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What Do I Need to Know about This Study?

This Bible study has two simple aims.

First, the purpose of the study is to help believers, new and old, live out the Faith through seven essential habits of the Church.

Second, the study helps college students learn to practice the art of reading Scripture, especially the Gospels. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that God’s word is “living and active.” We often seek to hear God’s voice. Scripture is God’s Word that expresses His love for us and the plan He has for our lives. Cultivating the skill of reading Scripture can create an open and dynamic stream of communication with the Creator of the universe.

The title, *Living Gospel*, tries to reflect these two aims with its double meaning. On one hand, we want students to live out the gospel and to embody its message with their lives. On the other hand, the Gospels are not just fairy tales or mere accounts of history, but a living reality that affects us today just as much as it affected Jesus’ listeners 2,000 years ago. This reality has the power to completely change our lives if we are open to hearing God’s message.

How This Study Works

This material is a part of the FOCUS Exploration Bible Study series. Each study in the series highlights one particular passage of Scripture. As the leader, you guide a discussion about the passage that allows participants to discover truths within the passage for themselves.

At the same time, you are not left alone to understand the Scriptures by yourself. There will be a section called “What’s This Passage All About?” in every chapter. This will provide you with details about the passage, along with summaries about the passage’s big picture, how it applies to Jesus Christ, and how it can apply to your group. Then, the discussion guide supplies you with an opening question, some background to share about the passage, and a set of example questions and answers on each passage to use with your group (see pictures below). Prepare by studying “What’s This Passage All About?” before the Bible study and then use the discussion guide to direct the conversation with your group.
Your Role
With all of this at your disposal, you are all set and ready to go. Just pass out the notes, ask each question as it is written, and read the answers to the questions, right? Well, not exactly. This would not make for a very engaging Bible study. You see, this material is a Bible study in a can (like a can of corn). It is meant to preserve good-quality Biblical content and allow for broad distribution, but someone still needs to take the material out of the can, spice up the content, and serve it to your study. This person is you.

Think of yourself as a chef. Like any chef, you might not follow all of the directions in the cookbook or even add all of the ingredients. You might actually change steps in the process or add different ingredients altogether. Feel free to add questions or thoughts to make this material your own. This is where the audience for your study is crucial; these are the people for whom you are “cooking.” Keep your audience in mind when preparing your study.

A Few More Tips
1. Read over the FOCUSequip articles on “How to Lead a Bible Study.” In particular, review the three specific goals of a Bible study and “Role #3: Facilitator: Leading great discussions.” The article on being a facilitator will equip you to properly brainstorm questions for the passage of Scripture. Map out the study’s main theme and the objectives you hope to accomplish. This should guide your questions and discussion.

2. Do not pass out the notes or questions. I know, it sounds strange at first, but hear me out. Students do not like studies to be over-produced. An informal atmosphere can be the best, especially if you want to create an environment where students feel free to discover what the passage has to say and how it applies to their lives.

3. We’ve also attached an article to each study that provides more in-depth information on the topic of the chapter. Feel free to incorporate this article in any way you think would be helpful to you as someone leading the study or to your group.

Finally, as we pursue the reading of God’s Word, let’s look to Mary as our guide. She is an image and model of the Church in the attentive hearing of the word of God, which took flesh in her. She symbolizes “an active listening which interiorizes and assimilates, one in which the word becomes a way of life.”¹ May you “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”. (Colossians 3:16).

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, Verbum Domini (October 30, 2010), no. 27.
The Gospel of John begins with one of the most elegant sections of Scripture found in the New Testament. In a poetic fashion, John places each line of Scripture into place with a distinct purpose. These first eighteen verses of John’s Gospel provide a table of contents, so to speak, for the themes throughout the Gospel of John. For our purposes, we are going to examine how these verses relate to our study of God’s Word. Let’s breakdown some main aspects of these opening lines.

In the beginning… (John 1:1-5)
John begins with the line “In the beginning was the Word.” John’s original Jewish audience would immediately think of creation and the Book of Genesis that begins with “In the beginning.” The Gospels of Matthew and Luke begin with Jesus’ birth, but here John goes back to the very beginning to reveal even more about Jesus’ true identity. During creation, it is God’s spoken Word that causes our world to come into being (Genesis 1:3; Psalms 33:6). When God’s Word goes forth, there is a direct cause of action.

The concept of the Word was significant in the Old Testament. Writers link the Word of God with the Wisdom of God which was with God from eternity and which created everything with God (Proverbs 8:23; Wisdom 7:22). Now this Word which was before time and which is found in the Old Testament “is not simply audible; not only does it have a voice, now the Word has a face, one which we can see: that of Jesus of Nazareth.”

In these first five verses, John reveals more about the identity of Jesus. He notes that Jesus:
- is God (v. 1)
- created everything with God (v. 2)
- is the life of men (v. 4)
- is the light to men in darkness (vv. 4-5)

John the Baptist (John 1:6-8)
John breaks off his poetic stanza to speak about John the Baptist. Like a lawyer in a court room, John will use witnesses throughout his Gospel to help support the evidence for Jesus. John the Baptist is used as a key witness for John’s case for Jesus. There might have been some confusion among the Gospel’s initial audience about whether to follow John the Baptist or to follow Jesus (for example, see Acts 19:1-7). John tries to make it clear that John the Baptist was a messenger who testified to Jesus, not the Messiah himself. John the Baptist’s purpose was to testify that Jesus was the true light and that all should believe in Him. Our

1 Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, Verbum Domini (October 30, 2010), no. 12.
role as Christians is similar to John the Baptist’s. We must testify to Jesus Christ and the light that He shed on humanity’s search for meaning and purpose.

**Children of God (John 1:9-13)**
John exposes the irony of Jesus’ coming—Jesus created the world, and yet the world did not recognize Him (vv. 10-11). This reveals the scandal of Jesus’ rejection by those who should have accepted Him. However, if one does accept Jesus and believe in His name one becomes a child of God (v. 12). It’s easy to get used to this concept, but hopefully it will always be in some ways shocking. God, the Maker of the universe, chooses to make us His own children. May this always cause awe and thanksgiving in our hearts.

**The Word Became Flesh (John 1:14-18)**
The previous lines have set up verse 14—“God’s Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Greek word for “dwelt” literally means “tabernacled” or “pitched his tent.” Because we are so used to the message that God loves us and is here with us, we lose sight of how radical this is. The Psalmist is in awe that God would even think of man (Psalm 8:4). Rather than being distant like so many of the ancient gods, Jesus shows that God is willing to be one of us and be among us to show us truth and to give us grace.

John is not just an abstract storyteller; he saw and experienced Jesus’ glory first hand (see also 1 John 1:1-4). We are not reading hearsay or stories passed down through generations but the up-close eyewitness account of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

**The Power of God’s Word**
Unlike the author or John the Baptist, we are not direct eyewitnesses to Jesus’ ministry here on earth. But, through the Word of God, we can have a living encounter with God. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” It is easy to see Scripture as either lessons in morality or fairy tale-like stories, but God’s Word is so much more. It is alive.

