

The Factor

VAN MOODY

The **i** Factor

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CONTENTS

Welcome from Van Moody	5
Using This Workbook (Read This First)	6
Outline of Each Session	8

Session One: Why the I?	10
Session Two: Peeling the Onion	32
Session Three: To Thine Own Self Be True	52
Session Four: The Search for Significance	70
Session Five: Training for Greatness	86
Session Six: The Long View	104
Session Seven: I Am What I Think	122
Session Eight: Steps to Greatness	140

RESOURCES **158**

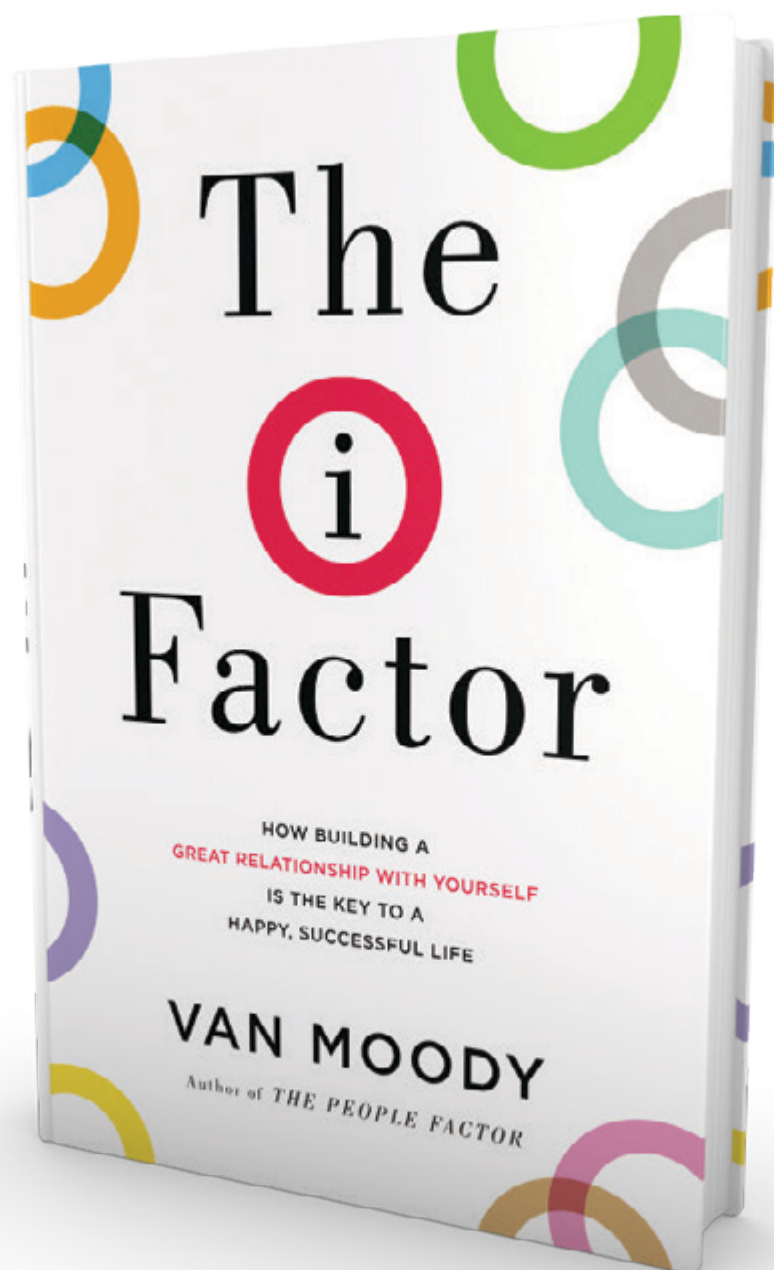
Frequently Asked Questions	159
Small Group Agreement	162
Small Group Calendar	164
Spiritual Partners' Check-In	165
Memory Verse Cards	166
Prayer and Praise Report	168
Small Group Roster	170

SMALL GROUP LEADERS **172**

Hosting an Open House	173
Leading for the First Time	174
Leadership Training 101	175

THE KEY TO THE LIFE YOU WANT IS INSIDE YOU.

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Welcome to our new series on *The i-Factor!* I believe your “i-Factor”—how you see yourself, how you manage yourself, and how you know yourself—is one of the single greatest factors determining your success in life. Over the next eight weeks we’re going to look at why the “i-Factor” is so important, what we can learn from difficulties, why it’s so important to manage our thoughts, and how we can be true to ourselves and our Creator as we grow. I am thrilled that you’ve decided to go on this journey, because I truly believe that if you put these principles into action you will improve your life now and change the trajectory of your life for the future. Are you ready to start changing your “i-Factor” for the better? Turn the page and let’s get started!





Using This Workbook

**TOOLS TO HELP YOU HAVE A
GREAT SMALL GROUP EXPERIENCE!**

- 
1. Notice in the Table of Contents there are three sections: (1) Sessions; (2) Resources; and (3) Small Group Leaders. Familiarize yourself with the Resources. 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

A typical group session for *The I-Factor* 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 that memorizing scripture can be a vital part of filling our minds with God's will for our lives. We encourage you to give this important habit a try. The verses for our five sessions are also listed in Resources.

INTRODUCTION

Each lesson opens with a brief thought that will help you prepare for the session and get you thinking about the particular subject you will explore with your group. 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 feel comfortable doing. Each session typically offers you two options. You can get to know your whole group by using the icebreaker question(s), or you can check in with one or two group members, your spiritual partner(s), for a deeper connection and encouragement in your spiritual journey.

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 pop in the DVD and watch a short teaching segment. You'll then have an opportunity to read a passage of scripture, and discuss both the teaching and the text. You won't focus on accumulating information but on how you should live in light of the Word of God. We want to help you apply the insights from scripture practically and creatively, from your heart as well as your head. At the end of the day, allowing the timeless truths from God's Word to transform our lives in Christ should be your greatest aim.

STUDY NOTES

This brief section provides additional commentary, background or insights on the passage you'll study in the Hear God's Story section.

CREATE A NEW STORY

God wants you to be a part of His Kingdom—to weave your story into His. That will mean change. It will require you to go His way rather than your own. This won't happen overnight, but it should happen steadily. By making small, simple choices, we can begin to change our direction. This is where the Bible's instructions to "be doers of the Word, not just hearers" (James 1:22) comes into play. Many people skip over this aspect of the Christian life because it's scary, relationally awkward, or simply too much work for their busy schedules. But Jesus wanted all of His disciples to know Him personally, carry out His commands, and help outsiders



connect with Him. This doesn't necessarily mean preaching on street corners. It could mean welcoming newcomers, hosting a short-term group in your home, or walking through this study with a friend. In this study, 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, and worshipping God.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

If you have time and want to dig deeper into more Bible passages about the topic at hand, we've provided additional passages and questions, which you can use either 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 read and reflect on between sessions. This provides you with a chance to slow down, read just a small portion of scripture each day, and reflect 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 God's direction.



“Blessed rather are those
who hear the word of God
and obey it.”

LUKE 11:28 | NIV



SESSION 1:

Why the **i**?

**THE LORD DOES NOT LOOK AT THE THINGS
PEOPLE LOOK AT. PEOPLE LOOK AT THE
OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT THE LORD
LOOKS AT THE HEART.**

1 Samuel 16:7

We all look different on the outside. Even identical twins will usually vary slightly in their height, their build, or their facial features. But scientists have discovered we are also different on the inside. A taller, heavier man's heart might be twice the size of a smaller person's heart. Our blood can be one of eight different types. Some people even have "situs inversus," where the internal organs are on the opposite side of the body.

Of course, we don't need teams of scientists to remind us we're different. As interesting as these physical facts may be, we intuitively know that our inside worlds—including our thoughts, emotions, motives, assumptions, and ideas—are uniquely ours. And we also know that these inside factors influence the outside world, including our relationships, our work, and the pursuit of our dreams.

Over the next eight weeks, we're going to look at our "I-Factor," and discover together what it means to know ourselves, how to define our identity, and how our relationship with ourselves affects our relationships with God and with others. We're going to explore our differences and let God transform us where it really matters—from the inside out.

Share Your Story

EACH OF US HAS A STORY. THE EVENTS OF OUR LIFE—GOOD, BAD, WONDERFUL OR CHALLENGING—HAVE SHAPED WHO WE ARE. GOD KNOWS YOUR STORY, AND HE INTENDS TO REDEEM IT—TO USE EVERY STRUGGLE AND EVERY JOY TO ULTIMATELY BRING YOU TO HIMSELF. WHEN WE SHARE OUR STORIES WITH OTHERS, WE GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE GOD AT WORK.

WHEN WE SHARE OUR STORIES, WE ALSO REALIZE WE ARE NOT ALONE—THAT WE HAVE COMMON EXPERIENCES AND THOUGHTS, AND THAT OTHERS CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT WE ARE GOING THROUGH. YOUR STORY CAN ENCOURAGE SOMEONE ELSE, AND TELLING IT CAN LEAD TO A PATH OF FREEDOM FOR YOU AND FOR THOSE YOU SHARE IT WITH.



1. Open your group with prayer. This should be a brief, simple prayer, in which you invite God to give you 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.
2. Before you start this first meeting, get contact information for every participant. Take time to pass around a copy of the Small Group Roster on page 170, a sheet of paper, or one of you pass your Study Guide, opened to the Small Group Roster. Ask someone to make copies or type up a list with everyone's information and email it to the group during the week.
3. Then, 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?
 - What do you think it means to have a relationship with yourself?
4. Whether your group is new or ongoing, it's always important to reflect on and review your values together. On page 162 is a Small Group Agreement with the values we've found most useful in sustaining healthy, balanced groups. We recommend that you choose one or two values—ones you haven't previously focused on or have room to grow in—to emphasize during this study. Choose ones that will take your group to the next stage of intimacy and spiritual health.
5. If your group is new, welcome newcomers. Introduce everyone—you may even want to have name tags for your first meeting.
6. We recommend you rotate host homes on a regular basis and let the hosts lead the meeting. Studies show that healthy groups rotate leadership. This helps to develop every member's ability to shepherd a few people in a safe environment. Even Jesus gave others the opportunity to serve alongside Him (Mark 6:30-44). Look at the FAQs in Resources for additional information about hosting or leading the group.
7. The Small Group Calendar on page 164 is a tool for planning who will host and lead each meeting. Take a few minutes to plan hosts and leaders for your remaining meetings. Don't skip this important step! It will revolutionize your group.



- **What are the unseen things we should fix our eyes on? What are some ways to keep our eyes fixed on the things of God?**

- **Why is our inner life and identity so important? How is it different from the external identity we present to the world?**

Study Notes

ON THE VIDEO, PASTOR VAN TALKED ABOUT THE STORY OF HOPHNI AND PHINEHAS, THE EVIL SONS OF THE GREAT PRIEST ELI. THIS STORY IS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF HOW OUR INTERNAL LIVES INFLUENCE OUR EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR. TAKE A FEW MINUTES THIS WEEK TO READ ABOUT IT IN 1 SAMUEL 2:27-36 AND 1 SAMUEL 4.

- What stands out to you from this tragic story?

- How does it illustrate the ideas we've studied in this session?



Create a New Story

GOD WANTS YOU TO BE PART OF HIS KINGDOM—TO WEAVE YOUR STORY INTO HIS. THAT WILL MEAN CHANGE—TO GO HIS WAY RATHER THAN YOUR OWN. THIS WON'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT, BUT IT SHOULD HAPPEN STEADILY. BY STARTING WITH SMALL, SIMPLE CHOICES, WE BEGIN TO CHANGE OUR DIRECTION. THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US ALONG THE WAY—GIVING US GIFTS TO SERVE THE BODY, OFFERING US INSIGHTS INTO SCRIPTURE, AND CHALLENGING US TO LOVE NOT ONLY THOSE AROUND US BUT THOSE FAR FROM GOD.

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.

