

SESSION FOURTEEN

# Life in God's Kingdom

## foothold

### Q | what did Jesus teach us about life in the kingdom of God?

Jesus taught us that life in the kingdom of God means we are to live in a loving relationship with God and others.

*“And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”—Mark 12:30-31, NLT*

## climb on

### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read Matthew 5:1-12.

### Prayer

**Progress Check**—Follow up on commitments made in the last session related to consciously living in God's kingdom.

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times. Ask: What do we learn about life in the kingdom of God from this statement and Scripture passage?

### Getting Started

*Foot/Hand Washing* (Bring a basin and towel for the foot washing ceremony.)

One of the Scripture readings for this session is John 13:1-17, Jesus washes the disciple's feet. This common practice at the time, a servant washing the feet of the guests, was used by Jesus to demonstrate life in the kingdom of God. Today people are uncomfortable with having someone wash their feet yet it could be a significant beginning to your group session. In order to make the group more comfortable you could 1) bring out a basin and towel and begin to wash feet before people have a chance to resist, 2) announce ahead of time your desire to wash feet at this session to allow people to prepare both mentally and physically, or 3) wash hands instead of feet. You as the leader could wash everyone's feet or you could allow each person to wash another person's feet.

Discuss the following questions after the foot washing:

- How did it feel to have someone wash your feet?
- How did it feel to wash another person's feet?
- What was Jesus trying to teach the disciples?
- How does this activity illustrate life in the kingdom of God?

You may want to mention that foot washing is a regular part of the Maundy Thursday liturgy in many churches.

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

- 1) Ask: What did we learn about life in the kingdom of God from this week's Scripture reading? What questions do you have about these passages?
- 2) Refer the group to the beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 and read them together. Ask: How do you respond to the list? Are these qualities that you seek in your lives or qualities that you try to avoid? Note that the western world often affirms the opposite of these qualities, for example: happiness not mourning, strength not meekness, etc. Take a few minutes to list the qualities and discuss what they mean. How are these qualities evident in our lives, in the lives of people we know or in the lives of people from history?
- 3) List the six problems identified in the article and addressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Write the problems on the board or on chart paper. Ask the participants to review Matthew 5-7, identify other problems addressed by Jesus and add them to your list. Review the list to be sure that what Jesus was teaching is understood by the group. This teaching by Jesus is not easy to practice in our daily lives.

### Heart—Believing

- 1) Refer your participants to the list of problems from number 3 above. Encourage your participants to consider the problems on the list and identify one or two problems which are personally challenging. Participants should reread the related section in the Sermon on the Mount and make a list of the reasons that this area is so challenging to them. Making notes in their Journals could be helpful. After several minutes invite everyone to share insights and reactions. Ask: Do you think that Jesus really expects us to live like this? Why or why not? What would we have to do differently in order for our lives to conform to the pattern that Jesus presents? How do you feel about what Jesus said in these chapters?
- 2) In the article it says that "When we invite Jesus to be our King he will patiently teach us how to live in his Kingdom." Discuss the following questions. How specifically does he teach us? In light of that, what is he teaching you at this point in your life? What do you still need to learn or find hard to learn?

### Hand—Doing

- 1) Summarize the session and challenge your participants to create an action plan. Part one of this session, Head – Knowing, identifies problems addressed in the Sermon on the Mount. Part two, Heart – Believing, identifies problems that are personally challeng-

ing. Now it is time to respond and develop an action plan for the coming week. Suggest reconsidering the two problems participants selected from part three of Head – Knowing and asking God to help identify ways for improvement. Encourage everyone to write their plan in their Journals and to be as concrete as possible. For example, “During the next week when \_\_\_\_\_ happens, I will seek to \_\_\_\_\_.” After the action plan is completed encourage participants to take a few moments to pray, committing the plan to God and seeking his help in addressing these areas.

2. The Lord’s Prayer is sometimes referred to as the Prayer of the Kingdom. Invite participants to open their Bibles to Matthew 6:9-15. Review this passage one verse at a time. Discuss together the meaning of each verse and also identify specific instances when that verse is or needs to be evident in our lives. For example verse 9 says, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. . .” This phrase helps us understand God and our response to God. It suggests worship can be part of our corporate worship, our personal devotional worship or just being aware of God as we take our daily walk. This activity could be completed in one large group, in teams, or individually.

## closing

(Make and distribute copies of the session 14 handout, “The Lord’s Prayer:”) Write a group prayer based on the Lord’s Prayer. Assign each phrase of the prayer to a person or small group. Each is to write two or three sentences that expand, continue or respond to the assigned phrase. For example the response to “Give us today our daily bread” could include thankfulness for God’s provision, a desire to appreciate all that God provides, openness to sharing with others, or recognition that much of the world is hungry.

After all have completed their writing, pray your prayer together. Invite the group to recite the phrase from the Lord’s Prayer followed either by individuals or small groups adding what they wrote.

You might want to consider using the group prayer on a Sunday morning during worship in place of the Lord’s Prayer.

## the Lord's prayer...

Write your thoughts, expanding or responding to the phrase that is assigned to you. These statements will be shared with the group as a closing prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts (sins) as we forgive our debtors (those who sin against us).

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory for ever.

Amen.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# The Lord's Supper

## foothold

### Q | what is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper is the sacred use of the bread and the cup as commanded by Jesus Christ. At the Lord's Table, believers recognize his presence, remember his suffering, proclaim his death until he comes, and partake of him in faith.

*"For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.' In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.' For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again."—1 Corinthians 11:23-26, NLT*

## climb on

### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read Luke 24:28-35.

### Prayer

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times. Ask: What do we learn about the Lord's Supper from this statement and Scripture passage?

**Getting Started**—Select one of the following options.

*Bake Your Own Bread*

Do you have a kitchen available? If so you could bake bread during this discussion. You can mix the ingredients at the beginning of your time. (The recipe that follows does not require time to let the bread rise.) Put the loaves in the oven while you hold your discussion and then enjoy your bread when it comes out of the oven. You could bake extra bread to be used the next time you celebrate communion at your church. Here is one recipe from the Luther Seminary website to consider:

- Sift dry ingredients together three times: 2 cups whole wheat flour; 1 cup white flour; 1 1/4 tsp baking powder; 1 1/4 tsp salt.
- Stir in 4 tsp oil. Set aside.
- Mix wet ingredients together until dissolved: 3/4 cup + 2 tbsp very hot water; 3 tbsp honey; 3 tbsp molasses.
- Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients and mix well. Dough should be slightly sticky. Do not knead.
- Divide into four balls and flatten each into a 1/4 inch thick disk. With a knife, score the top of each loaf into eight pie-shaped sections, so that the sections can be more easily broken off while serving. Alternatively, you could score a cross onto the loaf.
- Lay the loaves on a baking sheet. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes. Remove from oven and brush the tops of the loaves with oil. Bake an additional 5-8 minutes. Let cool.

Yield: four 8 oz. loaves. Each loaf serves 60-70 people, depending upon the size of the piece given. The loaves freeze well.

*Pass the Matzo* (Bring matzo for the group to taste.)

Explain that this bread is used by Jewish families to celebrate the Passover. Some Christians think of Christ when they look at the matzo. In the Bible, leaven is a symbol for sin. Matzo is unleavened, reminding us that Jesus was sinless. The matzo also has stripes and holes. These remind some people of Scripture passages like Zechariah 12:10, Psalm 22:16 and Isaiah 53:5. Older translations of these texts use the words pierced and stripes (lash marks received in a whipping). Pass around the matzo for all to taste while you have your discussion.

