



Basic Evangelization Training

Course 5: Introduction to the Spiritual Life of the Evangelist

Introduction: Evangelization Flows from Spiritual Life

Hi, I'm Beth Schuele. I'm delighted to present Lesson 5 of module 1 of the online basic evangelization training. The module is Introduction to Evangelization, and the lesson is "Introduction to the Spiritual Life of the Evangelist."

As evangelists we are stepping into the mission of the church. And to do that well, we need to make sure our spiritual life is in order. Anyone who has tried it recognizes that evangelization is not an academic exercise. We are not reporters stating facts; we must be witnesses passing on our lived experience of Jesus Christ. Also, evangelization is not merely a matter of human dialogue on a natural level, with point-counterpoint, as we work through dogma, and persuade people with our arguments. I've tried that in the past and it doesn't work!

One time I was evangelizing and there was a gentleman reading his red letter Bible. He was clearly a fundamentalist and had very particular beliefs about the Lord. He said he didn't quite understand what we thought about Mary. And I talked back and forth about it, thinking that he was going to say about how we worship Mary, and I could easily push that aside. But he didn't say that. He said something way off – something that was offensive. Oh my gosh, I stood back, and the gloves were off. I started going back and forth with him, battling, trying to prove my point.

Then I had to say, "Whoa, wait a minute, nobody is getting close to the Lord with this conversation. It's not about me, it's not about my arguments. No, evangelization is supernatural. It involves the conversion of heart. Since God is the one who convicts hearts, as evangelists we must tap into that power. Therefore, a certain interior attitude must be present and animate the work of evangelization. Among them is a docility of heart to allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. We must also exclude the joy of Jesus so we will attract others and be an authentic witness to his love and transforming power. And like Jesus in the Garden, we must love those we evangelize and truly desire their eternal salvation.

This necessary interior attitude comes from our spiritual life. Our relationship with the Lord will inform and direct our evangelization. So, let's look at the spiritual life of an evangelist.

The spiritual life is actually a journey -- a journey away from self and selfishness, and a journey towards God. It's wanting what God wants, loving what God loves. It's living a life that honors and gives glory to God. On this journey we strive to grow in holiness and unite our will to God's will. We strive to respond to the grace God gives us and yield to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we gradually turn our self over to the God who loves us more than we can imagine.

When we do this, God does not disappoint. As we willingly place ourselves in His loving hands, our minds and hearts become gradually transformed into the mind and heart of Jesus. When this happens, it is no longer we that live and act, but Jesus Christ lives and acts within us. Like I said, this is a journey. It unfolds over our lifetime. Now because God is infinite, this journey never ends, and we can always grow closer to God. And because we are human, this journey is sporadic, with fits and starts as we struggle with the freedom God gave us. But it's in that struggle that we overcome the obstacles that keep us from God.

By living a healthy spiritual life, we will be more fruitful as evangelists. God will give us the gift to witness his saving power working in others. This is the best part of evangelization. Seeing God pierce the heart of the person you're talking to. It's happened to me many times, and I never get tired of it. I remember one time I was talking to a teen named Kyle. He was a student and he was just walking through the park when I stopped him and asked if he needed prayer. He was kind of, you know, like teenagers are, and he said, "Well, okay, pray for my grandma." So we did this really short prayer praying for his grandma. In bringing the prayer in, Jesus jumped into that encounter. After we prayed, Kyle looked at me and said, "You know, I was supposed to die once, but I didn't."

Whoa! That opened up a beautiful conversation and we started talking. He told me about his grandma, and how his grandma prayed the rosary and prayed for him. It was amazing to see how the Lord transformed him in that way, and we talked about how odd it was to have that conversation – all the things that God had to orchestrate in order for us to be there. He recognized God in his life through that small encounter. And all I did was do a simple prayer.

It's a great privilege to evangelize -- to introduce someone to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to help them on their journey. We must allow the Lord will fuel and direct our work of evangelization. We all must develop a strong spiritual life. Jesus tells us, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:5) So let's abide in Him.

How important is prayer? How often should we pray?

So, what is prayer? Well, in the words of St. Therese of Lisieux, prayer is "a surge of the heart...a simple look turned toward heaven...a cry of recognition and of love." Prayer is the way we speak to God. It's the conversations in our relationship with him. It includes praise, adoration, thanksgiving, contrition, petition, intercession. But also listening, yielding. And, like other intimate relationships, it also includes turning our hearts over to the beloved.

For Christians, who want a personal relationship with God, prayer is necessary. It is impossible to be in a personal relationship with someone if we never communicate with them. Prayer is life for the soul, and lack of prayer is deadly for the soul. If we don't pay proper attention to prayer, our faith will become immature and weak. If we fail to pray over a period of time it can destroy us. We will become prone to sins and may lose the taste for spiritual things. Our relationship with God will crumble, making us more susceptible to fall into mortal sin and lose the state of grace. Then we are in danger of losing the gift of eternal life. So yes, prayer is necessary, because our relationship with God is necessary.

