

# The Church of God

“Together in Truth-Bible Study”

## The Plan of Salvation – Bible Study Guide

**Introduction:** Salvation is God’s **plan** to rescue humanity from sin and death through Jesus Christ. This plan is *universal* in scope – offered freely to **all people**, fulfilling God’s desire that none should perish – yet it must be applied *personally* by each individual through faith. The Bible declares that “**all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God**” (Romans 3:23, KJV). We cannot save ourselves by good works. **God’s solution** was to send His Son Jesus to live a sinless life, die for our sins, and rise again, so that “**whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life**” (John 3:16, KJV). Salvation, therefore, involves **deliverance** from sin’s penalty and power, restoring us to a right relationship with God.

In this study, we will journey through **the Plan of Salvation**, exploring both its broad scope for humanity and its deeply personal work in our lives. We will discuss key stages of the salvation journey – from **spiritual birth** into God’s family, through the lifelong process of **sanctification** (being made holy), including the empowering **baptism of the Holy Spirit**, growing into **maturity in Christ**, and remaining faithful with **endurance to the end**, until we receive the **crown of life** that God has promised. Each section of the Participant’s Guide includes Scriptures (from the King James Version) and questions for personal reflection. The Leader’s Guide provides additional insights and tips for facilitating group discussion.

### Participant’s Guide

Use this guide to follow along with the lesson. Read the Scriptures, fill in answers, and take notes in the space provided. Be ready to discuss your insights and questions.

#### 1. Spiritual Birth – Entering God’s Family

When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, He taught that **salvation begins with a spiritual rebirth**. “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3, KJV). This “**new birth**” (or *regeneration*) is a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of one who believes in Christ. Just as we had a physical birth, we must experience a **spiritual birth** to become children of God. The Bible describes it as being born “of water and of the Spirit” (John 3:5, KJV) – a **cleansing and renewal** by God’s Word and Spirit.

- **What Happens in the New Birth?** When you are born again, **God imparts new life** to you. You become a “*new creature*” in Christ – “*old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV). This is an **instantaneous change** from spiritual death to life. You are forgiven of your sins and the Holy Spirit comes to

live within you, giving you a new heart and new desires to follow God (Ezekiel 36:26-27). You enter into God's family as a beloved child (John 1:12).

- **Universal Aspect:** God's salvation is offered to everyone. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21, KJV). Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, but each person **must personally receive** Him. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12, KJV). There is no other way of salvation: "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, KJV). God **desires all** to be saved, but He calls each of us individually to repent and believe the Gospel.

**Reflection:** Jesus said, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7, KJV). Why do you think a second, spiritual birth is necessary? Consider your own life: have you experienced this spiritual birth? If so, what changed in you? If not, what is holding you back? **(Write your thoughts below.)**

> **Your Notes:** How would you describe the experience of being "born again" to someone else?

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## 2. Sanctification – Being Set Apart and Made Holy

After spiritual birth, a Christian begins the process of **sanctification**. The word *sanctify* means "to make holy" or "to set apart for God." In one sense, every believer is **sanctified at the moment of salvation** – God declares us holy and righteous in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2). Yet the Bible also talks about sanctification as an **ongoing work** in our lives. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3, KJV).

- **Made Holy by Christ's Sacrifice:** Jesus died not only to forgive our sins but also to **purify us**. "Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Hebrews 13:12, KJV). By His sacrifice, He cleanses our hearts. When we were saved, we were set apart as God's people. Sanctification **belongs to all of God's people** – Christ "gave himself for [the Church], that he might sanctify and cleanse it" (Ephesians 5:25-26, KJV). In salvation, God not only saves us **from the penalty of sin**, but also begins to save us **from the power of sin** in our daily lives.
- **A Deeper Work of the Spirit:** As we surrender to God, the Holy Spirit works to **refine our character and remove sinful habits**. In fact, Scripture indicates that there is a deeper *cleansing* God can do in the heart of a believer. After conversion, the apostles still struggled with pride and strife, indicating the need for further purification. Jesus prayed for them, "Sanctify them through thy truth" (John 17:17, KJV). God answered this prayer when He sent the Holy Spirit to **fill and purify their hearts by faith**. Some Christian traditions refer to this as a moment of **entire sanctification** – a profound

consecration where the believer is fully yielded and the heart is cleansed from the root of sin by the Holy Spirit. Whether experienced as a moment or as a growing realization, all Christians should seek to be “sanctified wholly” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, KJV) – allowing God to have every part of us.

- **Lifelong Growth in Holiness:** Sanctification begins at new birth and continues throughout our Christian life. We cooperate with God by faith and obedience, as He makes us more like Christ. The Apostle Paul urges believers to “*purge out*” old leaven (sin) and become vessels “*sanctified, and meet for the master’s use*” (2 Timothy 2:21, KJV). This means intentionally separating from sinful behaviors and dedicating ourselves to God’s purposes. It’s an ongoing “*perfecting [of] holiness in the fear of God*” (2 Corinthians 7:1, KJV). We’ll explore *progressive* sanctification more in section 4, but it’s important to realize from the start that salvation isn’t just a one-time event – it’s a call to a holy life. **True salvation produces a changed life:** “*Faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26). We don’t do good works to earn salvation, but because we are saved, God’s grace trains us to live righteously (Titus 2:11-12).

**Reflection:** *In what ways do you see God making you holy in your daily life? Are there areas you need to surrender more fully to Him so that He can sanctify you? Think about habits, attitudes, or relationships that God may be purifying. (Take a moment to pray and jot down what the Holy Spirit brings to mind.)*

> **Your Notes:** *List one practical step you can take to set yourself apart for God this week (for example: dedicating time daily for prayer and Bible reading, removing a temptation, reconciling a relationship, etc.):* \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Baptism of the Holy Spirit – Empowered for Life and Service

The Christian life is not meant to be lived in our own strength. Jesus promised **power from on high** for His followers: “*Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you*” (Acts 1:8, KJV). All who are born again receive the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence (Romans 8:9). However, the Bible also speaks of being “**baptized with the Holy Ghost**” (Matthew 3:11, Acts 1:5) – an immersion in the Spirit’s fullness that brings great empowerment and a deeper experience of God’s presence. In the Book of Acts, believers who were already saved later experienced dramatic fillings of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4, Acts 4:31, Acts 8:14-17, etc.). This **baptism in the Spirit** equips us to witness and serve effectively, and in many cases in Scripture it brought boldness, spiritual gifts, and miraculous results.

- **Promise of the Father:** The baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised not only to the first apostles but to **all believers for all generations**. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost: “*Repent, and be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall*

call” (Acts 2:38-39, KJV). God loves to fill His children with the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). This empowers us to live the holy life we just discussed. In fact, Scripture ties the Holy Spirit’s infilling to our sanctification – we are “*sanctified by the Holy Ghost*” (Romans 15:16, KJV). The Spirit provides both **purity** and **power**. When the Gentile believers first received the Holy Spirit, Peter said God “*purifying their hearts by faith*” had accepted them (Acts 15:8-9, KJV).

