

Love and Live...



Parables and Stories of the Bible



Riverside Church LIFEGROUPS

VOLUME 11

Fall 2015

The Coming Messiah

MAKING
DISCIPLES
WHO LOVE & LIVE
LIKE JESUS

Attend

Connect

Serve

Share

Lead

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CHRISTMAS BREAK

Over the holidays continue to tell more of your own stories until we begin our next season of stories in January...

THE LIFE OF JESUS

SMALL GROUP GROUND RULES

HOW WE LOVE EACH OTHER

These are guidelines more than rules.

CONFIDENTIALITY: What is shared in the group stays in the group. Unless given permission to share, keep what is shared confidential. This must be a safe environment where people can be real, open and honest with their struggles and their victories.

TRANSPARENCY: We encourage you to share from your heart—to let your walls down, so that others can really know you. It's difficult to love someone as God calls us to do without really knowing them in a deep and meaningful way.

NO CROSS-TALK: Be considerate of others as they are sharing; don't have side conversations. Please silence your phones and leave the room if you have to respond to an urgent call or text message.

NO CONVINCING: Share your opinions—a different opinion is welcome. However, please don't try to convince others to your way of thinking. Be aware of Riverside's core beliefs. If someone is trying to convince you, offer to discuss the issue further at a later time.

DON'T FIX: Let's try to hear what people are sharing without trying to fix them. If they want advice, they'll ask for it. If you have been through a similar circumstance, it's okay to let the person know and that you're available to talk more about it later if they're interested. Very rarely does a Christian cliché or quoted scripture help right in this moment. It's uncomfortable to see someone in pain or struggling, and if we're honest with ourselves, often we speak out primarily to ease our own discomfort. Let them NEED Jesus and ASK you for help when they're ready.

DON'T RESCUE: When someone is sharing something deeply personal and/or painful, a tension builds that may feel uncomfortable for you. There can be a tendency to try to make them feel better about themselves or the situation or relieve the tension with a smart remark or quick wit. Often this will cause people to stop sharing and results in their not going as deep as they might have gone. There is a let-down, like "the moment" has passed. Resist the temptation to pass them a tissue, touch them, or remark. This is hard, but it really is loving to give people the uninterrupted time to get it all out.

LISTEN: Let's value one another during the discussion by really listening to what is being shared. Nurture your sense of curiosity about someone else by focusing on the other person, rather than trying to figure out what you're going to say next or how you're going to respond. Be aware of how much you're talking—we want to give everyone a chance to share.

PAUSE: After someone shares, allow a pause in conversation to give the person sharing the chance to finish and the group the opportunity to consider what was just shared before responding.

SMALL GROUP GROUND RULES

SILENCE: It is important to allow silence in the group; it provides an opportunity for someone to share and for members in the group to process the topic or question being considered.

USE “I” STATEMENTS: It’s easy to talk about the issues of others, but for our purposes, we want you to put yourself on the table. Self-reflect. This is one time that it is kind of all about you. Try to use “I” statements, rather than “we”, “the church”, “Christians”, or “us”, etc.

SELF-ASSESS: Be self-aware of how you are personally effecting your small-group environment through your words, actions, and non-verbal communication. All of this takes practice. We don’t want you to be overly self-conscious, but it’s important that you pay attention to your own behavior and how well you’re loving others as they share. For example, if you catch yourself trying to “fix” someone, call yourself out, “Oops, I just tried to fix you. I’m sorry.”

COMMIT TO RESOLVING CONFLICT: The two things that bond a group more than anything else are conflict and crisis. Nobody wants either, but this is real life. Try to view conflict within the group as an opportunity to grow closer, to learn more about each other, and to extend grace. “Travel light.” Commit to working through the conflict, rather than sweeping it under the rug or holding on to a grudge. Pretending everything is okay, putting up walls, or venting with someone else breaks down relationships and is not loving. If you’re not sure how to resolve the conflict and need help, ask your facilitator or another ministry leader.

LETTER TO THE FACILITATOR

My Friends,

*FIND THIS STORY SET ONLINE AT riversidechurch.org

I hope you've all enjoyed your summers and have been able to work in some fun times with your groups. We're really excited to kick off this next story set, building anticipation for The Coming Messiah and the New Testament. We've purposefully chosen stories and passages that will help tie together the Old and New Testaments, demonstrating both the need for a Redeemer and God's fulfillment of His covenant. You will probably find these to be familiar stories, so we challenge you (and your groups) to look at each with fresh eyes, recognizing that God's Word is truly living, able to reveal something new to us each time we read it. While storying is a great way to learn and pass on God's message, this time we've also included two weeks when God's Word will be read rather than told as a story. They are passages where God is speaking to His people.

This season we brought together a team to help create the questions, discipling others to develop story sets. While we are ultimately trying to get others to listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling them about their own lives through scripture, we hope you find the questions to be helpful prompts and look forward to your input.

Continue to challenge your folks with the "Digging In" exercises. We recommend you mention them during group and then include them in your weekly email/prayer request list. You can just copy and paste them from the Riverside's website*. They're designed to help create a passion for delving into God's Word, studying from a place of curiosity, and growing in their relationships with God and others.

Continue to prayerfully raise-up apprentices and branch your small group when it's ready, making more room as there's a need. Frequent vision casting is really key to preparing your group and maintaining alignment. Be sure to ask for help if you need it.

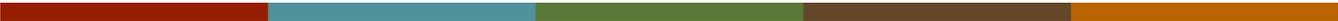
It is my prayer that you continue to lead with love and purpose and that you truly enjoy the relationships you're building with others as you grow in your knowledge and love for Jesus. I am so thankful I get to "run the race" with this awesome team.

Standing and serving beside you,
Ron

Ron Detwiler
Pastor of Spiritual Formation
Riverside Church
208-818-2677

"Pursue faith and love and peace, and enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts." 1 Timothy 2:22b

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Hebrews 12:1



LETTER TO THE FACILITATOR

ron@riversidechurch.org

FACILITATOR RESOURCES

VISION CAST

- This is where you remind the group why we are here and how we are going to accomplish what God has called us to do, the purpose of our small groups.
- It is important to vision cast periodically, maintaining alignment and helping the group prepare for the process of branching.

Mission of Riverside Church: To make disciples who love and live like JESUS

Discipleship Process: Create Intentional Relational Environments where people grow in their relationships with God and each other.

BASIC COMPONENTS IN THE DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS

Intentional Leader

Small Group Facilitators who intentionally guide, nurture and love the people in their groups.

Biblical Foundation

Studying & applying God's words through the stories of the Bible.

Relational Environment

Intentionally creating an environment where people can share what God is showing them, so they can grow in their maturity in Jesus.

Reproducible Process

An Intentional Leader creates a Relational Environment with a Biblical Foundation and raises up an apprentice so that the group can branch as it grows.

FACILITATOR RESOURCES

SMALL GROUP BASICS

- Especially when you're starting a new group, it's important to go over the basics of your small group.
- Also, pass around a sheet for each person to list the contact information they want shared with the group. Then make copies or email it out to the group.

