

**SMALL
GROUP
WORKBOOK**

Edition 1.1



**NEW LIFE
CHURCH**

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INTRODUCTION

Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons...

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17, MSG

Welcome to Foundations! If you are a new believer or are returning to the faith, this teaching series is designed to give you an encouraging space to talk about who God is and what having a relationship with Jesus means for your life. This group is a safe place to ask genuine questions that may have challenged your faith. There may not always be a perfect answer, but that's ok. God's Word tells us that "His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways." A god that could be fully understood by us would be no God at all. Aren't you grateful to have a God who is bigger, wiser, and who can do more than we ever could?

Our hope is for you to flourish in your relationship with and understanding of God. We believe that you can break old thought patterns, grow tremendously in faith, and experience extraordinary life change, both personally and spiritually, through this teaching series as you begin to seek after Jesus every day.

To get you started, here are some practical steps to take now that you have decided to follow Jesus:

- **Take a One-Year Challenge.** For one year, go all in. That includes attending weekend services, Worship & Prayer services, and other events and conferences. Join a serve team, and build relationships through life groups. We believe that if you dedicate one year of your life to these things, you will see God transform your life in new and exciting ways.
- **Get Water Baptized.** This is an important step of obedience that shows others we have personally trusted Jesus for our salvation. If you have not been baptized, the opportunity to do so is available every month at every NLC campus. For more information, text WATER to 88000.

- **Start attending weekend services regularly.** It's important to be plugged into a church with other believers. There are probably many good churches in your area, and although we'd love for you to call New Life Church your home and invite you to join us regularly, the most important thing is to pick a church and commit.
- **Connect.** If you would like to get more connected at New Life Church and even become a member, we invite you to attend Connect, available every first Sunday of the month at every campus. Text CONNECT to 88000 for more info on times and locations specific to your campus of choice. You can also learn more at newlifechurch.tv.
- **Participate in Real Change.** Text REALCHANGE to 88000 to join the next Real Change life group! Real Change is the next step in our discipleship track after Foundations and includes both an eight-session study and a semester-end capstone conference!
- **Grow.** We are so glad you have decided to take the first step in discipleship! Our discipleship track is designed to help you find freedom, discover your purpose, and make a difference in the world around you. We encourage everyone to walk through this journey with expectancy. God has great things for you; we are confident of that.
- **Serve.** There is a place for everyone within the Body of Christ, and every person has been created with a unique purpose! As you grow in your relationship with God and within the Church body, discovering your unique calling and spiritual gifts, you are encouraged to find your place serving! It's perfectly fine to try out a ministry or two as you seek your best fit.
- **Join a life group.** Great job! You can already mark this one off the list. We also want you to know that there are a variety of life groups available. From Bible and book studies, marriage and financial groups, to running and lunch groups, there is something for everyone. Our life groups have one simple purpose of bringing people together, because we believe that real change happens in the context of relationships. Find a life group that interests you by texting LIFEGROUP to 88000.
- **Stay connected** to what's going on at New Life, hear testimonies of life change, and see all kinds of other inspiring content through social media.



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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help you kick-start group discussions and grow deeper in your faith.

- Big Idea** This is a summary highlighting the main point or key thoughts of the message for that session. Each “Big Idea” is followed by a supporting Scripture.
- Teaching** Each session we will address and explain a main topic through the teaching and life group discussion. There is space here for you to take notes, if you want to!
- Discussion** This section contains questions that are designed to encourage discussion and group interaction, while hopefully moving people closer to God and others.
- Prayer Focus** Each session you’ll find a suggested prayer focus tailored to your group’s current step in the journey.
- Next Steps** Next Steps are your opportunity to take what you learn each session and put it into practice. They are practical, attainable, and stretching actions you can take to grow and move forward in your journey following Jesus.
- Notes** Use this space to jot down notes and insights during your discussions.
- Resources** This area contains additional resources based on each session’s topic. If you would like to continue learning outside of your group, these would be a great tool for you.

You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

EPHESIANS 2:19-22, MSG

PART ONE

What we need to know



SESSION ONE

WHO IS GOD?

Big Idea

Who is God, and how can we live in relationship with Him? God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to save us from our sin and set us free. The cost was heavy, and it was one that only God Himself could pay. Then He sent His Holy Spirit to empower and guide us in this life. God is our Father, and He wants His children to know Him—not just through a set of rules to follow—but through a genuine, vibrant relationship. God gives us life. He gives us His Son. He gives us Himself. It is the joy of our lives to know, pursue, love, and live in relationship with God our Father.

I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.
2 CORINTHIANS 6:18

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

Discussion

- What comes to mind when you think about God? How has your opinion of Him changed over time?
- What do you expect out of your relationship with God?
- What is your relationship with your earthly father like? How could that affect your relationship with your heavenly Father?
- Share about a time when you felt disconnected from God, or if He was unreachable. How did you realize that God is always right here with you? What advice would you offer to someone who feels disconnected from God?
- If you started doing one thing this week, what would improve your relationship with God?

Prayer Focus

In your daily prayer time, pray using Jeremiah 29:13: “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.” Ask God to reveal His character to you, and prepare to seek Him with all of your heart. Renew your commitment to Jesus each day.

Next Steps

Ask yourself: Am I currently serving God because I feel like I *have* to, or because I *want* to?

Spend time in the presence of the Father this week, connecting with Him. Don't worry about being formal. Try calling God by a different name like “Father,” “Dad,” or “Abba.” Just be real, and watch how your time with God transforms you.

Resources

FOUNDATIONS Session 1 Supplemental Videos • newlifechurch.tv/foundations

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
God the Father
God the Creator

bit.ly/God_the_Trinity
bit.ly/God_the_Father
bit.ly/God_our_Creator

NLC Vision & Values • newlifechurch.tv/nlc-vision-values

Relationship with God Series • newlifechurch.tv/watch-read/category/relationship-with-god

WHO IS GOD? | DAY ONE

GOD IS MY CREATOR

When others describe you, what do they say? Maybe they say you have blue eyes and brown hair, or maybe brown eyes and blue hair. You have many attributes that define you, not just your physical characteristics. The Bible says we're made "in the image of God," (Genesis 1:27), which means that before Adam and Eve messed things up, the rest of creation would do a double take when they saw Adam. It would have sounded something like this: "Hey, there's God! Oh sorry, my mistake. That's just Adam." Each of us is unique, with remarkable qualities and complex attributes. We are made like God, who is unique and different from us, with even more remarkable qualities and complex attributes.

There are many things we can learn about God. In fact, if we spent each day learning just one thing about God, we would not finish before we breathed our last breath! Sometimes it's easier to learn about who God is by comparing who He is to who He isn't. For example, God is not the Tooth Fairy—He doesn't rain down money from heaven just because we lost something precious. He's not Santa Claus, giving us things if we're nice but not if we're naughty. He's not "the opiate of the masses"—a fictitious character created to make people feel good. God does comfort us, but in a real and abiding way. God is not impotent, powerless to do anything. He's omnipotent, which means He's able to do anything; though whether He chooses to do something or not is up to Him but will always fall perfectly in step with His own character.

The Bible is not man's book about God, but God's book about Himself—His autobiography! So, if we want to know who He is, it's a good idea to find out what the Bible says about Him. A great place to start is on the first page: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1) One thing we can learn from this simple verse is that God was around long before we were. He created everything—even time and space—and therefore is not confined by anything.

A second thing we learn is that He is Creator. Of everything! Because man lives within the realm that God created—heaven and earth—man could not have created the God who created him. He made us; we didn't make Him or make Him up inside our heads. Just like you can't give birth to your own parents, it is impossible to create something that created you.

"God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"

NUMBERS 23:19

Ponder this: God made everything, He made me, and He is not like me. Stop and thank God for creating you and the world around you. Then ask Him to show you something new in His Word today.

WHO IS GOD? | DAY TWO

God does what He says He will do!

Yesterday we talked about how God made everything, including us, and that He is not like us. Let's review Numbers 23:19 again, this time paying attention to the second half of that verse:

God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

This verse among many reminds us that God does what He says He will do and that He never breaks His promises. Ever. Look over this New Testament verse that reinforces this idea:

If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.
2 TIMOTHY 2:13, ESV

Sometimes it can be hard to believe that there could be someone in your life who actually keeps His promises, especially if you've been in a place where those closest to you have consistently broken their promises to you. But God has been in the business of keeping His promises for thousands of years. His promise to disobedient Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior can be found in Genesis 3:14–15:

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

In this verse, when God is telling the serpent that "he will crush your head, and you will strike His heel," He is referring to one of Eve's descendants who would be able to defeat Satan. There is only one man who could do that: the Son of God. Jesus.

Ask Yourself: Do I believe in my heart that God keeps His promises or that He breaks them? If you believe that God breaks His promises, ask the Holy Spirit to show you where this is coming from.

WHO IS GOD? | DAY THREE

Jesus is God's Son and my Savior!

At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, He stood in the synagogue on a certain day, opened the scroll to that day's reading, Isaiah 61:1–2, and read this aloud:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

LUKE 4:18-19

Just prior to this scene, Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist, where the Spirit rested on Him (see Luke 3:22). Then Luke 4:1 describes that He was "full of the Holy Spirit" as He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days of prayer and fasting. There, He was also tempted by the devil. So in the span of just a few verses, the Holy Spirit is described as being both *on* Jesus and *in* Jesus. There is a difference between the two! The idea of Jesus being full of the Holy Spirit was in the context of being led by the Spirit into the wilderness, fasting, praying, and overcoming the temptations that the devil threw at Him. In this context, we see the Holy Spirit empowering Jesus from within to overcome. In essence, the Holy Spirit is *in* Jesus *for* Jesus.

Luke 4:14 then mentions that after the testing "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit." The power was released after the testing. His time of testing proved that He wasn't going to use the power of the Spirit foolishly or flagrantly. Jesus had all access to the power of the Spirit, but not once in His life did He use it childishly or selfishly. This is the definition of gentleness (see Galatians 5:22–23).

In Luke 4:18, Jesus practically announces the beginning of His ministry, while reminding them obliquely (by quoting the prophet Isaiah) that the Holy Spirit is on Him for healing others and setting them free. What this is saying is that the Holy Spirit is on Jesus for others. So we see in Luke 4 that the Holy Spirit is *in* Jesus *for* Jesus and *on* Jesus *for* others. Remember, Jesus was completely obedient to the Father.

