

aware

Lesson 2

Heart: Watchful and Prayerful for Others

opening prayer

Spend five minutes in prayer. Start by reading the passage of Scripture below. Then, move on to pray the themes presented in the Scripture. Prayer suggestions are provided for guidance.

Please read Colossians 4:2-6.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Prayer Suggestions:

1. Ask the Lord to help us to be *watchful* as we pray.
2. Take a moment to thank the Lord for answers to prayer.
3. Ask God to open doors for sharing the love of Christ with people we notice.

Aware of Others

Share about who and what you noticed during your Lesson 1 Field Assignment (page 17).

What helped you be more attentive to the people you encountered?

We live in this time and place by God’s design. So do the people we encounter. As ambassadors for Christ, we need to be aware of the culture of the people we meet every day.

In an effort to understand the perspectives varying age groups have of Christianity, Christians, and Jesus Christ, the Barna Research Group conducted a study of people outside the church—referred to as *outsiders* in the study.

Among those age 16-29 who are not following Christ, 9 of 12 expressed negative perceptions. Common negative perceptions about Christians were:

- Judgmental
- Hypocritical
- Too involved in politics
- Old-fashioned

Including all ages surveyed, only twenty percent of outsiders agreed with this statement: Christian churches accept and love people unconditionally, regardless of how people look or what they do.⁷ (Kinnaman, 185)

“Outsiders think of Christians as quick to judge others. They say we are not honest about our attitudes and perspectives about other people. They doubt that we really love people as we say we do.”⁸ (Kinnaman, 30)



In your experience, are these perceptions accurate? Explain.



How could these perceptions affect the way people outside the church consider a relationship with Christ?

aware of Myself

In *Deeply Aware* Lesson 1, we explored the underlying needs all people have for love and significance.



Where do others turn to have these needs met?



What effect do Christians with a critical or judgmental attitude have on people not following Christ?

“Dominique had a coworker whom she did not particularly enjoy. She asked the Lord to help her genuinely care about him.

She also prayed that the Lord might give her an opportunity to share her faith with him. Over the course of many weeks, Dominique’s heart softened towards him. She was able to enjoy his company and they became friends. After a couple of months, Dominique was working with her co-worker when he asked, ‘So you’re a Christian, right? Tell me about that.’ Dominique was amazed! God had been working in both of them all along.”

In what ways can you change your attitude from critical and judgmental to humble and compassionate?

One way to change our attitude is through prayer. Think of a time when you have experienced a change of attitude toward someone, or been filled with the love of God for someone, as you prayed for them. When we pray for someone, we begin to experience God’s love and care for the person. Our heart is changed. Our will becomes His will. Even Jesus prayed *“not my will, but yours be done”* (Luke 22:42).



When have you experienced a change of attitude toward someone, or been filled with the love of God for someone, as you have prayed for them?

aware of God

Prayer is most effective when we pray the will of God. If we ask anything according to His will, He will do it.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 John 5:14-15)

What do the following passages tell us about God's will for the lost?

Luke 19:10

1 Timothy 2:3-5

John 3:16-17

Write a simple prayer based on God's will as reflected in the Scripture above:

It is amazing to realize that Jesus Himself prayed for people who did not yet have a relationship with God (John 17:20). We can follow His example and pray His prayer for individuals around us who are not following Jesus.

Please read John 17:1-5.

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (John 17:3)



Some of us have been praying for specific people for a long time. Please share a story of how you have prayed (or are praying) for someone, and have seen them express interest in God.

Praying Scripture is powerful because we are praying the Word and will of God! Through prayer, God is aligning our will with His. Personalize prayer with Scripture, especially for individuals you encounter during *Aware*.

The Praying Scripture resource, found on pages 84-86, will help you pray God's Word for the people you encounter. Please record the names of people you are praying for throughout the study on the Personal Prayer List, page 87.



ambassador training exercise—10 minutes

These small group interactions pose tough questions in a safe environment, and are designed to strengthen your ability to communicate the Gospel to others. Each exercise is followed by time to process what you learned. Participants are encouraged to share thoughts and reflections relevant to the training.

