

STUDY

Recommended time: 30 minutes

I. Orientation

On the first day, the Grace talk told us about God's love for us, His plan of salvation and His desire to be in relationship with us. The Piety talk illustrated that our response to God's love for us is directing our lives to God. It is natural for the participants to want to know what will help them know God better. The goal of this talk is to suggest ways to be more conscious of our relationship with God and to seek His will for our lives.

As Christians, we will want to adapt the values of our faith to the values of our lives. This talk is a call to change our attitudes and to focus on making our relationship with God the first priority in our life. Maturity in faith comes from thoughtful study of the Bible. Faith gives us the ultimate reason for living and enables us to become effective apostles. This talk, through the witness of the speaker's study practices, should give us a model to imitate. God's plan is to transform everyone around us through the Holy Spirit. Through our study, our ability to see God's plan for us transforms our minds and hearts. This creates a desire to conform our lives to God's plan.

We become open:

- To changing ourselves through the study of God's word. This type of study helps us to know ourselves, and the Holy Spirit teaches us to be more Christ-like.
- To our God by recognizing when He is talking to us and what He is telling us. (Psalm 32:8)
- To the world by being aware of others and by sharing and bearing the burdens of our brothers and sisters. (Galatians 6:2)

In this talk we want to teach the participants how to discover all aspects of God through the study of His word.

The principle points of the talk are:

- Christian study is not the same as the study of Christianity.
- The principle source of study is the Bible.
- Everyone studies throughout life.
- There are obstacles to study.
- There are remedies to overcome these obstacles.

II. General Comments

The opening meditation of the second day is particularly important for the progression of the talks during this day. It presents Jesus as a person actually living among us today. He is the kind of person we can learn to know in the gospels. He is a leader worthy of following.

Study is the first talk of the second day. It is meant to explain Christian study and why it is needed. Participants now realize they live in grace but may not understand what that means. The Study talk is meant to inspire them to use the gift of their minds to learn how to live the life of grace and to accept the never-ending need to know God's will for them. The Piety talk presents the idea of directing one's whole life toward God. Study expands this to show the life of piety as a special way of life. It is necessary for the believer to study in order to know how to live as a Christian. The talk looks both backward and forward. It makes clear how study is a part of piety as a kind of prayer and a way of becoming more like Christ. Study is also directed toward action.

The purpose of study is to know God and His ideal, His plan for our life. It is a way of discerning and understanding God's will. It is not the study of facts but the study of a God who reveals Himself in His word. Through study we get to know God and learn what He wants for us. A person knowing, loving and serving God will need to change his/her life to conform to God's plan.

In our study, we spend time with God listening to Him, talking with Him and being with Him as a friend. The practices of piety make us more aware of God and deepen our relationship with Him. We study what God expects of a Christian and how to bring our lives more in line with His ideal. In other words, if a person spends time making a sincere effort to know, love and serve God, s/he will become more Christ-like and find it easier to respond to others with His love.

Study presents the second leg of the tripod that was introduced in the Piety talk. Picking up the theme from the Ideal and Piety talks, Section I reminds participants that human beings are the crowning achievement of creation. Each person is created in the image and likeness of God and is meant to direct his/her whole life toward God. Piety, study and apostolic action are the three elements of a life in Christ.

Section II presents the definition of study as the search for a life in grace. The purpose of Christian study is the search for God's truth in our lives.

Section III shows that the need to search for God's plan through study is never-ending. God wants us to live a life of friendship with Him. Our humanness requires that we study to achieve and maintain this relationship as we search for the truth in all of life. The more we learn, the more we want to know.

Section IV presents the objectives of study. It is a summation of the first three sections, addressing the objectives of study as a call to holiness -- to be set apart and consecrated to God. Study is presented as a call to live in obedience to God's plan. Even though short, it is a key section of the talk.

Section V deals with the various ways a person may study by giving practical ideas that will be helpful. It is important to emphasize that a believer needs more than natural ability and written resources to study. "Comprehending the things of God does not come solely through men's senses, but God reveals them by His Spirit." (I Corinthians 2:13) We do not have to be a scholar to understand God's Word when the Holy Spirit is our teacher.

Sections VI and VII cover the many obstacles to study and the remedies for those obstacles and excuses. The Christian ideal presents a proper perspective to help overcome the obstacles to study.

Section VIII offers study resources. The basic definition of study is expanded to show how many ways participants can study. Prayer and meditation are used to assist participants to put on the mind of Christ as they experience life.

Section IX summarizes the main theme, challenging the participants to use study to transform their minds and hearts and conform their lives to our ideal, Christ.

III. Suggestions for Writing this Talk

This talk will answer questions the participants have following the Piety talk and the first meditation of the morning. The fundamental question is: How do I find the path to God? Some feel the desire to answer the call of God; others are not there yet. Whatever the participant's state of readiness, the Study talk provides direction as participants seek to follow God's call for the rest of their lives.

