

Small Group Study For
*Go Make Disciples: Building a Culture
of Conversion and Discipleship for the
Archdiocese of Oklahoma City*



LEADER GUIDE

Special Men's Group Edition



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STUDY OVERVIEW

Archbishop Coakley released his second Pastoral Letter for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, January 25, 2019. He states in the opening of this letter its intended purpose:

“The purpose of this pastoral letter is to refocus the vision and consider what the Lord has been doing in our archdiocese and where the Holy Spirit is leading us over the course of the next few years. Our fundamental vision to ‘go make disciples’ has not changed. We are called to be disciples; called to pursue holiness and mission; called to become saints. We are still called to evangelize, to be witnesses, and to live authentic lives as missionary disciples. After five years, we have greater clarity and alignment in our mission.”

Our Archbishop is articulating a spiritual vision for us as an Archdiocese, and is writing a letter to us as our spiritual father to lay that vision out before us. This study guide is meant as a tool to help readers understand and engage with the content of this very important Pastoral Letter.

The study session is NOT a time to read through the Archbishop’s new Pastoral Letter. There are Leader notes in the study encouraging participants to read the letter ahead of time, which is highly recommended. But even if someone has not read the new letter in its entirety, this study session will give them access to the main themes and highlights of the letter and hopefully will draw them into a fuller desire to go back and read the whole thing.

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Use the time allotments in the session outline below as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group. The study is broken into a series of sections. CONNECT provides an opportunity to connect relationally, and a quick capture of the main points of the study, the points you want to keep holding on to long after the study is finished. Pay close attention during this section, and prayerfully listen and hear these key lines from the Pastoral Letter. DISCUSS allows these key points to take root in our hearts and begin to grow within us. This section is the main content of the study. COMMIT moves into life application. We begin to ask questions like, “So what? What does all this have to do with my life? And how do I start putting it into practice?” COMMIT also provides several practical ways that the content of the study can be meditated upon further in prayer afterwards.

Time	Section	Section Overview
5 minutes	Connect	A Series of key lines from the Pastoral Letter that capture the letter’s central theme, “Be Disciples Yourselfs, Go Make more Disciples of others!”
15 minutes	Discuss	Broken into two sections, this part of the study looks at the various kinds of soil we all find in our hearts, and the things we experience that prevent growth, what we could call “enemies to growth”: the world, the flesh and the devil.
15 minutes	Commit	This part addresses the universal call to holiness and helps us understand what God provides to assist us, and ways we can tangibly respond to the call God has given.
10 minutes	Commit	Several tangible ways you can take the content of this study into prayer for deeper reflection.



CONNECT

SAY:

Life is a journey, and it is one that we all are on. Like the Archbishop said, “We all are pilgrims on a journey, a Camino, to heaven . . . it’s a path marked with hills and valleys, over smooth and rocky terrain.”

SAY:

Let’s close our eyes and focus all of our attention as I read several selected statements from Archbishop Coakley’s letter to us.

READ:

- *“I call you to be disciples and go make disciples! This is why we are here! This is our mission.” – pg. 6*
- *“The deepest desire of my heart is to see the Church of central and western Oklahoma flourish as a community of faith that nurtures and raises up fervent missionary disciples. Our task is to prepare good soil to receive the seed of faith.” – pg. 8*
- *“Missionary discipleship is the fruit of good soil. If the goal throughout our archdiocese is to make more disciples, then we must address these kinds of obstacles, and do all we can to prepare good soil in our hearts.” – pg. 15*
- *“Till the soil of your heart, be generous in your response to Christ. Say ‘yes’ to him and embrace the call to holiness. Be a disciple and accept his challenge to go and make more disciples!” – pg. 21*

SAY:

The driving theme, the “golden thread” you could say, of the whole Pastoral Letter is this: Be Disciples Yourself, Go Make more Disciples of others!

PRAY:

Lord Jesus, we pray that you would help our hearts to be open to the power of these words, and give us the grace of your Holy Spirit to respond generously to all that you are asking of us through our shepherd.

