

Small Group Series
SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

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INTRODUCTION

God is generous. Plenty of gifts await those who confess their sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and make Jesus Christ their sole Lord. Paul calls these gifts as “spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3-14). The moment we are born again, these spiritual blessings are given to us. This series deals with enumerating and explaining these blessings. The hope of this series is for new Christians to understand our their new situation, come to a greater appreciation of what God does for and in us, and develop a deeper sense of worship to their generous Savior.

Too often, new believers are not aware of who they have become and what they have received from God. The result is clueless Christians who have no idea about the next steps they should take. They are like someone who won a scholarship to enter a prestigious university but has never read the acceptance letter because no one delivered it to him or her. This study series unpacks the privileges Christians have received that are rightfully theirs.

All of these spiritual blessings, however, imply a level of responsibility. The lessons in this series, therefore, also spell out the implications of these blessings in our Christian life. The reality is that we are responsible for everything we receive from God. We are blessed to be a blessing. Therefore, although this series is primarily about dealing with how blessed we are, it also provides room for us to reflect on what it means to receive God’s grace.

Are you ready to discover your new identity in Jesus Christ? Are you excited to know God’s lavish grace for you? If so, dive into the lessons with enthusiasm.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This workbook is designed for ease of use. It practically provides a step-by-step guideline in conducting a lesson. This booklet can be used as a Bible study guide for one-on-one settings or for small groups. The format is intentionally designed for discussions, not lecture-type interactions. The leader should view himself or herself as a facilitator, not an elementary teacher spoon-feeding students.

It is important for leaders to do a personal study of the lessons before attempting to facilitate them. They should have a personal copy of this booklet. Leaders should also encourage their members to have their own copy. It is also very important that members should have a pen to use during the sessions. Bible passages and suggested discussion questions are already provided so that leaders and members will not have to switch back and forth between this booklet and their Bibles. Spaces are also available for the members to write their answers. As much as possible, leaders should not divert from the teaching topic. They should stick to what is in the workbook.

The booklet contains lessons for six sessions. Group meetings will last approximately one hour. There are four parts in every session: Warm Up, Word, What Now? and Work.

WARM UP contains questions and activities the group can do to help prepare the members for the study. The group should not spend more than 7 minutes in this section. It is only meant as an introduction to get the brains of the members to start thinking.

WORD contains the actual Bible lessons. Here, the group will read Scripture passages together, answer the provided questions, and discuss other related matters. Again, leaders should not lecture.

WHAT NOW? provides an avenue for the members to reflect on the implications of the lesson for them and in their lives. Members will be challenged to go beyond an intellectual study of the Word to the realm of application. Suggested questions and activities are also provided in this section.

WORK spells what learners should do outside of the session. It is probably more appropriate to call this section “Homework.” This aspect of the lesson hopes to reinforce what members have learned during the session, challenging them to practice immediately what they learned.

The booklet is very easy to use and the lessons are very straightforward. Pray that the Spirit of Truth will teach you and guide you as you go through these lessons.

Soli Deo gloria!

SESSION 1 | FORGIVENESS

“If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness” (1 John 1:9)

Our God is a merciful God. He knows everything because nothing is hidden from Him. He knows our deepest and darkest secrets. God’s knowledge of our true selves does not lead Him to hate us. Instead, He looks at us with compassionate eyes. Of course, like any parent who sees the wrong-doings of his child, God is angry at our acts. But His love is greater than His anger. He is ready to forgive and extend His arms to embrace us. He is ready to forget our past and give us a fresh start.

WARM-UP

Have you ever felt guilty about something you have done? When was the most recent time you felt like this, and what was it about?

If we ever have felt guilty over something we have done—intentionally or unintentionally—this is an indication that God is at work in our lives. The amazing fact is that immediately after we sin, God is already knocking at our hearts. The guilt we feel is actually God’s silent whisper, urging us to do something. To be convicted is a sign of grace. It is the evidence that God has not given up on us. It is a sign that God really loves us.

What does the Bible say if we listen to God’s conviction and ask for forgiveness? The Bible is very clear: *“If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness” (1 John 1:9).*

WORD

As human beings, we can understand the importance of being forgiven. In every relationship we have—whether it is with our parents, or friends, or lovers—we often commit blunders that offend each other. If others do not know how to forgive, we will not have any friends. And if we do not know how to forgive others, then we still will not have any friends. Forgiveness is essential in all relationships, and this is especially true in our relationship with God.

1 Why do we need forgiveness from God?

*“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23)
“Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)*

What do the preceding verses tell us about humanity’s condition?

The sad reality is that even though we are created in the image of God, we do not measure up to God’s standards because of sin. Like children who constantly fail their parents, we continuously let God down. Because of sin deeply rooted in our hearts, we have an innate tendency to be rebellious. We do what we know we should not do, and do not do what we know we should do. Paul expressed his frustration about himself quite vividly: *“Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?” (Romans 7:24)*

2 What does it mean to be forgiven by God?

Paul’s evaluation about the human condition is striking. We are miserable in sin. The good news is that one of the greatest gifts of being a follower of Jesus Christ is forgiveness. To be forgiven is quite simple. It is like being in a court room. The accuser has solid evidences against you. Truth be told, you really committed the crimes the accuser has against you. Because you know that the accusations are right, you plead guilty. Jesus Christ comes to your aid and speaks to the Judge on your behalf. When the Judge passes the verdict, you are surprised to hear that you are acquitted of all the charges. Instead of being condemned as a criminal, you are released to start anew. Moreover, the Judge orders that all the records of your crimes be burnt.

