

# St. Therese: The Little Flower, The Little Way

## Purpose

This session introduces learners to St. Thérèse of Lisieux and the principle theme of her spirituality, “the little way.” Participants will explore the fundamentals of the “little way”: Jesus became little and the need to do the little things well.

## Session at a Glance

- 7:00 p.m. Welcome and Introduction
- 7:05 p.m. A Week in My Life
- 7:25 p.m. Opening Prayer
- 7:35 p.m. Annoyances and Frustrations
- 8:00 p.m. Just for Today
- 8:10 p.m. Closing Prayer

## Extend the Session: Prayer Journal

The session can be extended by describing St. Thérèse’s autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*. It is a spiritual journal that details her thoughts about God, herself, her family, and her community. The treasures we have from St. Thérèse are with us because she was urged to write her thoughts, feelings, experiences and prayers. We are all called to be saints! One day, people may read our own prayer journal and be inspired. Encourage the participants to begin their prayer journal by naming five things that are very important to them and why they are important.

## Materials Needed

- **Handout 1, A Week In My Life**, one for each participant
- **Resource 1, Just for Today** (see #1 in Prepare in Advance)
- Bible
- Two blank sheets of paper for each participant
- Pens or pencils, one for each participant
- “Little One” by Tom Booth (*Unravel*, OCP)
- CD or MP3 player

## Prepare in Advance

1. Copy **Resource 1, Just for Today**, onto heavy weight paper, and cut into fours. Make enough copies for each participant to receive a copy of the poem.
2. Choose a prayer leader and a reader for the opening prayer. The reader will proclaim Psalm 131:1-3 *NRSV*. Choose a reader for the closing prayer. The reader will proclaim Matthew 6:25-34 *NRSV*.
3. Prepare the CD or MP3 player in the location where you will have closing prayer with the song, “Little One,” ready to be played.  
*Note to Leader:* You might consider moving to the chapel or worship space for closing prayer.
4. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and nametags. **Hospitality is important:** As the leader, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

## Session Outline

### Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

Welcome each person warmly, graciously, and genuinely. In these early moments it will be important address them as fellow seekers and disciples rather than someone you are trying to “win over.” When

the time has come to begin, introduce yourself and give a brief introduction using these or similar words:

I want you to know how thankful I am that you joined us. A lot is demanded of your time. I hope tonight helps you in your relationship with God and makes your sacrifice worth it. Thank you for joining us this evening. I want to especially thank those who are here for the first time. If you are here for the first time, will you please raise your hand? If you are near someone here for the time, please take this time to introduce yourself. We are grateful that you joined us.

### **A Week in My Life** (20 minutes)

This exercise has a two-fold purpose. First, it will help the participants recall examples of ordinary events of their lives and will become the basis of the session. Second, it provides a reference point for community building between the participants.

Distribute **Handout 1, A Week in My Life**, along with the pens and instruct them in the following manner:

Take three to five minutes to complete the sheet, **A Week in My Life**. There are no right or wrong answers! This is meant to help you look at things you may do that you aren't necessarily aware of.

After everyone has completed the sheet, ask the participants to gather in groups of three or four, preferably with those they do not know very well. Invite them to share their results and encourage them to tell stories! Allow 15 minutes for discussion.

After allowing time for them discuss, address the participants using these or similar words:

The questions that you answered and discussed don't reveal huge events in your life. Maybe something very significant happened, but most of our weeks are filled with very ordinary things—going to class, cleaning your room, talking with friends, your decisions about what you'll do on the weekend—these are the things that fill up your week. They are ordinary.

During our time together now, we will be introduced to St. Thérèse of Lisieux. As a teenager, St. Thérèse began to figure out a spirituality that was right for her. She did not want to be a theologian, and she did not want to be great or famous. She just wanted to do what God wanted her to do in the ordinary moments and ordinary tasks of life. She called this "the little way." Let's begin tonight in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to help us do ordinary things with extraordinary love.

### **Opening Prayer** (10 minutes)

*Gather*

Prayer Leader: *(begin with the Sign of the Cross)*

We begin with the sign of our faith: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." (Matthew 19:16 *NRSV*)

God, you have revealed yourself as "love" and have made us your children. May our hearts understand the power of your desire to be in an intimate relationship with us and may we not be afraid to say "yes" to you. We ask this through Christ, your Son and our Lord. Amen.

*Listen*

Invite the reader to proclaim Psalm 131:1-3. Allow a few moments for quiet reflection.

*Respond*

Prayer Leader:

The Psalm describes a child that is at rest with its mother. God invites us to similarly be at rest in prayer. St. Thérèse belonged to the Carmelite order, an order that has a rich tradition of contemplative prayer. Becoming aware of God's presence first means becoming aware of God's presence in the quiet in our breath.

Invite the participants to sit comfortably. When they are ready, have them close their eyes and breathe lightly through their mouth. Invite them to quietly mouth the name "Jesus" as they breathe in and quietly mouth the name "Christ" as they breathe out. Invite them deeply breathe the sacred name five times and then come into quiet. Invite them become aware of God's presence around them. Allow three minutes for this silence. You can extend the silence if the group is ready. Break the silence with the following prayer:

Prayer Leader:

Lord Jesus, you are fully God. You are also fully human. You joined us in our laughter and make our laughter holy. You joined us in our tears and make our tears holy. You joined us in our work and make our work holy. You joined us in human relationships and you have made these holy. As you joined us in our lives, we join our lives to you. When we are tired or refreshed, when we are in good moods or bad, when we have been rewarded or treated unfairly, you are present with us. May we remain in your presence and have the strength to choose "love" at every moment. Amen.

