

Leader's Guide for Session One: *Begin with Jesus*

Main Theme: Christianity, The On-Going Journey

Ask participants to read the pamphlet before meeting for study.

Materials Needed:

[*Begin with Jesus*](#) by Mitchell Williams, (available from Discipleship Resources)

Bible

Newsprint or white board and markers

Photo copy the *Session One Small Group Activity Handout* for the group (pages 5&6)

Photo copy *The Privilege of Prayer* for the group (pages 7&8)

Key Terms & Concepts from [*Begin with Jesus*](#)

Love – When Jesus spoke of love he used the Greek term agape, which refers to unconditional love. This type of love is challenging for us, but it is possible to express this kind of love with God's help. Jesus was serious about loving unconditionally because he said, *You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.* Matthew 5:43-44*

Grace – the unmerited or unearned favor that God extends to us. Scripture often states that a person has favor in God's sight. This expression of grace reveals God's watchful nature. God's grace also carries the understanding of the power of God to create new spiritual life within believers.

Saved – salvation through personal faith in Jesus Christ *saves* a person. The term saved carries additional meanings including: help in trouble, rescue, deliverance, being set free. Being saved also means participating in God's Kingdom or Reign. The Reign of God, or Kingdom of God, is both a present and future reality.

Sacraments – in Protestant churches, like the United Methodist Church, there are two sacraments: Holy Communion (The Lord’s Supper) and Baptism. A sacrament is a visible sign of an inward grace. For more on the Lord’s Supper see [*This Holy Mystery*](#)

Bible Readings:

The leader should prepare for the lesson by reading and reflecting on the following passages under each term.

Unconditional Love:

Matthew 5:43-45a & 5:46-48

Matthew 22:36-40

Grace:

Romans 3:22-24

Ephesians 2:1-10

Saved (Salvation)

Matthew 19:24-26

Luke 7:36-50

Summary of Content:

The main theme of the pamphlet is Christianity, the on-going journey. Author Mitchell Williams begins by presenting Christianity as an adventure, a way of life and a journey. The key point is that Christianity is an on-going process.

Christianity is based on a loving relationship between you and God through Jesus Christ. Matthew 22:37-39* describes the way that Christians are to love. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.*

People typically become Christians by following a spiritual path that includes experiences such as:

Recognizing God’s work of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Accepting God’s gift of unconditional love.

Rejecting wrongdoing.

Following Jesus.

Trusting God’s guidance.

Being baptized.

Seeking to become closer to God.

Small Group Activities:

Spiritual Check-in:

Ask participants to share any joys or concerns that they may have. Open with a brief time of prayer to celebrate the joys and to offer intercessory prayer for the concerns. Pray for God's guidance for your time together as a group.

Icebreaker

Invite participants to remember a time when they completed an adventurous journey. Ask participants to share some of the positive and negative aspects of their adventurous journey. On newsprint, or a white board, make a list of the types of things they experienced on their adventure like: an unknown outcome, surprises, new discoveries, hardships, etc.

Discussion Starters

1. Invite the participants to share what was most meaningful to them in the pamphlet.
2. Divide the class into small groups of two or three to discuss the following: "How is following Jesus Christ like going on an adventurous journey?"
3. Read Matthew 22:37-39 aloud. Invite participants to share their understanding of those verses.
4. Read Matthew 5:43-44 aloud. In a group discussion, describe what would actually be required for us to love our enemies. List the types of challenges people might have in loving an enemy.
5. Distribute the article, [*The Privilege of Prayer*](#) and the *Small Group Activity Handout*. If time permits, read the article aloud together and talk about what was meaningful to participants. Or, follow the instructions on the *Small Group Activity Handout* and discuss the questions for reflection.
6. Re-read Matthew 22:37-39 aloud. Enter into a time of prayer. Invite participants to pray the closing prayer below. After reading the prayer as a group, invite participants to ask God to remind them of people that God wants them to love. Participants may wish to pray in groups of two or three about other concerns.

Closing Prayer

(Read Together)

Loving God, you have offered us grace and unconditional love through Jesus Christ. Thank you for loving us just as we are. Help us to grow in our personal relationships with you and to become more like Christ each day. We know that this journey is a challenging adventure. We also realize that you expect us to offer grace and unconditional love to others—even our enemies. We need your help to love as Jesus loved. Teach us how to love others as God loves us.

