CON TÚ PRIMER AMOR

Embracing Your First Love



"Con Tu Primer Amor/Embracing Your First Love"

Small Group Curriculum: Prayer Series

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MARY MAGDALENE "THE FAITHFUL MESSENGER"

"After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means." Luke 8:1-3

THIS WEEK, YOU WILL:

- Survey and process Mary Magdalene's life with Jesus.
- Discuss responses and reactions to loss and disappointment.
- Be discipled by Mary's maturity in the midst of her grief.
- Discuss our reactions to Jesus when we experience loss, grief, and/or disappointment. How does loss impact our relationship with Jesus?
- Continue the conversation of resurrection life.

<u>Materials Needed:</u> Bible (May choose to print out the passages) Notebook, Journal

OPENING QUESTIONS: (5-8 minutes)

- How do you react to loss or disappointment?
- How is your relationship with Jesus when you're experiencing loss or disappointment?

*Since the questions are connected, you can choose to answer either or both.

FOCUSED SCRIPTURES

(45 minutes)

01 Healed + Invested

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. – Luke 8:1-3

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- List what Mary Magdalene's life was like before she met Jesus?
 - Sick: Mentally unstable with 7 spirits haunting her.
 - The enemy taunting her and seeking to destroy her life.
 - Isolating her from her family, her community, and her God.
- What happens when Jesus enters her life?

02 Devoted One

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. – Mark 15:40

- Read about Jesus' burial (Mark 15:42-47). What was Mary Magdalene doing?
 - She stands near Jesus in the most painful and messy time of his life. She was there
 until his final breath.
 - Many of his followers fled, including most of the disciples. But she remained.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

• How do you think Mary could have handled being at the crucifixion with Jesus, in the midst of all of that was going on externally and we can imagine internally?

03 Empowered + Chosen

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. – John 20:11-18

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Make a list of all of Mary's actions.
- What is Mary's goal?
- Why do you think Jesus reveals himself first to Mary?
 - If you look at the previous chapter, you will see John and Peter were also at the tomb but did not see Jesus yet.



Loss and disappointment — death of any kind — can be offensive to us. We pull away in fear, anger, and confusion. Mary Magdalene doesn't shut down with Jesus like so many others did, she gets even more involved. Pain can cause us to distance ourselves from God. Mary doesn't distance but instead she clings to him.

Why her? <u>"Because she never left my side"</u> (words I heard Jesus tell me when I asked him, "why Mary?") Mary clings to Jesus, doesn't know how not to be with him. She's not afraid of suffering, maybe due to the agony and suffering she went through before she encountered Jesus. There's a maturity that she has in the midst of challenges, possibly feeling defeated, that we can learn from. Her faithfulness to Jesus leads her, not her emotions and not the surrounding circumstances.

Jesus saw Mary's remarkable before and after transformation and now Mary gets to experience Jesus' "Before & After." She gets to witness first-hand and see his incredible transformation from death to life.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- Take a few moments to listen to the Holy Spirit and reflect on what you've read and discussed.
- What is one thing you're learning from Mary and her relationship with Jesus that you would like to see in your own friendship with him?

QUESTIONS

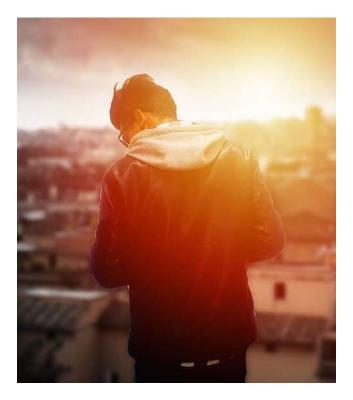
(5-8 minutes)

• Save some time for your group to ask questions.

THIS WEEK'S ENGAGEMENT WITH JESUS

Look at one point of Mary Magdalene's life and reflect on it with Jesus. Try not to study it but to interact and have a dialogue with Jesus about it. Journal your thoughts and feel free to ask Him questions.

Bless your group to encounter Jesus this week.



