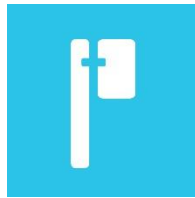


Growing in Christ

a Bible study series from
www.prisonnet.org



Prison Prevention Ministries
Chattanooga, TN

Foreword

Welcome to this life-enriching seminar for men and women who already know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and others who may be seeking Him.

The seminar is led by the volunteers of Prison Prevention Ministries, a Chattanooga-based ministry that functions to: a) prevent youth from going to prison, and b) prevent inmates from returning to prison, through a personal and growing relationship with Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

This material is provided through the kind generosity of www.prisonnet.org

This booklet
belongs to: _____

Seminar _____
Leaders: _____

Growing in Christ Lesson 1: Commitment

Notes for the leader: This is the first in a series of lessons about "Growing in Christ." This lesson focuses on the crucial first step in beginning a relationship with God -- a conscious decision and commitment to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Hand out the Gospel Outline sheet (containing the twelve scripture passages) before beginning the lesson. It is very important that everyone be able to follow along in this outline as the lesson proceeds.

If you are ready for a serious relationship with God -- one that will change your life forever -- the first step is to really understand "the gospel message" and decide whether you are ready to make the choice that Jesus talks about. Understanding the gospel isn't just learning "church talk." There are some very important ideas, like "sin," "salvation," and "believing," that we need to define carefully to make sure we're talking about the real gospel message.

This lesson will focus on twelve passages of scripture. To save time, we've copied these passages onto a single sheet of paper. You can take this sheet with you and look up these passages and read them in more detail if you want to -- or you can share this sheet with someone else who needs to understand the message of the gospel.

The first two verses talk about "**salvation**," which is the first important word we need to understand. What does the word "salvation" mean to you? Anyone?

Notes for the leader: To be most effective, this lesson needs to include some interaction with the group -- but this interaction needs to be channeled to avoid "side issues" that can interfere with the flow and impact of the main message. Mention that there will be small group discussions after the main presentation where questions can be raised. Then, if a potentially distracting question comes up, suggest that it be raised in the small group session.

Start the interaction by collecting as many quick ideas about what "salvation" means as possible in less than a minute. This is not a "right/wrong" exercise -- if a word or idea has anything to do with salvation, give a quick positive reinforcement ("good!" or "great!" ...). If an idea is "off-base," just look a little skeptical, say "Hmmm..." and go on to the next one.

Great! So salvation includes

- Becoming a **member of the Kingdom** of God
- being accepted as a **member of His family**
- having **eternal life** with Him in heaven
- having **all your sins forgiven** – washed away
- being **set free from the power of sins** that have held you captive
- being **declared "not guilty"** in the eyes of God
- being **rescued from spiritual death**

This last thought is really **the basic meaning of "salvation" – to be rescued** from a situation that seems hopeless, and that is about to lead to death. We've all seen news stories on TV of a fishing boat caught in a storm and sinking. They send out an "SOS" – "please come and rescue us if you can; otherwise, we're going to die!"

The "good news" of the gospel is **that God is willing to rescue anyone who really wants to be rescued!** And he will do this freely, even though we do not deserve it!

The Bible says that **salvation is a gift from God:**

Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:8

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Our "**wages**" are what we have **earned** -- what we **deserve**. God's **free gift** is **eternal life** through "**grace**" -- **God's love, which we do not deserve**. And ... Paul tells us that the very **faith** that allows us to be saved **is a gift from God!**

But let's step back for a moment... **Why do we need to be rescued?** What's our problem?

The Bible says that **our sin is what separates us from God.**

In another lesson, we studied about the Last Judgment, in which **every one of us will stand before God and be held accountable** for everything we have done in our lives. We learned that the Devil and his followers will be cast into a "lake of fire," called the "second death," and that **everyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life is cast into the lake of fire!** Jesus also called this "being cast into the outer darkness." We don't know exactly what Hell will be like, any more than we know exactly what Heaven will be like. But the Bible makes it clear to me where **I** want to spend eternity!

Hell means being forever outside the presence of God. This is what those who trust in Jesus are being rescued from! The Bible tells us in 2 Peter 3:9 that *"God does not want any to perish, but wants everyone to come to repentance."* C.S. Lewis points out that **God did not prepare Hell for mankind, but rather for Satan and his demons.** But, he reminds us, **God has given us the freedom to choose whom we will follow.** And, if we want to do so, **He has given us the terrible freedom to accompany Satan into Hell!** This is a choice each one of us is making, whether we realize it or not.

Sin, you will recall, is **everything we do that falls short of what God wants us to be.**

1 John 1:8

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Romans 3:28

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

There are several words used in Hebrew (in the Old Testament) and Greek (in the New Testament) that we translate as "sin." One means simply "**missing the mark**," falling short of what we know God wants us to do or be. Another means "**falling**," as when we say that someone has "**fallen into sin**" -- not necessarily something they intended to do. Another word means "**going astray**," as in "*All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, and each of us has turned to our own way.*" (Isa 53:6) Finally, another word means "**deliberately disobeying God and doing what is evil.**"

All of these things are sin, and sin is what separates us from God. One way or another, **sin is what causes all the trouble in the world. We suffer for our own sins, and our sins cause other people to suffer. We suffer for the sins of our parents and our grandparents, and our children suffer because of our sins. Sin is like a hereditary disease** that is passed on from generation to generation all the way back to the **first sin**, recorded in the third chapter of Genesis.