He reminded His disciples that He only did what He saw the Father doing, (see John 5:19), and He only said what He heard the Father saying (see John 12:49). Though fully man, He was also fully God and filled with the Holy Spirit, able to conquer the enemy, heal the sick, raise the dead, and set the captives free because of the Holy Spirit who also rested on Him. He spelled all this out before He did one miracle. He gave credit to the power of the Holy Spirit who was on Him. He lived His life in deference to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

WHO IS GOD? | DAY FOUR

God is my Redeemer!

We truly pray that at some point you have chosen to become a fully devoted Christ-follower. If you feel like you don't have a relationship with Jesus yet, we can certainly help you! We would love to have a conversation with you about that, because becoming a Christ-follower is all about being in a real-life relationship with Jesus Christ. And when you begin an honest relationship with Him, you become part of His family, the Body of Christ.

Colossians 1:21 (NLT) tells us that we were “once far away from God. You were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions.” Sin separates, and this separation costs us our freedom and the authority over Satan that God gives to His children (see Luke 10:19). Praise God that He made a way to end this separation! It was through Jesus that “God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross” (Colossians 1:20).

Before we go any further, you should know that the starting point to a relationship with God is accepting that you are a sinner and that Jesus paid the penalty for your sin by shedding His blood and dying on a cross.

Ponder this: What is the significance of Jesus’ declaration in John 14:6? According to Romans 10:13, who will be saved?

Has there been a time when you asked Jesus to come into your heart and be your Savior? If not, below is a simple prayer that you can use to invite Him to be the Lord of your life.

Dear Jesus,

Thank You for dying on the cross and making a way for me to come to God. I receive this extravagant gift and ask You to come into my heart and be the Lord of my life. I give You all of me and ask You to turn my life around for Your glory. Fill me with Your Spirit, and help me live the life You died to give me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

This is the first step toward a life of significance! If you just prayed this prayer—whether for the first time or as a renewal of a decision you made earlier in life—we would love to know about it! Please contact us at newlifecyclechurch.tv/contact. If you need more information about what this decision means or what becoming a Christ-follower is about, contact us at newlifecyclechurch.tv/connect, or get in touch with your Foundations leader.

WHO IS GOD? | DAY FIVE

What is God like?

It is common to approach God in one of two ways. We either try to earn God's approval by doing stuff, or we simply receive the gift that we have been made the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ. We either serve Him because we feel we have to do it or because we are excited that we get to do it.

There are a lot of reasons why we work to earn God's approval. One of those reasons is because we think God is mad at us, so we think we need to prove to Him that we're worth loving. But you can't earn God's approval. You can't earn His love. If you could earn it, then there would be no need for the word "grace" in the Bible. The word grace literally means "the free and unmerited favor of God." If you were earning God's approval, then you would be receiving His approval through the price you pay for it—the stuff you're doing. But look at what the Bible says about this:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

EPHESIANS 2:4-5

This verse says that God has great love for us. For all of us. Me. And you. It also says He is rich in mercy. Mercy is when you get compassion and forgiveness from someone, when you know what you really deserve is punishment. And finally, it says you have been saved by grace—a free gift, unmerited favor. You didn't deserve it, but He gives it to you anyway, because He loves you that much.

We learned earlier in this study that God is Creator. Today, He wants you to know that He loves us. He loves me, and He loves you. What is God like? God loves us! He is love. Ask God to show you today how much He loves you. At the end of the day, write down what you sensed He showed you.

*Then He sent His Holy
Spirit to empower and
guide us in this life.*





SESSION TWO

WHO AM I?

Big Idea

Many of us have the misconception that Christians are slaves to God. We are not slaves, but rather, sons and daughters. Romans 8:17 says, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God, and coheirs with Christ.” So, not only are we God’s children, but we are heirs of His Kingdom. The invitation to be adopted into God’s family is open and available to everyone through Jesus Christ.

But when the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are His child, God has made you also an heir.

GALATIANS 4:4-7



Teaching Notes

Discussion

- Do you approach God as your master or your father? Has this teaching changed the way you think about God? If so, how?
- Romans 8:17 states, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ...” What does being an heir of God mean to you?
- Talk about a time when you attempted to love someone because you felt like you had to, rather than because of your genuine care for them. Explain what that was like for you.
- How should your devotion to God impact how you love other people?
- What, if anything, stands in the way of viewing yourself as an heir? What can you do to remove the barriers?

Prayer Focus

Pray this week using Philippians 2:12-13: “Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.” Pray each day that you will be driven by devotion and not duty, relating to God because you *want* to be in relationship with the Father who loves you.

Next Steps

In our pursuit of God, we sometimes have a tendency to try to work our way into salvation. Identify one step you can take this week to focus more on Jesus and less on your own actions.

Resources

FOUNDATIONS Session 2 Supplemental Videos • newlifechurch.tv/foundations

We Need Jesus	bit.ly/We_Need_Jesus
Sons and Daughters	bit.ly/Sons_and_Daughters
Child of God	bit.ly/Child_of_God
We Are Heirs	bit.ly/We_Are_Heirs

Real Change Series • Part 3: Choose Life • bit.ly/RC-choose-life

NLC Worship • Let’s Talk About Worship: Team Panel • bit.ly/worship-team-panel

WHO AM I? | DAY ONE

I Am Loved by God

The first chapter of the book of John begins with, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” In this one brilliant chapter, the Bible describes Father God, the Son of God, and the Spirit of God working together at the beginning of creation in perfect harmony. You can only find perfect harmony when there is a perfect relationship of selflessness—pure love—where those in relationship are fully pursuing the desires of each other. And then John describes God stepping into His own creation in the form of Jesus, the Son of God, both fully God and fully human. Why did He do this? The book of First John, written by the same guy, gives us a clue:

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

1JOHN 4:8

Among other things, this verse directly reminds us that God is love. Love is the core of His character, the foundation of His nature. God loves you, because love is who He is. He doesn't require that you earn His love. He just loves you. In fact, it's the entirety of the reason why Jesus came to earth:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

JOHN 3:16-17

So, why does God love you? Because love is who He is, and therefore love is what He does. He loves you just because.

Take a moment to reflect on Psalm 4:8. Express to God how you feel—about His love for you and maybe even about something you may be thinking about today. He enjoys spending time with you!

WHO AM I? | DAY TWO

I Am a Child of God

One of the best ways to grow closer to God is to spend time listening to Him every day. But it might be difficult to listen to His voice if you really don't know what it sounds like. The challenge for most people is that the way that we were raised—whether by our parents or a parent figure—influences our approach to God more than any other influence. If your parents were mean and overbearing, you may think that God is mean and overbearing. If your dad was absent or your mother distant, then you may tend to feel overlooked by God or that He cares more about other people than He does about you.

Your childhood experiences affect your approach to God more than you know, but as you spend time getting to know who God really is and what He is like, as opposed to who you think He is based on your experiences, you will naturally grow closer to Him. A great place to start is by spending time in His Word.

Romans 8:15 clearly describes both our position in God's eyes and our relationship to Him:

“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”

The Message version puts it this way: “This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike “What's next, Papa?” God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who He is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance!”

Once we have been adopted into the God's Kingdom, God views us as His sons and daughters! The challenge is that we've lived our entire lives up until the point of adoption as children of this world, wallowing around in evil thoughts, bad habits, and a broken understanding of our identity. That's why it's good to spend time with God and in His Word every day, letting Him reframe your thinking about who you are in God's eyes, versus who you used to be.

WHO AM I? | DAY THREE

I Am a Christ-Follower

When you ask Jesus to be Lord of your life—to be in control of your thoughts, your choices, your words, and your actions—you become a Christ-follower and begin learning to do what He does and say what He says. When we become a Christ-follower, we begin learning how to walk with God in the Spirit. We learn how to tune in to His voice and discern His direction in our lives, and then we choose to obey it. To get there, we need to understand the Word of God—the Bible. We need to know what it says. The Bible is our spiritual compass, keeping us headed in the right direction. It is a compilation of God’s words and actions over thousands of years. It is His story, and He not only wants to share it with us, He wants us to be a part of it. Here’s a promise in the Bible that we want you to think about today:

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ears to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge.

PROVERBS 5:1-2

The Message version puts it this way: “Dear friend, pay close attention to this, my wisdom; listen very closely to the way I see it. Then you’ll acquire a taste for good sense; what I tell you will keep you out of trouble.” That’s what the Old Testament says. The New Testament says something similar:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

The Bible is extremely useful—in fact, it’s the best—for helping us grow in understanding who God is and learning to depend on Him...for everything! The Bible really is the best source for helping us figure out what the best choice is in each situation, and for learning how to receive forgiveness for our mistakes and healing from past pain.

God’s Word can do all these things for us. We just need to read it! We’ll dive more into that, but for now, stop and thank God for giving you His Word and ask Him to help you understand something you don’t yet.

WHO AM I? | DAY FOUR

I Am an Heir to the Kingdom of God

In the teaching this week, we mentioned that we are not slaves but heirs to the Kingdom of God, as we are His adopted sons and daughters. Let's check out the Message version of Galatians 4:4-7:

But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, "Papa! Father!" Doesn't that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you're also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance.

There was a royal wedding recently. Maybe you heard about it, and maybe you even watched it. Almost 30 million Americans did, and it is estimated that close to two billion people watched it worldwide. Every preparation leading up to the event was fully covered by the major news outlets. There was even a viral video on social media of a devastated little girl who found out that she wasn't invited to the wedding. She sobbed royally!

There were many elements of this wedding that made it unique and special. The prince married a divorced, mixed-race American. According to royal social norms 100 years ago, the prince would have had to abdicate his right to the throne in order to marry a divorcee. But instead, this wedding was a celebration of grace and diversity!

Likewise, the Kingdom of God is an ongoing celebration of even more epic proportions, celebrating the King of creation sacrificing the only Son He ever had to redeem a dirty, sinful, broken bride from certain and never-ending death. His loving sacrifice made a way for her to walk with dignity and confidence into His Father's house. Not in shame. Not in brokenness. Not a second-class citizen, but adopted into an everlasting Kingdom. Just like the new royal princess, we are adopted into God's royal family, full heirs to His Kingdom.

God's kingdom isn't a matter of what you put in your stomach, for goodness' sake. It's what God does with your life as he sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with joy. Your task is to single-mindedly serve Christ. Do that and you'll kill two birds with one stone: pleasing the God above you and proving your worth to the people around you.

