




GREG MARQUART



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CONTENTS

- 05 • Introduction
- 06 • Using This Workbook (Read This First)
- 08 • Outline for Each Session

SESSIONS

- 10 • Session One: The Plan
- 22 • Session Two: The Road
- 32 • Session Three: The Faith
- 42 • Session Four: The Favor

APPENDICES

- 52 • Frequently Asked Questions
- 54 • Life Group Agreement
- 56 • Life Group Calendar
- 57 • Memory Verse Cards (Clip and Review)
- 59 • Prayer and Praise Report
- 60 • Life Group Roster

SMALL GROUP LEADERS

- 61 • Hosting an Open House
- 62 • Leading for the First Time
- 63 • Leadership Training
- 66 • Notes



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Checkmate! God, the King we serve, is NEVER in Checkmate. He always has 1 more move!

During the 4 week study you will have opportunities to share your ideas and experiences, to discuss God's biblical truth that supports the theme of Checkmate, where God always has 1 more move, meaning so do all of us.

As we share and learn from each other in our life groups, we will encourage and sharpen each other so we can grow deeper in and own our faith in a way where no one gets left behind.

We are proud of you and excited to see what God has in store for you and your life group over the next 4 weeks. Our prayer is that you will experience the Holy Spirit in a new, fresh and fulfilling way like never before. That you begin to see and know, our God is never in Checkmate. He always has 1 more move in our life!

Much Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Greg & Connie". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Pastor Greg and Connie

USING THIS WORKBOOK

(Tools to help you have a great small group experience!)

2

If you are leading or co-leading a life group, the section Life Group Leaders will give you tips for effective leadership, encourage you, and help you avoid a few common obstacles.

1

Notice in the Table of Contents there are three sections: (1) Sessions; (2) Appendices; and (3) Life Group Leaders. Familiarize yourself with the Appendices. Some of them will be used in the sessions themselves.

3

Use this workbook as a guide, not a strait jacket. If the group responds to the lesson in an unexpected but honest way, go with that. If you think of a better question than the next one in the lesson, ask it. Take to heart the insights included in the Frequently Asked Questions pages and the Life Group Leaders section.

4

Enjoy your Life Group experience!

5

Pray before each session—for your group members, for your time together, for wisdom and insights.

6

Read the Outline for Each Session on the next pages so you understand how the sessions will flow.

OUTLINE OF EACH SESSION

A typical group session for the Checkmate study will include the following sections. Read through this to get a clear idea of how each group meeting will be structured.

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSES. Each session opens with a Memory Verse that emphasizes an important truth from the session. This is an optional exercise, but we believe memorizing scripture is a powerful way to grow spiritually. We encourage you to give this important habit a try. The verses for each session are also listed in the appendix.

INTRODUCTION. Each lesson opens with a brief thought that will help you prepare for the session and get you thinking about that week's topic. Make it a practice to read these before the session. You may want to have the group read them aloud.

SHARE YOUR STORY. The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. You build that connection by sharing your story with a few people who really know you and who earn your trust. This section includes some simple questions to get you talking—letting you share as much or as little of your story as you choose.

HEAR GOD'S STORY. In this section, you'll read the Bible and listen to teaching in order to hear God's story—and begin to see how His story aligns with yours. When the study directs you to, you'll watch a short teaching segment on video. You'll then have an opportunity to read a passage of scripture and discuss both the teaching and the text. The goal isn't to accumulate information, but to apply the insights from scripture to your daily life.

STUDY NOTES. This brief section provides additional commentary, background, or insights on the passage you've studied or on some aspect of the video teaching.

CREATE A NEW STORY. In this section, you'll have an opportunity to go beyond Bible study to biblical living. This section will also have a question or two that will challenge you to live out your faith by serving others, sharing your faith, or worshipping God.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY. If you have time and want to dig deeper into more Bible passages about the topic, we've provided additional passages and questions. You can use them during the meeting or as homework. Your group may choose to read and prepare before each meeting in order to cover more biblical material. Or, group members can use the additional study section during the week after the meeting. If you prefer not to do study homework, this section will provide you with plenty to discuss within the group. These options allow individuals or the whole group to expand their study while still accommodating those who can't do homework or are new to your group.

DAILY DEVOTIONS. Each week on the Daily Devotions pages, we provide scriptures to reflect on between sessions. This provides you with a chance to slow down, read just a small portion of scripture each day, and pray through it. You'll then have a chance to journal your response to what you've read. Use this section to seek God on your own throughout the week. This time at home should begin and end with prayer. Don't get in a hurry - take enough time to hear from God and talk to Him!

SESSION 1

THE PLAN

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:26



God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and told him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would be the mother of Christ. Jesus appeared to Saul in a blinding light and turned him away from a life of persecuting Christians.

You probably haven't encountered God in a fire, talked to an angel, or seen a vision of Jesus, but God is still working and moving in people's lives today. As we start this study, we'll discuss the plans God still has for His people and share our own stories of how He's moving in our lives.

LEADER NOTES

- If your group is new, welcome newcomers. Introduce everyone – you may even want to have name tags for this first meeting.
- Open your group with a brief prayer asking God for insight as you study. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting, or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion.
- Before you start this first meeting, get contact information for every participant. Take time to pass around a copy of the Life Group Roster on page 60 or a blank sheet of paper. Ask someone to make copies or type up a list with everyone's information and email it to the group during the week.
- Whether your group is new or ongoing, it's always important to review your values. On page 54-55 is a Life Group Agreement with important values for sustaining healthy, balanced groups. Choose one or two of these values – ones you haven't previously focused on or have room to grow in – to emphasize during this study.
- The Life Group Calendar on page 56 is a tool for planning who will host and lead each meeting. Consider rotating hosts and leaders and take a few minutes to plan future meetings.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking.

- What brought you here? What do you hope to get out of this group?

- How is God working in your life right now?

Use the Notes space provided on pages 66 to record your thoughts and questions as well as the things you want to remember or follow up on. After watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God's Story section and start the conversation.



LET LOVE EXPLODE AND BRING
DEAD TO LIFE



“WHAT KINDS OF CAPTIVITY OR EXILE ARE YOU EXPERIENCING? IN WHAT AREAS DO YOU NEED THE REMINDER THAT GOD IS WORKING TO CREATE A FUTURE FOR YOU?”

