

Session one  
Walking with Christ

## “Beauty and the beast”

Welcome to session one of “Walking with Christ”. I so glad you’ve joined us. I’m looking forward to some great times together. You know, most of us have heard that we are “made in the image of God”, but have you ever spent time wondering what that really means? I think for one, that it means we might even be able to learn a little about God by looking at ourselves. For instance, I bet God loves music. I think God likes stories and drama. I see that in mankind, and in Scripture.

I also think we can learn a lot about each other if we know what kind of music and movies we enjoy. So spend a few minutes sharing with each other what is your favorite song or music style. What is your favorite movie?



### *Fellowship*

1. What is your favorite song or music style? What is your favorite movie?



### *Discipleship*

Have you ever seen a movie that reminded you of a biblical truth? I remember when the movie “The Matrix” came out—everyone claimed it was an analogy of the Christian life. And do you remember way back to when the first “Star Wars” movie came out? Back then a lot of Christians didn’t go to movies—so I remember hearing from a lot of people that wouldn’t go to movies—but really wanted to see “Star Wars”, that it was based on the Gospel of Luke—yeah...I never really saw the Gospel in there--but it had great special affects!

I did like the “Narnia” movie that came out recently—and that one actually was written as a way to tell the Gospel story to children (and adults alike) in a way that would really speak to the young at heart.

But recently, someone was telling me about another movie that made some interesting points. It’s called “Beauty and the Beast”. If you have kids or grandkids—you probably have seen it. It is about this handsome prince who falls into a terrible state. Shadows fall on his heart and his castle, and he hid there for a long time surrounded by darkness. Over time, he turned into an ugly, horrible beast.

But that all changed when a beautiful girl came and began to care for him and love him. And basically, as “Beauty” loved the “Beast”, the beast became more beautiful.

Do you have the picture? We see a horrible, ugly beast, and a perfectly wonderful creature called “beauty”. He is so ugly; she is so beautiful. Imagine how his life would end—if he was left alone there. But for some reason that defies explanation—she cares. She loves him, and he is saved.

Does that story remind you of anything? Now lets be honest—some of you ladies in the room are thinking—yeah, it reminds me of me and my husband!

But no, that’s not what I’m getting at. Stay with me for a minute more.

Before the fall, were like the prince—the beautiful member of a rich perfect family. But now...wow. Have we ever fallen! We’ve turned into the beast. Now, I’ll admit that when I’m all dressed up on Sunday—looking my best, I may not want to admit how much trouble I’m in. But, at other times, I have to admit that a shadow has fallen over my kingdom.

I find it easiest to admit this when I’m driving. In fact, I knew a nice Christian lady once who was very nice to everybody and always looked like she had it all together—but when she got behind the wheel—watch out.

One day in particular, she was going to the store, and a taxi driver cut her off. Well, she didn’t like that very much—so she stepped on the gas and cut back in front of him. Well, he got angry and when they were stopped in traffic, he got out of his car and started yelling at her. She responded with a hand gesture that suggested to me she probably wasn’t witnessing to him—and he responded by hitting her car.

Well, traffic began to move, so the taxi driver got back in his car and drove off—thinking he had the last word. But my friend’s 6 year old son was in the back seat of her car, and she wanted to be sure and teach him how to respond correctly in a situation like this—so she told him to give here anything he could find lying in the back seat. Then she caught back up to the taxi driver and rolled down her window and started throwing things. She threw an empty cup, a banana peel, some garbage, a few small broken toys from McDonalds—all the while yelling for her son to find her more things to throw. Finally he said, mommy all that is left is a brick. So she waited for just the right time. She waited until the next light turned green, and she threw the brick through the taxi’s back window and then sped off in a different direction.

I’ll tell you two good things about that story. #1—she didn’t have a fish on her car. #2—the apostle Paul tells us in Romans that he was the same way. No matter how hard he tried to be perfect—he never could. The beast always found a way out.

In fact, all through the Bible, we see that nobody but God could be perfect. Every great hero of the Bible had trouble keeping it all together for more than a few minutes at a time. But God loves us anyway.

Now, as far the movie “The beauty and the beast” goes—this is where our analogy ends. Because in the movie Beauty kisses the Beast and everything is wonderful.

But in reality, Beast killed Beauty. We did that—our sins killed beauty!

Again, we don’t like to think about this too often—and we like to think that we wouldn’t do anything so horrible. But, do you remember the soldiers from the movie “The Passion of the Christ”? Between the time when they were commanded whip Jesus, and the time they were supposed to crucify him—they had some spare time. Do you remember what they did to kill the extra time? Just for fun—they beat him up. They spit on him...and lots of other terrible things to make themselves feel important and powerful.

