

Living Intentionally

Session One | Holy Living

Before the Session

Prepare a Group Covenant

For most of the sessions in this series, you will be invited to talk about things that are easy and comfortable. However, there will also be times when you will be encouraged to have conversations about issues that are more personal. It may be helpful for your group to take the time to set up a group covenant that will help everyone feel safe and provide appropriate boundaries for sharing outside of the sessions. A sample of some things you may want to include in the covenant is shared at <http://living.faithelement.net/sample-covenants/>, but feel free to adapt it to fit the needs of your group. Take some time before you begin the first session to do this so you and your group feel comfortable moving forward.

How to use the covenant

Before the session begins, make copies of the covenant for your group. As you begin your time together, introduce the series and then explain the need for the covenant by saying something like this:

“Over the next several weeks we will be considering and discussing ‘intentional living.’ Sometimes we will have conversations about our own lives, and out of respect for one another’s privacy, I think we all can agree that we should each honor that privacy by not sharing our conversations outside of our time together. This covenant voices our shared commitment to make this a safe space for sharing and caring.”

Distribute the covenant, allow time for the group to read it, and then ask if it is acceptable. Offer a prayer of commitment to the covenant, and ask for God’s blessings on the group’s time together.

Gather These Items

A toy magic wand

Old magazines

Cardstock paper

A collection of art supplies including: scissors, glue, crayons / markers, sequins, feathers, string, etc.

Leading the Session

Open (15-17 minutes)

Play the video *FaithElement Studies for Women: Living Intentional Lives, Introduction*.

Leader's Note: The “Open” activities for the sessions are designed to get things moving, encourage conversation, and begin to invest the participants in the session. The best approach to leading the “Open” activity is for the leader to be enthusiastic, positive, and fully committed to the activity. Make it clear everyone is expected to participate.

This opening activity is designed to help participants consider some aspect of their life that they might want to magically change. Some responses will be funny, and others serious. You may want to leave a few moments of silence before beginning to pass around the wand — allowing time for participants to consider the question. Also, after giving instructions, set an example by going first with your own response to the question.

Explain (feel free to put this in your own words): “Do you have a magic wand? You know — a way to make your wishes come true? In case you don’t have yours with you, I’ve brought one we can share. As the wand is passed to you, answer this question: If you could wave that magic wand and magically fix one thing in your life or take care of one daily chore for you, what would it be?”

After each person has taken a turn with the wand, encourage reflection with questions like these:

- What did you feel as you held the wand and considered your wish? (Leader: encourage them to focus on sharing feelings.)

- What were some of the repeated themes we heard as different persons shared?

Conclude the activity with a statement similar to this: “As nice as it might be to have a magic wand that can magically change aspects of our lives, that’s not reality. But there may be another way to begin to live more intentionally.”

Create (10-15 minutes)

Leader’s Note: The “Create” activities for the sessions are designed to encourage participants to engage different aspects of learning. We all learn in different ways. Some in your group may really get into the activities and others may not find them as appealing. Feel free to modify the activities in a way that best fits your group.

Using the art supplies, magazines, and card stock, encourage each participant to make a collage that represents all the different parts of her life right now. Say something like, “Use the art supplies you find in front of you to make a collage to represent the different roles in your life. You may choose to represent things like your work; children; volunteer work or role at the church; your role as a wife, daughter, granddaughter, or friend; or any other number of activities and relationships that take your time and energy. Don’t make any judgments on these roles — simply show us what they are.”

If you have a group that is less interested in the art project, you may encourage them to journal about their roles instead.

After everyone is finished, encourage reflection on the activity with questions like these.

- What do you notice about the roles you carry in your life? How many are chosen and how many are just a part of who you are?
- Which of these roles do you feel comfortable with? Uncomfortable with?
- Which roles are life-giving? Are any of them not life-giving?

- Do you want to strive to live more intentionally in any of these areas specifically?

Discuss (20-25 minutes)

Watch the FaithElement video, *Studies for Women, Living Intentional Lives: Holy Living*, and then use the questions below to encourage discussion. After the video is over, ask your group to respond to it. You can ask them what they thought about it and the text. After they have had an opportunity to respond to the video, use the following questions to encourage discussion.

Leader's Note: The “Discuss” section for each session is designed to encourage a deeper conversation for the participants. When appropriate, encourage the participants to reflect more and to discuss their feelings. In the first session, it may take some encouragement to get people to talk. Don't be afraid of a few minutes of silence. It takes some groups time to feel comfortable talking in front of one another. Use the following questions and statements to encourage discussion.

