



Be Transformed Forever!

Gathered Event Associated with
Fr. Larry Richard's message, *The Truth*

LEADER OVERVIEW: *The Truth Gathered Event*

Fr. Larry asks us the ultimate question: "What is the meaning of Life?" While many of us know about Jesus, many of us do not know Jesus. We know the answer, but do not fully know *The Answer*. We are all in need of deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. More than a theological fact or some historical figure from long ago, Jesus Christ is alive and present to us *personally*, here and now. He is the Answer to every question. He is the Answer to the deepest yearning of our hearts. Jesus Christ is the Truth. Through His Holy Spirit we are constantly being invited into an ever-deepening relationship with Him.

We often walk away from talks with a good feeling of having rubbed elbows with *The Truth*, but not too long after we find ourselves back to the way we were. Jesus wants us to do more than rub elbows. He wants more than a fleeting moment. He wants us for eternity. He wants us to live in this relationship because it's what He fashioned us to do! To help accomplish this God gave us Himself in community, a context of support and encouragement. That is the purpose of this study guide—to encounter Jesus Christ in a context of support and encouragement, that we might journey together toward our heavenly home.

OBJECTIVE: *To be transformed forever*



The simple objective of this guide is for our lives to be transformed forever. As Fr. Larry points out, it is in loving one another that we love God (1 Jn. 4:12). Transformation happens when we more deeply encounter Jesus Christ, not just as individuals, but as a community.

POTENTIAL USES:

- 1) **Family Gathering.** Our prayer is that you to use this to bring your family together—that this message might be experienced by your family— your husband or wife, along with parents, brothers, sisters and their middle school-age children on up.
- 2) **Friend Groups.** Invite your closer adult friends and their children to a warm evening in your home. Consider extending it to friends of friends.
- 3) **RCIA, Religious Education, High School, College Religion or Theology Class.** Offer teachers the gift of this easy-to-follow lesson plan. It will likely be one of the most memorable moments of their class experience!
- 4) **Bible Study or Prayer Groups.** Advertise and use this as an occasion to invite new participants!
- 5) **Unique Event.** Pastors and leaders—advertise this as a unique opportunity to bring your community together.

Regarding this guide—don't be intimidated! It's easy to use. Use it to the letter, or just in parts! The main thing is to come together. Let the Holy Spirit be your Guide! Make sure to review it in advance to make sure you've prepared all the materials. By plugging into our website (www.thereasonforourhope.org) we will make available other event guides, tools and resources to help you grow as a group and individually.

NEEDS:

- 1) Comfortable gathering space with sufficient capacity
- 2) Television or monitor with *The Truth* DVD, or boom box with *The Truth* CD
- 3) Snacks and Beverages
- 4) Have music to play at the gathering, and (a track like), *When all is said and done* by Geoff Moore and the Distance, and a reflective CD like Chris Rice's *Living Room Sessions* (purchase tracks for \$1 from itunes.com or Napster.com)
- 5) Prepare a "sandbox" – a pail or bowl filled with sand, with a toothpick/sticker "flag" on top that says "Earthly Treasure"; also have zip-lock bags, twisty-ties, a spoon and small stickers with markers.
- 6) Candle and matches
- 7) Scripture, with the passage prepared: Matt. 8:23-27.
- 8) Optional: someone willing to more fully share their experience of encountering God's love in their life and the difference it made
- 9) Shoot us a note and let us know when you're conducting your event—so we can keep you specially in our prayers: contact@TheReasonForOurHope.org – subject: Truth Event.

PART I: ICEBREAKER- What are You Holding Onto? (Optional)

LEADER: Fr. Larry tells the story of the Old Man from Crete who, before entering the Pearly Gates, has to surrender a handful of dirt from his beloved homeland. At a key point in the talk, Fr. Larry asks the question, "What are you holding onto so tightly that you will not receive what God wants to give you?" This icebreaker is an opportunity to help participants shift gears from where they've been. It helps establish a comfort level with those present. It sets the stage for what will follow. At the entry way to the gathering room, have a "sandbox" filled with sand, with a little sign in it saying "Earthly Treasure." As you greet people, invite them to take a baggie and fill it with one spoon full of sand, seal it with a twisty tie, apply a sticker and put their name on it. They should be advised to hold it in their hand until told otherwise. Also have snacks set out.

