



UNTIL CHRIST
IS FORMED
in us.

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First published 2025. ifesworld.org
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Until Christ is formed in us

(Galatians 4:19)

We are constantly being formed through our context and culture, our experiences and encounters. How amazing that in the midst of this, the Holy Spirit wants to form Christ in us! On our journey through life, we can become more like Jesus. Life-giving change is possible.

Spiritual formation is about change and about staying rooted in Christ. Spiritual formation is God's work in us, and it involves our active participation. Spiritual formation happens as we live in relationship with the Triune God and with one another.

What does it look like for Christ to be formed in us individually and as communities? How does it happen?

These cards invite you to explore these questions.

They invite you not only to search for answers but also to go deeper in your relationship with Jesus.

HOW CAN YOU USE THESE CARDS?

- On each card, you will find a biblical image for spiritual formation linked to a Bible verse and some reflection questions. You can use these cards individually or as a group. In a group, you might want to choose which reflection questions are appropriate for conversation and which ones are more appropriate for personal reflection. Make sure you give enough time to engage with each card in depth.
- On each card, you will also find a website link that takes you to additional material on this aspect of spiritual formation. This material is designed for small groups to spend 45-60 minutes together in one passage of Scripture.
- You can use these cards in any order. You can choose just one card to use at a student gathering, a staff meeting, a camp, in a prayer partnership, etc. – or you can work with the whole set of cards for a longer journey around the theme of spiritual formation.

Illustration: rolandtopor (shutterstock)



The potter formed it into another pot,
shaping it as seemed best to him. (Jeremiah 18:4b)

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION:

- Take some time to look at the picture. What stands out for you? How does it speak to you?
- What does the Bible verse above add to how you look at the picture?
- Imagine being clay in the potter's hand. What thoughts and feelings does this stir in you?
- What does this image tell us about the character and work of God?
- How can you surrender yourself more deeply into God's hands today?

Photos: Rock and Wasp, jaboo2foto, DedMityay, Alina Kruk (shutterstock)

GROUP TIME IN ROMANS 12:1-2:



ifesworld.org/
sf-potter
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When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. (Luke 24:30)

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION:

- Take some time to look at the picture. What stands out for you? How does it speak to you?
- What does the Bible verse above add to how you look at the picture?
- Imagine the scene described by the Bible verse. How does it make you feel that Jesus is the host at the table?
- How would you describe a community that is deeply transformative?
- With whom are you journeying in a way that helps you receive and pass on the life of Christ?

Photo: charmedlightph (shutterstock)

GROUP TIME IN LUKE 19:1-10:



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sf-community
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Speak, for your servant is listening. (1 Samuel 3:10b)

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION:

- Take some time to look at the picture. What stands out for you? How does it speak to you?
- What does the Bible verse above add to how you look at the picture?
- God is a God who speaks. What helps you listen to God and what distracts you from listening to him?
- When did God speak into your life in a way that impacted you?
- Today, for what particular situation do you need to listen for God's Word?

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GROUP TIME IN 1 SAMUEL 3:



[ifesworld.org/
sf-listening](https://ifesworld.org/sf-listening)
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God will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge. (Psalm 91:4)

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION:

- Take some time to look at the picture. What stands out for you? How does it speak to you?
- What does the Bible verse above add to how you look at the picture?
- What does Psalm 91:4 speak to you about who God is and who he wants to be for us?
- Let the image of the hen sheltering and being present with her chicks wash over you. How does this speak concretely into your life today?
- What are you tempted to make your refuge? How will you respond to the Lord's invitation to make him your refuge?

Photos: Tunatura, Warah38, Matthew Troke, Weerayuth (shutterstock)

GROUP TIME IN PSALM 57:



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sf-refuge
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Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION:

- Take some time to look at the picture. What stands out for you? How does it speak to you?
- What does the Bible verse above add to how you look at the picture?
- What does it take to run through all kinds of terrains (easy, rough, uphill, downhill, etc.)?
- When you look to Jesus, what thoughts emerge, as you see him go through all kinds of experiences?
- What obstacles do you currently need to face or overcome, as you run your own race?

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GROUP TIME IN PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14:



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sf-running
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I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION:

- Take some time to look at the picture. What stands out for you? How does it speak to you?
- What does the Bible verse above add to how you look at the picture?
- “Remain in me and I in you...” expresses intimacy with Christ. Reflect on how remaining in Christ results in transformative change.
- What makes our attachment as branches to Christ the vine so rich and yet so fragile?
- How would you describe your relationship to Christ? Where do you see strength, and where is there weakness?

