

JAMES & LYDIA RANGER

MAKING
RELATIONSHIPS

work

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James and Lydia Ranger

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ISBN 978-1-950007-56-1
Printed in the United States of America



new
— CHUR
welcome

life
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home



THE
best
IS YET TO
come!



YOU ARE
loved!
nlc.life



WELCOME
HOME
newlife



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WELCOME LETTER

Congratulations! You've just taken the first step towards improving every relationship in your life. Whether you're here to bolster your already good relationships, or fighting to resurrect a bad one, I know that this study will give you the tools you need to build life-giving relationships.

Through this study we will be pairing solid, Biblical truths about relationships with real experiences from my own life as husband, father, friend and pastor of 35+ years. The ideas we will cover in *Making Relationships Work* you'll be able to take and apply to all of the relationships in your own life. Maybe you're looking for tools to improve your marriage, or want to know how to build intentional friendships. Maybe you're in the middle of your parenting years, and need help as you navigate the always-evolving relational dynamic of a parent with their child. Perhaps you've identified that you don't handle conflict well, and are looking to improve that in yourself. No matter what drew you to this study, I know that it will empower you with the tools you need to grow in your relationships.

God designed us for community. That's why one of our core values here at New Life Church is just that, "Community is our culture." It is inside a healthy community that restoration and growth can flourish. I challenge you to truly invest in these next six weeks, and be open with your small group. I know that as you invest of yourself in this, God will multiply back to you the life-giving, life-sustaining relationships that we all need. Ready to get started? Let's go.



USING
THIS
WORK
BOOK

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

1. Notice in the Table of Contents there are three sections: (1) **Sessions**; (2) **Appendices**; and (3) **Small Group Leaders**. Familiarize yourself with the Appendices. Some of them will be used in the sessions themselves.
2. If you are facilitating/leading or co-leading a small group, the section **Small Group Leaders** will give you some experiences of others that will encourage you and help you avoid many common obstacles to effective small group leadership.
3. Use this workbook as a guide, not a straitjacket. 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, and for 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 MAKING RELATIONSHIPS WORK 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 Word for our lives. We encourage you to give this important habit a try. The verses for our six sessions are also listed in the Appendices.

INTRODUCTION. Each lesson opens with a brief thought that will help you prepare for the session and get you thinking about 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 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, you will 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 our 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 worshiping 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 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.





SESSION 1:

FRIENDS





PROVERBS 17:17

***A FRIEND LOVES AT ALL TIMES,
AND A BROTHER IS BORN FOR
A TIME OF ADVERSITY.***

Friends are of great value. They are the family you get to choose! Whether you've lived in the same area for your whole life and have life-long friends or have moved across the country and found new friends, your friends are the ones who stick with you through thick and thin. They love you, but they're not impressed with you. They speak the truth. They encourage you.

Today, however, there is some confusion over exactly who true friends really are. With the advent of social media, people feel like they're connected to a lot of people when in fact, they might lack true friendships. In fact, studies have shown that social media tends to produce more jealousy and depression than encouragement. It's a platform for more falsehood than connection.

To find a friend, you must be a friend. Some people are frustrated by their lack of friends. But, true friendship requires offering friendship to others. Risk is involved. You have to put yourself out there. But, when you find a true friend, you've found a wonderful thing.

**TO FIND A
FRIEND, YOU
MUST BE A
FRIEND. SOME
PEOPLE ARE
FRUSTRATED
BY THEIR LACK
OF FRIENDS.**

SHARE YOUR *Story*

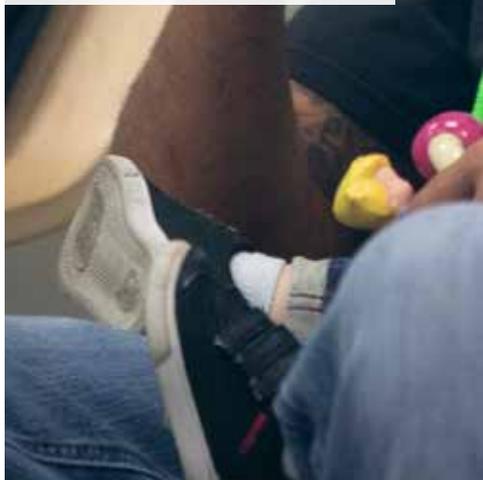
EACH OF US HAS A STORY. THE EVENTS OF OUR LIFE—GOOD, BAD, WONDERFUL OR CHALLENGING— HAVE SHAPED WHO WE ARE. GOD KNOWS YOUR STORY, AND HE INTENDS TO REDEEM IT—TO USE EVERY STRUGGLE AND EVERY JOY TO ULTIMATELY BRING YOU TO HIMSELF. WHEN WE SHARE OUR STORIES WITH OTHERS, WE GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO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

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.

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 152, a sheet of paper, or pass around 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.





THEN, BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO GET PEOPLE TALKING.

- What's the difference between a friend and an acquaintance?
- Who was your best friend as a child? How did you become friends?
- Whether your group is new or ongoing, it's always important to reflect on and review your values together. On page 145 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.



- If your group is new, welcome newcomers. Introduce everyone—you may even want to have name tags for your first meeting.
- 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 the Appendices for additional information about hosting or leading the group.
- The Small Group Calendar on page 147 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. If anyone is hesitant, simply tell them to think about it, and you'll get back to them.

IF YOUR GROUP IS NEW, WELCOME NEWCOMERS. INTRODUCE EVERYONE—YOU MAY EVEN WANT TO HAVE NAME TAGS FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING.



Watch
THE VIDEO
SESSION 1

Use the **Teaching 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 **Galatians 6:2-5**.

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

3 If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. 4 Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5 for each one should carry their own load.

- According to these verses, what should friends do for each other?
- How has a friend helped you to overcome something?
- What kind of accountability do you need from your friends in order to become more like Jesus?
- Who loves you enough to tell you the hard stuff?

