



Living Faith

A six week small group series
exploring love, wisdom, and use
coming together in life

Developed by Erik Buss & Bronwen Henry

Living Faith

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The concepts and teachings in this guide are drawn from the Old and New Testaments and the works of Emanuel Swedenborg. Throughout this book, as is customary in Swedenborgian studies, the numbers following the titles of the works of Emanuel Swedenborg refer to paragraph or section numbers (uniform in all editions) rather than to page numbers. This book utilizes a variety of translations of the Old Testament, New Testament and the works of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The New Church is a new Christianity. Among its teachings are:

- God (the Lord) is love and wisdom, and all life is from the Lord.
- The Bible's ancient truth is relevant today - truth about how to act with wisdom and love.
- The kingdom of heaven exists within each person.
- The Lord does not condemn anyone to hell.
- Every major religion has teachings similar to the Ten Commandments, and everyone who lives according to his or her conscience is saved.

Whether we are building a church, or a house, or
developing a fruit garden, or working to prepare a
field, our primary intention is always the use of it.

-True Christianity 336:2

WHO WAS EMANUEL SWEDENBORG?

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a renowned Swedish scientist. As the son of a Lutheran bishop, he cherished the Bible, but felt skeptical about certain Christian doctrines. Although he had become well-known for his inventions and scientific contributions, he experienced a profound spiritual awakening in mid-life that changed the course of his life. Swedenborg wrote that God had opened his eyes to understand the higher reality within and beyond the natural world. Impassioned by this inner awakening, Swedenborg devoted the later half of his life to sharing what has come to be called a “new Christianity.” His many books, with their teachings about God, the Bible, the afterlife, marriage, and human potential, are all centered on themes of kindness and understanding brought into action.

Here are some of the most popular books by Emanuel Swedenborg:

- **Divine Love and Wisdom:** Offers a strong theological and philosophical foundation for the book’s central premise: God is love itself and wisdom itself.
- **Divine Providence:** Describes how God (love and wisdom) operates in our lives, keeping us in freedom while constantly drawing us toward love and toward heaven.
- **Heaven and Hell:** Gives a vivid description of heaven, hell, and the whole spiritual world.
- **Secrets of Heaven:** Offers a phrase-by-phrase analysis of the symbolic meaning of the first two books of the Bible. (12 volumes)
- **True Christianity:** Offers a new kind of Christianity - one that embraces the good in all religions and encourages people to live a life of service to the neighbor.

Books from Swedenborg that are quotes in this small group series include: *Apocalypse Explained, Apocalypse Revealed, Brief Exposition, Charity, Divine Love and Wisdom, Divine Providence, Doctrine of the Lord, New Jerusalem and It’s, Heavenly Doctrines, Sacred Scripture, Secrets of Heaven, True Christianity*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Small Group Meeting Format
3	Introduction
5	Week 1: Worship
11	Week 2: Community
17	Week 3: Learning from the Word
23	Week 4: Sharing
27	Week 5: Keeping Commandments
33	Week 6: Serving
38	Appendix A: Participating in a Small Group
39	Appendix B: The Lord's Prayer
40	Appendix C: Love, Wisdom, and Use
41	Evaluation Form

SMALL GROUP MEETING FORMAT

(60-90 MINUTES)

- 1) **Opening Prayer** — Start each group with a prayer. You can read the prayer provided at the beginning of each chapter, or ask if anyone in your group would like to offer one of their own. (1-2 minutes)
- 2) **Brief “How Are You?”** — After the prayer, give each group member a chance to share something about their week or something about how they are doing. (10 minutes total, about 1-2 minutes for each group member)
- 3) **Icebreaker** — Go around the room with each person answering the icebreaker question. (10 minutes total, about 1-2 minutes for each group member)
- 4) **Readings** — Read the Scriptural quotations provided in workbook aloud with the group. If time permits, you can also read from the section of quotes at the end of each chapter. Make sure to give the group members a chance to respond to the readings. (5-10 minutes).
- 5) **Discussion Questions** — Choose 2-3 questions (depending on time) from the provided list to talk about as a group. Allow a chance for everyone in the group to offer their insights within the discussion. (25 minutes)
- 6) **Questions for Small Groups to Consider** — Thinking specifically of your small group or church, discuss the provided questions. (5-15 minutes)
- 7) **Closing comments** — Go around the room, giving each person the opportunity to make any closing comments about the discussions you’ve all just had, or any last insights they’d like to share. (5 minutes)
- 8) **Closing prayer** — Ask anyone if they have anything they have any prayer requests they would like the group to pray about. Then have either the leader or a group member close the meeting with a prayer, acknowledging the prayer requests, and/or saying The Lord’s Prayer in Appendix B together. (5 minutes)

See also Small Group Guidelines in Appendix A.

