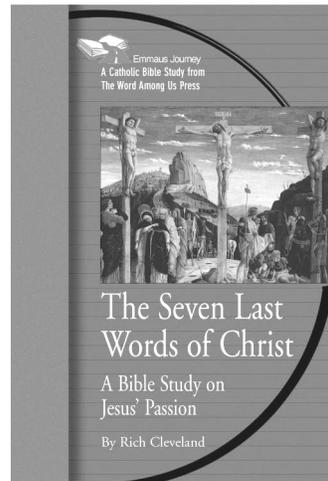




A Small-Group Facilitator' Guide for *The Seven Last Words of Christ*



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.

Emmaus Journey
PO Box 63587
Colorado Springs, CO 80962
www.emmausjourney.org

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Contents

Leading *The Seven Last Words of Christ*

Leading the Discussion On the Introductory Reflection

Leading the Discussion On Learning from Scripture

Leading the Discussion On the Remaining Three Sections

Specific Suggestions for Handling Each Chapter

Orientation Meeting

Step 1: Providing a welcoming atmosphere

Step 2: Providing an orientation to the material

Step 3: Providing an orientation to the group expectations

Suggestions for Chapter 1

Suggestions for Chapter 2

Suggestions for Chapter 3

Suggestions for Chapter 4

Suggestions for Chapter 5

Suggestions for Chapter 6

Suggestions for Chapter 7

Using Questions to Stimulate Discussion and Enhance Learning

Leading *The Seven Last Words of Christ*

This study, *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, will be relatively easy to lead, inasmuch as the process is fairly structured and the material is not difficult to cover. However, because the concepts involved in reflecting on Christ's Passion are quite profound it is important that they be thoroughly discussed.

The material can be broken down into three segments for the sake of the discussion, with each receiving approximately an equal amount of time. Normally it would be best to plan on a ninety minute discussion; however it could be compacted into sixty minutes if necessary. Consequently, that would mean that each of the three segments would have either thirty or twenty minutes of discussion depending on whether the total discussion time is ninety or sixty minutes. The three segments are:

1. The Introductory Reflection
2. Learning from Scripture
3. Experiencing, Praying, and Living, Jesus' Words,

Leading the Discussion on the Introductory Reflection

The written reflection on each of Jesus' statements from the cross is packed with concepts that can expand our appreciation of Christ's death on our behalf and change our lives. Normally, they will stimulate significant personal reflection, and consequently enthusiastic sharing. In addition you can either utilize the supplemental leading material provided for each chapter, and/or develop your own additional questions. Your faithfulness to show up well prepared and enthusiastic about the material will be caught by the people in your group.

You should begin the discussion of each section by having the material read aloud by one or more participants. This re-reading of the material gives people a chance to refresh their memory regarding the content which they may have covered several days prior to the discussion. Sometimes it is helpful to read through the entire introductory reflection at one time. At others times you will find that reading only one or more paragraphs at a time and then discussing them before continuing, will better serve the discussion of the material.

After the material is read aloud in the meeting, usually a simple question like, "What impressed or stimulated your thinking from this introductory material?" will be sufficient to get the discussion moving. Then as you acknowledge each contribution with a pleasant affirming comment others will be encouraged to share as well. Especially in the first couple of weeks you should volunteer to first share some concept from the material that was especially meaningful to you. This enables you to break the ice and also demonstrate to the participants what you expect from them when they share.

Sometimes it will be helpful to ask the person who shares some-thing to expand on their comment, or to ask the group if they would add anything regarding the same concept. Remember to keep affirming those who share. Normally, everyone should share at least once during this segment. When you are ready to move on to the next segment, simply summarize briefly with a general statement of what was discovered, and then have people turn to the "Learning from Scripture" segment.

Leading the Discussion on “Learning from Scripture”

The bible study portion of each chapter is also fairly self-contained. In each chapter there is usually a major passage of scripture to be discussed followed by a secondary passage of scripture to be discussed. These passages address a concept from Jesus’ words, such as “forgiveness,” from his statement “Father forgive them...,” and allows the participants to think more pointedly about what that concept means, and how it should affect the way we live.

As in the previous segment you should begin by having the scripture passage read aloud by either one person or several. Pause long enough to give everyone an opportunity to turn in their Bible to the Scripture passage so they can follow along and refer to the text. Before you move to the questions which are provided in the material, you could open discussion of the passage for general comments by saying something like, “Before we jump into answering the questions, does anyone have any comments or questions they would like to share?” If they do, usually it will provide a good transition into the questions in the text.

The primary objective is to answer thoroughly the questions in the book. Though we give some additional stimulation questions in the material which follows, for the most part you will not need to use it if the participants adequately prepare. With most of the questions you should encourage several people to share their answers, rather than having just one person answer the question. And as facilitator you should be alert to ask follow-up questions that enable the group to explore the material more thoroughly.

After having completed discussion of the first passage, move on to discuss the second passage in the same manner. (In some chapters there are three passages.) Because we do not ask a lot of questions on the second or third passage it will lend itself to more general comments and questions from the participants. In addition it will give you as the facilitator a chance to develop some additional questions if you choose to do so, and feel it is necessary.

When the discussion time is complete take a moment to summarize how the “Learning from Scripture” section is connected to the “Introductory Reflection.” For example on Chapter 1 you could say something like, “We see from this study that we are called to extend forgiveness to those we encounter in the same way Jesus extended forgiveness to us while hanging on the cross; freely, graciously and completely.”

Leading the Discussion of the Remaining Three Sections: Experiencing, Praying, and Living Jesus’ Words, ...

