



TODAY  
MATTERS

JOHN C. MAXWELL



WELCOME

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# Endorsements



“

*John Maxwell knows better than anyone that Today Matters. If you are hungry to live out your passion and leave a legacy, this study is the perfect resource to refocus your attitude, priorities, and faith to reach for your best tomorrows... starting today.*

**Steve Robinson**  
Church of the King,  
Mandeville, LA



“

*John Maxwell has added value to my life for almost three decades. He will most certainly add value to yours as you participate in Today Matters.*

**Bill Hybels**  
Senior Pastor, Willow  
Creek Community  
Church  
Chairman of the  
Board, Willow Creek  
Association Global  
Leadership Summit



“

*Today Matters will inspire and equip you to maximize the potential of every day and realize your God-given purpose.*

**Christine Caine**  
Founder, A21 &  
Propel Women



“

*Loaded with practical tools that can set you on a course for a life to be enjoyed, every day this curriculum is powerful. John is not only a great friend but one of the world's best communicators. I highly recommend it.*

**Joyce Meyer**  
Joyce Meyer  
Ministries



“

*Having known John Maxwell for over 25 years I've come to realize that the concept of Today Matters is at the core of every leadership thought and book he's authored. If you want to move from where you are to become someone who has high impact in life, this is your starting point!*

**Dennis Rouse**  
Founding/Lead Pastor,  
Victory World Church



“

*There is no day as important as today. John Maxwell's video curriculum on Today Matters teaches you how to manage the daily decisions that will affect the rest of your life. This curriculum provides insight from a diverse group of people from all walks of life to reinforce the lessons that will help you make the most of today.*

**Pastor Todd Mullins**  
Christ Fellowship  
Church





# Foreword

As a pastor, an author, and a leader, I am constantly reading. I read to learn more about the Bible, to find stories and illustrations for my sermons and books, to stay current on cultural trends, and to develop my skills in every area of life. Over the last two decades, I have read hundreds of books that have encouraged or educated me in some way. But *Today Matters* is on a short list of books that have transformed me and my ministry.

The principles in this book and video series can transform your life, too. Changing your attitude to life's challenges, identifying your personal and professional priorities, seeking out growth opportunities, and developing your relationships with God and with others are choices you can make today that will enrich your life now and reorient the trajectory of your future. I have learned so much about these ideas from my friend John Maxwell and I have seen firsthand how powerful each one can be in building a successful life.

Today Matters has changed the way I think about my roles as a husband, father, pastor, and friend. I'm so grateful to John for his investment of life in studying and sharing these ideas. My prayer is that you will also learn and live out these principles - starting today.

**Chris Hodges**

Founding and Sr. Pastor  
Church of the Highlands  
Birmingham, AL

# Introduction

## Hello, my friend!

You are preparing to engage in an important activity. The small group you are about to take part in has the potential to change people's lives—beginning with yours!

One of the most significant discoveries of my life was realizing that we often place too much emphasis on making decisions and too little on managing the decisions we've already made. This discovery was so significant to me that I wrote a book about it called *Today Matters*. The thesis of the book is that successful people make right decisions early and manage those decisions daily.

People create success in their lives by focusing on today. It may sound trite, but today is the only time you have. It's too late for yesterday. And you can't depend on tomorrow. That's why today matters. Most of the time we miss that.

Why? Because we over exaggerate our yesterday, overestimate our tomorrow and underestimate the importance of today.

The Bible teaches us...

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you TODAY shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.  
(DEUTERONOMY 6:5-7)

When we focus on today, tomorrow takes care of itself. When we focus on yesterday we miss the opportunities of today. What's ironic is that if you focus on today, you get a better tomorrow. Wise choices today put

“change in the pocket” for future choices.

You can't change yesterday. You can't count on tomorrow. But you can choose what you do today.

I challenge you to make today your focus. If you are successful in doing that, you will find this small group experience very rewarding and so will the people you connect with.

As you embark on this journey, just remember to be yourself, bring energy to the meetings, and focus your attention on living out what you learn each day.

Thank you for being part of this Today Matters small group. I know it will add value to you and transfer your value to others!

Your friend,

JOHN C. MAXWELL

A white, handwritten signature of John C. Maxwell, written in a cursive style, positioned to the right of the printed name.



# Using

## THIS WORKBOOK

- 1.** Notice in the Table of Contents there are three sections: (1) Sessions; (2) Appendices; and (3) Small Group Leaders. Familiarize yourself with the Appendices. Some of them will be used in the sessions themselves.
- 2.** If you are facilitating/leading or co-leading a small group, the section Small Group Leaders will give you some experiences of others that will encourage you and help you avoid many common obstacles to effective small group leadership.
- 3.** Use this workbook as a guide, not a straightjacket. 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 Small Group Leaders section.
- 4.** Enjoy your Small Group experience.
- 5.** Pray before each session—for your group members, for your time together, or wisdom and insights.
- 6.** Read the Outline for Each Session on the next pages so that you understand how the sessions will flow.

# Outline



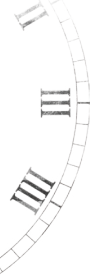
## OF EACH SESSION

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

**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 Appendices.

**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 each 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 excerpt from the book *Today Matters* will go deeper into one aspect of the week's topic.

**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!

# TODAY MATTERS

On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress of the United States of America adopted the Declaration of Independence, formally asserting their independence from England. Skirmishes with England had started more than a year before in Massachusetts, and with the Declaration, the Congress and the colonists made the separation of the two countries official.

**Remember this:** Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

**2 CORINTHIANS 9:6**





Americans now celebrate the Fourth of July as one of their most beloved national holidays. Each year they shoot off fireworks, soak up the summer sun, and remember the revolution that changed their country. Independence Day was a turning point for their nation, and the momentous events of that day more than 200 years ago continue to shape the culture and the values of America.

However, not everyone realized the significance of the Declaration or the war that followed. In his diary entry for July 4, 1776, King George III, the king of England, wrote only this: “Nothing of importance happened today.” Without email or Twitter, the king had no idea his colonies were rebelling or that England was about to be at war. What seemed like a routine day to King George was actually a day that would change the world.

Our daily choices probably won’t cause a national revolution. They may not affect kingdoms. But they do matter. The disciplines and decisions of today have a huge impact on the days to come. As we begin this study together, let’s look at how we can build meaningful lives one day at a time and how our choices today can revolutionize our future.

# 1

# 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 you can 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.
- Whether your group is new or ongoing, it's always important to review your values. On page 118 is a Small Group Essentials for Success section 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.
- Ask the members of your group what they hope to get out of this group. Note their answers, and share them with us so we can create even more effective resources for groups!

# Share

## YOUR STORY

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

Do you have any habits or disciplines that you try to include in your life each day?

What is a decision you've made in the past that is significantly affecting your life now?



# Hear

G O D ' S S T O R Y



Read Galatians 6:7-10.

