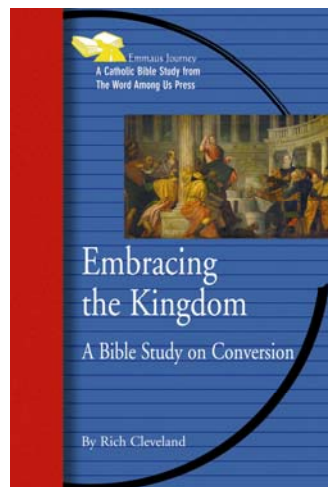


Emmaus Journey

Catholic Evangelization and Discipleship
Through Small Groups

A Small-Group Facilitator's Guide
For



A Catholic Bible Study from The Word Among Us Press

This small-group facilitators guide provides suggestions for leading each aspect of this bible study. In addition it provides helpful small-group dynamics principles which will enhance your group.

Emmaus Journey is committed to encouraging among Catholics, enthusiasm for, and commitment to daily scripture reading and reflection and regular participation in scripture based small groups.



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Embracing the Kingdom Facilitator's Guide

To the Facilitator:

The following material applies to *Embracing the Kingdom*. The group dynamics material that is found in the front of this guide should be read and studied before using the suggestions which follow. Within the chapter suggestions we did not try to duplicate the group dynamics information but assume that you will have read and will frequently refer to the group dynamics material as you prepare each week.

The suggestions and questions come out of the experience of leading this material for several years. The additional questions and suggestions will provide more material than you need, so pick and chose what is helpful, and have fun.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 1 — Introduction

Objectives

1. To encourage the group to get acquainted and comfortable with one another.
2. To familiarize the group with the material and what lies ahead.
3. To become comfortable sharing with one another.
4. To re-inaugurate the bible reading practices learned in *One Heart, One Mind*.

This first session will set the tone for the entire course, so you will want to be prepared and positive. As people arrive greet them with a smile and with welcoming warmth. Introduce each person to the others as they arrive. **Do not pass out the *Embracing the Kingdom* books until you have completed the “Getting Acquainted Exercise.”**

Page 10

Before You Begin

In preparation for this exercise you should re-read “Get Acquainted Exercises” on page 9. Also re-familiarize yourself with “Why We Read Aloud” on page 10.

After completing the get acquainted exercise, pass out the *Embracing the Kingdom* books and give people a chance to look them over.

Page 10-11

“Introduction” text

Have several participants read aloud pages 10-11. As facilitator, and for the first session, you should begin by reading paragraph one. Ask for questions and comments on what impressed them.

Consider emphasizing the concept in the next to the last paragraph, “As you apply yourself.” Benefits gleaned from these studies will be in direct proportion to the effort each person expends.

The last paragraph re-inaugurates the reading and marking, responding to God in prayer, and using a spiritual journal that was developed in *One Heart, One Mind*. If you have participants who did not complete *One Heart, One Mind* you will need to meet with them individually to insure that they thoroughly understand and are committed to practicing these disciplines.

Also point out that the “Notes” pages are available so that they can capture and write down important truths that others share.

Page 12

Materials

Have this paragraph read aloud asking for comments and questions. You should draw their attention to the progressive nature of the Emmaus Journey materials. The content begins with basic truths and becomes more complex as the studies progress. In addition the quantity of material and the difficulty of the questions progresses so that the participants grow in their abilities and commitments.

Bible Aids

Have this paragraph read aloud and point out the sequence mentioned. Completing preparation on their own each week should precede consulting reference material of others.

Applications

Continue by having this paragraph read aloud. Share with the group that part of spiritual growth is learning to be transparent and vulnerable both with our selves and with a spiritually and emotionally safe small community. So hopefully all participants will learn to share their answers to all parts of the studies.

Pages 13-14

Helpful Attitudes

This material is especially helpful in heading off some problems before they develop. Have each point read aloud by a different participant and comment on them as you feel necessary.

- The following are some things which could be emphasized on “Preparation.”
Lack of preparation can turn the study into an SYI (share your ignorance) study. We get out of a group like this what we put into it. So take your time and over-prepare.
Put your answers in your own words, don’t simply transfer the words of the Bible to your bible study blank.
Ask participants to think through on where and when they are going to do their study each week. Having a plan in mind really enhances the process.
- The following is something that could be emphasized on “Teachability” and “Wholeheartness.”
The most important time to come to the small group is when you are feeling down emotionally and spiritually. This will allow the Holy Spirit, and Christ dwelling in the other members of the group to minister to you. Don’t be proud, and take the easy way out by staying home. Each person will really need to decide ahead of time how they are going to handle these difficult times in their lives and not wait to make that decision at a time when they are feeling discouraged
- The following is something that could be emphasized on the last two points.
Pause and ask them for their comments. Inquire, “Which attitude do you think is most important?” and “What additional attitudes would you include?”

Pages 14-16

Group Conversational Prayer Exercise

Share with the group that for the next few minutes you are all going to participate in a group prayer exercise together. Then have someone read the first paragraph aloud.

Consider sharing with the group what it means to you to know that close friends are praying for you and for significant events in your life.

Have the Acts 12:1-17 passage read aloud by various members of the group, then read the question. Allow four or five minutes for participants to write down their answers to both parts of the question.