The New Testament is rich with verses that speak about what it means to be forgiven. Let us look at four of them:

“If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness” (1 John 1:9)

What does it mean to be cleansed from all wickedness?

“I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins” (Hebrews 8:12)

What does it mean for God to forget our sins?

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19)

What does it mean for God to stop counting our sins against Him?

“So now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1)

What does it mean to be condemned, and why is it important that we no longer feel condemnation?

Forgiveness is the gift of God. We receive it when we confess our sins and decide to follow Jesus Christ. Being forgiven means freedom from the guilt and punishment of our past sins. Once forgiven, we are also given the privilege of entering the kingdom of God. The change from our old state to the new is radical.

“Don’t you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

WHAT NOW?

Have you already experienced the freedom that comes from God in the forgiveness of sin? If not, or you are not sure about it, then God's promise is for you: *"If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness"* (1 John 1:9). You may pray the following prayer to seize God's promises:

Lord, thank you for making me realize my sins. I recognize my sinfulness. I admit my wrongdoings. I admit that I have sinned against You and others. I confess my shortcomings and rebellion against Your commands. Please forgive me of my sins. Blot out my transgressions and make me white as snow. Create in me a clean heart, and give me the joy of salvation. I pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, who died for me. Amen.

I know that I have been forgiven today: _____
Witness: _____.

Of course, receiving God's forgiveness entails responsibilities on our part. This is not a receive-and-run experience. Paul, for instance, wrote that we should not misunderstand and abuse God's grace. The facts that God is ready to forgive and that He is gracious should not give us a license to sin.

"Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2)

What are the sins that you have been forgiven from? How can you avoid doing them again?

The story of the adulterous woman who received the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in John 8:1-11 reveals to us what we should do as people who have been rescued from the punishment of sin. The last bit of the conversation between Jesus and the woman is important for us to remember.

"Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, 'Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?' 'No, Lord,' she said. And Jesus said, 'Neither do I. Go and sin no more'" (John 8:10-11)

WORK

Because you have already been forgiven by God, it is also proper that you forgive other people of their sins against you. This week, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the people against whom you hold grudges. And may the love of the God in your heart enable you to forgive them. List the names of the people you know you need to forgive here:

Also, in order to prepare for the next session, read and meditate on Romans 6:16-21.

SESSION 2 | FREEDOM

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36)

Everyone loves freedom. Even children love being unconstrained, leaving their poor parents gasping for air when they run from them. Youths of today have “freedom” as one of their major battle cry. They feel that traditional systems and rules clip their wings, so they argue that giving them total freedom will enable them to soar high and achieve their fullest potential. As much as possible, we would like to be free from external control.

When we follow Jesus Christ, one of the gifts given to us is freedom. This freedom, however, is not the ability to do whatever we want to do. The freedom that we receive from God is freedom *from sin* and freedom *for* God.

WARM-UP

Unfortunately, slavery is not something that existed only in the past. Problems of human trafficking still abound today, where people are sold and forced to hard and indecent work. We see people in the news who are bound to the vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment, and large families. Moreover, at the individual or personal level, people find themselves as slaves to their own desires, or to other people’s power, or to the pressures of the world. Addiction to alcohol, drugs, pornography and other things is also a stark reality in the world. For all of these people, the cry for freedom is especially loud.

What are different kinds of bondage today? What bondages are common for men or for women? What bondages are common for youths? Share your thoughts.

Knowing that there are many forms of personal bondages today, the world is quite quick to provide cures. Medicines and pills are continuously being invented as antidotes to what the world interprets as hormonal imbalances. Psychiatry is a booming field that seeks to address what are known as mental and psychological problems. This means that even the secular world realizes the critical issues of bondages and the need to address them.

WORD

The good news of the Bible is this: *“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”* (John 8:36). But why is freedom an important part of the gospel of the Lord? What bondages are we freed from when we become Christians? Can we truly be called followers of Jesus Christ if we are still in bondage to something?

1 Slaves to Sin and to the Devil

Before being set free by God, we were slaves to sin and to the deeds of darkness. Paul was clear about this in Romans 6:16-21.

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

What do we learn from this passage about our previous slavery to sin? What are the evidences that one is a slave to sin?

What does it mean to be *“slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness”* (Rom 6:19)?

What participation does humanity have in our own bondage to sin? What did Jesus mean when he said that *“everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin”* (John 8:34)?

There was once a king who summoned one of his blacksmiths into his presence, and ordered him to make a chain. The blacksmith, in obedience to the king's command, went to forge the chain. When it was done, he brought it to the king, but he was ordered to take it away and make it even longer. Upon finishing the upgrade, he brought it again to the king, and he was ordered to lengthen it again. When the work was finished, the king looked at the chain and commanded the servants to bind the blacksmith's hands and feet with the chain he had made and cast him into prison. This is what the devil does to humanity. He makes them forge their own chains, and then binds them with these chains, and casts them into the darkness.