Have you ever done that? Would you? Do you think you’ve ever come across a person who has been already beaten down by life, they don’t know Christ and they’re condemned to die without hope—and one day, they come across your path.

Maybe we meet them on the road, and we honk at them in anger, maybe we refuse to let them into our lane when they signal they need to move. Maybe we meet them at work and take a fun opportunity to gossip about them or make fun of them to make ourselves feel better.

All the while, we know down deep inside, that how we treat others is how we are treating Jesus. Do you remember what Jesus told us...”if you do it unto the least important of these, you do it unto me”.

We like to tell ourselves we have the beast under control—that we are really looking quite beautiful. But the truth is, we are like one ant looking at the other ants and thinking, “Hey, I look pretty good compared to these other guys!”

But the Bible tells us in Romans 8:7 that the human mind cannot submit to God’s law. And if you don’t believe me, then just try for a few minutes. Try to be perfect. Don’t think any bad thoughts. You know those things you worry about—don’t think about those. Oops—there you went and thought about them. Now, some of you haven’t had any bad thoughts yet, and about now your thinking to yourself...I bet I’m doing better and being perfect than everybody else in this room—ouch! There you went falling into pride. And then, if that weren’t bad enough, Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages for sin is death.

But here is the good news. Remember our fairy tale? Beauty kisses the beast and everything is ok. But in real life, “Beauty becomes the Beast, so the beast could become the beauty. You see it? Jesus changed places with us.

He hung on the cross and took our beating and punishment and sins. He became the beast, and in the process we can take his Beauty.

But like the movie, you ought to ask yourself...what if He hadn't come? Why did he care?

2. In what kind of situations does your "beast" tend to appear?
3. Can you describe a time when you saw someone trying to feel important by making someone else feel small?
4. Do you find it possible to be sinless?
5. Read Romans 3:10, 23-24 and Psalms 51:5. What do these verses say about us?



## *Ministry*

6. How do you think this affects our relationships with each other? How does it affect our ministry?



## *Evangelism*

7. Read Galatians 3:13. Like the beast we have been offered redemption. In what way could the movie affect the way that we see evangelism?

If you know all about Jesus, but cannot actually say that you are his disciple—then you're like the Beast who may have **seen** Beauty, but had not yet been **saved** by Beauty. It takes a committed relationship between you and God to achieve salvation. It isn't about religion, or how much you know—but Who you know. It's about the relationship. Only then will the beast transform.

If you are a believer, you need to know that you still have a little of the beast left in you.

You know what really ruins the name of Christ? Do you know what does the most destruction in the Church? Do you know what keeps most non-believers away from salvation? No, it's not Satan per say. It's Christians who **think** they are beauty.

Christians who think they have it all together. They're the trouble makers in churches; they're the hypocrites that turn people away from God. The beasts visit and hide in the corner and wait for scraps of food to be thrown their way. But the "righteous" people who have forgotten where they came from and think they have already become completely transformed—they are the ones who most need to hear this story.

So let's take three minutes to pray silently. I want you to spend some time in prayer just thinking what Jesus went through for us. Think of the slaps in the face, the beating, the crown of thorns, the mocking, and the cross. How does it make you feel?

And remember, Jesus didn't just do it for the soldiers, or for the person next to you. He had to go through it to redeem *you*.



## *Worship*

8. Spend time in prayer thinking about what happened to turn the curse into a blessing.

## *Hidden Treasure*

Welcome back to week two of walking with Christ, where we are going digging for some hidden treasure!

Let me tell you about Olympic gymnastic competitor, Jana Bieger. The daughter of an Olympian, this 15 year old girl strives every day to “go for the gold.” She began conditioning when she was two years old, but was born in Germany... a country which didn't have levels in which to compete. But after her family moved to the United States from Germany when she was 6, her gymnastics became even more of a priority. Speaking no English, but loving her sport, her career was born. Nowadays, a rigorous training schedule of two practices a day for a total of six hours doesn't allow for a traditional school schedule. For this reason, Jana has been home-schooled for the last four years in order to work around her time at the gym. Jana usually studies at night, between practices and on the weekends. By being home-schooled, she is able to take days off for competitions and not fall behind in her studies. If she needs more hours for study, she works on the weekends and through the summers, sacrificing even more of her precious free time.

Now *that* is dedication! In fact, I feel like I've done my exercise for the day just hearing that story! There are treasures worth digging for, and for Jana, the Olympic gold and excellence in her sport is one of them. How about for you?



