

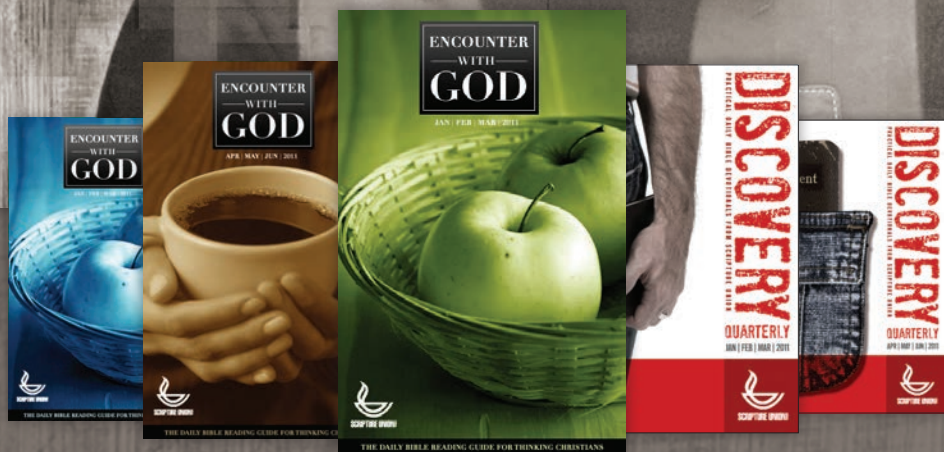


**THE ESSENTIAL
ONE-HUNDRED
BIBLE READING PLAN**

CHALLENGE GUIDE

SCRIPTURE & UNION^{USA}

FOR INDIVIDUALS + GROUPS



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Introduction

Welcome to the *E100® Challenge Guide*, the all-in-one resource for individuals and groups! In the following pages you'll find everything you need for an exciting through-the-Bible experience.

Most people discover the best way to “take the Challenge” is to combine personal Bible reading with group discussion. That's why each of the 20 sections in this book includes both a Personal Reflection Guide and a Group Discussion Guide. There are many other helpful features in this book, so let's back up and review the “essential information” you'll need for a successful journey through the Bible.

What is the E100®?

The Essential 100 (E100®) is a carefully selected list of short Bible passages—50 from the Old Testament and 50 from the New Testament. Most are about 1-2 chapters in length, just the right amount for a busy person to read in a few minutes. The readings cover all major types of biblical writing, including the Historical Books, Poetry and Wisdom, the Prophets, the Gospels, Acts, the Epistles and Revelation. They're organized into 20 sets of 5 readings each, so you can easily get the big picture of the Bible without getting bogged down.

The Essential 100 Challenge is the name of the program and accompanying resources a church or group can use to read through the E100® together. As you'll see, the plan is undated so you can use it on any time schedule, and flexible so you can use it with any Bible translation. Whether you are new to the Bible or you've been reading it for years, you're about to discover that *The Essential 100 Challenge* is a unique and meaningful way to get an overview of the Bible's message.





How to Use This Book

If you are ready to take the Challenge, here are some tips to help you get the most from it.

First, find a Bible that's easy for you to understand. Today there are many excellent new translations, such as the *New International Version* (NIV), the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), the *English Standard Version* (ESV), the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (HCSB), the *New American Bible, Revised Edition* (NABRE), the *New Living Translation* (NLT) or the *Contemporary English Version* (CEV). If you're unsure which one to use, check with your pastor, minister or priest.

Next, select a quiet time and place to read the Bible by yourself each day—with your morning coffee, on your lunch break, or in bed at the end of the day. Also, you'll want to get a copy of the *E100® Daily Planner*, the popular punch-out card that helps you track your progress.

Finally, plan to take the E100® Challenge with another person (spouse, friend, work colleague), or with a group (Bible study, home group, Sunday School class, church congregation). Reading the Bible on your own, and then discussing your insights with other E100 participants, will transform your journey through the Bible into a powerful spiritual experience.

Personal Reflection Guide

For each of the 100 readings, you'll find a Personal Reflection Guide, which is built on the Scripture Union Bible Reading Method—Pray, Read, Reflect, Apply, Pray. Once you learn this simple method, you can use it anytime you read a Bible passage. Here's how it works:

- *Pray* before you read, asking God to help you understand his Word.
- *Read* the Bible passage, slowly and thoughtfully, more than once if you have time.
- *Reflect* on what you've read by answering the questions in this Guide and by jotting notes in the Bible Journal.
- *Apply* what you learn from God's Word. The Guide gives you practical action steps for each reading.
- *Pray* again, asking God to help you live out his Word.

Group Discussion Guide

Combining your personal Bible reading with group discussion is the best way to take the E100® Challenge. Here are some tips to enhance your E100® group experience.

If this is a new group for the E100® Challenge, use your first meeting to answer some basic questions: who will lead or facilitate, what's the best time, place and frequency, will childcare be needed? After the logistics are set, everyone will need the following: 1) an easy-to-read version of the Bible, 2) a copy of the *E100® Daily Planner* and/or, 3) a copy of this *E100® Challenge Guide*.

When you meet, keep in mind the following principles:

- *Be Prepared.* Encourage every member to read the passages for that week prior to the meeting.
- *Be Welcoming.* You might start each session with singing and worship, or refreshments and fellowship. Leave time at the end for prayer.
- *Encourage Discussion.* Start by allowing members to share what they learned from reading the passages on their own during the week. Then use the questions in the Group Discussion Guide to continue the dialog. No one should monopolize the conversation; everyone should have an opportunity to participate.
- *Learn and Live.* Encourage members to share examples of how they've tried to live out what they've learned. That's when the Bible will really come alive.

Meeting God Every Day

As you take the E100® Challenge, remember that your goal is not just to make it through the world's greatest book, or to gain more Bible knowledge, or to become more spiritually disciplined. Those things are very important, but your higher goal is to get to know the Bible's Author, God himself. The reason God gave us the Bible is that he wants us to know who he is. It really is true: if you want to know God, read his Book.

At Scripture Union, our mission is to help people of all ages meet God every day in the Bible and prayer. So our hope is that over the next few months, the Bible and its timeless message will come alive for you as never before. But don't let the E100® Challenge be the end of your journey in the Bible. Let it become the beginning of a lifetime adventure of meeting God daily in the Bible and prayer.



THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Beginning

In these readings, we discover some important things about both God and humankind. The Bible doesn't attempt to prove the existence of God but simply asserts that God was in the beginning. It also asserts that God created everything, including humankind, and gave humans certain responsibilities. However, sin (disobeying God) soon came on the scene and people began wreaking havoc with God's plan for the world. God decided to rid the world of sin through a great flood and so destroyed all life on earth—except for Noah, and his family.

Sadly, not long after the flood, the effects of sin again were evident. In a prideful attempt to prove they were as mighty as God, people began building a great tower up to heaven. God destroyed the tower and confused people's languages so they could never again join together in such a way.



1 CREATION

PRAY

Thank You, God, that You made the world and that it is very, very good. You are a great God!

READ

Genesis 1-2

REFLECT

Not everyone believes in God or that God created everything. Do you? If so, on what basis? How important is it to believe in God, and why?

APPLY

While you are walking outside today, take some time to admire something beautiful in nature and ask yourself, "What does this teach me about God?"

