

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Christian Living
Leader's Guide

GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL REALM

LESSON 5: DREAMS AND VISIONS

INTRODUCTION

This module is a powerful set of lessons on the spiritual realm. Lessons specifically deal with the reality of spiritual forces that are in opposition to God. This should fuel our prayer and renew our passion for evangelism. It deals with the origin of evil, the end punishment of Satan, the reality of spiritual warfare and strongholds in our everyday lives, the armor that God has provided us with, God's great battle plan against Satan, God's ultimate control over all things and the supernatural ways in which God communicates with his people through dreams.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for Essentials for Christian Living are 1) new Christians who require knowledge of Christian living or 2) those who have been Christians for some time and would like a refresher course on the basic principles of our faith, based on the Word of God. These lessons will be helpful to those who find themselves teaching and discipling others and want to be reminded of foundational aspects of Christianity. These lessons assume the participant has made a decision to follow Jesus and wants to explore Christianity further.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL REALM

LESSON 5: DREAMS AND VISIONS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to understand how God uses dreams and visions to communicate truth to His people, and how to discern whether a dream is spiritual in nature.

LEADER'S NOTE

In every corner of the world people are reporting dreams and visions that are leading them to belief in Jesus Christ. We as Christians should rejoice in the miraculous ways that God saves people and brings them to faith. Where the Gospel is inaccessible, God will make a way for people to know Him. The Bible gives account of over 100 dreams or visions used for various reasons, and He may still use dreams today in places where people do not have the Word of God. This lesson looks at how one can discern if a dream is spiritual in nature. Some of your participants may have experienced dreams or visions, or know someone who has. It is important, however, to recognize that dreams of this kind are special and uncommon. We should not seek dreams or visions in order to cope with difficulties in life, but rather look to God and His Word in order to draw near to Him.

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions.

- ❖ Do you remember your dreams at night? What do you often dream about?
- ❖ What are the differences between a dream, a vision, and a prophecy?
- ❖ Has someone you know had a dream through which they were certain God was speaking to them? What was the result of the dream? How did they know?
- ❖ What are some examples of God speaking to people through dreams in the Bible? What characteristics do these experiences share?

STUDY

TEACH

- ❖ **Introduction to Dreams and Visions:** In today's world, where access to the Gospel is limited, and especially where the Church is persecuted, God is using dreams and visions to speak to His people. It might be natural to be sceptical of this, but we should not place limits on how God will save His people. God's Word tells us clearly that God sometimes chooses to reveal Himself in this way.



- The Bible tells us that in the last days before Jesus returns, God will sometimes choose to reveal Himself through dreams and visions. Acts 2:17
- The Bible is clear that if God wishes to communicate to someone, He may use dreams or visions. (Numbers 12:6, Psalm 16:7)
- The Bible also warns us that dreams can be false or faked. Not every dream is from God. Occasionally dreams may be demonic in origin. See Jeremiah 23:25, Jeremiah 23:32 – we must not take every vision or dream as an authentic experience from God.
- We must consider the difference between a dream, a vision, and a daydream. It is important our definitions are clear before we go on.
 - **A Dream** occurs while sleeping. We remember it upon waking.
 - **A Vision** occurs while we are awake. It may appear before us, or we may feel we are transported to some other place. We are not in our natural state during a vision and may not have control over our voice or actions.
 - **A Daydream** occurs out of our own thoughts. We are in control of what we imagine. While we might imagine what God would say to us, this is not the same as having a dream or vision from God.

❖ **How Did God Use Dreams and Visions in the Bible?** In both the Old and New Testaments, we have many accounts of God speaking through dreams and visions for various purposes. Let's look at a few examples of dreams in the Bible.

TASK

Divide your participants into three groups, and give each group a set of verses to look up. Have them discuss amongst themselves how a dream or vision was used in this situation and then present their findings to the other groups. If your group of participants is small, select a passage from each section to read together.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<u>Acts 9:3-9</u> <u>Acts 10:1-35</u>	<u>Acts 18: 9-11</u> <u>Judges 7:13-15</u> <u>Genesis 15:1</u>	<u>Matthew 1:20,2:13</u> <u>Acts 9:10-18</u> <u>Genesis 17:1-8</u> <u>Acts 16:9-10</u>

TEACH

- **We see three different types of dreams or visions in the Bible. These are the same types of dreams and visions that God gives His people today.**
 - **The first is Preparatory Dreams.** These are God-given dreams which enable someone to have faith leading to salvation, or which confirm what they have heard in the Gospel as being truth. In these dreams Jesus may appear to someone and identify Himself. Example: Paul's conversion (Acts 9:3-9).
 - **The second is Empowering Dreams.** These are God-given dreams in which God gives direction or encouragement. These are seen especially in times of great



trial or persecution. God will make His will and presence known in this way.