The sections Experiencing, Praying, and Living Jesus’ Words, ... provide an opportunity for each participant to personalize the concepts which have been introduced in the previous two sections (The Introductory Reflection, and Learning from Scripture). The discussion from each of these sections will be fairly minimal; however as the facilitator you will need to give each section sufficient attention to insure that people have processed the content.

Have “Experiencing Jesus’ Words, ...” read aloud by one or two participants. Then ask, “What are your

thoughts or comments on this person's experience? How is it helpful to you, and/or where do you identify with it?" Be ready to initiate the sharing by having a comment or question of your own ready to share with the group. Allow the discussion to flow naturally. Though you need not endeavor to have a prolonged discussion, you may want to use a stimulation question or two to help the participants think more deeply about one of the parts of the testimony. After the sharing naturally abates, move on to the next section.

You will need to make a determination regarding the order in which you handle the next two sections. Though "Praying Jesus' Words, ..." precedes "Living Jesus' Words, ..." it may be preferable to handle them in the opposite order. By so doing the group is able to conclude with the prayer, and actually pray the prayer together. However, you can feel free to follow your own preference.

"Living Jesus' Words, ..." is intended to enable the participants to practically apply the concepts which they have been studying. Some parts of this section will be quite personal, and you will need to be sensitive as to how much you ask them to share. For instance all four points in Chapter 1 are quite personal, and you would not want people to share specifics on who has hurt them, etc. So rather than asking people to share what they concluded on each point you should simply ask a general question like, "How did you find this exercise to be helpful for you?" or "By doing this exercise how were you able to bring closure to some past difficult relationships?" In this way people will be able to share in a general manner without compromising confidential information or feeling threatened. You of course should kick off the discussion, especially during the first couple of weeks, by sharing first.

"Praying Jesus' Words, ..." could be one of the most transforming aspects of this material. In the opening meeting, and in subsequent meetings encourage participants to thoughtfully pray this prayer daily during the following week. By so doing the Holy Spirit will be able to extend the affects of the concepts from the chapter, and continue the transformation process. It would not be unusual to see this prayer really take on meaning for the participants only after they have meditatively prayed this prayer for several days. Once again as the facilitator it is very important that you practice and experience the value of praying this prayer daily yourself.

One other beneficial suggestion that might be appropriate to mention at this point is that it may be helpful to read and reflect on the contents of each chapter, and or pray this prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, or before a family altar, or a favorite image of Christ on the cross. As people apply this concept they will cultivate a deeper sense of the significance of contemplating Jesus' passion.

During the meeting you should simply ask if anyone has any comment or question about the prayer. If so briefly discuss the prayer, then close the meeting, or the section, by praying the prayer aloud together. Often, just before praying together is a good time to read the final quote. Feel free to devise different ways to pray together. For instance instead of everyone simply praying the prayer in unison, at one of the meetings you may want to have one person read the prayer aloud, slowly and meditatively while the remainder of the group closes their eyes and listens reflectively while praying from the heart. If you have a smaller sized group, you might do the previous suggestion but have each person in turn pray the prayer aloud, slowly and meditatively. Use your creativity!

Specific Suggestions for Handling Each Chapter

The following information provides some specific ideas on how to handle each section. For an experienced 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 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.

Each chapter includes objectives which we hope to see accomplished through the material. As the facilitator this information both helps you understand what the focus of the chapter is, or could be, as well as provides direction as you pray for your group participants each week.

Some facilitators like to have a visual aid of some kind to introduce the material. Specific music can also serve this purpose. We have tried to give you one visual aid suggestion for each week's material. Feel free to use the suggestion, improve on it, or omit it depending on your and the group's personality.

Lastly you will find specific questions, and an occasional comment, that you can use to help move the group into discussion of the material. In addition, at the end of the suggestions for leading individual chapters there is some helpful small group dynamic material on using and writing your own questions. When you prepare, any ideas you decide to utilize should simply be incorporated into the margin of your book rather than taking the facilitator guide with you into the discussion group.

Orientation Meeting

Objectives:

- To orient people to the material and requirements of the group.
- To provide the information needed for participants to come prepared and ready to participate in the Chapter 1 discussion.

Step 1: Providing a welcoming atmosphere

Learning and sharing are enhanced when it takes place in an environment that does not distract from the process. There are several ingredients that contribute to a warm, welcoming, and conducive learning environment.

- As people arrive meet them at the door with a warm smile and hello. If you don't know them well or feel that others may not know them, make sure that you introduce them to the others in the group. Stimulate the "small talk" before and after the meeting by asking non-threatening questions, recognizing points of commonality that will make connection to others in the group, and by inviting others into the conversation with those who are less well know.

- Make your home as comfortable and conducive to small group discussion as possible by:
 - Making sure that pets are secured and will not jump on, climb over people or in anyway be a nuisance to others. Recognize that not everyone is a pet lover, in fact some people are fearful of some animals or are allergic to them, and may not appreciate your pets as you do.
 - Make arrangements for handling outside interruptions such as the phone, doorbells, and children.
 - Provide comfortable seating. Metal folding chairs are really quite uncomfortable to sit on for a 60-90 minute meeting. If you must provide additional seating consider purchasing some inexpensive plastic lawn chairs that are more comfortable.
 - Arrange the seating in a circle so that the group is seated as peers.
 - Arrange lamps and other objects so that people can have good eye contact without having to look around an object.
 - If you offer refreshments keep them simple. If they are provided in future meetings allow the participants to share in the responsibility of providing them so that the host does not have this extra responsibility
 - Offer your home as a gift to God and to those participating. Do not feel like your home has to be a fashion statement, simply, clean and comfortable will be adequate. You can anticipate having some wear and tear if a good size group meets there for many weeks. Remember that people are more important than things.

