

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Exploring Spirituality: Influences on Your Spirituality

Meeting with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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iFOLLOW

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Influences on Your Spirituality

This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus

Learning Objectives

1. Understand what your life is already telling you about your priorities
2. Learn some specific ways to change your priorities
3. Discover two simple ways to re-center your spiritual life

Content Outline

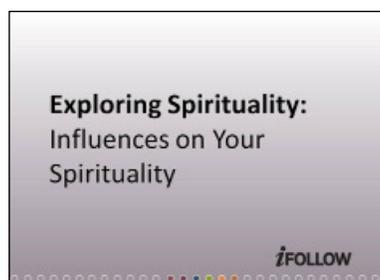
- A. You only see what you have in your heart.
- B. A pure heart
- C. Two basic tools to re-center your life
- D. What's holding you back?

Background Material for the Presenter

Newsweek magazine reported on a statue that sits in Manhattan on Fifth Avenue near the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It's a three-foot statue of Cupid in a courtyard fountain. Thousands of people walk by it every day. Many admire its beauty, but most don't pay much attention.

Then an art professor, on her way home from work one evening, stopped to look more closely at it and made an amazing discovery. This Cupid statue was in fact a work of art created by none other than Michelangelo himself, the great 15th century artist. This incredible art treasure had been missing from the art world for 90 years. Thousands of people had been walking by it every day, but no one recognized it as a valuable treasure, until one person looked more closely at it. What made the difference?

John Burroughs was one of America's best-loved naturalists. In simple style, his books convey his avid enthusiasm



and vast knowledge of nature. One day, Burroughs was visiting a neighbor friend. She was familiar with his writings and particularly impressed with his knowledge of birds.

As they sat on her front porch, she asked him, “Why is it, John, that there are so many birds at your place, but I have no birds at all in my yard? Do I need to build some special kinds of bird houses and plant some bushes and trees that attract birds? What’s your secret?”

Burroughs smiled. For the last 15 minutes he’d been watching all sorts of birds flutter in her bushes, land in her shrubs and trees. He replied, “You won’t see birds in your yard until you have birds in your heart.”

Another story is told of a naturalist and his friend walking down a city street. The naturalist stopped suddenly and said, “Listen to that cricket!”

His friend was amazed. “All this city racket, and you can hear a cricket?”

“Oh, you can hear what you ears are attuned to,” said the naturalist. He pulled a tiny, thin dime out of his pocket and dropped it on the sidewalk. All around them, people stopped and turned their way.

People do not hear the crickets or see the birds, but money? Oh, yes! What makes the difference? You see only what you have in your heart. That’s why the art professor discovered Michelangelo’s invaluable statue but not the thousands of others who walked by every day. She had art in her heart, so she saw art on the street. That’s why John Burroughs saw the birds that were invisible to the woman, and the naturalist heard the cricket. You see what you have in your heart.

A Pure Heart

This is also a profound and powerful spiritual principle. Jesus made the statement, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

The Hebrew word for “pure” (on which Jesus builds this saying) is used to describe things like liquids without mixtures (for example, milk or wine unadulterated with water); things like metals without alloys, an army without defectors, grain that has been sifted and cleansed of chaff, a person free of debt, and a sacrificial animal without blemish or defect. “Pure.” In other words, the word means unmixed, unadulterated, undistorted, undivided, completely focused.

What’s Jesus’ point? One Bible translation defines purity as single-mindedness. “Blessed



are they who are not double-minded, for they shall be admitted into the intimate presence of God.” Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian and statesman, defined it this way: “Purity of heart is to will one thing.” In the context of this saying by Jesus, what is that one thing? God.

Here’s the point: you only see what you have in your heart. So if you want to see God, you have to have God in your heart and mind. Only those with a single-minded focus and passion to know God will be able to connect with God. The pure in heart.

Jesus was probably quoting from the Old Testament when He spoke those words. The book of songs called Psalms says, “Who may go up on the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy Temple?” (Psalm 24:3-4) In other words, this question is really, Who is able to have access to God’s presence? Who will really see God?

The passage continues: “Only those with clean hands and pure hearts.” (Verse 4) Sounds like a saying of Jesus. But what does it mean? Is this suggesting that only those who are sinless, who have attained to a perfect moral purity, who never make mistakes, will be able to see God?

Notice how the parallelism in this verse defines that phrase: “Only those with clean hands and pure hearts, who have not worshiped idols, who have not made promises in the name of a false god.” (Verse 4)

What’s the point? A pure heart is one that is devoted singularly to God. It’s one that has no idols or competitors to God set up to take God’s place. It’s a heart which refuses to allow distractions to block a view of God. Seeking God is the number one priority and passion.