<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. <sup>8</sup> Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

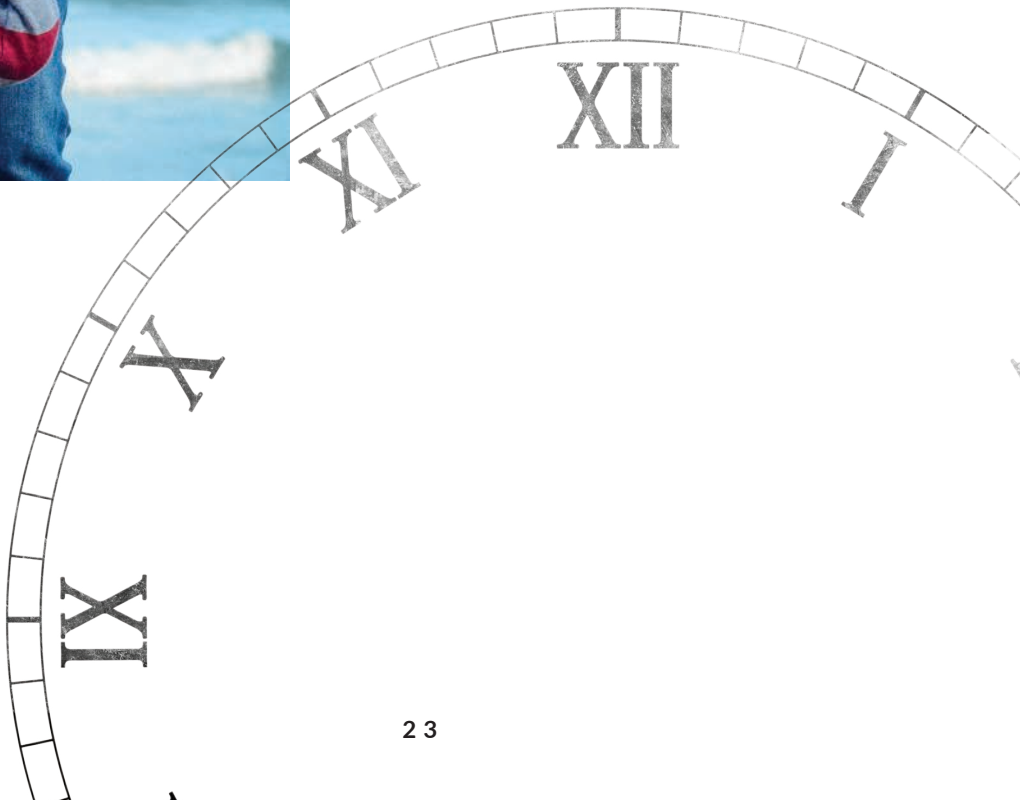
How do we sow to please our flesh? How do we sow to please the Spirit?

Have you ever become weary of doing good? What is the promise if we endure?



How does this passage reinforce the importance of daily consistency?

What are some ways you can use each day to bless others? To please the Spirit?



# Study

## NOTES

Isn't it appealing to think about making each day a masterpiece? The question is, how? What does it take? I believe there are two ingredients necessary to make every day a masterpiece: decisions and discipline. They are like two sides of the same coin. You could call them "goal setting" and "goal getting." They can't be separated because one is worthless without the other. I say that because....

Good Decisions – Daily Discipline = A Plan without a Payoff  
Daily Discipline – Good Decisions = Regimentation without Reward  
Good Decisions + Daily Discipline = A Masterpiece of Today

Time is an equal opportunity employer, but how we treat time is not equal. Time is like a block of marble. Give a block of marble to an average person, and you end up with....a block of marble. But put it in the hands of a master sculptor, and watch what happens! The sculptor looks at it with an artist's eye. First, he makes decisions about what it will be. Then he practices the disciplines of his craft until he has transformed lifeless stone into a masterpiece. I believe you and I can become like the sculptor. We can learn to become master craftsmen—not of stone but of our lives.





# 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.

**What is your definition of a successful life?**

**How does surrender lead to success? What does it mean to be a steward of life?**

**What is the difference between making a decision and managing that decision? Why is managing our decisions so important?**

**How do you maximize the moments of your life and make them matter?**

**Why is preparation so key to a successful life? Why is consistency so important?**

Take a look at the Circles of Life diagram on the next page 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.

- Choose one person—in this group or outside it—who you can begin going deeper with in an intentional way. This might be your mom or dad, a cousin, an aunt or uncle, a roommate, a college buddy, or a neighbor. Choose someone who might be open to “doing life” with you at a deeper level and pray about that opportunity.

This week how will you plan to interact with the Bible? Perhaps you can commit to spending time in the Daily Devotions or Additional Study sessions of this study guide.

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 120.

Close your meeting with prayer.

The diagram consists of five overlapping circles arranged in a pentagonal pattern. Each circle contains a title, a subtitle, and three horizontal lines for writing.

- Family** (immediate or extended)
- Familiar** (neighbors, kids, sports teams, school, and so forth)
- Friends**
- Fun** (gym, hobbies, hangouts)
- Firm** (work)

# Additional

## STUDY

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.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2.**

What does it mean to receive God's grace in vain? How can that happen?

How would it change your life if you lived as if verse 2 were really true—every day?

How do you need God's help so you can make today's moments matter?

### **Read Matthew 6:31-34.**

How does worry keep us from living in today?

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

Do you find verse 34 encouraging or discouraging? Why?



# Daily Devotionals

## Day 1

PSALM 27:1.

The Lord is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?

REFLECT:

It can be tempting to use anxiety or struggle as excuses for not making the most of today. Ask God to give you His peace and strength!

## Day 2

JEREMIAH 17:7.

But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.

REFLECT:

What blessings do we receive when we place our trust in God?

## Day 3

ISAIAH 43:18-19.

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

REFLECT:

What are the new things God wants to do in your life? What ways is He opening for you? What “former things” do you need to let go of so you can follow Him today?

## Day 4

1 PETER 5:6.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

REFLECT:

We do the hard work now so we can receive the blessing later. Ask God for the patience and humility to put in the work consistently, one day at a time.

## Day 5

PROVERBS 12:11.

Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.

REFLECT:

Our choices have consequences, and God will honor and bless your hard work. How are you stewarding your time?

## 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 Devotionals time this week.

# ATTITUDE

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, but he is perhaps best known as a Holocaust survivor and as the author of the book *Man's Search for Meaning*. In this book, Frankl shares his experience in a number of different concentration camps and describes his journey to find meaning in suffering. In this short but powerful book, he shares how each of us can overcome any hardship when the struggles are reframed as opportunities to grow, learn, and serve others.

Frankl famously wrote, “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.” We cannot always control what happens to us, nor can we control how people respond to us, but we can control what happens within us. We have the freedom to decide how we will respond to the challenges that come our way. Our attitude toward setbacks and struggles is often the difference maker in living a successful life. Today we’ll explore how we can choose the attitudes that will make today matter.

**Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.**

**2 CORINTHIANS 9:6**



A photograph of a man from behind, wearing a blue patterned t-shirt, with his arms raised in a gesture of triumph or celebration. He is standing in a field with mountains in the background under a clear sky. A red vertical bar is on the left side of the image, containing a large white number '2'.

# 2

# 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 you can 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:**

Have you ever been a difference maker in a situation? Has there been a time when you had the “right” to have a bad attitude, but you took the high road and made a difference with a good attitude?

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 27 to help you think of various people you come in contact with on a regular basis who need to know Jesus more deeply. Consider ideas for action and make a plan to follow through on one of them this week.



# Hear

G O D ' S S T O R Y



Read Philippians 4:4-9.

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever

you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

How can we rejoice when we are facing difficulties? Is this a suggestion or a command?

How does Paul tell us to pray when we are concerned or troubled? What should these prayers include?

What is the promise when we pray with confidence and gratitude?

How does our thinking affect our attitude? What are some true, right, excellent, or praiseworthy things you can think about today?