HEAR GOD'S STORY

Read Jeremiah 29:11-15.

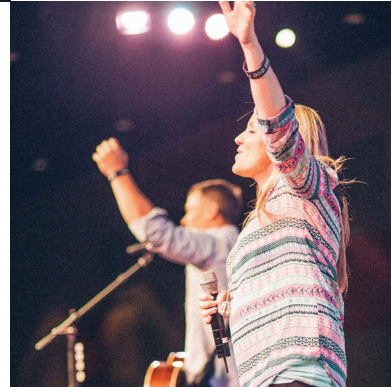
"11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

- What should our response be to God's plan? (verse 12)
-

- What does it mean to seek God with all of our heart?
-



- The end of this passage, especially the beginning of verse 14, seems to imply that we have part of the responsibility for being "found" by God. How can you apply this to your life?
-



STUDY NOTES

The passage we studied today in Jeremiah is addressed to the Jews who have been taken into exile by foreign powers. The prophet is warning the people in the years leading up to the eventual capture of their nation by the Babylonians. In 586 BC, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and exiled many of its citizens.

It's important to keep this historical context in mind when reading Jeremiah's words, but we can also apply these principles to our own lives. What kinds of captivity or exile are you experiencing? In what areas do you need the reminder that God is working to create a future for you? And how can you seek Him, call on Him, and pray to Him so that He will reveal the next steps?

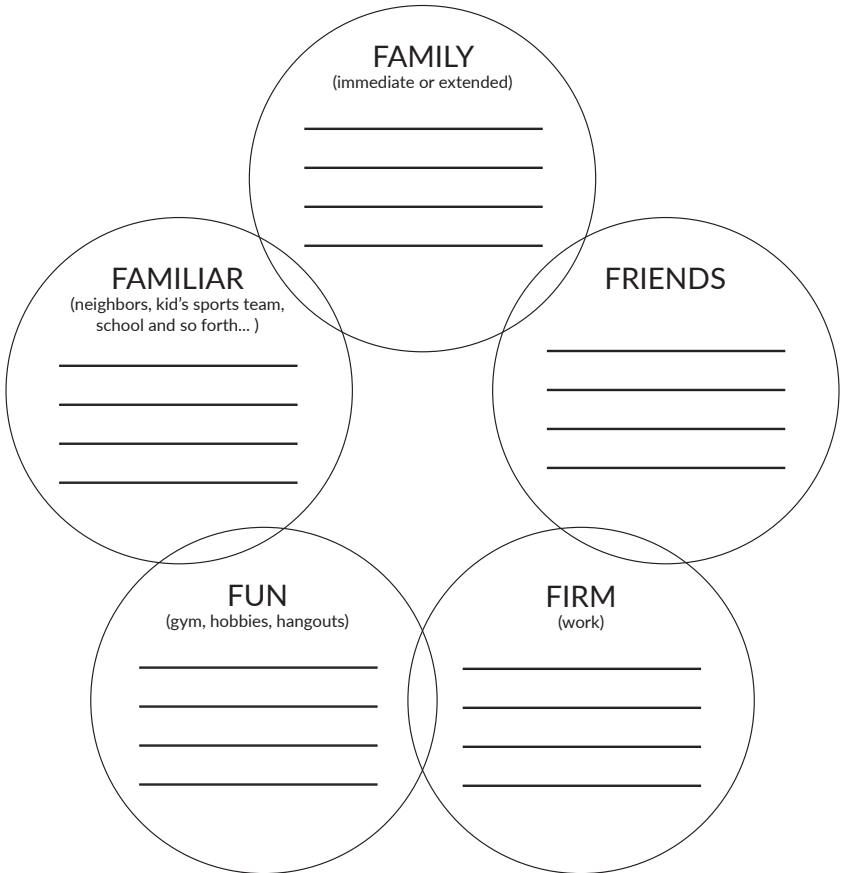
In this section, talk about how you will apply the wisdom you've learned from the teaching and Bible study. Then think about practical steps you can take in the coming week to live out what you've learned.

- What does it mean to be reconciled to God?

- Is there a situation in your life that seems hopeless? How would you like God to work in that situation?

**CREATE A NEW
STORY**

- Your testimony is where you were before you met Jesus, the day you met Jesus, and what your life is like now with Jesus in it. Share your testimony with the group.
- Take a look at the Circles of Life diagram below and write the names of two or three people you know who need to know Christ. Commit to praying for God's guidance and an opportunity to share with each of them. Would they be open to joining the group? Share your lists with the group so you can all be praying for the people you've identified.



- Give each person an opportunity to share prayer requests. If you'd like, you can write these on the Prayer and Praise report on page 59.
- Close your meeting with prayer.



- This week how will you interact with the Bible? Can you commit to spending time in the Daily Devotions? Tell the group how you plan to follow Jesus this week, and then, at your next meeting, talk about your progress and challenges.



FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY



Read Ephesians 2:4-10.

- How has God showed us His mercy? (verse 4-5)
-

- Why is it so important to remember that God's plan for us is rooted in grace, not in our own power?
-

- React to the idea that you were "hand-made" by God to do good works. How have you seen this in your own life?
-
-

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

- How do worry and anxiety keep us from following God's plans for our lives?
-

- What does this passage teach us about the way God cares for us? How does the reminder of His provision also remind us of His guidance?

- What does it mean to seek God's kingdom first in life?



Take some time between now and our next meeting to dig into God's Word. Explore the Bible passages related to this session's theme on your own. Jot down your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. You may even want to use a Bible website or app to look up commentary on these passages. If you like, share what you learn with the group the next time you meet.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL



DAY 1

Read Proverbs 16:9.

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.

REFLECT: There's nothing wrong with making plans and setting goals, but ultimately it is God who directs our lives. Ask for His wisdom in "planning your course" today.

DAY 2

Read Job 42:2.

I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

REFLECT: We do not have to wonder if God's plans for us will come to pass. He can do anything, and nothing can stop Him!

DAY 3

Read Psalm 119:165.

Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.

REFLECT: Much of God's plan for us we already know – it's based in His Word. How does being rooted in the Bible keep us on the path of God's plan?



DAY 4

Read John 10:10.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

REFLECT: What does it mean to have life to the full? How does Jesus bring us that life?