And what is the promise in this Psalm for the pure heart? “They will receive a blessing from the Lord; the God who saves them will declare them right.” (Verse 5) In other words, they have the privilege of enjoying intimacy with God, a right and good relationship with God. They see God for who God really is because nothing is allowed to distract their view. And therefore they have the joy of enjoying God. Their spirituality is alive and well and healthy and growing.

You won’t see birds in your yard until you have birds in your heart. You only see what you have in your heart. Only the single-minded focus for God will facilitate an experience with God.

John Ogilvie (author and spiritual leader) once met a man who earned his living as what he called an attention getter. That caught John’s interest. “What do you mean?” John asked.

The man replied, “My job is to get the attention of the American people. I’m an advertising executive. It’s my task to use everything I can – media, print, billboards – to impress people with the absolute necessity of buying the products I promote.”

So he, along with his entire industry, pours billions of dollars every year into whatever it takes to secure the public's riveted attention. If they can capture attention, they can capture the sale. That's why companies are willing to spend millions of dollars for a 30 second advertisement on Super Bowl Sunday, or \$2 million for 30 seconds on the final episode of Jerry Seinfeld. It is a fundamental principle: What captures your attention can capture your heart and then capture your response.

A group of businessmen were talking over breakfast one morning about the one thing in their lives which made it difficult to be faithful and growing spiritually. The last man to share cut to the core: "I have too many commitments competing for my attention and my ultimate commitment. I'm going in a hundred directions. I end up thinking about God and my spirituality only in a crisis."

What difficulty is he describing? Distracted attention; a lack of priority focus; a double-mindedness. In other words, his heart isn't "pure," it's not single-minded, focused and undivided in its passion for spiritual things. And since we see only what's in our hearts, no wonder it's so often difficult to see God or pay attention to our spirituality, the deepest core values of our lives, in the midst of day-to-day living.

Is It Possible?

So how is it possible to have a pure heart in the middle of the competing demands on our attention every day, most of which are necessary or good? Is a pure heart really possible in the 21st century?

There's a fascinating biography in the Old Testament that describes this spiritual possibility. The story of this man's life is told in only 6 verses, the first four being in Genesis 5. "When Enoch was 65 years old, he had a son named Methuselah. After Methuselah was born, Enoch walked with God 300 years more and had other sons and daughters. So Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked with God; one day Enoch could not be found because God took him." (Genesis 5:21-24)

Imagine having that kind of longevity! There's a guy with good genes! Of course, according to Bible history, people in those days lived a long time—consider that his son Methuselah ended up living for 969 years—but that is another story. The point is, life was very long in those days. So imagine the dynamics of trying to live a spiritual, God-connected life for that long. As the story states about Enoch, there were several "modern-day" realities he faced during his life.

He had family obligations as a father and husband. So you know his life was filled with things screaming for his attention every day. Also, he lived at a time when the world was incredibly evil. In fact, the next story (Genesis 6) goes on to describe the world being so



wicked that God has to step in and intervene lest the population destroy itself. So you can imagine Enoch's long life is filled with all kinds of attention-getters beckoning for his heart and mind.

But in the midst of all of these focus-grabbers, says the story, Enoch walked with God. What does that mean? How does he do it? The New Testament talks about Enoch this way: "Before Enoch was taken, the Scripture says that he was a man who truly pleased God." (Hebrews 11:5)

How did Enoch please God? Was he completely sinless in his life, never making any mistakes or having any failures so God was happy with him? The next verse puts it this way: "Without faith it is impossible to please God. Anyone who comes to God must believe that God is real and that God rewards those who truly want to find him." (Hebrews 11:6)

In other words, the secret to Enoch's walk with God, his spirituality, is that he learned how to place God in the center of his heart. He was willing to place his trust and belief in God. He truly wanted to find God and enjoy his relationship with God. That fact that the original story in Genesis uses the word "walked" with God implies going on a journey with God. In other words, Enoch takes God with him into every aspect of his life. Everywhere Enoch goes, God goes with him. Enoch is conscious of God in everything he does. Enoch believes that God is real and so places God at the center, allowing that priority to affect every other demand on his life.

The Jews have a tradition called "mezuzah." On the right side of every Jewish doorpost is nailed a small piece of parchment rolled and inserted into a wood, metal, stone, or ceramic case called a mezuzah. One the front of the parchment are lettered the twenty-two lines of the Shema, the Hebrew prayer from the Torah about God being the only God and that they will worship God with all their heart, mind, soul and body. The Hebrew word "Shaddai" (God Almighty) is inscribed on the back in such a way that it can be seen from the outside. As people go in and out the door, they touch the mezuzah, sometimes then touching their lips in a "kiss," as a visible reminder of what they want to focus their lives on.