PRAY

Sometime today, spend a few minutes looking into the sky and praying aloud to God.

2 THE FALL

PRAY

Lord God, I thank You for the many truths in the Bible, even those that make me uncomfortable.

READ

Genesis 3

REFLECT

The idea of "sin" is old fashioned to many people today. What do you think? Is sin real and how do you define it? What major effects of sin do you see?

APPLY

All during the day, watch for temptations to sin. When you identify one, stop and decide how you'll avoid it. Ask God for any help you need.

PRAY

God, You know temptation is all around me and it's not easy to avoid. Keep me alert and ready to ask for Your help.

3 THE FLOOD

PRAY

Lord, I want to learn more today about what the Bible says about You and Your ways in the world.

READ

Genesis 6:5—7:24

REFLECT

How does the world today compare with that in Noah's time? What would God say about it? Do you ever feel like Noah as you try to live the right way today? Why?

APPLY

What are 2–3 practical steps you can take to make your world a better place this week? Jot down a realistic plan to act on one of them.

PRAY

Ask God how you can be like Noah, someone whose life is consistently reflecting God's priorities and values.

4 GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH

PRAY

Thank God for his constant and good care for the earth which he so lovingly created.

READ

Genesis 8:1—9:17

REFLECT

What do you think of when you see a rainbow? What promises of God are special to you? What reminds you of them?

APPLY

What is one way you could care for the earth today? As you do, make it a time of silent prayer for the wonders of creation.

PRAY

Thank You, Lord, for keeping Your promise to care for earth. Show me what more I can do to care for it.

5 TOWER OF BABEL

PRAY

Lord God, language and speech are good gifts from You and I offer You my thanks for them today.

READ

Genesis 11:1-9

REFLECT

The motivation for building the Tower of Babel was pride. How can pride be both a good and a bad thing? What examples of both kinds of pride have you seen?

APPLY

Make a list of some things of which you are most proud. Separate any that cause hurt or problems. Throw that list away as a symbol of your decision to reject wrongful pride.

PRAY

God, it's enough that I'm proud to be Your child. Keep me from any pride that will hurt others or displease You.



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MY BIBLE JOURNAL

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

IN THE BEGINNING

Purpose: To understand basic truths about God, humankind and sin, and how sin affects our relationship with God and others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Genesis 1–3

- The beginning of Genesis assumes that God exists. If you agree, what do you think God is like?
- What evidence, if any, for God's existence do you see in the world around you? What's your "case for God"?
- Do you think God loves you and that you are important to him? Why or why not?
- Do you believe in sin? If so, how would you define it? Is your definition different from the way most people you know define sin?
- Why do you think sin is so attractive? Share some strategies that have helped you avoid sin and temptation.

Genesis 6:5—9:17

- Do you think God judges people for sin today as he did in Noah's time? If so, how and why? Do you think it's fair for God to judge people?
- Do you ever find yourself in a situation where, like Noah, you are surrounded by sin? If so, explain.
- What makes you feel guilty? How do you handle those feelings?
- Have you ever experienced forgiveness from someone close to you? Have you ever experienced God's forgiveness? Share what you learned from these experiences.

Genesis 11:1-9

- The motivation for building the Tower of Babel was pride. When might pride be a sin? When might it be a good thing? Explain.
- Do you think it is always dangerous to want to "make a name" for yourself as the people in Babel did? Why or why not?

Before the Next Time: Read again and reflect on Genesis 1:26. Thank God that you have been made in his image and think about what difference that makes (or should make) in how you see yourself and others.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Abram (whose name was later changed by God to Abraham) was promised by God that he, Abram, would become the father of many descendants. As Abraham and his wife grew older without any children, they decided to take matters into their own hands and have a child through a maid-servant. In spite of this, God re-affirmed his promise to Abraham and a son, Isaac, was born to Abraham's wife, Sarah. Later, God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. While Abraham was preparing to obey, Isaac asked Abraham where the customary lamb for the sacrifice was. Abraham responded that "God himself will provide the sacrifice," which he did then and does now for all who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. The story continues with the unhappy relationship of Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau. It's the story of a dysfunctional family that God uses for his great purposes.



6 THE CALL OF ABRAM

PRAY

Thank You, God, that You have called me to know You and have a close relationship with You.

READ

Genesis 12

REFLECT

Have you ever felt “called” by God to do something or go somewhere? When and how? What ways do you think God may use to call people today?

APPLY

If you’re not sure of your “calling” from God, ask a trusted friend or pastor for guidance. Review and evaluate the ways that you are pursuing that “calling.”

PRAY

Ask God to confirm in your heart his calling to you and to help you carry it out faithfully each day.

7 GOD’S COVENANT WITH ABRAM

PRAY

Thank God for his many promises to you and that you can count on him to keep them all.

READ

Genesis 15

REFLECT

Because Abram was childless, it seemed impossible for God to keep his promise. What obstacles seem to prevent God from keeping his promises to you?

APPLY

Today, write down God’s most special promises to you and then read that list a few times throughout the day. Remind yourself that God keeps his promises.

PRAY

Lord, I know that whatever circumstances may say, You can be relied on. Help me to always trust that.



ISAAC'S BIRTH AND "SACRIFICE"

PRAY

Lord, sometimes Your word is hard to understand but please help me because I really want to.

READ

Genesis 21:1—22:19

REFLECT

Sacrificing Isaac was a big test for Abraham. Has God ever tested you? What was the result? Why do you think God tests people? What does it accomplish?

APPLY

Think of one challenge you face today that provides an opportunity to exercise your faith. Then, decide that challenge will be a "spiritual opportunity" for you.

PRAY

Good Lord, I pray that You'll help my faith to grow a little bit stronger each day.



JACOB AND ESAU COMPETE

PRAY

Thank God for your family and close friends. Ask God to help you keep those relationships strong and healthy.

READ

Genesis 27–28

REFLECT

How has your family made you the person you are today? What have you learned about making and maintaining good family relationships? What must healthy families avoid?

APPLY

Ask yourself, "What can I do to strengthen my family relationships?". Do at least one such thing today and plan to do at least one more in the next few days.

PRAY

Ask God to bless your family with a growing closeness and harmony. Ask him to let you be a part of that.

10 JACOB AND ESAU RECONCILE

PRAY

Teach me from this passage, Lord, and give me a teachable spirit whenever I read the Bible.

READ

Genesis 32–33

REFLECT

What was the key to the reconciliation of these two brothers? What do you think is the most vital element in healing strained family relationships? Why?

APPLY

If you have any strained relationships in your family, prayerfully approach the person(s) involved to attempt a reconciliation as soon as possible.

PRAY

Lord, I want to be reconciled and a reconciler within my family and all my relationships.



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MY BIBLE JOURNAL

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

Purpose: To learn about God's call and test of Abraham and something of how healthy and unhealthy families operate.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Genesis 12

- What do you think it means to be called to something?
- God called Abraham to leave his relatives and country and go to a new place. Do you think God still calls people today? If so, how? To what?
- Do you have a calling in life? If so, how would you describe it?

Genesis 15

- Without a son and heir, it would be impossible for Abraham to realize his calling as the father of a "great nation." Are you facing things now that seem impossible to handle or a calling that seems impossible to fulfill? How could faith make a difference, as it did for Abraham? What's your first step?