- **Empowered to Witness and Overcome:** To be “*baptized in the Spirit*” means to be **completely filled and immersed in the Holy Spirit’s power** and presence. One author describes it as a “**supernatural empowerment**” from God to be a more effective witness for Jesus. Jesus knew we could not fulfill our mission or become who we ought to be without the Spirit’s help. The Holy Spirit gives boldness to testify (Acts 4:31), guidance in what to say (Luke 12:11-12), and strength to endure trials. He also helps us **overcome sin** in our lives (Galatians 5:16). When filled with the Spirit, we bear the “*fruit of the Spirit*” – qualities like love, joy, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). It’s not a one-time event; we can be refilled continually (Ephesians 5:18). But many Christians can point to a decisive moment or season when they yielded fully to God and were filled with the Spirit in a new and powerful way.
- **Differences in Understanding:** Some Christian groups teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs *at the moment of salvation* (meaning every believer is Spirit-baptized already into the Body of Christ – 1 Corinthians 12:13). Others believe it is often a **subsequent experience** after conversion that one should seek (as the apostles did, waiting in prayer until Pentecost). Regardless of the timing, all believers agree on our need for the **fullness of the Holy Spirit**. The Bible commands us, “*Be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5:18, KJV). We should continually desire **more of God’s Spirit** in our lives. He empowers us to pray, illuminates our understanding of Scripture, and distributes spiritual gifts as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) for the building up of the Church.

**Reflection:** *Have you invited the Holy Spirit to fill every part of your life? In your own words, why do we need the power of the Holy Spirit? Think about areas where you feel weak or fearful – how could the Spirit empower you in those areas? (Record a prayer or thoughts below.)*

> **Your Notes:** *Write a short prayer asking God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. For example: “Father, I need Your Holy Spirit’s power. Please baptize me afresh in Your Spirit – purify my heart and give me the strength and boldness to live for You. I surrender to You now. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

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#### 4. Progressive Sanctification – Growing in Grace Daily

Sanctification, as we saw, has an initial phase (being set apart to God) and a deeper infilling by the Spirit. But it doesn't stop there. **Progressive sanctification** is the ongoing **growth process** by which we mature spiritually over time<sup>6</sup>. Think of a newborn baby – it's fully alive, but it must grow and learn to become a healthy adult. Similarly, when we are born again, we are spiritual “**babes in Christ**” (1 Corinthians 3:1) who need to **grow**. God's will is that we do not remain spiritual infants, but advance to **spiritual maturity** (Hebrews 5:12-14).

- **A Lifelong Journey:** Progressive sanctification means **becoming in practice what we are positionally** in Christ. Day by day, with the Holy Spirit's help, we **put off** old sinful ways and **put on** Christlike virtues (Ephesians 4:22-24). This is often a gradual process with ups and downs. The Apostle Paul described it like a transformation “*from glory to glory*” into the image of Christ by the Spirit's work (2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV). It involves **renewing our mind** through God's Word, practicing obedience in our daily choices, and even through trials that refine our faith (James 1:2-4). God is faithful to continue the work He started in us: “*He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1:6, KJV).
- **Spiritual Growth Habits:** Just as physical growth requires nourishment and exercise, **spiritual growth** requires **disciplines** and God's grace. Key habits that help us grow include: **Bible study** (1 Peter 2:2 – “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*”), **prayer** and communion with God, **fellowship** with other believers (Hebrews 10:25), and **service** or witnessing (using our gifts in love). As we practice these, we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in our growth. Progress also requires dealing with sin through repentance and faith. When we stumble, we confess and receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9) and keep going. Over time, we should see progress – the **fruit of the Spirit** becoming more evident, our love for God and others increasing, and greater victory over temptations.
- **From Infancy to Adulthood:** The New Testament writers often address believers as needing to “*grow up.*” Paul admonished the Corinthians for remaining “babies” who could only handle milk, not solid food (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). The writer of Hebrews similarly said they should be teachers by now, but still needed basic lessons, likening them to those who “*need of milk, and not of strong meat*” (Hebrews 5:12, KJV). We are encouraged: “*Let us go on unto perfection*” (Hebrews 6:1, KJV) – the word “perfection” meaning maturity or completeness. **Maturity** doesn't mean faultlessness in this life, but it does mean a stable, grown-up faith marked by understanding and Christlike character. As we will see in the next section, maturity in Christ is a primary goal of this progressive sanctification.

**Reflection:** *In what areas of your Christian life have you seen growth? In what areas do you still feel like a “spiritual infant”?* Identify one area (such as prayer, understanding the Bible,

resisting a particular sin, showing love/patience, etc.) where you want to grow. What practical step could you take to pursue growth in that area? **(Note your thoughts below.)**

> **Your Notes:** *Personal Growth Plan:* “One area I desire to grow in is \_\_\_\_\_. To pursue growth here, I will \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., find a mentor, set a specific prayer time, memorize a helpful scripture, read a Christian book on the topic, etc.).”

## 5. Maturity in Christ – The Goal of Discipleship

**Spiritual maturity** is the goal toward which progressive sanctification moves us. The Bible paints a picture of mature believers who reflect Christ's character, discern God's will, and stand firm in faith. God wants us to develop from spiritual children into “fathers” and “mothers” in the faith who can mentor others (1 John 2:13-14, Hebrews 5:12). The Apostle Paul labored to present believers “**perfect in Christ Jesus**” (Colossians 1:28, KJV) – *perfect* meaning mature or complete. He explains that Christ gave pastors and teachers to the church “*for the perfecting of the saints ... till we all come...unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:12-13, KJV). In other words, maturity looks like **Christ-likeness**. We will never be equal to Christ, but we grow to “walk even as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

- **Marks of a Mature Christian:** A mature believer has a solid foundation in Scripture and doctrine (Ephesians 4:14 says no longer tossed by every wind of teaching). They display the **fruit of the Spirit** consistently – love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, etc. (Galatians 5:22-23). They have learned to use God's Word skillfully in life's situations: “*strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” (Hebrews 5:14, KJV). Maturity also shows in **enduring faith** under pressure. Rather than wavering or complaining, a mature Christian trusts God through trials and comes out stronger (James 1:2-4). They tend to focus more on serving others and less on themselves. Humility, wisdom, and steady obedience are hallmarks of Christian adulthood. Importantly, mature believers know they must continue depending on God's grace – in fact, recognizing our utter dependence on God is itself a sign of maturity.
- **Growth to Maturity:** How do we move toward maturity? Time and experience in walking with God are factors, but **intentional effort** is also required. The Bible gives us practical counsel: “*speaking the truth in love, may [we] grow up into him in all things*” (Ephesians 4:15, KJV) – meaning we need loving community and honesty. We should aim to **learn and apply** increasingly deeper truths of God's Word, not remaining forever on the basics (2 Peter 3:18: “*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*”). Trials and tests, though difficult, are allowed by God to develop our maturity (Romans 5:3-4, James 1:3-4). Just as an athlete or student

advances through progressively harder challenges, our faith muscles grow through use. The Holy Spirit is our trainer in this process, and fellow believers are like teammates. Ultimately, maturity in Christ means **having the character of Christ formed in us** (Galatians 4:19). This is a high calling, but God has given us everything we need for it (2 Peter 1:3-8).