INTRODUCTION

The church is where...

“Love, wisdom and useful action are three things that cannot be separated. If they are separated, none of them is anything. . . Therefore when love exists in usefulness through the help of wisdom, it really exists and becomes actual.”

–*True Christianity* 387:3

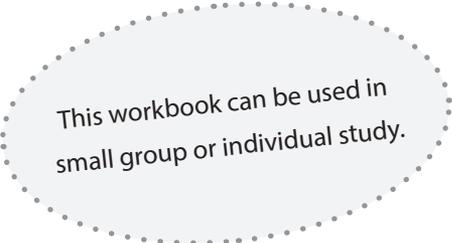
At times, many of us may find ourselves speaking about “the church.” We might refer to it as a building, or how it’s functioning as an organization, or simply whether or not we attend on Sunday. The above quote, however, offers a deeper, more personal way to think about church: in the realm of our own hearts, minds and actions. In this context, we can ask ourselves, “Am I resting into a faith that the Lord is here and present with all of us? Do I have goodwill in my heart for others?” When these things are true, and playing out actively in our lives, we are truly *being* the church, we have a living faith.

We’ve broken down faith into tangible topics: loving the Lord in worship and experiencing love for our neighbor in community (which is the broader theme of Love), receiving wisdom from the Lord by reading His Word and loving the neighbor by sharing the insights He has given us with others (which is the broader theme of Wisdom), and loving the Lord by doing what He says and loving the neighbor by serving those around us (which is the broader theme of Use). See also the graphic in Appendix C.

This small group series, “Living Faith” offers an opportunity for people to get together and support each other in bringing love, wisdom, and use into life. Because whether or not we are spending time in community, serving others, or exploring scripture, we have a chance to live our faith.

Goodwill and faith are two distinct things, yet they become one in us and make us people of the church - they cause the church to exist within us.

- *True Christianity* 336:1



This workbook can be used in
small group or individual study.

1

WEEK ONE

WORSHIP

Love, Love to the Lord

Introduction

What does the word “worship” mean to you? What images or emotions does this word bring? Some people have negative associations with worship and some have precious memories of services they’ve attended, while others wonder why God needs to be worshipped? Together we will explore what true worship looks like, more than just an event to attend on Sundays. We will discuss what it means to feel and express adoration and reverence for God; what it looks like in our minds, our hearts, and our lives.

Opening Prayer (1-2 min)

Lord, thank You for giving us this time together. We ask that You bless us each with peace in our hearts, to open ourselves to Your power. May we find the silence to earnestly hear Your message for each of us, and how we can help You work in each others’ lives. *Amen.*

Brief “How Are You?” (10 min)

Ice breaker (10 min)

Did you attend church when you were growing up? Where? What was your experience?

Readings (5-10 min)

Invite a volunteer or two to read.

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is the great God, And the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth; The heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; And His hands

formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God,
And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His
hand.” (Psalm 95:1-7)

“Anyone in whom the life of love, that is, in whom charity, is
present keeps the Sabbath holy since nothing delights him
more than worshipping the Lord and declaring His glory day
by day.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 1798)

Discussion Questions (Choose 2-3 depending on time, 25 min)

- What is your response to these readings?
- What is your favorite part of a worship service? The music? The presence of young families? The coffee in the social hall afterward? The readings from the Word?
- What would be your ideal worship experience?
- What is a way to worship that resonates in your life today?
- What does it mean to you to ‘turn to the Lord’
- Describe a time you felt connected to the Lord.

Questions for Small Groups to Consider (5-15 min)

- What favorite elements of worship might we incorporate into our small group? Lighting candles? Singing? Having flowers? Reading from the Word aloud? Group prayer? Sharing food?
- Is there anyone in the group especially lit up about this aspect of ‘Being the Church’? Might they want to prepare an offering on this theme?

Closing Comments (5 min)

Closing Prayer (5 min)

Ask for any prayer requests. Offer closing prayer and/or whole group can say together The Lord’s Prayer (see Appendix B).

QUOTES ABOUT

Worship

Use these quotes for independent reading.

“Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

Psalm 29:2

“You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”

Exodus 20:3-5

“O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.”

Psalm 95:6

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment.”

Mark 12:30

“Worship the One who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

Revelation 14:7

“Genuine Divine worship is unknown to those who think that all worship consists in acts of adoration and prayer, thus in such things as belong to the mouth and thought, and not in such as belong to deeds flowing from the good of charity and the good of faith. Yet

the reality is that in a person offering adoration and prayer, the Lord pays attention solely to the person's— the interiors as they are in respect to love and the consequent faith."