# Study

## NOTES

A friend emailed me the story of a very “together” and independent ninety-two-year-old lady who was moving into a nursing home. Since she was legally blind and her husband of 70 years had passed away, the move was her only option. She waited in the lobby of the facility for a long time before finally being told that her room was ready. As she was escorted down the corridor, her attendant described the room, down to the curtains hung on the windows.

“I love it,” the elderly lady enthused.

“But you haven’t even seen the room yet. Just wait,” the attendant responded.

“That doesn’t have anything to do with it,” she replied. “Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn’t depend on how the furniture is arranged. It’s how I arrange my mind.”

Appreciation isn’t a matter of taste or sophistication. It’s a matter of perspective. John Wooden said, “Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.” The place to start is with the little things. If you can learn to appreciate and be grateful for them, you’ll appreciate the big things as well as everything in between.



# 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.

**How do your bad attitudes show up? How do you let those attitudes affect others?**

**Is it a new idea for you that you choose your attitude?**

**Why is gratitude so important to a successful life?  
How does it lead us to God?**

**Do you struggle with comparing yourself to others?**

**How can you say, "But God," in the midst of your challenges?**



- 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 Devotionals. The Daily Devotionals provided in each session offer an opportunity to read a short Bible passage five days a week during the course of our study. In our hurry-up world, we often move too quickly through everything—even reading God’s Word! Slow down. Don’t just skim, but take time to read carefully and reflect on the passage. Write down your insights on 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 120.

Close your meeting with prayer.

# Additional

## STUDY

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.

### **Read Romans 12:1-2.**

What does it mean to be a "living sacrifice?" How is this an act of worship?

How do we renew our minds? How does this transform us?

What is the reward for this internal transformation?

### **Read Philippians 2:1-11.**

What should be our motivation for modeling our attitude after Christ's?

How does serving others influence our attitude?

What is a concrete way you can live out the teaching of this passage today?



# Daily Devotionals

## Day 1

PROVERBS 17:22.

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

REFLECT:

Our attitudes affect our spiritual, mental, and even physical health. How can you cultivate the “good medicine” of a cheerful heart?

## Day 2

PSALM 139:23-24.

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

REFLECT:

You can't hide your attitude from God! Ask Him to reveal the parts of your life and your thoughts that need His help, and ask for wisdom in redirecting your thoughts.

## Day 3

EPHESIANS 4:22-24.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

REFLECT:

Taking off our old self and putting on the new is a daily decision. How does our attitude help make us new?

## Day 4

PSALM 45:7.

You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

REFLECT:

God promises blessing to those who pursue right thinking and right living. Ask for His help in loving righteousness and living with joy!

## Day 5

THESSALONIANS 5:18.

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

REFLECT:

Notice that this verse says all circumstances. Take some time to give thanks for everything you're facing today.

## 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 Devotionals time this week.

# PRIORITIES

In 2010, Marie Murphy was at work when she got a call and found out her house was on fire. She hurried home and immediately ran into the burning house. Her goal wasn't to save a family member. Everyone in the house had successfully escaped and was waiting outside. It wasn't to grab photo albums or a priceless antique. It wasn't even to find her fire insurance documents. No, Marie's goal was saving her season tickets for the Philadelphia Phillies baseball games!

Marie did manage to save her tickets, but she lost every other possession she owned. And later, she discovered the Phillies would have simply reprinted the season passes. She could have focused her efforts on staying safe or rescuing a family heirloom.

We may laugh at this story, but the truth is that all of us sometimes prioritize the wrong things. Whether it's at work, at home, or in our relationships, we've all struggled to identify what's most important and determine where we should invest our time, energy, and efforts. Today we're going to look at what the Bible has to say about our priorities and discover how we can focus on what matters most.

Teach us to number our days,  
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

PSALM 90:12



3

# 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 you can 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 are your top two priorities right now?

What are the biggest distractions keeping you from those priorities?





# Hear

G O D ' S S T O R Y



Read Matthew 22:34-40.

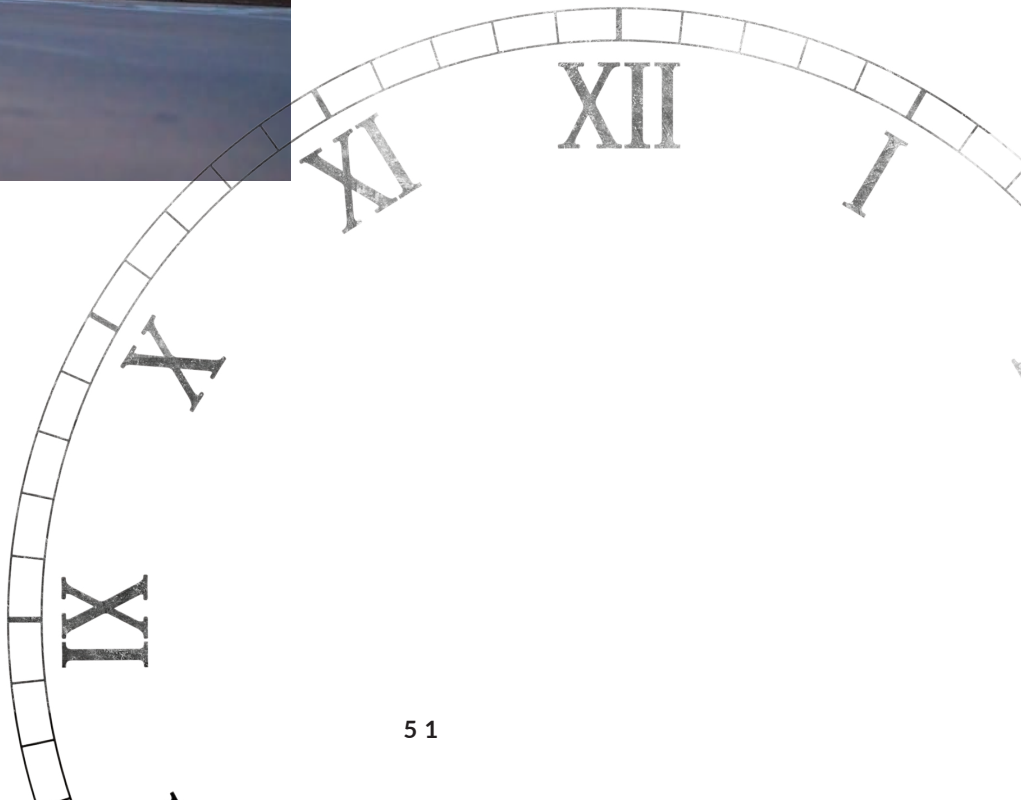
<sup>34</sup> Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.<sup>35</sup> One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”  
<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Why did the religious leaders think this question might test Jesus?

What does it mean to love God with all your heart? With all your soul? With all your mind?

How do these two commands sum up all of the law and the prophets?

If you strive to follow these two commands above all else, how would it change your priorities?



# Study

## NOTES

For a few, delegating comes easily, maybe too easy. For others, letting go of even the most trivial task is difficult. I've observed that most people fall into one of two categories when it comes to delegation: They're either clingers or dumpers. Clingers refuse to let go of anything they think is important, whether they are the best person to do it or not. Their goal is perfection. Dumpers are quick to get rid of tasks, yet they give little thought to how successful their delegation efforts will be. Their goal is to get things off their desk.

How do you find the right standard for delegation? When is it right to hand something off, and when is it right to hold on to it? Here's the guideline I use: If someone else can do a task I'm doing 80 percent as well as I do, then I hand it off. That's pretty darned good. And if I do a good job of motivating, encouraging, and rewarding them, then they will only get better. I've handed off responsibilities using that standard, and after a while, the person who's taken on the job has gone on to do it much better than I could. When that happens, it's very rewarding.

