

Welcome

Welcome to the Fall 2011 Curriculum for our Life Group Launch.

We're SO GRATEFUL for the way God is working through the life groups to minister to people, grow each of us in faith, and connect more people to Christ. This year, we're making additional effort to provide materials that deepen your group, and prepare us for another expansion season in the Winter of 2012.

This curriculum is a tool " it is provided to help you easily facilitate your group, but you are not "bound" to it. Each lesson will coincide with the messages on Sundays, but each is also independent and allows for people to join anytime. Take advantage of the tool as you see fit, and let us know what works and what doesn't work for future development efforts.

Our church goals for 2011's fall program are to:

Build a greater hunger for Scripture and deepen the knowledge of group members

Engage in the stories Jesus used, allowing us to get a greater picture of His heart

Encourage people to take action from the lesson, and also share it with someone else

We'd ask you as leader to pray for these targets and celebrate them as they happen in the group.

God bless you for leading! We're here to help in any way we can, and want you to know we're praying for each of our groups. Feel free to contact us with questions, needs, issues and feedback. Our desire is to grow every person and help them become fruitful multipliers for the Kingdom of Christ.

Sincerely,  
The Elders of Journey Christian Church

BRILLIANT BEGINNINGS

Session One

Begin the session by asking the Lord in prayer to unify your group and challenge you as you study His Word.

Every morning before school for the past year or so, John's daughter has faithfully made him a pot of coffee. He'd grown accustomed to going downstairs, reaching for a mug, and simply pouring a steaming hot cup. Once in a while, though, the carafe is empty. Only a little disappointed, John realizes that his daughter forgot to push the button to turn the coffee maker on. It's amazing how much difference power makes to a good cup of coffee.

Charles Spurgeon said, "We might preach 'til our tongue rotted, 'til we exhaust our lungs and die " but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit uses the Word to convert that soul."

Following Jesus' ascension in chapter 1 of the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit fills the apostles, empowering them to be his witnesses. The apostles might have felt confident in their ability to minister, especially having learned under the master himself, but without the power of the Holy Spirit to touch hearts, they are empty carafes.

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Small-Group Discussion

Here is where you come face-to-face with Scripture. In core passages you'll explore what the Bible teaches about the topic of the study. The focus won't be on accumulating information but on how we should live in light of the Word of God. We want to help you apply the Scriptures practically, creatively, and from your heart as well as your head. At the end of the day, allowing the timeless truths from God's Word to transform our lives in Christ is our greatest aim.

The early days of the church described in Acts were a time of extraordinary unity, growth, and expansion, as the Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered believers boldly proclaimed the message of salvation to the residents of Jerusalem.

Have someone read Bible passages aloud. It's a good idea to ask ahead of time, because not everyone is comfortable reading aloud in public.

1. Read Acts 2. What effect did the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit (2:1-4) have on the Jews who were present (2:5-13)

Leader's Notes:

The Jews were bewildered and amazed. Some questioned this demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit, while others made fun of the disciples attributing their display to drunkenness.

1a. Verses 14-26 summarize Peter's first proclamation of the gospel. What are the central historical facts of his message (vv.22-24, 32-33)

Leader's Notes:

The resurrection is the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, then he was merely one of thousands of men crucified as criminals by the Romans. Lots of people saw Jesus before His death. The apostles were the witnesses who saw him alive after his death. This was an astounding claim to make, but the Holy Spirit's power backed up Peter's assertion.

2. Two gifts were given in Acts 2:37-41: forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit. To whom was the Spirit given and how did they receive it?

Leader's Notes:

The indwelling gift of the Spirit was and still is available to all who profess faith in Christ. People receive the Spirit at the moment of conversion.

3. Look at the list of things to which the early church was devoted (2:42-47). Why was each of these important?

Leader's Notes:

The early church was devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, and meeting the needs of the community. The teaching fed them with accurate knowledge of what Jesus did and taught, and what his death and resurrection meant. Fellowship went deeper than socializing " it fed the soul with shared life on an intimate and practical level. The breaking of bread involved shared meals that fed bodies and also the Lord's Supper, which fed believers with a constant reminder of what Christ's broken body had done for them. Prayer taught them to talk and listen to God.

3a. What effect did this have on the growth in number of believers? Discuss the implication of this on the church today. Solicit personal answers

4. What are the noteworthy elements of the believers' prayer (4:23-31) after Peter and John were arrested and eventually freed?

Leader's Notes: The believers affirmed God's sovereign power in the face of the government's power. They petitioned the Lord for miraculous signs and wonders and for boldness in speaking His Word. After they

prayed, the place they were praying in was shaken, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God boldly.

5. When has the Holy Spirit enabled you to act boldly? Solicit personal answers. Leader's note: The intent of this discussion is to encourage group members to set aside some time to spend with God in prayer and His Word at home each day throughout the week. Be prepared to help the group understand how important it is to fill our minds with the Word of God. If people already have a commitment to a good Bible reading plan, that is great, but you may have people who struggle to stay in the Word daily. Sometimes beginning with a simple commitment to a short daily reading can start a habit that changes their life.

