



OUTLINE OF INTRODUCTORY TALK: IT'S TOUGH TO FOLLOW JESUS

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To show that it's wonderful being a Christian – but it's also tough.
- To see that God gives us help – the Holy Spirit, the church, the Bible and prayer.

Note: *It's often easier for people to hear a negative message ("it's tough") than a positive one ("it's wonderful") – so think of ways in which your talk can emphasize the thrill of being a Christian, eg: the tone of your voice, personal testimony, etc.*

Opening

In the past six sessions the group has read about a number of people who met Jesus. Choose one of the following activities to remind them of some of these people:

1. *Play hangman to discover three people who met Jesus. The group have to work out the description by playing hangman in the usual way, and then guess who it describes. Eg: "forgiven and healed by Jesus" (paralysed man), "invited his friends to meet Jesus" (Levi), "went away from Jesus sad" (rich man).*
2. *Stick up twenty pieces of paper around the walls. On ten, write the names of people who met Jesus; on the other ten, describe what happened when they met Jesus. Give group members a blank sheet of paper each. They need to match people with their descriptions and write down the answers. (This is easiest if you label each description from A to J, eg: A: brought back to life by Jesus; B: saw how Jesus died and said he was the Son of God, etc.)*
3. *Ask your group how many people they can remember and what happened to them as a result of meeting Jesus. Depending on your group, you might prefer to ask them to do this in pairs or small groups, and then feed the answers back to you. Between them (maybe with a little prompting from you!) they should come up with the following:*
 - *Paralysed man – Jesus forgave his sins and healed him (Mark 2:1-12)*
 - *Disciples – rescued from drowning when Jesus calmed the storm (Mark 4:35-41)*
 - *Demon-possessed man – his life was transformed when Jesus threw out the demons (Mark 5:1-20)*

- *Woman who had been bleeding for 12 years – Jesus healed her (Mark 5:25-34)*
- *Jairus and his daughter – Jesus brought Jairus' daughter back to life (Mark 5:21-24, 35-43)*
- *Levi the tax collector – left his job to follow Jesus, invited his friends to meet Jesus (Mark 2:13-17)*
- *Roman centurion – saw how Jesus died and said that he was the Son of God (Mark 15:39)*
- *Pontius Pilate – knew Jesus was innocent but still handed him over to be crucified (Mark 15:15)*
- *Rich man – went away from Jesus sad because he had great wealth (Mark 10:17-22)*
- *Man with skin disease – Jesus healed him (Mark 1:40-45)*

Try to keep the focus on the main characters, but you may find they also mention others who were present – the friends who brought the paralysed man, teachers of the law who disapproved, pigs (!), Jairus' family, teacher of the law who asked what the greatest commandment is, soldiers who crucified Jesus, religious leaders who watched Jesus die.

- Some of the people who met Jesus had their lives completely changed as a result. Some were seriously ill, but Jesus healed them. The disciples were in danger of drowning in a terrible storm, but Jesus stopped the storm and saved them. The man whose life was ruined by evil spirits had his life transformed when Jesus made the demons leave him. Jairus' daughter was even brought back to life. All of these people had their lives changed wonderfully by Jesus.
- But did you notice that following Jesus also has a cost? Levi, the tax collector, left his job to follow Jesus. And the rich man went away sad when Jesus told him to sell everything he had and give the money away.
- Following Jesus means a huge change in our lives. Being a Christian is great. But it's also tough. We need to make changes to how we live – changes that our family and friends will notice, and often won't like. There will be things we need to stop doing, which our friends and family will be puzzled, hurt or offended by. And there will be things that we need to start doing which our friends and family may not like. And we may find that we get laughed at, or worse, by people who are close to us.

You may want to include a personal testimony here giving an example of how it is both wonderful and tough living as a Christian. You might also want to refer to Mark 3:31-35; Mark 6:1-6 to show that Jesus had exactly the same experience. The testimony could be from you, another leader or a group

member who is a Christian. If you ask a group member, do give them plenty of advance notice and plan time for them to discuss what they want to say with you or a co-leader beforehand.

- It's great following Jesus, but it's also tough, so God gives us four things to help us:
 - The Holy Spirit – this is the Spirit of Jesus, who helps us to live for him.
 - The church – this means other Christians, who will encourage us to keep going.
 - The Bible and prayer – these are gifts from God to help us to grow to know him more and more.
- During this *Inside Track* weekend we'll find out more about these gifts God gives us as we get the "inside track" on what it's really like to be a Christian.