Photo: PeopleImages.com - Yuri A (shutterstock)

GROUP TIME IN JOHN 15:1-8:



[ifesworld.org/
sf-remaining](https://ifesworld.org/sf-remaining)
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We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Romans 5:3-4)

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION:

- Take some time to look at the picture. What stands out for you? How does it speak to you?
- What does the Bible verse above add to how you look at the picture?
- What feelings arise in you as you look at the ashes, tears and ruins?
- Suffering seems to be able to produce so much growth! What seems to be the difference between those who grow and those who don't?
- Into what experience would you like to invite Jesus to strengthen, grow and heal you, so that you can become his "wounded healer"?

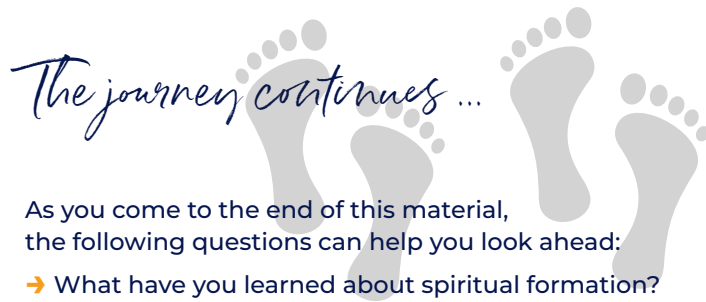
Photos: boonchoke, SeventyFour, GallHeri, Akmalmm (shutterstock)

GROUP TIME IN ISAIAH 61:1-4:



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sf-sufferings
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The journey continues ...

As you come to the end of this material, the following questions can help you look ahead:

- What have you learned about spiritual formation? Go back and look through the cards again with this question in mind.
- With whom can you share your thoughts and life? Talk and pray with someone about your journey of spiritual formation. Prayerfully consider how you can encourage someone else on their journey.
- What is your prayer with regard to spiritual formation in your life? Take some time to consider this question and then write a prayer on the back of this card. You might want to place it in your Bible and regularly pray it.

Spiritual formation is not a topic that we master; it is a life-long process of walking with Jesus, growing in intimacy with him, allowing him to form us according to his will and purpose.

We journey on trusting that the Holy Spirit will continue to do his work in us. We share in the confidence of the apostle Paul that *"God who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ."* (Philippians 1:6) Amen.

THIS IS MY PRAYER...

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Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®

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You can find more material on spiritual formation at scriptureengagement.ifesworld.org/spiritual-formation. A digital version of this material will be available from 2026.



Formed Against the Currents

Group Time in Romans 12:1-2

At the heart of Scripture engagement lies a relationship. The texts of Scripture are not just objects of study; they are like a room we enter to meet Jesus. God's word draws us into the presence of God himself. As we come to Scripture, let us listen and respond to the One who is behind these words and wants to meet us. Let us allow his Word to touch us, read us, and impact us.

If you are leading this group time, please read the suggestions for preparation at the end of this document.

Entering the Word

Read Romans 12:1-2 aloud in the group.

After reading, allow the verses to sink into your minds. As each of you consider the words, think of an image that reflects this passage and draw it on a blank sheet of paper. Show the images to each other. You can share them silently or very briefly explain your image.

Chewing the Word

Romans 12 reflects a major shift from what the apostle Paul has been mentioning in the previous eleven chapters. After enabling his readers/listeners to know the depths of God's grace and salvation (Romans 1–11), Paul now turns to practical application—how believers should respond to God's mercy.

In this passage, Paul invites us to be intentional in this process of transformation:

'Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice'

'Offering our bodies as a living sacrifice' is not an action through which we receive God's mercy, rather it is our response to God's benevolence.

- What are possible ways of being a living sacrifice?
- In what way is this worship?

„Do not conform to the pattern of this world...

- Consider your context (university setting, workplace, family, etc.) and list some of the common patterns that oppose the values of God's Kingdom.
- Stay with the phrase above. Where do you see yourself conforming to the world? (Have a moment of group silence to reflect on this. Those who want can briefly share.)

...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.“

Here we are told that a change in thinking leads to a transformed life. Inner change (of heart and mind) leads to outer change.