KING DAVID "THE WORSHIPPER"

"Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that they King of glory may come in." Psalm 24:7



THIS WEEK, YOU WILL:

- Survey and process David's life.
- Discuss the power of worship.
- Learn to differentiate between Praise and High Praise.

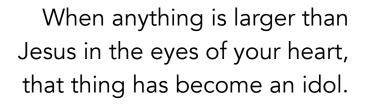
<u>Materials Needed:</u> Bible (May choose to print out the passages) Notebook, Journal A large ruler Provide some musical examples

> As a group you may want to: Create a list of High Praise **Songs** Create a list of High Praise **Psalms**

OPENING QUESTIONS: (5-8 minutes)

- What comes to mind when you think of worship?
- How do you like to engage worship?

Broad definition of worship = A heart posture towards someone or something.



Mark Virkler The Four Keys to Hearing God's Voice

25



HEART POSTURE

(8 minutes)

We are worshippers, created by God to worship. We can worship what we are consumed with, obsessing about and/or spending our time and energy on it — even things we don't like.

- Finances/Money
- Shopping
- A Person
- Children
- Job/Career
- Cancer/Sickness
- Body (positive and negative thoughts)

Mark Virkler's quote "When anything is larger than Jesus in the eyes of your heart, that thing has become an idol" (*The 4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice, 135*).

God wants to be worshipped more than anyone or anything — not because he's narcissistic but because he's loving. He knows we become what we worship. We can begin to look and act like our idols. When we worship God, however, we become more like him, reflecting him, and being transformed by him. He will not hurt us like anything else could. Worshipping him protects and guards us from stress, anxiety, fear, people's opinions, etc. We give our hearts, time, and energy when we worship him. In return, he gives us a greater measure of his love.

Worship truly affects how we hear from God. If we're obsessed with someone or something and are praying so hard for it but are forgetting to keep our eyes and heart on him, we can easily misconstrue a word from him. It's in that misdirected worship we can incorrectly interpret God's voice.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What is the temptation for you to think about more than Jesus?

FOCUSED SCRIPTURES

(20 minutes)

SURVEY OF DAVID'S LIFE

The Man, The King, The Leader

Ask your group to individually do a mini timeline of David's life in their notebook for 3 minutes and then gather to share with the larger group.

- Young Man
- Anointed and Waiting
- Persecuted
- King
- Ups and Downs as a Leader
- Final years with his children

David was a worshipper through it all and we'll look at the Psalms and survey them a bit.

- What was David's legacy?
- What did God enjoy about him? = A man after God's own heart Acts 13:22.

LIFTING UP OUR EYES TO GOD

Lift up your heads, you gates; be **lift**ed **up**, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. – Psalm 24:7

I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from?- Psalm 121:1

I lift up my eyes to you, to you who sit enthroned in heaven.- Psalm 123:1

Psalm 18 is full of David looking and seeking God.

Lifting up our hearts and minds from our current situations or from earthly things is a posture of worship.

Illustration: A Large Ruler (5 minutes)

(Leader brings out a ruler and follows the analogy.)

- The ruler represents the thing or things we're focusing on more than Jesus. (Finances, Something about the past or future, a relationship, career, ministry etc...)
- When we dwell on that thing or person, the ruler creeps up to eye level. When we're obsessed, super anxious about it, the ruler goes above our heads.
- Imagine the Lord telling you like he told David to look up, to seek me, to interact with me. As we encounter the Lord and put our eyes on him, our connection to the thing or person changes.
- As we worship him by meditating on his word and singing worship songs, the ruler and the issues the ruler represents slowly sink down and down.
- Keeping our eyes and hearts on the Lord keeps us from worshipping what does not bring us life.

PRAISE AND HIGH PRAISE (45 minutes)

Throughout the Psalms (Worship songs that David mostly wrote) we can see a huge theme of praise and thanksgiving. Let's see the different types of praises David does:

PRAISE

Praise = Thanking God for rescuing him, protecting him, providing for him.