Secrets of Heaven 10143.4

"Worship of God does not consist essentially in worship of the lips, but in a life of performing useful services. This worship is in keeping with the order of heaven. Worship of the lips is also worship, but it achieves nothing whatever without worship in the life one leads, since this is worship of the heart."

Secrets of Heaven 7884

"Worship of the mouth is accepted by the Lord according to the worship of the life."

Brief Exposition 51

"You are worshipping all the time if love and charity abide in you."

Secrets of Heaven 1618

"Thou shalt not make to thee other gods' includes not loving self and the world above all things. For that which one loves above all things is one's god."

Apocalypse Explained 950:3

"Worship does not consist in prayers and in external devotion, but in a life of charity. The essential of worship is the life of charity."

Apocalypse Explained 325.3

"All true worship consists in adoration of the Lord. Adoration of the Lord consists in being humble; and being humble consists in the self-acknowledgement that with oneself there is nothing living and nothing good.... Being humble also consists in the acknowledgement that everything living and everything good come from the Lord. The more you acknowledge these things not just with the lips but in your heart, the more humility you have; and consequently the more adoration—which is true worship—and the more love and charity, and the more happiness."

Secrets of Heaven 1153.2

“True worship of the Lord consists in performing useful services; and such services during one’s life in the world lie in a proper fulfillment of one’s function by each person, whatever one’s own position, that is, in serving one’s country, its communities, and one’s neighbor with all one’s heart. They also lie in honest dealings with fellow human beings and in the diligent discharge of duties, with full regard for each person’s character. These useful deeds are the principal ways of exercising charity and the principal means of worshipping the Lord.”

Secrets of Heaven 7038

“When I admire the wonders of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in the worship of the creator.”

Mahatma Gandhi

“A few minutes ago every tree was excited, bowing to the roaring storm, waving, swirling, tossing their branches in glorious enthusiasm like worship. But though to the outer ear these trees are now silent, their songs never cease.”

John Muir

“People who’ve had any genuine spiritual experience always know that they don’t know. They are utterly humbled before mystery. They are in awe before the abyss of it all, in wonder at eternity and depth, and a Love, which is incomprehensible to the mind.”

Richard Rohr

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“I need a God who is bigger and more nimble and mysterious than what I could understand and contrive. Otherwise it can feel like I am worshipping nothing more than my own ability to understand the divine.”

Nadia Bolz-Weber



WEEK TWO

COMMUNITY

Love, Love to the Neighbor

Introduction

The Lord calls each of us to love the neighbor; it is one of the clearest directives within Scripture. The neighbor extends past those near us or similar to us. It includes those with whom we have contact, and may or may not be in full agreement on many things. The connection and care God wants us to share with our neighbors is what we call community. What are the different kinds of community you have in your life? How are you called to show love to those in your life?

Opening Prayer (1-2 min)

Lord, thank You for giving us this time together. Help us to grow stronger with each other in this group, help us to encourage each other today. Give us humility to ask for and accept help on our journey. Give us courage to welcome and include others. Amen.

Brief “How Are You?” (10 min)

Ice breaker (10 min)

What is a time of sharing a meal with others that you’ve treasured? When and where did it take place? Why is this meal a treasured memory?

Readings (5-10 min)

Invite a volunteer or two to read.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (John 15:12-13)

“Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

“The heavenly form is such that everyone is as it were a kind of center, thus a center of communications, and consequently of happinesses, from all; and this in accordance with all the differences of mutual love, which are innumerable. And because those who are in that love perceive the highest happiness in being able to communicate to others that which flows into them, and this from the heart, the communication becomes perpetual and eternal; and on this account, as the Lord’s kingdom increases, so the happiness of each angel increases.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 2057)

Discussion Questions (Choose 2-3 depending on time 25 min)

- What is your response to these readings?
- What makes eating a meal with other people enjoyable? How is it different from eating alone?
- Describe a person that makes you feel comfortable.
- How would you describe your current life: Full of community or room for more community?
- Describe a time you felt you belonged.
- Describe a time you felt you didn’t belong.

For Small Groups to Consider (5-15 min)

- How can our small group be a place where people are welcomed and feel a part of this community?
- What small group activities have you been part of that had the effect of bringing people closer?
- How can we build our community and connectedness in this group gathering?
- Is there anyone else that we could welcome into this group?
- Consider going on an outing together: out to dinner, a retreat, attend church together, have a BBQ where significant others are welcome etc. to purposefully build community.

Closing Comments (5 min)

Closing Prayer (5 min)

Ask for any prayer requests. Offer closing prayer and/or whole group can say together The Lord’s Prayer (see Appendix B).

QUOTES ABOUT

Community

Use these quotes for independent reading.

“Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Matthew 18:20

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 22:37-40

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:18-21

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

John 15:12-13

“Love to the Lord and caring for the neighbor make the church.”

Secrets of Heaven 4723

“To love the neighbor as oneself is: not to hold the neighbor in light esteem in comparison with oneself, to deal justly with the neighbor, and not to pass evil judgments upon the neighbor.”

True Christianity 411

In the following passage, Emanuel Swedenborg describes his experience visiting various communities of angels in Heaven.

“The actual good residing with a person flows in from the Lord by way of the communities of heaven that are round about; good that does not flow in by way of those communities is not possible... Therefore when a person is being regenerated their enrichment in good is nothing other than being introduced into angelic communities, and in this way being joined to them. This has also been demonstrated to me quite a number of times by actual experience. Sometimes contact with certain communities has been withdrawn from me, and then the amount and the nature of life that remained were determined by the amount and nature of extension into the communities that were left. And when more communities were taken away, my life suffered and began seemingly to be snuffed out. Every angel, spirit, and person has a spiritual sphere, and its nature is determined by its extension into different communities. . . . [People] at the present day believe that they have life in themselves, and consequently that they live without association with spirits and angels, and so without being linked to heaven. But in this they are altogether mistaken; for all the life a person has comes from the Lord by way of communities.”

Secrets of Heaven 8794.2-3

“Things are temporary, relationships last forever. Nothing can replace the time we spend investing in the life of another.”

Roy Lessin

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched— they must be felt with the heart.”

Helen Keller

“The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers & cities; but to know someone who thinks & feels with us, & who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“The highest form of love is the love that allows for intimacy without the annihilation of difference.”

Parker J. Palmer

“Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning and purpose to our lives.”

Brené Brown

WEEK THREE

LEARNING FROM THE WORD

Wisdom, Love to the Lord

Introduction

The Word itself offers great inspiration and reminders to carry with us throughout our lives. It prompts us to not just read, but to meditate and live on its teachings. If we are to live a life based on the Word, it helps if we know the Word in our mind and heart. Essentially, the Word is God communicating with us. Is learning from the Word a part of your current life? A part of your history?

Opening Prayer (1-2 min)

Lord, thank You for giving us this time together. We ask for discernment as we explore Your Word. Show us how You meet our questions with compassion. Give us joy and excitement in exploring Your Word. Hold our doubts tenderly. *Amen.*

Brief “How Are You?” (10 min)

Ice breaker (10 min)

Where do you draw wisdom/inspiration from? What is a book that has inspired you? What is a truth or insight you’ve found inspiring?

Readings (5 min)

Invite a volunteer or two to read.

“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

“Read the Word every day, either one or two chapters.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 803)

“The Lord is the Word, as is very clear from the following statement in John: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became

flesh.’ (John 1:1, 14) In this passage the Word means divine truth, because the Word is the only source of divine truth for Christians. The Word is the spring from which all the churches named for Christ draw living water in all its fullness.” (*True Christianity* 777)

Discussion Questions (Choose 2-3 depending on time 25 min)

- What is your response to these readings?
- Do you own a copy of the Bible? What does it look like? What does it feel like when you pick it up?
- Describe a time of reading the Word when you felt insight/hope.
- Describe a time in your life where you felt in a drought in reading the Word.
- What does learning from the Lord look like to you?
- Describe a time of great growth/expansion in your understanding of the Lord and how He works.

Questions for Small Groups to Consider (5-15 min)

- Often people hear the Lord speak through the honest and heartfelt words of each other. How can leaders create an environment where people feel comfortable and safe enough to share their thoughts and perspectives?
- Does our group spend time learning from the Word? How could we make this time more meaningful?
- If your group is new to studying the Word, Is there anyone in our group especially lit up about reading the Word? Would they be willing to bring a quote that could be shared at the beginning of each gathering?

Closing Comments (5 min)

Closing Prayer (5 min)

Ask for any prayer requests. Offer closing prayer and/or whole group can say together The Lord’s Prayer (see Appendix B)

QUOTES ABOUT

Learning from the Word

Use these quotes for independent reading.

“Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God.”

Deuteronomy 12:28

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Psalm 119:105

“In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God... In God was life, and the life was humanity’s light... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld God’s glory...”

John 1: 1, 4, 14

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:31-32

“Those who love Me will be true to My Word.”

John 14:23

“The whole of the Word is a lesson in love and charity.”

Last Judgment 39:9

“The Lord is present with us and united to us through the Word because the Lord is the Word and is virtually talking with us in it.”

Sacred Scripture 78

“Each truth from the Word is a mirror in which we see the Lord.”

True Christianity 508.6

“When the Word is read, the Lord comes in and teaches.”