### *Fellowship*

1. What is one thing you prioritize?  
What are you willing to do to get it?



### *Discipleship*

Whenever Jesus says something, it's a good idea to pay attention! Well, in today's passage, He tells a story with the same message... *twice!* Turn with me now to Matthew Chapter 13, verses 44-46, as we read it together.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Jesus is saying that yes...there IS something worth having, and you should give all you have, sell everything you have, in order to get it! In the first parable, the man is so “happy”, that he immediately takes action. The treasure brings joy, happiness and satisfaction! Do you feel that way with what you pour your life into daily? Will you feel that way 30 years from now? The things you spend hours a day on now...will they be a priority when you are on your deathbed...or will you wish you had done things differently? Jana Bieger says, “Gymnastics is fun and challenging for me and it never gets boring or old.” Obviously, God has blessed her with an amazing talent. Yet when I look at professional athletes from all countries, and people who prioritize physical fitness, or outside beauty, I’m reminded of Paul’s words in I Timothy 4:8 – “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for *all* things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

We must take careful thought as to what we pour our limited time, resources and energy into...and make sure it is a treasure worth seeking. God is far more interested in who we *are* than what we *do*. In fact, in Philippians 3:8, Paul say, “What is more, I consider *everything* a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them *rubbish* that I may gain Christ.” *He* is the treasure! And becoming like Him should be our #1 priority!

The 2 men in the parable came to an immediate conclusion regarding “cost” and “reward”. They knew that no “cost” was too great, because the “reward” was immeasurable! Jana has sacrificed a typical high school experience and countless hours of free time...for what she considers a good payoff. It is worth it to her, the physical and mental sacrifice. So now we must ask ourselves: Is the treasure of knowing and being like Christ worth it to me? Is it worth giving up TV or computer time to dig for treasure in His Word? Is it worth making my career and extra hours spent advancing it subservient to time developing my *spiritual* nature? Do I spend more time thinking about God and His plans, or my own? Make a side-by-side comparison and ask yourself, “Will money bring me lasting happiness? Is there really enough prestige? Won’t my physical body rot within 100 years no matter how much time I put into it? Is there really a nice enough car or home that will bring lasting satisfaction?” I can guarantee you: no one has ever lain on their deathbed wishing they *hadn’t* spent more time with the King of Kings! But there are plenty who have breathed their last words, “If only I’d \_\_\_\_\_” or “I wish I’d \_\_\_\_\_”.

But Jesus never hides the fact that following him involves sacrifice. In Luke 9:23 and 24 he says that those who want to follow him must 1) deny themselves, 2) take up their cross daily, and 3) follow Him. Deny our agendas and goals, be willing to carry the cross (this painful instrument of death), and follow in His footsteps.

Matthew 13 isn't all about denial and sacrifice. Those words carry a depressing sound. Remember, the man in his *joy* went and sold all he had! He knew he was gaining from the exchange!! He did an evaluation of values—of what really matters...and the answer was obvious! Was he attached to the things he sold? I imagine so! Was he saying “goodbye” to things he would never be able to take comfort from or feel better for having? Absolutely! But for treasure to have any lasting value, it must endure! You see, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man or a woman who sees Jesus for who He really is. The treasure, not just of eternal life like something that happens after you die. Eternal life is a brand new kind of life. The Apostle Paul says, “Take hold of the life that is truly life.” It is a life filled with peace. A life filled with focus and purpose. A life worth giving anything for; truly, a hidden treasure!

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2. Read Matthew 13:44, 45. Why do you think the Kingdom of heaven is compared to a treasure?
3. If salvation is free, why must there be sacrifice to get to the treasure?
4. What would you have to give up if you wanted to make God's priorities your own?
5. Being totally honest, is the “cost” versus “reward” worth it to you right now?
6. Read Luke 9:23. In Greek, the words “deny yourself” means to “disown yourself, forget, lose sight of yourself and your own interests, refuse and give up yourself.” What will be the most difficult obstacle you will face when you choose to do this?
7. What are the costs of disobedience, or lazy discipleship?
8. Jesus is willing to be your personal trainer! Studies show it takes 30 days to build a habit, so which of the following steps are you willing to try for the next 30 days?

Prayer: take a few minutes each day asking Christ to “train” you in how to live.  
Keep a prayer notebook, with requests and answers.

Bible reading: go to [www.suiglesiaencasa.com](http://www.suiglesiaencasa.com) and get a daily bible reading schedule. Then, each day spend some time in the scripture.

Meditation: meditate on Matthew 13:44 or Luke 9:25 each day. Write them on a card, and placing it on your mirror or desk at work and you will soon have them memorized.



## *Ministry*

9. Crosses are so much lighter if shared! Take a few moments to pair up into prayer/accountability partners for the next 30 days, committing to hold each other up before the Throne in this quest for true treasure and denial of self.