As Christians, we pray! Let's talk about some great examples of Christian prayer that come from the heart of the church. First we have holy Mass, the highest prayer there is. This is something we all do, and it's part of the precepts of the Church to go to Mass every week and on Holy Days of Obligation. We also have devotions such as the rosary or novenas, and memorized prayers, which come to us from the Scripture or the saints. I love memorized prayers; they help bring to mind things I wouldn't have thought of on my own. "Bless the Lord, my soul; all my being, bless His holy Name. Bless the Lord, my soul, and do not forget His benefits. He pardons our iniquity, He heals all our ills, He rescues us from the pit, He fills our life with good things, surrounds us with love and compassion, gives us the strength of the eagle." Bless the Lord, my soul; all my being, bless His holy name. I love that memorized prayer; it's one of the Psalms, and it comes to mind to me throughout my day. It's just a way to spontaneously pray to God using Scripture. There's other spontaneous prayers, too, just using your own words, like, "Thank you God, for this beautiful day. Thank You for putting this person in my day. How did You know I needed to talk with her? But, of course, You always know. Thank You again."

We can also meditate and contemplate on different things. And this is a good way to listen to God. We can contemplate Scripture, spiritual readings, or other such things. Now, since prayer is lifting our heart and simply talking to Him, we are not constrained by these methods. We can each adapt a rhythm of prayer that fits for us. The important part is we keep on praying, and pray in a way that builds and deepens our relationship with God. And, because it's a relationship, it can't be a monologue. We've all had friends who chatter on and on, and those one-way relationships quickly grow stagnant. We don't want that with our relationship with God. We need to listen to God when we pray.

Let's make the comparison of prayer and other relationships that we have. At work, you may have to give a status update to your boss each day, and that's a communication, but it's a task. With a friend, a good friend, a loved one? Well, that's different. Often we can't wait to tell them about our day and to hear about theirs. We often call our dear ones on our way home from work. These days, we can even shoot them a quick text message, picture, gif, or whatever, back and forth, throughout the day, to share what has crossed your path as we go along. We find ways to invite those we love into our day, to share our joys and sorrows, to ask for help or support, to encourage them or ask about their day, their big meeting. This is the natural way of building a relationship. And it applies also to our prayer life.

Sometime prayer can drop into becoming a task to be done only when the time is right, or it can lose its priority altogether. These are temptations we must overcome. There is always a reason not to pray. We must remember that prayer is more than just a feeling to do when we feel like it. It's a discipline. It's a choice we make to tune in and to invite God into our day and into our life, to include God in the rhythm of our day. Don't make the mistake of waiting for the "feeling" to come over you, or wait for the perfect circumstance to pray. "Only if I'm in a chapel that's quiet and I have a half-hour." Choose to pray, even when you don't feel like it; even when you are tired, busy, distracted, not feeling holy enough (whatever that means). If prayer is inviting God into our day, we can and should pray any time or any place.

Even on busy days, we can turn to God and shoot up quick "text message" type prayers – like we do with our friends. It's one way to keep God in our day. A word of caution though: we must be careful not to limit our prayers to the short messages. In order to build the relationship, we do need to carve out time where we can sit with the Lord, to love Him and allow Him to love us. We'll talk more about that when we talk about the spiritual disciplines.

Now, if we recognize prayer as inviting God into our daily lives, prayer becomes less of a task and more of an attitude, a disposition of the heart. "I want God to be part of this. I need God to be in my day." This is how we pray constantly, which is, by the way, from scripture. Now, don't worry if constant prayer sounds impossible right now. It is something to work towards. We can start by setting aside regular times of prayer, especially in the morning and at night, and by pausing to turn our minds and hearts to God at various times throughout the day. In doing this, we can gradually develop the habit of talking with God throughout our day. Eventually, a wordless communion with God can "spill over" into every moment of our day and in all of our daily activities, even when we can't raise our minds to God intentionally.

This is a path of maturing love. It blossoms peacefully, often over a long period of time, as our relationship with God deepens. It's the gradual response of love to love. It is God "wooing" us as a lover woos his beloved. Jesus calls us forward: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden... abide in my love." (Mt 11:28 and Jn 15:9).

This deepening and maturing in our relationship with God through constant prayer is so important to our work of evangelization. It allows us to be the conduit between God and the people we encounter. Recognize that this is an everlasting journey toward the infinite love of God, and as such, no one will ever complete it in this life. We simply strive as we continue ever deeper in our relationship with God. One of the best way to do this is through prayer.

What are some good spiritual disciplines to embrace?

As we embark on growing in our spiritual life, let's look at some of the concrete ways we can deepen our relationship with God through spiritual disciplines. Now, the Catholic Church has been around for a long time, and it crosses many cultures. So, as you can imagine, there's a variety of spiritual disciplines out there that have been practiced in the Church through the years by great saints -- and sinner striving for sainthood, like me! Of course, I can't go through all of them, but I'll share a few of the more common ones that have proved to be beneficial in my journey. Additional spiritual disciplines are listed in the text of the lesson.

