

THE CHRISTLIFE COURSE

COMMENTARY AND OVERVIEW

Welcome to ChristLife! The following pages contain commentaries on the weekly sessions of the ChristLife course. These commentaries began some time ago as the pastor's introductions to each ChristLife session at his parish, but they also provide a summary overview of the themes covered in throughout the entire ChristLife course in one place.

The current commentaries are in a continuous state of revision. That means that, when they are actually delivered at the ChristLife sessions, they may be different. This is akin to the fate of sermon notes. The homily that is delivered is not necessarily the same as the prepared remarks. Hopefully, in both cases, the finished product is an improvement.

The reader may want to go to the end of this document and reflect on the Overview before perusing the weekly messages. In a way, this is like discovering the end of a movie before starting to watch it. However, in this case, it may be providential. What is that old saying? "Always begin with the end in mind." Steven Covey and others have said that. It is good advice!

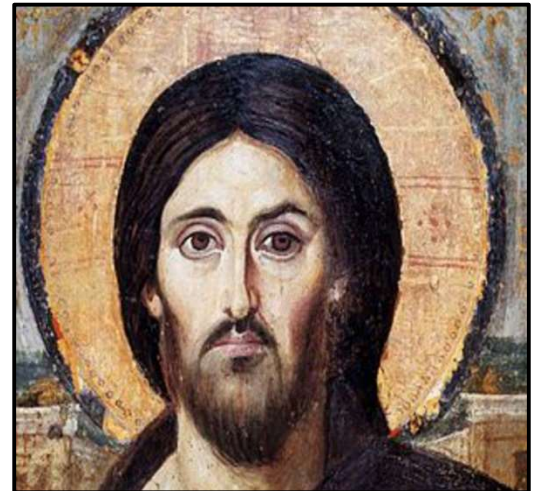
Here are some of the background resources for these commentaries, some of which are mentioned in the commentaries themselves. Your comments and observations on this document and these resources are appreciated and welcomed. This list is not complete and is growing all the time. What books and resources for spiritual reading would you recommend?

- [The Catholic Bible](#), especially the RSV revised edition for Catholics
- [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), [The Compendium](#), [YouCat](#), and [The Catholic Catechism for Adults](#)

- [Introduction to the Devout Life](#) by Saint Francis de Sales
- [The Three Ages of the Interior Life](#) by Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange
- [The Soul of the Apostolate](#) by Abbot Jean-Baptiste Chautard
- [The Way, The Furrow, and The Forge](#) by Saint Josemaria Escriva
- [In Conversation with God](#) by Father Francisco Fernandez

- [Discover Christ, Follow Christ, and Share Christ](#) by David Nodar
- [Making Missionary Disciples](#) by Curtis Martin
- [The Fulfillment of All Desire](#) by Ralph Martin
- [Forming Intentional Disciples](#) by Sherry Weddell
- [Navigating the Interior Life](#) by Daniel Burke
- [33 Days to Greater Glory](#) by Father Michael Gaitley
- [The Better Part](#) by Father John Bartunek
- [Foundations for Discipleship](#) by Curtis Martin and Edward Sri

- www.ChristLife.com – David Nodar and Associates
- www.Focus.org – Fellowship of Catholic University Students
- www.CatholicsComeHome.org – Thomas Peterson
- www.MyCatholic.Life – John Paul Thomas
- www.RenewMyChurch.org – Archdiocese of Chicago
- www.WordOnFire.Institute – Bishop Robert Barron
- www.AugustineInstitute.org – The FORMED Series



Too many to mention are the various writings of Scott Hahn, Brant Pitre, John Bergsma, Father Jacques Philippe, Peter Kreeft, Matthew Kelly, and others. This list is incomplete, but it is growing. Thank you for any other suggestions. In closing, please accept my invitation to participate in the ChristLife course. It has changed my life. It surely will change yours too!