Today I am surrounded by people on my team who do things much better than I can. They make up the difference in my weak areas, and they exceed my expectations in others. They lift me to a level higher than I could ever attain myself, and they allow me to live out my priorities. The advice of management expert Peter Drucker is true: "No executive has ever suffered because his subordinates were strong and effective."



# 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.

**How have you seen the Pareto Principle (the 80/20 principle) at work in your life? How have you experienced the Law of Diminishing Intent?**

**What's Required of me? What gives me the greatest Return? What Rewards me and fulfills me? Take some time as a group to talk about how these Three Rs are affecting your life. What would it take to make all three of them the same?**

**Where are you expending your heart energy? Are you doing things God hasn't asked you to do?**

**Why do we struggle with "staying in our lane?" How can we surrender our desire for the gifts we don't have?**

**What needs to be on your "start doing" list? What needs to be on the "stop doing" list?**

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 which one 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 120.

Close your meeting with prayer.



# Additional

## STUDY

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.

### **Read Matthew 25:14-30.**

Why does the master give different amounts to the three servants?

Why does the servant with one bag of gold bury the money?

What does this passage teach us about using our strengths? What reward are we promised if we are wise stewards of what God has given us?

### **Read Luke 10:38-42.**

What did Mary choose to do? What did Martha choose?

What was Martha focused on? Can you relate to her frustration?

What is the one thing Jesus says is needed?





# Daily Devotionals

## Day 1

PROVERBS 24:27.

Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house.

REFLECT:

Are you doing the most important things first? Where do you need to refocus your efforts?

## Day 2

EPHESIANS 5:15-16.

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

REFLECT:

The Bible says that God will always give wisdom if we ask for it. Take some time to ask Him for wisdom in making the most of the opportunities he's given you.

## Day 3

ECCLESIASTES 3:1.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

REFLECT:

What "season" of life are you in? What is it time for during this season?

## Day 4

PSALM 39:4.

Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.

REFLECT:

The point of this verse is not to think negatively about ourselves but to recognize the truth that our days are limited. Why is it so important to use our days well?

## Day 5

1 PETER 4:10.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

REFLECT:

Prioritizing our lives is important because it's a stewardship issue. How are you using your gifts to serve others? How are you being faithful with the time and strengths God has given you?

## 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 Devotionals time this week.

# GROWTH

Adults love to ask kids, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” We enjoy hearing the goals of these children and learning about their personalities through the way they answer. Depending on the age of the child, the responses can also be lots of fun. One young friend recently shared, very seriously, that he planned to be an elephant when he got bigger.

Perhaps we also enjoy asking this question because we realize that growth is actually a lifetime process. As long as we are alive, we are still “growing up,” and God still wants to work in our lives to help us become stronger, wiser, more effective, and more joyful. Growth is a daily decision, so today we’ll talk about how we can be intentional about growing in every area of life.

**And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.**

**LUKE 2:52**

A young girl with brown hair and a yellow bow is smiling and looking upwards. Her face and arms are covered in colorful body paint, including purple, orange, and yellow. She is wearing a white dress with a colorful floral pattern. The background is a blurred green field.

4

# 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 you can 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 is one area of your life in which you want to grow?

How does your growth help others grow?

Take some time for each person to share how they're doing on the challenge of 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?



# Hear

G O D ' S S T O R Y



## Read Psalm 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,

<sup>2</sup> but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.

<sup>3</sup> That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season



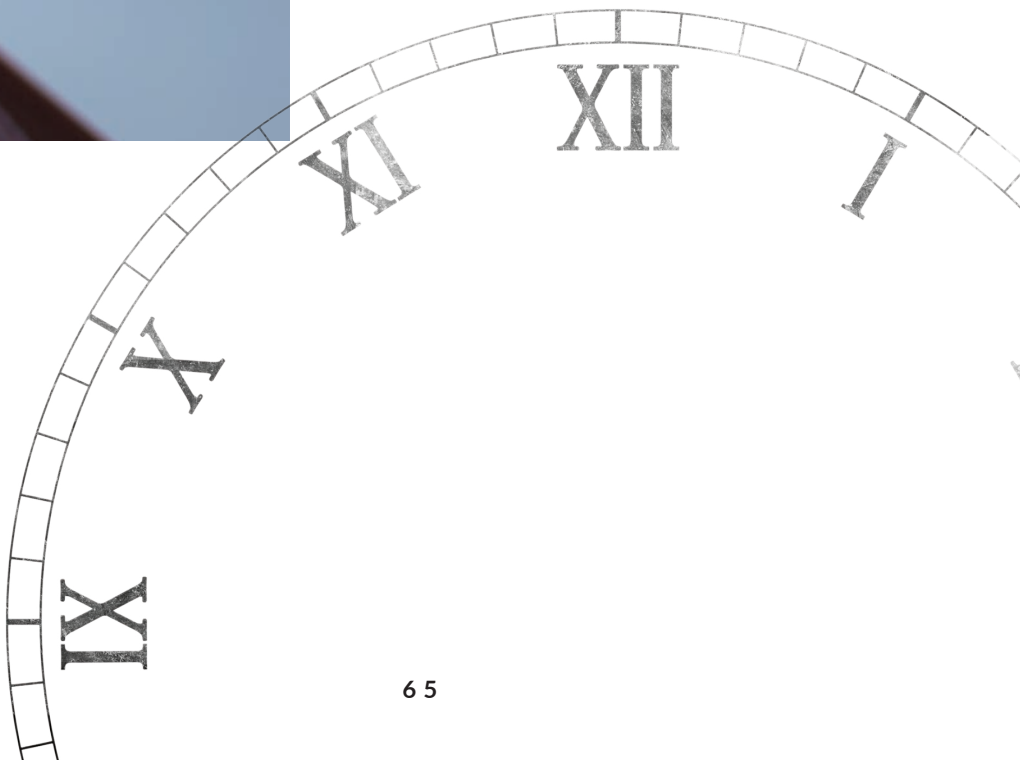
and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers.

What are some choices we should avoid if  
we want to grow?

How can we “delight” in God’s law?

Respond to the metaphor in verse 3. Why  
does this tree grow? What is the parallel for  
our lives?

Note that we yield fruit “in season.” We will  
not always grow or produce results at the  
same rate. What is one “fruit” you want to  
develop in this season of life?



# Study

## NOTES

Can you relate to the people in this week's video who shared an area of life where they were stuck? Did you write down an area in your own life where you need to start growing but you just feel stuck?

Perhaps you want to advance in your career, but you seem to have stalled. You desire to improve your relationship with your spouse, but you don't seem able to break new ground. Or you've hit a plateau in your health, and nothing you do seems to advance your efforts. How do you overcome such stagnation? I'll tell you what some people do: They make external changes. They look for a different job, leave their spouse, or give up exercising.

The better solution is to pursue internal changes. External changes generally only relieve symptoms of stagnation temporarily. If you get a different job, the newness of it and the fresh challenges it brings may thrill you for a while, but when those wear off—a few weeks, months, or years later—you will be faced with the same old problems. The same is usually true for second marriages. And if you give up exercising, your health will only decline.

However, if you make personal growth your goal, then your focus is on changes you can make on the inside. You become better equipped to face career challenges. You discover new ways to relate to your spouse. You find ways to improve your eating or maximize your exercise. You gain the potential to break the stagnation and improve your situation without some of the losses of career changes, broken relationships, or neglected health.



