

REFLECTIONS OF HOPE

LEADER'S GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION: GUIDE FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

A NOTE TO LEADERS:

Thank you for stepping up to lead this study! Your willingness to lead and facilitate a group is both commendable and appreciated. May the Lord honor your heart to serve Him and trust in Him to use you. Please know that you are being prayed for and that the Lord Himself intercedes on your behalf before the Father:

In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us... All of our thoughts are known to God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people... Christ died and was raised to life, and now He is at God's right side, speaking to Him for us (**Romans 8:26-27, 34**, CEV - Contemporary English Version).

This study is designed to help both the believer and the nonbeliever take the next step on their own faith journey. Their growth is not dependent on you, all you have to do is rely on the Holy Spirit as you lead, and let God do His amazing work in people's lives! And do not be discouraged if it seems nothing is happening. Trust that God is working and is glorified by your faithfulness to serve Him and to follow Him:

I (Paul) planted the seeds, Apollos watered them, but God made them sprout and grow. What matters isn't those who planted or watered, but God who made the plants grow. The one who plants is just as important as the one who waters. And each one will be paid for what they do (**1 Corinthians 3:6-8**, CEV).

Whether you are a seasoned small group leader, or just beginning, this leader's guide is designed to walk you through the study as easily as possible. These are only suggested guidelines, so feel free to make changes as you feel comfortable and as the group allows. Again, the most important thing is to let the Holy Spirit guide you:

"The Spirit shows what is true and will come and guide you into the full truth"
(**John 16:13**, CEV).

So, take a deep breath and let's get started!

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:**1. Pray!**

Spend some time in prayer for the study and for those who will be attending. Ask the Lord to move in a mighty way during the next eight weeks in each person's life, including your own!

2. Familiarize yourself with the material

Take some time to read through the study and Bible passages before each lesson. Watch the movie again if you need to or just watch the clips that pertain to each study.

3. Make it personal

Individually contact each person you know is coming and tell them that you are looking forward to meeting them, or getting to know them better. It's hard to resist a warm invitation and an enthusiastic leader!

4. Gather necessary materials

After reading through the study, make a note of materials you will need for each lesson and begin to gather those (i.e. TV, DVD player, name tags, pencils, copies of the lesson, snacks, etc.).

5. Enlist a mentor during the study (especially if you are new at this)

Ask God to bring to mind someone who would be a good mentor for you during the study—perhaps someone with some experience leading or facilitating groups or mentoring others. Ask him/her to pray for you and the group regularly. It is invaluable to have someone you can go to for advice or to answer any group questions you don't have answers for. If you are new at leading, you may even want to invite this person to come to the study and co-lead it with you. You can take turns leading the lesson, or it may just be comforting knowing they are there to help if you need it!

6. Pick a co-leader from the group

Though this is not a necessity, it may be a good idea to find someone who can step in and lead when you are unable to be there.

DURING EACH LESSON:

The following is a suggested timeline and flow of a lesson. Again, feel free to make changes to fit your particular needs.

1. Getting to know you (5-10 minutes)

The first five minutes of small group meetings are very important for establishing the feel of your group. Asking questions is a great way to create a warm and trusting environment. Below are some fun questions that will help your group become acquainted with one another and hopefully create a warm and inviting place to be. Feel free to come up with your own!

- *If money were no object, where would you like to vacation?*
- *What is your favorite book? What do you like about it?*
- *If you could be any animal, what would you be and why?*
- *You would know me better if you knew that I...*
- *If there was nothing stopping me, I would try doing...*
- *What is your favorite room in your home? Why?*
- *One dream that has not been fulfilled is...*
- *If I could sit face to face with Jesus, what would I talk about?*

2. Opening prayer (1-2 minutes)

You as the leader will open the group with a short prayer asking the Lord to bless your time.

3. SHARE (15 minutes)

Allow some time for your group members to share any thoughts from the previous week. To create an open and safe environment for sharing here are some ideas. (You can also find additional information on leading a small group in the appendix at the end of this study.)

- Be open to sharing yourself and set the example. Your group will typically be as vulnerable as you are.
- Listen intently to what others are sharing.
- You may want to consider establishing group norms for sharing upon the first meeting. (Example: don't interrupt each other, keep things confidential within the group, don't be quick to give advice, don't talk negatively about any other church or denomination.)
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" if there is a question you cannot answer. You can always get back to them later.

- Everyone in your group will have a different personality. The idea is for everyone to participate. Some will be quiet, and some will want to dominate. You may need to help direct the group to allow everyone to speak equally.

4. WATCH the *Magdalena: Released From Shame* movie clip pertaining to the lesson.

Each lesson will give you the location of the clip on the resource DVD-ROM or the chapter location on the movie DVD. If you are not able to play the movie clips, the corresponding Bible verses or dialog from the film have been provided for you to read.

5. KNOW (15-20 minutes)

This section contains the Bible text pertaining to the movie clip

6. LIVE (20 minutes)

This section is the core of the study. It contains more questions pertaining to how the story can apply to our lives today.

7. TELL (5-10 minutes)

This section is simply an action point that the group can consider as a challenge for the week.

8. Closing prayer (5-10 minutes)

Depending on your group, you may want to also add time for each person to share personal prayer requests.

Note: Occasionally you will notice a ♥ (heart bullet point) in your leader's guide. This symbol indicates that this question is of a more personal nature. If no one volunteers an answer, the leader should lead the way by answering, thus avoiding embarrassment.

9. And finally, Appendix A has many additional helps which may assist you in leading. Appendix B is titled "Modern Women Touched by Jesus" and contains testimonies which can be used as supplements or additions to the appropriate lessons. Please feel free to read them aloud or copy them for the ladies to take home.



LESSON 1:
JESUS, OUR LOVING PURSUER
Rivka: Does He see me?

Getting to know you... Share briefly (1-2 minutes each) a little of your story in the following areas:

- What is your spiritual background?

Where are you on your faith journey? Are you, like Rivka, wondering if God even sees you? Do you, like Mary Magdalene, know and walk closely with Jesus? Or are you somewhere in between?

WATCH

Resource DVD-ROM Clip #1 or Movie DVD - Introduction: 1:00 minute.

KNOW

In the film Rivka says: *“The God who created all of this? I doubt He even sees me, much less knows me. Perhaps God Almighty would love a holy man, but not someone like me.”*

Like Mary Magdalene, Rivka and the other women in the film, every woman has a story to tell. You have a story to tell. Your story has a beginning, middle and eventually, an ending. Interwoven into each of our stories is visible proof of a Loving Pursuer—the One who created you with a purpose and gives life and meaning to your story. During these next few weeks, may you come to know and see, as Rivka eventually did, that you matter to God. He sees you and He knows you!

DID YOU KNOW?

In a speech, Dr. Larry Crabb, a well known Christian psychologist, author and speaker said, “The core terror of women is invisibility.” Do you agree with that? Why or why not?

One of the names for God in the Bible is *El Roi*, which means “The God who sees.”

LIVE

No matter where you are in your journey, you are precious to God. Even *before* He created you, He saw you and knew you.

God Sees You:

You are the One who put me together inside my mother's body, and I praise You because of the wonderful way You created me. Everything You do is marvelous! Of this I have no doubt. Nothing about me is hidden from You! I was secretly woven together deep in the earth below, but with Your own eyes You saw my body being formed. Even before I was born, You had written in Your book everything I would do. Your thoughts are far beyond my understanding, much more than I could ever imagine. I try to count Your thoughts, but they

outnumber the grains of sand on the beach. And when I awake, I will find you nearby (Psalm 139:13-18, CEV - Contemporary English Version).

- What stirs in your heart when you hear these words?

*God made me as I am.
The way I am put together is good.
Before I was born God knew me.*

- Is it hard to believe that God made you the way you are? Why or why not?