Genesis 21:1—22:19

- Being called to sacrifice his son was a real test for Abraham. Have you ever felt God might be testing you? When and how?
- How might a time of testing make one a better person? Has it done that for you? Explain your answer.

Genesis 27–28

- In what ways has your family of origin shaped you, for good or bad?
- Jacob and Esau didn't have a healthy family of origin. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a healthy family?

Genesis 32–33

- Jacob and Esau were severely estranged. Have you ever had a strained or broken relationship with a close friend or family member? If so, how did you deal with it?
- From your experience, how can broken family relationships be healed? How could Jacob and Esau's relationship have been healed quicker?

Before the Next Time: As you reflect on the promises God made to Abraham and how God fulfilled them, ask God to show you something of the plans and promises he has for you. Then, write them down in a notebook or journal and thank God for them.

The Story of Joseph

Joseph, the son of Jacob (the grandson of Abraham), is the central character in these readings. As a young man, Joseph had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they got so angry that they decided to sell him into slavery in Egypt. There, he was falsely imprisoned, but continued faithful to God and God gave him the ability to interpret dreams. This eventually led to his release from prison and his promotion to the position of highest authority in the country, second only to the Pharaoh. When a famine hit the entire region, Joseph's brothers were forced to come to Egypt to buy food—from none other than Joseph. After some struggle, his family was reconciled and reunited. Joseph knew and declared to his brothers that, though they had intended to harm him, God used that situation to work out his saving purposes for Joseph's family, God's people Israel and even the Egyptians!



11 SOLD INTO SLAVERY

PRAY

God, I'm thankful today for all those whom I love and who love me. I pray Your blessing on them.

READ

Genesis 37

REFLECT

What are some of the problems you see in Joseph's family? How could they have been avoided? How have you dealt with any problems or conflicts in your family?

APPLY

Take time during the day to record your major dreams for you and your family. Then, share some with your family and pray together that God will bless them.

PRAY

Lord, may my dreams be ones that please You and create only harmony and blessing in my family.

12 PRISON AND A PROMOTION

PRAY

Ask God to share wisdom from his Word with you as you read this next passage about Joseph.

READ

Genesis 39–41

REFLECT

How can a person deal with situations where they may be severely tempted or mistreated (as Joseph was)? How can one continue to trust God in such situations? Have you?

APPLY

Make a plan to deal with the next time you are treated unfairly by someone. Decide how you will react, especially if you may be facing such a situation soon.

PRAY

Lord God, I want to have the strength and maturity of Joseph the next time I'm tempted or mistreated.

13

TEN BROTHERS GO TO EGYPT

PRAY

Lord God, I thank You that you know me inside out and all that I think and feel—and still love me so much.

READ

Genesis 42

REFLECT

Joseph was harsh and distant in dealing with his brothers. Is that kind of behavior ever justified within families? Can that behavior ever be loving and constructive?

APPLY

Make the effort today to tell someone close to you, perhaps in your family, how much they mean to you. Make a loving gesture to demonstrate your feelings.

PRAY

Pray for your siblings and other close relatives today. Pray for a greater love for them and ways to show it.

14

THE BROTHERS RETURN

PRAY

Lord, my life is a journey with You and I'm thankful to be on it. Guide me in that journey today, I pray.

READ

Genesis 43–44

REFLECT

Joseph's brothers had begun to change. What helps family members grow and change beyond past mistakes and sins? Have you been able to do so? What helped you?

APPLY

Make a note of 2–3 ways you have grown and matured in your family relationships. Next, list 2–3 ways you want to continue to grow and mature.

PRAY

My God, You know where I need Your help to grow and mature. I want to love and support my family even more.

15

JOSEPH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY

PRAY

God, I want to know You and know more about You. Draw me closer to You today, I pray.

READ

Genesis 45:1—46:7

REFLECT

Can you look back on troubles and disappointments of the past and see how God has used them for good in some way? What difference will that make in the future?

APPLY

Be prepared to deal with any challenge, frustration or problem today by first repeating to yourself: "God can use this for good—for me or for someone else."

PRAY

Lord, I trust Your loving care and good purposes for me in spite of whatever problems I may face today.



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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE STORY OF JOSEPH

Purpose: To learn lessons from Joseph's story about unfair treatment, family conflicts and how to resolve and deal constructively with them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Genesis 37

- Like most families, Joseph's family experienced conflict and tension. What causes tension and conflict in your family or families you know?
- From your experience, what is the best way to resolve family conflict?

Genesis 39–41

- Have you, like Joseph, ever been unfairly put in a tough situation? If so, tell when and what happened?
- Have you ever learned an important lesson from being put in an unfair or tough situation? Explain.

Genesis 42

- When his brothers came to him in Egypt, Joseph pretended not to know or care about them. Why do you think people sometimes hide their true feelings?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you felt it necessary to hide your true feelings? If so, tell why and what happened.
- In what kind of situations do you feel most comfortable sharing the "real you"? Why is that?

Genesis 43–44

- Joseph had a plan to see if his brothers, who'd hurt him so badly in the past, had changed. How have you found healing from the unresolved hurts from the past?
- How could you help others who are struggling with past hurts? What can you share from your own experience?

Genesis 45:1—46:7

- Are there issues from your past that still shape who you are and what you do today? Is their effect positive or negative? Explain.
- What lessons have you learned from the life of Joseph?

Before the Next Time: If this study has raised any personal issues in your life and family relationships that you still struggle with, talk these over with God this week and ask for help to resolve them. Don't hesitate to ask for professional help if you need it. Read Romans 8:28, 29 and be encouraged that, whatever your situation, God is at work in it for good.

Moses and the Exodus

In these readings, we meet Moses, one of the greatest and most significant Old Testament figures. Moses grew up as a privileged member of Pharaoh's royal family, but had to flee Egypt when he murdered an Egyptian who had been abusing one of the Israelites. Years later, the Lord appeared to him in a burning bush and called him to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to "let my people go" free from their slavery. In these passages from the book of Exodus, we'll see how God called Moses and how God was intimately controlling the "defining moments" (for example, the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea) by which he delivered his people and brought about their exodus.

16

BIRTH OF MOSES

PRAY

When you pray, ask God to meet you in his Word and to speak to you as you read it now.

READ

Exodus 1–2

REFLECT

God protected Moses at his birth and as he grew. How has God been active in caring for you through your life? Why do you suppose God has done this?

APPLY

Begin a journal to record the ways that God is providing, caring and preparing you for the work to which he has called or is calling you.

PRAY

Lord, I'm grateful for the many ways You have protected and prepared me for life. Help me live it faithfully.

17

THE BURNING BUSH

PRAY

Lord, I want to see You more clearly, love You more dearly and follow You more nearly today and each day.

READ

Exodus 3:1—4:17

REFLECT

What are the most significant ways you “meet” with God? What means does God use most often to get your attention? How can one best prepare to meet with God?

APPLY

Allow some additional time today, or this week, to meet with God alone. Plan any special ways you will prepare yourself for this meeting.

PRAY

Lord, tune my heart and mind to the frequency of Your Spirit so that we can meet and have real fellowship.

THE TEN PLAGUES

PRAY

God, You are a holy God who is right and good in all You do. I give You my worship and all honor.