- **Never Stop Growing:** Even the Apostle Paul, after decades of ministry, said “*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after*” (Philippians 3:12, KJV). He pressed on toward the goal, indicating that in this life, we keep growing. There is always more to learn about God's love, more to conform in ourselves to Christ's image. Recognizing that we haven't “arrived” keeps us humble and dependent. At the same time, we can look back and thank God for how much He has changed us from what we used to be. This gives hope for continued growth. **Maturity is a journey, not a destination, until Christ returns.**

**Reflection:** *Think of someone you consider spiritually mature. What qualities do you see in their life that you admire or want to imitate (see 1 Corinthians 11:1)? List one or two of those qualities. Now consider: in what ways have you grown more mature compared to a year or two ago? Thank God for that growth. (Use the space below to reflect or write a prayer of commitment to keep growing.)*

> **Your Notes:** “*Lord, thank You for growing me in \_\_\_\_\_. Please continue to mature me, especially in the area of \_\_\_\_\_, so I can better reflect Jesus. Amen.*”

## 6. Endurance to the End – Persevering in Faith

The journey of salvation is **not a sprint but a marathon**. Scripture repeatedly calls us to **endure to the end**. Jesus said, “*He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved*” (Matthew 24:13, KJV). This does not mean we earn salvation by our own effort, but it shows that **true faith persists**. A genuine believer, by the grace of God, will continue in the faith through all of life's ups and downs. We are called to **run the race with patience (endurance)**, “looking unto Jesus” as our example (Hebrews 12:1-2).

- **Why Endurance Matters:** The Christian life can be difficult. Believers face trials, temptations, persecutions, and hardships. Some early Christians were imprisoned or killed for their faith (Hebrews 11:36-38). Others faced internal struggles or discouragement. In these challenges, the easy path is to give up or fall away. But God's Word encourages us to **hold fast our faith**. James 1:12 (KJV) promises: “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*” Endurance under trial brings God's approval and leads to ultimate reward. Those who **fall away** show that their faith may not have been genuine or mature. Endurance is a hallmark of salvation

– not a means to earn it, but a fruit that comes from real salvation. We persevere because **God is preserving us** by His power (1 Peter 1:5).

- **God's Role and Our Role:** How do we endure? **God's grace sustains us.** Jude 24 says God *"is able to keep you from falling"*. Jesus promised, *"I am with you always"* (Matthew 28:20). We are never asked to endure on our own. At the same time, we are exhorted to be diligent: *"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not"* (Galatians 6:9, KJV). Practically, endurance grows as we **trust God's promises** and **keep our hope fixed on Him**. Romans 5:3-5 explains that tribulations produce patience (endurance), and endurance produces proven character and hope. When trials come, we should remember God's past faithfulness and His future reward. Encouraging one another in the church is also vital – *"exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end"* (Hebrews 3:13-14, KJV). Staying connected to fellow believers helps us not give up. Prayer is another key: when we feel weak, we can *"come boldly unto the throne of grace"* to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).
- **Pressing On:** The Apostle Paul, near the end of his life, could say, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"* (2 Timothy 4:7, KJV). He endured beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonments, and more, but by God's strength he didn't quit. We too are in a spiritual battle and a long-distance race. **Endurance** means continuing to trust and obey Jesus, even when you're tired or when obedience is costly. It means clinging to Christ through **every season** – youthful zeal, mid-life challenges, old age weaknesses – all the way until our final breath. Jesus told the church in Smyrna, *"be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"* (Revelation 2:10, KJV). That is His charge to us as well.

**Reflection:** *Can you recall a trial or season in your life when it was hard to remain faithful? What helped you get through it? List one or two Scriptures, truths, or people that have encouraged you to persevere. (For example, the promise "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" in Hebrews 13:5, or a friend who prayed for you.) Consider how those supports are evidence of God helping you endure.*

> **Your Notes:** *"The current challenge I face is \_\_\_\_\_. To endure faithfully, I will remember \_\_\_\_\_ (truth/promise), and I will continue to \_\_\_\_\_ (prayer, fellowship, etc.)."*

## 7. The Crown of Life – Eternal Reward for the Faithful

Finally, God's plan of salvation culminates in **eternal life**. The Bible often speaks of eternal life as a present possession of believers (John 5:24), but also as a future inheritance fully realized in heaven (Mark 10:30). One image used to describe the eternal reward is the “**crown of life**.” In ancient times, a crown (wreath) was given to victors in athletic games. The crown of life represents the ultimate victory – **life forever in God's kingdom**, bestowed by the King of Kings. James 1:12 (quoted above) and Revelation 2:10 both mention this crown, and they connect it with loving God and being faithful through trials. It's not a literal crown we wear for adornment, but a symbolic way of saying “**reward of eternal life**.”

- **Promise of the Crown:** *“When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away”* (1 Peter 5:4, KJV). Unlike earthly trophies that tarnish, the crown of life is **imperishable** (1 Corinthians 9:25). It is **promised to all who love the Lord** and persevere (James 1:12). This crown is essentially the fullness of salvation – being in God's presence, free from all sin, pain, and death. Revelation 21:4 describes that in eternity, *“God shall wipe away all tears... there shall be no more death, neither sorrow... for the former things are passed away.”* The crown imagery reminds us that **our life with God after this world is a prize to look forward to**. Paul wrote, *“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness... and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:8, KJV). Different “crowns” mentioned (of life, of righteousness) likely all refer to the same ultimate reward: eternal life with Christ, in perfect righteousness and joy.
- **Motivation to Finish Well:** Keeping our eyes on the crown of life **motivates us** to run the race faithfully. Just as an athlete endures training by looking to the victory ahead, Christians can endure suffering by focusing on the promised joy. Paul said *“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18, KJV). Knowing that **eternity with God** awaits gives us strength now. Jesus, *“for the joy that was set before him endured the cross”* (Hebrews 12:2). Likewise, when we fix our hope on the grace to be given us at Christ's return (1 Peter 1:13), we find the courage to persevere. The crown is described as **“the Lord's promise to them that love Him”** – our love for God fuels our perseverance, and God's love ensures our reward. It's important to note that the crown of life is a gift of grace, ultimately. We don't earn heaven by suffering; rather, *“the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 6:23, KJV). Yet God in His grace chooses to reward our faithfulness, as a loving father might reward a child's efforts.
- **Worship, Not Boasting:** In heaven, the crowns won't be for our personal glory. In a vision of heaven, the elders cast their crowns before God's throne, saying He alone is worthy (Revelation 4:10-11). Our salvation from start to finish is God's work and God's