At the end of the designated time allowed begin the discussion by sharing one way in which you feel the groups are similar or different. Ask if anyone saw the same similarity or difference and would like to comment further on it.

Proceed around the group in the same manner asking each participant to share one similarity or difference that has not yet been shared. Continue until all the similarities or differences have been covered. Remember to affirm all who share.

After you feel that the group has adequately answered the first part of the question, ask the group to share their answer to the second part of the question. Have several share their answer.

Continue by having the quote on page 15 read aloud and ask, “What stands out to you from this quote by Chrysostom?”

Introduce the next part by sharing your hopes that the group will grow together in their commitment to care for, and uphold, one another through prayer, and that they would become increasingly comfortable praying together.

Have the remaining paragraphs read aloud, each by a different person, taking comments and questions as you proceed. Have on or two points in mind to emphasize.

Close this session by actually praying together. Staying seated usually works best.

As the facilitator you can get it started by saying, “Okay, lets spend a few minutes in prayer together. Feel free to pray about anything we talked about tonight, or about anything else that is important to you. I’ll get us started, and after everyone has had a chance to pray, I’ll close the prayer time by saying, ‘Amen.’ So lets get started and feel free to jump in at any time.”

Remember to keep your prayer simple and succinct. Don’t be afraid of periods of silence. They are necessary both for people to collect their thoughts and to feel a sense of responsibility to enter into the prayer.

After you think everyone has prayed who is going to pray, briefly close.

Page 17

Preparation for Session 2

Have the assignment read aloud.

Encourage everyone to stay around for refreshments, if you have them, and communicate that you are looking forward to seeing them next week.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 2 — The Importance of Gods Word

Objectives

1. To encourage and if necessary reinvigorate the practice of daily reading the Scriptures and praying.
2. To experience the joy of discussing a Scripture study together.
3. To recognize the important role God's Word should have in our lives.

Page 18

Before You Begin

If you have some people who did not participate in *One Heart, One Mind* and are unfamiliar with reading and marking the Scriptures, responding to God in prayer, and journaling their thoughts, take a moment and find their response to using these techniques.

Take enough time for the entire group to share one or two thoughts from their daily reading. As the facilitator you should begin the sharing for the first couple weeks, to set the pace and model what you expect.

Be attentive as to whether people are journaling. You might inquire of the group what they are using to journal their thoughts; a notebook, *The Word Among Us* Prayer Journal, etc.

Pages 18-19

“The Importance of God’s Word” text

Explain that this week and next week the group will be studying and discussing “The Importance of God’s Word.” Read aloud through the first two paragraphs together, asking for and making comments as you proceed.

Ask, “Have you noticed any change in your attitude toward Scripture in the last few years?”

Continue by having all three quotes read aloud, perhaps each by a different participant. Give people an opportunity to share what impressed or stood out to them. Consider asking, “What do you think it means to be ‘well grounded’ in the Scriptures?” and “What does Boadt’s statement ‘reorientation of my values and priorities’ imply to you?”

Read the last paragraph of the introduction to the bible study yourself and comment that “It is important as you begin the actual discussion of these studies that people remember that you are discussing the Scriptures not simply their opinion. Consequently, it is valuable with each question you discuss, that people turn to the passage of Scripture and read it and the question being answered, before the group discusses their answers. In this way people can easily look back at the passage to see from where people’s answers were derived.

1(a)

Ask someone to begin by reading question 1(a), the passage, and give their answer.

Remember to be affirming as people share. Ask if anyone has additional benefits that were not mentioned. Continue receiving feedback from the group until you have a composite list that includes all of the benefits anyone in the group discovered.

Page 20-21

1(b)

Let several people share their choice for ‘the most important’ benefit, and explain their reasoning. As a new benefit is shared as being ‘the most important,’ see if anyone else chose the same benefit. If they have they should share their reasoning why at that time.

2(a)

Have the question read aloud. Then have a different person read the first passage and give their answer. Others can add their thoughts also. When you have thoroughly finished discussing the first passage then move on to the next passage and repeat the process.

Page 21

2(b)

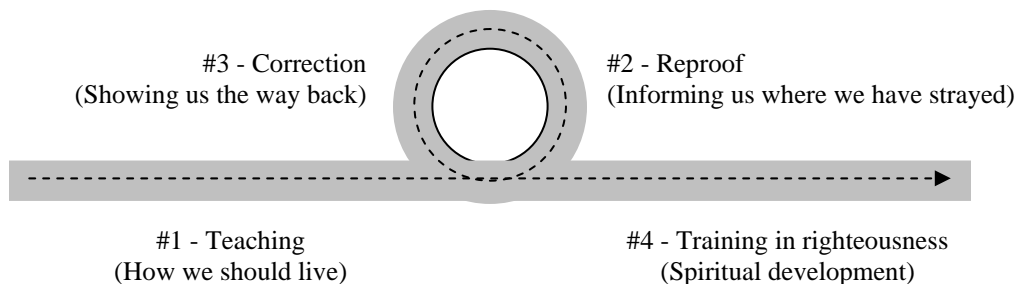
Remember, and remind the group, that there is not a right or wrong answer to this question for they are sharing 'what is most desirable' to them. Remember to share what God is teaching you also.

Page 22

3

After you have several share their answers, consider asking, "What do the four terms that are used in verse 16 mean?"