DAY 5

Read Romans 5:8.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

REFLECT: God's plan begins with reconciling us to himself through Christ. Have you accepted His love and grace? If not, are you ready to?

DAY 6

Use the following space to reflect on what you learned this week and what God is saying to you.

SESSION 2

THE ROAD

The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.

Exodus 14:14



Throughout scripture we see God's people on the move. Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt, Joshua led them into the Promised Land, and the prophets encouraged and warned them as they faced exile. Noah captained an ark, Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. Following God often means participating in a journey, often without any guarantees of how it will end.

The same is true for us today. While we are not wandering through the desert for forty years or riding a huge boat through a flood, we are all on a faith journey with God. Today we'll explore what it means to walk this road and why we can trust Him even when the way is unclear.

Open your group with a brief prayer asking God for insight as you study. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting, or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Then begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking:

- Are you facing a situation that seems impossible? Briefly share it with the group.

- Share something you learned in your Daily Devotions this past week.

- In the last session we asked you to write some names in the Circles of Life diagram. Who did you identify as the people in your life who need to meet Jesus? Go back to the Circles of Life diagram on page 15 to help you think of various people you come in contact with on a regular basis; people who need to know Jesus more deeply. Consider ideas for action and make a plan to follow through on one of them this week.

**“WE ARE
ALL ON
A FAITH
JOURNEY
WITH
GOD.”**

WATCH THE VIDEO

Use the Notes space provided on pages 66 to record your thoughts and questions as well as the things you want to remember or follow up on. After watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God's Story section and start the conversation.



*Read Proverbs 3:5-6.
Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*

- Why do we so often lean on our own understanding? Why is it difficult to trust?

- What does it mean to submit to God?

**DAILY
DEVOTIONAL**

- How does God make our paths straight?

STUDY NOTES

In the Old Testament, it was common for people to build monuments or pile up stones to commemorate a time when God acted on their behalf. For example, in Genesis 28, Jacob sets up a rock as a pillar and pours oil over it to commemorate hearing from God in a dream.

Other times, such as after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, the people composed songs to celebrate God’s deliverance and to remind them of His power. (Read Exodus 15:1-21 to enjoy the words of this song!)

Sometimes we struggle to submit our ways to God and to trust Him instead of ourselves. We forget the many ways God has been faithful to us in the past, and it can be helpful to create our own “monuments” to remind us. This can be anything that is meaningful for you—perhaps it’s a sculpture or rock like

In Genesis 28 or a poem or song as in Exodus. Maybe it’s a piece of fabric, a drawing or painting, a photograph, or simply a written list of the ways God has blessed you. Take some time this week to consider what might be a tangible reminder of God’s presence in your past and His promises for your future.



CREATE A NEW STORY

In this section, talk about how you will apply the wisdom you've learned from the teaching and Bible study. Then think about practical steps you can take in the coming week to live out what you've learned.

- Did you make a decision to follow God last week? If so, share it with the group!

- Why are we sometimes unaware of how God is working?

- React to the idea that God isn't afraid of our questions. Are there things you need to ask God about in prayer?

- Do you believe that God wants to give you good things? How does that change your perspective of the times when your back is against the wall?

- Here are some simple ways to connect with God. Tell the group which ones you plan to try this week, and talk about your progress and challenges when you meet next time.

- Prayer. Commit to personal prayer and daily connection with God. You may find it helpful to write your prayers in a journal.



- Daily Devotions. The Daily Devotions provided in each session offer an opportunity to read a short Bible passage five days a week during the course of our study. Take time to read carefully and reflect on the passage. Write down your insights about what you read each day. Copy a portion of scripture on a card and tape it somewhere in your line of sight, such as your car's dashboard or the bathroom mirror. Or text it to yourself! Think about it when you sit at red lights or while you're eating a meal. Reflect on what God is saying to you through these words. On the sixth day summarize what God has shown you throughout the week.

- Give each person an opportunity to share prayer requests. If you'd like, you can write these on the Prayer and Praise report on page 59.

- Close your meeting with prayer.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY



Read Isaiah 43:16-19.

- This passage reflects on the story we studied this weekend about Moses and the Red Sea. What are some of the ways Isaiah reminds his readers of God's power?

- Why is it important to look forward instead of backward when journeying with God?

- What is an area of life where you need God to do a new thing and make a way for you?

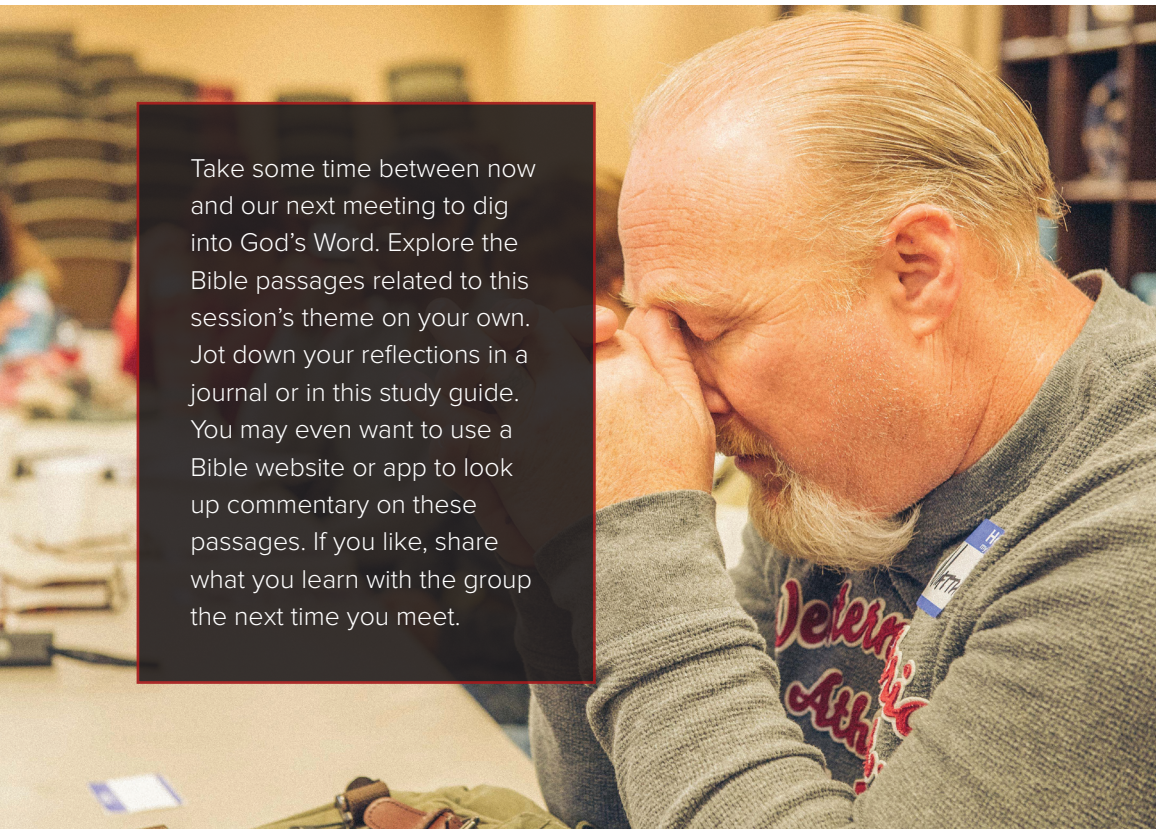
Read Romans 12:1-2.