*Sometimes because I don't always feel worthy.
I had no idea the Bible says I was created.*

In the Bible, **Colossians 1:15-16** (CEV) says:

Christ is exactly like God, who cannot be seen. He is the first-born Son, superior to all creation. Everything was created by Him, everything in heaven and on earth, everything seen and unseen, including all forces and powers, and all rulers and authorities. All things were created by God's Son, and everything was made for Him.

- Who created you? For what purpose?

*God/Jesus.
We were made for Him.*

- What importance does this have for you?

*I am part of a bigger plan.
That means there is a purpose for my life.*

God Knows You:

You have looked deep into my heart, LORD, and You know all about me. You know when I am resting or when I am working, and from heaven You discover my thoughts. You notice everything I do and everywhere I go. Before I even speak a word You know what I will say, and with Your powerful arm You protect me from every side. I can't understand all of this! Such wonderful knowledge is far above me (Psalm 139:1-6, CEV).

- ❑ What does this passage tell you about God?

He looks deep into our hearts.

He knows all about us.

He knows our thoughts.

He notices everything we do, everywhere we go, and everything we say.

He protects.

- ❑ Does it change your view of Him? If so, how?

I can trust Him.

He is bigger than I understood.

I never thought about God knowing all about me.

- ❑ What does this passage tell you about how God feels about you?

He cares deeply about me, even to the point of knowing the details of my life.

- ♥ How does that make you feel?

How humbling and amazing it is that even though God knows everything about you (the good, the bad and the ugly!), He still wants a loving relationship with you. He pursues you. He loves you.

God Loves You:

I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39, CEV).

TELL

Challenge: Perhaps you are like Rivka and have long wondered if God knows you or even sees you. At the end of the movie, Rivka chose to believe that God really does love her and she placed her faith in Jesus. Through a simple prayer, like the one below, you too can choose to believe that Jesus created you, sees you, knows you and loves you. *You!* Will you tell Him today that you believe?

God, my Father in heaven, You are holy and righteous. Thank You that You love me. I have sinned against You. Thank You that You sent the promised Messiah, Jesus, to destroy the curse of shame and guilt. Thank You that He died in my place. I want to follow my living Savior. Thank You for forgiving me and accepting me. Amen.

Go Deeper: Whether you already have chosen to believe these truths about Jesus, or you still struggle with doubting them, take some time this week to talk to God about your doubts. Review any of the above verses and reflect on them throughout the week. If God teaches you anything about your doubts, please consider sharing with the group next week.

Optional: Personal story 1 in Appendix B.



LESSON 2:
JESUS, OUR GRACIOUS FORGIVER
Adulterous Woman: Will He forgive me?

SHARE

Would anyone like to share if you reflected on the verses from last week? Did God reveal anything to you about your doubts?

WATCH

Resource DVD-ROM Clip #2 or Movie DVD - Chapter 12; The adulterous woman forgiven; 3:00 minutes.

Note to leader: At the end of this lesson, you will need to provide each person in your group a piece of paper and a pen or pencil.

KNOW

In the Bible, **John 8:1-11** (NIV - New International Version) says:

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn He appeared again in the temple courts; where all the people gathered around Him, and He sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do You say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger. When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

DID YOU KNOW?

In Jesus' day, adultery was a capital offense in Israel.

Religious leaders knew **Leviticus 20:10** (CEV), part of the Law of Moses, which says, *"If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."*

- What do you think this woman's struggle was?

Possibly looking to men or other's for approval, possibly for survival, lust, loneliness, giving in to temptation, probably viewed as a social outcast.

- ❑ Where was her partner? What does this tell us about the accusers?

He is not there! If the religious leaders were really concerned about following the "Law of Moses," they would have made sure the man was present as well.

- ❑ How do you think she felt after being caught and dragged out in public by a mob?

Terrified of being stoned to death, humiliated, embarrassed, ashamed, alone, worthless.

- ♥ How would you feel about having your wrongdoings exposed?

In the same way, when we do something against the law, something that hurts another person, or something that hurts God, He takes those things very seriously and calls them sin. Sin is going our own way, thinking our own thoughts and doing what we want, rather than what God wants. Sin can involve either attitudes or actions or both.

God's standards in the Bible show us His heart, and when we rebel against them and pursue our own desires, we miss God's best for us and we grieve Him.

- ❑ How does Jesus respond to this woman and provide for her in her situation?

He saved her from a painful death.

He stood up to the religious leaders on her behalf.

He helped her accusers see their own sin.

He deals with the accusation against her and forgives her.

He restores her dignity and gives her a new purpose.

- ❑ Why did Jesus' response mean so much to her?

He let her live. He valued her and demonstrated that she was worth rescuing.

- ❑ Did the adulterous woman have to do anything to be forgiven?

No, God offers forgiveness to all just for the asking. She just had to receive the forgiveness.

This is how a relationship with God differs from being religious. Religion says you do what is right in order to earn acceptance, love and forgiveness. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ is not based on our performance because *we already are* accepted, loved and forgiven.

LIVE

Life & Death are significant words in the Bible. The Bible refers to spiritual life and death as well as physical life and death.

John 17:3 (NASB - New American Standard Bible) refers to spiritual life: *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

The following verses refer to *spiritual* death.

Colossians 2:13-14 (CEV) says:

You were dead, because you were sinful and were not God's people. But God let Christ make you alive, when He forgave all our sins. God wiped out the charges that were against us for disobeying the Law of Moses. He took them away and nailed them to the cross.

- According to these verses, what happened to the “charges against us?”

God wiped them out.

God nailed them to the (Jesus') cross.

We don't live by the “Law of Moses,” which is referred to in the verse above, yet we all live by some sort of moral, ethical and cultural code that resides within us. As women we tend to put ourselves under a high level of pressure to perform well. When we fail, we try our best to cover up our imperfections.

God tells us in **Romans 8:1** (NIV), *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

- According to this verse, what is true of those who are “in Christ Jesus?”

They are not condemned.

- How can knowing we are not condemned change the way we view ourselves?

We can start believing our worth in Christ.

We can experience freedom.

- ❑ How does this fact apply to how we treat others?

They deserve the same treatment Christ has extended to us—no condemnation.

When Jesus talked with this woman caught in sin, He did forgive her but He also stated, “Go now and leave your life of sin.” He was telling her to embrace her new identity as someone who is free and forgiven. In the same way, we are forgiven, but with that freedom comes responsibility and a new identity. This doesn’t mean that we will never fail again, but it does set a new direction in our lives.

1 John 1:9-10 (NIV) says:

“If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives.”

- ❑ So when we do fail, how do we get right with God again?

Confess our sin and ask for forgiveness.

TELL

Challenge: Confession means that we agree with God about any wrong thoughts, attitudes or actions. We agree with Him that they are wrong, ask forgiveness and acknowledge that we already are forgiven by God because of Christ’s death on the cross.

Note to leader: Pass out a pen and piece of paper to each one in your group.

Let’s make confession practical:

1. Make your own sin list on a piece of paper and then destroy it. This list is just between you and God, so be completely honest. Silently ask God to help you see the things in your life that displease Him. Write down whatever God brings to your mind. As you write each one, confess it to God. Remember you have a loving God who forgives you—He even gave His Son for you!
2. After you have written your list, write the words of **1 John 1:9** (NIV) across your list. It says, “*If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*”

3. When you have completed your time of prayer and confession, thank Him for His forgiveness by faith, and then destroy your list as an illustration of the forgiveness God has granted you by tearing it to pieces, shredding it or burning it in order to show how completely God has forgiven you.

Going Deeper: Where is your sin (sin list) now?

It is gone or destroyed.

Being forgiven brings freedom from guilt!

Psalm 103:12 (NIV) says:

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

Hebrews 10:17 (NIV) says:

“Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

This week, ask God to reveal your sin as it happens. Confess it to God, ask forgiveness and thank Him for forgiving you.