Consider drawing on a piece of paper the following illustration to share what these four terms encompass.



Teaching from God's Word tells us how to live (#1), Reproof lets us know when we have strayed off of Christ's way (#2), Correction shows us how to return to a life of love and obedience (#3), and God's Word trains us to grow in godliness (#4).

Continue by reading the quote on the bottom of page 22 and asking for their comments.

Page 23

4

Have someone read question 4 and the passage connected to it, and read their answer.

Ask, "Can you provide a real life example that illustrates what this Psalm cautions us to avoid, and/or what it advises us to do?"

When you have finished discussing this question, commend them for their hard work and thoughtful answers. Share how much you are looking forward to growing together with them through the study of God's Word.

Page 23

Assignment for Session 3

Have someone read the assignment aloud.

Encourage them to start their bible study early so that they can really give thoughtful answers to each question.

Pray together. You might ask them, "What can we pray for in light of this week's lesson?" Also see if anyone has any special intentions for which the group should pray. Encourage the group, especially if they aren't accustomed to praying aloud together, that you would like everyone to become comfortable and willing to participate in the closing prayers, by offering a brief one or two sentence prayer.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 3 — The Importance of Gods Word (continued)

Objectives

1. To enjoy discussing God's Word together.
2. To develop personal convictions about God's word and it's role in our lives.

Page 26

Before You Begin

Take approximately 20 minutes for your sharing, depending on the size of the group.

At this point the group should be becoming comfortable sharing from their daily reading. However, inasmuch as this may be a new discipline for some people, they may be struggling with consistency. Several things will make consistency more likely for them. First, do they have a time and place where they have scheduled this daily appointment to meet with God? Second, are they using the daily Bible reading record? It is also helpful to encourage them to try, during this coming week, to not miss a time of reading their Bible and praying from Monday through Friday. Sometimes, Saturday and Sunday are difficult days to be consistent so embracing a mini goal like this may help them. Consider sharing these thoughts with them.

Page 26

“The Importance of God’s Word (continued)” text

Have someone read the first two paragraphs aloud. Briefly discuss, “What impressed you from this quote?” Usually it is helpful to discuss what it means to be “nourished and ruled” by God’s Word.

Page 27

5(a)

Have one or more people share their answers. A possible follow up question is “What is the difference between meditation, and meditation on God’s Word?”

Consider sharing that a good synonym for meditation is rumination. A cow has four stomachs. Rumination takes place when a cow swallows some food, and later regurgitates it in the form of the cud, and chews on it again, receiving additional nourishment each time until it passes through each of the four stomachs. Similarly, meditation can take place when we feed on God’s word, and later recall it again and again, to mull it over and receive additional insight and nourishment.

(b)

Have several share their insights.

6(a)

After several share their answers, you could ask, “How can we practically apply these lessons in our battle to overcome temptation?”

Page 28

6(b)

Have several share their answers then address the group with this follow up question; “Did you discover any aspect of Jesus’ view of Scripture that you should incorporate into your view?”

Page28-29

7

As people share their answers remember that the question deals with what *our response* should be and not simply what does the passage say. Often as people begin doing Scripture based studies they simply write down what the passage means to them, rather than remembering to answer the specific question asked. So be alert to calling the participants attention back to the question.

Here are some follow up questions you can consider using.

Acts 17:11 — “What difference would it make if a person only accepted the Scriptures as being ‘from men’?”

2 Peter 3:15-18 — “Which response do you find most challenging?”

Page 29-30

8

This question is very important so you might want to have everyone share his or her answer, with you sharing first, as facilitator. Don't evaluate their answers but encourage them. If someone hasn't answered this question, emphasize how important it is for us to develop personal convictions regarding these issues, and encourage them to make sure they put in their own words what they believe.

Close the bible study by reading the paragraph on page 30. It might be helpful to have looked up in advance the section in the Catechism that refers to sacred tradition so that you can reference the page number, and perhaps read an excerpt or two.

Page 30

Assignment for Session 4

Have the assignment read aloud

Close in prayer, encouraging others to pray also.

Remind them that some of the questions in these studies ask them to state their answer, or to restate a passage in their own words. Encourage them to give special attention to expressing their answer thoroughly.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 4 — The Importance of Prayer

Objectives

1. To continue growing in our daily commitment to Scripture reading and prayer.
2. To understand how Jesus viewed prayer and taught it to his disciples.

Page 34

Before You Begin

Prior to having people share from their daily reading, since this lesson is on prayer, ask the group how they are doing on responding to God in prayer regarding the things they read in the Scripture each day.

Continue by having people share.

If you think it is appropriate you might ask the group, “In light of the thought from Scripture that was just shared, how would you turn that thought into prayer?”

Page 34

Before You Begin

Have participants share from their Spiritual Journal one or more things that impressed them from this last week's daily readings.

Page 34

“The Importance of Prayer” text

Mention that during this week and the next we will be studying and discussing “prayer.”

Read through the next four paragraphs and ask for their comments and questions while stressing one or two things that also stood out to you.

Page 35

1(a) (b)

Handle this and each of the following questions as you did last week, having someone read the question, the Scripture passage, and their answer. Then open it up to others in the group for their feedback as well. In this guide we will include several follow-up questions which you can use to enhance the discussion.

Follow up question, “How would you explain the concept of ‘boldness’ in prayer?”