grace. We will gladly lay any “crown” at Jesus’ feet in worship. The real **reward** of salvation is **God Himself** – enjoying unhindered fellowship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever. The phrase “crown of life” underscores that **eternal life is a prize**, a treasure of immense worth. In contrast to the second death (eternal separation from God), the saved will partake in the resurrection of life and reign with Christ (Revelation 20:6). This is the glorious climax of the salvation plan: sinners saved by grace, transformed into Christ’s likeness, persevering by faith, and then welcomed into the **joy of their Lord** (Matthew 25:21) for all eternity.

**Reflection:** *Take a moment to imagine the moment you finish your race and meet Jesus face to face. What do you most look forward to about being in His presence? How does the promise of eternal life encourage you in your situation today? Write a short prayer or thought, thanking God for the “crown of life” He has prepared for you.*

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> **Your Notes:** *“Father, thank You for the promise of the crown of life. It reminds me that all this is heading toward eternal joy with You. Help me to keep my eyes on eternity when I feel discouraged. I long for the day I will be with You forever. Amen.”*

# Leader's Guide

**How to Use this Guide:** The Leader's Guide mirrors the Participant's Guide sections and provides additional **background information, commentary, and tips** for leading a group through this study. As a leader, familiarize yourself with each topic's key scriptures and main points beforehand. Encourage participants to share their thoughts, but also be prepared to clarify important doctrines. This guide offers suggested answers or insights to the reflection questions and helpful cross-references. Use these notes to facilitate discussion, but feel free to adapt to your group's needs. Pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance as you lead others in understanding the Plan of Salvation.

## 1. Spiritual Birth – Leader's Notes & Tips

**Background (John 3:1-7):** In this section, we introduce the concept of being “born again.” Nicodemus, a religious leader, was puzzled by Jesus' statement that one must be *born anew*. Emphasize that *spiritual birth (regeneration)* is a foundational step – it's how we **enter God's family** and start a genuine relationship with Him. The term “born again” means a new beginning given by God's Spirit. It's not merely adopting a religion or turning over a new leaf; it's a radical inner transformation where God imparts divine life to a person who was spiritually dead. Use Titus 3:5 (KJV) to reinforce this: “*According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*” Point out that *regeneration* literally means re-creation – God creates something new in us.

### Key Points to Emphasize:

- **Universal Need:** Every person, no matter how moral or religious, needs to be born again. Nicodemus was very religious, yet Jesus said “*YE must be born again*” (John 3:7). Romans 3:23 (KJV) “*For all have sinned...*” can be cited to support that the new birth is universally needed. Without it, we “*cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3). Explain that our first birth made us children of Adam (inheritance of sin); the second birth makes us children of God. This is part of God's universal salvation plan: He offers new life to **anyone** who believes, regardless of background.
- **Instantaneous Change:** Regeneration is *instant*, not a gradual process. One moment a person is “dead in trespasses,” and the next moment they are “quickened” (made alive) – see Ephesians 2:1,5. Use the analogy given in the participant content: a newborn baby is fully alive at birth, even though it must grow. Spiritually, the moment of new birth gives a person full spiritual life (they may be immature, but truly alive in Christ). This can assure believers that they don't become “more born again” over time – it's a one-time event that begins their walk with God.
- **Evidence of New Birth:** Ask the group what changes might be evidence of someone being born again. Possible answers: a new love for God, desire for prayer and

Scripture, conviction of sin, love for other Christians (1 John 3:14). 1 John is a great resource on “born of God” signs. For instance, 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 5:1, 5:4. While we don’t want to base assurance solely on feelings, a truly born-again person will have some observable transformation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

**Leading the Discussion:** For the reflection question, participants might share personal testimonies of when they were born again or questions if they’re unsure. **Be sensitive** here: not everyone may remember an exact moment, and some may be unsure if they’ve had this experience. Encourage those who haven’t yet made a commitment to Christ that today is a good day to do so. You can highlight John 1:12 – receiving Christ by faith. If someone is unsure, you might lead a short gospel presentation: We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), simply by trusting in Jesus and His finished work.

**Additional Scripture Support:** Refer to 1 Peter 1:23 (KJV): “*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God...*” to show that God’s Word (the Gospel) is the seed that the Spirit uses to produce new life in someone. Also, mention John 3:16 as Jesus’ explanation of how to be born again – by believing in Him.

**Illustration Idea:** Sometimes using a quick illustration helps. You could use the story of Jesus turning water into wine (John 2) as an analogy – water became something entirely new (wine) by Jesus’ power, just as He turns a sinner into a new creation by His power. Or use natural birth: a baby doesn’t cause its own birth; it’s brought forth by its parents. Similarly, we can’t regenerate ourselves; it’s God’s work when we trust Him.

**Leader Tip:** If time and context allow, consider leading the group in a short prayer here, thanking God for giving us new birth, and inviting anyone who hasn’t experienced it to open their heart to Jesus. This sets a tone of expectancy and grace for the study.

## 2. Sanctification – Leader’s Notes & Tips

**Background (Sanctification Defined):** Begin by clarifying the meaning of *sanctification*. It’s a somewhat theological word, but its basic meaning is **to make holy or set apart**. Use the participant guide’s explanation: at salvation, we are set apart as God’s own (positionally holy in Christ), but sanctification is also the process by which we are made actually holy in character. **Highlight biblical evidence** that sanctification is part of salvation: 2 Thessalonians 2:13, “*God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation **through sanctification of the Spirit...***”. The text from F.G. Smith (in the research) noted that sanctification is clearly a Bible doctrine and “belongs to all of God’s people” – you can mention this to affirm that holiness isn’t optional. Hebrews 12:14 (KJV) could be quoted: “*Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*”