DISCUSS

Good Soil

SAY:

How many of you have ever planted something? Most of us can at least remember planting a bean seed when we were in elementary school. Even if you've never planted anything, we all understand that you need good soil if you want to grow something. It was a great analogy back in Jesus' time, and it still works for us today. The powerful lesson for us is the translation of all this to the spiritual life and growth in our faith. If you want to grow spiritual fruit, you need good soil! Listen to this exhortation from the Archbishop's Letter:

READ:

“ . . .we are invited to constantly cooperate with grace to expand our receptivity to God's Word in our hearts. Indeed, the primary work of a spiritual life is to cooperate with God's grace and cultivate the good soil in our hearts to rid ourselves of those things that compete, distract and hinder our receptivity to God's life-giving Word. The more good soil in our hearts, the greater our capacity to bear fruit for the Kingdom. Bearing fruit is the evidence of authentic discipleship.” –

pg. 11

SAY:

Let's capture the various types of soil that the Parable of the Sower talks about. Who can help fill in the details?



Lead a discussion here, about the details from the Parable – see table below. Direct participants to the Participant Guide for the study.

Type of Soil	Internal Condition	External Condition	Group of People Represented
Hard Path	Lack of understanding, unreceptive to faith	Birds (the enemy) come and steal away the seed before it ever sinks in	The Sadducees and Pharisees
Rocky Soil	No depth of heart, seed can't sink any roots	The sun (trial, persecution) comes and the plant withers	The Crowds
Thorny Soil	The seed takes root, but grows up alongside thorns and weeds, which choke off growth	The plant gets choked off by the thorns (the cares of the world and the delight in riches) and can't bear fruit	The Crowds
Good Soil	The seed sinks in and takes root, and the plant grows	The plant bears fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold	The Disciples, followers of Jesus

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Can I relate to any of these various types of soil from my own experience, past or present? How?
- 2) How might God be convicting me about what needs to change in my heart?

Enemies to Growth

SAY:

If the aim is to get more good soil in our heart, then it makes sense to see anything that prevents us from doing that as an “enemy to growth”. The Archbishop uses this section of the Pastoral Letter to talk about our main enemies, defined by the Church as the world, the flesh, and the devil.

READ:


“Continued growth as a disciple calls for an understanding of the enemies and dangers we will encounter along the way, so we can protect ourselves against them. The Parable of the Sower captures the effects of these enemies as Jesus talks about the rocky soil, and the soil filled with thorns. This soil limits fruitfulness and can prevent it altogether. Missionary discipleship is the fruit of good soil. If the goal throughout our archdiocese is to make more disciples, then we must address these kinds of obstacles, and do all we can to prepare good soil in our hearts.” – pg. 15

SAY:

Let’s talk a bit about these enemies from our own experience.



Take time for the group to share about these various enemies, fleshing out the details about them with personal examples.



Enemy	Effect	Can you think of how these things separate us from Jesus?
The World	Busyness, Distractions	
	Legitimate responsibilities – homes, jobs, families, involvements, etc.	
	Noise – TV, technology, activities, entertainment, etc.	
	Secular mentality	
The Flesh	Excessive value on our own comfort and ease	
	Neglecting prayer, skipping Mass	
	Temptations – food, entertainment, sexuality, etc.; not mastering our passions and becoming enslaved to them	
The Devil	The enemy of our human nature, because he literally makes us “less human” with every sin he tempts us to	
	He looks for the “weak places” in us and there he tempts us	

Discussion Questions:

1. How have I experienced these “enemies” myself?
2. Is there a particular area where I seem to be more vulnerable? A “weak place” where the enemy seems to be tempting me? How could I strengthen that area?

COMMIT

Tilling Good Soil

SAY:

One of the most important lessons of the Pastoral Letter is that spiritual growth and the pursuit of discipleship won't happen by accident. It requires intentionality and planning. If the evidence of discipleship is good fruit, and good fruit only grows in good soil, then it makes sense that the key to discipleship is to till more good soil.

READ:

“For fruitful discipleship to be a reality in our parishes, schools and homes, it requires intentional effort. The good soil needs to be cultivated and tilled. Every person, by virtue of their baptism, is called to the pursuit of holiness. This pursuit is the path of discipleship, and fruitful discipleship is rooted in good soil. In addition to dealing with these enemies to our holiness, we must cooperate with God’s grace to till the good soil in our hearts.” – pg. 15



In this section, the discussion has the potential to get more personal, and possibly intimidating. You will need to assess your group and their capacity for self-disclosure to determine how deep you allow the conversation to go. Let their sharing and openness drive the depth, rather than the study questions. Direct participants to the Talk Sheet for the study.



Take time for the group to share about the various things that God provides to assist, and the ways that we can respond to what God is providing. Direct people to their Participant Guide for the study.