2(a)

Follow up question, “What do you think was Jesus’ primary intent in teaching His disciples this prayer?”

Page 36

2(b)

This question should be discussed in depth for our attitudes regarding prayer fully determine our practices.

Page 36

2(c)

First ask to see how many were able to find all seven ingredients, and see if anyone found more than seven ingredients. Share around the group with individuals adding one ingredient at a time, until you have compiled a composite list. Because people use different translations, and view the parts of the prayer differently, they may not all end up with seven. The number really isn't important, the objective is to think

about what makes up the various parts of the prayer.

Page 37-39

2(d)

This question can be introduced by also asking, "What is the concept Jesus most strongly stresses in this teaching about prayer?" Take time to thoroughly examine the patterns and principles and relate them to our lives and prayers.

After the group has sufficiently answered the question have someone read the quote by St. Thomas Aquinas.

3

As you move through the following passages have a different person share their thoughts on one of the passages and then see if others would like to add to what has been said. Interspersed are some additional questions you might consider using.

Matthew 21:18-22 — "How would you complete the sentence, 'Prayer is...?'"

Luke 11:5-13 — "What role do you think the Holy Spirit plays in our prayers?"

John 14:12-14

John 15:7-11 — "How do you think not abiding in Christ affects our prayers?"

John 16:22-24 — "How do you feel about your ability to affect life through your prayers?" "What should we do if we don't have a lot of confidence in our prayer's effectiveness?"

Page 39

Assignment for Session 5

Have someone read the assignment and close with prayer.

Thank them for their contributions to the discussion and remind them that, "We will learn more about prayer next week."

This is a good time to talk about having some social function to solidify interpersonal relationships. Consider discussing this idea with the group and coming up with some initial plans. Solidify the plans next week.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 5 — The Importance of Prayer (continued)

Objectives

1. To focus on primarily sharing from their journal entries.
2. To make prayer practical and to change our attitudes and commitments about praying for others.

Page 44

Before You Begin

This week, because the bible study is somewhat longer, consider encouraging everyone to share specifically from their journal entries. You should set the pace and model what you expect from them by telling them what Bible passage you are going to share from and allowing them time to turn to it. Tell them the chapter and verse again and read it aloud. (If it is a passage which is longer than three or four verses just point out the phrases to which you are going to refer.) Then read exactly what is written in your journal, perhaps followed by one or two additional comments.

Some will begin to share as they have in the past. When this happens listen attentively, and when they finish say, "That sounds great, but would you read what you actually wrote in your journal?" Then once they read from their journal entry, provide profuse and valid affirmation. You can do that with something as simple as, "Oh, I really like the way you said that!" or "Would you read that one part again, that was really meaningful?" You will want to make sure that you are sincere and not phony, but provide strong affirmation on what they have *written*.

Page 44

"The Importance of Prayer (continued)" text

Have one or more people read the introduction and pause briefly for comments or questions.

Draw special attention to the quote by Bonhoeffer by asking, "How do you feel about this statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer?"

Page 45

4

Cover this question as recommended previously.

Pages 45-46

5

Remember to focus on practical aspects of prayer.

At this point as facilitator you should be developing many of your own questions to amplify on the lesson material. Remember to review the group dynamics material on how to develop and use questions.

Philippians 4:4-7 — "What does worry say about our concept of God and our relationship with Him?"

1 Timothy 4:4-5 — "What is the difference between being thankful and thanksgiving?" "What portion of our prayer time do you think should be devoted to thanksgiving?"

James 4:1-3 — "What affect does prayer have on our relationship with others?"

1 John 5:13-15 — "Where and when do you do your best praying?"

Have someone read Nouwen's quote aloud, and ask, "How valuable have you found some of these memorized prayers?"

Page 47-48

6

Handle these passages as before by having different members of the group read the passage aloud and then share their answer. Remember that the question focuses on areas that could become the focus of our prayers

Some additional questions are included for further stimulation. You, of course, can use all or none of them depending on the needs of the discussion. In addition you should also be developing some questions of your own, in light of the information this guide gives for developing questions.

Matthew 9:35-38 —“In your mind what constitutes a Christian ‘laborer’?” “Where do you see a need for laborers?”

Ephesians 1:15-23 — “How could we use this prayer for our families?” “What would you anticipate happening if you prayed this for a member of your family on a regular basis?”

Ephesians 5:17-20 —“What does the church teach about being filled with the Holy Spirit?” “What does it mean to you?”

1 Timothy 2:1-4 — “Who do you pray for regularly that would fit into this category?” “Give us some examples of people in authority and what would you pray for them?”

Page 48

7

This is an important question that you will want to make sure that you have adequate time to cover. Remember God didn't give the Scriptures simply to increase our knowledge but to change our lives. Each of us should experience change as a result of reflecting on God's Word.

After the discussion is finished close by having St. Augustine quote read.

Page 49

Assignment for Session 6

Have someone read the assignment.

Close in prayer together. By this time people should be feeling comfortable participating in prayer together, and in sharing prayer requests and intentions with one another. Encourage the group not to just zero in on the problems in their lives that need prayer, but to also pray about ministry events and opportunities, and some of the areas you discovered tonight.