Secrets of Heaven 6516.3

“The literal sense of the Word is like a well with water in it, in that every single thing in the Word holds within itself the internal sense.”

Secrets of Heaven 3464

“The Word’ is the Lord in respect of Divine Truth. Through this Truth all things in heaven and in hell are arranged into order... Divine Truth holds all power within itself, so completely that it is power itself.”

Secrets of Heaven 8200:1,2

“It is through the Word that the Lord is present with a person and conjoined with him, for the Lord is the Word, and as it were speaks with the person in it.”

Doctrine of the Lord 2

“Where the Word is read with reverence and the Lord is wor-

shipped from the Word, the Lord is present together with heaven. This is because the Lord is the Word, and the Word is Divine Truth which constitutes heaven."

Divine Providence 2:2

"The Word in its internal sense contains innumerable things which transcend the human comprehension."

New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine 260

"Unless we form the habit of going to the Bible in bright moments as well as in trouble, we cannot fully respond to its consolations because we lack equilibrium between light and darkness."

Helen Keller

"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."

Mahatma Gandhi

"The more I read, the more I acquire, the more certain I am that I know nothing."

Voltaire

"I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day."

Abraham Lincoln

"...Faith isn't about having everything figured out ahead of time; faith is about following the quiet voice of God without having everything figured out ahead of time."

Rachel Held Evans

WEEK FOUR

SHARING

Wisdom, Love to the Neighbor

Introduction

Sharing our insights about life can be transformative for both the listening and receiving parties. It also can be confrontational. Who are we to offer insight? What do we really ‘know’? The Lord is at work in all people’s lives, and there is a natural inclination to want to share joy. How have you benefited from others sharing their learned wisdom about life? How can you be part of sharing a message of hope of healing of transformation with those around you?

Opening Prayer (1-2 min)

Lord, thank You for this time together. Fill our hearts with such love that we are unable to contain it. Expand our understanding and help us to share Your love and wisdom with those around us. Help us express our delight in You. Thank You for the chance to participate in creating a more loving world with those around us. *Amen.*

Brief “How Are You?” (10 min)

Ice breaker (10 min)

Describe a time someone really helped/guided you in your life.

Readings (5 min)

Invite a volunteer or two to read.

“Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised.” (Psalm 96: 2-4)

“Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

“And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. This symbolically means that anyone who has any knowledge of the Lord’s coming and of the New Heaven and New Church, thus of the Lord’s kingdom, let him pray for the Lord’s coming; and anyone who desires truths, let him pray for the Lord to come with light. And anyone who loves truths will then receive them from the Lord apart from any endeavors of his own. “ (Apocalypse Revealed 956)

Discussion Questions (Choose 2-3 depending on time, 25 min)

- What is your response to these readings?
- What is advice you’ve recently given a friend? Was it well received?
- Describe your relationship with God in 5 words.
- Describe a time you felt it easy to talk about your faith.
- Describe an area in your life where you are struggling to share your faith with others.
- When someone says “sharing your faith” what is your response?

For Small Group Consideration (5-15 min)

- What would it look like for our small group to share the truths we are learning?
- What would it look like for us to share our small group experience to help others get involved in small groups?
- Is there a way our small group can give back from the growth/transformation we’ve experienced here?

Closing Comments (5 min)

Closing Prayer (5 min)

Ask for any prayer requests. Offer closing prayer and/or whole group can say together The Lord’s Prayer (see Appendix B).

QUOTES ABOUT

Sharing

Use these quotes for independent reading.

“Freely you have received, freely give.”

Matthew 10:8

“Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:19

“And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”

Mark 16:15

“To make a dinner and a supper, and to call them, symbolizes the same as giving to eat and drink, or giving bread and wine, namely, to do good to the neighbor, and to teach truth, and thus to be associated in love.”

Apocalypse Explained 695.6

“Love consists in willing what one has to be another’s, and in feeling the five other’s delight as delight within oneself.”

Divine Love and Wisdom 47

"The Lord is present with you the moment you start to love the neighbor."

Secrets of Heaven 904

"If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it."

Margaret Fuller

"A teacher who establishes rapport with the taught, becomes one with them, learns more from them than he teaches them."

Mahatma Gandhi

"Once I knew only darkness and stillness... my life was without past or future... but a little word from the fingers of another fell into my hand that clutched at emptiness, and my heart leaped to the rapture of living."

Helen Keller

"A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle."

Father James Keller

"If you want to learn something, read about it. If you want to understand something, write about it. If you want to master something, teach it."

