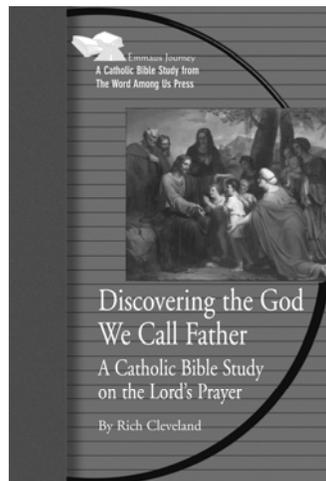




A Small-Group Facilitator's Guide For *Discovering the God We Call Father*



A Catholic Bible Study from The Word Among Us Press

This small-group facilitator's 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.

Copyright © 2008 by Rich Cleveland
All rights reserved.

Emmaus Journey
PO Box 63587 • Colorado Springs, CO 80962-3587

Contents

Leading <i>Discovering the God We Call Father</i>	1
Specific Suggestions for Handling Each Chapter	
Suggestions for Session 1; Introduction	3
Suggestions for Chapter 1	6
Suggestions for Chapter 2	8
Suggestions for Chapter 3	10
Suggestions for Chapter 4	12
Suggestions for Chapter 5	14
Suggestions for Chapter 6	16
Suggestions for Chapter 7	18
Suggestions for Chapter 8	20
Small-group Bible Study Resources	22

Leading *Discovering the God We Call Father*

This study, *Discovering the God We Call Father*, will be relatively easy to lead, inasmuch as the material is fairly comprehensive, and could technically be led simply by proceeding from question to question. However, because of the practicality of the concepts involved it will be helpful to enhance the material by asking probing questions at the right time.

The material can be broken down into four segments for the sake of the discussion. Normally it would be best to plan on a ninety minute discussion; however it could be compacted into sixty minutes if necessary or expanded to two hours. However because there are five sections to each chapter you will need to keep the discussion moving at a pace that will insure that you give some attention to each section without cutting the discussion short. The five segments are:

1. The introductory reflection
2. Learning from Scripture – questions on passages of Scripture
3. Real-Life Lessons – testimonies regarding the topic
4. Learning from the Church – writings from Church leaders and documents
5. Closing Prayer Together

Normally a session would consist of having participants read aloud the introductory material and taking time to discuss the points that are covered there. This can usually be done by simply asking, “What did you get from this introductory material?” or “What impressed you from reading the introductory material.” This material, though succinct, is full of pertinent points and is valuable for setting the stage for the discussion.

The session continues by having the question you are to discuss read aloud, along with the Scripture passage. It is important for people to turn to the passage in their Bible and follow along because you are in fact going to be discussing both the content and the context of the verses. After the above has been completed one or more persons should be asked to share their answers. At this point you simply need to decide whether the discussion has been adequate or whether you should use additional questions which you have prepared to drive the discussion to a deeper or more comprehensive level.

The other sections are designed to shed light on the material studied and to reflect insight either from someone’s personal experience or from Church documents and respected Catholic leaders. These should also be read aloud and the participants given the opportunity to comment or ask questions.

As the facilitator it is your responsibility to set the pace regarding preparation, attitude, and application. You can do this by being open and honest as you share, and by usually going first to demonstrate what you expect of others.

As we have observed various groups and facilitators, two situations have recurred frequently. The first has to do with the preparation of members of the group. Quite frequently people read the passage provided for a question and write down their reflections on the passage without actually answering the question provided in the lesson. As you know, the Scriptures are filled with an abundance of information, so a host of ideas can come out of a passage. However, as a community, the group is supposed to be reflecting on and answering a specific question on the same passage. So please encourage the participants to make sure they read and understand what the question is asking, before they record their answer.

A second observation is for those who facilitate a group. Frequently, in their desire to be thorough many facilitators feel the need to discuss every question in each lesson. In a ninety minute session, if the discussion is lively, it is usually not possible for every question to be answered thoroughly within that time frame. Consequently, a facilitator should have decided

ahead of time which questions are essential to answer to adequately cover the material. With one eye on the clock, as the discussion progresses, the facilitator should move the group through the material and if necessary omit some of the material that is less pertinent. Keep in mind however, that members of the group should have an opportunity at the end of the evening to share anything that was particularly important to them which you may not have discussed.

As individuals prepare, the best way to get the most out of the non-bible study sections is to encourage people to read and think about what is being said, to underline key words or phrases that stand out to them, and to make comments in the margin. Then when the group begins to read and discuss these sections they will be able to quickly recall what was significant to them.

Lastly, in this study the final step of the study is to bring closure through group prayer. The focus of each closing prayer is to ask the Holy Spirit to help participants apply the material as you pray together. Encourage each participant to use the weekly prayer from their lesson on a daily basis as they prepare the next lesson. In that way they will be reminded of the previous week's material and this will intensify the impact of what they studied and discussed. We will give suggestions within the facilitators guide for various ways to handle the group prayer for it is an important part of each session to conclude with community prayer.

Specific Suggestions for Handling Each Chapter

The following information provides some specific ideas on how to handle each section. For a trained facilitator this information will have marginal value, though there will be some suggestions which will be helpful or which will stimulate some ideas of your own. For the person who is new at facilitating a group these suggestions will be very helpful ideas that you can immediately incorporate into your plan for leading. In the process you will also find that your creativity will come alive and you will need to rely on these suggestions less and less.

