



Christianity  
201: A *Living  
the Way*  
Guide

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*Christianity 201 is an exploration of what Christians believe—and have believed since the time of Jesus—about God, his world, and the life he has for us.*

**This workshop will guide participants to ...**

- Understand the Kingdom of God
  - Encounter the Holy Spirit
- Engage in Transformative Practices

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:15-18)

**Resources you will need ...**

LTW Christianity 201 Workshop Guide  
The Bible, any translation  
[startlivingtheway.com](http://startlivingtheway.com)

## Session One | Now and Forever Kingdom



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. What is one thing that has made you smile recently? What is something that has made you reflective? Then, discuss the following questions.

1. Do you have any lingering questions, comments, or concerns from Christianity 101?
2. The term "heaven" has a lot of cultural and religious significance. Do you have any background knowledge about Heaven and God's kingdom? Share and discuss.
3. How do you hope the following weeks with help you grow in your faith in Christ?

## Session One | Now and Forever Kingdom

### Heaven on Earth

God enjoys quite a life in heaven. He is constantly filled with joy, delight, and love. God enjoys thriving community in a relationship of mutual love and submission as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Christianity 101). God is never lonely. He is never afraid. He never despairs. One day, we will experience this kind of life. God will remake this earth into what it was always meant to be. It will be filled with the beauty goodness of heaven. You and I—followers of Jesus—will delight in it together. Believe it or not, there's more.

Jesus came to earth so that we could experience the life of heaven **here** and **now**. Yes, that's right. You and I can have the joy, delight, and love of heaven today. It won't be complete until God one day remakes our world (we'll cover this in Christianity 301). But, when we follow Jesus, we enjoy community with Father, Son, and Spirit and all the goodness it brings—right now.

This is the heart of what it means to follow Jesus. In Him, we step into God's heavenly way of life.

**How does it make you feel to know that the joys heaven are available to you now?**

### Gospel of the Kingdom

First, let's define a couple words will help us to better understand Jesus' message. These are *Gospel* and *Kingdom*. The **Gospel** is the good news that Jesus taught. He said that our sins can be forgiven. We can be healed. We can be transformed. Justice and peace will one day win over oppression and chaos. All of these realities are good news. They are part of Jesus' Gospel.

**Kingdom** is closely related. A king rules in a kingdom. His kingdom is the space where the things he wants to be done are done. We all have spheres of influence that are like kingdoms. They are the places in life where we exert influence and bring change, for better or worse. The same goes for God's kingdom. His kingdom is His rule. It's where His will is done. It's where His way of living is practiced. It's where peace, justice, forgiveness, and hope are the daily reality.

When you hear other followers of Jesus talk about God's kingdom they are talking about the familiar spaces (e.g., neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and homes) where His will is done—**on earth as it is in heaven** (the Lord's Prayer). When they pray for God's kingdom to come, they are praying that His heavenly peace, forgiveness, justice, and hope would fill the world around them.

Let's put these two words—*Gospel* and *Kingdom*—together. The Gospel of Jesus is the **Good News of God's Kingdom**. It is the reality that God's good, kind, and just rule has come to earth and is available to every man, woman, and child who is willing to surrender and walk with Jesus.

*Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15)*

1. In what ways have you seen the kingdom of God—the life of heaven come to earth— transform your life and those around you?

2. That's a lot to take in at once. What questions you have?



## Session One | **Now and Forever Kingdom**

### **How We Become Part of the Kingdom**

God hasn't kept His kingdom a secret. It's not just for a select few. It's for everyone. And He's been clear about how step into His beautiful kingdom. Here's a hint. It has to do with Jesus.

*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)*

1. What do you think Jesus means when He calls Himself the Way, Truth, and Life? Discuss the meaning of each of these words together.

2. Jesus claims to be the one and only way to know God. How does this claim strike you?

It's almost as if Jesus says, "I am the way into the incomparable reign of God. Follow me to experience the peace, joy, love, and hope of heaven here and now and in the life to come." We walk into the kingdom by choosing to follow Jesus. We experience the life of heaven when we become His disciple and learn from Him how God intends for us to live our lives.

You made this commitment when you came to know Jesus. You committed not just to attend church and pray before meals (although those are important!). You committed to being His student in this thing called life. We will cover this in more detail session three of this guide.