READ

Exodus 6:28—11:10

REFLECT

God judged Egypt harshly with the plagues. Do you think God still judges nations today? If so, what are some reasons for that judgment and some examples of it?

APPLY

Whenever you read or hear the news today, pray and ask God to lead your nation in ways that will avoid his judgment. Pray also for your nation's leaders.

PRAY

Lord, You are an upright and fair judge. May our people live so that You won't judge us as You did Egypt.

PASSOVER AND EXODUS

PRAY

Lord, my life is a journey with You and I'm thankful to be on it. Guide me in that journey today, I pray.

READ

Exodus 12:1-42

REFLECT

The Passover and Exodus are central biblical events. Why do you think they are still memorable today? What meaning do they have in your daily life, and for others you know?

APPLY

The next time you receive Communion, recall that Jesus' "last supper" was a Passover meal. Then reflect on how his death accomplished a great deliverance for you.

PRAY

Lord, I'm grateful that Jesus has made it possible for me to be freed from slavery to sin.

20

CROSSING THE RED SEA

PRAY

My God, I trust my day to You today. You are the one who I know I can count on no matter what happens.

READ

Exodus 13:17—14:31

REFLECT

Have you ever had a time when, like the Israelites, you had to rely totally on God? What did you learn? How did that time affect your relationship with God?

APPLY

What are the situations in your life where your only hope is for God to act on your behalf? Write a helpful Bible verse on paper and carry it with you to remind you of God's care.

PRAY

Ask God to equip you with courage to trust him in tough times and simply follow as he leads.



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MY BIBLE JOURNAL

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

MOSES AND THE EXODUS

Purpose: To learn from the way Moses encounters God and how God's actions in the special times of our lives shape and define us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Exodus 1–2

- Moses faced both challenges and opportunities growing up in Pharaoh's household. How have the difficulties and opportunities in your past prepared you for your life today?
- Do you have a mission in life? If so, how would you describe it?

Exodus 3:1—4:17

- Moses encountered God at the burning bush. What are some ways that people encounter God today? How do you encounter him?
- Have you ever had a kind of "burning bush" experience? If so, explain.
- Moses was afraid to look at God. How would you describe your relationship with God? Is fear involved? Why or why not?
- Have you, like Moses, ever felt inadequate and unprepared for something God wanted you to do? If so, explain the situation. Did God help you in any way?

Exodus 6:28—11:10

- God was clearly involved in the affairs of Egypt at that time. How involved do you think God is in the world today? Explain your answer and give examples.
- Some people think that natural disasters, like the plagues on Egypt, are expressions of God's judgment. What do you think?

Exodus 12:1–42

- What does the account of the Passover and Exodus show you about God?
- Why do you suppose the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt has inspired people throughout the ages? What do these events say to you?

Exodus 13:17—14:31

- The Exodus and crossing the Red Sea were defining moments for the Israelites. What have been the defining moments in your life? How did they affect you?
- Have you had any defining moments with God? If so, what happened?

Before the Next Time: Reflect on Moses' interactions with God and the way God personally delivered his people from slavery. Consider all the miraculous signs and how God fulfilled his promises. How does this change the way you see or interact with God? Thank the Lord, the great I AM who fulfills his promises.

The Law and the Land

Having delivered his people from Egypt, God continued to guide them. When they reached Mt. Sinai, God spoke to them and gave them the Ten Commandments to shape their worship and their relationships. This would set them apart to be his special people, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." But the people disobeyed God's ways and had to spend forty years wandering in the wilderness before reaching the border of the Promised Land. Moses was allowed to see it but not go in. Joshua led the people across the Jordan River and into the land God had promised them. God was with them every step of the way.

21

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

PRAY

Lord, thank You for giving us the wisdom for fruitful living that is contained in Your laws.

READ

Exodus 19:1—20:21

REFLECT

Some people consider the Ten Commandments outdated today. What use can they have in a modern, diverse society such as ours? Which ones are most needed today?

APPLY

Reread the Ten Commandments each day this week and decide how well you are able to live by each one. Pray for help to observe any that you find difficult to obey.

PRAY

Pray that God's wise laws for living will gain greater acceptance throughout our country.

22

THE GOLDEN CALF

PRAY

God, You and You alone are the true and living God, worthy of all worship, honor and praise.

READ

Exodus 32–34

REFLECT

What are some of the "things" that people you know make into "idols"? Why do you think they do that? What "idols" or false gods are most tempting to you?

APPLY

As you go through the day, be alert to and name the "idols" that people are worshiping. Be especially alert for those that tempt you.

PRAY

Lord and God, keep my heart and mind focused on You so that I never fall prey to the lure of false gods.

23

JOSHUA SUCCEEDS MOSES

PRAY

Lord, I know You are always with me and I thank You that I can have the courage to face whatever comes my way.

READ

Joshua 1

REFLECT

What examples or sources of guidance do you have to rely on when you face difficult or threatening situations? How have others and God's Word helped you in the past?

APPLY

Recall someone who has been a good example or a helpful guide in your life. Thank them today, if possible. Identify someone who you could help in a similar way.

PRAY

Father God, I'm grateful for those who have helped me along life's way. Help me do the same for another.

24

CROSSING THE JORDAN

PRAY

Show me more today, O Lord, about how to live in a way that pleases and honors You the most.

READ

Joshua 3–4

REFLECT

Joshua's men gathered stones to be a sign to future generations. What "stones" will you leave behind to testify to God's work in and through your life?

APPLY

Write a purpose or mission statement for your life. Include goals or "stones" that you want to leave as your spiritual legacy for your children and grandchildren.

PRAY

Lord, I want my life to make a difference. Show me what I can do now to leave a lasting legacy behind.

25

THE FALL OF JERICHO

PRAY

Powerful God, I trust Your power and I want to learn to trust it more and more each day.

READ

Joshua 5:13—6:27

REFLECT

Have you ever felt God asking you to do something seemingly impossible? What happened? How did that experience affect your faith today?

APPLY

Write this down and put it where you can see it each day: "Be strong and courageous...do not be discouraged, for the Lord Your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

PRAY

Ask God for assurance of his presence and care for you no matter what challenges you may face.



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MY BIBLE JOURNAL

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE LAW AND THE LAND

Purpose: To see how God wants his people to live and act as those called to be holy and live in close relationship with him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Exodus 19:1—20: 21

- There's a lot of controversy today surrounding the Ten Commandments. What place do you think they should have in our pluralistic society?
- Which of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) is most challenging to you? Why?

Exodus 32–34

- What do you think motivated the Israelites to worship the Golden Calf instead of God? What motivates people to worship "things" rather than God today?
- What things pull you away from God? What makes you feel closer to God?

Joshua 1

- Moses was Joshua's mentor. What would you say makes a person a good mentor? Have you ever been one?
- From what you know about Moses, why was he a good spiritual mentor for the young Joshua?
- Is there someone you view as a spiritual mentor for you—either a living person or someone from history? How does their example help you today?

Joshua 3–4

- Some people see the Israelites crossing the Jordan as an image of death. What do you think about it?
- What is your Promised Land? Do you think you'll ever reach it? Why or why not?

Joshua 5:13—6:27

- What do you think the Israelites were thinking as they marched around Jericho? Have you or someone you know ever taken a step of faith that seemed odd or impossible? If so what did you learn?