Imagine trying to **tune a radio**. If you're on the wrong frequency, the message is full of **static**. But when you **adjust the dial**, the message becomes **clear**. In the same way, when we allow God to **renew our minds**, we can **discern his will** clearly.

As a small group, talk about the following:

- God wants to enable us to test and approve his good will. Identify issues in your community (university setting, workplace, family, etc) where you need to discern God's will.
- How can you create spaces for your mind to be renewed?

Embracing the Word

In silence, read through the following application suggestions. Which ones speak most to you at the end of this time in the Word? Share in pairs and pray for each other.

1. **Daily surrender** – Starting our day by offering ourselves to God in prayer, asking him to use us for his glory.
2. **Let God renew your mind** – Reading Scripture daily, meditating on it, and allowing it to reshape our thinking.
3. **Reject worldly influences** – Identifying and removing influences that pull us away from God's truth (e.g., unhealthy media, relationships, habits).
4. **Seek God's will** – Making decisions based on prayer, Scripture, and godly counsel rather than personal feelings or cultural trends.
5. **Live as worship** – Viewing our work, relationships, and daily tasks as an opportunity to glorify God.

Preparing as a Leader: Read through the material and decide what needs to be adapted for your context. Consider how much time you have and where you want to focus. You will need blank sheets of paper and pens for “Entering the Word”.



Jacob Varghese

UESI India General Secretary

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IFES spiritual formation kit, 2025

Transforming Welcome

Group Time in Luke 19:1-10

At the heart of Scripture engagement lies a relationship. The texts of Scripture are not just objects of study; they are like a room we enter to meet Jesus. God's word draws us into the presence of God himself. As we come to Scripture, let us listen and respond to the One who is behind these words and wants to meet us. Let us allow his Word to touch us, read us, and impact us.

If you are leading this group time, please read the suggestions for preparation at the end of this document.

Entering the Story

There are encounters that transform us. Today, we're going to reflect together on one encounter that is, in various ways, surprising. In many Christian circles, it is a well-known story told to children. But even if it's a familiar story, it has elements that intrigue and amaze us. We are told of an unusual encounter on the way, an unexpected invitation, a hospitality that shocks many, and a profound transformation. This transformation arises from hospitality in the intimacy of the home, around the table. Let's look at some fascinating elements of the story together.

Please Read Luke 19:1-10.

Divide the group into two. (Please make sure you do not spend more than ten minutes in the separate groups and another fifteen minutes for the re-enacting/reading and interviewing together.)

Group 1: This group reads the passage again and spontaneously prepares a reenactment of the events that took place. Alternatively, you could divide the roles among you (Jesus, Zacchaeus, the critics, people from the crowd) and talk about how they experienced this event from their different perspectives.

Group 2: This group prepares to act as a news crew, broadcasting 'live' the events taking place in Jericho. They prepare questions to ask of the different people involved: Zacchaeus, Jesus, the crowd, the critics, those in Zacchaeus' house watching what is happening. When preparing the questions, they can be along the lines of: 'what's going on...', 'how do you see that?', 'tell us more about what you said or how you reacted to that?', 'how do you feel about it?', 'what do you think about Jesus' actions here?', etc.

Together: Group 1 re-enacts the story. If they chose the alternative version of thinking and feeling themselves into different roles, then someone from group 1 reads the story again. Immediately afterwards, group 2 enters the scene asking questions of the people involved.

Chewing the Word

- Read Luke 19:1-10 out loud again. What do you hear differently because of what you just saw and heard?
- Look more closely at what Jesus says and does in this story. What impact does this have on different people in the story?
- Zacchaeus acts in a radical and restitutive way after his encounter with Jesus. His actions indicate that something needed to be repaired/changed in his life – through the formative work of Jesus. Imagine Jesus inviting himself into your house today. What would you like to see Jesus transform in your life? (It might be good to give a moment of silent reflection before sharing your answers to this question.)
- In this passage, neither the food nor the table are explicitly mentioned. But when Jesus goes to stay at Zacchaeus' house, and when Zacchaeus stands up to say something, we understand that this is an encounter around a table. (The Gospels are full of such encounters at a table, e.g. Matthew 9:10-13; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 10:38-42; Luke 24:3-31; John 21:9-14). How do we understand the place of the table and hospitality in the work of formation that Jesus carries out in Zacchaeus' life (and that of so many others)?