Next Steps

If you would like to develop a regular spiritual practice, consider reading [*The Upper Room Daily Devotional*](#). It is produced as a print and online resource. In print form, this devotional is available in many different languages. Online, this resource is available in English, [*The Upper Room Daily Devotional*](#) and in Spanish, [*El Aposento Alto*](#)

This week, pay attention to situations that prompt you to pray. When such situations arise, pause and offer a silent prayer at that moment. At the end of the day reflect on the impact that frequent prayer had on you.

Suggested Resources:

[*This Holy Mystery*](#)

[*The Privilege of Prayer*](#)

[*The Main Event*](#)

[*"Ask Julian"*](#) -- aspires to answer some of the questions of modern-day seekers.

[*The Upper Room Daily Devotional*](#) -- Online

[*El Aposento Alto*](#)

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Session One Small Group Activity Handout

Discuss the following:

Imagine that you are on a journey in an unfamiliar country. You don't know where any of the roads will lead you. There is a guide available to help you, but the guide will only help you by phone. Without the guide's help you are likely to get lost and experience unnecessary trauma. How would you respond to that situation?

After discussing the above, hear the following:

The Christian journey is unfamiliar to all of us at first. In fact, apart from God's guidance, none of us knows exactly which path to choose. Jesus is our trusted guide on this journey. The question is how often and how much will we depend on God's guidance? Prayer is one of the most common ways to receive God's guidance.

Discuss the questions for reflection from Mary Lou Redding's article, [*The Privilege of Prayer*](#) that you received as a handout.

Questions for Reflection:

What is your first memory of praying? Who taught you to pray?

What settings or situations move you to prayer?

Do you have a special place where you go to pray? What might be the advantages of having a special prayer place?

What people and situations do you want to bring to God today in prayer?

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The Privilege of Prayer

by Mary Lou Redding, Managing Editor of The Upper Room

Prayer is simply conversation with God, and we are always welcome to approach the great God of the universe for a personal audience. But every time I ask a group, "How many of you feel good about your prayer life?" no more than one or two hands go up. Such negative feelings spring from our good motives. We want to draw close to God, but we also want to do things correctly -- and often we're not sure about how to pray. We are in good company! Even the disciples who spent lots of time with Jesus had to ask, "Lord, teach us to pray." And Jesus responded to their yearning by giving the model prayer that we call the Lord's Prayer.

The disciples' request reminds us that praying is something we can learn to do. Many of us are helped by having models for our praying. One simple and widely known model is built on the acronym ACTS:

- A - Adoration (worship, praise)
- C - Confession
- T - Thanksgiving
- S - Supplication (requests)

We begin by adoring God, acknowledging who God is. Then we confess our failures and our need for God and ask for forgiveness. Next we express thanks, acknowledging God as the source of all we have, all our blessings. Finally, we ask God for what we need and want. This model can help us to pray more freely by giving us a way to search our hearts for what we want to say to God.

Another pattern for our praying can help us as we pray for others. We often say, "God bless you," which is a sort of prayer. This phrase draws on biblical blessings such as Numbers 6:24-26. Dr. Alvin VanderGriend has created a helpful model that can guide us in praying for others by building on the word B-L-E-S-S-*

- B - Body. Pray for health/healing, for "daily bread"/physical needs to be met.
- L - Labors. Pray for God's help in the person's work, school, and daily tasks.
- E - Emotional needs. Pray for comfort, reassurance, hope, joy, peace, etc.
- S - Social needs. Pray for healthy relationships with family, friends, and associates.
- S - Spiritual needs. Pray for continually deepening relationship with God.

Patterns like these can encourage us to exercise the privilege of prayer and to pray more freely and faithfully. Several meditations in this issue discuss prayer.

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*The B.L.E.S.S. acronym is adapted from Dr. VanderGriend's book, *Love to Pray: A 40-Day Devotional for Deepening Your Prayer Life*, and is used by permission.

The Privilege of Prayer – adapted, from *The Upper Room*[®] [daily devotional guide, September/October 2004](#). Copyright ©2004 The Upper Room. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission. This handout may be reproduced only for in-class use.