## *Evangelism*

10. Is there someone you can think of that you wish were a member of your group? Maybe have lunch or coffee with them this week and invite them to join you. Spend two minutes silently praying about who they might be and commit to meet with them this week.



## *Worship*

11. For those who have accepted Christ as Savior, you've already received the priceless treasure of eternal life and an incomparable Advocate in God! Share what God has done for you and spend time worshipping Him together.

Session Three  
Walking with Christ

### *A love like His*

Welcome to session three of “Walking with Christ”. Isn’t it great to be back together enjoying each other’s company again? I really like that God wants us to be a family!

Today we’ll hold our love up to the perfection of God’s, as we seek to develop a love like His!

If you visit Toledo, Spain, you can see the Alcazar, a 16-th century fortress sitting majestically atop the highest hill. In the civil war of the 1930s, the Alcazar became a battleground when the Loyalists tried to oust the Nationalists, who held the fortress. During one dramatic episode of the war, the Nationalist leader received a phone call while in his office at the Alcazar. It was from his son, who had been captured by the Loyalists. The ultimatum: If the father didn’t surrender the Alcazar to them, they would kill his son. The father weighed his options, but after a long pause and with a heavy heart, he said to his son, “Then die like a man.”

God’s love is self-sacrificial, shown when He gave up His only Son for each of us! And unless we are willing to die to ourselves, we will never have a love like His.

But first of all, I must tell you...you will never develop this kind of love if you haven’t accepted Christ’s love for yourself. It’s supernatural, and requires a partnership between you and the Author of this love, or it will not happen. Sure, you can be a non-Christian and love your spouse, your friends and mother...but the strongest kind of love, “Agape” or “God-love”, can only come if you have first accepted His love gift to **you**! If you have not yet done that, please don’t leave this small group without talking to someone in your group who will be thrilled to share how to become a child of God, so that God Himself can build **His** character traits into yours!

Author Patrick Morley tells about a group of fishermen who landed in a secluded bay and had a great day fishing for salmon. But when they returned to their sea plane, it was aground because of the fluctuating tides. They had no option except to wait until the next morning when the tides came in. Yet when they took off, they only got a few feet off the ground before crashing down into the sea. The problem of the day before had caused the pontoon to puncture and fill with water.

The sea plane slowly began to sink. The three men and a 12-year-old son of one of them prayed and then jumped into the icy waters to swim to shore. The water was cold, the riptide was strong, and two of the men reached the shore exhausted. They looked back and saw that their companion, also a strong swimmer, did not swim to shore because his

12-year-old son wasn't strong enough to make it. They saw that father with his arms around his son being swept out to sea. He chose to die with his son rather than to live without him.

What a model, and what a picture of God's love for us! He chose to die for us, rather than to live without us knowing we would never be able to reach heaven on our own!



## **Fellowship**

1. Share with the group when you accepted Christ's love for yourself.
2. Describe one situation this week in which you were challenged to love.



## **Discipleship**

A man went to the doctor after weeks of symptoms. The doctor examined him carefully, then called the patient's wife into his office. "Your husband is suffering from a rare form of anemia. Without treatment, he'll be dead in a few weeks. The good news is, it can be treated with proper nutrition."

"You will need to get up early every morning and fix your husband a hot breakfast—pancakes, bacon and eggs, the works. He'll need a home-cooked lunch every day, and then an old-fashioned meat-and-potato dinner every evening. It would be especially helpful if you could bake frequently. Cakes, pies, homemade bread—these are the things that will allow your husband to live.

"One more thing. His immune system is weak, so it's important that your home be kept spotless at all times. Do you have any questions?" The wife had none.

"Do you want to break the news, or shall I?" asked the doctor.

"I will," the wife replied.

She walked into the exam room. The husband, sensing the seriousness of his illness, asked her, "It's bad, isn't it?"

She nodded, tears welling up in her eyes. "What's going to happen to me?" he asked. With a sob, the wife blurted out, "The doctor says you're gonna die!"

That story makes me laugh every time I hear it, but it also brings conviction...as it brings to the light my weakness...and yes, unwillingness oftentimes, in putting others' needs before my own. Turn with me now to Philippians 2:3-5, and let's read it together.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”

An attitude the same as Christ Jesus'! Considering other's needs as more important than my own!? That means that no sacrifice is too great! Let's jump down to verse 13, because if you're like me, you are feeling a little bit discouraged now.

“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

OK...so it's God that makes us 1) willing and 2) able. Do you see why it's impossible to have a God-sized love without God? When we accept Christ and His love for ourselves, it's like a blood transfusion. His life and blood works in us, and a supernatural change begins. We take on His characteristics. The Bible says that the life is in the blood! His life, given through His blood. Now let's read what is called by most “The Love Chapter”: I Corinthians 13.