- Psalm 16 & 20 are great examples. (Look at those Psalms and briefly list what God does for the psalmist.)
- This type of praise is centered around God's activity for David, on his behalf.
- These are some amazing psalms and it's so important to see what God does for us and how we see his hands in our lives working for our good.

HIGH PRAISE

This praise is centered on who God is, his character, what his desires are.

- Psalm 145 & 148 are great examples. (Look at those Psalms and briefly list how the psalmist thanks, reveres, admires God for God.)
- This is not praise having to do with our lives or our circumstances.
- This has nothing to do with us per se.
- But yet, high praise is vital for our mental health and our maturity in the Lord.
- It's a great part of our relationship with Jesus. It helps us praise him when our circumstances are difficult.
- Praise is not dependent on all that's going well in our lives. High praise rests on WHO God is not WHAT he's doing for us.

WORSHIP

- Think of your favorite worship song. Would it fall under mostly praise or high praise?
- One is not essentially better than the other but it's important to practice both. And maybe many of us have not been exposed to a lot of High Praise in our lives with God.
- Put on a High Praise worship song. Here's a few examples:
 - Most High God (African praise song) Urbana '15
 - You are Good (Israel Houghton)
 - We exalt thee (hymn)
 - You are worthy of it all (David Brymer)
 - Storm All Around You (Jon Thurlow)

DISCUSSION QUESTION

• What have you learned about worship during this time?

QUESTIONS

(5-8 minutes)

• Save some time for your group to ask questions

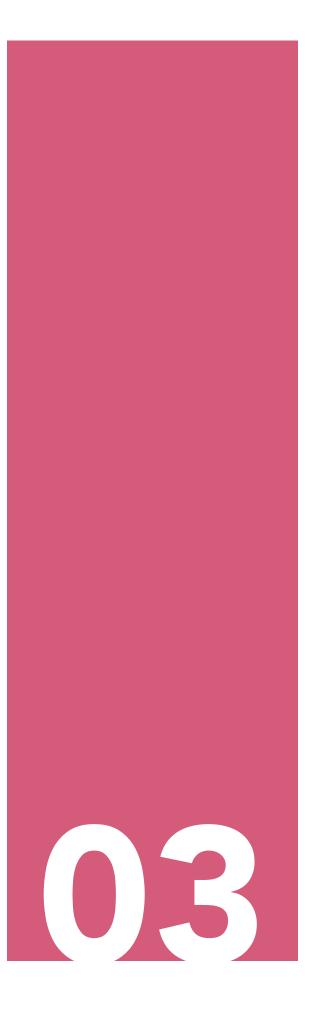


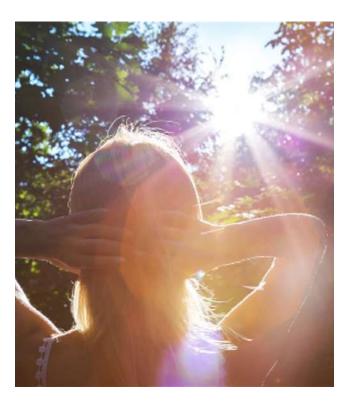
THIS WEEK'S ENGAGEMENT WITH JESUS

Try to do a few of these this week:

- Try to worship God with High Praise at least once a day.
- Research some High Praise songs and High Praise Psalms.
- Read through some of the Psalms and note which fall under the category of High Praise and learn more about how David did it.
- When anxiety starts to rise, worship it out with High Praise.

Bless your group to encounter Jesus this week.





THE SHULAMITE WOMAN "THE BELOVED"

"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful. Your eyes are doves." Song of Solomon 1:15

THIS WEEK, YOU WILL:

- Explore a non-exhaustive Biblical survey of Bridal and Bridegroom language in the Old and New Testament.
- Have the opportunity to be in the Song of Solomon and understand the work that the Bridegroom (Jesus) is doing in maturing His bride (us).
- Learn about the Bridal paradigm and how this can bring us closer to Jesus.

<u>Materials Needed:</u> Bible (May choose to print out the passages) Notebook, Journal

OPENING QUESTIONS: (5-8 MINUTES)

- When you think of the Bride of Christ, what comes to mind?
- Do you see yourself as his bride? If no, how do you see yourself (his laborer, his friend, his child)?