Example: Solomon (1 Kings 3:5).

- o **The third is Prophetic Dreams.** These are God-given dreams which contain a specific instruction or prophecy about the future. These dreams give the opportunity for the dreamer to change behaviour and avoid the wrath of God, or to obey God in order to accomplish His will. Example: Joseph taking Jesus to Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23).

- In the Bible, God uses dreams and visions for the three purposes listed above. It should also be noted that in every case:
 - o The dreamer or bearer of the vision had no doubt that the dream or vision was from God.
 - o The dreamer understood the meaning of the dream, or an interpretation was provided to him by someone else.
 - o The dream is used for the good of God's people, to advance the Gospel and/or for the strengthening of the Church.

❖ **What Should We Know About Dreams Today?** There are some important principles we should note from our study of dreams in God's Word.

- **God Still Uses Dreams and Visions:** We know that God still uses dreams and visions today, and it is in keeping with the way God communicates with His people. This is especially true in times of persecution, tribulation or where there is little or no access to the Gospel (Joel 2:8, Acts 2:17).
- **Dreams and Vision are not Ordinary:** That is to say, they are rare occurrences. We should not expect visions as part of our normal Christian experience. A person may only receive one vision in their lifetime. We must not seek or rely on dreams and visions to direct our life. God's Word and His Holy Spirit are sufficient (Psalm 105:4, Psalm 119:105).
- **We Must Show Discernment:** Dreams can be counterfeit, and miraculous revelations can be faked. People can announce a dream and be lying. Demons may present themselves as angels and be false. We must always show discernment when interpreting the source of a dream (2 Corinthians 11:14, Ezekiel 13:7, 1 John 4:1-6).
- **Vision and Dreams Should Never be Given Greater Authority than the Bible:** Dreams and visions from God will always agree completely with the Bible. The Bible contains all we need to know. A dream will not give new revelation about the will of God that is not contained in the Bible (1 Peter 1:25, Jeremiah 23:28, Proverbs 30:5-6, Matthew 24:24, Deuteronomy 13:1-3).
- **Visions and Dreams do Not Replace the Work of God's People:** God uses people to confirm dreams, and God uses people to preach the Gospel. Dreams may be used by God to prepare a person to hear the Gospel or to confirm what they have heard. God uses His own people whenever possible to bring knowledge of the Gospel to others.



- ❖ **Discerning the Meaning and Origin of Dreams:** It is important for us to examine how we can know if a dream is from God or if it is false.
 - A Dream from God:
 - Will be clear or vivid
 - Is remembered upon waking
 - May feel different
 - May contain an instruction to follow
 - May contain images of Jesus, angels, heaven or hell
 - Builds faith
 - Strengthens the Church
 - Reinforces God's Word
 - Reveals the Identity of Jesus Christ as Messiah
 - Promotes obedience and purity in our lives
 - A Dream that does not originate from God but rather demons:
 - Disturbs faith or causes doubt
 - Contends against the identity of Jesus Christ
 - Instructs behaviour contrary to the Word of God
 - Promotes fear or hopelessness
 - Promotes self and human endeavours, not God's glory

- ❖ **If You Dream:** If you have been given a dream, or someone you know experiences one, consider it a blessing, a special event, and a responsibility. It might be appropriate to tell the story of the vision or dream you were given. Your testimony concerning your dream will help to build your faith and glorify God.
 - If you have a dream you feel is spiritual in nature, and the meaning is not clear because of symbols it contains, pray for discernment and a revelation of the meaning of the dream. A trusted Christian friend or leader may be able to interpret it for you.
 - If you receive instructions in a dream that are in line with the Word of God (for example, to go to a certain place and share the Gospel with someone) rejoice that you are being used by God. Obey without hesitation. If the meaning of the dream is unclear to you, pray for clarification before you act.
 - We are not told in the Bible to pray for dreams, visions or special revelations. We are told that the Word of God is sufficient for any answer we need from God. The Holy Spirit can work within us in many ways. We should not ask or expect dreams as evidence of God's truth. We are required to have faith.

- ❖ **Read True Accounts.** As a group, if time remains, read the attached true accounts of God's people who are receiving dreams and visions in this present age.
 - What features we have discussed in this lesson can you identify in these accounts?



- What were the results of these dreams that brought glory to God and/or strength to the Church?