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

I've always been fascinated and in awe of those who have been willing to not only die for Christ, but to be burned at the stake for him. Imagine...alive, and burning until there is no flesh left! Yet as I read verse 3, and see that God counts surrendering our body to the flames as *nothing* if there is no love...I realize how much He wants this for us!

Now, I may never be called to physically die for another, but daily I'm presented with opportunities to sacrificially love others and die to myself! Sometimes I think it would actually be *easier* to die physically than to die to self...giving up MY preferences, MY wishes, MY agenda, and MY comfort...to consider them better than myself, preferring

them and their wishes. To welcome the opportunity to invite a hurting neighbor in when I am tired after a long day at work. To help someone move when I would rather relax with a good book. To write that note of encouragement when I want to complain, “But no one has encouraged ME today!”

Jesus says that the world will *know* we are Christians by our love! So I ask you: is there any doubt as people watch *your* life that you’ve had a spiritual blood transfusion and God’s love is permeating your life?

3. Read I Corinthians 13:4-7. Which of these characteristics of love do you struggle with most?
4. To what extent does Christ’s love for you—His sacrifice, forgiveness, and care instead of condemnation—motivate you to love others? Does it motivate you a lot, or not much? Why do you think that is?



## *Ministry*

5. How would you like this study and this group experience to affect the way you handle relationships from now on?
6. Spend some time in prayer for each other...that as God does His part, we would cooperate and be willing to change.



## *Evangelism*

7. Think about what you believe will be your biggest challenge to love this coming week. Share it with the group and brainstorm on how you can demonstrate Christ’s love to that difficult-to-love person...so that they will *know* you are a Christian by your love.



## *Worship*

8. The Bible says, “The prayers of a righteous man are powerful and effective.” How has God answered your prayers during this study? Review your list of prayer requests and praises and update the group.



## *More than skin deep*

When I was growing up, there was a couple in my church that I wanted to be “just like when I grow up”! The husband was handsome, the kids adorable, the wife gorgeous. They were affluent, had a great house and car, were pillars in the church, and just seemed to have it “all together”. Imagine my surprise when years later the husband left the wife for a younger woman, the kids were grown and devastated, and the woman was left to struggle financially and emotionally. Things are not always what they seem, and neither are people! Some of the world’s most famous and beautiful we later find out are the most unhappy and unfulfilled...yet some of the most persecuted and destitute are the most joyful. I’ve come across people to whom I was so intimidated to share my faith, thinking, “Oh, they would never sense a need for God! They’ve got it all!” I’ve also caught myself with the mindset of, “Oh, they are so far gone...they’ll never repent.” I fear God was speaking of *me* when he said in I Samuel 16:7, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.”



### *Fellowship*

1. Think back to your life as an unsaved person. What unfulfilled needs did you have?
2. Were your needs obvious or carefully hidden?



### *Discipleship*

It’s so hard to see people as they really are! That must be why we’re warned to judge no one... and to leave that job to God! Only their all-knowing Creator can see inside the heart! Well, since Jesus was such a Master at interpersonal relationships and treating others with understanding and wisdom, let’s look at *His* example in order to glean some pointers in meeting their needs, no matter what the façade they show the world! The story is found in John 4:5-29 and shows Jesus with the Samaritan woman. As you may know, Jesus was tired from a journey, but still found the time and energy to enter into a divine appointment with a woman who needed the hope He had to offer. He sent the disciples away to find food, and asked the Samaritan woman (who came to draw water) for a drink. Since Samaritans were looked down upon and Jews didn’t associate with them, her shock was evident. Yet Jesus reveals Himself to her and offers her Living Water...even while she tries to change the subject and evade the truth.

Now, if I had been Jesus, I could have found many reasons to avoid this whole situation...just like I do in day-to-day opportunities! He was physically tired, of a different social class, and was not even “supposed” to talk to a “Samaritan”! He was a man, alone...talking to someone with a

sordid past! What might people have thought? When she acted uncomfortable and changed the subject, it allowed for a neat and tidy escape from going deeper and talking about real needs, *if* Jesus had been so inclined. But He wasn't! He loved her and knew she was thirsty. He had what it took to satisfy the thirst, and He wouldn't leave a hurting soul to go on in that need without offering the true and lasting solution: Living Water. We, too, are Jesus' hands and feet to our hurting world...sent to those hurting souls who long to be seen more than skin deep.

I so very much want to be the person to whom Jesus will say these words of Matthew 25:35, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in." It's *fun* to give a starving person some food to relieve their misery, but I promise you...there is no greater joy than sharing Christ with hungry people! The pressure is not on you to change their life! That's God's job. You are just given the privilege of sharing the food. And remember, no matter what the outward appearance, *everyone* needs Jesus!