What was that original sin? [*Get a few answers. Point out that it did not involve eating an apple – it was about the "fruit of the knowledge of good and evil."*]

God told Adam and Eve, "Everything here is yours to enjoy as you wish. **Only one thing is forbidden: you shall not eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.**" God was reserving for himself alone **the right to say what is right and wrong.**

God is infinite, and can see all of history. **He can see the consequences of every choice we make.** We are very limited in our understanding, and **we often can't see the consequences of our actions even a few minutes from now.** That is why **God is God, and we are not.**

And what was the temptation? [*Get a few answers.*] "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**"

The **temptation**, in other words, was **to set ourselves above God**, and say, "**I will decide what's right and wrong for myself!**" This is how sin entered the world. And each one of us suffers the consequences of that sin. **Each one of us**, at some point fairly early in our lives, **has reenacted that first sin**, saying to ourselves, "**I will decide what's right and wrong.**"

Our sin affects our minds, and our **bodies**, and our **souls**. We can't even trust our own thinking, because of the way it has **been infected by the effects of sin!**

Now so far, this doesn't sound like "good news" at all! In fact, it sounds like a **pretty hopeless situation!** And it would be, except for the fact **that God has sent His Son into the world to rescue us from our sins!**

The heart of the gospel message can be found in three verses in John, Chapter 3, in the words that Jesus himself said to Nicodemus:

John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned; whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Think about this for a minute ... no matter how familiar the words may seem to you.

Why did Jesus say the Father sent him into this world to save us? Because **He loves us!** ... He **loves us!** He loves **you!** He loves **me!** Why does he love you and me? **Because we are so lovable?** ... No!

Because He is a perfect God of perfect love!

Romans 5:8

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Here is where **a lot of people misunderstand the message of the gospel.** They think it says, "First, I need to get my life together. **I need to become a good person. Then, God will love me and accept me!** But **that's not what the gospel says!** It says that **God loves us while we are still sinners!** And that **He loves us so much that he was willing to send His only Son to die for us!**

Jesus made some amazing claims about himself:

John 14:6

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Notice that Jesus did **not** say, "I'm **one way** you can find the truth," or "I'm **one way** you can find a relationship with God. He said he's the **only way!** Peter put it this way in Acts 4:12:

Acts 4:12

Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

So .. what do you need to do to **become a member of the Kingdom of God?** To **have your sins forgiven?** To be **declared righteous in the eyes of God?** To **know that you will be with him forever?**

You must put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ!

When Jesus talks about "**believing**" in him, he **doesn't just mean intellectually understanding** who he is and what he's done. As James tells us, **the Devil and his followers know who Jesus is!** They **believe that he's the Son of God!** But that doesn't mean that they're part of his kingdom, because **they aren't willing to trust him, and follow him, and do what he says!**

Jesus put it this way:

Matthew 18:3

Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Why did Jesus use the example of a little child? The answer is clear: **because little children still know how to trust in the way that Jesus wants us to trust him!**

But **we have to make a choice:** We must **repent of our sins**, and really, truly **be willing to give them up.** The Greek word we translate as "repent" is "metanoia" -- and it means, literally, **to change your mind.** To realize that you've been headed in the wrong direction. **To make an intelligent decision** to turn around, to change your course, to **surrender yourself to him.**

That's what the son did in the story Jesus told, which we studied in another lesson. He had demanded his share of the family money now, and his father gave it to him and let him go. He went to a far-off land and started to party. He had lots of friends ... until the money ran out. Then the "friends" all disappeared. And times grew hard. Finally, he hit bottom, taking a job feeding pigs ... and realizing that the pigs were eating better than he was! Finally, Jesus said, **he came to his senses and made an intelligent decision:** "**I will go back to my father**, and say to him, '**Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.** I am no longer worthy to be called your son. I ask you only to take me back as a hired worker on your farm.'" And his father accepted him back as a son, and hugged him, and there was great rejoicing, because "this son of mine was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found." The son in Jesus's story **repented, and confessed, and surrendered himself** to his father.

If you're willing to do this, Jesus makes this promise:

John 5:24

Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

And Paul tells us that

2 Corinthians 5:17

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.

In John's vision in Revelation, Jesus says:

Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me.

There's a famous painting that hangs in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, called "The Light of the World." It shows Jesus standing at the door of a small, simple cottage in the woods, at night, holding a lantern, knocking on a door that's surrounded by weeds and overgrown by vines. When the painter's friends first saw the picture, they said, "You've made a mistake!" "Really?" said the painter. "What mistake do you see?" "There's no latch or handle on the door," they said. "Ah," said the painter. "That's the whole point of the painting. **The latch is on the inside.**"

Like the door in the painting, **the doors to our hearts and lives open only from the inside.** Jesus will knock on the door, **but each one of us must decide for himself whether we're going to open the door and let him in.** God has allowed each of us the freedom to choose whether or not to be part of His kingdom.