2 Freedom in Christ

But God is rich in mercy. Even though being in bondage is the result of our bad decisions, He does not come to us with an "I told you so!" Instead, He comes to our aid, and sets us free. Because of our own choices, we have given authority to the devil over our lives. The devil's authority, therefore, is false and temporary. We can be set free – although not on our own power, but through Jesus Christ. In fact, the gospel says that one of the reasons Jesus came to our world was to redeem us.

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23-24).

What does it mean to be redeemed in Christ Jesus?

One of the terms used to describe our salvation is redemption. To be redeemed basically means to be bought back. To redeem something is like someone who goes to the pawnshop to take back what was his originally by paying the appropriate price. Applied to salvation, the emphasis is that we are originally God's beloved possessions, but because of sin, we have become slaves. As slaves, our lives were owned by the devil. However, God loves us so much that He does not want to see us suffer as slaves to an alien power. But the price of redemption is costly.

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45)

What can we learn about our salvation from the fact that Jesus Christ gave his life as a ransom?

It is through the death of Christ and His blood that we are freed from captivity to sin, death, and the devil. God bought us back, so that we can enjoy the privilege of being His treasured possessions. Because we were bought back at a costly price, Paul wrote, we must “honor God with our bodies” (1 Cor 6:20) and “not become slaves of human beings” (1 Cor 7:23). We must always remember that because Christ freed us, our lives are not our own. We belong to God.

WHAT NOW?

1 Independence Day

The blacksmith was powerless against his own chains. Because it was he who made the chains, he knew its strength. He knew that his situation was hopeless. He was tied to an unbreakable chain under the command of a ruthless king. So he gave up hope. But to his delight, the king was defeated by the rightful ruler, and the new king reaches out to him in prison. The new king removes his chain from him, setting him free.

“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36)

What freedom have you experienced over the last few months or weeks? From what bad habits and addictions were you saved from?

If you have not yet experienced God’s gift of total freedom, and if there are still things that continuously bind you, God is willing to set you free. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in your life, because as Paul said, “*where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*” (2 Cor 3:17). The price for your redemption or ransom has already been paid by Jesus Christ, and nothing should ever hold you back anymore. Your only role is to allow Him to work in your life and set you free.

If there are still things that are enslaving you (like pornography, alcohol, cigarettes, or other bad habits), list them here, and ask your leader to pray for you.

2 The Freed Life

The blacksmith, having been completely freed, was extremely thankful to the new king. So he made two vows. First, he vowed to never ever make chains again, no matter who commands it. Secondly, he vowed to use his life in service for the king. He realized that he was given a new life. He would have died anyway, so there is no better way to use his second chance at life other than serving the king.

What visible signs of gratitude would you like to do in response to your newly found freedom?

WORK

Do you have family members or friends who also need to experience freedom in Christ? Make plans to help them by using the following table:

PRAY		PAT		PROCLAIM	
I will pray for	When	How will I encourage	When	What will I share	When
Luis	Mon, 9PM	Invite for dinner	Oct 5, 12, 19, 26	My testimony	Nov 10

Also, in preparation for the next session, read and mediate on Luke 15:11-24 and 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

SESSION 3 | RELATIONSHIP

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19-20).

Salvation is not about being a part of religion. Christianity is not about commitment to an institution. Our allegiance as Christians is not to a denomination or a group. Being a Christian is not about going to a cell group or to a worship gathering or entering a worship hall once a week. Christianity is about being in relationship, but our primary relationship is none other than with God. We deceive ourselves if we consider ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ when all we do is sit down at church every now and then. It may be granted that young converts may think this way, but we have to come to a point in our lives when we must realize that Christianity is not about good music, comfortable chairs, awesome sermons, generous monetary giving, and membership in church committees. When all of these are stripped away, all that is left must be our intimate knowledge and relationship with God.

WARM-UP

Do you have anybody at your school, workplace or neighborhood whom you see on a regular basis, but have no relationship with? These are the people that you know by face or by name, but do not interact with at all.

Many people’s relationship with God is only at the level of knowing *about* Him. They know and acknowledge that He exists. They sometimes hear Him speaking, or they hear about Him through the stories of other people. In a supposed Christian nation such as the Philippines and especially in an age of information, there is probably virtually no Filipino who has zero knowledge about God. But the question is: Do they really know God, or do they only know about God?

What is the difference between knowing God and knowing about God?

WORD

A young man walked towards a young attractive woman. This woman is, of course, a stranger. The man did not know anything about her. In fact, it was the first time he ever saw her. He did not know that a woman like her even existed. But the young man approached her anyway. He wanted to introduce himself to the woman. By approaching the woman, his intentions were obvious. He did not wish for the woman to remain a stranger to him. He wanted to leave the “stranger zone” and at least enter the “friend zone.” This is what God does to us. He makes the initiative to come to us so that we might have a relationship with Him.