3. Read John 4:5-29. In verse 9, what was Jesus' first step (and first words) in making a connection with this woman?
4. Why do you think he shared his need?
5. How do you think the woman felt when Jesus did this?
6. In verses 10-15 of John 4, what did Jesus then do?
7. What did she perceive her need to be?
8. In verses 16-26 of John 4, how did Christ point out her real need?
9. Jesus knew her real needs and hurts. When she became uncomfortable with the conversation and tried to change the subject to an age old argument--he moved beyond it and again spoke to her heart. What examples can you think of where we need to do the same.



## Ministry

10. What needs do you have that you are you hiding even from those in your group? If you feel comfortable, share them with your fellow group members...and see if there are needs of others *you* can meet as well.



## Evangelism

11. Think of someone in your life who doesn't know Christ. What needs do you sense this person has?

Pause to pray for him/her and for opportunities to meet those needs.



**Worship**

12. Spend some time adoring the God who “knows all you’ve ever done” and loves you anyway!

## ***Forgetting what lies behind***

Welcome to session five of “Walking with Christ”--“Forgetting what lies behind.” I want you to take a moment and think about the worst mistake you have ever made. Really “live it” once again. How did you feel at that crucial moment that you knew you had made a HUGE mistake that you could never undo? How much guilt did you experience? Maybe you got pregnant or got someone pregnant when you weren’t married. Maybe you beat your wife in a moment of rage. Maybe you’ve said some words that you can never take back and which still haunt you today! As I read through the Gospels after I had made mistake after mistake in my life, I saw Jesus touching the lepers and they were suddenly clean... white as snow! I longed to receive just such a touch, so that the ugliness of my sins was erased. As I was thinking about that, I turned to Acts 10 where Peter has a vision. He kept calling “unclean” what God had declared “clean”! He spoke through His Word and told me, “Don’t keep calling yourself ‘unclean’ when I HAVE touched you and cleansed the sin!”

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### **Fellowship**

1. What is one positive way the ugliness of your past has helped make you a better person today?

As we get started, let me remind you of something very important. In two weeks you’ll have your Celebration Week. There will be no video—you just get to decide how you would most like to spend an evening together...enjoying each other and being a family. It might be a dinner, or game night, singing, sharing testimonies or a picnic in the park with all your kids. Decide before you leave and start making plans. Now, back to our lesson about forgetting what lies behind.

I think the incredible thing about youth for many of us is that the “real world” with all of its problems hasn’t come crashing down on us...yet. For some this happens at a younger age than others. Maybe you grew up in a home with physical or sexual abuse. Or the pain of alcoholism was your reality. Eventually, pain in life will present itself, but until then we have such high hopes! I was saddened to hear the story of a young woman whose expectations came crashing down after high school. Her childhood was a happy one. She had a father with a good job, a mom who stayed home to take care of her and her brothers, and she worked hard in high school looking forward to a fast-paced and high-paying career. After meeting a boy at 16, they dreamed of a brilliant future together. But along the way, the pressure got to her dad and he turned to alcohol. Before long, he was a full-blown alcoholic who lost his job, her mom went to work for the first time in her life, and the only person she could find comfort in was her boyfriend. In a moment of weakness she did what she swore she would never do and shortly after found herself staring at a positive pregnancy test. Their grandiose “plans” were greatly changed as she took a low-paying job while her new husband struggled through college and they were new parents! Their dreams of affluence seemed even more remote 2 yrs. later when baby #2 was born...and her husband decided this was NOT what he wanted for HIS life and left.

She felt like she was at the end of her rope when she met a friend who also had a painful past, yet she seemed so free! In fact, in some ways, her story was worse, but joy emanated from her face...a face

not etched with bitterness! The words of life she showed me are found in Philippians 3: Paul cites an impressive resume that would make any Jew proud. Yet He goes on to say in verses 7 through 10,

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

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## ***MERGEFORMATINET Discipleship***

2. Read Philippians 3:4-10. How do you respond to Paul’s statement that his ethnic heritage was “rubbish” compared to knowing Christ? How do you feel about your heritage?
3. What does Paul say about the good and bad of his past in verses 4-6?
4. How did Paul compare his past social status with his subsequent status after accepting Christ?
5. What was Paul’s desire for his future that made him willing to surrender his past to God (verses 8, 10)?

Well, let me finish the story of my friend, as it’s so much like many of our stories.

Right when she felt like running away herself, hunting for greener pastures and craving a new beginning, her friend showed her how to get one! How to allow God to use her painful past and even use it for His glory!