Step 2: Providing an orientation to the material

Distribute a copy of the book you will be using, *The Seven Last Words of Christ* to each individual. Both husband and wife will need their own copy. Allow them a few minutes to look the book over, and mention to them any cost that they will incur for the book, and how you intend to collect the money.

Table of Contents and Endorsement: Have them turn to page 5 and look over the "Table of Contents." Then have several people take turns reading aloud the endorsement by Fr. Brad Noonan. You could ask

people to share their thoughts on the two statements from *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*.

(This is a good time to introduce the practice you will be using of having the material read aloud before you discuss it. Though people will have read and reflected on this material during the previous week it is essential that material be read aloud once again prior to the discussion of each section. The reason this is important is that usually there are several days between the time they prepared and the time of the group discussion. If you simply jump right into the discussion without rereading the material it will catch most people off guard and they will not be ready to share. So we always recommend that you have the material read aloud to enable people to recall the content and get ready to discuss.

Sometimes people assume that you simply can ask people to read the material silently to themselves during the meeting. The problem with this is that it always takes much longer than having it read aloud. This is because the speed and style with which people read something varies greatly, and so some people are always finished quickly and waiting for others, while some people are embarrassed because they are the last one finished, or else the group begins before they have finished. Thirty years of experience with literally hundreds of groups has proven that it is better simply to have the material read aloud.

You can vary the way the material is read. For instance sometimes you can have only one or two people read all of the section, while at other times you can simply have participants take turns reading one paragraph at a time. In some chapters you may find it helpful to only read one or two paragraphs and discuss them, and then read one or two more paragraphs and discuss them, proceeding this way until you have completed the section.

If you have some poor readers in your group, or people who prefer not to read aloud you need to be sensitive and honor their feelings. With the poor readers you can occasionally ask the person sitting to the right or left of them to begin reading and then proceed around the circle away from the poorer reader. Or you may prefer to find the shortest paragraph and mentally determine with whom the reading should begin in order that the poorer reader can participate in reading aloud, though having the easiest portion to read.)

Introduction: Have the “Introduction” read aloud. Because this material is 3 pages long you will not want to have the whole thing read at once, but read a few paragraphs and discuss them. We would suggest reading the first three paragraphs and then asking for their comments and questions. You of course should have already read this material and have one or two things to point out and/or discuss from these paragraphs.

- Then you should read aloud paragraphs 4-6 yourself. As the material refers to the different parts of each chapter pause long enough for people to look at the sections in Chapter 1 and see what is being explained.

- Have each of the five attitudes read aloud and discussed briefly. You can read and discuss each paragraph individually, or have all five of them read at one time by five individuals, and then discuss the attitudes. This information is very valuable to read and discuss because they are attitudes which offset potential problems which can arise in small groups. By discussing them ahead of time you are usually able to head off these problems.

Chapter 1: Briefly walk through Chapter 1 with the group so that you can orient them a little bit more to the material. Explain:

- That each week, while contemplating the picture which accompanies the chapter, you will begin by reading aloud the scripture passage from which comes the phrase for that week's lesson.
- The way a participant should handle the Introductory Reflections, like the one found on page 13-14, is by reading, thinking and praying about the written material with a pen or pencil in hand so that they can underline, circle, and put asterisks, etc., by statements and concepts that impress them and stimulate their thinking. They should write questions and comments in the margin so that they can recall them when you meet to discuss the material.
- Explain that in the "Learning from Scripture" sections you will discuss one major portion of scripture and a smaller portion. (One or two chapters will have a third scripture portion.) You should share with the participants that they will receive from the bible study in proportion to the time and thought they put into it. Specifically, explain that rather than simply writing down a quick, undeveloped answer, they should take time to elaborate on their answer, putting it in their own words, and expanding on the concept. If they prepare in this way they will always discover significant truths and consequently also show up with significant thoughts to share. There is insightful a little poem that will help you emphasize this point.

Thoughts disentangle themselves
When they pass through the lips
And over the finger tips.

Simply stated, as they write down and express their thought they will become even clearer to them.

- Explain that they should handle the sections "Experiencing Jesus' Words. . . ." and "Praying Jesus' Words," in much the same way as they did the "Introductory Reflection." Point out that during your meeting each week you will actually pray the prayer together, and that they will be asked to pray the prayer on a daily basis the week following the discussion.
- Explain that the section "Living Jesus' Words," will give them an opportunity to apply what they are learning in a practical and helpful way. Point out that some of the questions are quite personal and that you will not be asking them for specifics on those types of questions but will discuss the section in a more general and non-threatening way, nevertheless, for their growth they should be very specific and thorough in answering each question. Turn to pages 20-21 and explain that these note pages are the place where they can complete the "Living Jesus' Words," section. They can also be used to make any notes of things they want to remember during the discussion.

Step 3: Providing an orientation to the group expectations

Many discussion groups never get off the ground, or die quickly, because the people who initially agree to participate are unaware of the real purpose of the discussion group and are not committed to its purposes. Many potential problems can be avoided by clearly articulating, to those invited, both the purpose of the discussion group and the format and material you intend to discuss. One of the worst side effects of not doing this is that a strong-willed participant will often unwittingly hijack the group by strongly suggesting different objectives, formats, and materials. So take time to clearly articulate what the discussion group is all about.