# 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.

**Which benefit of growth is most significant to you? Why?**

**What are some ways you can schedule your growth? Do you need to develop a personal growth plan?**

**How can you evaluate your experiences so you can learn from them?**

**What area of life did you identify as the place where you're stuck? What is the next step you can take to begin growing in this area?**

Groups grow closer when they serve together. How could your group serve someone in need? You may want to visit a shut-in from your church, provide a meal for a family who is going through difficulty, or give some other practical help to someone in need. If nothing comes to mind, spend some group time praying and asking God to show you who needs your help. Have two or three group members organize a serving project for the group, and then do it!

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 120.

Close your meeting with prayer.



# Additional

## STUDY

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.

### **Read Colossians 1:9-14.**

How does knowing God's will help us to grow in our faith?

What does it mean to bear fruit?

How is giving thanks a form of growth?

### **Read Ephesians 4:15-16.**

How do we grow as the body of Christ? What does it mean for Jesus to be the head of the body?

Why are both truth and grace so important to growth?

What is our responsibility in growth? What is God's part?



# Daily Devotionals

## Day 1

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18.

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

REFLECT:

The ultimate growth is becoming more like Christ! Ask Him to help you be transformed into His image, one day and one decision at a time.

## Day 2

1 PETER 2:2-3.

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

REFLECT:

We crawl before we walk! What is some spiritual milk that can help you grow up in your faith?

## Day 3

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. <sup>12</sup> 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 our faith so that 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 4

PHILIPPIANS 1:6.

....he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

REFLECT:

Growth is not a contest, and it's not going to happen in a few months. It's between you and God, and it's for a lifetime. No matter what comes, He will be faithful!

## Day 5

2 PETER 3:18.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

REFLECT:

We must grow in both grace and truth. As we close this week, take a few minutes to glorify and praise God for the ways He has helped you grow in the past. Then ask for His help in taking your next steps of growth for the future.

## 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 Devotionals time this week.

# FAITH

There are a number of reasons why faith is beneficial to an individual beyond spiritual growth. Researchers have found that spiritual practices like Bible reading, prayer, serving others, and participating in worship services can strengthen your immune system, reduce depression, lessen anxiety and stress, strengthen relationships, and even extend your life span. As one writer put it, “If faith could be packaged in a pill, the stock price of drug companies would soar.”

However, we’re focusing on faith this week not because it can lengthen your life or lower your stress. As great as those side benefits are, the real value of faith is growing closer to God and discovering the true meaning and purpose of our lives. Today we’ll talk about why faith matters today and how it can make a difference in the future—and for eternity!

**Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

**JOHN 14:6**



5

# 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 you can 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:**

If you are a Christian, what's one thing you've learned from the Bible about leading or living well?

How has faith made a difference in your life?



# Hear

G O D ' S S T O R Y



Read Hebrews 11:1-3.

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. <sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for.

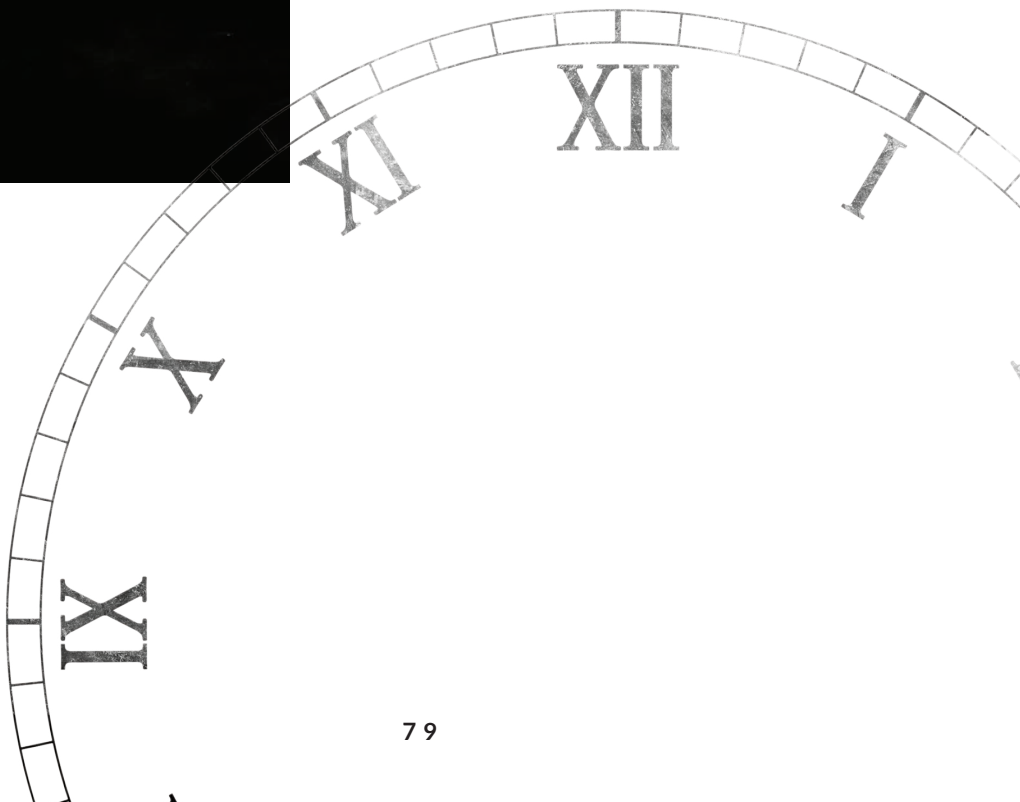
<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

How can we have confidence in what we “hope for?” How does faith grow when our hope is in Christ?

What are some things you do not see, but you are completely sure of?

How does faith give us greater spiritual understanding?

Why does God commend us for faith?



# Study

## NOTES

There are a lot of things in life that are difficult to understand. The subject of faith falls into that category. Faith allows the soul to go beyond what the eyes can see, the mind can think or the heart can feel. God can be the greatest supplier to your life if you let Him. His faith in us surpasses our faith in ourselves.

When you say...

“I am too tired,” God says, “I will give you rest.”

“It’s impossible,” God says, “All things are possible.”

“Nobody really loves me,” God says, “I love you.”

“I can’t go on,” God says, “My grace is sufficient.”

“I am not able,” God says, “I am able.”

“I can’t forgive myself,” God says, “I forgive you.”

“I can’t manage,” God says, “I will supply all your needs.”

“I am afraid,” God says, “I have not given you a spirit of fear.”

“I am not smart enough,” God says, “I give you wisdom.”

“I feel alone,” God says, “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

“I can’t figure things out,” God says, “I will direct your steps.”

“I am worried and frustrated,” God says, “Cast all your cares on me.”

God has an answer for every doubt we possess. Faith is leaning in and relying on a God who wants to live within us and through us.





# 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 is risk part of faith? How does faith bring freedom?**

**Respond to the idea that faith is not optional. Why is faith so central to our identity and purpose?**

**Why does faith require discipline? What are spiritual disciplines that help you grow closer to Jesus?**

**Does it encourage you to know “the end of the story?” How does it make a difference in your perspective on your life?**

**Why should we focus on our knowledge of Christ instead of our feelings or fear?**

Spend some time praying about those you know who might respond to a simple invitation: to come to a church service, join your small group, or even just have coffee and talk about spiritual matters. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind people you can pray for.

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 120.