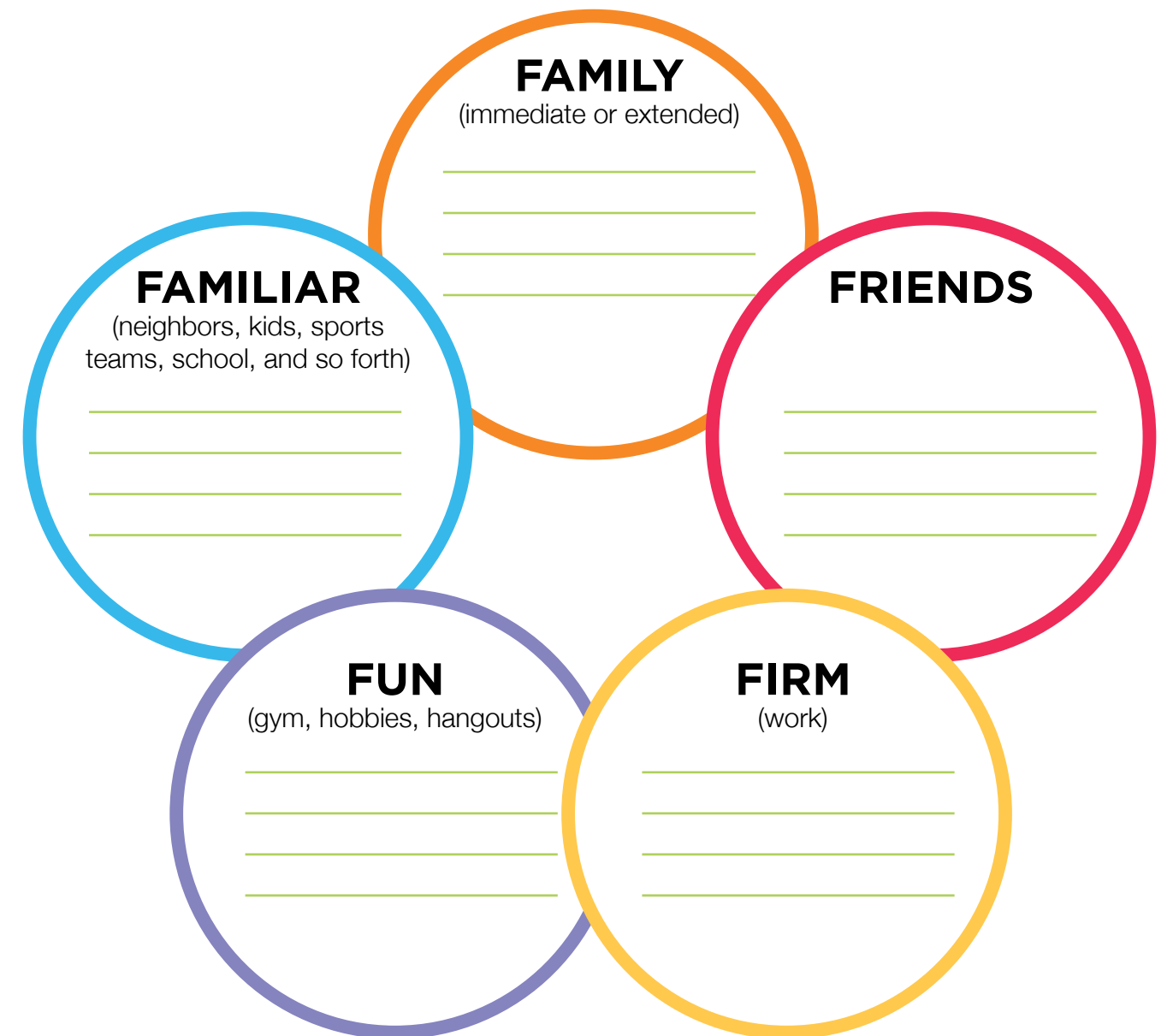
- **Why do success and purpose in life begin with managing ourselves?**

- **Think about the Titanic and the iceberg. How does what's "beneath the surface" in us determine the course of our lives?**

- **When considering who you really are, do you listen more to the voices of others or to the voice of God?**

- **What is holding you back from the life you long for?**

- **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. Perhaps they would be open to joining the group? Share your lists with the group so you can all be praying for the people you've identified.**



- Also consider someone—in this group or outside it—that 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 interact with the Bible? Can you commit to spending time in daily prayer or study of God’s Word (use the Daily Devotions section to guide you)? Tell the group how you plan to follow Jesus this week, and then, at your next meeting, talk about your progress and challenges.
- Stack your hands just like a sports team does in the huddle and commit to taking a risk and going deeper in your group and in your relationships with each other.
- Ask, “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 168.
- Close your meeting with prayer.



For Additional Study

IF YOU FEEL GOD NUDGING YOU TO GO DEEPER, TAKE SOME TIME BEFORE THE NEXT MEETING TO DIG INTO HIS WORD. EXPLORE THE BIBLE PASSAGES RELATED TO THIS SESSION'S THEME ON YOUR OWN AND JOT YOUR REFLECTIONS IN A JOURNAL OR IN THIS STUDY GUIDE. A GREAT WAY TO GAIN INSIGHT ON A PASSAGE IS TO READ IT IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS. YOU MAY WANT TO USE A BIBLE APP OR WEBSITE TO COMPARE TRANSLATIONS.

READ EPHESIANS 3:14-19.

- **How does God strengthen us inwardly?**

- **What does it mean to be “rooted” in love? How should that inner rootedness affect our external world?**

- **How does God fill us? How does that change us?**

READ MATTHEW 23:23-28.

- **In this passage, Jesus is speaking harsh words to the Pharisees, a group of religious leaders who believed following very detailed and precise rules was the way to please God. Read through these verses. Is Jesus more concerned with the internal heart or the external behavior?**

- **What are the “cup and dish” that need to be cleaned?**

- **Re-read verse 23. Is Jesus saying none of the externals matter? What distinction is he making?**

Daily Devotionals



DAY 1 • READ PROVERBS 20:27 (NLT).

The LORD’s light penetrates the human spirit, exposing every hidden motive.

Respond: As we begin this study, invite the Lord to work in your heart and to penetrate your spirit. God, expose our motives and reveal who we really are—and who you want us to be.

DAY 2 • READ LUKE 6:45.

A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Respond: Have you found this to be true? Do your words and actions reveal what’s truly going on inside you?

DAY 3 • READ 2 PETER 1:3.

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Respond: When we know God and we are growing in relationship with him, we have everything we need. Ask God today to move in your life with his power!

DAY 4 • READ 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.

Respond: When we allow Jesus to work in our lives, our internal growth shows Jesus to other people!

DAY 5 • READ MATTHEW 6:33.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Respond: All the external things are secondary to what really matters. Commit that over the next eight weeks you will seek God and allow him to help you grow.

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.

SESSION 2:

Peeling the Onion



SEE WHAT GREAT LOVE THE FATHER HAS LAVISHED ON US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD! AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE!

1 John 3:1

You may be a businessman, a lawyer, a secretary, a nurse, a teacher, or a homemaker. You might be older, younger, or right in the middle. You might be the youngest daughter, the oldest son, or an only child. You might be a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, a husband or a wife. You are tall or short, heavy or thin, African-American or Asian or Caucasian or Latino.

There are so many ways we can describe ourselves and so many aspects to our identity. However, far more important than our job or our marital status or our race or our age is our identity in Christ. How he describes us, what he says about us and what he values, are more important than anything else. Today we'll learn more about how to "peel the onion" and get to the core of our identity—finding who we are in the greatness of who God created us to be.

Share Your Story

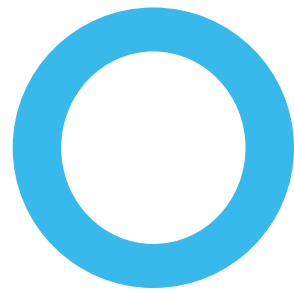
AS WE SAID LAST WEEK, WHEN WE SHARE OUR STORIES WITH OTHERS, WE GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE GOD AT WORK. YOUR STORY IS BEING SHAPED, EVEN IN THIS MOMENT, BY BEING PART OF THIS GROUP. IN FACT, FEW THINGS CAN SHAPE US MORE THAN COMMUNITY.

WHEN WE SHARE OUR STORIES, WE CAN ENCOURAGE SOMEONE ELSE, AND LEARN. WE EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF GOD AS HE HELPS US BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO REVEAL OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.



1. Open your group with prayer. This should be a brief, simple prayer in which you invite God to be with you as you meet. 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.
2. Begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking:
 - Which people in your life influence your opinion of yourself the most?
 - What parts of your identity are most important to you?
 - 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 25 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.
 - Pair up with someone in your group. (We suggest that men partner with men and women with women.) This person will be your spiritual partner for the rest of this study. He or she doesn't have to be your best friend. Instead, this person will simply encourage you to complete the goals you set for yourself during this study. Following through on a resolution is tough when you're on your own; it makes all the difference to have a partner to cheer you on.





- **What are the blessings we receive when we find our identity in God? (verse 3)**

- **What are the consequences of disobedience and rebellion against God?**

Study Notes

THROUGHOUT THIS SESSION, PASTOR VAN TALKED ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO FIND YOUR IDENTITY IN WHO GOD SAYS YOU ARE. THE BIBLE IS FULL OF INFORMATION ABOUT HOW GOD SEES US AND WHO HE SAYS WE ARE. ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD, WE ARE:

- accepted by God
(Romans 8:1)
- holy and blameless before God
(Ephesians 1:4)
- near to God
(Ephesians 2:13)
- heirs of God, our father
(Romans 8:17)
- able to overcome the world
(1 John 5:4)
- a citizen of heaven
(Philippians 3:20)
- dearly loved
(Colossians 3:12)
- forgiven
(Ephesians 1:7)

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.

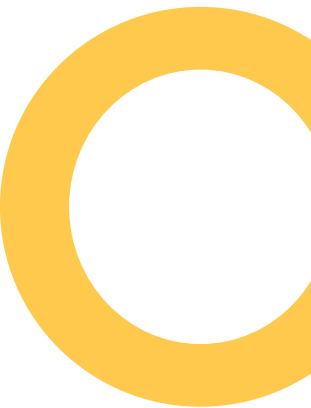
- **Why do we focus on other people's opinions when we're not secure in our own identity?**

- **Why is it hard work to discover our true identity? What does it mean to "peel the onion"?**

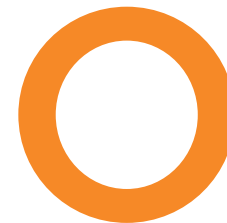
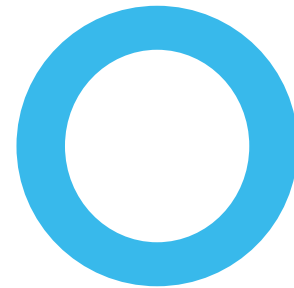
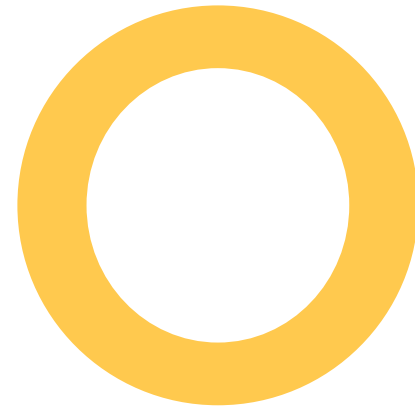
- **What has God shown you about who you are not?**

- **How does knowing our core give us stability?**

- **What external circumstances have you allowed to influence your identity?**



- 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. 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.
- Ask, “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 168.
- Close your meeting with prayer.



For Additional Study

IF YOU FEEL GOD NUDGING YOU TO GO DEEPER, TAKE SOME TIME BEFORE THE NEXT MEETING TO DIG INTO HIS WORD. EXPLORE THE BIBLE PASSAGES RELATED TO THIS SESSION'S THEME ON YOUR OWN AND JOT YOUR REFLECTIONS IN A JOURNAL OR IN THIS STUDY GUIDE. A GREAT WAY TO GAIN INSIGHT ON A PASSAGE IS TO READ IT IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS. YOU MAY WANT TO USE A BIBLE APP OR WEBSITE TO COMPARE TRANSLATIONS.

READ PSALM 139.

- What are some examples the Psalmist gives throughout this Psalm about how God knows us?

- How does this Psalm reinforce the idea that each one of us has a distinct, unique identity?

- When we consider the way God knows us, cares for us, and values us, how should we respond? Try writing verses 23-24 in your own words and pray them back to God.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21.

- What does it mean to be a new creation in Christ?

- How can we be part of reconciling others to God?

- What does this passage tell you about your value to God?

Daily Devotionals



DAY 1 • READ 1 JOHN 3:1.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Respond: The core of our identity is in a God who loves us so much that he calls us sons and daughters. Reflect on this incredible truth, and thank him for being your loving father.

DAY 2 • READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:27.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Respond: The identity we have as Christians includes not only ourselves, but the church. What does it mean to be part of the body of Christ? How does this shape your identity?

DAY 3 • READ 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.

Respond: When we choose to follow Jesus, we live a completely different life, empowered by the Spirit. Jesus' identity becomes our identity!

DAY 4 • READ JOHN 15:15.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Respond: What an amazing thought, that we are friends of God!

DAY 5 • READ EPHESIANS 2:10.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Respond: As Pastor Van said, we are the masterpiece of God. Thank him for the way he has uniquely created you, and ask him for wisdom about the good works he's called you to do.

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.