- Perhaps the easiest way to accomplish this is to prepare a “covenant card” that lays out all the particulars. Give a copy to each person and discuss it with them.
- On the next page is an example of a “covenant card.” You can use the above paragraph to explain why the groups needs to agree on their purpose and process. Or you can simply explain it this way, “Folks I am really excited about the study we will be doing together during the next few weeks. I looking forward to it. However, I am also aware how busy all of us are and how easy it will be to allow other things to either crowd the study our of our life altogether, or push it to the corner of our life where it will not be given adequate attention. So I want to discuss with you what my commitment will be as facilitator of this group, and then invite you to make a similar commitment.”

Then explain that you have made up a covenant or commitment card to guide the group to consider what their commitment should be. Begin by explaining what you think the purpose is and what your commitment to them entails. At that point simply toss the following question before the group for discussion, “What do you think your commitment should be in the following six areas?”

After the discussion has flowed a bit ask the group, “Can we articulate and agree on some basic commitments? Let me write them down, and I’ll give us all a copy next week.” Then take good notes and provide a revised covenant or commitment card the following week.

Sacred Heart Small Group Fellowship

Purpose: To create in the heart of people such an enthusiasm for their faith that in living their faith they freely share it with others.

Time: Tuesday 7-9pm **Location:** Sam Johnson’s Family Room

Material and Format: Prepare and discuss the book *The Seven Last Words of Christ*. This discussion will be followed by thirty minutes of food and fellowship, and will include prayer with and for one another.

My Commitment to You:

- ✓ To be present weekly
- ✓ To provide a pleasant environment
- ✓ To thoroughly complete each assignment
- ✓ To prepare to facilitate graciously and effectively
- ✓ To participate with openness and teachability
- ✓ To pray for the group

What Should Be Your Commitment Regarding?

- ✓ Attendance?
- ✓ Attitudes?
- ✓ Communications?
- ✓ Preparation?
- ✓ Confidentiality?
- ✓ Other things?

Suggestions for Chapter 1

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

Objectives

- To recognize and accept the forgiveness that is offered freely to us in Christ.
- To extend forgiveness to family, friends, and acquaintances who have hurt or offended us.

Visual Aid

- This chapter speaks of the forgiveness we have in Christ. Consider laying several bills on a coffee table and have written on them in large red letters, “Cancelled: PAID IN FULL,” to illustrate that we have been set free from the debt we owe.

- Read aloud the scripture passage, and then ask, “What is communicated to you by the picture on page 11?”

Read aloud the Introductory Reflection

Paragraph 1– To what extent was this (seeing ourselves in the crowd at the foot the cross) a new thought for you?

Paragraph 2 – What has been your experience with feelings of guilt?

- What is meant by the term “unrecognized, unclaimed, and unforgiven” guilt?

Paragraph 3– Various translations may use different adjectives in each passage to describe the conscience. As it is needful, look up the passage and have it read aloud, however do not feel the need to read every passage on the conscience.

- Which type of conscience have you spent the most time living with, in your life?

- Why do you think it is possible to see ourselves as having more than one type of conscience?

- It would probably be valuable to close this paragraph by reading the scripture passages on the cleansed or clear conscience.

Paragraph 4 - What are some ways as Catholic Christians that we can deal with our guilty conscience?

Paragraph 5 - Practically, what can we do to maintain an awareness of the complete forgiveness we have through Christ?

Learning from Scripture

Have the opening paragraph and the passage read aloud.

Question 1a-c - Where do you see yourself in this paragraph?

- Why do you think as Christians we tend to magnify the seriousness of sins of the flesh like the younger son manifested, over sins of the spirit like the older son manifested?

Question 1e -How do you find yourself responding when you hear of a fellow Christian’s flagrant sins of the flesh?

Question 1f - You should have almost everyone share their answer on this questions.

Have question 2 and the passage read aloud.

Question 2 -Have several share their answers.

Experiencing Jesus' Words, "Father, Forgive Them."

Have the true story read aloud.

Questions - How did you respond to his testimony?

- What did you think of the concept that when we don't forgive we keep the sinful behavior alive?

Living Jesus' Words, "Father, Forgive Them."

These are pretty personal questions so only handle in a general way, getting their impressions rather than the specifics of each point.

Question - How did this experience help you?

- Did you find it difficult or easy?

Praying Jesus' Words, "Father, Forgive Them."

See if there are any thoughts or questions regarding this prayer.

- Read the ending quote and pray this prayer together in unison.

Closing

- Point out the subject of next week's material.
- Remind them to try and pray this week's prayer daily.
- Commend them for their enthusiastic sharing.

Suggestions for Chapter 2

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Objectives

- To gain assurance that Christ will accept and redeem us regardless of our past or former condition of sin.
- To recognize that our salvation is based on Jesus’ merit and not our own.

Visual Aid

If you can find one of those old balancing type scales set it on the table. (If you can not locate one, you can use a picture of one, or make one of wood.) On the side that is outweighed put a sign saying, “All my sin.” On the other side that is weighing down the scale, put a sign, saying, “Jesus’ merit!” to visually show that Jesus’ merit far outweighs our sin.

- Read the scripture passage aloud and have people comment on the message of the picture on page 23.
Question - Why do you think the criminals responded so differently?

Read aloud the Introductory Reflection

Question - What comments or questions do you have on this material?

Paragraph 1 - How would you describe this man’s attitude toward life and toward God?

Paragraph 2 - To what extent has this or a similar question influenced your life?

Paragraph 3 - Where do you think we derive this concept that our eternal future is determined by how our good and bad behavior balance out?

Paragraphs 4,5- How would you define “mercy” and “grace”? How are the two alike or dissimilar?

Paragraphs 6,7- Where would you say you are on this journey of discovering and accepting mercy and grace from Jesus?

Learning from Scripture

Have the opening paragraph and the passage from John read aloud.