Remember to complete the planning for your groups social time that you discussed last week. A good guideline for these times is to keep it simple, plan for some kind of interaction and some light fun.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 6 — The Importance of One Another

Objectives

1. To strengthen commitment to daily Scripture reading and prayer, and completion of the small group assignments.
2. To understand the value of healthy interpersonal relationships within the family of God.

Page 52

Before You Begin

Continue to encourage them to first read what they wrote in their Emmaus Journal, before elaborating if desired. Be aware of people who have not shared for more than one week. Usually this is an indication that they are struggling with this daily discipline. Perhaps you should schedule a meeting over coffee, or a meal to talk about how they are doing.

Page 52-53

“The Importance of One Another” text

Consider introducing this section by sharing a struggle you may be having with consistency. Your transparency will help them to also be able to talk about their struggles without fear. Have this material read aloud, asking for comments and or questions, and being ready to emphasize one or two things that you feel are important. Several points of importance to consider emphasizing are included here.

Have the first two paragraphs read, then ask, “What are some other ways in which we can deliberately hold God’s truths before our mind?” “What is the alternative to our belief ‘automatically remaining alive’?”

Continue by reading the next two paragraphs asking for their thoughts and comments. Another question could be, “Is not ‘simply drifting away’ the answer to the question about the alternative to our belief ‘automatically remaining alive’?”

Finish by reading and discussing the remaining paragraphs. Underscore that because the daily Scripture reading we do tends to anchor our lives, this is why we focus on it each week. Consider discussing, “How do we focus on consistency, without slipping into legalism, and still keep enjoyment of daily Bible reading and prayer as our goal?”

Page 53-54

Bible Study

Have various participant read aloud the opening three paragraphs and then ask, “What stood out to you from this introduction?” Interspersed are additional questions you can use.

“How did you respond to the statement, ‘belonging to a community of disciples who follow Jesus is more primary than belonging to an institutional church’?”

“Since we are often physically together, what kind of separation do you think is meant here?”

As facilitator read the last paragraph of the introduction and then ask someone to do question 1.

Page 54

1(a)

This is a difficult question. What we are after here is the relationship that exist between the Father, the Son, and we, the Body of Christ, and how that relationship constitutes a unique family.

Page 54

1(b)

“Practically, to what extent do you think Christ wants to be our head?”

Page 55

2

Handle as you have in the past. Here are some additional questions you can use to stimulate the discussion. Remember to focus on attitudes and behavior that help us overcome selfishness.

Romans 12:1-8 — “What is the opposite extreme of thinking more highly of yourself than you should?” “How should we think about ourselves?”

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 — “How would a proper understanding of these truths manifest itself?”

Page 56

3

These next two passages are very important because Jesus shared them during his last hours with his disciples.

John 13:33-35 — Have people answer both parts of this question, and then ask, “How do these passages further define love?”

John 15:12-17 — “How would a friend consider this strong admonition?”

Page 56-58

4

Each of the following passages is full of meat to chew on, so it will be easy to get off track. Maintain the groups focus on *why* the behavior is harmful. You will notice that each passage has a follow up question as well. It is helpful to have the person sharing read the passage if it is not too long, and share their answer to both parts of the question, and then open it up for comments and questions from the rest of the group.

Romans 14:13-23 — “What is the difference between judging and being judgmental?”

Galatians 5:24-26 — “To what kind of competition does this verse refer?”

Colossians 3:9-10 — “What does being dishonest communicate about ourselves?” “What does it communicate about those with whom we were dishonest?”

James 4:11-12; 5:9 — “What are some of the subtle ways Christians speak evil of others?”

Close off the discussion by having C.S. Lewis’ quote read aloud. Ask, “How do you feel about this quote?”

Emphasize how important it is to understand this concept. We all fail, miserably at times, and we need to recognize the need to not let our failures kill us spiritually, but use them as a stepping stone.

Page 59

Assignment for Session 7

Have the assignment read aloud.

Encourage people when they complete portions like question 5, in Session 7, to not simply list what is in the passage but to summarize the message of the passage. This will help them see the meaning and not just the details.

Close by praying together.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 7 — The Importance of One Another (continued)

Objective

To recognize what are our responsibilities toward one another.

Page 62

Before you Begin

Remind people how helpful it is to use the “Notes” pages to write down anything helpful another participant shares during the evening. Quite often we will here Christ speaking to us through someone else and taking note of it prevents our letting the thought slip by without thinking more about it later.

Hopefully, the sharing each week is very meaningful for all the participants. Gauge the amount of time you should devote to it based on the time needed for the bible study discussion. If you think you will be seriously pushed for time, you can always suggest pairing off in mini-groups of two or three to share for 10-15 minutes. However you should use this technique sparingly.

Page 62

“The importance of One Another (continued)” text

Have this section in its entirety read aloud, making comments that you feel are necessary and encouraging the participants to share what impressed them from it.

Page 63-66

5

Handle question 5, a little differently than you have handled questions previously since it has several parts to it. Ask the participants to look over the parts of question 5 and choose the passage they would most like to discuss. Once someone has suggested a passage, inquire whom else chose that passage as the one they wanted to discuss. Then have the person who suggested it read and answer that part of the questions. Take additional comments from the others who also chose it.

Then ask someone who didn't choose that same passage, which passage did they choose, and handle it in the same manner.

Remember that each passage has a follow up question. Also included here are some additional questions you can use as you see fit.

