



Standard Parish Small Group Seven-Week Curriculum

Society of St. John the Evangelist

The Center for the Ministry of Teaching at Virginia Theological
Seminary

Standard Small Group

Seven-Week Curriculum

Getting Started: Meeting Jesus

Set-up:

Your purpose here is to create a welcoming environment that sets clear expectations for your time together. Be sure to follow all guidelines for the space you are using.

- Chairs need to be arranged around a table or in a circle.
- Devotional helps are set up. This may be a candle, a cross, an icon, or something else that will remind the group that their time together is blessed by God. They may be placed in the center of the table or in some other visible place.
- A written agenda that gives time allotments, i.e. Gathering Prayer 5 minutes, Check-In 20 minutes.

Needed materials:

- *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* prayer journals for each participant. These journals can be downloaded and printed for free, or they may be purchased online. Please note there is a large-print journal available for the seeing impaired.
- Books of Common Prayer for each participant. Hymnals optional.
- A bible for use during worship.
- Newsprint and markers.
- Writing utensils for participants.

Learning outcomes:

- Participants will be able to articulate where they have met Jesus in their daily lives.
- Participants will be prepared to pray through the journal in a way that is most helpful to them.

Gathering Prayer:

Invite participants to be seated comfortably either around a table or in a circle of chairs. If there is a candle, light it. Invite participants into a period of silence. You may wish to keep silence for 1-4 minutes. If your group is unused to long periods of silence, you may wish to start with one minute this week and progressively lengthen the silence by 30 seconds each week. However long you decide, let the group know how long it will be, and that you are keeping time. At the end of the silence, pray this or another suitable prayer:

Loving God, you gave us your Son Jesus Christ so that all may be drawn to him. We ask you to bless our time together, and to give us grace and courage to meet Jesus wherever he may be found. We ask this by the grace of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Check-in:

Check-in may take longer this session than the allotted 20 minutes, as your group gets to know one another, and that is perfectly fine. Simply shorten the time of your guided conversation to ensure everyone gets out of small group on time.

This is a good time for you as facilitator to get the pulse of your group. Who are the quiet members who might need to be drawn out? Who are the “happy to talk” participants who will need a gentle nudge to let others speak? See the facilitator’s guide on Pitfalls and Troubleshooting.

There are several ways to do check-in. Of course, you may start with one person and go around the circle. However, we recommend either the process of mutual invitation as outlined by the Kaleidoscope Institute or simply allow participants to speak when they are ready. (Briefly, mutual invitation is a process where the group leader invites someone to speak, and after that person is done speaking, she invites the next person to speak. The person who is invited may pass if he likes, and invite someone else. This continues until everyone has been given the opportunity to speak.)

For this first check-in session, we recommend asking three questions. Don’t move along to the next question until everyone has either answered or passed. Be sure to re-invite those who passed at the beginning to see if they would like to add anything before you move on to the next question. You might consider writing these questions on a flipchart or whiteboard for those in the group who are not auditory learners.

- What is your name, religious background, and how long have you been a part of this parish community?
- What drew you to participate in this small group, and what are you hoping to experience?

- Have you been a part of a small group before? What did you find to be the most life-giving part of the small group experience?

Small Group Activity:

In the sessions that follow this one, the small group activity time is optional, offered as a way to engage that is not entirely discussion-based. However, as this your first time together, you will be using two small group activities to create a fruitful small group experience.

The first activity is setting expectations/group norms. The second activity is orientation to the prayer journal. If engaged in properly, these activities will get your small group off to a great start.

Setting Expectations

This exercise is designed to help set norms for the small group. Norms are the expected standard of behavior for a social group, and setting them at the beginning will help the group function smoothly. When everyone engages with the norm-making and feels a part of the discussion, participants are more likely to adhere to the norms and help the group self-regulate.

While complete consensus isn't necessary, there should be general agreement about the norms. Some groups will find this a very simple exercise, others will have more of a back-and-forth.

Post a large piece of newsprint where everyone can see it.

Here are recommended items for discussion:

- Confidentiality. Can members discuss what happens in group with other members outside of group time? Can members post pictures on social media? *(One often-reached decision is that conversations stay in the group unless the person who shared gives explicit permission for someone else to share their story outside of group.)*
- Use of technology. Should devices be entirely off, or should they just be silenced? Will the group make exceptions for important work or family calls?
- How will group members signal they would like to add something to the discussion?
- What kind of listening should group members participate in? Will they be silent or respond with thoughts and feelings?

- Attendance. How often are members expected to be there? What constitutes a valid excuse?
- Arriving on time
- Preparing before the session. *(This curriculum is designed so that no one must do the journal in order to fully participate in the discussion, however, group and personal prayer life will be enhanced if everyone is participating in the weekday activities.)*
- How will members of the group pray for one another?
- Housekeeping. Who will lead worship or bring snacks/meal? Who will help clean up? How will these tasks be divided up? What will be the mechanism for reminders?
- Will there be alcohol? *(If your parish's policy is a ban on alcohol, there may be nothing to discuss. If there is no policy or adult functions outside of church are a gray area, this is an important item to discuss as individuals may be discreetly be in recovery.)*

As items are discussed and consensus reached, write the norms on the newsprint. At the end of the session, take the newsprint down and save it for the next week. You may either use the newsprint from week to week, or type it up and print it out. If you print it out, be sure to either make the font big enough it can be seen across the room, or make a copy for each individual.