Embracing the Word

Hospitality, the intimacy of the home, and celebrations around a table can be special spaces when we are deeply formed and transformed by the Lord. We invite you to continue reflecting on this aspect in your formative journeys with Jesus.

As you conclude your time together, please split into pairs and share something more about how this passage touches you personally. Pray for one another.

Preparing as a Leader: Read through the material and decide what needs to be adapted for your context. Consider how much time you have and where you want to focus.



Ricardo Borges, Brazil

Former IFES Secretary for Scripture Engagement

Until Christ is Formed in Us

IFES spiritual formation kit, 2025

Surprised in the Listening

Group Time in 1 Samuel 3

At the heart of Scripture engagement lies a relationship. The texts of Scripture are not just objects of study; they are like a room we enter to meet Jesus. God's word draws us into the presence of God himself. As we come to Scripture, let us listen and respond to the One who is behind these words and wants to meet us. Let us allow his Word to touch us, read us, and impact us.

If you are leading this group time, please read the suggestions for preparation at the end of this document.

Entering the Story

Each person reads 1 Samuel 3:1-21 for themselves. As they do so, they should simply take note of what stands out for them (no sharing at this point).

I recently viewed two videos reflecting attitudes of two parents. The mom was teaching her daughter to say “mommy”, but whenever she says “mommy”, her daughter would echo “daddy”, and she was frustrated. The father was praising her daughter – singing her name Mouna like this: “Mouna de Mouna de Mouna”. Whenever he did that, the daughter would echo “Daddy de daddy de daddy” and both were happy! What do we say and what do we hear? Samuel is the son of Hanna and Elkana; his birth was preceded by Hanna’s sterility, the mockery of her co-spouse Penina, as well as many tears and prayers by Hanna. When Samuel was born, Hanna dedicated him to God as she had promised. (1 Sam 1:11)

At that time, Israel had no king, and everybody did what he wanted (Judges 21:25). Corruption and various kinds of sin were rampant, even among the sons of the priest Eli (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-26). The word of God was rare, and visions were not frequent in the years of Samuel’s childhood (1 Sam 3:1).

Chewing the Word

Samuel was a young boy when he was brought to serve the Lord at the temple under the priest Eli. Let us have a close look at his experience:

Please read 1 Samuel 3:1-9

From a Familiar to an Unfamiliar: a Learning Process

- How did Eli help Samuel to hear the unfamiliar voice of God?
- Who helped you hear God's voice? How did they help you? After sharing, take a moment in pairs to thank God for these people.

Please read 1 Samuel 3:9-18

From Receiving to Wrestling: a Challenging Process

- Read v. 9 out loud two more times. How would you describe Samuel's attitude?
- Samuel puts himself in a listening position. The message he hears from God is challenging. Put yourself in Samuel's shoes: What do you think he was going through during the rest of that night?
- Can you think of a time when you struggled with what God was inviting you to do? How did you walk through that?

Please read 1 Samuel 3:18-21

From Unfamiliarity to Familiarity: an Enriching Process

The Lord was with Samuel, and he did not let down any of his word (v. 19).

- How do you appreciate the shifts from vv. 1 to 4 and vv. 7 to 21?

At the end of Samuel's life, he became very sure of who God was.

- In your listening and journeying with the Lord, how have you become more familiar with the Lord and his ways? (Please share one example.)

Embracing the Word

It might happen that you go through a similar experience of not hearing God's voice or lacking familiarity with him. In this story we see that, despite everything, Samuel was born and the word of God again was heard more frequently. God is a speaking God, and he invites us to listen.

In pairs, pray for one another about what helps or hinders you listen to God.

Preparing as a Leader: Read through the material and decide what needs to be adapted for your context. Consider how much time you have and where you want to focus.



Dieudonné Tindano, Burkina Faso

UGBB General Secretary

Until Christ is Formed in Us

IFES spiritual formation kit, 2025

Discovering the Safe Refuge

Group Time in Psalm 57

At the heart of Scripture engagement lies a relationship. The texts of Scripture are not just objects of study; they are like a room we enter to meet Jesus. God's word draws us into the presence of God himself. As we come to Scripture, let us listen and respond to the One who is behind these words and wants to meet us. Let us allow his Word to touch us, read us, and impact us.

If you are leading this group time, please read the suggestions for preparation at the end of this document.