LESSON 3:
JESUS, OUR POWER FOR LIVING
Mary, Mother of Jesus: *Strength for daily life*

SHARE

Would anyone be willing to share if God showed you sin in your life as it happened this week? How did you respond?

WATCH

Resource DVD-ROM clip #3 or movie DVD - Chapter 3; The Birth of Jesus; 1:40 minutes.

KNOW

Luke 1:26-38 (NIV) says:

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Mary was going about her daily activities when the angel Gabriel encountered her and told her that she would have a child. We all know that it is impossible to have a baby without being intimate with a man. When Mary posed this question to Gabriel, his response was "For nothing is impossible with God." He explained to Mary that in order for this to occur, "The Holy Spirit will come and God's power will overshadow you."

- ❑ What kinds of things could Mary have been thinking and feeling when she heard Gabriel's message?

Wonder, confusion, astonishment, fear, surprise, honor

- ❑ Even though Mary could have been thinking and feeling a number of things, what was her actual response?

*She questioned how this could happen, yet she trusted God.
She was willing to allow God to use her to fulfill His plan.*

- ❑ How do you think you would have responded?

*What about my plans for my life?
What about Joseph?
What will everyone think when I am unmarried and pregnant?*

DID YOU KNOW?

Mary was *betrothed* to Joseph which, in her culture, was a promise as strong as marriage. Though Mary still lived with her family, she was legally considered Joseph's wife. If she was suspected of being unfaithful, Joseph had the right to have her killed like the woman caught in adultery or at least force her to leave the town in shame and disgrace. Therefore, Mary's pregnancy was a huge ordeal to both of them.

Her choice to be obedient demonstrated faith, especially in light of the consequences that she faced.

LIVE

In one moment, Mary's life forever changed as a result of God choosing to use her to carry out a task that in human terms would be impossible. But as the angel Gabriel said, "Nothing is impossible with God." None of us will be asked to carry the Son of God as Mary was. However, God does ask us to do something that is also impossible—to faithfully follow Jesus every day.

Someone has said that to live the Christian life is not difficult; it is impossible.

The following verses show how impossible it is to live life as a Christian without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 16:24 (NIV) says, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.'"

James 1:26 (NIV) says, *“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”*

Matthew 5:48 (NIV) says, *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

- ☐ According to these verses, how should we be living our lives?

Deny ourselves.

Have perfect control over the words we say to other people.

Be perfect as God is perfect.

- ♥ So, how are you doing?

In our own power, these commands are impossible, but God does not expect us to follow Jesus in our own strength. The Christian life is a supernatural life and only Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit can enable you to live it.

Let's look at how the Holy Spirit empowers us to live the Christian life.

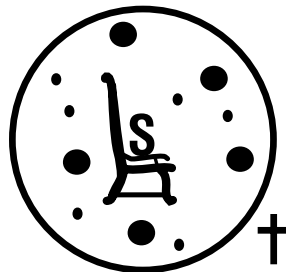
The Bible tells us there are three kinds of people.

1. The **natural person** is described as never having invited Jesus into his/her life.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NASB) says, *“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”* Some words that characterize the natural person are pride, fear, guilt, worry and disobedience.

Self-Directed Life (natural person)

- S** - Self is on the throne
- † - Christ is outside the life
- - Interests are directed by self, often resulting in discord and frustration

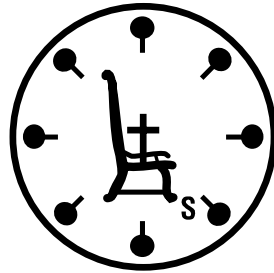


2. The **spiritual person** is described as being directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:15 (NASB) says, “*But he who is spiritual appraises all things...*” Some words that characterize the spiritual person are *trust, obedience, peace, forgiveness and love.*

Christ-Directed Life (spiritual person)

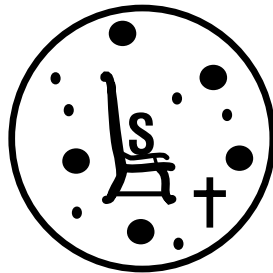
- † - Christ is in the life and on the throne
- S - Self is yielding to Christ
- - Interests are directed by Christ, resulting in harmony with God’s plan



3. The **carnal person** is described as someone who has invited Jesus into his/her life, but lives in defeat trying to follow Jesus in his/her own strength.
- 1 Corinthians 3:1** (CEV) says, “*My friends, you are acting like the people of this world. That’s why I could not speak to you as spiritual people. You are like babies as far as your faith in Christ is concerned.*” Some words and phrases that characterize the carnal person are frustrated, defeated, self-righteous, little desire for growth, and an up-and-down spiritual experience.

Self-Directed Life (carnal person)

- S - Self is on the throne
- † - Christ dethroned and not allowed to direct the life
- - Interests are directed by self, often resulting in discord and frustration



- ♥ Which of the three diagrams best describes your life?
- ♥ Which person would you like to be?

Most people want to be directed by the Holy Spirit. Let’s look at how to live a Spirit-filled life.

In the Bible, we see God represented in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God has provided us with the Holy Spirit to live inside us to give us the power we need to live life as followers of Christ. Although the Holy Spirit lives in all people who have invited Christ into their lives, we are not filled with the Holy Spirit unless we allow Him to direct and empower us. We choose to be filled (directed and empowered) with the Holy Spirit through faith on a daily, even moment-by-moment basis. This is the difference between the spiritual person and the carnal person.

The Bible gives us a command to be filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18 (NIV) says, “*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*”

We know that being filled by the Holy Spirit is God's will for us because He commands it. We have God's promise in **1 John 5:14-15** (NIV—emphasis added) which says:

*“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we **know** that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him.”*

TELL ME MORE

Spiritual breathing is a powerful word picture which can help you experience moment-by-moment dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Just as we physically breathe out bad air and in good air, we can practice spiritual breathing.

Exhale: Confess your sin the moment you become aware of it—agree with God that you are wrong and thank Him for His forgiveness.

Inhale: Surrender control of your life to Christ, and rely on the Holy Spirit to fill you with His presence and power by faith.

Just like Mary responded in faith by trusting God in her situation, we also need to respond in faith by trusting God to live the Christian life through us.

- ❑ How can you, like Mary, respond to the Lord?

I can trust God with difficult circumstances.

I can choose to be obedient.

- ❑ How are we filled with the Holy Spirit?

We are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith.

Confess to God that we are running our own lives and living in our own strength.

Believe by faith that we are filled.

TELL

Challenge: Begin each day this week by asking God to allow His Holy Spirit to direct your life. Share with at least one person what you have learned this week about the Holy Spirit.

Go Deeper: To learn more about how the Holy Spirit can be active in your life, read and reflect on the following passages: **Galatians 5:16-26**, **Romans 5:1**, **Romans 8:1** and **Ephesians 5:18**. You can also read the booklet, *Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-Filled Life?* by Bill Bright. It can be ordered through Campus Crusade for Christ or found online at: www.greatcom.org/english/spirit.htm.



LESSON 4:
JESUS, OUR POWERFUL DELIVERER
Mary Magdalene: *Will He free me?*

SHARE

Did you have an opportunity to talk with someone about the Holy Spirit last week? What happened? Did you see a difference in your life last week after asking the Holy Spirit to direct you?

WATCH

Resource DVD-ROM Clip # 4 or Movie DVD - Chapter 5; Mary Magdalene is freed from demons; 5:07 minutes.

KNOW

Luke 8:1-3 (NIV) says:

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve [the disciples] were with Him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

- What do you think Mary Magdalene's life was like before she encountered Jesus?

Appeared crazy, dirty, rejected, out of control. Her life was not her own, she was controlled by demons. Unable to make rational choices.