- What is our motivation for submitting to God? What does it mean to offer ourselves as a sacrifice?

- How is trusting God this way an act of worship?

- How does God change us? What is the goal of this transformation?

Take some time between now and our next meeting to dig into God's Word. Explore the Bible passages related to this session's theme on your own. Jot down your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. You may even want to use a Bible website or app to look up commentary on these passages. If you like, share what you learn with the group the next time you meet.



DAILY DEVOTIONAL



DAY 1

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

REFLECT: As some of the people shared on this week's video, often we are able to love others with more compassion after we have gone through something difficult. How might God be using your struggles to prepare you to help others?

DAY 2

Read Psalm 37:39.

The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble.

REFLECT: A stronghold is a place protected against attack. We can be confident that God is with us during hard times and that He is working to protect us.

DAY 3

Read 1 Chronicles 29:11.

Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

REFLECT: Spend a few minutes meditating on the truths in this verse.



How do these attributes of God help you to trust Him when your back's against the wall?

DAY 4

Read Hebrews 10:35.

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

REFLECT: God will reward us if we trust Him in the face of trouble. How does this week's lesson encourage you and give you confidence in Him?

DAY 5

Read Colossians 1:13-14.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

REFLECT: If God can rescue His people from darkness, forgive our sins, and give us new life, He can certainly handle anything else life throws at us. As we end this week, spend some time in prayer asking God to take charge of the struggles you're facing and thanking Him for His power in your life.

DAY 6

Use the following space to reflect on what you learned this week and what God is saying to you.



SESSION 3

THE FAITH

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20



If you grew up going to church, you might know the old hymn “Trust and Obey.” The chorus is very simple: “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey.”

These two words go together—if we trust Jesus, we will be willing to obey His teaching. And if we’re not willing to do what Jesus says, it’s probably because at some level we don’t trust that He knows what’s best or can take care of us. Like so many old hymns, this one is full of truth. When our lives are characterized by faith in God and in who He is, we experience victory and joy; but when we rely on ourselves, we struggle to have the power and peace He wants for us. This week we’ll discuss what it means to have faith and why we can trust and obey the God who always has another move.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Open your group with a brief prayer asking God for insight as you study. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting, or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion.

Then begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking:

- Is there a situation you have trouble praying about? Do you find it difficult to trust God with certain parts of your life?

- Share something you learned in your Daily Devotions this past week.

WATCH THE VIDEO

Use the Notes space provided on pages 66 to record your thoughts and questions as well as the things you want to remember or follow up on. After watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God's Story section and start the conversation.



HEAR GOD'S STORY

Read Hebrews 11:1-16 (NLT).

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. 2 Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation. 3 By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen. 4 It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith. 5 It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—"he disappeared, because God took him." For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God. 6 And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. 7 It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith. 8 It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. 9 And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. 10 Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God. 11 It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. 12 And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them. 13 All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. 14 Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. 15 If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. 16 But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

- Why is faith a requirement for pleasing God?
-

- What is the city Abraham was looking forward to in faith?
-

- What does it mean to be a “foreigner” on earth? How does faith help us prepare for our eternal home?
-
-

STUDY NOTES

When athletes are preparing for competition, they undergo strict training. Weight lifters lift heavier amounts so their muscle will break down and rebuild to be even more strong. Basketball players do plyometric exercises to increase their vertical jump and their ability to sprint quickly across the court. Long-distance runners, baseball players, soccer players, gymnasts – all kinds of athletes push themselves in resistance and endurance so they’ll later see improvements in performance. The same is true in our spiritual life. If we’re going to grow stronger in faith, it will require times of testing that stretch us, push us, and perhaps even cause us pain. As some of the group shared on this week’s video, God uses these experiences to build our faith and increase our spiritual endurance. How is God “training” you in faithfulness? How did He train the biblical heroes mentioned in Hebrews 11?

**“HOW
IS GOD
TRAINING
YOU IN
FAITHFUL-
NESS?”**

CREATE A NEW STORY

In this section, talk about how you will apply the wisdom you've learned from the teaching and Bible study. Then think about practical steps you can take in the coming week to live out what you've learned.

- Why does faith sometimes require sacrifice? How have you experienced this?

- Why is faith crucial to the Christian life?

- How is surrender tied to faith?

- Have you ever had to “throw out the logic” to walk by faith? Share your story with the group.

- How is faith a choice?



- What steps will you take this week to grow in your relationship with God? If you've focused on prayer in past weeks, maybe you'll want to direct your attention to scripture this week. If you've been reading God's Word consistently, perhaps you'll want to take it deeper and try memorizing a verse. Tell the group what you plan to try this week, and talk about your progress and challenges when you meet next time.

- Give each person an opportunity to share prayer requests. If you'd like, you can write these on the Prayer and Praise report on page 59.

- Close your meeting with prayer.



FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY



Read Joshua 3:9-17.

- When did the water stop flowing in the river? What literal step of faith was required from the priests first?

- Why do you think God chose a time of flooding to lead the people across the river?