OUR SMALL GROUP

- When we start and end
- Our general format (Example: Fellowship, Worship, Study, Prayer Requests, Refreshments)
- "Storying"
Jesus is the Master Storyteller. We practice Biblical Storytelling because this is one of the ways Jesus revealed God's Truth. It helps us to apply scripture to our own lives and share our hearts with others. It teaches us how to tell the stories to others so we can show them God's love.
- Logistics
 - Where to park
 - How childcare is provided (or not)
 - Snack list (allergies?)
 - How we will contact each other
 - Pass around a notepad. Ask people to list the contact information they feel comfortable sharing with the group, so you can pass out a contact list next week.
 - Caring for each other in crisis/need (meals, hospital visits, etc.)
 - Inviting new people, etc.
- Courtesies
 - Let your facilitator know if you can't make group or if you have to leave early.
 - Keep interruptions to a minimum by silencing cell phones and answering urgent calls/texts in another room.
- Ground Rules
We use the ground rules to help create a loving environment that promotes authenticity. They are more guidelines than rules.

FACILITATOR

Review the Ground Rules/guidelines. Consider discussing why they're important.

WEEK 1

ESTHER RISKS HER LIFE

DOING WHAT IS RIGHT

ESTHER 4:1 – 5:2

PRAY

THERE'S NO HURRY:

If you are starting a new group, or you have a lot of new people, be sure to spend some time vision casting and going over the basics for your small group (See the last few pages). Don't worry if you don't actually get to the story this week. You can start "Week 1" next week. There's a reason why the stories are not dated. We remain flexible, keeping in mind the needs of the group and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

REVIEW GROUP GROUND RULES

How we practice loving each other

FACILITATOR

- Do this each week for the first few weeks and then again whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, "What does it mean to be self-aware?"

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- We ended last spring with the story of Nehemiah Rebuilding the Wall.

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK'S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

Even though the book of Esther comes after the book of Nehemiah, she was actually made queen a few decades before Nehemiah began rebuilding the walls in Jerusalem. Esther was a young Jewish orphan in exile, who was chosen by King Xerxes to become queen over Persia—primarily in modern-day Iraq and Iran. Taking her cousin Mordacai's advice, she didn't divulge her nationality or family background. Mordacai

WEEK 1

had adopted her when her parents died and was a palace official. He uncovered and exposed a plot to assassinate the king and was considered very loyal. As the king commanded, all his officials bowed down before Prime Minister Haman—except Mordecai. Haman knew that Mordecai was Jewish and became so enraged by his continued disobedience that he decided to punish all of Mordecai’s people. Haman told the king that there was a certain race of people scattered throughout his empire who operated under different rules than the king’s, and he convinced the king to destroy them all. Letters were sent out to all the provinces. They decreed that all Jews must be killed, completely annihilated, nearly a year later on March 7th. Their property would then be given to those who killed them. *THIS is where our story begins.*

TELL THE STORY

ESTHER 4:1 – 5:2 ESTHER RISKS HER LIFE

REMINDERS

If you have new people, explain this intentional process (Story it, Rebuild it, Read it).

- With their Bibles closed and yours open, tell the story as a story.
- Have the group open their Bibles and rebuild the story.
- Have a volunteer read the story directly from the Bible to make sure nothing is missed.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don’t try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- When has it been difficult for you to do what is right?
- Are you in a position where doing the right thing may end badly for you personally?
- How do you engage with the community of believers around you when you’re struggling?
- Who do you most relate to in this story?
- How does this story challenge you in your current circumstances?

WEEK 1

THE NEXT STORY

ESTHER 7:1-10 HAMAN'S FATE

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to read the story at least once before next week.
- Unless you have just branched or started a new group, **ASK IF ANYONE WILL VOLUNTEER TO TELL THE NEXT WEEK'S STORY**. Encourage and remind them that it's just telling the story, not memorizing it. Hopefully your apprentice is telling many of the stories by now, but periodically, continue to ask for a volunteer to tell the next week's story. We're always encouraging and inviting people to "get in the game," take a risk, and get out of their comfort zones. That's a huge part of discipleship.

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

PRAY

WEEK 1

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

In the Bible there are many times people put on sackcloth and ashes and/or tear their clothes. These were very powerful public expressions. Google Search: gotquestions.org/sackcloth-and-ashes and gotquestions.org/tear-clothes to learn the significance and history of these practices as well as numerous examples from the Bible. Does this give you another or new perspective on the events in Matthew 27:51?

WEEK 2

HAMAN'S FATE

TRUSTING GOD FOR JUSTICE

ESTHER 7:1-10

PRAY

REVIEW GROUP GROUND RULES

How we practice loving each other

FACILITATOR

- Do this each week for the first few weeks and then again whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, "What does it mean to be self-aware?"

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- We ended last week with the story of how Esther decided to risk her life to save her people.
- What's something that you took away from that story, something that stands out or you had to "chew on" this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK'S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

When Esther approached King Xerxes, she risked her life. However, the king was pleased and asked her what she wanted, promising to give her anything she requested, even up to half the kingdom. She only asked that he and Haman attend a banquet that very day, and so they did. At the banquet, the king pressed her again. She asked that he and Haman attend a banquet the following day, when she promised to make her request. When Haman left the banquet, Mordecai didn't bow down. Furious, Haman ordered a 75-foot-high gallows to be set up and decided to ask the king to hang Mordecai the next morning. That night, King Xerxes couldn't sleep and began reviewing the kingdom's historical records. When he discovered how Mordecai had exposed an assassination plot, he also learned that Mordecai had never been rewarded. Before

WEEK 2

Haman could make his own request, the king asked him what he should do to honor a man that truly pleased him. Assuming it was for himself, Haman suggested a nobleman dress the man in the king's robes and lead him through the city square on the king's horse while shouting, "This is what happens to those the king wishes to honor!" This pleased the king, so he instructed Haman to immediately and personally carry out the plan—honoring Mordecai. Afterwards Haman was completely humiliated and knew he would never succeed in his plans against Mordecai. Then, he headed to the banquet. *THIS is where our story begins.*

TELL THE STORY

ESTHER 7:1-10 HAMAN'S FATE

REMINDERS

If you have new people, explain this intentional process (Story it, Rebuild it, Read it).

- With their Bibles closed and yours open, tell the story as a story.
- Have the group open their Bibles and rebuild the story.
- Have a volunteer read the story directly from the Bible to make sure nothing is missed.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don't try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- What do you expect from God when you sin? What do you give others when they sin against you?
- When have the consequences of pride, bitterness, un-forgiveness, or revenge effected your life?
- When have you been caught in your own trap?
- How does this story challenge you in your current circumstances?

WEEK 2

THE NEXT STORY

ISAIAH 6:1-13 GOD'S THRONE

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to read the story at least once before next week.
- Unless you have just branched, **ASK IF ANYONE WILL VOLUNTEER TO TELL THE NEXT WEEK'S STORY.** Encourage and remind them that it's just telling the story, not memorizing it. Hopefully your apprentice is telling many of the stories by now, but periodically, continue to ask for a volunteer to tell the next week's story. We're always encouraging and inviting people to "get in the game," take a risk, and get out of their comfort zones. That's a huge part of discipleship.

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

WEEK 2

PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Read Esther 8 & 9, then Google Search: "the Festival of Purim." Which Christian holiday have we set to commemorate our own eternal deliverance?

WEEK 3

GOD'S THRONE

RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL

ISAIAH 6:1-13

PRAY

REVIEW GROUP GROUND RULES

How we practice loving each other

- Do this whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, "What does it mean to be self-aware?"