**Key Points to Emphasize:**

- **Sanctification as Part of the Salvation Journey:** It may help to outline *three “tenses” of salvation*: We **have been saved** from sin’s penalty (justification, new birth), we **are being saved** from sin’s power (sanctification), and we **will be saved** from sin’s presence (glorification, which we’ll touch on with the crown of life). Sanctification is in that second category – the present ongoing salvation. This keeps people from thinking salvation is only about going to heaven. God’s plan is to **restore us fully** from the effects of sin, including our behaviors and inner nature. Sanctification is evidence of God’s grace at work in a believer’s life, progressively transforming them.
- **Entire Sanctification (Holiness of Heart):** Depending on your group’s theological background, you might introduce the concept of a deeper work of grace (sometimes called *entire sanctification* or *heart purity*). The participant’s guide mentioned that after conversion, a believer may still discover an “inner bending” toward sin (the **carnal nature**). The research from the Church of God text described it as being “one degree below perfect holiness” even after conversion. Many holiness teachers use the analogy of the Israelites: delivered from Egypt (justification) but needing to enter Canaan (sanctified life), with a crisis crossing of Jordan. If this resonates with your context, you can share it. The main idea: God can **cleanse the heart from self-centeredness or rebellion by the infilling of the Holy Spirit**. Romans 12:1 (*present yourselves as a living sacrifice*) and 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 are powerful verses here. 1 Thess. 5:23 (KJV): “*And the very God of peace **sanctify you wholly**; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord... Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*” This shows it’s God’s work in response to our surrender and faith. You might mention that Wesleyan theology distinguishes between *initial sanctification* at conversion, *entire sanctification* (a definite work of heart cleansing), and *progressive sanctification* (growth thereafter). Whether or not the group uses those terms, stress that we should hunger for **greater holiness** and the fullness of the Spirit.
- **Sanctification is both Instant and Progressive:** It’s helpful to convey the **paradox**: in one sense we are sanctified (1 Corinthians 6:11 “*ye are sanctified*”), in another we *are being sanctified* (Hebrews 10:14 speaks of those who “*are sanctified*” as an ongoing process). If someone asks, explain: At conversion, God sets us apart as His own (sometimes called positional sanctification). Subsequently, as we walk with Him, He sanctifies us in experience (progressively). And ultimately at resurrection we’ll be completely sanctified (glorified). This aligns with a quote from research: “*The sanctification of the believer is in three realms—positional, progressive, and ultimate, reflecting the past, present, and future aspects of salvation.*”. You can share that to give a broader picture.

**Discussion & Reflection:** The reflection question asks what areas God is making the person holy and what needs surrender. Be prepared to share an example from your life to prompt

openness (e.g., “I sensed God working on my attitude at work, teaching me patience and honesty – that’s part of Him sanctifying me”). Affirm any participant’s insight, e.g. “I feel I need to surrender my entertainment choices” – commend sensitivity to the Spirit. If someone mentions a struggle (like anger, lust, etc.), steer the group to respond with encouragement rather than judgment. Note that sanctification is often gradual victory; slips don’t mean failure, but we get up and keep growing.

**Important Doctrine – Not by Works but for Works:** We must guard that sanctification (holiness) is pursued **by relying on God**, not as legalism. Reference Philippians 2:13 – it’s God who works in us to will and do of His pleasure. Also Galatians 3:3, a warning about trying to be perfected by the flesh. Encourage reliance on the Holy Spirit for change. Stress that holiness is a response to God’s grace, not a means to earn favor (Ephesians 2:8-10, where v10 says we are created for good works after being saved by grace).

### **Leader Tips:**

- If your group has a mix of backgrounds, some might be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the idea of a post-conversion “experience.” You can present it as “*a deeper surrender and infilling of the Spirit that many believers testify of*”, and show it biblically through Acts (e.g., Samaritans in Acts 8, or disciples in Acts 19). But avoid contentious debate; focus on the common ground: **we all need the Holy Spirit continuously to purify and empower us.**
- Perhaps do a short word study: The Greek *hagiazō* (to sanctify) – share Webster’s definition given in research. That might interest some.
- Encourage the group that sanctification is a **hopeful** doctrine: God intends to **change us for the better**. No one is stuck as they are – “*sin shall not have dominion over you*” (Romans 6:14).

**Possible Activity:** If time, have participants look up one verse about sanctification (like one each: John 17:17, 1 Thess 4:3, 1 Thess 5:23-24, 1 Peter 1:15-16, Philippians 2:13) and share what it teaches. This gets them interacting with the Word directly.

### **3. Baptism of the Holy Spirit – Leader’s Notes & Tips**

**Background (Acts 1–2):** Now we focus on the role of the Holy Spirit. As a leader, clarify that this portion is about the **empowering work of the Spirit**. Depending on denominational context, terms like “baptism of the Holy Spirit” might have specific connotations (e.g., Pentecostal view including speaking in tongues as initial evidence, vs. a non-Pentecostal view that equates Spirit baptism with conversion). Know your audience and possibly acknowledge differing views. The approach in the participant guide tries to be inclusive: it notes the debate but emphasizes the need for **Spirit’s fullness** regardless.

### **Key Points to Emphasize:**

- **Holy Spirit's Indwelling vs. Filling:** Every true believer has the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9 – “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”). However, the New Testament also shows believers being “filled” or experiencing additional outpourings of the Spirit (Acts 2, 4:31, Ephesians 5:18). Explain that *baptism* in Greek means to fully immerse – so being *baptized in the Spirit* means to be fully immersed in the Spirit's presence and power. Use Acts 1:8 (KJV) as Jesus' own definition: “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses.” The research quote from Clarence Haynes is useful: the Spirit's baptism empowers us to live out the Christian life and be Christlike. Consider citing it: “Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we would never become the people [Jesus] wanted us to be...so He sent the Holy Spirit to fill us”.
- **Pentecost as a Model:** Recount briefly the story of Acts 2 – the disciples, already believers, were waiting in prayer; the Spirit came like a rushing wind, tongues of fire, they spoke in other languages and gained boldness. Then mention Acts 10 (Cornelius' household) where Gentiles received the Spirit and Peter equated it to what happened to them at Pentecost. And Acts 19 where Paul finds disciples who had not heard of the Spirit and lays hands on them, they receive Him. These show the experience can happen at or after conversion. The main thing: **it's God's gift, received by faith** (Galatians 3:2). Encourage that the Spirit is given to those who ask (Luke 11:13).
- **Empowerment and Purity:** The Holiness perspective (from the research PDF) stresses the cleansing of the heart at Spirit baptism. The Pentecostal perspective stresses empowerment for service (and often initial evidence of tongues). You can present both as aspects: the Spirit both **purifies and empowers**. Acts 15:8-9 was quoted to show purification; Acts 1:8 shows power. Historically, early holiness preachers (like D.L. Moody or Charles Finney) spoke of being filled with love and purity. Finney describes waves of love via the Spirit, for example. Meanwhile, the Azusa Street revival folks emphasized spiritual gifts. Without getting too technical, say: *The Holy Spirit wants to do an entire work in us – to rid us of sin's domination (Rom. 8:13) and to equip us with gifts and boldness to minister (1 Cor. 12, Acts 4:31)*. Being filled with the Spirit should make someone more holy **and** more effective as a witness.
- **Contemporary Application:** Urge that believers today should seek to be continually filled with the Spirit. It's not just a one-time historical event. Ephesians 5:18 (present imperative in Greek) indicates an ongoing state: “be [being] filled with the Spirit.” Some in the group might share experiences of a “Spirit baptism” or powerful encounters with God. Welcome those testimonies as encouragement. Also, normalize that some may not have dramatic experiences – the Spirit works in different ways (sometimes quietly transforming, other times dramatically). What's important is the **fruits** (Gal. 5:22-23) and **power for godly living** (2 Peter 1:3-4).