- Why did God require the people to trust before He acted?

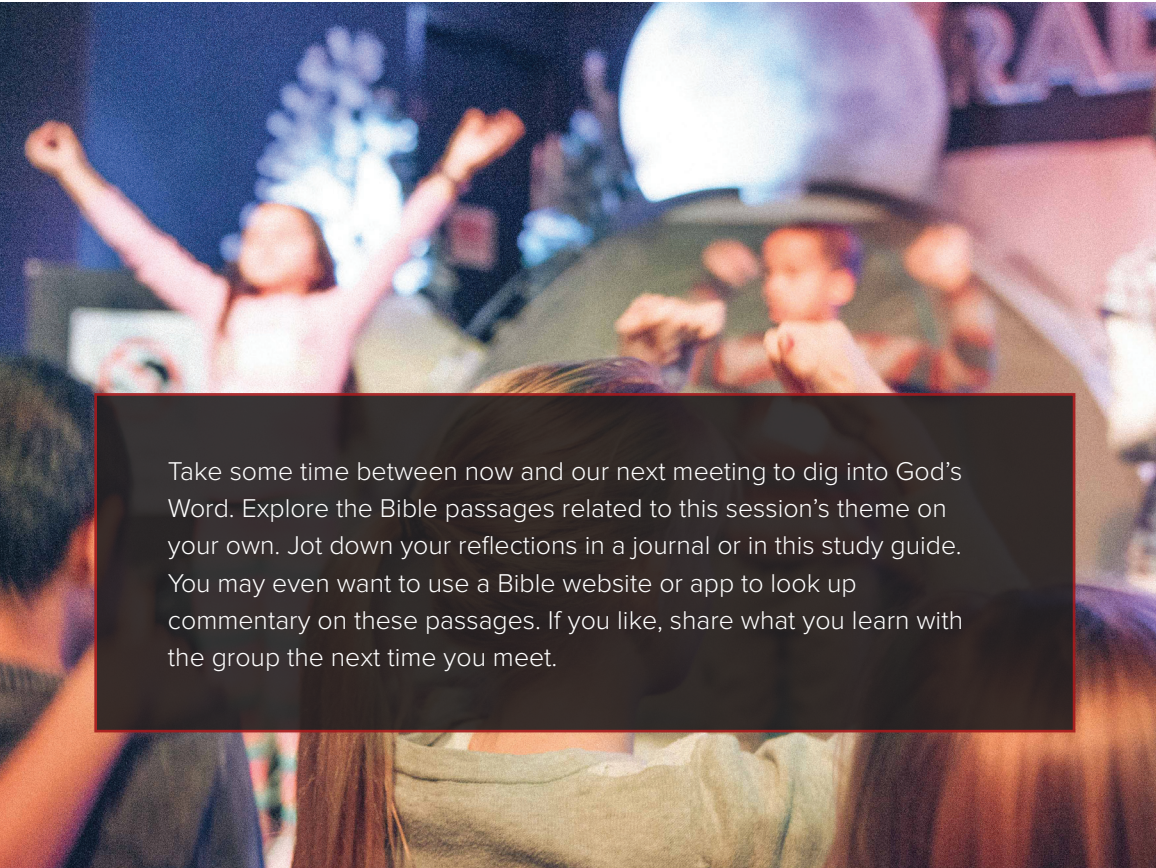
Read 1 Peter 1:3-9.

- What is our inheritance in Christ?
-

- How do the promises of verses 3-5 help us to rejoice in our trials?
-

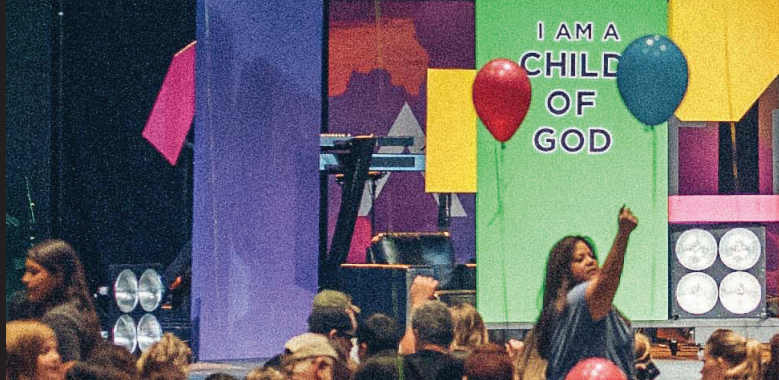
- What does this passage tell us about why God allows our trials?
-

- How do hard times prove that our faith is genuine?
-



Take some time between now and our next meeting to dig into God's Word. Explore the Bible passages related to this session's theme on your own. Jot down your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. You may even want to use a Bible website or app to look up commentary on these passages. If you like, share what you learn with the group the next time you meet.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL



DAY 1

Read 1 Corinthians 13:11-12.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

REFLECT: We “grow up” in faith so we can know more of God. We will never know or understand everything in this life, but God promises we will someday see Him face to face and understand what’s difficult for us now.

DAY 2

Read James 1:2-3.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

REFLECT: It can be difficult to consider our struggles to be “pure joy.” Ask God to help you approach trials as a way to grow in faith.

DAY 3

Read Colossians 2:6-7.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

REFLECT: What does it mean to be rooted in Christ? How is thankfulness connected to faith?



DAY 4

Read Philippians 4:19.

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

REFLECT: One of the many things we can have faith in is that God will always take care of us. After all, He owns everything, and He loves us as a father loves His children!

DAY 5

Read Psalm 143:8.

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,
for I have put my trust in you.
Show me the way I should go,
for to you I entrust my life.

REFLECT: As we close this week, consider what it means to entrust your life to God. Are there areas you are holding back?

DAY 6

Use the following space to reflect on what you learned this week and what God is saying to you.

A photograph of a man with a shaved head, wearing a green button-down shirt, holding a baby in his arms. The man is looking down at the baby with a gentle expression. A white silhouette of a king chess piece is overlaid on the image, positioned in front of the man and baby. The background is dark with a warm, reddish glow.