Who doesn’t love to be clean? We love to be cleansed outside, but God wants to give us a fresh start on the inside as well!

She accepted Christ through the help of her friend...but didn’t feel the freedom she had so desperately wanted! She knew in her mind she was cleansed of her sin, but still felt the dirtiness of her past. You know, blame is as old as the Garden of Eden! Adam blamed Eve; Eve blamed the serpent...and she blamed her parents for ruining her adolescence, her husband for stealing her hopes and dreams...and felt anything but free. Have you ever run a race and tried to look behind you at the same time? Imagine the goal right ahead and you are running with everything in you...but you are craning your neck at the same time to see how close the other guy is. You will lose time...and probably get a neck ache at the same time. Paul knew the danger and fruitlessness of looking to the past-- from his own experience! Imagine living with the guilt of aiding those who ***murdered*** those who worship the Jesus you now love!! From a human viewpoint he could have spent years living in self-afflicted guilt and self-condemnation. But in Philippians 3:13 he tells us that he forgets what is behind and is reaching towards the goal! Of course, he can’t literally forget his past, but he turns it over to God to use for ***good***, to comfort others and show His glory! Our lives aren’t really about us! They are all about God!

God could have called Paul before he had watched Stephen being killed and saved him from his painful past. He could have called me before I slept with my boyfriend. Only God knows the “why’s” of when He calls each of us and why He allows certain painful experiences into our lives, but our job is to trust Him and His Word of Romans 8:28...that He will cause ALL things (painful or joyful) to work together for the good. Psalms 139:16 assures us that He recorded each of our days in his book before one of them came to be!

Trust Him to touch you and make you clean...then only bring up the past to show the power of God to transform your future and help those who are struggling. You have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer you who live...but Christ lives IN you!

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## **Ministry**

6. Paul wanted to share in Christ’s sufferings and become like Him in his death. How might we do that today, and how would that affect how we treat each other?

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## **Evangelism**

7. We often try to evangelize others by telling them about hell, or explaining why they need to repent, but can you think of any ways you might use your past to open up people’s hearts to the healing power of Christ?

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## **Worship**

8. He who has been forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47) What would you like to thank God for freeing or cleansing you from today? After some time in prayer, begin to plan your celebration.

## ***“A gift for me?”***

I'll never forget the day I met Jorge! He came to my small group and I immediately sensed that he was special. We became close friends, and the synergy between us could be felt! We worked together perfectly, me with my strengths of encouragement and mercy, and he with his gifts of administration and teaching. Whenever we had group discussions, Jorge brought out facets of the lesson none of us had noticed, and his normal reticence to speak in front of people slowly melted away throughout our study. I poured my life and energy joyfully into Jorge, and was amazed at the person and man of God I saw emerge. After 3 sessions, I tapped him on the shoulder and told him he was ready! God had groomed and prepared him to lead his own group, and he could do it!

Welcome to session six, where we will talk about an exciting subject that will give you a blueprint for ministry: spiritual gifts! We all know God wants us to get busy for Him... but often that knowledge just results in guilt, as we don't know **how!** But by the time you leave here today, you won't feel guilt at not doing “enough” for God because of fear of failure, but you will see how exciting and fulfilling working within God's specific plan for **you** can be! Maybe you've heard the plea for nursery workers before your morning service and felt like, “Oh, I should do that! They seem so desperate for helpers!” but you have never enjoyed the baby stage and dirty diapers! Or maybe while enjoying the morning worship music and have pangs of guilt for not singing in the choir. Maybe you have wanted to work with teenagers, but instead of guilt, you have fears of failure. “What if they don't respect me and I'm not good enough?” Well, today you will be encouraged by some good news! You have been given gifts! The same God Who called you to work for Him has given you equipment! Who isn't excited to open gifts?? When you see them under the tree on Christmas morning, do you want to wait to open them out of fear of what may be inside? I didn't think so, so let's get to opening yours from the Greatest Giver of Gifts...your Creator!



### **Fellowship**

1. What comes to your mind when you think of the words “spiritual gifts”?



### **Discipleship**

Meeting new people and encouraging them when they are down has never been a problem for me. I love to stand at the door of the church and shake hands, handing out bulletins and listen to the stories of their lives. I love everything positive, and conflict makes me nervous. Whenever I sense that someone else is uncomfortable or sad, that makes me sad and uncomfortable! God, in His great sense of humor, has “blessed” me with people around me throughout the years who are direct opposites of me! They will tell it like it is even if it steps on peoples’ toes. They give out opinions freely while I cringe and stand ready to pick up the pieces if the other person seems offended. I feel like I must be watchman so that those “rude people” don’t hurt any feelings. I saw those “others” as obstacles to my goals of nurturing and positive affirmation! I even prayed for them that God would make them more like me! **THEN...**I learned about spiritual gifts!