Before the Next Time: This week, read again the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and read Joshua 1:8. How can you make God's Word and God's law more completely a part of your everyday life?

The Judges

The Book of Judges describes a period in Israel's history before they had a king. It was a time when everyone did whatever they thought was right; consequently it was also a time of unfaithfulness, disobedience to God and one in which Israel suffered many defeats by her enemies. Yet, all was not dark. In the book of Judges we meet amazing individuals such as Deborah, a female Judge who courageously obeyed God and set an example of courage in the midst of adversity. We meet Gideon, the reluctant leader who nonetheless obeyed God, and Samson, whose life ended in disaster because he was unable to look past the beauty of the women around him. We'll also read the story of Ruth, one of the greatest love stories of all time.



26 ISRAEL'S DISOBEDIENCE

PRAY

Lord God, I want to know what You say is right and wise, and then to live that way. Teach me more today.

READ

Judges 2:6—3:6

REFLECT

What do you think causes people to ignore God's ways, suffer as a result, see him help them, and then turn away from him again? Have you experienced that pattern?

APPLY

What are two things you can do this day and this week to help you keep your relationship with God steady and moving forward? Begin implementing them now.

PRAY

Lord, I pray for myself and my nation that we will keep following Your ways faithfully each day.

27 DEBORAH LEADS ISRAEL

PRAY

God, I thank You for those people who set a good example for me and others in following You.

READ

Judges 4–5

REFLECT

What "spiritual mentors" have you learned the most from? What spiritual leaders are you most thankful for? How can you pass on to others what you've learned?

APPLY

Think of one or two people whose leadership and example has been important to you. Thank God for them and then write, call or personally thank them soon.

PRAY

God, help me to be a good leader and example to someone else, just as others have been for me.

28

GIDEON DEFEATS THE MIDIANITES

PRAY

Lord, thank You that when I am afraid and unsure, You provide the assurance of Your presence with me.

READ

Judges 6–7

REFLECT

Have you ever felt the call of God to anything that seemed too much for you to handle? How did God provide the help and assurance you needed? What did you learn?

APPLY

Think of at least one thing that God might be calling you to do for which you feel inadequate. Research possible solutions on the internet. Then, make a plan carry it out.

PRAY

Lord, I want to be bold and confident when I'm practicing my faith. Help me to rely on You more and more.

29

SAMSON DEFEATS THE PHILISTINES

PRAY

Thank God now for the many good and rewarding relationships you share with others.

READ

Judges 13–16

REFLECT

Samson's pride got him in big trouble. What dangers could pride pose in your relationships with others, especially with the opposite sex? How can you avoid those dangers?

APPLY

During the day, be alert to occasions of pride that might hurt your relationships. Make a list of any you notice and keep the list, praying for God's help with the items on it.

PRAY

Lord, help me to keep my pride in check. I want to be proud, first of all, of my relationship with You.

30 THE STORY OF RUTH

PRAY

Thank God for the gift of love, for his love for you and the love that you share with others.

READ

Ruth 1–4

REFLECT

Why do you think this is regarded as such a special story? What can you learn from Ruth's story and example to help you in your life today?

APPLY

Think of someone who may be older, in need or overlooked. Decide what you can do to show them love and care in a practical way today.

PRAY

God, I want to be a loving, loyal and caring person like Ruth. Show me how to begin today, I pray.

26-30



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MY BIBLE JOURNAL

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE JUDGES

Purpose: To learn from the experience of those in these stories who obeyed or disobeyed God and how that affected their relationship with him and others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Judges 2:6—3:6

- How would you explain the Israelite's pattern of falling away from God, getting in trouble, crying out for help, being delivered and falling away again?
- Do you experience ups and downs in your relationships with God? With others? Why is that so?
- Do you think God might use other nations to "test" our country as he did with Israel? If so, explain and give an example if you can.

Judges 4–5

- What lessons do you learn from the experiences of Deborah?
- Do you think faith can be a source of courage? Explain.

Judges 6–7

- Do you think Gideon was bold or timid? Why?
- God was clearly guiding Gideon. Does God still guide people today? How? How can you find God's guidance?

Judges 13–16

- How would you characterize the way Samson related to women? Why do you think he was that way?
- How can (or do) you develop healthy relationships with those of the opposite sex? What helps or hinders that development?

Ruth 1–4

- What character traits are most evident in Ruth's life? Which do you admire most? Why is that so?
- What character traits would others say are most evident in your life? Which of Ruth's character traits would you like to develop or develop more?

Before the Next Time: Ask God to show you how you can work through, in his strength, any issues you are facing. Recall the pitfalls Samson fell into and ask for help to avoid any pitfalls in your life. Identify any areas where you need greater faithfulness and ask for God to help you have the same faithfulness Ruth had.

The Rise of Israel

Samuel was the last of Israel's judges and the first of its prophets. His mother, Hannah, had been unable to have children and cried out to God for a son. When Samuel was born, she dedicated his life to God. When Samuel was old, Israel chose to reject God's Kingship and asked for an earthly king, like other nations. At God's command, Samuel anointed Saul as Israel's first king. In the course of time, however, Saul proved unworthy and God chose David to be king. Under David, a man after God's own heart, Israel experienced great prosperity.

31

SAMUEL LISTENS TO GOD

PRAY

Thank You, God, that You speak to me in the Bible. Help me to listen and learn well today.

READ

1 Samuel 1–3

REFLECT

Have you ever felt that God was speaking directly to you somehow? How could you tell? When you speak to God how do you know that he really hears you?

APPLY

If there's anything deeply troubling you today, set a time to share your trouble with God in prayer as soon as you can.

PRAY

Lord, I'm grateful that you hear my prayers and want to give me what is best for me.

32

KING SAUL

PRAY

Thank God for the leaders of government (at all levels) and pray for him to give them wisdom to lead well.

READ

1 Samuel 8–10

REFLECT

The people rejected God as their king. What role do you think religion has in national life and politics? What evidence of faith do you expect in a political leader?

APPLY

Write a note of encouragement today to a local or state political leader. Praise them in any way possible and assure them of your prayers for them as they lead.

PRAY

Lord, remind me to pray for my government leaders and to support and encourage them in any way I can.



DAVID AND GOLIATH

PRAY

Lord, may I confront any challenges this or any day trusting in Your awesome power and Your love for me.

READ

1 Samuel 16:1—18:16

REFLECT

Do you think David was really courageous or just foolhardy to fight Goliath? How can you judge when it's right to take on such a fight? Do you face one now?

APPLY

Courage to face the "goliaths" of life come from a strong faith and the support of others. Take some concrete steps, beginning today, to strengthen both.

PRAY

Ask God for courage to face any "goliaths" in your life. Pray to be able to trust him as young David did.



DAVID AND SAUL

PRAY

Ask God to help you maintain a healthy relationship with anyone in authority over you.

READ

1 Samuel 23:7—24:22

REFLECT

Is there a coworker, supervisor or other that you find it difficult to get along with? Why do you think that is so? What can you do to help make the relationship better?

APPLY

As you go through your day relating to "difficult" people, identify any negative attitudes and actions you can and try to react with a positive, disarming attitude or action.

PRAY

Lord, please give me the patience and insight I need in order to bring peace to my difficult relationships.