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

- 1) What is a sacrament? (Refer to Foothold 25.) What is the outward sign in the Lord's Supper? Why are the bread and the cup used in this sacrament? What is the invisible and spiritual grace?
- 2) Why is the Lord's Supper so important? Encourage your participants to refer to this article, the Foothold and their Scripture reading for their answers.
- 3) Who should not participate in the Lord's Supper? First Corinthians 11:27 tells us not to participate in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Review the context of this verse to understand what this means. In this case the reference is about hospitality.
- 4) Are the bread and the wine really the body and blood of Jesus? In the Covenant Church, we have insisted that Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is "really present" in the bread and wine. *The Covenant Book of Worship* says, "That Christ and his grace are present in the...bread and wine has been more important than explaining how they are present."

### **Heart—Believing**

Be sure to affirm that answering yes to either question 1 or 2 is appropriate. Participating in the Lord's Supper is a personal and family decision.

- 1) How many of you have taken communion? Why do you do it? When did you first receive communion? What meaning did it have for you at that time?
- 2) How many of you have not taken communion? Why don't you do it? When do you think you will be ready to receive communion?
- 3) Why is participating in the Lord's Supper so important for Christians? (Earlier this question was asked from an academic perspective. It is included again to encourage a more personal response.)

### **Hand—Doing**

Ask participants to share how they personally prepare to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. After several responses refer them to the Climbing Higher article and list together the five suggestions included there. They include: a) repent of our sins, b) remember our special need of grace, c) recognize Christ's continual presence in our lives, d) remember his suffering and death, and e) celebrate the new life we have in him. Ask: How can this list help you prepare to receive the Lord's Supper?

## **closing**

(Make and distribute copies of the session 15 handout, "The Lord's Supper" to guide this time of prayer. Bring a cup and loaf of bread for this prayer time. You may want to use the chalice and plate that your church uses when celebrating the Lord's Supper.) Put a cup and loaf of bread in the middle of the group. These elements are not intended to be used for the Lord's Supper at this time. Encourage the group to meditate and reflect on them during your closing time of prayer. The following guide incorporates the five statements from Hand – Doing. Read each statement and pause, as directed, for the group to pray. Invite your group to pray silently and aloud as the Spirit prompts them.

### **Guided prayer**

Let us quiet our hearts before God as we remember the gift of the bread and cup.

(Pause)

Let us repent of our sins. (Pause)

Let us remember our special need of grace. (Pause)

Let us recognize Christ's continual presence in our lives. (Pause)

Let us remember Christ's suffering and death. (Pause)

Let us celebrate the new life we have in Christ. (Pause)

Close the prayer time by inviting participants to pray aloud expressing their thanks to God for the gift of the Lord's Supper.

## the Lord's supper...

The following prayer is based on the five statements in the "Preparation for the Lord's Supper" section of the Climbing Higher article.

### Guided Prayer

- 1) Let us quiet our hearts before God as we remember our gift of the bread and the cup.  
*(Pause)*
- 2) Let us repent of our sins.  
*(Pause)*
- 3) Let us remember our special need of grace.  
*(Pause)*
- 4) Let us recognize Christ's continual presence in our lives.  
*(Pause)*
- 5) Let us remember Christ's suffering and death.  
*(Pause)*
- 6) Let us celebrate the new life we have in Christ.  
*(Pause)*
- 7) Continue to pray expressing your thanks to God for the gift of the Lord's Supper.

You may find it helpful to place this prayer in your Bible and use it again when you prepare to receive the Lord's Supper.



## foothold

**Q | what is salvation?**

Salvation is the work of God through Christ by which God forgives us our sin, frees us from guilt, and restores us to a right relationship with God.

*"I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life."—John 5:24, NLT*

**climb on****Welcoming Conversation**

**Bible Reading**—Read Romans 5:6-11.

**Prayer**

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.

Ask: What do we learn about salvation from this statement and Scripture verse?

**Getting Started**

*Trust Fall*

What is salvation? In one sense it is a rescue, as in salvation from drowning. A trust fall is an activity to demonstrate salvation as rescue. This activity has been used for many years and dramatically demonstrates the need for trust in those responsible for catching you.

You will need at least 8-10 people for this activity. It is wise to ask participants to remove jewelry as well as items from shirt pockets before attempting this activity.

Select one person to stand on a chair or bench and fall backward into the prepared arms of the rest of the group. The 8-10 catchers stand in two lines facing each other with the first persons next to the bench or chair. They extend their hands, palms up and alternate them with the hands of the person they are facing. The catchers should not grasp each other's hands. The leader needs to be sure that the catchers are ready and that the person falling stands straight and keeps elbows close to the body. The leader should also participate in the middle of the catchers to make sure all goes well.

Encourage all in the group to take a turn as the person who falls.

After the activity ask: How did you feel when it was your turn to fall? How did it feel to be one of the catchers? What connections can be made between this activity and the Foothold for this session? How are we like the person falling? How is Jesus like the people doing the catching?

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

- 1) The opening paragraphs of the article stress that radical change takes place when a person becomes a Christian. This is the new birth that Nicodemus asked Jesus to explain in John 3. The article says that, “Something radical has happened to change the way a person thinks, feels, sees, speaks, works, walks.” Ask: How do you feel about this description? How was life different before you became a Christian?
- 2) The article identifies three stages: a) God Calls, b) Conversion, and c) Discipleship and Growth in Holy Life. The Foothold identifies three areas as well: a) God forgives our sin, b) frees us from guilt, and c) restores us to a right relationship with God. Discuss how



- these two lists can compliment each other. The diagram below suggests one possibility.
- 3) Draw the above diagram on a piece of chart paper and review the meaning of each phrase. Invite participants to review the Scripture passages for this week looking for verses or phrases that illustrate the diagram or give insight regarding salvation. Suggest they may discover important ideas that do not fit the diagram and that these should be identified in a separate list. The intention of this activity is to better understand salvation and the role of God and the individual in the process.

### Heart—Believing

- 1) (Make and distribute copies of the session 16 handout, “What Is Salvation?”) Key Bible verses from the Scripture reading for this session are listed below and on the handout. Review each verse, one at a time, and discuss how it helps us understand salvation. These would be good verses to memorize.
  - Acts 4:12—“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.”
  - Romans 5:8—“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
  - Romans 10:9—“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

- Ephesians 2:8, 9—“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”
- Philippians 2:12b, 13—“...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.”
- Hebrews 9:14—“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”
- Titus 3:4,5a—“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.”

2) Ask participants to share insights from their lives related to each of the stages mentioned in the article.

- God calls: How did God call you?
- Conversion: How did you experience conversion?
- Discipleship and growth in a Holy Life: What has your “apprenticeship” been like? (Apprenticeship was used in the article as the Christian’s role in stage three.)

### Hand—Doing

Ask: What other ideas or questions from the article or the Scripture passages would be helpful to discuss?

The article suggests that we become apprentices and “learn by working alongside the master artisan.” Is there an activity your group can do together involving works of love and justice with Jesus? Participating in an activity like this builds faith but it also strengthens the bond between members of the group. Set a date, make a plan and do it. You may need to come to this session with some possible activities in mind.