Groups usually don't need to walk through their norms at the beginning of every session. If the group or one particular member consistently breaks the norms, referencing the group norms before check-in may be a helpful exercise to keep your group dynamics under control. You can also reference the norms the group decided during the session if a behavior is becoming a distraction. "I'm sorry Carol, but the group decided that we would not be texting during the session. Is this an emergency?" or "Jim, remember it's our policy not to interrupt others while they are talking. Please wait for Emily to finish."

After the norms are set, remind participants that the norms can be revisited at a later session if they are not working for the group.

Journal Orientation

This exercise is designed to familiarize the participants with their prayer journal. When participants know how many different ways they can engage with the journal, and how simple it really can be, they will be more likely to use it. This will lead to more fruitful discussions during your time together.

- Pass out the prayer journals to participants
- Turn to page 5 and invite different members of the group to read through the bullet points.

- Explain that there is no wrong way to use this journal. You can:
 - Write in the journal
 - Draw in the journal
 - Respond silently in prayer (although it may be good to jot down some thoughts after your prayer time)
 - Use your imagination to imagine yourself in the scriptural story
 - Call a prayer partner and talk through it
 - Post online using #MeetingJesus
 - Create a photo journal
 - Respond creatively to the journal in another way.
- Emphasize that the discussions each week will be informed by their personal work in the journal, but if they get off track and don't end up responding as faithfully as they would have liked, they can still come and participate fully in the conversation each week.

To show participants how simple responding in prayer to the journal can be, you may wish to walk them through praying with the journal. Invite the group to turn to Week One Day One, or choose a page at random. Ask a volunteer read. After a period of silence, ask another reader to read the same reading. Invite participants to pray silently, or write a response in the book. After a period of five minutes, process the experience with the group, asking questions like, "How was that for you?" or "What surprised you about your time reflecting on the scripture?"

Small Group Conversation:

Directed conversation is the heart of a small group. Sharing our personal stories and accounts of faith is only possible in an atmosphere of trust and mutuality.

Here are some questions to get your conversation started. It may be that you move through all of them, or have a deep conversation with the first question you ask. You may choose to ask your own question that speaks to the needs of your group. *What matters is that participants are engaged with each other.* These questions are based on the experience of the Living God and responses will be unique to each person. There is no right or wrong answers, there is only further discussion and exploration of our relationship with God and one another.

Questions for Discussion:

You might write these down or print them out so that everyone can see them. Ask the first question. Give everyone the opportunity to respond or to pass. Circle back to those who pass in case they wish to add more. When everyone has answered the question, move on to the next. If a question has more than iteration, participants

may chose to answer whichever part they like; they do not need to answer all of them.

How were you “introduced” to Jesus? What were your first impressions of Jesus? Where did those impressions come from? Were these impressions accurate?

Has your relationship with Jesus changed over time? How?

What are the ways you have interacted with Jesus over the years?

How has Jesus influenced your life?

Knowing Jesus the way you do now, how would you describe Jesus to someone who has never been introduced to him?

Wrap up the conversation when people’s responses start to slow down.

Check-out:

Invite group members to share feedback with each other by using **one** of these prompts:

- Where did the group have a lot of energy? Where was the energy lacking?
- Where did you feel close to God? Where did you feel far away from God?
- Where did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- Where did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- [If short on time!] Please describe our time together in one word.

Housekeeping details:

- Remind group members that they will start with **Week One Day One** in their journal (page 8) tomorrow. The theme of the upcoming week is *God is Love*.
- Remind participants that videos are available online, and that the social media campaign will be starting if they would like to participate online.
- Ask for a volunteer to lead worship next week, if this hasn’t already been decided.
- If there is a meal or refreshments, remind the group of their decisions regarding food and clean-up, or ask for volunteers.

Worship:

Worship is the time we give thanks to God for all the gifts of our life and for our time together. Because *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* is a gift of the Society

for Saint John the Evangelist, a monastic order in the Episcopal church, we recommend using the Daily Office, which is a cornerstone of monastic life.

Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families, found on pages 136-140 of the Book of Common Prayer, offers a wonderful and simple framework for your prayer time together. You may choose to use the recommended psalms and readings found in the BCP; supplement with our recommended readings; prayers and songs; or choose your own. Hymns may be sung a capella, or read as poetry. Be sure to make time for prayer intercessions, and encourage the group to pray for one another and loved ones.

For the week of *Meeting Jesus*, we recommend:

- Scripture: 1 John 4:7-13
- Hymn: O Love of God, how strong and true (Hymnal 1982 #455)
- Collect: *A General Thanksgiving* (BCP 836)

If your group is meeting in the evening, you may also wish to use the service of Compline, found on page 127. This is a brief, beautiful, and very popular service.

Your worship leader may wish to do something more creative or context-specific, like use another liturgy, lead a meditation, invite participants into silence, lead participants in song, or use prayer beads together. There are many other ways to worship God. Taking into consideration the theme for the week, we invite you to explore what that might look like together.

Week One: God is Love

Set-up:

- Chairs need to be arranged around a table or in a circle.
- Devotional helps are set up. This may be a candle, a cross, an icon, or something else that helps remind the group that their time together is blessed by God. They may be placed in the center of the table, or in some other visible place.
- A written agenda with expected timing should be clearly visible.
- Group expectations are hung where participants can see them.

Needed materials:

- An extra copy of *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* prayer journal in case a participant forgets his or hers.
- Books of Common Prayer for each participant. Hymnals optional.
- A bible for use during worship.
- Collage making materials: magazines/catalogues, scissors, glue, posterboard.
- Writing utensils for participants.

