

SINGLES FOR CHRIST
CHRISTIAN LIFE PROGRAM

TALK NO. 1 – GOD’S LOVE

GOAL:

To communicate the truth that God loves us and to provide a better understanding of that love.

CORE MESSAGE:

God is love. Thus he is compelled by his very nature to create, so that he can share that love. God demonstrates his love by creating man in his image. God’s love creates. But man, in the exercise of his God-given gift of free will, has rejected his Creator by sinning. Yet, even when we sin and abandon him, God still loves us and patiently waits for us to come back to him. God’s lavish and generous love is best described in the parable of the father and his two sons (Lk. 15:11-31). The parable tells us that God’s love forgives. The greatest expression of God’s love is the sending of his only Son to suffer and die, that we may have life eternal. Therefore, God’s love is, most of all, a love that redeems.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

In the beginning, God broke the deafening silence and stillness of the universe. He lit up its blinding darkness. He filled up its infinite void. He disturbed the sound of silence. He did all these to manifest and share his love. For love is not love if it is not shared!

B. God’s Love Creates

1. The starting point for understanding God’s love is found in the story of creation in Genesis. Since God is love, he is compelled by his very nature to create so that he can share this love (Gen. 1:1-31).
 - a) For five days, God created the heavens and the earth, the water and the land, the animals and the plants. And after each description of what God has created, the verse is followed by the words, “God saw how good it was” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).
 - b) Then on the sixth day, God created man and woman (Gen. 1:27).

- c) After God had created man and woman, **"God looked at everything that he had made, and found it very good"** (Gen. 1:31).
 - d) After God had created the heavens and the earth, the land and the water, the animals and the plants, he found them "good." But after God had created man and woman, he found all creation not just "good", but "very good."
 - e) So God created man in his image. In the divine image, God created him. What better demonstration of God's love than being created in the image of the Creator!
2. But man, in the exercise of his God-given gift of free will, rejected his Creator by sinning. And since then, man has continued to offend God and go against his ways. But God's love never wanes despite the sinfulness of man.
- a) Despite their sin, God bestowed on Adam and Eve a gesture of grace by giving them clothing (Gen. 3:21).
 - b) When Cain murdered his brother Abel, God manifested his love and mercy by putting a mark on Cain to protect him from being killed on sight (Gen. 4:15).
 - c) When God decided to eradicate evil on earth by sending a great flood, he instructed Noah to build an ark to save the righteous from death (Gen. 9:1-28).
 - d) Even when mankind continued to disobey and offend God, still God promised Abraham that he would love him and his descendants forever (Gen. 12:1-3).
 - e) He made the same promise to Isaac and to Moses and to David.
 - f) As in Old Testament times, God's love for us today remains that same compassionate and forgiving love of the God who created us. Even when we abandon him, he patiently waits for us to come back to him.

C. God's Love Forgives

1. God's forgiving love is described in the Bible's most well-known parable that has come to be known by a wrong title, The Prodigal Son. But this parable is really about a father who has two sons. The central figure in the parable is neither the younger son nor the elder son. The central figure is the father. And the central message is the father's prodigal love, his lavish and generous love, not just for the younger son but for the elder son as well (Lk. 15:11-31).

a) Under Jewish law, the children inherit their share of the property only after the father's death. By asking for his share of the inheritance, the younger son is effectively saying that as far as he is concerned, his father is already dead. It is expected that he will never come back (Lk. 15:12).

b) But the younger son suffers misfortune in a distant land. He decides to come back. He prepares a three-part statement:

Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you (Lk. 15:18).

I no longer deserve to be called your son (Lk. 15:19a).

Treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers (Lk. 15:19b).

c) The parable includes a phrase that gives an insight into the nature and magnitude of the father's love: *While he was a long way off, his father caught sight of him* (Lk. 15:20b).

d) Perhaps it was by chance that the father was outside the house when the son was about to enter his property. But it was more likely that this father had been constantly looking beyond his property since his son had left. He missed his son so much that each morning, as the sun rose, he would stand on the threshold of his house gazing at a distance, asking himself, "Is it today that my son will come back?" After lunch, he would do the same and ask again, "Is it today that he will return?" Then before it got dark, he would again look beyond his property, hoping to catch a glimpse of a familiar figure and mumble softly, "Is it today that I will see my son again?"

e) This father loves his son so much that he has been waiting. He has been regularly watching the path leading to his house. And that is the reason why, while his son was still a long way off, he sees him right away. That is why he is outside his house on the day his younger son returns.

f) He does not wait for him to come near. He runs to meet his son. Most fathers would wait and expect an apology. But not this father! He loves his son so prodigally that he hugs and kisses him—no matter how dirty he must have been (Lk. 15:20c).

g) The son stammers out his prepared statement with 3 parts. He is able to say the first two but he does not get to say the third part. His father cuts him short. He will not allow his son to ask to be treated like a servant. All that he is interested in is letting his son know that he is loved as a son. Yes, not a servant, but a beloved son (Lk. 15:21)!

h) He interrupts his son's apology and asks his servants to give his son the best robe—to show that he is regarded with highest esteem; to put a ring on his finger—to show that he has authority as a son; and to put sandals on his feet—to show that he is a son and not a slave (Lk. 15:22).

- i) The elder son returns from working in the field and refuses to come in. Again, the father, who loves his elder son as much as the younger son, comes out to meet and console him. The elder son refuses to call his younger brother as “brother” but refers to him as “this son of yours”. So the father also assures the elder son of his love: *“My son, everything I have is yours.”* *What an assurance* (Lk. 15:25-31)!
2. The parable is a graphic story of God’s love, a God who is passionately in love with all his children—those who “leave and return” and those who “stay and obey”; a God who will “run out to meet us” whenever we decide to come back to him; a God who will “come out” to comfort and assure us whenever we feel rejected, taken for granted, or hurt.
3. Finally, it is a parable that confirms God’s willingness to give us all that he possesses (*everything I have is yours*). Even his only begotten Son.

D. God’s Love Redeems

1. We learn that God’s love is manifested in the story of creation—God’s love is a love that creates. We discover that the parable describes the nature of this love—God’s love is a love that forgives. Then Pope John Paul II tells us, “God’s love is expressed in the offering of his only Son.”
2. Indeed, the Bible tells us that the fullest revelation of God’s love is the giving of his only begotten Son to suffer and die that we may have eternal life. God’s love is, most of all, a love that redeems.
 - a) *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life* (Jn. 3:16).
 - b) *In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his Son into the world so that we might have life through him* (1 Jn 4:9).
 - c) *But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us* (Rom. 5:8).
3. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, in *One Heart Full of Love*: “Let’s believe in God’s love, and let’s be faithful to him. If you look at the cross, you will see his head lowered to kiss you. You will see his arms stretched out to embrace you. You will see his heart open to welcome you. He loves us in spite of how poor and sinful we are. His love is true, and we should believe in his love.”

E. Conclusion

We are both the younger son and the elder son in the parable. Some of us have “taken our share of the inheritance” and abandoned God. Some of us have stayed

on but have become self-righteous. Regardless of whom we are, God loves us dearly. Like the younger son, we should “come to our senses” and return to God who is patiently waiting for us. Unlike the elder son, we should not be jealous of our brothers or hesitate in accepting God’s invitation to join in the celebration.

God’s love is reflected in his creation. God’s love is described in the parable of the father and his two sons. But the fullest revelation of God’s love is the sending of the Son to suffer and die that we may have life eternal. Thus, we ought to know who this Son really is.

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TALK NO. 2 – WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

GOAL:

To provide a better understanding of Jesus Christ and thus attract people to him.

CORE MESSAGE:

Jesus of history is an absolutely unique figure. He was the only person in history ever pre-announced. He was born in Bethlehem of a virgin named Mary, but grew up in Nazareth. He became an itinerant preacher but his three-year ministry attracted only a modest number of disciples, mostly fishermen and their relatives. He was crucified in Jerusalem for stirring up the people. From a purely historical perspective, Jesus should have been forgotten by now. Yet we are confronted by the fact that he divided history into two: before his coming (B.C.) and after his death (A.D.), and after two thousand years, billions of people profess him as Lord.

Christ of faith did many signs, forgave sins, gave life to the dead, claimed to possess all power in heaven and on earth, claimed that he will sit at the right hand of the Father and come to judge all mankind, and claimed straightforwardly to be God. But it is his suffering and death on the cross that reveals his true identity. The cross is the central point of our knowing and understanding Jesus Christ. His cross is both language and parable. But Jesus' death on the cross would have been meaningless without the resurrection. The most conclusive proof that Jesus is Lord and God is his resurrection. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. Being God we can pray to him and he can answer our needs. Being human, he feels our feelings, suffers our pains, understands our loneliness, and we can have a very personal relationship with him.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. As Christians, we derive our identity from a person, one whom we can be truly proud. He is truly impressive.
 - a) Millions today claim to be his followers, almost 2,000 years after his death.
 - b) Countless numbers have been martyred for their faith in him.
 - c) The book about him, the Bible, is easily the no. 1 best seller of all time.
2. It is this person who won for us our salvation, who restored us to our relationship with God. In him we can have a full and a new life.

3. Jesus himself asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” (Mk. 8:27-30).
4. Fr. Raymond Brown in his book, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, reflected on the significance of Jesus’ question: “‘Who do people say that I am?’ is a question associated with Jesus as early as the first Gospel to be written. In that Gospel it produced a variety of answers, including one volunteered but poorly understood by Peter, his best-known follower. The question has produced a variety of answers ever since.”
5. After realizing the importance of this person to us, and to better understand who he really is, we also ask: “Who is Jesus Christ?”

B. Jesus of History

1. Three things that make Jesus an absolutely unique figure in human history:
 - a) History is full of men and women who have claimed that they came from God. Simple logic dictates that if God is sending someone into the world, God should announce his coming in advance. Otherwise, anyone could claim that he or she is the one sent by God. Jesus is the only person in history ever pre-announced. The prophecies of the Old Testament made centuries before Jesus was born converge towards the person of Jesus (Is. 7:14, Is. 9:5, Nm. 24:17).
 - b) He was born in Bethlehem of a virgin named Mary (Lk. 2:1-20). Once he appeared on the scene, he struck history with such impact that he split it in two, dividing it into two periods: BC and AD.
 - c) Every person who came into this world came into it to live. Jesus came into the world to suffer and die. His death was the goal and fulfilment of his life.
2. Some details about his life.
 - a) Jesus grew up as a young carpenter in Nazareth. For three years he became an itinerant preacher. He was never more than 150 kilometers from his home. He had never been into cities with populations larger than 50,000.
 - b) He did not have an army like Alexander the Great. He did not have a school like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. His father was a mere carpenter. His short ministry attracted only a modest number of disciples, mainly uneducated fishermen and their relatives.

- c) He experienced anger and grief (Mk. 3:5), love (Mk. 10:21), compassion (Mk. 1:41), and sadness (Mk. 14:34). He also showed tenderness and personal concern.
- d) He was a magnetic leader. He summoned Simon and Andrew (Mk. 1:16-18), James and John (Mk. 1:20), and Levi (Mk. 2:14), who all followed him immediately.
- e) But after a mere 3 years of preaching he was killed, nailed to a cross in Jerusalem for stirring up the people.
- f) By right he should simply have faded into complete oblivion. Instead, he is surely the most famous, honoured, and best-loved person who ever walked on earth.

C. Christ of Faith

How did this happen? What did Jesus do or say about himself that, in spite of his humble and short human life, he created such an impact in history?

1. Jesus did many signs or miracles. His first sign, the transformation of water into wine during a wedding in Cana, was occasioned by his mother, Mary (Jn. 2:1-11).
2. Jesus forgave sins (Mk. 2:5-7).

C.S. Lewis, in his book "Mere Christianity", gives the most compelling commentary on these verses: "Jesus' claim to forgive sins, any sin, is really so preposterous or comic unless he is God himself. One can understand how a man can forgive offenses against himself. You step on my toe and I forgive you. You steal my money and I forgive you. But what do you make of a man, himself unrobed and unhurt, who announces that he forgives you for stepping on somebody else's toes and stealing somebody else's money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we can make of such a man. He forgives sin without consulting the people adversely affected by the offenses. This makes sense only if he really is God whose very laws were violated by the offenses."
3. Jesus gave life. The Gospels report that he did this at least 3 times: the raising of the widow's son in Nain (Lk. 7:11-17), the raising of the daughter of Jairus (Lk. 8:52-55), and the raising of his friend Lazarus after being dead for 4 days (Jn. 11:38-44).
4. Jesus claimed to possess all power in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18-19). Unlike earthly kings or military generals, Jesus did not have any army to wage war. He did not have a vast wealth to purchase and own territories. And yet he proclaimed with great conviction that he had power not just on earth but also in heaven.