35

KING DAVID

PRAY

Lord God, I pray to know You better so that I can be more and more the person you want me to be.

READ

2 Samuel 5–7

REFLECT

David wanted to build a “house” for the Lord. If you could do anything for God, what would it be? What’s standing in the way of doing it?

APPLY

Today, be alert to any concrete, practical things that you can do for God, whether big or little. Pray first to ask if they are appropriate and, if so, do or at least begin them.

PRAY

Ask God to show you how you can best serve him, in both big and little ways, today and each day.



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MY BIBLE JOURNAL

RECORD YOUR INSIGHTS FROM THESE FIVE PASSAGES.

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE RISE OF ISRAEL

Purpose: To discover the qualities that God desires in those who lead his people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Samuel 1–3

- Hannah cried out in desperation to God for a son. Have you ever cried out to God in desperation? What happened? How did you react?
- God clearly spoke to the boy Samuel. Do you think God still speaks to people today? If so, why and how?
- To what extent do you think young children such as Samuel can hear from the Lord, understand and respond? Do you know any children like that? Explain.

1 Samuel 8–10

- God directed Samuel to anoint Saul as king and leader of his people. What would you say are the traits of a good leader?
- Are there Christian leaders—today or from history—that you admire? Who and why?

1 Samuel 16:1—18:16

- What do you think really motivated David to challenge Goliath? Have you ever experienced that same motivation?
- Do you face any “Goliaths” in your life? What are they and how might faith in God help you confront them?

1 Samuel 23:7—24:22

- What underlying issues do you think affected Saul’s attitude toward David?
- Is there anyone who has an irrationally negative attitude toward you? How should you respond?

2 Samuel 5–7

- What would you say made David such a great king? What were his weaknesses?
- From what you know, what lessons from David’s life could you apply to yours?

Before the Next Time: Hannah, Eli, Samuel, Saul, David and Jonathan all can teach us something about living with devotion and integrity before God. Reflect on each of them and list the major lessons we can learn from them. Ask God how you can incorporate these lessons into your life.

The Fall of Israel

In these readings, we see that David, though a great king and a man of God, committed adultery and murder, with tragic consequences not only for himself but for his family and the nation, also. His son, Solomon, famed for his god-given wisdom and wealth, fell into idolatry and soon, Israel fell into the depths of defeat under successive kings. Through the prophet Elijah, the Lord clearly demonstrated that he is the one true God, but because of its sin, the nation became divided and eventually was taken into exile.

36 DAVID AND BATHSHEBA

PRAY

Lord, I thank You for the wisdom and guidance in Your Word that shows me the best way to live.

READ

2 Samuel 11:1—12:25

REFLECT

What do you think David did wrong and right in this story? How could he have avoided this tragedy? What valuable lessons can you learn from David?

APPLY

In your interactions today, watch for temptations to do wrong and to cover it up. If necessary, tactfully confront someone else who, like David, needs it.

PRAY

God, keep me honest about any wrong in my life and open to hearing from others when I'm not.

37 KING SOLOMON

PRAY

I praise You for Your great wisdom, Lord. You are such a wise and good God, and You share Your wisdom with me.

READ

1 Kings 2–3

REFLECT

If God promised to give you anything you asked for, what would you request? Why? What are some right, and wrong, motivations for prayer?

APPLY

Write on a piece of paper the 3–5 greatest sources of wisdom in your life. Reflect on how you can add to them or increase the wisdom you gain from current sources.

PRAY

Show me, O God, how I can gain greater wisdom, not for my sake but for the sake of those around me.



SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

PRAY

Thank God today that he is with you every second of the day, and that nothing can change that.

READ

1 Kings 8:1—9:9

REFLECT

The Temple was a special place where God's glory was present. Do you sense God's presence clearly when you go to church? How? What might "cloud" that sense?

APPLY

As you go through the day, stop frequently to remind yourself that God is with you each minute, and to sense his presence with you and enjoy it.

PRAY

Pray now for a greater, clearer sense of God's loving presence in your life each day.



ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

PRAY

Lord, I'm grateful for the good people who teach me so well what it means to follow You.

READ

1 Kings 16: 29—19:18

REFLECT

The people didn't trust God to feed them so they worshiped both the Lord and the idol Baal. Have you ever been tempted to do something like that? How can you avoid it?

APPLY

Is there anything you need that's so big it's hard to trust God to provide it? If so, write it on a piece of paper and next to it write; "God is big enough to do it." Trust that.

PRAY

Lord, You proved Your power through Elijah. Help me to trust that You can provide anything I need.

40

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

PRAY

Thank God that he is in control of all things that will come your way during this day.

READ

2 Kings 25

REFLECT

The fall of Jerusalem was punishment for Israel's sin. Do you believe God uses disasters of different kinds to punish people today? Who would you warn if you could?

APPLY

Pause today to confess any sin in your life you're aware of and ask God's forgiveness for both your wrongs and the wrongs of your nation, also.

PRAY

Lord God, I know You are a totally just and loving God and I trust in that completely.



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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE FALL OF ISRAEL

Purpose: To see how the sin of Israel's leaders and people led to the destruction and exile of the Israelite nation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

2 Samuel 11:1—12:25

- “What I do in my personal life is nobody’s business but my own.” Agree? Disagree? Explain your answer.
- What do you learn from Nathan’s response to David about how to act when people you care about make bad choices? Have you ever had to act as Nathan did?

1 Kings 2–3

- How would you answer if God said to you, as he did to Solomon, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you”? Be honest!
- Solomon asked for and received great wisdom from God. What are the greatest sources of wisdom in your life? Who is the wisest person you’ve ever known? Why do you say that?

1 Kings 8:1—9:9

- The worship of Solomon and the people in dedicating the temple was lively and heartfelt. What makes worship come alive for you? Why?
- If you could, what would you change about the worship services you’ve attended recently? What would you want the changes to do?

1 Kings 16:29—19:18

- Elijah was so spiritually dry and discouraged that he asked God to end his life. Have you ever felt great spiritual dryness or discouragement? Explain the situation.
- What do you do when you feel spiritually dry? What gives you a sense of personal and spiritual renewal?

2 Kings 25

- The capture of Jerusalem and sacking of the Temple was a terrible disaster. Have you experienced any terrible disasters in your life? If so, what did you learn from them?
- Have you ever felt closer to God during, or as a result of, any tough times in your life? If so, in what way?

Before the Next Time: This week, consider the main reasons why the kingdom fell from prosperity into captivity and exile. Do you agree that the main reason was neglecting the Word of God and failing to deal appropriately with sin? If so, how can you make spending time in the Word of God a (higher) priority? Consider also whether there is sin in your life that you need to deal with.

Psalms and Proverbs

The Psalms describe every form of human emotion from the depths of despair to the heights of joy. The Psalms teach us a great deal about what an authentic relationship with God is like. Although there are times when the psalmist expresses deep anguish and pain to God, there is also a constant refrain of thanksgiving and praise to the One who can always be relied on in times of trouble.

The Book of Proverbs is full of wisdom and practical advice on how to lead a life that pleases God and avoid the many pitfalls we can so easily fall into.

41

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

PRAY

God, I thank You for all the beauty, comfort, inspiration and guidance found in Your Word.

READ

Psalm 23

REFLECT

What do you learn about the nature and character of the Lord in this beloved psalm? Which verse is most significant to you? Why?