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- Last week we looked at how the king dealt with Haman.
- What's something that you took away from that story, something that stands out or you had to "chew on" this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK'S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

More than 250 years before Esther became Queen, and during the Judean reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Isaiah was given visions, messages from God. Recorded in the book of Isaiah, they begin with messages about the Rebellious Judah, the unfaithful Jerusalem, the Lord's future reign, His judgement against Judah and Jerusalem, and His promise of restoration. Judah and Jerusalem were filled with wickedness and arrogance. The people rejected the law, despising God's Word. God's judgement against them included the complete destruction of land and extreme poverty. His people would die by starvation, dehydration, and massacre. The survivors would be sent into exile or taken into captivity to foreign lands. Isaiah wrote, "The hills tremble and the rotting bodies of his people are thrown as garbage into the street. But even then the Lord's anger will not be satisfied" (Isaiah 5:25 NLT). After all of this judgement is carried out, "A cloud of darkness and sorrow will hover over Israel. The clouds will blot out the light" (Isaiah 5: 30 NLT). God's message was very clear. *THIS is where our story begins.*

WEEK 3

TELL THE STORY

ISAIAH 6:1-13 GOD'S THRONE

REMINDERS

If you have new people, explain this intentional process (Story it, Rebuild it, Read it).

- With their Bibles closed and yours open, tell the story as a story.
- Have the group open their Bibles and rebuild the story.
- Have a volunteer read the story directly from the Bible to make sure nothing is missed.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don't try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- What do you learn about God from this story?
- How do you struggle with the supernatural things of God?
- How would you respond if God asked you to do something that had eternal rewards but would create earthly failure?
- What does obedience to God over earthly rewards look like in your life?
- When or how do you ponder the awesomeness of God?

NEXT WEEK

Plan a group social or outreach event for next week.

This is a time to have fun and get to know your group better. Encourage others to invite someone new, someone who might otherwise feel a bit intimidated. If you haven't done so recently, this is also a good time to briefly vision cast .

SUGGESTIONS:

BBQ

Progressive Dinner

Game Night

Group worship and fellowship

Bowling

Dessert Buffet

Potluck

Campfire and s'mores

WEEK 3

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Throughout the Bible, fire is the symbol at once of the wrath and the love of God, destroying the evil and purifying the good. For examples, and greater understanding of perhaps why Isaiah was cleansed with coal, read: Numbers 31:23; Malachi 3:2; Matthew 3:11; 1Corinthians 3:15; Hebrews 12:29; and 1Peter 1:7.

WEEK 4

GROUP SOCIAL

This is a time to have fun and get to know your group better. Encourage others to invite someone new, someone who might otherwise feel a bit intimidated. If you haven't done so recently, this is also a good time to briefly vision cast .

SUGGESTIONS:

BBQ	Progressive Dinner	Game Night	Group worship and fellowship
Bowling	Dessert Buffet	Potluck	Campfire and s'mores

THE NEXT STORY

DANIEL 2:14-19, 24-47 THE KING'S DREAM

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to read the story at least once before next week.
- Each week **ASK IF ANYONE WILL VOLUNTEER TO TELL THE NEXT WEEK'S STORY**. Encourage and remind them that it's just telling the story, not memorizing it. Hopefully your apprentices is telling many of the stories by now, but periodically, continue to ask for a volunteer to tell the next week's story. We're always encouraging and inviting people to "get in the game," take a risk, and get out of their comfort zones. That's a huge part of discipleship.

PRAY

WEEK 5

THE KING'S DREAM

FACING A CRISIS

DANIEL 2:14-19, 24-47

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Start inviting others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUND RULES (IF NECESSARY)

FACILITATOR

- Do this whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, “What does it mean to be self-aware?”

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- The last story we looked at was the story of Isaiah’s cleansing and call as he approached God’s throne.
- What’s something that you took away from that story, something that stands out or you had to “chew on” this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK’S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

Isaiah prophesied for nearly 60 years, and tradition says he was executed by Manasseh. About 75 years later, Daniel, from the tribe of Judah, was taken into captivity to Babylon (present-day Iraq). Judah fell to the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, and Jerusalem was destroyed. Daniel and 3 of his fellow captives, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (also from the tribe of Judah), were chosen to be trained in the language, literature, science and customs of Babylon. During this time, they refused to be defiled by Babylon’s food and practices. God gave them an unusual aptitude for learning, and He gave Daniel a special ability to understand visions and dreams. After 3 years, the king found that their wisdom and sound judgement was 10 times better than that of all the

WEEK 5

magicians and enchanters throughout his kingdom. The king was so impressed that he appointed them to his regular staff of advisers. One night Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream. When his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers could not tell him what he dreamt and what it meant, he became furious and ordered that all the wise men in the kingdom be executed. Because of the king's decree, men were sent to find and kill Daniel and his friends. *THIS is where our story begins.*

TELL THE STORY

DANIEL 2:14-19, 24-47 THE KING'S DREAM

REMINDERS

If you have new people, explain this intentional process (Story it, Rebuild it, Read it).

- With their Bibles closed and yours open, tell the story as a story.
- Have the group open their Bibles and rebuild the story.
- Have a volunteer read the story directly from the Bible to make sure nothing is missed.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

As we go through the stories in Daniel, try not to get off onto discussions about "prophecy." While it is valuable and fascinating, you may need to remind your group that this time is about listening to what the Holy Spirit is telling them through each story; it's not a teaching lesson on prophecy.

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don't try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- How does this story challenge you in your current circumstances?
- When have you reached out to your Christian community for help?
- When you face a hard struggle, what do you believe about God?
- How confident are you about God's word when you share it with others?

WEEK 5

THE NEXT STORY

DANIEL 3:1-30 FAITH IN THE FIRE

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to read the story at least once before next week.
- Each week **ASK IF ANYONE WILL VOLUNTEER TO TELL THE NEXT WEEK'S STORY**. Encourage and remind them that it's just telling the story, not memorizing it. Hopefully your apprentice is telling many of the stories by now, but periodically, continue to ask for a volunteer to tell the next week's story. We're always encouraging and inviting people to "get in the game," take a risk, and get out of their comfort zones. That's a huge part of discipleship.

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

WEEK 5

PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Take a look at our world history.... What eras, empires or regions do you think the silver, bronze, iron, and iron & clay portions of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream represent? What does the rock represent?

WEEK 6

FAITH IN THE FIRE

TRUSTING DESPITE CONSEQUENCES

DANIEL 3:1-30

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Start inviting others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUND RULES (IF NECESSARY)

FACILITATOR

- Do this whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, “What does it mean to be self-aware?”

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- The last story we looked at was the story of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.
- What’s something that you took away from that story, something that stands out or you had to “chew on” this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK’S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

After Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the king made him chief over all the wise men and ruler over the whole province of Babylon. He also gave Daniel many valuable gifts. At Daniel’s request, the king put Daniel’s 3 friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, in charge of all the affairs of the province of Babylon, while Daniel remained in the king’s court. *THIS is where our story begins.*

WEEK 6

TELL THE STORY

DANIEL 3:1-30 FAITH IN THE FIRE

REMINDERS

If you have new people, explain this intentional process (Story it, Rebuild it, Read it).

- With their Bibles closed and yours open, tell the story as a story.
- Have the group open their Bibles and rebuild the story.
- Have a volunteer read the story directly from the Bible to make sure nothing is missed.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

As we go through the stories in Daniel, try not to get off onto discussions about “prophesy.” While it is valuable and fascinating, you may need to remind your group that this time is about listening to what the Holy Spirit is telling them through each story; it’s not a teaching lesson on prophesy.