### closing

Close by praying for each other and then reading together the Lina Sandell hymn from the Journal.

## what is salvation?

Key Bible verses from the Scripture reading for this session are listed below. Review each verse, one at a time, and discuss how it helps us understand salvation. These would be good verses to memorize.

- a) **Acts 4:12**—“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.”
- b) **Romans 5:8**—“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- c) **Romans 10:9**—“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”
- d) **Ephesians 2:8, 9**—“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”
- e) **Philippians 2:12b, 13**—“...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.”
- f) **Hebrews 9:14**—“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”
- g) **Titus 3:4, 5a**—“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.”

1) Why would these verses be helpful to memorize?

2) How would these verses help you talk to another person about your faith?

SESSION SEVENTEEN

# Jesus's Death and Resurrection

## foothold

### Q | what was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God conquered sin, death, and the devil, offering forgiveness for sin and assuring eternal life for those who follow Christ.

*"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."—John 3:16, NLT*

## climb on

### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 20-26.

### Prayer

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.

Ask: What do we learn about the death and resurrection of Jesus from this statement and Scripture verse?

### Getting Started

*Make a Cross* (Select the cross design that you will use and bring appropriate materials.)

Invite participants to make crosses, either to wear around their necks or to hang on their walls as a reminder of Jesus's sacrifice of love.

(For nail crosses: Take two nails, a five-inch length of wire and whatever length of leather lace you'd like for wearing a necklace or hanging the cross on the wall.) Make a cross shape with the nails. Wrap the wire around the intersection of the nails in both directions. Lay the leather lace flat on the table or floor. Place the top of the cross in the middle of the lace and tie the lace to the top of the cross. Then tie the ends of the leather together to form a necklace or hanger.

(For clay crosses: A lump of clay and leather lace or yarn) Knead a small lump of air-hardening clay until it is soft. Form it into a cross shape. The cross will be stronger if you shape it as one piece instead of making two separate pieces and then sticking them together. Put

a hole through the cross and attach the leather lace to make a wall hanging.

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

(Bring a crucifix and a cross or pictures of them for this discussion.)

- 1) According to the article, what is the meaning of the death of Jesus?
- 2) Show the crucifix. Why do you think that some people find meaning in this symbol? (It reminds them of the sacrifice, pain and suffering that Christ went through on the cross.)
- 3) According to the article, what does the resurrection mean?
- 4) Show the cross. Why do you think some people find meaning in this symbol? (The cross is empty which points to Jesus's resurrection and eternal life.) Be sure to note that both symbols can be meaningful at different times.
- 5) Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 together. What does Paul mean when he says that the cross is foolishness and a stumbling block? What do verses 27-31 mean? How does that make you feel?
- 6) Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 20-26 together. What does this passage say about the death and resurrection of Jesus? What is meant by verse 21? ...22? ...25? and ...26?

### Heart—Being

Take time to explore both of these questions using the following three approaches: a) the biblical record, b) the historical record as stated in the creeds, and c) the current record of people who are changed because of their personal experience with Christ today.

- 1) Do you think Jesus really died on the cross? What makes you so sure?
  - Read part of the death narrative from Mark 15:33-47. What from this record suggests that the disciples believed Jesus was really dead? What other verses of Scripture can you add to the answer to question 1?
  - Give a brief background to the value of creeds. *The Journey* discipleship/confirmation curriculum explains creeds as follows: "The church wrote statements, known as creeds, to define the faith of the church and defend itself against popular heresies." Review the Apostle's Creed (Journal, page 137) and the Nicene Creed (Journal, page 169). Identify statements from the creeds about the death of Jesus.
  - Tell your own story, as the group leader, regarding the importance to you of Jesus's death.
- 2) Do you think that Jesus really rose from the dead? What makes you so sure?
  - Read parts of the resurrection narrative: Matthew 27:62-66, 28:11-15, Matthew 28:5-10; John 20:3-10, 24-29, Luke 24:36-49, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. What did Jesus do to prove that he was alive?
  - Review the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed and identify statements from the creeds about the resurrection of Jesus.
  - Tell your own story, as the group leader, regarding the importance to you of Jesus's resurrection.

## Hand—Doing

(Make and distribute of the session 17 handout, “Jesus’s Death and Resurrection” for this writing activity.) Have participants write their answers for the following questions.

- Why did Jesus have to die?
- Why did Jesus have to rise from the dead?

Explain that the answers to both questions are very important.

## closing

(Make and distribute of the session 17 handout, “Breathing and Praying.”) Teach participants about breathing as an aid for prayer. In this prayer you focus on breathing in the spirit of Christ as you inhale, and expelling the tension and frustration that come from sin as you exhale. The following phrases have been used for many centuries to guide this prayer. Encourage each person to slowly and silently pray these phrases as they inhale and exhale. They should repeat the four lines several times. Some people choose to close their eyes while others prefer to focus on something like a cross during this type of prayer.

- (Inhale) Jesus Christ who takes away the sins of the world,
- (Exhale) Have mercy on us.
- (Inhale) Jesus Christ who takes away the sins of the world,
- (Exhale) Grant us your peace.

End the prayer time with a corporate amen.

## Jesus's death and resurrection...

Based on the article and Scripture readings, your discussion and your personal experience write answers for the following questions.

1) Why did Jesus have to die?

2) Why did Jesus have to rise from the dead?



## breathing and praying...

In this prayer you focus on breathing in the spirit of Christ as you inhale, and expel the tension and frustration that comes from sin as you exhale. The following phrases have been used for many centuries to guide this prayer. Slowly and silently pray these phrases as you inhale and exhale. Repeat the four lines several times. Some people choose to close their eyes while others prefer to focus on something like a cross during this type of prayer.

- 1) (Inhale) Jesus Christ who takes away the sins of the world.
- 2) (Exhale) Have mercy on us.
- 3) (Inhale) Jesus Christ who takes away the sins of the world.
- 4) (Exhale) Grant us your peace.
- 5) End the prayer time with a corporate amen.

You may find it meaningful to use this prayer in your personal times of worship.



## SESSION EIGHTEEN Atonement

### foothold

#### Q | what is meant by atonement?

Atonement means the work of God in Jesus Christ by which we, being guilty, are justified; being enslaved to sin, are redeemed; being alienated from God, are reconciled; and being unholy, are sanctified.

*“Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.”—Colossians 1:22, NLT*

### climb on

#### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read Ephesians 2:14-22.

#### Prayer

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.  
Ask: What do we learn about atonement from this statement and Scripture passage?

#### Getting Started

*Atonement Memory Tool*

The answer to this Foothold is difficult to remember. One memory tool that will help involves drawing a picture for each of the main words or phrases. These pictures are not definitions of the words but images to help you remember the words. For example, being guilty could be represented by a judge’s gavel; alien could be illustrated by a creature from outer space. Have fun with the pictures. Get the group involved in suggesting images to draw. After you complete the drawings on chart paper try to use them to help the group recite the answer from memory. You can also use these pictures later in the discussion when images of atonement are discussed.