ROMANS 14:17-18



SESSION THREE

HOW CAN I MAKE WISE CHOICES?

Big Idea

The Holy Spirit is our guide, our teacher, and our friend. John 16:13 says,

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come.

The Holy Spirit lives within us, a source of power and comfort who guides and directs us on the journey to live a life of purpose, submitted to God. Being filled with the Holy Spirit doesn't make you better than anyone else; it makes you better than yourself!

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

JOHN 14:26, ESV

Teaching Notes

Discussion

- What have you believed about the Holy Spirit? Where do you think your beliefs came from?
- Have you ever had an encounter with the Holy Spirit where He convicted or guided you to action? Did you feel a signal from God or hear His “still, small voice”? (See 1 Kings 19:11-13). Did you listen and do what the Spirit was leading you to do? What were the results?
- Did learning about who the Holy Spirit is change how you think about Him? If so, how will that new perspective change how you make decisions in the future?
- Briefly share your salvation story. When did you make the decision to follow Jesus?

Prayer Focus

Pray for God to give you the wisdom to discern His voice and direction in your life. Check out this verse in Isaiah 30:21: “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”

Next Steps

- Ask the Holy Spirit these two questions: “What am I doing that grieves Your heart?” and “What am I not doing that would bring You joy?”
- Listen for His answer and make a decision to move forward in obedience to the Spirit.

Resources

FOUNDATIONS Session 3 Supplemental Videos • newlifechurch.tv/foundations

The Holy Spirit Isn't Weird
Understanding the Holy Spirit
Truths About the Holy Spirit

bit.ly/The_Holy_Spirit_1
bit.ly/Understanding_Holy_Spirit
bit.ly/Holy_Spirit_Truths

HOLY SPIRIT • Overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit • bit.ly/Overwhelmed_by_Holy_Spirit

HOW CAN I MAKE WISE CHOICES? | DAY ONE

The Elephant in the Room

Most families have at least one awkward or unpredictable relative—one you might avoid making eye contact with at family gatherings. You’ve heard nothing but disconcerting things about them: She’s kind of weird. You never know what he’s going to do or say. It’s not that she lives outside the box; I’m just not sure she even knows what a box is!

Many people feel a similar way about the Holy Spirit. There are a lot of stereotypes and bad definitions floating around about Him, and very little if any of it seems like normal, everyday life to you. Let’s face it! If you open your Bible and read through the book of Acts, there’s some pretty crazy stuff in there, right? We may think it’s okay for Jesus to heal the sick, raise the dead, and set the captives free, but that was Jesus! He’s the Son of God!

You may think, “Of course He can do that, but don’t ask me to do any of that stuff. That’s supernatural. That’s not normal. Besides, people will think I’m weird.” What feels normal to you is primarily based on how you were raised, regardless of whether or not your parents raised you to trust Jesus. Whatever your background is, that’s what feels normal to you. But we don’t want to strengthen a bias towards any particular tradition or upbringing; we simply want to find out what the Bible says.

So what does the Bible say?

Paul asked the disciples at Ephesus if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, and they replied, “No! We haven’t even heard that there was such thing!” It’s common today for people to reject the packaging that the Holy Spirit is brought to them in. “Holy Spirit” is the best attempt for translators to introduce people to Him. The first mention of the Holy Spirit—Spirit of God—is in Genesis 1:2, which says this:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

GENESIS 1:2

In this verse, the Hebrew phrase “Spirit of God” is ruach Elohim. “Ruach” means “breath” or “wind,” and “Elohim” is a complex name referring to one God with three distinct persons, implying power and strength. This is the Bible’s first mention of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So ruach Elohim roughly means something like “the breath or wind of powerful, strong, almighty Three-in-One.” Breath of God. This powerful wind was just hovering over the waters. Invite the Holy Spirit to help you understand in your mind and heart who He is, versus who you grew up thinking He might be.

HOW CAN I MAKE WISE CHOICES? | DAY TWO

When God Exhales

One thing that really helps us understand the Holy Spirit is Jesus' own words, and one of the first times He refers to the Holy Spirit is in Luke 11:13, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

The Greek definition of "Holy Spirit" means "holy" and "Spirit." If you dig deeper into understanding the name "Spirit"—which is *pneuma*—it is quite complex. In the Greek (Strong's G4154) sometimes the name emphasizes His personality and character ("holy"), and other times His work and power ("Spirit of Truth"). Drilling further down, you discover a description of Him as "a movement of air, a gentle blast of wind, the wind itself, the breath of nostrils." If you put all that together, you could say the Holy Spirit is the presence of God as He exhales. Check out Genesis 2:7, where we observe God exhaling for the first time:

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now this isn't the first time that something powerful came out of God's mouth. He created the entire universe simply by speaking. His words have immeasurable creative power, and just as a breath escapes your mouth when you speak, the breath of God—the Spirit of God—was present from the beginning of creation. But our focus in this moment is directly on what happened when God simply breathed without uttering a sound: "man became a living being." Life is created when God exhales. That is a definition of the character of the Holy Spirit: the breath of life. He brings life to us.

If you knew His name as it is literally translated, you would no longer run away from what you think is something like your weird relative. The enemy would like for you to think the Holy Spirit is weird, but that's really a lie. The Holy Spirit is life to us. And we receive His life, His presence, and His power when we choose. Why "when we choose"? Because the Holy Spirit is also the quintessential gentleman. He does not go where He is not invited.

Think about it: What have your past experiences with the Holy Spirit been like? What have your past experiences with others who have approached you about the Holy Spirit been like? If the Holy Spirit just brought to mind any negative thoughts or feelings about others, take a moment to choose to forgive and release them. Don't let others' perceptions of God limit your approach to him! Are you afraid to let the Holy Spirit fill you, lead you, and even take control of your life? If so, ask Him where the root of that might be.

HOW CAN I MAKE WISE CHOICES? | DAY THREE

The Holy Spirit is My Helper

Do you think if we spent each day of our lives learning just one of God's attributes, that we would never get to the end of it? Well, the Holy Spirit is the living, breathing presence of God, so the same applies! But there are characteristics that are unique to the Holy Spirit, as well, and one of them is that the Holy Spirit is our Helper.

Strong's definition of "spirit" (*pneuma*, mentioned earlier) states that the name is "never referred to as a depersonalized force." The Holy Spirit has a personality of His own, with unique character traits. According to John 14:26, one of those traits is that He is our Helper.

Have you ever worked on a project—maybe at school or at work—that had a ridiculously tight deadline, and you didn't have enough time or support to complete it with excellence by the due date? In moments like this, we all want to scream, "I need some HELP!" We have good news for you! One purpose of the Holy Spirit in your life is to help you. If you think about it, when you have the presence of God helping you, what a powerful helper you truly have! Here are a few ways to meditate on how the Holy Spirit helps us:

- Read John 14:26. Has a Scripture ever come to mind that helped you in the moment with something you were facing?
- Some versions of this verse translate the word "helper" as "advocate." When is it beneficial to have an advocate in your life?
- Read Romans 8:26–27 and describe a few ways the Holy Spirit helps you.
- What weakness are you currently facing that you could use some help with?
- Write 2 Corinthians 3:17 in your own words.

HOW CAN I MAKE WISE CHOICES? | DAY FOUR

The Holy Spirit Empowers Me

Jesus had a lot to say about the importance of the Holy Spirit in everyday life, giving clear instructions to the disciples in John 16. Check out what He said:

“I have to go away, but I’m sending the Holy Spirit. Don’t worry! He is good for you. If I don’t go, The Advocate won’t be able to come to you. And when he comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own, he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify Me, because it is from Me that he will receive what he will make known to you.”

JOHN 16:7-14, *paraphrased*

In this passage, Jesus is passing the baton to the Holy Spirit. One of His last instructions before He ascended to heaven is found in Luke 24:49:

“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

He said this after His resurrection. To be clear, His disciples believed in Him as Messiah by this point, yet Jesus knew it was important to give them clear directions, so that they didn’t run off and try to save the world in their own strength. If that would have happened, we would have seen all sorts of chaos in the book of Acts.

So, why was it so important to Jesus that they wait? Because He sent the Holy Spirit to equip the believers with power and authority to be effective in fulfilling the Great Commission, to be supernaturally empowered to build the Kingdom of God on this earth. Jesus then delivered on His promise in John 20:22 when He walked through a wall and breathed on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (Are you surprised that Jesus breathed on them?)

Soon after that, Jesus promises in Acts 1:5 to these same apostles that they will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Let’s be clear! He had already breathed on them, and now He’s promising to them a second, separate encounter: “...in a few days you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5b). He then made the promise more clear in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” He gives them a reason to wait. This wasn’t about salvation, but a supernatural boldness that we could never have in our own strength.

Then He ascends. He leaves town. He leaves the earth. And the disciples are left for the rest of that chapter fumbling around, wondering what to do next.

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost in Acts 2, the power displayed in the moment created quite a stir! On that day, the Holy Spirit descended with loud sound and fire, God wrote His law on believers' hearts, and 3,000 people were saved. From that point forward, we then see the apostles preaching boldly! All the disciples who were in hiding before are now empowered, preaching and baptizing people everywhere. Jesus wanted His disciples to wait, because He knew that in order for them to succeed, they would need something supernatural, something beyond their understanding to empower them. And we need this same power from the Holy Spirit on us to pull off this same commission.

The problem with a lot of teaching on the Holy Spirit is that it has—more often than not—come across as, “I’ve got something you don’t have.” The root of that attitude is pride. When you get more of God in your life, and then you respond to others in pride, you don’t have more of God in your life! (Pride has done a great job of bringing disunity to the Body of Christ). Instead, when you get more of God in your life, the opposite happens. You are empowered to pray more, to serve more, to humble yourself more, to love more sacrificially. You can say it this way: Being filled with the Holy Spirit does not make me better than you; it makes me better than me.

HOW CAN I MAKE WISE CHOICES? | DAY FIVE

The Quintessential Gentleman

The Holy Spirit is always willing and able to fill us, help us, and empower us, but as we mentioned before, He is also the quintessential gentleman. In order to receive all the goodness He has for us, we must first yield to Him. Everything we have said about the Holy Spirit begins with yielding to him, but what does it mean to yield to God? To yield to God—to yield control to him—can be compared to respecting the yield sign on a highway.