1 Strangers, Aliens and Enemies

Even though we do not know God, He knows us. Because of sin, we have been separated from Him. Such a separation was radical so that our lack of contact with Him even made us somewhat forget about Him. We were so used to not having Him in our lives that He was no longer a variable in our lives. This is the human situation in relationship with God. The Bible is actually quite clear about how bad our relationship with God was before we were saved:

“While we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” (Rom 5:10, NIV)

What does it mean to be enemies of God?

“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds...” (Col 1:21)

What does it mean to be alienated from God?

“Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12)

What does it mean to be strangers from God?

The three passages above indicate our relationship with God. Because of sin, we have become God's enemies. We made God our enemies because of our disobedience, rebellion, and non-submission to Him and His will. Because we have committed sins against Him, we have intentionally distanced ourselves from Him. Because we are too ashamed and guilty of our sins, it became uncomfortable to be in His presence, leading us to alienate ourselves from Him. His presence reminds us of our sins, so as much as we can, we try to avoid Him. Because we have been running away from Him for a long time, we have become strangers to Him. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "*Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear*" (Isa 59:2).

2 Reconciled

One of the greatest stories of being reconciled to God is the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-24.

There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me." And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants'." And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to celebrate.

What do we learn about humanity in the parable?

What do we learn about God in the parable?

What do we learn about being reconciled to God in the parable?

The parable is very enlightening. It is the only story in the Bible in which God is said to have run. Phillip, Craig and Dean wrote a song based from the parable, and the words are very inspiring:

Almighty God, The Great I Am, Immovable Rock
Omnipotent, Powerful, awesome Lord.
Victorious Warrior, Commanding King of Kings,
Mighty Conqueror and the only time,
The only time I ever saw him run,
Was when...

He ran to me, He took me in His arms,
Held my head to His chest,
Said "My son's come home again!"
Lifted my face, wiped the tears from my eyes,
With forgiveness in His voice He said,
"Son, do you know I still love You?"

And because we are already forgiven of our sins, we can now come to God with confidence. If someone does evil against us, and we have not forgiven them yet, our only relationship with them is that of hatred. But the moment we forgive them, the once broken relationship can be restored. This is the same in our relationship with God. Because He already forgave us, we can return to Him and enjoy the good relationship that once existed between us and God. Once shame and guilt have been erased from the equation, we can re-start our relationship with God. Our forgiveness and reconciliation with God is through the work of Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and humanity.

"Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility... and... reconcile[d] us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:13-16)

What does it mean to have been reconciled to God?

What does it mean to have peace with God?

What does it mean to be members of the household of God?

WHAT NOW?

As Paul wrote, “since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). One of the immediate consequences of our reconciliation with God is that we now have confidence to draw near to the throne of grace and pray for mercy and help from God. But being reconciled to God also entails responsibilities.

1 Status: In a Relationship

Our relationship status changes as soon as we are reconciled to God. We are no longer single, or are in a complicated relationship. We are now married to Jesus Christ, and we are in a monogamous relationship.

What does it mean to be in relationship with God? What are the expectations of the relationship? What do we do as people who are in relationship with God?

Because we are already in relationship with God, we must not look for other gods to love, serve, and worship. God does not like love triangles. He was very clear when He said that we should not have other gods other than Him, for He is a jealous God. Also, if we love Him, we must love Him with our everything: mind, soul, body, and strength.

2 Relationship Goals

Relationships are always dynamic. This is true even in our relationship with God. Because we are in relationship with a Person, we cannot treat Him as if He is a rock that would not mind even we just put Him on a shelf for display only. God wants us to develop an ever deepening intimate relationship with Him. We must be intentional in this.

What are your goals in your relationship with God this year?

How do we maintain our relationship with God? List the things that you should do and not do.

Of course, we are not called only to maintain our relationship with God. We are called to grow deeper in love with Him. How do we achieve this?

WORK

Having been reconciled to God in Jesus Christ, we are truly blessed. But there are still many around us who need to experience God’s forgiveness and embrace. It is true that “Christ reconciled us to himself,” but we are also given “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18-19). God entrusted to us the message of His reconciling love to the world.

This week, approach five people (strangers or friends) and share with them the good news of forgiveness and reconciliation. The table below will help you plan.

REACH		RECITE	RESPONSE
I will approach...	When	I will share the verse	How did he/she respond?
Anna	Mon, 5PM	John 3:16	She said she wanted to hear more of the gospel.

Also, in preparation for the next session, read and mediate on Ephesians 1:4-5 and 1 John 3:9-10.

SESSION 4 | ADOPTION

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)

Once we receive forgiveness from God, we are also reconciled to Him. Because all our sins are wiped away, God no longer has reasons to be angry at us. Once the thing that stands in between God and us (sin) is done away with, harmonious relationship follows. It is like being forgiven by a friend. Once we are forgiven, we can resume being with one another—as we have once been—and enjoy each other’s company.

The Bible says, however, that the relationship between God and us, once we receive forgiveness, is not only a relationship between friends. Rather, our relationship with God is that of a parent with his or her child. This is the most intimate relationship in the world. Like the Israelites, those who enter into a covenant with God can receive the words of Yahweh: *“You are the sons of the living God” (Hosea 1:10)*. This is the destiny that God intended for us (Eph 1:5).