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don’t try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- What stirs in your heart when you hear this story?
- What does the way you live out your faith tell others about God?
- How do you feel about trusting God even though He may not physically rescue you this time?
- Have you ever struggled to believe God is good when life isn’t working out?
- Are there things or people in your life that you either did or do bow down to?
- When has God “gone through the fire” with you?
- How has your faith been affected when you prayed for something and God said no?

WEEK 6

THE NEXT STORY

DANIEL 6:11-28 HUNGRY LIONS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to read the story at least once before next week.
- Each week **ASK IF ANYONE WILL VOLUNTEER TO TELL THE NEXT WEEK'S STORY**. Encourage and remind them that it's just telling the story, not memorizing it. Hopefully your apprentice is telling many of the stories by now, but periodically, continue to ask for a volunteer to tell the next week's story. We're always encouraging and inviting people to "get in the game," take a risk, and get out of their comfort zones. That's a huge part of discipleship.

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

PRAY

WEEK 6

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Memorize: Isaiah 43:1-2

WEEK 7

HUNGRY LIONS

GOD RESCUES THE PERSECUTED

DANIEL 6:11-28

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Invite others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUP GROUND RULES

How we practice loving each other

FACILITATOR

- Do this each week for the first few weeks and then again whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, “What does it mean to be self-aware?”

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- The last story we looked at was the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace.
- What’s something that you took away from that story, something that stands out or you had to “chew on” this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK’S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

Daniel continued to interpret dreams for and counsel King Nebuchadnezzar. Many years later, King Belshazzar became king of Babylon. He worshipped idols and dishonored God, so at last God gave the king a (literally, hand-written) message of judgement. Daniel interpreted the writing and urged him to humble himself before the Lord. The king honored Daniel immediately, but he did not honor the Lord. That very night the king was killed. Darius the Mede then took over the kingdom. As God had promised Belshazzar in his message of judgement, the kingdom was divided. The new king chose Daniel and two others to supervise the princes of the 120 new provinces and to watch out for his interests. Daniel more than proved his capability, so the king

WEEK 7

planned to place him over the entire empire. The other leaders were jealous and desperately tried to find some fault in Daniel's ways. Finding none, and knowing his religious requirements, they plotted against him. They convinced the king to issue an irrevocable law stating that, for the next 30 days, anyone who prayed to a divine or human other than the king would be thrown to the lions. However, this did not keep Daniel from praying and giving thanks to God in his upstairs room...with its windows open toward Jerusalem. *THIS is where our story begins.*

TELL THE STORY

DANIEL 6:11-28 HUNGRY LIONS

REMINDERS

If you have new people, explain this intentional process (Story it, Rebuild it, Read it).

- With their Bibles closed and yours open, tell the story as a story.
- Have the group open their Bibles and rebuild the story.
- Have a volunteer read the story directly from the Bible to make sure nothing is missed.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

As we go through the stories in Daniel, try not to get off onto discussions about "prophesy." While it is valuable and fascinating, you may need to remind your group that this time is about listening to what the Holy Spirit is telling them through each story; it's not a teaching lesson on prophesy.

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don't try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- How does this story challenge you in your current circumstances?
- When have you put your life, job, or relationships on the line for your faith?
- How do you respond when people persecute you for what you believe?
- Are there areas in your life where you've compromised your convictions or even succumbed because of "political correctness" or peer pressure?
- How has your own jealousy been destructive?

WEEK 7

THE NEXT STORY

JONAH 3 & 4 HOPE FOR THE LOST

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to read the story at least once before next week.
- Each week **ASK IF ANYONE WILL VOLUNTEER TO TELL THE NEXT WEEK'S STORY**. Encourage and remind them that it's just telling the story, not memorizing it. Hopefully your apprentice is telling many of the stories by now, but periodically, continue to ask for a volunteer to tell the next week's story. We're always encouraging and inviting people to "get in the game," take a risk, and get out of their comfort zones. That's a huge part of discipleship.

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

PRAY

WEEK 7

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Deuteronomy 32:21 tells us that our God is a jealous God who will not share our affections with any other god. That would be idolatry. The Bible is full of warnings, however, about jealousy. Using a word concordance or Google Search, spend some time looking up exactly what God has to say about the effects of our own jealousy.

HOPE FOR THE LOST

GOD'S MERCY

JONAH 3 & 4

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Start inviting others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUND RULES (IF NECESSARY)

FACILITATOR

- Do this whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, "What does it mean to be self-aware?"

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- The Last story we looked at when Daniel was thrown to the lions.
- What's something that you took away from that story, something that stands out or you had to "chew on" this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK'S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

During Uzziah's reign in Judah, about 250 years before Daniel was thrown to the lions, God gave Jonah a message for Nineveh, the most important city in Assyria. Located in present-day Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, Assyria was the world power at that time. God told Jonah to tell the people in Nineveh to turn from their sins or meet God's severe judgement. Jonah was afraid, so he got on a ship and headed in the opposite direction. When a terrible storm threatened the lives of everyone on the boat, Jonah knew it was from God and urged the sailors to throw him overboard. A great fish swallowed Jonah. Jonah prayed to the Lord, praising God and promising to fulfill all his vows. After 3 days and 3 nights, the fish spit Jonah out on dry land. *THIS is where our story begins.*

WEEK 8

TELL THE STORY

JONAH 3 & 4 HOPE FOR THE LOST

REMINDERS

If you have new people, explain this intentional process (Story it, Rebuild it, Read it).

- With their Bibles closed and yours open, tell the story as a story.
- Have the group open their Bibles and rebuild the story.
- Have a volunteer read the story directly from the Bible to make sure nothing is missed.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don't try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- How do you feel when God shows others mercy or blesses other people?
- What do you learn about God from this story?
- When God shows you areas of sin in your own life, are you quick to repent and change your ways?
- How has God shown you mercy?
- How does this story challenge you in your current circumstances or beliefs?

THE NEXT STORY

TELL YOUR STORY

FACILITATOR

- Next week tell your own stories.
- Explain that you'll take about 15-20 minutes to share highlights of your own lives: the key things that shaped you and brought you to where you are and who you are today—**the ways God has been working in your lives.**
- If you have not done this in your group before, model by going first.
- **Especially if this is new to your group:** Try to create an intimate/campfire-type atmosphere. Consider sharing a meal or dessert together around a large table while sharing stories or even sitting around a campfire if you're able.

WEEK 8

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Jonah was the first missionary sent by God to teach people in foreign lands about His love. What an amazing privilege, right? So, why did he go to such extremes to run away from Nineveh, deliberately disobeying God? Do some checking on your own about the culture of Ancient Nineveh. Then, look up <http://www.mpumc.org/uploads/file/nineveh.pdf> for a fascinating historical publication that might shed more light on just what Jonah faced. What "Nineveh" is God asking you to face?

YOUR STORY

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Invite others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUP GROUND RULES

How we practice loving each other

FACILITATOR

- Do this each week for the first few weeks and then again whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, “What does it mean to be self-aware?”

TELL YOUR STORY

FACILITATOR

- Explain that you’ll take about 15-20 minutes to share highlights of your own lives: the key things that shaped you and brought you to where you are and who you are today—**the ways God has been working in your lives.**
- If you have not done this before in your group, model by going first.
- Ask for volunteers.
- Depending on the dynamics of the group, sometimes it’s fun to let the person who tells a story pick the next “volunteer.” Be careful not to pressure someone to tell their story, though.