5. Jesus claimed that he will sit on the right hand of the Father and come to judge all mankind (Mk. 14:61-63, Mt 25:31-33).
6. Jesus claimed straightforwardly to be God (Jn. 8:56-58, Jn 10:30,37-38).
7. Jesus' contemporaries came to the realization that he was God.
 - a) Simon Peter (Mt. 16:13-16)
 - b) Martha (Jn. 11:27)
 - c) Nathanael (Jn. 1:49)
 - d) Thomas (Jn. 20:27-28)
 - e) The centurion (Mt. 27:54)
 - f) Even the evil spirits (Mt. 8:29, Mk 1:24, Mk 3:11, Lk 4:41)

D. Liar, Lunatic, or Lord

1. Jesus' claim to be God must be either true or false. If false, then we have two and only two alternatives. Either he knew it was false, in which case he would be a liar, or he did not know it was false, in which case he would be a lunatic.
2. Could Jesus have lied? If he lied, then he would have been deliberately deceiving his followers. But we need only look at his person, his words, and his work to conclude that he could not have been a liar. Look at his moral purity, dignity, sound intellect, and air of truth. Consider his character that is so original, consistent, perfect, and high above human greatness. He carried out a plan of unparalleled beneficence, moral magnitude and greatness, and sacrificed his own life for it. Would he die for a lie? The results of his life and teachings have been lives changed for the better, thieves made honest, and hateful individuals becoming channels of love.
3. Could Jesus have been a lunatic? In Jesus we do not see any abnormalities or imbalances that usually go along with being deranged. In fact, his poise and composure would be amazing if he were insane. He spoke some of the most profound sayings ever recorded. Such a man cannot be a lunatic.
4. If not a liar or a lunatic, the only alternative left to us is that Jesus did speak the truth. He was, and is, the Son of God as he claimed—He is Lord!

E. We Truly Know Jesus Through the Cross

Jesus Christ walked on earth, cured the sick, restored life to the dead, and proclaimed God's kingdom. But the miracles, the healings, and the teachings are

not the most important aspects of Jesus' life and ministry. It is his suffering and death on the cross that makes Jesus our Savior and Redeemer. Jesus' entire life is salvific. It is through the cross that Jesus reveals his true identity. The cross is the means by which we can truly know Jesus. The cross is the central point of our knowing and understanding Jesus Christ because his cross is both language (knowing) and parable (understanding).

1. As language, the cross conveys an idea and reveals a message (1 Cor. 1:18)
 - a) As language, the cross communicates the weakness of our human nature.
 - b) It discloses our sins and reveals our errors.
 - c) It conveys our desperate need of redemption.

2. As parable, the cross tells a story and provides a lesson. As parable, the cross teaches us that our evil deeds are the very nails piercing Christ's hands and feet on the cross. If the cross, as parable, is the means by which we can truly know Jesus, we ought to ask ourselves, "What happened on the cross? What happened on Calvary?"
 - a) Because crucifixion is excruciatingly painful, the condemned was usually offered a strong drink of wine mixed with myrrh to reduce his feeling of pain. But as the Gospel of Mark reports (Mk. 15:23), Jesus refused to take it. Although his body was dehydrated, Jesus refused to take a drink that would lessen the pain of his role as Savior. Although his lips were craving for water, he declined a drink that would reduce the pain of our redemption. At his birth in Bethlehem, Jesus accepted the gift of myrrh. But at his death in Calvary, he refused the sedative of myrrh. Jesus did not want to deaden the very reason for his coming. He did not want to reduce the price of our redemption.

 - b) It was expected that all those being crucified would cry loudly from the unbearable pain. The historian Seneca wrote that they all indeed shouted loudly, cursing everyone and everything, if only to find some outlet to ease the pain they endure. Everyone expected Jesus to do the same. And indeed Jesus cried and shouted. But from the depths of his loving and merciful heart, Jesus cried out not a curse, he shouted not a blasphemy. Instead Jesus cried out a prayer, a prayer of forgiveness: **Father, forgive them, they know not what they do** (Lk. 23:34).

F. Conclusion

1. We cannot know Jesus by just his miracles and teachings. It is only through his suffering and death on the cross that we can truly know Jesus. Only when we start to fully realize the magnitude of this sacrifice that we can begin to truly know Jesus.

2. But Jesus' death on the cross would have been meaningless without the resurrection. The most conclusive proof that Jesus is Lord and God is his

resurrection. Even the doubting Thomas finally believed when he saw the glorified body of the risen Christ (Jn. 20:26-29).

3. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. Being God we can pray to him and ask him for all our needs. But being human, we can have a very personal relationship with him. Being human, he feels our feelings, he suffers our pains and he understands our loneliness. Being human, he can be passionately involved in our lives.
4. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, invites us to love, to repent, to forgive, and to celebrate, confident that he is involved in our daily struggles. When we truly know Jesus, when we take him as our Lord and God, when we develop a personal relationship with him, then we become truly Christian.

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TALK NO. 3 – WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN

GOAL:

To make clear what Christianity is, and to enjoin the participants to appreciate the blessings of being a Christian.

CORE MESSAGE:

To be a Christian means having a loving personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, there have been misconceptions or incomplete notions about Christianity. For some people, Christianity is a mere religious system, a mere moral system, a mere social or humanitarian system, or an escape from the realities of life. But the truth is that Christianity is a relationship initiated by God out of his mercy and love for us.

As Christians, we become a new creation and we participate in the very life of Christ. As Christians, we become children of God and take on his nature. Accordingly, to be a Christian means to become a disciple of Christ, to live the Christian theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. To be a Christian is to know the Father through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. To be a Christian is to have faith in God, to live in hopeful expectation of the fulfillment of the plan of God, and to love God above everything else. For this, we have the Blessed Virgin Mary as our model, for she is Christ's most perfect disciple.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. Last week we asked the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" And we should have come away with the conviction that he is God, and that he is our Lord and Savior. As such, we are his followers.
2. In fact, as Christians, we carry his name. And so now we want to learn about what it really means to be a Christian.
3. It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

During New Testament times, the ancient city of Antioch was the capital of Syria. Syria then was a Roman province and Antioch was the third largest Roman city. Located about 480 kilometers north of Jerusalem, Antioch was renowned for its culture and the arts. It had a large Jewish, as well as Greek,

community. Unfortunately, in AD 526 a strong earthquake leveled this ancient city. On the same location is now the modern city of Antakya, now a territory of Turkey, near the border of Syria.

After Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60), many of the persecuted followers of Jesus fled to Antioch from Jerusalem. As a result, there developed in Antioch one of the largest and most active communities of the followers of Jesus. The new communities converted many local people, including a large number of Greeks.

B. Misconceptions or incomplete notions about Christianity

1. Christianity is a mere religious system.

- a) A set of doctrines to believe in, like the Apostles Creed. Faith remains on an intellectual level.
- b) A set of religious practices, such as going to Mass, novenas, etc.
- c) Knowing or reading a lot about God.
- d) Doing a lot for God.

All the above are misconceptions or incomplete notions about Christianity unless what we believe in is translated into our lives, i.e., we base our values and lives on the doctrines we believe in. Our religious practices ought to be experiences of faith and not mere rituals we do as a matter of habit.

2. Christianity is a mere moral system.

- a) A set of dos and don'ts, a set of rules regarding right and wrong.
- b) Avoiding those things that can make you go to hell.

These are incomplete notions because they make religion legalistic and sterile. There is no life and joy. Rather, our religion is our life. We do or don't do certain things not because the rulebook says so, but as an expression of our relationship with God and with our brethren.

3. Christianity is a social, humanitarian system.

- a) Equating Christianity with humanitarianism.
- b) A Christian is someone who does good and is kind. He is a nice man or woman who always smiles, never gets angry, and tries to please everyone.

This is an incomplete notion because it leaves out the deity of Christ, and limits Christianity to merely being a Good Samaritan. In fact, a Christian can get angry (righteous anger), as Jesus did. In fact, non-Christians can also do good.

4. Christianity is an escape from the realities of life.

- a) An opium of the poor and the oppressed. It is for the weak, for those who cannot cope with life.
- b) Equating Christianity with convent life, an escape from the ordeals of a secular life.

This is a wrong notion because Christians are not taught to escape problems but to face them.

C. Truths About Christianity

The essence of Christianity is union with God that is made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What makes us Christians is our loving, personal relationship with Christ. There are three important truths about Christianity.

1. Christianity is a relationship initiated by God out of his mercy and love for us.
 - a) Our Christian faith is a gift from God. It is a free gift (Eph. 2:8).
 - b) God initiated our relationship with Christ. We did not initiate it (1 Jn. 4:10).
2. As Christians, we become a new creation and participate in the very life of Christ.
 - a) When we are baptized as Christians, we become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).
 - b) Christianity is a life of constant renewal (Gal. 2:20).
3. As Christians, we become children of God and take on his nature, which is holiness.
 - a) If we are his children, then God is our Father (Gal. 3:26).
 - b) As children of the heavenly Father, we have access to him.
 - c) If we all have but one Father in heaven, then we are all sons and daughters of God.
 - d) As children of God, we take the nature of God, which is holiness (1 Pt 1:15-16).
 - e) As children of God, this earth is not really our home; our real home is with our Father in heaven.

D. Implications of Being a Christian

To be a Christian means having a personal relationship with Christ. Being a Christian means becoming a disciple of Christ. Being Christ's disciple means living in faith, hope and charity, of which are "infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1813).

1. A Christian is a person of faith (Heb. 11:1).
 - a) Faith means acceptance and commitment.
 - b) A true Christian is one who freely and boldly expresses his faith to other people so that they may also be brought further into faith.

2. A Christian is a person of hope (Rom. 8:24-25).
 - a) Hope is an attitude of confident expectation.
 - b) A true Christian is one who lives full of hope, confident that the will of God will happen and his plan will be consummated.

3. A Christian is a person of love (Jn. 13:35).
 - a) Love for one another is what distinguishes the disciples of Jesus.
 - b) A true Christian is one who loves as Christ loves.

What does it mean to be a Christian? To be a Christian is to have a loving, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to know the Father through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. To be a Christian is to have faith in God, to live in hopeful expectation of the fulfillment of the plan of God, and to love God above everything else. In short, to be a Christian is to let Christ take over our life, to obey his voice and do his bidding, to let go and let God.

E. Conclusion

1. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the model Christian, the perfect disciple of Christ. She has the closest and most personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. Mary was the first to believe. From the moment of the Annunciation and conception, from the moment of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Mary followed Jesus step by step. She was a singular witness to the years of Jesus' infancy and hidden life in Nazareth. She followed him when he began to teach, preach and heal. But most of all, she followed him to his death on the cross. Mary witnessed the dawn of the Church since she was with the apostles in the upper room in Jerusalem.

3. Like Mary, being a Christian means living in faith, hope, and love. Being a Christian means believing that God is our Father and we are his children, hoping that at the end of our earthly pilgrimage we will join the Father in our true home, loving God and our brothers and sisters.

4. As Christians, we become Christ's disciples. And as Christ's disciples, we ought to put our lives completely in his hands, and experience the tremendous peace of Christ flowing into our lives and into our families. As such, we are called to repentance and faith.

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TALK NO. 4 – REPENTANCE AND FAITH

GOAL:

To lead people to repent for their sins and turn to renewed faith in Jesus Christ.

CORE MESSAGE:

The only proper response to all that God has done for us is repentance and faith. “Repent, and believe in the gospel” is precisely what Jesus calls for from the beginning of his ministry. Repentance and faith go together. It is a double-action response. But repentance is not just being sorry for sin because of adverse consequences. It is also not dependent on feelings. True repentance is *metanoia*, a change of mind, a change in direction. Repentance is turning away from sin and evil and surrendering to Jesus as Lord of our life. And if Jesus is Lord, there is no room for being lukewarm. Authentic repentance requires honesty, to admit that a sin is a sin, and humility, to admit that we are weak and we need help. But true repentance requires faith in God. Faith is not a feeling or wishful thinking or a blind leap. Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. It is man’s response to God. It is belief in the gospel, a personal act and decision. Most of all, faith is a pure gift from God. The consequence of repentance and faith is a promise of salvation from sin and death, and at a personal level, freedom from fear of death. Jesus sounded the call to repentance and faith two thousand years ago. It is the same call to us today. Like the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us have complete faith in God and say, “Let it be done to me according to your word.”

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. So far we have heard the basic truths about Christianity, and the most basic truth is that God loves us. And the love of God is most clearly revealed in the sending of the Son to suffer and die that we may have life eternal. This Son is our Lord, Jesus Christ, who has done so much for us. Now it is time for us to respond.
2. Our proper response is repentance and faith. This is precisely what Jesus calls for from the beginning of his ministry: *After John has been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel”* (Mk. 1:14-15).
 - a) We need to repent, i.e., to reform our lives. And we need to believe in the gospel, i.e., have faith in Jesus and the message he brings.

- b) Repentance and faith go together. It is a double-action response. We cannot just have one without the other.
- To just reform our lives is an inadequate response to God. We need to believe in him and in his plans and promises.
 - To simply believe without doing anything to reform our lives to become pleasing to God is also inadequate. Faith necessarily needs to be connected to morality. In other words, faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:14-17).
3. St. Paul was keenly aware of the importance of Jesus' call to repentance and faith. In his farewell speech at Miletus, he said: *You know how I lived among you the whole time from the day I first came to the province of Asia. I earnestly bore witness for both Jews and Greeks to repentance before God and to faith in our Lord Jesus* (Acts 20:18, 21).