Learning how to study is a key to discovering the way of Christ. The talk must not be a

dry, intellectual talk on knowledge or a review of the best Christian books that have inspired the speaker. This talk is a call to experience Christ through the reading of God's word and through the Holy Spirit with the purpose of changing our hearts and minds. With God's word in our hearts and minds, we can face life boldly and live up to our full potential. This presents a challenge to each participant to change his/her life.

The speaker's search for God should shine through as s/he demonstrates his/her methods of study. The speaker must be living the study method presented and give witness to a personal, living search for knowledge of God. The witness should be simple, objective and calm, presented with assurance and strength, and presented simply as a statement of fact. The speaker need not be an authority or an intellectual, but must be someone who lives his/her daily life with study not only as a basic foundation, but also applying God's word to daily life.

The basic purpose of the talk is to show the path leading to a lifetime of growth and learning -- becoming friends of God and daily reaching toward the created potential given us by our Father. The talk reaches a peak in the short section IV in the objectives of study.

The talk does not stress how to read books, but rather concentrates on the attitude brought to study. While books and formal knowledge are important, it is more important that the participant hear that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17) Martin Luther said, "The Bible is the cradle of Christ; it holds Christ on every page." Therefore we experience Jesus and His redemptive power through study. Daily study helps us discover the riches of God's word. This causes a profound change in our hearts and minds. The speaker's study life is the witness for this talk. This talk also prepares the participants for the third day talk, The Study and Evangelization of Environments.

IV. The Atmosphere of the Weekend

There is a wide range of feelings at this time. Many participants have been touched by the general palanca. Most will respond to God's call by the end of the Sacraments talk later in the morning. Nearly everyone will feel the pull of God, but responses will be mixed. Do not look for a visible change in participant's emotions. Each will seek God in his/her individual way. The purpose is to stir the participant's desire to seek the road to God and to begin the daily process of study in order to search for His will.

This point in the weekend may be a crossroads for participants. They have been refreshed with a night's sleep but have also been exposed to much food for thought. They may have unanswered questions and/or high hopes coupled with fear. They may be attracted to the lifestyle they have seen but also doubtful that it could be real. Participants are struggling with many questions about how or whether this is possible for them. It is important that study is portrayed as a means to answer these questions, a means to achieve this new lifestyle.

STUDY OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

This is the second leg of the tripod of piety, study and apostolic action. The Church needs believers who base their apostolic action on piety and direct it through study.

- A. The Christian ideal gives purpose and meaning to life. Christians who desire to live the Christian ideal will intellectually accept the idea and move to act upon it with their full potential. This ideal includes piety (giving our heart), study (giving our mind), and apostolic action (giving our energy).
- B. A Christian directs his/her whole life to God. Jesus is the living example of the Christian ideal.
- C. All people study. What we study is determined by our ideal. Study is our ability to reason and decide. Study is more than reading books or going to school. When we study, we gather information and use life's experiences to make choices that affect our whole lives.
- D. Study is the search for truth. Since we believe that God is part of our lives and He is our ideal, then His way, His truth and His life must be the subject of our study as we search for the truth -- Jesus Christ, our Lord.

II. DEFINITION

- A. Study is applying our minds to learn the truth. (dictionary definition)
- B. Christian study is the process of learning to know, love and respond to God's truth. This enables us to reach our potential as His children.
- C. There are many forms of study. Even those who do not like to read can study. We can learn from music, art, Bible on tapes, etc. Give an example.

III. THE NEED FOR STUDY

Study is not an option. It is a necessity and an obligation if we are to rise to the challenge of reaching our potential. It opens us to God and enables our faith to penetrate every aspect of life.

- A. Study is a part of God's natural order. It is our inner nature searching for knowledge. God expects us to develop the potential He gave us. We all have undeveloped talents God wants us to use. The parable of the talents illustrates the strength of God and His desire for us to use what He has given us. (Matthew 25:14-30)
- B. Study is our obligation as believers to know the truth. God calls us to knowledge of Him. It leads us to Christian growth and maturity.
 1. A childhood level of knowledge is not adequate. (I Corinthians 13:11)
 2. Even Jesus "grew steadily in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:52)
 3. Truth is never revealed unless we are open to it. Jesus assures us that our search will be fruitful. He asked the Father to reveal the truth to His disciples. (John 17:7,26) Once we receive it, the truth makes us free. (John 8:31-32)
- C. Study is necessary to know God.
 1. We are called to friendship with God. Friendship with someone is impossible without knowing the person.