Study NOTES

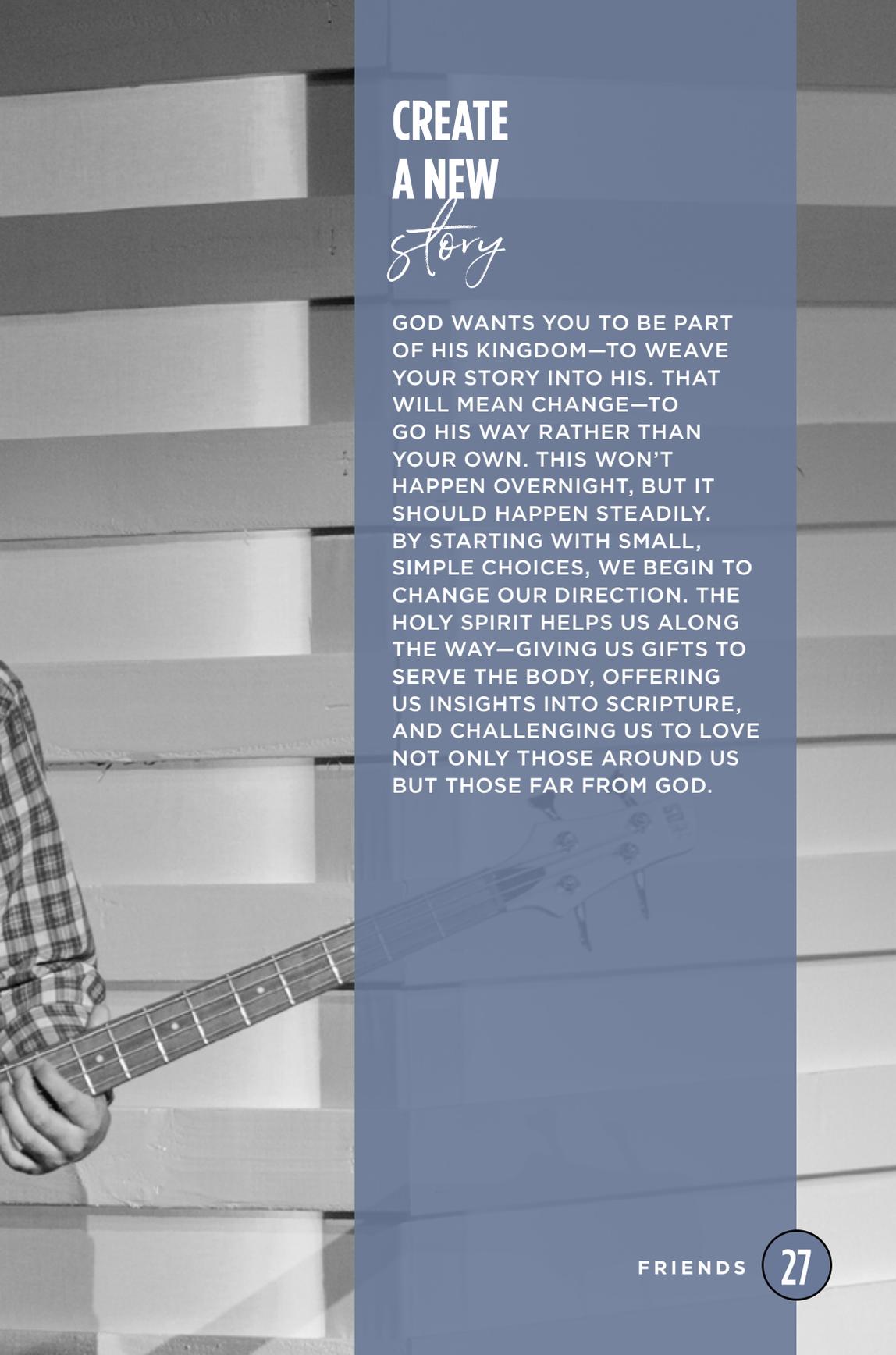
v. 2 *“the law of Christ”* The church at Galatia struggled with requiring non-Jewish believers to submit to Jewish laws in an effort to follow Jesus. While Jesus freed believers from the Law through salvation, many Jewish traditions were continued or even required in the church. Here Paul is referencing a new “law,” the “law of Christ” which are the principles stemming from the heart of the Gospel. These principles relate to the direction and enabling of the Holy Spirit and are always motivated by love.

v. 4 *“take pride in themselves”* While Paul is instructing believers against comparing themselves with other people, he is not advocating for them to become proud. Rather than positioning themselves as better than others, Paul encourages them to find satisfaction in what they have personally achieved.









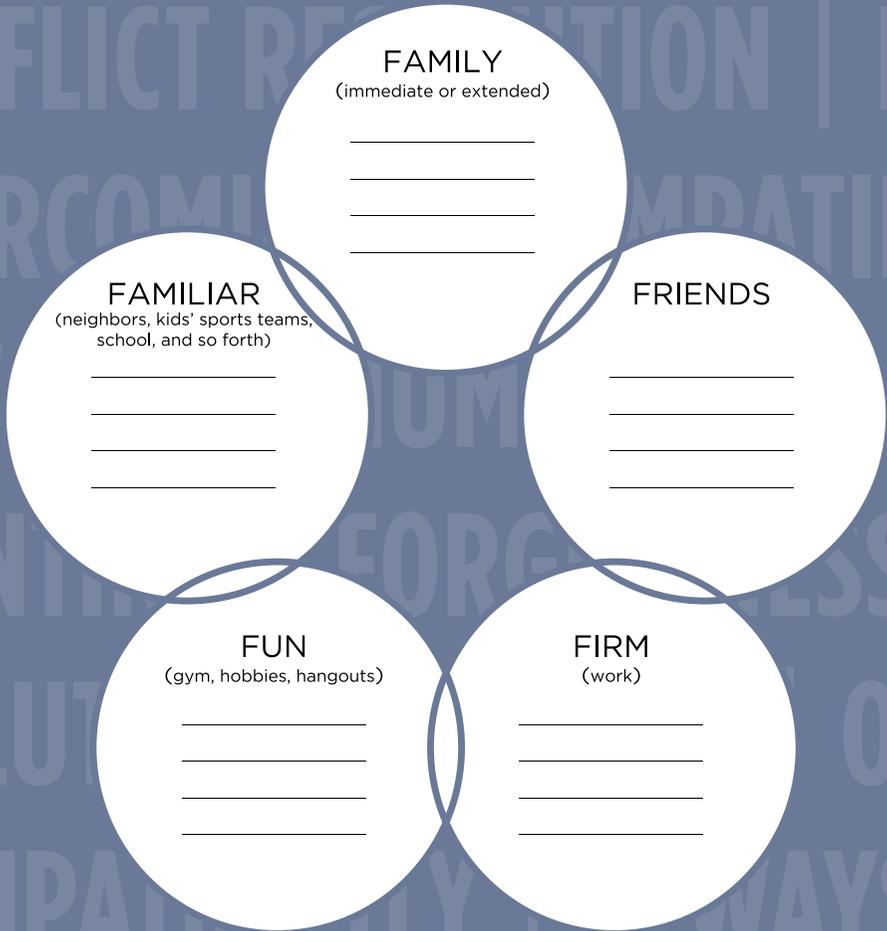
CREATE A NEW *story*

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.

- Who are the five people closest to you?
- If you become like your five closest friends, what will you be like?
- Which friends bring out the best in you?
- What is one step you can take to make better friendships?
- Take a look at the Circles of Life diagram 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.

Circles OF LIFE DIAGRAM



- 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.
- Commit together 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 151.
- 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 JOB 6:14-24

- **According to this passage, what are the consequences of choosing the wrong friends?**
- **How does withholding kindness show a lack of respect for God?**
- **How can friends support each other in times of trouble?**

READ PROVERBS 23:19-21.

- **How do you set your heart on the right path?**
- **What is the result of being a drunkard or glutton?**
- **What are the consequences of associating with drunkards and gluttons?**

DAY 1

Read **Proverbs 27:6**.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Respond: How have you experienced these kinds of “wounds”?

DAY 2

Read **Proverbs 22:5**.

In the paths of the wicked are snares and pitfalls, but those who would preserve their life stay far from them.

Respond: How do you intentionally avoid pitfalls and snares?

DAY 3

Read **Proverbs 13:20**.

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

Respond: How have you gained wisdom from your friends?

DAY 4

Read **Proverbs 24:1**.

Do not envy the wicked, do not desire their company.

Respond: When are you tempted to envy the wicked?

DAY 5

Read **Proverbs 27:17**.

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Respond: Who keeps you sharp? How?

DAY 6

Reflect on the last days' verses, and 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:

OVERCOMING INCOMPATIBILITY





PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

***DO NOTHING OUT OF SELFISH
AMBITION OR VAIN CONCEIT.
RATHER, IN HUMILITY VALUE
OTHERS ABOVE YOURSELVES,
NOT LOOKING TO YOUR OWN
INTERESTS BUT EACH OF YOU TO
THE INTERESTS OF THE OTHERS.***

People are different. Usually you notice this most in marriage. When a relationship begins, couples in love focus on everything they have in common. Once they are married, the focus moves to how different they are from each other and how irritating those differences are. But, if couples were identical, then one of them wouldn't be necessary.

No married couple in history was completely compatible. It's not just you! Differences can be good. Your spouse may be good at something you are not good at or vice versa. That's a wonderful asset. Some differences are just a matter of preference or taste. It's really nothing to fight over. You can learn to appreciate your spouse's differences. But, there are some differences that seem to make or break relationships. These are the things you must work through. It will require conversation and might require counseling. But, if you're willing to put in the work, your differences don't have to break you. In fact, your relationship can be stronger than ever.

**NO MARRIED
COUPLE IN
HISTORY WAS
COMPLETELY
COMPATIBLE.**

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.

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.





BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO GET PEOPLE TALKING:

- Without starting World War 3, what's the biggest difference between you and your spouse (or your best friend, if you're not married)?
- How were your parents different from each other? How did they work through their differences?
- 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 29 to help you think of various people you come in contact with on a regular basis or 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.