God’s Word has the ability to shed light into our lives. To give testimonies as do John the Baptist or the author John, we need to be in a place where God is continually transforming us. We can then always have something to share with others about what God is doing. Below is one way to pray with Scripture.

**How to Pray with Scripture**
To close, the Church has a deep tradition and value for the study of Scripture. The tradition of lectio divina in the Church has been a fruitful practice of praying and reading Scripture for centuries. It involves first reading through a passage of Scripture, for instance, a story from the Gospels, and then going through a progression of steps while you read the passage.

- **Lectio**—What does the biblical text say in itself?
- **Meditatio**—What does the biblical text say to us?
- **Oratio**—What do we say to the Lord in response to His Word?
- **Contemplatio**—What conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us?
- **Actio**—Making a resolution to make his our lives a gift for others in charity.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opener
If you had one question you could ask God, what would you ask Him?

Backdrop
The Gospel of John begins with one of the most elegant sections of Scripture found in the New Testament. In a poetic fashion, John places each line of Scripture into place with a distinct purpose. These first eighteen verses of John’s Gospel provide a table of contents, so to speak, for the themes throughout the Gospel of John. For our purposes, we are going to examine how these verses relate to our study of God’s Word. Let’s breakdown some main aspects of these poetic lines.

Passage
Read John 1:1-18.

Exploration


2. Why do you think it is so crucial for John to focus on this beginning and the beginning of Jesus’ earthly life?

3. What else does John reveal about Jesus in verses 1-5?

4. Why is this so radical to our world today?

5. Read Genesis 1:3 and 1:6. What does the relationship between God’s Word and what is created, say about God’s word?

6. Who is John the Baptist? What did he do?

7. Why do you think John uses John the Baptist’s testimony?

8. How does the testimony of others have an effect on us?

9. Read 1 John 1:1-5. (Note: Be sure to read from John’s letter and not his Gospel). What does this tell us about the testimony of John, the author of this Gospel? How does this change how we view his Gospel?

10. How can we build a more powerful testimony to share with others?

11. In vv. 10-11, the world does not accept Jesus. What is ironic about this situation?

12. In light of what we have learned about God’s Word, why is it significant that this Word takes flesh in verse 14?

13. The word “dwelt” in Greek means “tabernacled” or “pitched his tent.” Traditionally, this concept has been called the Incarnation, when God takes on our very flesh. How can this change our view of God?

14. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. What does Jesus’ Incarnation allow us to do?

15. Read Hebrews 4:12. How is reading God’s Word different from reading any other book?
Answers

1. John starts by not focusing on Jesus’ human birth but by showing how Jesus was there at the beginning of time.

2. John wants to reveal more about Jesus’ true identity. Jesus is God and was with God during creation.

3. John notes that Jesus:
   - is the Word (v.1)
   - is the life of men (v. 4)
   - is the light to men in darkness (vv. 4-5)

4. It is easy to accept that Jesus was a great moral teacher. If Jesus is God, His moral teaching takes on a much greater gravity. The acceptance of Him entirely is necessary.

5. The relationship between God’s Word and what is created shows the direct connection between the two. It reveals how powerful God’s Word is. This is the same Word that we find in the Bible.

6. John the Baptist was a prophet who testified to the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, the new Jewish king who would “take away the sins of the world” (for more, see John 1:19-34).

7. John’s audience most likely would have known John the Baptist and respected him as a true prophet.

8. A testimony demonstrates the power of how a person has been changed. It is a tangible witness to the effect that can occur to whatever you give testimony to. Testimonies are hard to argue with because they reflect a personal experience.

9. John tells us that he witnessed Jesus’ glory. We can trust that his Gospel is not just made up of fables or legends but comes from someone who saw Jesus himself.

10. See “The Power of God’s Word” in “What’s This Passage All About?”

11. The irony is that Jesus made the world and yet the world did not recognize its creator.

12. The Word created the universe and is God Himself. This Word humbles Himself to become a mere man and dwell among us.

13. God doesn’t seem so far away but someone who is truly with us.

14. We realize that God relates to all of the difficulties we have in life and He allows us to draw near to Him to receive His grace.

15. God’s Word is “living and active.” Just like the power of God’s Word in creation, God’s Word has the power to change our lives.
What’s This Passage All About?

Just like the Lord’s disciples in Luke 11, many young Christians ask, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Jesus’ response is what we know today as the Our Father that is recorded in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. Many people have wondered, should Christians pray the Our Father word-for-word or was Jesus just providing a model for our prayer?” The best answer to this question is “yes” to both. The words of the Our Father are powerful in themselves and they give us an incredible model to form our own prayers. Let’s walk through the Our Father in Matthew phrase-by-phrase to get a better understanding of how Jesus is teaching us to pray.

Our Father Who Art in Heaven (v. 9)
Faced with a hectic schedule, we can easily lose track of why we pray in the first place. These first words of the Our Father gives us the foundational reason—we are in a relationship with God. The Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, the source of all that is good, invites us to converse with Him. Prayer is a daily response to take part in an invitation to an incredible relationship.

Hallowed Be Thy Name (v. 9)
To understand this phrase, we have to understand the power of God’s name. Using God’s name in vain is forbidden by one of the Ten Commandments. This does not mean just the use of God’s name as a swear word; it also means that we should not use God’s name without a purpose. The name of God is sacred because of its power. In fact, when we utter God’s name, we bring about His very presence (Matthew 18:20; CCC 2666). This phrase is a reminder that God is with us when we call on His name in prayer through the sign of the cross.

Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven (v. 10)
At first glance, this is a confusing concept. Why are we praying for God’s kingdom to come if Jesus announced, “The kingdom is at hand” (Matthew 3:1-2)? There is no doubt that Jesus established His kingdom here on earth. And yet, the Lord allows us to work with Him. This phrase helps orient our lives to think of how our words and actions can build up the kingdom of God each day.

In a similar fashion, it would seem that the will of God is going to happen no matter what. Do we even have a choice of whether we follow God’s will or not? The answer is Yes. We have a free will to choose whom we will follow—God or ourselves. The Christian author C.S. Lewis once wrote about our decision to follow God or to follow ourselves, and its
implication on our eternal life: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'” Silent prayer is a great outward and inward expression of a desire for God’s will. With our heart, mind, and body, we are saying that what God has to offer is more than we can offer by ourselves.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread (v. 11)
Notice the sequence of the Our Father. It is only now that we bring a petition before the Lord. This petition occurs after we have recognized our relationship with God, praised God for His holiness, and invited His kingdom and will into our lives. In this context, as children who first seek His kingdom, we make our petitions known to God (Matthew 6:33). In one sense, we ask God to provide for our material needs. In another sense, others have noted that it is a request for the daily bread of the Eucharist. Overall, it is a realization that we do not place our material or spiritual needs in our own hand but turn to God to provide for us.

And Forgive Us Our Trespasses as We Forgive Our Trespassers (v. 12)
This phrase reveals a key teaching that occurs several times in Scripture—the mercy God grants us depends on our own forgiveness of others. When we truly experience and understand the gravity of God’s mercy, we will forgive others in turn. We will be, as Jesus says in Luke, “merciful even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:33).