- Why didn't she do anything to get rid of the demons herself?

She may have tried but she didn't have the power within herself to do it.

- How did people respond to her?

Ran her off; never welcome anywhere, scared.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the culture of the day, being near someone who was inhabited and controlled by evil spirits would make you unclean, and therefore unable to go to the Temple or even associate with others of the community until you were considered clean again.

In the Old Testament, God established many "rules" for the Jewish people to follow. He gave rules that determined whether someone was ceremonially clean or unclean. When a person was "unclean," it basically meant he or she had to be separated from the people and from God. They had to wait until they were ceremonially clean before they could again be in fellowship with God and with others.

- ❑ In the film, how did Jesus respond to Mary Magdalene and the possibility of becoming unclean Himself?

He went toward her, touched her and called her daughter of Abraham.

- ❑ Why do you think the evil spirits left when Jesus commanded them to leave?

Jesus, being God, has power over all things including evil spirits, therefore the spirits had to obey.

Hebrews 1:1-3a (NIV) says: *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV) says: *When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And the voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased."*

Jeremiah 32:17 (NIV) says, *"Ah, Sovereign LORD, You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You."*

- ❑ What do these verses say about who Jesus is and His power?

He is God's beloved Son. He is the very image of God's nature. Nothing is too hard for Him. God speaks through Jesus.

- ❑ How was Mary Magdalene's life changed as a result of her encounter with Jesus?

Her life was completely changed, she became a new person. She went from being rejected and without purpose to a life of acceptance and purpose.

- ♥ Is God speaking to you through Mary's story? What do you need to be freed from in your life?

LIVE

Through our relationship with God, Jesus can also deliver us from any ongoing struggles. In our world today we find people reaching for all types of things to provide a temporary level of comfort. These may include food, shopping, money, gambling, alcohol, drugs, pornography, television or the Internet. Although the level of dependency may vary, we all sometimes seek something external to soothe our internal pain.

No matter what your struggle may be, they all have the same effect—they keep us from experiencing the fullness of God's power in our lives.

Like Mary Magdalene, we can be released from the power of bondage to live a life where we can experience God's freedom and purpose. Through Christ's power, we can begin to live in true freedom, overcoming the hold that negative influences can have over our lives.

Remember, when following Christ, our struggles may not end. God can give us the power to endure and persevere, and He can use these things to build desired qualities in our lives.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV) says: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

James 1:2-4 (NIV) says: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

- ♥ What in your life would be different if you relied on God when you have struggles?

TELL

No matter where we are in our faith journey, we all have struggles. Mary Magdalene's struggle was with evil spirits and Jesus was her powerful deliverer. Regardless of what your struggle is today, Jesus wants to be your powerful deliverer.

Challenge: This week, can you entrust an area of struggle or difficulty to God and ask Him to give you freedom? Share with another person what you are learning.

Go deeper: Write out and commit to memory **Hebrews 12:1-2** (quoted earlier) and ask God to help you understand and live out this truth.

Optional: Personal story 2 in Appendix B.



LESSON 5:
JESUS, OUR COMPASSIONATE PROVIDER
Widow of Nain: *Will He take care of me?*

SHARE

Would anyone be willing to share about the struggle/difficulty that you entrusted to God this week?

Would anyone like to recite **Hebrews 12:1-2** (NIV) from memory? If not, let's read it together. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

WATCH

Resource DVD-ROM Clip #5 or Movie DVD - Chapter 6; Jesus heals and teaches; 1:00 minute.

KNOW

Luke 7:11-17 (NIV) says: *Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and His disciples and a large crowd went along with Him. As He approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, “Don’t cry.”*

Then He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

DID YOU KNOW?

Adapted from source: www.stathanasius.org/bible/oct_8_2000.html

From the events described in Luke, it appears that the widow of Nain was not well off financially. First, the dead man was being carried in an open coffin (v.14). Second, when Jesus spoke to him, “Young man, I say to you, arise” (v.14), he sat up and began to speak immediately. There was no need to unbind the widow’s son from any burial wrappings, for there were none. From the open coffin and lack of burial wrappings, we can assume he was being carried to a pauper’s grave. Clearly, the widow was very poor.

*Under Mosaic Law, virtually no special provisions were made for widows because the oldest son - who had the birthright or extra share of the property - had the duty to provide for her. Additionally, the Scribes and Pharisees of that day were known for foreclosing on widows’ houses when the poverty-stricken widows ran out of money (see **Matthew 23:14**, NASB).*

- ❑ What was this woman's need when Jesus saw her?

She was a widow and was now alone.

She was grieving the loss of her only son.

She would have no way to provide for herself.

- ❑ How did Jesus respond to her and provide for her in this situation?

Jesus saw her and her need.

He brought her son back to life.

- ❑ What did it mean to the widow that Jesus raised her son from the dead?

What looked like a hopeless situation was turned around. She was given hope and her son was returned to her.

Her situation no longer seemed hopeless.

Psalm 68:5 (NIV) says, “*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.*”

- ❑ What does this passage tell us about God's character?

He sees and cares about our needs.

He understands the losses in our lives.

God is neither distant nor uncaring, but is willing to be the father to the fatherless and a defender of widows.

LIVE

Like the widow we all experience circumstances that seem overwhelming. We may feel hopeless, lost, grieved, anxious, depressed, fearful or even despondent.

- ♥ Are you struggling with something right now?

Philippians 4:6-7, 19 (NIV) says: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds, in Christ Jesus.... And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

- ❑ What needs are included in the word “all” in these verses?

“All” means all! It is all inclusive. (Have them name some needs.)

- ❑ What does God promise He will do?

*Give us peace beyond our understanding.
Guard our hearts and minds.
Provide for our needs.*

- ❑ Since God's promise is to meet every need, what do we need to do?

We need to pray and express what we are going through to God. Tell Him everything we are worried about.

- ❑ When it seems like God is not meeting our needs immediately, can we still trust Him?

Yes

1 Peter 5:7 (NIV) says, “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”

Matthew 6:31-34 (NIV) says, *So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

- ❑ What does God ask us to do in these verses?

*To seek God's kingdom first.
To trust God to take care of our needs.
To not worry.*

- ❑ What do you think it means to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness?”

*Make it a priority to spend time getting to know God and what He wants.
Live for Him, not for yourself.*

- ❑ What are some practical ways to apply these truths to your life?

*Ask God to change your heart.
We get to know God and what He wants by reading His Word, the Bible and spending time with Him.*

TELL

- How do we cast our anxiety and burdens on Him? (see **1 Peter 5:7**)

Tell Him your needs in prayer. Give Him your problems/worries.

TELL ME MORE

In the Bible, “to cast” refers to physically putting a load on an animal like a donkey or an ox. Jesus invites us to literally “cast” our burdens and anxiety upon Him.

Challenge: Do you have some things you need to “cast” on God? For example: finances, relationships, physical needs (food, clothes, health, housing), emotional needs (fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, loneliness, depression), work.

Matthew 11:28 (NIV) says, “*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*”

Note to leader: At this point you may want to divide into pairs and pray for each other concerning these things or you may want to pray for the group as a whole.

Go Deeper: Make a commitment to ask God to provide for you in the most critical area of your life. Share next week what has happened in response to your prayers.



LESSON 6:
JESUS, OUR COMPLETE RESTORER
Woman Healed of Bleeding: *Will He heal me?*

SHARE

Did you ask God to provide for you in a critical area this past week? What happened?

WATCH

Resource DVD-ROM Clip #6 or Movie DVD - Chapter 9; Jesus heals a dead girl and a bleeding woman; 3:00 minutes.

KNOW

Mark 5:25-34 (NIV) says: *And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched His cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.*

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

"You see the people crowding against You," His disciples answered, "and yet You can ask, 'Who touched Me?'"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at His feet and, trembling with fear, told Him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Many scholars agree that this hemorrhage was related to her menstrual cycle. According to Old Testament law, a hemorrhaging woman could not enter God's presence or be touched by another Jew. Any physical contact would make the other person unclean.