Galatians 5:13-14 — “How would you define freedom in light of this verse?”

Ephesians 4:25-29 — “How can you be angry without sinning?” “What constitutes ‘evil talk’?”

Ephesians 5:21 — “What would happen if two or more people truly tried to be submissive to one another?” “How does Jesus’ submission to the Father’s will, redefine the nature of submission?”

Colossians 3:12-14 — “Can you give an example of clothing yourself with kindness?” “How do we do that?”

Colossians 3:15-17 — “How can we tell if the Word of God is dwelling within us?”

1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11 — “What are some ways to encourage one another?” “When you need encouragement how do you prefer to have it given to you?”

Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:23-25 — “How do you feel about being accountable to another person, or for another person’s faith life?”

James 5:15-16 — “We know the healing value of confession, but how can we as lay people practically put this principle into practice with some of our closer friends and family?”

Page 67

6

“Who, in your mind, makes up the community to whom you have responsibility?”

Page 67

7

These two passages deal with an important concept, how to maintain healthy relationships in the midst of conflict. One passage deals with what to do when wronged, the other with what to do when you have wronged someone. Take time to thoroughly help people recognize their responsibility to resolve conflicts.

“Whose responsibility is it to resolve conflict?”

Page 68-69

8

Handle as you have the previous questions with multiple parts.

Colossians 3:13 — “How does interpersonal conflict affect our relationship with God?”

Jeremiah 31:34 — “What can we do to try and remove from our mind wrongs done to us?”

Ephesians 1:7-8 — “What can we conclude about the costliness of being a forgiving person?”

Colossians 2:13-15 — “What affect could forgiving a person even when they haven’t asked for forgiveness have on that person?”

1 John 1:9 — “Define what it means to *confess* our sins?”

Point out that “When you think of the need to forgive, who comes to mind?” (That is probably the relationship to which these passages should be applied.)

Close the discussion by reading the quote by Nouwen on page 69 and asking, “How did you respond to this statement by Nouwen?”

Page 69

Assignment for Session 8

Have the assignment read aloud.

Remind them that we are only four weeks from completing this book, and urge them to plan on finishing strong.

It is always fun and helpful, for building community, to conclude this course by planning some social event, such as a meal together. Ask them to think about what the group could do socially after Session 11, and come prepared to share and discuss their suggestions next week.

Close in prayer. (What has your group been praying about? Are they asking God for *big* things, or only presenting their problems to him. He wants us to present to him our problems but he also wants us to be praying with vision for the work of his kingdom. Try to encourage the group to think big and ask God to do big things through them.)

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 8 — The Importance of Conversion

Objective

1. To understand that God is calling us to conversion and to respond accordingly.
2. To strengthen the participant's resolve to continue following Christ.

Page 74

Before You Begin

Share insights from your daily Scripture reading.

Encourage participants to use the "notes" section to record anything significant that others share.

Page 74-75

"The Importance of Conversion" text

As participants have proceeded through this booklet the process of conversion has been taking place. These next two lessons provide an opportunity to challenge people to respond to God's call for conversion, regardless of where each is individually. Remember to pray for the participants as they study and discuss this important subject. Additional questions are included that you may use to stimulate the groups thinking.

Have the introduction read aloud then kick off the discussion by having participants share what impressed them from the introduction.

Explain that this session will deal with the first response, the response of faith. Session 9 will deal with the other two responses, the response of obedience, and the response of service.

After reading the quote which concludes the introduction ask, "What are some areas of change you would like to see the Holy Spirit accomplish in your life?"

Page 75-76

1

Though the passage for question 1 is rather long it will be helpful to have it read aloud since all three parts of question 1 concern it. Have several read, a paragraph at a time, until all 21 verses have been read.

"What do you think Jesus could be referring to when He speaks of being born of 'water' and the 'spirit'?"

"What other words would you use as synonyms for believe?"

Have several persons read their answers to part two

On part three, consider asking, "Why do you think that some people, after having heard the Gospel, choose not to believe?"

Page 76

2

Have each participant share one of the ingredients they discovered, continuing around the group until all the ingredients people have discovered has been shared. Encourage people to add to their list anything that others share which they overlooked.

"Was anything in this list surprising or new to you?"

Page 77

3

Question three can be a great time for clarification. Have the questions read, along with the quote from *Go and Make Disciples*. Have several people share their definition.

“How do you like this explanation of the Good News?”

Page 77

4

This question provides the opportunity for people who may not have already confirmed their faith in Christ to consider responding to him in faith.

Go and Make Disciples says, “We know that people experience conversion in many ways. Some experience a sudden, shattering insight that brings rapid transformation. Some experience a gradual growth over many years. Others undergo conversion as they take part in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults...”

“This is crucial we must be converted—and we must continue to be converted.” (p. 2)

You may have some people who either are unaware of a time when they affirmed their faith through an *adult faith decision* or some who have had many times of doing this. Assure them that the important thing is that we communicate to God that we believe and welcome Jesus as Savior and Lord of our life and choose to follow him, thus confirming our baptismal vows.

Ask, “Does this concept of the need to individually affirm our faith in Jesus, make sense?” “What are various ways we could do that?”

Page 78

5

Remember to keep the answers focused on *anchors* for our faith.