B. What is Repentance?

1. To better understand what is meant by Christian repentance, let us examine what repentance is not.
- a) First, repentance is not dependent on feelings. While we might go through a deep emotional experience when we truly repent for our sins, the emotion is not the essential element. Peter's salutary repentance led him back to life. Judas' worldly sorrow led him to death (2 Cor. 7:9-10).
- b) Second, repentance is not being sorry for sin because of fear of the adverse consequences of sin. We should not confuse sorrow for sin with sorrow for the consequences of sin. Fear of the possible punishment may serve as our first step towards true repentance; but to be truly repentant, we must hate sin itself because it offends God.
2. What then is true Christian repentance? In Greek the word for repentance is *metanoia*, which is literally translated as a *change of mind*.
- a) Repentance refers to a change in direction and not just a simple confession of wrongdoing.
- It is a significant change in the way you live your life: dropping an old set of ideals and values by which you live your life and adopting new ones.
 - Repentance affects the way you think and act, your attitudes, motives, thought and behaviour.

- b) Repentance means turning away from sin, evil, and wrongdoing. It means asking God for forgiveness and availing of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, i.e., going to a priest for confession.
- There are specific sins we need to renounce, serious sins that are totally incompatible with a relationship with God.
 - Among these serious sins are: involvement in cults such as Freemasonry and New Age; practicing the occult such as witchcraft, fortune telling, and séances; sexual wrongdoing such as sexual intercourse outside marriage, adultery, active homosexuality; serious crimes such as murder, rape, kidnapping, robbery, corruption; and drunkenness (not just drinking but drunkenness) and getting stoned on drugs.
- c) Repentance is breaking away from running our own lives. It means surrendering to Jesus as the Lord of our life. And if we accept Jesus as Lord, then there is no room for lukewarmness (Rev. 3:15-16).
- The lukewarm do not embrace the cross; they merely drag it along (St. Teresa of Avila).
 - “My enthusiasm is gone,” you wrote me. Yours has to be a work not of enthusiasm, but of love conscious of duty, which means self-denial (Blessed Josemaria Escriva).
 - Lukewarmness is completely incompatible with true repentance. We cannot be half-hearted when approaching God for forgiveness. Repentance becomes complete only under the lordship of Jesus.
3. There are two essential characteristics of authentic repentance: honesty and humility.
- a) When we ask God for forgiveness, we must be honest enough to admit that we have made a mistake. If it is a sin, we must be honest enough to admit that it is a sin.
- If we are practicing a lifestyle of drunkenness or drug addiction, we must be honest enough to admit that it is a sin and resolve to correct the situation.
 - If we are into bribery, cheating and other forms of corruption, we must be honest enough to admit that it is against the teaching of the Church and we should not rationalize the situation.
 - If we are engaging in sexual intercourse outside marriage, we must admit that it is seriously wrong and cut it off immediately.

- b) When we come to God to say how sorry we are for our mistakes, we also should be humble enough to ask him for help so that we can change.
 - We must admit our weakness and not expect that we are capable of changing only through our own efforts.
 - We must be humble enough to seek the help of others, our parish priest or our elders in Couples for Christ and Singles for Christ.

C. What is Faith?

1. To better understand what faith is, let us examine what faith is not.
 - a) Faith is not just a feeling. In faith, we accept God's word as truth, no matter what we feel.
 - b) Faith is not wishful thinking. It is not based on illusions or personal desires, but on God's word.
 - c) Faith is not a blind leap. When Peter stepped on the water he did not do this blindly. He came out into the water because Jesus invited him to. As long as he relied on Jesus he was able to walk on water. Only when he lost his focus on Jesus—when the strong wind and giant waves distracted him—that he began to sink (Mt. 14:26-30).
2. What then is faith? *Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen* (Heb. 11:1).
 - a) Faith is man's response to God, who reveals himself and gives himself to man, at the same time bringing man a superabundant light as he searches for the ultimate meaning in life (Catechism of the Catholic Church).
 - b) Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace (St. Thomas Aquinas).
3. Faith is a grace from God. It is not something that we can earn or acquire by ourselves. It is a pure gift from God.

Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior help of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth (*Dei Verbum*).
4. Faith is belief in the gospel, which is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.
 - a) Faith is belief in both the messenger, Jesus, and in the message that he brings.

- b) Faith means not just believing with our minds (an intellectual belief) that Jesus is the Savior, but believing in our hearts that he came to be our personal Savior.
5. Faith is a personal act and decision. It has several aspects (Rev. 3:20).
- a) It is a definite act. We must open the door if Jesus is to come into our lives.
 - b) It is an individual act. We need to decide on our own to open the door. No one can decide for us to do so.
 - c) It is a deliberate act. We do not have to wait for a supernatural light to flash upon us from heaven (like St. Paul's experience) or an emotional experience to overtake us. We already know that Jesus came into this world and died for our sins. He is now standing outside the door of our hearts and is knocking. The next move is ours.
 - d) It is an urgent act. The future is uncertain and time is passing away.
 - e) It is an indispensable act. It is part of our double-action response. It is the step needed to receive all God has promised. Faith is relying on all God has said.

D. Consequences of Repentance and Faith

1. The consequence of repentance and faith is a promise of salvation from sin, Satan, and death. This is the promise of forgiveness and eternal life with God (Acts 16:31).
2. At a personal level, one consequence of true repentance and profound faith is freedom from fear of death. If indeed we believe that death is nothing but a passage from a life of fleeting joy on earth to a life of eternal happiness in heaven, then we should not fear it. We are unable to overcome our fear because we have not fully repented and our faith is weak.

E. Conclusion

1. Jesus sounded the call to repentance and faith two thousand years ago. It is the same call to us today. We are called to turn away from sin and to accept Jesus as Lord.
2. Like the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us have complete faith in God and say, "Let it be done to me according to your word."
3. As we respond positively, God promises us salvation from sin, forgiveness and reconciliation, eternal life, and the power of the Holy Spirit for our lives.

4. Accept the challenge to repent and believe in Jesus. Then take God up on his promises, and expect to experience the peace and joy and power of the Lord in our lives.

SINGLES FOR CHRIST
CHRISTIAN LIFE PROGRAM

TALK NO. 5 – THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL: LOVING GOD

GOAL:

To explain the meaning of loving God and to teach us how to live out this Christian ideal.

CORE MESSAGE:

Loving God is our highest ideal. This is God's first and greatest commandment. We are asked to love God with all our heart, with all our mind and soul, and with all our strength. To love God with all our heart is to be totally committed to him. It means putting God first in our life and doing things to make this happen. It means spending a lot of time with God, talking with him, listening to him. It requires a decision to obey God. To love God with all our mind and soul means to keep our minds preoccupied with things of God, using it according to God's truths and not according to the ways of the world. It means to fill our mind and soul with thoughts of God and to use our mind to know God more closely and learn his ways and teachings more deeply. To love God with all our strength means giving God our resources: time, talent, and treasure. We need to be generous with the time we devote to serving God and others. We need to use our God-given talent for the kingdom of God. We need to have the right attitude towards our treasure by believing that everything belongs to God and thus use these resources in accordance with God's plan. Our perfect models for loving God are Jesus and Mary. This love is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. Goals and ideals are important to move us on. Goals can direct our behaviour and plans for life. Our goals can become our ideal of life, influencing and directing our lives. Is our goal to amass a lot of money? To attain a high position? To achieve considerable fame?
2. We can give our lives to pursuing good goals and lofty ideals such as reducing criminality or eradicating poverty. These are laudable ideals but they are not sufficient.
3. As Christians, loving God is our highest ideal. This is God's first and greatest commandment. Mk 12:28-30: *One of the scribes, when he came forward and heard them disputing and saw how well he had answered them, asked him, "Which is the first of all commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: 'Hear,*

O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

B. Loving God with All Our Heart

1. We need first to understand what Jesus meant by “heart.”
 - a) The modern understanding of “heart” is related to feeling or emotion.
 - b) The Biblical understanding of “heart” is the seat of intelligence and decision. In modern English, it will be equivalent to “mind” or “will”. The heart is the symbol of the core of who the man is. It includes intelligent thought and will, along with feeling or emotion. The heart determines who the person is: *As one face differs from another, so does one human heart from another* (Prov. 27: 19).
 - c) The Biblical understanding makes more sense because the kind of love God requires cannot depend on feelings, which are changeable, but rather based on a commitment, a decision to love.
 - d) Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical “Deus Caritas Est” states: “Love is not merely a sentiment. Sentiments come and go. A sentiment can be a marvelous first spark, but it is not the fullness of love. It is characteristic of mature love that it calls into play all man’s potentialities; it engages the whole man. But this process is always open-ended; love is never ‘finished’ and complete; throughout life, it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself.”
2. To love God with all our heart means to be totally committed to him.
 - a) It is a commitment to seek the Lord first and foremost. It is a decision to put God first, to be loyal to him, to place his will and interest above our own.
 - b) It is quite similar to the commitment done in marriage, but more, higher and deeper.
3. How do we put the Lord first and foremost in our life?
 - a) It requires a decision to obey him. Jn. 14:15: *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*
 - b) We need to develop a personal relationship with him, a relationship that is dynamic and alive, not legalistic, a personal experience arising from our relationship as God’s sons and daughters.
 - c) We should be with God all the time, to talk with him, to hear his voice. No trip should be too long, no task too tedious, no obstacle too difficult, to be

with our beloved. We should spend regular time with God, in prayer, and in Scripture reading.

C. Loving God with All Our Mind and Soul

1. We love God with all our mind and soul by keeping our mind clean and holy.
 - a) Our mind should be free of evil and impure thoughts. Mt. 5:28: *But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*
 - b) Our mind should be free of uncharitable thoughts (Mt. 7:1-5).
 - c) We should keep our mind away from suspicion that can lead to estranged relationships.
2. We love God with all our mind and soul when we use our mind according to God's truths and not according to the ways of the world.
 - a) The way we think and act must reflect the fact that we are not just living for this temporal world but for God's eternal kingdom.
 - b) Our decisions and choices must be guided by God's words in the Bible.
 - c) We should keep our minds free of worries knowing that God will provide and care for us.
3. We love God with all our mind and soul when our mind is preoccupied with things of God.
 - a) Our mind and soul should be preoccupied with how we can be holy and not by how we can amass wealth or attain high status in society.
 - b) Our mind and soul should be preoccupied with how we can please God and not how we can glory in the praises of men or gain wide popularity.
 - c) A model for loving God with all our mind and soul is St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church. His greatest work was the *Summa Theologica*. At the time of his death, he was writing his reflections on the subject of penance. He devoted his life reflecting about God, studying about God, and writing about God. His mind was preoccupied with things of God—loving God with all his mind and soul.
4. We can love God with all our mind and soul by protecting and preserving our mind from unholy influences so that God can use us for his purposes.

- a) We should be very discerning in the use of television, internet and other media, which can expose our minds to inputs not consistent with Christian living.
 - b) We should fill our mind with thoughts of God by reading the Bible and other Christian literature which can help form our Christian mind.
5. We can love God with all our mind and soul by using our mind for God's purpose.
- a) We should always think of ways to serve God's purpose in our business or career, family, peer group, romantic relationship, etc.
 - b) We should use our mind and intellect for Christian service such as by giving pastoral advice, teaching catechism, etc.

D. Loving God with All Our Strength

1. Since we are God's creation, he owns us. What we call "ours" is not really ours but his. We must not set any limit on our giving. Loving God with all our strength means giving God all our resources: time, talent, and treasure.
2. Loving God with all our strength means giving God our time.
 - a) We must have the proper attitude with respect to our time. We do not own our time, we merely manage it. Thus we need to be generous with our time. We need to use it not just for ourselves but for God and for others.
 - b) We must seek God's directions on how we are to spend our time through prayer and Scripture reading.
 - c) We must examine what to do with our free time: watch a movie, read a novel, sleep. These are not erroneous use of free time but we may be able to find other ways: volunteer for Christian service, visit the sick, etc.
3. Loving God with all our strength means using our talent to glorify God.
 - a) If you are a talented singer, you must ask yourself, do I use my voice to praise and glorify God? If you are a talented painter, you must ask yourself, does my work portray the goodness and greatness of God? If you are a talented physician, you must ask yourself, do I have the same compassion and love of Christ for the sick, the suffering and the dying?
 - b) In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus teaches us that if we do not use our God-given talent for the kingdom of God, then whatever talent we have will be taken away and given to those who use them rightfully (Mt. 25:28-30).

4. Loving God with all our strength means having the right attitude toward our treasure, our wealth and material possessions.
 - a) The right attitude includes believing that everything belongs to God. He created everything. There is nothing in heaven and on earth that does not belong to God. What this means is that we are mere stewards of what belong to God. Therefore, we must use these resources wisely, unselfishly and in accordance with the plan of God, who is the rightful owner (Ps. 24:1, Hg. 2:8).
 - b) We must also be convinced that it is God who enables us to acquire wealth and possessions (Prov. 10:22, Eccl. 5:18, Sir. 11:21).
 - c) God asks for our treasure, wealth and possessions not because he needs them, but in order to test the disposition of our heart. And so God asks us to return to him what is his so that he might pour out even more blessings upon us. God asks us to give our tithes and alms (Mt. 6:21, Mal 3:10).
5. A model for loving God with all our strength is St. John, the Patriarch of Alexandria. He was born of a rich and noble family in Cyprus. He was married but soon became a widower and shortly thereafter all his children also died. Left alone he devoted himself to spiritual pursuits and used all his resources to help the poor. His reputation for personal holiness and generosity became known and when he was just over 50 years of age, he was appointed to the patriarchal chair of Alexandria in 608. He died in 619 and was canonized a saint of the Church and became known as St. John the Almsgiver.