**Discussion & Reflection:** The guide asks why we need the Spirit's power and if participants have invited Him to fill their lives. Listen for answers like: *"to overcome sin, to witness, to understand scripture, to pray effectively, to have guidance, to comfort us,"* etc. If someone is unsure about what Spirit baptism means, you might explain using a simple analogy: *We all have the Spirit like a pilot light in a furnace, but being baptized in the Spirit is like the fire filling the whole furnace – it's the difference between having the Spirit and being had by the Spirit. Or water in a cup vs. cup in the ocean.*

If someone asks about speaking in tongues or other gifts: handle according to your doctrinal stance. If open, acknowledge that in Acts, often speaking in tongues accompanied Spirit baptism (Acts 2, 10, 19), but not always recorded (no mention in Acts 8 or 4:31). Emphasize *unity and love* in the group irrespective of differing gifts (1 Cor. 13 puts love above tongues). The goal is not any particular manifestation, but a life overflowing with the Spirit's presence and power.

### **Leader Tips:**

- Sensing the group's comfort, you could consider having a moment of prayer or even laying on hands (if appropriate in your setting) for those desiring to be filled with the Spirit. This can be a powerful time, but ensure it's done orderly and caringly.
- Clarify that being filled with the Spirit is not about emotional hype but about surrender and faith. It often does bring joy and sometimes deep emotional experiences (as Romans 5:5 says *"the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost"* – which can be very moving).
- Remind the group that the Spirit never contradicts Scripture. Any purported leading or manifestation should align with God's Word and exalt Jesus (John 16:13-14). This keeps focus on Christ, which is the Spirit's mission.
- If someone fears this topic (some do), explain the Holy Spirit is gentle – He's compared to a dove. Being filled with Him will never hurt or harm; it will only cleanse and empower and fill with God's love.

**Additional Scriptures:** Joel 2:28-29 prophecy of God pouring out His Spirit on all flesh, showing it's for everyone. Also Romans 5:5 (mentioned above). Possibly share personal testimony or a historical one (e.g., how Moody after being filled saw way more fruit in his preaching).

## **4. Progressive Sanctification – Leader's Notes & Tips**

**Background:** This section is closely tied to section 5 (Maturity), but here we focus on the process aspect. The participant guide covers the idea that sanctification is ongoing – daily growth. The theological term "progressive sanctification" might be new to some, but they understand "spiritual growth." Use relatable terms interchangeably.

## Key Points to Emphasize:

- **Christian Growth is Expected:** Compare spiritual life to natural life: babies are cute but something's wrong if a 20-year-old still behaves like a baby. In the same way, God expects growth. 2 Peter 3:18 and Hebrews 6:1 were cited which explicitly command growth and moving to maturity. Make sure group sees that status quo or stagnation is not the goal; we should "*press toward the mark*" continuously (Philippians 3:13-14).
- **Cooperation with the Holy Spirit:** Progressive sanctification is unique in that it's a **cooperative work**. Justification was entirely God's act; sanctification (the ongoing part) involves our response. Galatians 5:16, "*Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*" Our part is to walk (active), the Spirit then empowers. Similarly, "*work out your own salvation...for it is God which worketh in you*" (Phil 2:12-13). The research materials note that progressive sanctification requires the believer's cooperation and is marked by conflict – mention that inner conflict with sin is actually evidence of sanctification at work, not of failure. (Before salvation, one doesn't war against sin, one lives in it. After, there's a battle between flesh and Spirit – see Gal 5:17 – which shows the Spirit is active in you.)
- **Means of Growth:** Ensure the participants identified the "growth habits." If not thoroughly covered, you list them clearly: **Scripture intake, Prayer, Fellowship, Sacraments (or ordinances like Communion/Baptism), Service, Confession/repentance, and Suffering/Trials**. Maybe ask them which ones they find most impactful or which they struggle with. Encourage balance: e.g., someone might love Bible study but neglect fellowship or vice versa.
- **Patience in Progress:** Growth can be slow or hard to notice day by day. Use an illustration like: *Growth is like a tree, you don't see it growing in real time, but over seasons you notice it has grown*. Encourage them that God is patient like a gardener (John 15, He prunes to get more fruit). Also note that each person's growth path is unique; avoid unhealthy comparisons in the group. The standard is Christ, not each other.

**Discussion & Reflection:** The question was about identifying an area to grow and making a plan. Go around if possible and have each share what they wrote. As a leader, gently ensure the goals are realistic and specific. For example, if someone says "I want to pray more," ask "What might that look like? Maybe set aside 15 minutes each morning?" Make it practical. This turns the study into life application, which is crucial. Also celebrate the growth they *have* seen (the question asked both areas of growth and areas of needed growth). Perhaps have each person share one thing God has grown in them. This can be very encouraging as people realize they aren't who they used to be. It glorifies God's transforming power.

**Addressing Challenges:** Some might express frustration at slow growth or recurring struggles. Remind them that sanctification is usually a **gradual upward trend with some dips**. Like a stock market chart that overall rises but has fluctuations. If someone feels they've plateaued or backslid, encourage repentance and renewal – God can redeem lost time (Joel 2:25 “*restore the years the locusts have eaten*”). No condemnation, just get up and keep going (Prov 24:16 “*a righteous man falls seven times and rises again*”).

### **Leader Tips:**

- It can be helpful to mention that growth is not always linear; sometimes God focuses on one area, then another. Also, early in faith some growth is quick (big obvious sins drop off) but later growth can be more about heart motives, which can feel slower but is deep.
- If applicable, share a personal anecdote: e.g., “I remember as a new Christian overcoming foul language quickly, but years later God worked on deeper pride in my heart, which took longer to root out.” This shows the layers and ongoing nature.
- Keep the atmosphere of **grace**. Growth happens in an environment of grace, not guilt. Affirm that God is pleased with our progress like a parent is with a child's first steps – even if wobbly.

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 3:18 was referenced in participants' text as a key verse on transformation by beholding Christ. Make sure to explain it if not already. The idea of “from glory to glory” – each stage of growth reflecting more of God's glory. Romans 12:2 was cited too about renewing mind. Maybe bring that in: the mind renewal via Scripture is central to transformation.

## **5. Maturity in Christ – Leader's Notes & Tips**

**Background:** This continues the theme of growth but zooms in on the end-product (in this life): **spiritual maturity**. The participant guide described characteristics and the goal of being Christ-like.