- ❑ We have read about this woman's physical suffering, in what other ways might this woman have been hurting?

All of her energy and money were focused on trying to get help.

Isolated from society therefore unable to attend synagogue.

Suffered physically, at the very least, probably anemic and weak.

Unable to experience physical touch from family and friends.

Experienced shame and loneliness.

- ♥ Desperation pushes us to try anything. In what ways have you tried to find an answer to your situation? How far do you think Jesus is from your reach?

Regardless of the possible consequences for herself, the hemorrhaging woman was desperate and determined to see Jesus. In order to touch Jesus, the woman had to elbow her way through the crowd that stood in her way. She had confidence that only Jesus could help her.

- ❑ What did she believe that gave her the courage to push through the crowd?

She had hope and faith that Jesus could heal her.

- ❑ What did Jesus restore by healing her?

He restored her physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

- ♥ What is preventing you from reaching out to Jesus?

Pride, doubt, insecurity, fear, self-sufficiency.

God really cares about restoring all the different areas of your life because He deeply cares about you. “*I don’t know which brings greater healing, Jesus’ power or His compassion.*” – Mary Magdalene, in *Magdalena: Released From Shame*

LIVE

Restoration can be a process. After waiting 12 long years and spending all her money the day came when she met Jesus and glorified God through being healed by Him in response to her faith. God is in control of all things and has His own timetable for us. Even when we have faith like this woman did, He sometimes answers us in a different way, or at a different time than we might expect. It is important for us to be willing to accept His will for us no matter what the answer.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV) says: *Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because He was tempted in every way that we are. But He did not sin! So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness and we will find help.*

- ❑ How does Jesus respond to us when we come to Him?

With understanding, undeserved kindness.

This woman received from Jesus exactly what she desired—her physical healing. Not everyone gets exactly what they desire. Paul gives us an example from his personal experience in **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** (NIV): *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

God did not heal Paul when he asked, so he was forced to depend on the Lord’s strength in the midst of his weakness. Likewise, God does not always heal our physical problems, but He always enables and strengthens us to endure the problem.

James 1:2-4 (NIV) says: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

- ❑ According to these verses, what are some of the reasons God may choose not to restore us or answer our prayers the way we expect?

He wants to grow our faith. He wants us to become mature and complete. He wants us to depend on Him and not ourselves.

TELL

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NIV) says: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.*

As Christians, we are not immune from difficulties. The way Jesus helps us becomes part of our story and can encourage others who may be going through something similar. The comfort and healing that God gives is not intended just for us. We glorify God and give Him praise when we share with others what He has done for us.

Challenge: If God has offered you restoration in an area, look for an opportunity this week to share your story with someone who needs encouragement.

Go Deeper: Write down some areas in your life that need restoration. These could be physical, relational, spiritual or others. Commit those to the Lord and believe by faith that He will restore them.

If you have an area that has not been restored in the way you desire, entrust that to God. Thank Him by faith for whatever His answer is. The act of thanking God demonstrates faith. Don't stop trusting in God's goodness. He is a good God and He loves you!

Please be aware that many of us have deep and complex issues. This may mean seeking the guidance of a trusted friend, pastor or a professional counselor. Do not be afraid to seek further assistance to find complete restoration. Ask God to help you find the right person to help.

Optional: Personal story 3 in Appendix B.



LESSON 7:
JESUS, OUR LIVING WATER
Woman at the Well: *Will He satisfy me?*

SHARE

How has God encouraged you this week in an area of your life that needs restoration?

If you had an opportunity this week to encourage someone with your story, would you be willing to share?

WATCH

Resource DVD-ROM Clip # 7 or Movie DVD - Chapter 7; The woman at the well; 5:45 minutes.

KNOW

John 4:7, 9-26, 28-30, 39-40 (NIV) says:

Jesus was traveling with His disciples from Judea to Galilee and had to pass through Samaria where they stopped to rest about mid-day near a well made by the patriarch Jacob.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give Me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can You ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can You get this living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am He.”

Just then His disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are You talking with her?”

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to Him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days. And because of His words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

❑ What is this woman’s story?

Samaritan (a mixed race)

Married five times. Unmarried now but living with a man.

Bold. Intelligent. Probably very attractive to men.

DID YOU KNOW?

It was culturally unacceptable for a man and a woman who were strangers to converse in first century Palestine.

There was also great racial tension between Jews and Samaritans at that time, as the Samaritans were a mixed race. The woman even asks, *“How is it that you a Jew ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?”* To Jews at that time, the word “Samaritan” was like another word for “dog.” The Jews often would walk miles out of their way to avoid going through Samaria and having contact with the Samaritans.

The fact that this woman came to the well at mid-day tells us something about her. She was probably labeled an outcast for her immoral behavior and thus socially rejected.

The Samaritan woman did not even expect Jesus to speak to her much less ask her for a cup of water.

- ❑ Jesus initiated a conversation with this woman. What does this reveal to us about His character?

Jesus accepts us regardless of social status, race or marital status.

- ❑ Why do you think Jesus asked the Samaritan woman about her husband?

He may have wanted to show her that He knew everything about her, that He was God.

While she didn't need physical healing, she had other needs.

Jesus spoke frankly about the woman's past and present living situation. Nothing about her life was hidden from Him. He understood the pain and brokenness in her life. He does not reject her. He compassionately shows her the way to life which is Himself.

- ❑ How was the Samaritan woman trying to meet her own needs?

Running from man to man to meet a need that only God could fill.

- ❑ What are ways that we try to meet our own needs today?

Filling our time and lives with anything other than God, for example: food, relationships, possessions, career, appearance, and entertainment.

- ❑ How does Jesus say He would meet her needs? How does that apply to us?

He is the living water, the One who satisfies our deepest needs. He offers the woman at the well and us salvation, reconciliation and fulfillment.

LIVE

People who truly believe in Jesus begin to experience a change in themselves, their attitudes and their perspectives. They become “new people.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV) says, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.*” The Samaritan woman’s immediate response to go tell others in her town shows that she believed in Jesus and became a new person.

Three things happened as a result of the conversation that the Samaritan woman had with Jesus. Her past no longer separated her from a relationship with God. Many people in the town became believers along with her. Jesus’ followers saw Him reach across cultural and racial lines.

Galatians 3:28 (NIV) says, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*”

John 7:37-39 (NIV) says: *On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

- ❑ What does it mean to have living water flowing from us?

Jesus is the living water who flows in us when we become believers, nourishing us and giving us life eternal. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the character of Jesus flows out of us instead of our own character.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) says, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”*

When we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our lives, we begin to see Him change us from within and others will see this fruit in our lives.

TELL

- What kind of person did Jesus say the Father is seeking? (See passage at the beginning of this lesson.)

*True worshippers. (There are a lot of religious people in the world but God is looking for true worshippers, those who have a relationship with Him.)
Those who would worship Him in spirit and truth.*

Although we don't know who will respond, we like the Samaritan woman need to tell others about what God has done for us.

John 4:39 (NIV) says, *“Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, ‘He told me everything I ever did.’”*

The outcast woman became the hero of the town. Jesus reconciled the woman to Himself, and then He used her to bring many in the town to God.

Challenge: Who in your life still needs to hear about what God has done for you? Telling others your story is one way to be a true worshipper. Make a list of people and begin to pray that when they hear about Jesus they will respond like the Samaritans did.

Next week's celebration will have a time of sharing. The following questions can give you some direction in your thinking.

- Has your view of Jesus changed during this study? If so, how?
- What is one area in your life that you want to develop as a result of this study?
- How has Jesus touched your life while we have been studying about Him together?