SOUL OUTLINE OF TALK 1: THE HOLY SPIRIT

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To explain that being a Christian is to have God living in our lives, changing us from the inside out.
- To show that being a Christian is both wonderful and tough.
- To explain what Jesus means when he calls the Holy Spirit “Counsellor”.
- To describe how the Holy Spirit guides us, shows us our sin and gives us the desire to please God.
- To explain that being a Christian is impossible by ourselves – but God gives us his Spirit to help us.

Opening

- We’re going to be thinking about what it’s like to be a follower of Jesus. The first thing to say is that it is great. Being a Christian is about knowing that your sins are forgiven.
- We saw in the story of the paralysed man (Mark 2:1-10) that his friends (and probably he) thought his greatest need was healing. Jesus knew that forgiveness is our greatest need, because sin is the obstacle that prevents us from having a friendship with our loving Creator.
- It’s the same with us. Whatever problems you may have – and many of them are real, and deeply felt – your greatest need is to have your sins forgiven.

You may want to illustrate this point with things your particular group may relate to as “felt needs”: a boyfriend/girlfriend; good grades at school; sense of significance; self-fulfillment; acceptance with others, etc. Try to make your examples very concrete!

- We saw in Jesus’ teaching in Mark 7 that sin comes from deep within us. He said that it’s out of the heart that come “evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly” (Mark 7:21-22). Something big needs to happen to our sinful hearts if we’re going to change.
- That “big thing” is at the centre of what it means to be a Christian. We looked in the last session at what grace means. Being a Christian is not about trying to be a better person in our own strength. The truth is we can’t become a better person – because what’s at the centre of us – our hearts – are sinful. We can’t change our hearts from the outside in.

You could remind them of the illustration of sin as a disease (used in the talk for session 4). The spots on the skin are the symptoms of disease in your blood. You don’t heal the disease by putting band aids (sticking plasters) on the spots – you need medicine to destroy the disease in your blood. Then the spots will go away.

- The Bible tells us that only God can change us from the inside out. God does an amazing thing. He has promised that he will come and live in our hearts, and change us from the inside out.
- We just saw in the game we played how we find some things impossible without help from someone else. Some of you were guided pretty badly and found it doubly difficult! But, if you’re a Christian, you have the perfect helper: God the Holy Spirit.
- We’re going to look at what Jesus says about the Holy Spirit in John chapter 14.

Note: *These Inside Track talks will look at several books of the Bible, not just Mark’s Gospel, so it will be helpful if you give your group page numbers for the Bible references.*

Read aloud John 14:15-18.

1. Who is the Holy Spirit?

- Jesus promises that those who trust him will have a “Counsellor” – in other words, a helper, comforter, guide, instructor – who will live with them and in them.
- Jesus says “another Counsellor”. He is saying that this Counsellor will do for his followers what he himself did for them while he was on earth. Jesus taught his followers the truth about God – so will the Holy Spirit. Jesus challenged his disciples to recognise the truth about themselves – so will the Holy Spirit. Just like Jesus, this Counsellor will help them to understand God’s word, encourage them and support them.
- So the “Counsellor” who comes to live in Christians is the Spirit of Jesus himself. This is what Christians mean when they talk about “the Holy Spirit”.
- The Spirit is not some sort of weird impersonal power. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “him” and “he”. The Spirit is a person – in fact He is God – God in your life.

Note: *If your group includes people with little or no Bible knowledge, you may want to give a very quick explanation of the Trinity here. It’s enough to explain that the Bible says that **God is one** (there is only one God), but also that **God is three** (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). Three persons - one God.*

2. The Holy Spirit shows us the truth

- Do you see how Jesus describes the Holy Spirit in v 17? “The Spirit of Truth”.
- Our sin blinds us to the truth about God, and to the truth about who Jesus is and what he came to do (his identity and mission).
- Only if the Holy Spirit works in our lives will we start to understand the truth of these things.
- So if you’re starting to be convinced that Jesus is who he claims to be – the Son of God – then it’s not because you’re brilliantly clever, but because God’s Spirit is already working in your heart to help you understand it.
- And if you’re starting to see that Jesus’ mission to die for our sins and rise again is true, then that too is God already working in your heart to show you the truth.
- And if you’re still scratching your head and wondering what this is all about, then it’s not because you’re incredibly stupid. It’s because the only way you can understand the truth about God is if the Holy Spirit helps you understand it. You need to ask him to help you understand the truth.

3. The Holy Spirit shows us our sin

- A little later in John, Jesus says this:

Read aloud John 16:8.