Assume that you are going in a certain direction and you reach a place in the road where it would be beneficial to yield right-of-way to a semi-truck, rather than smashing into it. You move aside and let the truck continue first, avoiding a most certain disaster. Only remember, the Holy Spirit is not like the semi-truck but is the quintessential gentleman who also yields to your decision. If you choose to yield to him, He will kindly take control and lead you well. If you do not yield to him, He will choose to yield right-of-way to you, allowing you the opportunity to retain control and continue driving in whatever direction you have chosen. Of course, there is a downside to maintaining control. You can choose your way for God for you, or you can yield to God's way for you. Generally, choosing your own way for yourself tends to be a waste of time.

In Romans 6:13, the NIV translators used the word “offer” to help us understand the action the Lord desires that we take in reference to him:

Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.


ROMANS 6:13

Other translations have used the word “present” or “yield.” The Greek word behind all of this is the verb *paristemi*, which literally means to “stand by.” In context, the action we are taking in reference to God is to stand by—or move aside—and allow the presence of God to be in control of our lives, our situation. It's kind of like the song, “Jesus, Take the Wheel,” from a few years back. Not to be cliché, of course, but it does demonstrate the truth in this verse.

Generally speaking, do you tend to daily yield control to the Holy Spirit?

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there is an area of your life where you may have resisted releasing control to Him.





*The most powerful tool
you have, outside of the
Bible, is your own story.*



SESSION FOUR

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Big Idea

The Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13 walks us through how to pray. The Lord's Prayer is not the only way to pray, but it does provide a guideline for how we can pray effectively. Many of us have repeated the Lord's Prayer by memory, or read it word for word as a more general prayer, but it is also very valuable as an outline for our prayer life. The Lord's Prayer is simple, beautiful, and powerful. If we draw out the principles in His prayer, we can use them to help us develop our own prayer life.

This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

MATTHEW 6:9–13

Teaching Notes

Discussion

- Does prayer tend to be your first response or your last resort? Why do you think that is?
- After hearing this session's teachings, what do you think your prayer time should look like?
- What are some potential distractions that get in the way of spending time in prayer?
- God responds to the prayers of His people, and His answers sometimes surprise us. Share a time God answered your prayer.

Prayer Focus

Ask God to help you fully surrender anything that you need to release to Him. Pray for a healthy, vibrant, daily prayer life.

Next Steps

Plan your prayer time by establishing a time and place that you can see yourself engaging in prayer daily.

Resources

FOUNDATIONS Session 4 Supplemental Videos • newlifechurch.tv/foundations

Psalm 40

bit.ly/Psalm40

Worship Thankfulness & Prayer

bit.ly/Worship_Thankfulness_Prayer

Following Jesus

bit.ly/I_Am_Following_Jesus

Ask God

bit.ly/Ask_God

PRAYER Series • How to Pray • newlifechurch.tv/watch-read/category/prayer-message

WHAT IS PRAYER? | DAY ONE

Where is This Coming From?

Part of prayer is the practice of being in a continual dialogue with God. Some will say it's easy to talk to God, yet more difficult to hear from Him or discern if what you're hearing is from Him or from somewhere else.

So how do you know if what you're hearing is from God or somewhere else? We'll spend some time over the next few weeks covering a few key ideas about discerning the voice of God in your life, but right now we're going to look at an interesting story in the Old Testament.

In 1 Kings 19, the prophet Elijah ran for his life from wicked Queen Jezebel. It's easy to understand why he would be afraid! You would be, too, if an evil queen was screaming, "Off with your head!" In short, Elijah had just proven to Israel that God is mightier than Jezebel's false prophets. Elijah was simply obeying God and was now suffering the consequence of his obedience. Sometimes the world won't want to be friends with you—even when you have the best of intentions—if you choose rightly to obey God. So Elijah ran 40 days until he reached Mt. Horeb, where he desperately prayed and waited to hear from God. First Kings 19:11–13 says this:

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ... "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah didn't hear God in the earthquake, the wind, or the fire. He heard God's voice in a gentle whisper. God doesn't physically shake us to get our attention, blow us over with His power, or burn us up in the heat of the moment. No, He waits until we quiet our hearts before Him, shutting out the noise and the clutter of life. He waits until we set everything in life aside, so we can spend a quiet moment with Him. His voice comes like a gentle whisper. You just have to be quiet enough to hear it.

We'll continue to dive into God's character throughout this series, but for now take a moment to pray through the following verse, and if you need Him to demonstrate His safety and protection to you today, tell Him! And take time to listen for His response.

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

PSALM 18:2

WHAT IS PRAYER? | DAY TWO

Cut Out Competing Voices

Often we can't hear or see God's design clearly because there are too many voices competing for our attention. It's not because he's not speaking. It's that we can't hear because of the voices all around us. These other voices may be hobbies, finances, our kids, our marriage, our job, or just plain old boredom. The voice of God is not loud. In fact, God's plans are often revealed in a still, small voice, not even as loud as a whisper.

The voice of God is not loud.

Sometimes in order to hear God, it's a matter of timing. Pastor Rick tells this story of years ago when he was able to speak at LSU's chapel the day before a game:

I walked out on the field before anyone was on it. No one was in the stadium. It had room enough for 95,000 to sit there, but it was just me. I was looking around, waiting for my chaplain friend, Ken, to meet me. Two guys came out on the opposite side of the stadium and were talking about whether the grass on the field was ready for the game. I was far away from them but could hear everything they were saying. I wondered if it was due to the acoustics there. The next day, the stadium was packed with 95,000 people, screaming loudly. My friend tried to tell me something during an intense part of the game, and I couldn't hear it. Why? Too many voices. (*Be Real*, pp. 130–131).

So how do you eliminate distracting voices? One suggestion is to consistently open up God's Word in the morning. If you want wisdom, read Proverbs. For more of a heart after him, read the book of Psalms. If you don't know how to study the Word, meet with someone who does. Get involved with a small group that teaches the Word of God. If you don't buy into fasting from food, at least fast from media every now and then. Turn off the computer and TV, pull away from social media, and take a break from reading blogs, magazines, and newspapers. Get alone with God somewhere for a couple of days. One directional idea from Him can totally destroy what the devil has built for years in your life. We can't hear God's voice when we allow distractions. We *can* hear His voice, but only if we're tuned in.

WHAT IS PRAYER? | DAY THREE

Discerning God's Voice

God speaks to us all the time, but we often don't hear what He is saying. Maybe we're afraid of what He might say because we've been told that we should be afraid of Him, that He is mad at us. Or maybe we just don't want to listen to Him, because we think we know what's best without His input. Both of these issues cloud our understanding of what God's voice sounds like.

Have you ever been to a coffee shop to meet a friend, but before they arrived, you heard a new band playing that you really liked? How did you find out more about that band? Maybe you used your favorite app to identify the band or genre, and within minutes you had them on your favorite playlist. If you were really interested in them, maybe you even Googled the band to learn a little more about the musicians. And the more you tune into the sound of your favorite band, the more you discern what you like about the genre that particular band fits into. Then you find similar bands, and before you know it, you've got dozens of new songs to listen to. All because you tuned your ear to something you liked in the coffee shop that day.

Sometimes we struggle to hear what God has to say because we haven't trained our ears to tune in. Tuning the ears of your heart to discern God's voice can be likened to the song discovery process. There are many Bible verses that help us discern God's voice, and the foundation of understanding God's character and nature, and therefore His voice, can be found in Scripture—the Word of God—the Bible. Check this out:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

The word “God-breathed,” comes from the Greek word *theopneustos*, which quite literally means “God's breath.” If you are ever unclear whether what you are sensing is the voice of God whispering into your life, stop and ask the question, “Is what I'm hearing consistent with Scripture?” And the more you know the Word of God, the more easily you will be able to discern the whisper. For example, Galatians 5:22–23 (ESV) says:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

If the voice that gently whispers to you is consistent with the fruit of the Spirit, what you're hearing is from God! And if it causes you to love others well, creates more joy in your life, and encourages you to be kind towards others, it is consistent with God's character! Simply put, the voice of God will never contradict the Word of God or the character and nature of God as He has revealed Himself in His Word.

WHAT IS PRAYER? | DAY FOUR

Am I Ready for This?

So, when you do get quiet before God and you start practicing listening to Him and getting in His Word, what are some things to talk to Him about? In truth? Anything! God wants to hear your heart. He wants to hear from you, and the best place to start is right where you are!

Whether you're in a noisy coffee shop or a quiet room, invite God to join you in that space. If there are people around, maybe ask Him to give you His eyes to see others the way He does, giving you His perspective. If you're all alone, no holds barred! You can sing to Him, read His Word, talk to Him out loud or in a quiet whisper. You be you. The good news is that nothing about you will surprise God, because He made you that way. He likes everything He made and calls it "good," and that includes you!

If it will help, listed below are a few conversation starters for your time with God:

God, I've been thinking about...

Jesus, I'm struggling with...

Father, I've been meaning to ask You...

Holy Spirit, I want to know....

Jesus, I've been mad at...

God, I choose today to forgive (name) for (why)...


God, I'm sorry for...

Save some time to listen. Remember, conversations are two-way, and your prayer time is a conversation with God. Write down what you think or feel you may be receiving, and share it with someone you trust. Compare what you've written down with Scripture. God will never contradict His character and nature as He has revealed himself to us in His Word. Similar to Galatians 5:22-23 that we talked about yesterday, Philippians 4:8-9 is also a good passage to consider as you grow in discerning God's voice in your life.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

If what you wrote down is consistent with the character and nature of God as He has revealed himself through Scripture, then what you are hearing is from Him! For example, if it causes you to love more, be content, treat others with honor and respect, then what you're hearing is from God. His Word is alive and active and always brings us closer to Him when it is activated in our lives.





*We refocus each day on
where we are going,
not where we are.*

PART TWO

What we need to do

*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper
than any double-edged sword,
it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit,
joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts
and attitudes of the heart.*
HEBREWS 4:12



SESSION FIVE

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

Big Idea

The Bible is God's Word. It's His voice, constant and unchanging, speaking to a world that is always moving fast. Sometimes, it may seem impossible in the midst of your busy schedule to make time for God. Here's the good news: holding onto God's Word is not as hard as you think. Give Him the first 15 minutes of your day by spending five minutes in the Bible, five minutes in worship, and five minutes in prayer, starting with the ABC's:

A—Ask Questions

Is there a command to obey?
Is there a promise to claim?
Is there a sin to avoid?
Is there an application to make?
Is there something new about God?

B—Best Verse

Write down the verse that stands out to you and why.