FOCUSED SCRIPTURES

BRIDAL LANGUAGE IN OLD TESTAMENT (30 minutes)

The Bible **BEGINS** with a wedding (Adam & Eve, Genesis 1:26-28) The Bible **ENDS** with a wedding (Jesus and his Church, Revelation)

01 Hosea 2:5-8

Briefly look at the story of <u>Hosea</u> where God asks his prophet to marry Gomer, a prostitute, as a representation of God's relationship with Israel. (Read Hosea 2:5-8)

- What does Gomer do? (Israel)
- What does God do?

02 Jeremiah 2

The priest warns Israel of its past and how far they've gone away from the Lord.

- Describe Israel's past with God
- Why is God angry with Israel?

03 Ezekiel 16:8-14

The priest and prophet warn Israel of God's wrath for the choices they've made.

- What is God's heart for his bride?
- What does Israel keep choosing?
- Why don't they stay married to God?

04 Isaiah 49:18, 61:10, 62:5

- How is Isaiah the prophet describing God the bridegroom?
- According to these 3 passages how does the Bride respond?

FOCUSED SCRIPTURES

SONG OF SOLOMON (30 minutes)

We'll be looking at a few themes in this allegory/poem. This is not exhaustive but hopefully your group will get an overall idea of this book and its powerful message.

CONTEXT

This book is an allegory. Solomon, David's son, wrote this as one of his most famous songs. In church history some have treated this book as a marriage manual and that's even true today, but Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. I don't believe he was giving us a marriage manual. Look at this book as a poem about love, a maturing Bride, and the Bridegroom that she grows more in love with over time.

There is much symbolism throughout this book that we don't have time to uncover. There is much wisdom found in this book but we'll go over some general themes.

THEME: DOVE EYES

- He says to her, noting her dove-like eyes (Read S.S. 1:15, 4:1_
- She says to him (Read S.S. 5:12)
- Both have dove-like eyes for one another. Doves are birds that do NOT have peripheral vision. They can only see ahead and what's in front of them.
- This reveals devotion, being enamored with God and him with us and most importantly what it means to focus our eyes on him.

THEME: BANQUETING TABLE

- Read S.S. 2:3-6. How does the Bridegroom feed the Shulamite woman?
- How does she get refreshed?
- How is she held?
- Where else do we see God banquet us in the scriptures? (Quickly list them)
- This reveals his desire to satisfy us, nourish us, and secure us.

THEME: GARDEN (represents our hearts and God is our Gardener)

- Hear what the Bridegroom says to the Bride (Read S.S. 4:12, 4:15, 5:1)
- Hear what she says to him (Read S.S. 4:16, 6:2)
 - How does he interact with his garden, her heart?
 - What does she want to happen to her garden?
- Where do we see garden or gardening in the scriptures:
 - Genesis Garden of Eden
 - Parable of the 4 Soils Mark 4
 - He is the Gardener John 15
 - Mary Magdalene (Week 1) mistakes Jesus for being the gardener.
 - Revelation- Restoration of Eden Revelation 22
- This reveals that God sees our hearts as his garden. A garden he loves to cultivate grow and remove the barriers for his vision and beauty.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

• What strikes or surprises you about Song of Solomon?



THIS WEEK'S ENGAGEMENT WITH JESUS

Looking at the Bridal Paradigm throughout the Old Testament:

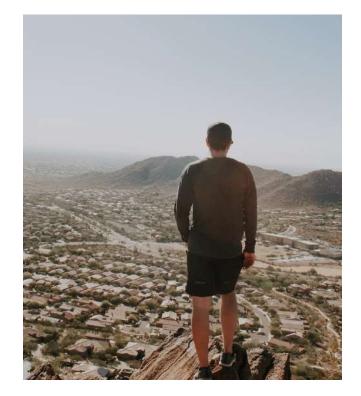
- what new things did you learn about:
 - ► God?
 - ► Us?