THE NEXT STORY

CONTINUE TO TELL YOUR STORIES

FACILITATOR

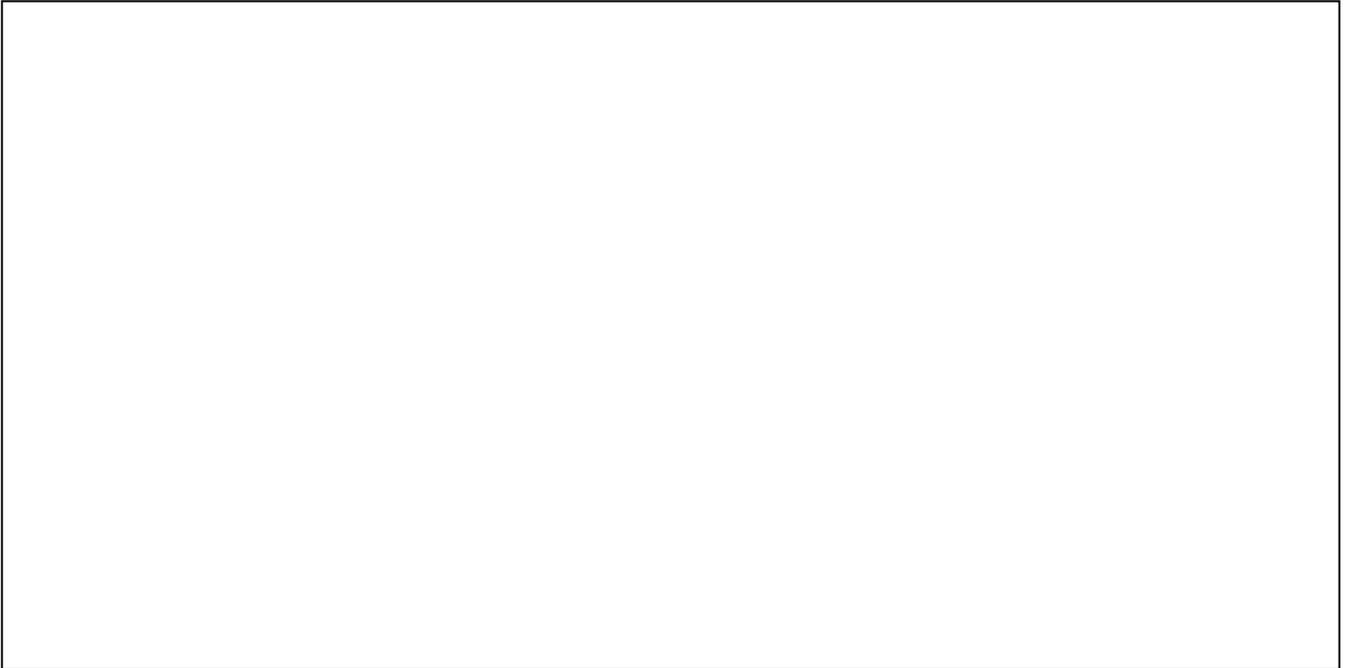
- Ask for volunteers.
- Remind them to share highlights of their own lives (15-20 minutes): the key things that shaped them and brought them to where they are and who they are today—**the ways God has been working in their lives.**

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don’t have to have something to share every week.

WEEK 9



PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

How do you tell your own story? Here are some great helps:

<http://evangelism.intervarsity.org/how/conversation/30-minutes-shareable-testimony>

<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/what-we-get-wrong-about-giving-our-testimony>

<http://rickwarren.org/devotional/english/share-your-testimony-of-gratitude>

<http://www.cru.org/train-and-grow/how-to-tell-your-story-worksheet.html>

YOUR STORY

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Invite others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUP GROUND RULES

How we practice loving each other

FACILITATOR

- Do this each week for the first few weeks and then again whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, “What does it mean to be self-aware?”

TELL YOUR STORY

FACILITATOR

- Explain that you’ll take about 15-20 minutes to share highlights of your own lives: the key things that shaped you and brought you to where you are and who you are today—**the ways God has been working in your lives.**
- If you have not done this before in your group, model by going first.
- Ask for volunteers.
- Depending on the dynamics of the group, sometimes it’s fun to let the person who tells a story pick the next “volunteer.” Be careful not to pressure someone to tell their story, though.

THE NEXT STORY

HAGGAI 1:1-14 FINISHING THE TEMPLE

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to read the story at least once before next week.
- Ask for a volunteer to tell the next story.

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don’t have to have something to share every week.

WEEK 10



PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Do you want to be inspired by other Christian's stories?

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/iyf/truelifestories/>

FINISHING THE TEMPLE

MAKING GOD FIRST

HAGGAI 1:1-14

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Start inviting others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUND RULES (IF NECESSARY)

FACILITATOR

- Do this whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, “What does it mean to be self-aware?”

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- The last story we looked at was when God had mercy on Nineveh.
- What’s something that you took away from that story, something that stands out or you had to “chew on” this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK’S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

Nearly 250 years after Jonah went to Nineveh, reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem began—as we read about last spring in the book of Ezra. Babylon had conquered Jerusalem and the land of Judah and carried away its people. Babylon was then conquered by Persia, and the new king, Cyrus, allowed God’s people to return to their homeland. There were actually 3 returns; Zerubbabel led the first return in 538 BC. The reconstruction started 2 years later but then halted after only 6 years. Ten years went by without any new construction on the Temple and Haggai, a prophet, had a message for God’s people. *THIS is where our story begins.*

TELL THE STORY

HAGGAI 1:1-14 FINISHING THE TEMPLE

REMINDERS

If you have new people, explain this intentional process (Story it, Rebuild it, Read it).

- With their Bibles closed and yours open, tell the story as a story.
- Have the group open their Bibles and rebuild the story.
- Have a volunteer read the story directly from the Bible to make sure nothing is missed.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don't try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- What does this story stir up in you?
- Is there anything in your life that God is calling you to finish?
- What does Temple-reconstruction look like in your life?
- When you look at your checkbook and your calendar, are you building your own temple or God's?