I'd like to start with the baseline, the minimum standard we need to live by in order to be Catholic. These are called the precepts of the Church, and they concern Mass attendance, confession, the Eucharist, fasting, stewardship, and marriage. We all start with these precepts and then add on daily prayer because, as we mentioned, prayer is the life of the soul. So, these seven things we hold in common with all faithful Catholics, and we move on from there as we develop our relationship with God. The different disciplines that we embrace are meant to strengthen us, to build our spiritual muscle, as we grow towards God. It's a distortion to view them as checkboxes, or something God holds over our head to make sure we're good enough for Him to love.

Of course, that isn't true. God loves us all. In fact, it's the temptation to pride to think that somehow we can earn God's love, and He owes it to us. These disciplines, instead, help to dispose our heart so we can receive and respond to God's love.

Let's start with the morning offering and the daily review. These are short prayer times at the beginning and the end of the day, and they serve as bookends for our day. With this practice, no matter how my day goes, I know that at least I started and ended with the Lord in prayer.

The morning offering should remind us of God's goodness and with a humble heart we offer our day back to Him -- the giver of all good gifts. It's the attitude from the Psalms: "What can I render unto the Lord for all he has done for me?" (Psalms 116:12) When I taught school, my 9th graders would start the hour with a short version of the *Amni Christi* to praise God, followed by this simple offering:

"Lord, inspire my thoughts, words, and actions, and accompany them with Your aid, so that all I undertake and carry through will be done according to Your will and out of love for You."

We did it every day, and by the end of the year, the students knew it well. I hope that it became part of their normal day.

In the evening, it's time to look back and review your day. Taking the time to reflect and recall how the Lord worked in and through your day is very important if you want to grow in the spiritual life. First, put yourself in a posture of prayer and ask the Lord to give you the grace to see your day through His eyes. Review your day. Consider the stirrings of your heart and the thoughts which God has given to you today. Look also at those thoughts that were not from God. Review your choices and responses to both of those, and your day in general. Thank God for the blessings and, with honesty and humility, ask for forgiveness for the times you did not respond as you should have. Then look forward to tomorrow and plan concretely how you can live concretely according to God's will. Ask God for the grace to see Him more clearly in your day.

This prayer takes practice, but the more we pay attention and reflect on how God is active in our day, the more we will recognize it and be able to respond to those gentle promptings more generously.

Also high on the list is dedicated time in prayer with Scripture. The bible isn't like a textbook. I would not recommend sitting down at a desk, opening up to Genesis and then reading straight through to Revelation. The bible, in fact, is a

collection of books with different genres, written over thousands of years. So, it's helpful to have a reading plan to guide you. There are many plans out there; I like using the readings of the day from the Catholic Mass. It mixes up the old and new testament, it's easy to find reflections and commentaries, and it prepares me for Mass.

One popular bible study maps out the historical books of the bible so you can read them in order and get a great overview of salvation history. Another popular method is to focus on one book at a time, using a commentary to help break open the scripture. Now, the particular method you choose doesn't matter that much; just choose one that works, and get started.

So how do we pray with the Bible? Begin by calling upon the Holy Spirit to be with you and to inspire you. Then, read the Scripture selection prayerfully and reverently. Reflect upon what you have read. Are there any words, phrases, or even whole sentences that caught your attention? Focus on those, and listen. Is the Lord is telling you something? Stirring your heart or imagination? Does an image come to mind? Pray to the Lord in response to the Scripture. Praise Him, thank Him, or just talk to Him from your heart. Feel free to go back, to reread, to reflect, to pray again. This is not a race to be finished, it's a treasure hunt. Once you find the prize, stay with it. Sometimes, the Lord will stir up a flame of love in your heart, and you will become deeply aware of his love. Treasure these moments. It's common to keep a journal of your prayer time so you can recall the things that God brought to mind and stirred in your heart. Finish your prayer time thanking God and perhaps making a resolution to put into practice something you have learned.

Frequenting the Sacraments is another important spiritual discipline. Sacraments are a guaranteed encounter with Jesus, and they give us the grace that strengthens our will and sharpens our intellect. A good guide is to go to confession at least monthly, and receive the Eucharist as often as possible. If you can find a daily Mass that fits into your schedule, go for it! Daily Mass was the first commitment I made to God when I started taking my faith more seriously, and God blessed me greatly through it. There are tools such as masstimes.com that can help you find the schedule of churches in the area near you.

These are just a few of the many spiritual disciplines we can use to draw closer in our relationship with God, to grow in holiness and to practice virtue. Don't get overwhelmed with all the choices. Try a few that you may like, and see if they fit. Then, pick one or two, and stick with it for six months or a year, that way they become part of the rhythm of your life. It's OK to swap out things that don't work, or add more things to your day as you grow deeper in love with the Lord.

A caution, though: be wary of the temptation to be overzealous and take on too many practices at once, or jumping back and forth between different practices so that nothing really sticks. We can easily burnout or become overwhelmed. We don't need to do everything all at once, and taking on too much for our state in life can hurt our relationship with God, and lead to a check box mentality we talked about.

You know, God is very patient with us, and He wants our relationship with Him to last for an eternity. So it's okay if it grows gradually.

What should we know about rooting out sin?