2. The knowledge that promotes friendship is a living knowledge, not just the facts or things we can recite. It comes from spending time with Him and listening to Him.
 3. This type of knowledge is not taught in a book or a course. It evolves from living our life in union with God.
 4. Only through knowing God can we find meaningful answers to all the questions of our lives. Who am I? What am I doing? Where am I going?
- D. Study includes our obligation to society to share His truth.
1. It must be shared. (II Timothy 3:16-17)
 2. We, as Christians, are not just to go to church on Sunday but become enthusiastic followers, active leaven, basing our lives in the truth, and working to transform the world so Jesus is present to people we meet. In other words, we live what we learned in God's word: "Be fruitful."

IV. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- A. Study is not an end in itself; it is a means to live the Christian life in its fullness.
- B. Study directs our life to Christ, our ideal. This requires a profound change:
 1. To inform our minds.
 2. To transform our hearts.
 3. To conform our lives to Christ.
- C. Study insures that this change of mind and heart, the desire to be Christ-like, is progressive and on going.

This would be an appropriate place to share a brief personal example of how study has made Christ and the life of grace more real and alive to you.

V. METHODS OF STUDY

- A. The importance of a relationship with God in Christian study.
 1. Begin with prayer. There is an intimate relationship between prayer and study. We become closer to God when we devote ourselves to study. It deepens our relationship with God. We discover His power in our study. An hour of study can be an hour of prayer.
 2. Pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit to speak to you through God's word. As we study scripture, God speaks to us and directs our actions to follow His will. (John 14:26)
 3. Jesus' spirit touches us through study. Some of us have had spiritual experiences while we were studying that brought us closer to God and made what we were studying more real for us.
- B. Develop a personal study plan.
 1. Study is a personal process, not a mechanical one.
 2. Set aside a designated time to study.
 3. It is important to emphasize that revelation comes from the Holy Spirit who is our teacher. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we learn to discern truth.
 4. Pray and study daily to deepen your awareness of God's plan for your life. Outline ways to begin a study program. Reflection, self-examination and prayer must be used if study is to be Christian study. Share how you study and the format you use, pointing out that this is just one way to study, not the only way.

A short example of the kinds of personal spiritual experiences and/or benefits found in study would be helpful in this section.

VI. OBSTACLES TO STUDY

- A. Materialism. We spend our time and resources gathering things. We are so busy making money and accumulating possessions that we do not study.
- B. Busy-ness. We choose to spend our time doing other things and do not take the time to study.
- C. Pride. We believe we know enough to guide our lives without study. We want to be in control.
- D. Fear. We are afraid of change and failure. We may be afraid we will not be able to understand or successfully complete a study. We may be afraid to face our doubts and not realize that this can mature our faith. We may deny our God-given gifts and fear how/if they may be used by God.
- E. Indifference. Do not care attitude. We do not think we need to study. We are satisfied with the status quo.
- F. Laziness. Lack of motivation.

VII. REMEDIES TO OBSTACLES

- A. Prayer. Seek God's direction in the process of change.
- B. Dedication. Make and live the decision to seek God's will. Break the chains of material wants in favor of the desire to be a child of God.
- C. Prioritize. Free yourself from your worldly passions to give yourself time to study. Pay attention to what is really important -- your relationship with God.
- D. Humility. Recognize you are nothing without God, but God has made you something. When you act in humility, God gives you wisdom. (I Peter 5:5)
- E. Courage. Live with faith and trust in God's plan regardless of the consequences. Use God's power and let Him guide and strengthen you.
- F. Discipline. Form good study habits and stick to them.

VIII. RESOURCES

- A. The Holy Bible is the foundation of all Christian study. It is God's guide for our lives. If you want to know more about God, there is no better resource.
- B. Study guides offer practical helps.
 1. Bible commentaries, handbooks, dictionaries, etc.
 2. Devotional Books.
- C. Other resources: Study groups and Bible studies, lectures, Christian courses, tapes, videos, CDs, DVDs, Internet, etc. There are good and bad examples in each category. We need discernment to sort out the best.
- D. We can also discern God's will in the signs of the times -- media, arts, and events of life.

Do not waste time reading good books. Read only the best.

IX. CONCLUSION

- A. The aim of study is the search for God's truth. It is revealed to us in the Scriptures. When we direct our whole life to Christ, (piety), we grow in wisdom. (James 1:5)
- B. Out of gratitude for what He has done for us, we want to know Him better. That happens through study. The result is:
 - 1. Our minds are informed.
 - 2. Our hearts are transformed.
 - 3. Our lives are conformed to Christ, our ideal.
- C. As we study to know about God, we learn to love Him, discern His will for our lives and desire to serve Him.

CLARIFICATION OF THE STUDY OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

This talk presents the second leg of the tripod of Piety, Study and Apostolic Action.