If we let Jesus in, **he will implant his Holy Spirit in us**, to live in us, and **begin changing us** into the men or women God intended us to be. **We can't do this by our own will power, but we can do it by the power of God.** But we have to be willing to give control of our lives to him, and **be willing to let him work in us and change us.**

If this makes sense to you, and you want to give your life and yourself to Jesus, you **can make sure right now that you're part of God's kingdom!** All you need to do is to **admit that you're a sinner**, tell God that you **repent of your sins**, and tell him that you are willing to **accept Jesus and follow him.**

There's a brief prayer printed at the bottom of the page each of you have. If you want to make this choice right now, you can pray quietly along with me.

But first, I need to warn you: Jesus never promised that if you come to him and follow him, that life will become easy, and all your problems will disappear. In fact, he warned his disciples that they would be persecuted, and that some of them would even die because they followed him. But he did promise that he would never leave them ... never forsake them ... no matter what troubles might come in their lives. He promised that **whoever comes to him, he will never turn away.** **He promised a personal relationship that starts now, and lasts forever.**

If you want this relationship with Jesus, please pray quietly with me right now:

Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner, and I want to change.

Thank you for dying for my sins.

I ask you to come into my life as my Savior and my Lord, and to change me into what you want me to be.

Notes for the leader: Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can answer questions that come up about the gospel message. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 10 to 20 minutes is ideal. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion. Then close with a prayer for those who have committed (or re-committed) their lives to Christ. This prayer might include, for example, asking that God will give them a hunger to know His word better; that they will find fellowship with a mature believer who can help them study the Bible, help them find answers to their questions, and encourage them in their walk with Christ. Ask for the Holy Spirit to work in their minds and hearts to enable them to communicate with God in prayer and to resist temptation.

If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you can help out with any "difficult" questions.

For this lesson, the handout sheet serves as the "Take-Home Thoughts" page.

Understanding the Gospel

1. SALVATION IS A GIFT FROM GOD

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)

2. OUR SIN IS WHAT SEPARATES US FROM GOD

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:28)

3. GOD SENT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO RESCUE US FROM OUR SINS

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned; whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:16-18)

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

4. YOU MUST PUT YOUR FAITH AND TRUST IN JESUS CHRIST

Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3)

Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20)

5. YOU CAN GIVE YOUR LIFE TO JESUS RIGHT NOW

Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner, and I want to change.
Thank you for dying for my sins.
I ask you to come into my life as my Savior and my
Lord, and to change me into what you want me to be.

Growing in Christ

Lesson 2: Temptation

Notes for the leader: This is the second in a series of lessons about "Growing in Christ." This lesson focuses on a problem every one of us has to face every day -- dealing with temptation.

Introduction

The first lesson in this series focused on the important step of faith that you must take to become a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of his Church and his Kingdom. Jesus promised that if we sincerely commit ourselves to following him, he will forgive our sins. He also promised that He will be with each one of us forever, wherever we go and whatever happens to us. (*Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5*)

Jesus did **not** promise that if you choose to follow him, all your problems will disappear. In fact, he warned his disciples that many of them were going suffer, and some of them would even die, because they followed him. (*John 15:20*)

The apostle James wrote about the trials and temptations that will come into our lives, even after we become followers of Christ:

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James talks about keeping an **attitude of joy**, even when we face **trials**, because we know that through these trials, God is building up our faith, and that we're learning to "hang in there" and trust him (that's what **perseverance** means). God works in our lives through these experiences to help us become "**mature and complete, not lacking anything.**"

God doesn't send us trials to punish us. Rather **He allows us to go through trials** that come upon us as part of our lives in a sinful world -- and often because of our own actions. James says that He has a **purpose** in doing this: **to build up our faith** and to **help us grow spiritually**. For most of us, **spiritual growth seems to come mostly from what we learn during the hard times in our lives**, not the easy times. This seems to be a fact of spiritual life.

So, what about **temptation**? Is temptation some kind of test that God puts us through to see if we pass or fail? Let's see what James says about this.

James 1:13-15

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is fullgrown, gives birth to death.

Where does James say that **temptation** comes from?

He says **temptation starts inside of you**, and it will grow and lead you into sin, unless you seek God's help to deal with it. Sometimes we talk about other people tempting us, **but there's no way that anyone can tempt you with something you don't already want!** If you don't want it, then dealing with it is easy, and it's not really a temptation!

So, how can we deal with temptation? Let's look **at one of the most important promises in all of scripture.**

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

What is Paul telling us in this verse?

First, he's saying that **everybody faces temptation**, all our lives. Temptation may take different forms for different people, but we all face it. My greatest temptation may not bother you at all, and your temptation may be no problem for me. But we **all** have to deal with temptation of some kind.

Second, he's reminding us **that God is faithful**. He knows us, he understands us, he loves us, and he will stick with us if we put our faith and trust in him.