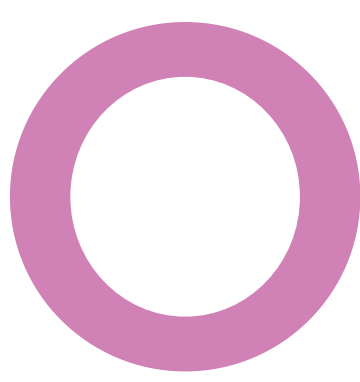
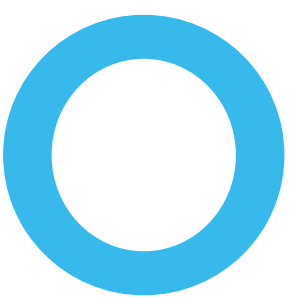
SESSION 3:

To Thine Own Self Be True




THE WORLD AND ITS DESIRES PASS AWAY,
BUT WHOEVER DOES THE WILL OF GOD LIVES
FOREVER.

1 John 2:17



In Shakespeare's famous play *Hamlet*, the character of Polonius tells Laertes, "This above all—to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night to the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." This quote has become famous because it resonates with what we know of life—we understand that if we are not honest with ourselves, and living in ways that are consistent with who we are, that it will affect every other relationship and every part of life.

It is so tempting to construct our lives on an image of who we want to be, or to hide who we really are to please others. But the abundant life God wants for us is built on the foundation of truth. In this session we'll discover what it means to build our lives on that foundation, live out of our identity, and examine who we really are.



Share Your Story

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH PRAYER. THIS SHOULD BE A BRIEF, SIMPLE PRAYER IN WHICH YOU INVITE GOD TO BE WITH YOU AS YOU MEET. 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.

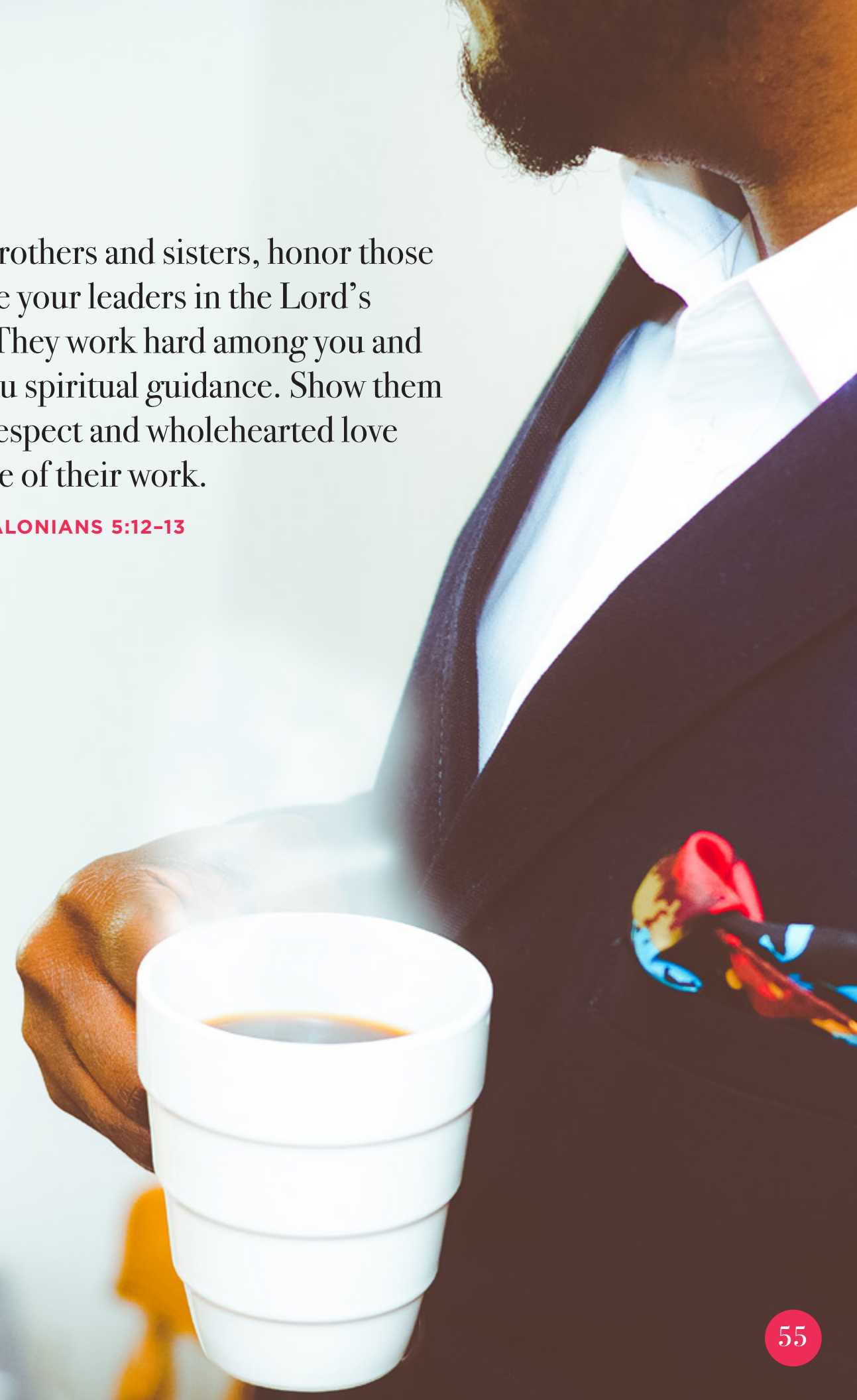
SHARING PERSONAL STORIES BUILDS DEEPER CONNECTIONS AMONG GROUP MEMBERS. BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO GET PEOPLE TALKING.

1. Can you do any impressions? Share with the group!
2. Who do you really look up to and admire? What do you respect about that person?

3. Sit with your spiritual partner. If your partner is absent or you are new to the group, join with another pair or someone who doesn't yet have a partner. If you haven't established your spiritual partnership yet, do it now. (See Share Your Story in Session Two on page 34.)

Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-13



Study Notes

The story of Asa's life is fascinating. As Pastor Van said, he started off as a king who honored and pleased God. In 2 Chronicles 14:2-6, it says, "Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God. He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his laws and commands. He removed the high places and incense altars in every town in Judah, and the kingdom was at peace under him. He built up the fortified cities of Judah, since the land was at peace. No one was at war with him during those years, for the LORD gave him rest." When he does eventually have to do battle, he calls on God and asks for his help (2 Chronicles 14:11), and he takes down all of the false idols the people had been worshipping (2 Chronicles 15).

However, in the 36th year of Asa's reign, things begin to change. Baasha, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel, goes to war against Asa, and Asa takes the silver

and gold from the Lord's treasuries and makes a treaty with another king in the area. He relies on that other king instead of God, and God responds by telling him through a prophet, "You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war" (2 Chronicles 16:9). This is the beginning of the end for Asa; he throws the prophet in jail, gets a severe disease in his feet, and refuses to seek the Lord's help. Two years later, he dies.

If we were to take this week's question—"Where did I go wrong?"—and apply it to Asa's life, the answer would center on Asa's fear. At the end of his life, Asa stops trusting in God and instead tries to solve the problem with Baasha through his own efforts and through other earthly leaders. He forgets his core identity as a follower of God and king of integrity, and he leads an entire kingdom down the wrong path.

Can you relate to Asa's story? Where have you done "a foolish thing" and turned away from your core identity?



Create a New Story

GOD WANTS YOU TO BE PART OF HIS KINGDOM—TO WEAVE YOUR STORY INTO HIS. THAT WILL MEAN CHANGE. IT WILL REQUIRE YOU TO GO HIS WAY RATHER THAN YOUR OWN. THIS WON'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT, BUT IT SHOULD HAPPEN STEADILY. BY MAKING SMALL, SIMPLE CHOICES, WE CAN BEGIN TO CHANGE OUR DIRECTION. THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US ALONG THE WAY, BY GIVING US GIFTS TO SERVE THE BODY, OFFERING US INSIGHTS INTO SCRIPTURE, AND CHALLENGING US TO LOVE NOT ONLY THOSE AROUND US BUT THOSE FAR FROM GOD.

IN THIS SECTION, TALK ABOUT HOW YOU WILL APPLY THE WISDOM YOU'VE LEARNED IN THIS SESSION.

- **Why are we tempted to mimic others and be like them instead of living out of who we are?**

- **What are some areas of your life you need to examine? Do you need to ask yourself, "Where did I go wrong?"**

- **How do we let our core identity drive our decisions? How do we live from the foundation of who we are?**

- **Are you letting other people see your foundation, or are you hiding who you are?**

- **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.**

- **Ask, "How can we pray for you this week?" Invite everyone to share, but don't force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 168.**

- **Close your meeting with prayer.**



For Additional Study

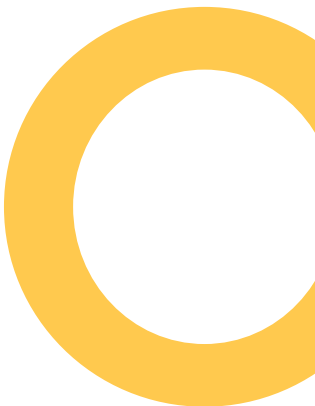
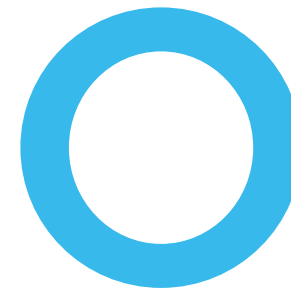
TAKE SOME TIME BETWEEN NOW AND OUR NEXT MEETING TO DIG INTO GOD'S WORD. EXPLORE THE BIBLE PASSAGES RELATED TO THIS SESSION'S THEME. JOT DOWN YOUR REFLECTIONS IN A JOURNAL OR IN THIS STUDY GUIDE. YOU MAY EVEN WANT TO USE A BIBLE WEBSITE OR APP TO LOOK UP COMMENTARY ON THESE PASSAGES. IF YOU LIKE, SHARE 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 a way to worship God?**

- **How do we conform to this world? What does God ask us to do instead?**

- **What is the promised blessing when we allow God to transform our minds?**

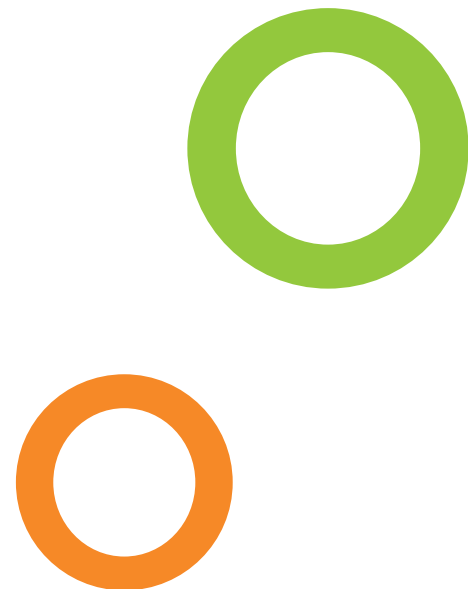


READ 1 JOHN 2:15-17.