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

### climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

## Head—Knowing

- 1) The Foothold includes four significant words that need to be defined in order to understand atonement: justified, redeemed, reconciled and sanctified. Invite your participants to define the words. Write their responses on the board or on chart paper. The following definitions may be helpful in refining their definitions.
  - Justified means to acquit or be declared legally innocent by God. All those who believe in Jesus are set free from sin.
  - Redeemed means we are delivered or ransomed from sin by Jesus.
  - Reconciled means restore. Believers are restored to a harmonious relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
  - Sanctified means we are made holy by Jesus, but our lives are also on a journey of being transformed toward a holy life.
- 2) The meaning of the atonement has been debated since Jesus's death on the cross. What really happened when Jesus was crucified? The Bible has several images that will help uncover the meaning to this unfamiliar word. Have your group read the following Scripture passages and identify the image in the passage and how it helps us understand the atonement. Record on chart paper each reference and the image as you discuss it.
  - Hebrews 9:12-14 (Sacrifice from temple worship)
  - Mark 10:45 (Ransom paid)
  - Galatians 3:10-14 (Law court)
  - 1 John 3:8 (Battle or war against the Devil)
  - John 15:13 (True friendship)Next consider these five images and compare them with the four images in the Foothold. Where do the images overlap?
- 3) Another definition for atonement is "the saving action of God in Christ through which we are restored to covenant relationship with God." (*Covenant Affirmations This We Believe*, Donald C. Frisk, Covenant Press, 1981.) What is a "covenant relationship"? How is that relationship possible? (Remember the images discussed earlier.)

## Heart—Believing

- 1) How does at-one-ment help us understand atonement? Who became one with whom?
- 2) Why can't we simply say to ourselves, "I'm tired of sin - I think I'll return to God," and then proceed to do so?
- 3) How does God bring sinful people back to himself? Why is this important?

## Hand—Doing

- 1) (Make and distribute copies of the session 18 handout, "What Is Atonement?" to guide this discussion.) Covenant theology says that:
  - Atonement comes from God
  - Atonement comes through Jesus Christ
  - Atonement is for our benefit or for our sakeHow do you understand each of these statements?
  - What do we learn about God?
  - What do we learn about Jesus?
  - What do we learn about ourselves?
- 2) Because of the atonement human beings are \_\_\_\_\_. (Fill in the blank)
- 3) Without the atonement people today would \_\_\_\_\_. (Fill in the blank)

## closing

(Make and distribute copies of the session 18 handout, "Prayer of Atonement" to guide the closing prayer.) Use the Foothold as a guide for the closing prayer. For each phrase thank God for helping us to change from:

- being guilty to being justified;
- being enslaved to sin to being redeemed;
- being alienated from God to being reconciled; and
- being unholy to being sanctified.

Close the prayer time with the following personalization of Colossians 1:22.

God, we thank you that you have reconciled us to yourself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, you have brought us into your own presence, and we are holy and blameless as we stand before you without a single fault. Amen.

## what is “atonement?”

Covenant theology says that...

- Atonement comes from God.
- Atonement comes through Jesus Christ.
- Atonement is for our benefit or for our sake.

1) What do these statements teach us...

a) ...about God?

b) ...about Jesus?

c) ...about ourselves?

2) Fill in the blank. “Because of the atonement human beings are...”

3) Fill in the blank. “Without the atonement people today would...”

## prayer of atonement...

- 1) Use the Foothold from the lesson as a guide for the closing prayer. Pause between phrases for prayer both silent and aloud.

*"We thank you God for helping us to change from:*

- a) *being guilty to being justified;*
- b) *being enslaved to sin to being redeemed;*
- c) *being alienated from God to being reconciled; and*
- d) *being unholy to being sanctified."*

- 2) Close the prayer time with the following personalization of Colossians 1:22.

*"God, we thank you that you have reconciled us to yourself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, you have brought us into your own presence, and we are holy and blameless as we stand before you without a single fault. Amen."*





## foothold

**Q | what is the Christian hope?**

The Christian hope is the confident expectation of Christ's triumphant return when he will reign forever with his Church.

*"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever."—1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, NLT*

**climb on****Welcoming Conversation**

**Bible Reading**—Read Revelation 21:1-8.

**Prayer**

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.

Ask: What do we learn about the Christian hope from this statement and Scripture passage?

**Getting Started**

*What is Heaven Like?* (Bring pieces of cloth, ribbon, glue, scissors and 8 ½" x 11" pieces of cardboard or cardstock for each person. If you do not have cloth substitute colored construction paper which could be torn instead of cut with scissors.)

Distribute the cardboard pieces and spread out the other materials. Tell participants to use the material supplied to create a picture of heaven. After the pictures are completed allow time for the artists to display and explain their drawings. Continue the discussion by asking the following questions:

- Where do we get our ideas about heaven?
- Which of the ideas are from the Bible? If a person is not sure if an idea is in the Bible, try to find the supporting verse by using a concordance.
- How does our view of heaven inform the way we live our lives each day?

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

- 1) What are the two statements of “Good News” from the early church mentioned in the article? Discuss the meaning of these statements. Why is this considered “Good News”? “An important part of the preaching of the early church was the Good News that
  - in Jesus the Christ the kingdom of God had already begun to come, Acts 2:16; 3:18,24
  - God’s full kingdom is not yet perfectly established but the Lord who has begun his rule will come again for the fulfillment of his kingdom, Acts 3:22; 10:42.”
- 2) Why were the people in the early church “cheerful” when they were being persecuted? Where might we see a similar attitude in the world today?
- 3) What do the Scripture passages for this session tell us about heaven? What insight do they give about eternal life? How do these images give us hope for each day?

### Heart—Believing

- 1) Invite participants to recall a time when they wondered if the world might end quickly? It could be a time from childhood, after reading a book or seeing a movie about the topic, or when facing a frightening situation. What feelings accompanied those thoughts? What gave you comfort? What made you afraid?
- 2) How do you feel about the way the phrase, “Come, Lord Jesus” was used in the early church? Do you live your life in the hope that Jesus will come back soon or do you want him to stay away as long as possible? Why do you think you feel this way about Jesus coming again?
- 3) What does the following sentence mean to your life? “We will start practicing our parts in anticipation of the last act when justice will win out, evil and death will be destroyed, and God will be triumphant.” What does “start practicing” mean for your life?
- 4) Review the Scripture passages for this session and identify times in your life when it would be comforting to reread some of these passages.

### Hand—Doing

- 1) (Make and distribute copies of the session 9 handout, “Christian Hope.”) The article concludes with four action points. Reread the four points together and then encourage participants to write a personal response. Possibly the following questions will help guide their thinking.
  - How could we start being peace-makers here?
  - How could we get involved in our community for the sake of righteousness?
  - Where are the walls that keep us apart and how can we break them down?
  - Where could you plant an apple tree in hope of the harvest to come?

## closing

Reread the paragraph that begins “During the early part of the sixteenth century...” and then discuss together how the people in your group would answer the question put to Martin Luther, “What would you do if you were convinced that tomorrow the world was

going to end?" Explore the answers to identify some of the underlying reasons for their answers.

Luther's quotation about planting a tree could become a symbolic closing for your session. Is there an area near your gathering place that needs a tree? Planting a tree together followed by joining hands around it in prayer would make a strong statement about Christian hope both now and through eternity. Just think, if you repeat this small group every year and continue to plant a tree, you will have a forest in no time.

Close the session with prayer and end the prayer with the phrase, "Come Lord Jesus!"

## Christian hope...

The article concludes with four action points. Reread the four points together and write a personal response. Possibly the following questions will help guide your thinking.