Watch
THE VIDEO
SESSION 2

Use the **Teaching 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 **Ephesians 5:21-33**.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

- What does this passage teach about mutual submission?
- To what degree should husbands love their wives according to verses 25 and 33?
- Why does verse 33 direct wives to respect their husbands rather than love them?
- How are men's and women's needs different in a relationship?

Study NOTES

v. 22 and 25 *“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands...Husbands, love your wives...”* Wives are called to submit rather than obey as in the case of children or slaves in this chapter. Husbands are called to love, not rule.

v. 26 *“to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word”* This language which is applied both to Christ and the Church as well as husband and wife, indicates the leadership role in sanctification, or becoming holy. The pathway to holiness is sacrifice and submission to God. Husbands are called to love their wives to the degree that Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her.

v. 31 *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”* Paul quotes this verse from Genesis 2:24 to remind his readers that marriage was God’s idea from Creation forward.





Hope





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.

- How can we let our spouses be themselves in matters of personality or taste?
- Why is it important to forgive each other's character defects and not allow our grievances to stockpile?
- How could accepting each other's differences improve your relationship?
- How can incompatibility lead to endearment? How can a couple's differences actually bring them together?
- 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 offers 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 carefully read 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 151.
- 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 PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

- **What does this passage reveal about Jesus' character?**
- **How can you model Jesus' character?**
- **How does humility ultimately lead to exaltation? How does putting yourself first prevent that reward?**

READ EPHESIANS 4:31-32.

- **How does the list in verse 32 remedy the list in verse 31?**
- **What do you need to get rid of?**
- **How does God's forgiveness enable you to show kindness, compassion, and forgiveness? What do you need to forgive?**

Daily DEVOTIONS

DAY 1

Read **Philippians 2:2**.

then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Respond: How does this verse apply to your marriage?

DAY 2

Read **Genesis 1:27**.

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Respond: Which of your spouse's differences are by God's design? How can you celebrate them?

DAY 3

Read **Romans 12:16**.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Respond: How does pride or conceit disrupt the harmony of your relationships?

DAY 4

Read **Titus 1:6**.

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Respond: Why is leadership in your family important to leadership in the church?

DAY 5

Read **Proverbs 18:22**.

He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord.

Respond: How is your spouse a blessing in your life?

DAY 6

Reflect on the verses from this past week, and 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.



wife

newlife

This girl.
JEREMIAH 31:6

SESSION 3:

ALWAYS BE HUMBLE AND KIND

60

SESSION THREE

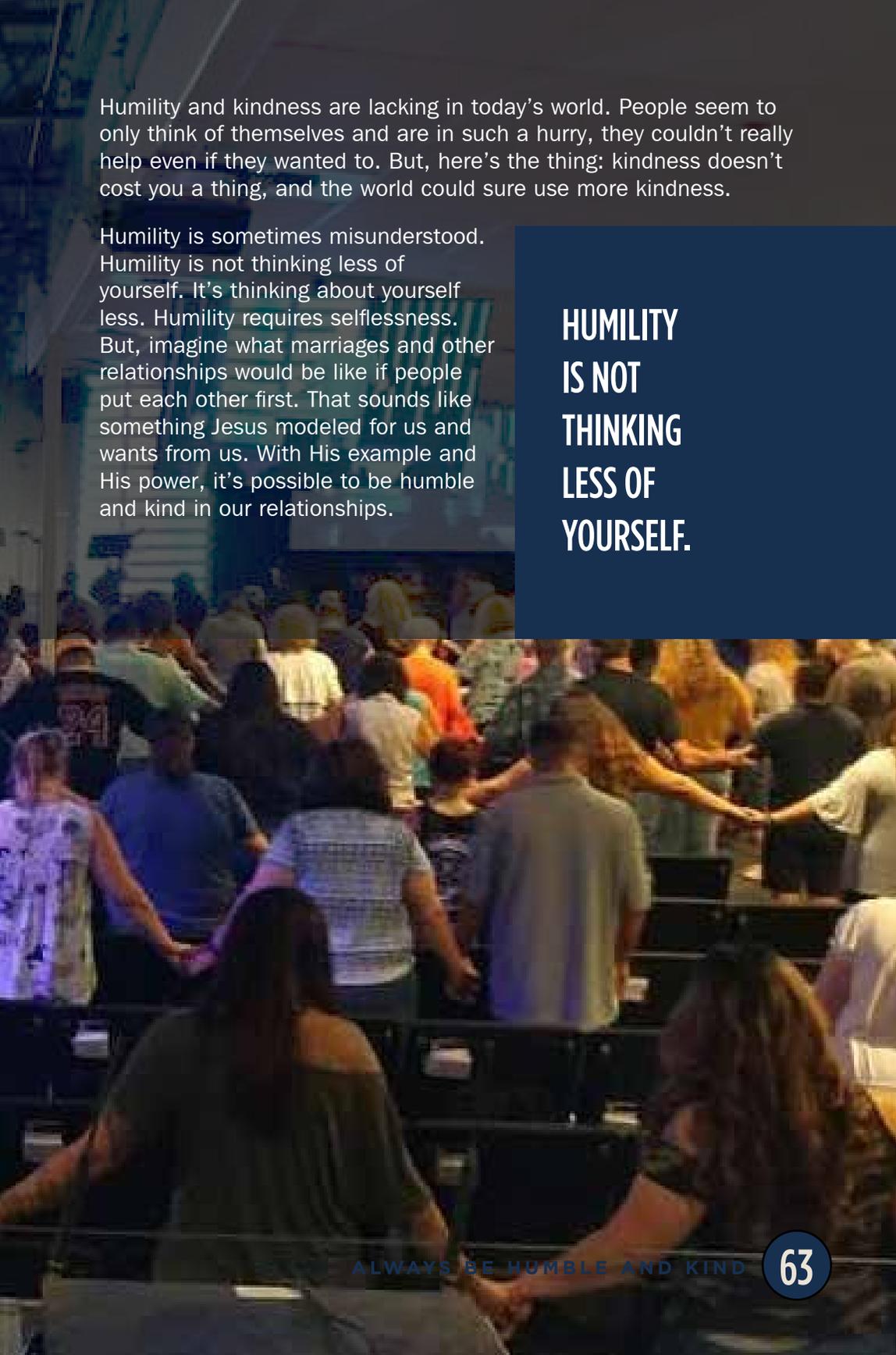




1 CORINTHIANS 13:4

***LOVE IS PATIENT,
LOVE IS KIND. IT
DOES NOT ENVY, IT
DOES NOT BOAST,
IT IS NOT PROUD.***





Humility and kindness are lacking in today's world. People seem to only think of themselves and are in such a hurry, they couldn't really help even if they wanted to. But, here's the thing: kindness doesn't cost you a thing, and the world could sure use more kindness.

Humility is sometimes misunderstood. Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It's thinking about yourself less. Humility requires selflessness. But, imagine what marriages and other relationships would be like if people put each other first. That sounds like something Jesus modeled for us and wants from us. With His example and His power, it's possible to be humble and kind in our relationships.

**HUMILITY
IS NOT
THINKING
LESS OF
YOURSELF.**

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.

- What act of kindness is memorable to you?
- Who is the most humble person you know?





ALWAYS BE HUMBLE AND KIND

Watch
**THE VIDEO
SESSION 3**

Use the **Teaching 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

Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the teaching and stories you just experienced in the video and the Bible passage below.

Read **Luke 10:30-37**.

30 *In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’*

36 *“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”*

37 *The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”*

- Would your response be more like the religious leaders or the Samaritan in this story?
- To what extent did the Samaritan care for this man?