Close your meeting with prayer.



# Additional

## STUDY

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.

### **Read Romans 5:1-5.**

How does faith lead to peace with God?

What does it mean to boast in God? How is that different from boasting in ourselves?

How do sufferings lead to perseverance, character, and hope? How have you seen this in your own life?

### **Read Ephesians 2:8-10.**

Why is it so important to remember we are saved by faith and not through anything we have done?

What does it mean to be God's "handiwork?" How does His plan for you increase your faith?

What an incredible idea: God has prepared specific good works for us to do! What is He calling you to do right now?



# Daily Devotionals

## Day 1

GALATIANS 2:20.

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.

REFLECT:

We not only have faith that God has saved us, but we have confidence that His power is at work within us. What does it mean to live by faith?

## Day 2

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7.

For we live by faith, not by sight.

REFLECT:

This is easier said than done! Ask God to help you focus on what He has promised through His word.

## Day 3

1 CORINTHIANS 2:4-5.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

REFLECT:

Is your faith built on the power of God or on human wisdom?

## Day 4

ROMANS 12:3.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

REFLECT:

Faith in God and focus on Him gives us a wiser perspective on our own accomplishments.

## Day 5

ROMANS 4:20-21.

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

REFLECT:

In every situation, we can choose whether we will focus on God's power. Ask God to help you hold fast to your belief in His promises and give Him glory!

## 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 Devotionals time this week.

# RELATIONSHIPS

One of the first things Jesus did when He began His earthly ministry was recruit a ragtag bunch of fishermen and tax collectors to hang out with Him. These common men went on to do extraordinary things as Jesus' disciples, but in the beginning, they were simply Jesus' friends (and, in a way, His small group!).

If Jesus needed to walk through life with other people, we definitely do. Yet so often we focus more on our to-do lists and our tasks than we do our friends, co-workers, and family members. Although we know relationships matter, we sometimes struggle to build and nurture these relationships in the day-to-day.

However, we were created to need each other. We're stronger together, and life is more enjoyable and rewarding when we are experiencing it in relationships. Today we'll explore why relationships are so important and how they can help us create a life that matters long-term.

**As iron sharpens iron,  
so one person sharpens another.**

**PROVERBS 27:17**





# 6

# 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 you can 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:**

Share a time when you've been part of a wonderful team or group of people. Perhaps it's in your family, at work, or at church. What made these relationships so valuable to you?

What are some of your fondest memories? What role did other people play in those experiences?



# Hear

G O D ' S S T O R Y



Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one,  
because they have a good return for their labor:

<sup>10</sup> If either of them falls down,  
one can help the other up.

But pity anyone who falls  
and has no one to help them up.

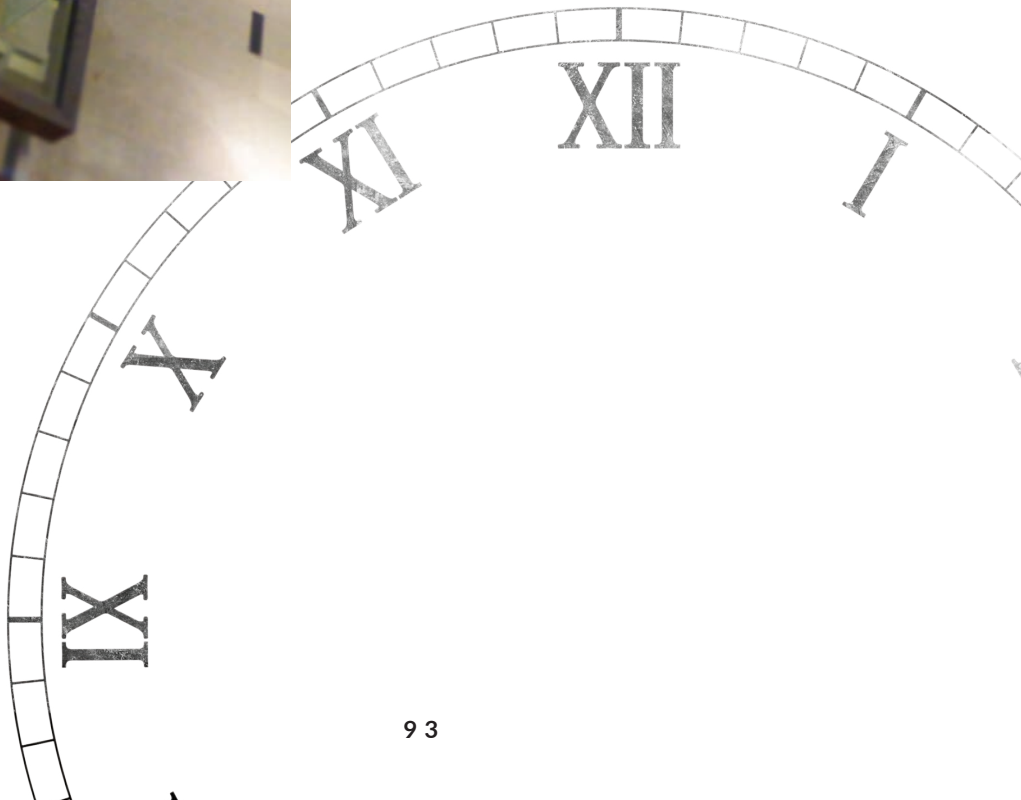
<sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.  
But how can one keep warm alone?

<sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered,  
two can defend themselves.  
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

According to this passage, what are some reasons we should build relationships with others?

A proverb from the Talmud says, “A man without companions is like the left hand without the right.” Similarly, these verses extol the benefits of partnership with someone else. How does this passage apply to friendships? To marriage? To working relationships?

Who or what is the third strand in verse 12?



# Study

## NOTES

The quality of your relationships determines the quality of your life. People are the building blocks of great relationships. If you desire to improve your relationships begin by placing a high value on people. Next, strive for a deeper understanding of people.

Tom Peters and Nancy Austin, authors of *A Passion for Excellence*, state that “the number one managerial productivity problem in America is, quite simply, managers who are out of touch with their people and out of touch with their customers.” I think one possible explanation is that some managers don’t value people. But that isn’t always true. Many people care about others, but they still remain out of touch. In those cases, I think the problem is that they don’t understand people.

Keep in mind the following truths about people while building positive relationships, and actions you can take to bridge the gap often caused by them:

- People are insecure....Give them confidence.
- People want to feel special....Sincerely compliment them.
- People desire a better tomorrow....Show them hope.
- People need to be understood....Listen to them.
- People are selfish....Speak to their needs first.
- People get emotionally low....Encourage them.
- People want to be associated with success....Help them win.



# 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.

**How should God's view of people affect our view of people?**

**What does it mean to live for your eulogy instead of your resume?**

**Why does following Jesus require that we value everyone?**

**How can you carve out time and create margins to invest in relationships? How can you be intentional about relationships?**

**Remember DIRT: Don't Ignore Relational Tension. How do you need to practice this in your life? How do you need to implement this in your leadership?**

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 120.

Close your meeting with prayer.





# Additional

## STUDY

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.

### **Read Galatians 6:2-5.**

How does carrying each other's burdens fulfill the law of Christ?

This passage says to both carry other's burdens and carry our own load. The word for burdens means a weight, something heavy that's beyond our ability to handle alone. And the word for load means the responsibility of one person. How does that clarify this passage? What is the difference between the two commands?