Yogi Bhajan

WEEK FIVE

KEEPING COMMANDMENTS

Use, Love to the Lord

Introduction

Coming full circle from worship to a life of love and charity: “You are worshiping all the time if love and charity abide in you” (*Secrets of Heaven* 1618), that is, the life of worship is where one is constantly striving to keep the commandments. Perhaps the most essential of living your faith is doing good things (and shunning evil)—walking the walk. No matter what we learn or what we say, it is what we do that reflects a true life of faith.

Opening Prayer (1-2 min)

Lord, thank You for this time together. Help us to understand the Commandments You have taught us and given us in Your Word. We strive to better ourselves, to grow closer to You, and to become living examples of Your Love. *Amen.*

Brief “How Are You?” (10 min)

Ice breaker (10 min)

What is a motto you consciously try to live by?

Readings (5 min)

Invite a volunteer or two to read.

“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:17)

“All the Lord’s commandments relate to loving our neighbor. In summary form, they involve not doing evil to our neighbors, and instead doing them good.... People like this love God and God loves them. Because love for God and love for our neighbor are connected in this way, John says: “Those who keep the commandments of Jesus Christ live in him, and he lives in them. If any say, “I love God in every way” but hate their brothers and sisters, they

are liars. If they do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they see, how can they love God whom they do not see? This commandment we have from him: that people who love God also love their brothers and sisters.” (*True Christianity* 458)

“When a person shuns and turns away from evils as sins and is raised up into heaven by the Lord, they are no longer in what is their own, but in the Lord, and thus think and will goods.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 946)

“In the Word it is said in many places that they should keep and do God’s commandments and His precepts; and by doing the precepts of God is meant the same as by loving the Lord above all things, and the neighbor as ourselves. For what a person loves inwardly, or from one’s heart, this one wills; and what one wills, one does. And to love God is to love His precepts, because they are of God, even as they are God.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 894)

Discussion Questions (Choose 2-3 depending on time, 25 min)

- What is your response to these readings?
- How would you describe yourself between being a rule-follower and a rule-breaker?
- What is your experience with the Ten Commandments? Did you ever learn them as a child?
- Do you ever find any rules or regulations in your daily life to be pointless or hypocritical? Do you follow them?

For Small Group Consideration (5-15 min)

- Are there any small group guidelines we’d like to add or revise for our group?
- How can our small group be a support for each other in keeping the Commandments in our own lives?
- Do we want to study content centered around the 10 Commandments (such as “Rise Above It”)?

Closing Comments (5 min)

Closing Prayer (5 min)

Ask for any prayer requests. Offer closing prayer and/or whole group can say together The Lord’s Prayer (see Appendix B).

QUOTES ABOUT

Keeping Commandments

Use these quotes for independent reading.

“And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before My face.

You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.

You shall not covet your neighbor’s spouse, nor their manservant, nor their maidservant, nor their ox, nor their donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Exodus 20:10-17

“Walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you.”

Deuteronomy 5:33

“Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God.”

Jeremiah 11:4

“If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

Matthew 19:17

“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

Luke 11:28

“Worship of the Lord does not consist in mere belief nor in mere love. Rather it consists in leading a life in accord with His commandments.”

Secrets of Heaven 10645.2

“To love the Lord is to live according to His commandments.”

Apocalypse Explained 433

“Charity is a person’s spiritual life.”

Last Judgment 39:9

“When a person though the last six commandments conjoins oneself to the Lord as if of oneself, the Lord then conjoins Himself to a person through the first three commandments, which are that a person must acknowledge God, must believe in the Lord, and must keep His name holy.”

Apocalypse Explained 1027:3-4

“The adherents to faith separated from charity can have no other belief than that the works of charity consist solely in giving to the poor and helping the distressed.... But in fact the works of charity consist in each person doing what is right and fair in his employment, from a love of what is right and fair, and of what is good and true.”

Secrets of Heaven 4783.5

“One who lives according to the commandments is conjoined

with the Lord. For the commandments teach life and also give life, and thus open the way to heaven, and the sight to the Lord.”

Secrets of Heaven 8767

“The Ten Commandments contain everything concerning doctrine and life, not only everything which concerns God, but also everything which concerns people. That is why the law was written on two tablets, one dealing with God, the other with people.”

True Christianity 287.2

“The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently.”

Pema Chodron

“The five points of yama, together with the five points of niyama, remind us of the Ten Commandments of the Christian and Jewish faiths, as well as of the ten virtues of Buddhism. In fact, there is no religion without these moral or ethical codes. All spiritual life should be based on these things. They are the foundation stones without which we can never build anything lasting.”

Swami Satchidananda

“I do not understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us.”

Anne Lamott



WEEK SIX
SERVING

Use, Love to the Neighbor

Introduction

In this series, we've explored ways that we are to share elements of our religion, community and faith, with those around us. Taking both of these a step further is to serve the neighbor through our actions. How does living our faith impact the way we serve others? How does it gain life and form through our useful actions?