THE NEXT STORY

ZECHARIAH 9:9-13 ZION'S COMING KING

FACILITATOR

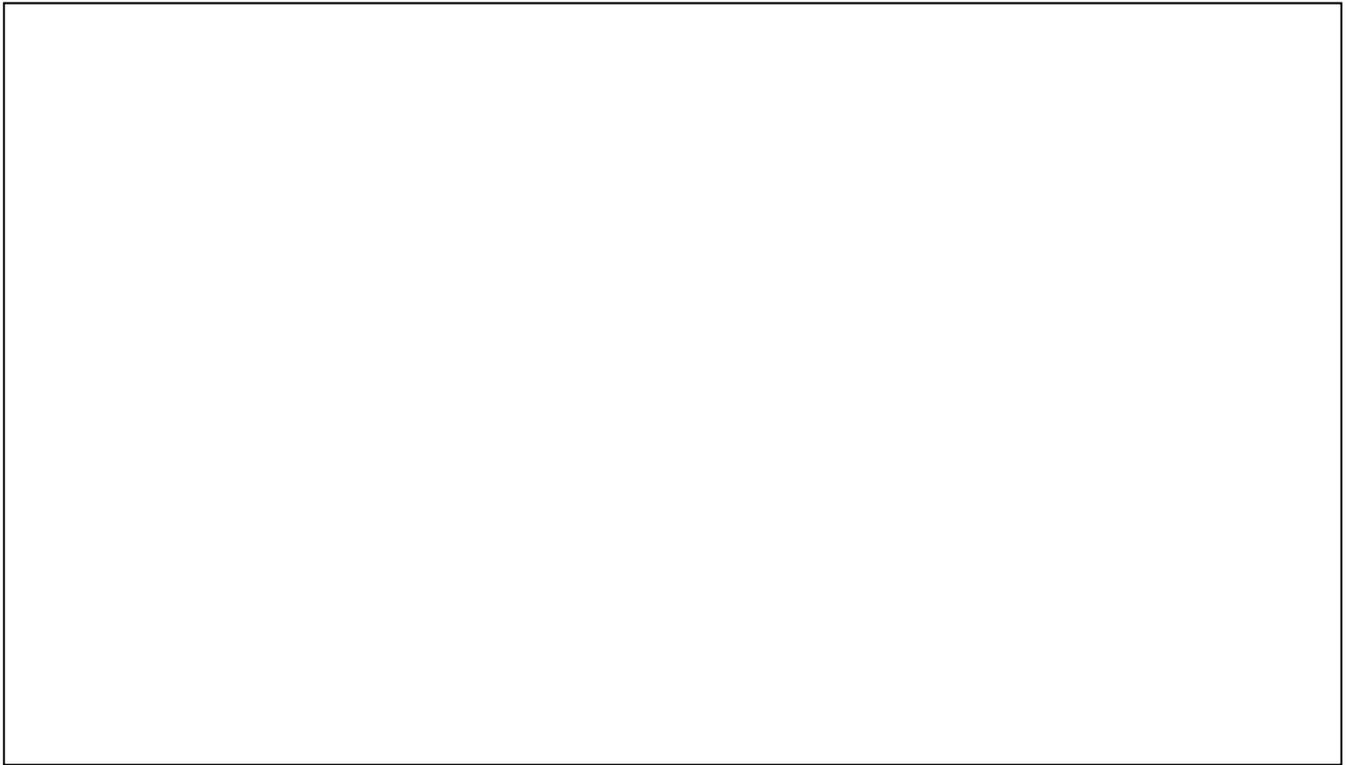
- Encourage the group to read this passage at least once before next week.
- **THIS IS A PASSAGE THAT WILL BE READ ALOUD RATHER THAN TOLD AS A STORY.**

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

WEEK 11



PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Rebuilding the Temple became *the* priority, and it was finally completed in 516 BC. What does God's word say about how we are to set our own priorities? Read Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Exodus 20:3, Matthew 6:31-33, Mark 12:32-31 and Proverbs 3:5-6 and 4:25-27.

ZION'S COMING KING

GOD'S PROMISE OF DELIVERANCE

ZECHARIAH 9:9-13

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Start inviting others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUND RULES (IF NECESSARY)

FACILITATOR

- Do this whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, "What does it mean to be self-aware?"

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- Last week we looked at the story of God's people resuming the rebuilding of the temple.
- What's something that you took away from that story, something that stands out or you had to "chew on" this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK'S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

When the Temple reconstruction resumed in 520 BC, Zechariah became a prophet. Alongside Haggai, he had urged the exiles to rebuild the Temple. The book of Zechariah records many of Zechariah's visions—important messages that greatly encouraged the exiles facing their desolate land and ruined city. It records visions of the eternal Kingdom, judgment against Israel's enemies, and many visions of the long-awaited coming Messiah. *THIS is where we pick up.*

WEEK 12

READ THE PASSAGE

ZECHARIAH 9:9-13 ZION'S COMING KING

FACILITATOR

This is a passage that will be read rather than told as a story.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don't try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- How does this story challenge you in your current circumstances or beliefs?
- How often do you take time to really think about and get excited about Jesus' return?
- How do you think you'll respond when you see Jesus face to face?
- Do you earnestly seek your Messiah daily?

THE NEXT STORY

MALACHI 3:1 – 4:4 THE COMING DAY OF JUDGEMENT

FACILITATOR

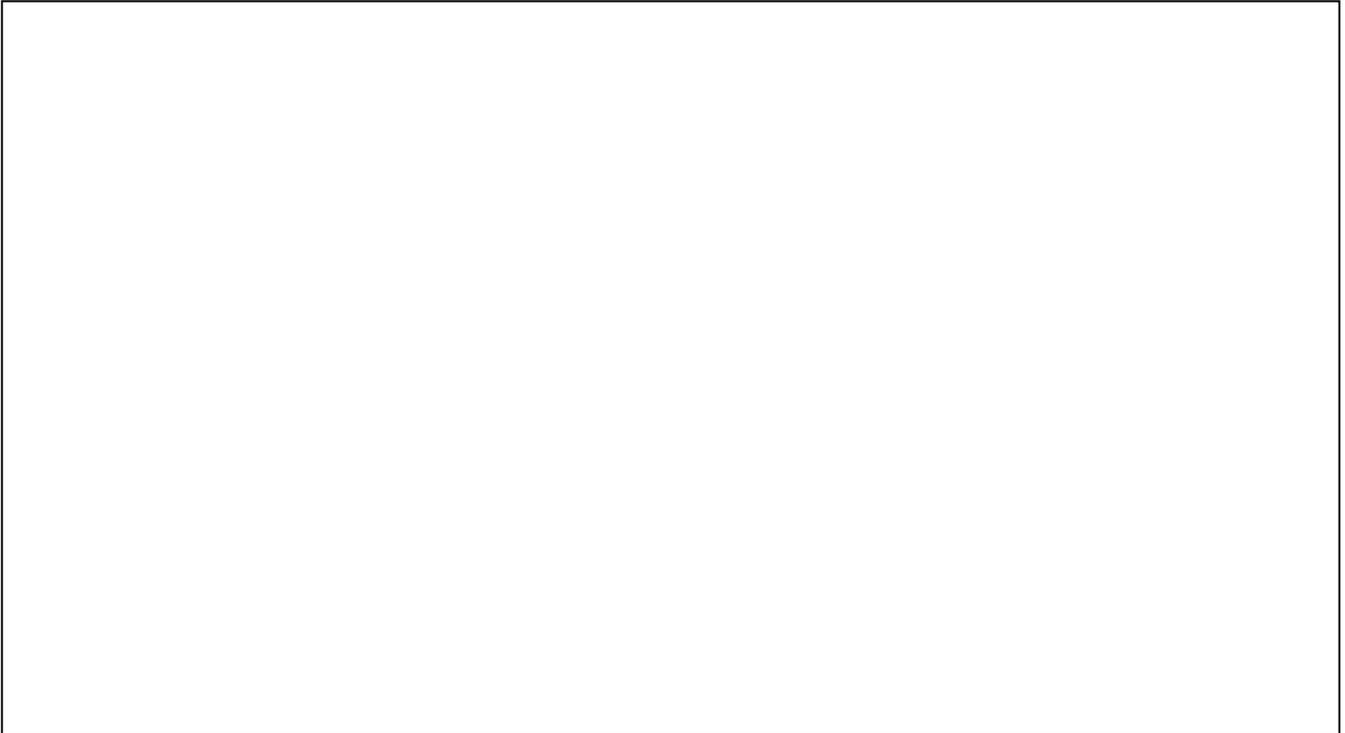
- Encourage the group to read this passage at least once before next week.
- **THIS IS A PASSAGE THAT WILL BE READ ALOUD RATHER THAN TOLD AS A STORY.**

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

WEEK 12



PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Review God's covenant with David: 1 Chronicles 17:11-14

THE COMING DAY OF JUDGEMENT

A PROMISE OF MERCY TO THE FAITHFUL

MALACHI 3:1 – 4:4

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Start inviting others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUND RULES (IF NECESSARY)

FACILITATOR

- Do this whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, “What does it mean to be self-aware?”