And Lead Us Not into Temptation but Deliver Us from Evil (v. 13)
Temptations are a refining fire. Sometimes they bring out the very best in us. Many times they bring to light our weaknesses. We know the Lord uses temptations for our good and He will not let us be tempted beyond our strength (1 Corinthians 10:13). Yet, we should not hope for temptations. Where do these temptations come from? In the Our Father, we usually say “deliver us from evil,” but the Greek could actually be translated as “the evil one.” 1 Peter 5:8 tells us that the devil prowls like a roaring lion. Prayer is our spiritual weapon to fight this battle.

Living Out Prayer
Prayer is at the heart of our relationship with God. It is our source of communication with the God who loves us. And yet, most Christians find prayer to be difficult. Deep prayer seems almost impossible, especially in such a busy, materialistic, and distracting age. But this is precisely why prayer is even more important for us today. We need silence in our lives and most importantly, we need the presence of an eternal and immaterial God to help guide our path. As one contemporary author noted, “No one died of hunger because of not having enough time to eat.” In other words, we do the things that we know are important.

Application to Our Lives
Taking time each day to pray keeps us connected to the God of the universe.

At the end of the study, you may want to challenge your group to pray twenty minutes each day. Be sure to show prayer not as an obligation but as an opportunity to speak with the God of the universe. Also, be sure to give them resources on how to pray. We suggest not just leaving the members of your group with a challenge but actually taking the time to pray with them, either in or out of the study. Prayer is a lost art form and your students will need examples to see how it is done. Finally, we included a “Prayer Card” where the members of your group can commit themselves to praying each day if desired.
Prayer Pledge

“And in the morning, a great while before day, He rose and went out to a lonely place, and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35).

“But so much the more the report went abroad concerning Him; and great multitudes gathered to hear and to be healed of their infirmities. But He withdrew to the wilderness and prayed” (Luke 5:15-16).

“And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

With God’s help, I resolve to spend at least twenty minutes in prayer to God each day.

Name: ______________________________________

Signature: __________________________________

Resources to help me pray:
Time for God by Jacques Philippe
Praying Scripture for a Change by Tim Gray
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opener
Many Christians find prayer to be difficult. Why do you think this is the case?

Backdrop
Just like the Lord’s disciples in Luke 11, many young Christians ask, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Jesus’ response is what we know today as the Our Father that is recorded in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. It is easy to read or pray the Our Father without realizing its significance. Let’s walk through the Our Father in Matthew phrase-by-phrase to get a better understanding of how Jesus is teaching us to pray.

Passage

Exploration
1. What do you think is the most common way to pray?
2. Why do you pray?
3. How does the very first phrase, “Our Father,” indicate why we should pray?
4. Prayer can feel like just a task to check off from our list. How do we find ways to make it an opportunity and not an obligation?
5. The names of God and Jesus have always been considered sacred throughout history. There is power in God’s name because it invokes His presence. Read CCC 2666. How does this apply to our prayer lives?
6. What comes to mind when you hear the words “Thy Kingdom Come”?
7. In what ways do you personally hope to help the Kingdom come about?
8. Why do you think we pray that God’s will be done? Don’t you think that God’s will should happen whether we pray for it or not?
9. What is the relationship between silence in prayer and wanting God’s will instead of our own?
10. Over half of the Our Father has gone by and it is only now that Jesus tells us to make our requests known. Why do you think this is the case?
12. After reading Luke 11, why do you think God doesn’t always answer our prayers?
13. When we turn over our material and spiritual needs to God, how does this change our relationship with Him? How can we actually do this?
14. Read verses 14-15. Why do you think God makes His own forgiveness dependent on our forgiveness of others?
15. How can temptations be helpful to us? How can they be harmful?
16. Where do these temptations come from?
17. Why do you think prayer is difficult in our world? What part of our culture can make it easier?
18. See the “What’s This Passage All About?” on how to help your group learn how to pray.
Answers

1. Most people pray because they have a request to make to God. They need something or feel helpless, so they ask God for it.

2. Allow the group to discuss this.

3. The phrase “Our Father” shows that we are praying because of a relationship that we have with God.

4. Allow the group to discuss this.

5. Prayer is our time with God. By invoking His name through the sign of the cross, we are asking for God to be present in a special way when we pray.

6. Allow the group to discuss this.

7. Allow the group to discuss this.

8. God is powerful enough to make His will happen in any and every situation but God allows us to have free will. He allows us to reject His will if we so choose.

9. When we enter into silence, we are saying with our bodies, minds, and hearts that we want to hear less of what we want to say and more of what God has to say in our lives.

10. Making your requests known to God isn’t a bad thing. The Our Father, however, shows us that the requests should be made in a context where we are recognizing our relationship with God and asking that His will be done first and foremost.

11. God doesn’t want to be a genie in a bottle. He wants us to have a relationship of trust with Him. Persistence helps us form this relationship.

12. Allow the group to discuss this. Sometimes it is because we fail to continue our prayers. At other times, God gives us what we need even if we can’t see this at the time. In the end, God is always willing to give us His Holy Spirit (v. 13).

13. We show that we don’t rely on ourselves but on God. This will change our view of God and our anxiety about life.

14. It is only when we are able to act like the Father and forgive others that we truly understand and accept God’s mercy.

15. Temptations can bring out the best in us by showing what we are able to withstand. Since they can also bring out the worst in us, we should pray not to go through them.

16. Temptations come from the devil. The original Greek shows that this phrase from the Our Father could also be read “but deliver us from the evil one.” Read 1 Peter 5:8 for more.

17. We live in such a busy, distracted, and materialistic age that setting time aside to be silent seems to be a waste of time or too difficult to accomplish. With so much going on around us, we must take care to stay centered and to be in touch with the One who will help us navigate our lives each day.

18. No answer is needed.
What’s This Passage All About?

People come to know Jesus Christ in a number of ways. The Catholic Church’s vision is that ultimately those who come to know Jesus Christ would meet Him in the most personal and profound way through the sacraments and receive the grace necessary to live out a life fully dedicated to Him.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, we want members of the study to develop a desire for the sacraments themselves. It is easy to view sacraments as dead rituals if we don’t know the meaning behind them. Second, we want members of the study to see the Scriptural foundations for the sacraments (in this case, the Eucharist). While these aims will not be totally achieved in this chapter, we hope to give you a taste of each.

The Crowd in Context

The crowd in this passage is crucial in seeing our struggle in believing in the sacraments. The surrounding passages on the crowd help us learn more about them.

Some of the crowd had presumably already seen Jesus heal the sick (John 6:2) and multiply the loaves and fish (John 6:10-14). As a result, they tried to make Him their king (John 6:15). Despite this, the crowd refuses to believe in Jesus until they see another sign (v. 30). They do not want just any bread but the bread or manna from heaven that Moses had provided (v. 31).

Bread of Life (John 6:35-51)

In the passage, Jesus progressively reveals His teaching about the Eucharist. Jesus uses the request for bread to claim that He is the bread of life. Belief in Him provides not just physical nourishment of the body but also food for the soul, leading to eternal life.

The Jews respond with a murmuring. Before, the Jews wanted more signs. Now, they discount Jesus because they cannot comprehend how Jesus could come from heaven if they know His parents (v. 42).