You will find specific questions, and an occasional comment, that you can use to help move the group into discussion of the material. When you prepare, any ideas you decide to utilize should simply be written into the margin of your book rather than taking the facilitator's guide with you into the discussion group. REMEMBER that though the suggested questions and possible ideas for handling each question are stated strongly, they are only recommendations and ideas, not authoritative instructions on how you must handle the facilitating.

We recommend that you order a copy of *A Facilitator's Guide: Practical training for leading lively and informative small-group discussions*. This guide is a comprehensive presentation of successful small-group dynamics which will be helpful not only for facilitating this bible study, but whenever you are participating in a group discussion. It is available online at the Emmaus Journey web site.



The following is the recommended procedure for preparing to lead *Discovering the God We Call Father*.

- ✓ Pray for wisdom and insight and then complete the bible study for your own edification.

Ideally you should do the study two weeks before the discussion. That way if you need to alert participants to some difficulty in the material you will have discovered it the week prior to giving out the assignment.

- ✓ Review the bible study passages and questions for additional concepts that need to be clarified, emphasized or amplified during the discussion.

- ✓ Review the material on writing focus questions in the *A Facilitator's Guide* and begin writing additional focus questions. (*A Facilitator's Guide* is an excellent small-group dynamics resource you can purchase from Emmaus Journey, and which you will turn to often as you lead future groups regardless of the bible study you are discussing.)

Record the questions in the margin of your study.

You should have approximately one question for at least every other part of the material.

Review the suggestions in this facilitators guide to see if the suggestions are useful.

- ✓ In each of the sections other than "Learning from Scripture" read and mark the material. Then develop one or two questions you can use to generate discussion on these sections.

- ✓ The day of the study, preferably the hour before the study, review the material and the questions you developed to refresh you memory.

- ✓ Of course, throughout the process of preparation you should be praying for wisdom and insight, and for the preparation of the participants.

Suggestions for Session 1

Introduction

Objectives:

- To lay the foundation for a successful small group.
- To kick off the study by having a fun and a thought provoking first session together.
- To break the ice and get people interacting
- To preview Chapter 1.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Get acquainted with the others in your group by sharing the answers to these questions:

- What is your name?
- What country would you most like to visit? Why?

This first session will set the tone for the entire course. Begin with a positive attitude and graciously welcome those who have come. Hold off passing out the material until the “Get Acquainted” material is finished. If your group has been together for some time, they will know each other quite well, however it will still be a fun exercise to complete the two questions in the getting acquainted exercise above. If you have any new people make sure that you facilitate relationships by pointing out natural connections, such as mentioning others in the group who are employed in the same or similar professions, or who are from the same state, etc.

The Introductory

Distribute the books and review the material on page 7-9 with the group. Explain that after you discuss the introductory material, and look over the various chapters, you will briefly begin work on the Chapter 1.

Explain to the group that one of the ways you are going to handle the written material like the introductory reflection of each chapter is to have various participants read portions of the material aloud. Explain that this allows the entire group to refresh their thinking on the material before you discuss it. Then read through the paragraphs on page 7, and the top of page 8.

Ask the group, “What stood out to you in the Introduction?” Give adequate time for several to comment. (You should be ready to briefly share one thing in the material that stood out to you. Additionally, consider asking, “What role does the *Our Father* play in your spirituality.” If someone does not comment on the importance of praying about the material being studied, you should underscore it.)

Practical Suggestions

Have each of the seven suggestions read aloud, making comments, and emphasizing their importance as you go.

After completing the above read through the chapter titles so that people will get an idea of what’s coming in future lessons.

Turn to Chapter 1, “Discipleship Begins with Prayer” and walk them through the layout, which is the same for each chapter:

- Each chapter begins with the passage of Scripture being discussed, or with the *Our Father* passage with the key phrase in bold type.
- The reflection at the beginning of each chapter introduces the topic and raises some valuable thoughts and/or questions on which to focus our attention. Point out that the

introduction should be read thoughtfully, marking what stands out to the person so that they can share their thoughts during the discussion.

- “Learning from Scripture” is the bible study part of each chapter and requires about 40-60 minutes of study. It is essential that these passages are read and that the questions asked are completed. (One tendency is to simply read the passage and write down what the passage means to the person, however each question is very specific and so point out that you need to keep clearly in mind what the question is asking, and answer accordingly.)

- “Real-Life Lessons” are true stories that illustrate how someone has applied the concept being studied to their own life. Each week they will have a chance to talk about the relevance of the story to their lives.

- “Learning from the Church” has a section which needs to be filled out so that people can amplify on one important truth they saw in the material from the Church. This is simply a device to make sure that they read *and think* about the material. Each week several will have a chance to share what impressed them.

- Each chapter ends with “Closing Prayer Together.” This is not only a prayer you will pray together, but it will be used to either introduce or end a period of group prayer where participants can intercede for one another. Encourage people to pray the printed prayer daily, or at least several times a week, and to remember to pray for one another.

Take a few minutes to see if there are any additional questions about the study or about the parameters of the group. Then close with prayer and refreshments.

Chapter 1

Discipleship Begins With Prayer

Objectives:

To understand something of the overall value and purpose of prayer.

To set the tone for future discussions in a relaxed, thorough, and free-sharing manner.

Introductory Scripture and Reflection

Luke 11:1-4

This material can best be discussed in two parts; a) paragraphs 1-5, and then, b) paragraphs 6-10. Begin by your reading aloud the first two paragraphs, and then have someone else read paragraphs four and five. (By going first you demonstrate what you expect in terms of speed, loudness, etc.,) Then ask; "What stood out to you from these paragraphs?" Encourage sharing by listening attentively and by providing good non-verbal feedback.