Third, he's telling us that **God has promised that he won't let us face temptation that's too strong for us**, and that **He will always make sure that there's a way out** of whatever temptation comes to us. This promise is so important that **everyone should memorize this verse**, so that it will come to your mind whenever temptation "seizes" you.

Since all of us face temptation every day, this is an area where we all have plenty of experience. And that's what our discussion questions are about.

Notes for the leader: Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes

should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.

Follow-up Discussion

Notes for the leader: The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers.

If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.

1. What are the best ways you have found for dealing with temptation?

Prayer -- call for God's help right away!

Fleeing -- get away from the source or place of temptation as fast as you can. Seeking help from other Christians, who can pray with us, and perhaps share how they have dealt with similar temptations.

Reciting scripture, as Jesus did when he was tempted by Satan.

Focusing our minds on other thoughts -- perhaps a hymn or a praise song.

2. How can we prepare ourselves for temptation before it comes?

Stay away from anywhere we know temptation is likely to be! (We are rarely seized by a new temptation -- for most of us, it's usually the same temptations, over and over!) Learn the scriptures. They will not come into our minds when we are facing temptation unless we put them there first, by reading them, understanding them, and memorizing them.

Turn to mature Christians for help. Talk to them. Pray with them.

Seek help from Christian support groups of people who are dealing with the same kinds of temptations that you are. We can often learn a lot from each other.

3. If we find we have failed, and given in to temptation, what should we do?

Repent, confess, ask God for forgiveness. Let's read 1 John 1:9 ...

1 John 1:9 - 2:6

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense —Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

Let's close with the wonderful benediction from the book of Jude:

Jude 24-25

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy --

to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Notes for the leader: *Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cell-mate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!*

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Dealing with Temptation *(1 Corinthians 10:13)*

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

1. What are the best ways you have found for dealing with temptation?
2. How can we prepare ourselves for temptation before it comes?
3. If we find we have failed, and given in to temptation, what should we do?

Take-home Thoughts About ...

Dealing with Temptation

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. (James 1:13-14)

God doesn't tempt us, but he allows us to go through trials and temptations in order to **strengthen us spiritually**. For most of us, **spiritual growth** comes from what we learn during **hard times**, not easy times!

Where does **temptation** come from? James says that it **starts inside of me**, and it will grow and **lead me into sin, unless I seek God's help** to deal with it. There's no way that anyone can tempt me with something I don't already want!

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Corinthians 10:13) Our responsibility is to **look for the way out that God has promised to provide**.

We can deal with temptation by **praying for God's help**; by **asking mature Christians to pray** with us; by **quoting scripture we have memorized**, as Jesus did when he was tempted personally by Satan himself. *(See Matthew 4:1-11.)*

We should learn to **stay away from people and places where we know we'll face temptation**. And if we find ourselves suddenly facing temptation, we should **get away from it as fast as we can**.

Growing in Christ

Lesson 3: Confession

Notes for the leader: This is the third in a series of lessons about "Growing in Christ." This lesson focuses on the importance of repentance and confessing our sins quickly whenever we realize we have sinned or fallen short of what God wants of us. It also touches topics that are often of great concern to prisoners -- "Can I lose my salvation?" and "Have I committed the Unforgivable Sin?"

Introduction

The first lesson in this series focused on the important step of faith that you must take to become a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of his Church and his Kingdom. The second lesson focused on dealing with temptation -- a reality that all of us have to deal with every day, even after we make a commitment to follow Jesus! We studied God's promise that ***He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but when we are tempted, he will always provide a way out.*** (1 Cor 10:13) We learned that we need His help to avoid sinning – if we try to do it on our own spiritual strength alone, we're going to fail.

This lesson focuses on what happens when someone sins after he becomes a Christian. This is a subject that we are often asked about, both in prison ministry and outside of prisons. Many people get worried that their sins may not be forgiven, and that they may lose their salvation. This is a serious subject -- one that Christian teachers have had different opinions about over the centuries. This is a subject that needs to be studied and understood!

First, let's review some of the promises that Jesus made to those who follow him:

John 5:24

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

John 6:37-39

All that the father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

These verses promise that **if you make a sincere commitment to follow Jesus, you become part of his Kingdom forever.** He has set you free from the power of sin. **You don't have to sin any more!** And he has promised to protect you from temptations that are too strong for you; he has promised that he will make **sure there will always be a way out!**

So, then -- what happens when we sin? Are we **always** forgiven, no matter how many times we sin? If so, **why can't we just go ahead and do whatever we feel like?** Why do we need to worry about sin any more?

Look at 1 John 1:8. This letter was written by Jesus' disciple John when he was a very old man. **It is written to believers** and it talks about this very subject.

1 John 1:8 – 2:6

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense —Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

There are two important principles that John is giving us here:

- **you must never sin deliberately.**
- **you must never fool yourself into thinking that you are no longer a sinner.**

There is a big difference between **sinning because of weakness** and **sinning deliberately!** You must never fall into the trap of saying, "I can go ahead and do this ... then I'll confess it to God, and he'll forgive me!" **If you do that, you are taking God to be a fool!** And that is a very dangerous thing to do! God **knows** what's in your heart. He **knows** if you're sincere or not. **You can fool other people,** but **you can't fool Him!** The greatest danger is that **you may fool yourself.** That's what John is warning us about in this passage.