FATHER JAMES DVORCAK
CatholicChristian.org

DISCOVERING CHRIST: HOW TO WIN SOULS FOR CHRIST THROUGH UNWAVERING CHRISTO-CENTRISM

- 1. What is the Meaning of Life?** The assertion that we discover our own reality just isn't working. It never really did. Our contrary realities are colliding with each other, causing division and destruction among us. The quest to construct our own truth is failing as well, resulting in anger and polarization among us. But it doesn't have to be that way. That is why there really is a God, and why each of us cannot pretend to be our own god or act if we were our own supreme being. The evidence is overwhelming, and the solution to our predicament is obvious. There is a true God who created reality and imbued it with his truth. Believing anything else is self-destructive. This course will introduce us to a reality not of our own making and refresh us with a truth that is not of our own concoction. Yes, there is hope for us after all. There always was. It is time to come back to our senses. It is time to come back to God. Welcome to ChristLife!
- 2. Why does Jesus Matter?** Because he is The Answer to the puzzle of human existence. Ultimate reality revealed itself to us by becoming one of us in Christ. Jesus is the only founder of a religion who claimed to be God, to be ultimate reality in himself. Now, when Jesus claimed this, he was either a liar or a lunatic, or he really was the Lord! Look at the change that he made in the lives of his closest followers, who would rather die than deny Jesus. Suffering martyrdom with bold confidence, they testified to the resurrection that awaited them in Christ. Jesus made a difference that changed the course of human history. Let Jesus make a transforming difference in your personal life now as well!
- 3. What does Jesus want us to Know?** That we are loved! That we are loved by God unconditionally! And, when we respond to the love of God, our human condition changes for the better. In other words, God not only loves us the way we are, but loves us so much that he does not simply leave us the way we are. Instead, his divine love heals, transforms, and fulfills us in our broken humanity. There is nothing that we could ever do that would cause Jesus to love us any less. In fact, he gave his whole life for us on the cross, even though we were not then his friends. Come and experience the life-changing love of Jesus. Come as you are, so that Jesus may transform you into his own image and likeness!
- 4. Why do we Need a Savior?** Consider three things: the good, the bad, and the ugly. The Good: nothing satisfies us for very long in this life. This life always disappoints us. The Bad: none of our solutions seem to work out very well. We just cannot seem to get things right by our own efforts. The Ugly: in the end, we all die anyway. So, what's the use? Well, Jesus saves us from ourselves, thereby saving us for glory. Through Jesus we are introduced to truth, goodness, and beauty. We will learn a commitment prayer that will bring us into a saving encounter with Jesus Christ. In Christ, we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. Come and experience salvation in Jesus!
- 5. Why is the Resurrection Important?** Because it inaugurates the final stage of human development which is available to us through Jesus Christ. The resurrection could not have been made up by Jesus' followers because they really were not expecting it to actually happen. And when they did encounter the Risen Christ, they were transformed from cowards into courageous believers. The Risen Christ invites us even today to die to sin and to rise to new life in him. Eternal life begins the moment we believe in Jesus and start walking in his footsteps in the community of his Church. So, start really living now! Christ came to give us life in abundance. Let eternal life begin now in your life of faith!
- 6. Retreat: Who is the Holy Spirit?** The unique teaching of Jesus is that of the Trinity. God the Father is beyond us. God the Son (Jesus) came among us. And the Holy Spirit is God dwelling within us. The Interior Life is what the Holy Spirit is all about. God is not only out there. God is not only next to us. God is also within us. Because of this, our daily lives can be changed forever through the working of the Holy Spirit in the community of the Church, especially through the sacraments of salvation bestowed upon us by Jesus. So, Spirit matters! Spirit changes matter! Spirit transforms matter! Let the Holy Spirit matter to you and make a matter of fact change in your life for the better as well!
- 7. Retreat: The Holy Spirit and You.** Religion only really works from the inside out. When we commit ourselves to God, we behold reality in a new way, and we feel about ourselves and about others in a new manner as well. The Interior Life feasts on the presence of God in our minds and hearts, which transforms every aspect of our lives. Religion is not a hobby, but a comprehensive lifestyle in which our Interior Life overflows into our external daily way of living. Prepare to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that you can go with the flow of his life-giving grace.
- 8. New Life in the Spirit.** Can you be spiritual without being religious? The short answer is no. Here is the longer answer. The opposite of spiritual is not religious – the opposite of spiritual is worldly. Being worldly is living as if this present life was all that there is. Being spiritual is living as if the best is yet to come. Religion is how we connect our highest spiritual aspirations with our everyday earthly lives. Spiritual people religiously engage in prayer. They religiously learn more about sacred realities. Spiritual people religiously engage in acts of charity and kindness to and for others. Come and experience new life in the Spirit! Be religiously spiritual in every sense of both words!
- 9. Why do we Need the Church?** We are never alone. We did not invent ourselves. We were born into a family, and we live as part of a community. It is not a matter of Jesus and "Me." Religion is all about Jesus and "We." That is why we call ourselves an Acts 2:42 Church. Look up that Bible verse to explore the four dimensions of church community: learning, community, sacraments, and personal devotion. You need the Church! And the Church needs you too!