C—Communicate with God

Pray, "God, Though my day is packed, I need time with You. I'm asking You for help, because I want to understand what this says. Please show up, because I don't want to go through today by myself.

End your quiet time by praying Scripture over your life. If you take these simple steps, God will honor your commitment, and the Word will put down roots in your heart. Make this time the foundation of your day and watch how quickly God uses it to transform your daily life.

Discussion

- What is the Bible to you? Has this session's teaching changed the way you view the Bible? If so, how?
- How could giving God the first of each day by starting every morning with five minutes in the Word, five minutes in worship, and five minutes in prayer make a difference in the rest of your day?
- Have you seen your decisions and actions change by holding onto God's Word? How?
- Share your experience with reading the Bible. What has worked well for you? What has not worked well for you?

Prayer Focus

This week, focus on praying that the Word of God would draw you into a more vibrant relationship with the Father.

Next Steps

- Make a commitment to set the foundation of your life in God's Word. Find and use a study Bible in a translation that helps you understand the Word better.
- Dedicate the first part of your day to Him by taking the ABC approach.
- Decide ahead of time that you will attend church each week so that you can hear the Word preached regularly.

Resources

FOUNDATIONS Session 5 Supplemental Videos • newlifechurch.tv/foundations

The Word	bit.ly/The_Word_Real_Change
Understanding Scripture	bit.ly/Understanding_Scripture
Joy In The Word	bit.ly/Joy_In_The_Word
The ABC's of Quiet Time	bit.ly/How_to_Finally_Win

BIBLE Series • How to Stop Drifting • newlifechurch.tv/watch-read/category/scripture

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE | DAY ONE

The Word Became Flesh

Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.

JOSHUA 1:8, NLT

Imagine if someone offered you a special gift that would guarantee you direction, prosperity, and success. A gift that would give you the ability to rise above any circumstance and stand against any enemy. A gift that would keep you from sin, destruction, and despair. Wouldn't you be eager to receive this gift? Well, you can! Through the gift of God's Word, we have access to all of that power. When we read His Word and apply it to our lives, we will see Him fulfill the promises contained in its pages. When we regularly meditate on God's Word, our old way of thinking begins to be replaced with God's way of thinking. When we choose to grant Him permission to change us from the inside out, over time our thoughts become His thoughts, and our ways become His ways.

Before reading John 1:1–5 a few times, pray and ask God to show you something you may or may not have noticed before. Then write down your observations here.

In verse 14 of this same chapter, Scripture says this: “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

It is clear from this passage that Jesus, the “Word became flesh,” was present at the world's beginning, and He is the Word. In Jesus, the Word was manifested in human form, and through the Word, we have Jesus manifested on written pages. So, the more of the Word that is in you, the more you know the Word—Jesus. And the more you know the Word, the more you understand the character of the Author of that Word—also Jesus.

So the Word of God in you plus the living, breathing presence of God in you equals the power to overcome everything the world is throwing at you. If Jesus appeared to you in the flesh right now and someone around you was sick or depressed, you probably wouldn't have any trouble believing that Jesus could heal them and set them free. And yet, the same power that is in Jesus is in the Word. The Word of God is powerful! When we receive that truth, the Word works with power in our lives.

On the other hand, if at some point we think the Word has lost its power, it's not because the Word has changed. It's because we've stopped inviting the presence of God to speak to us through the Word. If you want to fall in love with Jesus, then seek Him in the Word and make consuming the Word a priority in your daily life. And as you consume the Word, you give the Holy Spirit room to breathe life into your soul and change you from the inside out.

Write John 6:63

In this verse we find the word *pneuma* again—"the presence or breath of God." The Bible is not just a collection of words in a book that you can study to improve your life; instead, it is a powerful body of truth—the very breath of God—that has the ability to bring about its own fulfillment.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE | DAY TWO

Spirit and Life

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

ISAIAH 55:10-11

The Word is literally Spirit and life. If you try to understand the Bible with only your mind, it will be dry and without power. Studying the Word is important, but if we don't include the Spirit of God in the process, the words we read will be just words on a page. If your experience with the Bible has been unexciting up to now, rest assured you are not alone. Like trying to read without the correct glasses, many of us try to read the Bible without the one thing that will help us see. We need the Spirit of God for the Word to come alive! Take a moment to invite the Spirit of God to bring understanding to your heart as you read the following.

But I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish. And they prove that he sent me. And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself. You have never heard his voice or seen him face to face, and you do not have his message in your hearts, because you do not believe me—the one he sent to you. You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!

JOHN 5:36-39, NLT

The Pharisees often questioned the legitimacy of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. The Pharisees were religious scholars who knew the Scriptures better than anyone at that time. They could even recite the first five books of the Old Testament from memory!

But in this passage, Jesus points out that there is more to knowing God than intellectually knowing the Scriptures. He confronts the Pharisees with, "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!" (see John 5:39). You are missing the big picture if you're only reading the Word to get a thought for the day. The Bible can come alive, introduce you to the true character of Jesus, and genuinely change your life.

Ask Yourself: How do I generally approach reading the Bible—out of duty or out of desire to know God? Describe what makes you think that. As you journal, invite the Holy Spirit to help you every time to understand what you read, because He is the One who leads us into all truth.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE | DAY THREE

How to Activate God's Word in Your Life

1. Make God's Word a priority.

I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.

EXODUS 16:4

The daily manna was their quota. Enough for that day. And just as God provided daily manna for the Israelites, we need to let the Word feed our spirits every day. We will always make time for the things that are important to us. Just as our bodies need food for fuel, our spirits need the Word. As you spend time reading your Bible each day, it will bring you life.

Physically you can't survive on one meal a week, and the Word of God is the same way. You need to eat it every day. Jesus even taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." He's talking about physical provision, yes, but also spiritual nourishment. Right now, whatever your season of life, however old you are, make a commitment to get in the Word every day. God gives us from the Bible each day what we need for that day. But we have to be willing to receive what He has for us. We have to be willing to give Him some time and read His Scriptures, even if it's only a few minutes every day.

Christians who aren't in the Word of God every day become emotionally driven, led by their feelings. They become like a person on a sailboat. Wherever the wind blows, that's where they're headed. On the other hand, a person who is led by faith, who stays in the Word, is like a person on a steamboat. Wherever the captain says we're going, that's where we're going.

2. Believe what you read.

Choose to believe that the Word is true! God says that it is impossible to please Him without faith. When you put your trust in God's Word, you will see your faith and confidence grow as you read it!

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word about Christ.

ROMANS 10:17

3. Meditate on Scripture.

Don't just do a daily reading and put the Word away. Instead, spend some time thinking about it. Psalm 1:2 says, "the righteous man delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night." In other words, it is a good idea to get the nutrients out of it and swallow it—then, recall it again and chew on it some more. Chew on it all day long, and you'll be mindful of it and able to do what it says. Consistently recalling truth to mind paves the way for *rhema* or revelation to take place and puts faith into motion.

We'll explain next time what "rhema" means, but for now, pick a verse or two from Scripture—you choose!—write it down, and think about it throughout the day. Write down anything that comes to mind that you think or feel is relevant for your life in this moment. If you don't know where to start, try one of these!

Psalm 27:1

Philippians 4:19

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE | DAY FOUR

The Revealed Word

One of the most incredible stories of the Bible is the account of young Mary and her visit with the angel Gabriel, who told her she was about to become the mother of the Savior of the world. You can find the details in Luke 1:26–38.

Mary’s initial response to the angel was to question how she could bear a child as a virgin. In verse 37, Gabriel said, “Nothing is impossible with God.” The word “nothing” in Greek is two words: “no *rhema*.” *Rhema* is the Greek word for “word,” and it means “revealed word.” So, in essence it says, “no revealed Word of God is without the power to accomplish it.” Think about that.

God has given us the written Word of God to consume—a gift that is up to us to open. The written Word becomes the revealed Word when we “meditate on it day and night” (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2). To meditate on something essentially means to get deep into it, to chew the cud, to mull over it awhile. While you are thinking about what a passage means, it is also a great opportunity to be in conversation with God about that passage. When you pray, “God, show me what I might be missing while I read this passage,” you are humbly approaching our gentle and patient Father, asking Him to show you things. He will gladly do it.

Jesus promised to actively communicate with us through Scripture:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

JOHN 16:13

The apostle Paul prayed a similar thing:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

EPHESIANS 1:17

Whether it’s a verse that you have been familiar with for a long time or one you just stumbled upon yesterday, you can receive a revelation from the Lord that will change your life forever. Then, when you go back to that passage later, you no longer view it the way you did before. More importantly, you remember how it has changed you. You may have experienced the *rhema* Word of God while listening to a sermon: It seemed like the words leapt from the speaker’s mouth and landed right in your heart.

You may have also experienced rhema while reading your Bible: The words jumped off the page and spoke directly to the battle you were facing. That's the Word at work! When it becomes revelation to you, no word God speaks will be void of the power for its fulfillment. Look at Mary's response to the angel's news in Luke 1:38: "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Again the word "word" in this passage is the word *rhema*.

When the Word became revelation to Mary, she believed. She had settled in her heart ahead of time that anything God would speak to her would be true. So when the rhema Word came from Gabriel, she was prepared to obey. Pastor Rick reminds us of the importance of this:

Pray for it. Pray for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Ask God to guide you through His Holy Spirit. Ask Him to speak to you through His Word and to open your eyes as you go through your day. If you pray this consistently, you can expect to grow in discernment. (*Real Love*, p. 62.)

- Can you remember a time when you experienced the rhema Word of God, when a passage of Scripture just came alive for you, or made sense in a whole new way?
- Have you settled in your heart that once you hear God speak, you will obey?







SESSION SIX

THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

Big Idea

Choosing our relationships carefully is vital to staying healthy. God calls us to nurture and initiate meaningful relationships, to stay away from harmful relationships, and to restore broken ones. Developing strong relationships takes work, but we can do it. Be intentional with the people in your sphere of influence. Take the time to cultivate Godly relationships with your church family, friends, and coworkers. Growing the right relationships is important because “we” is always better than “me.”

A mirror reflects a man's face, but what he is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses.

PROVERBS 27:19 TLB

Discussion

- Talk about a time when you walked through a difficult season on your own. How do you believe the support of a life group would have impacted the way you experienced that season?
- Who do you turn to for advice? How healthy and helpful have those relationships been so far?
- Can you think of any relationships in your life that feel negative, draining, or unhealthy? What are ways you could start to make a change in those relationships?
- What new relationships do you need to start? How can current relationships be stronger?