- 1) How could we start being peace-makers here?
  
- 2) How could we get involved in our community for the sake of the righteous?
  
- 3) Where are the walls that keep us apart and how can we break them down?
  
- 4) Where could you plant an apple tree in hope of the harvest to come?

## SESSION TWENTY Holy Spirit

### foothold

#### Q | who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God, everywhere present and powerful, working in us, in the church, and in the world.

*“But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me.”—John 15:26, NLT*

## climb on

### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read 1 Corinthians 2:10b-16.

### Prayer

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.  
Ask: What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from this statement and Scripture verse?

### Getting Started

*Holy Spirit Puzzle* (Make copies of the session 20 handout, “Characteristics of the Holy Spirit”.)

Distribute copies of the handout and use it to identify some characteristics of the Holy Spirit as the group looks up the verses and fills in the blanks. Answer key: fellowship, encouraged, Gives life—sets free, Spoke boldly, sanctified, power, intercedes, fruit, spirit of truth, advocate.

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

Tell the group to read through the article again quickly and underline the words or phrases that describe the Holy Spirit or what the Spirit does. You could assign different sections of the article to small groups to help complete the assignment more quickly. Review the underlined words and their meaning. List the responses on the board or on chart paper. Next, do this same activity with the key verses from the Journal.

## Heart—Believing

1. How do you know the Holy Spirit exists?
- 2) When have you been aware of the Holy Spirit in your life? Be prepared as leader to add your own stories to this part of the discussion.

## Hand—Doing

- 1) Look up Galatians 5:22 and list the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control). What can you as a Christian do to free the Spirit to help these characteristics flourish in your life?
- 2) (Make and distribute copies of the session 20 handout, "Spiritual Gifts" to guide this discussion.) The Spirit gives gifts to people in the church. Look up Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11-16. Explain that the Spirit gives gifts to people for a special purpose. List some of the gifts from the passage. What do these passages say is the purpose of these gifts? What gifts has the Holy Spirit given you? The following are four questions to help identify Spiritual Gifts.
  - What do you like to do?
  - What do people ask you to do or tell you they appreciate you doing?
  - How could you use these things in a ministry of the church or in your ministry as a Christian?
  - Are the things you like to do similar to any of the Spiritual Gifts mentioned earlier?
- 3) Learn more about the Holy Spirit by discussing some of the words in the fill-in-the-blank activity. A Bible dictionary might be helpful. It is also important to discuss these words in the context of life today.

## closing

Close the session with a time of prayer. Use the Foothold as a guide for this prayer. After entering into prayer, continue by using the following prayer guide.

Pray inviting the Holy Spirit to work:

- In us (pause for the group to pray silently and aloud)
- In the church (pause for the group to pray silently and aloud)
- In the world (pause for the group to pray silently and aloud)

# characteristics of the Holy Spirit...

Look up the Scripture verses and find the word that explains what the Holy Spirit does. The words used are from Today's New International Version of the Bible.

\_\_\_\_\_ H \_\_\_\_ (2 Corinthians 13:14)

\_\_\_\_\_ O \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 9:31)

Gives L \_\_\_\_\_, sets free (Romans 8:2)

Spoke \_\_\_\_\_ Y (Acts 4:31)

S \_\_\_\_\_ (Romans 15:16)

P \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 1:8)

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Romans 8:26)

\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ (Galatians 5:22)

\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_ of truth (John 16:13)

\_\_\_\_\_ T \_\_\_\_ (John 14:26)

## spiritual gifts...

- 1) The Spirit gives spiritual gifts to people in the church. Look up Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11-16.
  - a) List some of the gifts from the passage.
  
  - b) What do these passages say is the purpose of these gifts?
  
- 2) What gifts has the Holy Spirit given you? The following questions may help you identify your spiritual gifts. Take a few minutes to consider them at this time.
  - a) What do you like to do?
  
  - b) What do people ask you to do or tell you they appreciate you doing?
  
  - c) How could you use these things in a ministry of the church or in your ministry as a Christian?
  
  - d) Are the things you like to do similar to any of the spiritual gifts mentioned earlier?



# SESSION TWENTY-ONE Trinity

## foothold

### Q | what does it mean to believe in the Trinity?

To believe in the Trinity is to confess that God is one, and that he continually and personally makes himself known to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”—2 Corinthians 13:14, RSV*

## climb on

### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read John 14:15-21.

### Prayer

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times. Ask: What do we learn about the Trinity from this statement and Scripture verse?

### Getting Started

*Three-in-One*

Show a couple of items that have three parts or exist in three states as well as in one. (Examples: H<sub>2</sub>O—water, ice, steam; an apple—skin, meat and seed; a banana—it is said that if you peel a banana, place your finger at one end and push, it will separate into three pieces. Be sure to practice the banana example ahead of time.) Ask the following questions. What else can you add to this list of examples of three in one? How do these concrete items help us understand the Trinity? How are they not helpful?

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

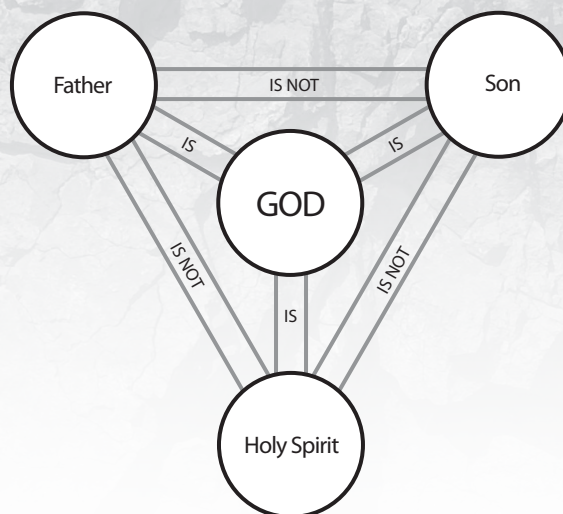
## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

1) How can God be one when there is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

- 2) (Make and distribute copies of the session 21 handout, “What Is the Trinity?” to guide this discussion.) Draw the following diagram on chart paper and invite your participants to examine it silently.



After a couple of minutes ask them to explain the diagram.

- 3) What are the primary characteristics of the Father? ...the Son? ... the Holy Spirit? Encourage your participants to use their concordances and other Foothold statements to answer this question.
- 4) Why are three persons necessary in the Trinity? (Refer to the article to answer this question.)
- 5) How do the Scripture passages for this session describe the role of each person in the Trinity? Draw three columns on a sheet of chart paper and list the words and phrases from the Scripture passages that refer to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. What other Scripture images could be added to the lists?

### Heart—Believing

- 1) To which person in the Trinity do you relate most easily? Why do you think this is the case?
- 2) When you pray, do you primarily pray to the Father, Son, or the Holy Spirit? Why do you think you pray like this? What would be different if you prayed to a different person of the Trinity?
- 3) Compare the Nicene Creed (Journal, page 169) with the Apostle's Creed (Journal, page 137). How are they alike and how are they different? Why are they different?
- 4) How has God been present in your life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

### Hand—Doing

- 1) As you live your life, when are you most aware of God the Father? ...God the Son? ... God the Holy Spirit? How does this awareness influence the way you live your life?
- 2) Are there persons in the Trinity of which you are seldom aware? Why do you think this is so? What could you do to become more aware of this person in the Trinity?
- 3) (Bring play dough or clay to this session.) Invite the group members to illustrate their relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit using clay or play dough. Share the creations with each other.