Question 1, - Have several share their feelings and insights to part a and b.

Question 1, c - What is the difference between “judging righteous judgment” and being judgmental?

Question 1, e - How is it merciful to exhort someone who has been freely forgiven to “go... do not sin again?”

Have question 2 and the passage from Ephesians read aloud.

Question 2 - Ask for any general comments and or questions on this passage.

- Ask someone to explain the connection between our salvation not being “of works,” and salvation resulting in our being “created unto good works.”

- If Dismas had been freed from the cross how should the concept found in this verse have affected his life?

Experiencing Jesus’ Words, “You Will Be With Me in Paradise.”

Have this true story read aloud.

- Provide an opportunity for people to comment on it.

Question - How do you relate to this testimony?

Living Jesus' Words, "You Will Be With Me in Paradise."

Read the opening paragraph aloud.

Questions- What did you discover about yourself from this exercise? (Remember to share first.)

- What new "faces and voices" to minister to did you begin to see and hear? (Remind them to be sensitive about revealing names. Perhaps it would be better, if the "voices and faces" are known by people in the group, to simply speak in general terms.)

-Did you receive any new insights regarding how you can minister?

Praying Jesus' Words, "You Will Be With Me in Paradise."

Pray this prayer together and remind people to pray this prayer daily during the coming week. Consider using a format where one person prays slowly and meditatively while others close their eyes and pray silently.

Closing

- Point out the subject of next week's material.

- Read the quote at the end of the lesson aloud.

Suggestions for Chapter 3

“Woman, here is your son. ... Here is your mother.”

Objectives

- To recognize that Jesus, fully God and fully human, shares in our anguish and offers us comfort in our sorrows and feelings of loneliness and abandonment.
- To recognize the familial relationships into which we have been born through our baptism.

Visual Aid

- Place on the table a layout of family pictures. In a prominent part of the arrangement include a picture of Mary and John if you can locate one, or simply pictures of Mary, Jesus, and/or pictures of the disciples. Include a prominent sign which says, “Our Family.”

- Have people focus on the picture on page 35 while the scripture passage is read aloud.

Read the Introductory Reflection aloud

Question - What came to mind when you read this introductory material?

Paragraph 1 - What has been your most heartrending human separation? (This would be a good time for you to go first in the sharing.)

Paragraph 2 - What various aspects of separation can you see in this situation?

Paragraph 3 - Explain Mary’s role in your life.

Paragraph 4 - Through the Passion of Jesus, what can we learn about the presence of God amidst human suffering?

Paragraph 5 - How should we handle the difficulties of human tragedy when they seem to contradict our understanding of God?

Learning from Scripture

Have the introductory paragraph, the passage, and the first question read aloud.

Question 1 a - To what extent do you feel that you have found “favor” with God?

Question 1 b - What attributes or promises about Jesus are revealed to Mary that would increase her willingness to yield to the Father’s will?

Question 1 c - Have several share their answers to this question.

Have the second question and the passage in John read aloud.

Question 2 - What implications for us are there in this incident?

Experiencing Jesus’ Words, “Here Is Your Son, Here Is Your Mother.”

Read this true story aloud.

Question - How do you relate to this person’s experience?

Living Jesus’ Words, “Here Is Your Son, Here Is Your Mother.”

Have several share their answers to parts 1 and 2 about someone for whom they are especially thankful.

- Have several share what they discovered they could do, or refrain from doing, that would enhance another's life of following Jesus. (Remember to set the pace by being vulnerable and sharing first.)

Praying Jesus' Words, "Here Is Your Son, Here Is Your Mother."

Close by praying this prayer together. One format you can consider using is to have two people read the two paragraphs from this prayer while the rest of the participants listen and reflect. You might consider then having the group pray in unison Mary's Canticle, Luke 1:46-55 (Have copies for each person), or the Hail Mary prayer.

Closing

- Reference the subject of next week's material
- Remember to thank and affirm people for their preparation and participation.

Suggestions for Chapter 4

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Objectives

- To recognize that God will never forsake us.
- To realize that when we feel forsaken that Christ is present and available to us in many ways, especially through his body the Church.

Visual Aid

Consider recording the passage Matthew 27:45-54 being read aloud. At the beginning of your study turn off every light making the room as pitch dark as possible. Then as the passage is read focus a flashlight on a picture or symbol that can represent the Father's presence. For instance, a picture of the morning sun breaking the darkness of night, to communicate that God is with us even in our darkest hour, even as he was for Christ.

- Have the scripture passage read aloud, while people contemplate Christ's image on page 47. Consider asking, “What comes to mind as you hear this passage and contemplate Christ's image?”

Read the Introductory Reflection aloud.

Give people a chance to share their thoughts and comments.

Paragraph 1 - Why do you think people taunted Jesus during his crucifixion?

Paragraph 2 - What often lies behind our doubts of God's love?

- How can a Christian community help erase these doubts during difficult times?

Paragraph 3 - When we are facing darkness in our experience where can we encounter truth that is capable of halting our slide from disappointment into doubt, discouragement, depression and despair?

Paragraph 4 - What is the relationship between abandonment of one's self to God's will and the presence or absence of doubt, discouragement, etc.?

Paragraph 5 - Jesus suffered alone, bearing our sin, so that we might not have to suffer and bear the results of sin alone. What provisions did he make for removing this aloneness?

Learning from Scripture

Have the introductory paragraph and the passage from John 14 read aloud. Instead of reading all 31 verses at one time, consider reading verses 1-3 prior to answering question 1a, and verses 15-18 prior to answering question 1b, and verses 27-31 prior to answering questions 1c and 1d.