When you're sure everyone's gathered (etc.) -- invite everyone to get some snacks or beverages and to sit down. Welcome everyone. Have them make sure they have their Earthly Treasure in their hands. Explain:

When you first arrived you hopefully saw the sandbox with the sign, "Earthly Treasure." I want to invite you to take a moment and imagine that everything you value, everything you hold dear, everything you really love and live for is represented by those grains of sand. Before we get to the talk, I want to invite us to go around and learn more about those of us here. Please introduce yourself, and take a moment to share what your

Earthly Treasures are. What are those things that excite you, that you live for, that give you a sense of purpose on this earth?

Beginning with yourself, go around and have everyone introduce themselves, and explain what their Earthly Treasures are.

PART II: INTRODUCE THE TALK

LEADER: Invite everyone to get comfortable. Invite a participant to read Matt. 8:23-27 (Jesus calms the storm). Read areas in blue, or offer words which similarly dispose the group. Prepare to read reflectively and dramatically.

Our lives are so full of words. Like a small ripple on a placid lake, beginning in the morning words begin to stir the water of our souls. It begins quite peaceful. But little by little, as more words are added by co-workers, family, friends, media... as some of those words have real weight, those ripples become waves. Those waves are inside of us. They can carry us away, and even drown us.

Do we ever stop to ask the question, with all these words are our lives more peaceful or more anxious? Have the words opened up our hearts? Or have they made us numb to the sound of the Living Word?

While there are many of us who speak *about Him*, few of us take the time to really speak *with Him*. Fewer still take the time to be silent, to let Him speak within us. Before we begin tonight let's think about the state of the ocean in our souls. Let's think about those inner waves we've grown so accustomed to. He is present. Let us hear Him speak to the raging storm in our souls: "Be still!" "Be still!" While silence can be uncomfortable, let's allow enough time for He who is the Word to still all the other words. Let's allow His Silence to sweep away our distractions, to still the storm so we can more fully receive Him [allow enough silence, past that uncomfortable space, until everyone is surrendered. Even 2-3 minutes of good silence can do this. Then continue....]

2000 years ago while dying on a cross, Jesus looked ahead to this moment. He saw deep inside you and me, here and now. He saw every struggle, every burden, every hardship, every ugly sin and vice. He saw our distractions, those swirling things that keep us from encountering Him. For this moment, for you, here and now-- Jesus was literally dying – dying for you to experience His life-transforming grace. As we listen to Fr. Larry tonight, let us be mindful of the Earthly Treasures we carry in our hands. Even more, let's have ready hearts to hear what God offers us. Let us have a spirit of anticipation. Let's turn to Him as we pray:

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER... Lord Jesus, we are incomplete. We are in need. You are the only one who can fill that space inside. In this new moment we pray for a spirit of anticipation. Open up our hearts Lord to hear your Voice, to newly experience the wonder and depth of your

amazing love. We pray for you to reveal yourself again. We pray that our lives might be flooded with your life-transforming grace. We desire to encounter You who are Love, a love that does not fade, a love which captures us in a communion with you forever. Tonight reveal yourself to us that we might know you in our depths, that we might love you and serve you. We believe in you Lord, help us to believe in you more. We ask these things in your name. IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER...

**Ask them to turn off cell phones (etc.).
View (DVD) or listen (CD) to *The Truth*.**

PART III: PROCESSING CONVERSATION

After hearing the talk, give everyone the chance to stretch, use the bathroom and/or get some beverages and snacks. When you're re-settled, gather together again. Below are some questions to help foster conversation. Use them as a guide, not as a goal (i.e., to get through them all). The main purpose is to foster fellowship in the Spirit through comfortable reflection and conversation. It is to build meaningful and lasting relationship in Him. It should be free flowing. Be mindful of introverts and extraverts. If someone is particularly quiet, ask them what they think. Don't be afraid of silence. That's God's opportunity to speak.

OPENNING: What in general did you think? What hit you?