Learning outcomes:

- Participants will be able to talk about how God's unconditional love influences their lives.

Gathering Prayer:

Invite participants to be seated comfortably either around a table or in a circle of chairs. If there is a candle, light the candle. Invite participants into a period of silence. You may wish to keep silence for 1-4 minutes. However long you decide, let the group know how long it will be, and that you are keeping time. At the end of the silence, pray this or another suitable prayer:

Loving God, we ask to experience your profound love for us; that we may know and truly believe that we are deeply and unconditionally loved by God now and always, just as we are. Amen.

Check-in:

Using the process of mutual invitation as outlined in "Getting Started: Meeting Jesus" begin the check-in process with your group.

- Where did you see God's unconditional love for you this week?
- How was the process of journaling? What surprised you? (*N.B. this is a question about process "How did journaling/praying go for you?" not content "What did you journal about?"*)

Small Group Activity:

Reminder: You can find different activity options in the Teen, Young Adult, and Older Adult curricula.

In this small group activity, participants will take time to think about the ways that God's love is shown to them in everyday life.

Provide a stack of magazines and catalogues, at least one for each group member. Invite everyone to find and cut out images that remind them of God's love for them. When everyone has at least a few pictures, ask participants to explain why they chose what they did. As they share, invite them to glue their images on the posterboard.

Small Group Conversation:

Small group conversation time is the heart of your work together as a small group. Sharing our personal stories and accounts of faith is only possible in an atmosphere of trust and mutuality.

Here are some questions to get your conversation started. You may move through all of them, or get stuck in deep conversation with the first question you ask. You may choose to ask your own question that speaks to the needs of your group. What matters is that participants are engaged with each other. Because these questions are based on the experience of the Living God, they are unique to each person. There is no right or wrong answers, there is only further discussion and exploration of our relationship with God and one another.

Questions for discussion:

There are times in our lives when we closely feel God's unconditional love. Share a story about a time you felt God's unconditional love. What was it like? How did you respond?

There are times in our lives when we feel very far away from God's unconditional love. What do you do when you feel like this? What keeps you going?

In the prayer journal's introduction to Week One, the brothers write, "When we know ourselves to be loved deeply and unconditionally, we can love others with that same love that has been given so generously to us." Have you found that to be true in your own experience? Why? Why not?

The last stanza of the hymn "There's a wideness in God's mercy" is:

*For the love of God is broader
than the measure of the mind.
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful,
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be thanksgiving
for the goodness of our Lord.*

What does it mean to have a life that reflects God's love? What might that look like in your life?

The passage for Week One Day Six is 1 John 4:18. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love." What does this mean to you?

Check-out:

Invite group members to share feedback with each other by using one of these prompts:

- Where did the group have a lot of energy? Where was the energy lacking?
- Where did you feel close to God? Where did you feel far away from God?
- Where did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- Where did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- [If short on time!] Please describe our time together in one word.

Housekeeping details:

- Remind group members that they will start with **Week Two Day One** in their journal tomorrow. The theme of the upcoming week is *The Word Became Flesh*.
- Remind participants that videos are available online, and that the social media campaign will be starting if they would like to participate online.
- Ask for a volunteer to lead worship next week, if this hasn't already been decided.
- If there is a meal or refreshments, remind the group of their decisions regarding food and clean-up, or ask for volunteers.

Worship:

Worship is the time we give thanks to God for all the gifts of our life and for our time together. Because *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* is a gift of the Society for Saint John the Evangelist, a monastic order in the Episcopal church, we recommend using the Daily Office, which is a cornerstone of monastic life.

Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families, found on pages 136-140 of the Book of Common Prayer, offers a wonderful and simple framework for your prayer time together. You may choose to use the recommended psalms and readings found in the BCP; supplement with our recommended readings; prayers and songs; or choose your own. Hymns may be sung a capella, or read as poetry. Be sure to make time for prayer intercessions, and encourage the group to pray for one another and loved ones.

For the week of *God is Love*, we recommend:

- Scripture: 1 John 4:16-21
- Hymn: "God is Love, and where true love is" (Hymnal 1982 #577) or "Just as I am" (Hymnal 1982 #693) or "There's a wideness in God's mercy" (Hymnal 1982 #469, 470)
- Collect: *Loving God, we ask to experience your profound love for us; that we may know and truly believe that we are deeply and unconditionally loved by God now and always, just as we are. Amen.*

If your group is meeting in the evening, you may also wish to use the service of Compline, found on page 127. This is a brief, beautiful, and very popular service.

Your worship leader may wish to do something more creative or context-specific. There are many other ways to worship God. Taking into consideration the theme for the week, we invite you to explore what that might look like together.

Week Two: The Word Became Flesh

Set-up:

- Chairs need to be arranged around a table or in a circle.
- Devotional helps are set up. This may be a candle, a cross, an icon, or something else that helps remind the group that their time together is blessed by God. They may be placed in the center of the table, or in some other visible place.
- A written agenda with expected timing should be clearly visible.
- Group expectations are hung where participants can see them.

Needed materials:

- An extra copy of *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* prayer journal in case a participant forgets his or hers.
- Books of Common Prayer for each participant. Hymnals optional.
- A bible for use during worship.
- Newsprint and markers.
- Writing utensils for participants.

Learning outcomes:

- Participants will be able to articulate what the Incarnation of Jesus means in their lives.