Entering the Prayer

Open your Bibles to Psalm 57. One person reads the Psalm out loud. The others read along and listen carefully. They watch out for words or phrases that catch their attention.

After the Psalm has been read, group members can speak out one word or phrase that caught their attention. Without adding any comments or explanation. They can do so more than once with moments of silence in between.

After a few minutes in which parts of the Psalm are echoed in this way, someone else reads the Psalm out loud again. Slowly.

Chewing the Word

Facing Challenging Circumstances

We are told that this Psalm was written by David when he had to flee from King Saul. David was already anointed to become king, but not yet on the throne. He had God's promise and a calling, but he was homeless, on the run, pursued by Saul.

- Keep this background in mind and look through the Psalm for everything that describes David's outer and inner life. Imagine what this must be like for him.
- What are points of identification between the struggles in your life and those expressed in the Psalm? What are inward or outward 'beasts' (v. 4) in your life?

Seeking a Safe Refuge

David hides in a cave and yet he knows that his real shelter is God.

- When David looks to God for refuge, what aspects of God's character and work does he focus on?

After you have shared around this, pause for a moment of prayer. You have been talking about God and what he is like, now talk to him.

- In simple, short sentences ('God you are...'), express how and who God is – in your own words, but inspired from this Psalm.

David writes (v. 1), "I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed."

- How do you take refuge in the shadow of God's wings? Share some concrete examples.

Singing God's Glory

The Psalmist decides to sing; he speaks to his own soul telling himself to awake and make music. He does not sing about the solution to his problems; we do not know whether his outer circumstances have changed. He sings about God's character – his love and faithfulness – which are spread out over him and all the earth like the heavens. They are like a huge cave which shelters him.

- Which song comes to your mind that praises God for who he is? Sing it together or listen to it. You could choose this song based on Psalm 57:

<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Be+exalted+o+God+I+will+give+thanks#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:4c588a7c,vid:hPtKkUU84rs,st:0>



Embracing the Word

After reflecting on this Psalm, is there a verse you want to commit to memory? Share it with the group. Put the verse in your calendar to be reminded of it at a specific time each day. Notice how it takes root and begins to form you over the next month.

At the end of our time together, what do you want to say to God? Close with a time of prayer.

**Preparing as a Leader: Read through the material
and decide what needs to be adapted for your context.
Consider how much time you have and where you want to focus.**



Sabine Kalthoff, Germany

IFES Secretary for Spiritual Formation

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IFES spiritual formation kit, 2025

Pressing on All the Way

Group Time in Philippians 3:7-14

At the heart of Scripture engagement lies a relationship. The texts of Scripture are not just objects of study; they are like a room we enter to meet Jesus. God's word draws us into the presence of God himself. As we come to Scripture, let us listen and respond to the One who is behind these words and wants to meet us. Let us allow his Word to touch us, read us, and impact us.

If you are leading this group time, please read the suggestions for preparation at the end of this document.

Entering the Story (10 minutes)

Begin your time together by taking a few deep breaths. With each breath, become more present to our God, who is always fully present to us. Silently give the worries and busyness of your day over to God and offer yourself and this time to him, inviting him to form you today. Paul had incredible Jewish heritage, education, righteousness, and zeal for God. His passionate commitment for knowing Jesus and sharing him with others is inspiring. Even though he was persecuted and thrown into prison, his passion for Jesus remained strong. While in prison, Paul wrote these words to encourage the believers in Philippi.

Philippians 3:7-14.

Ask someone to read the passage slowly. As they read, imagine Paul writing these words to your group from prison.

Invite someone else to read the passage again. Pay attention for a word, phrase, or image that stands out to you and catches your attention. Encourage each person to share the word, phrase, or image that stood out to them (with no elaboration). Have a third person read the passage slowly.

In silence, chew on the word, phrase, or image that stood out to you as you listened to the passage.



Chewing the Word (15 minutes)

Provide paper, slips of paper, pens and art supplies. Invite people to respond to the passage as creatively as they like by drawing, writing on the paper provided or in their journal to help them continue listening to the Spirit.

As you silently reflect on the following questions, offer your honest thoughts and feelings to God and invite his response. Ask God if there is anything he wants you to know or what his invitation is for you.

- What do you learn from Paul about his passion for knowing Jesus and pressing on, despite what it cost him?
- What do you need to leave behind in order to press on? Write it down on a slip of paper. When you are ready, tear it up and put it in the garbage as a symbolic act.
- How can you press on to know Christ more fully?