WARM-UP

What is the ideal parent-child relationship? What are the characteristics of this relationship? In particular, what do parents do for their children?

Some people measure God’s parenting nature and skills by looking at their experiences with their own earthly parents, especially with their fathers. This is not proper and fair. The stereotype that fathers receive is not really nice. Human fathers are typically presented as aloof, unconcerned, idiotic, or high-tempered. But these descriptions should not be used to measure God’s Fatherhood. We should not project on to God the failures of our earthly fathers. In fact, our earthly fathers should be measured in the light of the Fatherhood of God.

If God is the perfect example or model of fatherhood, what should fatherhood look like on earth?

WORD

The Bible is clear: those who receive Jesus Christ and believe in Him are given the right to become God's children. This is one of the gifts of God to us the moment we are saved. We are not only freed from bondage; we are accepted into the family of God. This is only by grace. In the words of John: "*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are*" (1 John 3:1).

1 The Gift of Adoption

What does it mean to be adopted into God's family?

"Adoption" is used to describe the reality of our entrance in the family of God because only Jesus Christ is God's son *by nature*. We only become God's children *by grace*. To be adopted means that we were originally not God's children. We were children of someone else. Our surnames were different, and we belonged to a different household. But who were we before God took us in and made us His very own? There are two possible answers about our previous identity:

a. Children of the Devil

Jesus told the Jews that because they do not believe in Him, they are the children of their father, who is the devil: "*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires*" (John 8:44). What does it mean to be children of the devil?

b. Orphans

We were lost and needy orphans who have fallen to depression and extreme poverty (Ps 10:14).

What are the characteristics of orphans that also characterize those who are not yet saved?

“So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal 3:24-26)

What is the difference between being under a Guardian and being children of God?

The good news is that when we believed in Jesus Christ, we became God’s children. We are no longer children of the devil or orphans. Paul wrote that it is Jesus Christ Himself who came to earth precisely so that we might receive the gift of adoption: *“When we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:3-5)*. It is because it is He who saves us that Jesus calls us His brothers (Heb 2:11).

2 New Name

By law, one who is adopted in a new family will automatically get the surname of the parents who adopted the child. Hence, the one who is adopted receives a new identity and a new name. In fact, it could be said that an orphan does not even have an identity and a name until he or she is adopted into a family. Until someone adopts a child, he or she might have a first name, but without a last name, his or her identity is truly lacking. Or, adoption can mean a complete change of names and identity. A child’s original last name is legally changed upon adoption. Hence, his or her identity is completely brand new.

What change of identity happened to you when you became a Christian?

What does it mean to be baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19)?

To be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit also means getting a new identity. Your past identity is gone. It does not matter who you were or what you have done in the past. It does not matter what other people knew about you, or how they labelled you. The moment you are born again, you are no longer defined by your feelings, or by the opinions of others, or by your own circumstances. You are no longer defined by your successes or failures, or by your race or gender. You are now defined by your new name. This can be likened to a woman getting married in Philippine culture. When a woman gets married, she gets a new last name. Hence, the woman with a new last name has a new identity and will be known as such.

3 Benefits and Privileges

Although some people are offended that the Bible does not use gender-inclusive nouns and pronouns, we can actually learn something important in the fact that we are called “sons of God” (Gal 3:26; 4:5-6). In the Roman empire, when the New Testament was written, the adopted son not only had the right to the name and citizenship of the person who made the adoption. The adopted son also had the right to inherit his parents’ property. These were rights that were not granted to an adopted daughter.

“If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29)

As heirs of God, what inheritances are waiting for us?
What awaits the children of God?

“So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (Gal 4:7)

What difference does it make that we are called sons and not slaves?

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons” (Rom 8:14-15)

What fears have we been freed from now as children of God?

The other benefit in being children of God is related to freedom. In Roman law, slaves are not even considered as persons. Basically, they do not own their lives and their actions. They are not free to make decisions on their own apart from their masters' biddings. They do not even have the privilege of voting. So when Paul contrasted believers as children of God to slaves, he was pointing out the fact that God's children have all the rights and privileges that others may not have.

WHAT NOW?

Being children of God is a gift, but it is a gift with attached responsibilities. We do not only receive the benefits of being children, but we also accept the burdens of being God's beloved

children. When we join the family of God, we begin to carry the name of God. Like a married woman carries the name of her husband, whatever she does implicates her husband, whether she likes it or not and whether she cares to admit it or not. As such, when God accepts us as His sons and daughters, He opens Himself to a huge risk.

So what must we do as children of God? How must we behave?

1 Living as Children of God

The Apostle John wrote with extreme clarity. In 1 John 1:9-10, he did not only speak about the concrete evidence of being children of God, but he also argued that our actions determine whose children are we.

“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 1:9-10).

What are the evidences that one is a child of God? What are the things we should proactively do as children of God?