- **What does it mean to not love the world? Does that mean we can't like the people and events in our lives?**

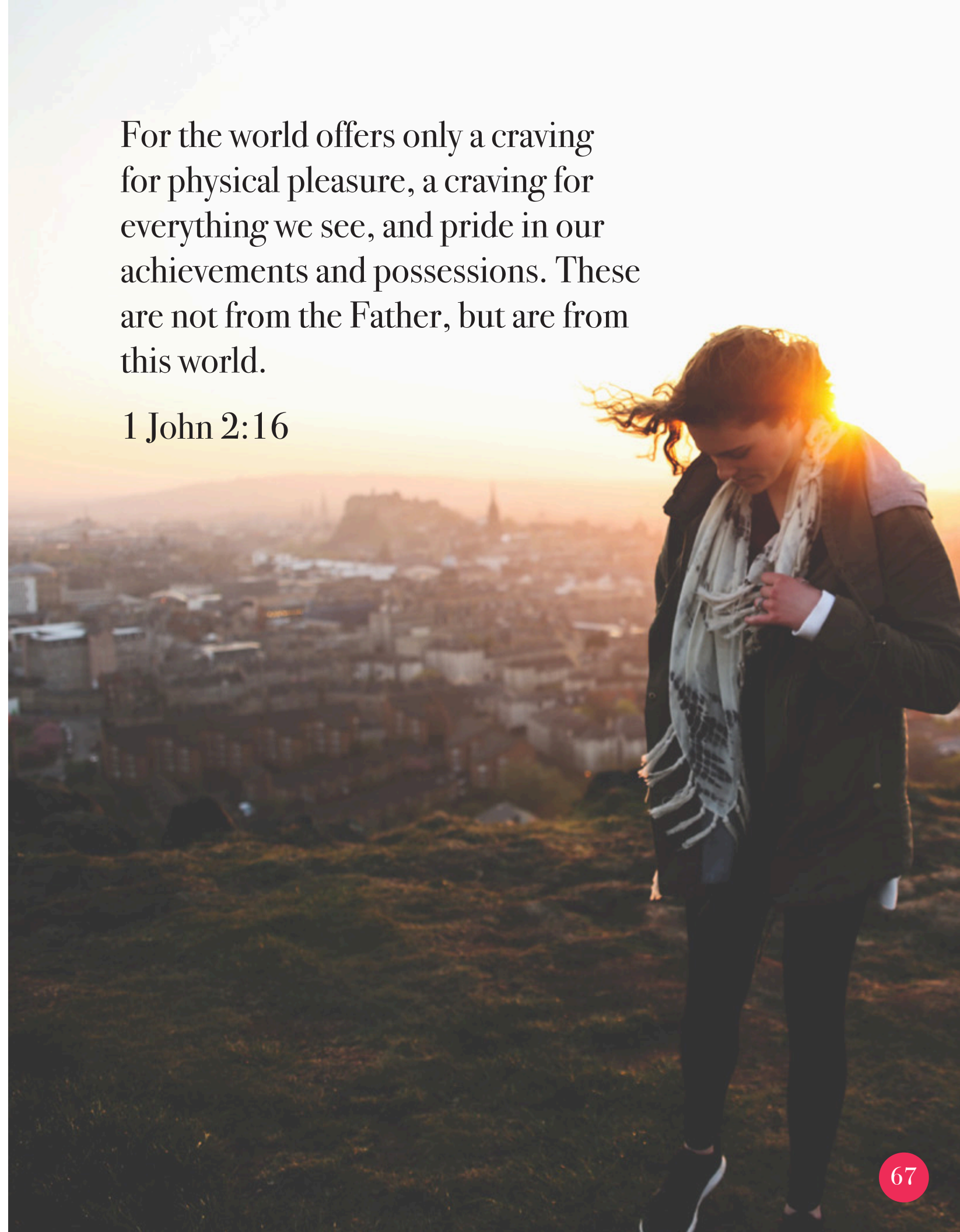
- **What are the lusts and pride described in verse 16? How do those distract us from the things of God?**

- **Why should we base our identity on the will of God instead of the ways of the world?**



For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world.

1 John 2:16



Daily Devotionals



DAY 1 • READ PSALM 27:8.

My heart says of you, “Seek his face!”
Your face, LORD, I will seek.

Respond: When we listen to our core, we find a desire for God. After all, he created us to be in relationship with him. Is your heart telling you to seek God? How do you need to respond?

DAY 2 • READ PROVERBS 31:30.

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

Respond: Ladies (and men!), the external things are not the eternal things. Build your core on fearing, honoring, and following the Lord.

DAY 3 • READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9.

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

Respond: As we discover our true identity, we don’t have pretend we don’t have any faults. God knows that we are not perfect, but he can use our weaknesses to bring him glory. Confess your areas of struggle to God, and ask him to show his power.

DAY 4 • READ PSALM 20:7.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

Respond: Just like Asa, we often turn away from our identity because of fear. What are you afraid of? Take it to God and lean on his strength!

DAY 5 • READ PHILIPPIANS 1:27.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Respond: This is the bottom line—be true to who you are and who God is calling you to be. Remember what we studied last week—we are beloved children, heirs, and friends of God. Live out of that identity!

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.



SESSION 4:

The Search for Significance



WHOEVER LOVES GOD IS
KNOWN BY GOD.


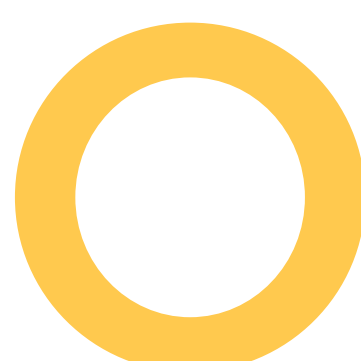
1 Corinthians 8:3



What makes you special? What makes you unique? Maybe you have accomplished something noteworthy, like writing a book or hiking the Appalachian Trail. Maybe you have completed a personal goal, like being the first person in your family to graduate from college, or a professional goal, like starting your own company. Maybe you are an especially gifted parent, or a great singer, or a wonderful cook. What makes you special?

We all want others to pay attention to us, and we often think our skills or achievements are what make us worthy of love. But this week, as we study the story of Leah and Jacob, we realize it's not our looks, our accomplishments, or even our talents that make us valuable. We don't matter because others say so—we matter because God says so.

There's nothing wrong with working hard to become good at something or feeling proud of our achievements. But only God can truly tell us who we are—and as we'll learn this week, he says each one of us is special and significant to him.



Share Your Story

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH PRAYER. THIS SHOULD BE A BRIEF, SIMPLE PRAYER, IN WHICH YOU INVITE GOD TO BE WITH YOU AS YOU MEET. 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.

AS WE HAVE SAID IN PREVIOUS LESSONS, SHARING OUR PERSONAL STORIES BUILDS DEEPER CONNECTIONS AMONG GROUP MEMBERS. YOUR STORY MAY BE EXACTLY WHAT ANOTHER PERSON NEEDS TO HEAR, AND YOUR LISTENING TO OTHERS' STORIES IS AN ACT OF LOVE AND KINDNESS TO THEM—AND COULD VERY WELL HELP THEM TO GROW SPIRITUALLY. BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO GET PEOPLE TALKING.



1. Are you “known” for something? What makes you unique?

2. What aspects of your identity make you feel important and valuable? Think about your roles as a spouse, parent, son or daughter, church leader, or professional.

3. Sit with your spiritual partner. If your partner is absent or if you are new to the group, join with another pair or someone who doesn't yet have a partner. If you haven't established your spiritual partnership yet, do it now. Share one prayer request and one thing you want to thank God for. Spend some time praying about what you've shared. (See Share Your Story in Session Two on page 34.)

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

Study Notes

When Leah named her son Judah, which means “Praise,” it not only demonstrated her change of heart and desire to find meaning in God. Her son was one of Jacob’s twelve sons; each one of the tribes of Israel is named for one of these sons, and the tribe of Judah became incredibly important in the biblical story. King David came from this tribe, and many of the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah were also descendants of this tribe. And in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 we read that Jesus was also a descendant of this tribe.

Old Testament names were meaningful, so it’s probably not an accident that the royal tribe of Israel, and the one that was potentially the most significant of all, began with a focus on praising God. How do you need to refocus your own search for significance? What would it look like for you to begin with praise?



For Additional Study

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. 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 EPHESIANS 3:7-9; 20-21.

- Where does Paul find his significance? (verse 7)

- How does he define his identity? (verse 8-9)

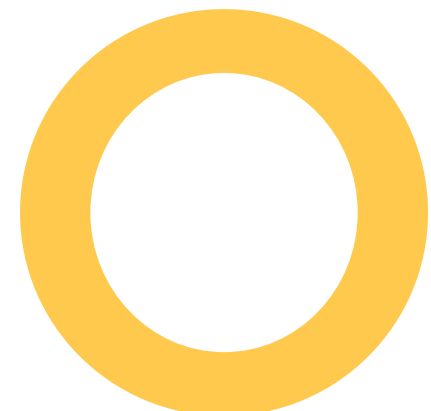
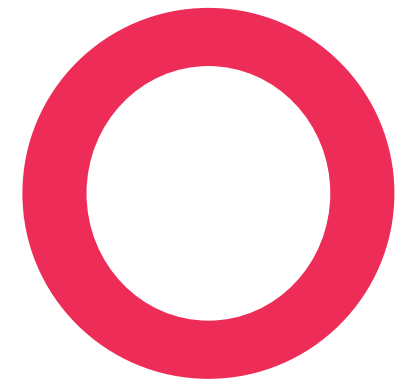
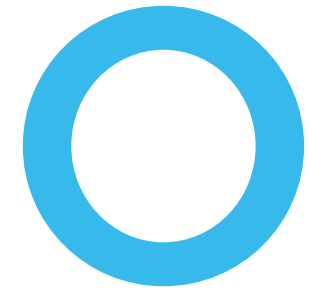
- How does God accomplish the "immeasurably more" that he wants to do in our lives?

READ GALATIANS 4:8-9.

- What sin can overtake us when we don't know God well?

- How does God knowing us precede us knowing him?

- How should being known by God change the choices we make?



Daily Devotionals



DAY 1 • READ JOHN 10:27.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Respond: God knows us, and we demonstrate that we know him when we choose to obey him. Spend a few minutes sitting quietly with God today, and listen to anything he has to say to you.

DAY 2 • READ PROVERBS 16:2.

All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the LORD.

Respond: Part of being known by God is allowing him to correct us and teach us. He knows our deepest hearts. What do you need to confess to him today?

DAY 3 • READ MATTHEW 10:29-31.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Respond: What an amazing reminder of God's love for us! We are seen, known, and connected to God!

DAY 4 • READ JEREMIAH 12:3.

Yet you know me, LORD; you see me and test my thoughts about you.

Respond: What does it mean for God to test our thoughts? How is that part of being seen and known by him?

DAY 5 • READ ISAIAH 64:8.

Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Respond: God has created each one of us. We are significant because the Master Potter has created us to be his masterpieces!

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.



SESSION 5:

Training for Greatness



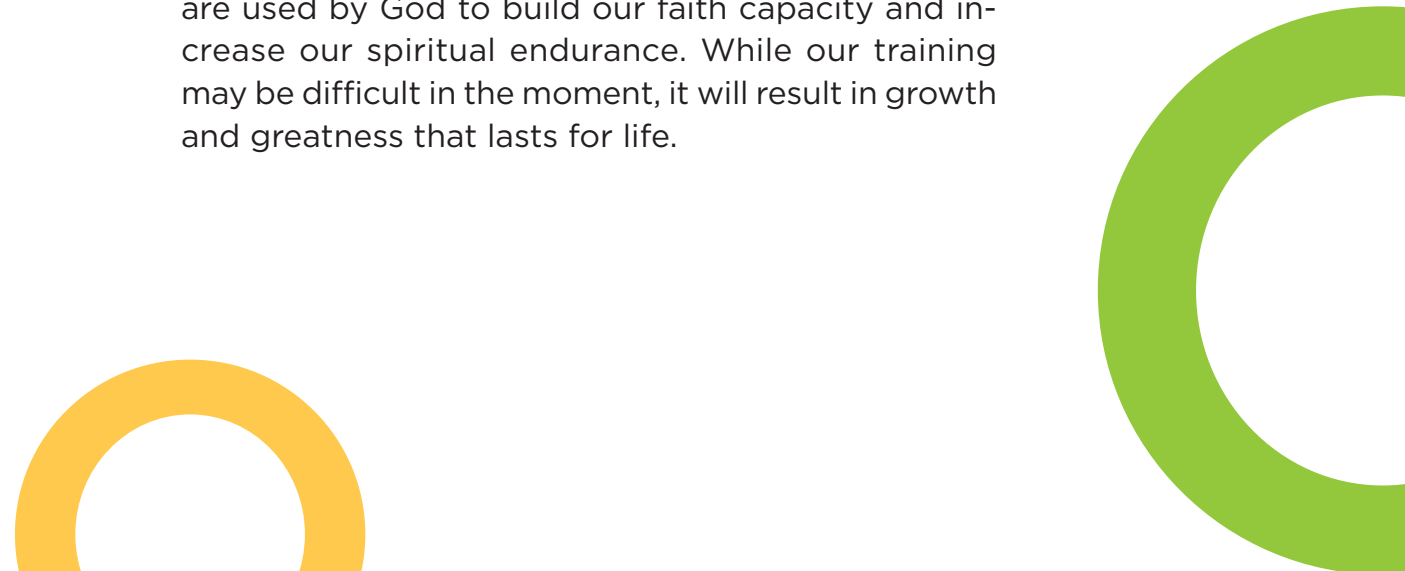
**I CONSIDER THAT OUR PRESENT
SUFFERINGS ARE NOT WORTH
COMPARING WITH THE GLORY THAT
WILL BE REVEALED IN US.**

Romans 8:18



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 we'll learn in this session, these "wilderness" experiences are purposeful, not punishment—they are used by God to build our faith capacity and increase our spiritual endurance. While our training may be difficult in the moment, it will result in growth and greatness that lasts for life.



Share Your Story

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH PRAYER. THIS SHOULD BE A BRIEF, SIMPLE PRAYER, IN WHICH YOU INVITE GOD TO BE WITH YOU AS YOU MEET. 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.

TELLING OUR PERSONAL STORIES BUILDS DEEPER CONNECTIONS AMONG GROUP MEMBERS. BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO GET PEOPLE TALKING. SHARING OUR STORIES REQUIRES US TO BE HONEST. WE CAN HELP ONE ANOTHER BE HONEST AND OPEN BY CREATING A SAFE PLACE; BE SURE THAT YOUR GROUP IS ONE WHERE CONFIDENTIALITY IS RESPECTED, WHERE THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “STUPID QUESTIONS,” WHERE YOU LISTEN WITHOUT CRITICIZING ONE ANOTHER.