The introduction spoke about conversion as both “immediate and continual” transformation. “What part do these aspects of conversion play in our assurance of our eternal destiny?”

Have the quote from the Catechism read aloud, and give people an opportunity to discuss it. This would be a good time to encourage people to purchase a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and to begin becoming thoroughly familiar with it.

Page 79

Assignment for Session 9

Have the Assignment read aloud.

You asked participants to come prepared to talk about a social event to wrap up the study of this book. Take time to plan the event together.

Close in prayer together.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 9 — The Importance of Conversion (continued)

Objectives

1. To diffuse the misunderstanding and remove the threatening nature that terms like “born again” often hold for Catholics.
2. To understand the “continual” process of conversion and some of what it entails.
3. To challenge them to be faithful to daily meet with God in Scripture reading and prayer even though they are nearing the finish of this study.

Page 84

Before You Begin

Encourage the group by sharing the growth you have seen in them through their sharing from their daily Bible reading and prayer. Challenge them to commit to continue this practice regardless of whether or not they are part of a small group who encourages them to do so. Those who choose to continue the practice will have changed from simply doing it as an “assignment” to keep, to having a heartfelt “conviction” about it.

Share insights from your daily Scripture readings as usual.

Pages 84-85

“The Importance of Conversion (continued)” text

This introduction is especially valuable. Many Catholics have been attacked and abused because they were unfamiliar with these terms. Often when they were asked something like, “Are you born again?” because they were unfamiliar with the term they would respond, “I’m a Catholic.” Frequently, the person asking the question then proceeded to assume they were non-believers and would challenge them to “accept Christ,” etc., sometimes in a rather aggressive and even hostile manner. Last week’s study, and this introduction are intended to take the mystery out of these terms, and enable Catholics to understand that these terms are in *our* Bible and are fully Catholic, simply meaning that someone believes and follows Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Have someone read the introduction aloud.

Frequently, groups will need to spend several minutes sharing negative experiences they have had, or negative feelings about these terms which previous encounters have generated. Be understanding without contributing to additional resentment and bitterness.

This is the same quote from *Go and Make Disciples* which was used on page 77 in last week’s study, broken into its various components. It is an excellent summarization of the Good News. Anyone choosing to believe in these points has in fact, “accepted Christ” and been “born again” or “saved.” Hopefully, this will help Catholic believers to have confidence to simply say, “Yes!” when next they are asked. Hopefully, this explanation will also help them to know how to explain to another family member or friend what essentially they must believe about Jesus to respond to the Good News.

Inquire as to whether anyone looked up the two verses used in the last paragraph of the introduction. It will be helpful as a prelude to the study to read them aloud.

Page 85

6

Questions 6-8 deal with the *response of obedience*.

Actually, there is more than one motivation mentioned here.

You could ask, “Which comes first the chicken or the egg, or in this case love or obedience?”

Question 6, Part 2— “How does the Holy Spirit help us obey?”

Page 86

7

Have different people read the two passages aloud, and then state the question.

“What are some ways in which we can renew our minds?”

“What does it mean to present our bodies as a ‘living sacrifice’?”

Page 87

8

Remember that when a question asks you to state what you *believe* is the *most* important, there isn't a right or wrong answer. But this kind of question will generate active sharing.

“What did you feel as you read this passage?”

Follow the discussion of question 8 by having the quote read aloud and asking, “How does this passage from the catechism connect what we learned last week with what we are discussing tonight?”

Page 87-89

Questions 9-11 deal with *the response of service*. Have the paragraph at the bottom of page 87 read to introduce this section.

Page 88

9

Frequently, in discussing our gifts there are people who feel that they do not have any gifts, or do not know what their gifts are. If appropriate you might take a few minutes and have people share what they think this person's gifts may be. Encourage each person, that as God's child and a member of His family, they do have gifts that God desires that they use.

Inquire as to who thinks they know what their gift(s) are, and how they discovered what gifts they have.

On part two of the question consider asking, “Which of your gifts do you enjoy using most?”

“How have you discovered the importance of your gifts to and for others?”

On part three of the question you could use the following question if you need to generate more discussion. “What gift would you like, which you don't think you have?”

Page 89

10

You might want to clarify what a principle is; a “comprehensive or fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption” (Websters New Collegiate Dictionary), before they begin to answer this question.

“What are some improper motives for serving?”

“What could you do to further develop your gifts?”

Page 89

11

Stress the importance of Jesus' example. Consider the following question, “Describe how Jesus served.”

Close the session discussion by having Fr. DeSiano's quote read.

“Which of these qualities are most active in your life?” “Which are least active?”

Page 90

Assignment for Session 10

Have the assignment read aloud

Close with group prayer.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 10 — The Importance of Faith

Objectives

1. To understand the foundation of a living faith.
2. To understand the relationship between faith and works.

Page 94

Before You Begin

After having several people share the highlights of last week's Bible reading ask them, "What has been your experience regarding daily Scripture reading and prayer during these past 10 weeks?"

Page 94-95

"The Importance of Faith" text

Have several participants read through the introductory paragraphs. Open the discussion for them to share their thoughts about these paragraphs.

This concept of "reaffirming" our faith is vital. For many this challenge takes place through confirmation as they reach the age of accountability and choose to identify with Christ's people. Others will have done this through their family as they were taught the significance of their baptism. Yet at the same time some of us will have gone through these processes by rote and thoroughly missed this "response to God by faith" of which the Catechism speaks. So be affirming as this material is covered and encourage any who are unaware of having made this response to simply do so in prayer to God.