The crowd reveals two tendencies of humanity’s relationship with faith. First, we seem to always want more proof. And yet, faith does not work like this. Hebrews 11:1 tells us, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Second, humans have a hard time seeing how the material can be made into the supernatural—how can Jesus be from heaven if we know His natural parents? This can be a stumbling block for many.
others, it can be an inspiration. In the sacraments, God chooses natural materials such as bread, wine, or oil and makes them supernatural. Similarly, with these supernatural sacraments, our material bodies will be filled with God’s supernatural grace and become more like God Himself.

**Eating Flesh? (John 6:52-59)**

After the murmuring of the Jews, Jesus affirms His teaching and then makes Himself even clearer. The bread that He offers is better than the miraculous bread or manna in the wilderness. Those who ate that bread did not escape death; this bread leads to eternal life (v. 49). Finally, Jesus specifically notes that this bread is in fact His very flesh (v. 51).

In response to Jesus’ statement about eating His flesh, the Jews remark, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” It is clear that the Jews understand that Jesus was talking about literally eating His flesh. Jesus does not correct this literal understanding. Rather, He continues to preach the same message and notes that His flesh is food indeed and His blood is drink indeed.

Reading this passage in the Greek makes this point even more apparent. In verses 50-58 of chapter six, John uses the word “eat” eight times. However, John employs two different Greek words that are both translated as “eat” in English.

*Phago* is used in verses 50-53. It means “to eat” or “to consume.” This word in the Greek can mean to eat symbolically.

*Trogo* is used four times in verses 54-57 when Jesus answers the Pharisees’ objection and clarifies exactly what He means. *Trogo* is more graphic—it means “to chew” or “to gnaw.” *Trogo* cannot be used symbolically in the Greek language. Therefore, we have to take it to mean to literally eat the flesh of Jesus, and this graphic word is used to emphasize this very fact.

**The Eucharist Lived Out**

The Church’s belief in the Eucharist is easy to understand but, at times, hard to accept. Even Our Lord’s followers in the Gospel confess that “this is a hard saying” (John 6:60). After listening to this teaching, many of His disciples decide to no longer follow Him (v. 60, 66).

And yet, what a beautiful teaching! Jesus wants to give His whole self—body, blood, soul, and divinity—to us in the Eucharist so that we can be in communion with Him and the whole Church. Throughout this passage, Jesus conveys that He is sent by the Father to give eternal life to those who believe in Him (vv. 37-40; 44-47). The sacraments reveal the love of the Father and allow us to receive grace and eternal life. It is easy to get caught up in the ritual and motions of the sacraments and not to see it as a gift of God’s love in a real and tangible way.

Find a tangible way to learn how to receive the sacraments more profoundly as a group. For instance, find time to attend daily Mass, go to Adoration once a week, learn how to prepare yourself for the Eucharist before Mass, or go to Confession.

**Application to Our Lives**

God’s grace is always available to us. By opening our hearts to His gifts, we can be filled with grace more abundantly.
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opener
Have you ever had the feeling that God was far off and distant from you? What did you do to help you in this situation?

Backdrop
This chapter will examine the sacraments. It is important for us to see that the sacraments come from Scripture itself. We will specifically look at the Eucharist today in John 6. Also, if we do not understand what the sacraments really are, they become dead rituals with no meaning for our lives today. The sacraments and their supernatural character can be difficult to believe in at times. The crowd in the passage today will help us appreciate this struggle.

Passage
Read John 6:35-59.

Exploration
1. Use the “The Crowd in Context” section in “What’s This Passage All About?” to teach your group a little of the background for the passage.

2. What is strange about the members of the crowd’s request for a sign in light of what Jesus did for them previously?

3. Why do you think that humans often look for signs?

4. How are signs or miracles helpful for our faith? How can they be harmful?

5. Can someone sum up Jesus’ exchange with the Jews in vv. 35-42?

6. Why exactly do the Jews not believe Jesus’ message about His coming down from heaven?

7. What do you think the relationship is between the doubt of the Jews and the doubts that we can have about the sacraments?

8. Why do you think God uses natural means like bread, wine, and oil for the sacraments? How can these natural means of giving us the supernatural be helpful to us?

9. Can someone sum up what the Jews think Jesus is saying and how Jesus responds in John 6:52-58?

10. Read John 6:60-69. What is the reaction of Jesus’ disciples?

11. If Jesus’ disciples simply misunderstood Him, do you think Jesus would let them leave like this?

12. Examine the passage closely. Point out all of the connections between Jesus and the Father.

13. What is the relationship between Jesus’ connection to the Father and His teaching on the Eucharist?

14. Read CCC 1324. What does it mean for the Eucharist to be the “source and summit of the Christian life”?

15. How can we make the Eucharist the source and summit of our lives?
Answers

1. No answer is needed.

2. Jesus just performed a sign where He multiplied loaves and fish for this very crowd.

3. Humans want proof for their faith.

4. Signs and miracles can be helpful because they remind us of the power of God. At the same time, they can also cause us always to seek proof for the faith. Faith is not blind, but there is always a sense of trust of belief beyond what we can see (Hebrews 11:1).

5. Use the first two paragraphs of the “Bread of Life” section in the “What’s This Passage All About?”

6. The Jews don’t believe Jesus is the bread of life that came down from heaven because they know His parents.

7. Use the last paragraph of the “Bread of Life” section from “What’s This Passage All About?”

8. Allow the group to discuss this.

9. The Jews think Jesus is speaking literally. Jesus responds by telling the crowd that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Use “What’s This Passage All About?” to teach your group about the significance of the Greek in this passage.

10. Jesus’ disciples note that the teaching is hard to accept and many of them cease to follow Him. Peter speaks for the disciples who stay by saying they have faith in Jesus because He has the words of everlasting life.

11. If His disciples simply misunderstood Him, you would expect Jesus to correct Himself and not let them go away.

12. See the second paragraph of “The Eucharist Lived Out” section in “What’s This Passage All About?”

13. Jesus is revealing the Father through His life. The Eucharist and the sacraments are an image of Jesus and with it an image of the Father. The Eucharist is a tangible sign of God’s love and the eternal life God provides for us.

14. Allow the group to discuss this.

15. Allow the group to discuss this. See the idea in “What’s This Passage All About?”
Living Gospel • Chapter 4: Being Open to the Holy Spirit (John 15:26-16:15)

What’s This Passage All About?

In West Texas, there is a famous oil field known as the Yates Pool. During the Depression, this field was a sheep ranch owned by a man named Yates. Because Mr. Yates was not able to make enough money on his ranching operation to pay the principal and interest on the mortgage, he was in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes or food, his family, like many others, had to live on government subsidy.

Day after day, as he grazed his sheep, he wondered how he would be able to pay his bills. Then a seismograph crew from an oil company came into the area and told Mr. Yates that there might be oil on his land. They asked for permission to drill a wildcat well, and he signed a lease contract.

At 1,115 feet they struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many of the later wells were more than twice as large. Thirty years after the first well was drilled, all the wells still had the potential of pumping 125,000 barrels of oil a day. And Mr. Yates owned it all! The day he had purchased the property, he received the oil and mineral rights, yet he was living on government assistance. A multi-millionaire living in poverty! What was the problem? He did not know the oil was there. He owned it, but he did not know it!

When Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He gave us the Holy Spirit to guide us. And yet, many Christians fail to use this rich gift even though they have easy access to this wonderful Counselor. In a passage from John’s Gospel, Jesus gives some insightful teaching on why He gave us the Holy Spirit and how the Holy Spirit can work in our lives today.

Who Is the Holy Spirit? (John 15:26)
Along with Jesus Christ and God the Father, the Holy Spirit is one of the three persons that make up the Trinity (Matthew 28:19). Here, in John’s Gospel, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit, the Counselor and the Spirit of Truth. Jesus will elaborate on these titles later in the passage.

Why Does the Holy Spirit Come? (John 15:27-16:7)
The Spirit comes precisely because Jesus is leaving His disciples. While Jesus is gone, the Holy Spirit will bear witness to Jesus (15:26). Plus, Jesus foretells of the persecution that the disciples will endure; the Holy Spirit is there to help them not fall away (16:1). Surprisingly, Jesus tells His disciples that it is actually a good thing that He is leaving. Most people would

choose to have Jesus Himself with us rather than the Holy Spirit. And yet Jesus tells us the
direct opposite (16:7)! The Holy Spirit must be a powerful weapon.

What Does the Holy Spirit Do? (John 16:8-15)
Jesus then details what the Holy Spirit will do when He comes. First, He will convict the
world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (16:8). Jesus is departing because of the lack
of faith of the people who will eventually crucify Him. Afterwards, the Holy Spirit will convict
these unbelievers of their lack of faith.

Also, Jesus knows that His disciples will be much more open to His message after His death
and resurrection. After Jesus is gone, the Holy Spirit is to guide the disciples to all truth with
the same authority as Jesus (16:12-13). He will tell them of things to come and glorify Jesus
(16:14-15).

What Else Does the Holy Spirit Do?
Scripture mentions numerous things about the Holy Spirit that help us to understand His
role more clearly. The Holy Spirit:

- acts as a teacher (John 14:26)
- encourages us (Acts 9:31)
- intercedes for us (Romans 8:26)
- sanctifies us (Romans 15:16)
- leads us (Romans 8:14)
- gives us different gifts
  (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)
- lives inside of us (Romans 8:11)
- helps us avoid sin (Galatians 5:16)
- can be resisted (Acts 7:51)
- aids us in prayer (Romans 8:26-27)
- can be invited further into our lives
  (Acts 2:38)

The Holy Spirit in Our Lives
While the Holy Spirit comes to us most powerfully in the sacraments of Baptism and
Confirmation, we still need to continually open our lives up to this powerful Person of the
Trinity. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul says this about the Holy Spirit, “Hence I remind
you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God
did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.” How can
we “rekindle” or, as other translations say, “fan into flame” the Holy Spirit in our lives?

During his last homily of World Youth Day 2010, Pope Benedict XVI told the participants
how to increase the Holy Spirit in their lives:

“Yet this power, the grace of the Spirit, is not something we can merit or achieve, but only
receive as pure gift. God's love can only unleash its power when it is allowed to change us
from within. We have to let it break through the hard crust of our indifference, our spiritual
weariness, our blind conformity to the spirit of this age. Only then can we let it ignite our
imagination and shape our deepest desires. That is why prayer is so important: daily prayer,
private prayer in the quiet of our hearts and before the Blessed Sacrament, and liturgical
prayer in the heart of the Church. Prayer is pure receptivity to God's grace, love in action,
communion with the Spirit who dwells within us, leading us, through Jesus, in the Church, to
our heavenly Father.”

May we put these words into practice and increase the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opener
Read the story and commentary about the Yates Pool oil field in West Texas.

Backdrop
The words found in our passage today come from the time just before Jesus is crucified. Having spent three years with His disciples, Jesus knows that His absence will be quite a change for those who have followed Him for this long period of time. In response, Jesus tells them about the Holy Spirit who will come after He is gone.

Passage
Read John 15:26-16:15.

Exploration
1. After reading this passage, what stands out to you about the Holy Spirit?
2. Verse 26 mentions bearing witness to Jesus. What do you think this means?
3. What does Jesus say will happen to His disciples when they bear witness to Him after He is gone?
4. How do you deal with the persecution of your faith?
5. How can the Holy Spirit help you?
6. Think about the situation of the disciples. Why would it be hard for Jesus to leave them?
7. How does Jesus’ departure help His disciples?
8. Is it hard for you to trust that it is better for Jesus to go than to be here? Why is this the case?
9. What will the Holy Spirit do when He comes?
10. Read the account of the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes to the disciples in Acts 2:1-12, 36-42. How does the Holy Spirit come to Jesus’ disciples? How does He come to those who convert?
11. Pick out three to five passages from the list of Scripture passages on the Holy Spirit provided in the “What’s This Passage All About?” Have individuals read these passages to the group to learn more about the Holy Spirit. Afterwards, feel free to share the whole list with your group.
12. Think about the story of the Yates Pool oil field in West Texas. When Yates was a poor man, what kept him from the wealth he already possessed?
13. How does this relate to the Holy Spirit?
14. Read 2 Timothy 1:6. In his letter to Timothy, Paul reminds us to “rekindle” or, in other translations, to “fan into flame” the Holy Spirit in our lives. In a homily at a recent World Youth Day, Pope Benedict XVI gives us some tips on how to rekindle the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Read the quote from “What’s This Passage All About?”
15. Take some time as a group to pray for the Holy Spirit. You can do this in a number of ways. You can pray individually in silence. You can pray as a group. You can pray over one another and ask for specific intentions and ways that the Holy Spirit can increase in the lives of your group.
Answers

1. Allow the group to discuss this. This should give you a feel for the thoughts of your group.

2. Allow the group to discuss this.

3. Persecution is the result. In this case, Jesus says death is a possibility.

4. Allow the group to discuss this.

5. Allow the group to discuss this.

6. The disciples have been following Jesus for three years and have given up everything for Him. They have sought to conform their whole lives to Him.

7. After seeing the power of Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples will be much more open to learning Jesus’ message and spreading it to others.

8. Allow the group to discuss this.

9. Jesus is departing because of the lack of faith of the people who will eventually crucify Him. When He comes, the Holy Spirit will first convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8). Afterwards, the Holy Spirit will convict these unbelievers of their lack of faith.

10. The Holy Spirit comes to the disciples with tongues of fire. He comes to those who convert through Baptism.

11. No answer is needed.

12. Mr. Yates didn’t know the riches he already possessed.

13. We possess the Holy Spirit, but if we don’t know about this gift, we can’t take advantage of it.

14. No answer is needed.

15. No answer is needed.
What’s This Passage All About?

Chances are several members of your group are trying to figure out how their lives should be different in light of their relationship with Jesus Christ. This chapter focuses specifically on how to form our characters around the person of Jesus Christ and how the community around us can help us do this.