FOLLOWING CHRIST: HOW TO BUILD SOULS FOR CHRIST BY FOCUSING ON SACRAMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

1. **Daily Personal Prayer** is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the Interior Life. The three dimensions of prayer are liturgical, meditational, and contemplative. Liturgical prayer is common verbal prayer, even when it is done alone. The most important liturgical prayer was taught to us by Jesus, the Lord's Prayer. He also gave us the seven sacraments as liturgical prayers that always work. Meditation is mental prayer, which focuses on images and feelings that bring our minds and hearts closer to God. Meditation prepares us to emerge from our prayer with power to engage in more fully Christian lives. Contemplative prayer goes beyond thoughts and feelings to encounter God with intimate silence beyond words, and a mystical union beyond comprehension. We will explore these three dimensions of prayer, striving always for the goal of contemplation which is a foretaste and foreshadowing of heavenly bliss itself.
2. **Hearing God in Scripture.** When we study Scripture, God speaks to us. When we pray, we respond to God message. A traditional form of Scriptural prayer is called *Lectio Divina*, which means "divine reading." Here is one way to practice *Lectio Divina*. Read a passage of Scripture prayerfully, then engage in three questions. Mind: What do I think about what I have prayerfully read? Heart: How do I feel about what I have prayerfully read? Will: What am I going to do about what I prayerfully read? When we engage in *Lectio Divina*, the Scriptures come alive in our hearts. However, the most important and valuable context for hearing God in Scripture is through the Liturgy of the Word at Mass.
3. **The Power of the Sacraments.** Why do we have sacraments? First, because Jesus gave them to us, commanding us to prayerfully celebrate them in memory of him. Second, because, as humans, we exist as sacramental beings. A sacrament is an outward sign of an inward spiritual reality. Humans are beings with bodies that are animated by souls, that is, our souls which express themselves through the instrumentality of our bodies. Jesus is the ultimate sacrament, for whoever encounters Jesus Christ encounters God himself. As Jesus said: "He who sees me sees the Father." After his Ascension into heaven, Christ remains with us in the sacraments of his Church, until he returns again in glory.
4. **Forgiving One Another** is based on the forgiveness that we have already experienced in Christ. Forgiving others is an opportunity to share with others the gift of forgiveness that we have received from Christ. We will learn a forgiveness prayer that will unchain us from the shackles of resentment and anger that often bind us. Unforgiven hearts are one of the main obstacles to fully experiencing the love of God in Christ. Forgive and forget; then move on with your life!
5. **The Spirit-Empowered Life.** Through prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments, we grow in our relationship with God. Through forgiveness we make peace not only with others, but experience more fully an inner peace that only God can give us. We will learn a Holy Spirit Prayer that will bring the blessings of forgiveness and salvation into our lives in a way that we may not have yet experienced. Spoiler alert! The Spirit-empowered life is a most wholesome and healthy addiction that frees us for excellence. The Spirit makes it possible for us to live holy lives that are pleasing to God!
6. Retreat: **The World.** First, Evil is all around us. We refer to this first Evil as the World. The antidote to the Evil that is all around us is to surround ourselves with Jesus Christ instead. We do this by growing in the Interior Life. When Christ is in us, he is also surrounding us with protection from the Evil of the World. In Christ, we overcome the world!
7. Retreat: **The Flesh.** Second, Evil is within us. We refer to this second Evil as the Flesh. The antidote to the Evil that is within us is to achieve self-mastery in Christ through ongoing conversion of life. We are always in recovery from sin. Repentance is a life-changing event, while Penance is a maintenance plan for spiritual growth in the ways of the Lord.
8. Retreat: **The Devil.** Third, Evil is beyond us. We refer to this third Evil as the Devil. We will learn a renunciation prayer that unites us so closely to Jesus Christ that his grace within us will protect us from the evil that is beyond our control. When we are possessed by the Spirit of God, we cannot become possessed by Evil. God protects us from Evil.
9. **The Heart of a Disciple.** Spiritual Unity of Life is the key to the Interior Life. What is your Plan of Life? When we develop a solid spiritual program of prayer, learning, and charity at the center of our lifestyle, we are on the path that leads to eternity. That is a journey which we make in the community of the Church, where the Kingdom of God begins.
10. **Going On with the Lord.** Let us complete this part of our ChristLife course by becoming Reservoirs of Grace. We are not only channels of God's peace. We must become abundant Reservoirs of Grace that overflow into our daily lives. The key to joyful living in Christ is by steadily developing our Interior Life. If we are not advancing in the spiritual life, we are regressing into a worldly life. Let us resolve to keep on keeping on, by living in this passing world with our hearts set on the world that will never end. The practice of our Catholic Christian Faith is our greatest blessing in this regard!