Page 95

1

Have one or two participants read the question and passage and share their answers. Consider asking what it means to be *justified*.

Page 95

2

Have several answer this question.

Seek to have the group differentiate between relying on their own righteousness to warrant heaven and relying on Christ's righteousness.

"What does it mean that Christ is the 'end of the law'?"

Page 96

3

This is perhaps the most critical question of this session for it captures the simplicity of saving faith and removes the complex formulas and methodologies that people often manufacture to explain it.

After several have shared their answers consider asking:

"What does 'believing in our heart that God raised Him from the dead,' tell about our faith?"

"What does it mean to confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord?" "What are some occasions when you have done this?"

"What assurances does this passage provide?"

Take time to read the quote found after question 3 and take people's comments on it as you feel necessary. Encourage people to read and think through on this paragraphs about faith from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Page 97**4**

Read the introductory paragraph on the bottom of page 96 and explain that the next several questions will be dealing with these issues.

You can simply read this introductory paragraph then have a participant read and answer question 4.

“What are the two aspects of works that are mentioned in this passage?”

“How do you feel about the concept that as a Christian you have been ‘created for good works’?”

Page 97**5&6**

Have the passage in James read aloud, then have several participants share their answers to the question.

Question 6 is a follow up to question 5 and allows people to express what they understand about good works. Encourage them to explain their definition in light of the two passages we have just studied.

Consider sharing C. S. Lewis perspective—“Christians have often disputed as to whether what leads the Christian home is good actions, or faith in Christ. I have no right to speak on such a difficult question, but it does seem to me like asking which blade in a pair of scissors is most necessary.”

Ask the group to explain why faith and good works cannot exist independently to one another.

Consider asking, “Which is the source and which is the evidence?”

After completing the above discussion have the *Catechism* quote read aloud. Have people share what impressed them from this statement.

Page 98**7**

This is one of those questions where you should share your answer first. Your example will open up the group to share more freely. Remember to encourage sharing but to not put anyone on the spot.

Page 98**Assignment for Session 11**

Have the assignment read aloud

As the group closes in prayer include prayer for wisdom to know how the group should proceed regarding future continuation of the study.

Embracing the Kingdom

A Bible Study on Conversion

Session 11 — The Importance of Faith (continued)

Objectives

1. To close this study on a high note of enthusiasm and commitment.
2. To develop a fresh understanding of the interrelationship between faith and action.

Page 102

Before You Begin

This is the last session of *Embracing the Kingdom*, as you know. Take a moment at the end of this week's sharing of insights from daily Scripture reading to express appreciation for all the inspirational thoughts that have been shared in the past weeks.

Page 102

"The Importance of Faith (continued)" text

Have the introductory paragraphs read aloud and allow people to share what impressed them from them.

You might ask, "Where, between the two extremes of 'ye of little faith,' and 'great faith' would you describe your faith."

Page 103

8

Questions 8-12 are based on Hebrews 10:38—12:2, have everyone turn to that passage so you can refer to it often. Consider having the entire chapter read by participants in the group. For instance if your group consists of ten people each could read four verses.

As you have participants share about the different people of faith in Hebrews 11:4-31 give ample time for several to share on each person.

This passage, Hebrews 11, gives a great overview of the history of God's dealing with the nation of Israel. Consider asking, "What broad principle would you conclude about following God by faith?"

Page 103

9

Have several share their answers. Consider asking, "What do you think is Paul's purpose in contrasting people who accomplished so much by faith with people who suffered so much for their faith?"

Page 104

10

This question will provide insight into the issues of faith that people are currently encountering. Take time to have the majority of participants share their answers.

Page 104

11

This question will enable people to express what faith means to them. Keep bringing people's answers and comments back to the issue, "How would *you* define faith?" Often it is helpful to couch this question in terms of, "How would you explain faith to a child, or to a non-Christian, some one who is not steeped in religious terms?"

Page 105

12

Re-read Hebrews 10:38-39, and Hebrews 12:1-2 aloud. Some questions to consider are:

“What are some negative ways we could respond?”

“What special meaning could Hebrews 12:1 hold for Catholics?”

“Who might some of these witnesses be?”

“What is the difference between a ‘weight’ and a ‘sin’?”

“How does Hebrews 12:1 shed light on Paul’s reason for inclusion of those who suffered for their faith in Hebrews 11?”

After completing question 12, have the quote which follows read aloud, and ask for comments and questions.

Page 106-107

Summary

Read the two opening paragraphs and then the evaluation question. Begin by sharing how you feel, then have several read their response. If you have time it would be helpful for each person to share what he or she wrote.

Read this closing paragraph to the group truly affirming and commending them. Add to it your own observations and comments of encouragement.

A PERSONAL NOTE: Leading this group has probably been a stretching experience. You too should be commended for the diligence and faithfulness you brought to this study as the group facilitator. We hope it was a rewarding experience for you, and we are confident that much spiritual growth has taken place in people’s lives as a result of your ministry. Some of these results you may never see, but they have nevertheless taken place. We would love to hear your assessment and to know of some of the highlights of this experience for you and your group. **God bless you!**