Jesus’ message in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) seems to turn the thinking of the world upside down. The persecuted should rejoice. The meek will inherit the world. How can this be? The Beatitudes are a reminder that our lives, if we are truly dedicated to Christ, should look distinctly different than those in the world. Let’s explore some details behind Jesus’ message.

The Life and Times of a First-Century Jew (Matthew 5:1-2)
During the time of Jesus, the Jewish people were under Roman occupation. The Romans charged incredibly high taxes on the Jewish people, most of who were impoverished already. The Jews faced this national crisis with the hope that one day their kingdom would be restored. Some Jews had already tried to restore this kingdom through revolutionary violence. As Jesus’ ministry flourishes, people look to Jesus to see what kind of revolution He would lead. In response, Jesus gives His famous Sermon on the Mount that includes the Beatitudes examined in this chapter. (If you want an idea of what a violent Jewish revolution looks like, see 1 Maccabbes 3:15-26. Read 1 Maccabees 1-3 for even more background).

Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)
The word “beatitude” means “blessing.” These blessings not only give us an example to follow; they would have also been good news to the downtrodden Jews held captive under Roman occupation. Here is some commentary on just some of the Beatitudes.

Humility
The Beatitudes build off one another, beginning with poor in spirit, or humility. Many theologians throughout the history of the Church have pointed to humility as the starting point in our relationship with God. Humility leads us to see that we cannot do everything on our own—we need God, His salvation and grace, to truly live.

Meekness
The blessing of meekness stands out because meekness is often seen as weakness. True meekness is not weakness but control over anger, especially during trials. In fact, Jesus Himself says, “Lo, I am meek and humble of heart” (Matthew 11:29). By examining the
Beatitudes, we realize that they are not just an ethical treatise on how we should behave but a reflection of Jesus' own character. For instance, Jesus shows great meekness during His suffering and death. He could have stopped His torture at any moment and given His persecutors what they deserved. Yet, His meekness allows Him to provide salvation for the world (see 1 Peter 2:23).

Meekness can help us defend the faith (1 Peter 3:15-16), control our speech (James 1:19-20), and corral our anger (Ephesians 4:26-32).

**Mercy**
Being merciful is essential in our outreach to others. An unfortunate part of our coming to Jesus Christ is that we can often become prideful and judgmental of others. Rather, we should be merciful as our Father is merciful (Luke 6:36).

**Purity of Heart**
Even while doing “religious things,” we can end up doing them doing them out of pride (see Matthew 6:2-6). “Man sees the appearance, the Lord sees the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Purifying our intentions helps us to pursue a relationship with Jesus Christ for all the right reasons.

**Community of Virtue** (Matthew 5:13-16)
Jesus uses the example of salt and light to show how members of a community can influence others through their example. Salt is a natural product known to all in the crowd listening to Him. Salt was used to flavor food. It would eventually lose its flavor; if so, it would be used on the ground to prevent slipping. Jesus seems to use salt as an analogy for influencing or seasoning others with our character.

Jesus also uses the analogy of light. Originally, God made His covenant with Israel so that the people of Israel could follow God’s law and be a light to the nations around them (Isaiah 42:6). Jesus is reminding the Jews of this concept and that their own faith and character is not just for themselves; it is an example that naturally invites others to want to know more about the God they follow (Isaiah 49:6).

Practicing the Beatitudes and imitating the character of Jesus Christ do not happen overnight. Slowly, through the power of virtue, we can develop a Christ-centered character. Virtue occurs when our disposition is naturally inclined to do the good or what is right.

Virtue can be greatly improved when we have others around us pushing us to become better people. What can you do to hold each other accountable to the people you would like to become? If your group is over four people, it can be a good idea to have group members break off into groups of two or three and hold each other accountable on a weekly basis.

Virtue helps our communities shine the light of Christ for all to see.
Discussion Guide

Opener
Have you ever gone to a store and become irritated or angry with the behavior of the staff? How did this affect your view of the store and whether you went back there or not?

Backdrop
During the time of Jesus, the Jewish people were under Roman occupation. The Romans charged incredibly high taxes on the Jewish people, most of who were impoverished already. The Jews faced this national crisis with the hope that one day their kingdom would be restored. Some Jews had already tried to restore this kingdom through revolutionary violence. As Jesus’ ministry flourishes, people look to Jesus to see what kind of revolution He would lead. In response, Jesus gives His famous Sermon of the Mount that includes the Beatitudes examined in this chapter.

Passage
Read Matthew 5:1-16.

Exploration
1. Taking the historical context into account, what do you see that would be shocking about Jesus’ message to the Jews?

2. What is striking about Jesus’ message to us today?

3. What is it about Jesus’ revolution that could make it more effective than others?

4. Give some brief notes from the first paragraph of the “Beatitudes” section from “What’s This Passage All About?” The Beatitudes begin with the beatitude of humility, or poor in spirit. Why do you think humility is first?

5. What does meekness mean?

6. Read Matthew 11:29. How does Jesus demonstrate meekness during His life?

7. How can we practice meekness?

8. The Beatitudes also calls us to be merciful and pure of heart. Read Luke 18:9-14. What is the main difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector?

9. When we grow in our faith, we often act more like the Pharisee than the tax collector. Why do you think this is the case?

10. What can we do not to fall into this trap?

11. Give some background information on salt in verse 13 from “What’s This Passage All About?” Why do you think Jesus uses this example?

12. Read Isaiah 42:6. What was God’s original plan for His people?

13. How is Jesus restoring this plan?

14. Think of the example in the Opener about the employees working in a store. As members of a community, why should we be concerned about our character?

15. How do we improve our characters and imitation of Jesus Christ?

16. How do we help each other improve?
Answers

1. The Jews were expecting Jesus to lead a violent revolution like other Jews in the past.

2. Jesus’ message seems counter-intuitive. It seems to be backwards to the world as we know it.

3. People know that Jesus seeks something beyond the things of this world and He seeks this in a selfless way. People can trust this revolution more than others.

4. Many theologians throughout the history of the Church have pointed to humility as the starting point in our relationship with God. Humility leads us to see that we cannot do everything on our own—we need God, His salvation and grace, to truly live.

5. True meekness is not weakness but control over anger, especially during trials.

6. Jesus demonstrates meekness several times most especially during His trial and crucifixion.

7. Allow the group to discuss this. Some examples from Scripture: when we defend the faith (1 Peter 3:15-16), in our speech (James 1:19-20), and in our anger (Ephesians 4:26-32).

8. The difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector lies in their purity of heart and in their understanding of mercy. The Pharisee intends on showing others how “holy” he is and in doing so, shows how he looks down on others. He fails to grasp God’s mercy. The tax collector prays from the heart and directly seeks God’s mercy.

9. Allow the group to discuss this.

10. As we improve our lives in imitation of Christ, we need to continually realize that we are able to do this because of God’s mercy and not our own power.

11. Jesus seems to use salt as an analogy for influencing or seasoning others with our character.

12. God’s original plan was that the example of His people would be a light to the nations.

13. Jesus is hoping that the people in His kingdom can fulfill this plan.

14. People normally come to know Jesus Christ through a community of people. Our lives communicate to others who Jesus Christ is.

15. We improve our character and imitation of Christ by developing virtue. See “What’s This Passage All About?” and the accompanying article for more.

