

SPENDING TIME WITH GOD

Relationships require an investment of time - it's an obvious statement but one we often neglect, both with people and with God. This week we look at what it means to get into the habit of setting aside time to focus on God.

This week you'll need:

- A copy of the attached 'Spiritual Habits Tipsheet' for everyone in your group.

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions:

- What is your ideal holiday? Where would you go/what would you do?
- If you were an animal, which one would you be and why?
- How have you shown love to your family this week?
- What's one area you feel you are maturing in?

DISCUSS

Have members of your group read out loud the following Scripture verses:

Mark 1:35-37, Matthew 14:23, Luke 4:42, Luke 5:16.

NEW CHRISTIANS

- Have you ever spent time one-on-one with God? What was it like?
- Why do you think the Bible includes these verses?
- Are you surprised that even Jesus - the son of God - would take time out away from other people to spend with God? Why/why not?
- Why do you think it's important to spend time with God without other people around?
- Do you ever feel like you're too busy to spend alone time with God?
- Do you think there is a right/wrong time to spend alone with God?
- What do you think we should do during that time with him?

ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you the most in the passage we've just read?
- Tell us about a time when you really enjoyed alone time with God. What happened?
- On the whole, how easy do you find spending time alone with God?
- As we grow as a Christian, do you think we should spend more, less or the same amount of time with God? Explain your answer.



SPIRITUAL HABITS

SPENDING TIME WITH GOD

- Why is it especially important for people who have a public ministry (like Jesus did) to invest into their relationship with God in private?
- What sorts of things help you sense God's presence when you spend time alone with him?
- What do you think is the purpose of us spending quiet time with God?

INVOLVE

Choose an activity (or a couple of activities) from the attached 'Spiritual Habits Tipsheet' for everyone to have a go at during group time.

Try to pick something that matches the personality of your group but also stretches them. Don't pick the option you think would be hardest for them, but don't choose the one you think would be easiest either. Aim for creating a new but helpful (as opposed to frustrating) experience.

APPLY

Hand out the attached Spiritual Habits Tipsheet (page 1.3). Allow time for everyone to read it over and give everyone an opportunity to ask any questions they may have.

Then ask everyone to select one thing from the list that they are going to try this week. Challenge everyone to be specific - how many times will they do it? On which day(s)? How long for? How will they get their hands on books/CDs/art supplies if they don't already have them?

Jot down people's commitments and follow up with everyone next week to see whether they have followed through.

Encourage your group to take the tipsheet home and put it up in a place where they'll be able to easily refer back to it.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Be real with your group - be open to sharing your own successes and struggles in your own personal relationship with God.
- Anyone missing from your group? Don't forget to ask for volunteers to follow them up.

SPENDING TIME WITH GOD

SPIRITUAL HABITS TIPSHEET

Hand out copies of this sheet and ask each person to select one idea that they are going to try during the week.

1. IF YOU LIKE NATURE...

Visit a beach, a park, watch a sunset or go anywhere where you can be quiet and close to nature. Start by declaring who God is. You are... (E.g. creator, the best artist ever, the beginning and the end, perfect, full of love...). When you are ready, stop and listen for his voice.

2. IF YOU LIKE ART...

Choose some art materials (paints, crayons, spray paints) and use them to draw an expression of your relationship with God. Maybe ask God questions about your relationship as you create your artwork.

3. IF YOU LIKE MUSIC...

Get comfortable at home and put on some worship music. Focus in on the words and what they mean. Let God speak to you about who you are, or about the events that are going on in your week.

4. IF YOU LIKE WRITING...

Write God a letter about your life at the moment. Use two headings: 1. Where I am now, and, 2. Where I sense you want me to be. Take time to make sure you're listening to your heart and to God before you write.

5. IF YOU LIKE EXERCISE...

Go for a run with God! Practice talking to God for 3 mins, and then listening for 3. If you find yourself getting distracted just repeat the name of Jesus over until you refocus.

6. IF YOU'RE A LISTENER...

Head to iTunes and sign up to a couple of sermon podcasts. You can get regular downloads of awesome talks from guys at Planetshakers (PlanetBoom), CCC Oxford Falls (Stadium Generation) and more.

7. IF YOU LIKE READING...

Make your next book a Christian book. Something simple yet challenging like 'Soul Seekers' by Judah Smith would be a great start. Ask your youth pastor or life group leader for more ideas.

8. IF YOU CAN'T STAND BEING ALONE...

Then it's ok to include other people in your personal time with God! Organise to meet up with one or two others a few times a week to pray and read the Bible together.