Read:

The Holy Spirit enables believers to minister with confidence. Developing our ability to serve God according to the Holy Spirit's leading requires that we get to know God personally and intimately. We must make time for prayer, for reading God's Word, and for meditation, and invite the Holy Spirit to speak into our lives every day.

Ask:

Which of the following steps are you willing to take for the next few months?

Prayer:

Commit to daily time in personal, focused prayer and connection with God. Find a place where you can be alone and undistracted. You may find it helpful to write your prayers in a journal. Meditation: Meditation is focused attention on the Word of God " a great way to internalize God's Word more deeply. Copy a portion of Scripture on a card and tape it somewhere in your line of sight, such as your car's dashboard, the bathroom mirror, or the kitchen table. Think about it when you sit at red lights, while you get ready for your day, or while you're eating a meal. Reflect on what God is saying to you through these words.

## THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER

### Session Two

In this digital age, the term "staying connected" conjures up images of cell phones, text messaging, e-mail, e-greetings, blogs, and Facebook " to name a few. We communicate with our families, co-workers, classmates, and loved ones, both near and far away, with handheld devices or computers, without even the need to pick up a telephone.

One would think with all the technology, we would have more free time; but realistically, we have less. Our days are so full that we still fail to keep in touch with people we care about, much less the One who deserves our attention the most " our heavenly Father.

We can learn much from the fact that, despite an impossibly busy schedule, Jesus made time to be quiet and alone with God, His Father. He knew that above all else, He needed to keep connected to His source of strength and guidance. We all need this connection as well. Thankfully, Jesus invites us to partner with Him and discover the joy of staying connected to him 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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### Small-Group Discussion

Jesus made prayer the highest priority in His life. Many times in the Bible we see Jesus setting aside time to be alone with God despite a hectic schedule. We will discuss how Jesus handled His busyness, what kinds of things he prayed about, and why.

1. Read Mark 1:14-34. Jesus had a very busy ministry. What kinds of things occupied His time? Leader's Notes: Jesus was a man of action, whose ministry was a whirlwind of teaching, healing, casting out demons,

and proclaiming the kingdom of God. 1a. How are these things like or unlike the things that occupy your daily life? Solicit personal answers

2. Read Mark 1:35 aloud. This verse shows us that, as busy as He was, Jesus took time to pray to his heavenly Father. Where did Jesus go to pray? Leader's Notes: Jesus had just had a successful ministry in Capernaum healing many sick and demon-possessed people. Early the next day, Jesus went out by himself for a time of prayer. By the time the disciples found Him, He was ready to face the day. We must follow Christ's example by making time for personal prayer. Those who help and serve on Sunday, especially need to set aside time with God to restore their strength. Our ability to serve will be hindered if we neglect times of spiritual replenishment. During His ministry on earth, Jesus was in constant prayer with the Father. Mark recorded three of these times (Refer to Mark 6:46 and 14:32-42).

2a. What do you think is the significance of where Jesus prayed?  
Solicit personal answers

3. Read Mark 1:36-39. What do you think was the connection between Jesus' decision to make time for prayer and the way he dealt with people's expectations? Solicit personal answers

4. Jesus' busy schedule wasn't about to change anytime soon. How do you respond to this statement: "If we are too busy to pray, we are too busy?"  
Solicit personal answers

5. What are some of the things that sometimes hinder you from prayer? Solicit personal answers

6. Look up the following passages and note how prayer fit into Jesus' life and ministry at various points. For instance, what did He pray about? What happened when He prayed?

Luke 3:21-22

Luke 9:28-31

Luke 6:12-13

Luke 22:41-44; 23:46

Leader's Notes:

Jesus prayed at key transitions and crisis points in His life. For example, here He prayed as the Holy Spirit descended on Him after his baptism. He also prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:41-44) and even on the cross (Luke 23:46)

It's important to examine what specific things Jesus prayed about so we can do the same. First, Jesus prayed before making decisions such as in the case of choosing His twelve disciples. This should serve an example to us that we, like Jesus, need the strength and wisdom of the Father in our lives. In Luke 22:41-44, Jesus prayed before going to the cross. In the garden Jesus' prayer was agonizing. Yet, His prayer brought clarity to His situation. In Luke 23:46, Jesus gave up His spirit and died

7. How would you summarize the role prayer played in Jesus' life?  
Refer to below listed summary

8. What will it take for you to build consistent times of prayer into your life?

8a. How motivated are you to do this? Why is that? Solicit personal answers  
Summary: Jesus made prayer the highest priority in His life, knowing that He could only accomplish His mission through complete dependence on the Father. It is so with us as well. Prayer is the primary means which we stay connected to the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. And apart from that connection, we can do nothing (John 15:5)

Homework:

In preparation for next week's session instruct your group members to read all of Ephesians chapter 4 and complete the Spiritual Gifts Inventory.

Note:

The Spiritual Gifts survey can be found on Journey's website.

## EMPOWERED TO LIVE AND SERVE

### Session Three

Before accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we often don't give much thoughtful consideration to the way we behave in our daily lives. We may be rude to someone who is inconsiderate to us. Perhaps we're prone to quarrels with loved ones. Some of us many find it second nature to talk about others with unkind words.