Prayer Focus

Pray to have healthy relationships. Ask God to help restore any relationships that have been broken, and for the strength and wisdom to sever harmful ones.

Next Steps

- Ask God to show you any relationships in your life that need to be restored. Take a small step towards reconciliation. Starting may be as simple as making a phone call.
- Ask the other members of your group how you can pray for them. Write down their prayer requests and pray for them throughout the week. You might even text them with an encouraging word sometime during the week.

Resources

FOUNDATIONS Session 6 Supplemental Videos • newlifechurch.tv/foundations
A Guide to Thriving Friendships • bit.ly/A_Guide_to_Thriving_Friendships

PARABLES • The Father's Love Is Amazing • newlifechurch.tv/watch-read/category/family

FAMILY • The Secret of Marriage • newlifechurch.tv/watch-read/category/family

FAMILY • Ingredients for the Parent • newlifechurch.tv/watch-read/category/family

FAMILY • Home Field Advantage • newlifechurch.tv/watch-read/category/family

CHURCH FAMILY • Building Healthy Families • newlifechurch.tv/watch-read/category/family

THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS | DAY ONE

Don't Go Living in Bayou Self

Pastor Rick often mentions a fictitious place called “Bayou Self,” the worst place to live! When nobody’s around, you can start thinking and acting differently, and when you spend too much time in Bayou Self, it’ll drive you a little crazy! Genesis chapter 32 tells the story of how God met Jacob at Peniel and wrestled with him there. Jacob never let go of God that night. As a result, God blessed him, changed his name and even changed the way he walked. Transformation in our lives begins when we focus on the simple but challenging process of coming out of isolation and being real with God and others.

Has there ever been a season when you felt isolated or lonely? Have you ever felt rejected, embarrassed, or worse, humiliated? Do you ever worry more about what others think about you than what God thinks? Well guess what? You may not believe this, but you are not alone! If they’re honest most people feel alone in their hurts and challenges. But when you start doing life in community with others, it really is refreshing to realize that the things that challenge you are things that challenge others. But you’ll never know that if you keep it all trapped inside.

There is a woman mentioned John 4 who had been doing life alone for a long time. Her name was “The Woman at the Well.” It’s interesting that the world knows her story—that she had five husbands and the one she was currently with when she met Jesus wasn’t even her husband—but the world doesn’t know her name. Perhaps God was protecting her from public humiliation, even thousands of years later. It’s a thought anyway.

Though we don’t know her name, we do know she was thirsty the day Jesus met her. He went out of His way to go to this town. He would have gone anywhere to meet her, just as He will go anywhere to meet you. So He asked her like He knew her, “Hey, friend! Get me something to drink!” Like when your friends come over and they just open the fridge and you don’t care. This was how He treated her—like a friend. Why? Because He knew her well. He created her! She just didn’t know it yet.

She didn’t let her guard down, though, because she didn’t know if she should trust Him. It takes awhile sometimes to know whether a situation, a place, or a relationship is safe. We get that too. It’s why we tell people all the time to take as much time as you like to check a place out, then dive in when you’re ready. Look at what Pastor Rick has to say about this story:

So she listened, probably with a bit of skepticism. She wasn’t closed off and wrapped up in herself, but she was reluctant. She wasn’t ready to put her guard down completely, because she didn’t really know who she was dealing with, but she could tell she

was dealing with someone very different from the norm. So she responded, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (John 4:9).

You don’t really let down your guard with God until you realize that the God who loves you really does love you! And the love He has for you is not what you might think. It doesn’t have strings attached to it. The Bible tells us, “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

In Him there’s a perfect balance of grace and truth. He speaks the truth and He demonstrates grace at the same time. In fact, though grace and truth are both listed together, I find it interesting that the Word places grace first. Notice the order! The truth is there, but it’s wrapped in grace. He convicts, not condemns. (*Be Real*, pp. 63-64).

It is our hope and dream that you grow deeper in your relationship with God and stronger in your relationships with others. If you’re curious what we’re about at New Life Church, it is just that! We have no agenda other than that, and we’re honored to join you in this journey called life.



THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS | DAY TWO

The conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well continued. She was astonished that He spoke to her, even asked her for a drink of water, because they were two different people from two different cultures that historically had a lot of bad blood between them. There seems to be a lot of that going around these days as well, so we can also probably relate. So she gave Him a drink, and He starts talking some crazy talk about how He's got some water that she could drink and never be thirsty again.

We really don't think too much about thirst these days, because if we need a drink of water, we just go to the faucet or the fridge and pour a glass. But they didn't have indoor plumbing back then. If you wanted a drink of water, you had to trek down the street to the local well, lower a bucket, pull it up with your bare hands, maybe filter it (if you cared), and then you could pour a glass. So the thought of never having to do that again was intriguing to her! Plus, she apparently didn't have the finest reputation in town, so this would cut out the high noon walk of shame that she was subjected to every day. So she asked Him to give her some of that!

And she let her guard down—maybe it was because Jesus was ridiculously consistent about the way He honored her. Then He requested something seemingly innocent: “Go, call your husband and come back.” She gave Him the side eye, “I'm not married.” She played it safe. She didn't lie, but she didn't tell the truth either. People do this all the time. You feel good, sort of, but it's because you've learned to compartmentalize. You put that thing back there in your mind, because it's just too painful to deal with. You only tell people what you have to in order to get by. It is common to isolate what's hurting on the inside from what you project on the outside.

So what did He say? With compassion and total acceptance, He responded, “I know. You've had five of those, you gave up, and now you're just living with another guy.” It dawned on her that the Man she was talking to wasn't just any man, but God Himself! What other complete stranger would know absolutely everything about her?

She realized that this “living water” thing had nothing to do with physical thirst but was some unique combination of real truth wrapped in never-ending grace. She'd never experienced that before and ran back to the village to tell anybody she could find about who she met at the well. And just like her, Jesus never brings up anything in your life to leave you there to die. He only brings it up so you can get free from it. Saved from it. Healed from it.

The reason many of us are not engaged relationally is that we don't want anybody to know what's really going on in our lives, whether it's a bad marriage, rebellious kids, messed-up finances, or a heavy secret. Maybe if we pretend it's not that bad, it'll feel better than it really is. It would be really cool to just know what others are thinking, but we can't. In order for us

to come close to knowing people the way Jesus did, we have to get connected in long-term relationships. We get real with them over time as the relationship is proven to be safe.

Remember, Jesus related to the woman at the well as her friend. He carefully coaxed her out of isolation. He didn't judge or condemn her. He just listened and understood and offered her a way out. And He wants us to do the same thing the Samaritan woman did that day: talk about it and share it with others.

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him. . . . Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."

JOHN 4:28-30, 39



THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS | DAY THREE

When Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman, He gently pulled the truth out of her in such a way that she was able to own it. She felt convicted by the truth, but definitely not condemned. It's encouraging to see the result of that conversation: she came out of isolation, got back into community, and the town was ultimately changed! It's so cool how God uses us to help each other! I love that when we get real with each other about what's going on inside, the Lord promises that we'll be healed. That's amazing! And part of the healing process is that guilt and shame, or humiliation and embarrassment, no longer have a hold on us. There's healing in that right there. God made all of us for community, so just as we need to be around others, they need us, too!

When we come out of isolation and share what we're struggling with or going through with someone else, we find that we are actually shedding His light on lies we've been believing about ourselves.—(*Be Real*, p. 73)

Think of the scene between Jesus and the woman at the well as a favorable moment—a moment when God makes the timing, the location, and the people all line up for something amazing to happen. Sometimes it looks like an unexpected encounter that's not on your calendar. Other times, a meeting or a phone call that was meant to be about a business transaction, or about what it would take to fix your car, moves into an encouraging conversation that leads one or both of you closer to God. It's easy to miss favorable moments because you have to be paying attention to the idea that God wants to use you to encourage others (and others to encourage you); however, He will never force it.

A healthy life group will work to create an environment of trust so people can talk about issues they're facing as they need to, when they're ready. This helps you get to a place where you can be real about where you really are, rather than where you're pretending to be or wish you were. We don't want to force anyone to bring up something they may not be ready to discuss yet. But it's definitely important to be able to walk together through challenges we face.

Scripture says that if you confess your sins to God, He'll forgive you (see 1 John 1:9). And that's beautiful. He forgives you of your sins! But hold on—it also says that if you confess your sins to somebody else, then you'll be healed (see James 5:16). Think about that! There is much more to living life than forgiveness. The importance of forgiveness here is not to be dismissed or overlooked. But we also don't have to live our lives knowing in our heads that we're forgiven but still feeling wounded in our hearts. We can be healed.

God never brings up anything in your life to leave you there to die. He only brings it up so you can get free from it.—(*Be Real*, p. 66)

Read John 4:39–41 and Acts 9:31. What seems to be the catalyst that started the church in Samaria? What was the result?

THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS | DAY FOUR

Right About Now

While Jesus was talking to the woman at the well, the disciples had gotten hungry, so they went into town to buy lunch. When they returned, they found Jesus talking to this woman, with townspeople starting to crowd around. But they didn't ask, "What's going on?" or "How can we help?" They asked, "What's to eat?" Yep, it was all about them. They had just eaten lunch, and they still asked for food! They were thinking, like we so often do, "It's all about my life, my schedule, and what's in it for me." We all have this gravitational pull to our own little worlds.

Jesus looked at them and said, "I have food to eat that you don't know about," but they still didn't get it! They responded, "Jesus ate already and didn't get us anything?" Jesus responded, "My food is to do the will of the Father. Look around and notice what's really going on. Can you see? Don't put this off until later—now is the time!"

JOHN 4:32–35, paraphrased

Jesus' urgent plea is also for us today: Don't say later. Now is the time to stop living in Bayou Self and instead get in community with others—real community, not just one-sentence status updates or discussing what's for lunch. Find out what's going on with your friends and tell them about what you're facing, before you get to a place where the Lord has to track you down at high noon in the heat of your life! Be honest with somebody. You don't have to keep making big mistakes.

Question! What does it look like when you believe that you're not loved or accepted? The Samaritan woman felt ashamed by her past and shunned by her community, most likely acting out of a belief that she was worthless. So she lived in seclusion, settling for less than God's best for her. In the same way, what beliefs about yourself tend to motivate your actions?