Notes for the leader: Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.

Follow-up Discussion

Notes for the leader: The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers.

If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.

1. If we, as Christians, pretend that we never sin, how does this affect our relationship with God? (1 John 1:10)

We make God out to be a liar, and his truth is not in us!

2. If we fall into sin and quickly confess our sins to God, how will he deal with us? (1 John 1:9)

He is faithful and just, and will purify us from our unrighteousness...

3. Why is God willing to forgive our sins? (1 John 2:1-2)

Because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, which God had planned from the very beginning of the world.

There is **always** a penalty for sin. God **never** says, "Sin doesn't matter." But **He** has paid the penalty for our sin **Himself!** All we need to do is to **surrender** ourselves to Him and make Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives.

4. How can we test ourselves to see if we are living a Christian life? (1 John 2:3-6)

We must make sure that we are obeying his commands, that we are walking as Jesus walked. It does no good to "**talk the talk**" if you're not "**walking the walk**"!

5. Is it possible to be sure that you have eternal life? (1 John 5:12-13)

Yes! That's why John says he is writing this letter! He doesn't want the young Christians to worry about losing their salvation. As long as they are sincere in their commitment to Christ, they (and we) are safe. Remember the verses we read earlier?

Whoever comes to me I will never drive away ... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. (John 6:37,39)

Now let's deal with two more questions: **really tough questions:**

- Is it possible for someone who has proclaimed his faith in Christ to lose his salvation?
- How can you be sure you haven't committed the "unforgivable sin" that Jesus talks about?

What happens when someone who seems to believe in Jesus returns to sin, and ends up rejecting the faith? Is he saved, or not? Does Jesus' promise still hold – that he will lose none of those the Father has given him?

Perhaps the person who turns away from Jesus was never really sincere in the first place. Perhaps he was. Here's the heart of the problem: we're dealing with something that is **private, only between God and that person**. We can't tell if he was sincere ... but **God** knows!

The question of whether someone who is really saved can ever lose his salvation is a question that theologians have argued about for centuries. Here's a "middle-of-the-road" answer: If you were **really sincere** in your comment to Jesus, **you will come back** to him, even if it takes many years to do so, and he will wait for you. If you **weren't sincere**, **you won't come back**.

Sometimes people ask, "What if I get killed before I come back to Jesus." The best answer to this is, "Why take that chance? Come back now!"

Now, what about the "unforgivable sin" that Jesus talks about in these verses:

Matthew 12:31-32

And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

To understand why Jesus is saying this, you must read the earlier part of this chapter. The religious leaders have been following Jesus around, watching him heal the sick, the blind, and the crippled. They have been accusing Jesus of breaking the Jewish Law, because he even heals people on the Sabbath! The poor "sinners" have been rejoicing and following Jesus, but the religious leaders have become more and more opposed to Jesus and have begun to plot to kill him.

Finally, in a major confrontation in chapter 12 of Matthew, the religious leaders accuse Jesus of doing these miracles by the power of Satan! Jesus first points out to them that their argument is completely absurd -- it makes no sense that Satan would allow his own power to be used to destroy himself. But then Jesus warns the religious leaders with some of the strongest words in all of the Bible: "If you, even though you are the religious leaders, are **so far gone spiritually that you can no longer tell the difference between the work of God and the work of Satan, then there's no longer any hope for you!**"

Jesus **never** said anything like this to ordinary people -- only to the religious leaders who **thought they were not sinners** and **didn't need to be forgiven**. To the people **who knew that they were sinners**, and **were willing to admit it**, Jesus gave a message of **encouragement, hope, and power**.

So here's the answer to the question of whether you have committed the "unforgivable sin": **If you know you're a sinner, that is proof that you haven't committed the unforgivable sin!**

Notes for the leader: Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cell-mate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Confessing Our Sins (1 John 1:8 - 2:6; 5:12-13)

1. If we, as Christians, pretend that we never sin, how does this affect our relationship with God? (1 John 1:10)
 2. If we fall into sin and quickly confess our sins to God, how will He deal with us? (1 John 1:9)
 3. Why is God willing to forgive our sins? (1 John 2:1-2)
 4. How can we test ourselves to see if we are living a Christian life? (1 John 2:3-6)
 5. Is it possible to be sure that you have eternal life? (1 John 5:12-13)
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1. Why is God willing to forgive our sins? (1 John 2:1-2)
 2. How can we test ourselves to see if we are living a Christian life? (1 John 2:3-6)
 3. Is it possible to be sure that you have eternal life? (1 John 5:12-13)

Take-home Thoughts About ...

Confessing Our Sins

Many Christians worry about "losing their salvation" when they sin. This is a serious issue, which Bible teachers have argued about for hundreds of years. **Will God always forgive us**, no matter how many times we sin? If so, **why can't we just go ahead and sin all we want**, knowing that He will just forgive whatever we do?

