

# Learning to Live – Living to Love

*A Workbook for Spiritual Renewal*

The Annual Church Stewardship Campaign usually invites you to renew your pledge to support the church with your gifts. This year, our church is inviting you to participate in a more comprehensive renewal. You are invited to participate in a quest for the renewal of your whole relationship with God and the church.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THESE WORKSHEETS

1. First, skim through these worksheets by reading only the bold print.
2. Work your way through the worksheets by dealing with one page each day for four weeks. Look up the scriptures. Read the devotional. Think about the questions. Fill in the blanks, and pray the prayers.
3. Use your completed workbook to complete your personal covenant page for this year (to come at a later date).

**Our Prayer: Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. PSALM 51:12**

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## ***SUNDAY, FIRST WEEK***

Jesus said: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be **filled**(Matt. 5:6).

READ MATTHEW 5:1-12

*Righteousness* is another word for that new kind of life that results from organizing life around the reality of God. It means life lived in a right relationship with God – and it is full of exciting surprises.

That new kind of life is a real possibility for each of us

no matter what we have done

no matter what has been done to us

no matter what we have or don't have

no matter if our lives are in a mess.

That new life is possible because God is always there

ready to forgive us

ready to accept us as we are

ready to love us

ready to help us make a fresh start.

New life is a free gift to you from God.

It is there for you.

**You can have it if you want it.**

**But you really have to want it.** You have to hunger and thirst for it. It will make demands upon you, and if you don't really want it, you probably won't accept it.

(Still, hungering and thirsting for this new life is better than hungering and thirsting for something less valuable that you probably never can have.)

**What are you hungry and thirsty for?**

What are the strong desires that are driving you right now?

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*Prayer:* Lord, show me how the new life you offer me can satisfy the deepest hungers of my heart. Amen.

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**MONDAY, FIRST WEEK**

Jesus said: **No one can serve two masters . . . . You cannot serve God and wealth** (Matt. 6:24).

READ MATTHEW 6:19-24.

Most of us have a problem entering into new life because we don't want to do anything that will jeopardize the advantages we have gained---through our old commitments.

Jesus once met a young man who was stuck in that kind of ambivalence. Jesus told him to go and sell all that he had and give the money to the poor, and then come and follow him. Obviously, that commandment was not for everyone. Someone has to manage the businesses and homes and funds. But that young man had a decision to make—and so do we. (Read the story in Matt. 19:13-26).

**A wheel can have only one center.** Either everything in our lives, including our resources, will be organized around our relationship with God, or everything in our lives, including our religion, will be organized around our pursuit of affluence—or whatever else we choose as the center of our lives.

**You can't have it both ways.** We have a decision to make. Our faith can't do us much good unless we allow it to really be our faith.

**How would management of your business, your home, and your resources be different, if it were reorganized around a new center in God?**

Business \_\_\_\_\_

Home \_\_\_\_\_

Resources \_\_\_\_\_

*Prayer:* Lord, help me to catch a vision of the shape of the new life you offer, so that I can really want to choose it. Amen.

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**TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK**

Jesus said: **Do not worry about . . . what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. . . . Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things will be given to you as well**(Matt. 6:25, 33).

READ MATTHEW 6:25-34

It seems that Jesus asks us to do some very frightening things. Isn't this rather unrealistic?

There is a promise that goes with the calling of Christ that makes everything possible. It is the promise that God will be there---and that God loves you---and that God will provide for you.

This is not an invitation to stop assuming responsibility for yourself and your family. Neither is it a promise that God will miraculously give you everything you want as if God were a great Santa Claus.

God's promise simply says that if we will let go of our anxieties, trust God, and put first things first in life, God will be with us. Only when we can trust the goodness of the One who gives life can we be free to live life fully.

**It's like learning to swim. First you have to learn to trust the water.**

What are the things you are trusting and depending on in life right now?

**What would it mean for you to trust God to provide?**

Begin listing the changes that trusting might make in your life.

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\_\_\_\_\_

*Prayer:* I admit it, Lord. I am anxious and afraid. Help me to trust so that I can be free. Amen.

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**WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK**

Jesus said: **You must be born from above** (John 3:7b).

READ JOHN 3:1-16

Did you ever wish that you could just cancel your past and start over again? Jesus invites us to do that.

The changes that God wants to make in our lives are not just changes that we have to make through our own superhuman effort and grim determination.