SPIRITUAL HABITS

MEMORISING SCRIPTURE

The Bible is more than just a handy training or reference manual, it's filled with life-changing principles and truths. By memorising Scripture we make sure that 'truth' is always available to us, regardless of where we are or what we're doing.

This week you'll need:

- Cardboard or paper cut into business card sized pieces and a pen for each group member

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions:

- What's one dream you want to come true before you die?
- What's one goal you have for yourself this year?
- If you could have one guarantee about your future on earth, what would you choose?

DISCUSS

Have someone in your group read aloud Psalm 119:9 – 16.

QUESTIONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

- What kinds of things do you think are important to have memorised? What kinds of things do your teachers, parents or your boss tell you that you need to remember?
- Re-read verse 11 - what do you think it means to hide God's word in our hearts?
- Is there anything from the Bible that you can remember off the top of your head? Do you know why you can remember that particular part?
- What do you think are all the benefits of memorising parts of the Bible? Make a list as a group.
- Personally, are you good at remembering things or do you find it hard? Does anyone have any ideas for how we can get better at remembering things?



SPIRITUAL HABITS

MEMORISING SCRIPTURE

QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you most from the passage we've just read?
- What's your favourite Bible verse? Why is it your favourite? How did you learn it / why do you remember it?
- Re-read Psalm 119:11, and then read Luke 6:45. What can we learn by looking at these verses side-by-side?
- Continuing on from the previous question, what are some things that you personally 'treasure' or 'store up' in your heart? Which are healthy and which aren't? What impact do you think 'storing up' Scripture would have on your heart and on your life?
- It has been said of the Bible that "this book will keep you from sin and sin will keep you from this book". Do you agree? Why / why not?

INVOLVE

Choose together as a group four Bible verses that you will memorise over the coming weeks. You may want to learn one per week or one per fortnight.

Have the group read the following list of verses aloud (you can add more if you want) and ask them to choose the one or two they want to focus on first.

- * Romans 10:9
- * 2 Corinthians 12:9
- * Romans 8:28
- * Colossians 4:2
- * Hebrews 4:16
- * Isaiah 41:10
- * Matthew 6:33
- * John 15:5
- * Acts 1:8
- * 1 Peter 5:7
- * Acts 4:12

Have your group write their chosen verses (and the Bible reference) down on a small piece of card that will fit in their wallet. You may want to agree to all use the same translation of the Bible to be consistent within the group.

Make sure everyone understands all the words in the verse and knows what the verse means.

MEMORISING SCRIPTURE

APPLY

Have your whole group read this week's memory verse out loud. Challenge your group to practise the verse each day, learning it in small sections a few words at a time.

Remind each other during the week via text or phone call to keep practising the verse, and make sure that you set aside some time next week to see how people have gone.

You may even want to make a learning weekly or fortnightly Bible verse part of your regular group culture.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Helpful scriptures to begin learning are those that are not too long and that make an obvious connection to real-life situations.
- If your group are struggling to come up with some benefits of memorising scripture here are just a few:
 - * They will be better equipped to recognise false and incorrect teaching.
 - * Memorised verses are helpful for personal prayer and adoration.
 - * They are also great tool for ministering to others.
 - * You will be filling your mind with good things and gaining wisdom.
- Make sure you include prayer as a part of your night. Maybe you could do this by asking someone to open in prayer and someone else to close?
- How's the atmosphere in the room? Is it relaxed and inviting? Do people feel comfortable when they arrive?
- Is anyone missing from your group? Why not take 30 seconds to call them during group time, put them on speakerphone, and let them know you're thinking about them. If they don't answer then leave a message on their voicemail.
- Don't forget to set aside some time to ENJOY.

TWO-WAY PRAYER

He's God: All-powerful, all-knowing, supernatural, perfect and holy. And yet he invites us into a relationship where we can speak to him as a friend talks to a friend.

This week you'll need:

- Pens and paper (preferably lined paper) for everyone

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions.

- How has your week been on a scale of 1 to 10? Why?
- What is your favourite thing about Christmas? Why?
- Who is someone new you've met in the past month? What's the number 1 thing you remember about them?
- What's your favourite thing about church at the moment? What's something you wish you could change?

DISCUSS

Have your group read Luke 11:1-10 aloud.

QUESTIONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

- Have you ever prayed before? When was it? How did you feel while you were praying?
- Think of a friend or family member that you find it easy to talk to. What is it about that person that makes them good to talk to? Do you think that it's ok to Jesus in that way?
- What kinds of things do you think it's ok to pray about? What kinds of things do you think God is interested in listening to?
- Have you ever heard God say something to you before? What was it? Why do you think it was God saying that?
- As Christians we believe that God can and does speak to us. What ways do you think he speaks with us? How can we make sure that we're always able to hear his voice?