This whole section is done in silence as a time of personal reflection.

Embracing the Word (20 – 35 minutes)

Invite each person briefly to share one insight or experience from their time of personal reflection.

Share around the following question: What could it look like for you/your group to focus attention and energy into knowing Jesus, and not just knowing more about him?

Spiritual formation is God's work in us and requires our active participation. Offer each other grace, patience, and encouragement as you resolve to know Jesus. It is a journey with a goal worth straining toward.

End your time in prayer.

Preparing as a Leader: Read through the material and decide what needs to be adapted for your context. Consider how much time you have and where you want to focus. You will need to provide paper, slips of paper, pens, and maybe other art supplies for "Chewing the Word" (see above).



Karen Fletcher, Canada

Director of Spiritual Formation and Prayer, InterVarsity

Until Christ is Formed in Us

IFES spiritual formation kit, 2025

Remaining in the Life-Giver

Group Time in John 15:1-8

At the heart of Scripture engagement lies a relationship. The texts of Scripture are not just objects of study; they are like a room we enter to meet Jesus. God's word draws us into the presence of God himself. As we come to Scripture, let us listen and respond to the One who is behind these words and wants to meet us. Let us allow his Word to touch us, read us, and impact us.

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Entering the Image

In this part of John's Gospel, we enter a close, intimate space with Jesus as he prepares his disciples for his departure through the suffering of the cross.

Surely the disciples would remember everything from these encounters with the Lord Jesus, his words and his actions! From him washing their feet in humble service (13:1-17) and his command to love one another (13:34), to his promise of the Holy Spirit (14:16).

Away from the crowds, the Pharisees and the hecklers, Jesus, in some of his last words to his disciples, leaves them with an image:

Read John 15:1-8

One person reads John 15:1-8, everyone else listens without yet reading; as they listen, they can look at the visual prompts set up on the table.

5 minutes individually to:

- read through the passage, encourage the group to notice and perhaps pick up the objects/photos;
- notice repeated ideas and the different aspects of the image.

Question to the group: Which aspect of the image that Jesus uses captures your attention and why? Note down anything significant that you hear from others in the group.

Chewing the Word

Read John 15:1-8 again: each group member reads one verse

1. Joined to Jesus, the true vine

Jesus is the true Vine (v1), the faithful One of God who came in service and sacrifice, had compassion on the crowds, washed his disciples' feet and taught the truth of God's kingdom. As with many of the 'I Am' sayings in John, Jesus' declaration "I am the true vine" emphasizes that life and salvation are found in him.

LOOK at the plant/image on the table, notice where the branches are joined to the stem, the green leaves that are growing because of being joined to the plant, etc.

Their life and growth comes from what they are joined to.

- How would you describe your relationship with Christ, the true Vine? Share about this with regard to your personal life and your Christian communities (student group, church, etc.).
- Are there attitudes, ways of thinking, or practices that will help you to remain in Christ?

PRAY together (choose an option):

- a) pray short prayers praising God for who he is and the life you receive in Christ by being IN him.
- b) write out a prayer for your group or the church in your country, thanking God for the wonder of being in Christ and the life received in him, and for fruit that reflects belonging to Jesus, the true Vine.
- c) have a large drawing of a vine and during this time encourage the group to write their prayers on the leaves or on leaf shaped notes that can be stuck on the picture.

2. Joined to bear fruit

Jesus reassured and instructed the disciples through this image, likening them to branches in him (v5).

Consider the descriptions of branches in this passage:

- fruit bearing branches that remain in the vine (fruit is not produced by their own effort but by being joined to Christ)
- these branches become even more fruitful from the pruning¹ of the Father
- other branches that do not bear fruit...

What implications does this have for your discipleship and ministry?

3. A reassuring image

In Central Asia, the news would report frosts that damaged the apricot blossom, preventing fruit from forming later. This had a big impact on fruit production, availability, and those whose livelihood depended on this fruit. The fruitfulness of the vine in John 15 did not depend on outward conditions, but on the faithful vine and the good care (by pruning) of the Father.

As the disciples anticipated Jesus' departure, you can imagine their confusion and sadness, their misunderstandings and fears of the unknown.