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- Last week we looked at the passage promising Zion’s coming King.
- What’s something that you took away from that passage, something that stands out or you had to “chew on” this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK’S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

Over 80 years have passed since the Temple was rebuilt. The people had expected the Messiah to come and their nation to rule the world when they returned from exile. Waiting, their spiritual zeal faded. Many grew discouraged, skeptical, and increasingly wayward. Malachi, a prophet of God, reminded them of God’s great love and cataloged their failures. They cheated and dishonored God by bringing stolen, blind, crippled, and diseased animals as sacrifices, marrying women who worship idols, and being unfaithful in their marriages. Ironically, the people had grown so ignorant of God’s ways, that they were surprised God was not pleased with them. Malachi warned them that they’d turned up their noses at God’s commands and instructed them in the law. God reminded the priests, “The purpose of my covenant with the Levites was to bring life

WEEK 13

and peace...” and warned them, “You have left God’s paths. Your ‘guidance’ has caused many to stumble into sin. You have corrupted the covenant I made with the Levites...So I have made you despised and humiliated in the eyes of all the people. For you have not obeyed me but have shown partiality in your interpretation of the law” (Malachi 2:5a, 8:-9 NLT). Malachi urged the people to return to faithfulness. He warned them that they had wearied the Lord with their words, suggesting God favors evildoers and complaining, “Where is the God of justice?” *THIS is where we pick up.*

READ THE PASSAGE

MALACHI 3:1 – 4:4 THE COMING DAY OF JUDGEMENT

FACILITATOR

This is a passage that will be read rather than told as a story.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don’t try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- How does this story challenge you in your current circumstances?
- When do you question God’s ways or His judgement?
- Do you believe you will be counted as righteous on the day of judgement?
- How do you “fear God” without living in fear?
- How does this convict and/or encourage you?

WEEK 13

THE NEXT STORY

MATTHEW 1:18-25 & LUKE 1:26-38, 2:1-21 THE BIRTH OF JESUS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to read the story at least once before next week.
- ****ASK FOR 3 VOLUNTEERS TO TELL THE NEXT WEEK'S STORY** (There are 3 sections). Encourage and remind them that it's just telling the story, not memorizing it. Invite people to "get in the game," take a risk, and get out of their comfort zones. That's a huge part of discipleship.

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

PRAY

WEEK 13

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Write a letter to the Lord: What have you gained in serving Him?

WEEK 14

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

A GOD'S PERFECT PROVISION

MATHEW 1:18-25 & LUKE 1:26-38, 2:1-21

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Start inviting others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUND RULES (IF NECESSARY)

FACILITATOR

- Do this whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, “What does it mean to be self-aware?”

RECAP

FACILITATOR

- Last week we looked at the passage regarding the coming Day of Judgement and God's promise of a Savior.
- What's something that you took away from that passage, something that stands out or you had to “chew on” this week?

BACKGROUND TO THIS WEEK'S STORY

FACILITATOR

This is to help connect the dots from where we ended to where the next story starts. It is here as a help for you and as an option.

God promised his chosen people a savior long, long ago—a savior from the line of David. For centuries this nation experienced rebellion, destruction, repentance, and restoration, over and over again—a people struggling to remain faithful. Numerous times the ancient prophets had foretold of the coming Messiah. Then, God was silent for 400 years. Now, in the time when Herod the Great ruled Judea, an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah, a priest, while in the sanctuary to burn incense in the Lord's presence. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were very old, and she was barren, but they

WEEK 14

were also righteous in God's eyes. The angel, Gabriel, told the priest that his wife would bear a son, they'd name him John, he'd be great in the eyes of the Lord, and he'd persuade many Israelites to turn back to God. Then he told Zechariah that his son would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. As incredible as it sounded, soon Elizabeth was indeed pregnant. *THIS is where our story begins.*

TELL THE STORY

MATTHEW 1:18-25 & LUKE 1:26-38, 2:1-21

REMINDERS

If you have new people, explain this intentional process (Story it, Rebuild it, Read it).

- With their Bibles closed and yours open, tell the story as a story.
- Have the group open their Bibles and rebuild the story.
- Have a volunteer read the story directly from the Bible to make sure nothing is missed.

THE QUESTIONS

FACILITATOR

You have the freedom to come up with HEART QUESTIONS for your group, but keep in mind that these should be FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT GOD IS SHOWING THEM, rather than a desire to teach them something.

SUGGESTIONS

Please don't try to cover all of these. Pick the one/s that God is leading you to ask your specific group.

- What does this story stir up in you?
- Who do you most relate to in this story?
- What's something new God is showing you in this story?
- When has God brought something wonderful out of impractical or uncomfortable circumstances in your own life?
- How does this story challenge you in your current circumstances?

WEEK 14

NEXT WEEK

GROUP SOCIAL: OUR CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

This is a time to have fun and get to know your group better. Encourage others to invite someone new, someone who might otherwise feel a bit intimidated. If you haven't done so recently, this is also a good time to briefly vision cast .

SUGGESTIONS:

Consider allowing the kids to come....