16. See “What’s This Passage All About?” on accountability.
What’s This Passage All About?

This passage includes two powerful parables from Jesus. In both parables, Jesus is teaching His disciples about the end of the world and the judgment that will come. In doing so, Jesus wants us to see the eternal perspective of our actions.

*The Parable of the Talents* (Matthew 25:14-30)

This parable focuses on stewardship or what we do with what God gives us. Three men are given separate talents by their master. A talent is a coin that was worth 6,000 *denarii*. This would be equivalent to 20 years’ wages for a laborer or about $2,000,000 today. Even the man who is given one talent is entrusted with a huge sum of money. This parable is where we get the term “talents” that apply to our God-given abilities. More than money, God’s talents include all that God gives us.

Each of the servants is given a different amount of talents. This parable reflects the human experience of receiving different gifts and talents. This is frustrating to some, just as the servant who received one talent may have been angered about receiving so little. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, “These difference belong to God’s plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular ‘talents’ share the benefits with those who need them” (CCC 1937). Even the supernatural gifts that God bestows on us are different from one another (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

Two of the servants double the amount of talents they are given. The servant given the lowest amount buries his talent in the ground. This servant is judged by God to be lazy and wicked (v. 26). Fear prevents him from multiplying the talents he is given (v. 25). Notice that the servant gives back to God what God gave him, and yet God is still angry with Him. God is not satisfied with merely giving Him what He has given us. He wants us to take what we have been given and multiply His efforts and gifts. The talent of the lazy servant is taken from him and given to the one with ten talents.

*Stewardship*

The central theme of this parable is stewardship. We can give back to God through our time, talents, and treasure.

In regards to money, the Old Testament had a law for tithing—giving ten percent of your wages. In the Church today, there is no specific mandate governing the exact amount that we give. St. Paul notes in the New Testament, “arrange in advance for this gift you have promised...Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under...
compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7, 9). While no specific tithe is required, we exist in a new covenant that is greater than the old. It makes sense that we should give more than what was required in the old covenant. Therefore, while ten percent is not required, it does provide a great baseline for what to give to the Church.

God asks us to use our talents and to give our time to others. As 1 Peter 4:10 notes, “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another.” Just like the lazy servant, we must not hide the talents that God has given us but be selfless in using them for the service of others. The next parable gives us some concrete examples for ways to use our time and talents.

The Judgment of the Nations (Matthew 25:31-46)
Matthew 25:31-46 gives us an even more intense parable than the first. To help us truly understand what it means to help others, Jesus places Himself in the place of those in need (v. 40). In fact, Jesus’ own life was filled with His service to the poor and afflicted (for example, Matthew 4:23-24, 8:1-17, 11:4-6). By serving the disadvantaged, we serve Christ Himself.

The Church calls these the Corporal Works of Mercy. They are the following:
- Feeding the hungry
- Giving drink to the thirsty
- Clothing the naked
- Offering hospitality to the homeless
- Visiting the imprisoned
- Caring for the sick
- Burying the dead

Notice the gravity of our response to these actions. In the parable, this is the King’s criteria for our eternal salvation. During the last judgment, the Catechism notes, “In presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each man’s relationship with God will be laid bare. The Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life” (CCC 1039). This perspective helps us concretely to reflect on whether or not our lives are directly for or against serving the Lord.

Our faith isn’t supposed to be lived out in a one-hour Bible study and one hour at Mass each week. As a Bible study, how can your group live out practically the Corporal Works of Mercy? Plan out a service project to fulfill one of these in the upcoming weeks. The creativity of your group just might surprise you.
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opener
Have you ever looked at an old photo or yourself and remembered something odd you used to do or a strange perspective you used to have? How has the course of time helped you realize your mistakes?

Backdrop
This passage includes two powerful parables from Jesus. In both parables, Jesus is teaching His disciples about the end of the world and the judgment that will come. In doing so, Jesus wants us to see the eternal perspective of our actions.

Passage
Read Matthew 25:14-46. You may want to read the parables and their questions one at a time.

Exploration
Matthew 25:14-30
1. Why do you think the master gives the men different amounts of talents?
2. Do you think this affected the behavior of the servant with the least amount of talents?
3. A talent is worth 6,000 denarii or about $2,000,000 today. Do you think the servant with one talent should have let this amount affect him?
4. How does this parable apply to the talents God gives us?
5. How can jealousy keep us from using the talents God has given us?
6. What keeps the lazy servant from multiplying his talents?
7. What causes us to be fearful about using our talents?
8. God receives back what He gave the servant. Why is He still upset?
9. What are some ways that we can give back to God?

Matthew 25:31-46
12. What is the setting for Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25:31-26?
13. Why are some granted entrance into God’s kingdom?
14. Why do the others go into the eternal fire?
15. What is significant about Jesus’ relationship to the disadvantaged?
16. How are we able to see Jesus in the disadvantaged?
17. Read CCC 1039. Think about how you are living your life right now. How can this eternal perspective change the way you think?
18. As a group, what are some ways you can practice some Corporal Works of Mercy together?
Answers

Matthew 25:14-30
1. Allow the group to discuss this. Read CCC 1937.

2. The servant with the least amount of talents may have been discouraged by this.

3. No, despite not having what the others had, he still should have appreciated the trust the Master had in him.

4. At times, we can complain what the gifts God has or has not given us and be jealous of others’ gifts.

5. We can focus too much on what we do not have and it can distract us from seeing the wealth of talents God has given us.

6. The lazy man fears his master.

7. Sometimes we fear what others will think. It is easier to not try and thus not fail than to try and open ourselves up to the possibility of failure. Using our talents to their fullest ability also takes an immense amount of work. This is why God calls the servant lazy.

8. God expects us to multiply the talents and gifts that He gives us, not just to hold on to them.

9. Allow the group to discuss this. Time, talent, and treasure are three categories that fit most of our efforts.

10. God expects our hearts turned towards Him and not toward wealth or possessions.

11. We should use our gifts for the service of others.

Matthew 25:31-46
12. The setting is the Last Judgment where God judges all of the people of the world.

13. Some are granted entrance into God’s Kingdom because they took care of the disadvantaged. They exercise what the Church calls the Corporal Works of Mercy.

14. The others go into the eternal fire because they fail to take care of the disadvantaged.

15. Jesus places Himself in the place of those who are disadvantaged. He makes them who He is.

16. One way to see Jesus in the disadvantaged is to see the value of each and every person, to view them as sons and daughters of God.

17. The eternal perspective can help us stop focusing just on the here and the now. It allows us to see past all of the trivial things in our daily lives and to try to live for what really matters.

18. Allow the group to discuss this.
Living Gospel • Chapter 7: Sharing the Good News with Others (John 4:4-46)

What’s This Passage All About?

In this chapter, we’re going to look at this passage from the perspective of evangelization. Some of your students may have heard of evangelization, but practically, why and how should we evangelize? This passage teaches us about the human condition, the answer Jesus has for us, and the need to share Him with others.