APPLY

Try to take a walk outside today and look for examples of the images used in this psalm (sheep, green grass, still waters, etc.). Thank God for these reminders of his care.

PRAY

Lord, You are indeed a very good Shepherd to me and I'm grateful for Your unfailing and loving care.

41-45

42

HAVE MERCY ON ME

PRAY

Lord, prepare my heart and mind to be with You now. I bow before You as Lord and God.

READ

Psalm 51

REFLECT

Why is it so important to confess your sins? How can you be confident that God will forgive you? What help does this psalm give you?

APPLY

Find a quiet place to reflect on your life this week. List any sins you recall. Write them on paper, confess them, ask God's forgiveness and then tear up the paper.

PRAY

Thank God for the many times he has forgiven you and for his patience and understanding toward you.



PRAISE THE LORD

PRAY

Lord God, You are such a wonderful God; Creator and Sustainer of all! I marvel at all that You are!

READ

Psalms 103

REFLECT

Having read David's words of praise in this psalm, what would you most praise God for? What inspires or hinders you in praising the Lord?

APPLY

Try to compose your own short psalm of praise to the Lord. Use David's psalm as a guide but substitute your own words and specific ideas.

PRAY

Praise God now for who he is and for all that he means to you and for all he has done for you.



GODLY WISDOM

PRAY

You are the source of all true wisdom, Lord. I come to You seeking more of Your wisdom.

READ

Proverbs 1–4

REFLECT

People have many ideas about what wisdom is. What do you think it means to be really wise? How does one become truly wise?

APPLY

Think of someone you believe is really wise. What wisdom do they have that you need? Ask them how they got it and then ask them to share it with you.

PRAY

Thank God that his wisdom is freely and readily available to you and to anyone who asks.



PROVERBS OF SOLOMON

PRAY

Ask God to give you some real, practical wisdom for right living as you read these proverbs today.

READ

Proverbs 16–18

REFLECT

What are some of the main themes of these proverbs? Which of them are most helpful to you? Are there any of your own you'd add?

APPLY

Choose 2–3 of these proverbs that seem most applicable to you. Write them on paper and put them where you'll see them each day. Try to memorize them quickly.

PRAY

Lord, I don't want to just read Your words of wisdom; I want them to really mold and shape my life.

41-45



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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

PSALMS AND PROVERBS

Purpose: To discover more of God's character and the nature of right living as expressed in the praise, worship, laments and wise sayings of these books, and to see how these insights apply to our life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Psalms 23

- Of the many images in Psalm 23, which are most comforting to you? Why?
- What contemporary image(s) would you use in describing the Lord to a friend? "The Lord is my...?"

Psalms 51

- What do you learn from Psalm 51 about confessing your sins? In what ways is this psalm helpful or encouraging to you?
- Have you ever experienced a deep sense of God's forgiveness for something you've done wrong? How did it come about? What happened as a result?

Psalms 103

- What things motivated David to praise God in Psalm 103? What most impresses you about the Lord as David describes him?
- Do you have any reasons for praising God? If so, what are they?

Proverbs 1–4

- In the Book of Proverbs, a father imparts wisdom to his son. What wisdom did your parents or other significant adults impart to you? What wisdom do you wish they had shared?
- What do you think it means to be wise? Is it different from simply being knowledgeable? How?

Proverbs 16–18

- Would you say you are wise? Why or why not? What wisdom have you gained from your experiences in life? From your relationship with God?
- If you were writing a few "proverbs," what would you say?

Before the Next Time: Make note this week of some of the characteristics of God that are most meaningful to you and take time to praise him for them. As you reflect on the advice given in both books, ask God to help you incorporate specific aspects into your life.

The Prophets

The prophetic writings make up approximately one third of the Bible. They are divided into two sections: the major prophets and the minor prophets (given those names because of the length of their writings, not the importance). First, we'll look at a prophecy of great significance found near the middle of the Bible. Then, we'll see how three of the prophetic writers responded to their calling. Their response was not always a positive one, but God was working in and through them all to achieve his good purposes. Finally, we'll look briefly at a prophetic vision of judgment day.



46 THE SUFFERING SERVANT

PRAY

Lord, it's amazing to me how rich the Bible is with the story of Your wonderful work in the world.

READ

Isaiah 51–53

REFLECT

There is both “bad news” and “good news” in this passage. What is the bad news and the reason for it? What foreshadowing of “good news” do you see?

APPLY

Compare these verses with what you know about how Jesus suffered. Note the striking similarities. Thank God for the Good News that resulted from that suffering.

PRAY

Good God, thank You that Jesus suffered for my sins so that I could be free of their penalty.

47 JEREMIAH'S CALL AND MESSAGE

PRAY

Lord, give me ears and a heart to be ready to hear and obey whenever You call to me.

READ

Jeremiah 1:1—3:5

REFLECT

Have you ever felt that God called you to deliver a hard message to friends, your church or community? If so, what did you do? How did you feel?

APPLY

Is God calling you to deliver a challenging message to anyone? If so, write down what you'll say. Be sure to consult with a trusted friend or pastor before you say it.

PRAY

Lord, keep guard over my mouth so that I say only those things which You want me to say.

48

DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN

PRAY

Lord, You know it's not easy for me to do the right thing all the time but I really do want to.

READ

Daniel 6

REFLECT

Daniel may have been tempted to go along with the King's decree. What temptations to "downplay" your faith do you face? How can you avoid them?

APPLY

Look for a way to stand up for your faith in public today, whether giving silent thanks before a meal, wearing a Christian symbol or in some other appropriate way.

PRAY

Ask God to show you how to appropriately stand publicly for your faith and for the courage to do it.

49

THE STORY OF JONAH

PRAY

Lord God, I want to share your desire that all people everywhere come to know You.

READ

Jonah 1–4

REFLECT

Have you ever wanted to run away from God? What did you end up doing and why? What lesson did you learn? How would you advise someone else who felt that way?

APPLY

There are many people and groups—some near you—who don't yet accept the Christian faith. Decide on one or two that you will pray for regularly, beginning today.

PRAY

Lord, if there are people near me who need to know about Your love for them, show me how I can help.

50 THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

PRAY

My God, I want to know You and draw closer to You as I spend this time with You today.

READ

Malachi 1–4

REFLECT

Some people think the notion of a “judgment day” is outmoded. What do you think? What place does judgment have in the Good News?

APPLY

Ask yourself this question: “If I faced judgment day today, what would happen to me?” Then, talk to God, based on your answer to that important question.

PRAY

Ask God to give you confidence for the judgment day. Ask him to calm any doubt or worry you may have.



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RECORD YOUR INSIGHTS FROM THESE FIVE PASSAGES

RECORD YOUR INSIGHTS FROM THESE FIVE PASSAGES.

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE PROPHETS

Purpose: To look at an important Old Testament prophecy of the coming Messiah and to examine the calling, character and motivation of some of the prophets.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Isaiah 51–53

- In what ways does the passage from Isaiah 52:13—53:12 seem to describe what happened to Jesus Christ hundreds of years later?
- Why do you think that the servant of God described by Isaiah had to suffer?