- A. Study expands on the Ideal talk, which presented the purpose of human existence and each person's need to reach his/her potential. Here we remind the participants that our aim this weekend is to reveal the authentic ideal and to allow each person to discover, or begin to discover, his/her role in God's plan. Piety fills our hearts with the life of Christ. Study fills our minds with the gift of God's word. Apostolic Action is sharing the love of Christ that is in our hearts and the word of God that is in our minds.
The participants heard in the Piety talk that piety is directing our whole life to God. Study becomes an important means to achieve that goal. Study compliments piety as it nurtures our relationship with God. Study helps us identify the Christian ideal: life with Jesus Christ. As we seek an increasingly intimate relationship with God, a friendship with Him, it will change us. We use study to apply our minds to learn the truth. We will then want to share this with others in apostolic action.
- B. Living a life of grace is the Christian ideal. A life modeled after Jesus fulfills all the criteria of the Christian ideal. Via de Cristo teaches us how to live a Christ-centered life. In the Study talk, we stress the intimate relationship between prayer and study. Our task is to establish His love and peace in the world.
- C. Everyone studies. A blue-collar worker researches unions, wages, working conditions. A professional reads specialty journals and attends conferences. A secretary studies the entire office operation, especially the boss. An artist observes people to capture life's moods in song, painting and dance. A mother monitors her children's needs, wants, moods and patterns of behavior. A sports fan knows his/her heroes' statistics and accomplishments.

We use our ability to think, to reason and to ponder. Our ideal affects what we choose to study. Study is more than book reading; it is participating in and observing life. Books are only the opinions or expressions of what the authors have observed or thought. Anytime a person decides to do anything in a better way, study is an integral part of that process.

We are developing a new concept to most of the participants. For most of them, study reminds them of school and homework, something many were glad to leave behind. This section aims to dispel the dry, dusty image of study and replace it with a vibrant image, the constant search for the meaning of life itself, the most

basic question of humanity. This moves study to a new dimension. Study can be exciting. We will be repeating this theme throughout the talk in various ways, as it sets the tone for this entire phase of the weekend.

- D. Study is the search for truth. If we claim that God is our ideal, then His truth, His way, His plan for our lives should be part of our study. Jesus' life gives us a model for living the Christian ideal. God calls us to walk with Him and to realize our potential. God calls us to embrace the perfect ideal -- one without ending, yet one within reach, for Jesus said, "Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) Our relationship with God must be the decisive factor in our lives. Everyone is called to deepen his/her understanding of God. Everyone must learn according to his/her God-given potential and talent in order to become perfect as the Father calls us to be. (Ephesians 4:24)

II. DEFINITION

- A. The dictionary defines study as "application of the mind to the acquisition of knowledge as by reading, investigation or reflection." We use our minds to learn. In this talk we use a broader definition of study as any learning process or a search for truth.
- B. Christian study is the process of learning to know, to love and to respond to God's truth. In this light, study becomes a desirable concept. Our existence is a mystery. It makes sense only in the radical nature of God's love for us. We begin to understand His love and live in that love through Christian study. His gift to us is radical -- salvation through the sacrifice of His Son. Genuine understanding of that gift results in a desire to live for Him and to achieve our full potential. The desire to understand the meaning of life is fundamental.
- C. There are many forms of study. Everyone can study, even those who do not like to read. The Bible, Christian books, music, classes, videos, the Internet and art are all sources for searching out the fundamental essentials of life. You must pray for discernment since there is good and bad material in each medium.

Simple examples here can help clarify the broad nature of our meaning of study. The examples need to deal with ordinary life and touch a deeper meaning in our search for truth. Use recent examples from the newspaper, magazines, Internet or media showing the variety of sources for study. One or two of the examples could be expanded so that each becomes an example of study as integrated in the pursuit of the authentic ideal of becoming all we can be.

III. THE NEED FOR STUDY

Study is not an option. Study is a necessity and an obligation as we attempt to develop our God-given potential. This builds on the theme from the Ideal talk that all people are created to fulfill their potential. This is a life-long effort that few people reach. Jesus' demand for our time and energy is not just something extra we are to do, but this effort must be an integral part of our lives.

- A. Study is a part of God's natural order for humanity. The inquisitive nature of our mind causes us to study. Our intellect must be used to become proficient. God involves us in the creative process, and He expects us to develop our natural potential. Our vocations in life demand study and knowledge.

Life is exciting. We all have many undeveloped talents that God wants us to use. Refer to Matthew 25:14-30, the parable of the talents. If we realize that we are made in the image of God and have His help, how can we fail or be afraid to use our talents?

God created us for perfection. He created us to share Himself with us and to help us reach this goal. The parable of the talents illustrates the strength of God's desire for us to use what He has given us. However, it takes effort on our part. If we sit and do nothing, we will be like the servant who hid his talent so that it wouldn't get lost. It is our choice, our freedom, but why would we say no?