SESSION 4

THE FAVOR

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:31

Sometimes we're hesitant to talk about God's favor because we equate it with a "prosperity gospel" that says God will give us anything we want. Other times we avoid asking for God's favor because we think it's being greedy. However, neither approach is consistent with what the Bible teaches. Throughout scripture God tells us He is eager to bless His people with good things, and He also reminds us those blessings are often spiritual and relational. So while God may sometimes give us favor with a better job or good health, He also consistently shows us favor in our families or friendships, our personal growth, and His presence in our lives.

As we close this study, we'll consider what it means to experience the favor of God, and how His blessing on us can help us share His love with others.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Open your group with a brief prayer asking God for insight as you study. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting, or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion. Then begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking:

- What has surprised you most about this group? Where did God meet you over the last four weeks?

- Share something you learned in your Daily Devotions this past week.

- Take some time for each person to share about how they've done with inviting the people on the Circles of Life to church or your life group. What specific conversations are you praying about for the weeks to come?

WATCH THE VIDEO

Use the Notes space provided on pages 66 to record your thoughts and questions as well as the things you want to remember or follow up on. After watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God's Story section and start the conversation.



HEAR GOD'S STORY

Read Psalm 5:3-7, 12.

*3 In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait expectantly.*

*4 For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness;
with you, evil people are not welcome.*

*5 The arrogant cannot stand
in your presence.*

You hate all who do wrong;

6 you destroy those who tell lies.

*The bloodthirsty and deceitful
you, LORD, detest.*

*7 But I, by your great love,
can come into your house;
in reverence I bow down
toward your holy temple.*

*12 Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous;
you surround them with your favor as with a shield.*



- How does verse three reinforce the teaching that God wants to bless us?
-

- We have all done wrong. Why are we still able to experience God's favor? (verse 7)
-

- What does it mean to be righteous?
-

- How is God's favor a shield around His people?
-

STUDY NOTES

Luke 2:52 says, "Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people."

We don't get much information about Jesus as a young man; we're simply told that He grew intellectually, physically, socially, and spiritually. In this verse we discover that as He became an adult He became more wise, more strong, and more connected in relationship with God and with the people in His life.

Jesus is a model for us, and He demonstrates the best way to live. Therefore, this simple verse is a great place to begin in considering your own growth and the ways you'd like to receive God's blessing. In what areas of life do you need more wisdom? How do you need to grow in your physical health? How can you take a step closer to God through this life group experience, and what relationships with other people do you need be intentional about strengthening? If Jesus grew in favor with God, we can, too!

**“IF JESUS
GREW IN
FAVOR
IN GOD,
WE CAN,
TOO!”**

CREATE A NEW STORY

How has God changed your story during this study? What new things is He asking you to do? What truth has transformed your heart? Think about specific steps you want to take to apply what you've learned.

- What does it mean to have God's favor?
-
-

- How can the favor of God affect a family, a workplace, or even a community?
-
-
-
-

- Share a story of how God has shown you favor.
-
-
-



- If your group still needs to make decisions about continuing to meet after this session, have that discussion now. Talk about what you will study, who will lead, and when you will meet.
-
-



- Review your Life Group Agreement on page 54 and evaluate how well you met your goals. Discuss any changes you want to make as you move forward.

- Close by praying for your prayer requests and take a couple of minutes to review the praises you have recorded over the past four weeks on the Prayer and Praise Report on page 59. Spend some time thanking God for all He's done in your group during this study.

**FOR
ADDITIONAL
STUDY**



Read Romans 8:31-39.

- How does the gift of God’s son help us to trust Him in other ways?

- Why are we innocent and free of condemnation in God’s sight?

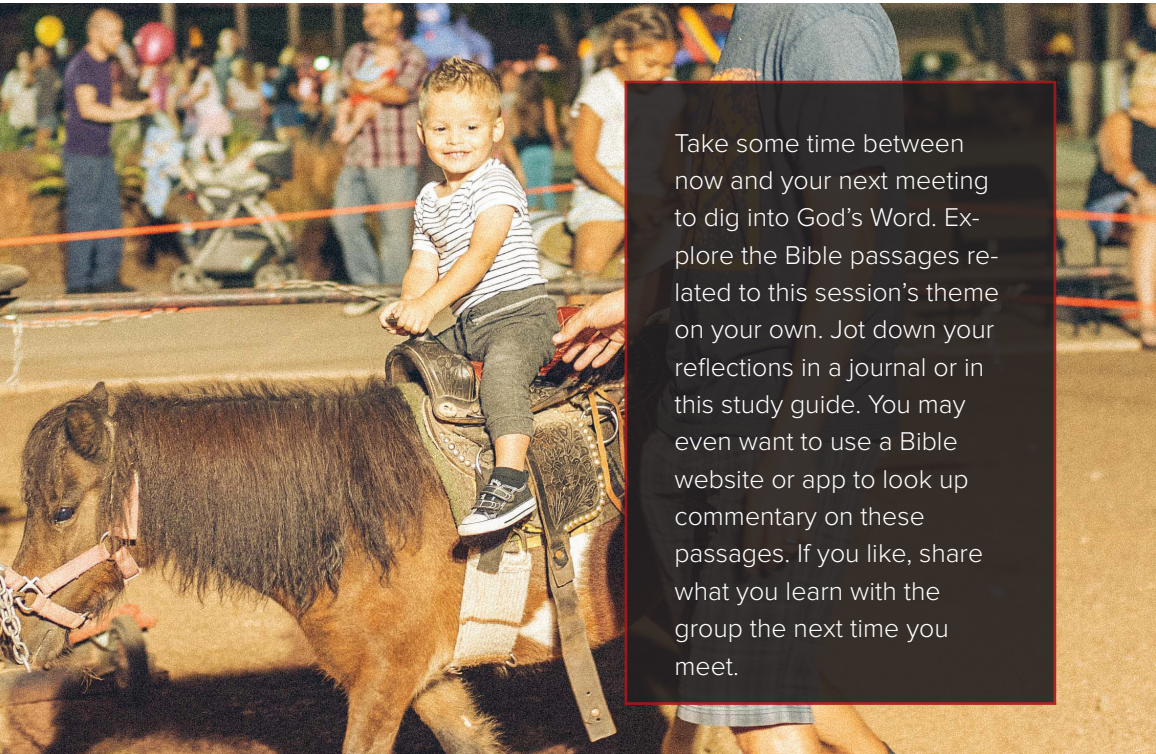
- What does it mean to be a conqueror through Christ?