So what makes the difference in the life of Christ's followers? When we offer Jesus our hearts in surrender, we promise to do our best to live according to His will for our lives. Ephesians 4:22 tells us to "put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires." The more we read and reflect on the truth in the Bible, the more obvious it becomes that these "old self" behaviors don't reflect our commitment to follow Christ.

It's not easy to live for Jesus and we may still revert back to some of our old tendencies from time to time, but we can be encouraged by the words of Ephesians 4:24, which says we are "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." We can know that God is faithful to complete us as Paul tells us in Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. We can do our part by keeping our focus on God's desires for us and reminding ourselves daily to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit for guidance; for we know that one day we will be complete " like God in true righteousness and holiness.

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### Small-Group Discussion

Turning now from doctrinal matters to the outworking of that doctrine in practice, Paul calls the church to unity, maturity, and mutual love, because they are one body in Christ. Read Ephesians 4

1. Paul was in prison when he wrote to the Ephesians, and he refers to himself as a prisoner for the Lord, Paul calls the church to unity based on the things they share in common. Review the seven areas of common ground for unity found in Ephesians 4:4-6. Why is each point important for true unity in church relationships?

Leader's Notes:

Paul indicated that he received the mystery referred to in verse 3 in a revelation from God. This was in a direct communication from God to Ananias (Acts 9:15). This wasn't something Paul thought up on his own. He claims the authority of an apostle.

One body

One faith

One spirit

One baptism

One hope

One God and Father of all

One Lord

2. Citing Psalm 68:18, Paul refers to the gifts that God has given to believers. What are these gifts according

to Ephesians 4:11?

Leader's Notes:

God revealed to Paul that Jesus Christ truly was the promised Messiah of the Jews and that light to the Gentiles too. Both Jews and Gentiles would be included in the church. All mankind is united into one under Christ.

For what purpose were these gifts given? (See Eph. 4:-12-13)

The infants in 4:14 are young Christians. What does this verse say about the tendencies of spiritually immature believers?

3. Paul exhorts believers to cast off the ungodly ways of their previous lives. Four lifestyle characteristics are identified in 4:17-19. Read each verse and discuss why you think these characteristics are detrimental to faith.

Leader's Notes:

Paul raised as a faithful and devoted Jew, trained by Gamaliel, one of the leading rabbis of his day. Before becoming a Christian, he had persecuted the church, believing that Jesus was a false Messiah and that the Christians were heretics. Paul is overwhelmed that, despite this past, God had chosen him and saved him for the purpose of telling the Gentiles about Christ.

4. Believers are created to be like God in holiness and righteousness. What needs to be made new to accomplish this according to Ephesians 4:23?

Leader's Notes:

Paul describes the believer's ability to come fearlessly into God's presence as the most awesome privilege anyone could have. Because of this "his own awesome privilege" he does not want readers to despair over his suffering through imprisonment. Paul considers it a privilege to suffer for championing the ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles (thus bringing others to the freedom and confidence he enjoys), and he encourages believers to consider it an honor too.

5. Paul concludes the chapter with some practical tips on what the new life in Christ should look like. Read Ephesians 4:25-32. What is helpful to you in what Paul says here about:

Anger?

Talk?

Leader's Notes:

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (v17a). Christ dwelling in believers' hearts conveys the idea of settling down, taking up permanent residence. The "heart" in the Bible always refers to the center of a person's emotions and will. Christ takes up permanent residence in the hearts of those who trust in him, changing their "heart" and, consequently, their words and thoughts.

6. How do the basic Christian attitudes in 4:32 contribute to unity, maturity, and mutual love?

Solicit personal answers

Summary:

Believers are united in Christ because of all that we share in common. We must work out the purpose of the church, in unity, through the diverse gifts that God has given to us. This means living lives of maturity as we move beyond the selfish desires that controlled us in our previous lives, and learning to relate to one another with honesty, transparency, and love, replacing anger and bitterness with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

Serving God created each of us to serve Him within the body of Christ. According to 1 Peter 4:10, which says, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (NKJV), every believer has been given at least one spiritual gift for the purpose of filling specific needs within the body of Christ- the church. First Peter 4:10-11 says, "Each one should use whatever gifts he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

1. Review the Spiritual Gifts Inventory and discuss which of the listed gifts you believe you may have.
2. Discuss some ways that we can serve the body of Christ. If you are already serving somewhere, share your experiences with the group.
3. Discuss some of the ministries Journey offers to people looking to get involved such as children's ministry, or hospitality. Remind everyone that it sometimes takes time and trying several different ministries before finding the one that fits best.

If you are not currently serving, is there a particular area of service that God has put on your heart to serve this group, your church or the community? If not, pray about finding a ministry in which you can serve. As you take that first step, God will lead you to the ministry that expresses your passion.

### Acknowledgments

The source of this curriculum is The Deeping Life Together Series. For a deeper and more comprehensive study refer to The Deeping Life Together: Acts; Praying God's Way, and Ephesians Small Group Bible Studies, which can be found in Journey's Resource Library.