Gathering Prayer:

Invite participants to be seated comfortably either around a table or in a circle of chairs. If there is a candle, light the candle. Invite participants into a period of silence. You may wish to keep silence for 1-4 minutes. However long you decide, let the group know how long it will be, and that you are keeping time. At the end of the silence, pray this or another suitable prayer:

Jesus, image of the invisible God, by your words and example, and by your divine life abiding in us, teach us to see and know the God of Love, whose Light and Life you came to reveal. Amen.

Check-in:

Using the process of mutual invitation as outlined in "Getting Started: Meeting Jesus" begin the check-in process with your group.

- Did you meet God embodied anywhere this week? Where did you brush up against Jesus this week?
- How was the process of journaling? What surprised you? (*N.B. this is a question about process "How did journaling/praying go for you?" not content "What did you journal about?"*)

Small Group Activity:

Reminder: You can find different activity options in the Teen, Young Adult, and Older Adult curricula.

This activity will help the participants understand that Jesus was fully human.

Distribute pieces of paper to the group. Ask them to list the top ten most emblematic things about being a human. Explain that these things can be weird, or painful, or amazing. Draw a large outline of a human on piece of newsprint. Ask participants to call out or write "what it is to be human" in the general area of the experience/around or in the outline. For example, "Humans have hearts that can break" would go over the left breast of the figure. Go through the all the items together and talk about whether or not Jesus would have experienced that as a the unique person that Jesus was. Invite the group to reflect on how God is able to relate to humanity.

Small Group Conversation:

Small group conversation time is the heart of your work together as a small group. Sharing our personal stories and accounts of faith is only possible in an atmosphere of trust and mutuality.

Here are some questions to get your conversation started. You may move through all of them, or get stuck in deep conversation with the first question you ask. You may choose to ask your own question that speaks to the needs of your group. What matters is that participants are engaged with each other. Because these questions are based on the experience of the Living God, they are unique to each person.

There is no right or wrong answers, there is only further discussion and exploration of our relationship with God and one another.

Discussion Questions:

Briefly share about a time that your body had a surprise for you. Given that surprise, what does it mean to you that God also chose to become incarnate, to have a body?

How does knowing that God experientially understands human limitations, physical pain, sickness and death change the way you pray?

In the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, we say that we believe in the "resurrection of the body." Does this influence the way you think about your body or your faith?

In the resurrection stories of John 20, Thomas says that he needs to put his finger in the wounds of Jesus before he believes that the man before him is Jesus, resurrected. What are the ways you have been able to "touch" Jesus?

Do you participate in the Maundy Thursday foot washing? Why or why not? Why do you think Jesus commands us to wash one another's feet?

Check-out:

Invite group members to share feedback with each other by using one of these prompts:

- Where did the group have a lot of energy? Where was the energy lacking?
- Where did you feel close to God? Where did you feel far away from God?
- Where did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- Where did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- [If short on time!] Please describe our time together in one word.

Housekeeping details:

- Remind group members that they will start with **Week Three Day One** in their journal tomorrow. The theme of the upcoming week is *Close to the Father's Heart*.
- Remind participants that videos are available online, and that the social media campaign will be starting if they would like to participate online.
- Ask for a volunteer to lead worship next week, if this hasn't already been decided.

- If there is a meal or refreshments, remind the group of their decisions regarding food and clean-up, or ask for volunteers.

Worship:

Worship is the time we give thanks to God for all the gifts of our life and for our time together. Because *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* is a gift of the Society for Saint John the Evangelist, a monastic order in the Episcopal church, we recommend using the Daily Office, which is a cornerstone of monastic life.

Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families, found on pages 136-140 of the Book of Common Prayer, offers a wonderful and simple framework for your prayer time together. You may choose to use the recommended psalms and readings found in the BCP; supplement with our recommended readings; prayers and songs; or choose your own. Hymns may be sung a capella, or read as poetry. Be sure to make time for prayer intercessions, and encourage the group to pray for one another and loved ones.

For the week of *The Word Became Flesh*, we recommend:

- Scripture: John 1:1-5, 14, 16-18
- Hymn: My song is love unknown (Hymnal 1982 #458) What wondrous love is this (Hymnal 1982 #439)
- Collect: *Jesus, image of the invisible God, by your words and example, and by your divine life abiding in us, teach us to see and know the God of Love, whose Light and Life you came to reveal. Amen.*

If your group is meeting in the evening, you may also wish to use the service of Compline, found on page 127. This is a brief, beautiful, and very popular service.

Your worship leader may wish to do something more creative or context-specific, like use another liturgy, lead a meditation, invite participants into silence, lead participants in song, or use prayer beads together. There are many other ways to worship God. Taking into consideration the theme for the week, we invite you to explore what that might look like together.

Week Three: Close to the Father's Heart

Set-up:

- Chairs need to be arranged around a table or in a circle.
- Devotional helps are set up. This may be a candle, a cross, an icon, or something else that helps remind the group that their time together is blessed by God. They may be placed in the center of the table, or in some other visible place.
- A written agenda with expected timing should be clearly visible.

Needed materials:

- *An extra copy of Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John prayer journal in case a participant forgets his or hers.*
- Books of Common Prayer for each participant. Hymnal 1982/Wonder Love and Praise optional.
- A bible for use during worship.
- Paper (you may wish to use legal or 11×18) for group members.
- Writing utensils for participants.

Learning outcomes:

- Participants will be able to articulate what it means to have intimacy with God.

Gathering Prayer:

Invite participants to be seated comfortably either around a table or in a circle of chairs. If there is a candle, light the candle. Invite participants into a period of silence. You may wish to keep silence for 1-4 minutes. However long you decide, let the group know how long it will be, and that you are keeping time. At the end of the silence, pray this or another suitable prayer:

Jesus, just as you lived in intimate union and daily communion with your Father, so draw us to yourself in love that we may live in this same intimacy and communion with you; so that all that we do and all that we say may flow from your divine life abiding in us. Amen.