Study NOTES

v. 32 *Levite*. A Levite was a member of the Jewish tribe of Levi and served as assistants to the priests in the Jewish temple.

v. 33 *Samaritan*. Samaritans were “distant cousins” to the Jewish people. They claimed to be descendents of the tribes of Northern Israel, Ephraim and Manasseh, who survived the destruction of their kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Samaritans were not highly regarded by the Jews since they were descendents of both Jewish and native peoples in the region. Jesus intentionally uses the Samaritan as the hero of the story to prove a point about the character of a neighbor.





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.





ALWAYS BE HUMBLE AND KIND

IN THIS SECTION, TALK ABOUT HOW YOU WILL APPLY THE WISDOM YOU'VE LEARNED FROM THE TEACHING AND BIBLE STUDY. THEN, THINK ABOUT PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS YOU CAN TAKE IN THE COMING WEEKS TO LIVE OUT WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED.

- How do humility and kindness work together?
- What could unkindness portray about someone?
- How well do you notice the needs around you? What keeps you from noticing at times?
- What specific needs are you currently aware of? What can you do about it this week?





- 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 151.
- 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 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7.

- According to this passage, what is the purpose of pain or trouble in our lives?
- What kind of comfort have you received?
- How could you use your experience to help and comfort others?

READ ROMANS 2:1-4.

- How is human judgment inadequate?
- How has God demonstrated His kindness to you?
- Which is more effective in reaching the lost – judgment or kindness? Why?
- How can you practice more kindness when it comes to lost people?

Daily DEVOTIONS

DAY 1

Read **Galatians 6:8**.

Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Respond: What are you sowing in your life?

DAY 2

Read **Proverbs 3:27-28**.

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, “Come back tomorrow and I’ll give it to you”— when you already have it with you.

Respond: What good are you withholding?

DAY 3

Read **Proverbs 11:17**.

Those who are kind benefit themselves, but the cruel bring ruin on themselves.

Respond: Which side of this equation do you find yourself on?

DAY 4

Read **Isaiah 58:10**.

...and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

Respond: How can you serve the needs of the hungry and oppressed?

DAY 5

Read **Ephesians 4:32**.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Respond: Who specifically needs your kindness and compassion?

DAY 6

Reflect on the verses from this past week, and 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.



ALWAYS BE HUMBLE AND KIND

SESSION 4:

PARENTING





PROVERBS 22:6

START CHILDREN OFF ON THE WAY THEY SHOULD GO, AND EVEN WHEN THEY ARE OLD THEY WILL NOT TURN FROM IT.

newlife
CHURCH
welcome people

82

SESSION FOUR

Very few couples are adequately prepared for the addition of children into their lives. Out of some advice and our own experience being parented, most people find they must learn as they are parenting. After all, for many people, they were parenting experts before they had children. But, once children arrive, the expertise disappears.

Raising children is a significant privilege and responsibility. Beyond the basics of clothing, feeding, and caring for children, there are also the needs of building their esteem, nurturing their faith, discovering their gifts, and helping them become adults and parents themselves one day. It's a huge responsibility. But, you are not alone. God is with you in your parenting and is with your children in their life experience. God needs you as His hand of direction and help. The more you learn, the better equipped you will be to guide your children.

**GOD IS WITH YOU IN
YOUR PARENTING
AND IS WITH YOUR
CHILDREN IN THEIR
LIFE EXPERIENCE.**



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 listening to others' stories is an act of love and kindness to them—and could very well help them to grow spiritually.



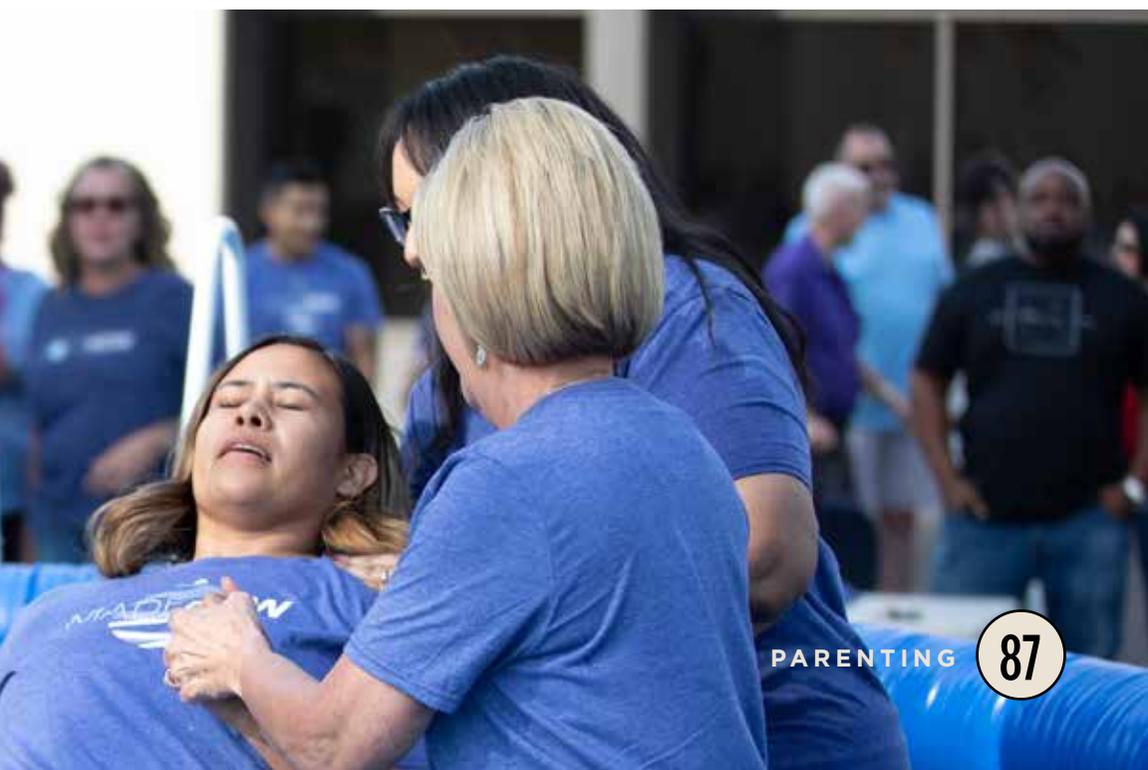
WELCOM



BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO GET PEOPLE TALKING:

- What children do you currently have in your life? (Think about your children, grandchildren, nieces/nephews, friends' children, neighborhood kids, or any other children you're around).
- What stands out to you from your childhood?
- Share one prayer request and one thing you want to thank God for. Spend some time praying about what you've shared.
- 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 diagram to church or your small group. What specific conversations are you praying about for the weeks to come?