First, remember what Jesus promised: *All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.* (John 6:37-39)

If you make a **sincere commitment to follow Jesus**, he **sets you free from the power of sin**, so that **you don't have to sin any more**. **He protects you from temptations** that are too strong for you, and makes sure there is always a way out.

But you still have **freedom to choose** whether to follow him or not. **He will never drive you away** – but if you choose to do so, **you can walk away from him**, as the son did in Jesus's story (*Luke 15*). He will let you go, then wait for you to decide to **come back to him**. Don't take the chance that you may die before coming back! If you need to come back to him and start over, **do it now!**

God knows the difference between **sins we commit out of weakness** and **sins we commit deliberately**. How can we tell who is really sincere in their commitment to follow Jesus? We can fool each other. We may even fool ourselves. **But we can never fool God!** So don't try! If you ever find yourself saying, "I'll just go ahead and do this, then ask God to forgive me later," **fall on your knees** right then **and ask him to protect you** from thoughts like this! (*See 1 John 1:8 – 2:6.*)

Growing in Christ

Lesson 4: Fruit

Notes for the leader: This is the fourth in a series of lessons about "Growing in Christ." This lesson focuses on the blessings God wants every Christian to experience in his or her life -- love, joy, peace, patience, and more ... and some things we need to do to allow this "Fruit of the Spirit" to grow.

Introduction

The first lesson in this series focused on the important step of faith that you must take to become a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of his Church and his Kingdom. The second lesson focused on dealing with temptation -- a reality that all of us have to deal with every day, even after we make a commitment to follow Jesus! We studied God's promise that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but when we are tempted, he will always provide a way out. (1 Cor 10:13) The third lesson addressed the importance of avoiding any deliberate sin – and, when we **slip** or **fall** into sin, how important it is to **admit** it quickly, to **confess** our sin to God and to those we have hurt by our sin, to **ask for forgiveness**, and to **seek God's help** to change what we're doing to make sure the same thing doesn't happen again.

In that same lesson, we learned that our goal should be to "*walk as Jesus walked*" – in all our relationships, to try to act as Jesus would: with our families, with our friends, with those in authority over us, and even with our enemies. This lesson focuses on another way to measure whether we are living a life that's pleasing to God: whether we are producing the "*fruit of the spirit*." Paul writes

Galatians 5:19-23

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

But **how** does this "fruit of the spirit" grow in us? We all know believers who are not experiencing this fruit. **What can we do to make these things a reality** in our lives?

Let's look again at a passage we studied as part of the Kingdom of God series of lessons – the parable of the sower.

Matthew 13:3-8

"A farmer went out to sow his seed.

As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Jesus goes on to quote a prophecy from Isaiah, which says that most people won't understand his parables because they don't want to understand them. Then Jesus explains the parable:

Matthew 13:18-23

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

In the other lesson, we focused on what this parable tells us about **the initial step of commitment** each of must make to have a real relationship with God -- **accepting Christ as Savior and Lord**, and following Him. But this step of commitment isn't the **end** of the story – it's really only the **beginning**. The farmer's job isn't finished when he sows the seed – his work has just begun! He will be out in his fields every day until the harvest, making sure the plants are watered and fertilized, chasing away the rabbits, and making sure weeds don't take over the field, until finally, when the time is right, he can harvest his crop.

In the same way, we need to pay attention every day to our spiritual lives. We need to allow the Word of God take root in our souls. We need to feed it by reading the Scriptures God has given us. We need to water it through prayer, asking God to give us the "living water" Jesus promised to everyone to comes to him. And, we need to weed our spiritual lives by getting rid of everything that is not pleasing to him.

Jesus told other parables involving seeds and weeds, a couple of which are in this same chapter. If you have extra time in the small group session, you can read and discuss these other parables.

Notes for the leader: Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.

Follow-up Discussion

Notes for the leader: The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers. If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.

1. Look at this list of "fruit of the spirit," and compare it with the list of "worldly values." Do you think this is a good picture of the tensions a Christian faces while in prison?

Of course ... and not just in prison, either! Most of the people in the world don't experience this fruit -- at least not very often!

- 1a. Do you think it is possible for someone to really experience the fruit of the spirit in his or her life while in prison?

It sure **is** possible -- there are tens of thousands of men and women who are **locked up** today, but who are **spiritually free** for the first time in their lives.

Experiencing the fruit of the spirit is not a "**natural**" thing. It can happen in the lives of those who have made a commitment to follow Christ -- but only because of the **supernatural power** of God, and the **work of His Holy Spirit**.

2. What are some ways we can "water" and "fertilize" the fruit of the spirit to help them to grow?

Prayer and meditation.

Listening to what the Holy Spirit tells you, and allowing Him to work in your life.

Studying the Scriptures and learning about what Jesus taught and did.

Memorizing the Scriptures so the words are always in your mind and heart.

Talking and praying with spiritually mature brothers in Christ.

3. What are some of the "weeds" that can grow in our lives and choke off the growth of the fruit of the spirit? What can we do to control these weeds?

Some are obvious: lust for power, lust for sex, lust for things, greed -- always wanting more, envying other people, etc.