E. Conclusion

1. Loving God is a very high ideal. But it is not vague or impractical as one may think. Rather, it involves specific, practical decisions, commitments, and actions.
2. Our perfect models for loving God are Jesus and Mary.
 - a) Jesus loves the Father and thus was dedicated to accomplishing his mission (Jn. 4:34), obedient unto death (Lk. 22:42), and constantly sought the Father's will (Mk. 1:35).
 - b) Mary loves God with all her heart, mind and strength that she gave her fiat: *May it be done to me according to your word* (Lk. 1:38), travelled in haste to share the Good News (Lk. 1:39), and proclaimed God's greatness: *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior* (Lk. 1:46).
3. We cannot love God with all our heart, mind, and strength by merely deciding to do so. What will make it possible is the power of the Holy Spirit.

SINGLES FOR CHRIST
CHRISTIAN LIFE PROGRAM

TALK NO. 6 – LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

GOAL:

To explain the meaning of the Christian love for neighbor, and to inspire the participants to practice it.

CORE MESSAGE:

Loving God and loving neighbor form the inseparable core of the Christian life. These two go together. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor. The characteristics of Christian love are described by St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. But Jesus elevated loving one's neighbor to a higher plane. We are to love our neighbors not only as we love ourselves, but as God loves us.

Our model for loving our neighbor is our Lord, Jesus Christ. He washed the feet of his disciples. He died for us. The full depth of the meaning of Jesus' teaching on loving our neighbor is revealed in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In the parable, Jesus took pains to describe in great detail the various actions done by the Samaritan in helping the victim—"approached the victim," "poured oil and wine," "bandaged him," "lifted him up," "took him to an inn," "cared for him"—in order to convey the message that "being a neighbor" entails "doing things" and not merely wishing others well. Loving our neighbor is not a passive attitude but an active involvement. It involves a lot of "going" and "doing," and "approaching" and "caring for others." In the parable, Jesus does not directly answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?" since this opens up the possibility that some will be "neighbor" and others are not. Jesus does not want to make any distinction. The relevant question is, "Am I neighbor to others?" And Jesus commands us to be so.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. The first of all commandments is to love God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength. This is found in the Book of Deuteronomy: *Therefore you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength* (Dt. 6:5).
2. The second of all commandments is to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is found in the Book of Leviticus: *Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Lv. 19:18).

3. Jesus summed up the whole law in these two greatest commandments: *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments* (Mt. 22:37-40).
4. These two go together. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor: *If anyone says, "I love God", but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen* (1 Jn. 4:20).
5. Loving God and loving neighbor form the inseparable core of the Christian life. Because God created man in his image, one cannot claim to love God while hating the very likeness of God that is present in man.

B. Characteristics of Christian Love

1. In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul describes the characteristics of Christian love and how to love others (1 Cor. 13:4-8).
 - a) To love others is to be patient. We should be slow to anger. We should give ample allowance for the shortcoming of others.
 - b) To love others is to be kind. We should avoid an attitude of criticism. We should have a posture and speech that is up-building and encouraging.
 - c) To love others is to not be jealous of others. We should not covet what others have or begrudge another for possessing something we do not have.
 - d) To love others is to not be pompous or inflated. We should be humble and think not of our own importance. We should be conscious of our own unworthiness rather than our merit.
 - e) To love others is to not be rude. We should accord honor and respect to one another, praise them if they do well and console them if they do badly.
 - f) To love others is to not be self-seeking. We should not focus on having our rights met but focus rather on our duties to others.
 - g) To love others is to not be quick-tempered. We should master our emotions and feelings, we should be slow to frown but quick to smile.
 - h) To love others is to not brood over injury. We should not hold grudges or resentments but rather be forgiving and understanding of the weakness of others.

- i) To love others is to not rejoice over wrongdoing. We should always seek the good in others, even with people that we find difficult to deal with.
 - j) To love others is to rejoice in truth. We should always be sincere and honest and tell the truth to one another.
 - k) To love others is to have forbearance. We should patiently and humbly bear insults, injuries and disappointments without taking counter action.
 - l) To love others is to have trust and to believe in the best about other people. We should have a positive attitude towards others, always seeking their good side.
 - m) To love others is to have hope. We should have a positive attitude towards life and other people and remain joyful and peaceful under any circumstance.
 - n) To love others is to have endurance. We should develop an ability to bear things, not with passive resignation but with triumphant attitude.
2. We are able to assume the characteristics of Christian love if we can honestly substitute the word “I” for the word “love” in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (ask the participants to read together loudly the cited verses but substitute “I” for “love”).

C. Loving Others as Jesus Loves

1. Loving our neighbor is not an option. It is God’s commandment. And Jesus commanded us to love others not only as we love ourselves but as he loves us: *I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another* (Jn. 13:34).
 - a) Jesus emphasized this command. He stated this several times: *This is my commandment: love one another as I love you (Jn. 15:12). This I command you, love one another (Jn. 15:17).*
 - b) Jesus elevated loving one’s neighbor to a higher plane. We are to love our neighbors not only as we love ourselves, but as God loves us. Since God loves us with a self-sacrificing, forgiving and prodigal love, then we must also love our neighbor with self-sacrificing, forgiving and prodigal love.
2. Jesus showed the example of Christian love when he washed the feet of his disciples. When he finished, he told his disciples to do likewise (Jn. 13:12-15).
 - a) The feet that Jesus washed were the feet of men who had spent most of the day walking long, crowded and dusty roads. In all likelihood, they were very dirty feet. In the Jewish culture of Jesus’ time, the servant washes the

feet of the guests. But Jesus took a towel and a basin of water and washed them.

- b) What Jesus is teaching is that we should be servant to one another. Loving others as Jesus loves means serving others.
3. Jesus clearly commanded us to love our neighbor as he loves us. But how much does Jesus love us? What is the extent of his love?
 - a) Jesus himself answered this question. *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends* (Jn. 15:13)
 - b) Jesus died for us because he loves us so much. Loving our neighbor demands not merely giving our time, imparting our wisdom, or praying for them. If necessary, we should be prepared to give up our lives for them, as Jesus did for us.
 4. Our model for loving our neighbor is our Lord, Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Philippians, St. Paul describes the love that Jesus has for us (Phil. 2:5-8).
 - a) When Jesus said that we should love our neighbor as he loves us, this is exactly what he meant.
 - b) Like him, we should be prepared to offer our life for the sake of others, as Jesus offered his.

D. Who is our Neighbor?

1. If we are to die for our neighbor, we need to know exactly and clearly who our neighbor is. We are thus compelled to ask the question, "Who is my neighbor?"
2. The answer to this question and the full depth of the meaning of Jesus' teaching on loving our neighbor are revealed in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37).
 - a) We have heard this parable many times. To some the story has become boring and the message dry and lifeless. To bring life back into the story, we need to examine its historical context more deeply (read historical note below).
 - b) The story begins with a lawyer among the crowd wanting to test Jesus by asking a question: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Knowing his intention, Jesus did not answer the question directly. Instead he asked another question: "What is written in the Law?" The lawyer answered by quoting Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18. Jesus responded: "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

- c) Somewhat embarrassed that Jesus was able to take the initiative, the lawyer asked a rhetorical question: “And who is my neighbor?” Again Jesus did not answer the question directly, but instead responded with a parable.
 - d) The Jewish audience knew that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was close to 30 kilometers and descended 1000 meters. They were familiar with the winding road that was bordered by desert and huge rocks from which bandits could easily hide in and then attack travelers. As Jesus related the story, they began to see themselves as the victim in the story.
 - e) They heard that both the priest and the Levite did not offer any help. But there was a third man in the story. They began to think that this third man must be a Jewish layman who will help the victim. But wait! What is he saying? A Samaritan helping a Jew! But this is impossible! Why not a Jew helping a fellow Jew? Or why not make a Samaritan the victim and a Jew to help him?
 - f) At the end of the story, Jesus asked the lawyer: “Which of these three was neighbor to the victim?” The lawyer was left with no option. He has to say the Samaritan. But being a Jew who bitterly hated the Samaritans, he could not utter the word “Samaritan”. So he answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.” And to this Jesus replied, “Go and do likewise.”
 - g) In relating the parable, Jesus took pains to describe in great detail the various actions done by the Samaritan in helping the victim: “approached the victim,” “poured oil and wine,” “bandaged him,” “lifted him up,” “took him to an inn,” “cared for him.”
3. Jesus tells us that loving our neighbor is not a passive attitude but an active involvement. He wants to convey that “being a neighbor” entails “doing things” and not merely wishing others well. It involves a lot of “going” and “doing” and “approaching” and “caring for” others.
 4. The Parable of the Good Samaritan embodies Jesus’ teaching on loving our neighbor. He does not directly answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?”, since this question opens up the possibility that some will be “neighbor” and others are not. Jesus does not want to make any distinction. He tells us that it is irrelevant to ask the question, “Who is my neighbor?” since the responsibility of being a neighbor is placed upon us. The perspective is not to ask others but to ask ourselves, “Am I being neighbor to others?”

E. Conclusion

1. Loving God and loving neighbor have been likened to the vertical and the horizontal parts of the cross. One directs us upward to God, while the other directs us horizontally towards our fellow men.

2. Loving our neighbor as Jesus loves us is not an easy task. In fact, it is impossible without God's grace. But God will give it freely and generously, if we sincerely ask for it.
3. Jesus said that we should love one another as he loves us. Jesus loves us regardless of who we are. He does not care if we are rich or poor, educated or illiterate, Samaritan or Jew. He died for all of us. He is "neighbor" to us all.

Historical Note:

The Jews and the Samaritans had hated and despised each other for many generations. It all started after the death of Solomon in 922 BC. Israel was divided into two, the kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judea in the south. In 721 BC the Assyrians occupied the northern kingdom. Then in 857 BC, the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom of Judea. But in 529 BC, the Persian emperor Cyrus defeated the Babylonians and allowed the exiled Jews to return to Judea.

In the meantime, the northern kingdom remained under Assyrian occupation. The Assyrians, who were pagans, intermarried with the native population, including the Samaritans. And these intermarriages went on for many generations. Thus in the eyes of the Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon and who considered themselves as the only faithful interpreters of Israel's religious traditions, the Samaritans were half-breeds and half-pagans. As a result, the Samaritans were prevented from worshiping in the Temple of Jerusalem. The Samaritans, therefore, built their own temple on Mt. Gerisim. Then around 6-9 AD, a group of Samaritans defiled the Temple court in Jerusalem by strewing it with human bones. This action led to further division and even more bitter hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans.

This hostility and hatred between Jews and Samaritans was so intense that we read in the book of Sirach 50:25-26: *My whole being loathes two nations, the third is not even a people. Those who live in Seir and Philistia, and the degenerate folk who dwell in Shechem.* Mt Seir is in the territory of the Edomites. The Edomites and the Philistines were enemies of the Jews. Shechem is a city in Samaria. As stated in the book of Sirach, the Jews did not even want to call the Samaritans "people" (*the third is not even a people...the degenerate folk who dwell in Shechem*). The Jews hated the Samaritans more intensely than the Edomites and the Philistines, whom they had fought with regularly in their long history.

SINGLES FOR CHRIST
CHRISTIAN LIFE PROGRAM

TALK NO. 7 – THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

GOAL:

To stress the importance of the Christian family, and to give practical advice to single men and women for building up their present families in preparation to raising up a strong Christian family of their own in the future.

CORE MESSAGE:

The family is under attack at many fronts. We want to face up to this attack and to come out with our families intact and even stronger. For this we need to put on God's mind and to follow his plan for the family. God has intended the family for the transmission of life. It is a place for teaching children and training leaders. The family is a domestic church. But in this modern society, God has lost central place in the family. The family itself is losing its importance. The pace of modern life has become very fast making it difficult for lasting relationships to develop. We thus find the family to be under attack by evil forces. To make God's plan happen, we must make a decision to make it happen in our family. This requires praying together and making time for the task of building a strong family. We must learn more about God's plan for our family and seek other Christian singles that share our concern about family life and be in regular fellowship with them. The Holy Family of Nazareth is our model. We should seek the protection and guidance of the Holy Family of Nazareth to make God's plan happen. With all the challenges that families face, we need God's power, the power of the Holy Spirit.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. The family as an institution is under attack from many fronts. Marriages are being broken and the traditional definition of family is being challenged.
 - a) In many countries, divorce is already legal. For some western countries, even the slightest marital differences can be a reason to file for divorce
 - b) In some countries, same-sex marriages are already legal and recognized.
 - c) In some countries, abortion is already legal.
2. Children tend to become more disrespectful and disobedient to their parents especially when they already earn their own money.

3. We want to face up to this attack and to come out with our families intact and even stronger. We need to prevent the breaking up of families. We need to make our families more resilient.
4. For this we need to put on God's mind and to follow his plan for the family. It is essential, first and foremost, that we fully understand what marriage is all about. We need to know God's purpose in marriage.