Spend some time reflecting on the Bridal Paradigm you've looked at today.

- What feelings or thoughts come up as you put yourself in the position of Jesus' Bride?
- What feelings/thoughts came up for you as you think of Jesus as your Bridegroom?

Spend some time processing and journaling what it might look like to apply the Bridal Paradigm to your relationship with Jesus.

Bless your group to encounter Jesus this week.



JOHN "THE LOVER"

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. John 19:26-27

THIS WEEK, YOU WILL:

- Survey and process John the Disciple and Apostle's life with Jesus.
- Continue to be mentored by someone in the Bible. See how they cultivate intimacy with Jesus in the midst of the ups and downs of life.
- Observe the moments when John leans into Jesus and how that impacts who he is and what he does.
- See the theme of LOVE running throughout John's life and discover what we can learn from that.
- Learn about the idea of receiving revelation from God

<u>Materials Needed:</u> Bible (May choose to print out the passages) Notebook Journal

OPENING QUESTIONS: (5-8 minutes)

• What makes someone a good friend to you?

FOCUSED SCRIPTURES

(45 minutes)

01 John the Beloved Leaner

- John is the author of the Gospel of John and throughout his book he does not mention his name but rather his identity "the disciple whom Jesus loved". (John 13:23 is one example)
 - What does this tell us about how John saw their friendship? What do you think is John's priority in writing this?
- John 13 The last supper. Read the story and look at John's role.
 - What hard news does Jesus share?
 - How does John respond? (Note what he does physically leans into Jesus)
 - What does Peter ask John to do?
- John 19: 26-27 John at the Cross
 - Who's present at the Cross?
 - Where are the other disciples?
 - What does Jesus ask of John in his final moments?
 - What can we see in their friendship? (Jesus is now leaning on John)



02 JOHN THE APOSTLE

Acts 3:1-10 is often referred to as "The healing at the Beautiful Gate." On their way to the temple, John and Peter meet a blind man begging at the city gate. He asks them for money and in response, John and Peter look this man in the eye and say the now famous line "Silver or gold [we] do not have, but what [we] have we give you — in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk."

Peter and John, being filled with the Holy Spirit, are partnering with Jesus in a new way — healing people and inviting them into the Kingdom of God.

In Acts 4, we find John and Peter persecuted and imprisoned, yet full of the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter and John continue to tell of the resurrecting power of Jesus wherever they go, and as a result a new emerging church, a revival community is born. This new church called "The Way" was experiencing exponential growth – around 5000 people at this time.

The Jewish leaders grow angry and want to shut down this new emerging church. They seize John and Peter and put them in jail. However, this does not hold back the power of God as John continues to press on — full of confidence, boldness, leadership, and the Holy Spirit.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How do you see John's leadership changing and how do we see him closer to the Holy Spirit?

FOCUSED SCRIPTURES

(45 minutes)

03 John the "Hippie"/Disciple Maker

John wrote three letters to early Christian communities emphasizing the need to love God and love others. God's love motivates us to love others.

- Read 1 John 4:16 19 all together
 - Reliance on his love, Completion of his love, Confidence in his love
 - Perfect love casts out fear.
 - We love because he FIRST loved us.

04 John the Receiver of Revelation

John is exiled to an island called Patmos where God gives John two visions (the book of Revelation), the blueprints for the finale to the biblical story, the good news of how Heaven will fully and completely come.

- Read Revelation 1:10-12
 - John remains spiritually fervent
 - God invites him to see and to take notes. He is giving him revelation.
- Read Revelation 2:4
 - John calls the churches back to their first love Jesus. They had forsaken their first love. Again John is about love, this most concrete relationship we have with Jesus.



THIS WEEK'S ENGAGEMENT WITH JESUS

As you reflect on John and Jesus' friendship, where do you sense Jesus is asking you to lean into him?

Do you, like John, believe you are one that Jesus loves? Why or why not?

What revelation, insight or encouragement do you believe Jesus wants to give you today?

Bless your group to encounter Jesus this week.