- 1) You know about God, but do you know God? How?
- 2) What is your prayer like? How much time do you spend? Do you listen to God?
- 3) What do you need from God right now?
- 4) Fr. Larry speaks of Sr. Joan Wagner helping him to understand God. Has there been someone like that in your life? Who? Have you been that person in the lives of others? Explain.
- 5) Fr. Larry was moved by God's words in Isaiah 43:1-5, that we are precious and honored in His eyes... and He loves us. Do you find it easier to see that in others, but not accept it for yourself? Why?
- 6) Fr. Larry hurt his grandma by not letting her love him. Are there those in your life whom you do not let love you? Why? What is it like when someone you love does not let them love you?
- 7) What is love? [explore difference between the world's view and the true view: God is love, revealed in Jesus Christ, who showed us that love is dying to self for the good of the other, without any expectation of return].
- 8) What are you afraid of in your life?
- 9) Before hearing this talk, what was your identity? How did you view yourself? What do you think now?
- 10) Fr. Larry quoted 1 John 4:20: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." Not mentioning names, are there some people you struggle to love? Do you think that affects your relationship with God? What does it take to love someone?

- 11) What did you think about Fr. Larry's story about his father? Do you *regularly* tell those closest to you that you love them? How are you going to be different as a result of hearing this story?
- 12) Fr. Larry says, "You prove your love by what you give your time to." Is Jesus your Lord? Is He totally in charge? What parts of your life are not under his Lordship? Do you place a higher priority on anything (i.e., television, food, friends, etc.) above time with the Lord? What will it take for you to make Him the Lord?
- 13) Does your family place a higher priority on watching television, movies, sports, eating food than praying together? Is Jesus Lord of your family? Do you pray with your parents, children, brothers, sisters, etc.? Will you commit to doing so beginning now?
- 14) Fr. Larry says, "If you don't give 10% of your money to God, you're stealing from him." What do you think about that? Is God in charge of your money?
- 15) Who or what sets the standard for sexuality in your life, popular culture or the Lord? What is the difference between the two—in terms of an ability to bring real peace and intimacy? Is Jesus the Lord of your sexual life?
- 16) Fr. Larry quotes Gal. 2:19 "I have been crucified with Christ... the life I live is not my own." What do you think about this message -- that we have to die, so He can live in us? What does this mean?
- 17) Have you ever felt like the Old Man of Crete, thinking that God just wants to take away what is most important to you? When? What is it that you hang onto so tightly that you can't receive what God wants to give you?

PART IV: WITNESS (Optional)

If someone has a powerful testimony to share along these lines, inform them in advance and have them prepare to share it at this time.

PART V: CLOSING PRAYER AND COMMITMENT

LEADER: Announce that you're going to conclude. Invite them to be silent for a few moments. Play some reflective music as you change the environment. Light candles and turn off the lights. Place the "sandbox" in the middle of the group.

Read:

[read slowly and prayerfully] Fr. Larry tells the story of the Old Man from Crete who, before entering the Pearly Gates, has to surrender a handful of dirt from his beloved homeland. At a key point in the talk, Fr. Larry asks the question, "What are you holding onto so tightly that you will not receive what God wants to give you?" From the moment you arrived here tonight you've been holding onto sand. This sand represents your Earthly Treasures, it represents your Crete. It represents all the things you value most. It might also be anger or bitterness—things you don't value, but are very much apart of your life—that you've carried so long. This sand is quite literally what is in your soul. Take a moment now to think about it again [allow a few moments for quiet consideration].

[read slowly] God invites us now... each and every one of us, to *let it go...* so He can flood us with His Amazing Love. As we play a song I want to invite you to listen to the words. When you are so moved, open your bag and empty back into the Earthly Treasure box. Don't do this lightly. Really think about what you're doing. Think about what this sand represents. Make it a prayer— and as the Spirit moves you to pour it back, when you return to your place, close your eyes and invite Jesus Christ to fill the space. Invite Him to take the place of those things you value so much. Invite Him to take the place of any bitterness or anger. Invite Him to flood you with His love that you would strive to live under His Lordship, that you would strive to live a life marked by prayer and love.

Play the song, *When All is Said and Done*. Have other reflective music for when this track is complete. Consider Chris Rice's piano/instrumental, *Living Room Sessions*. When you conclude, allow the Spirit to Guide you—perhaps this group would like to gather again, or commit to a regular gathering? Perhaps you'd like to set up another opportunity where all present invite friends? Stay plugged into www.TheReasonforourHope.org – we'll be providing other guides. We've been praying for you—please shoot us a note and let us know how it went—contact@TheReasonForOurHope.org – subject: Truth Event.