B. God's Plan for the Family

1. God has intended the family for the transmission of life.
 - a) "The fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator—that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person" (*Familiaris Consortio* 28). It was meant to be so from the very beginning (Gen. 1:27-28, Gen. 2:18-24).
 - b) God created man, male and female, with their physiology so formed as to enable man to increase and multiply and fill the earth.
 - c) God intended man and woman to be one, not independent individuals producing babies, but husband and wife raising a family.
2. The family is a place for teaching children and training leaders.
 - a) "Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it" (Second Vatican Council).
 - b) "Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223).
 - c) The family is a place to transmit wisdom and values of life. Teaching is not formal, but rather comes in the everyday activities in the home.
 - d) A leader, especially a church leader, receives his basic training in his own home (1 Tim. 3:4-5).
3. The family is a domestic church.
 - a) Parents, especially the fathers, are to be the priests in their families. They present God to their families—by their example of a living Christianity, by diligently teaching Scripture (Deut. 6:7), by the use of symbols (Deut. 6:8-

- 9). They present their families to God—by family prayer, by blessing the children.
- b) “The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. As such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms part” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 71).

C. Why God’s Plan for Families is Not Happening

1. God has lost his central place in the family.
 - a) Parents no longer bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). They look more and more to psychology as a source of wisdom for raising their children.
 - b) Husbands and wives do not follow God’s order for them. There is confusion of roles (Eph. 5:22-25). Their commitment is shaky. They cannot be depended on and the partners become insecure.
 - c) There is too much importance given to acquiring material possessions and having an easy and comfortable life.
2. The family itself is losing its importance.
 - a) Many of its responsibilities have been taken over by other groups in society—education in schools, livelihood in offices and factories, recreation in malls.
 - b) Easy availability of modern recreation and communication facilities result in diminished interaction among family members, e.g. TV, internet and social media, video games, smart phones.
 - c) The traditional family has become dispensable—separations and divorces becoming easy to obtain, living-in becoming acceptable.
3. The pace of modern life has become very fast making it difficult for lasting relationships to develop.
 - a) Members of the family are constantly on the go and are too busy to engage in meaningful interaction with others.
 - b) Earning a living is taking a big chunk of the time of the parents, and oftentimes, of the working children as well, leaving little family time.

4. The family is under attack by evil forces (1 Pet 5:8).
 - a) The devil wants to break up the family and promotes many things to undermine the family, such as secularism (taking God out of educational systems and government), materialism, relativism, communism, etc.
 - b) Anti-life forces have become very aggressive. The culture of death has crept into many societies through the promotion of abortion and contraception.

D. What can we do?

Parents take on many roles and responsibilities toward their family. But this does not mean that the success of the family resides only on them. Children should support and rally around their parents with love, respect and gratitude.

1. Make a decision that in your family, you want God's plan to happen.
2. Honor and respect our parents.
 - a) "Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).
 - b) Affirmatively, children should love their parents and hope they will enjoy long and happy lives.
 - c) They should pray for their parents that they may be holy and good.
 - d) They should strive to please their parents and be a credit to them by imitating their good example and fulfilling their good hopes and upright plans.
 - e) They should express reverence and gratitude to their parents by speech and action.
 - f) Grown up children should continue to visit their parents, listen respectfully to their advice, celebrate their special occasions, give them gifts, and so on.¹
3. Protect, support and serve our parents.
 - a) Help them in doing the household chores.
 - b) Care for them especially when they are sick, old or they can no longer care for themselves (Sirach 3:12-16). Making our parents realize that we love them not based on what they can do, provide or have but as who they are.

- c) Grown up children ought to give their parents whatever support, both material and moral.
 - d) Siblings must help one another in taking care of their parents. "And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).
4. Obey our parents.
- a) "My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching" (Proverbs 6:20).
 - b) Our motivation should not be of fear but of love and respect.
 - c) However, a child should not obey a particular command which he is convinced is morally wrong. They should discuss the problem politely and respectfully with their parents.
5. Love and support our siblings.
- a) Serve and respect your siblings.
 - b) Support them in times of trials and problems.
 - c) Lovingly correct them when they commit any wrongdoing.
6. Be a source of unity in the family
- a) Examine your daily life to ensure that your family has enough quality time together. Though you are not yet the head of the family, you should encourage your parents and siblings to spend time together.
 - b) Be ready to reduce your other activities, if necessary.
 - c) Plan regular family recreation, vacation, and other activities with your parents.
 - d) Encourage your parents and siblings to pray together as a family. Attend Holy Mass together. Pray the rosary as a family. Pray for your family. Pray for healing of family members. Intercede for each other's needs.
7. Learn more about God's plan for your family.
- a) Attend teachings on strengthening family life. Bring your parents with you or invite them to attend these activities. Do the same with your siblings. In fact, why don't you invite your parents and siblings to join the CFC community and its Family Ministries.

- b) Read Christian books and magazines. *Familiaris Consortio* is the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World.
- c) Seek other Christian singles that share your concern about family life, and be in regular fellowship with them. This is what you can look forward to in the CFC Singles for Christ ministry (SFC). SFC will provide you support and formation.

Family life calls for the constant practice of mercy. Emotional bonds often facilitate this practice, but even when they are strained, each family member should contribute whatever he or she can to the good of the others and should readily seek reconciliation and offer forgiveness. A heartfelt “I am sorry” and a sincere “I forgive you” should be among the most common expressions of love among members of a Christian family, imperfect but drawn toward perfection by the Holy Spirit.

The family should be animated by mutual love, submission, and service. Family members should not keep careful accounts of what they contribute and receive, as if they were partners in a business. Rather, each should contribute according to his or her ability and receive according to his or her needs. ²

E. Conclusion

1. The Holy Family of Nazareth is our model.

“Through God’s mysterious design, it was in that family that the Son of God spent long years of a hidden life. It is therefore the prototype and example for all Christian families...It underwent trials of poverty, persecution and exile. It glorified God in an incomparably exalted and pure way. And it will not fail to help Christian families—indeed, all families in the world—to be faithful to their day-to-day duties, to bear the cares and tribulations of life, to be open and generous to the needs of others, and to fulfill with joy the plan of God in this regard” (*Familiaris Consortio* 86).

“The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus...a lesson on family life. May Nazareth teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character...” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 533).

2. God has a plan for our families. But the evil one wants to prevent this plan from happening. We should not allow this to happen. We should seek the protection and guidance of the Holy Family of Nazareth to make God’s plan happen.
3. With all the challenges that our families have to face and with the role expected of us to play to build strong Christian families, we need God’s

power—the power of the Holy Spirit—to help us in all these. Next week, we will discover how to live a life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. In the future, as we get to raise our own family let us put it up on the foundations that God has set for us—having only one goal in mind—that is to build a strong Christian family.

Sources:

1. A thoughtful philosophical reflection on the relationship between adult children and their parents: Joseph Kupfer, “Can Parents and Children Be Friends?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1990): 15–26.
2. <http://www.twotlj.org/G-2-9-G.html>

SINGLES FOR CHRIST
CHRISTIAN LIFE PROGRAM

TALK NO. 8 – LIFE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

GOAL:

To stir up expectant faith and an eager desire for a greater working of God in people's lives through the Holy Spirit.

CORE MESSAGE:

The starting point for understanding life in the Holy Spirit is to realize that it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to experience God and have a living relationship with him. The early disciples received and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, a Jewish holiday celebrated fifty days after Passover. We too can receive and experience this life in the Holy Spirit since God has promised us the Holy Spirit. Thus we simply take God up on his promise and we will experience the same relationship with Jesus, the same transforming power, and the same courage for proclaiming the gospel. We will also receive the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit. But we need to avoid the obstacles to these gifts through: unrepentant attitude, feeling unworthy, fear, doubt, pride, and being selective as to what gifts we want. This new life in the Spirit is the authentic Christian life. And God desires it for all. We should thus look forward to this new life and to experiencing your own "Pentecost", remembering that "there is no Pentecost without the Virgin Mary." Thus with the Virgin Mary, we can live a life in the Holy Spirit

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. Much of Christianity today looks weak and lifeless, lacking in power and effectiveness. But this was not so in the beginning of Christianity.
 - a) The early Christian movement was dynamic, strong and attractive. For example, from a small sect, it subsequently conquered the Roman Empire.
 - b) The source of this power was the Holy Spirit. This life in the Holy Spirit was normal for the early Christians. They truly experienced the Holy Spirit at work. In the Book of Acts, we see the Holy Spirit acting among them, guiding them, speaking to them, and giving them gifts.
2. God wants everyone to have this new life. This new life in the Holy Spirit is available to all who turn away from a life of sin and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

3. The starting point for understanding life in the Holy Spirit is to realize that true Christian living is not just a matter of human will power, but a new heart, a new life from God.
 - a) We cannot do it with our own effort. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to experience God, a living relationship with him, and his actions in our lives.
 - b) We need to know and understand the Holy Spirit as a Person who can truly affect and change our lives. Unfortunately, many of us know the Father and the Son, but not the Holy Spirit. But Jesus stressed the importance of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:7).

B. Receiving the Holy Spirit

1. Life in the Holy Spirit is very important because it is the kind of life that God wants for us. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we gain:
 - a) Union with God, a new relationship with God as Father that is deep and personal (Eph. 2:18).
 - b) A new nature, we receive spiritual power for living the Christian life (2 Cor. 5:17).
 - c) Power to serve as Jesus' witnesses (Acts 1:8).
2. The early disciples received and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - a) Jesus promises the Holy Spirit and the disciples do as they are told, staying and waiting in Jerusalem (Lk. 24:49, Acts 1:8).
 - b) On the day of Pentecost, a Jewish holiday, 50 days after Passover, the following happened (Acts 2):
 - V.1-4: An exciting event. Noise like a strong wind, fire, speaking in tongues.
 - V.5-13: It created a big stir.
 - V.14-21: Peter explained they were not drunk but that the Old Testament prophecies (Book of Joel) were coming true.
 - V.22-36: Peter proclaims the gospel.
 - V.37-39: Peter tells them the response needed.
 - V.40-41: The disciples were transformed from frightened men into bold, powerful apostles, and 3,000 were converted.
 - V.42-47: The Holy Spirit created bonds of love and unity among the new Christians. The Church was born.
3. Others received the Holy Spirit as well.

- a) In Samaria (Acts 8:14-17), Cornelius (Acts 10:44-46), in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6).
- b) Those who received the Holy Spirit knew the Lord more personally and more experientially.

C. What Receiving the Holy Spirit Means Today

1. How can we receive the Holy Spirit?
 - a) God has promised us the Holy Spirit (Lk. 11:9-13). So we simply take God up on his promise. We ask our Father to give us the Holy Spirit, and we can be sure that we will receive the Spirit because God said so. We just need to ask in faith.
 - b) But for us Christians, this will not be the first time we will receive the Holy Spirit. We already received the Holy Spirit during our Baptism and Confirmation. Rather, what we will experience is a fuller release of the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
2. Next week, we can receive and experience the same power and gifts of the Holy Spirit that the early Christians did.
 - a) We will experience the same relationship with Jesus, the same transforming power, the same deep worship, and the same power and courage for proclaiming the gospel.
 - b) We can receive the same spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1,4-11). These gifts may be divided into 3 groups: two teaching gifts: wisdom and knowledge; three sign gifts: faith, healing and miracles; and four revelational gifts: prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Your discussion group leader will explain these in greater detail when you meet during the week, and these will be reviewed during the talk next week.
 - c) We need to properly understand the gift of tongues.
 - The gift of tongues is a common experience when we receive the Holy Spirit, just like the experience of the disciples described in Acts.
 - It is a gift from God, thus it is important.
 - But unlike the other spiritual gifts, tongues is a gift that may not immediately manifest.
 - Once we receive it, it can have great consequences in our spiritual life, especially in our prayer and worship.

- It is an important first step and is often the gateway to a fuller life in the Spirit.
3. We need to avoid the obstacles to receiving God's gifts through:
 - a) An unrepentant attitude, refusing to admit sin as sin.
 - b) Feeling unworthy of the gift.
 - c) Fear, for example, of what others will think, or of looking foolish, or of being overtaken
 - d) Doubt.
 - e) Pride, or an attitude of not wanting or needing God's gifts.
 - f) Being selective as to what gifts we want.
 4. Give a brief personal testimony or relate your own experience during and after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, which may cover any or all of the following:
 - a) Knowing God more personally.
 - b) Praying in a new way (more God-centered, more of thanksgiving and praise rather than petition, more listening).
 - c) The Bible comes to life.
 - d) Better relationships with parents, siblings, friends, others.
 - e) A new joy despite problems.
 - f) Much more peace, answered prayers, guidance, etc.

D. What We Will Do in the Prayer Session Next Week

1. Mainly, we will pray and you will be prayed over. We will have corporate prayer, and then the discussion group leaders will pray over each person individually.

2. We will start the praying over with the “Commitment to Christ.” Thus be prepared to pray this next week. Take time to read it through and get yourself behind the words so you can pray it sincerely.
3. Each of you should meet individually with your discussion group leader before next week’s prayer session. This will be an opportunity to clear up any questions and to receive greater clarity, particularly, on the 9 gifts of the Holy Spirit.