If Jesus were to meet you at the well at high noon, what would He want to talk to you about? We challenge you to go to Him about those things right now! Whatever it is, He won't let you down.



SESSION SEVEN

REACHING OTHERS

Big Idea

We were made to live in communion with God forever, yet some of us view God as living behind a locked gate where He can't be reached. Others think of getting to God like scaling an endless ladder, where we strain to climb and climb but never really reach the top. The truth is that God offers himself as a free gift to all through Jesus. God's word says He is near to us and not remote. All God asks from us is to believe in Jesus and live in light of that redemption.

When we receive Christ as our Lord and Savior, our adoption as sons and daughters of the King of kings gives us the right to live for eternity with God! We can be assured that our ultimate destination will be to spend eternity in the presence of God, but what do we do in the meantime while we wait? Why am I here? The Bible says we are here as Christ's ambassadors or representatives, that God's plan until Jesus returns is to reach and redeem the world through us.

With that in mind, how can we share this free gift with others? The most powerful tool you have, outside of the Bible, is your own story. People connect with stories. Honestly share how you came to know Jesus and invite them to experience the presence of God that heals and transforms broken lives.

So we are Christ's ambassadors: God is making his appeal through us.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20, NLT

Teaching Notes

Discussion

- Discuss what you heard in this session's message. Was it different than what you have learned before? How?
- What excites you the most about Heaven?
- What does being an ambassador for Christ mean to you?
- Talk about a time someone shared their faith with you. What can you learn from how they did it?

Prayer Focus

Seek God's will daily and look for opportunities to expand the Kingdom.

Next Steps

- Make a list of the people in your direct sphere of influence and begin intentionally showing them the love of God. Pay attention to them, hear their needs, and make yourself available to serve them in the areas where they need help.
- Invite someone you know to attend church with you next Sunday.

Resources

FOUNDATIONS Session 7 Supplemental Videos • newlifecyclechurch.tv/foundations

A Church that Pleases God

bit.ly/A_Church_That_Pleases_God

OUTREACH Series • newlifecyclechurch.tv/watch-read/category/outreach

MISSIONS Series • newlifecyclechurch.tv/watch-read/category/missions

REACHING OTHERS | DAY ONE

So far, we've talked about who God is, who we are, the importance of His presence in our daily lives, how to connect with God through prayer and getting in His Word, and ways we can connect with others. But where does this ultimately end up? Why were we made? In short, we are made by God for God! He loves to spend time with us, and ultimately that is where we will be—in His presence for eternity. The Bible tells us that Heaven is a real place where evil is absent and there is no more sorrow. And Heaven is a relational place. God created mankind to be His family, and in Heaven we will live in perfect relationship with God and one another.

So if spending eternity with God is the ultimate reality, why don't we just go straight there? Why are we even here? Why do we have to hang around here in a broken, cruel world that's just getting hotter every day? It is simply because God loves everybody and wants everybody to have what you have—a real relationship with Him.

We respond to this truth by refocusing each day on where we are going, not where we are. Then we reach people at any cost because we know that life is like a vapor, here today and gone tomorrow. Each day, in every interaction with another person, we recognize that we have an opportunity to impact their eternity through an introduction to Jesus, the One who saves.

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise."

[LUKE 23:42-43](#)

Do you know someone whose eternity is still on the line? Identify some ways that you can help them take a next step. Starting may be as simple as reaching out to them and building a closer relationship, sharing what God has done in your life, or inviting them to church. Don't be intimidated! You can start small and be amazed at what God does.

REACHING OTHERS | DAY TWO

Often our problem is not that we don't have any idea about who God made us to be. Our real problem is that we fight God's design for us. It's not a question of "What does God want for me?" but rather "What do I do with what God wants for me?" It's a battle of our wills. Pastor Rick tells a great story about a friend of his named "Big Mike."

...This dude weighed 300 pounds of solid muscle on a six-five frame. He was clearly very strong but seemed very humble about it. It was almost like he didn't even realize his own strength. One day a group of us went to an arcade that had a punching bag where you could earn a strength score from 0–1,000. I turned to Big Mike and said, "Watch this! I'm going to show you what life is all about!" I hit that thing and scored 400 points—just a little lower than my SAT score. I then challenged Big Mike: "Come on! I want to see what you can do!" But he wouldn't do it.

Later that day, as we were walking out, I talked Big Mike into it, and something came over him. He zoned in with a purpose, reared back, then hit it square, right in the middle. The machine totally powered down! No joke, he knocked that machine out! And Mike just stood there looking at his hands. Big Mike resisted my suggestion in the beginning, but when he finally tried it, his own strength amazed him. I believe he walked a little taller when we left that place, and he was already fairly tall. (*Be Real*, p. 126).

It is common to not recognize our own abilities, or embrace what God has given us. A lot of times, what we think is self-doubt or lack of confidence is really an inability to understand or embrace the way God made us. It's not bad to have goals and objectives in life; in fact, you won't get much accomplished if you don't! But the question here is really this: Have you taken the time to put your plans for your life in front of God and simply and honestly ask Him if your plans for you line up with His plans for you? Romans 12:1-2 says this:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Late in his life, after spending 40 years in Pharaoh's house and 40 years wandering around the desert as a shepherd, Moses was asked by God to return to Pharaoh and demand that God set the Israelites free from slavery. In response, Moses got to a place where he willingly and boldly approached God with this: "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here" (Exodus 33:15). Moses was not willing to take one step on his own if God was not leading him. He had already spent 80 years doing his own thing and sometimes messing things up. He was finally strong about staying in the center of God's purpose and plan for his life.

We can do a lot of good and pleasing things in life, but what we're challenging you with today is to go deeper in your relationship with God by submitting your plans to Him. It's a question of control. Who's in control of your decisions? Do you let God take the lead? If He asks you to share something encouraging with the grocery store cashier or maybe even a coworker, are you willing to open your mouth and go for it?

Pray and ask God to begin giving you favorable moments.



REACHING OTHERS | DAY THREE

Have you ever noticed that there is no one exactly like you on the planet? Some of you have twin siblings, and a few of you may even have an identical twin, but even identical twins have some differences! No one is exactly like anyone else. So even after we've chosen to let God be the boss of our lives, there are still many unanswered questions, like, "Who should I marry?," "What am I good at?," or "What kind of job should I get?" We certainly can't answer all the questions that can be asked, but the most important point to always remember is that God has a plan for your life! Check this verse out:

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

PSALM 139:16

Sometimes we make big life decisions because of tough circumstances. Maybe a decision is made out of desperation to get as far away as possible from a bad situation. God can work with that, for sure! If that's you—if you've had to make a decision like that, maybe even for your own personal safety—don't feel bad or ashamed. God is not mad at you or ashamed of your circumstances.

Sometimes some of the decisions we make are simply because we're doing the best we know how at the time. Other times we make big life decisions because we are just being selfish. Sometimes we listen to the wrong people and make a big decision that has lasting consequences. Sometimes we can even listen to good people who have well-meaning intentions, but that doesn't necessarily mean that their intentions for you are also God's intentions for you. We can't cover God's specific purpose for you here, but you can start from a simple place: Start with where you are, get quiet before Him, and stay humble and teachable.

We mentioned earlier in this series that God's voice is not loud, not even as loud as a whisper. It takes discipline to eliminate distractions, and it takes patience to wait on God to speak to you. As Pastor Rick says, "One directional idea from God can destroy what the enemy has built for years. We can't hear God's voice when we allow distractions. We can hear His voice, but only if we're tuned in." (*Be Real*, p. 131).

Staying in God's Word also helps ensure that you're tuning into God's direction and purpose for your life. And if studying God's Word intimidates you, then meet with someone who knows how. Get plugged into a life group (like this one!) where someone is teaching the Word of God. Be willing to admit that you don't always know what's best. When you take this approach, you may notice someone who has already walked through whatever you're facing. When you stay teachable, you can learn a lot of wisdom from them. If the direction is still not clear, James 1:5 reminds us what to do: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault." God doesn't blame us or heap condemnation on us when we approach Him needing wisdom for the next step. That same verse promises His generosity to all who ask Him. That's very comforting when times are tough.

REACHING OTHERS | DAY FOUR

God wants and needs everybody in the Body of Christ to be who He made them to be. Every 1000-piece puzzle has 1000 unique pieces. If you have 1000 puzzle pieces that were all the same, it wouldn't make a puzzle. It would be 1000 meaningless pieces that don't fit together. There are many types of people in the Body of Christ. Some have a passion for keeping things neat and clean. Others care deeply about visiting others in the hospital. Some love serving up a good meal; others love eating it! The Bible says,

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7

Don't be mistaken! You are a unique individual with a specific personality and a specific set of skills. Resist the temptation to compare yourself to others, not just in what they do, but also in the timing of the fulfillment of God's plans for you. Some people marry early, some later in life, and some not at all. Moses got married later than most, and he didn't start leading the nation of Israel out of slavery until he was 80! So don't compare yourself to others; it'll just hinder your ability to do what you're called to do. It'll slow you down. It'll mess you up. It may even derail you. God didn't call Moses to give birth to baby Jesus. He called Moses to be an old man leading a bunch of slaves across a desert.

Lastly, how you do is just as important as what you do. We can even take this a step further: How you do what you do is almost *more* important than what you do. Jesus was a carpenter. Was that His calling in life, to be a carpenter? Was building a house or furniture the most important thing He ever did? Of course not! Yet there was a season in His life that being a carpenter was important.

The Word of God says that Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing (see John 5:19), and He only said what He heard the Father saying (see John 12:49). He lived His life in complete obedience to His Father, so if He was a carpenter, it was because His Father (His Father God, not His mother's husband) told Him to be a carpenter for a season. Maybe He had some things to learn while in that season.

The Word does say that "Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). We don't know what things He suffered; maybe He wasn't particularly fond of construction as a career. There is no way of knowing, and it doesn't really matter. But we are confident in knowing that He was content in that season of strengthening His character.

For now, we'll leave you with this thought from Pastor Rick:

When you embrace *who* God made you to be and what His plans are for you, when you are able to open your hand to Him and say, "Not my will but Your will be done," you'll discover a whole new level of peace and contentment. (*Be Real*, p. 139).





SESSION EIGHT

WHY AM I HERE?