For now, let's review. God has a kingdom. It's where He rules. God has graciously provided the way into the kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ. We can follow Him into a thriving kind of life that we cannot find anywhere or from anyone else.

1. In your own words, what does it mean to be Jesus' disciple? What is it, specifically, that we are learning from Him?

2. Do you think most Christians see themselves as disciples of Jesus? How do you think the Church and the world would change if more of us did?

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)*



## Session One | Now and Forever Kingdom

### Outposts of the Kingdom

God is at work—always—to multiply His kingdom. He does this by forgiving sins. Freeing people from regrets. Exacting justice for victims. Showering hope on the hopeless. Delivering peace to the conflicted. Showing mercy to the brokenhearted. Even more, He invites you and I into the work He is doing.

That's right. Anytime we walk with Jesus into places of pain, regret, failure, insecurity, injustice, or heartache He calls us to join Him in bringing healing. In other words, He calls us to join in the task of extending His kingdom. He invites us to make our lives and sphere of influence into little outposts of the life of heaven here on earth.

1. Where do you think God is calling you to join with Him to multiply His kingdom?
2. What remaining questions do you have about this session?

### Exercises for Session Two

1. *Am I living in God's kingdom today? Am I living each moment with Jesus so that I see the good He longs to give me and the world around me?* Ask yourself these two simple questions each day between now and next meeting. Reflect on your answers and come ready to discuss.
2. Complete the discussion questions for session two. Come ready to discuss!

"The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to 'inject' His kind of life and thought, His Zoe [Life], into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man. The part of you that does not like it is the part that is still tin." (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)



## Session Two | God Who Dwells With Us



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. Share a high and a low from this week and pray for each other. Then, discuss the following questions.

1. In this session, we will talk about God's community, the Church. Where have you gotten involved in your local church, past or present?
2. Have you seen evidence of the Holy Spirit through miracles or events only explained by the presence of God?

## Session Two | God Who Dwells With Us

### Who is the Holy Spirit?

Once in a while, something strange happens. It seems to defy the laws of science and logic. It is so marvelous that we cannot help but share and even call it a miracle. Here are three true, factual, real-life examples.

*A college student feels prompted to give her meager savings to a family in the church who, unbeknownst to her, had been praying for God to provide that week's groceries. Her money comes through at a crucial time.*

*A middle-aged man with nearly unbearable shoulder pain is prayed over one Sunday by his church family. He feels a strong tingling sensation in his upper back, after which his symptoms recede, and he is fully restored to health.*

*A Syrian family is at the hospital grieving the loss of a loved one. The chaplain, who is a follower of Jesus, arrives and prays a prayer whose words he himself does not understand. It turns out his words are in Arabic. The family understands and is comforted.*

How are stories like this possible? How can the unthinkable happen in a world that seems so full of pain and greed? Well, something had to intervene from beyond our experience. Someone, rather. Followers of Jesus know Him as the Holy Spirit. He's often forgotten in our discussions about God, which is tragic. Let's dive deeper in our understanding of the Holy Spirit and see why He's so crucial in our lives.

*The Holy Spirit is God.* The Bible reveals that the Spirit has characteristics only God can and does have. For instance, it says that the Spirit is everywhere, i.e., what is called omnipresent.

*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. (Psalm 139:7-10)*

It also says the Spirit is omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), eternal (Hebrews 9:14), and the Creator (Genesis 1:1-2). Again, these are qualities only God has. So, we know that the Holy Spirit is God.

**Look up the above passages and discuss. What questions do you have?**

### What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

Let's get more specific. Recall from Christianity 101 that God is three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and yet one God. This is a deep mystery. However, while we can never fully understand the Trinity, we can know each person by His role in our lives. Here's where it gets exciting. *The Holy Spirit is God who dwells with us!* When we surrender our lives to Jesus, He sends the Spirit to live inside us and walk with us in the ups and downs of life.

Pause to let that sink in. God Himself dwells in you. It's been His plan since before the world began. He desired creatures whom He could love and whom would love Him. God knew the best life we could possibly attain was to have His presence. That's the stunning role of the Spirit.





## Session Two | God Who Dwells With Us

What does the Holy Spirit do in our lives? In other words, why are we different—better off—because we have the Spirit? Well, **first**, He transforms who we are deep down. With Him, we launch into a new way of living.

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22-23)*

1. What do you think Galatians 2:20 means when it says, “I no longer live?” In other words, what aspects of our lives are inconsistent with God’s presence?