LESSON 8: JESUS, OUR LIFELONG FRIEND Let's Celebrate!

This is a time to celebrate what God has done in this study! We're going to have a party!

Note to leader: For this event you as a leader will want to make it special (possibly using decorations, special foods, a small gift or a new location—whatever will make it a special event). The idea is to celebrate all that God has done during your time together. Below is a suggested outline and flow for the session. Feel free to make changes as necessary to meet the needs of your group.

1. Open with prayer, thanking God for the past seven weeks of the study.
2. Then spend time celebrating with food, fun and fellowship (about 30 minutes).
3. As this time winds down, open the 30-minute time of sharing with a review of the questions at the end of lesson 7.

4. If no one volunteers to begin, the leader should be prepared to share briefly on one question.
5. Spend some time in prayer as a whole group and thank God for all He has done in your lives. Include any prayer requests that the group may have.
6. Below is a suggested “script” of what you could say to the women in your group to challenge them to pass on what they have learned. The idea here is to help them take a step of faith to share the movie with others and even lead a group of their own. Let them know what the study has meant to you and how you have grown as a result from leading.

Remember the story of the Samaritan woman at the well? She was so moved and transformed by Jesus' words that she ran into town telling people about Him, and as a result, many from the town believed in Him because of her testimony! In **Matthew 28:19-20** (CEV), Jesus gave what is called “the Great Commission” to His disciples: *“Go to the people of all nations and make them My disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you.”*

This is also a command and challenge for us today as followers of Christ! Who do you know that would benefit from watching *Magdalena: Released From Shame*, and sharing in the Bible study? Let's make a list of these people right now. (Space is provided for this in the participant's study.) Remember how watching the film opened your heart to God? Imagine how it could open your friends' hearts too! Let's take a minute to think about how we could share this film with the people on our lists. (Find out their ideas. Do they want to do a big showing all together? Would they like to show it in their homes? Let them brainstorm. Then make a plan together, possibly even choosing a showing date, and see how you can help one another.) Let's see what God is going to do through us!

7. Close in prayer.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Ten Basic Steps for Christian Maturity by Dr. Bill Bright
How to Forgive... When You Don't Feel Like It by June Hunt
Seeing Yourself Through God's Eyes by June Hunt
Lord, I Want To Know You by Kay Arthur
Practical Christian Living developed by Priority Associates

APPENDIX A: TIPS FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

Adapted from *Leading a Small Group: The Ultimate Road Trip, Second Addition*, Copyright 2005, Cru Press, Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., Orlando, FL

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MANEUVERING THE POTHOLES

Like any road trip, every small group has its share of unexpected problems and detours. There is the killer question: “What is the relationship between human will and God’s sovereignty?” Or you might experience that one person who won’t stop talking, who you know has to come up for air soon (but not soon enough for you). Or maybe someone makes a heretical statement, “The Bible isn’t against premarital sex if you love the person.”

The crash of a small group discussion can be ugly. You may wonder what made you choose to lead a group. Leaders often struggle with the unexpected because they don’t anticipate difficult situations and are unprepared for certain surprises. **This chapter will examine some of the most common problems which come up in small groups.** You’ve probably encountered most of them before, or if you haven’t, you likely will in the near future.

TOP TEN DISCUSSION PROBLEMS

1. Dead Silence

“My group is totally silent after I ask a question. It’s as if they have taken a vow of silence.”

If the question was good, relax; people need time to think. After some practice and getting to know your group, you will find it easier to detect whether they are silent because they’re thinking or because the question is not understood. If you cannot tell, ask, “Does what I’m asking make sense?”

If the question was not good or just seemed to miss the point, you can rephrase the question. For example, you asked, "Who do you have trouble forgiving?" and the group is silent. You are not sure whether they are thinking about it, or scared, or did not understand the question. You could ask backup questions such as: "Is there anyone you hold a grudge against? Would anyone like to share an example?" Remember to use "open questions" which cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." "Yes" or "no" questions will limit the discussion and silence open sharing.

Whatever you do, do not fill the silence with preaching. It is good, even essential, for you to share and be vulnerable, but resist the urge to talk just to fill the silence. Some silence is necessary to allow your group to think about the question. If you jump in too quickly, they will be listening to you rather than thinking of their own answer.

Encourage them with your nonverbal communication. Maintain good eye contact. Smile. Be relaxed. Lean toward the person speaking as you listen. Nod your head as you listen.

Encourage them with your verbal feedback: Acknowledge and affirm each speaker with a non-judgmental response such as, "Thanks for your input." Compliment appropriate answers with responses like, "Excellent insight" or "Good thinking." Convey acceptance. Do not judge. Express appreciation when people grasp new ideas, express feelings or ask questions.

Call on individuals who look like they have something to say.

2. A Wrong Answer

"The biggest problem I have is when someone gives the wrong answer. I just kind of sit there with a nervous smile and go, 'Uh... Err... Umm.'"

Use discernment. Determine if it truly is a wrong answer or just a perspective different from yours.

Be gracious and gentle. Do not get flustered.

Redirect the question to another individual or to the rest of the group. Say something like, "Does anyone else have a different perspective or anything to add?"

Refer the group back to the passage and use questions to guide them to discover the truths in it.

If it is an off-the-wall response, say something like: “That’s an interesting thought. How did you come to that conclusion?” Lead them to the truth gently.

Note: At times it may be necessary to briefly give the correct answer if the group is unable to: “I can understand why you might think that, but...” For example, if someone strongly asserts the Bible is full of errors you cannot simply move on to the next question.

Use wisdom in determining which errors to handle in a group setting. It is best to avoid certain discussions in the group. For example, an erroneous comment such as, “God helps those who help themselves,” can likely be corrected by the group. Furthermore, discussing this misconception is likely to be good for everyone in the group.

However, be wary of a comment like: “The Bible doesn’t prohibit homosexuality. In fact, most scholars think David was a homosexual.” A possible response might be: “What passages have you read in the Bible about homosexuality? (Expect silence.) I don’t want to chase that topic now, but I think if you read the passages for yourself you might conclude differently. I have some information I can get to you.” Then meet with the person individually.

Exclude inappropriate answers when you are summarizing.

3. Disastrous Distractions

“Every week in the middle of group some distraction always comes up. Usually the phone rings, someone pops their head in, or everybody wants to leave early for a TV show.”

Ask whoever lives where you meet if they can let their answering machine get the phone, or if they would be willing to unplug it.

If all else fails, meet somewhere that is less distracting.

If the group continually has schedule conflicts, reevaluate the group time.

Caution: If you need to permanently move your group time, do so. But do not begin to move it every other week because someone has something come up. Soon no one will know what time to come, and everyone will feel like group should be moved for them.

Whatever the interruption, do not lose your patience. If you get exasperated or angry, you will cause uneasiness in your group and only make it worse.

If necessary, put a sign on the door. Be creative and not dogmatic. For instance, "Bible Study... Keep Out" is not what you want to communicate. Something like "Bible Study going on from 7-8 p.m. Feel free to join us," might work better.

4. The Difficult Question

"The other day one of the ladies asked me if Christ was going to come before the tribulation. I have read Revelation, but I'm not a Bible scholar."

Admit you do not have a good answer, but tell them you will look into it. Then ask someone older in the Lord, like your pastor or mentor, if they know the answer or have the resources for you to study this yourself.

Ask them why or what they want to know. It may be something they are only slightly curious about. You do not want to put hours of work into finding an answer someone is not really interested in knowing.

It could be a great question for them to research and bring back to the group. They will learn more if they do the study themselves. You might need to give them some materials to get started.

5. Group Has Trouble Finishing the Lesson

"All the women in my group have such a good time together that I can't get through a lesson."

This might happen for a couple of reasons. One, the members of your group like to talk, share and joke around and it is hard for you to even get to the study,

or two, the members of your group have so much to say about each question that you cannot get through them all.