B. Study is a Christian obligation to know the truth. In our baptism, God calls us to be a part of His family. Through study, we realize that we are made in God's image and that He chose us. We are a part of His perfect order and we have an obligation to follow His word, to serve and praise Him. We must exercise our choice to study. As Christians, it is our privilege to search and discover who He is and who we are in His plan, growing and maturing in faith.

1. A childhood faith is not enough. I Corinthians 13:11 reminds us that as we mature, we must develop a deeper faith. We cannot be satisfied with a child-like or teenage level knowledge of God. If we expect to live as God's friends, we will mature beyond childhood levels.
2. After Jesus' family trip to Jerusalem for the Passover when he was twelve, scripture reports that He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." (Luke 2:53) In the same way, we must continue to grow as adults. Sunday School and Christian Education are not just for children. Our faith must continue to grow and mature throughout our lives.
3. Study requires that we be open to it. For us to grow in knowledge of God requires that we search. Jesus assures us that our search will be fruitful. He asked the Father to reveal the truth to His disciples. (John 17:7,26) Once we receive the truth, it makes us free (John 8:31-32), free to be who God created us to be.

C. Study is necessary to know God.

1. The study that promotes this friendship with God requires that we live in grace and grow in knowledge of God and ourselves. Grace is friendship with God. Through study we get to know God. Through lack of study, people have grown apart from God and even rejected Him. Referring to such people, Jesus proclaimed, "They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me." (John 16:3) For us to grow in knowledge of God requires that we search His word and spend time with Him. Friendship with someone is impossible without knowing him/her. If we are to be God's friends, we will want to put at least as much effort into knowing Him as we do into knowing our friends and studying things that are of vital interest to us in other parts of our lives. Jesus told us, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3) Jesus assures us that our search will be fruitful, for He told the Father that He had revealed Him to the disciples and they accepted everything that came from the Father. (John 17:6-8) We can know God through knowing Jesus.
2. Friendship is a living knowledge. Our knowledge of God and His creation must spring from a living relationship with God. It is not just facts or rote

prayers. Spending time with God and listening to Him are necessary conditions for friendship with Him. This is what prayer is all about. Here we have the full circle of faith. If we are to gain eternal life then we must know God. (John 17:3) To know God takes time--time to learn and grow into what God wants us to be.

To develop a deep relationship with Jesus requires firm commitment and a willingness to stand strong and to make choices that may not be popular. When we do not know how to handle our daily life, we can turn to our relationship with our Heavenly Father. (Hebrews 4:12)

3. This does not happen overnight, nor is it taught from a book or in a short course. This knowledge evolves from living our life in relationship with God. St. Paul discusses his spiritual growth in Galatians 1:11-24. Many of us are aware of Paul's missionary journeys and his preaching the gospel in far parts of the known world. What many of us do not realize is that he spent thirteen years learning and growing in his relationship with God before he was sent. It is the same for us. A mature faith does not appear overnight. Study must become part of our daily routine. It is part of becoming a child of God.
 4. It is normal to search for the answers to life's deep questions: Who am I? What am I doing? Where am I going? What is truth? Why am I here? How does God want me to live? Only through God can we find meaningful answers to these questions. The Church has long recognized the necessity of each individual coming to grips with personal salvation. (II Timothy 3:16-17)
- D. Study includes our obligation to society to share His truth. Salvation is a uniquely individual experience, but we are to live in community, fully involved in the world, living in society and being a Christian influence in our environments. We are to be the bearer of Christ, to be saints in this time and place. Studying scripture equips us for this.
1. If we love our brothers and sisters, and we must if we claim to love God, then we will have a commitment to share God and His plan of salvation with them. We will recognize more and more that each person is made in God's image. Everyone is searching for meaning and truth, not only us. We must study, taking time to learn and grow into our purpose in God. We are encouraged to share Christ with others.
In the Beatitudes Jesus showed that He understood the struggles of life. He presented a way to handle the everyday issues of life in a new way. They guide us in handling problems we face in our daily life, for example: money, power, and relationships. These are things that we decide every day.
 2. If we love others as Christ loves us, we will feel their pain and agony. It will be our deepest desire to ease their hurts, as Jesus did when he wept over Jerusalem. We will want to do something. Thus, the circle is completed. Our daily renewal of baptism results in a deepening relationship with God, moving from piety to study to apostolic action, then back to piety, always growing and never ending. This is the life cycle meant for all of us by our creator God.