## closing

Use the Foothold to provide a guide for your closing prayer time. Begin by inviting the group into an attitude of prayer with a time of silence or centering. After a time, ask the group members to join you in reading aloud the entire Foothold statement followed by a time for silent reflection. Next, lead the group through the statement one phrase at a time. Pause between the phrases and encourage participants to pray aloud in response to that phrase. For this prayer use the following phrasing.

- To believe in the Trinity is to confess that God is one,
- and that God continually and personally makes himself known to us
- as Father,
- Son,
- and Holy Spirit.

Close the prayer time with a unison prayer using the Foothold Bible verse.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”—2 Corinthians 13:14, RSV

# what is the Trinity?

Use a concordance and the other foothold statements to answer the following questions.

1) What are the primary characteristics of each?

a) The Father?

b) The Son?

c) The Holy Spirit?

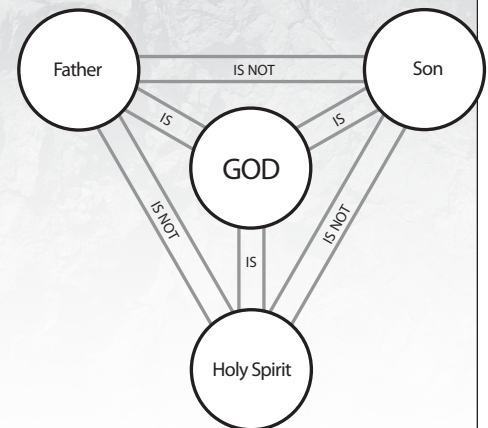
2) How do the Scripture passages for this session describe the role of each person in the Trinity?

a) The Father?

b) The Son?

c) The Holy Spirit?

3) What other Scripture images could be added to the lists?



# Source of the Church's Life

## foothold

### Q | what is the source of the Church's life?

The life of the Church has its source in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is created and renewed by the Spirit and Word, the holy sacraments and prayer.

*"Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen." —Ephesians 3: 20-21, NLT*

## climb on

### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read Ephesians 1:15-23.

### Prayer

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.

Ask: What do we learn about the source of the Church's life from this statement and Scripture passage?

### Getting Started

*The Church in Music* (Bring hymnbooks or songbooks.)

Invite the group to brainstorm a list of songs and hymns that talk about the church. After several have been suggested distribute copies of hymnbooks or songbooks. Many hymnbooks have a topical index which could be used to add additional hymns to your list. Encourage the group to look up some of the suggested titles and read the song, looking for answers to the question, "What is the source of the Church's life?" After a few minutes list together the words and phrases that answer the question. After listing several, ask: How do the answers from the songs or hymns compare to the answer to the Foothold question?

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

- 1) How is the church similar to other clubs to which you may belong? How is it different?
- 2) Each of the following lettered phrases from the Climbing Higher article tells something about the church. First read the phrase and discuss what it means. Then ask the question that follows the phrase and apply each phrase to your local church.
  - The church is one—How is your church “one”?
  - The church is holy—How is your church holy?
  - The church is catholic (universal)—How is your church catholic?
  - The church is apostolic—How is your church apostolic?

Dr. Stephen Graham teaches briefly on these characteristics in the introductory session of the Exploring Covenant Affirmations DVD (available from [covenantbookstore.com](http://covenantbookstore.com)). Showing it at this time could be helpful.

- 3) Review the Foothold. How is God the source of life for the church? List the four elements that create and renew the church: a) Spirit; b) Word; c) the holy sacraments; and d) prayer. Ask: How are each of these elements illustrated in the Scripture reading for this session? Where do you see evidence of them in your church?

### Heart—Believing

- 1) How does your church emphasize “hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel”?
- 2) What would you say is the source of your church’s life? What makes you want to be part of your church? What excites you about your church? What frustrates you about your church? What could be done about these frustrations?

### Hand—Doing

The article identifies four practices that were common in the early church. List the four practices and talk about what they mean: a) the apostles’ teaching; b) fellowship; c) breaking of bread and prayers; and d) service. Read Acts 2:40-47 together. What do you like about this picture of the church? What makes you uncomfortable? What could your church do to become more like the Acts 2 church?

## closing

Close the session by considering the hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation.” Use hymn-books or the session 22 handout, “The Church’s One Foundation,” to explore how this hymn enhances the Foothold answer. Read through the hymn verse by verse and note how it answers the question, “What is the source of the Church’s life?” As you go through the hymn you might also note references to other Footholds like “What is the Christian Hope?”

Invite the participants to join in a time of prayer. Encourage them to pray for their church and each other as they seek to be the church.

# the church's one foundation...

*The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook, page 579*

- 1 The Church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
she is his new creation  
by water and the Word.  
From heav'n he came and  
sought her  
to be his holy bride;  
with his own blood he bought her  
and for her life he died.
- 2 Elect from ev'ry nation,  
yet one o'er all the earth,  
her charter of salvation,  
one Lord, one faith, one birth;  
one holy name she blesses,  
partakes one holy food,  
and to one hope she presses,  
with ev'ry grace endued.
- 3 We see her long divided,  
by heresy and sect;  
yet she by God is guided,  
one people, one elect:  
her vigil she is keeping  
her cry goes up, "How long?"  
and soon the night of weeping  
shall be the dawn of song.
- 4 'Mid toil and tribulation,  
and tumult of her war,  
she waits the consummation  
of peace forevermore:  
till, with the vision glorious,  
her longing eyes are blessed;  
and the great Church victorious  
shall be the Church at rest!
- 5 Yet she on earth hath union  
with God, the Three in One,  
and mystic sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won.  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we  
like them, the meek and lowly,  
on high may dwell with thee.





## SESSION TWENTY-THREE The Church

### foothold

#### Q | what is the Christian Church?

The Christian Church is all who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and who are united in one body with Christ as head.

*“Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”—Ephesians 4:15-16, NLT*

### climb on

#### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read Romans 12:3-8.

#### Prayer

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.

Ask: What do we learn about the Christian Church from this statement and Scripture passage?

#### Getting Started

*The “Body” of Christ* (Make a copy of the session 23 handout, “The Body of Christ,” or bring a skeleton of the human body and display it during this discussion.)

Paul describes the church as the body of Christ. He says that we are each a part of the body. How is the human body similar to and how is it different from the church? Read Ephesians 4:15-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 to highlight this imagery.

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

### climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

#### Head—Knowing

- 1) How would you describe the Church (Church Universal) to your friends? How would you describe your church (local church) to your friends?
- 2) What do you think the “fellowship of believers” means?

- 3) What does the article mean when it says the church is “imperfect”?
- 4) What do we learn about the church from the Scripture readings for this session?
- 5) How is your church like the “Body of Christ”? Who are the hands, the brain, the collar bone and the heart of your church? Give participants a couple of minutes to write the names of people from your church on the session 23 handout, “The Body of Christ,” handout of the body and then share some of the names listed.
- 6) Why do you think Jesus established the church?

### **Heart—Believing**

- 1) What is the “visible” church? When have you experienced the “visible” church?
- 2) How is your life different because you are a part of the church? Or, how would you be different if you were not part of a church body?
- 3) Why do you go to church?