DISCUSSION

- ❖ What would you say to someone who felt they had had a dream from God? How would you counsel them?
- ❖ Why do you think God uses dreams as only a special means of revelation, not a regular ever day occurrence?
- ❖ When God gives His people dreams or visions, what is the purpose of them?
- ❖ What is your response to the following true accounts? Were you aware of dreams of this nature occurring? How can you pray for people in similar situations around the world?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer

Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have made known to us the paths of life, that You do not leave us or forsake us, but that You are with us and make Your ways and Your name known to us by many means. We thank You for the Word of God where You reveal Your truth, and that in some cases You reveal Yourself through dreams and visions. Thank You that Your gift of salvation is offered to people in every nation. Thank You that even in the darkest corners of this world, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God may still shine and the darkness cannot overcome it. Even in the night, Your Word is Truth. Thank You, Father God, for Your love and kindness to us. Amen.



DREAMS AND VISION TESTIMONIES

TESTIMONY 1

I had sought out spiritual counsel from many sources. The religion of my countrymen did not satisfy me or bring me peace. I wrote to a Christian radio station with questions, but was not able to follow their advice in my life. In 1993 I had a dream. I was walking in a valley, carrying a large cross. When I came to the mountain, I saw a large cross on top of it. When I looked around to the cross I had been carrying, it was no longer there. I realized that the cross on the mountain was the one I had been carrying. I knew that this was a message from God to me. I began listening to Christian radio broadcasts again, and reread the letter they had sent me years ago. I shared the letter with a friend of mine who introduced me to a Christian man who taught me many things and confirmed that my dream was showing me that Jesus wanted to forgive my sin and have me follow Him. I was secretly baptized in 1997. I began to share the Gospel with a few friends and my life has recently been threatened because of my Christian witness. I know now that I will do whatever God wants, and that I belong to the Saviour. The dream I had confirmed to me that Jesus was the truth I needed to follow.

TESTIMONY 2

As a child I was taught to be very religious, and pray 5 times a day. I obeyed my parents; I sought after God but never knew Him. I was used to practising my culture and traditions which was all I knew. One night while I was asleep, I had a terrifying dream of being taken to hell. What I saw there brought me real fear and the dream recurred every night. I wondered what the meaning of the dream was, and was shaken deeply. Then one night the dream changed, and Jesus appeared to me. He wore a robe of white and said to me, "Son, I am the way, the truth and the life. And if you would give your life to Me and follow Me, I would save you from the hell you have seen". This came as a surprise to me. I did not know who this Jesus was! I had heard the name of Jesus, but did not know that He could save me from hell. I began to look for a Christian to help me know more. It was difficult to find one in my country, and even more difficult to get them to talk to me, as they were in fear for their lives. I found a man who was able to give me a Bible and teach me, and at this point Jesus had become a close friend to me. I read the Bible alone and shared the Gospel with all those around me, even though it brings me trouble from authorities and I am imprisoned. I am not afraid to lose my life, because Jesus Christ is my true life.



TESTIMONY 3

I am the mother of three children. I listen to Christian radio broadcasts and when I hear the message of the gospel, my soul rejoices and I thank God for it. My first contact with Christianity happened when I was a small child. I saw Jesus appear to me in a dream, and he told me in my own language, "My daughter, you are chosen to be my servant". I knew the dream was from God, but because Jesus would not be accepted by my family, I hid my dream. While listening to a Christian radio program, I was invited to pray and give my life to Jesus Christ, which I did with joy. When it came time for me to marry, God gave me a good man but He does not yet know Christ. My husband often drank too much and had a poor attitude. One day while we were visiting friends, he decided to go home earlier than I. I knew that he might drink, so I prayed that God would keep him from drinking. When I arrived home later, I was filled with joy to see that my husband was not drinking, but was reading a portion of my New Testament! He is not yet a believer, but I pray for him. My parents and sister now believe, and I continue to serve Him and pray for opportunities to share the Gospel.

TESTIMONY 4

I had not considered the Christian faith before, but lived my own life the best I knew how. I was as religious as those around me and my family were. I never thought much about God. One night, I had a powerful dream in which I saw a figure in a white robe calling to me. He had a kind face, and at first I did not know who this man was. In my dream, Jesus told me to visit a Christian woman I knew and that she would teach me. When I awoke, I could not forget my dream and went as quickly as I could to my friend. I told her about the dream, and she told me that the man who appeared to me was Jesus Christ. He was asking me to follow Him, and she told me how God loves me. I met often with my friend who taught me about Jesus and the Bible, and am now convinced that Jesus appeared to me in a dream. I am a Christian now, and serve God.