First of all, what are spiritual gifts? Well, when we accepted Christ into our lives, right off, He blessed us with gifts! I love people like that: you meet them, and immediately they hand you a gift! Think of them as tools, or equipment, for your future role as a son or daughter of God. Just as you need a racquet for tennis or a club for golf, God is not going to send you out with a Great Commission to work for Him without something to work with! I wouldn’t tell my kids to sweep the kitchen floor with no broom, and God in the same way won’t tell us to do certain things for Him without equipping us.

But here’s point #2: Spiritual gifts are to be used alongside other peoples’ gifts--complimentary gifts! Paul explains it well in I Corinthians 12. He says how there are many different kinds of gifts...but they all come from God. Their purpose is to help others. And, just like the physical body has different “members”, the Church does too! I mean, who in their right mind would expect an eye to walk or an ear to see? Each part of the body has a different function...all for the good and health of the body. The parallel is a great one...and a great reliever of guilt, too! Verse 24 says,

“God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.”

As we can see, our gifts were created by God! It was His idea to make you how you are! Also, they were not created to be used alone! It’s not God’s plan to have stressed out and burned out Christians.

I saw a great example of gifts working together when a woman from our church had a high-risk pregnancy and was bed-ridden for the last 3 months! She had 3 active kids, a husband who worked long hours, and was devastated (and panicked!) by the news that she was only to leave the couch for 5 min. intervals for these 3 months! Thankfully, she had diverse friends! One with the gift of service took on the role of shuttling her kids to and from soccer practice and school; another with the gift of administration organized a rotating meal schedule among the other members with the gift of service. A woman filled with the gift of mercy came to just sit and talk and hold her hand when fear for her unborn baby seemed overwhelming. One man with the gift of giving donated money for a maid to come once/week to help the husband keep up with the household chores. This

is a perfect example of how we can rejoice in diversity! What if everyone only had the gift of mercy and wanted to come and hold her hand...and do nothing else? Where would the sense of encouragement be for the family? Wouldn't they just feel frustrated that people said they cared, but they could "see" it? But when we bring everyone together we see a job well done.

Thirdly, we need to accept **our** gifts and live how God has wired us. On Christmas morning, when we see our children open the gifts we've carefully selected for them according to their personalities and likes, how would we feel if they immediately looked to their sibling's gifts and said, "But what about **his**? I like **that** one!" We would be hurt and chagrined.

Along the same lines, spiritual gifts don't compete. This is God's work, and He gets to decide how He would like to use each one of us. A foreman at a construction site doesn't expect to hear arguments from his workers about how he would like to do someone else's job instead of his own. Building the church is God's construction site, not ours. If we truly believe it's all about Him, we won't compete, but rather rejoice when others succeed! I can welcome the people through the door of the church and do my part well, but when the pastor uses his gifts of exhortation and brings the message of salvation "home" I will feel nothing but satisfaction that our gifts worked together! Pastors don't have time to hand out bulletins and run out the door after church to give words of affirmation or meet every need of the members, so God has placed each of YOU there to work alongside Him.

How can you know what your spiritual gift is? There are, I believe, 4 key questions that will help you discover what they are. First of all, think back throughout your life to when your work has been **fruitful**. What work have you done in the past that bore results? Secondly, **what gives you energy and joy**? I feel like I could talk to people all day long and not tire of it. Working within your gifts will leave you feeling energized, not worn out and frustrated.

Thirdly, **what do your friends say** your strengths and gifts are?

Everyone has to start somewhere, and don't be afraid of what may SEEM like failure! Just get busy. Choose a ministry that appeals to you and soon you'll get a feel for what your spiritual gifts are. The only failure is in failing to try. We've been recruited to be part of the best army in the universe, with the equipment for assured victory! How's that for motivation?

2. In I Corinthians 12:4-7, why do you think Paul keeps repeating that all spiritual gifts come from the same spirit of God?

3. Verse 7 says that God gives spiritual gifts "for the common good". How will this affect the practicing of our individual gifts?

4. Read I Corinthians 12:14-26. What can we learn about spiritual gifts from the human body?

5. If all gifts are equally important, why is it so easy to feel we are less important or useful?



## **Ministry**

6. What has kept you from jumping into ministry in the past?

7. How has your thinking changed in the last hour?



## **Evangelism**

8. Take a moment to go around the group and share what strengths/gifts you sense in each of the other members. And meditate at home about how your gifts can be used to reach the lost.



## **Worship**

9. Take time to pray for each other as we go out to use the equipment God has blessed us with. Afterwards, finalize your plans for the celebration next week.