Repent and believe in the gospel! This is the message of John the Baptist as he called people to a radical conversion of heart. A call not just to change our actions, but to change our life and direct it towards the God who loves us. How interesting that there are two sides to this equation: repent and believe. Repent is being sorry for our sins, gaining forgiveness, detaching ourselves from sin, and changing our life. Then believe is reaching forward to that mystery: to the hope, the grace, the love that can actually transform us and lead us to eternal salvation.

Yes, repent and believe. Let's start with the repent side of this equation: the process of rooting out sin in our life. I love the protoevangelium. It's the first gospel, the first time God reveals his plan of redemption in the bible, and it's right after the fall in Genesis 3. How merciful is that!

After confronting Adam and Eve, God turns to the serpent and curses him: "On your belly you shall crawl." And then tells the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Did you hear that? The offspring of the woman is Jesus Christ, and on the cross, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent. No, sin will not have the last word! But, in this life, the serpent is still there nipping at our heels, trying to pull us down and separate us from the transforming love of God. So we need to work to root out sin, and not fall prey to the things that lead us away from God.

Sin can blind us; it dulls our intellect and weakens our will. Sin kills or injures our ability to love God and to love our neighbor, which, of course, is the greatest and most important commandment that Jesus gave us (Mk 12:28-34).

The process of rooting out sin is an important part of our spiritual journey. So, how do we do it? We start by taking an honest look at how we live. What we say and do, how we treat others, our general attitude towards life, our conversations, and how we spend our free time. We need to consider all of this and get rid of anything that pulls us away from God. This may seem overwhelming, but it doesn't happen all at once. It's a process we go through with God's help and by God's grace.

Let's use an analogy to help describe this process. Now, imagine that you have the task of cleaning up a room. But when you walk in, it's totally dark. You don't know what's in there and you can't see where you are going. You bump your shin on something as you feel around for some sort of light. You finally find a small lamp and turn it on. By that dim light, you can see that things are a mess. The furniture is in disarray and you can barely move through the room. So, the first thing you do is put the furniture into place. You push the couch against the wall, you upright the coffee table that was knocked down, and you put the chairs all around the dining room table.

Then, you find another lamp and turn it on. You can see the whole room now, and you notice papers, books and magazines strewn about, along with clothes and trash everywhere. So, you bag up the trash, gather the clothes in the laundry room, and then organize the books and papers. Things are starting to look reasonably tidy now. You find a window and you open up the curtain, which lets in a little more light. But the windows, they're a mess too. So you wash them until they sparkle and the sun shines brightly through them. Satisfied, you turn around and look at the whole room. With the bright sun, you see everything in the room clearly. You now can see that there is a thick layer of dust everywhere, and the crumbs from the chips are scattered all over the floor. So you grab the vacuum cleaner and the dust rag and you go to it.

This is similar to the process of rooting out sin. As the light of Jesus shines in our heart, we see our sins more clearly and we can clean them up. We start with the big things and get them in place before moving on to the smaller things. And we don't do this alone, by our own power. Instead, we are cooperating with the transforming grace of God, the transforming grace He gives us in the process of turning from sin. Remember: sin blinds us. It dulls our intellect and weakens our will. So, as we root out sin, we can see more clearly. We understand how sin enslaves us and hurts our relationship with God, and we are stronger to fight against temptations nipping at our heel.

So, what's the big stuff? Those are the mortal sins, and we must deal with them first. The Catechism tells us that mortal sin destroys charity in the heart as we separate ourselves from God. (CCC 1855) For a sin to be mortal, three conditions

must all be met: it is grave matter, which is also committed with full knowledge, and deliberate consent. That means it's really bad, we know it's bad, and we freely choose to do it anyway. (CCC 1855-57). Some examples are blasphemous use of the Lord's Name, shoplifting, manipulative lying, fornication, slanderous speech, coveting or being envious of the success of others, and skipping Sunday Mass. Did you catch that last one? Yes, skipping Mass on Sundays or Holy Days without serious reason is grave matter. For these grave sins, we must go to confession to get forgiveness, and then strive to remove these habits and attitudes from our life. In doing this, we really take our soul out of darkness.

Once the mortal sins are conquered, we'll have the light to see what needs to be done next, which is conquering the more serious and deliberate venial sins. Sins like failing to pray daily, vulgar language, gossip, distracted driving, or driving way over the speed limit, greed that focuses our time talent and treasure on self instead of being generous to others. Again, as we root these out, more light is ushered in. The more light there is, the better we can see, and the more sensitive we become, even to the minor venial sins: that sharp tone of voice, being unnecessarily late, irritability with that customer service rep, uncharitable thoughts about a family member.