Check-in:

Using the process of mutual invitation as outlined in "Getting Started: Meeting Jesus" begin the check-in process with your group.

- When did you feel particularly close to God/Jesus/Holy Spirit this week?
- How was the process of journaling? What surprised you? (*N.B. this is a question about process "How did journaling/praying go for you?" not content "What did you journal about?"*)

Small Group Activity:

Reminder: You can find different activity options in the Teen, Young Adult, and Older Adult curricula.

In this activity participants will see patterns in their spiritual life as they make a chart of their ups and downs with their relationship with God. Participants will be invited to share a portion of their chart with the group.

Distribute paper to participants. Invite them to turn the paper to landscape orientation, and draw a line across the middle of the paper. Label one end "Birth" and the other end "Now." Ask them mark major life events on the horizontal line. After participants have done that, invite them to write "Close to God" at the top of the paper, and "Away from God" at the bottom of the paper. Now ask them to chart their relationship with God as closer or further away at different times in their life. They are not judging these moments, merely observing. No one will be asked to share their chart unless they would like to.

When everyone has completed the exercise your group can proceed in two ways: Either participants may identify a time on their chart and talk about it, or they can identify the highest or lowest parts of their chart and talk about them. What was it like to be close to or far away from God at that moment? Why were they there? What made that experience stand out?

Small Group Conversation:

Small group conversation time is the heart of your work together as a small group. Sharing our personal stories and accounts of faith is only possible in an atmosphere of trust and mutuality.

Here are some questions to get your conversation started. You may move through all of them, or get stuck in deep conversation with the first question you ask. You may choose to ask your own question that speaks to the needs of your group. What matters is that participants are engaged with each other. Because these questions are based on the experience of the Living God, they are unique to each person. There is no right or wrong answers, there is only further discussion and exploration of our relationship with God and one another.

Discussion Questions:

The word intimate is from the Latin, *intimare*, "to make known." To be intimate, one must really know the other. What is the process of becoming intimate with someone? How long does it take? What sort of relationships create intimacy? (*Emphasize that group members should be using "I" or "me" statements, not broad generalizations.*)

What does it feel like to be intimate with someone? How do people act differently when they are close with one another?

In the introduction to Week Three, the brothers write: "Knowing that this intimacy [with God] is possible is one thing; realizing that it is *essential* to our life and fruitfulness is another. It is a gift to be treasured and nurtured." Can you tell a story about a time when you learned to be more intimate with God?

How are you actively encouraging intimacy with others and with God? How are you actively or passively discouraging intimacy with others and with God?

Jesus had an innate special connection with God, but Jesus also actively fostered intimacy with God through time spent alone praying. What are some of ways you have learned to create space for your relationship with God?

Check-out:

Invite group members to share feedback with each other by using one of these prompts:

- Where did the group have a lot of energy? Where was the energy lacking?
- Where did you feel close to God? Where did you feel far away from God?
- Where did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- Where did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- [If short on time!] Please describe our time together in one word.

Housekeeping details:

- Remind group members that they will start with **Week Four Day One** in their journal tomorrow. The theme of the upcoming week is *I Have Called You Friends*.
- Remind participants that videos are available online, and that the social media campaign will be starting if they would like to participate online.
- Ask for a volunteer to lead worship next week, if this hasn't already been decided.
- If there is a meal or refreshments, remind the group of their decisions regarding food and clean-up, or ask for volunteers.

Worship:

Worship is the time we give thanks to God for all the gifts of our life and for our time together. Because *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* is a gift of the Society for Saint John the Evangelist, a monastic order in the Episcopal church, we recommend using the Daily Office, which is a cornerstone of monastic life.

Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families, found on pages 136-140 of the Book of Common Prayer, offers a wonderful and simple framework for your prayer time together. You may choose to use the recommended psalms and readings found in the BCP; supplement with our recommended readings; prayers and songs; or choose your own. Hymns may be sung a capella, or read as poetry. Be sure to make time for prayer intercessions, and encourage the group to pray for one another and loved ones.

For the week of *Close to the Father's Heart*, we recommend:

- Scripture: John 5:19-24
- Hymn: Take my life, and let it be (Hymnal 1982 #707) Loving Spirit (Wonder, Love and Praise #742)
- Collect: *Jesus, just as you lived in intimate union and daily communion with your "Father," so draw us to yourself in love that we may live in this same intimacy and communion with you; so that all that we do and all that we say may flow from your divine life abiding in us. Amen.*

If your group is meeting in the evening, you may also wish to use the service of Compline, found on page 127. This is a brief, beautiful, and very popular service.

Your worship leader may wish to do something more creative or context-specific. There are many other ways to worship God. Taking into consideration the theme for the week, we invite you to explore what that might look like together.

Week Four: I Have Called You Friends

Set-up:

- Chairs need to be arranged around a table or in a circle.
- Devotional helps are set up. This may be a candle, a cross, an icon, or something else that helps remind the group that their time together is blessed by God. They may be placed in the center of the table, or some other visible place.
- A written agenda with expected timing should be clearly visible.
- Ground rules for group expectations are hung where participants can see them.

Needed materials:

- An extra copy of *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* prayer journal in case a participant forgets his or hers.
- Books of Common Prayer for each participant. Hymnals optional.
- A bible for use during worship.
- Writing utensils for participants.
- Card making materials, or a pack of cards and envelopes.