Read Proverbs 2:20-3:4.

- How do we keep to the good paths?

- How can following God's teaching prolong our lives? How can it bring us prosperity?

- What is the difference between God's favor and man's favor? Which one are you more concerned about?



Take some time between now and your next meeting to dig into God's Word. Explore the Bible passages related to this session's theme on your own. Jot down your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. You may even want to use a Bible website or app to look up commentary on these passages. If you like, share what you learn with the group the next time you meet.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL



DAY 1

Read John 1:16 (NLT)

From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.

REFLECT: Jesus delights in giving us good things. What are some ways He has blessed your life right now?

DAY 2

Read 2 Timothy 1:9.

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.

Reflect: Jesus saved us not because we are great on our own, but because He is great! Thank Him for the favor He has shown you through His grace.

DAY 3

Read Deuteronomy 5:33.

Walk in obedience to all that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

REFLECT: What are the blessings promised in this verse to those who obey?



DAY 4

Read Proverbs 3:34.

He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.

REFLECT: Why is humility so important in receiving God's favor?

DAY 5

Read Psalm 90:17.

May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.

REFLECT: What work do you need God to establish and bless? Join with the Psalmist in praying this prayer!

DAY 6

Use the following space to write any thoughts God has put in your heart and mind about the things we have looked at in this session and during your Daily Devotions time this week.



APPENDICES

RESOURCES TO MAKE YOUR LIFE GROUP
EXPERIENCE EVEN BETTER!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT DO WE DO ON THE FIRST NIGHT OF OUR GROUP?

Like all fun things in life—have a party! A “get to know you” coffee, dinner, or dessert is a great way to launch a new study. You may want to review the Group Agreement (pages 54-55) and share the names of a few friends you can invite to join you. But most importantly, have fun before your study time begins.

CAN WE DO THIS STUDY ON OUR OWN?

Absolutely! This may sound crazy, but one of the best ways to do this study is not with a full house but with a few friends. You may choose to gather with another couple or a few friends who would enjoy going out for dinner and then walking through this study.

WHAT IF THIS GROUP IS NOT WORKING FOR US?

You're not alone! This could be the result of a personality conflict, life stage difference, geographical distance, level of spiritual maturity, or any number of things. Relax. Pray for God's direction, and at the end of this study, decide whether to continue with this group or find another. However, don't bail out before the four

weeks are up—God might have something to teach you. Also, don't run from conflict or prejudice people before you have given them a chance. God is still working in your life, too!

WHO IS THE LEADER?

Most groups have an official leader. But ideally, the group will mature and members will rotate the leadership of meetings. Healthy groups often rotate hosts and leaders on a regular basis. This model ensures that all members grow, give their unique contribution, and develop their gifts.

HOW DO WE HANDLE THE CHILDCARE NEEDS IN OUR GROUP?

Very carefully. Seriously, this can be a sensitive issue. We suggest that you empower the group to openly brainstorm solutions. You may try one option that works for a while and then adjust over time. One approach is for adults to meet in the living room or dining room and to share the cost of a babysitter (or two) who can watch the kids in a different part of the house. This way, parents don't have to be away from their children all evening when their children are too young to be left at home. A second option is to use one home for the kids and a second home (close by or a phone call away) for the adults. A third idea is to rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson or caring for the children. This can be an incredible blessing for kids. Finally, the most common solution is to decide that you need to have a night to invest in your spiritual lives individually or as a couple and to make your own arrangements for childcare. No matter what decision the group makes, the best approach is to dialogue openly about both the problem and the solution.

LIFE GROUP AGREEMENT

OUR PURPOSE

To provide an environment where participants experience authentic community and spiritual growth.

OUR VALUES

GROUP ATTENDANCE To give priority to the group meeting. We will call or email if we will be late or absent. (Completing the Group Calendar on page 56 will minimize this issue.)

SAFE ENVIRONMENT To create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved. (Please, no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes.)

RESPECT DIFFERENCES To be gentle and gracious to fellow group members with different spiritual maturity, personal opinions, temperaments, or “imperfections.” We are all works in progress.

CONFIDENTIALITY To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group, and to avoid sharing improper information about those outside the group.

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR GROWTH To be not just takers but givers of life. We want to spiritually multiply our life by serving others with our God-given gifts.

SHARED OWNERSHIP To remember that every member is a minister and to ensure that each attender will share a small team role or responsibility over time.

ROTATING HOSTS/LEADERS AND HOMES To encourage different people to host the group in their homes and to rotate the responsibility of facilitating each meeting. (See the Group Calendar on page 56.)

OUR EXPECTATIONS

• Refreshments/mealtimes _____

• Childcare _____

• When we will meet (day of week) _____

• Where we will meet (place) _____

• We will begin at (time) _____ and end at _____

• We will do our best to have some or all of us attend a worship service together. Our primary worship service time will be _____

• Date of this agreement

• Date we will review this agreement again

• Who (other than the leader) will review this agreement at the end of this study

GROUP CALENDAR

Planning and calendaring can help ensure the greatest participation at every meeting. At the end of each meeting, review this calendar. Be sure to include birthdays, socials, church events, holidays, and mission/ministry projects.

| DATE | LESSON | HOST HOME | DESSERT/MEAL | LEADER |
|-------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------|
|-------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------|

| | | | | |
|-------------|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------------|
| <i>1/15</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>Steve and Laura's</i> | <i>Joe</i> | <i>Bill</i> |
|-------------|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------------|

MEMORY VERSES

SESSION ONE

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:26

SESSION TWO

The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.

Exodus 14:14

SESSION THREE

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

SESSION FOUR

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:31



**CLIP AND REVIEW THE MEMORY VERSES
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS PAGE.**

PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORT

SESSION 1 PRAYER REQUEST:

PRAISE REPORT:

SESSION 2 PRAYER REQUEST:

PRAISE REPORT:

SESSION 3 PRAYER REQUEST:

PRAISE REPORT:

SESSION 4 PRAYER REQUEST:

PRAISE REPORT:

LIFE GROUP ROSTER

NAME:

EMAIL:

PHONE NO.:

NAME:

EMAIL:

PHONE NO.:

NAME:

EMAIL:

PHONE NO.:

NAME:

EMAIL:

PHONE NO.:

NAME:

EMAIL:

PHONE NO.:

NAME:

EMAIL:

PHONE NO.:

KEY RESOURCES TO HELP YOUR LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE BE THE BEST IT CAN BE.