Watch
THE VIDEO
SESSION 4

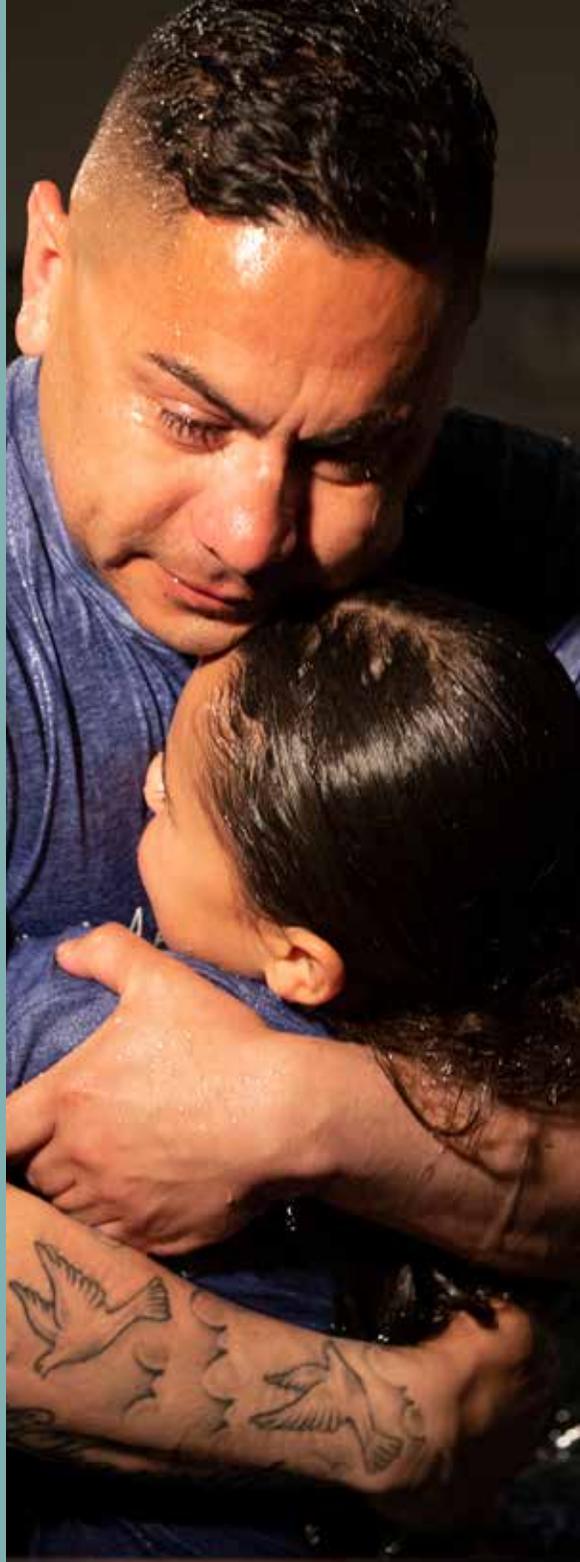
Watch the video for this session now. Use the Teaching Notes space provided below to record key thoughts, questions, and things you want to remember or follow up on. After you've watched the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the **Hear God's Story** section, and direct the discussion 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 **Deuteronomy 6:6-8**.

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

- When and where should you instruct children about faith in God?
- Why is it important to know and live out God's commands yourself?
- What comes to mind when you hear the word discipline?
- What's the difference between discipline and punishment?



Study NOTES

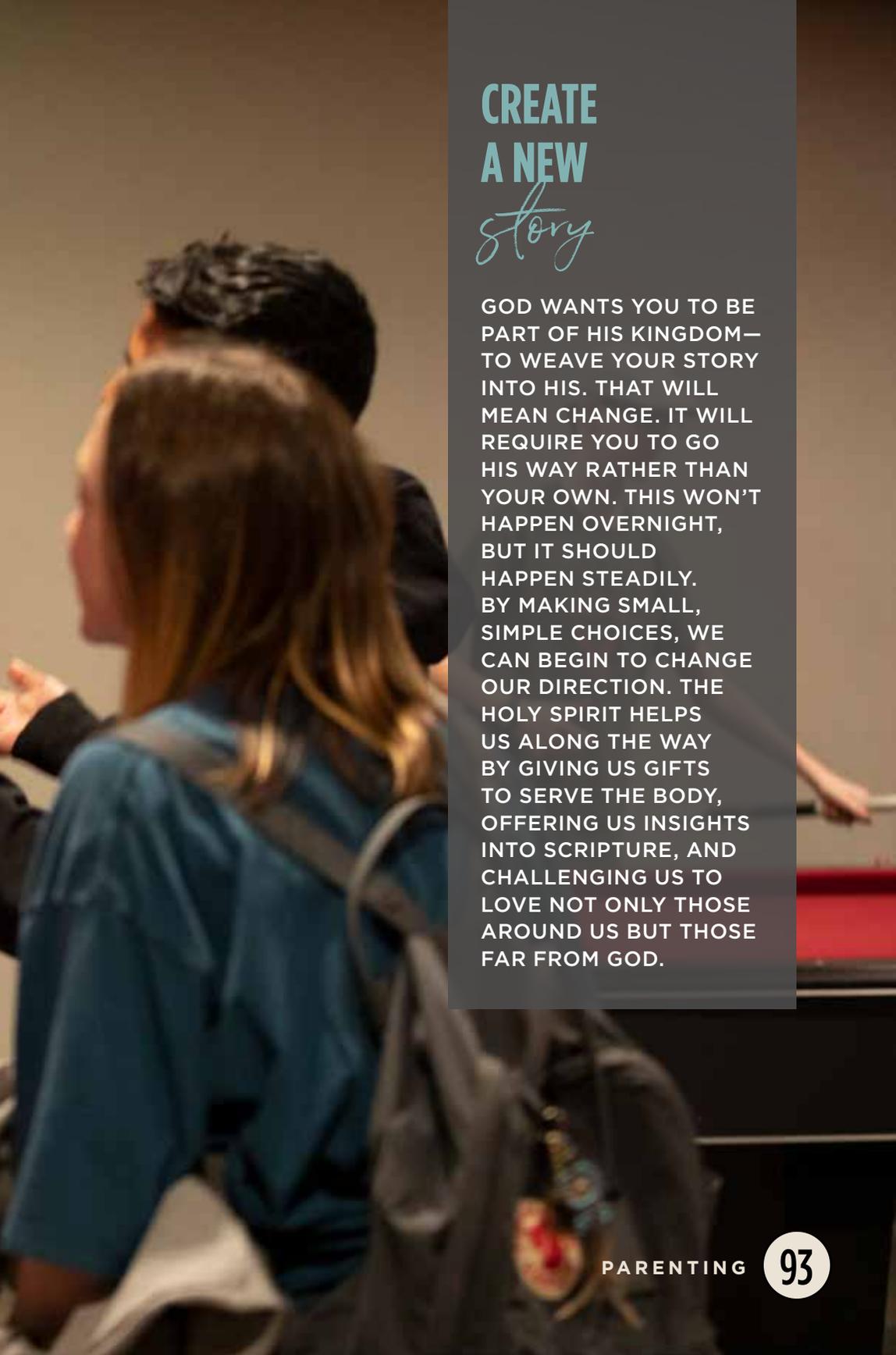
v. 6 “These commandments that I give you today” There are 613 commandments in the Bible. Jesus summed up all of these commandments with two: Love God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18) when He was challenged by the religious leaders to identify the most important commandment (Matthew 22:36-40).

v. 8 “Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” In some Jewish traditions, small boxes containing Scripture verses called phylacteries were literally worn on the hands and foreheads as reminders of God’s commands. The symbolism represents thinking about God’s commands (forehead) and obeying God’s commands (hands).









CREATE A NEW *story*

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- “Truth told without love does the same damage as a lie.” Agree or disagree? Why?
- How can parents give children their baggage?
- How often do you talk to your children individually?
- How can you encourage your children? What’s one specific thing you could do this week?
- What are your children good at doing? If you don’t know, how can you find out?





- Each of you in the group has different gifts and abilities. And every small group has tasks and roles that need to be done. How could you serve this group—perhaps with hospitality or prayer, by organizing an event, research or study of a topic, or inviting new people?
- 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 to just have coffee and talk about spiritual matters. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind people you can pray for.
- Groups grow closer when they serve together. How could your group serve someone in need? You may want to visit those who are homebound 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 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!

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.

WELCOME HOME



READ COLOSSIANS 3:21.

- **Why is this verse specifically addressed to fathers?**
- **How can fathers embitter their children?**
- **How can you encourage your children today?**

READ HEBREWS 12:4-12.

- **How does God discipline you? Remember, discipline is different than punishment.**
- **What hardship are you facing? How is God using this as discipline in your life?**
- **How is God's discipline producing a harvest of righteousness and peace in your life?**

Daily DEVOTIONS

DAY 1

Read **Proverbs 13:24**.

Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.

Respond: Why is discipline equated with love?

DAY 2

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:11**.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Respond: How could you build someone up today?

DAY 3

Read **Proverbs 12:18**.

The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Respond: Would your words be considered reckless or wise?

DAY 4

Read **Colossians 2:2**.

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ.

Respond: How could you bring more encouragement and unity to your group and to your church?

DAY 5

Read **Proverbs 10:17**.

Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.

Respond: How does ignoring correction lead others astray?

DAY 6

Reflect on the verses from this past week, and 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.