2. What do you think it means to live by faith? What might this have to do with the Holy Spirit’s presence within us?

3. Pick one or more of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. How do you hope to see the Spirit help you grow in this area?

God’s Spirit transforms us by convicting us of sin, encouraging us when we’re down, reminding us of our identity in Jesus, and teaching us the truths we find in the Bible.

**Second**, the Holy Spirit builds a supportive community around us, called the Church. The Church is God’s plan for caring for us, others, and the entire world. In the Spirit, His presence builds and shapes His people.

*In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Ephesians 2:21-22)*

1. How do you think God uses His Spirit to grow the Church into all He means it to be?

2. What evidences of the Spirit’s work have you seen in your local church community?



## Session Two | God Who Dwells With Us

### Walking in the Spirit

The Bible says that our part is simply to walk in the Spirit. This means that we ask the Spirit to be with us and give us His power for living well. We then intentionally draw on that power, rather than our own strength. The Spirit offers us all that we need for the challenges of life when He offers His presence. We will have the ability to show humility when we are criticized. The ability to forgive when we are wronged. The ability to resist the wrong path when it seems tempting. The Bible tells us that the Spirit is, in a real way, our life and hope.

*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. (Galatians 5:16-17)*

We will talk more about what this means in the next session. In fact, it's really what Living the Way is all about—learning to live our lives for, with, and by the Spirit of God.

1. What do you think it means to live by the Spirit of God? How have you seen His power already in your life?
2. What questions do you have that you can discuss together?

### Exercises for Session Three

1. Try spending 15 minutes each day just sitting in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Don't have an agenda. Just sit and be still. When your mind wanders (and it will!) gently call yourself back to His presence. Make note each day and come ready to discuss together.
2. Complete the discussion questions for session three. Come ready to discuss!



## Session Three | Whole Life Transformation



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. What's one way God has been working in your life recently? Then, discuss the following questions.

1. What is one vision you had for your life before knowing Christ?
2. Did that change as your relationship with Him grew?
3. What is one vision you believe He has for you now?

## Session Three | Whole Life Transformation

### The Spirit Transforms Us

We learned in session two that God gives us the Holy Spirit to transform us. Once we were lost. We wallowed in sin and self-centeredness. Life without the Spirit is a miserable place to be. The Spirit changes all that. He moves us from misery into a place of faith, hope, and love. Every person who has ever lived longs to be made whole. Every person needs the Spirit in his or her life to make wholeness a reality.

In this session, we will talk about what it means to be transformed. Sometimes people call this *sanctification*. Sanctification, also called *spiritual formation*, is the transformation of our hearts, minds, and souls into what God desires them to be. When this happens, we naturally begin to do the things like Jesus did, i.e., we show mercy, forgive offenders, and pray all the time.

Bill Hull says, "In spiritual transformation, we move from the person we are and continue to change by degree into the image of Christ." The Bible affirms, over and over, that we are called to become more like Jesus. That's transformation.

*So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into [Jesus'] glorious image. (2 Corinthians 3:18)*

*But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. (1 John 2:4-6)*

*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:21-23)*

People sometimes speak as if we can do the things Jesus did by mere effort. That's simply not the case. You know this if you've tried, for instance, to consistently bless others and not curse them (Luke 6:28) while driving your car. We can do the things Jesus did only as the Spirit makes us more and more like Him.

1. Have you seen evidence of the Spirit's work in your life? If so, what has changed?
2. How do you hope to grow spiritually in the coming weeks and months?
3. Do you have any concerns or apprehensions about the call to grow spiritually?



## Session Three | Whole Life Transformation

### How Spiritual Formation Happens

The Spirit walks with us, helps us, and shows us grace as we grow. God promises it. You can count on it. At the same time, God also calls us to work with the Spirit as He forms us. In other words, we are called to put some effort into our transformation. God desires us to be part of the beautiful things He's doing in our lives. These Bible verses show us exactly that.

*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12-13)*

*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8)*

Spiritual formation, becoming more like Jesus, requires the Spirit's power, God's grace, and our effort. Dallas Willard says our role in becoming more like Jesus can be summed up in what he calls the **VIM principle**. Vision is for vision. I is for intention. M is for means. Let's break these down in more detail.