How do we respond to this invitation to love our neighbor through service?

Opening Prayer (1-2 min)

Lord, thank You for this time together. Grant us the willingness to help serve our neighbor, those outside ourselves and outside this group. Help us see where other peoples' needs are, and where the gifts You've given us can give aid, both for the sake of others and as a reflection of Your love.
Amen.

Brief "How Are You?" (10 min)

Ice breaker (10 min)

Describe a memorable experience of serving when you were a child or young adult?

Readings (5 min)

Invite a volunteer or two to read.

"Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My sisters or brothers, you did it to Me. (Matthew 25:40)

"Charity can be defined as doing good to the neighbor daily and constantly, not only to the neighbor as an individual but also collectively; and the only way of doing this is by good and fair dealing in the position, business or work in which one is engaged and with anyone with whom one comes into contact. For this is what one does every day, and when one is not doing it, it still constantly occupies one's mind, one's thoughts and intentions." (*True Christianity* 423. See also *Life* 114, *Secrets of Heaven* 3928)

“I have been permitted to see many things in heaven, as well as in the world, and in the human body, and at the same time to ponder over their uses, and it has been revealed to me that every thing in them, both great and small, was created from use, in use, and for use.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 1194)

“Love and wisdom without the good of use are nothing; they are only ideal entities, and do not become realities until they exist in use. Love, wisdom and use are three things which cannot be separated; if separated, they are nothing. Love is nothing without wisdom; but by means of wisdom it assumes a form, which is use; therefore, when love by means of wisdom is expressed in use, then it really is, because then it actually exists. Love, wisdom and use are like end, cause and effect; the end is nothing unless it is in the effect by means of the cause; and if one of these three is destroyed, the whole is destroyed, and nothing remains.” (*True Christian Religion* 387.3)

Discussion Questions (Choose 2-3 depending on time, 25 min)

- What is your response to these readings?
- Describe a time you felt you really served another.
- If you didn't have to worry about having a job for financial stability, how do you envision you'd spend your time?
- When do you experience the disappearance of time, where you are just fully engaged in the present?
- How do other people describe your gifts?
- Do you feel you get to share your gifts in your current life/work/situation?

For Small Group Consideration (5-15 min)

- What are some of the needs of members of our group? How can we support each other?
- What are some of the needs of our church and greater community?
- How could our small group work together in service to meet some of these needs?

Closing Comments (5 min)

Closing Prayer (5 min)

Ask for any prayer requests. Offer closing prayer and/or whole group can say together The Lord's Prayer (see Appendix B).

QUOTES ABOUT

Serving

Use these quotes for independent reading.

“If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help [that person], like a stranger or a sojourner, that [they] may live with you.”

Leviticus 25:35

“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

Matthew 25:40

“Give, and it will be given to you..”

Luke 6:83

“[W]hen people who are perceptive have feelings of compassion they know that they are being alerted by the Lord to offer help.”

Secrets of Heaven 6737

“Charity means love to the neighbor and compassion, for anyone who loves one’s neighbor as oneself also has as much compassion for another person in their suffering as one does for oneself in their own.”

Secrets of Heaven 351

“The essence of spiritual love is to do good to others, not for one’s own sake, but for their sake.”

Divine Love and Wisdom 335

“You are born that you may become charity. But you cannot become charity unless you perpetually do the good of use to the neighbor, from affection and delight. ”

Charity 126

“Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It’s a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.”

Pema Chodron

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”

Mother Teresa

“We are not a voice for the voiceless. The truth is that there is a lot of noise out there drowning out quiet voices, and many people have stopped listening to the cries of their neighbors. Lots of folks have put their hands over their ears to drown out the suffering. Institutions have distanced themselves from the disturbing cries.. It is a beautiful thing when folks in poverty are no longer just a mission project but become genuine friends and family with whom we laugh, cry, dream, and struggle. One of the verses I have grown to love is the one where Jesus is preparing to leave the disciples and says, “I no longer call you servants.... Instead, I have called you friends” (John 15:15). Servanthood is a fine place to begin, but gradually we move toward mutual love, genuine relationships. Someday, perhaps we can even say those words that Ruth said to Naomi after years of partnership: “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried” (Ruth 1:16-17).”

Shane Claiborne

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participating in a Small Group

For each meeting, bring your workbook. Come a few minutes early so that you have time for fellowship with others in your group before beginning the meeting.

Small Group Guidelines

The following guidelines help create a safe, supportive environment. With your group, you can customize them to meet your needs.

1. We do not give unsolicited advice.
2. We do not interrupt.
3. We speak only for ourselves.
4. We share, we do not preach.
5. We have the option to pass.
6. We do not use names when sharing.
7. We keep confidentiality.
8. We seek to stay within time limits so everyone has a chance to share.