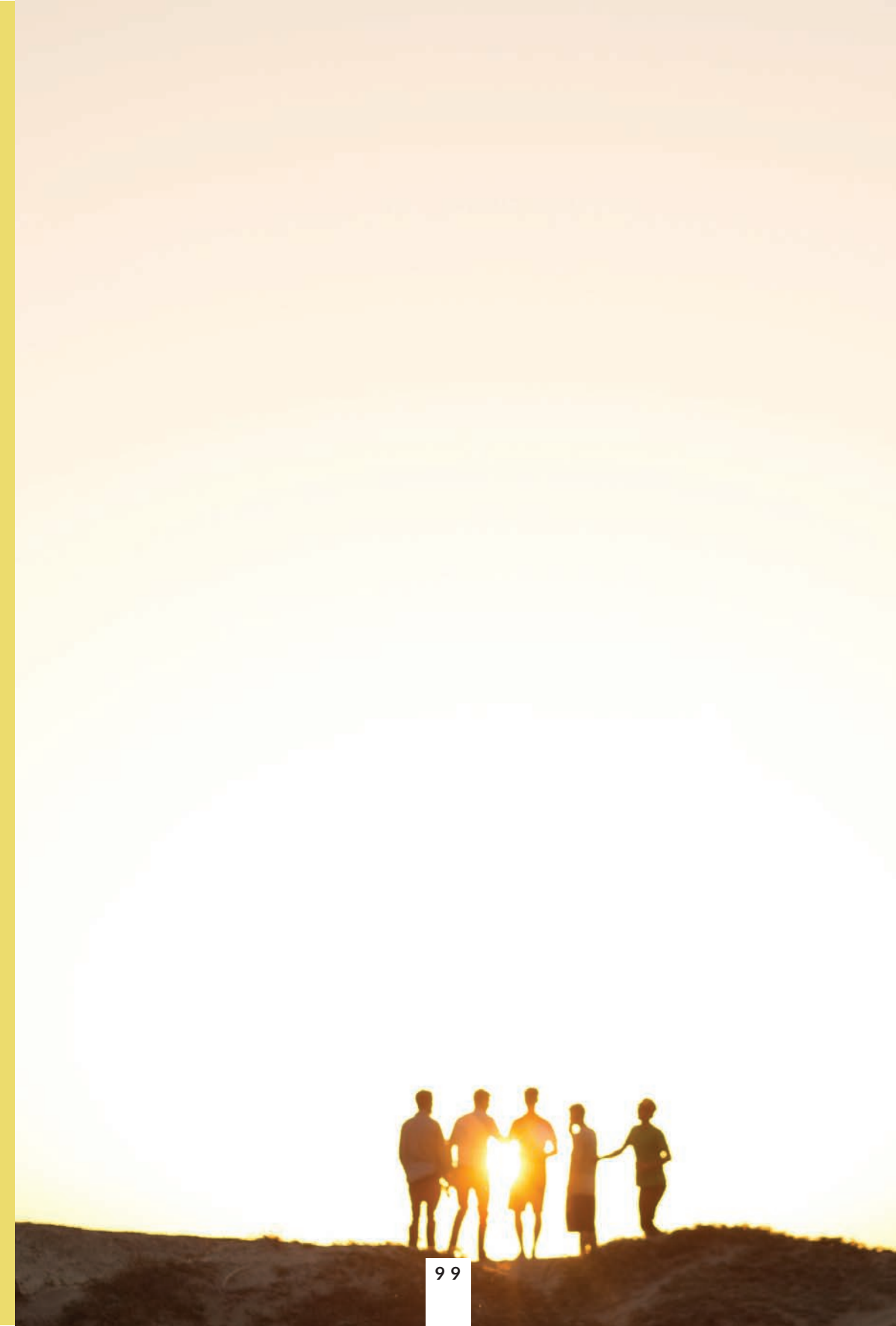
Why would verses about pride and humility be sandwiched in the middle of this teaching?

### **Read Romans 12:9-21.**

This passage is full of instructions for relationships with others. Which commands do you find most challenging?

What are some ways we can rejoice with those who rejoice? Mourn with those who mourn?

How do we live at peace with others? What depends on us, and what is out of our control?



# Daily Devotionals

## Day 1

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

REFLECT:

What is the treasure we have inside us? Why is it so important to keep this perspective in our relationships with others?

## Day 2

ROMANS 15:7.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

REFLECT:

What are some ways Christ accepted you? How can you show that same acceptance to others?

## Day 3

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

REFLECT:

What does it mean to be “like-minded?” Does it mean people always have to agree? How does the rest of the verse explain this command?

## Day 4

PROVERBS 13:20.

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

REFLECT:

Although we are to value everyone, we do not have to learn from everyone! Ask God for help in choosing wise people to journey with through life.

## Day 5

EPHESIANS 4:2-3.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

REFLECT:

What is the unity of the Spirit? How can you develop this unity in your relationships?

## 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 Devotionals time this week.

# PICTURES OF GOD

You've probably heard the old saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Whether it's trying to describe the beauty of the Grand Canyon or the emotion of holding your new baby for the very first time, there are moments when words are not enough. A photograph or a painting or a picture can communicate the immensity of an experience far better than anything we might say.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

**REVELATION 3:20**



God knows we're wired this way—after all, He created us! And He also knows that we develop incorrect pictures of who He is and how He loves us. He knows that sometimes we believe it's impossible to know Him, impossible to please Him, or impossible to be good enough for a relationship with Him.

That's why God sent Jesus—to show us who He is and how He loves us. As we close this series, let's look at some of the ways we often see God and consider how Jesus is both the Word of God and the picture of God's love.

# B

# 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 you can 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 seven weeks?

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 small group. What specific conversations are you praying about for the weeks to come?



# Watch

THE DVD

After watching the video, take two minutes before moving into group discussion to record your three biggest takeaways from this session. How will you apply this week's teaching to your life?

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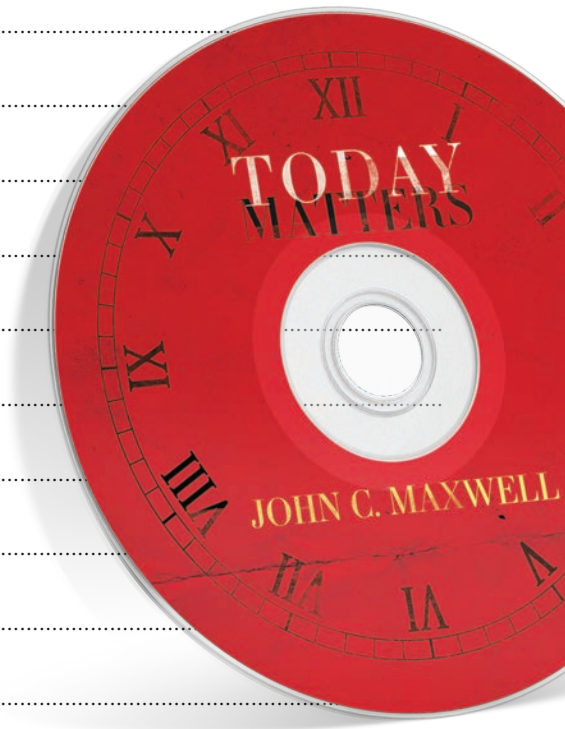
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# Hear

G O D ' S S T O R Y



Read Colossians 1:15-20.