The following are some other questions and points you can use to stimulate the discussion. From this point forward in this facilitator's guide we will simply insert these helpful suggestions by preceding them with the following insertion point (»).

- » How do you feel about praying aloud in a group, or praying spontaneously?
- » Paragraph 4 speaks about learning to pray by observation. Have any of you learned about prayer by observing someone else's prayer life?
- » Who is relying on your example to learn about having a relationship with the Father through prayer?

Have one or two people read aloud paragraphs 6-10. Thank them and then ask the group, "What do you think about these two realities the author mentions?"

- » Point out that your small group is a great, secure environment, for them to start becoming comfortable praying aloud, and spontaneously—after all we are all learning together.
- » Of the things mentioned by Anselm, which affect would you most desire in your life?

Learning from Scripture

The questions this week will not need much additional stimulation. They set the foundation for the future chapters on specific aspects of the Our Father.

Question 1a: Have several share their definition

Question 1b: Once people start sharing have a pencil ready and begin compiling a list of all of the reasons given as to why prayer is important. After the sharing is finished on this part of the question say something like, "Wow! You all listed __ different reasons why prayer is important. That's terrific."

Question 2a: Ask everyone to turn to Matthew 6, and ask three individuals to read the indicated portions when you request it. Then read aloud question 2a, stopping to have a person read the verses at the appropriate places in the question.

- » The key is what do they have "in common."

Questions 2b,c: Allow time for several to give their answers to these two parts of question 2. Because we as Catholics use memorized prayers repeatedly it is important to understand that adequately engaging our mind and spirit when we say these prayers moves them from being "empty repetitions" to meaningful prayer.

Question 2d: In spite of the fact that the Father knows what we need before we ask, Jesus nevertheless follows that statement with “Pray ...”

Question 2e: If Jesus introduced the concept of “reward” he probably intended it to motivate us.

Question 3a: Have someone read the question and then give everyone an opportunity to share their answer. Remember that you too are a member of the group so jump in and share what you have learned as well.

Questions 3b,c: Discuss these two parts in tandem.
» How does this passage help us define prayer?

Question 3e: Have everyone share.

Real—Life Lessons

Have one person read this story aloud.

- » What points are being made in this story?
- » Who are you learning from about prayer, who is learning from you?

Learning from the Church

Have several share what truth stood out to them.

Closing Prayer Together

Explain that each week the group will close using various prayer formats, but always including the written prayer at the end of the chapter. Explain that tonight you would like to close the prayer time by praying the prayer in unison. Encourage them to think about what they are praying and not to simply rush through it. Also mention to them that when they are praying in unison and come to a reference like “[see Song of Solomon 8:7]” they should simply skip reading the reference.

Before closing in prayer ask if there are any requests or intentions for which the group should pray. Encourage people to make note of them so that they can pray for them later in the week also. Explain, “Tonight I will pray for the requests and intentions and then together we will pray in unison the closing prayer.”

After you close, have some refreshments available so people can socialize some before going home.

Chapter 2

Understanding Our Father

Objectives:

To rediscover the joy of being *a child of God*, heir and joint heir with Jesus.
To realize what our *heavenly* Father is like.

Introductory Scripture and Reflection

Matthew 6:9-13 “Our Father who art in heaven, ...”

This material can best be discussed by reading and discussing paragraphs 1-3, and then reading and discussing paragraphs 4-7. After those sections are discussed, you as the facilitator can read the remaining paragraph as an introduction into the “Learning from Scripture” section.

The following questions and comments can be used for paragraphs 1-3. It is helpful to note that normally these questions and comments can be introduced in response to someone’s sharing and to draw the others into the discussion. Also please note that there is more information here than you will have time to use, so be selective.

- » How do you respond to this concept of speaking “intimately” with the Father?
- » What is one characteristic of your earthly father that greatly influenced your understanding about what God our heavenly Father is/isn’t like?
- » The third paragraph speaks of being “initially influenced” about what God is like by our earthly fathers. How do we insure that this influence doesn’t continue if it was incorrect or negative?

The following questions and comments can be used for paragraphs 4-6.

- » Have any of you ever been “chosen” for some special honor? How did it feel to be chosen?
- » How do you feel about being especially “chosen” by God—adopted by the Father to be part of his family? (You may have some people who were adopted into their earthly family who can shed light on this important concept of being “chosen.”)
- » What is the significance of the two concepts, “adopted by” and “adopted into?”

Learning from Scripture

The questions this week by themselves are pretty thought provoking. Provide adequate time to discuss each one, and to allow each person who wants to share to do so.

Question 1a: Have several share their answer.

Question 2a: Before you begin sharing the answers people wrote in their studies read the opening sentence and ask, “Where do you see yourself in this parable?”

After several share, then read the specific question pertaining to question 2a.

- » The focus you should look for as people answer this question is that our worthiness does not rest upon what we do, but upon the fact that we were chosen out of love to be part of the Father’s family—that’s what makes us worthy.
- » Additionally, point out that our actions don’t make us worthy, but rather they reflect the self-image of who we believe we are. If we really believe we are a loved son or daughter of the Most High God we will live accordingly.

Questions 2b: Allow time for several to give their answers.

- » The error of the brother who remained at home was that he believed that sacrifice, whether it was derived from love or not, was worthy of reward.
- » He also believed that relationship was meaningless, and things were all important.

Question 2c:

- » Point out that to the father in this parable the important thing was the privilege of being always *with him*. Why is that important? How does that apply to the Christian life?
- » What does it mean that we have access to all that is the Father's?