1. Briefly share with the group about a time of struggle in your life. (Just a few sentences—we’ve got a lot to cover today!)

2. Is it possible to grow without experiencing pain?

3. Sit with your spiritual partner. If your partner is absent or if you are new to the group, join with another pair or someone who doesn’t yet have a partner. If you haven’t established your spiritual partnership yet, do it now. Answer this question: how has being in this group impacted your personal relationship with God? (See Share Your Story in Session Two on page 34.)

Hear God's Story

READ I CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

²⁴ DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT IN A RACE ALL THE RUNNERS RUN, BUT ONLY ONE GETS THE PRIZE? RUN IN SUCH A WAY AS TO GET THE PRIZE. ²⁵ EVERYONE WHO COMPETES IN THE GAMES GOES INTO STRICT TRAINING. THEY DO IT TO GET A CROWN THAT WILL NOT LAST, BUT WE DO IT TO GET A CROWN THAT WILL LAST FOREVER. ²⁶ THEREFORE I DO NOT RUN LIKE SOMEONE RUNNING AIMLESSLY; I DO NOT FIGHT LIKE A BOXER BEATING THE AIR. ²⁷ NO, I STRIKE A BLOW TO MY BODY AND MAKE IT MY SLAVE SO THAT AFTER I HAVE PREACHED TO OTHERS, I MYSELF WILL NOT BE DISQUALIFIED FOR THE PRIZE.

- **How can we run to “get the prize”?**

- **What is the crown the athletes would have received? What is the greater crown that we receive?**

- **How can we be intentional about using our “dying places”? How can we be purposeful about letting God use struggles to transform us?**

- **This passage is talking about self-discipline as well as the discipline or trials that come from God. How are they related?**

Study Notes

In his book *Jesus: An Intimate Portrait of the Man, His Land, and His People*, author and pastor Leith Anderson writes, “.....the devil had confronted Adam and Eve at the beginning of history, and they failed their test; the nation of Israel had spent forty years wandering around the desert after escaping Egyptian slavery, and they behaved badly and suffered the consequences; Jesus was going to face similar tests.” He goes on to write about the three temptations Jesus faced when Satan encountered him in the desert: the temptation to turn stones into bread, to jump off the temple and command angels to save him, and to worship Satan in return for all the riches of the world. This biblical account (which you can read in Matthew 4 and Luke 4) is significant for many reasons, but one reason is that in conquering these temptations and pleasing God in each one of these tests, Jesus succeeds where all of his people had previously failed. Where their “wilderness experiences” involved sin, Jesus completely won this battle and confirmed his identity as the Son of God.

If you’re struggling through a time of testing or you’re finding yourself in the wilderness today, be encouraged! Even Jesus experienced this during his testing—and he will walk with you through every step of your own struggles.



Create a New Story

GOD WANTS YOU TO BE PART OF HIS KINGDOM—TO WEAVE YOUR STORY INTO HIS. THAT WILL MEAN CHANGE. IT WILL REQUIRE YOU TO GO HIS WAY RATHER THAN YOUR OWN. THIS WON'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT, BUT IT SHOULD HAPPEN STEADILY. BY MAKING SMALL, SIMPLE CHOICES, WE CAN BEGIN TO CHANGE OUR DIRECTION. THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US ALONG THE WAY—GIVING US GIFTS TO SERVE THE BODY, OFFERING US INSIGHTS INTO SCRIPTURE, AND CHALLENGING US TO LOVE NOT ONLY THOSE AROUND US BUT THOSE FAR FROM GOD.

IN THIS SECTION, TALK ABOUT HOW YOU WILL APPLY THE WISDOM YOU'VE LEARNED IN THIS LESSON.

- **How do suffering and struggle “prove” our identity?**

- **What are some of the reasons why we can actually be encouraged when we're facing the wilderness?**

- **Pastor Van says sometimes the best thing that can happen to us is something that was very painful at the time. Do you have an example of a “dying place” like this from your own life?**

- **Is it worth going through crisis or wilderness if it means God can use you more significantly in his story?**

- **Why is it so important to acknowledge our pain?**

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

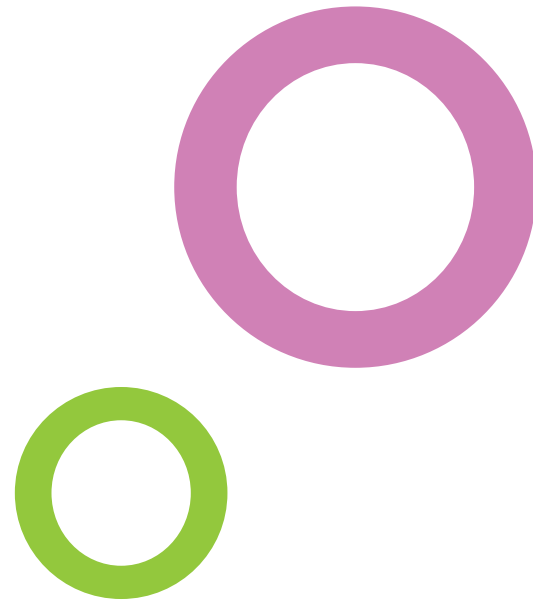
- **A strong group is made up of people who are all being filled up by God, so that they are empowered to love one another. What specific steps will you take this week to connect with God privately, so He can “fill you up?” If you’ve focused on prayer in past weeks, maybe you’ll want to direct your attention 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. Then, at your next meeting, talk about your progress and challenges.**

- **Ask “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 168.**
- **Close your meeting with prayer.**



For Additional Study

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. 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 DEUTERONOMY 8:1-10.

- How did the wilderness years humble the Israelites? How did it test them?

- What was the goal of this testing?

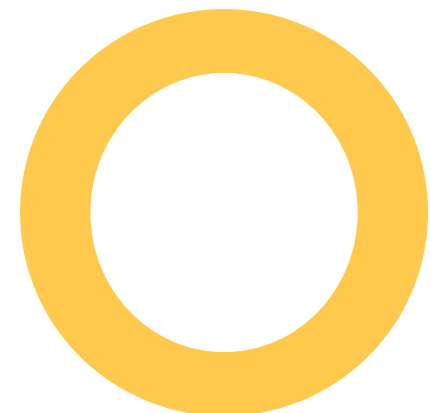
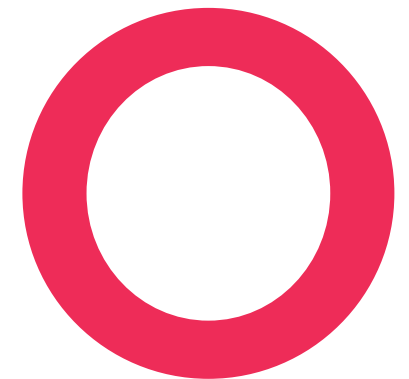
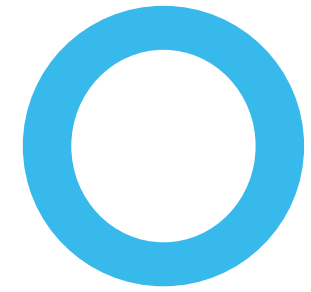
- In this passage, what is the reward God is giving the Israelites for enduring the trial?

READ 1 PETER 5:8-10.

- What can we learn about the devil from the comparison in verse 8?

- How can it strengthen us to connect with other believers? (verse 9)

- Rewrite verse 10 in your own words. What are the promises in this verse?



Daily Devotionals



DAY 1 • READ JAMES 1:12.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Respond: There's that crown imagery again! Ask God to help you stand through any test that you're facing so that you can have the victory he's promised.

DAY 2 • READ JOHN 16:33.

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Respond: We will have trouble—Jesus guaranteed it. But he is stronger than anything the world can throw at us. Take heart! Be encouraged!

DAY 3 • 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.

Respond: How does testing produce perseverance? Can you imagine facing your trials with joy?

DAY 4 • READ ROMANS 5:3-4.

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Respond: Here we see the next part of the story—perseverance leads to character, and character to hope. Which of these do you need more of in your life? In what ways is God using your trials to grow you in these areas?

DAY 5 • READ ROMANS 8:28.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

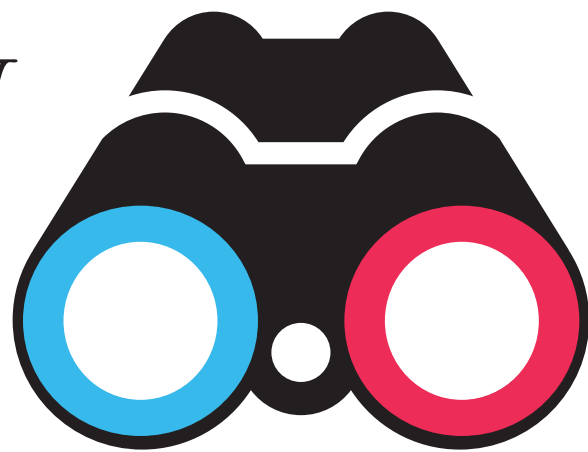
Respond: God doesn't cause terrible things to happen to us, but he can use anything terrible and turn it into something that blesses us. Take a few minutes today simply to praise God for his power and thank him for his great love.

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.

SESSION 6:

The Long View



WAIT FOR THE LORD; BE STRONG AND
TAKE HEART AND WAIT FOR THE LORD.

Psalm 27:14

Waiting seems so passive. After all, when you're waiting you're not doing anything—you're just....waiting. But in reality, waiting is incredibly hard work. When we have dreams that aren't yet reality, visions that haven't yet been realized, and prayers that haven't yet been answered, our work is to keep believing, to look for the blessing, and to grow in our spiritual journey.

This is difficult, so we're devoting an entire session to it this week. It can take a long time to experience the things we long for—but God has so much to teach us during the wait.

Share Your Story

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH PRAYER. THIS SHOULD BE A BRIEF, SIMPLE PRAYER, IN WHICH YOU INVITE GOD TO BE WITH YOU AS YOU MEET. 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.

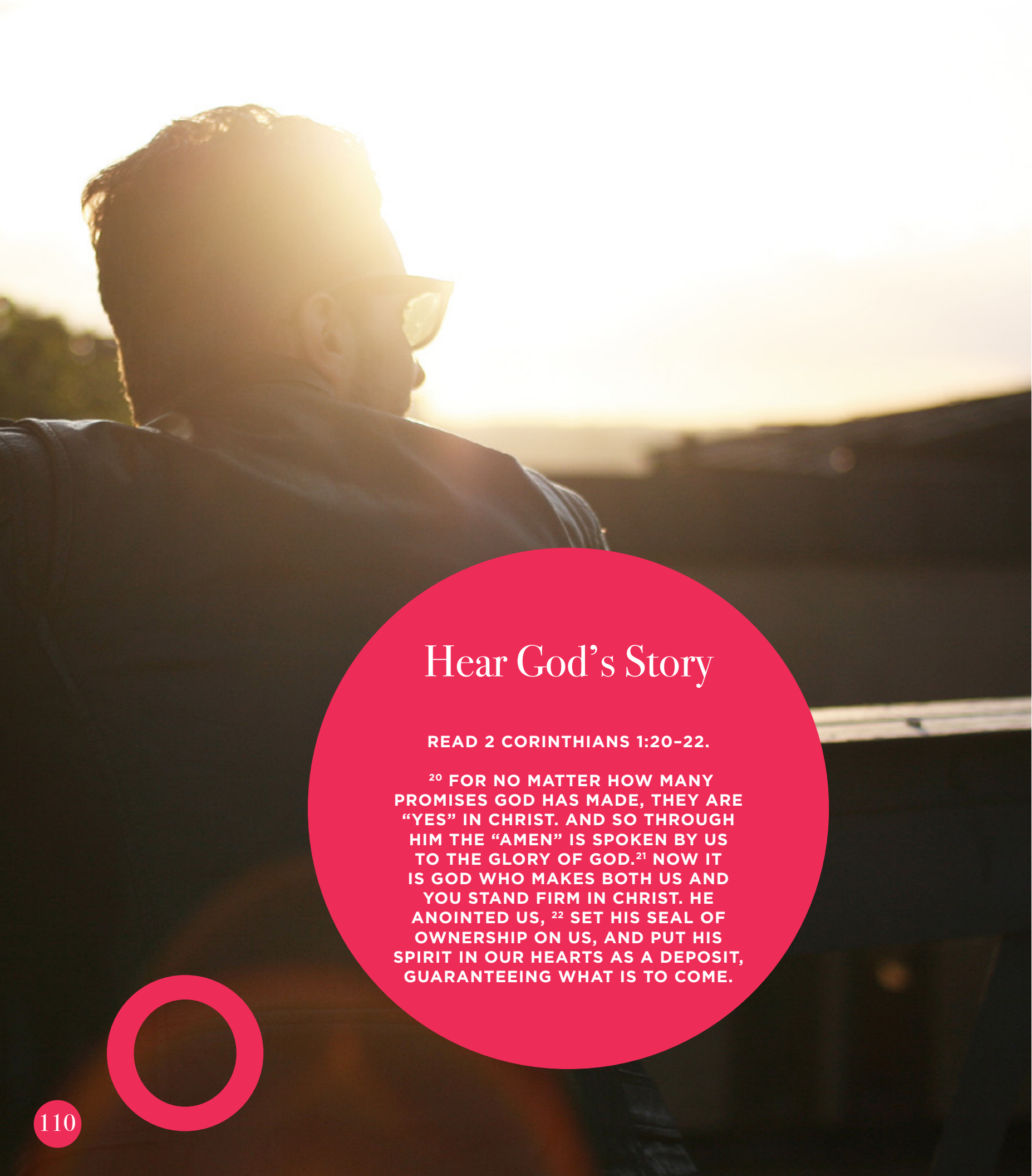
AS WE HAVE SAID IN PREVIOUS LESSONS, SHARING OUR PERSONAL STORIES BUILDS DEEPER CONNECTIONS AMONG GROUP MEMBERS. YOUR STORY MAY BE EXACTLY WHAT ANOTHER PERSON NEEDS TO HEAR TO ENCOURAGE OR STRENGTHEN THEM. AND YOUR LISTENING TO OTHERS' STORIES IS AN ACT OF LOVE AND KINDNESS TO THEM—AND COULD VERY WELL HELP THEM TO GROW SPIRITUALLY. BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO GET PEOPLE TALKING.