1. Please form groups of two or three.
2. Each member of the group should think of one person she/he noticed over the last week.
3. Choose from the prayers you wrote on the previous page and refer to the **Praying Scripture guide on pages 84-86**, and pray for that person.

Reflect: How will praying impact your intentional actions toward the person you are praying for?

When we pray, we become more Aware of what God is doing around us. As we look for His work, Colossians 4:2 says that we should *pray, being watchful and thankful*.

- Watch to see what is going on in the lives of people around you.
- Watch to see how they respond to God moving.
- Watch to see how God wants to engage you, too. Continue praying.



Sometimes we pray and see answers within moments, hours, or days. Other times we pray for years before we see fruit in the lives of those we are praying for. In some cases, we may not live to see the prayers answered. No matter what the outcome, God is the One in control. We plant. We water. We trust that He makes the seeds grow.

We watch what God is doing and join Him.

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does." (John 5:19-20a)



Describe a time when you've seen God working.

"When Mercy's sister Laurie began avoiding her, Mercy knew it was because Laurie was getting involved in a religion other than Christianity. Mercy committed to spending every Wednesday praying Luke 15 specifically for her sister. Mercy invited her close circle of friends to pray as well. After months of praying, Mercy finally received a call from Laurie—during which they shared their hearts, talking openly, for the first time in a long time. Through their conversations, Mercy learned that Laurie's new roommate is a Christian!"



How did you know it was God?

So often we pray and then we forget about it. This week, when we pray, let us be expectant that the Lord will be working and look for signs of what He is up to in the lives of people we encounter. Let us become Aware of His work in answering our prayers and drawing others to Himself.

Through his blog, Chris Walker recently shared his decision to pray every day for 30 days for those he encountered who didn't know Jesus. He asked the Lord to let him plant a seed somewhere every day. He describes one of those opportunities during a trip to the barber:

“I can trace back almost every time I have had a friend ask me about Christ, God, church or being a Christian, to prayer. They were people I had prayed for. A few I had prayed for many times over a long season. Others just once or twice, but prayer preceded them asking the question.”

“Every time I get my hair cut, I try my best to get the same barber so I can nurture a relationship. Until recently, he had been asking me about myself, my life, typical small talk between two acquaintances. So when he asked, ‘Where do you go to church?’—it was out of the blue.

“I noticed his body language and his tone of voice. After I answered, I asked where he attended church. His response was, ‘Nowhere, I just need to go.’ So, I invited him to our Sunday service. It wasn’t the time or place to go much further or deeper. I have added him to the list of friends I’m praying for and expect to see him on Sunday.”⁹ (Walker)

Chris prayed and then he saw an answer to his prayer during the conversation with his barber. Our prayers are powerful and, when we pay attention, we may get to be part of the answer to our own prayers.

It is quite possible that many of the people we encounter in our everyday lives have no one in their family who is a Christian. We may be the only ones on the planet praying for that person!

Many of us can trace our journey toward Christ back to a person who was praying for us.

Pray. And be prepared.

...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect... (1 Peter 3:15)



ambassador training exercise—5 minutes

It is good for us, as Aware ambassadors, to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have. It is possible that God may call any of us, as His ambassadors, to be a “minister of reconciliation”—to share the Good News that Christ has died for each of us and He is the way to freedom, forgiveness, and everlasting life.

1. Form groups of two.
2. Ask one another these questions and practice answering them:
 - Why are you a Christian?
 - Why do you attend church?
 - Who do you believe Jesus is?

Reflect: How will this training exercise impact your intentional actions to be prepared to share Jesus Christ with others?