SPIRITUAL HABITS

TWO-WAY PRAYER

QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you most in the verses we've just read?
- Which different expressions of prayer have you tried in the past? What has worked and what hasn't? Which is most helpful for you at the moment?
- Read Exodus 33:11. Do your personal prayer times feel like friends speaking face-to-face? If not, how would you describe your personal prayer times with God? Are you satisfied with your prayer life or do you feel there's room for improvement?
- Is there a right amount of time to spend in prayer every day? What would you consider to be ideal?
- Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-4. What is your response to what Paul has written? Do you know anyone with the gift of praying in tongues, or have you ever prayed in tongues yourself? What do you know about the gift?

INVOLVE

This week we're going to look at prayer journaling as a way of talking to God. Hand out the pens and paper to everyone. If anyone has a journal or notebook then they can feel free to use that instead.

Have your group write the following headings on their page, with at least 3-4 lines underneath each.

- God, I think you're amazing because...
- God, I'm sorry for...
- God, thank you for...
- God, I need your help with...
- God, I think I hear you saying...

Encourage your group to spread out around the room and spend some time praying by thinking about and writing responses to each of the headings. Make sure they understand there's no right or wrong way to write - using full paragraphs or just bullet points is fine.

Allow some time for people to feedback on how they found the activity. If people are comfortable, you might also want to ask people to read their prayers aloud as a group activity.

TWO-WAY PRAYER

APPLY

Ask your group to share one thing that they are going to do this week based on what they've learned or been challenged about.

AND/OR

Find time this week to sit and have some conversation with God. Sit and tell him what has been going on in your life (be honest with him) and listen to what he has to say to you. You might want to do this out loud or by using the journal method we used earlier.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Theological Notes - 1 Corinthians 14:1-4... Paul speaks of the gift of tongues as a prayer gift given to strengthen us personally. Here are a few points to keep in mind if you discuss this Scripture:
 - * In some communities the gift of tongues is not widely discussed and so it's possible that your group has had absolutely no exposure to this spiritual gift. If this is the case then there's no problem with them having questions or doubts, but try to gently work through any attempts to dismiss or laugh off the subject. The gift of tongues *is* Biblical and so we should take what the Bible says seriously.
 - * If after reading the verses anyone has questions about how we might go about receiving the gift of tongues or the gift of prophecy, it's probably most helpful to approach that topic by shifting the discussion back to Luke 11:5-13.
 - * Be honest about what you know and what you don't. If someone asks you a question that you don't the answer to then you can offer to try to find out the answer for them during the week.
 - * If your group is after more information on the gift of tongues then reading the rest of Chapter 14 is a good place to start.
 - * Talk to a corps officer or church leader if you have any questions or concerns, either before or after your group meeting.
- Have you noticed the white space down the right side of every page? It's there to give you space to write comments, notes and ideas to help you plan your group meeting.



READ YOUR BIBLE

The Bible is full of fantastic stories, principles and lessons - but sometimes it can be a challenge to read it in a way that actually impacts the way we think and act. This week we'll look to help people engage with the Bible on a deeper and more personal level.

This week you'll need:

- Paper and pens for everyone
- A Bible for everyone

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions.

- What's the most fun or exciting thing you've done in the past week?
- How are your relationships at home going? What's the best thing? What's the most difficult?
- What is a personal goal you're currently working towards?
- What has been the most challenging thing you've faced over the last 12 months? How did the challenge change you? What did you learn?

INVOLVE

This week we're going to do something different. Because we're talking about how to study the Bible, we're not going to provide a list of discussion questions - instead, we're going to help your group to engage with Scripture on their own and then have opportunity to talk about what they learned.

Hand out the paper, pens and Bibles. Have everyone write the following questions on their paper.

- What's the main point of this passage?
- What doesn't make sense to me?
- What's my favourite verse or section of this passage? Why?
- What does this passage teach me that I didn't already know?
- How does this passage challenge me to live differently?
- What will I do about it?

Have your group spread out and get comfortable, and ask them to open their Bibles to Psalm 119:97-105. Have your group work through the above questions based on the given Scripture passage.

Let your group know that they don't have to answer every question, but they should at least make an attempt.

You probably want to put aside at least 20 minutes for this activity.



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READ YOUR BIBLE

DISCUSS

Give an opportunity for your group to share what they've written.

In particular, make sure that the group has a chance to talk out anything that comes up in response to the 'What doesn't make sense' question.