This mezuzah was a ritual code that said to everyone entering and leaving that home, "As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord." Touching of the mezuzah and saying this prayer serve as regular reminders of who they belong to and what place they want God to occupy in their lives.

Enoch figured out meaningful and powerful ways to "mezuzah" his world, ways to help him grow his own soul and spirituality by "modulating the mundane into the eternal." One author, in writing about the life of Enoch, commented: "The infinite, unfathomable love of God became the subject of Enoch's meditations day and night; and with all the fervor of his soul he sought to reveal that love to the people among whom he dwelt." (White, p. 84)

How did he do that in practical, tangible ways? How did he develop this perspective and experience with God?

Use the very distractions to remind you of the priorities.

For one thing, as the story suggests, Enoch was drawn into a closer relationship with God in the midst of being a father. He was able to use his family relationships to remind himself about God.

Those who are parents understand this potential dynamic. As you watch your children grow, and as you feel your own tenderness in your heart for your children, you can't help but be in awe of the experience of unconditional love. You recognize how much you value and love your children, no matter what they do. And as you see how resilient children can be—even when you might be mean or unloving toward them at times, they bounce back in love toward you—you experience of their unconditional love melts your own heart. The possibility of understanding God's unconditional love increases and grows.

And so it's possible, little by little, to use our natural family relationships (or loving, trusting relationships with significant others) to point our own hearts toward God, to let our own hearts be melted by the love and grace of God. When we make those deliberate connections between the earthly and the divine, our loyalty and attention to God can be strengthened and purified, we become more undivided and single-minded.

Make time for retreat. Also, according to one author, Enoch's "walk with God" often involved a need to withdraw by himself for a time (from the midst of his busy domestic and professional life) on order to regain perspective. He felt a hunger and thirst for quality time alone with God. So he would take mini-retreats into the mountains to rivet his attention on God.

Jesus did the same thing often. After hours of interacting with and helping people, he would withdraw into a quiet place to be in solitude with God. He would often spend whole nights in prayer and meditation by himself. This example has been emulated by spiritually-inclined people all through the centuries of time.

So Enoch's "walk with God" involved the same retreats. Ellen White, in her book, says that he would emerge from these sanctuaries in time strengthened and empowered to pour his energies into his family and the people he felt called to share God's love with.

So there are two simple ways in which Enoch learned how to walk with God and keep his heart undivided and focused in the middle of conflicting demands, using everyday life to point him to God and develop his spirituality.

One day, to show the world what happens to those with "pure hearts," to give hope for the reality of God's promise of intimacy and meaningful relationship with Him, as God and Enoch are walking along together, God simply says, "Let's go a bit further today, Enoch. I



want you to see My home this time. Come on home and live with Me.”

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” You only see what you have in your heart. Only those who are willing and intentional about minimizing the many distractions for the heart, only those who are disciplined enough to focus their attention on God, only those who are willing to be single-minded in their passion to grow their spirituality, those are the ones who experience the depth of life, the divine encounter, God in the heart.

What’s Holding You Back?

So what are the greatest distractions in your life that keep you from focusing on God? What occupies your attention the most? What are those issues or things that steal your heart away from the most important? What are the urgent things that you pay more attention to than the significant things?

What might be some ways you could “mezuzah” your world; build reminders into your life that keep you focused on your spiritual existence, on God? How might you use your meaningful relationships to be a spiritual discipline, a way of focusing on God? How might you structure time into your schedule to pay attention to God (in both your daily schedule and long term calendar)?

A woman in Philadelphia several years ago was up in her attic cleaning. She spotted what looked like an old helmet lying near the Halloween costumes. She had never noticed it before. So she cleaned it up. It was beautiful! She wondered if it might be worth some money. After all, it appeared to be an antique.

So she lugged it down to the Civic Center where Chubb’s Antique Roadshow was offering people free appraisals of their junk. Greg Martin, the appraiser from San Francisco’s Butterfield and Butterfield, held the helmet, looked it over carefully, then proceeded to inform her that the helmet was a 16th century cabasset from Milan, Italy, forged from a single sheet of steel and covered with gold. It was probably a parade helmet.

The woman was speechless, until he told it was worth about \$250,000, to which she finally uttered, “Super!” And then she put the helmet back in her bag, asked not to be identified, and left.

Imagine a \$250,000 helmet sitting up in the attic next to the old and moth-eaten Halloween costumes. No one knows what it is or the value it has. It just sits up there unnoticed, year after year. Why? Because you only see what’s in your heart.

How valuable is your spiritual life to you? How much would you like God to be in your heart? How much attention do you want to give to God? Are you willing to bring God



down from the attic into your heart?

Handouts in this Package

1. Participant's Notes



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Additional Resources

Chittister, Joan (1990). *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

MacDonald, Gordon (1986). *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*. Nashville: Oliver Nelson.