### **Hand—Doing**

What is your position in the Body of Christ? Write your name on the handout of the body at the place you feel fits you best.

Ask: Why did you write your name where you did? What contribution are you able to make to the life of the Body? How do you think the rest of the Body of Christ views your place in the Body? Remember 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

## **closing**

Place the body handouts in the middle of your group and join hands around them. Explain that each person in the circle is an important part of the Body of Christ; all are to grow more and more like Christ, and all have special work to do.

Ask the group to repeat Ephesians 4:15-16 (from the Foothold) together.

Following the Scripture recitation invite participants to consider how they are growing more and more like Christ and what special work they can contribute to the body.

After a time of silence either pray for each person in the group or ask the members of the group to pray for each other as they continually become the Body of Christ.

the body of Christ...





SESSION TWENTY-FOUR

# Purpose of the Church

## foothold

### Q | what is the purpose of the Church?

The purpose of the Church is to glorify God, celebrate new life in Christ, build up one another in faith and love, proclaim and teach the gospel everywhere, and care for the needs of the world.

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” —1 Peter 2:9, NRSV*

## climb on

### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read Acts 2:40-47.

### Prayer

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.

Ask: What do we learn about the purpose of the Church from this statement and Scripture verse?

### Getting Started

*What Does the Church Look Like?* (Make copies of the session 24 handout, “Healthy Missional Markers.”)

After reviewing the Foothold, make a list on chart paper of the five purposes from the statement. Be sure that everyone understands to what each statement refers: a) glorify God; b) celebrate new life in Christ; c) build up one another in faith and love; d) proclaim and teach the gospel everywhere; and e) care for the needs of the world. Next, distribute copies of the “Healthy Missional Markers” handout. Explain that the Covenant’s Department of Church Growth and Evangelism uses this handout to help churches evaluate and strengthen their ministry. It is suggested that these elements are important in the life of a healthy church. Review the list and talk about the meaning of each statement. Next, compare the Healthy Missional Markers to the five purposes from the Foothold. Ask: How are they similar? Where are they different?

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

- 1) The Climbing Higher article asks the question, “What’s a Covenant church, anyway?” Ask participants how they would answer this question. Encourage them to share their own ideas rather than referring to the article.
- 2) Use the five purposes of the church from the foothold to record the discussion. Review the Scripture passages for this session in light of the five purposes from the Foothold. Where are the five purposes addressed? Some passages will include more than one of the purposes.
- 3) The Climbing Higher article refers to the Covenant mission presence throughout the world. Consider bringing some information about Covenant World Mission to present to the group. The website [www.covchurch.org/mission](http://www.covchurch.org/mission) has many downloadable resources that may help you present the scope of this ministry.

### Heart—Believing

- 1) Return to the five purposes from the Foothold and use them in considering your church. Encourage the group to illustrate the five purposes with examples from your church. Next ask the group to identify areas where improvement or extra emphasis might be helpful.
- 2) Ask: What do you think Martin Marty means when he says that the Covenant Church is the “most ecumenical, distinctively evangelical denomination in the United States?”
- 3) The article said the title “Mission Friends” was used to describe the early Covenant Church. Ask: What does “Mission Friends” mean? How does our church live up to this title? What could our church improve in order to be “Mission Friends”?

### Hand—Doing

- 1) Appreciative Inquiry is a process, used by the Alban Institute (an independent center of learning and leadership development), to help people gain perspective on a current situation. The questions that follow were selected from Appreciative Inquiry to help the members of your group appreciate your church and learn from each other. Select appropriate questions and discuss them together.
  - What drew you to this church in the first place?
  - Why have you stayed in this church?
  - What is a peak experience you have had in this church?
  - Who are you as a congregation when you are at your best?
  - How do you see God at work right now in your own life and in the life of your church?
  - For you, what is the heart of the matter in terms of where the church is right now?
2. One of the concluding paragraphs in the Climbing Higher article asks readers to “consider what’s in our name.” Read the statement aloud and then discuss the questions that follow. The statement suggests that rather than a building or a place, the church is its people.

“The Evangelical Covenant Church asks people to live out its name—to preach, teach, and live the evangel, the good news of Jesus Christ, and to

covenant with other believers for growth, friendship, hope, encouragement and accountability—all of which help to connect and build us up.”

Ask: How do you feel about this statement and the challenge that it provides to each church member? How is this statement evident in our church?

3. Discuss the following idea together: In light of question 2, would the Foothold definition work if you changed the statement from “The purpose of the church is...” to “My purpose is...”? How would individuals address each of the five characteristics in the statement? (“Proclaim and teach the gospel everywhere” may be hard to illustrate, yet, people have opportunities to proclaim and teach everyday with friends, family, etc. St. Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the gospel at all times – if necessary, use words.”)

## closing

Close the session in prayer thanking God for your church. After a brief beginning to the prayer invite your group members to pray for your church in the following areas.

- We glorify God
- We celebrate new life in Christ
- We build up one another in faith and love
- We proclaim and teach the gospel everywhere
- We care for the needs of the world

Note: Check the Getting Started activity for session 25 for a possible assignment to be given at this time.

# healthy missional markers

Adapted from the *Veritas* seminar (Church Growth and Evangelism)

**Centrality of the Word of God**

2 Timothy 3:16

*We believe that the Bible is the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine and conduct.*

**Life transforming walk with Jesus**

John 3:3, 30; Phil. 1:6

*We teach our people how to be attentive to Christ in all circumstances.*

**Intentional evangelism**

Matthew 28:18-20

*We are burdened for the spiritual condition of those who do not yet know Christ.*

**Transforming communities through active compassion, mercy and justice ministries**

Micah 6:8

*We are burdened for the hurting people in our community and beyond.*

**Global perspective and engagement**

Acts 1:8

*We develop a Biblical worldview and often pray for and reference global matters.*

**Compelling Christian community**

Acts 2:42-47

*We understand that our love for one another is a powerful testimony to the deity of Jesus.*

**Heartfelt worship**

Psalm 138:1a; John 4:23

*We exalt and celebrate God for who he is, what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do.*

**Sacrificial and generous living and giving**

Romans 12:1-8

*We help people discover, develop and deploy their spiritual gifts.*

**Culture of godly leadership**

Hebrews 13:7

*Our leaders at all levels serve with character, competence, and conviction.*

**Fruitful organizational structures**

Exodus 18:13-26, Acts 6:1-7

*We can articulate a compelling, Christ-honoring vision for our church.*



## SESSION TWENTY-FIVE **Sacrament**

### foothold

#### **Q | what is a sacrament?**

A sacrament is a visible and outward sign of an invisible and spiritual grace. The sacraments commanded by Jesus Christ are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

*"So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."—Acts 2:41-42, NRSV*

### climb on

#### **Welcoming Conversation**

**Bible Reading**—Read Luke 22:24-30.

#### **Prayer**

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.  
Ask: What do we learn about sacraments from this statement and Scripture passage?

#### **Getting Started**

*Special Memories*

Is there some object, aroma, song or activity that brings back special memories from childhood or another special time in your life? For example, it could be a bowl of Cheerios or a yellow rose or a song. Bring the item to the session and be prepared to explain its significance. (Note: you could give this as an assignment to the rest of the group at your previous session.)