Keep the following discussion tips in mind as you move through this process:

- * Feel free to ask people to explain their responses and go deeper.
- * After someone has shared, regularly ask questions like 'Would anyone like to add to that?' or 'Does anyone agree/disagree with that?'
- * If someone's sharing is long-winded or unclear, try to repeat it back and summarise it for clarity. This helps make sure you've understood what's been said, and it also helps the rest of the group stay engaged with the conversation.

You can find these and other discussion tips in the LIFE Leadership Handbook, available from salvos.org.au/more.

APPLY

Challenge your group this week to go through the same six questions from 'Involve' on their own with a new Scripture passage. You can let people choose their own passage or choose one together as a group.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Many young people don't enjoy reading and therefore don't engage well with the Bible. Here's a few things you can do:
 - * Make sure people have access to a suitable Bible translation. Typically, both the NLT and The Message translations are more accessible for young people than the NIV version.
 - * When people are starting out, stick to Scripture verses that have an obvious connection to real life.
 - * Make it fun! Reading the Bible might be difficult for some people, but your group time will only feel like a classroom if you let it.
 - * Talk it up! If a leader is genuinely passionate about the Bible, then that will rub off on the people around them.
- Don't forget to set aside some time to ENJOY - have supper, play a game or just chill!

FELLOWSHIP

In Hebrews 10, the author challenges Christians to stay in the habit of meeting together. Being in community is an essential part of Christian faith, and so it's important we commit to regularly setting aside time for fellowship with other believers.

This week you'll need:

- Food for your group to prepare a meal together.

INVOLVE

We are looking at Acts 2:42-47, which looks at the early church and shows us what it is like to regularly be in Christian community. One of the important elements of early Christian fellowship was the emphasis on sharing meals together.

This week for life group, try serving each other by preparing a meal together. Have some people cook and a few others prepare the table, but make sure everyone is involved somehow.

Some simple ideas for meals are sausages/hotdogs, nachos, burritos or homemade pizzas. For the health conscious, try cutting up pieces of fruit and skewering them on kebab sticks.

Once your food is prepared, sit down at the table together and finish the rest of your life group as you enjoy your meal.

**If preparing a meal is not possible, try ordering something in or organising something simple in advance. Sharing a meal is a fantastic way to build community and will be well worth the effort. If nothing is possible then you may just want to re-use one of the Involve activities from earlier in this series.*

CONNECT

Have your group answer your choice of the following questions. If everyone is in earshot of each other, you might want to ask a few of these questions as you're preparing your meal together.

- Where's your favourite place to hang out?
- What's your favourite meal to eat? To cook?
- What have you read in the Bible this week?

If your group has been memorising Scripture verses then you might want to test people during this time as well.



SPIRITUAL HABITS

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FELLOWSHIP

DISCUSS

Have someone read out loud Acts 2:42-47.

QUESTIONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

- Read v42. What do you think it means by ‘the apostle’s teaching’, ‘fellowship’ and ‘the Lord’s Supper’?
- Do you think it’s important for Christians to regularly meet together? What are the benefits?
- What’s been your favourite thing about being in a life group? What has been the most beneficial?
- The believers sold everything they had and shared the money with those in need. What’s the most generous thing anyone has ever done for you? How did you feel about that person afterwards?
- How would you feel if you had to share everything you had with other people? What would motivate people to live this way? What do you think it would be like to live in a community like this?

QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you most from the passage we read?
- Read v42 - do you think those four things (teaching, fellowship, sharing meals and prayer) are in balance in your life and in your church community? Why?
- Read v44,45. Do you think that type of generosity is realistic in today’s day and age? Why/why not?
- Is there a difference between ‘hanging out with Christians’ and ‘being in Christian fellowship’? Explain your answer.
- “Being in the habit of going to church will help you get through the tough times in your life.” What do you think about this statement?

FELLOWSHIP

APPLY

Ask your group to share one thing that they are going to do this week based on what they've learned or been challenged about.

AND/OR

Go around the table and have everyone commit to one thing they will do this week to invest into or add value to their church/life group community. Some possible ideas are:

- * Follow up someone they haven't seen for a while.
- * Make time to hang out with or have dinner with someone they normally wouldn't.
- * Serve the church by arriving early to set up, staying late to pack up or volunteering to do another job.
- * Bless others by making some small gifts, writing some encouragement cards, or handing out lollies.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Can you remember the 5 things that every life group leader absolutely needs to know? If not, it's time to pull out the LIFE Leadership Handbook and give yourself a refresher course.
- Are school holidays coming up? Check out our LIFE items on toolkit.salvos.org.au/youthandkids pages for some ideas if you want to keep meeting as a group during the school holidays.
- Don't forget to set aside some time to ENJOY – have supper, play a game, or just chill!