<sup>15</sup> The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.<sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him

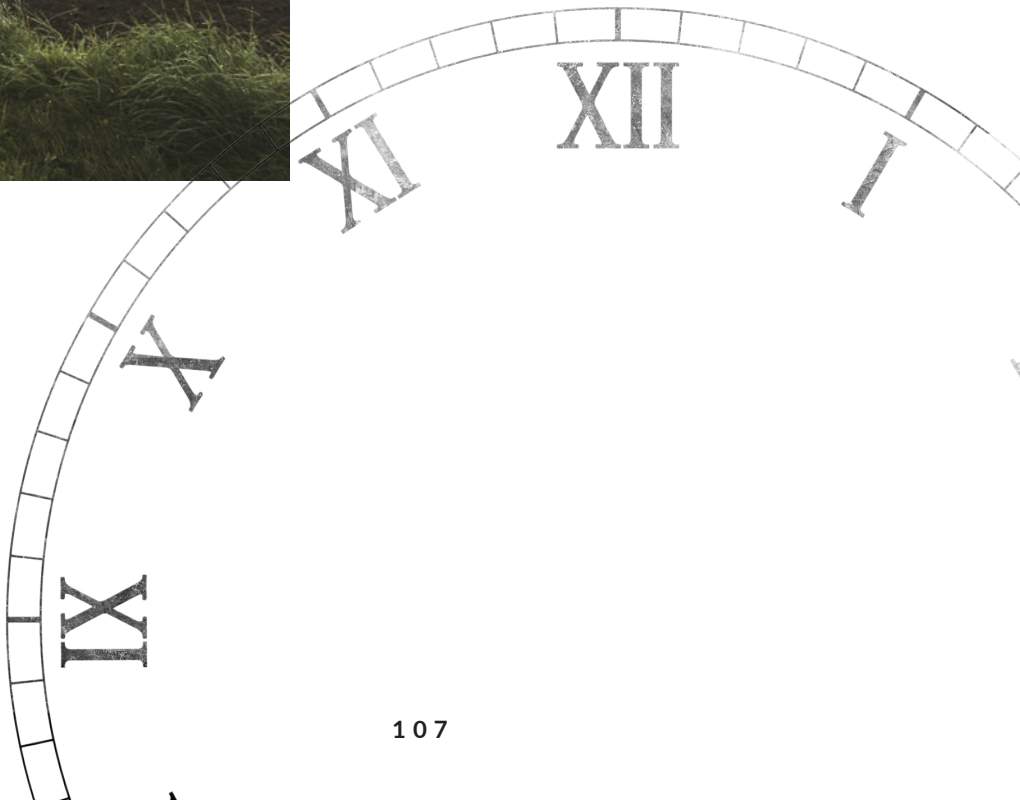
to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

How does Jesus show us who God is?

Why does this passage begin with establishing Jesus's authority and power?

What does it mean for Jesus to be the firstborn over creation? What about the firstborn from among the dead?

How does Jesus reconcile us to God?



# Create

## A NEW STORY

**Most people have the wrong picture of who God is. And that causes them to misunderstand who He is and miss the fullness of a relationship with Him. Reflect for a moment on the 3 wrong pictures of God. A fence. A ladder. A garbage can. Which picture have you held onto?**

**Perhaps you have had a combination of wrong pictures?**

**What do you think has kept you from seeing the true picture of God?**

God will...

Jump the fence.

Climb the ladder.

Accept the garbage.

& Walk through your hearts opened door, to have a relationship with you!

Did you pray the prayer to receive Jesus today?

If so, congratulations on beginning building a beautiful relationship with God. Share this good news with your group and welcome to the family of God!

Close by praying for your prayer requests, and take a couple of minutes to review the praises you have recorded over the past several sessions on the Prayer and Praise Report on page 120. Spend some time thanking God for all He's doing in your group during this study.

We would love to hear from you! By telling your story, you can inspire someone else to live a new story too. Start sharing your story to encourage others - [stories@iequip.org](mailto:stories@iequip.org).



# Additional

## STUDY

Take some time 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.

### **Read Titus 3:3-7.**

How did the people live, according to verse 3? How did God respond to their brokenness and sin?

Why does God save us?

What does it mean to be reborn in Christ?

### **Read Luke 5:27-32.**

Tax collectors were among the most hated members of Jewish society. Why did Jesus invite one of these men to follow Him? What does this teach us about grace?

Why was the group of tax collectors willing to have dinner with Jesus, but the religious leaders were not?

What is Jesus saying in verses 31 and 32? Who are the "sick?"



# Daily Devotionals

## Day 1

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:

We have done nothing to deserve God's grace, and we can do nothing to earn it! Why is it so important that our relationship with Jesus is based in grace?

## Day 2

ROMANS 5:8.

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

REFLECT:

Even at our lowest points, God loved us enough to die for us. Thank Him for loving you long before you loved Him!

## Day 3

HEBREWS 13:8.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

REFLECT:

We can trust what Jesus tells us about Himself and about God. We can always come back to the picture of Him seeking us and knocking at the door of our hearts.



## Day 4

2 PETER 3:9.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

REFLECT:

Are you still exploring your faith and considering what it means to truly follow God? He is patient with everyone who seeks Him.

## Day 5

MICAH 7:19.

You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

REFLECT:

As we close this study, take some time to meditate on the compassion and mercy of God. Allow this picture of His forgiveness to encourage you.

## 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 Devotionals time this week.



# Appendices



# 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 Small Group Essentials for Success on pages 118-119 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! 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.

### **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.



# Small Groups

ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

## OUR PURPOSE

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

## OUR VALUES

### **Consistency**

To bring priority to the group meeting. We will keep meeting start and stop times the same for each meeting. Life happens! However, the greatest reward for the collective group, and for each member individually, is for consistent presence and participation at each meeting.

### **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 of Growth**

To foster a positive environment for growth. Growth is contagious! Your growth helps others grow. We want to spiritually multiply our lives 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.

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OUR REMINDERS

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?  
\_\_\_\_\_









A person wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt is shown from the chest down, pointing their right index finger towards an open book. The book is open to a page with dense, small text. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the person's hand and the book. The title 'Small Group Leaders' is overlaid on the image in a large, serif font. 'Small' is white, 'Group' is yellow, and 'Leaders' is red.

# Small 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/our community?**
- **What is one thing about your life 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 walk through the Small Group Essentials for Success and talk about each person's expectations and priorities.

Finally, open prayer up for newcomers. Ask participants to speak the names of people they think would benefit from joining a small group but who aren't there yet.

Ask God to work in their lives. Hand out postcards and have everyone write an invitation or two to the small group.

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. Go through the session material.**

If you are using the video, listen to the teaching segment. Don't wait until the last minute to prepare.

### **Be time conscious.**

Everyone leads busy lives. One of the greatest ways you can value people is by placing value on their time. Therefore, you will want to be certain you are beginning on time and concluding on time. Be aware of the clock throughout the group session.

### **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. Demonstrate 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.



# Small Group

## LEADERSHIP REMINDERS

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 appendices, 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 "thank you." 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 encourage you to have the group gather in discussion circles of three or four people during the Hear God's Story or Create a New Story sections of the study. 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.

9. Rotate facilitators weekly. At the end of each meeting, ask the group who should lead the following week. 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. Exchange your contact info with the volunteer facilitator of the next week's meeting and offer to help.

10. Spend time in heart preparation (for new or first-time leaders). Below are five passages to help you develop a shepherd's heart for your first meeting.

Matthew 9:36

1 Peter 5:2-4

Psalms 23

Ezekiel 34:11-16

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12

# EQUIP<sup>®</sup>

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