The process of moving forward, gaining clarity, and moving forward again is the general progression of the spiritual life. However, it often comes with fits and starts. We make progress and then fall back a bit. This is normal so we need to guard against doubt and discouragement when we do stumble. The saints tell us to treat doubt and discouragement as temptations of the devil rooted in pride and self-sufficiency. I remember, once, after stumbling back quite a bit far back, I went to confession and my confessor gave me a really easy penance, like one Hail Mary. And I'm thinking, "Whoa, didn't you just hear those sins? I'm sure I need to do something way more difficult than that!" But no. And in that prayer, that simple Hail Mary, God reminded me that it's not about me and my efforts. I am not saved by myself, but I'm saved by placing myself into God's loving hands. So, when we do stumble, we should immediately repent and return to God without all the hand-wringing. It's important to stop trusting in our own abilities, and instead trust in God's mercy.

That's what keeps us moving forward: our love for God in response to His love for us. Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans that it is the kindness of God which leads us to repentance. (Romans 2:4) In God's kindness, He is patient with us as He sheds His light in our mind, allowing us time to gradually understand our real situation before Him and the greatness to which He calls us. We can better see our sin for what it is, that serpent nipping at our heels, trying to pull us away from God. Repentance and rooting out sin are very important, but it shouldn't be a soul-scraping activity. By God's grace, we can gain a growing awareness of the things in our life that are not in line with God's will, along with a growing strength to root them out. Yes, repent and believe.

What should we know about holiness?

Repent and believe. We first looked at the repent side, which is rooting out sin and detaching from what holds us down. Now, let's look at the believe side, which is moving forward to the mystery of love God has in store for us as we grow in holiness.

But what exactly is holiness? Holiness means to be separated from and opposed to evil, and also set aside for the service of God. Holiness, first and foremost, is a gift of God's grace in Baptism. And with the gift of holiness, we also have the capacity to grow in holiness ever more.

I like the way Pope Benedict put it: "Holiness does not consist in never having erred or sinned. Holiness increases the capacity for conversion, for repentance, for willingness to start again...and, especially, for reconciliation and forgiveness." (See Pope Benedict's *Catechesis on the Apostles* p. 157).

In other words, for us, holiness is not about living the perfect, sinless life. Instead, it's our capacity to overcome and turn away from sin which enables us to grow in holiness, to grow towards God. And this is something all of us can do. So, when Jesus teaches, "You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48), we should not look at that as an unattainable ideal, something static. No, it's alive, it grows, it's something we can all strive for. In fact, the Church teaches there is a universal call to holiness, which means holiness is for everyone.

So, how do we get there? We've already talked about prayer, the practices of the spiritual life, and the need to root out sin. In all of these, if we have a docile heart, we can be led by the Spirit to form good habits that direct us in the path of holiness -- a path that transforms us and deepens our relationship with God. Because that's what it's about: growing towards a union with the Almighty God who loves us.

C.S. Lewis once said, "A Christian does not think God will love us because we are good...but that God will make us good because He loves us." (Mere Christianity Book 2 Chapter 5) In the pursuit of holiness, God's love always comes first. Indeed, coming to know and experience the love of God has a powerful, transformative effect on us. As we become more committed in our relationship with Him, we become more and more inclined to want to please Him, to love Him more deeply, and not offend Him.

We love God through our actions, through our spiritual disciplines, and the love we show our neighbor. However, it's a temptation to look at these spiritual practices as a checklist that we must get through in order to attain some level of holiness. Sometimes my spiritual life takes on that flavor, as if I'm going to impress God and earn His love by ticking off these spiritual activities like a checklist. "I went to mass, I volunteered at the soup kitchen, I'm even starting a novena!" It's part of our fallen nature to want to do things by ourselves and without God. So, it's easy to fall into that trap and to think that being holy is a matter of trying really hard, that it comes thru sheer willpower on our own.

Another problem with that checklist mentality is that it could lead into the sin of judging others, which Jesus forbids. So, let's just nix that checklist!

Growth in holiness, instead, is a journey we take in cooperation with the grace of God. It's a journey as we gradually become conformed more and more to the image of Jesus Christ. Through our spiritual practices, we take small steps, and, like any relationship, it doesn't happen all at once. It happens over time in what the Church calls the "law of gradualness."

Saint Josemaria Escriva reminds us that grace, like nature, acts gradually, and he warns that we should not move AHEAD of grace. Yet, we must move ahead *with* grace, and "aim very high" towards Christ's ideal. We should not lower the goal in any way. And, since sanctity is not something worked out "by one's own hands," we must rely on grace. And grace takes time. The saint also encourages us to have a "holy impatience" in his journey; an urgency and desire to move forward, but also reminds us not to lose patience with ourselves.

I've experienced this law of gradualness many times, most especially during my reversion. But it was a struggle, and I needed to move in God's time; I couldn't go faster than God enabled me. I learned that holiness becomes possible when we open ourselves up, with all of our problems and limitations; when we trust God and entrust ourselves to Him as we persevere over the long haul, through difficult times and in times of consolation, in our imperfections, and as we grow in virtue; when we stumble in our sins, and when we get back up again. It's not about white-knuckling it, but simply doing what we can, and faithfully, humbly asking God for the grace to do what we cannot.