YOU
belong
HERE
nlc.life

SESSION 5:

FORGIVENESS





COLOSSIANS 3:13

***BEAR WITH EACH OTHER AND
FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER IF
ANY OF YOU HAS A GRIEVANCE
AGAINST SOMEONE. FORGIVE AS
THE LORD FORGAVE YOU.***

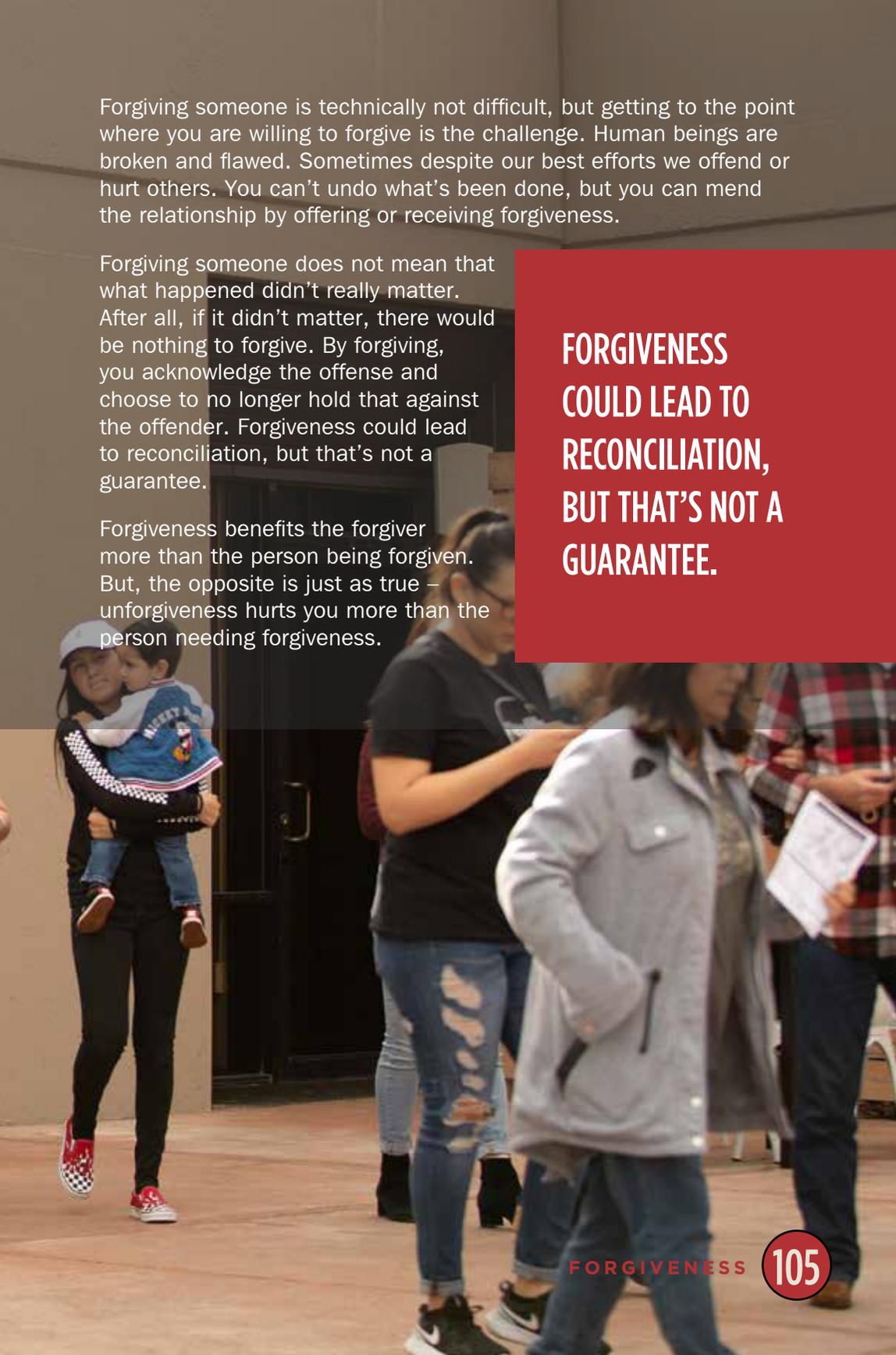


Forgiving someone is technically not difficult, but getting to the point where you are willing to forgive is the challenge. Human beings are broken and flawed. Sometimes despite our best efforts we offend or hurt others. You can't undo what's been done, but you can mend the relationship by offering or receiving forgiveness.

Forgiving someone does not mean that what happened didn't really matter. After all, if it didn't matter, there would be nothing to forgive. By forgiving, you acknowledge the offense and choose to no longer hold that against the offender. Forgiveness could lead to reconciliation, but that's not a guarantee.

Forgiveness benefits the forgiver more than the person being forgiven. But, the opposite is just as true – unforgiveness hurts you more than the person needing forgiveness.

**FORGIVENESS
COULD LEAD TO
RECONCILIATION,
BUT THAT'S NOT A
GUARANTEE.**

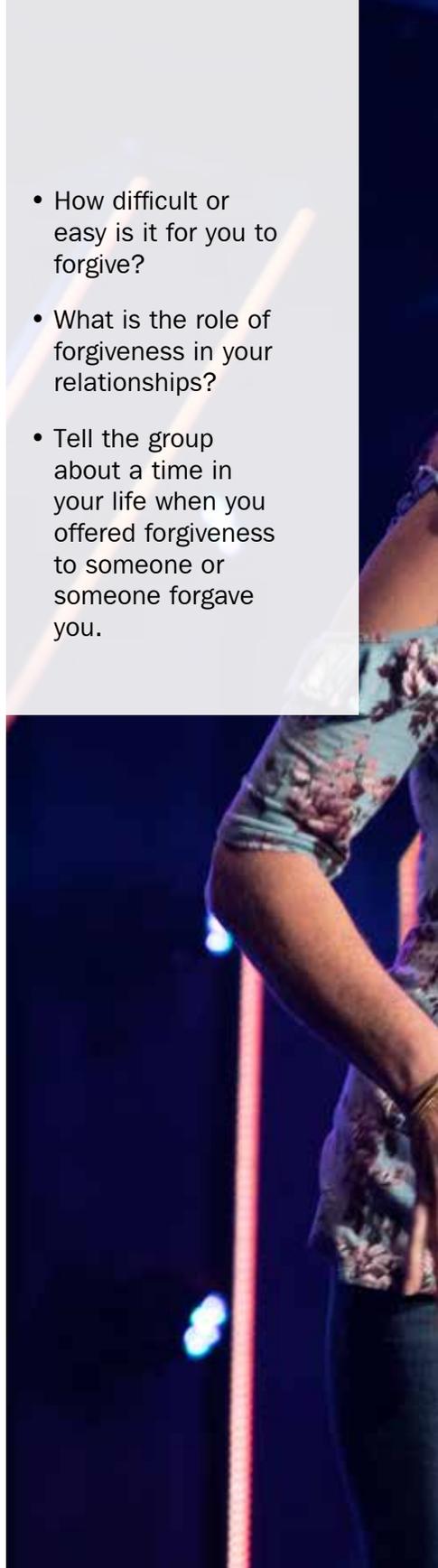


SHARE YOUR *Story*

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,” AND WHERE YOU LISTEN WITHOUT CRITICIZING ONE ANOTHER.

- How difficult or easy is it for you to forgive?
- What is the role of forgiveness in your relationships?
- Tell the group about a time in your life when you offered forgiveness to someone or someone forgave you.





Watch
THE VIDEO
SESSION 5

Watch the video for this session now. Use the Teaching Notes space provided below to record any key thoughts, questions, and things you want to remember or follow up on. After you finish 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 **Matthew 6:14-15**.

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

- According to this passage, what is the motivation to forgive others?
- How does unforgiveness affect your relationship with God?
- In the video, the pastor said, “Unforgiveness kills us.” How have you experienced this principle?
- What’s the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?