Have question 2 and the passage from Psalm 22 read aloud.

Questions - With what aspect of the Messiah's forsakenness do you most identify?

- How would you define the experience of feeling forsaken?
- What are the advantages, once we have gone through an experience of forsakenness and healing, of telling others about our experience and God's help?

Experiencing Jesus' Words, "Why Have You Forsaken Me?"

Have this story read aloud.

Questions - Have you seen any similar patterns in your experience?

- What have you found to be especially helpful to interrupt this five dimensional slide into darkness?

Living Jesus' Words, "Why Have You Forsaken Me?"

Have the introductory paragraph read along with points 1 and 2. Share your answers to these questions and then open the discussion up for others to share.

- Points 3-5 provide an excellent opportunity for the group members to minister to one another by sharing practical aspects of how Christ can enlighten their lives. Take adequate time to learn from one another.

- Lastly, you could suggest that each member of the group consider writing a letter similar to that mentioned in point 2 to another member of the group rather than just to themselves. If they respond to this idea, have them write the letter, and then next week randomly exchange letters.

Praying Jesus' Words, "Why Have You Forsaken Me?"

Before praying this prayer, ask the group, "What would you add to this prayer?"

- After a brief discussion, pray this prayer together in unison.

- Keep reminding the group to pray these prayers daily.

Closing

- Direct their attention to the subject of next week's material.

- Read the final quote and end the meeting.

Suggestions for Chapter 5

“I am thirsty.”

Objectives

- To realize that the root of all our various thirsts is a thirst for Jesus the Living Water.
- To recognize and accept the opportunity we have to quench Jesus' thirst, by being involved in quenching the thirst of those he loves.

Visual Aid

Place several glasses filled with water on a table, representing the members of your small group. Along with them place one or two glasses that are empty, representing the needs of others. Under each empty glass place a photo which depicts a needy person and the words, "... just as you did it to one of the least of one of these who are members of my family, you did it unto me." (Matthew 25:40 NRSV)

- Have the scripture read aloud while people look at the picture on page 59. Ask, "What does the picture communicate about Jesus' thirst?"

Have the Introductory Reflection read aloud.

Question - What impressed you from this introduction?

Paragraph 1 - When have you been the most exhausted and thirsty?

Paragraph 2 - Describe evidences of spiritual thirst in our society.

Paragraph 3 - What do you think affects our desire, or lack of desire, for the salvation of souls?

Paragraph 4 - What are some examples of things the world offers to satisfy our thirsts which really would be equivalent to the sour vinegar offered to Jesus?

Paragraph 5 - How does complacency by Christians mock Jesus' thirst?

- What is the opposite of complacency?

- How would you describe someone who is demonstrating a genuine concern for satisfying Jesus' thirst?

Learning from Scripture

Have the opening paragraph and the passage from John 4 read by one or more participants.

Question - Who are the Samaritan men and women in your environment?

Have question 2 and the Isaiah passage read aloud.

Questions - Why do you think this prophesy puts so much emphasis on our thirst being totally satisfied without it costing us anything?

- What is the real cost of satisfying our thirst?

Experiencing Jesus' Words, "I Am Thirsty."

Have this testimony read aloud.

Question - What is your experience of thirsting for God, and/or of having that thirst satisfied?

Living Jesus' Words, "I Am Thirsty."

Have the opening paragraph read aloud and then ask as one the following several questions; "How did this exercise go for you? Were you able to envision Jesus' being present with you? How vulnerable were you able to be as you discussed your thirsts with him?" Once you have asked these questions jump right into sharing your experience and then allow others to share.

Praying Jesus' Words, "I Am Thirsty."

As you pray this prayer together consider having yourself, or one other, prayerfully read the first paragraph, with the remainder of the group joining in unison to pray the second paragraph.

- Encourage the group that as they pray this prayer daily this week to thoughtfully pray from the heart their request to the Lord, to "fill me with yourself."

Closing

Point out that you only have two weeks remaining in this book and encourage them to try and spend some extra time each week contemplating Christ on the cross.

- Next week's visual aid will be Jesus on the cross, ask people to consider bringing a cross or a picture of Jesus on the cross that is especially meaningful to them.

- Read the final quote and close the meeting.

Suggestions for Chapter 6

“It is finished.”

Objective

To increase our understanding and appreciation for the completeness of Jesus' finished work of salvation.

Visual Aid

Have several crosses of various sizes and styles laid tastefully together on the table.

- Have people turn to page 71 and contemplate Jesus on the cross as the scripture is read by one of the group.
- Ask, “What does the Holy Spirit communicate to you when you view this picture of Jesus on the cross?”

- If several brought a cross, or a picture of Jesus on the cross that is especially meaningful to them, have them show it to the group and share why it is meaningful.

Read aloud the Introductory Reflection

Ask for comments and/or questions.

Paragraph 1 - Since Christ has completed the work of salvation how should we celebrate this victory?

- As you know the Mass is a victory celebration of the completed work of Christ, so you might mention this and then ask, “What makes a celebration, a celebration?”

Paragraph 2 - Describe in your own words what is meant by the statement, “Nothing need be, nor can be, added to make the forgiveness of sins more complete.”

Paragraph 3 - What does the term “God’s justice” convey to you?

- What affect does wearing a crucifix as jewelry have on society?

Paragraph 4 - How do you think God views your sin?

- The word justified is often used to describe how God views our sin and guilt. Someone, in trying to explain this concept, has said it is “just-as-if-I’d never sinned”. You may want to use this illustration and ask for their response as a way to discuss the concept of justification.

Paragraph 5 - Would a couple of you define propitiation for us?

- What are some various ways that people endeavor to atone for their sins?