Let's try to summarize this discussion:

When you become a Christian, God places His Holy Spirit inside you to help you to "walk as Jesus walked." The Holy Spirit will cause this fruit to grow in your life, if you allow him to. But you need to provide the "good soil" that Jesus talked about in the parable – you need to be willing to listen, and willing to do what God tells you. And you need to be willing to provide daily fertilizer and water through your study of the Bible and by seeking God's will through prayer. Finally, you need to be careful of the weeds that grow in your life, and be willing to get rid of anything that keeps you from growing in your relationship with God.

Notes for the leader: Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cellmate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22)

Fruit	Qualities	Opposites
Love	Self-sacrifice; seeking the best for others even if they wouldn't do so for you	Hostility, indifference
Joy	Trust and confidence and in God, even during difficult circumstances	Worry, hopelessness
Peace	Spiritual quietness and tranquility	Stress, strife
Patience	Persistence; waiting for God's time; bearing with people, even if they are difficult	Taking matters into your own hands; striking back at others
Kindness	Being willing to help others; showing mercy	Harshness, seeking retribution
Goodness	Virtuousness; doing the right thing, even if you could get away with doing wrong	Corruption; taking advantage of people
Faithfulness	Trustworthiness; keeping your promises, even when it is difficult to do so	Unreliability; looking for "loopholes" to escape your commitments
Gentleness	Being considerate; not taking advantage of others, even when you have the power to do so	Insisting on your own way; bullying people
Self-control	Resisting temptation; controlling your desires; controlling your anger; controlling your tongue	Letting your desires and emotions control you

1. Briefly consider these "fruits of the spirit". Think of some examples of each one.

2. What can we do (with God's help) to provide "good soil" for these fruits to grow in our lives?
3. What are some "spiritual weeds" in our lives that can choke the growth of these fruits?
What can we do to try to control these weeds?

Take-home Thoughts About ...

Fruit of the Spirit

When you became a Christian, God gave you a **special spiritual gift**, which he wants you to use to serve him and to help other people in their spiritual growth. This gift might be **showing mercy** to those who need help, or **encouraging** those who are in distress, or **teaching** people about God's Word, or **leadership** in the church.

But God wants **every** Christian to have all of the "**fruit of the Spirit**": **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**. (*Galatians 5:19*) **How does this happen?** What do you and I need to do to experience these things?

Remember the parable of the sower (*Matthew 13*). Remember that a farmer's job isn't finished when he sows the seed – it's really just started! From then on, he needs to **work every day** to make sure his plants are watered and fertilized, to protect them from animals, and to make sure weeds don't take over the field.

In the same way, we need to pay attention to our spiritual lives. We need to **feed** our spirits by **reading the Word** God has given us. We need to **water** them through **prayer**. We need to **weed out everything** in our lives that is **not pleasing to God**.

Some weeds are obvious: lust for money, lust for things, lust for sex, lust for power. **The more dangerous weeds are trusting in ourselves** rather than trusting in God, **spiritual pride** that makes it hard for us to admit that we're wrong, and looking for security in our money or possessions rather than in our relationship with Him.

Growing in Christ Lesson 5: God's Temple

Notes for the leader: This is the fifth and final lesson in a series about "Growing in Christ." This lesson focuses on what it means to call Jesus "Lord," and what it means to have the Holy Spirit indwelling you and guiding your life.

Introduction

The first lesson in this series focused on the important step of faith that you must take to become a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of his Church and his Kingdom. The second lesson focused on dealing with **temptation** -- a reality that all of us have to deal with every day, even after we make a commitment to follow Jesus! We studied God's promise that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but when we are tempted, he will always provide a way out (*1 Cor 10:13*). The third lesson addressed the importance of avoiding deliberate sin – and, when we **slip or fall** into sin, how important it is to **admit** it quickly, to **repent**, to **confess** our sin to God and to those we have hurt by our sin, to **ask for forgiveness**, and to **seek God's help** to change what we're doing to make sure the same thing doesn't happen again.

In that same lesson, we learned that our goal should be to "*walk as Jesus walked*" – in **all** our relationships, to try to act as Jesus would: with our **families**, with our **friends**, with **those in authority** over us, and even with our **enemies**. The fourth lesson focused on another way to measure whether we are living a life that's pleasing to God: whether we are experiencing the "*fruit of the spirit*" in our lives: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* (*Galatians 5:19-23*). These are things that God wants **all** Christians to have in their lives. But these things don't just "happen" -- you need to be willing to **submit** yourself to God, and especially to His Holy Spirit, who lives in you, if you belong to Him.

This lesson focuses on what it really means to **belong to God**, what it really means for Jesus to be your **Lord**.

In Bible times, calling someone "Lord" meant something very serious. Today, for most people, a job is just a job, and if you don't like what your boss tells you to do, you can ignore him, or you can decide to quit. In Bible times, it wasn't this way at all. If you were a servant, or a slave, which is what most people were, your **Lord** was literally your **master**. If you were a servant, you **couldn't** quit. You couldn't decide to go work for someone else, or decide that you wanted to do something different from what your master said.