- It is important to celebrate things that we do well. To do something intentionally is to do it purposely and willfully. What are some things you already do intentionally in your daily lives? These could be things in your work, in keeping your house, in caring for yourself, your kids, others, or your faith.
- In the video, Nikki discusses how working toward living more intentionally can feel overwhelming. When you are preparing to make improvements in some area of your life, what most often holds you back?
- Sometimes it is helpful to know where we can grow when we have a sense of where God is already moving in our lives. In what areas of your life have you sensed God's working and building?
- What kinds of things do you want to make happen in your life of faith? What would you hope your life of faith could look like if you had all the time in the world?

Share (5-7 min)

Leader's notes: The "Share" section of each session is intended to encourage application and to continue to build community in your group. For this particular activity, you may have a member that cannot find a blessing to share. It is important to honor that and to not try to name one for her. Simply honor her honesty and continue with the next person.

Say something like: "One of the simple ways we can begin to live our lives more intentionally is to work toward looking at the difficult things in our lives in new ways. At the beginning of the session, you shared with one another something in your life that you would change if you could wave a magic wand and make it happen. Take a moment to reconsider that thing you would change and try to see it in a new way. See if you can find a blessing in it."

Pass the wand around again, this time sharing your new perspective on a difficult task. For example, dirty dishes means you have food on your table, changing diapers means you have a child you love at home, long commute means you have the means to get to a job and support your family.

After everyone has had a turn, it may be helpful to reflect on what they have done. Do so using questions like these.

- Did you notice any themes in the responses from each person?
- Can we find ways to use this kind of activity in our daily lives? How can it play a part in our efforts to live more intentionally?

Pray (3-4 min)

Leader's Note: Ideas for prayer are offered, but it is up to you to know what works best for your group. Do be sure to encourage the group to pray for one another throughout the week.

Sometimes it can be a challenge to find the blessings in the difficult parts of our lives. Take some time to pray for one another. Pray for those things that have been named during your session

and for those things that go unnamed. You might consider getting in groups of two or three and having each group pray personally for one another.

At-Home-Work

Leader's Note: Each session will be followed by at-home-work activities. This is not intended to be homework, in the sense that it is required. It is simply offered as an opportunity to continue the work that was begun in the sessions and as a way to prepare for the coming week. Encourage you participants to take advantage of these opportunities, but also let them know that they have full control over how much time and energy they put in them.

There is a practice in Christian Spirituality called the Daily Examen that was practiced heavily by Ignatius of Loyola who lived in the 1500s. His group of monks, the Jesuits, continue the practice to this day. It is a process of reviewing your day through a series of steps that include becoming aware of God's presence, reviewing the day with gratitude, paying attention to your emotions, praying for one aspect of your day, and looking toward tomorrow.

Invite the participants to practice a modified form of the Daily Examen (be sure to use the explanation above to help them understand what you mean) over the next week as a way to think intentionally at the end of each day about where they have seen God.

Say to them, "Over the next week take some time at the end of each day to consider two things for your examen: the times of the day in which you felt God's presence the most near to you, and the times of the day in which you felt God's presence the least. Take a moment at the end of each day to write your reflections in your journal."

Your journal is a place to record your experiences as you practice the activities for each session.

Use your journal in the way that is most suited for you. Write, draw, or decorate—however you choose to journal, know that it is intended to enhance your learning experience and not place any undue burden on you or your experience.

Living Intentional Lives

Session 1: Holy Living

There is a practice in Christian Spirituality called the Daily Examen. Ignatius of Loyola, who lived in the 1500s, practiced it heavily. His group of monks, the Jesuits, continue the practice to this day. The Daily Examen is a process of reviewing your day through a series of steps that include becoming aware of God's presence, reviewing the day with a sense of gratitude, paying attention to your emotions and experiences, and looking toward tomorrow.

You are invited to practice a modified form of the Daily Examen over the next week as a way to think intentionally about where you have seen God each day. Over the next week take some time at the end of each day to consider two things: first, consider times of the day in which you felt God's presence the most near to you, and second, consider the times of the day in which you felt God's presence the least. Take a moment at the end of each day to record your reflections.

You do not have to come to any conclusions at the end of this activity. It is simply a time to observe God's presence with you.