Time Frame

With your group, decide on the time frame for your weekly meetings. We suggest a minimum of 60 minutes. If your church is participating in this program, set your time frame so that your first meeting follows the first worship service. That way, you will have had an introduction to the material before covering it in the group.

Bring Your Talents!

Think about what you enjoy - whether it's baking, singing, researching, acting, or anything else. Work with your small group leader to find ways your talent might enhance the group experience.

APPENDIX B

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
as in heaven, so upon the earth.
Give us this day, our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts
as we also forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever.
Amen.*

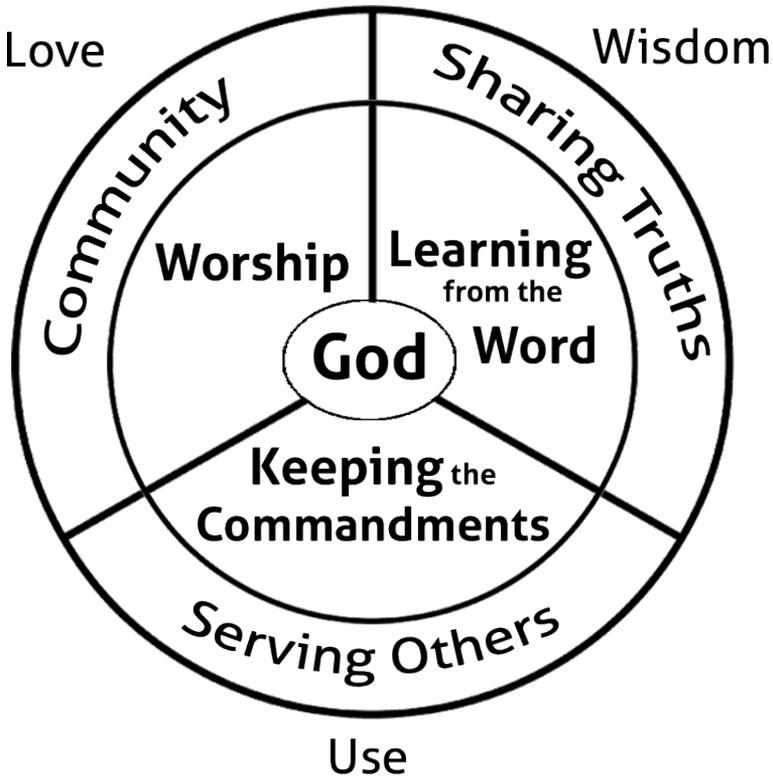
—Matthew 6:9-13

APPENDIX C

Love, Wisdom, and Use

Below is a graphic of how the various themes explored in “Living Faith” relate to each other. This is an attempt to answer questions about how do love, wisdom and use show up in our lives? What about loving the Lord and loving the neighbor?

Your word choices and interpretation may vary and hopefully this is a useful prompt for introspection and conversation.



The outer circles reflect ways we can love our neighbor, while the inner circles reflect loving the Lord.

EVALUATION FORM

LIVING FAITH

DATE _____ YOUR LOCATION _____

YOUR AGE

- Under 18 18-35 36-60 Over 60

HOW DID YOU FIRST HEAR ABOUT THIS PROGRAM?

- Newspaper Banner outside the church
 From a friend Announcement at church
 Mailing Website
 Other (please specify): _____

HOW DID YOU PARTICIPATE?

- With an in-person small group With an online group
 Independently With a marriage group
 Other (please specify): _____

ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE

What is your experience with the New Church and New Church teachings?
(Are you a life-long member, or did you recently find the church?)

What did you find to be the strengths of this program?

If you participated in a small group, what was something you gained from your small group experience?

What elements of this program could be improved?

What types of programs would you like to see in the future?

SHARE YOUR STORY

Would you like to be contacted to share your story? Yes No

If yes, please fill out the following contact information. Thank you!

Name _____

Phone number _____

Email _____

Address _____

GIVING BACK

Would you like to donate to support future programs? Yes No

If yes, please go to www.newchurchjourney.org and click on “donate.” Be sure to mention “Journey” in the comments. Or, send your check to General Church Outreach, P.O. Box 743 Bryn Athyn, PA 19009, USA. Please mention “Journey Program “ in the description. Thank you!

What does it look like to live your faith?
How does loving the Lord and the neighbor show
up in everyday ways?

This small group program, “Living Faith” offers an opportunity for people to get together and support each other in consciously, actively practice bringing love and wisdom into life. Because whether or not we are kneeling in pews, serving others, or studying scripture, we have a chance to let our light shine, and live our faith.