LIFE GROUP LEADERS

HOSTING AN OPEN HOUSE

If you're starting a new group, try planning an "open house" before your first formal group meeting. Even if you have only two to four core members, it's a great way to break the ice and to consider prayerfully who else might be open to joining you over the next few weeks. You can also use this kick-off meeting to hand out study guides, spend some time getting to know each other, discuss each person's expectations for the group and briefly pray for each other. A simple meal or good desserts always make a kick-off meeting more fun.

After people introduce themselves, have everyone respond to a few icebreaker questions:

- What is your favorite family vacation?
- What is one thing you love about your church/your community?
- What are three things about your life growing up that most people here don't know?

Next, ask everyone to tell what he or she hopes to get out of the study. You might want to review the Life Group Agreement and talk about each person's expectations and priorities.

Finally, set an open chair (maybe two) in the center of your group and explain that it represents someone who would enjoy or benefit from this group but who isn't here yet. Ask people to pray about inviting someone to join the group over the next few weeks. Hand out post-cards and have everyone write an invitation or two. Don't worry about ending up with too many people; you can always have one discussion circle in the living room and another in the dining room after you watch the lesson. Each group could then report prayer requests and progress at the end of the session.

You can skip this kick-off meeting if your time is limited, but you'll experience a huge benefit if you take the time to connect with each other in this way.

LEADING FOR THE FIRST TIME

• SWEATY PALMS ARE A HEALTHY SIGN.

The Bible says God is gracious to the humble. Remember who is in control; the time to worry is when you're not worried. Those who are soft in heart (and sweaty-palmed) are those whom God is sure to speak through.

• **SEEK SUPPORT.** Ask your leader, co-leader, or close friend to pray for you and prepare with you before the session. Walking through the study will help you anticipate potentially difficult questions and discussion topics.

• **BRING YOUR UNIQUENESS TO THE STUDY.** Lean into who you are and how God wants you to uniquely lead the study.

• **PREPARE. PREPARE. PREPARE.** Go through the session several times. If you are using the video, listen to the teaching segment and Leadership Lifter. Don't wait until the last minute to prepare.

• ASK FOR FEEDBACK SO YOU CAN GROW.

Perhaps in an email or on cards handed out at the study, have everyone write down three things you did well and one thing you could improve on. Don't get defensive. Instead, show an openness to learn and grow.

• **PRAYERFULLY CONSIDER LAUNCHING A NEW GROUP.** This doesn't need to happen overnight, but keep growth as a goal. Not all Christians are called to be leaders or teachers, but we are all called to be "shepherds" of a few someday.

• **SHARE WITH YOUR GROUP WHAT GOD IS DOING IN YOUR HEART.** God is searching for those whose hearts are fully his. Share your trials and victories. We promise that people will relate.



LEADERSHIP TRAINING 101

Congratulations! You have responded to the call to help lead your group. As you prepare to lead, whether it is one session or the entire series, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind.

1. REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE. It is common for good leaders to feel they are not ready to lead. Moses, Solomon, Jeremiah, and Timothy were all reluctant to lead. God promises, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Whether you are leading for one evening, for several weeks, or for a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.

2. DON'T TRY TO DO IT ALONE. Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy leadership team. If you can enlist a co-leader to help you lead the group, you will find your experience to be much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is call and ask people to help. You'll probably be surprised at the response.

3. JUST BE YOURSELF. If you won't be you, who will? God wants you to use your unique gifts and temperament. Don't try to do things exactly like another leader; do them in a way that fits you! Just admit it when you don't have an answer, and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it, and you'll sleep better at night!

4. PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING AHEAD OF TIME. Review the session and the leader's notes, and write down your responses to each question. Pay special attention to exercises that ask group members to do something other than engage in discussion. These exercises will help your group live what the Bible teaches, not just talk about it. Be sure you understand how an exercise works, and bring any necessary supplies (such as paper and pens) to your meeting. If the exercise employs one of the items in the appendix, be sure to look over that item so you'll know how it works. Finally, review “Outline for Each Session” so you'll remember the purpose of each section in the study.



5. PRAY FOR YOUR GROUP MEMBERS BY

NAME. Before you begin your session, go around the room in your mind and pray for each member by name. You may want to review the prayer list at least once a week. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of every person uniquely. Expect God to lead you to whomever He wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead!

6. WHEN YOU ASK A QUESTION, BE PATIENT.


Someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the question. If silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple "thanks" or "good job." Then ask, "How about somebody else?" or "Would someone who hasn't shared like to add anything?" Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren't ready to say, pray or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time.

7. PROVIDE TRANSITIONS BETWEEN QUESTIONS.

When guiding the discussion, always read aloud the transitional paragraphs and the questions. Ask the group if anyone would like to read the paragraph or Bible passage. Don't call on anyone, but ask for a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

8. BREAK UP INTO SMALLER GROUPS EACH

WEEK. If your group has more than seven people, we strongly encourage you to have the group gather at times in discussion circles of three or four people during the Hear God's Story or Change Your Story sections of the study. With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply what they're learning more quickly, and ultimately get more out of it. A small circle also



encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member. When you gather again at the end of the section, you can have one person summarize the highlights from each circle. Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud will feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests. People are more willing to pray in small circles if they know that the whole group will hear all the prayer requests.

9. ROTATE FACILITATORS WEEKLY. At the end of each meeting, ask the group who should lead the following week. Let the group help select your weekly facilitator. You may be perfectly capable of leading each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to lead. You can use the Life Group Calendar to fill in the names of all meeting leaders at once if you prefer.

10. ONE FINAL CHALLENGE (FOR NEW OR FIRST TIME LEADERS):

Before your first opportunity to lead, look up each of the five passages listed below. Read each one as a devotional exercise to help yourself develop a shepherd's heart. Trust us on this one. If you do this, you will be more than ready for your first meeting.

Matthew 9:36

1 Peter 5:2-4

Psalm 23

Ezekiel 34:11-16

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12

NOTES