1. Are you waiting for something specific to happen in your life? Perhaps a goal or an answered prayer?

2. Have you ever felt angry at God because you didn't get something you'd waited for?

3. 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?



Hear God's Story

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:20-22.

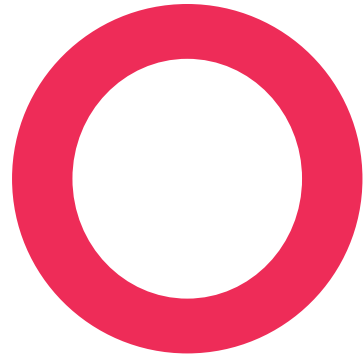
²⁰ FOR NO MATTER HOW MANY PROMISES GOD HAS MADE, THEY ARE "YES" IN CHRIST. AND SO THROUGH HIM THE "AMEN" IS SPOKEN BY US TO THE GLORY OF GOD.²¹ NOW IT IS GOD WHO MAKES BOTH US AND YOU STAND FIRM IN CHRIST. HE ANOINTED US, ²² SET HIS SEAL OF OWNERSHIP ON US, AND PUT HIS SPIRIT IN OUR HEARTS AS A DEPOSIT, GUARANTEEING WHAT IS TO COME.

• What does it mean for Jesus to be the "yes" to God's promises?

• How does the guarantee of God's promises help us stand firm in Christ?

• Why should God's ownership of us give us hope as we wait on him?

• How is the Holy Spirit a "deposit"? What is yet to come from God to us?



Study Notes

Today we studied this passage from John 5:

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

Look at how the story ends: the man explains (or complains!) about why he’s unable to be healed, and Jesus responds by telling him to get up. Surely the man must have thought, “How am I supposed to get up? I just told you why I can’t be healed.”

But look at what happens next: he stands up and walks. He is immediately healed, but he has to obey Jesus. He could have kept complaining, or telling Jesus why it would never work, or he could have simply refused to try. But for all of his faults, this man has enough faith to obey.

Don’t miss your miracle when it arrives. Don’t limit yourself by limiting God. Be ready to obey when he tells you the waiting is over!



Create a New Story

GOD WANTS YOU TO BE PART OF HIS KINGDOM—TO WEAVE YOUR STORY INTO HIS. THAT WILL MEAN CHANGE. IT WILL REQUIRE YOU TO GO HIS WAY RATHER THAN YOUR OWN. THIS WON'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT, BUT IT SHOULD HAPPEN STEADILY. BY MAKING SMALL, SIMPLE CHOICES, WE CAN BEGIN TO CHANGE OUR DIRECTION. THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US ALONG THE WAY—GIVING US GIFTS TO SERVE THE BODY, OFFERING US INSIGHTS INTO SCRIPTURE, AND CHALLENGING US TO LOVE NOT ONLY THOSE AROUND US BUT THOSE FAR FROM GOD.

IN THIS SECTION, TALK ABOUT HOW YOU WILL APPLY THE WISDOM YOU'VE LEARNED IN THIS LESSON.

- **What causes apathy? How is it related to waiting?**

- **Are you missing your breakthrough because you're focused on the past?**

- **This week's topic connects to the earlier topic on being seen and known by God. How does knowing that God sees you make it easier to wait on his timing?**

- **Are you struggling with "destination disease"?**

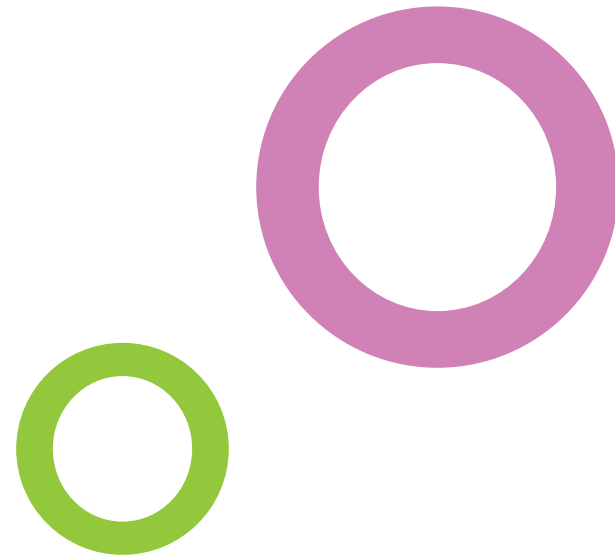
- **What are some of the blessings surrounding you? How do you need to change your perspective?**

- **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!**
- **Ask, “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 168.**
- **Close your meeting with prayer.**



For Additional Study

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PASSAGES RELATED TO THIS SESSION'S THEME ON YOUR OWN, JOTTING 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 2 PETER 3:8-9.

- What does it mean for a day to be like a thousand years, or a thousand years to be like a day? Do you find this thought encouraging or discouraging?

- Why do we understand “slowness” the way we do?

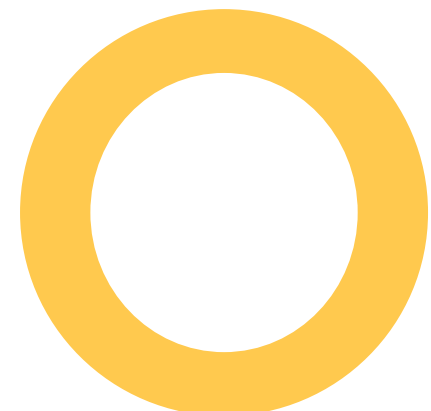
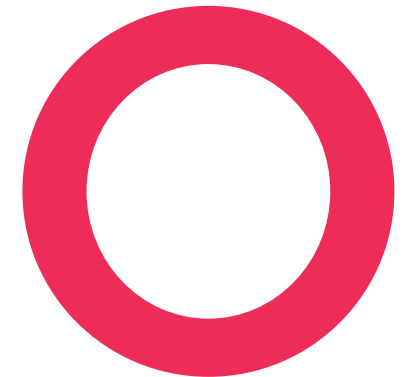
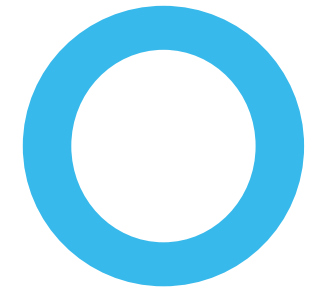
- Why might God be causing some of our waiting? Who else is it about besides us?

READ JAMES 5:10-11.

- How are the prophets an example of patient waiting?

- Why are those who have persevered considered blessed?

- How does it change your experience of waiting to know that God is compassionate and merciful?



Daily Devotionals



DAY 1 • READ PSALM 27:13-14.

I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

Respond: Sometimes it's difficult to keep the faith when our circumstances are painful. As we start this week, spend some time reflecting on God's goodness and ask him for the faith to be strong.

DAY 2 • READ MICAH 7:7.

But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.

Respond: What joy in knowing that God hears us, even though he seems far away. How do you need to change your perspective so that you can watch for him in hope?

DAY 3 • READ PSALM 23:6.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Respond: One reason we can wait on God's timing is because we trust him. No matter what else we're facing today, his goodness and love are with us.

DAY 4 • READ JAMES 5:7-8.

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

Respond: We've been waiting our whole lives for Jesus to return and to bring justice and peace. Yet the farmer knows the seasons will change, and we can "stand firm" because the Lord's return and His blessing are just as certain.

DAY 5 • READ ISAIAH 64:4.

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

Respond: This verse says if you are waiting, God is acting! We don't have the full picture, but we can change our perspective to believe that God is working behind the scenes.

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.



SESSION 7:

I Am What I Think

**JESUS REPLIED: “LOVE THE LORD
YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART
AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH
ALL YOUR MIND.”**

Matthew 22:37

A friend of mine has a book titled “What to Say When You Talk to Yourself.” It’s a great concept, because all of us carry on a constant narrative in our heads. Throughout the day we think about the past, the future, and occasionally even the present, and our thoughts influence our experience of every moment.

The famous philosopher Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am.” What’s also true is, “How I think is how I am.” In this week’s session, we’re going to look at why our thoughts are so important, how they affect us, and how to honor God with our minds.

Share Your Story

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH PRAYER. THIS SHOULD BE A BRIEF, SIMPLE PRAYER, IN WHICH YOU INVITE GOD TO BE WITH YOU AS YOU MEET. 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.

AS WE HAVE SAID IN PREVIOUS LESSONS, SHARING OUR PERSONAL STORIES BUILDS DEEPER CONNECTIONS AMONG GROUP MEMBERS. YOUR STORY MAY BE EXACTLY WHAT ANOTHER PERSON NEEDS TO HEAR TO ENCOURAGE OR STRENGTHEN THEM. AND YOUR LISTENING TO OTHERS' STORIES IS AN ACT OF LOVE AND KINDNESS TO THEM—AND COULD VERY WELL HELP THEM TO GROW SPIRITUALLY. BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO GET PEOPLE TALKING.



- What are some of the things you “say” when you talk to yourself?

- Are most of your thoughts positive or negative?

- 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?

Hear God's Story

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5

³ FOR THOUGH WE LIVE IN THE WORLD, WE DO NOT WAGE WAR AS THE WORLD DOES. ⁴ THE WEAPONS WE FIGHT WITH ARE NOT THE WEAPONS OF THE WORLD. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY HAVE DIVINE POWER TO DEMOLISH STRONGHOLDS. ⁵ WE DEMOLISH ARGUMENTS AND EVERY PRETENSION THAT SETS ITSELF UP AGAINST THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, AND WE TAKE CAPTIVE EVERY THOUGHT TO MAKE IT OBEDIENT TO CHRIST.

• How does the world do battle? How are we called to do battle?

• How can changing our thoughts “demolish strongholds”?

• What are some thoughts we might have to fight against in our own minds that go against the knowledge of God?

• How can we take our thoughts captive?

Study Notes

Changing your thoughts is so powerful—and so difficult—because it actually means you’re changing your brain. When you begin to think differently, you create new pathways and connections for the neurons in your brain. For instance, if you learn a new language, the part of your brain that controls language functioning is going to grow. If you start intentionally refocusing on scripture instead of worry, your brain will start carving new channels for those new messages. If you experience a trauma and choose to obsessively focus on that experience, those pathways will grow and become strong.

The good news is that we have a huge amount of control over what and how we think, and the more we think something the stronger those channels become. The bad news is related, however—the more we focus on certain thoughts, the harder it is to leave those paths and create new ones.



Create a New Story

GOD WANTS YOU TO BE PART OF HIS KINGDOM—TO WEAVE YOUR STORY INTO HIS. THAT WILL MEAN CHANGE. IT WILL REQUIRE YOU TO GO HIS WAY RATHER THAN YOUR OWN. THIS WON'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT, BUT IT SHOULD HAPPEN STEADILY. BY MAKING SMALL, SIMPLE CHOICES, WE CAN BEGIN TO CHANGE OUR DIRECTION. THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US ALONG THE WAY—GIVING US GIFTS TO SERVE THE BODY, OFFERING US INSIGHTS INTO SCRIPTURE, AND CHALLENGING US TO LOVE NOT ONLY THOSE AROUND US BUT THOSE FAR FROM GOD.