- “When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”
- Just as Jesus showed people the sin in their lives, so his Spirit does the same today.
- Do you remember the way Jesus spoke to the rich man – gently pointing out his sin and telling him to build “treasure in heaven” instead? Well that’s exactly what the Holy Spirit does in people’s hearts today.
- If you’re starting to see that you’re a sinner who needs rescuing, that shows the Spirit is already working in your life. He’s showing you what real goodness – “righteousness” – is, and showing you how far you fall short of it, and how much we need forgiveness.

4. The Holy Spirit gives us the desire to obey God

- None of us naturally has the desire to obey God. You might have realized that from your own experience. That’s why we need God’s Spirit to change us from the inside out.
- We’re going to turn to the Old Testament, to the book of Ezekiel. This is a

promise from God himself, to all those who put their trust in him.

Read aloud Ezekiel 36:26–27.

- So, the Spirit changes people’s hearts, taking away stone-like hearts that don’t care about God and giving them hearts that desire to obey God. He makes it possible for us to do things that previously would have seemed too hard or that we would simply not want to do ourselves. If you have started to have a longing in your heart to go God’s way, then it’s a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life. He fights against everything that keeps you from knowing God more fully.

Starting and continuing

- I don’t want to give you the impression that this happens all at once. Being a Christian is about growing. Growing in our understanding of the truth about God. Growing in our understanding of the truth about ourselves. And growing in our ability to love God, and live in a way that pleases him.
- Think of it this way. It’s a bit like moving into a new house. There’s a “moving in day” when you arrive with all your boxes and stuff. Over the next few weeks, you unpack and put all your furniture in the rooms, and your clothes in the drawers. But it’s only over a long period of time that you redecorate the house, and make it how you want it. It’s like that when you become a Christian – except you are the house and God is the one who moves in! It will take him a long time to change you – and some of the changes you will find incredibly hard. But in the end he is “remaking” you into how he wants you to be.

You may want to ask one of the leaders (or a Christian group member) to give an example of how the Holy Spirit has affected their life – by teaching them the truth, by showing them their sin, or by giving them a desire to live for God. Give them plenty of advance notice and plan time for them to discuss what they want to say with you or a co-leader beforehand. It is important that they make clear that being a Christian is great, but also tough.

Conclusion

Now, you might be thinking: “If I become a Christian, I could never change; I could never keep it up; I could never live like I am supposed to.” And that’s true – you can’t. And God knows that too. That’s why he sends the Holy Spirit into our lives to help us.



OUTLINE OF TALK 2: THE CHURCH

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To explain that a church is a family of Christians who meet together.
- To show that we need to help each other if we are to live the Christian life.
- To explain that a good church is where Christians listen carefully to God's word – the Bible – and change how they think and live as a result. They also encourage each other, remember Jesus' death and resurrection, and pray together.
- To show that being part of the church is a great privilege – but sometimes it can also be tough.

Opening

- What springs to mind when you think of church? Maybe you think of a building in the centre of your town, or a Sunday service with lots of old ladies wearing hats, or a place where some people go for a coffee morning now and again. (*You could play the first 1½ minutes of Episode 1 of the Soul DVD here to show some ideas of "church".*)
- But the Bible says church is none of those things. It's a family of people who believe in Jesus.

1. What is a church?

Read aloud **Hebrews 10:25**. (*Either stop reading after the words "encourage one another", or continue to the end of the verse and explain that "the Day approaching" means they were looking ahead to when Jesus will come back again on the Day of Judgment.*)

- So the church is about meeting with one another and encouraging each other.
- One of the amazing things about becoming a Christian is that you're immediately part of a family. The Bible often talks about God as our Father and Christians as his adopted children. So, every Christian has a whole bunch of new brothers and sisters who are looking out for them.

Ask one of the leaders (or a Christian group member) to talk about how the church has been an encouragement to them, and also how going to church has been tough. If you ask a group member, give them plenty of advance notice and plan time for them to discuss what they want to say with you or a co-leader beforehand.

- Proverbs 13:20 says: "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm". This verse is talking about how you can spend time with two different types of people. If you hang out with a fool, the Bible says you'll suffer harm. If you hang out with a wise person, the Bible says you'll grow wise. We need to have Christians around us because they will have a positive influence on us and help us to be wise in living for God.
- So the Christian life is not a solo activity; it's not about going on your own – it's about teamwork.
- It's like the activity we did together a moment ago, where we all had to help each other. Everybody in the church has a role to play, and they need to work with each other so that the whole church benefits and serves God together.