What else should we know about holiness? How about that we each have our own unique path! We will never be holy, if we do not follow God's will for our lives. Remember that God calls each of us by name, with our unique gifts and

abilities. He calls us to exercise Christian love in our unique circumstances. Every one of us, in fact, has a personal vocation. I'm always inspired by Blessed John Henry Newman's words,

"God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission." Then he ends the prayer reminding us that God "knows what He is about." (Meditations and Devotions Part 3 Chapter 1)

Yes, God is in charge, and He knows the plan He has for each of us, a plan for goodness and abundant life. That's why He created each of us unique, with our gifts, our vocation, our mission. Yet, at the same time, we are all working together as one body of Christ. I find it consoling that I don't have to live the life of Mother Teresa to be holy. I don't know if I'd make it without a lot of grace from God! Pope Francis says each of us must discern our own path. One that brings out the very best of ourselves using the most personal gifts that God has placed in our hearts. He warns that we could actually be led astray and away from God if we hopelessly try to imitate a spiritual path not meant for us. (Gaudete et Exsultate 11) So, discernment is key.

When we think about it, in a way, holiness is about being who we are -- that is, being who God made each of us to be. We are each called to follow Jesus, to love to the fullest like Jesus, but each according to a path that "fits us" -- fits the unique plan of God. I love the fact that I was created for "some definite purpose" -- and if I become who God created me to be, I will set the world ablaze! Hey, maybe we should write that one down: "Become who you are and you will set the world ablaze!" (St. Catherine of Siena, Letter 368)

In conforming our life to God's, and allowing Him to transform us into who He created us to be, our relationship grows ever deeper. We can better see the world the way God sees it, to become a part of God's mission. So, holiness is not a static ideal, but a journey, a journey of love. It's not something we do on our own, through sheer willpower, but something done in cooperation with God's grace. It doesn't happen all at once, but unfolds gradually, as we place ourselves deeper and deeper into God's hands. And holiness is not the same for everybody, it takes on a different form for each of us because each of us is unique, with an individual relationship with God. So, we pray, we discern, we stick with it, and we respect the process, knowing that the God of the universe is taking care of things.

How do we deal with obstacles?

There are epic journeys that we just love. Whether it's Frodo Baggins and his journey to Mount Doom to destroy the One Ring, or Captain John Miller and his squad of Rangers as they search for Private Ryan, or of course the Children of Israel as they journey from slavery in Egypt to the promised land.

One thing all of these journeys have in common is obstacles that need to be overcome. Our spiritual journey is no different. There will be obstacles and setbacks. It's how we respond to the obstacles that will define our spiritual progress and our evangelization efforts. Think about the response from the Children of Israel. Some grumbled, "we were better off in slavery," while others, like Joshua, trusted, "the Lord will provide." Which attitude do you have? To be honest I have both.

In the journey of the spiritual life, growing towards holiness, and in the work of evangelization, a variety of obstacles will tempt or dissuade us. We may, for example, struggle to keep the discipline of prayer or to avoid distractions. We may have difficulty overcoming a particular sin. We may fail to see any fruit from our evangelization or feel reluctant to undergo the hostility and friction we get for our evangelization efforts. We may experience illness, or a death in the family, or stresses at home.

In the face of these difficulties—big or small—we often experience strong feelings of self-doubt, discouragement, fear, unworthiness, or spiritual sadness, and this harms our ability to live in the joy of the Lord, and to serve Him faithfully and fruitfully. We can be encouraged by the Sacred Scriptures. They are filled with stories of faithful people who, like us, also encountered great obstacles. Knowing the goodness of the Lord, shining forth in the Cross of Jesus, we also know that if we remain faithful, like them, our own crosses will be redeemed.

Our faith tells us that “in everything God works for good for those who love him.” So we don’t need to be overwhelmed by doubt, discouragement, fear, unworthiness, or sadness. There is no obstacle that can separate us from the love of Christ. With His help, we can overcome obstacles, rise above them, endure them, or simply move past them. They will not defeat us!

Through Jesus, the battle has already been won. But it still must be played out in our lives. The obstacles will come, so expect them! Now let’s look at how we can prepare for them.

First, we have to know our enemies. We need to know the things that make it especially hard for us to face and overcome obstacles. Each of us needs to identify weak spots. Recognize what leads us to sin. Name (or pin point) what it is that prevents growth in holiness and in intimacy with God. The list we each come up with will be different, because each of us is unique. Is it television, or junk food? Is it some false idea such as, “I need to earn God’s love”? Is it your tendency to anger, jealousy, or gossip? Perhaps it’s a lie about yourself that you have internalized, such as, “I can never be good at that,” or “I’ll never stop doing that.” By knowing the enemy, we can be more vigilant, and we can better fight back, and protect ourselves.

For example, I’m rarely tempted by lust, but anger -- especially when partnered with some sense of injustice -- whoa, that will set me off! So, I’ve learned to recognize that anger and step back. Now, whatever our particular enemies might be, they come from three possible sources: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

A second part of preparing for obstacles is simply to strive for holiness. We’ve discussed this in previous lesson segments. When we’re not enduring heavy obstacles, it’s usually easier to be faithful to prayer and our duties in the midst of the day-to-day obstacles. By following the principles we mentioned earlier -- such as prayer, sacraments, spiritual disciplines -- we will build up our spiritual strength. This is taking the offense in preparation for the battle when it comes later, in various obstacles and trials.