Very clearly, there are behaviors and practices that do not fit the nature of the children of God. Our changed identity is not only in name, but in action and in truth. Going back to the marriage analogy, once a woman is married to her husband, she does not only take his surname, she also submits to him as her husband (Eph 5:22-23). Her life is never the same. There are things that become inappropriate for her to do the moment she took his name for hers.

2 Profaning the Name

How can we give glory to the name of God?
How can we profane His name?

Because we receive the name of God when we become His children, if our lives are not characterized by holy living, then instead of bringing glory and honor to the name of Christ, we profane Him. This was precisely where the Israelites failed. God's complaint to them was that "they defiled my holy name by their detestable practices" (Ezek 43:8).¹ In the words of Yahweh, *"But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.' But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came"* (Ezek 39:20-21). Quite simply, it is either we profane God's name through our actions and cause people to ridicule our God, or we live our lives as transformed men and women, and thus make the nations know God's holy and saving name.

The reality is that the world's spotlights are focused on us, watching our lives, scrutinizing our intentions, and looking for signs of inconsistencies. Whether we like it or not, we live in a cynical world where people delight in talking about the evils of others. Sadly, Christianity has dimmed its light and made its salt bland by the broadcasted sins committed by Christians, particularly its religious leaders. It is when our testimony is damaged that the Name of our Holy God is tainted.

WORK

We may be grieving our Father in heaven or profaning His name without us knowing it, especially if we never spend time to reflect and search our own lives. The following questions can help as we engage of self-introspection this week. Be honest with your responses.

What behavior do I still have that is not befitting a child of God?

What practices should I give up as a child of God?

¹ See also Exo 20:7; Lev 18:21; 19:12; 20:1-5; 22:32; Prov 30:9; Isa 52:5-6; Jer 34:16; Ezek 13:19; 20:9, 14, 22, 27, 39; 22:16; 29:14; 36:20; Amos 2:7; Mal 1:12.

What hobbies should I give up as a child of God?

Also, in preparation for the next session, read and mediate on John 3:1-8 and Ephesians 4:22-24.

SESSION 5 | NEW LIFE

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17)

God’s gifts to believers encompass the past, the present, and the future. Forgiveness is God’s remedy to our past sins. Once we are forgiven, God forgets our pasts. Freedom and reconciliation are God’s gifts that enable us to live in the present. We are freed from the bondage of sin so that we might be able to live now in relationship with God, our new Master. In addition to these gifts, God also receives us as His children. This happens not only because we believed in Jesus Christ, but also because we are “born again.” This is what we call “new birth,” which enables us not only to forget the past but also to have a new future. New birth allows us to start anew. Along with adoption, new birth points us to a new way of life that should determine our lives today and the future.

WARM-UP

Every New Year, one of the most heard phrases is “New Year’s Resolution.” Have you ever made a New Year’s resolution before? Can you remember some of the things in your list?

There is something alluring and magical about a new beginning. The incoming New Year usually brings great excitement in people’s hearts. The New Year reminds people that the present can be a moment of the past, along with its painful experiences and memories. It makes people pause to think about their own selves and imagine a better image of the future. It makes people take their lives seriously and compels them to take action for their future’s sake. Some see their weight and vows to exercise and diet. Some notice their poor financial record and decide to do extra effort to save. Some realize their attitudes and behaviors and promise to do better. Whatever it is that people write as their New Year’s resolutions, there is always the sense of desiring a new beginning for a better tomorrow.

WORD

The dream of a better future was probably what prompted Nicodemus, a Pharisee, to come and converse with Jesus. Their conversation is recorded in John 3:1-7:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'."

What are common misunderstandings about being born again? What do people think when they hear the phrase "born again?"

What does it mean to be born again?

1 Born from Above

Like Nicodemus, the phrase "born again" can easily confuse us. It can even lead to misunderstandings. But thankfully, Jesus gives us clues about that the new birth means in John 3. In fact, it is precisely because of Nicodemus' confused question—*"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born"*—that prompted Jesus to give a few more details about new birth. Actually, Jesus' original statement in verse 3 already explains what the new birth means. In NIV and ESV, the translation is rightly "born again," but in the original Greek, the original phrase can also be translated as "born from above."

What does it mean to be born from above?

Being “born from above” simply means being born of God. This is related to Session 4 that deals with our adoption as children of God. When we are born again, our identity is no longer grounded in our earthly relations. Even our earthly families become secondary. Our identity now comes from God. We are members of God’s household (Eph 2:19). Jesus proclaimed that He is from above (John 8:23), and because He is our brother, we also need to be born from above. Because we are united to Christ, we belong to “those who are of heaven” (1 Cor 15:48). Because we are born from above, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20).

“He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all” (John 3:31)

Why does it matter that we do not just belong to the earth, and that we belong to heaven and up above?

The answer is simple, and it is spelled by Paul: *“I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor 15:50)*. Unless we are born again, Jesus told Nicodemus, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

2 Born of the Spirit

Jesus also explains that to be born again is to be born of the Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit is God and who comes from above, it might seem that Jesus just repeated Himself here. In reality, however, there is something quite profound in the fact that we must be born of the Spirit.

What does it mean to be born of the Spirit?