As Christians, we have two vocations. The first vocation is the universal call to holiness. That is what the first two sessions of the ChristLife course are all about. The second vocation is the universal call to evangelization. This is what the third session of ChristLife is all about. The Great Commission is a privilege and duty for all who have embraced Christ as God!

SHARING CHRIST: HOW TO SEND FORTH SOULS FOR CHRIST WITH AFFIRMATIVE ORTHODOXY

1. **Called to Share Christ.** As a Reservoir of Grace by the development of our Interior Life, we overflow with the good news of Jesus Christ in who we are, in what we do, and in what we say. A good starting point is by making a prayer and action list for spiritual outreach. Who do you want to share your faith with? Start by praying for them. How do you propose to begin reaching out to them? Start praying about that too. God will inspire you with his plan for your life!
2. **Befriending Others.** Make a friend, be a friend, then bring a friend to Christ! That is what friendship evangelization is all about. We have two vocations: the universal call to holiness, and the universal call to evangelization. We can respond to both of these calls with who we are, with what we have, with where we are at, and with all the time that God gives us to invest in our salvation and the redemption of others. Let us all be Friends of Christ, Friends with Christ!
3. **Sharing Your Story.** Preach the gospel always through the quality of your life, and be ready to respond with a focused message whenever golden opportunities present themselves. In ChristLife, we will learn how to develop our personal story, and to practice it with our friends in Christ. In this way we prepare ourselves to share our message with those who do not know Christ. In sharing our personal faith story, that story becomes more fruitful in our own lives as well!
4. **The Power to Share Christ.** When we become a Reservoir of Grace through the development of our Interior Life, we overflow with the love and the message of Jesus from our lives to the lives of others. We will learn a Mission Prayer that will help us realize more fully that it is in Christ, rather than in ourselves, that we receive the power to share Christ effectively with others. From this starting point, the power of Christ will be at work *within* us and *through* us.
5. **Sharing the Good News.** People appreciate stories, such as our personal faith testimonies. It touches their hearts. But people also need images to help them make sense of their experiences. We will learn a bridge illustration that we can use to illumine people's minds once we have touched their hearts. By winning their hearts, and enlightening their minds, we can invite people to cross the bridge of faith and make a commitment of their lives to Jesus Christ as God.
6. **Inviting Others to Meet Jesus.** We will go deeper into the commitment prayer which we learned, so that we can help people use it to lovingly bond with Christ. The purpose of evangelization is not to win arguments about religious matters. The purpose of evangelization is to win hearts for Christ. Affirmative Orthodoxy means that we present the Gospel in positive and appealing ways, without compromising the challenges that come with being devoted followers of Christ!
7. **Retreat: Put Out into the Deep.** As we come to the conclusion of our ChristLife course, we can regard it as a commencement ceremony as well. There is Life after ChristLife. We now go forth on a mission. But our journey of faith development continues as well. Please always cultivate the Reservoir of Grace which is your Interior Life. It is the key to our salvation and the resource for bringing the grace of salvation to others as well. Please follow up with the ChristLife course by becoming more involved with the prayer, the learning, and the charities of our parish community!

Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In the ChristLife course, we encountered Jesus Christ in three ways. Our ongoing journey in life is to bring to fulfillment the good work that God has begun in us through faith, hope, and love.

- **ChristWAY:** Jesus shows us how to live in this passing world with our hearts set on that world which will never end.
 - The early Christians were often referred to as Followers of the "Way." Our Plan of Life is our Way in Christ.
 - Our daily schedule reveals to us our priorities in life. In this sense, everyone has some kind of plan of life.
 - Christians schedule their lives around their faith, instead of squeezing religion into their busy worldly lives.
- **ChristTRUTH:** Jesus is the real thing, the ultimate reality, who patiently reveals to us the truth of our human existence.
 - Only God can create reality. When we try to create our own reality, we are engaged in unproductive fantasy.
 - Only God can create morality. When we make up our own rules for life, we are woefully unoriginal in our sins.
 - Only God can create truth. The truth of Christ will truly set us free from all our unrealistic worldly illusions.
- **ChristLIFE:** Jesus enables us to really live rather than merely survive. Christianity is a lifestyle, not just a hobby.
 - The Christian life is the only life that is truly worth living. When we physically die, our Christian life continues.
 - If you die (to sin) now, you don't have to die (go to hell) later. God is on a search and rescue mission on earth!
 - Salvation costs us nothing, for it is a gift from God. Discipleship costs us everything, for we give our all to God.

In conclusion, ChristLife is not just an academic course. ChristLife charts the course of your whole life, redeemed in Christ! For more information, please contact our parish office. There you will encounter God's plan, our problem, God's provision, and our pathway to restoring all things in Christ. Wherever you are at in life – welcome to your new life in Christ!

CHRISTLIFE OVERVIEW: HOW TO WIN, BUILD, AND SEND FORTH MISSIONARY DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

Welcome to ChristLife! I pray that your experience with the ChristLife course is a blessing to you as it has been for me. Not only in my ministry, but in my vocation as a baptized Catholic, I have been illumined, empowered, and inspired to grow as a missionary disciple of the New Evangelization. For more information, please send an email to the pastor. Thank you for participating in the ChristLife course at our parish community! God bless you! – Father James Dvorscak, pastor

The ChristLife course blends well with other spiritual renewal initiatives in the Church today: FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), Bishop Barron's Word on Fire Institute, and Chicago's Renew My Church program. Finally, the ChristLife process presents the fullness of Catholic Christianity in a context similar to the well-known Alpha course. Here is an overview of the ChristLife course in comparison with these inspirational programs for the New Evangelization.