The Study talk precedes the Apostolic Action talk. Here we present the necessity of discovering and knowing God. In the Apostolic Action talk we illustrate that the mature person is the one who is self-giving. "Whoever loves God must also love his brother [or sister]." (I John 4:20-21)

IV. OBJECTIVES TO STUDY

- A. The purpose of study is not knowledge alone. It is a means to help us live the life of grace, not just be someone who does Christian things. In our worldly environment we seek specialized training, college education, and graduate degrees. People who have spent years in school or various forms of study may confuse the study of Christianity with Christian study.
- B. Study directs our life to Christ.
 - 1. Study informs our minds. Building on the Piety talk, the directing of one's whole life to God requires study to discover and discern how to live the life of grace in friendship with God. It is also what God has called us to do. Living the life of grace requires that we grow in knowledge of God and ourselves. This is a daily discipline that does not necessarily bring a rapid change. Through study we discover and discern the path of God for us, allowing us to put on the mind of Christ.
 - 2. Study transforms our hearts. We are called to be saints. Our faith penetrates the deepest aspects of our personality, creating a radical change in the way we think. Study is an extension of our piety. It moves from head knowledge to integrating these truths into all aspects of our lives. It moves from our head to our heart. We are called to be saints, forgiven sinners.
 - 3. Through study we seek to conform our lives to the Christian ideal, a life in Christ. Through a profound change of mind and heart, we experience the mind and heart of Jesus, joining ourselves with God and allowing His concerns to become ours. Our spirits soar, catching the possibilities of life and fulfilling the promise implied in our being created in God's image.
- C. Study is not a one-time experience. It is a process, a continual program. Like Christ, we must grow "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:52) This continuous conversion of self is available to every person through God's grace and mercy.

This is an appropriate place for the speaker to share an example of how study has made Christ and the life of grace more real and alive to him/her.

V. METHODS OF STUDY

- A. Preparation.

Christian study differs from secular study in purpose and also in preparation. Non-Christian study might undertake to learn all there is to learn about Christianity, the Church, its goals, its history, the life of its members, etc., but that does not fulfill the Via de Cristo concept of Christian study. A person filled with the life of Christ, while even lacking the ability to read or write, could fulfill our concept of Christian study while the scholar may not. Christian study involves developing a personal relationship with the triune God.

 - 1. Begin study with prayer. Spending time with God and listening to Him is what prayer really is. This is a necessary condition for friendship with Him, just as spending time with any friend deepens the relationship. Christian study is the interrelationship of prayer and study. It is searching for the truth and learning to discern the will of God through prayer and study of His word. Christian study includes a search for knowledge and understanding, but goes beyond that

to demand that the Christian take this knowledge and understanding and let it permeate and change his/her daily life on an ongoing basis. The person I am today should not be the person I am tomorrow, for by tomorrow I will have changed and grown a bit more toward my ideal in Christ. I will have learned something in the deepest sense of the meaning of learning.

2. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through God's word. When we pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our study, we have a special and powerful teacher. (John 14:26) The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see the world through God's eyes. It can bring us to an awareness of God's presence and loving care that nothing else can surpass.
3. Jesus becomes more real to us as we study scripture. As the early apostles relied on the power of God and not on earthly things, we are also to rely on the power of God through Jesus. It gives us strength to face the temptations of everyday life and the courage to reach out to others. Many have been touched in a special way during their study. For instance, Jesus' healing power is available to those with open hearts.

B. Develop a personal study plan.

Only if we are truly free in Christ can we learn to live the life of grace. This freedom is important, but many people mistake freedom for license to do what pleases them, not what pleases God. Choosing God's way is personally motivated and comes from within.

1. This is a personal, not a mechanical process. You must seek God's direction for a plan of study that will work for you and then put that plan into action. To be a new creation, we must allow God to work in us. (Ephesians 4:23-24)
2. Set aside a designated time to study. This may require a change in your routine. Select a time when you know you are able to follow through with your plan.
3. Our revelation comes from the Holy Spirit who is our teacher. (John 14:26) As the Holy Spirit works to reshape our conscience, we can no longer lie to ourselves. It is in the silence of self-awareness that pride and all the other excuses and obstacles mentioned in the next section are overcome. Often self-examination is the key that takes intellectual learning and moves it into the heart. This learning can then change our lives. (Romans 2:15-16)
As the Holy Spirit reshapes the conscience, believers become aware that the proper response to God's love is to love God and neighbor. The more the conscience grows, the more we are aware of the needs of others and the more we will want to meet those needs. The Holy Spirit guides us but does not force us to do things against our will. God calls us to serve Him in spirit and in truth. We are moved by conscience, but we are under no compulsion. Jesus is our example. Jesus wrestled with himself in the wilderness and in Gethsemane but did not waver from obeying God. God does not coerce people. We are to be guided by our own judgment and are to enjoy the freedom of making our own choices.
4. Pray and study daily to deepen the awareness of God's plan for our lives. Reflection on life allows us to see the hand of God in daily events. Jesus made a point to dialogue with people throughout his public ministry, i.e. Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, and the Samaritan Woman. He wants to dialogue with each of us

also. Scripture is the source of all truth and must be the backbone of a Christian study program. The use of scripture brings us face to face with God. He speaks directly to our souls as we meditate and reflect on our life as revealed by scripture. It must become the anchor around which we build our lives. In studying scripture we learn to discern truth from error as we face the daily challenges of our lives. Discernment is found in dialogue with and in quiet reflection on scripture and in sharing with others who are mature in faith and can help to guide us.