One of the available clues that will help us understand what it means to be born of the Spirit is to look at its contrast: being “born of the flesh.” Jesus Himself makes this comparison: *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (John 3:6). Flesh in this verse may refer to our human nature, which is sinful from the moment we are born (Ps 51:5). The result of being born in the flesh is this: *“We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind”* (Eph 2:3). This is the condition of all humanity, but God gives us a second chance so that we can start anew. This new life is possible in a second birth that comes from God.

Ironic in John 3:1-7 is the fact that Jesus told a Pharisee to be born again. A Pharisee is a religious leader who keeps the law to the letter. If there was one who was righteous in relation to obedience, it would be a Pharisee. And yet, Jesus told him that he cannot enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again. What is the significance of the fact that even Nicodemus had to be born again?

3 A New Start

What happens when we are born again? An important passage to look at is Ezekiel 36:25-27, *“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”*

According to Ezekiel 36:25-27, what are the characteristics of those who are born of the Spirit?

A good analogy of something born again is a butterfly. Before its new birth, the butterfly is a caterpillar that crawls on the ground and on trees. It would take a lot of effort for it to feed on

leaves. Given that the caterpillar is a tiny creature, it is also subject to a lot of dangers. Its mobility is also limited. The moment it transforms into a butterfly, however, great changes happen to it. It has more freedom to go wherever it wants to go with greater ease. Its lifestyle radically changes. Its play place, habitation, and interests change. It even changes its food. The transformation that its new birth brings to it is absolutely radical.

WHAT NOW?

A butterfly will live as a butterfly. Although it was once a caterpillar, once it turned into a beautiful butterfly, it would no longer crawl on the ground and do its former wormy routine. Instead, it would begin to live its life as a butterfly, flying over plants and flowers. This is the same for us who are born again. We are a new creation where the old is gone and the new has come. Therefore, our lifestyle and interests should change. What kind of life is expected from those who are born again?

1 Life in the Spirit

Because we are born of the Spirit, we must live in the Spirit. Check the following verses and see what they teach us about the Christian life.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Gal 5:16-17).

What are the desires of the flesh that are contrary to living in the Spirit?

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law... If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23, 25).

What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit?

To keep in step with the Spirit means to live as the Spirit guides. It is to walk alongside the Holy Spirit, go where He goes and do what He wants us to do. In contemporary language, it is to be in complete sync with the Spirit. It is to harmonize our steps with the Spirit, like soldiers in a parade. Our actions are careful and measured. This does not entail mere obedience to the Spirit's guidance, but a willful regulation of our emotions, intellect, and will in accordance with the Spirit. We want to live in accordance with the Spirit that we are afraid of grieving Him.

2 The Sanctified Life

A tadpole that already transformed into a frog will no longer swim in the muddy puddle. It would abandon its former habits of swimming with one tail, because it already possesses legs. Going out of the pond is his entrance to a new life. This is the change that happens to those who are born again. They realize the bondage of their previous existence and appreciate the grace of their current selves. This realization compels them to live a life pleasing to their Savior and Maker.

The appropriate response for the new life we have in Christ was recorded by Paul in Romans 6:1-4, 6-7, 10-11, 12-13

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin... For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

What do we learn from the passage about how we must live?

WORK

Observe yourself in the next few days, and fill the table in order for you to see the changes that has happened to you when you were born again.

	In the past, I...	Now, I...
on entertainment		
on time		
on money		
on relationships		
on God		
on where I want to go		
on priorities		

Are there things in your life that you realize needs to be changed? List them here.

HOMEWORK

In preparation for the next session, read and mediate on 1 Peter 2:4-12.

SESSION 6 | FELLOWSHIP

“We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another?” (Rom 12:5)

Although the Christian faith involves a very personal decision which no one can do on our behalf, the Christian life is not individualistic. The spiritual blessings of salvation covered in the previous sessions are received by individuals. This does not mean, however, that the corporate aspect should be neglected. There are others who have received the same spiritual blessings that we have received. The Christian life is not lived in isolation. As the saying goes, “no man is an island” existing on its own and only for its own. The moment we become followers of Jesus Christ, whether we like it or not, we belong to the body of Christ or the Church. This is a part of God’s design for us. The Christian faith is lived before God in the context of the community that God Himself organized. In the words of Paul, becoming a follower of Jesus Christ is like being engrafted into a tree with already existing branches.

WARM-UP

Especially in the Philippines, there are those who claim to be Christians but do not like to go to church or become a part of a local congregation. What are their usual reasons?

People who do not want to be a part of the church usually justify their decision and action by saying that the most important part of being a Christian is one’s relationship with God. In one sense, they are right. But this does not mean that the most important thing should lead one to neglect the other important elements. If one takes a licensure examination, for example, the most important thing is to answer the questions correctly. But if the examinee only answers the questions and forgets to write his name on the answer sheet, then he would not get even a single point, no matter how right his answers are. The Christian life is not a matter of picking some elements that are comfortable with us and neglecting all others. Just as it is important to have an intimate relationship with God, it is also important to engage the aspects of the Christian life. One of these important aspects is our participation and belongingness in the body of Christ, the Church.