- 1. Discovering Christ:** Come for the Experience! Our first goal is to win souls for Christ. Unwavering Christo-centrism means that our faith is all about Jesus, and that we are all about Jesus! We want to win souls for Christ because the good news of Jesus propels us to live our faith fully and to share it with conviction! Making disciples is not an optional activity for just a few people. It is the essence of what it means for everyone who is a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.
 - ChristLife: Discovering Christ reveals the “who” and the “why” behind the “what” and the “how” of our faith.
 - FOCUS: Winning souls for Christ is more about winning hearts rather than just winning religious arguments.
 - Bishop Barron: Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus is what unwavering Christo-centrism is truly all about.
 - Renew My Church: Making Disciples on the local level is the foundation for the renewal of the whole Church.
- 2. Following Christ:** Stay for the Journey! Our second goal is to build souls for Christ. Through a sacramental spirituality, we become Reservoirs of Grace who overflow with truth, goodness, and beauty. We want to build up our Interior Life as Intentional Disciples of Christ, within the community of the Church, to prepare for Missionary Discipleship. People need people, and believers need fellow believers. Building community is the next phase of building Christ's Kingdom.
 - ChristLife: Following Christ moves from the experience of initial conversion to the “discipling” of fervent believers.
 - FOCUS: Building up disciples helps them to grow and develop a comprehensive Catholic Christian lifestyle.
 - Bishop Barron: Sacramental spirituality keeps people connected to Jesus in both his Word and Sacrament.
 - Renew My Church: Building community creates the context for believers to live and work together in faith.
- 3. Sharing Christ:** Go Forth on a Mission! Our third goal is to send disciples forth on a mission for Christ. By affirmative orthodoxy, we become missionaries who are positive, credible, and persuasive in witnessing to Christ. Through the ChristLife course we win, build, and send missionary disciples forth to share the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ! Inspiring witness means that the best form of discipleship is one that reaches out to the peripheries to save souls!
 - ChristLife: Sharing Christ equips fellow disciples with the tools they need to go forth and make new disciples.
 - FOCUS: Sending forth missionaries with the Gospel message of Christ is what maturing discipleship is all about.
 - Bishop Barron: Affirmative orthodoxy teaches us to reach out to others with the Gospel in fruitfully convincing ways.
 - Renew My Church: Inspiring witness transforms devout disciples into everyday bold missionaries for Christ.

In conclusion, the ChristLife course is the most practical form of initiating the New Evangelization at the local parish level. Having begun humbly as a rudimentary “Alpha in a Catholic Context” course in Baltimore, it was transformed into a comprehensive “Catholicism in an Alpha Context” course with parallels to the FOCUS, Bishop Barron, and Renew My Church movements. Welcome to ChristLife! May Jesus truly be your ChristWAY, your ChristTRUTH, and your ChristLIFE!

WE ARE ... LOOKING UPWARD IN FAITH, MOVING FORWARD IN HOPE, LEADING ONWARD IN LOVE ... TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST!

AS A FAITH COMMUNITY OF PRAYER, LEARNING AND CHARITY, WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US AS INTENTIONAL DISCIPLES OF CHRIST!

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHRISTLIFE COURSE, PLEASE CHECK OUT THEIR WEBSITE AT CHRISTLIFE.ORG.

UNDERSTANDING THE FOUR SPIRITUAL LAWS

What is the basic message of Catholic Christianity and why should it matter to me? The main thing here is to keep the main thing the main thing by focusing on God's plan, our problem, his provision, and our pathway to Christ our God.

- **God's Plan:** God has a loving plan for our happiness. God made us to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world, so that we could be happy with him forever in heaven. God loves us that much!
- **Our Problem:** We did not accept God's plan for us. And thus, we sadly brought harm and evil into our world, our lives, and all our relationships. But none of our solutions to our problem worked.
- **God's Provision:** Jesus Christ came to be our Savior. Christ saved us from the problems we caused, entered into a new relationship with us, and gave us his Church as a community of faith.
- **Our Pathway:** When we accept Christ as our Savior, we enter into a special relationship with him in the community of his Church and begin to live a new life as followers of Christ.

When we enter into a personal relationship with Christ in the community of his Church, our whole life is changed forever! So, please join us in the following prayer of commitment to Jesus Christ.

**LORD JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD,
HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER.**

**FILL ME WITH YOUR SPIRIT,
SO THAT I MAY LIVE A NEW LIFE.**

**HELP ME TO KNOW YOU, TO LOVE YOU,
AND TO SERVE YOU IN THIS WORLD,**

**SO THAT I MAY BE HAPPY WITH YOU
BOTH NOW AND FOR ALL ETERNITY.**

THANK YOU, LORD. AMEN.

Thank you for sincerely reciting this powerful prayer. Your new life in Christ has begun. Please let us help you make your new life in Christ grow and develop well, by contacting us at church for guidance and spiritual support.