Closing Prayer

Spend 10 minutes in prayer. Start by reading Romans 12:1. Then move on to pray through the steps provided below. Please allow moments of silence for people to pray.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Offer

- Lord, as an act of worship, we now offer our hearts to You, as a living sacrifice. May we love people around us as You love them.

Confess

- God, we are sorry for our critical attitudes toward people—those who know you and those who do not. Please forgive us, help us turn, and follow You.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Join

- Lord, we want to love the people we notice. Please enable us to watch and see what You are doing in our lives and in the lives of individuals we encounter. In Jesus' name, Amen.

aware ambassador field assignment

As Christ's ambassadors to our communities, we are going out on Field Assignments—noticing people we encounter every day and putting our Aware training to good use. You will be encouraged to journal and share about your experiences during *Aware* Group.

Pray—This week focus on praying and watching for glimpses of what God is doing.

- As you begin your day, prepare to be watchful and sensitive to the Lord and people around you.
- Pray for the people you notice throughout the day.
- As you end your day, pray for the people who God brings to mind.

Remember, noticing people is an essential aspect of evangelism. Don't forget to notice those around you as you pray through your day.

During next week's *Aware* Group, you will have the opportunity to share prayers or verses you pray for people not following Jesus Christ.

deeply aware

Preparing for Lesson 3

Ears: Attentive and Listening to Others

Begin your time of study with prayer.

While studying Psalm 23 this week, we will continue investigating the benefits we have as sheep of the Good Shepherd.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,

He leads me beside quiet waters,

He refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:2-3)

This picture is one of contented sheep who are satisfied—all their needs provided for. They are at peace. To lie down and rest, sheep must be free from:

- Fear
- Hunger
- Tension
- Aggravation

Sheep are helpless to deal with these difficulties by themselves. Only their shepherd can provide freedom from these anxieties. If they are not cared for, the sheep will not rest and, therefore, will become exhausted and sick.

deeply aware of *Myself*

What keeps you from being at peace and rest right now?

- Fears?
- Hunger or longing?
- Tension between you and others?
- Aggravations—pesky doubts, thoughts, or lies?

There are many things that we are helpless to fix in our lives. But the Lord can bring us freedom from fear, hunger, tension, and aggravation. God offers us peace and contentment. He can *refresh our souls*.

Look up the following verses to discover how our Good Shepherd provides for His sheep.

Freedom from fear:

2 Timothy 1:7

Isaiah 41:8-10

Freedom from spiritual hunger and thirst:

John 6:32-35

Isaiah 55:1-3

Freedom from tension with other people:

Galatians 3:26-28

James 3:17-18

Freedom from aggravation—pesky doubts, thoughts, or lies:

Philippians 4:8-9

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

- 1. Meditate on and ponder the truth of the previous verses.**
- 2. Confess any areas where you have difficulty trusting that God will take care of you.**
God is faithful! He always keeps His promises and acts according to His unchanging character. Confession is an important step in moving forward, letting go of unbelief, and placing our trust in God.
- 3. Present these concerns to the Lord. Acknowledge the truth from His Word. Declare that you believe He is faithful. Thank Him for freedom from fear, hunger, tension, and aggravation.**

This is time well spent with the Lord, so try not to rush it. If you need to set it aside, come back to it. We all need times of refreshing, times of restoration in our spiritual lives. Repentance (acknowledging our sin and then turning away from it to God's way) is powerful.

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.
(Acts 3:19-20)



deeply aware of Others

God creates people with a need for peace and rest. Sheep that do not get adequate rest become sick and exhausted, and then they are vulnerable to harm.

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”
—Saint Augustine

What happens to people unable to find spiritual, mental, and emotional rest?

Where do people look for peace and rest when they do not look to Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd?

Who do you know who is burdened, weary, and in need of rest?

Write a prayer for them using Matthew 11:28-30:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Prayer:

Record the prayer you wrote for your friend in your Personal Prayer List on page 87.