E. Conclusion

1. One important warning: Since you have been doing so well responding to God (you have finished 2/3 of this CLP), you are making Satan very unhappy. He is losing his grip, but he will not give up.
 - a) So beware of temptations this week, or irrational doubt, or of strange circumstances that Satan may pose in order to keep you from attending the session next week.
 - b) But do not be afraid. Simply call on the name of Jesus and seek the intercession of the Blessed Mother and you will resist Satan and his works.
2. Take time also to review your intentions and expectations in this CLP. What are you seeking? Is God’s offer clear to you? How do you intend to respond?
3. God offers each of you a new life.
 - a) This new life in the Spirit is the normal Christian life. It is the authentic Christian life. And God desires it for all.
 - b) Thus, be open to it. Better yet, desire it with all your heart. And have faith that you will receive it, because God has so promised.
 - c) Look forward to this new life and to experiencing your own “Pentecost”. And remember that “there is no Pentecost without the Virgin Mary” (Benedict XI, *Regina Caeli*). And with the Virgin Mary, you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit during our session next week.

SINGLES FOR CHRIST
CHRISTIAN LIFE PROGRAM

TALK NO. 9 – RECEIVING THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

GOAL:

To lead people to understand and receive the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

CORE MESSAGE:

God promised to give his people the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit that God promised through Ezekiel, Jesus gave to his disciples and is giving to us. With the Holy Spirit, we gain a new nature, a new spiritual power, a power to serve. We also receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are two teaching gifts: wisdom and healing; three sign gifts: faith, healing, and miracles; and four revelational gifts: prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. During the pray over session, we will claim God's promise. We should desire the gifts of the Holy Spirit and, in particular, the gift of tongues. We should ask for these spiritual gifts in faith, and then cooperate with God's Spirit in order to receive them. God makes the offer. We accept and receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction: The Promise of the Holy Spirit

1. Like many Christians today, many people during the time of the prophet Ezekiel were enmeshed in sin and spiritual lifelessness (Ez. 36:24-28). This is what God said to them:

- a) V.24: I will take you away from among the nations, gather you from all the foreign lands, and bring you back to your own land.

The people were in exile in foreign lands, particularly in Babylon, and they longed to return to their own land. God soon fulfilled his promise to bring them back from exile.

God has gathered you from different places and circumstances and brought you together in this CLP to lead you to the "promised land," God's kingdom on earth.

- b) V.25: I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

As God has forgiven the people during Ezekiel's time, you have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to this session.

- c) V.26-27: I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes careful to observe my decrees.

This promise was fulfilled during the time of Ezekiel. But God's word is alive. This is God's promise of the Holy Spirit. It will be fulfilled in you during the pray over session. God will give you a new heart and a new spirit, the Holy Spirit as he has promised.

- d) V.28: You shall live in the land I gave your fathers; you shall be my people and I shall be your God.

After the CLP, you will be invited to join Singles for Christ which is a part of the Couples for Christ community. If you accept the invitation, the prophecy "you shall be my people and I shall be your God" will be fulfilled in you.

- 2. The Holy Spirit that God promised through Ezekiel, Jesus gave to his disciples and to us. With the Holy Spirit, we gain:
 - a) A new nature, spiritual power (Gal. 5:16-23). The inward dimension.
 - b) A power to serve (Acts 1:8). The outward dimension.

B. Review Gifts of the Holy Spirit and Elaborate Gift of Tongues

- 1. We are here to claim God's promise of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 11:9-13).
- 2. God is offering you nine gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11). These were mentioned in the previous talk and were explained to you in detail when you met your discussion group leader. You were also asked to identify the specific gifts that you want to receive.
 - a) You know what gifts you need. Ask for these gifts. But be open to whatever God wants to give you.
 - b) Just to review: there are 2 teaching gifts: wisdom and knowledge; 3 sign gifts: faith, healing, and miracles; and 4 revelational gifts: prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.
- 3. We should all desire and ask for the gift of tongues. It is a gift from God. We should ask it in faith. And then we should cooperate with God's Spirit in order to receive it.
 - a) Tongues is a gift of praise. It is a means to enrich our prayer life.

- b) You should cooperate with God's Spirit and yield to the leading and prompting of the Spirit by opening your mouth and speaking out.
- Begin by just praising God in your own words. Then start speaking out in tongues. If necessary, begin by uttering meaningless sounds (e.g., la-la-la-la). The Holy Spirit will form these sounds into tongues. (*Analogy: it is easier to manipulate the steering wheel of a car when it is in motion rather than stationary*).
 - Do not be analyzing the sounds or focusing on the experience. Just focus on the Lord and offer to him your utterances as prayers of praise.
 - Resist the temptation to think that it is just you and not the Holy Spirit forming the sounds.

C. Explanation of Pray Over Session

1. Explain the procedure, what will happen during the pray over session (refer to manual).
 - a) We will pray the Commitment to Christ.
 - b) We will lay hands on you and pray with you. But it is basically between you and God. We are just instruments. You have to ask God to give you what he promised. And in faith expect it to happen!
2. Some important points to have in mind:
 - a) This is not a baptism, not even a second baptism. We should refrain from using the term "baptism" to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. This is a prayer session for the release of the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - b) Different things will happen to different people. Do not seek a particular kind of experience. Just turn to the Lord and receive the new life of the Holy Spirit from him.
3. Right attitudes during the pray over session:
 - a) Relax. The more relaxed you are, the easier it is to receive God's gifts. Open your palms and place them on your lap. It is harder to receive something in a clenched fist than in a relaxed and open hand.
 - b) Do not be afraid. The Lord is here with us, and he loves you very much. He wants you to experience his love in a new way.

- c) Do not be concerned about how you might act as you respond to the promptings of the Spirit.
 - Do not entertain thoughts that you might look or sound foolish if you begin to praise God in a new way, by raising your hands or speaking in tongues.
 - Nobody will laugh at you. Instead, we will rejoice and be glad with you. We love and care for you.
- 4. After you are finished being prayed over, please return quietly to your seat and avoid talking with anybody on your way back. We will have some closing remarks and then we will all end together.
 - a) While waiting, you can continue to pray in your heart, read the Psalms, or pray the rosary silently. Pray for your brothers and sisters here as well.
 - b) Maintain an atmosphere of prayer and reverence and refrain from doing anything that will disturb those being prayed over.
- 5. Final words:
 - a) God wants you to have his gifts because he loves you and wants to live in you by his Holy Spirit. Desire God's gifts!
 - b) God offers and gives his gifts. Our part is to accept. Let us all give the Holy Spirit a welcome into our lives.

D. Review Sequence of Pray Over Session

1. Start with a song (Let the Fire Fall).
2. Review the procedure briefly.
3. Sing another song (Create in Me).
4. Do the prayer of "Commitment to Christ."
5. Pray over session (refer to manual for details).
6. Give the closing exhortation.
7. Give the mini-talk on vocal prayer.
8. End with full worship, with singing in tongues.

COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

Do you renounce Satan and all wrongdoing? (Yes, I do)

Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died to free us from our sins, and that he rose to bring us new life? (Yes, I do)

Will you follow Jesus as your Lord? (Yes, I will)

Lord Jesus Christ, I want to belong to you from now on. I want to be free from the dominion of darkness and the rule of Satan, and I want to enter into your Kingdom and be a part of your people. I will turn away from all wrongdoing, and I will avoid everything that leads me to wrongdoing. I ask you to forgive all the sins that I have committed. I offer my life to you, and I promise to obey you as my Lord. AMEN.

Proceed to Pray Over Session:

(The speaker rests or joins the service team. He returns to give the closing exhortation after everyone has been prayed over with).

E. Conclusion: Closing Exhortation (after all have been prayed over)

1. Different people have different experiences.
 - a) Feeling is not the important thing. Rather, look for the new way that God is at work in you and respond to it (e.g. a new desire for prayer, for Scripture, etc.).
 - b) If you did not speak in tongues, do not worry about it. Do not equate receiving the Holy Spirit only with receiving the gift of tongues.
 - c) In your prayer time this week, give plenty of time to praise and thanksgiving. Do this aloud, if you can without disturbing others. And continue to be open to the Lord forming your praise into tongues.
2. Be aware that Satan can tempt you to doubt.
 - a) Satan is seeking to rob everyone of God's gift. For him the next best thing to keeping you from getting it is to keep you from using it.
 - b) Do not let feelings of doubt bother you. Just remember the fact that God promised it and that you asked for it.
3. Do not expect all your problems to go away all at once, though many will. The Holy Spirit will make a big change in you, and you will see it. But not

everything will change. Some things will take a while to get worked out. But now you have a new power to use in working them out.

4. Be faithful to a regular time of daily prayer. Spend a good portion of your prayer time in praise and thanksgiving in your own words. Pray in tongues every day.
5. What just happened is only a beginning.
6. Let us now learn about Vocal Prayer.

EXHORTATION ON VOCAL PRAYER

- A. Today I want to teach you all another way of praying from what we are used to. Typically, most Christians today are only used to quieter ways of praying, e.g. silence or just one person praying out. Singing is one exception to the quieter approach most people take.
- B. The Bible shows other ways that are more varied, expressive and demonstrative for prayer and worship.
 1. We can learn from how the Israelites, God's chosen people, praised God.
 - a) Psalm95:1-2. Singing and crying out.
 - b) Psalm81:2-4. Singing, shouting, and playing instruments.
 - c) Psalm150:3-6. Playing instruments and making a loud noise.
 2. In these passages, the Lord is being acclaimed like a king with shouts, songs, playing of instruments, and dancing. When a king entered his throne room or appeared before an assembly of his people, all would stand and acclaim him with shouts and songs to express their love and loyalty, like "Long live the king."
 3. This is a good way to worship the Lord.
 4. The angels and saints in heaven worship God in the same way (Rev. 19:1, 4-6).
- C. A key element of this type of prayer is simultaneous praising. This is when people praise God in a loud voice and all at the same time.
 1. We praise God by acclaiming who He is (samples in Annex D of CLP Team Manual) and what He has done for us (our many blessings).
 2. This type of prayer can help us enter into the throne room of God, where we can truly feel His presence in our midst.

3. This type of prayer also allows us to worship actively as a community, in a way that he is enjoyable, inspiring and faith-building.

D. We are going to do some vocal prayer in a short while.

1. At first it may seem strange or chaotic. But it is neither. Or to others, it might be a turn off. Please just be open to it. It is new and will take some getting used to. After a few times doing it, it will feel much more natural and you will be able to see its benefits.
2. First we will sing a song of praise. Then we will go right into worshipping the Lord in this way. Then we can have sentence prayers of thanksgiving or petition, like we have been doing up to this point.
3. Remember: we are coming before the Great King of the universe, our King who loves us and who sent His son to die for us and rise from the dead. Let us acclaim our King and worship Him!

(FULL WORSHIP)

SINGLES FOR CHRIST
CHRISTIAN LIFE PROGRAM

TALK NO. 10 – GROWING IN THE SPIRIT

GOAL:

To teach the basic tools needed for our growth and maturity as Christians.

CORE MESSAGE:

The Christian life can be pictured as a wheel that has three components: the outer rim, the hub, and the spokes. The outer rim represents the daily Christian life; the hub, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the spokes, the tools through which the Holy Spirit is transmitted from the hub (Jesus Christ) to the outer rim (our daily life). There are five spokes corresponding to the five tools that we can make use of to grow in the Holy Spirit: prayer and study, service and fellowship, and the sacraments. Our prayer must be faithful, led by the Holy Spirit, and centered on Jesus. We study to know more about God by reading the Scriptures and Christian publications and attending teachings. We serve by making ourselves and our resources—time, talent, and treasure—available for God’s work. Fellowship is the expression of the spiritual reality that we are brothers and sisters belonging to one family and doing things together. The sacraments, particularly the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Holy Communion, are the most important means to grow in the Spirit. If we are faithful in using these tools, we will grow in the Holy Spirit and be more blessed in our Christian life.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. The prayer session last week for the release of the power of the Holy Spirit is only a beginning. Now we need to grow in this new life in the Spirit.
2. In order to grow, we need to make use of the basic means of growth which the Lord provides us. These are prayer and study, service and fellowship, and the sacraments.
3. The Christian life can be pictured as a wheel that has three components: the outer rim, the hub, and the spokes.
 - a) The outer rim: This is the part of the wheel that meets and touches the road. This represents daily Christian life, where we encounter the realities of daily living.

- b) The hub: This is the part of the wheel from which the power emanates to the rim. It holds the wheel together. The hub represents our Lord Jesus Christ, who is or should be at the center of our lives. The power is that of the Holy Spirit.
- c) The spokes: These transmit the power and direction from the hub to the rim. The spokes are the means of putting our whole life in contact with Christ, so that our life can be transformed by his power and direction. The five spokes represent the five tools or means for us to grow in the Holy Spirit, namely, prayer and study, service and fellowship, and the sacraments.

B. Prayer and Study

1. The first tool is prayer. It is the primary means for establishing and maintaining a deep and loving personal relationship between ourselves and God. A successful prayer life involves 3 important principles:
 - a) Our prayer must be faithful.
 - Decide to spend time with the Lord every day.
 - Adopt a prayer format to begin.
 - Use ACTS: Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication.
 - Use daily prayer guides (e.g. In His Steps).
 - Decide on the practical details.
 - When? Decide on a specific time of the day, which you can protect.
 - Where? Mt 6.6. Find a place where you will not be disturbed or distracted.
 - How long? Begin with 5 to 10 minutes, and gradually increase.
 - b) Our prayer must be led by the Holy Spirit.
 - Scheduled and structured prayer is helpful, but could make our prayer dry and mechanical.
 - Be open to changing the format of your prayer as the Spirit leads.
 - c) Our prayer must be centered on a relationship with Jesus.
 - Prayer is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Our goal is not “to pray” or even “to pray well,” but to grow in our relationship with the Lord.
 - People can get wrapped up in techniques. While these can help, prayer is really very simple. It is a matter of loving God and being loved by him.
 - Concentrate not on the prayer but on the Lord. In prayer we talk with God and God talks to us.