MARY + MARTHA "THE RECIEVERS"

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me! "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42



THIS WEEK, YOU WILL:

- Participate in an inductive study of this passage and contextual observations.
- Have an opportunity to interact with a new Biblical perspective or priorities with Jesus.
- Learn about the "One Thing."
- Discuss being Spirit-Led in life and in ministry.

Materials Needed:

Journal Phone Large Water Bottle

OPENING QUESTIONS: (3 minutes)

- Ask how people's personal times with Jesus have been going?
- What does your time with Jesus typically look like?

FOCUSED SCRIPTURES (45 minutes)

Spend some time studying Luke 10:38-42

OBSERVATIONS:

- Compare and contrast Martha and Mary.
- What is the tension between these two sisters?
- How does Jesus get involved?
- Who does he defend?
- How does Martha deal with her sister?
- How does Martha bring Jesus in? (She commands Jesus what to do.)
- How does Jesus describe Martha?
- What is the "good portion" that will never be taken away from Mary?
- What is the "one thing?"

INTERPRETATIONS:

This is not about personality (which sister do you resonate with), which is unfortunately how this passage generally gets taught and applied. This passage is about the one thing that we will never lose. Lunch comes and goes. Conferences come and go. Leadership comes and goes but what will never be taken away is friendship cultivated and deepened with Jesus. What will never be taken away is Jesus, his voice, his words, his truths and wisdom. Mary was receiving, Martha, who ironically was the one that invited Jesus in the first place, is the one who's completely missing Jesus. She let culture dictate and in the end she was resentful and angry questioning if Jesus cared about her.

- Can you remember a time when you felt like Martha? If you feel comfortable, please share with the group.
- Can you remember a time you felt like Mary? If you feel comfortable, please share with the group.
- Spend a few minutes looking at the context of this passage. Luke places this story at the end of a chapter where there's lots of serving and giving to others. (Jesus sends out the 72 and the Good Samaritan.) Jesus cares about serving and giving but his #1 value is us being connected to him, close to him, receiving from him. Maybe that's what fuels the giving and the serving.

APPLICATIONS:

- Living and ministering with the ONE thing Jesus wants means giving time and space for him; growing that intimacy and friendship. How can you be like Mary in your personal life?
- How can you apply this to the ministry/leadership God has given you?

Prop

(15-20 minutes)

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." - 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Paul is giving his final words to the church of Thessalonica.

- What are the 3 different parts of our being? (spirit, soul, and body)
- These 3 parts make us up as a whole. (Objects in parenthesis symbolize these 3 parts)
 - Body = easiest to see and comprehend. (large water bottle)
 - Soul = our attitude, emotions, upbringing, culture surrounding us, our likes, and dislikes. (journal)
 - Spirit = God given, made in his image. (cell phone)



As we listen to God the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit and we spend time with him and allow his scriptures, his encouragement, his correction to come — that's when our spirit is communing with his Spirit and that's when our spirit is led by the Holy Spirit. (Put the cell phone at the top of the pile of objects.) When our moods or our thoughts and feelings have taken over that's when our souls are leading us. (Put the journal on top of the water bottle and the phone) When we are sick or in pain or addicted to something and that's all we can focus on — when most of our energy is placed there, that's when our bodies are taking over the spirit and the soul and we're being led by the flesh. (Put the bottle on top of the phone and the journal.)

- Which do we want leading us? Why?
- What was leading Martha?
- What was leading Mary?

QUESTIONS (5-8 minutes)

• Save some time for recipients to ask questions



THIS WEEK'S ENGAGEMENT WITH JESUS

Reflect on these sisters and spend some time dialoguing with Jesus concerning this story.

- What about this short yet powerful story is impacting you?
- How can you be free from worry and anger and be one whose about the "One Thing" with Jesus?

Take some time to pray, journal with the Lord regarding the illustration. Take an inventory of what usually leads you (spirit, soul, body) and talk to God about that.

Bless your group to encounter Jesus this week.

AT THE HEART OF EVERY REVIVAL IS THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

ARTHUR WALLIS