Learning outcomes:

- Participants will be able to articulate what it means to be a friend of Jesus.

Gathering Prayer:

Invite participants to be seated comfortably either around a table or in a circle of chairs. If there is a candle, light the candle. Invite participants into a period of silence. You may wish to keep silence for 1-4 minutes. You may wish to start with one minute and progressively lengthen the silence by 30 seconds each week. However long you decide, let the group know how long it will be, and that you are keeping time. At the end of the silence, pray this or another suitable prayer:

Jesus, loving Shepherd of my soul, grant that, as we observe and reflect on the friendships your disciples enjoyed with you, we may, like them, be drawn closer to you in love. Amen.

Check-in:

Using the process of mutual invitation as outlined in "Getting Started: Meeting Jesus" begin the check-in process with your group.

- How has someone been a friend to you this week? How have you been a friend to someone else this week?
- How was the process of journaling? What surprised you? (*N.B. this is a question about process "How did journaling/praying go for you?" not content "What did you journal about?"*)

Small Group Activity:

Reminder: You can find different activity options in the Teen, Young Adult, and Older Adult curricula.

In this small group activity, participants will think about friendships that are important to them.

Invite participants to think about a friend who they haven't spoken to in a while. Invite participants to create a card, or take a pre-made card and write a note to their friend, telling their friend what their friendship means to them, and how that friend has changed their life for the better. Encourage participants to address the envelope and send it to their friends.

After the cards are completed, invite participants to jot down (or discuss) what they might write in a card like that to Jesus. How has Jesus been a good friend? What are they grateful for in their relationship with Jesus?

Small Group Conversation:

Small group conversation time is the heart of your work together as a small group. Sharing our personal stories and accounts of faith is only possible in an atmosphere of trust and mutuality.

Here are some questions to get your conversation started. You may move through all of them, or get stuck in deep conversation with the first question you ask. You may choose to ask your own question that speaks to the needs of your group. What matters is that participants are engaged with each other. Because these questions are based on the experience of the Living God, they are unique to each person.

There is no right or wrong answers, there is only further discussion and exploration of our relationship with God and one another.

Discussion Questions:

Describe an ideal friendship. How do friends treat each other? What are some traits that all friendships seem to have in common?

Talk about a meaningful friendship in your life. How did that friendship come into being? How did it help you grow as a person?

How do you imagine Jesus interacting with the disciples? It may help to imagine them walking down the road together. What are they talking about? What are the expressions like on their faces?

Jesus came to regard his disciples as his friends (John 15:14). Does this change how you see your role as a follower of Jesus? How would you act differently toward Jesus if you really believed that Jesus was first and foremost your friend?

Remaining in friendship requires the giving and receiving of forgiveness. After betraying Jesus, Peter had to receive Jesus' forgiveness for his action (John 21). What is it like to receive forgiveness from a friend? Is it easier to grant forgiveness, or accept forgiveness?

Check-out:

Invite group members to share feedback with each other by using one of these prompts:

- Where did the group have a lot of energy? Where was the energy lacking?
- Where did you feel close to God? Where did you feel far away from God?
- Where did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- Where did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- [If short on time!] Please describe our time together in one word.

Housekeeping details:

- Remind group members that they will start with **Week Five Day One** in their journal tomorrow. The theme of the upcoming week is *Abide in Me*.
- Remind participants that videos are available online, and that the social media campaign will be starting if they would like to participate online.
- Ask for a volunteer to lead worship next week, if this hasn't already been decided.
- If there is a meal or refreshments, remind the group of their decisions regarding food and clean-up, or ask for volunteers.

Worship:

Worship is the time we give thanks to God for all the gifts of our life and for our time together. Because *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* is a gift of the Society for Saint John the Evangelist, a monastic order in the Episcopal church, we recommend using the Daily Office, which is a cornerstone of monastic life.

Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families, found on pages 136-140 of the Book of Common Prayer, offers a wonderful and simple framework for your prayer time together. You may choose to use the recommended psalms and readings found in the BCP; supplement with our recommended readings; prayers and songs; or choose your own. Hymns may be sung a capella, or read as poetry. Be sure to make time for prayer intercessions, and encourage the group to pray for one another and loved ones.

For the week of *I Have Called You Friends*, we recommend:

- Scripture: John 15:12-17
- Hymn: What a friend we have in Jesus! or My Shepherd will supply my need (Hymnal 1982 #664)
- Collect: *Jesus, loving Shepherd of my soul, grant that, as we observe and reflect on the friendships that your disciples enjoyed with you, we may, like them, be drawn closer to you in love. Amen.*

If your group is meeting in the evening, you may also wish to use the service of Compline, found on page 127. This is a brief, beautiful, and very popular service.

Your worship leader may wish to do something more creative or context-specific, like use another liturgy, lead a meditation, invite participants into silence, lead participants in song, or use prayer beads together. There are many other ways to worship God. Taking into consideration the theme for the week, we invite you to explore what that might look like together.

Week Five: Abide in Me

Set-up:

- Chairs need to be arranged around a table or in a circle.
- Devotional helps are set up. This may be a candle, a cross, an icon, or something else that helps remind the group that their time together is blessed by God. They may be placed in the center of the table, or some other visible place.
- A written agenda with expected timing should be clearly visible.
- Ground rules for group expectations are hung where participants can see them.

Needed materials:

- *An extra copy of Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John prayer journal in case a participant forgets his or hers.*
- Books of Common Prayer for each participant. Hymnals optional.
- A bible for use during worship.
- A big multi-color craft-pack of chenille stems (pipe cleaners), at least 5-7 per participant.
- Writing utensils for participants.