Learning from Scripture

Have question 1 read aloud along with the passage from John 12.

- Question 1 - What implications for daily living does this concept have for our lives?

Have question 2 and the scripture passage read aloud.

- Question 2 - Have several share their answers.

Have question 3 and the scripture passage read aloud.

Question 3 - How many different ways do these passages describe the “rich yield” brought about through the Messiah’s death on our behalf?

- Which aspect of the “rich yield” means the most to you?

Experiencing Jesus’ Words, “It Is Finished.”

Have this testimony read aloud by one or two people.

Question - How do you relate to this story?

Question - What does it mean to you to finish well?

Living Jesus’ Words, “It Is Finished.”

Have several share what they believe God’s purpose(s) for them may be.

- Ask several to volunteer to share what they learned through this exercise.

Praying Jesus’ Words, “It Is Finished.”

Have one person read aloud the opening paragraph, then have the remainder of the group pray the second paragraph aloud in unison.

- Remind people to use this prayer daily.

Closing

Read aloud Bishop Baldwin’s quote and close the meeting.

- Next week is the final week. Ask people to give some thought as to whether they would like to continue as a group into another study?

- Remember to affirm people for their vulnerability and openness in sharing.

Suggestions for Chapter 7 “I Commend My Spirit.”

Objectives

- To gain understanding regarding the fears that hold us captive from fully resting in God’s love and care.
- To have each participant consider fully dedicating, or rededicating, their life to God.

Visual Aid

Try to find a picture of a child jumping into its father’s arms. You might find a picture like this in family magazines or perhaps in picture files from the internet.

- Have people turn to page 83 as the scripture passage is read. Ask them, “What is the alternative to following Jesus’ example and commending ourselves fully to the Father’s love?”

Have the Introductory Reflection read aloud

Paragraph 1-2 - What keeps a person from abandoning oneself to the Father’s will?

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of giving ourselves fully to the Father’s will?

Paragraph 3 - Can any of you relate a situation in which confidence in God’s love was tested? How did you discover his love in the situation?

Paragraph 4 - How much do you think *doing* the Father’s will influences your ability to have confidence that the Father’s will for you is good?

Paragraph 5 - How can we practically develop a consciousness of the Father’s will in our daily life?

Paragraph 6 - Where are you in your journey; have you learned, are you in the midst of learning, or will you have to learn in the final hour to commend yourself to the Father’s hands?

Learning from Scripture

Have the opening paragraph and question 1 read aloud, and then have several people take turns reading the Job passage aloud.

Question 1a - Have several share their answers.

Question 1b - Have the Job 19:23-37 passage read aloud.

- What have we learned from this study that will enable us have a response to God that is similar to Job’s?

Have question 2 and the scripture passage read aloud.

Question 2 - Since 1 Corinthians 15 is quite long, instead of reading it aloud ask everyone to turn to this chapter in their bible so they can refer to it as you discuss this passage.

Have question 3 and the scripture passage read aloud.

Question 3 - What did you think of the story of Stephen?

- How reasonable is it to expect to have a similar level of boldness, faith and mercy?
- How do you think Stephen manifested these attributes in daily life?

Experiencing Jesus’ Words, “I Commend My Spirit.”

Have a couple of people read the story aloud.

Questions - Ask for comments and thoughts regarding the testimony.

- What are you learning about trusting yourself to God?
- What is the opposite of learning to trust?

Living Jesus' Words, "I Commend My Spirit."

Ask the lead-in question; "What would it take...?"

- Set the example by vulnerably sharing your experience in doing this exercise, and then ask others to share.

Praying Jesus' Words, "I Commend My Spirit."

Referring to the last point in "Living Jesus' Words,..." explain, "Having considered Christ's words from the cross it is very appropriate to end by providing us an opportunity to dedicate, or re-dedicate, our lives to Christ. As we pray aloud Jesus' words this evening would you consider making this, not just another prayer, but a major moment of conversion where you dedicate yourself by telling Jesus of your desire to, 'live well, selflessly and fully cooperating with the Father,' and 'learning from Jesus and following' his example."

- Read St. Augustine's quote, emphasizing the freedom we have to commit, and to pray together.

Closing

You may want to take a few minutes to talk about where you go as a group from here. Many similar studies are available from either Emmaus Journey, or from The Word Among Us. On the Emmaus Journey web page there is a helpful description of several studies which would be a great follow-up to this study.

Using Questions to Stimulate Discussion and Enhance Learning

The first objective of the discussion group facilitator is to get people thinking, only then does the second objective of communicating truth come into play. If we turn these objectives around we will find ourselves *instructing* people rather than devising ways to help them *discover* truth. “A living faith is a *searching* faith—it ‘*seeks understanding*.’ Adults need to question, probe, and critically reflect on the meaning of God’s revelation in their unique lives in order to grow closer to God.” (*Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope* by T.A. Kleissler, M.A. LeBert, and M.C. McGuinness; published by Paulist Press, 1991)

Telling is not teaching, as any parent will affirm. Telling tends to cut the learning process short and cause people to turn on their “uhhs,” whereas well developed questions seem to enhance the learning process and turn on a person’s desire to know. If you raise a timely, well thought out question, and allow people to wrestle with the answer, the truth will become part of their understanding.

Unfortunately most small group discussion materials only use a form of questions called observations. These types of questions are valuable for enabling people to locate facts, however they don’t require people to wrestle with either the meaning or the implications of the facts. Consequently, it takes a trained facilitator to develop additional discussion group questions that will enable people participating to answer, “What does it mean?” and “How should I respond to this truth?”