**First**, we are inspired by a vision of what life with Jesus can be. He tells us in **John 10:10** that his kind of life is abundant. We can relate lovingly and truthfully to friends and family. We can be content even when circumstances don't go our way. We can have hope even when the world seems bleak. We see this vision presented in the Gospels and fall in love with it.

**Second**, we say to ourselves and others, "That vision is the kind of life I want!" We commit ourselves to living with Jesus, no matter what. We commit to live our lives such that we worship Him always as in **Romans 12:1-2**, and deny ourselves of lesser things, as in **Mark 8:34-37**.

**Finally**, we focus our lives on activities that bring us into the Spirit's presence. In other words, we do the things that help us to be with and to know Him better. These include practices like prayer, Bible study, community, and solitude. God uses these to make us more like Jesus by bringing us into His presence. See, for instance, **1 Timothy 4:7**. It's what Living the Way, including this guide, is all about!

1. Reflect on the three aspects of spiritual transformation. Which of these comes most naturally to you? Do you need to work on your understanding of the life God offers (vision), your commitment to Jesus (intention), or your engagement with spiritual practices (means)?

2. What specific practice (e.g., prayer, community, or Bible study) do you think God is calling you to in this season of life?



## Session Three | Whole Life Transformation

### Summing It Up

Let's summarize. The Spirit of God transforms us from what we once were into what He wants us to be. He guides, helps, and shows us grace along the way. Our calling is to join the Spirit in the change He is working in our hearts. We do this when we understand and fall in love with the vision Jesus has for our lives. We then commit ourselves wholeheartedly to walking in that kind of life. Finally, we focus on activities that make us more aware of the Spirit's presence in our lives. It's His presence that shapes us and makes us like Jesus.

Here's another way to say the same thing. God shapes us into the people He created us to be when we become disciples (which simply means students or apprentices) of Jesus. He leads us into a better life than we could have imagined, even when we experience difficulties. You can begin this journey today by telling God you want to be Jesus' student in His way of living. These guides and, more importantly, the leader with whom you are meeting are great ways to walk closer and closer with God.

**Do you have any lingering questions or concerns?**

### Exercises for Session Four

Congratulations, you have completed some difficult but rewarding material! Make sure to keep the relationship central to this experience. Call, text, and email regular encouragements. It's a crazy world. We need one another.

1. Develop your vision over the next couple weeks. Meditate on one of the following aspects of the abundant life (John 10:10) Jesus offers: Your mind can be filled with what's good (Philippians 4:8). Your heart can be overflowing with gratitude even during trials (Matthew 5:10-12). Your relationships can be based in God's love for you (1 John 1:7). Spend some time with one of these and then discuss how it made you feel.

2. Complete the discussion questions for session four. Come ready to discuss!



## Session Four | Conversation with God



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. In what area of your life is God using you right now (work, home, family)? Pray for each other after talking! Then, discuss the following questions.

1. Last session, we talked about some ways to use spiritual formation to strengthen our relationship with God. Did you try any ways this past week?
2. If so, talk about them! What are some spiritual formation habits you'd like to start or continue?
3. This session is all about prayer. Discuss some of your experiences, good or bad, with prayer.

## Session Four | Conversation with God

In this final session we will get more practical. We'll look at a crucial practice that fosters the transformation we talked about last session—prayer. Many other practices are important and more than worth taking time to learn. But prayer is so at the heart of walking with Jesus that we will spend extended time talking about it here. You can check out lots of other practices at [startlivingtheway.com](http://startlivingtheway.com). Let's dig in.

### Being with God in Prayer

Prayer includes all the ways we converse with God. It's that simple. Prayer connects us with God. We talk with Him. Listen to Him. We rest quietly with Him. Prayer isn't a task or burden. It's the best thing we get to do—build a relationship with the Maker of all things. We can do this not only in concentrated times alone, but also in the hustle and bustle of daily life (see 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

As we pray, we are drawn into Jesus' presence. It is a relationship that transforms us. Our prayer lives—especially what we say to God—should reflect the complexity of our relationship with Him. Just like our bonds with family and close friends are strengthened by intimacy and stifled by superficiality, so our conversation with God should be more than repetitious cliché. We should praise Him, confess our sins to Him, thank Him for all He's done, and share our requests with Him. Let's look at the prayer Jesus gave to guide us.