Question 2d: Encourage everyone to briefly share their answer to this question. Once again set the pace by your vulnerability and succinctness.

Question 3:

- » What are some synonyms for the word kingdom?
- » Can someone illustrate what it means to seek first the Father's kingdom?
- » What are some indications that we might not be seeking the Father's kingdom?

Questions 4: There are two ways you can handle this question. First you could ask for volunteers to read their prayer, and encourage everyone to share. Second, you could say, "We are going to come back to our prayer in question 4 at the end of the evening when we close in prayer, and at that time we will give everyone a chance to pray aloud the prayer they wrote. Then when closing in prayer have them turn back to their written prayer in question 4, explain that you will begin by first praying your prayer, and then proceed around the circle with each praying aloud their prayer. (If their prayer is too personal and they feel self-conscious about praying it aloud, let them know they can pass, but that you hope that all will share.) Explain that when everyone has finished praying their prayer we will pray the closing prayer aloud together.

Real—Life Lessons

Have one person read this story aloud.

- » How did a better understanding of her relationship to her heavenly Father, and his characteristics, affected Jenny's life and relationships?

Learning from the Church

After having a couple of people read these paragraphs aloud, have several share what truth stood out to them. (When you are running short on time it is permissible to omit reading the paragraphs under this section and move right to sharing the truth that stood out to them.)

- » How does Mass attendance and parish participation reflect our understanding of being "adopted into" the family of God?

Closing Prayer Together

If you answered question 4 at the end of the "Learning from Scripture" segment then simply ask for prayer requests or intentions and then ask one or more people to pray for them. (Often people forget some of the intentions and requests that were shared and consequently some are left un-prayed. This is a good time to encourage people to use the "Notes" section to not only record important points that were brought up in the discussion but also to record the prayer requests of others. In this way they can remember to pray for one another throughout the week as well.)

One way to introduce variety into your closing prayer is to change how you do it. This week consider having five people take turns, each praying one paragraph of the written prayer. When it is finished simply say "Amen" to bring finality to the closing prayer.

After you close, have some refreshments available so people can socialize some before going home.

Chapter 3

Honoring Our Father

Objectives:

To encourage the habit of taking notes and recording significant thoughts by having a pen or pencil in your hand and making some notations on the “Notes” page.

To discover the importance of keeping the reality of God in the forefront of our mind and heart, thus influencing our hope, actions, and speech.

Introductory Scripture and Reflection

Matthew 6:19-13 “Hallowed be thy name, ...”

The first five paragraphs, through the end of Romano Guardini’s quote, seem to provide a natural break in the introductory reflection. Have one or more participants read these paragraphs and then ask, “What stood out to you in this material.” As people share their observations encourage them with positive comments, and draw out their thinking and that of the other participants with comments like, “That’s a helpful thought, what do some of the rest of you think?”

- » Prior to doing this lesson what did “Do not use the Lords name in vain mean to you?”
- » How much of a reality is God in your everyday life?
- » What is an example of holding God in the forefront of your mind?
- » What are some things we can do to enable us to keep God in the forefront of our mind?

Have one or more people read aloud paragraphs 6-8 which focus on making a choice to keep God’s name holy. Consider the following:

- » Do you agree or disagree with the comment that using God’s name or Jesus’ name in derision, a joke, or a curse is wrong? Why?
- » Please give an illustration of using God’s name wrongly for personal or manipulative purposes?

Learning from Scripture

There are six questions this week so keep your eye on the clock and keep the discussion moving so that you can cover the material, and at the same time have a chance to dwell on the more important questions.

Question 1: Begin by compiling a list of names for God that people were able to recall from memory in the “Notes” pages. Have one person share their answer, and record the names they recalled, then proceed through the participants asking them for any additional names that have not already been mentioned. See how many names the group comes up with.

Question 2: Have one or two people share their answer to this question, and then see if anyone else has something to add.

Questions 3a: This question can be handled by having each person read a Scripture passage and then describe what God is like in that passage. This takes a little time but is helpful for getting to know the characteristics of God the Father.

- » Which aspect of the Father would you like to learn more about experientially?

Question 3b, c: These two questions are perhaps the most important of this chapter. You can handle them two ways: 1) Have everyone share their answers only to part b, and then go around and have everyone share their answer to part c. This will require a little more time.

2) by having each person share their answers to both part b and part c, before you move to the next person is a somewhat quicker way to handle it. But if possible everyone should get to share their answers to these two questions.

Question 4a, b: Have someone read the passage of Scripture and share their answer to these questions. See if anyone else has something to add.

Question 5: Handle this question in a similar manner to question 4.

» How does Jesus' example, or Mary's example help to illustrate what it means practically to keep the Father's name hallowed?

Questions 6: Have several discuss their answers to question 6.

Real—Life Lessons

Have one person read this story aloud.

» What does Al's experience teach us about witnessing?

Learning from the Church

Have several share what truth stood out to them.

» How do you feel about the concept of being "holy"? Is it something attractive or fearful to you? Why?

Note: Before closing in prayer, alert participants to the fact that next week's lesson takes the most preparation of all the chapters. Encourage them to begin their preparation early so that it won't become burdensome to them.

Closing Prayer Together

The closing prayer could be read meditatively by one person as the others listen and pray also from their hearts, prayed in unison, or prayed with each participant praying aloud one phrase. Make the choice based on the chemistry of your group.