¹ Please note that the Greek word for 'he prunes' [καθαίρει kathairei] is also 'he cleans', and that the branches that are pruned are those that are already fruitful

- How would this image of connection have been both a comfort and a challenge to the disciples after Jesus left them physically?
- How can this image of the Vine help you face the challenges in your context, now and in the coming months?

Embracing the Word

This is an example of a prayer you can use in closing.

Take a moment in silence as a group before praying this aloud together.

Father God,

In our confusion, sadness and fears, help us remember that Jesus is the Vine we are joined to.

Thank you for the reassurance that Jesus is the One who loves us and is the source of our life, salvation and fruit-bearing.

In our fears about the future and in our current difficulties and weakness, remind us Lord that our lives and fruitfulness come from you.

In your mercy, enable us to trust and not fear.

Thank you for the life we have because we are joined to Jesus.

Help us, Father, to remember that you call us to remain in Jesus, no matter whether life is going well or is a struggle.

Thank you that you are always with us through your Holy Spirit. Thank you that through Him you remind us of Jesus' words and transform our character and perspectives.

In your mercy, enable us to trust and not fear, and to delight to remain in Jesus day by day.

Amen.

Preparing as a Leader: Read through the material and decide what needs to be adapted for your context. Consider how much time you have and where you want to focus.

Set up pictures or objects of growth, e.g. a plant, pruning shears, grapes/other fruit on a plate (good, juicy ones and, if available, also some in not such good condition as a contrast). Alternative: print out photos to look at.

If you choose the third option for prayer, you will need a sketch of a vine and sticky notes or leaf shaped papers to stick on.



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Until Christ is Formed in Us

IFES spiritual formation kit, 2025

Called Out of the Ashes

Group Time in Isaiah 61:1-4

At the heart of Scripture engagement lies a relationship. The texts of Scripture are not just objects of study; they are like a room we enter to meet Jesus. God's word draws us into the presence of God himself. As we come to Scripture, let us listen and respond to the One who is behind these words and wants to meet us. Let us allow his Word to touch us, read us, and impact us.

If you are leading this group time, please read the suggestions for preparation at the end of this document.

Entering the Story

Isaiah speaks to a callous and disobedient people, almost 150 years before they were sent into Exile. God's intention was to proclaim not just judgement, but also to expose his heart for restoration. Many years before their return from Exile, the people of Israel are told: God will overturn their ruins! God will make them rebuilders of broken things!

Life often surrounds us with its distractions, devastations, brokenness, and ruins. Sometimes, we are trapped by what seems totally impossible! The LORD walks into those messes, and invites us to allow him to work, to become a "planting of the LORD". This familiar passage shocks us and invites us to allow the LORD to come near. To be ready to be re-formed into restored instruments, who then go on to become instruments of restoring!

Ask someone to read Isaiah 61:1-4 out loud, slowly and intentionally. While the passage is read, everyone else uses colours to highlight the words or phrases that stir their heart. Then have a time of silence in which each one reads the passage again for themselves. Continue to highlight any other word or phrase stirring within you. Turn that over in your hearts and listen to what speaks to you.

[You can do this in your Bibles or print out the passage beforehand.]

Chewing the Word

1. Which phrases in these four verses stood out for you?
Reflect and share on why this might be so.
2. What seems to be the “Good News”, the Anointed One brings? List them all. (Isaiah 61:1b - 3a).
Look at the great exchanges the Anointed One ushers into the darkness of life (Isaiah 61:3b). How would you put these in your own words for today’s situations?
3. When you hear the phrase, “they will be called a planting of the LORD,” what images and thoughts does this evoke in you?
4. The once broken hearted, poor, captives will be re-formed into the LORD’s beauty. They will begin to thrive amidst the ruins and make possible the impossible (Isaiah 61:4).
Picture this verse and allow the LORD to invite you into his kingdom’s business of restoration. Where specifically might he be calling you to rebuild and restore?

Embracing the Word

The LORD is a Master Sculptor, who forms and re-forms us, because we are his! As we come through transformations in our lives, he invites us to work with him to reform life (people, systems, society) around us.

As you ponder the images earlier and the Word itself, share in groups of two or three, where you need the LORD’s transformation; and where he is stirring you to partner with him to transform your surroundings.

As each of you listens to the other, may you pray over the person sharing.

Preparing as a Leader: Read through the material and decide what needs to be adapted for your context. Consider how much time you have and where you want to focus. You might want to print out the Scripture passage for ‘Entering the Story’ (see above).



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