Give an example from your own life of how being surrounded by like-minded people helps you. For example: training for a race, trying to lose weight, or learning a new skill such as pottery or playing the viola.

- If you look around the people here, you might think we're a weird bunch! And you might think that at church too. Sometimes it can be tough getting on with other Christians. But that's another thing the Holy Spirit helps us with. He draws Christians together as members of God's family, so we can help and support each other. He helps us to genuinely love each other.

2. What happens at church?

- So what's church supposed to be like? In the book of Acts we find out what happened after Jesus died and came back to life. It's like a time capsule because it shows us what the very first churches were like.

Read aloud **Acts 2:42**.

- The apostles were all men who had spent time with Jesus. This verse tells us that the church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."
- What four things happen here? (*Ask the group to suggest answers.*)
 - They listen carefully to God's word (the apostles' teaching) and change how they think and live as a result.
 - They care for one another.
 - They remember Jesus' death by breaking bread (which churches do today when they take communion or The Lord's Supper together).
 - They pray.
- It's so important to find a church where all these things happen.

Conclusion

Church should be about people who follow Jesus spending time with one another, encouraging one another and getting to know God better. Being part of a church is a great privilege. Sometimes it can also be tough – but if we ask the Holy Spirit to help us get along together, he will.



OUTLINE OF TALK 3: TALK

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To show that the Bible and prayer are vital to the Christian life.
- To explain that when we read the Bible, God talks to us.
- To explain that when we pray, we talk to God.
- To show that reading the Bible and praying are great – but we can also find them tough.

Opening

You may want to use the following illustration (or come up with another illustration that is particularly relevant to your group):

Good communication is important, isn't it? Some people really aren't very good at it. There was a sign in an office which said: "Would the person who took the step ladder yesterday please bring it back or further steps will be taken". And a sign on a church noticeboard said: "Weightwatchers will meet at 7pm. Please use large double door at the side entrance." (You can find other examples of mis-communication on signs by searching online for "funny signs around the world".)

- Good communication is the key to knowing God. We need to speak regularly and honestly with God, and also listen to what he wants to say to us. That's why Christians pray and read the Bible – in the Bible God talks to us and in prayer we talk to God.

1. God talks to us

You may want to use the following illustration (or come up with another illustration that is particularly relevant to your group):

Imagine the postman delivers a letter to you. You pick it up and then, if you're anything like me, you look to see who it's from, because when we know who it's written by, it affects the way we read it. If it comes from your friend or is important news, you'd read it really carefully. But if it's a letter from your dentist, or someone you've never heard of trying to sell you chair covers, you'd probably just look it over quickly and then throw it away. But when we pick up the Bible, we should remember that it's a love letter from God and full of important news. So we'll want to read it really carefully.

Read aloud *Psalm 1:1–3*.

- Verse 2 tells us that the Christian's "delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night". So Christians are to follow, not the people around them, but what God's law – the Bible – says. When we read the Bible, we are reading God's words to us. God talks to us.
- And in case you're worrying that reading the Bible is like trying to understand an astronomy text book written in Russian – that's something else the Holy Spirit helps us with. He helps us to understand the Bible, and to do what God is telling us.
- And as we listen to God's words in the Bible, we become, verse 3 says, "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither." It's like one of those great big trees you sometimes see in a forest – it's so big, you can't get your arms around it – it's been there for years. Storms have come and gone but it's still there. And it's still producing fruit – year in, year out. Amazing that it keeps going. But of course, it wouldn't keep going if it had no water. Trees need it to survive.
- And that's what it says here: if we want to be strong and keep going year after year, we need the Bible – just as a tree needs water.

Read aloud *Psalm 1:4–6*.

- Did you notice the contrast there? These people, who don't care what God wants to say to them, are like "chaff". That's the useless bits left over at harvest time when the farmer is collecting grain. You know, the husks and bits of straw. And, unlike the tree by the river, they just get blown away by the wind.
- It's amazing to know God "watches over" those who have put their trust in him. But there's a warning that people who ignore the words of the one who made them have no future and will perish.
- So, will we be like chaff – with no stability, or substance, and no future? Or will we be like the tree – firmly rooted and fed and strengthened by what we read in the Bible?

2. We talk to God

- It's really hard to communicate with people without using words, isn't it? Some of you were better at it than others when we played the game, but words just make it so much easier, don't they? It's the same if we want to build a relationship with God. We're going to need to talk to him – and that's what prayer is all about.
- We're going to look together at one of the prayers in the Bible.