...*He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.* (Psalm 23:3, TNIV)

People, like sheep, need to be guided to the right paths. Like sheep, without a shepherd, we are likely to go our own way and cause ourselves harm. Author Philip Keller describes the similarity between people and sheep this way:

“No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detailed direction, than do sheep...(destruction of the land by the sheep) happened simply because the sheep, instead of being managed and handled with intelligent care, had been left to struggle for themselves—left to go their own way, left to the whims of their own destructive habits.

“And this (going our own way) we do... deliberately, repeatedly even to our own disadvantage. There is something almost terrifying about the destructive self-determination of a human being. We insist we know what is best for us even though the disastrous results may be self-evident.”¹⁰ (Keller, 62, 65-66)

Turning to our own way is doing what we want, even if what we want is destructive. Think of destructive patterns in your own life. How has God established right paths for you again?

Christians have a standard of right and wrong by which to measure their actions—the Bible. Christ, our Good Shepherd, guides us on the right paths according to His Word and through the direction of the Holy Spirit.

How do people who do not have Christ as their Shepherd find guidance?

How do people who do not rely on the Bible determine what is right and wrong?

deeply aware of My Attitude

As we become more Aware of people we encounter who need Jesus, let us listen well. Sometimes this uncovers areas in people's lives in which they are not following the values and standards of the Bible. They need to know the Good Shepherd and the Word of God.

It is humbling to note that even with our relationship with Jesus and knowing His Word, we still make bad decisions. Let us be people of mercy and compassion. Most of all, let us be people of prayer.

Prayer example:

Dear Lord, I sense that (this person) needs your guidance. Please draw her to yourself and remove any barriers that stand between her and You. I pray that she could know You as her own Good Shepherd. In Jesus' name, Amen.

In the next *Aware* Group we will be challenged to listen, with compassionate ears, to people around us. We will be more attentive to the Lord's working in their lives and interested in learning about them, their stories, and their struggles.

aware ambassador heart check

This is an opportunity to stop and pray. During these quiet moments, invite the Lord to encourage you, correct you, and guide you on the right path.

People long for a sense of community, of family, of love, and significance. Jesus initiated relationships with people from all walks of life—fishermen, tax collectors, religious figures, foreigners, women, and men. Those He encountered, He often invited to belong with Him, and sometimes even invited Himself to belong with them.

He leads by example. However, before we can follow in His footsteps, we must be honest with ourselves.

Do I have a judgmental attitude?

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:1-3)

Sometimes we need to know how to begin.

Read Matthew 9:10-13.

The second part of the *Aware* series is *Belong*.

Consider starting a *Belong* study with some of your friends. *Belong Evangelism* explores how we can follow in Jesus' footsteps—and walk with others on their journey toward Jesus Christ.

Visit stonecroft.org/belong.



1. Take a moment and allow the Lord to reveal anyone you have a judgmental attitude toward.
2. Ask God to forgive you and give you the ability to respond with compassion and mercy instead. Thank Him for His forgiveness.
3. Pray the Scripture prayers found on pages 84-86 for this person.

Do I look to the interests of others?

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus... (Philippians 2:3-5, ESV)

Take a moment to pray. What distracts you from looking to the interests of others?

Am I approachable?

Sinful, hurting, and sick people were willing to approach Jesus, a holy man and a Jewish teacher. This was quite uncommon in the culture and it shows how approachable Jesus was to people He encountered. For example:

- Mark 1:40-45 (Man with leprosy)
- Mark 10:46-52 (Blind man receives sight)
- Luke 7:36-50 (Jesus anointed by a sinful woman)

Pray and ask the Lord to help you to be a warm and welcoming person to individuals around you.

Am I Listening?

“So many things compete for our attention. If you will start showing personal attention to those God brings around you, you will have a ministry and the results will surprise you.”¹¹ (Morton, 19)

How exciting that a meaningful ministry awaits every one of Christ’s followers who is willing to start giving their attentive minds and their available ears to people around them. We can do this!