IN THIS SECTION, TALK ABOUT HOW YOU WILL APPLY THE WISDOM YOU'VE LEARNED IN THIS LESSON.

- **Why does life change begin in our minds?**

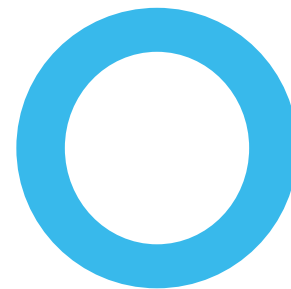
- **Why should our thoughts, not our feelings, be in control?**

- **Are you letting your thoughts keep you from God's love or acceptance?**

- **What revelations have you received? What insights have you had that things need to be different?**

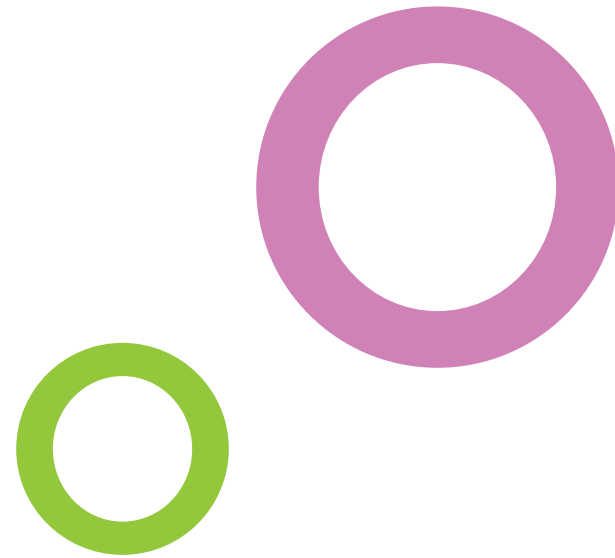
- **What negative thoughts are holding you back? What chains do you need God to break?**

- Ask, “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 168.
- Close your meeting with prayer.



For Additional Study

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PASSAGES RELATED TO THIS SESSION'S THEME ON YOUR OWN, JOTTING 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 PHILIPPIANS 4:4-8.

- What is the remedy for anxiety?

- What is unique about the peace God gives us? How does it guard our minds?

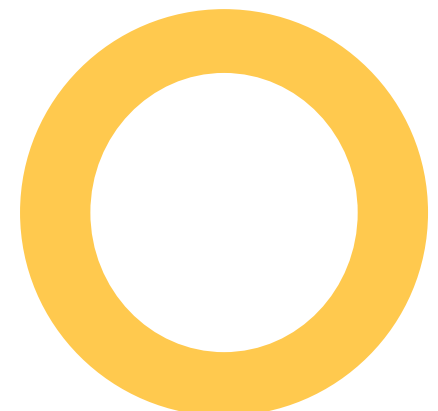
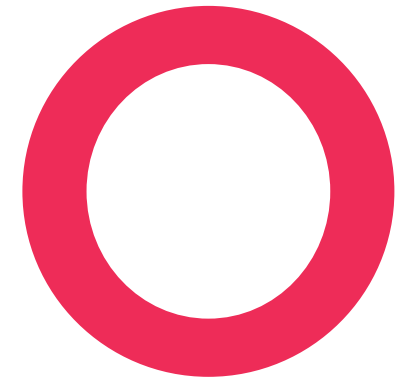
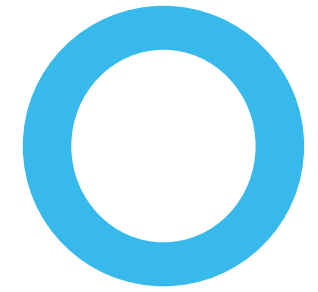
- List something you could think about for each word Paul uses in verse 8. For example, something true, something noble, etc.

READ EPHESIANS 4:22-24.

- What is our old self? How do we “put it off”?

- How can the attitude of our minds make us new?

- What is the new self? How is it different from the old self?



Daily Devotionals



DAY 1 • READ ISAIAH 26:3.

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Respond: This is a promise you can claim—if we choose to focus our minds on God and trust in him, he will bring us peace. Spend a few minutes reflecting on why God can be trusted, and remind yourself of these truths throughout the day.

DAY 2 • READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-2.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Respond: Why are we told to focus on the things of God? How could re-setting your mind on these things transform your life?

DAY 3 • READ PROVERBS 17:22.

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

Respond: There is a strong correlation between our mental and physical health. Improve both today by choosing positive, life-giving thoughts.

DAY 4 • READ MATTHEW 22:37.

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Respond: Part of loving God is managing our thoughts and improving our minds. Ask for his help in this today.

DAY 5 • READ 1 CORINTHIANS 2:11.

For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

Respond: As we close this week, let’s remember that God’s thoughts are always bigger and more awesome than anything we can imagine—and they are always to bring us good.

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.



SESSION 8:

Steps to Greatness

**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?**

Isaiah 43:18–19



Olympians achieve athletic greatness. Movie stars who win Academy awards are known as great actors. The CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and innovative website companies are known as great leaders.

But all of these “great” people will eventually be forgotten. Few people remember who set the speed records for the 400 meter run in the last Olympic games, or the Best Actress winner ten years ago, or the retired executives of big companies. These types of greatness may last for a while, but at some point there will be a new record, a new award-winning movie, and a new thought leader in the business world. Professional and positional greatness is always temporary.

However, we can achieve lasting greatness when we follow some key principles for life. As we close this study together, let’s consider seven core ideas that will lead us to personal greatness—now and for eternity.

Share Your Story

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH PRAYER. THIS SHOULD BE A BRIEF, SIMPLE PRAYER, IN WHICH YOU INVITE GOD TO BE WITH YOU AS YOU MEET. 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.

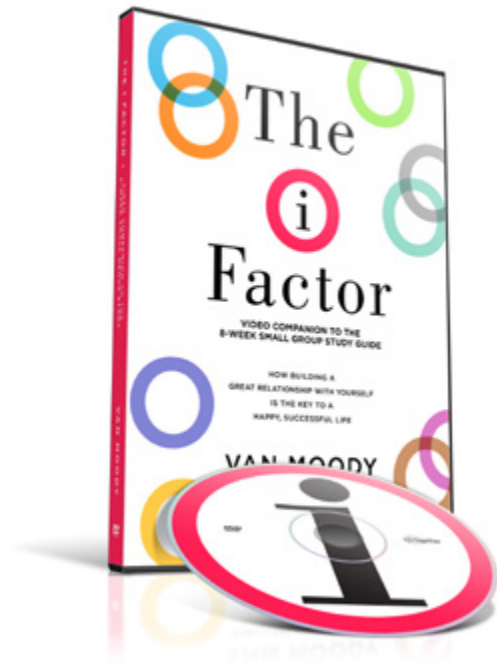
AS WE HAVE SAID IN PREVIOUS LESSONS, SHARING OUR PERSONAL STORIES BUILDS DEEPER CONNECTIONS AMONG GROUP MEMBERS. YOUR STORY MAY BE EXACTLY WHAT ANOTHER PERSON NEEDS TO HEAR TO ENCOURAGE OR STRENGTHEN THEM. AND YOUR LISTENING TO OTHERS' STORIES IS AN ACT OF LOVE AND KINDNESS TO THEM—AND COULD VERY WELL HELP THEM TO GROW SPIRITUALLY. BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO GET PEOPLE TALKING.



1. What has surprised you most about this group? Where did God meet you over the last six weeks?

2. What does greatness mean to you?

3. Take time in this final session to connect with your spiritual partner. What has God been showing you through these sessions? What positive changes has your partner noticed in you? Check in with each other about the progress you have made in your spiritual growth during this study. Make plans about whether you will continue your relationship after the group has concluded.



Watch the DVD

USE THE NOTES SPACE PROVIDED BELOW TO RECORD KEY THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS AND 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 DIRECT THE DISCUSSION AMONG THE GROUP. AS YOU GO THROUGH EACH OF THE SUBSEQUENT SECTIONS, ASK SOMEONE ELSE TO READ THE QUESTIONS AND DIRECT THE DISCUSSION.



Hear God's Story

READ COLOSSIANS 2:6-10.

⁶ SO THEN, JUST AS YOU RECEIVED CHRIST JESUS AS LORD, CONTINUE TO LIVE YOUR LIVES IN HIM, ⁷ ROOTED AND BUILT UP IN HIM, STRENGTHENED IN THE FAITH AS YOU WERE TAUGHT, AND OVERFLOWING WITH THANKFULNESS. ⁸ SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE TAKES YOU CAPTIVE THROUGH HOLLOW AND DECEPTIVE PHILOSOPHY, WHICH DEPENDS ON HUMAN TRADITION AND THE ELEMENTAL SPIRITUAL FORCES OF THIS WORLD RATHER THAN ON CHRIST. ⁹ FOR IN CHRIST ALL THE FULLNESS OF THE DEITY LIVES IN BODILY FORM,¹⁰ AND IN CHRIST YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO FULLNESS. HE IS THE HEAD OVER EVERY POWER AND AUTHORITY.

- What does it mean to be rooted in Christ? What are some signs that we have put our roots into his love?

- Name some examples of the “hollow and deceptive philosophy” mentioned in verse 8. Why is it so important that we guard against these things?

- What is the “prescription” for greatness given in verses 6-8?

- How does Christ bring us to fullness?

Study Notes

This week, Pastor Van shared seven key principles for success in life. Consider what you would share if given a similar opportunity, and then make it real: write a letter to someone in your life summing up some steps for greatness. This might be for your child, a niece or nephew, or even a friend or adult family member. Some of your steps may be the same as the ones we studied this week, and you may have additional steps you want to share, as well. Think about what you've learned during the last eight weeks, and sum it up in your letter. You might choose to actually give the letter to the person you've written it for. You might not. Either way, take a little time to reflect on what you believe about developing a strong I-Factor and then commit those thoughts to paper. (Remember, thoughts and words have power!)



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 LIVE A NEW STORY, TO WALK MORE CLOSELY WITH GOD SO YOU CAN BE PART OF HIS STORY, ENGAGED IN HIS KINGDOM.

- React to the idea that God has already prepared good work for you to do. What has he revealed to you about this plan so far?

- How is “being” greatness different from “doing” greatness?

- How are words powerful? How do you need to harness their power in your life?

- What kind of change produces growth? Are there changes you’re resisting in your life right now?

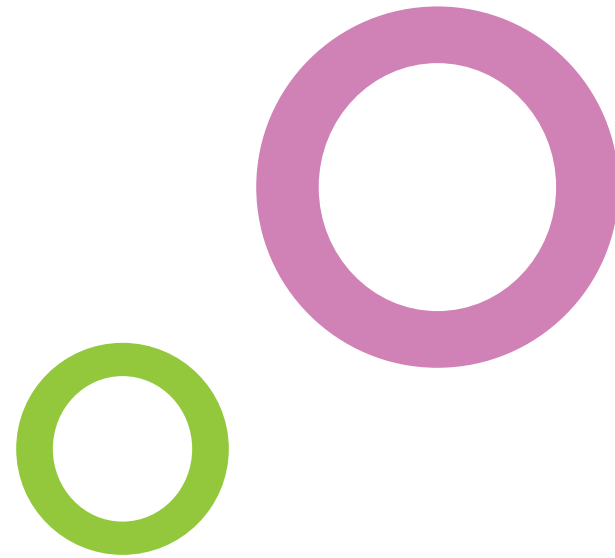
- As this is the last meeting in this study, take some time to celebrate the work God has done in the lives of group members. Have each person in the group share some step of growth they have noticed in another member. (In other words, no one will talk about themselves. Instead, affirm others in the group.) Make sure each person gets affirmed and noticed and celebrated—whether the steps they’ve made are large or small.



- 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 Small Group Agreement on page 162 and evaluate how well you met your goals. Discuss any changes you want to make as you move forward. If you plan to continue meeting, and your group starts a new study, this is a great time to take on a new role or change roles of service in your group. What new role will you take on? If you are uncertain, maybe your group members have some ideas for you. Remember you aren't making a lifetime commitment to the new role; it will only be for a few weeks. Maybe someone would like to share a role with you if you don't feel ready to serve solo.
- Close by praying for your prayer requests and take a couple of minutes to review the praises you have recorded over the past five weeks on the Prayer and Praise Report on page 168. Spend some time thanking God for all He's done in your group during this study.

For Additional Study

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PASSAGES RELATED TO THIS SESSION'S THEME ON YOUR OWN, JOTTING 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 PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14.

- What has Christ accomplished for us? What does it mean for us to press forward toward him?

- Why do we need to forget the past in order to reach the future?