Putting in the effort now, we are like the “wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock” (Mt 7:24-25).

What do we do when great difficulties finally arrive? Here are some helpful tips:

Number one: As before, know your enemies. When you know your enemies, it is that much easier to recognize an attack when it comes. Whatever your situation, identify the source of the problem. What from the world or the flesh is leading you to temptation? Keep in mind that the devil may be involved as well. Identify the enemy and treat it as such. Do not be deceived into treating enemies as friends.

Number two: Prayerfully read the Book of Sirach, chapter 2. It begins with the words, “My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation,” and continues with powerful words of encouragement to persevere.

Number three: Pour out your heart to the Lord. Pray. Entrust your difficulties to Jesus. Ask Him for help. Ask Him especially for the Holy Spirit, and the virtues you need to overcome the obstacles: trust, courage, perseverance, faith,

and so on. Reading the Psalms prayerfully is a great way to do this. Another helpful way to pray is meditative prayer such as the rosary, divine mercy chaplet, or the Jesus prayer. These prayers help us to find calm and reorient ourselves towards the God who loves us. They can sometimes lead to meditative silence and contemplation, where you maintain loving attention on the Lord in silence. These moments are healing.

Number four: Go beyond identifying your enemies and define the precise temptation. Whatever it is, reject it and do the opposite. What does the world, the flesh, or the devil want you to do, or not do? If you identify the precise temptation, then it is easier to reject it before you give in and commit sin. Let's look at despair as an example. When you identify the temptation to give in to the feeling of despair, reject it and do the opposite — which is to stir up hope! Pray in your own words. "In the Name of Jesus, I reject despair! Jesus, you are my hope!" Follow with something like Psalm 143, which says, "Make haste to answer me, O Lord, my spirit fails... Let your good Spirit lead me on a level path..." Finally, do something proactive that expresses your hope, like taking a walk, doing work around the house, or calling a friend to make plans for the weekend. Something that expresses the conviction that life is worth living.

Number five: Turn to trusted friends—faithful Catholics—and tell them your troubles. I love the passage in Sirach that says, "A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter: he that has found one has found a treasure." It really is a great blessing to have a friend who shares your faith life. Someone you can go to for advice, encouragement, and prayer. In times of trouble go to them and ask for their help.

These are just some of the practical steps we can take as we progress on our spiritual journey. We expect and prepare for the obstacles that will come, and then take up the battle with courage and confidence once it arrives, knowing that by conquering the enemy, we will grow stronger in our relationship with Jesus.

How do we do spiritual battle for souls?

We introduced this lesson with the idea that "evangelization flows from the spiritual life." This is so important that we should repeat it. We cannot fulfill our mission as evangelists if we don't have a strong spiritual life. Saint Maximilian Kolbe confirmed this, when he wrote,

The conversion and sanctification of a soul has been, and shall always be, the work of divine grace. ... We attain grace for ourselves and for others through our humble prayers, our mortification, and our faithfulness in the fulfillment of our daily duties, including the most simple ones. The closer the soul is to God...the more effectively the soul shall be able to help others to attain divine grace. [And also] the faster and more abundantly shall its prayer be answered. ... Therefore, the value of every [evangelizing community] depends only and absolutely...on our interior life, on our personal closeness to the Immaculate [Virgin Mary] and, through her, to the Heart of Jesus.

Saint Maximilian is absolutely right. The external means of our evangelization — that is, what we do when we're out there — listen, befriend, proclaim, and invite, and so forth — are useless without the interior, spiritual power we've gained as we've grown in holiness.

How do we make use of the spiritual power more effectively? How do we wield it for the salvation of others? How do we use that power to do spiritual battle for souls? The example of Our Lord Jesus, going to His cross, sheds light on these questions. If we're already pursuing a strong spiritual life, let's consider three additional habits for doing spiritual battle for souls.

Number one: Develop a regular habit of interceding for those you evangelize, and for anyone else you know who may be far from God. Jesus Himself did this on the cross when He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they

do" (Lk 23:34). With the same heart of mercy, we ought to regularly—even daily—pray that Our Lord might open the hearts of others to the grace of faith, repentance, and salvation.

After all, final salvation is the first, most important need of every human being, and intercession for the conversion of others is the easiest, most basic habit of our spiritual battle for souls. It should be an important part of our prayer life.

The story I love is the story of St. Catherine of Siena, who had a relationship with a man who was on death row in prison. He was getting ready to be killed. And she kept praying for him and interceding for him and talking with him, and getting him so that he would convert and come back to the Church. And he did. And what ended up happening is, as he was going to the guillotine, he asked St. Catherine of Siena to join him, and she did. And she actually held his head as it was getting ready to be chopped off. And their conversation back and forth was beautiful. It says, in the book, that she kept telling him, "You're going to see Jesus today, you're going to see Jesus today." And it was her spiritual strength, her sacrifice, that helped his conversion, and then walked him — literally — walked him to heaven! I love that story.