What God provides	God's Life – grace; given first in baptism, and offered again and again through the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Reconciliation
	The invitation to relationship with Him, experienced primarily through the gift of prayer
	The Holy Spirit, active in our relationship with God and in our experience of prayer
	The sacred Scriptures; the teachings of the Church and study of our faith
	The experience of community with other believers
Ways we can respond	Giving of our time – for prayer, for Church, for study, for service and love of others, etc.
	Growing in virtue in our life, tempering vice; rooting out sin in our lives, particularly regular sin and sinful habits
	Detachment from the things that can separate us from God – money, possessions, simple pleasures, etc.
	Special encouragement for parents – greater intentionality and vigilance in raising holy children



COMMIT

[This brief time of prayer will incorporate all that has been discussed in this study session. There also are several other prayer and further reflection activities. Encourage them to take time during the next week to enter into one of these prayer experiences.]


SAY:

We have talked about how time in prayer, as well as the experience of community with others can be ways to till good soil in our hearts. As we end our study together, we are going to experience a little of both at the same time by praying together.

For this time of prayer, we are going to imagine that we are Jesus' disciples, and are with him as he is telling the Parable of the Sower. We are going to pray with a short section of the overall passage, where the disciples come to Jesus and ask him why he is speaking in parables. Let's quiet ourselves, and come into His presence for this time of prayer.

PRAY:

"Lord Jesus, we invite your presence here with us today. Come with your Holy Spirit and inspire our imagination in this time of prayer. Open our hearts so we can be receptive to you and all that you desire to speak to us."



[Have one person from the group read this passage from Matthew 13:10-17]

READ:

Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ . . . But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”

SAY:

As we imagine ourselves sitting with Jesus, and hearing his words to our question, what stirs in your heart? How does it feel to be in this inner circle with our Lord? Stay close to the Lord, sitting in his presence and soaking in this moment.

[Allow several minutes of quiet for everyone to reflect and pray. Afterward, take time for each person to share what they experienced in prayer.]

SAY:

There are several other prayer experiences in your Handout. These are things you could do during the coming week to continue praying with the content of this study and the Archbishop’s Pastoral Letter.




Participant Handout - Additional Prayer Experiences

1. Take a prayer hike outdoors, where you will be surrounded by things that are growing, living. Invite the Lord to walk with you and speak into your heart about how he is desiring you to grow and be more alive. Let the content of this study be in the backdrop as you take this time to pray. Talk with Jesus about all you learned, and what ways you feel called to respond to what he has taught you.
2. One of the times the Parable of the Sower appears in the Mass readings schedule, it is coupled with Isaiah 55 as the Old Testament reading. Take time to prayerfully read Isaiah 55:10-13.

Questions to prayerfully reflect on: This message from Isaiah gives us great hope. God's word, which we can also think of as the "seed of faith" from all we have heard from the Parable of the Sower, never goes forth and returns empty, or void. "It shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

3. How have I seen the seed of faith (God's word) bear fruit in my life over time? How has that seed of faith had effect despite the condition of the soil of my heart? What kind of hope does this give me for other areas in my life?
4. There is a good article on the Parable of the Sower on Aletia.org. The link to the article is: <https://aleteia.org/2017/07/15/how-the-parable-of-the-sower-can-change-your-life/>
5. Take time to prayerfully read the article and meditate on the questions at the end of the article:
 - How does reading the Parable of the Sower as a call to conversion challenge you?
 - What are signs that the Word of God has taken root and is growing inside a person?
 - How is the Word of God "alive and active" in the Church? In you?



6. Pope Francis developed a beautiful prayer for Young people and Vocations. Take time this week to very intentionally join your prayers to those of the Holy Father and pray for young people. Make your prayer specific and personal if possible and pray for the young people in your own parish community, offering this prayer up for them:

LORD OF THE HARVEST,

BLESS young people with the gift of courage to respond to your call. Open their hearts to great ideals, to great things.

INSPIRE all of your disciples to mutual love and giving—for vocations blossom in the good soil of faithful people.

INSTILL those in religious life, parish ministries, and families with the confidence and grace to invite others to embrace the bold and noble path of a life consecrated to you.

UNITE us to Jesus through prayer and sacrament, so that we may cooperate with you in building your reign of mercy and truth, of justice and peace.

AMEN.



CLOSING PRAYER

SAY:

Let's close our time together by praying the prayer that Jesus taught us, His friends, to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.