McLaren, Brian D. (2008). *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Ortberg, John (1997). *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

White, Ellen (1890). *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.

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Discussion Questions

1. If someone who didn't know you looked at a transcript of all your activities today and yesterday, what would that person believe was your greatest priority in life?
2. What are some things you love, and therefore tend to notice first?
3. Prior to this presentation, how would you have defined the word "pure"? Do you have any different ideas about it now? Why do you think our society tends to put so much emphasis on sexuality in terms of purity and impurity?
4. Why do you think Psalm 24 defines a person with a pure heart and clean hands as one who has not worshiped an idol or made promises in the name of a false god? How might we phrase the same principle today?
5. How can you use the very distractions that seem bent on keeping you from spirituality as reminders of your deepest priorities?
6. What are some ways in which you intentionally schedule time for God into your life? What might you do differently?

Group Activities

Purpose: To help each other take a new look at “what’s holding us back.”

Preparation: You will need space for pairs or trios of people and writing materials.

Assignment: On the principle that it’s usually much easier to see the mote in another’s eye, divide the group into pairs and have each person write a list of half a dozen things that are particularly distracting them at this time. Tell them to be as specific as they can. Not just, “I have three kids,” but “My son has soccer three nights a week, my daughter needs special tutoring, and the baby has an ear infection.” Then have them give their lists to each other and brainstorm possible solutions for each other. Much of what they come up with may not be applicable or possible for the other, but they may spark some real solutions that will help them both use the distractions as reminders of deep values, and also schedule retreat time.

Debrief: If any pairs have come up with particularly creative ideas they think might be useful to others, have them share them. Anyone, of course, may also share reactions and emotions.

Time: Allow 10 minutes for writing down the distractions, another 10 minutes for coming up with possible solutions, and the last 10 minutes for sharing.

Handout 1

What Things Influence My Spirituality?

A spiritual principle: “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” (Jesus, Matthew 5:8)

“Pure” (in Hebrew) means:

1. Liquids without mixtures (for example, milk unadulterated with water)
2. Things like metals without alloys
3. An army without defectors
4. Grain that has been sifted and cleansed of chaff
5. A person free of debt
6. An animal without blemish or defect

“Pure in heart” = _____

“Purity of heart is to will one thing.” (Soren Kierkegaard)

Jesus is quoting from Psalm 24: “Who may go up on the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy Temple? Only those with clean hands and pure hearts. Only those with clean hands and pure hearts; who have not worshiped idols, who have not made promises in the name of a false god. They will receive a blessing from the LORD; the God who saves them will declare them right.” (Psalm 24:3-5)

“Pure in heart” = _____

Obstacles to Spiritual Focus

A Story of Spiritual Focus: Enoch

“When Enoch was 65 years old, he had a son named Methuselah. After Methuselah was born, Enoch walked with God 300 years more and had other sons and daughters. So Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked with God; one day Enoch could not be found because God took him.” (Genesis 5:21-24)

Enoch’s Life Realities

1. Family Obligations (Father and husband)
2. Evil Environment

Enoch’s Spiritual Strategy

“Before Enoch was taken, the Scripture says that he was a man who truly pleased God. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Anyone who comes to God must believe that God is real and that God rewards those who truly want to find him.” (Hebrews 11:5-6)

1. _____
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

A Jewish Tradition: Mezuzah

On the right side of every Jewish doorpost is nailed a small piece of parchment rolled and inserted into a wood, metal, stone, or ceramic case called a mezuzah. One the front of the parchment are lettered the twenty-two lines of the Shema – the Hebrew prayer from the Torah about God being the only God and that they will worship God with all their heart, mind, soul and body. The Hebrew word “Shaddai” (God Almighty) is inscribed on the back in such a way that it can be seen from the outside. As people go in and out the door, they touch the mezuzah, sometimes then touching their lips in a “kiss,” as a visible reminder of what they want to focus their lives on.

This mezuzah was a ritual code that said to everyone entering and leaving that home, “As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord.” This touching of the mezuzah and saying this prayer were regular reminders of who they belonged to and what place they wanted God to occupy in their lives.

Questions to Help You Evaluate Your Spiritual Focus

1. What are the greatest distractions in your life that keep you from focusing on God?
2. What occupies your attention the most?
3. What are those issues or things that steal your heart away from the most important?
4. What are the urgent that you pay more attention to than the significant?
5. What might be some ways you could “mezuzah” your world – build reminders into your life that keep you focused on your spiritual existence, on God?
6. How might you use your meaningful relationships to be a spiritual discipline, a way of remembering God?
7. How might you structure time into your schedule to pay attention to God (in both your daily schedule and long term calendar)?