Two recommended tools for this kind of intercession—our weapons for the battle—are the Rosary and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. I also use mass intentions and prayers after communion.

Number two: Develop a regular habit of making spiritual sacrifices for people as you intercede for them. Jesus went to His crucifixion intentionally. Out of the love of His merciful heart, He willingly made of Himself an offering to atone for our sins. He suffered and died for us. The book of Hebrews says that "for the joy that was set before [Jesus], he endured the cross, despising the shame." (Hebrews 12:2) Did you hear that? That means that Jesus counted as nothing the shame of the Cross. All He had in His heart was the joy of us before Him. He wanted us to be in heaven with Him! That's why He went to the Cross.

So, with the same heart of mercy, we should regularly make sacrifices for others — especially those we evangelize. Making a spiritual sacrifice with a heart of love adds strength to our intercession. A great way to sacrifice for others is abstaining from certain foods, or complete fasting, for a period of time. You may, for example, consume only bread and water for a week as a sacrifice for a friend who had an abortion and left the Church. Another way to sacrifice is to give extra alms to the poor as a spiritual offering on someone's behalf.

Yet another way is to spend an extended, sacrificial amount of time interceding for them—maybe 2 or 3 hours, or more. Also, we can offer up involuntary sufferings like illnesses and persecutions, uniting them to the Cross. Whenever we make a spiritual sacrifice for someone, we ought to keep that person in mind and intercede for them as we make that sacrifice.

I knew a group of seven young adults who were deeply concerned with a high school friend who seemed to be falling away from the Church and away from grace. Each of them picked a day of the week to fast so that their friend would be lifted up by prayer and fasting every day of the week. They kept up this regimen for a whole year, and they saw good fruits from it.

Number three: When interceding for others, embrace God's sorrow for them. When Jesus went to the Cross, He went with sorrow for sinful mankind—sorrow for the harm we inflict upon ourselves and our sins; sadness for the stubborn hardness of our hearts. We should join in this sorrow. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn." We should be sad and weep over the situation of those who are far from God, or do not know Him.

Like Jesus, we should "look straight into the face" of sin. We should unite ourselves with Jesus to such a degree that we see with His eyes, we feel it with His heart, and recognize sin for what it is: the thing that separates us from God for

eternity. If we recognize the great weight of sin that the Lord Jesus had to carry in going to His cross, we will be sad and weep.

I spent some time with Immaculee Ilibagiza in Rwanda, and she told me one of the stories of what happened during that genocide. She told me how she was face to face with the killer, and she looked at this killer, and all she could do was pray. She grabbed her rosary and she started to pray. But she didn't pray the way I thought she would, like, "Lord, deliver me from this killer!" She didn't. She had a heart that was filled with mercy. She recognized that there was evil in this man, but this man in front of her was also loved by God. She was very sad for that, and she felt it in her heart. So she prayed that the man would be delivered from the evil. And what happened next was amazing. They were looking eye to eye. After she prayed, he looked down, he sat down on the rock, and he dropped his machete, the same machete he would have used to kill her and the others that were with her. Because of her prayer, he was delivered from the evil, and then she was spared. That's a perfect example of someone that looks evil right in the face, and then looks for the mercy -- feels the sadness, and looks for the mercy of God.

If the tears of Jesus can pay the price of salvation, and we are the body of Christ, what spiritual value might our tears have (see Col 1:24)? A great way to grow in our sorrow for sin is to spend time meditating on sin, judgment, hell, or most especially, on the Cross of Jesus. These three habits can help us do powerful spiritual battle for the salvation of souls. The better we follow Jesus, the better instruments we become for the salvation of others.

Final Thoughts

It's been a pleasure to present this to you, and I hope that It's helped you in your spiritual journey. I challenge you to embrace your call to evangelization. It's the mission of the Church! Be no afraid. Let the Holy Spirit lead. Holy Spirit will always be there to help you in your mission. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, watch over everyone. Put souls in their path and give them the holy boldness to proclaim your love. Bless them with an abundance of blessings. In Jesus's Name we pray. Amen.

Thank you for watching!

Practical Activity

Thanks for watching Lesson 5. We hope you found this lesson enlightening. Now, we have three parts to your activity this time. First, if you haven't embraced the spiritual discipline of praying at the beginning and the end of the day, do it. Even if it's only for five or ten minutes in the morning, and then again in the evening. This is a very important foundation for your spiritual life.

Next, we want to give you a jump start or a power surge in the spiritual life. Set aside some time and spend one to three hours before the Blessed Sacrament in the church. Spend that time with the Lord, asking Him to guide you in your spiritual life. Ask Him what are the next steps that He has in mind for you to grow in your relationship with Him. Listen and be patient. Write down what comes to your mind and your heart, and begin to put those things into practice. Remember not to fall into the checklist mentality.

Third, we'd like you to begin to intercede for the salvation of souls. This should be a continual prayer intention for any evangelist. Begin to include this intention in your prayers every day in some form or another. Finally, I want to praise God for bringing you to this moment in your spiritual life. This is such an important step in our continual growth as disciples of our Lord Jesus. God bless you.