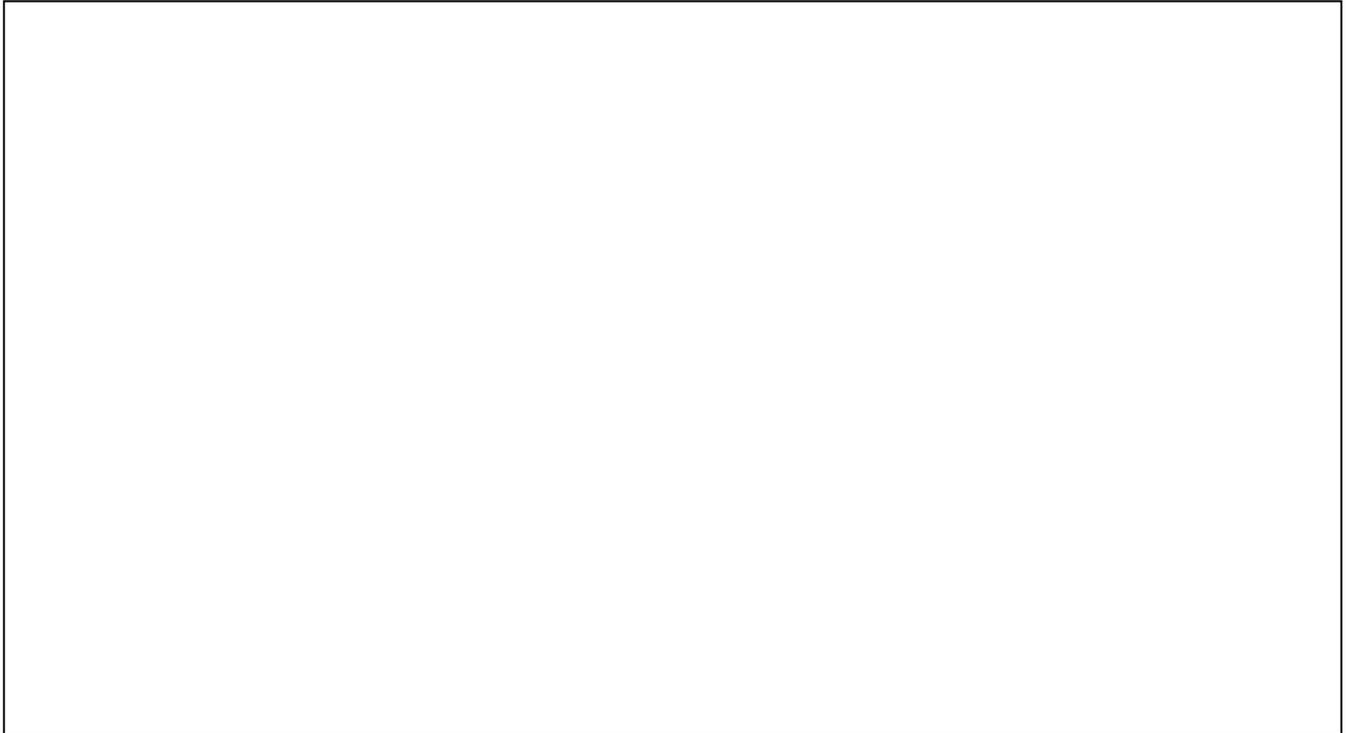
Baked Potato Bar	Ice Cream Sundae Bar	Caroling	Bring gifts for a family in need
BBQ	Progressive Dinner	Gift Exchange	Group worship and fellowship
Potluck	Soup Buffet	Game Night	Campfire and s'mores

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

WEEK 14



PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Read this story several times over the next few weeks as you prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth—perhaps to your family. Spend time considering how absolutely amazing this was for a people who had waited so long. Allow yourself to be amazed, joyful, even overcome with gratitude throughout this Advent season...and tell God about it.

WEEK 15

GROUP SOCIAL

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

This is a time to have fun and get to know your group better. Encourage others to invite someone new, someone who might otherwise feel a bit intimidated. If you haven't done so recently, this is also a good time to briefly vision cast .

SUGGESTIONS:

Consider allowing the kids to come....

Baked Potato Bar	Ice Cream Sundae Bar	Caroling	Bring gifts for a family in need
BBQ	Progressive Dinner	Gift Exchange	Group worship and fellowship
Potluck	Soup Buffet	Game Night	Campfire and s'mores
			Ice Breakers (Attached at the end)

THE NEXT STORY

TELL YOUR STORY

FACILITATOR

- Next week tell your own stories.
- Explain that you'll take about 15-20 minutes to share highlights of your own lives, the key things that shaped you and brought you to where you are and who you are today, the ways God has been working in your lives.

PRAY

YOUR STORY

PRAY

FACILITATOR

- Invite others to open or close the group in prayer.

REVIEW GROUP GROUND RULES

How we practice loving each other

FACILITATOR

- Do this each week for the first few weeks and then again whenever there is someone new or you feel your group could benefit from a review.
- Remember to keep it conversational, eventually quizzing them, “What does it mean to be self-aware?”

TELL YOUR STORY

FACILITATOR

- Explain that you’ll take about 15-20 minutes to share highlights of your own lives, the key things that shaped you and brought you to where you are and who you are today, the ways God has been working in your lives.
- Ask for volunteers.
- Depending on the dynamics of the group, sometimes it’s fun to let the person who tells a story pick the next “volunteer.” Be careful not to pressure someone to tell their story, though.

THE NEXT STORY

CHRISTMAS BREAK

Over the holidays continue to tell more of your own stories until we begin our next season of stories in January...

THE LIFE OF JESUS

WEEK 16

PRAYER REQUESTS

FACILITATOR

- Encourage the group to keep it personal and brief, allowing others time to share their praises and requests.
- Explain that they are invited to share if God has put something on their heart, but they don't have to have something to share every week.

PRAY

DIGGING IN

FACILITATOR

- Try copying and pasting this into your Meeting Notes when you record attendance on *Church Teams* each week. Then you can send it out in a group email along with the group's prayer requests.
- This is an opportunity for group members to do some further Bible study on their own, if they choose to. The desire is to help them find a passion to get into the Bible and study it for themselves from a place of curiosity.

On your own this week...

Consider asking someone from your life group to join you for part of your Christmas celebration. Ask God who He might want you to reach out to.

ICE BREAKERS

TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

Going in a circle, have each person say 3 statements about him/herself—2 of them true and 1 a lie. Each should be equally plausible. The group members then guess which is a lie and why they think it's a lie.

WHO'S THAT?

Each person writes down 3 things about him/herself that others might not already know. Put all the papers in a hat. The reader pulls one, reads it, and the group attempts to identify the author. Finally, if the group cannot guess, the author identifies him/herself. You don't have to draw all the papers; it's fun to save some for other weeks.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Ahead of time, cut out several questions—more than the number of people you have in your group. Fold up the questions and put them in a basket or container. Pass it around the group. Each person draws out a question and reads it silently. If they don't like their question, they can exchange it. Allow enough time for each person to read and answer the question to the group.

Or, ask random questions to the group and have each person answer it.

- Below are questions that we have used in the past.
- I suggest using 5-6 questions depending on the size of your group.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF...

1. You could become an animal for one day?
2. You could go anywhere in the world for a week?
3. You could go back in time for a week?
4. You could be someone else for a week?
5. You could have any job you wanted?
6. You could be invisible for a day?
7. You could spend the day with anyone you wanted?
8. You could change one thing in your past?
9. You could change one thing about yourself?
10. You could audibly hear God answer one question you asked?

(Continued...)

ICE BREAKERS

RANDOM

1. What's one thing you're afraid of?
2. What one quality do you look for most in friends?
3. When was the last time you cried? Why did you cry?
4. Share one of the happiest days of your life.
5. What do you want to be doing in ten years?
6. What do you like most about yourself?
7. In what ways do you act like a child?
8. What do you like to do in your spare time?
9. What is something that really "bugs" you?
10. Where would you like to go for a vacation if you could go anywhere in the world?
11. What makes you laugh?
12. What is your favorite room in your house? Why?
13. What would you like to invent to make life better?
14. Where would you most like a shopping spree?
15. What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

"ME, TOO!"

This is a great way to get a group to open up and start talking about themselves while learning how much they have in common with each other. Remember, the focus is to share little tidbits of information about yourselves.

Supplies needed: Spool of twine or string at least 100ft long for each group of 8-10

Give each group a spool of string. Note: If your group is larger than 10, you'll want to break up into smaller groups of 8-10 people.

Choose someone to start by telling their group something about him/herself such as:

- My favorite color is green.
- I like to sing in the shower.
- I have two children.
- I dip my pizza in ranch dressing.

Once the person with the string says something that applies to another person in the group, that person calls out, "Me, too!" The first person holds on to the end of the string and passes the spool to the other person. If more than one person has a "me, too" then the string passes to all those people, and ends at the last person to say "me, too." The person with the ball of spool then says something else about him/herself. In the end, a group will end up with a web of connections. Point out how much you have in common with each other.