This section is critical in explaining the new process of study. The stress on life and life situations as being a key to Christian study prepares the way for the Apostolic Action talk later and, in particular, for The Study and Evangelization of Environments talk on Sunday. The concepts are new and may be startling to many participants. This section clearly spells out that the sources of study are based on the goals of study--life in grace. It is vital to know and use all the facets of learning in a new way in order to become a new person. The goal of study is to "put on the mind of Christ" in order to change our mentality, day after day. This requires a new approach to study and its sources.

The traditional sources of study are given a relatively minor place -- books, courses and magazines, for instance. These sources should not be neglected, but approached in a new way. The goal in using these sources is not just obtaining knowledge, but sharing insights the author has gained through study. All study must be handled differently and examined against events of our life so they can contribute to our changing mentality.

Our attitude toward study is not a pursuit of intellectual satisfaction; rather it is searching for truth and developing an intimate relationship with Jesus as our friend. This friendship is ever changing, molding us to be more like Him. Grace transforms study into a love affair. We never want to stop getting closer to Him. (Colossians 2:2-3) Reflection, self-examination and prayer must be present if study is to be Christian study.

A short example of the kinds of personal spiritual benefits found in study would be helpful here. (See the outline.)

VI. OBSTACLES TO STUDY

Participants may leave the weekend with good intentions, determined to increase their study and practice of piety, only to find that they are buried in the expectations of the world they returned to. Then excuses and guilt emerge, discouraging them and perhaps even leading them to turn from God.

Life is difficult. We are continually faced with temptations and decisions. Following God is more difficult than finding God. The trials and problems we face in life can discourage the most dedicated Christian. This section is meant to attack the root causes of these problems. Excuses are just that--excuses. These sections (VI and VII) lead the participants to see a need for support to help them with their commitments to direct their lives to God. Group Reunion, Ultreya and spiritual direction will be introduced to them on Sunday. These sections will weaken their resistance to actually working on a program of study. By analyzing their motives, the speaker shows problems that may be keeping Christians from study. Not taking the extra step will result in a stagnant life. Daily discipline is required to mature in faith.

- A. Materialism: We cannot escape being a part of our culture, which bombards us with its materialistic values and makes it easy to forget our true purpose in life. Materialism sees things as more important than people. Even after seeing the truth,

it is not easy to go against one of the tenets of a capitalistic society, and we may not be motivated to change. Is the accumulation of things keeping you from study?

- B. Busy-ness: Life is full of things to do. Many of these activities, even worthwhile ones, take us away from spending time with God in study. How many of them are in pursuit of materialism or pleasure rather than a relationship with God? Take a look at your habits. Which of them reflect the presence of Jesus in your life?
- C. Pride: Pride claims: “I know it all!” There is an element of over-confidence or over-estimating one’s experience and knowledge. Pride engenders an attitude of self-sufficiency. It may lead to boasting. It keeps us from the fulfillment of our potential and the giving of ourselves. It is not surrendering all that we are to God and letting Him make of us what He wants. (Isaiah 50:11)
- D. Fear: Study of God’s Word will result in a challenge to change. People fear change. Some believe that they will fail the challenge, will suffer a loss of their faith or be condemned. Others fear they will not understand the Bible and do not want to experience failure. Still others may fear that the Lord will call them to something that they do not want to do. To fear is to doubt your faith.

Another form of fear is false humility. Many people think of themselves as worth very little. Such denial of one’s capabilities or worth provides a handy excuse not to study. They sell themselves short, believing they are not able to accept the challenge of becoming a fully Christian person.

- E. Indifference: Indifference is an attitude of “Who cares?” Indifference may manifest itself as an attitude of unwillingness to let go and let God come in. This may be an attitude: “I don’t want to get involved” or “I don’t care.” This attitude sees no reason to study.
- F. Laziness: Laziness is a lack of motivation often expressed in the words: “I’d really like to, but I just do not have the time.” This is an excuse. If we really want to do something, we find the time to do it. Saying, “I don’t have the time to study” is saying, “I don’t really want to.”