Evaluation Afterwards

Your small group is now three lessons into the study. As you observe and listen to the group, how do you feel they are they doing? Are people completing their study each week? Do they share freely and on a personal level? If you detect some problems think about briefly addressing them in a general way next week. You can do this by drawing their attention back to the practical suggestions mentioned on pages 8-9, or by simply sharing a word of encouragement to prepare faithfully, and share positively. Remember that prayer for the individuals and for the group discussion is an important part of your job as a facilitator.

Chapter 4

Living As Citizens of the Kingdom

Objectives:

To re-evaluate our desire and commitment to be citizens in the Kingdom of God and to welcome him afresh to rule in our lives.

To better understand our responsibilities as citizens of the Kingdom.

Introductory Scripture and Reflection

Matthew 6:9-13 “Thy kingdom come, ...”

The first six paragraphs of the introductory reflection discuss the voluntary aspect of being members in the Kingdom of God. Consequently, you should have six individuals take turns reading one of these paragraphs, and then ask people to share what impressed them from these paragraphs. Encourage sharing by giving positive verbal and nonverbal feedback.

- » How do you respond to the Scripture quote in the first paragraph and the statement that people have an innate dislike for being ruled?
- » Which do you find more dominant in your life behaving as a Catholic Christian because you have to, or because you desire to?
- » What is an example of holding God in the forefront of your mind?
- » Would any of you be willing to share an experience about how you welcomed God into your life or responded to his invitation?

Paragraphs 7-10 introduces the monarchical reign of Christ as King of the Kingdom. Begin, after having the paragraphs read aloud, discussing the second quote by Pope John Paul II.

- » If you were king of a kingdom of people what expectations would you have for your citizens?
- » What responsibilities toward them would you feel?
- » What is the main lesson of the story about the boy on the ship? Where in the analogy between living as a pauper or living as a rich kid would you put yourself when it comes to experiencing the Kingdom of God?

After discussing the above, read the final paragraph as the introduction into the “Learning from Scripture” section.

Learning from Scripture

There are a lot of passages to discuss this week. Because some are quite long, instead of reading each of them you might simply have people turn to the passage in their bibles. (This is always desirable for after all this section of the lesson is in fact a *bible* study.) On the longer passages you may have someone simply read the verse or two that summarizes the point of the passage.

With a longer lesson like this it is quite likely you won't get to answer all of the questions. In your preparation you should identify and select ahead of time the questions you think will be most pertinent and perhaps move to these while skipping some of the others if time is tight.

Question 1: What is the crux of Peter's argument?

Question 2: Please define or illustrate the following:

“repent”

“become like a little child”

“being born from above”

- » Describe the nature of responding to the invitation of the King and his Kingdom. (Is it a one time event, many times, ever deepening, etc.)

Questions 3a: What is a synonym for “blessed”?

» What should be our response if when we read these statements they don't seem to really make sense to us.

Question 3b: With which group do you most identify?

» In your heart of hearts do you feel the landlord's treatment was fair or unfair? Why?
» How does this relate to eternity?

Question 4: With which of these excuses can you identify, or have you had other excuses in the past?

» How has God helped you to resolve some of these excuses?
» Jesus relates the Kingdom of God to a big party or celebration. How would you explain this?

Question 5: How have you responded to the Kingdom of God?

Questions 6: If someone was to ask you, “What is good about the Good News?” what would you tell them. (Several should share on this question so that the group can hopefully move beyond the more anticipated answers to some of the deeper good things about being a child of God.)

Question 8: Have as many as possible share their answer to this question. Set the pace by sharing first how your understanding has changed.

Real—Life Lessons

Have one person read this story aloud.

» What similar experiences have you had?
» Have you ever felt intimidation like Millie did when someone talked to you about Christian things? How did you handle it?

Learning from the Church

Have several share what truth stood out to them.

» How do you feel about the concept of being “holy”? Is it something attractive or fearful to you? Why?

Closing Prayer Together

The closing prayer could be read meditatively by one person as the others listen and pray also from their hearts, prayed in unison, or prayed with each participant praying aloud one phrase. Make the choice based on the need for variety and how you feel the group is doing.

Remember to ask and pray for the requests and intentions of individuals in the group. Often people only mention hard things in their life like sickness, etc., try to also bring up a request for positive things that may be going on in the parish, thanksgivings, etc. Remember to write down these request on the “Notes” pages and encourage others to do so and pray for them during the coming week.

Have some refreshments for the social time and make a point to talk with those whom you know the least.

Facilitator Suggestion

If you have not already had a pot-luck or some social event apart from your study, you might consider doing so. The end of this week's lesson is the half-way point in the study. One way to do this without skipping a week of the study is to have a pot-luck supper prior to the study. Remember that part of being a good facilitator is building relationships.

Chapter 5

Doing the Father's Will

Objectives:

To understand the importance of orienting our lives to the Father's will.

To recognize that God's will brings delight and many benefits to our lives.

Introductory Scripture and Reflection

Matthew 6:9-13 "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ..."

The introductory reflection can be read aloud and discussed two or three paragraphs at a time. If sharing is slow or sluggish you can use the following questions to stimulate the discussion. After the sharing is finished you might ask people to what extent they are marking the reflection as they read it. Remind them that marking or highlighting with pen or pencil those parts of the reflection that stand out to them will help them to think and meditate. Show them how annotated your reflection is—of course this assumes that you too are aggressively using pen or pencil markings to aid in your reading.

- » Where do you turn when you are endeavoring to determine God's will on an important decision?
- » How can you tell whether someone is predisposed to doing God's will?
- » What is an example of holding God in the forefront of your mind?
- » What are the ramifications for us if most of God's will for us is already disclosed in sacred Scripture and in Church teachings?
- » What needs to be done to produce a "pure and formed conscience"?