*Discussion:* The objects shared evoked memories and feelings of more significance to the persons than the actual items shared. The bread and wine that is shared in the Lord's Supper and the water in baptism communicate an even deeper meaning and more profound feelings because they are not just objects associated with an event, they demonstrate in a mysterious way Christ's presence with us.

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

### Head—Knowing

- 1) What does the article mean when it says that sacraments are “the Word of God enacted”?
- 2) As a group, define “Outward, visible sign” and “inward, invisible grace.”
- 3) Why are baptism and the Lord’s Supper sacraments?
- 4) What does it mean that the “sacraments transcend the language of words and can best be expressed in the language of action”?
- 5) Paragraph 3 from the Climbing Higher article identifies several ideas about baptism and Holy Communion. Ask participants to identify the ideas connected with each sacrament. As ideas are identified list them in two columns on a piece of chart paper.

### Heart—Being

The desired outcome for this discussion is a heartfelt, personal conversation about the two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It might be helpful for you to set the tone by sharing how the sacraments are meaningful to you and formative in your spiritual life.

- 1) Place a bowl of water in the middle of your group. Invite the group members to reflect on and talk about baptism. Beginning with phrases like “For me baptism is...” or “I personally have found baptism meaningful because...” may be helpful.
- 2) Place a loaf of bread in the middle of your group. Invite the group members to reflect on the Lord’s Supper. Beginning with phrases like “For me the Lord’s Supper is...” or “I personally have found the Lord’s Supper meaningful because...” may be helpful.
- 3) Ask: How have you met Christ in the sacraments?

### Hand—Doing

Invite participants to reread the final paragraph of the Climbing Higher article looking for words that characterize the administration of the sacraments. As words are called out write them on the chart paper. Some informative words might include: pastor administers, behalf of the church, presence and power, celebrate and commune together, dignity, thoughtfulness, participate, faith, hope and love. Ask: How do these words characterize the sacraments as they are practiced in our church? What do we affirm in our practice? What ideas for change could be considered and who should consider them?

Ask: What can this group do to help others meet Christ in the sacraments? Responses might include:

- Develop a teaching time for the children or families in the church on the sacraments.
- Commit to preparing the elements for the next service of communion.
- Bake bread using the recipe in Session 15 for the next several communion services.
- Bring communion as a group with the pastor to your church’s homebound members.
- As a group, attend a church that celebrates the sacraments in a manner different from the way your church celebrates them. Go out for lunch and talk about what you observed. What did you like? What made you uncomfortable?

Brainstorm a list of possible actions, decide on one and set a date for following through on the commitment.

## **closing**

Make copies of the session 25 handout, “Sacraments Litany,” and pray it together, responsively, in closing this session on the sacraments. The intention of the litany is to remember and reflect on the sacraments, not to receive baptism or the Lord’s Supper at this time. It would be appropriate to leave the water and bread in the center of the group if you used them earlier in the session.

## sacraments litany

Adapted from *The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook*, 934, 945.

Leader: The Lord be with you.

**Group: And also with you.**

Leader: Let us hear baptism's call and promise: There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

**Group: And by one Spirit we were baptized into one body and were made to drink of one Spirit.**

Leader: All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.

**Group: So that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

*Pause for silent reflection on baptism.*

Leader: Let us hear the Lord's Supper's call and promise:

**Group: The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,**

Leader: "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembering me."

**Group: In the same way he took the cup after supper saying,**

Leader: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembering me."

**Group: With thanksgiving we remember this bread and this cup and proclaim the death and resurrection of our Lord.**

*Pause for silent reflection on the Lord's Supper.*

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

**Group: We lift them to the Lord.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**Group: It is always and everywhere right to give God thanks and praise.**

Leader: Amen

**Group: Amen**

SESSION TWENTY-SIX

# Christian Growth

## foothold

### Q | how do we grow as Christians?

We grow as Christians as we devote ourselves to the spiritual disciplines of corporate worship, participation in the sacraments, prayer, Bible study, service, stewardship, and Christian fellowship.

*“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”—Colossians 2:6-7, NIV*

## climb on

### Welcoming Conversation

**Bible Reading**—Read 2 Peter 3:14-18.

### Prayer

**Foothold Review**—Recite the statement and the Scripture together several times.

Ask: What do we learn about growing as Christians from this statement and Scripture passage?

### Getting Started

*Rock Solid Review*

As this is the final Rock Solid session, take a few moments to reflect on your time together. List the seven elements that contribute to Christian growth included in the Foothold (corporate worship, participation in the sacraments, prayer, Bible study, service, stewardship, and Christian fellowship). Ask participants to reflect on these elements and to share stories or experiences from Rock Solid that have helped them grow as Christians. Consider bringing refreshments to enjoy during this sharing time.

**Climbing Higher Article**—Give the group a few minutes to review the article.

## climbing higher exploration

Select appropriate questions from the following list or create your own for discussion.

## Head—Knowing

- 1) What is Christian Formation? (Christian formation concerns that process of growth toward wholeness in Christ. It is our continuing journey of being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ, experiencing and expressing love for God and others.) What strikes you as important in this statement?
- 2) What are the four essential agents or means of growth into Christ's likeness? a) God's Word; b) Relationships; c) Obedient Living; d) Worship. Write the four agents on chart paper and then list ways that each can be practiced in the Christian life. Invite participants to add other agents to the list if they feel something should be added.
- 3) How is "continuing journey" illustrated in the Scripture reading for this session?

## Heart—Believing

- 1) The Climbing Higher article says that we never "graduate from the school of Christian living." What does this statement mean and how do you feel about it? Does it give you permission, freedom, license or frustration as you realize that you never finish growing?
- 2) How have you felt the Scripture come alive within you?
- 3) How have others in your family or church influenced your Christian lifestyle?
- 4) When have you given witness to the good news and served others in Jesus's name? When have you found this difficult to do?
- 5) How has worship empowered you for living an obedient, abundant and joy-filled life in Christ?
- 6) What Scripture passages do you appreciate for their challenge to you to grow in your Christian life?

## Hand—Doing

The Climbing Higher article says that the spiritual journey continues throughout our lives. Now that Rock Solid is concluding, it will be helpful to spend time together creating an action plan to help continue this journey or growth. The article identifies three areas to pursue (listed below) that will enhance our spiritual journey. Take the statements one at a time and invite participants to identify ways they intend to pursue these. For example, how will they continue to become aware of God? Encourage participants to write their action plans on the last page of their Journals.

- Becoming aware of God (newly recognized aspects of God's character)
- Committing to Christ
- Maturing through the work of the Holy Spirit

Another option for this session is to use "GROW-ing as a Disciple" section on Journal page 213.

## closing

(Bring a candle in a holder for each person plus one extra candle and holder. You might want to buy new or make candle holders for this activity and then give them to the participants as a gift to remind them of their Rock Solid experience.) Distribute the candle holders and candles but light only the extra candle as you begin.

- 1) Read the following Scripture passage and reflect on it in the context of your time together. There is both celebration and encouragement in these verses.

- “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” —Philippians 4:4-7

- 2) Invite the participants in your group, one at a time, to light their candles and share a word of thanks, encouragement or challenge to the others in the group.
- 3) Lead the group in prayer and provide an opportunity for others to pray aloud as well.
- 4) Conclude by joining hands in a circle and reading together “The Journey Continues” section on page 211 as a closing challenge and benediction or prayer to each other that would have special meaning for the members of your group.