The obstacles and excuses mentioned here may be felt or spoken by those who desire to know God better but fail to take that extra step. The result is a stagnant Christian who does not progress to the full potential described by Jesus. After a period of months or a few years, there is generally a drifting away from God and a retreat back to the old life. We must remember that the goal of Via de Cristo is the beginning or continuation of a life-long process of growth and commitment. Christian maturity requires change and growth.

VII. REMEDIES FOR THE OBSTACLES

- A. Prayer. Spending time reflecting on our study, allowing ourselves to be confronted by the word of God in order to change our lives. Through prayer and meditation we gain greater understanding and direction for our lives. (Psalm 1:2)
- B. Dedication: Make a decision to study and remain steadfast in your determination to find God’s will for you. God promised to take care of our needs. A life of grace requires love of God and neighbor, not “keeping up with the Joneses.” Material possessions, the accumulation of things or money, must not guide our lives. Recall the challenge at the end of the Ideal talk: Where do your thoughts, your free time and your extra money go? This is your ideal.

- C. Prioritize. Make study a priority in your life. Many people waste time because they do not prioritize their time and efforts. Pay attention to what is really important. “I don’t have time” indicates that you really do not want to. Your relationship with God must be important enough to take time to study.
- D. Humility: Recognize that we are nothing apart from God; also that God has made us something. Low self-esteem is contrary to the idea that we are made in the image and likeness of God and that we are called to share a life with Him. We never stop growing or knowing God on a deeper level. Proverbs 11:2 and Philippians 2:1-9 give us descriptions of humility.
- E. Courage: We stand with courage to face our fear, to do what is right in spite of the ways of the world. (I Corinthians 16:13)
- F. Discipline: Form good habits, especially that of study. The first step is to decide to live a life of study. We must make this commitment and stick to it.

VIII. RESOURCES

In this talk the traditional sources of study are given a relatively minor place. Our goal in studying these sources is obtaining the knowledge and the insights of the author of the book, course or magazine. The new approach to study given in this talk means that even these traditional sources of study must be handled differently.

- A. The Holy Bible is the foundation of all Christian study. (Luke 21:33) As the source of all truth, the Bible brings us face to face with God. Meditation and reflection allow His word directly into our souls. The power of God’s word changes our attitudes and our lives. God gave us the Bible to guide our lives and to learn to discern His will. Daily study is encouraged and recommended. Comparing the passage you are studying in different translations of the Bible may be helpful.
- B. Study guides
 - 1. Study guides generally assist us in the study of portions of the Bible. They can be found in books, on tapes, on CD ROMS, on the Internet, in Christian bookstores, in churches and even in superstores.
 - 2. Devotional books are a daily mini study giving us a little lesson in life. They can assist us in some aspect of our Christian lives, like prayer, service or witness. Devotional books are useful additions to our study but do not take the place of the study of God’s word.
- C. Through study groups, lectures and Christian courses, we have access to the interpretations, ideas and comments of others. As we learn to discern between the truth and error, we have the advantage of sharing our questions and concerns. Discernment is clearer through dialogue with other mature Christians who help and guide us.
- D. We also discern God’s truth in the signs of the times.
 - 1. Newspapers, radio, television, the Internet, etc. communicate information, putting us in touch with the world and its problems. We want to discover the will of God in daily life.
 - 2. Movies, theaters and literature not only transmit a message from the writers but, in addition, reflect the mentality of our time and help us to understand what society is thinking.
 - 3. Reflections on life events allow us to see the hand of God in daily events. Christ made a point to converse with people all through His public life.

Do not waste time reading good books; read only the best.

Be careful not to suggest specific books other than the Bible even if you have found them beneficial. The best direction is to advise the participants to consult with his/her pastor or spiritual director regarding the best books to include in a program of study.

IX. CONCLUSION

- A. Christian study is a search for God's truth, His plan for our lives, as revealed in the scriptures. The goal is an active, growing Christian life. (Colossians 2:2-3) The more we put on the mind of Christ, the more we will grow in wisdom. (James 1:5)
- B. Because we realize more fully what God has done for us, we come to Him with a thankful heart and want to know Him better.
 - 1. The goal of study is to put on the mind of Christ. This requires a new approach to study and its sources. Through study we seek the truth. In doing so, we continually grow closer to the mind of Christ.
 - 2. The study of God's word will transform our hearts. Genuine love and knowledge of God results in love and compassion for our neighbor.
 - 3. Through this process, we conform our lives to Christ, our ideal. The Father has called us to this. Living a Christian life requires that we use all of our gifts to serve God.
- C. Study is the way to grow in faith. Being faithful is more important than learning facts. Study is not complete without piety, and study rounds out piety. The aim of study is to find the truth, a constant changing of our mentality so that we put on the mind of Christ. The Father has called us to perfection, and we can never reach perfection unless we utilize every part of our humanity. We are to grow not only in age, but also in wisdom -- the wisdom of God.