After discussing the above, read the final paragraph as the introduction into the "Learning from Scripture" section.

Learning from Scripture

Though there are several passages of Scripture this week, many of them are quite short in length. As you handle each question have someone read the question aloud and then read the scripture passage, and answer the question. Encourage at least a couple of people to share their answer on each question. Remember to draw out the thoughts and comments of those who are the least verbose.

Question 1: In these passages what seems to be the focus of Jesus' doing the Father's will?

- » How realistic is it for us to try and replicate Jesus' example?

Question 2a, b: How does this question relate back to the reflection statement that the Father's will is already revealed to us in sacred Scripture and the Church's teachings?

Questions 3: What are some examples of what Jesus means when he talks of "bad fruit" and of "good fruit"?

Question 4: This is a very important parable to understand and apply. Make sure that people do not mistakenly identify the rock simply as Christ. Specifically, the rock represents obedience ("he who hears my word and does them"), and sand represents the lack of obedience ("he who hears my word and does not do them").

- » What are the different forms that lack of obedience can take?
- » To what extent do you actively endeavor to "hear" Jesus' words?
- » How would you define "to hear" as it is used in this paragraph?

Question 5: Handle the five passages in this question by simply going around the room and assigning one to each of five people. Then in order of the passages have each read aloud and answered. Invite others to comment on their answers as you read and discuss each one.

- » In Romans 12:1-2, what cause and effect relationships do you see in this passage?
- » Describe or illustrate what conforming to this world means.
- » What does it mean to “quench the Spirit”? How do we do that?

Questions 6: How does this passage define conversion?

Question 7: Encourage everyone to share their answer to this question.

Real—Life Lessons

Have one person read this story aloud.

- » What a tragic story! What do you think affected the change in this man’s spirit?

Learning from the Church

Have several share what truth stood out to them.

- » How do you feel about the concept of being “holy”? Is it something attractive or fearful to you? Why?

Closing Prayer Together

The closing prayer could be prayed in unison, or it could be prayed responsorially. If you use the latter method have one half of the group read the first phrase and the other half read the second phrase of each stanza. Remember to ask for the requests and intentions of individuals in the group and pray for them prior to praying this closing prayer together.

Have some refreshments for the social time and make a point to talk with those who you know the least.

Chapter 6

Relying on God's Resources— Grace for Today

Objectives:

To increase our sense of gratitude for God's provision and deepen our dependence on the Father for our daily needs.

To recognize that the Father wants to use us to help meet the daily needs of others.

Introductory Scripture and Reflection

Matthew 6:9-13 "Give us this day our daily bread; ..."

Discuss paragraphs 1-4 of the introductory reflection as a unit and then move on to the remainder of the reflection. The first four paragraphs speak of our daily need for sustenance in all areas of life, and the remaining paragraphs speak of our need for spiritual sustenance.

Though the obvious meaning of this phrase refers to our daily need for food, many of the Church Fathers understood this phrase as a reminder of our need for Christ the bread of life.

» If our petitions are to be consistent with "his nature and will," how would you describe the Father's nature?

» What is our responsibility for praying with the rest of the body of Christ in mind? What do you think the Father expects of us in this regard?

» What are the ramifications for us if God does in fact want us to be interdependent on one another? How hard is it for you to share your needs with others, and to willingly cast off your independence?

» What responses should become second nature to us if we really believe that God is "the source of all that is good in life"?

After reading the remaining paragraphs of the introductory reflection, simply let people share what stood out to them.

» For those of you who make an effort to receive the Eucharist more than once a week, tell us your thinking. What got you started going more than once a week, why do you make the effort?

Learning from Scripture

There are only five questions in this week's lesson but they provide a lot to discuss. Take time to read each of the passages aloud prior to answering the questions. After people have an opportunity to share their thoughts on these questions you can consider some of these additional discussion stimulants:

Question 1: What's wrong with a little grumbling and complaining now and then?

» What are some of the parallels between the rules God laid down for receiving the manna and the realities of our relationship with him? For instance they had to gather daily and we need God's presence on a daily basis.

» How is the presence or absence of God's provision a test of our trust in God?

Question 2: What would happen if we never had any physical or material needs?

» What is the most important thing you can do to insure that you do not forget the blessings of God?

» Which do you think is easier to do, forget God's blessings when things are going good or forget them when things are going badly?

» Recommend that they take some time (perhaps 15 minutes) this week to write down as many of the blessings of God as they can.

Questions 3 a,b,c: What is the balance between pragmatism and faith?

» To what extent is God bound by our limitations? By our faith? By our generosity?

Question 4: Some of these passages are very long, so you might not want to take the time to read every verse. One way to handle these longer passages is to have everyone turn to the Scripture, and then to simply talk through what took place prior to asking for their responses.

» 1 Kings 17:8-24 what is the relationship between the widow's feelings and her behavior?

» What would have been the outcome if the widow had allowed selfishness to prevail?

» John 21:9-14 how does Jesus' provision for Peter illustrate the role of grace in God's provision for us?

» Acts 4:32-37 what do you think was the primary motivation for people to sell all that they had and pool their resources? What are the principles this passage is trying to illustrate?

» 2 Corinthians 8:12-15, 9:7-10 how many principles for giving can you find in these passages?

Question 5: In what way will these passages of Scripture change how you live and function in the future?

Question 7: Encourage everyone to share their answer to this question.

Real—Life Lessons

Have one person read this story aloud.