Learning outcomes:

- Participants will be able to articulate what it means to abide in God, and the implications of abiding with God in their own life.

Gathering Prayer:

Invite participants to be seated comfortably either around a table or in a circle of chairs. If there is a candle, light the candle. Invite participants into a period of silence. You may wish to keep silence for 1-4 minutes. However long you decide, let the group know how long it will be, and that you are keeping time. At the end of the silence, pray this or another suitable prayer:

Gracious God, the Giver and Sustainer of Life, help us to abide in you, and to let you abide in us, so that your life becomes our lives, and your will our will, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Check-in:

Using the process of mutual invitation as outlined in "Getting Started: Meeting Jesus" begin the check-in process with your group.

- Did you notice the presence of God within you this week? If yes, what was that like?
- How was the process of journaling? What surprised you? (*N.B. this is a question about process "How did journaling/praying go for you?" not content "What did you journal about?"*)

Small Group Activity:

Reminder: You can find different activity options in the Teen, Young Adult, and Older Adult curricula.

In this small group activity, participants will create vines that remind them of how they are intertwined with God.

Place multi-color packs of pipe cleaners in the middle of the table and invite participants to create vines, branches, and fruit. Encourage participants to use multiple pipe cleaners to create their vines. When the group is finished, invite them to talk about how they connected the pipe cleaners to one another. How do we bind ourselves to Jesus? How do we foster these connections?

Invite participants to take their "vines" home and put them somewhere their creations will remind them to be connected to God.

Small Group Conversation:

Small group conversation time is the heart of your work together as a small group. Sharing our personal stories and accounts of faith is only possible in an atmosphere of trust and mutuality.

Here are some questions to get your conversation started. You may move through all of them, or get stuck in deep conversation with the first question you ask. You may choose to ask your own question that speaks to the needs of your group. What matters is that participants are engaged with each other. Because these questions are based on the experience of the Living God, they are unique to each person.

There is no right or wrong answers, there is only further discussion and exploration of our relationship with God and one another.

Discussion Questions:

In the introduction to Week Five the brothers write, "A key word in the text is 'abide,' and this abiding is, for John, the secret to living in intimate union with God and God's Son. In Greek, the word here translated as 'abide' is also translated as 'remain,' but that is not a static word. It does not refer to some lethargic state in which one simply bides one's time. Rather, there is a slight edge to the word that implies 'sticking it out' or 'hanging in there' when things get tough." Can you share a story of a time when you had to stick it out with Jesus? How did hanging in there change your relationship with Jesus?

What qualities are essential for a spirituality of the long haul? What sustains people to be in relationship with God over a lifetime?

What are the ways our culture pushes us away from abiding with God? How do you counteract these influences in your own life?

Jesus says, "I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). What is the connection between bearing good fruit and abiding in Jesus? Why do you think Jesus says this?

How would your life change if you were able to truly know that God lived, abided, dwelled, in you? What would you do more of? What would you do less of?

Check-out:

Invite group members to share feedback with each other by using one of these prompts:

- Where did the group have a lot of energy? Where was the energy lacking?
- Where did you feel close to God? Where did you feel far away from God?
- Where did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- Where did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- [If short on time!] Please describe our time together in one word.

Housekeeping details:

- Remind group members that they will start with **Week Six Day One** in their journal tomorrow. The theme of the upcoming week is *We Declare to You*.

- Remind participants that videos are available online, and that the social media campaign will be starting if they would like to participate online.
- Ask for a volunteer to lead worship next week, if this hasn't already been decided.
- If there is a meal or refreshments, remind the group of their decisions regarding food and clean-up, or ask for volunteers.

Worship:

Worship is the time we give thanks to God for all the gifts of our life and for our time together. Because *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* is a gift of the Society for Saint John the Evangelist, a monastic order in the Episcopal church, we recommend using the Daily Office, which is a cornerstone of monastic life.

Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families, found on pages 136-140 of the Book of Common Prayer, offers a wonderful and simple framework for your prayer time together. You may choose to use the recommended psalms and readings found in the BCP; supplement with our recommended readings; prayers and songs; or choose your own. Hymns may be sung a capella, or read as poetry. Be sure to make time for prayer intercessions, and encourage the group to pray for one another and loved ones.

For the week of *Abide in Me*, we recommend:

- Scripture: John 15:1-11
- Hymn: *Abide in me, fast falls the eventide* (Hymnal 1982 #662)
- Collect: *Gracious God, the Giver and Sustainer of Life, help us to abide in you, and to let you abide in us, so that your life becomes our lives, and your will our will, to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

If your group is meeting in the evening, you may also wish to use the service of Compline, found on page 127. This is a brief, beautiful, and very popular service.

Your worship leader may wish to do something more creative or context-specific, like use another liturgy, lead a meditation, invite participants into silence, lead participants in song, or use prayer beads together. There are many other ways to worship God. Taking into consideration the theme for the week, we invite you to explore what that might look like together.

Week Six: We Declare to You

Set-up:

- Chairs need to be arranged around a table or in a circle.
- Devotional helps are set up. This may be a candle, a cross, an icon, or something else that helps remind the group that their time together is blessed by God. They may be placed in the center of the table, or some other visible place.
- A written agenda with expected timing should be clearly visible.
- Ground rules for group expectations are hung where participants can see them.