*"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." (Matthew 6:9-13)*

1. What kinds of prayer does Jesus teach should be part of our conversational life with Him?
2. How often do you make time simple to praise God? To thank Him? To confess to Him?
3. What do you think would change in your relationship with Jesus if you incorporated all these things (i.e., praise, thanksgiving, confession, and requests) into your prayer life?

Here are some easy-to-try applications that will help you grow in prayer. Remember, it's about thriving in our life with God. It's about our transformation. It's about knowing the One who loves us unconditionally. Adele Calhoun sums it up nicely when she says, "Prayer is sustained less by duty than by a desire to connect and grow in intimacy with the Holy Three."





## Session Four | Conversation with God

### Applying Prayer to Life

**ACTS Prayer** ACTS is a mnemonic to help you remember how to talk with God in different ways as you pray. **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication. (Supplication just means asking God for needs.) That's ACTS. It is more of a guide and not so much a formula for every prayer. For instance, sometimes you may want to talk to God using each of the four parts of ACTS. Other times you may want to focus on one aspect of prayer, such as adoration.

**Resting in God's Presence** God invites us to quietly and calmly silently in His presence, as His nearness heals and forms our spirits. It's just like when you rest with a friend or family member. No one needs to say anything profound, or anything at all. You can just be together. Psalm 23 paints a beautiful portrait of what this looks like. **Read through it out together!** Then, maybe even memorize it so you can practice rest with God throughout the day. There is no other purpose of this practice than to quietly find peace in the reality of God.

**Prayer and Other Practices** Prayer naturally works together with other practices that the Holy Spirit uses to transform us. The English Puritans who lived from 1550 to 1700 are a great example of the power of combining our conversation with God with other practices. They emphasized the importance of practicing study, meditation, and prayer together. William Bates, a Puritan author, explains:

*"Reading the scriptures teaches us profound truths about God, creation, and ourselves. For these truths to form our spirits, we must internalize them, contemplate them, and allow them to develop from our heart and minds into a state of prayer. The spiritual practices are rarely practiced in isolation from one another. Rather, God uses them in concert to work His will in our lives."*

**Breath Prayers** These are brief prayers that you quietly repeat to yourself throughout the day. The purpose is to help keep your focus on God and what He's doing in your life and the lives of others. They might be spontaneous or memorized prayers. For instance, a mentor to Martin Luther, recommended that Luther pray Psalm 119:94, "I am Yours, save me," throughout his day as a reminder that he must cling to Jesus. Christians throughout the centuries have also prayed the prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18:13, "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner." Breath prayers will turn your attention back to God and His provision in all of life's tasks.

**Fixed Hour Prayers** Jesus and the disciples prayed at set times throughout the day. These are called fixed hour prayers. Jews went to the temple at the sixth and ninth hour. The disciples continued the practice after His death. Fixed hour prayers are not unfamiliar to us. In fact, many of us practice them, at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and, possibly, bedtime. You might find it helpful to introduce an additional fixed hour prayer, perhaps on a break at work. This is a chance to offer a brief prayer of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, or supplication to God during a busy schedule. It is a way of intentionally returning our attention to Him.

**Conversational Prayer** Corporate prayer, i.e., praying with others, is also crucial, and was practiced in the early church (see Acts 4:24-31). Conversational prayer is simply a group practice that invites everyone to pray. Topics are brought forward for prayer as the Holy Spirit leads, and the prayer takes on a conversational tone between participants, as they pray simple in turn. Silence is not awkward but is welcomed as a time for listening to the Holy Spirit in silent prayer. This is something you and your discipler can try together!



## Session Four | Conversation with God

1. How do these ways of praying make you feel? Are you hopeful? Excited? Overwhelmed? Confused? Be honest with one another and process your responses together.

2. What would it look like for you to work on just one of the ways of praying? What would you need to change or reorganize in your life?

### Reflections on Christianity 201

1. What is a highlight or something especially meaningful you learned in this guide?

2. What is something that especially challenged you as you learn to walk with Jesus?

3. How do you plan to celebrate the good things God has done over these past weeks?

"Spirit of the living God, be the Gardener of my soul. For so long I have been waiting, silent and still —experiencing a winter of the soul. But now, in the strong name of Jesus Christ, I dare to ask: Clear away the dead growth of the past, Break up the hard clods of custom and routine, Stir in the rich compost of vision and challenge, Bury deep in my soul the implanted Word, Cultivate and water and tend my heart, Until new life buds and opens and flowers. Amen." (Richard Foster)