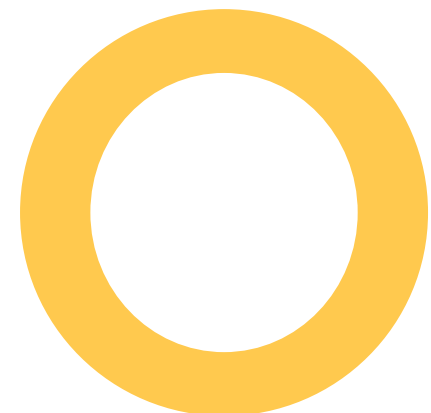
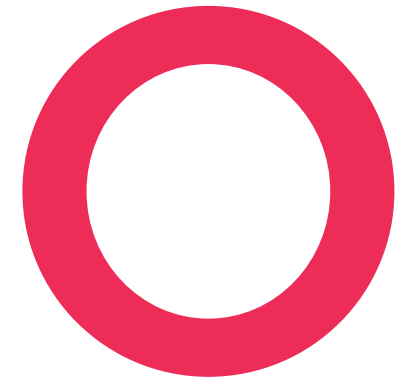
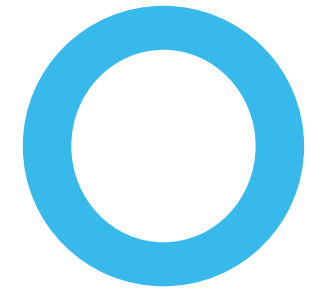
- What is our goal as we strain forward toward Christ?

READ JOHN 15:1-5.

- Why does God cut away what's not bearing fruit? Why does he prune the parts of are lives that are fruitful?

- How do we remain in Christ?

- What is the key to our own greatness? (verse 4)



Daily Devotionals



DAY 1 • READ PSALM 119:105.

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Respond: One of this week's teachings was to make decisions based on God's word. Ask God to shed his light on your path and give you directions for the decisions you're facing today.

DAY 2 • READ MATTHEW 6:33.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Respond: The sure-fire way to find success in life is to follow God's commands and to seek him first. How are you doing with putting his kingdom above everything else?

DAY 3 • READ PSALM 32:8.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

Respond: When we choose to follow's God, he gives us guidance. Be bold and ask for his wisdom and instruction today—and then obey!

DAY 4 • READ PROVERBS 4:25-26.

Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways.

Respond: It's so easy to get distracted from God's ways. How do you need to refocus on the steps for success and the paths to greatness?

DAY 5 • READ HEBREWS 12:1.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

Respond: What is hindering you from following Christ? What do you need to throw off as we finish this study and move forward in living it out?

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.

Resources

RESOURCES TO MAKE YOUR SMALL 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 Small Group Agreement (pages 162-163) and share the names of a few friends you can invite to join you. But most importantly, have fun before your study time begins.

WHERE DO WE FIND NEW MEMBERS FOR OUR GROUP?

This can be troubling, especially for new groups that have only a few people or for existing groups that lose a few people along the way. We encourage you to pray with your group and then brainstorm a list of people from work, church, your neighborhood, your children’s school, family, the gym, and so forth. Then have each group member invite several of the people on his or her list. Another good strategy is to ask church leaders to make an announcement or allow a bulletin insert.

No matter how you find members, it’s vital that you stay on the lookout for new people to join your group. All groups tend to go through healthy attrition—the result of moves, releasing new leaders, ministry opportunities, and so forth—and if the group gets too small, it could be at risk of shutting down. If you and your group stay open, you’ll be amazed at the people God sends your way. The next person just might become a friend for life. You never know!

HOW LONG WILL THIS GROUP MEET?

Most groups meet weekly for at least their first eight weeks, but every other week can work as well. We strongly recommend that the group meet for the first six months on a weekly basis if at all possible. This allows for continuity, and if people miss a meeting they aren't gone for a whole month.

At the end of this study, each group member may decide if he or she wants to continue on for another study. Some groups launch relationships for years to come, and others are stepping stones into another group experience. Either way, enjoy the journey.

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 who would enjoy some relational time (perhaps going to the movies or having a quiet dinner) and then walking through this study. Jesus will be with you even if there are only two of you (Matthew 18:20).

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 eight-week study, decide whether to continue with this group or find another. You don't typically buy the first car you look at or marry the first person you date, and the same goes with a group. However, don't bail out before the eight weeks are up—God might have something to teach you. Also, don't run from conflict or prejudge 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. We have discovered that healthy groups rotate hosts/leaders and homes on a regular basis. This model ensures that all members grow, give their unique contribution, and develop their gifts. This study guide and the Holy Spirit can keep things on track even when you rotate leaders. Christ has promised to be in your midst as you gather. Ultimately, God is your leader each step of the way.



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. Our favorite 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 care for the children either in the same home or in another home nearby. 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 Group Agreement

OUR PURPOSE

To provide a predictable 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 Small Group Calendar on page 164 will minimize this issue.)
- **Safe Environment**
To help 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 Small Group Calendar on page 164.)

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** _____

Small 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 A REGULAR ROTATION OF HOST HOMES AND LEADERS, AND DON'T FORGET BIRTHDAYS, SOCIALS, CHURCH EVENTS, HOLIDAYS, AND MISSION/MINISTRY PROJECTS.

DATE	SESSION	HOST HOME	DESSERT/MEAL	LEADER
------	---------	-----------	--------------	--------

January 11	1	Steve and Laura's	Joe	Bill
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Spiritual Partners' Check-In

BRIEFLY CHECK IN EACH WEEK AND WRITE DOWN YOUR PERSONAL PLANS AND PROGRESS TARGETS FOR THE NEXT WEEK (OR EVEN FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS). THIS COULD BE DONE BEFORE OR AFTER THE MEETING, ON THE PHONE, THROUGH AN E-MAIL MESSAGE, OR EVEN IN PERSON FROM TIME TO TIME.

MY NAME:

PARTNER'S NAME:

OUR PLANS:

OUR PROGRESS:

Memory Verse Cards

SESSION TWO

SEE WHAT GREAT LOVE THE FATHER HAS LAVISHED ON US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD! AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE!

1 JOHN 3:1

SESSION FOUR

WHOEVER LOVES GOD IS KNOWN BY GOD.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:3

SESSION ONE

THE LORD DOES NOT LOOK AT THE THINGS PEOPLE LOOK AT. PEOPLE LOOK AT THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART.

1 SAMUEL 16:7

SESSION THREE

THE WORLD AND ITS DESIRES PASS AWAY, BUT WHOEVER DOES THE WILL OF GOD LIVES FOREVER.

1 JOHN 2:17

SESSION FIVE

I CONSIDER THAT OUR PRESENT SUFFERINGS ARE NOT WORTH COMPARING WITH THE GLORY THAT WILL BE REVEALED IN US.

ROMANS 8:18

SESSION SEVEN

JESUS REPLIED: "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."

MATTHEW 22:37

SESSION SIX

WAIT FOR THE LORD; BE STRONG AND TAKE HEART AND WAIT FOR THE LORD.

PSALM 27:14

SESSION EIGHT

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?

ISAIAH 43:18-19

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

Group Roster

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 A REGULAR ROTATION OF HOST HOMES AND LEADERS, AND DON'T FORGET BIRTHDAYS, SOCIALS, CHURCH EVENTS, HOLIDAYS, AND MISSION/MINISTRY PROJECTS.

NAME	PHONE	EMAIL
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Small Group Leaders

**RESOURCES TO MAKE YOUR SMALL
GROUP EXPERIENCE EVEN BETTER!**

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 and share how they ended up being at the meeting (you can play a game to see who has the wildest story!), 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 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 Small 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 postcards 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 DVD, listen to the teaching segment and Leadership Lifter. Consider writing in a journal or fasting for a day to prepare yourself for what God wants to do. 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 God's heart is for this to take place over time. 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.
- **Prayerfully consider whom you would like to pass the baton to next week.**
It's only fair. God is ready for the next member of your group to go on the faith journey you just traveled. Make it fun, and expect God to do the rest.

Leadership Training 101

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU HAVE RESPONDED TO THE CALL TO HELP SHEPHERD JESUS' FLOCK. THERE ARE FEW OTHER TASKS IN THE FAMILY OF GOD THAT SURPASS THE CONTRIBUTION YOU WILL BE MAKING. AS YOU PREPARE TO LEAD, WHETHER IT IS ONE SESSION OR THE ENTIRE SERIES, HERE ARE A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND. WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ THESE AND REVIEW THEM WITH EACH NEW DISCUSSION LEADER BEFORE HE OR SHE LEADS.

1. **Remember that you are not alone.**
God knows everything about you, and He knew that you would be asked to lead your group. Remember that it is common for all good leaders to feel that 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 Resources, 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. Keep in mind, 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 or they won't stay.

If your group has more than seven people, we strongly encourage you to have the group gather sometimes 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 more quickly what they're learning 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. It can also help people feel more loved in your group. 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 Small Group Calendar to fill in the names of all meeting leaders at once if you prefer.

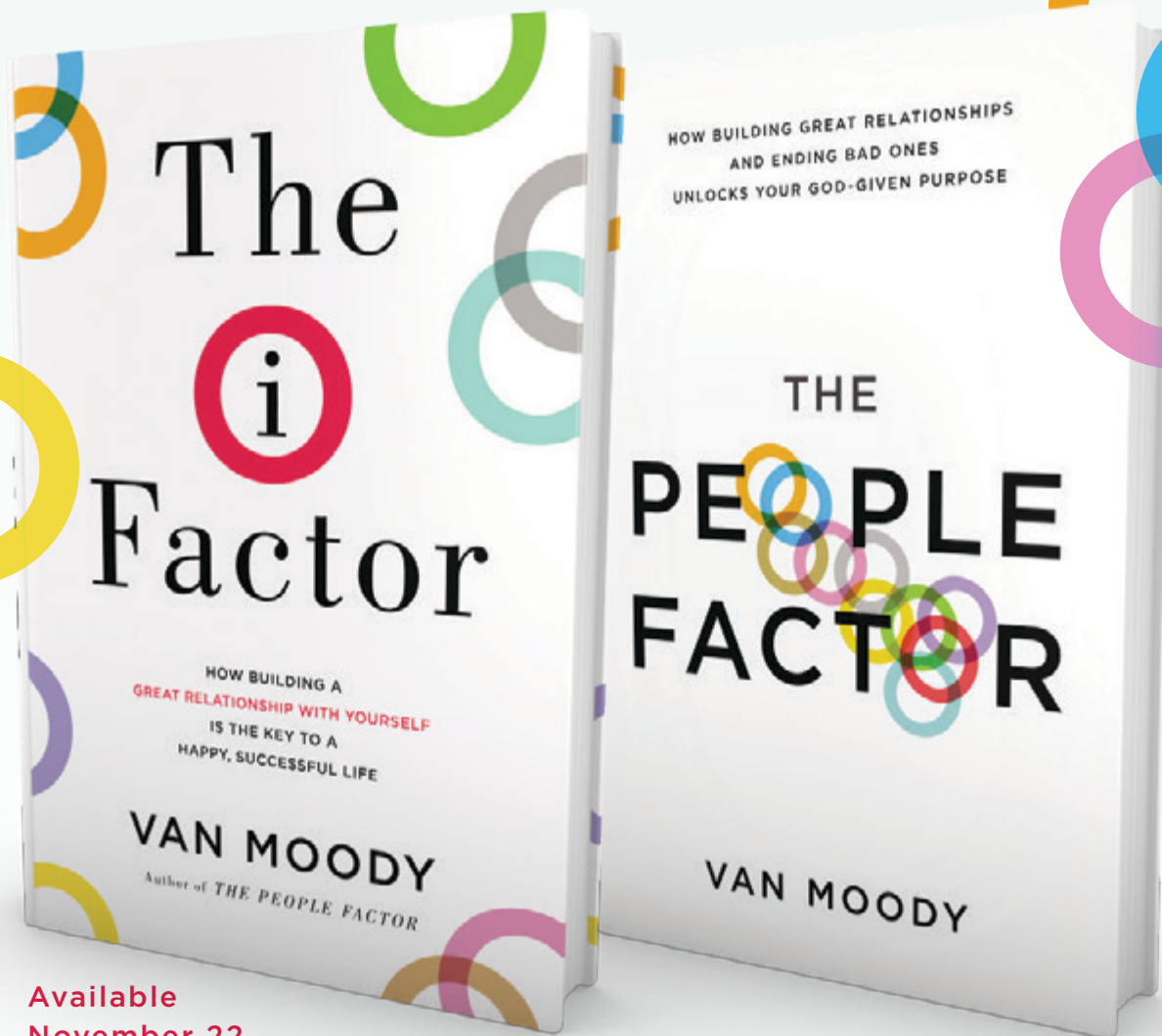
10. One final challenge (for new or first time leaders):

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

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