» Do any of you have unusual experiences of God's provision which you will share with us?

Learning from the Church

Have several share what truth stood out to them.

Closing Prayer Together

Prior to praying this prayer, as the facilitator, read through the prayer aloud so that people can establish in their mind what they are about to pray. Then lead the prayer in unison praying slowly and thoughtfully enough so that it becomes meaningful to the participants.

If you pray this prayer responsorially, have one half of the group read the first phrase and the other half read the second phrase of each stanza.

Remember to ask and pray for the requests and intentions of individuals in the group and pray for them prior to praying this closing prayer together.

Chapter 7

Relying on God's Resources— Forgiveness and Forgiving

Objectives:

To understand that being forgiving is an essential means of receiving God's grace.
To help people recognize and deal with unresolved issues of resentment and unforgiveness.

Introductory Scripture and Reflection

Matthew 6:9-13 “**And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; ...**”

Before reading the introductory paragraphs say something like, “Tonight we are going to be talking about forgiveness and forgiving. How hard is it for you to say, ‘I forgive you’?” After hearing and seeing people's initial responses have a two participants read paragraphs 1-4 which make up a natural grouping. Consider the following questions:

- » What is the difference between saying “I forgive you” and saying something like “that's okay” when a person apologizes and/or asks for your forgiveness?
- » Is it wise or unwise to forgive someone who hasn't admitted wrong or asked for forgiveness?
- » What do you think the author meant when he said that our receiving forgiveness is linked to “our willingness to forgive others”?
- » Would someone give me an example of how a spirit of unforgiveness can pollute the atmosphere and harm us and others?

Have the remaining paragraphs read aloud and ask, “What stood out to you in these paragraphs?”

- » What are some ways in which people shift blame from themselves when they sin?
- » How did you feel about this concept of “infused grace” that comes through forgiveness or is blocked by unforgiveness?

Learning from Scripture

These questions, and this subject may be the most important of this bible study. Many people have been genuinely hurt by people or events and are walking around wounded with resentment and unforgiveness poisoning their lives. Others are walking around wounded knowing that they have done something terribly wrong to someone else and have never received forgiveness for it. Take the time to discuss and mull over together the ramifications of these truths. It could be life saving.

Question 1a: The answer to 1a is mostly found in verses 15-20 which was not assigned, so you may need to have them look back at those verses.

- » What do you think is the simple answer to Peter's implied question of, “When do I get off the hook from this requirement to forgive?”
- » Take the time to allow each person to give their answer to question 1d.

Question 2: Take a few minutes to let people come up with synonyms for the attitudes mentioned in Ephesians 4:31-32.

- » Explain that the answer we are trying to discover in these passages is “how God forgives,” for that is the command, to forgive as God in Christ forgave.
- » Read each passage and discuss it before moving on to the next one.
- » If you were given what you deserve for your sin, how would you feel? Let them share their answers and then ask, “Why then do you think it is so hard for us to forgive others when they grieve us, rather than giving them the kind of treatment we think they deserve?”

- » What is the difference between not being able to remember and not choosing to remember? Describe how you would chose not to remember someone's sin against you.
- » Take adequate time to allow everyone to answer 2b.

Questions 3: These passages speak of the healing affect of receiving unjust treatment gracefully. Can you illustrate this from your own life, or an experience you know about?

Question 4: Everyone should answer this question

Note: Have everyone turn to page 101 and write in the reference James 1:2-4. This passage will help them answer question 2b when they prepare next week's lesson.

Real—Life Lessons

Have one person read this story aloud.

- » Of the principles we have discussed so far, which one does this story best illustrate?

Learning from the Church

Have several share what truth stood out to them.

Closing Prayer Together

How is your prayer time going? Are people learning to pray together? Spontaneously? Recording prayer intentions/requests in their Notes pages and remembering to pray for one another during the week? Try to encourage all of the above.

This week after praying for people's requests and intentions, consider having four different people each pray aloud and meditatively one stanza of this prayer while the others pray with them from the heart.

Chapter 8

Relying on God's Resources— Protection from Evil

Objectives:

To increase consciousness in the role of prayer and grace in overcoming the battles with temptation.

To bring closure to the study, and end on a high note.

Introductory Scripture and Reflection

Matthew 6:9-13 “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Have two people read the first five paragraphs of the introductory reflection and then ask, “What did you learn about temptation in these paragraphs?” Encourage people to share their observations. You can consider using the following questions to generate deeper discussion.

- » How do you respond to these three essential concerns? What else would you consider is an essential concern?
- » Let's talk a little about this concept of the devil's accusing us. How does this accusation usually manifest its self in our lives? What can we do about it?
- » How would you differentiate between temptation and sin?

Have the remaining paragraphs read aloud and ask, “What stood out to you in these paragraphs?”

- » What did you think of the insight St. Catherine of Siena was given about Christ's presence in the midst of the battle with sin and temptation?

Learning from Scripture

Temptation and surrender to temptation is a battle all of us face, and which is the subject of this week's Scripture study. Many of us experience defeat in the face of our temptations and sin. These passages, and your discussion of them, can help bring about a new orientation to the Christian life. Take the time to plum the depths of these passages. Here are some questions to help with the discussion:

Question 1: Why do you think Jesus did not surrender to temptation?

- » Explain the significance of the statement “it is written” in Jesus' response to Satan. How can we apply this to our lives?

Question 2: How are temptations and trials, or test, different or similar?

Question 2b: Have someone read James 1:2-5 before you discuss this question.