**CREATE
A NEW**
story

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

- How does unforgiveness hurt us?
- How does minimizing or ignoring pain allow it to continue to harm us?
- Why should we leave revenge and punishment to God?
- How can forgiveness bring healing to the person who has offended you?



- 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 151.
- 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 MATTHEW 18:21-35.

- **How often should we forgive someone?**
- **What can you relate to in this parable?**
- **How does unforgiveness “torture” people?**

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:10-11.

- **How does Satan outwit people?**
- **How was the Corinthians’ forgiveness tied to Paul’s forgiveness?**
- **Who do you need to forgive? What has kept you from forgiving?**

Daily DEVOTIONS

DAY 1

Read **1 John 1:9**.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Respond: How has God forgiven you?

DAY 2

Read **Romans 12:19**.

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Respond: Where are you tempted to seek revenge?

DAY 3

Read **Romans 4:7**.

Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Respond: Take a moment to thank God for the blessing of forgiveness.

DAY 4

Read **2 Corinthians 2:7**.

Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

Respond: Who is God prompting you to forgive?

DAY 5

Read **Hebrews 8:12**.

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

Respond: What does it mean to you that God remembers your sins no more?

DAY 6

Reflect on the verses from this past week, and 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:

CONFLICT RESOLUTION





MARK 3:25

IF A HOUSE IS DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF, THAT HOUSE CANNOT STAND.

CHANGE

For all the good we do, it may seem
to be wasted. Through the power
of the Holy Spirit, we can
change. A faith community built
in the Spirit is a house that can
stand. Jesus said, "If a house
is divided against itself, that
house cannot stand. If it is
built on the rock, it will stand."
The church is the house of God.
Let's change a house that is
not built on the rock.

SWER

ER

Every relationship comes with a certain amount of conflict. We are imperfect people. When imperfect people get together, the result is, well, less than perfect. Whether it's a difference in preference or upbringing or outright sinful behavior, conflict happens. The future of the relationship is often determined by how conflict is dealt with.

People react in very different ways when they face conflict. Some ignore it or run away from it. Others want to take it head on. Some even want to fight until they win. Unresolved conflict doesn't go away. In fact, it can end up undermining the relationship. If the conflict becomes a zero sum game, then someone can win the disagreement, but lose the relationship. In this study, you will hear from Pastors James and Lydia about a solid, biblical way to resolve conflict.

**EVERY
RELATIONSHIP
COMES WITH A
CERTAIN AMOUNT
OF CONFLICT.**



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 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 has surprised you most about this group? Where did God meet you over the last five weeks?
- When it comes to conflict, do you run to it or run from it?
- What has God been showing you through these sessions? What positive changes has your group 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.
- Take some time for each person to share about how they've done with inviting the people on the Circles of Life diagram to church or your small group. What specific conversations are you praying about for the weeks to come?



Watch
**THE VIDEO
SESSION 6**

Watch the video for this session now. Use the Teaching Notes space provided below to record any key thoughts, questions, and things you want to remember or follow up on. After you finish 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 **Ephesians 4:25-32**.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- How does falsehood create conflict?
- How does not dealing with conflict give the devil a foothold?
- How does unwholesome talk fuel conflict?
- When should you speak the truth? When should you not?

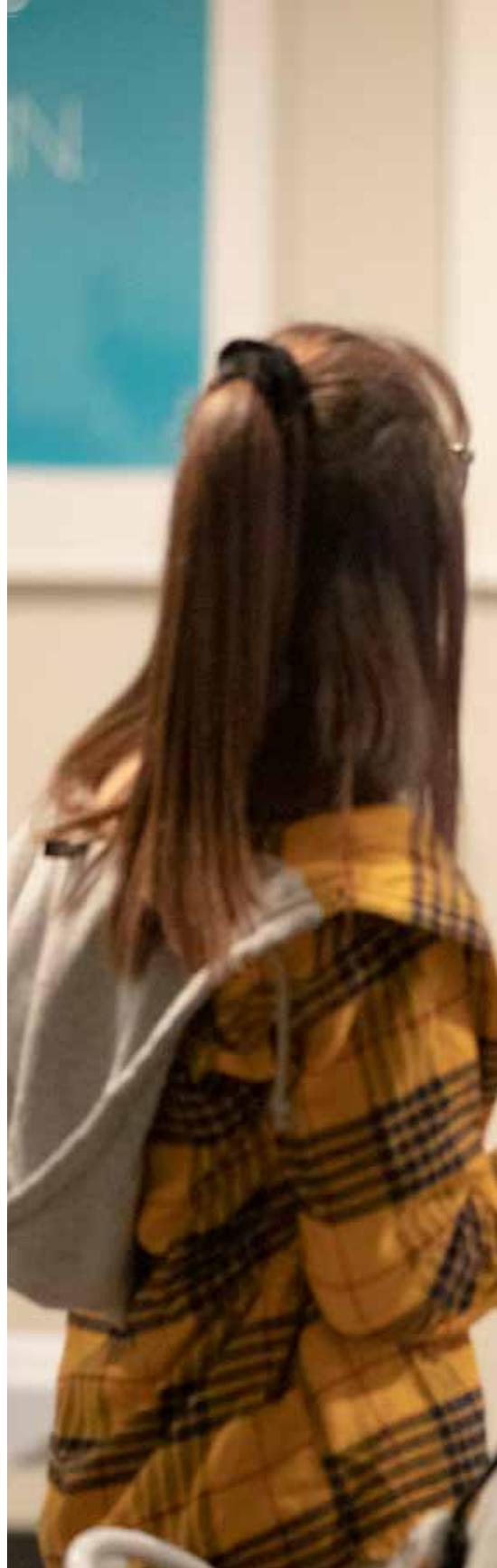
Study NOTES

v. 25 “neighbor, for we are all members of one body.” Neighbor in this context indicates a fellow believer since Paul refers to the Ephesian church as “all members of one body” (see Ephesians 4:4). While believers should speak truthfully to everyone, every “neighbor” is not necessarily part of Christ’s body.

v. 26 “In your anger do not sin.” Anger is an emotion and is not sinful in and of itself. Anger, however, when not restrained can lead to sinful behavior.

v. 30 “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” Paul instructs the Ephesian church in v. 3 of this chapter to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Disunity, then, causes grief to the Holy Spirit. This is not a reference to the unpardonable sin.







CREATE A NEW *Story*

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HOW HAS GOD CHANGED YOUR STORY DURING THIS SIX-WEEK 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 AND ENGAGED IN HIS KINGDOM.

- What's the difference between speaking the truth in love and saying it lovingly?
- How does conflict flow out of our own pain?
- How does overreacting increase conflict?
- What conflict do you need to resolve? What is the first step toward resolving it?
- Since 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 in some way.



- 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 145 and evaluate how well you met your goals. Discuss any changes you want to make as you move forward. If you plan to continue to meet, 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 151. Spend some time thanking God for all He's done in your group during this study.
- 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 ROMANS 12:17-21.

- **How is it possible to live in peace with everyone?**
- **What is the Lord's contrary advice on how to deal with enemies?**
- **How can you do what is right in the eyes of everyone?**

READ MATTHEW 18:15-20.

- **What are the steps for resolving conflict in the church according to Matthew 18?**
- **Since churches are very large today, who would be considered "the church" in verse 17?**
- **How should believers treat "pagans and tax collectors" or people far from God?**

Daily DEVOTIONS

DAY 1

Read **Proverbs 12:16**.

Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.

Respond: How “foolish” are you in this context?

DAY 2

Read **Proverbs 14:29**.

Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.

Respond: Do you find yourself more patient or more quick-tempered? How could you work to slow down your response?

DAY 3

Read **Proverbs 18:13**.

To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.

Respond: How can you improve your listening skills?

DAY 4

Read **Proverbs 28:11**.

The rich are wise in their own eyes; one who is poor and discerning sees how deluded they are.

Respond: What is your level of discernment these days?