Big Idea

God has blessed us with more than we need so that we can be a blessing to others, and we all have an innate, God-given desire to make a difference. When we know Jesus personally, He empowers us to serve His Kingdom in a way that can forever change the lives of others. We are all called to use everything God has given us to serve others and to share the love of Jesus. When we live like this, we get to contribute to the Kingdom of God in a way that continues to impact the world long after we go to Heaven.

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

ROMANS 14:10-12, NIV

Teaching Notes

Discussion

- What gifts, abilities, or resources has God given you to bless others with or to make an eternal difference in someone else's life? What is one thing you could do to bless someone this week?
- What do you believe is the greatest inheritance that you can leave for your children or the next generation? What one step can you take today to be more intentional about creating or sustaining that legacy?
- We are challenged in the Word to intentionally tithe, give, serve, and share Christ. Which one of these is easiest for you and why?
- Are there times when it's easier or more difficult to be generous, whether in regards to your time, your financial resources, or your abilities?

Prayer Focus

Pray for your eyes to be opened to the needs around you. Ask God to show you how to use your time, resources, and gifts to bless others.

Next Steps

- Ask God to speak to you clearly about how He is calling you to live generously.
- Think about random acts of kindness, outreach, mission trips, a giving plan at church, and other opportunities that can help you to demonstrate generosity in your daily life.
- Ask for wisdom managing your personal finances and pray that God would show you how to leverage your resources to expand His Kingdom.
- Decide as a group how you can help each other build a legacy. Create opportunities to bless others together and invite people to join you. Your faithfulness will make a difference in others' lives.

Resources

FOUNDATIONS Session 8 Supplemental Videos • newlifechurch.tv/foundations

Find Your Place at the Table Part 1: bit.ly/FindYourPlacePart1

Find Your Place at the Table Part 2: bit.ly/FindYourPlacePart2

PURPOSE Series • newlifechurch.tv/watch-read/category/purpose

WHY AM I HERE? | DAY ONE

It can be tempting to get a little introspective when thinking about how God designed me for my place and my ministry in this world. But the reality is that God created us with our unique skills and giftings to be a blessing to others, and we simply can't do that effectively if we're unable or unwilling to live in real community with others. We're designed to need friends and to be a friend to others. We can never get too far from that. Take a moment and just ask God to speak to you clearly about how He is calling you to live generously.

One of the values at New Life Church that helps create the kind of community God intends for us to have is the value of a soul. This means we cultivate a deep craving to reach the lost because Jesus had a craving to reach the lost.

Another value that is important in making the most of life is remaining both culturally relevant and doctrinally pure. What does that mean? Jesus said you must, from time to time, grab new wine skins. We all occasionally need new packaging. We never need to change the message—only the method. Jesus was very relevant about practical activity. In His day-to-day ministry, He met people where they were. In Luke 5 Jesus sat down in Peter's fishing boat, taught from there, and demonstrated His power over even the fish. Peter was so humbled and amazed in that moment that he immediately left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus strategically borrowed Peter's boat that day, using a tool that was familiar to Peter in order to plant an eternally significant message in his heart: Life isn't just about fishing for fish.

If Jesus was around today, He would be talking about Facebook, the Internet, divorce rates, and teen suicide. He would talk about career paths and how to be a man or woman of God. Jesus was at the forefront of culture then; and He would certainly be that way now. I believe that the Church—all of us, myself and you—are called to be culturally relevant. That means we have to be willing to change.

Stop for a second and think about ways that you believe the Lord wants you to be a “fisher of men.” Ask God often to give you His eyes to see your world and the people in your world the way He sees them. Invite Him to show you His perspective on your situation, your location, your family, even the neighborhood where you live. Whether you realize it or not, He has strategically placed you where you are in time and space to have significant impact there. But you'll miss it if you're focused on you.

WHY AM I HERE? | DAY TWO

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

ROMANS 13:14

Just as Jesus reminded the disciples when He was talking to the woman at the well, Paul reminds us to not be self-absorbed with wondering what's for dinner. The Greek word for "clothe" in this verse is *enduo*, which literally means to "sink into." Thinking in this way, Paul is challenging us to sink into a new identity—wearing "clothing" fitting for a son or daughter of a King.

But what does it look like to wear the royal clothing of the Kingdom of God? It doesn't mean dress up like a prince or princess all the time, though if that's what you want to do, be our guest! No, it means to sink into, to wear the character of Christ as often as you are able to, which is all the time. Remember this verse from Session Four:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control; against such things there is no law.

GALATIANS 5:22–23, ESV

When you wear the character of Christ, you begin thinking the way He thinks and subsequently responding the way He responds. For example, you may respond with more patience for others, not frustration, because love for them enables you to view them with compassion.

Think for a moment about how you think or feel about yourself as God's child. Do you feel like royalty? How does your view compare to who God says you are? When you begin realizing that you are a child of the highest royalty there is, it changes the way you view yourself, the way you walk and talk, even the way you carry yourself. You don't carry yourself with despair, because you know you're a child of royalty. You also don't carry yourself with snobby pride for the same reason. True royalty knows they are not better than others; they carry themselves in such a way that they make decisions that are good for others, not simply benefiting themselves.

Philippians 4:8-9 shows two key elements of building the character of royalty:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

These key elements are simply this: Think about them, and put them into practice. We covered a lot of ground so far, but it all ties together as we reach out and build relationships with others at various levels of closeness. As we become more secure and confident in who God uniquely made us to be, we strengthen the relationships we are building, even in the midst of conflict.

In your prayer time, ask the Lord to give you His eyes to see your crowd the way He sees them. Ask for a greater compassion for people right where they are. If you sometimes struggle with being annoyed or impatient in public, ask the Lord to begin to show you why you feel that way, and allow Him to change you to respond to others the way He responded through the example of His Son.

WHY AM I HERE? | DAY THREE

Pastor Rick has a lot to say about taking a big step when you start following God's plans for you. We are so thankful that he and Michelle took a big step when they moved to Arkansas! Check out what he says in *Be Real*:

God is not going to reveal everything about His plans to you immediately. In my experience, all you can do is say, "Okay, that looks really cool," and then go for it. When we take that first step, God takes the next.

Sometimes—maybe even most of the time—the first step feels like a really big step. Sometimes it has significant risk attached to it. Take the story of Esther, for instance. In Esther 1:13, King Xerxes, who was furious with his first wife for publicly disrespecting him, chose to "consult experts in matter of law and justice," and spoke with "the wise men who understood the times," before deciding how to respond to his wife, Queen Vashti. When he had received their advice, which was consistent with the laws and culture of that time, he wrote an irrevocable edict that she would be forever banished from his court and her position as queen would be given to somebody else.

Then we read about Esther, a beautiful young woman raised by her uncle Mordecai because her parents had died when she was young. She was entered in the first beauty pageant recorded in history, as far as we know, and she won, of course. She was on her way to becoming the next queen.

Meanwhile, King Xerxes's right-hand man, Haman, was getting ticked off at Esther's uncle for not bowing down to him, so he manipulated the king into issuing another irrevocable edict, this time to kill all the Jews. (Haman got mad at one guy and decided to wipe out an entire race. It's probably safe to say that Haman had a lot of pride in him!) Next we see a snapshot of the entire nation of Israel fasting, weeping, and mourning. Fair enough—I would be too if I knew that my entire family was about to be executed! So Mordecai sent a messenger to Esther to "instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people" (Esther 4:8).

Well, Esther already knew, based on what happened with the previous queen, that Xerxes was all about following the law to the letter. And one of the laws back then was, "You don't go to the king. Ever. If the king wants to see you, he summons you. Not the other way around, or you'll die." She was faced with a real decision: either go to the king and risk instant death, or wait it out and hope for the best. The only problem was, if she waited it out, it might possibly have turned out okay for her, but it certainly was not going to be good for every other Jew in the kingdom. So she sent a message back to Mordecai saying, "I will go" (Esther 4:16).

Those three words, “I will go,” represent bold decisiveness—what it took for her to step out in faith, not knowing what was going to happen, not knowing the end of the story, not even knowing if she was going to make it out alive. It took faith for Esther to boldly decide to get off the fence and take the risk to do what God was calling her to do. I love what Mordecai had said to her just before in verse 14: “And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

We see God’s people taking a step of faith time and time again throughout the stories of the Bible: Noah, Moses, Abraham, Joseph, Gideon, Ruth, and so many more. Even in the life of Jesus, it’s clear that He had to come to terms with what His Father called Him to do. Even when you can’t see what’s coming or it looks scary and impossible, take that first step of faith, trusting that God will use it, and you, for His purposes.

Once we accept how God made us and what he calls us to accomplish through His power, we find it’s pretty easy to be real. We can be genuinely excited about life because we don’t have to pretend to be anything but who we are. Once I realized that God really had a good idea for me—that God’s design for me was not to move to Florida and become a millionaire—I entered into a lifetime of contentment! (*Be Real*, pp. 137-139).

We encourage you to get alone with God and ask Him what He is leading you to do. What is your next step in light of what you have read?

WHY AM I HERE? | DAY FOUR

As you grow stronger in your identity as a child of God, it will change the way you view yourself and the way you view others. It will change the way you walk and talk, and it will change your responses. You may find yourself, like Jesus, moving slowly through the crowds, taking time to notice others and interact with them differently.


As children of God, we have full access to the Father and the privilege of going straight to Him to talk about anything! Now that's a confidence you can count on: being confident not in what you can accomplish on your own, but confident that God is with you all the time! When you start growing in confidence and courageously stepping out in faith, you may even start doing things that you're normally not comfortable with, stuff that maybe isn't even like you, but is like God.

The more you confidently follow Christ—wherever He takes you—the more you become like him, and the less you look like the person you've always known yourself to be. As you change on the inside, you will begin to think differently and live differently. You'll start making choices that are less about your plans and more about God's purpose. You'll start noticing the needs in your community and growing in confidence to do something about them. You'll change on the inside and it will change your approach to others, the way you respond to them, and the way you reach out to them!

As we grow in confidence in who God has made us to be, we begin thinking less about our own needs and more about how we can positively impact the culture and community around us with God's love. Spend some time praying over the next step that you should take. Submit those ideas to the Lord for His direction and clarity. Talk it over with your life group leader or a close confidant.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

MARK 10:45

A photograph of a woman with long, straight blonde hair, smiling broadly and looking towards the left. She is wearing a dark red top. In the foreground on the left, the back of another person's head and shoulder is visible, slightly out of focus. The background shows an indoor setting with a doorway and some blurred lights.

*We are all called to use
everything God has given
us to serve others and to
share the love of Jesus*