- » Considering trials a “joy” seems unreasonable unless we stop to put our life in context. What is the purpose(s) of our lives that explains why we can have joy in the midst of trials?

Question 2c: Give everyone an opportunity to answer this question.

Question 3b: Please provide an example of when God “provided a way of escape” from temptation for you?

- » Does God always provide a way of escape? Why or why not?
- » What can we do that will increase our willingness to look for and take the way of escape from temptation which God always provides?

Question 4: What various affects should we see if we are really conscious of the fact that nothing we do or say or think is hidden from God?

Question 5: This passage ends by saying he is able to help those being tested. Apart from removing the testing, what are some ways he will help us? What do you think is the purposes of testing?

Question 6: Which piece of armor do you wear most faithfully? Which piece do you most consistently fail to put on?

Real—Life Lessons

Have one person read this story aloud.

» How do you resonate with the concept of addiction? What can we learn from Mike's experience?

Learning from the Church

Have several share what truth stood out to them.

Closing Prayer Together

This prayer could probably best be handled by having each member of the group pray one stanza aloud, continuing around the group until all the stanzas have been prayed.

Remember to congratulate the participants for the efforts they have expended to prepare and for their openness to share their thoughts and feelings with the rest of the group.

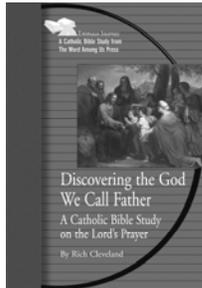
Facilitator's Suggestion

This is the final week of the study. Have you considered having a completion celebration? We find that it is usually best to treat the last lesson like a normal lesson, or else it sometimes gets lost in the celebration. Consider having a social together the following week to celebrate your bible study discussion experience. When you meet you could ask people to come prepared to share how this material or this eight week experience has affected their lives. Second, you could ask them how they feel about continuing to meet together to study another book, after a break of a couple of weeks. Lastly, just have some good food and fellowship.

On the following pages are some additional bible studies to consider using:

Catholic Resources for Growth, Evangelization and Faith Formation

The following studies and other practical resources are available from Emmaus Journey. Multiple copy discounts are available online.

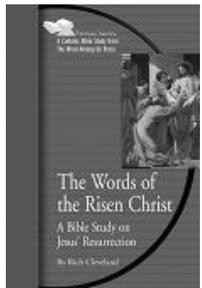


Discovering the God We Call Father enables us to enter into a more profound understanding of some of those “great mysteries of our faith” contained in the Our Father prayer which Jesus taught his followers. As you complete this study each of its petitions will take on new meaning as you pray them. This bible study will enable you to develop a new consciousness of your relationship to the Father as his dearly beloved child, and as an heir with Christ to all that is the Father’s.

8 chapters

Free online facilitator’s guide is available

\$9.95 each

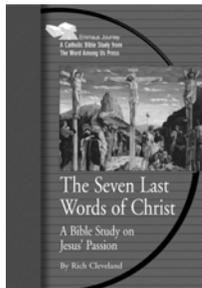


The Words of the Risen Christ will enable you and your small-group to enter into the heart and mind of the disciples as they joyfully discover that Jesus is not dead but has risen. Participants of this study will resonate with the disciples as they come to grips with their disappointments and shortcomings, and will exult with them as they experience Jesus’ love, forgiveness, and companionship.

8 chapters

Free online facilitator’s guide is available

\$9.95 each



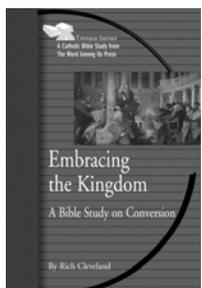
The Seven Last Words of Christ is an excellent resource to use during Lent or in the beginning of the small-group cycle. Participants have an opportunity to reconsider their commitment to Christ and respond in gratitude and conversion.

7 chapters

Great introduction for starting a new small-group bible study

Free online facilitator’s guide is available

\$9.95 each



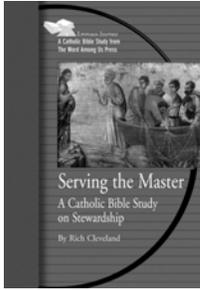
Embracing the Kingdom helps establish individuals in five basic truths of discipleship, spending two weeks on each. Participants develop a new appreciation of important foundational truths which are necessary to grow as a disciple.

11 chapters

Scripture, prayer, one another, conversion, and faith

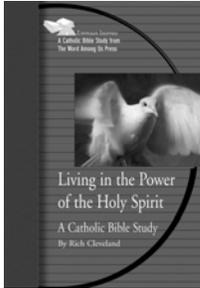
Free online facilitator’s guide is available

\$9.95 each



Serving the Master provides a practical and comprehensive understanding that as Catholic Christians we are called to a life of stewardship. This study compliments the USCCB statement on stewardship, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*.

9 chapters
 Stewardship of heart, life, and mission
 Free online facilitator's guide is available
 \$9.95 each



Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit enables participants to develop an understanding of the Holy Spirit's presence and influence in our lives, and an appreciation for the fruit and gifts he makes available to us.

8 chapters
 Great follow up to the season of Easter and Pentecost
 Free online facilitator's guide is available
 \$9.95 each

PUBLISH



Celebrating Life Together is a small-group study on marriage. Both intensely biblical and immensely practical, this study will benefit couples who are either soon-to-be-married, newly married, or those who have been married for some time.

11 chapters
 A fun and engaging study
 Practical and informative
 \$10.95 each

ER

S

BEST

SELL

E

R

PUBLISH

ER

S

BEST

SEL

LE

R