God is alive and at work in our lives. God can change our lives. Yes, we have to be willing, and we have to work with God. But we are not alone.

**If you give God a chance, God will reorganize your life and make it new.**

Being aware of the presence and reality of God can change things. It can put everything in a new perspective. Some things that seem overwhelming when we face them alone will seem manageable because God is bigger than they are.

Some things that seem terribly important will seem less important and we will be free of their demands. Other things will be shown to be truly important.

Experiencing **God's love** for you can change things. It can replace anxiety with freedom; self-deprecation with healthy self-esteem; despair with hope.

Most important, in place of whatever has been the dominant force in your life, God will give you a new driving force---love. It can be exciting. Are you willing?

Don't try to write down the answer to this question. Just think about it throughout this day.

*Prayer:* Lord, I am not sure I want a new life. I kind of like myself as I am. Even if my present life is not so good, it is familiar. I am comfortable in it. Show me the better possibility you are offering me, and help me become excited about it. Amen.

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**THURSDAY, FIRST WEEK**

Jesus said: **The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it** (Matt. 13:45-46).

READ MATTHEW 13:44-46

Are you satisfied with your life?

- Is the quality of life you are enjoying now what you really want? Is it full and meaningful and genuinely happy?
- Is your life making any difference for good in the lives of others or in the world?
- If you were suddenly to learn that you had only a short time to live, could you look back on your life and feel good about it?

Jesus told a story about a man who had spent his life doing nothing but accumulating wealth. Then, just as the man decided he had plenty and was about to retire and start living, he died. Jesus said that he was a very foolish man. (Read Luke 12:15-21.)

**Jesus came to offer us a better life.**

He came to offer us a life that is genuinely full and free and meaningful and profoundly happy. The Bible calls this life by such names as “fullness of life,” “eternal life,” “the abundant life,” “righteousness,” or “the kingdom of God.”

**What do you want most out of life?**

Imagine that you have just learned that you have only a few months to live. Look back over your life and list the things you wish you could change.

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*Prayer:* Lord, you have given me being. Help me to be fully alive.

**FRIDAY, FIRST WEEK**

Jesus said: **The kingdom of God has come near** (Mark 1:15b).

What did Jesus mean by that? He meant that God is offering an exciting new possibility to each of us and to our world.

Most of us believe in God.

- We believe in someone who created the world and keeps it going.
- We believe in someone who is the most important of all realities, the reality behind all other realities.
- If we believe what Jesus taught us, we believe in someone who loves us.

But too often we act as if that God in whom we believe were somewhere else---don't we?

If that God in whom we believe were standing right here among us in some form that we would be forced to recognize, we would pay attention, wouldn't we? We would forget everything else and reorganize our lives around God, wouldn't we? Jesus came, announcing that God is real and present and that we should recognize our lives around God, as a kingdom is organized around a king.

**Life that is organized around the reality of God is a new and exciting kind of life.**

It is God's new possibility for us and for our world. We can have it.

## **What difference could God make in your life?**

Close your eyes and imagine God, as you usually visualize God, standing right in front of you. Try to visualize the difference God's presence would make. Imagine that happening at home, at school, at work.

*Prayer:* Hello, God. Please forgive me for not recognizing you. Help me to get my life around your reality. Amen.

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## **SATURDAY, FIRST WEEK**

Jesus said: **Follow me** (Matt. 4:19).

Read Matthew 4:18-22

Also read Mark 8:34-37

Jesus invites us to go on an adventure with him.

The disciples whom Jesus called left their homes and businesses. They went with Jesus.

They joined him in a new life, liberated by faith and shaped by love.

They joined him in a life committed to something bigger than themselves.

They lived in service to the purposes of God.

Jesus gives us a similar invitation.

We may or may not need to leave anything geographical or physical, but we are called out of an old way of life.

We are called into a new life of faith, freedom, commitment, and purpose.

## **Are you up for an adventure?**

Are you still anxious about what you might lose in such an adventure? Then ponder what Jesus said in the second reading.

Those who are anxiously preoccupied with getting and saving their lives are likely to lose them.

Those who lose their lives in the service of something bigger, especially in the service of God, are likely to gain life.

Think about that.

Remember the people you have known who were anxiously striving to promote themselves.

Remember those who forgot themselves in a commitment to something bigger.

Which of them seemed most fully alive to you?

**Ponder the mystery of life lost and found.**

*Prayer:* Help me to hear you calling me to follow. Help me to be able to do it. Amen.