DAY 5

Read **Proverbs 15:1**.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Respond: How can you give more gentle answers?

DAY 6

Reflect on the verses from this past week, and 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.



newlife
— CHURCH —

wednesday



A photograph of a woman with long brown hair singing into a microphone. In the background, a man with a beard is playing an electric guitar. The scene is lit with blue stage lights.

Appendices

RESOURCES TO MAKE YOUR SMALL
GROUP EXPERIENCE EVEN BETTER!

FREQUENTLY ASKED *Questions*

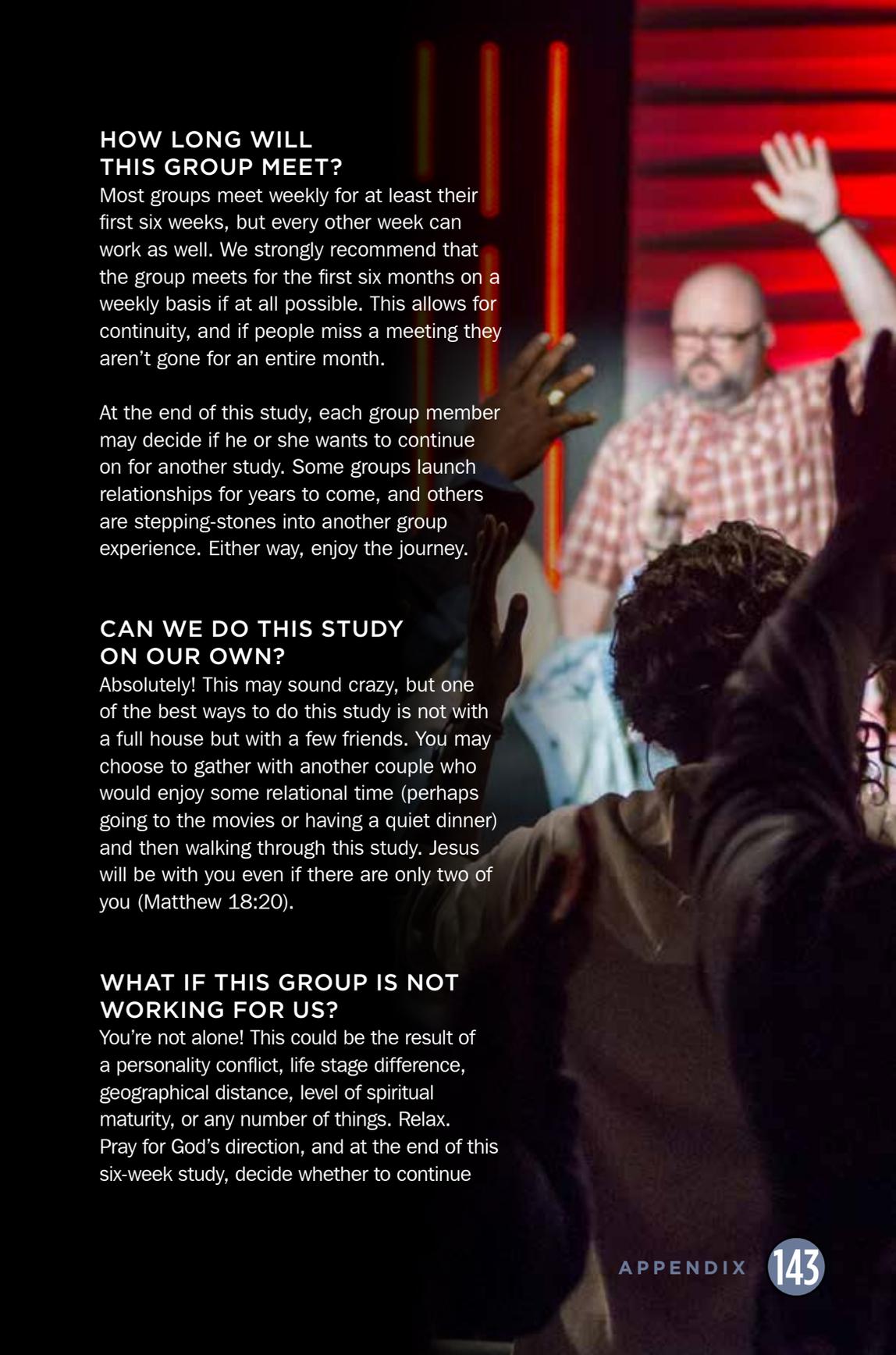
WHAT DO WE DO ON THE FIRST NIGHT OF OUR GROUP?

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 Group Agreement (pages 145-146) 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 an insert in the Welcome Guide.

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, etc.—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 six weeks, but every other week can work as well. We strongly recommend that the group meets 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 an entire 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 six-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 study is 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. Healthy groups usually 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 among you 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. One approach is for adults to meet in the living room or dining room and to share the cost of a babysitter (or two) who can watch the kids in a different part of the house. This way, parents don't have to be away from their children all evening when their children are too young to be left at home. A second option is to use one home for the kids and a second home (close by or a phone call away) for the adults. A third idea is to rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson or 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 **Group Calendar** on page 147 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 levels of spiritual maturity, personal opinions, temperaments, or “imperfections.” We are all works in progress.

Confidentiality

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

Encouragement for Growth

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

Shared Ownership

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

Rotating Hosts/Leaders and Homes

To encourage different people to host the group in their homes **and to rotate the** responsibility of facilitating each meeting. (See the Group Calendar on page 147.)

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 _____

Weekly 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 email message, or even in person from time to time.

My Name:		
Partner's Name:		
	Our Plan	Our Progress
Week 1		
Week 2		
Week 3		
Week 4		
Week 5		
Week 6		

Memory VERSE CARDS

SESSION ONE

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity. Proverbs 17:17

SESSION TWO

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. Philippians 2:3-4

SESSION THREE

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 1 Corinthians 13:4

SESSION FOUR

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. Proverbs 22:6

SESSION FIVE

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13

SESSION SIX

If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. Mark 3:25

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

PRAYER AND PRAISE *Report*

	Prayer Requests	Praise Report
Session 1		
Session 2		
Session 3		
Session 4		
Session 5		
Session 6		



SMALL GROUP *Leaders*

Key resources to help your leadership experience be the best it can be.

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 beforehand will help you anticipate potentially difficult questions and discussion topics.
- **Bring your uniqueness to the study.** Lean into who you are and how God wants you to uniquely lead the study.
- **Prepare. Prepare. Prepare.** Go through the session several times. If you are using the video session, 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 that went well and one thing that could be improved 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 culture. 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, 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 **Create A New 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 still 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

Psalms 23

Ezekiel 34:11-16

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12

MAKING RELATIONSHIPS

work

Relationships are work, but they are worthwhile work. Often people think that loving someone will automatically create peace and harmony. That view is a bit naïve. Peace and harmony are both the result of hard work. We must recognize and accept each other's differences. We have to learn to fight fair. We have to resolve our issues and not allow the enemy to gain ground in our lives and tear us apart.

There is only one thing you can take to Heaven: other people. Our investment in others will pay tremendous dividends both in this life and in the next life.

JAMES & LYDIA RANGER



James Ranger is an author, songwriter, and the lead pastor of New Life Church. Over the last 30 years he, alongside his wife Lydia and two sons Jim and Jon, have propelled the church from its small beginnings to the multi-site church spanning across Kern County it is today.

Lydia is a pastor, motivational speaker, and recording artist who currently serves as the Global Music Lead for NLC's campuses. She is affectionately referred to as the "Momma of the house", as she has worked diligently alongside her husband to raise and release leaders for over 30 years. She has also had the honor of singing the National Anthem for the LA Lakers 26 times.

Through their leadership, and the leading of the Holy Spirit, New Life Church has become known as a safe place for people to experience the life-transforming message of Jesus in a real and relevant way. Through their teachings and music, James and Lydia have developed a community focused on Jesus, prayer, restoration, and leadership development.

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ISBN 978-1-950007-56-1



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