2. The second tool is study. It is a deliberate, focused exercise of the intellect, not referring primarily to scholarly or academic endeavour but to the wider process of understanding more about God so we can love and better serve him. There are three ways we can learn more about God:

a) Reading and reflecting on the Bible.

- This is the most important means to know more about God and his plan for us since the Bible is the very word of God. It teaches us who God is, what he has done, and what he wants us to do.
- We should read the Bible daily. Start with about 10 to 15 minutes and gradually increase. Pursue a more deliberate study of selected portions of the Bible, particularly the Gospels. Make it a goal to read the whole Bible.

b) Reading Church's publications and other spiritual books.

- After reading what God has said of himself in the Bible, we can read what men have said or written about God.
- This includes studying the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and reading encyclicals (e.g. **Lumen Fidei**), apostolic exhortations (e.g. **Evangelii Gaudium**), spiritual books, magazines, articles, etc. In particular, the Catechism will enable us to know better our Catholic faith.

c) Attending teachings and listening to preaching.

- SFC has a teaching and formation program, including several formation weekend retreats.
- The word of God is spoken during Sunday Mass homilies, parish conferences, etc.
- Begin the habit of taking notes.

d) In the Catholic tradition, the intercession of Mary and the saints is a powerful tool of prayer. "The prayers of the Virgin Mary, in her Fiat and Magnificat, are characterized by the generous offering of her whole being in faith." (**CCC 2622**). A devotion to Mary and the saints is part and parcel of our Catholic tradition. Reading books on the lives of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints is also a good way to understand how the Holy Spirit acts in our lives.

C. Service and Fellowship

1. The third tool is service. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is at work in us, not just for our personal development but also to equip us for effective service for him and his people. We need to take on a mentality of service so that we see our

whole life given over to God's work. We need to take on the heart of a servant (Mt. 20:26-28).

- a) As we put the Lord first in our lives, he calls us to reach out also to others.
- b) Service helps us grow because it touches the most basic attitudes we have of ourselves and our independence. To serve others is to be humble.

2. There are many ways we can serve:

- a) We can serve God by the way we live: through daily prayer and Scripture reading; through the pursuit of righteousness and practice of holiness.
- b) We also serve by performing the basic responsibilities God has given us in our daily lives, e.g. doing our duties as children to our parents, brother or sister to our siblings, employee, etc.
- c) We can serve others by recognizing and making use of the many opportunities for service in day-to-day life, e.g., offering a ride, visiting the sick, helping to care for the need of others, offering hospitality, etc.
- d) We serve by making ourselves and our resources—our time, talent, and treasure—available for God's work.
 - Doing good works (James 2:14-17).
 - Supporting through prayer and financial contribution authentic Christian ministries that further the spread of the gospel.
 - Looking for opportunities to give our time and energy to serve in a Christian group, such as Singles for Christ, on a regular basis.

3. The fourth tool is fellowship. It refers to almost everything that Christians do together as a body. It is the concretization of a spiritual reality that we are brothers and sisters belonging to one family.

- a) We do not become Christians by ourselves. We must be joined to others in order to experience the fullness of Christian life. Fellowship is not an optional extra. We need the support of others. We need their wisdom and strength. We need to do things together.
- b) We can experience Christian fellowship in a number of ways: worship in liturgies, prayer meetings, conferences; coming together for teaching and formation; serving together (like the service team in this CLP); and social gatherings.
- c) We can experience this Christian fellowship in Singles for Christ. Next week we will explain what SFC is, its vision and mission, and what it does.

D. Sacraments

1. The fifth and most important tool for Catholics to grow in the Holy Spirit is the regular reception of the sacraments, particularly the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Holy Communion.
2. There are 7 sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Penance (or Reconciliation), Eucharist (or Holy Communion), Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick. The seven sacraments are instituted by Christ and given to the Church to administer. They are necessary for our salvation.
3. The purpose of the sacraments is to make people holy, to build up the body of Christ, and to give worship to God. The sacraments impart sanctifying grace.
4. Although the sacraments of Confession and Communion are required to be received by Catholics only once a year, we should exert every effort to avail of these sacraments as often as possible.

E. Conclusion

1. This CLP, your commitment to Christ, the pray over for the power of the Holy Spirit—all these are just the beginning of an exciting, new life. We are still “babies in Christ” and we need to grow. This will happen if we make use of the 5 tools provided by God.
- 2 If you are faithful, you will grow in the Holy Spirit and be more blessed in your Christian life.

SINGLES FOR CHRIST
CHRISTIAN LIFE PROGRAM

TALK NO. 11 – THE LIFE AND MISSION OF SINGLES FOR CHRIST

GOAL:

To explain the life and mission of Singles for Christ and to inspire people with the desire to be part of this community.

To show the role of SFC in the bigger mission of Couples for Christ.

CORE MESSAGE:

Couples for Christ (CFC) is a Christian community for the renewal and strengthening of family life and making the love of God felt among the poor. It started in June 1981 in Manila, Philippines, with 16 couples. It is a highly evangelistic community. It is officially recognized by the Vatican's Pontifical Council of the Laity as a private international association of pontifical right. As such, it has a God-given vision and mission, a statement of philosophy, and a 5-point commitment.

Singles for Christ, being one of the family ministries of Couples for Christ, also has its specific vision and mission, statement of philosophy and 5-point commitment—The Covenant of Singles for Christ—which is embodied in a small white card that we carry with us all the time. In SFC, we support one another primarily through households, which are small groups composed of from 4 to 7 singles and headed by a household head. The households meet twice a month in the home of members. We also have teaching and formation programs as well as regular activities such as leaders' conferences, formation retreats, assemblies, and others. We invite everyone who completes the CLP to be a part of God's work in Singles for Christ and to be ready to make the covenant.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. Last week we talked about the basic tools for growth in our Christian life. One tool is the need to be in regular fellowship and supportive relationships with other Christians, which is best attained within a community.
2. This time we will present in some detail how we learned to appropriate God's wisdom and power for our family life as we entered into a committed relationship with one another in the community of Singles for Christ.
3. We will explain the life and mission of Singles for Christ, briefly trace its history, and describe some of its major programs and activities.

B. What is Couples for Christ?

Couples for Christ (CFC) is a Christian community for the renewal and strengthening of family life and making the love of God felt among the poor.

1. It started in June 1981 in Manila, Philippines, with 16 couples.
2. It is a highly evangelistic community that continues to grow. In 2014, there are about 700,000 active adult members and 300,000 kids and young adults in 105 countries throughout the world.
3. CFC is one with the Catholic Church. It is officially recognized by the Vatican's Pontifical Council of the Laity as a private international association of pontifical right.
4. Through its formation programs, CFC aims for its members to grow in holiness.

C. What is Singles for Christ?

CFC - Singles for Christ (SFC) is one of the family ministries of Couples for Christ (CFC). The ministry was established to cater to the needs of single men and women from 21 to 40 years of age.

CFC - Singles for Christ began on April 1993, when a group of about 40 singles from different parts of the country and belonging to different groups who were being supported by CFC met for a 3-day workshop in Kalibo, Aklan. During this workshop the participants, with the guidance of some CFC elders and the grace of the Holy Spirit, drafted the basic outline of what is to be the Ministry of CFC - Singles for Christ.

- CFC leaders and elders did not formulate the policies and programs, but asked the participants themselves what they desired and needed.
- The singles grouped themselves to discuss the various aspects and the output of that workshop has become the cornerstone of the SFC manual, its mission, philosophy, commitment, and programs.

On June 18, 1993, at the CFC Leaders' Conference held at Xavier School in San Juan, MM, the four "Family Ministries" were formally launched. These are:

- CFC Kids for Christ (KFC). The membership of this ministry are children up to 12 years old. The ministry aims to expose and make their members aware of the beauty of the world around them. It seeks to teach them to see God's love in their families and in what they see in their world. KFC also train members to sing praises to the Lord.

- CFC Youth for Christ (YFC). This ministry is composed of members who are students in high school and college. They are men and women ages 13 to 21. The group seeks to provide the peer group or “barkada” their members long to have. It also hopes to provide through this barkada the identity they are searching for. YFC hopes to achieve these goals while its members enjoy each other’s company and discover God and His love in love and friendship of their companions.
- CFC Singles for Christ (SFC).
- CFC Handmaids of the Lord (HOLD). Single women and widows over 40 years old are the desired members of this ministry. The group hopes to be the support their members need through the love and care they will offer one another and the prayers they will do together.

Like Couples for Christ, SFC is highly evangelistic and grows rapidly, such that as of 2014, there are already about (30,000) singles throughout the world. And it continues to grow.

Who is the single person?

“Single” refers to anyone within the said age group who is free from any legal impediments to marriage. The pastoral care offered by the ministry, is not limited to those who are called for marriage, but includes as well those who may be considering either single blessedness or religious vocation as a state of life.

1. The single is a person in transition. He/She is drawing away from the traditional structures of:
 - a) The Family. While still a member, he/she is a step away from the family. He/She has come of age, has graduated, is working and earning and so enjoys a large degree of independence from parents.
 - b) The School. The single has finally graduated from his/her basic formal education. He/She is now free of the guidance of school authorities, teachers and counselors. No one supervises his/her moral values, ideals and beliefs.
2. This drawing away implies a sense of self-determination. With income and buying power, there exists a sense of greater freedom. However, the single may not realize that with the added freedom, greater responsibility is required. The single, confronted with the reality of evil in the workplace and, under tremendous pressure to succeed, or simply to survive, may start to compromise his/her values, ideals and beliefs; and, be led to a path away from God.

3. Another implication of this transition stage of the singles is as the single is drawn away from his/her family, he/she is also drawn into the process of starting his/her own family — at least, for most of the singles.
 - SFC acknowledges that this period is exciting and that the single has the right to have fun and excitement.
 - SFC also acknowledges that it cannot and should not structure the single so that he cannot move in this area. Being Christian, for SFC, does not mean being sedate but having a deep relationship with Jesus Christ and possessing the values that must be found in a Christian.
 - God's presence in the life of the single will automatically express itself in his/her speech, action and purpose. It is not necessary, therefore, to tie down the person with much rules and regulations.

D. What are we called to do?

1. SFC VISION

“Every single man and woman all over the world experiencing Christ.”

Singles for Christ is the next generation of Couples for Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to journey and witness with single men and women in their discovery and pursuit of vocations and the fullness of the mission towards building a Christ-centered society.

2. SFC MISSION

“Building the Church of the Home. Building the Church of the Poor.”

We are for Christ and we live as His disciples in the present day (empowered and led by the Holy Spirit to passionately and unceasingly proclaim Christ to all nations, establishing a brotherhood of love and sharing, and serving the poor, the captives, the blind, and oppressed). The totality of our lives is a reflection of Christ.

The SFC mission is taken from the mission of Couples for Christ. This is the expression of the Mission in the SFC Ministry.

a) Building the Church:

- First, be good and faithful members, who are committed to growing in love, personal holiness, and knowledge of the foundations of our faith.
 - Be defenders of the Church and life by opposing worldly beliefs and movements that undermine the very things our faith holds sacred.
 - Work for justice, equality, and the dignity of life.

- Actively serve and participate in our parishes.
- Second, we build the Church by bringing more people to knowing Christ through active evangelization and by being strong witnesses to Christ living in our lives.
 - We strive for both holiness and excellence in all aspects of life that Christ may be known and glorified.
 - We are passionate to go to the ends of the earth to proclaim Christ and we are just as passionate to do the same where we are right now.

b) Building the Church of the Home:

- We take the lead in creating a family atmosphere where there is love, openness, forgiveness, happiness, and unity under Christ.
- We are reflections of Christ in our own homes as we support the families we are born into (as members) as well as prepare ourselves for the families we will start in the future (as heads). We do this by living a life of purity, holiness, and selflessness.

c) Building the Church of the Poor:

Because we see and experience Christ in the poor, we serve the poor through a committed and loving dedication to provide for their needs with urgency through love and a personal sacrifice of our time, our resources, efforts and talent. We understand that we cannot build God's kingdom here on earth without the poor.

SFC lives out the social teachings of the Church through CFC ANCOP (Answering the Cry of the Poor) and the CFC Social Development Programs. Particularly, we help in the Cornerstone program (tutorial and values formation in public schools).

E. The SFC Statement of Philosophy

Read the “SFC Statement of Philosophy”.

F. The Covenant of Singles for Christ

1. In SFC, we make a commitment to grow together in holiness as single Christians, and to encourage and support one another in living a Spirit-filled Christian life.
2. We have a 5-point commitment—The Covenant of Singles for Christ—which is embodied in a small white card that we carry with us all the time. Read “The Covenant of Singles for Christ” and explain briefly.

(refer to SFC Covenant Card for a more detailed context of the SFC Covenant)

- a) I shall live as a follower of Christ.
- b) I will work towards the evangelization and transformation of my work place, my family and my community.
- c) I will be a committed and active member of the CFC Singles for Christ.
- d) I will make myself available to the Lord for service.
- e) I will study and seek to grow as a Christian person.

