

Living Real, Living Deep

A Course Using Life Experiences, Spiritual Practice

and the New Testament

**Greenbelt Community Center
Senior Classroom
15 Crescent Road
Saturdays, 3:30-5 PM
February 5 - March 25, 2000**

*(First 3 sessions were also held
Wednesday evenings at a
different location.)*

Core Ministry Team:

John Smallwood

Bill Samuel

Jackie Phillmore-Antoine

**Friends in Christ
6006 Greenbelt Rd., Suite 110
Greenbelt, MD 20770
Voice Mail: (301) 773-8007
Email: friendsinchrist@mail.com
Web: <http://www.fic.uni.cc/>**

Living Real, Living Deep

Welcome to a journey into reality and wholeness.

Does our life sometimes feel shallow, lonely and unreal? How many times have you kept quiet, hiding your true self, fearing your compassion would be seen as weakness? How many times have you succumbed to following the world's values when you sensed they were hollow? How many times have you felt separated from others? By your own desires for pleasure? By your own concept of your self? How can you grow into deeper truth, compassion and unity with God and other people?

These questions plague all of us. Jesus is the answer if we let him into our lives. In this course, Jesus is the teacher and healer, the Way to God. Our goal will be to meet him and open ourselves to him. Jesus speaks to us through the Bible and the inner stirrings of our heart. We will, thus, pray and reflect upon Scripture and our own life experiences. We will also experiment with ancient spiritual practices which open us to God's constant love.

Come along, take a chance with Jesus. All you have to lose is that part of your life which is incomplete and unreal.

Mind and Heart

The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God.
-Theophan the Recluse

There are dangers along the path of seeking spiritual insight. The first danger is to see the path as an intellectual effort at knowledge. We like to use our minds. By analyzing, comparing and contrasting, we control ideas. We like to keep the spiritual journey in our mind so we can control it. Unfortunately, as long as we keep the search solely intellectual, we will fail. The essence of the journey is to let go and receive the Divine Other.

The second danger is to see the path as only one of the heart and emotions. We ache to feel the Truth. This way, however exciting it may appear, robs us of the great gift of thought and can trap us in the great currents of the flesh.

The goal of our inquiry here is **to stand with the mind in the heart before God**. We will not abandon our minds, but we will not be ruled by our minds. We must put our minds in our hearts, the core of our whole being; the center of our emotions and physicality. From this place and posture, we will relate to God. So, beware of overemphasizing either thought or emotion.

Session #1, February 2 & 5: Worry distracts us from God

Sometimes, we feel our lives slipping out of control. We worry. We try to protect ourselves from pain, poverty and loneliness. Our anxiety drives us away from life and God. Jesus teaches us to see the Kingdom of God all around us. Rejoice!

Read: Matthew 6: 25-34 Don't worry

Queries:

1. What causes you to worry?
2. What does anxiety do to you?
3. What is the cure to worry, which Jesus teaches us?

Session #2, February 9 & 12: Be like a child; receive the Kingdom of God

Children have two qualities which are very different from adults. They have no illusion that they are self sufficient. Also, with little past and only a dim idea of the future, they live very much in the present moment. These qualities open a person to God.

Read: Matthew 18:1-4 Become like children
Mark 10:13-16 Jesus blesses little children

Queries:

1. What life experiences have taught you that you are not self sufficient?
2. How much of your day do you dwell in the past or the future? What effect does it have on you?
3. How do you react to this teaching of Jesus?

Session #3, February 16 & 19: Love binds us together with God

Jesus had a powerful sense of God's love. He felt it flowing through him to his disciples so that they came together as a vine and its branches. Jesus called his followers his friends, not his servants. Love is the life blood of the community of God.

Read: John 15:1-17 Vine and branches

Queries:

1. Remember how you learned to love; it was probably because someone loved you. Who was that person? How did you learn to love?
2. What does it mean to you to think of yourself as a friend of Jesus, rather than his servant?
3. Describe an experience when God's love brought you as close to others as a vine and its branches.

Session #4, February 26: Let your light shine

Sometimes we are embarrassed by our instincts of love and compassion. We fear that we may be seen as weak or naïve. So, we hide our feeling and hang tough. Jesus teaches us that to hide the Divine part of our nature is to risk losing it.

Read: Matthew 5:13-16 Salt and light

Queries:

1. Describe an experience when you have hidden your feeling of love and compassion for God and others. How did this make you feel?
2. Salt is both a sharp tasting spice and a vital ingredient for life. Describe an experience when your expression of God's love was like salt.
3. What is Jesus urging us to do by this teaching?

Session #5, March 4: True security: the way of the Cross

It is obvious to the world that a fundamental value is to keep alive. We struggle mightily for ourselves and our loved ones to avoid death. Thus, when Jesus accepts death at the hands of others, it seems strange to us. When Jesus also teaches us that to save our own life is to lose it, we are even more perplexed. What is he trying to help us understand?

Read: Matthew 16:21-27 Carry the cross

Queries:

1. Describe a life experience when you have risked your safety for a reason.
2. If we focus our lives on our own safety, what effect does that have on the quality of our living?
3. What is your personal sense of why Jesus allowed himself to be executed?

Session #6, March 11: Self and Separation, Part I

There is incredible pressure from modern American culture for self gratification – to have a good time! We are urged to accumulate things for our pleasure. A great entertainment & sports industry tries to fill our every moment with fun. Ceaseless advertising portrays our lives filled with good-time friends. When life turns tough, we often are alone. We then search our way back to true community.

Read: Luke 15:11-24 Parable of the two sons
Luke 18:18-25 Rich man

Queries:

1. Describe an experience in your life when you desired to be free of family control and do what you wanted.
2. In the story of the rich man, what is the real problem that wealth causes in entering the "Kingdom of God"? Can those who are not wealthy have the same problem? Explain.
3. The younger son eventually decided to return home. Have you ever felt called to return to your "roots"? Explain.

Session #7, March 18: Self and Separation, Part II

Many times our own concept of who we are blocks our own healing or alienates us from others. We can think of ourselves as moral and thus feel uncomfortable around immoral people. We can think of ourselves as disabled and fail to realize our own abilities. Jesus urges us to free ourselves of these concepts and take responsibility for our own growth.

Read: Luke 15:11-32 Parable of the two sons: older son
John 5:2-9 Man at the pool

Queries:

1. Describe an experience when your concept of yourself hindered your ability to see or act in a situation.
2. Describe an experience when someone helped you lay aside an old self concept to empower you to do something new.
3. How can we empower those around us to see their true, Divine potential?

Session #8, March 25: Spiritual Growth

God's love is constantly raining down upon us. Sometimes, we ignore it. Sometimes, we revel in it for a few moments and then forget it. But occasionally, we take it within us and it grows and blossoms. Different times in our lives lead us to respond in different ways to God's outreach. It helps in spiritual growth to realize what kind of soil we presently are.

Read: Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23 Parable of the sower

Queries:

1. Describe an experience when you sensed God's calling, but did not understand it and thus ignored it.
2. Describe an experience when you sensed God's calling and responded, only to fall away soon after.
3. Describe an experience when you sensed God's calling and responded faithfully. How did it change your life?