### **Key Points to Emphasize:**

- **Definition of Maturity:** In Greek, “mature” is often *teleios* meaning complete or full-grown. So maturity is *not sinless perfection*, but *completeness, stability, grown-up faith*. You might clarify that when the Bible says “perfect” in some translations, it often means mature (e.g., James 1:4).
- **The Role of Solid Food:** Use Hebrews 5:13-14 which participants saw. A mature Christian is feeding on the “meat” of the Word, not just basic milk doctrines. Maybe ask: *What are examples of 'milk' vs 'meat' teachings?* Milk could be foundational truths (Jesus loves me, introductory gospel facts, etc.), meat could be deeper

doctrines (union with Christ, end-times, God's attributes, etc.) and more challenging biblical themes. Not that milk is bad – it's necessary first. But one shouldn't only ever drink milk.

- **Discernment:** Hebrews 5:14 highlighted discernment between good and evil as a mark of maturity. These days, many new or immature believers struggle to discern worldly values vs. biblical values. A mature believer has a *biblical worldview* and can test things (1 Thess 5:21). Encourage developing discernment by constantly measuring things against Scripture.
- **Mentoring and Teaching:** Maturity isn't just for personal benefit; it's so that one can help others (Heb. 5:12 implies they should be teachers by now). Encourage those who have walked with the Lord longer to consider how they can invest in younger believers – that's a sign of maturity, reproducing oneself in others (2 Tim 2:2). This could motivate the mature to not become complacent, thinking "I'm grown now, I can coast." Instead, each should ask, "*Who can I disciple or encourage?*"

**Discussion & Reflection:** The question had them identify qualities of a mature believer they admire and reflect on their own growth. Engage the group by inviting someone to share about their role model of faith (maybe a grandparent, a pastor, etc.). That helps paint a concrete picture of maturity. Common qualities might be: steadiness, deep joy, humility, knowledge of Scripture, fervent prayer life, love for others, wisdom. List them on a board if available. Then ask, how do you think they got there? Draw out that it likely took years, trials, consistency in spiritual disciplines.

Also ask if anyone would like to share how they've grown in the last year or two. Celebrating growth is motivating.

Perhaps discuss the difference between *age* and *maturity*: one can be a Christian for 30 years and still be immature if they haven't yielded to growth; conversely a Christian of 5 years might be quite mature if they pursued God intensely. It's about obedience and learning, not just time served.

**Potential Pitfall:** Someone might equate maturity with knowledge only. While knowledge of scripture is a facet, emphasize that **love** is the true measure (1 Cor 13: if I understand all mysteries but have not love, I'm nothing). So, a simple believer who deeply loves and obeys God may be more mature than a theologian who is proud or unloving. Bring 1 John 2:5, "*whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him.*"

#### **Leader Tips:**

- Encourage an atmosphere where older believers share with younger. Maybe have someone seasoned share advice on growing to maturity.

- If the group has mostly newer believers, use this section to cast vision: *This is what we're aiming for. It's a journey, but God will lead you there.* Possibly share testimonies of well-known saints (missionaries, etc.) to inspire.
- Reiterate that maturity is not the same as being boring or losing zeal; in fact, a mature Christian often has an even deeper passion for God, but it's rooted and wise as well.

**Scriptures:** James 1:2-4 ties trials to maturity ("perfect and entire, wanting nothing"). You might mention how enduring hardships (as covered in next section) plays into maturity – they develop perseverance and character which is part of being complete. Also Colossians 1:28 was cited (present every man perfect in Christ) – underscore that church teaching and ministry aims to help everyone reach maturity, not just conversion.

## 6. Endurance to the End – Leader's Notes & Tips

**Background:** Here we tackle perseverance. The participant guide explained the need to endure and that true believers will remain faithful. The Ligonier devotional excerpt underscored that *only those who stand firm inherit eternal life*, yet clarified it's by God's preserving grace.

This is an opportunity to teach **assurance balanced with warning**. The group might have questions about "Can we lose salvation?" or "What if someone falls away?" Prepare to address this carefully according to your theological leanings (Arminian vs Calvinist views differ some here, but both agree endurance is necessary, they just explain the mechanics differently). Perhaps stick with Scripture phrasing: *We must continue in Christ, but He also keeps us.* Colossians 1:22-23 is a good balanced verse: we'll be presented holy "*IF ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled*". Also Jude 24 (God able to keep us) and Jude 21 ("*keep yourselves in the love of God*"). So there's a mutual aspect.

### Key Points to Emphasize:

- **Trials Will Come:** Ensure participants know the Bible doesn't sugar-coat Christian life. 2 Tim 3:12 "*all who live godly will suffer persecution.*" John 16:33 "*In this world you will have tribulation.*" This preps them so they're not shocked when difficulties hit. Historically, persecution weeded out false believers, but those with genuine faith held on (even if with struggles). Not all trials are persecution; many are everyday hardships or personal sorrows. God uses all to shape us and test our faith's genuineness (1 Peter 1:6-7). It's like fire testing gold.
- **Assurance of God's Help:** Make sure to communicate that **we are not left to endure alone**. God provides resources: His promises (verses to cling to), the Holy Spirit (our Comforter and Strengtheners), fellow believers (to encourage us), and the hope of glory (an anchor for the soul). Highlight that Jesus intercedes for us (Heb. 7:25) and He told Peter, "*I have prayed for you that your faith fail not*" (Luke 22:32). If Jesus prays

for us, we can have confidence. Also, 1 Corinthians 10:13 – God limits our temptations and provides a way to endure it.

- **The Reality of Apostasy:** You might need to address what about those who *don't* endure. For instance, someone might ask, “I know someone who used to follow Christ but now has abandoned the faith – what about them?” You can refer to 1 John 2:19 “*they went out from us because they were not of us*” – implying their departure revealed they were not truly born again. Or Jesus’ parable of the sower: some seed springs up with joy but has no root and withers in trial (Luke 8:13). Stress that **only God knows each heart**, so we shouldn’t judge prematurely, but the **evidence of salvation is continuing in faith**. The positive side: even if someone strays, as long as they are alive there is hope they can repent and return (e.g. the prodigal son). But we shouldn’t presume upon that – hence the warnings in Scripture to take endurance seriously. Use Hebrews 3:14 (we share in Christ “*if we hold our confidence firm to the end*”) as a sober reminder.
- **Practical Ways to Build Endurance:** The participants might mention verses or people that encourage them. Affirm common strategies: daily time with God (builds spiritual resilience), memorizing scripture (to recall in adversity), being part of a supportive church community, reading biographies of saints who suffered, keeping an eternal perspective. Perhaps introduce the concept of “means of grace” – things God has given to strengthen us (Word, prayer, fellowship, etc., which we covered as growth habits). Also emphasize the role of **hope** – looking to the reward. This segues to next section, crown of life. Hebrews 12:2, Jesus endured for the joy set before Him; likewise, 1 Thess 4:17-18 says comfort one another with hope of reunion with Christ.