If the basic problem is that they like to talk and share too much at the beginning of the group: Set some guidelines from the very start. Take advantage of this opportunity to plan a time when you will just get together to share, play, and get to know each other. Explain, however, that the central purpose for your weekly time together is to spend time learning from God and His Word. So if they get carried away talking you can say, “OK, it’s time to get back to learning from God and His Word, so let’s get into the study.”

Be careful with icebreakers if this is a tendency for your group. Keep them moving and do not let them eat up a lot of time, unless you have already allocated a large block of time for one.

If the basic problem is spending too long on each question, try to pace yourself. Prioritize your lesson. Allot a specific amount of time to spend on each section. For example, you might spend 10 minutes on your introduction, 25 minutes on the biblical passage, and 10 minutes discussing application. This will help you know when to move on. Do not be afraid to say, “This is all good, but we need to move on.” Prioritize questions of greater importance and spend more time on those. Note which ones you will omit if you are short on time. Encourage brief answers so more people will have time to speak.

Note: Some discussions are so profitable you will not want to move on. When that happens, be flexible. Choose an appropriate place to end the lesson on time. Next week you may either pick up where you left off or more on to a new lesson.

6. The Non-Stop Talker

“I really like Danielle, but she just talks and talks and talks. The other women try to say something, and Danielle interrupts them. Or it’s like a ping pong match—they say something then she says something. She dominates the group. Just once I’d like to see the other women talk without a return volley.”

Direct your questions to other members in the group: “Let’s hear from some of you who haven’t had a chance to say anything yet.”

Since eye contact encourages people to share, sit next to the talkative person and minimize eye contact.

If it is still a problem, ask for the talker's help in drawing out quiet members or privately ask her to keep her answers to a minimum. No one wants to initiate this conversation, but if you let a bad situation go unchecked, it will hurt everyone in the group.

7. The Silent Member

"Whenever I'm with Tracy alone, she's a chatterbox, but get her in a group, and it's hard to get her to say a thing."

Ask direct but low-risk questions a shy person could answer comfortably. For example, "Tracy, I'd be interested in your thoughts. What are your thoughts on what we've been talking about?"

Sit where you can maintain good eye contact with those who seem reluctant to speak out.

Give positive feedback when the shy person does respond to encourage further responsiveness.

8. Going Off on Tangents

"I don't know how they did it, but we started off talking about prayer, and before long we were talking about what clubs we were involved in in high school. These people seem to have the spiritual gift of tangents."

Try to be diplomatic and reflect an accepting attitude.

Use a good question to put the discussion back on the right track.

Say something like, "That's an interesting topic, but since we're focusing on _____ today, let's talk about that. If we have time later on we can come back to this topic." As you gain experience, you will learn when it is time to try to bring a group back to the subject.

Jokingly say, “Well, speaking of (the day’s topic)...” when the tangent is far removed from the actual topic.

9. Disagreements & Conflicts

“These two women can’t agree on anything, whether it’s about groceries or which of the Gospels tells the most complete story of Jesus. They’re going to kill each other by the end of the study.”

Do not let disagreements rattle you. Often they can aid in learning.

If two people disagree on a certain point, it may be profitable to talk about the two opinions. It makes group members think and encourages interaction. Say something like: “This is good. It means both of you are thinking. Let’s look at both of your ideas and see if we can sort out what the Bible says.”

Caution: Whether it is appropriate to discuss a disagreement depends upon the subject. For example, if two people start arguing over the platform of the Republican Party, you would not want to delve into either opinion because it will not help your study of God’s Word. On the other hand, if two people are disagreeing whether James 2 and Romans 3 contradict each other, you could pursue both sides for the group’s advantage.

If a disagreement persists that you do not want to address in group, say something like, “You might want to carry on that discussion after Bible study. Let’s look now at the focus of our study today.”

If a disagreement is a matter of personal preference, sometimes it is best to just move on. You can say something like, “I suppose we all have our opinions on that,” and continue the lesson.

If two group members regularly bicker, you might need to talk about it with each of them. Remember, problems will not just go away.

10. Leader is the Only One Answering the Questions

“My group members are always asking me what I think. Then I end up telling them, and I feel like I do all the talking.”

Rather than tell them the answer, help them discover it for themselves. Use questions to help them get their focus back on the issue. Here are some ways you can respond when someone asks you a question you want them to answer:

Direct another question to a specific person in the group. “Judy, what are some things Paul says about love in this passage?”

Reverse the question back to the person who asked it: “That’s a good question, Steve. What do you think?”

Relay the question back to the whole group: “That’s a good question. What do you all think?”

CONCLUSION

You can eliminate most small group discussion crashes by planning and preparing well. Work hard at knowing your group members’ needs. This will ensure your discussions are relevant and will help you know how to respond.

Learn the art of asking good questions and using learning activities to involve the entire group. Learn to trust the Lord with your efforts. A good sense of humor will usually help—something just about always seems to come up. Over time you will be able to tell some great stories of things that happened in groups you led.

FOR THOUGHT/DISCUSSION

What is your greatest fear concerning what might happen when you are leading a group? Go ahead, say it. What is a good way to deal with this if it occurs? How would you deal with the following situations:

- You have just asked a question you thought was brilliant, but now you realize it wasn’t even understandable. Blank stares greet you everywhere you look.
- One of the women in your group says she wants to watch a special mini-series during group next week. Everyone else seems to agree.

- Someone in your group has just begun to vigorously assert that if you don't believe in a "young earth" theory of creation you are not a Christian. Everyone is on edge.
- You are leading a lesson on forgiveness and one of the women in the group starts crying.

POST SCRIPT

OK, you have looked through this whole chapter, and your problem is not among them. Maybe someone always shows up late, or people just do not show up at all no matter how many times you remind them. Or after several weeks, you have reached a point where you do not seem to be progressing. When you do not know what to do, pray. Ask God to give you wisdom and bind your group together in love. Pray also that He will create a hunger in them to continue to grow.

This might be a good time to get some feedback from those in your group. And of course, you can always ask your pastor or mentor for suggestions. There is a sample evaluation you can use to get feedback from the group members below. Whatever happens, do not get too anxious. Every great group has had its share of discussion disasters.

SAMPLE SMALL GROUP MEMBERS EVALUATION

An evaluation like this could be taken halfway through the study to make mid-course corrections. It is short enough to take during the group time.

- I look forward to coming to this small group: Yes / No / Sometimes. Why?
- I benefit from this time: Yes / No / Sometimes. For example:
- I wish we would do the following:
- I feel a part of the discussion during the group time: Yes / No / Sometimes. Why?
- Other comments or suggestions?

APPENDIX B: MODERN WOMEN TOUCHED BY JESUS

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV) says:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

This section contains personal stories written by women like you and me, women who live in our modern world and have been touched and changed by Jesus. These stories can be used however you as the leader feel would best fit your group. Some suggestions might be to read one aloud during your time together, maybe before you close with prayer. Another might be to print a copy of the story for each woman to be read at home. You be the judge of when and how to best utilize them.

STORY 1: "GOD, DO YOU SEE ME?"

Neighbors found my brother and me alone in our house 2 weeks after our divorced, drug addicted mother abandoned us. I was only 4. "God do you see me?"

Our father became our guardian and did his best as a single father, however, a year later mom was back in our lives. Weekend visits included sexual abuse at the hands of her live in boyfriend. I was a broken and wounded 5 year old little girl. "God do you see me?"

Dad remarried when I was 8. Finally, my life would be filled with love. But hopes were dashed when my new mom proved to be mentally unstable, inflicting physical and emotional abuse on me for 4 long years. Even after their divorce, the abuse didn't stop as my brother transformed into my abuser. I felt invisible in my pain. "God do you see me?"

