

# Introduction

*LifeCrossings* is distinctive in providing learning materials on topics that pose some of the greatest challenges to Christian life. Remaining faithful during the difficult moments of each phase of life is one of those challenges. These materials are designed to provide sufficient background so that participants can dig into the topic without requiring leaders to read several books. Each session has been carefully researched and crafted. They were revised following review by our advisory board and revised again after field-testing in two churches located in city and suburban settings.

The covers of all *LifeCrossings* books feature a cross, not a formal one from inside or outside a church building but one that is found in our ordinary experience – a part of a window frame or a fence – present but maybe unnoticed at times. Similarly our Christian faith frames our every experience but we may not always pay enough attention to it. Just as there is something to see beyond the cross on the cover so the participants will find within the book new insights beyond the crosses and challenges of their daily lives.

The goals of *Autumn of Christian Life: Finding Meaning and Joy Amid Change and Loss* are to help Christians of all ages (1) examine the unique characteristics of this later time of life, (2) plan for it and make good choices and decisions, and (3) struggle together to discover what it means to bring the kingdom of God to our world even while dealing with the special problems and challenges of life at this stage. The leader should be aware that some individuals may be upset by this topic if they have never before dealt with facing the fact of their own mortality and also that single people will be confronted with their ‘oneness’ in dealing with issues of later life.

It is recommended that groups undertake *From Here to Community: Enhancing Christian Community in Today’s Society* prior to embarking on this topic. Although not required, this provides a thorough understanding of today’s Christian community and its possibilities, a terrific perspective from which to embark on other topics such as *Autumn of Christian Life*. Stories from the faith walk of Rick and Pam, two members of fictitious Hope Church, appear in both books.

## **Teaching Approach**

Every session is Bible based with scripture and prayer as **FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY**. The prayers include confession and petitions for guidance for the discussion time and also for possible action.

*Autumn of Christian Life* includes many **ENCOUNTERS ALONG THE WAY** – stories, dramas, readings, questions, and discussion. Each session is a journey – thus the metaphor that is used in each of the six sessions. These materials are not intended for lecturing. The extensive use of stories and dramas is intended both to educate and to motivate. The question and discussion section, usually based on the story or drama, is the heart of every session.

Your group will participate in a debate in Session 2 and become part of a Greek theater chorus in Session 6. From a learning theory standpoint, the more the leader can involve the participants in the stories, dramas, readings and especially the discussion, the more effectively they will learn.

Some groups using LifeCrossings resources choose to have two leaders, one for leading the discussion, one for recording it. The perforated pages from this Leader’s Guide can be removed and used with the learner’s version, thus making the teaching hints and visual aid suggestions readily available when leading the session. The sidebar prompts in their book will help the group move through each session and inform them of the time allotted for each activity so that the material can be covered in a one hour time period. Encourage participants to write helpful notes in the same sidebar space and to underline new ideas.

This Leader's Guide is written to assure that even novice teachers will be successful discussion leaders. It provides supplementary material for each of the six sessions, including:

- guidance on leading the session
- suggested layouts for either a flipchart or a marker board
- potential responses to questions

**TRAVEL GUIDES** in the participant's book lists all references at the end of each session.

### ***Setting for discussion***

These materials are suitable for adults either in a home discussion group or a Sunday School class. The group can be as few as 4-5 or as large as 30-40. Use of either a marker board or a flipchart is assumed even for those meeting in a home setting. Arrange chairs in a semicircle so that all can see the visuals as well as each other. Provide an opportunity for introductions if some people do not know each other. A cup of coffee or tea somehow encourages conversation.

The church is one of the few intergenerational places in American society. The discussions will be most fruitful if several seasons of life are represented.

Sessions are designed for 50-60 minutes with time estimates provided for each subsection. If more than an hour is available, some groups may appreciate extended discussion time on the encounters or the leader may supplement with material from the **RE-ENTRY** section. One field-testing group used two one-hour periods on consecutive Sundays to complete each entire session, including **RE-ENTRY**.

#### ***Dual Responsibility for Leader***

##### ***Session leader***

Be familiar with materials ahead of time.  
Estimate of preparation time – two hours.  
Arrange flipchart to record responses.  
Sense when it is time to move on.

##### ***Facilitator for discussion***

Encourage a balanced, focused discussion.  
Encourage participation by everyone.  
Discourage domination by anyone.  
Don't talk all the time.

### ***“Homework”***

**RE-ENTRY** (Reflection, Action, and Digging Deeper) is the section where the most personal growth will occur and is designed as independent work (homework) for the participants. However, any **RE-ENTRY** section may be used to expand the discussion. These readings may also provide helpful background material for the leader. If your session is longer than an hour, spend time doing the Re-entry section together.

Although the action components in **RE-ENTRY** at the end of each session are focused toward the individual participant, the leader should intentionally encourage everyone to do the reflections and actions that are suggested. **RE-ENTRY** gives the participants a greater depth of understanding and opportunity for change in attitude or behavior than would be the case if they just learned what is included in the group session.

The **POSTCARD** provides time for brief discussion of “homework” from the previous session, but each session moves on to new material quickly and does not depend on completion of the Re-entry “assignment” by the participants.

We pray that God will be with you in this endeavor and bless you with an enthusiastic and receptive group of participants!