G. How do we Support One Another in SFC?

1. Through households.

All members of SFC belong to small groups which we call “households.” At the end of this CLP, if you decide to be a part of SFC, you will be assigned to a household.

- a) The purpose of a household group is to have a smaller and more intimate environment for personal support in the Christian life, and to provide a means for encouraging and hastening growth as a Christian.
 - Here you can share life experiences of God’s love.
 - You can be helped to overcome obstacles in the Christian life.
 - You will develop real friendships and true brotherhood/sisterhood, without which our Christian life would lack joyful expression.
- b) A household is composed of from 4 to 7 singles and is headed by a household leader, and is set up immediately after the CLP.
- c) The household meets twice a month, on the same day of the week as mutually agreed by its members.
- d) The household meetings are held in the homes of the group members, on rotation basis. Holding the household meetings in our homes has the following values:
 - Worshipping the Lord in our home makes the truth that the home is a domestic church a concrete reality. And God’s blessings will surely descend upon the home where God’s people can be found, worshipping him together and growing in faith together.
 - The people living with us—our parents, our siblings, our housemates, household help, the people who are closest to us—will be aware of what we are involved in and what we do. To them we will become people who are living their Christian faith openly and powerfully.
 - What we do in our home may be used by the Lord as an effective tool for evangelization, especially to our families, relatives, neighbours and friends.

- e) There are basically three ingredients in a typical household meeting: an extended period of prayer and worship, a time for sharing or discussion, and some time for fellowship.
2. By our ongoing teaching and formation.
 - a) There is a formal first-stage teaching program.
 - Covenant Orientation Weekend (3 months after CLP)
 - Knights Tales (for brothers) and Princess Diaries (for sisters)
 - Christian Character Weekend
 - Evangelization Training
 - b) Beyond the first stage, there are many other courses (e.g. Christian Personal Relationships Weekend, Intimacy Weekend, Christ Pursuit Weekend, etc.) and various training modules for those who will undertake leadership services in SFC.
 - c) Various teachings will also be given through monthly teaching assemblies, annual conferences, other assemblies, and through the SFC website (www.singlesforchristglobal.org). We also have books and other materials on evangelization, vocation, working with the poor, etc.
 3. By the other regular activities of our community.
 - a) Annual SFC Provincial, Regional (National in some countries) and International conferences.
 - b) Mission trips both local and international.
 - c) Monthly prayer assemblies and teaching assemblies.
 - d) Lord's Day celebrations, family days, evangelization rallies, leaders' summit, sportsfests, social activities, etc.
 - e) Participation in Church-led activities and advocacies.

H. Conclusion

1. We are living in exciting times. As we see the deterioration of Christian values and family life all around us in all parts of the world, we are also seeing God's loving and protective hands in restoring our lives, families, workplaces and society as a whole back to his original plan.
 - a) We need to see this spiritual drama with the eyes of faith.

- b) We are called to be part of God's work and we should gladly respond to his divine efforts of restoring families back to his kingdom.
 - c) We are inviting you to be a part of God's work by being a part of us in SFC.
2. Think and pray about "The Covenant of CFC Singles for Christ."
- a) Look at the covenant as an ideal, not yet fully in place, but as what God calls us to.
 - b) What is important is that:
 - You understand the SFC covenant.
 - You accept the SFC covenant as helpful and even necessary for our support and growth in our Christian life.
 - You will try to live out the SFC covenant.
 - c) We precisely need one another in SFC in order to support each other in living out the covenant.
3. If you decide that SFC is for you, come back next week, ready to make the covenant.

THE STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY OF CFC – SINGLES FOR CHRIST

The following embodies the beliefs and ideals of the CFC Singles for Christ as a ministry, from which flow the Christian attitudes, values and behavior, as well as its programs, teachings and approaches to Christian renewal.

- We believe that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we safeguard its sanctity by being pure in thought, in word and in deed.
- We believe that God gave us gifts and talents with which we can serve and glorify Him and which allow us to live fruitful lives. We believe in the proper stewardship of these gifts by striving to succeed in our chosen work or profession without sacrificing our Christian values and ethics.
- We believe in the indissolubility of Christian marriage and the importance of family life in the plan of God, in the sanctity of human life and the right of the unborn child.
- We believe that we are called to live out our faith fully and to share actively in the life and mission of our Church — through prayers, evangelization and service to others.
- We believe in living productive lives as citizens of our country, obeying its laws and respecting its institutions. We believe that we have a duty to the future generations, in protecting our natural environment and in combating the proliferation of evil in our social environment.
- We believe that individual and corporate renewal can best be achieved by having a deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by calling upon the power of the Holy Spirit in our day-to-day life and by making full use of all charismatic gifts at our disposal.

THE COVENANT OF CFC - SINGLES FOR CHRIST

Trusting in the Lord's help and guidance:

- I. I shall live as a follower of Christ.
 - Pray daily for at least 15 minutes.
 - Study scriptures daily for at least 15 minutes.
 - Live a righteous life and avoid situations which are occasions for sin.
 - Put good order into my private life and support my parents in building a Christian family.
 - Participate regularly in the worship life of my church.

- II. I will work towards the evangelization and transformation of my work place, my family and my community.
 - Put good order in my work situation.
 - Be a witness of the love and power of the Lord Jesus in my work and in my family.
 - Be a good steward of all resources entrusted to me.
 - Be a good citizen of my country, obeying its laws and protecting its environment.

- III. I will be a committed and active member of the CFC - Singles for Christ.
 - Attend my small group meetings regularly and support the good order of the meetings.
 - Faithfully participate in all the activities of the group.
 - Relate in love, loyalty to and respect for all my brothers and sisters in the Lord.
 - Interceded daily for the group and its mission.

- IV. I will make myself available to the Lord for service.
 - Bring other single men and women to Christ.
 - Give generously of my time and resources to the Lord's service, whenever I am called and follow directions of those who responsibility for any service .
 - Support the work of Couples for Christ and its Ministries.

- V. I will study and seek to grow as a Christian person.
 - Attend all teachings, retreats, seminars and conferences of the CFC - Singles for Christ.
 - Diligently study all materials given to me.

May the Lord Jesus Christ help me to be faithful in living out this commitment everyday for His greater honor and glory and for the good of any brothers and sisters.

Signature

SINGLES FOR CHRIST
CHRISTIAN LIFE PROGRAM

TALK NO. 12 – TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIST

GOAL:

To encourage people to live out actively the new life in the power of the Holy Spirit, and to excite them about becoming a part of the SFC ministry.

CORE MESSAGE:

This talk marks the end of the Christian Life Program. But it is not really the end, but just the beginning. The Lord has laid the foundation for our transformation throughout the Christian Life Program. Our transformation, and what we have gone through, may be likened to the story of the man born blind in the Gospel of John 9:1-38. To continue our transformation, we need to grow in holiness and discipleship and have a greater commitment to service. This we can attain in Singles for Christ. Christ could have restored the sight of the man born blind by merely saying the words “be healed”. But Jesus has chosen to go through a “process” of making mud paste with spittle, rubbing it on the eyes of the blind man, and sending him to the Pool of Siloam. In the same way, Jesus could have transformed us and opened our eyes to his plan by some other means. But he has chosen to open our eyes and transform us through the “process” of the Christian Life Program. Let us thus praise and thank the Lord for calling us, for opening our eyes, and for starting the process of our transformation in Christ.

EXPANDED OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. Today marks the end of our Christian Life Program. But it is not really the end, but just the beginning. We have before us a whole new life with God and with one another. It is exciting!
2. The Lord has laid the foundation for our transformation throughout this Christian Life Program.
 - a) In the first module, we learned the basic truths about Christianity, and the most basic truth is that God loves us. He revealed his love by sending his only Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us. We learned who Jesus Christ is. He is the Son of God who suffered on the cross and died so that we may have eternal life. Thus we follow him as our Lord, we become his disciples, we become Christians. To be a Christian is to have a personal relationship with Jesus. And we respond to everything that he has done for us by our repentance and faith.

- b) In the second module, we learned how to live an authentic Christian life; that the Christian ideal is to love God with all our strength, with all our heart, and with all our mind, and that we should love our neighbour as God loves us. We learned how to live as an active member of a Christian family, which can only happen if we live a life in the Holy Spirit.
 - c) In the third module, we received the power to serve when we were prayed over in the Holy Spirit. We learned how to grow in the Holy Spirit. We learned the vision and mission of Singles for Christ.
3. We need to allow the Lord to continue the process of our transformation in Christ. The Holy Spirit is at work so that we can grow to know, love and serve God more.

B. Our Transformation: Story of the Blind Man

1. Our transformation, and what we have gone through during the past weeks, may be likened to the story of the man born blind in the Gospel of John 9:1-38. This story gives a lesson on the blind man's transformation in Christ.
 - a) Here Jesus opened the eyes of a man born blind, and he did it through some sort of a process or ceremony. Instead of just saying "be healed" as he had done in his other miracles, in this particular incident, Jesus made mud paste, placed it on the blind man's eyes and asked him to wash it.
 - b) The first time the blind man was asked on who cured his blindness, he responded by saying that he was cured by "the man called Jesus". His answer revealed an element of unfamiliarity and remoteness. It was obvious that he did not know who Jesus was—that man, whom I do not know but people call him Jesus, yes, he was the one who cured me.
 - c) The second time he was asked on who cured him, he responded that the man was a prophet. This is a significant transformation. From "a man called Jesus", a statement that reveals unfamiliarity, the blind man now professes "he is a prophet". The blind man has now started to recognize him, and has progressed to the level of admitting that Jesus is a prophet.
 - d) Towards the end of the story, the transformation has come to its fullest. From the unfamiliarity of a statement like "the man called Jesus", to a recognition of what is good in "he is a prophet", the blind man has been transformed into a believer in his final statement, "Lord, I believe." The blind man's eyes and mind were opened and he progressed in his knowledge of Jesus from "that man" to "prophet" to "my Lord".
2. As we come to the end of the Christian Life Program, we should ask ourselves, have we achieved this transformation? From one who only remotely knows "the

man called Jesus”, are we now ready to proclaim him as “my Lord”?

C. Continuing our Transformation

1. To continue our transformation in Christ, we need to grow in holiness and discipleship and have a greater commitment to service.
 - a) Growth in holiness (1 Pt. 1:15-16). It is not an accident that you joined the CLP. God called you. And as God who called you is holy, you are also enjoined to live in holiness.
 - b) Growth in discipleship (Mt. 16:24). To be disciples of Jesus, we have to carry our own crosses. We have to be like Christ who embraced the cross for others. We must listen to the language of the cross and live out its parabolic meaning.
 - c) Greater commitment to service (1 Pt. 4:10). Our transformation through a greater commitment to service is achieved by serving God, neighbour, society, Church and country.
2. As we grow and are transformed, God wants us to take an active participation in making every single man and woman all over the world experience Christ.
 - a) For the fulfilment of God’s plan (Eph. 1:10).
 - b) For the fulfilment of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20).

D. Transformation Through Singles for Christ

1. It is a great privilege to be where we are now—to have a personal relationship with Jesus and have the support of a vibrant ministry like Singles for Christ. This happened through no worth of our own but through God’s mercy and grace. We ought to respond with gratitude and humility.
2. In Singles for Christ, we can continue our transformation in Christ.
 - a) We will continue to grow in personal holiness through our regular prayer time and Scripture reading, reflection and study; through our faithfulness to the covenant of Singles for Christ; and through the SFC Formation Programs.
 - b) As a member of Singles for Christ, there will be numerous opportunities to render service.
 - c) In Singles for Christ, we will develop a greater commitment to evangelization. Evangelization is the global mission of the whole Couples

for Christ community. SFC is one of the family ministries of CFC. Thus, every SFC member is an evangelist. We must endeavour to bring others to SFC to meet Christ.

E. Conclusion

1. If Christ so wished, he could have restored the sight of the man born blind by merely saying the words “be healed” or “open your eyes.” But Jesus has chosen to go through a “process” or a “ceremony” of making mud paste with spittle, rubbing it on the eyes of the blind man, and sending him to the Pool of Siloam.
2. We are that blind man whom Jesus has chosen to be transformed. Jesus could have transformed all of us and opened our eyes to his plan by some other means. But he has chosen to open our eyes and transform us through the “process” of the Christian Life Program.
3. Yes, the Lord has chosen you. He has chosen to open your eyes so that you will begin to see God’s plan for you. His plan is to bring you to his heavenly kingdom.
4. Let us all rejoice and be glad. Let us praise and thank the Lord for calling us, for opening our eyes, and for starting the process of our transformation in Christ.

Dedication Ceremony

1. The leader explains the commitment ceremony.
2. The leader invites everyone to stand. A song of offering oneself is sung (e.g., Here I am Lord, I Give My All).
3. The leader invites everyone to read out the covenant of the Singles for Christ. They all read out loud together.
4. The leader prays over the newly committed brothers and sisters, inviting the old members to pray in their heart with him/her. During this time of prayer, it is appropriate to insert one solemn song (e.g., Spirit of the Living God).
5. The leader welcomes the new brothers and sisters to SFC and invites the old members to express acceptance by means of one big applause. This is followed by spontaneous greeting and welcoming of the new members by the old members. The music ministry plays “Welcome to the Family” and/or other lively songs.
6. Fellowship follows.