Friends took me to church when I was 13 and I met Jesus, inviting Him into my heart and life. In that moment I felt a love so big and safe; I was home. But my physical home didn't change and the enemy began planting seeds of doubt. "You are not worthy of God's love." "You are defiled and dirty." "You are useless to God." And I believed every word of Satan's lies. "God do you see me?"

Numbing the pain became my norm: alcohol, drugs, promiscuity, anything to fill the void. And surprisingly, no one knew. I hid my internal pain with external successes: cheerleader, pageant titles, good grades, and the most popular boy in our class as my boyfriend. I wore a flawless mask to cover the years of devastation. "God do you see me?"

By age sixteen I no longer wanted to live. The pain was so immense that it hurt to breathe. Leaving a letter for Dad, I stuffed handfuls of pills into my mouth and lay down on my bed. Looking up at the ceiling I cried "God do you see me?"

Unexpectedly, Dad came home early from a meeting and found me. Two days later I awoke in the hospital. I was alive but the pain inside had not changed. My behavior was still out of control and my alcohol and drug use escalated. "God do you see me?"

After my college scholarship for dance was withdrawn due to a knee injury, I had nowhere to turn, so I accepted my mother's invitation to live with her. In this environment, at age 18, I found something I'd longed for—love, not from my mother, but from a man. This drug dealer, ex-con loved me with his fists and abusive behavior. After escaping with only the clothes on my back, I soon found that I was pregnant. Abortion seemed the only option I had, and within the next year I made that decision again. “God do you see me?”

I hit rock bottom hard and after a night of drinking I retrieved a gun given to me for protection. As I raised it to my temple, I felt a hand gripping my shoulder, but I knew I was alone in the apartment! I knew it was God's hand and I could either pull the trigger or drop the gun and grab His hand. As the gun fell to the ground, I grasped onto the hope of Jesus. He literally lifted me from the floor and embraced me. After seeking forgiveness, He said; “I have been waiting for you. Welcome home, daughter.”

Through challenges and trials I have moved step by step towards my Savior. Some days it feels as if I am taking several steps back, several steps forward but I have continued on my journey with Jesus, He has even given me a ministry to reach out to others with His hope and love.

Lonna Vopat

www.in-his-grace.com

STORY 2: "JESUS, WILL YOU SET ME FREE?"

The sound of chains and shackles dragging on the ground seemed deafening as the defendant came down the hall. As an alternate juror for his trial, this sound made chills run up and down my spine while hauntingly reminding me of my own chains. Chains I had drug through life until Jesus Christ unlocked them and set me free.

My slavery began involuntarily through sexual abuse at the young age of four. Many years of voluntary slavery followed through bad choices, a sin-filled lifestyle and a desire to run away from a God I felt couldn't possibly love me. Although I had wonderful Christian parents, I had stuffed the confusion and hurt of my sexual abuse deep inside but it was beginning to seep out and affect my life. I loathed myself feeling like something was deeply "wrong" with me. By the time I came to Christ at the age of 13, I knew I needed Him. I literally felt as if a load had been lifted from my shoulders, as though some of my shackles had been removed.

However, as I grew into adolescence, I became very promiscuous and rebellious selling myself into voluntary slavery. I shook my fist in rebellion and anger towards God and told him, "I don't need You! Forget You!" while I walked away from Him into the darkest time of sin in my life. My shackles grew tighter, but God never left me.

Eventually I married a wonderful young man but our first years were hurtful and harsh as we both brought baggage into our marriage. Difficulties between me and one of my new family members led to harsh words and a broken relationship as I vowed never to forgive, selling myself into more voluntary slavery.

While pregnant with my first child, I was so grieved that my child would have such a mess for a mother. I fell on my knees and cried out to God for help and He came into my slavery, using His Word to heal me, redeem me and set me free. I began to study His Word and realized I needed forgiveness from the life of sin I had led. I recommitted my life to live for Christ and longed to know Him more, but before He would reveal Himself to me further, He told me I must forgive the family member who had hurt me so deeply. Oh, how hard this was! But as God enabled me to forgive, He began to open the floodgates of His grace upon my life.

For 27 years not even my parents knew of my childhood abuse and it ate away at me like cancer. God wanted to remove this yoke, make me whole and redeem every year the locusts had eaten in my life. And He did. Though processing the abuse was a very dark period in my life, He was with me, releasing me from the involuntary slavery I had been sold into so many years before.

The more I studied God's Word, the more I saw something I had never seen in my life... hope. God's Word gave me hope for a better life, a life lived in freedom. Sometimes I wondered, "Could God possibly set me free?" I have found the answer to that question in Galatians 5:1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." He took my chains and He flung them as far as the east is from the west. Jesus Christ reached down into the mess of my life and made something beautiful and I no longer hear the haunting sound of my chains.

Amy Brady
Amy Brady Ministries
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STORY 3: "GOD, WILL YOU HEAL ME?"

"Why would he want to stay married to a blind woman? He deserves better, and I want to die." Those thoughts haunted my sleepless nights. The incurable disease that robbed my sight also stole our dreams and dropped a black curtain of desperation into what was once a marriage shining with dreams and hopes.

But at thirty-one, unexpected as a sudden storm, my peripheral vision began to close in. Desperation burned in me. Futile trips to specialists, fortune tellers and acupuncturists along with new age treatments and numerous vitamins all jammed my schedule while frantic thoughts of hopelessness jabbed my head.

One winter morning, what I dreaded became a horrifying reality. I woke, thinking daylight hadn't come. I groped for my husband asleep beside me, turned to see him, but all I saw was a dark gray nothing. Daylight had come through the window, but total blindness shoved me into a dark prison.

I hungered to see again, to see my boys' faces just one more time. A desperate search for an answer somewhere, from someone, consumed my every thought.

Then, as a last option, I accepted an invitation from a friend to attend a Christian church. Bitterness, anger and anguish had turned my heart as cold as the metal chair I sat on. But in the midst of muffled sobs, a verse pierced my heart, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added on to you." (Matthew 6:33)

I sighed and inhaled its meaning. I'd been seeking to regain my sight with all my mind, heart, and soul. But God was instructing something different. To seek Him? To seek His righteousness? I really didn't know how, so I asked Him and He pointed the way each time I allowed His Word to seep into my heart as I intently listened to Scripture on cassette tapes.

I had foolishly lamented because my life as a sighted person had died, my hopes had vanished and my dreams had ended, but He ushered me beyond my bitterness into the beauty of His love.

The widow of Nain must have agonized over the loss of her son, but God revived him. He did the same for me. He gave me a renewed vision, He revived my hope, and He breathed a more vibrant life into my days.

And when thoughts of insecurity, of living sightless in a sighted world jugged through, His Word soothed anxious moments. “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)

Meet all my needs? The idea was hard to fathom. My needs were immense—from needing someone to drive me places, take my sons to a myriad of events, help them with homework, catch their mischievous antics, clean house and cook. Yet, the Lord said, “all your needs.” So I obeyed, thanked Him for what He’d done for today and thanked Him again for what He’d do in my tomorrows. I leaned on Him for each detail. Tasks like cooking, cleaning and laundry took twice as long to accomplish sometimes, but that was okay. I learned to do it all. Not through my own abilities, but through the power of His promise that eased my fretting heart. His whisper echoed in me, “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)

Cared for me? For my single, isolated circumstance in the far corner of the world? He did. He cared; I had no doubt. And in the silence of night, I’d wondered about going out into the world—to work or pursue a career. He listened to my questions, He heard my pondering. And all along, He knew what I needed even before I did. He filled me with confidence and ushered me to a job as a Spanish interpreter. With details that only He could provide, He paved the path to success in the career He carefully crafted for me.

When I could physically see, I’d been blind to His goodness. When I lost my sight, He gave me clarity to see His faithfulness.

Janet Eckles

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