In God's Kingdom, **you** decide whether you are willing to turn your life over to Him. But if you **do** decide to call him "Lord," you need to take this decision very seriously.

What are some modern-day examples that carry some of the power that the word "Lord" used to mean? One example is **military service**. If you enlist, you make a **commitment** to obey all lawful orders of your superior officers. You can't **pick** and **choose** which ones you **like**, following **some** orders while ignoring **others**. No army can function effectively unless everyone can **depend** on their fellow soldiers following orders and doing what they're supposed to do.

The main point is that it meant a **lot** to call someone **lord** in ancient times. And it **still** should mean a lot **today**. Keep that in mind as we read the question Jesus asked his followers:

Luke 6:46

Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?.

It means **nothing** to call Jesus "Lord" unless you do your **very best** to **do** what he **says!** You **belong** to him. He **bought** your freedom from sin with his **own blood!** This is what Paul is talking about when he says:

1 Corinthians 6:19

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

The meaning of the word "**temple**" is "**God's house.**" The Bible tells us again and again that **we -- all** Christians -- are God's **temple**, the place where He lives. That's what it means when we say that the Holy Spirit "**indwells**" every Christian -- He **lives in us**, and **teaches** us, and **guides** us, and **comforts** us, and **counsels** us. But we must be **willing** to allow Him to do this -- and we must be **willing to listen** and to **do** what He says.

If you try to clean up your **own** life, by **yourself**, without allowing the Holy Spirit to **take control**, you could end up **worse off** than you were before. Jesus told a short parable about this:

Matthew 12:43

When an unclean spirit comes out of a man, it goes through desert places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to the house I left." When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.

What does this parable mean to us today?

Perhaps, for a while, you can manage to stay away from **drugs**, or **alcohol**, or **smoking**, or **sex sins**, or whatever your problem may be. But, unless you invite the Holy Spirit to **move in** and **take control** of your life -- unless you spend time in **prayer** and **bible study**, and **learning God's word** -- unless you become an **accountable member of a Christian community** where people will **pray with you** and **support you** when you are **struggling with temptation** -- it's only a matter of time before sin takes control of your life again! You can't "**clean out the house**" by yourself and leave it **spiritually unoccupied!** Many people try to do this -- and that's why many people end up falling into the same sinful patterns and end up **back in prison.**

Many people talk about “**turning control of their lives over to God**” – but then they keep **grabbing the steering wheel**, trying to take control themselves. Fighting over the steering wheel is a good way to end up off the road, in the ditch, or worse, like dead, or back in prison!

These are some serious issues to talk about. Let's split into small groups and discuss three questions about what we've just read. Then will come back together and compare our answers.

***Notes for the leader:** Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.*

Follow-up Discussion

***Notes for the leader:** The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers. If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.*

1. What does it mean to call Jesus your "Lord"?

Jesus is your “master.” You have committed yourself to follow him and his teachings and commandments. As in the military, you can't pick and choose which ones you like, following some orders while ignoring others.

2. If Jesus is your "Lord," who owns your body and your soul?

How should this affect the way you live your life?

1 Cor 6:19 says “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

It means **nothing** to call Jesus "Lord" if you don't do your **very best** to **do** what he **says!** You **belong** to him. He **bought** your freedom from sin with his **own blood!**

3. If your body is the Temple of God, and where the Holy Spirit lives, how should you take care of your body?

You should treat it as “holy” (set apart for God). You should take care of it and do everything you can to keep it healthy. Don't pollute it with chemicals. Don't use it for unholy purposes.

Notes for the leader: Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cell-mate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Your Body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit

(1 Cor 3:16-17, 1 Cor 6:19-20)

1. What does it mean to call Jesus your "Lord"?
2. If Jesus is your "Lord," who owns your body and your soul?
How should this affect the way you live your life?
3. If your body is the Temple of God, and where the Holy Spirit lives, how should you take care of your body?

Take-home Thoughts About ...

The Temple of the Holy Spirit

In Bible times, calling someone "Lord" meant something very serious. Your **Lord** was literally your **master**. What are some modern-day examples that carry some of the power that the word "Lord" used to mean? If you enlist in military service, you make a **commitment** to obey all lawful orders of your superior officers. You can't pick and choose which ones you like, following some orders while ignoring others. No army can function effectively unless everyone can **depend** on their fellow soldiers following orders and doing what they're supposed to do.

Jesus asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?(Luke 6:46). It means **nothing** to call Jesus "Lord" if you don't **do** what he **says!** You **belong** to him. He **bought** your freedom from sin with his **own blood!**

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Cor 6:19)

The meaning of "**temple**" is "**God's house.**" The Bible tells **we** – all Christians -- are God's **temple**. The Holy Spirit "**indwells**" every Christian -- He **lives in us**, and **teaches** us, and **guides** us, and **comforts** us, and **counsels** us. But we must be **willing** to allow Him to do this -- and we must be **willing to listen** and to **do** what He says.

Many people talk about "**turning control of their lives over to God**" – but then they keep **grabbing the steering wheel**, trying to take control themselves. Fighting over the steering wheel is a good way to end up off the road, in the ditch, or perhaps back in prison!