**Discussion & Reflection:** Allow sharing of testimonies of trials endured. People might talk about how God got them through illness, loss, doubt, etc. This can greatly edify the group. One might say, “I was about to give up, but Scripture X encouraged me,” etc. Write down any particularly powerful scriptures that come up (like Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 40:31, etc.) for all to note.

If someone is currently in a severe trial, take time to encourage and pray for them. This study can become very pastoral at this point.

#### **Leader Tips:**

- Ensure nobody leaves feeling insecure or fearful about salvation. The aim is to exhort to faithfulness while also assuring that **God is faithful**. Philippians 1:6 is a good comfort: “*He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.*”
- If your theology holds “once saved always saved,” phrase it as “*Truly saved, always saved – because true salvation results in a life that endures.*” If your theology allows falling away, emphasize the real warnings and need to abide, but also God’s

readiness to forgive and restore the repentant (Hebrews has both warnings and encouragements).

- Perhaps mention historical martyrs (like Polycarp's famous quote "86 years He has been faithful to me, how can I blaspheme my King now?" at his execution) to inspire endurance under persecution. Or modern stories of believers in difficult countries remaining faithful.

**Scriptures:** James 1:2-4 – trials -> patience -> maturity was in participant part. Romans 8:35-39 could be great to read aloud as a triumphant assurance that nothing can separate us from Christ's love, so we can endure anything with Him. Also Revelation 12:11 about overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and their testimony, loving not their lives unto death, to highlight early Christians endured even death through faith in Christ's blood and hope.

## 7. The Crown of Life – Leader's Notes & Tips

**Background (Eternal Perspective):** In this final part, we look at the *finish line*: eternal life (symbolized as a crown). It ties together the motivation for enduring and living holy – our hope in Christ's promise.

### Key Points to Emphasize:

- **Eternal Life as Knowing God Now and Forever:** John 17:3 defines eternal life as knowing God and Jesus Christ. So eternal life starts now in relationship and continues forever, growing deeper. The "crown of life" implies the **victory of that life over all death** – ultimate vindication of the faithful. Make sure they see crown of life = "*the reward which is life.*" It's not about literal jewelry in heaven; it's about the gift of immortality with Christ.
- **Multiple Crowns in Scripture:** Perhaps briefly list the crowns mentioned: crown of life (James 1:12, Rev 2:10), crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8), crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4 for faithful shepherds), an incorruptible crown (1 Cor 9:25 for disciplined service). Some say these are different rewards; others think they're facets of the same eternal reward. It's not crucial to differentiate, but interesting. The common thread: God promises to reward faithfulness in specific areas (enduring trials, loving His appearing, feeding the flock, self-control in ministry, etc.). But ultimately, any reward is by grace.
- **Not Earning Salvation by Works:** Reiterate (especially if anyone misconstrued enduring or maturity as works to earn heaven) that our entrance into heaven is by Christ's merit alone. But God, as a loving Father, delights to reward His children's obedience. Ephesians 2:8-9 (saved by grace, not works) and 2:10 (created for good works, which lead to reward) can be referenced to maintain balance. The crown is "promised to those who love Him" as James 1:12 says – love for God is the real qualifier, and even our love is a response to His grace.

- **Imagery of the Crown – Victory and Honor:** In the ancient context, the wreath (crown) given to victors implies **we have “won” the race** Paul spoke of (2 Tim 4:7-8) and are honored by the King. Amazing thought: the Lord not only saves us, but will say “Well done” to us and place a crown (honor) on us, when all honor truly belongs to Him. This shows His generosity. Encourage awe and gratitude for that. It should stir a desire to live in a way that pleases Him now, as a person wanting to honor the one who will honor us.
- **Eternal Communion with God:** The participant guide nicely said the crown of life is basically eternal communion with God. Perhaps highlight Rev 21:3, “*Behold, the dwelling of God is with men*” – that’s the essence of heaven. Also Psalm 16:11, “*In Thy presence is fullness of joy...at Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore.*” The greatest reward is God Himself. If someone asks about differing rewards (since some scripture suggests degrees of reward), you can say: The core joy of heaven (God’s presence) is for all, but our capacity to appreciate it or roles in eternity might differ. But in heaven, jealousy or regret won’t mar anything; each is perfectly satisfied with their “capacity” of joy. Yet these rewards motivate us now to give our utmost for His highest.

**Discussion & Reflection:** Encourage sharing of what aspect of heaven/eternity people look forward to most. Some may say “no more pain,” others “reunion with loved ones,” others “seeing Jesus face to face.” All are valid. This can be a joyful, hope-filled discussion, which is a beautiful way to end the study. If someone expresses fear (like fear of death or fear of judgment), reassure them of the promises to those in Christ (Romans 8:1, John 5:24 – “*shall not come into condemnation*”). If appropriate, you might read a bit of Revelation 21–22 describing the New Jerusalem, to stir imagination (no need to get into eschatological debates; focus on the presence of God and beauty of the scene).

Ask how this hope impacts daily life. They might say it gives them courage, helps them value eternal things over material, encourages evangelism (want others to have eternal life too), or provides comfort in loss (knowing it’s temporary). Affirm these.

#### **Leader Tips:**

- End on an encouraging note. Perhaps have everyone say aloud together a verse like Revelation 2:10b “*Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*” Or 1 Corinthians 15:58 “*your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*”
- You might pray a closing prayer thanking God for the comprehensive plan of salvation – from new birth to crown of life – and asking for His help to walk this path faithfully.

- It could be nice to sing or quote a hymn about heaven or perseverance (e.g., “Amazing Grace” final verse: “*When we’ve been there ten thousand years...*”, or “It Will Be Worth It All When We See Jesus”).

**Follow-Up:** Encourage participants to continue studying and growing. Maybe suggest a next study (like on the Gospel of John or Romans, or a practical discipleship course) to build on this. The plan of salvation study has given them the big picture; from here, every aspect can be dug into deeper.

Finally, remind everyone that **salvation is ultimately about a relationship with Jesus**. We look forward to seeing Him crowned with many crowns, even as He gives us a crown of life. Therefore, the driving motive in all of this is love for Christ.

**Thank the group** for their participation and encourage them to keep their Participant’s Guide notes and verses handy as a resource in their walk.

> **Facilitator’s Closing Prayer:** *“Lord, we thank You for Your great salvation – for causing us to be born again, for sanctifying us daily, for empowering us by Your Spirit, for guiding us toward maturity, for helping us endure, and for the promise of eternal life. Strengthen each participant here to walk in this plan of salvation fully. May we all one day hear You say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your Lord.’ In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*