Needed materials:

- *An extra copy of Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John prayer journal in case a participant forgets his or hers.*
- Books of Common Prayer for each participant. Hymnals optional.
- A bible for use during worship.
- Writing utensils for participants.
- Please see small group activity for possible materials.

Learning outcomes:

- Participants will be able to articulate the importance of sharing the story of God's love with others.

Gathering Prayer:

Invite participants to be seated comfortably either around a table or in a circle of chairs. If there is a candle, light the candle. Invite participants into a period of silence. You may wish to keep silence for 1-4 minutes. However long you decide, let the group know how long it will be, and that you are keeping time. At the end of the silence, pray this or another suitable prayer:

Blessed Savior, send us into the world, so that, like you, we may bear witness to God's light and life. Turn us loose, Lord, to be a channel of your love, an instrument of your compassion, a minister of your grace. Amen.

Check-in:

Using the process of mutual invitation as outlined in "Getting Started: Meeting Jesus" begin the check-in process with your group.

- Where did you see God at work in the world around you this week?
- How was the process of journaling? What surprised you? (*N.B. this is a question about process "How did journaling/praying go for you?" not content "What did you journal about?"*)

Small Group Activity:

As your time together concludes, the brothers are asking how you might take what you've seen, heard or learned out into the world. For this small group activity, participants will prepare a presentation for your parish (or wider!) community.

How you go about creating this presentation will depend on your group's gifts. We recommend that the facilitator present and prepare for only one or two options for the group to work on together. Here are some options for declaring to the world how you have met Jesus:

- Make a short video to post online or to show to your congregation! It could be as simple as different members sitting down in front of the camera and saying where they met Jesus. Or, members could write, "I met Jesus [fill in where/how they met Jesus]" on signs and simply walk on and off of camera one after the other. If you do post online, please use the hashtag, #MeetingJesus.
- Prepare a short presentation for your parish. To make this really affective, consider asking a member or two of your group to tell a personal story about how they met Jesus, or about how their life has been changed by God.
- Talk to your parish leadership and see if the group could offer a story/stories in lieu of a sermon at a point in the near future. Take the time to plan a sermon together. What are your most important take-aways from your time together?
- Make a word cloud, collage, or other art on a posterboard, present it at the announcements or another adult education venue, and display it on the bulletin board.
- Plan a day where the group will go outside the church walls and reach people together. You might consider an act of service, like working together at a food bank or a homeless grate patrol, or a reaching out in love to your neighborhood by offering prayers or other goodwill to passersby. Get creative

about your specific context! How can you remind people of God's immense love?

- Take sidewalk chalk and chalk up the sidewalks around the church and in your neighborhood with encouraging words about God's love.

Small Group Conversation:

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Here are some questions to get your conversation started. You may move through all of them, or get stuck in deep conversation with the first question you ask. You may choose to ask your own question that speaks to the needs of your group. What matters is that participants are engaged with each other. Because these questions are based on the experience of the Living God, they are unique to each person. There is no right or wrong answers, there is only further discussion and exploration of our relationship with God and one another.

Discussion Questions:

We bear witness to God's love because first someone witnessed to us. Who are the people in your life who have witnessed God's love to you?

In the introduction to Week Six, the brothers write, "We are witnesses, both by our words and our deeds, to the Light and Life and Love of God, which have been made known to us in Jesus, our Savior and our Joy." What are the tangible ways which you can make the Light and Life and Love of God known to those around you?

What are the things that get in the way of us sharing our story of how God loves us with others?

God sends us into to the world to declare what we have seen and heard. What is my testimony about God and God's love for the world? What is my gospel (i.e. "good news")?

In the opening prayer, we prayed that we might be made a channel of God's love. What do you think that means? What images are brought to mind?

Check-out:

Invite group members to share feedback with each other by using one of these prompts:

- Where did the group have a lot of energy? Where was the energy lacking?
- Where did you feel close to God? Where did you feel far away from God?
- Where did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- Where did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- [If short on time!] Please describe our time together in one word.

This can also be a time to solicit feedback about the entirety of your time together.

- Are small groups something the group believes the church should continue doing? Are they interested in moving forward together with another topic or bible study?
- What are you most grateful for over the whole of our time together?
- What moments stand out to you as particularly spirit-filled?

Worship:

Worship is the time we give thanks to God for all the gifts of our life and for our time together. Because *Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* is a gift of the Society for Saint John the Evangelist, a monastic order in the Episcopal church, we recommend using the Daily Office, which is a cornerstone of monastic life.

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For the week of *We Declare to You*, we recommend:

- Scripture: 1 John 1:1-5
- Hymn: Come labor on (Hymnal 1982 #541) Lord, you give the great commission (Hymnal 1982 #528; use alternative tunes *Hyfrodol* or *Abbot's Leigh*. You can find this set to *Abbot's Leigh* in Wonder Love and Praise #780) We all are one in mission (Wonder Love and Praise #778)
- Collect: A Prayer attributed to St. Francis (BCP 833)
- It would be appropriate to end your time together by sharing thanksgivings for the particular blessings you have received during your time together.

If your group is meeting in the evening, you may also wish to use the service of Compline, found on page 127. This is a brief, beautiful, and very popular service.

Your worship leader may wish to do something more creative or context-specific, like use another liturgy, lead a meditation, invite participants into silence, lead participants in song, or use prayer beads together. There are many other ways to worship God. Taking into consideration the theme for the week, we invite you to explore what that might look like together.

Thank you for your ministry! We'd love to hear how your small group experience went, and listen to feedback about our resources. You can contact us at facilitationsupport@meetingjesusinjohn.org.