Taking the Initiative (John 4:4-9)
The passage begins with Jesus having to “pass through Samaria” on His way to Galilee (v. 4). Jesus’ journey to this place is noteworthy. Because of their history with one another, Jews and Samaritans did not get along and avoided each other at all costs (v. 9). Originally, there were twelve tribes of Israel. The ten northern tribes, later known as the Samaritans, rebelled and broke away from the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, later known as the Jews. Eventually, the Assyrian empire conquered the ten northern tribes. Assyria then forced them to intermarry with five other nations (2 Kings 17:24). This brought about a cultural separation from the southern tribes, but also a religious separation as the foreign nations introduced their foreign gods. Despite this history, Jesus dares to travel into their country to have a conversation with a particular Samaritan woman. We too are called to be daring in sharing the gospel, no matter the situation.

The cultural background of the woman makes Jesus’ actions even bolder. First, in Jesus’ culture, men do not strike up conversations with unknown women. Then, the text tells us that the woman is getting water at the sixth hour or noon. In Palestine, this would have been one of the hottest times of the day. Almost everyone in the city would do this chore early to avoid the mid-day heat. Instead of avoiding the heat, the woman chooses to avoid everyone else in the city. We’ll see why in a minute, but this is just another reason for Jesus to stay away from this woman. It is important to see what Jesus is willing to risk to share the gospel with this woman.

Meeting People Where They Are (John 4:10-15)
Jesus begins the conversation by relating to something the woman can understand—water. Jesus takes this simple concept and uses it to show man’s thirst for something more. It catches the woman’s attention and she asks to learn more (v. 15). Jesus’ method calls us to reflect on how we share God’s love. Are we willing to make our message relevant and on the level of our listeners? How do we change our language and approach when speaking to those who are not living out the faith?
A True Husband (John 4:16-26)
Jesus then seems to do something very odd—He asks the woman to go get her husband (v. 16). After she responds, Jesus reveals her past history with five different husbands. This fact is highly symbolic of the history of the Samaritans. As mentioned before, the five nations who intermarried with the ten northern tribes introduced their foreign gods. The main god was Baal, which in Hebrew means “husband.” These ten tribes intermarried with the five nations and in doing so accepted their gods and spurned their relationship with their true husband, God.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites’ worship of foreign gods is compared to adultery. Maybe the clearest example is the prophet Hosea. When Hosea prophesizes to the ten northern tribes, God asks him to marry a prostitute who continues her unfaithfulness after their marriage. He does this to symbolize the actions of the ten northern tribes (Hosea 2:14-23).

God’s point is this: He is the only one that fills our need for love, and yet we continue to find other unfulfilling things to fill this void. Jesus embodies this message as He comes as the true bridegroom to this Samaritan woman and to the world as He provides living water that truly satisfies. Our desire to reach others would soar if we owned this reality: Jesus is the answer to the longing of everyone’s heart.

Conversion (John 4:27-30)
Throughout the conversation, the woman’s view of Jesus progresses. First, she calls him “sir” (v. 11), then “prophet” (v. 19), then “Messiah” (v. 29). In her excitement, she leaves her jar and runs into the city to tell others about Jesus. Some have pointed out that the jar symbolizes her formal life that did not satisfy her. She leaves it behind now that she has a higher purpose. Have we left our own past behind, in light of the gospel? Do we call others to do the same?

Testimony and Conversion (John 4:31-42)
St. John Chrysostom noted, “The Apostles, when they were called, left their nets; this woman leaves her water jar and proclaims the gospel, calling not just one person but influencing the whole city.” Through the woman’s testimony, many Samaritans come to believe in Jesus.

Just think about who this woman was. This same woman was shunned by her community and she has the courage to tell them this good news. And, the change in her life is so significant that those who ostracized her are willing to listen to her and believe what she has to say. How much more will our friends and family be willing to hear how the Lord has changed our own lives! It is important to know how the Lord has changed our lives and be able to express this to others. Testimonies are powerful!

All can learn something from the different stages of the woman’s life. Have they had a conversion? Have they left their old lives behind? Are they willing to tell others about it? Find ways the members of your group can improve. Help them follow the courageous example of the woman at the well.
Discussion Guide

Opener
Name some persons you admire for the way they share their faith. What characteristics allow them to be so effective?

Backdrop
In this passage, Jesus travels to Samaria. Jesus’ journey to this place is noteworthy because of the history between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews and the Samaritans did not get along and avoided each other at all costs (v. 9). Originally, there were twelve tribes of Israel. The ten northern tribes, later known as the Samaritans, rebelled and broke away from the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, later known as the Jews. Eventually, the Assyrian empire conquered the ten northern tribes. Assyria then forced them to intermarry with five other nations (2 Kings 17:24). This brought about a cultural separation from the southern tribes, but also a religious separation as the Samaritans incorporated the worship of foreign gods.

Passage
Read John 4:4-42.

Exploration
1. What do Jesus’ travels to Samaria say about His evangelization, given the history of the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans?
2. How should this story affect how we share Jesus with others?
3. Use “What’s This Passage All About?” to teach your study more background information about the Samaritan woman.
4. How does Jesus start the conversation with the Samaritan woman?
5. Why do you think Jesus starts the conversation this way?
6. How does Jesus use this natural example of water and take it to a higher level?
7. What do vv. 16-18 say about the woman’s past history of marriage?
8. What is symbolic about the woman’s response, given the background about the people of Samaria’s intermarriage with other tribes?
9. The Old Testament often uses adultery as a symbol for Israel’s worship of foreign gods. Maybe the most direct example is found in Hosea when God asks the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute (Hosea 3:1). Read Hosea 2:14-23. How does this human example give us a glimpse of God’s love for His people?
10. How does Jesus fulfill this prophesy?
11. What is the woman’s reaction to Jesus’ message?
12. Read the quote from St. John Chrysostom from the “Testimony and Conversion” section of “What’s This Passage All About?” What do you think the relationship is between our own conversion and how we share Jesus with others?
13. Put yourself in the shoes of the woman. What is so remarkable about her willingness to tell others? What is so remarkable about their response?
14. See the last paragraph of “Testimony and Conversion” section in “What’s This Passage All About?” for how to apply this passage to your group.
Answers

1. Jesus is willing to take risks to reach others with His message.

2. We cannot stay in our comfort zones. At times, we will have to be bold and courageous in sharing the Faith.

3. No answer is needed.

4. Jesus asks for a drink of water.

5. Jesus wants to relate to the life of the woman.

6. Jesus uses water to show the emptiness that each one of us has inside. This emptiness cannot be satisfied by anything natural here on earth but by Jesus alone.

7. The woman has had five husbands.

8. See the “True History” section of “What’s This Passage All About?”

9. The courage and love it would take to overcome the repeated adultery of a loved one is astonishing. God continues to do this every day.

10. Jesus is the true bridegroom who comes to make a new covenant with us and rescue us from our sin that led us astray.

11. The woman leaves her water jar and goes into the city to tell everyone about Jesus.

12. The more our hearts turn towards God and accept His mercy, the more we should want to share this great gift with others.

13. She was ostracized by so many people in the city and yet she is still willing to share the news. Not only is she willing to share but the people in the city overcome their rejection of her and accept what she has to say (v. 39).

14. No answer is needed.