Read aloud *Acts 4:23–31*.

- Can you think of the worst time in your life, when everything seemed to be

going badly wrong? Well, that's exactly where the disciples are at this point. Their two main leaders have just been questioned by the most important religious leaders, who are determined to shut them up. So what's the answer? What's the best thing to do in this situation? Answer: they pray together.

- And look at who they pray to in verse 24: the "Sovereign Lord ... [who] made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them." It's as if they're saying: "Lord, you made the universe, our world and all the people who live in it, and you're in control of everything, even those people who are threatening us."
- That's who Christians pray to: a God who is unimaginably powerful, who is the real King of everyone and everything.
- However much people try, plotting against this "Sovereign Lord" is a complete waste of time. So even though Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel all plotted to have Jesus killed, verse 28 tells us: "They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." You have to be incredibly powerful to make your enemies do what you want, even as they're doing what *they* want!
- The disciples then ask for God's help. They pray in verse 29: "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." And God responds to their prayer in a very visible way: "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."
- That's another thing the Holy Spirit helps us to do – he helps us to be bold when we tell people about Jesus. By speaking the word of God boldly, they are doing exactly what the authorities have forbidden them to do. You wouldn't do that unless you believed that God was in control!
- Of course, God doesn't always answer prayer in the way Christians want or expect. At moments like that, we must remember that God is still in control; that he has a plan; that he is wiser and more loving than we are; and that the decisions he makes are trustworthy. There will be difficult situations that we won't understand until we're with God in eternity.
- So when Christians pray, they're praying to the Sovereign Lord, who is in complete control of everything that will happen. It's an amazing privilege. And it means that Christians can talk to God about anything. He is interested in even the small details of their lives.
- When talking to God, you mustn't forget to say the things you'd say to a trusted friend. You'd apologize for the things you've done wrong and ask them to forgive you. You'd thank them, ask them for help (for yourself or for other people), tell them your secrets, and pour out your heart to them.

- The difference is, when you talk to God, you're talking to someone who is in control of everything – and who loves to give you every good thing you need. He even gives us help when we don't know what to say. If you're not sure how to pray, or what to pray about, ask the Holy Spirit to help you. He will!

Conclusion

- What is your attitude to prayer and the Bible? Sometimes people use them as a last resort when everything else fails. There they are on the way to school or college and they've got a really tough exam coming up; they haven't done much studying, so they pray something like this: "Please God, get me through this test and I promise I'll be nice to grandma from now on". And sometimes we treat the Bible in the same way. It's where you go for some emotional support or help in emergencies.
- But praying and reading the Bible shouldn't be like a big red button we press only in an emergency. Actually, it's what Christians do every day because they want to know God better.

Ask one of the leaders (or a Christian group member) to talk about the importance of speaking to God and God speaking to them through his word. Ask them to include times when they have found prayer and Bible reading tough, as well as ways in which it has been great. If you ask a group member, give them plenty of advance notice and plan time for them to discuss what they want to say with you or a co-leader beforehand.

SOUL OUTLINE OF CONCLUSION

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To recap the main points covered during the weekend/day away.
- To prepare the group members for session 7, the final session of the Soul course.
- To challenge group members to think about the personal implications for them if they follow Jesus.

Talk

- Being a Christian is both great and tough. We've seen examples of this from the lives of the very first Christians, and we've also heard examples from leaders (*and group members*) who are living as Christians right now.
- We've thought about the things God gives us to help us live for him:
 - *The Holy Spirit* – who shows us our sinfulness and helps us to change on the inside and want to live for God.
 - *The church* – meeting together with other Christians who help us keep going as followers of Jesus.
 - *The Bible and prayer* – God talks to us through his book, the Bible, and he helps us talk to him, too, as we pray.
- In the closing session of the *Soul* course we will be looking at exactly what it means to be a Christian. To help us be ready for that session, I'm going to give you two questions to think about. I'm not going to ask you the answers today, but it will help if you think about them before our last meeting together.
- The questions are:
 1. What sort of things would you need to start doing if you followed Jesus?
 2. What things would you need to stop doing if you followed Jesus?
- We've seen that God will help you as you start doing some things and stop doing others – he'll help you by his Spirit, through other Christians in the church, and as you read the Bible and pray. God will help you – but it's still important to think carefully about the difference being a Christian will make to you personally. So that's why we're asking you to think about these two questions before we meet again.

- We'll pick up some of your answers in the last session as we think about exactly what it means to be a Christian.