Please respond by praying: **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

Prayer Leader:

He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:2-4 NRSV)

We pray ... **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

Prayer Leader:

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:26 NRSV)

We pray ... **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

Prayer Leader:

And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you ... (Matthew 6:27-30 NRSV)

We pray ... **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

Prayer Leader:

God, you have put in our hearts a deep desire that can only be satisfied by a relationship with you.

We pray ... **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

*Send*

Prayer Leader:

Lord Jesus, through prayers of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, help us to not be worried about the future and help us to avoid dwelling on our mistakes. Instead, help us to live in the present moment and recognize how you are leading us to act. Amen.

### **Annoyances and Frustrations (25 minutes)**

Relay these two anecdotes about St. Thérèse to the participants:

St. Thérèse was a very real and authentic person. We have the image of saints as people who always had positive feeling toward everyone. But there was a nun in St. Thérèse's community who really annoyed her. It was a great struggle for her. This other nun made bizarre clicking sounds in the chapel. St. Thérèse was known to have a pretty short temper, and she was infuriated by this nun's strangeness and the irritating racket. But this was a prime opportunity for her practice her "little way." Instead of allowing the annoyance to get the best of her, especially in the chapel, she imagined that the clicking sounds were her own chimes making a song to praise God.

Look at question #2 on **A Week in My Life**. How do you think you can take that or a similar annoyance and change your reaction to it? Write your reflections on the back of the paper.

Allow two to three minutes for them to write their thoughts. After allowing the allotted time, tell them the second anecdote about St. Thérèse:

We said earlier that we can often have the image of saints as people who never had any problems loving others. We can also think that saints loved to pray and prayed all the time. Even though St. Thérèse was a person of great prayer and a mystic, she had a hard time staying awake during prayer and often slept during time in the chapel with the other nuns. This greatly embarrassed her. In her "little way," she thought about God as a tender, loving father and thought about the way he looked at her. Thinking about how much she was loved by her own parents, she imagined that God looked at her in a similar way. She knew that God loved her equally when she was awake or asleep. Her "little way" was centered on the truth that she is a child. God's love is deeper than a parent's love. We are to live as children—secure in God's love for us and to live as freely as children live.

Look at question #6 on **A Week in My Life**. You named a way that you get frustrated with yourself. But how does God look at you? On the back of your paper, what five words do you think God would say to you?

After allowing two or three minutes for them to write, ask the participants to find the people with whom they shared the **A Week in the Life** sheet. Invite to share their reflections on questions #2 and #6.

### **Just for Today (10 minutes)**

Thank the participants for sharing their thoughts with each other. Then distribute **Handout 2, Just for Today**. It is a short poem by St. Thérèse that speaks about the importance of living today. Allow them a few moments to read and reflect on the poem. Then address them:

Others have had a spirituality similar to St. Thérèse. One person described "the sacrament of the moment." This person said that being holy is really rather easy. One must simply be aware of God's presence in the moment and do what is right. The prayer we did at the beginning can help become more aware of God throughout our lives. Because Jesus himself became a little child and joined us, he is present at all times and has made all things holy. Very simply, this is St. Thérèse's "little way."

### **Closing Prayer (10 minutes)**

Invite the participants to get comfortable again for the final prayer, but not laying down. Invite them to be in a posture of prayer, but it is okay if they fall asleep. Ask them to call to mind the little things they find difficult in life. Ask to rest in the confidence that Jesus is always by their side. Allow for a

few moments of silence and then begin the song “Little One” on the CD player. After the song has played, invite the reader to proclaim Matthew 6:25-34. Close with the following prayer:

God, our loving Father, you invite us into freedom and joy. We believe what you said is true. We don't have to worry about anything. We only need to trust you as a child trusts its mother. Give us hearts that are free to love others and to love you. We pray this through Jesus your Son and our brother. Amen.

Invite the participants to share a sign of love and peace with each other.

### **Announcements and Refreshments (10 minutes)**

Thank the young people for their participation this evening. Make any announcements, and invite them to enjoy some refreshments.

This session was written by Robert Feduccia, general manager, [spiritandsong.com](http://spiritandsong.com), a division of OCP, Portland, Oregon.

### **Handout 1**

## **A Week in My Life**

Below you will find a list of questions that name ordinary activities in our lives. Answer the questions and share them in your group when you're asked to do so.

1) Who is the person that you IM, text, email, or talk to the most? \_\_\_\_\_

2) Without naming names, did someone really annoy you this week? Describe what happened. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3) What is the kindest thing you did for a family member in the past week?  
\_\_\_\_\_

4) On a scale of 1 - 10, I would say I put this much effort into my schoolwork over the past week.  
\_\_\_\_\_

5) This past week I prayed when \_\_\_\_\_.

6) I got so frustrated with myself over the past week when \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Resource 1 Prayer Cards**

## **Just for Today**

My life is a moment,  
a passing hour.

My life is a moment,  
which flits away from me.

O my God, you know that  
for loving you on earth,  
I have only today.

## **Just for Today**

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a passing hour.

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