There are many different types of question formats you can use. We will give you three in this section. But before we explain these three types of questions it is helpful to understand the process of preparing and using them. Here is the recommended sequence.

1. It is important to first simply prepare the material for your own spiritual enlightenment as a fellow participant.
2. Review the material, especially the Scriptures referenced, for words, concepts, and implication which would be helpful to have expanded and clarified.
3. Decide which type of question format would best enable you to lead people to think through on the word, concept, or implication. It is always more interesting if you use a variety of question formats.
4. Compose the question and write it in the margin of your study material so that during the study it will be readily available if needed. Always compose many more questions than you anticipate using.
5. During the study, based on the groups interest and understanding of the material, and when an additional question is needed, selectively use those questions that will stimulate discussion.

The three question formats that are most helpful in stimulating discussion are:

Questions of Value: This question format uses adjectives like “most,” “main,” “major,” “least,” “primary,” etc., words that cause the answerer to assign value to a set of facts. Because the question is formed in terms of what is most or least valuable *to them*, they do

not need to fear giving the wrong answer, or having to defend truth. They are simply sharing what *they* perceive is most or least valuable. However, because in any group the participants will have multiple opinions this question format tends to elicit additional opinions and the reasoning behind them. Here are two examples of this type of format:

1. What to you is the *least* important aspect of evangelization?
2. How would you state the *major* truth of this passage?

Questions of Feeling: This question format is especially valuable when facilitating a group in which one or more participants may feel somewhat insecure about participating. If you ask them a question that requires them to give a definitive answer as to the meaning of some passage they will often freeze up and simply mumble an, “I don’t know.” However if you handle the same material with a feeling question they usually will be quite comfortable telling you how they feel. Frequently, you can move from a feeling question right into the question, “What then do you think it means?” Here are two examples of this type of format:

1. How did you *feel* when you read about the poor widow having given her last two cents to the temple?
2. How did you *respond emotionally* to this passage on the roles of the husband and wife?

Questions of Relationship: This question format deals less with stimulating discussion and more with revealing understanding. It tends to force people participating back into the text of the Scripture, or the material you are using, to rethink and rediscover some truth they overlooked. It calls for the answerer to discover a *connection* between facts. Often when the connection is discovered, such as a cause and effect relationship between two concepts, the Holy Spirit opens their minds to deeper more meaningful truths. Here are two examples:

1. What is the *relationship* between forgiveness and bitterness according to this passage?
2. What is the *connection* between the disciples’ receiving power after receiving the Holy Spirit, and their role as witnesses?

Lastly, here are four principles which will serve you well if you implement them in your task of facilitating a group discussion:

Encouraging Application: Someone has observed that God did not give the Scriptures to simply increase our knowledge but to change our lives. No discussion group is complete until the participants, individually and collectively, have answered the question, “What does it mean *to me?*” or “How should *I respond* to this truth?” It is always helpful to be as specific as we can in applying God’s truth to our life, but in reality there are many truths that have implications for the way we think rather than what we do. So answering these questions can result in either applications or implications. As facilitator you should always end with questions like these, and allow people to really discuss what difference the material should make in their lives. As facilitator you should especially have these questions thought through for yourself, so that you can set the example (pace set) in the area of applying truth.

K.I.S.S. Principle: “Keep It Simple, Stupid” or “Keep It Simple Sweetie” provides a very blunt reminder that people appreciate functioning on a basic academic level. When we use highfaluting

theological and ecclesiastical terms we may sound intellectual but we do not enable others to relate to what we are saying. Most profound statements are simple statements that are profound in their simplicity. So when you are composing your discussion group questions compose short, simple sentences.

If when you ask a question of the group, one or more people ask you to repeat the question, usually that is an indication that you have stated a question that is too long and complex. If you have a complex concept which you would like to discuss by asking the participants a question, try composing a couple of short questions, rather than a longer complex sentence.

Dead-enders: A dead-end question is one that results in either a “yes” or “no” answer. Invariably these questions have been composed by beginning with a helping verb such as do, does, is, are, was, were, could, would, should, etc. When a sentence begins with one of these words the answer always results in “yes” or “no.” For example, “Don’t you think this is a good suggestion?” If you want to generate discussion you should rephrase this question into one like the following: “What do you think of this suggestion?”

Don’t Preach: Because we are also learning a lot, and feel passionate about some of the things we believe, it is easy to appear like we are on a soapbox preaching at people. As you know, most of us do not appreciate being preached at, and if we become too uncomfortable from someone’s preaching at us, we will simply extricate ourselves from the situation.

The way we can share some really intense concepts without sounding “preachy” is by avoiding the uses of pronouns like “you” and “your” and instead use pronouns like “I” and “we.” As you read and listen to the following two sentences you will see what I mean.

(a) “You people need to take this passage about being transformed seriously. If you really want to be transformed you will get into studying God’s Word and allow the Holy Spirit to renew your mind.”

(b) “As I read this passage about transformation I realized that I need to really take this seriously. If I want to allow myself to be transformed I will need to get serious about studying God’s Word and allow the Holy Spirit to really renew my mind.”

Paragraph (a) sounds very preachy and as though you are pointing out their failures and needs. On the other hand paragraph (b), though making the same points just as strongly, sounds like a non-threatening testimony. The second communicates the issues just as clearly, and though people will feel equally challenged by your sharing, no one will feel personally lambasted.

So if you desire to have a really stimulating discussion, come to each session with additional well thought-out questions to supplement the material, and share them in a simple non-threatening way.

We pray that God will bless and enable you as you facilitate *The Last Seven Words of Christ*, and that those in your group will be drawn into a deeper love for, and commitment to Jesus.