WORD

More than it is often recognized, being a part of the body of Christ and belonging to a local congregation is one of God's spiritual blessings to believers. We can only imagine if Jesus Christ had only chosen one disciple, who was left all alone the moment Jesus ascended to heaven. What loneliness he would have felt. Jesus gathered a band of brothers so that each of them had people they can rely on and find strength from. This is the strength and advantage of a community.

1 Members of the Body

The New Testament strongly insists that Christians are a part of the body of Christ. Paul, in particular, was adamant in arguing that we are members of the body. Read the following passage below to determine why it is important for us to recognize our belonging and participation in the body.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Cor 12:13-27)

Why is it important to recognize that Christians are a part of the body of Christ?

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one

bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:16-17)

What does it mean to participate in the body of Christ?

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:19-21).

What does it mean to belong to the household of God?

In some ancient cultures, to be called by one’s first name was considered as an insult. The idea is that one’s personal identity is always related to a family or a place. As such, there is no such person as Apple, but only Apple Deticio or Apple the daughter of Darwin or Apple of Antipolo. Going back to Session 4 on Adoption, the moment we become Christians, we acquire a new name. Hence, our identity is now tied to the names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In addition to this, we become recognized as members of the body of Christ. Our identity becomes completely connected to the new community and family we belong to.

2 Two is Better than One

Explain the benefits or advantages of becoming an active part of the church.

One of the greatest advantages of being a part of a community is the possibility of mutual encouragement. We encourage others and others encourage us. We rub each other's shoulders. We offer counsel to one another. We pray together. We eat together. We share each other's burdens. Paul admonished the believers in Thessalonica: *"Encourage and build one another other up"* (1 Thess 5:11). Being with like-minded people who share the same passions and beliefs has a psychological and emotional effect on us. Just being with others who are like us lifts us up.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:24-25)

What does it mean to neglect one another and be neglected by others?

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecc 4:9-12)

Why is it important to stick with one another?

God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:24-26).

What do we learn from this passage about our being a part of the body of Christ?

To start grilling using coals, one would naturally light the fire in order to light the coals. But not all the coals will catch fire. In fact, it is not necessary for all the coals to be lit. Just a few coals will be enough, as they will become the catalysts to light the other coals around them. A piece of coal that is separated from the group will not be lit, and will therefore be useless. Moreover, a lit coal that goes astray and gets separated from the other live coals is more likely to be snuffed out earlier than the others. Each live coal radiates heat to one another, which then helps each coal maintain their light. This is also true in our Christian lives. We have to be with other Christians in fellowship in order for our fire to continue.

3 Growth

Another importance of being with other believers is related to our Christian growth. Every one of us needs encouragement, guidance, teaching, and rebukes. All of these happen when we belong to a local congregation or a small group that meet regularly. Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Eph 4:11-16).

What are the works of the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers?

How can we grow together until we attain “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ?”

WHAT NOW? / WORK

Being a part of the church entails benefits and privileges. In particular, we can have access to the various spiritual activities with others that can ensure our growth. Being a part of the church does not only mean attending the service every Sunday morning. A Christian whose only contact with God and with others is limited to Sunday services only is more likely to fall in his or her faith as time progresses. In order to prevent this from happening, every Christian should participate in the group activities and programs of the church.

1 Means of Grace

The church is a body of believers who share the same faith and spiritual goals. One of the reasons why it is crucial to join a local congregation is because of the availability of organized group activities and programs that we can participate in throughout the year. A Christian does not really need to attend all of these group programs, but he or she must join some of them.

In order for you to join some of these activities, investigate your preferred local congregation and their available group programs. Fill the table below, and make plans which of these are good for you.

What are the church activities?		I will join...
Weekly	Sunday service	✓
Monthly	Men's fellowship	✓
Quarterly		

Specials	Spiritual Retreat	✓

2 Church Within the Church

One of the most important practices in churches around the world today is small group meetings throughout the week. This is not a new innovation, but something that even the early church already did. It is a small gathering of people meeting in homes or other places for the purpose of encouraging one another, studying the Word, sharing praises and burdens, praying for one another, and fellowship. This was what Luke described as happening in Acts 2:42, *“they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*

Because being in a small group is important, it is good to consider joining one immediately, if we are still not a part of one. Answer the questions below to prepare yourself in joining a small group.

1. What are my current needs as a follower of Jesus Christ?

2. What are my available days and times?

3. What small group interaction do I prefer: discussion, Bible study, prayer, or just fellowship?

4. Are there small group meetings that are close to where I am?

5. What can I pro-actively do in order to join a small group?

3 Service

Aside from attending regular services and group activities, and joining a small group, it is ideal for a Christian to be involved in the ministries of the church. Participating in fellowships and being involved in a small group are means for the Christian to grow in the faith, but both of these are for the sake of the self. In the body of Christ, we are not only recipients of encouragement and grace. We, too, should become encouragers and channels of grace for others. This is why we must also be involved in the ministries of the church.

Your possible involvement is dependent on your talents or gifts, availability, and the current needs of the local congregation. Fill the table below to help you identify the area(s) you can serve.

I have a gift in...	Thus, I can...
playing the guitar	join the music team