Jeremiah 1:1—3:5

- Why did Jeremiah resist God's plan for him? Do you ever feel that you, like Jeremiah, are resisting something God wants you to do? Why did or didn't you?
- Jeremiah was sent to speak God's message to Jerusalem. If God sent you to speak to your community or country, what would you say?

Daniel 6

- Daniel took a great risk to stand up for his faith. Have you ever had to stand up for what you believe, in spite of significant consequences? What happened?
- Do you think people today should be more "up front" about their religious beliefs? Why or why not?

Jonah 1–4

- Have you, like Jonah, ever "run away from God"? If so, tell when and why.
- Jonah was disappointed in God for his compassion on Ninevah. Have you ever been disappointed with God? Explain. What did you learn as a result?

Malachi 1–4

- Malachi talks about "the day of judgment." What do you believe about judgment? Do we really need it? Explain.
- Do you think there will be a "day of judgment" sometime in the future? If so, how does that affect your actions today?

Before the Next Time: Congratulations! You've finished these readings in the Old Testament. How would you summarize its teachings about how God wants to relate to people? Plan steps you can take soon to cultivate a deeper relationship with him.



THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Living Word

These readings explore the life of Jesus from his eternal past to his birth and early life on earth. We get a glimpse of his glory and also of his humanity as he is confronted with temptation. John and Luke show us how people respond to Jesus, some with outright rejection and others with wholehearted acceptance. In these readings, we meet Jesus, the fully human, fully divine son of God, the Word become flesh, the Living Word.



51

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

PRAY

Thank You, God, that You sent Your Son into the world to demonstrate Your great love for us.

READ

John 1:1-18

REFLECT

What do you find most striking or significant about what this passage says about Jesus? Has it changed or deepened what you believe about Jesus in any way?

APPLY

Write a few sentences that describe what you believe about Jesus, why he came to earth, and what all that means to you.

PRAY

Lord, help me to understand more and more about who Jesus is and what he means to my life.

52

GABRIEL'S MESSAGE

PRAY

Thank God today for giving you his written Word, the Bible and the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

READ

Luke 1

REFLECT

How important do you think it is that Luke says his account of Jesus' birth is based on eyewitness accounts? Does anything in this account surprise or trouble you?

APPLY

The angel's appearance must have been a surprise. Today, ask God to surprise you in some way with some good news or event. Be alert and open to God's surprise.

PRAY

Lord, I want to be willing to hear You and accept Your Word to me no matter how surprising it may seem.



THE BIRTH OF JESUS

PRAY

Praise God today for the good news that the angels proclaimed when Jesus was born.

READ

Luke 2:1-40

REFLECT

Why do you suppose the lowly shepherds were the first to hear of Jesus' birth? How would you share the angel's good news in our time?

APPLY

Ponder how you could most effectively share the good news of Jesus with a friend or coworker. Then, look for opportunities today to do it.

PRAY

Lord, I'm grateful for the good news of Jesus. Help me to be able to share it effectively with others.



JOHN THE BAPTIST

PRAY

God, my Lord, I'm always eager to be with You and listen to You speak to me through Your Word and Spirit.

READ

Luke 3:1-20

REFLECT

If John the Baptist had a message for us today, what do you think it would be? How do you think he would look, communicate, and be received by people?

APPLY

John told his listeners how to produce "fruit in keeping with repentance." If you need to produce any or any more of that fruit, adopt one of John's suggestions.

PRAY

Lord, sometimes Your Word makes me uncomfortable but I do want to hear it clearly and obey it fully.

55

BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION

PRAY

Lord, there is so much good help for me in the Bible. Help me today to learn more from it.

READ

Matthew 3:13—4:17

REFLECT

What can you learn from this account of Jesus' temptation that will help you when you are tempted? What temptations affect you the most?

APPLY

List the biggest temptations in your life. For each, jot down some practical strategies for resisting.

PRAY

Lord, I pray that throughout this day and the days ahead You will help me to resist temptation and honor You.



51-55

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ASSAGES

55

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE LIVING WORD

Purpose: To learn more about Jesus, the various ways people respond to him and how he dealt with temptation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

John 1:1-18

- If someone asked you “What do you believe about Jesus?” what would you say?
- What does this passage in the Gospel of John teach about Jesus? Does any of it surprise you? Explain.

Luke 1

- How would you have felt if you were Elizabeth or Mary, Zechariah or Joseph?
- Zechariah and Mary must have been quite surprised by the angel’s visit. Has God ever done something surprising in your life? If so, what happened?

Luke 2:1-40

- Why do you suppose God allowed his son to be born where and how he did?
- Christmas began as the celebration of Jesus’ birth. In our pluralistic society, do you think Christmas should still focus more on Christ? If so, why?

Luke 3:1-20

- Would you consider John the Baptist to be a “religious extremist”? Is it bad to be passionate and public about what we believe? Why?
- Is there anyone you consider to be a modern example of John the Baptist?

Matthew 3:13—4:17

- What situations pose the greatest temptation for you today? Why?
- What helped Jesus resist temptation? What could you do to resist temptation?

Before the Next Time: In these readings, we’ve learned who Jesus truly is, why he was born on earth and how he coped with temptation—a challenge we all face. Identify some facet of Jesus that is especially important to you and praise him for it. What can you learn about resisting temptation from Jesus’ example?

A vibrant stained glass artwork depicting the Holy Family. In the upper left, Jesus, with a beard and halo, is shown in prayer with his hands clasped. To his right, the Virgin Mary, also with a halo and wearing a blue mantle over a red gown, is in a similar prayerful pose. Below them, the infant Jesus lies on a white cloth, looking up. The background is filled with colorful, abstract patterns in shades of blue, red, and gold, typical of traditional stained glass design.

The Teachings of Jesus

These readings explore some of Jesus' teachings. Like other teachers of his time, Jesus sometimes spoke directly and other times he used stories (such as parables) to convey his message. Much of his teaching was based on the Old Testament—the Bible his listeners were familiar with (and that we read during the first ten sections). Jesus made it clear that the Messiah who had been promised in the Old Testament had come—and he was that Messiah. God's unfolding plan had reached a new phase and brought about a new way of living. That new way of living was not just for Jesus' followers then, but also for those who follow him today.

56

SERMON ON THE MOUNT-PART 1

PRAY

Thank God that he wants you to come and be with him now—and that he welcomes you with love.

READ

Matthew 5:1—6:4

REFLECT

“If you live by the Sermon on the Mount, you’ll be happy.” Agree, disagree? Why? Is it possible to follow Jesus’ teaching completely in our modern society?

APPLY

There are many different attitudes and actions Jesus commends here. Choose one or two that seem difficult for you and try to begin practicing it or them today.

PRAY

Lord, I want to live the kind of life that You commend because I know that’s the way to be the happiest.

57

SERMON ON THE MOUNT-PART 2

PRAY

Lord, continue to do Your good work in me as I read and study Your Word today.

READ

Matthew 6:5—7:29

REFLECT

Is it really possible not to worry, as Jesus says here? What things worry you the most? How can your faith help you deal with those worries?

APPLY

Write down on paper the things that are worrying you the most right now. Pray for God to help you trust him and then tear up the paper and “throw your worries away.”

PRAY

Pray and thank God that he is big enough to deal with anything and everything that worries you.

58

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

PRAY

Pause to thank God now for the gift of this day and all that you'll receive from him today.

READ

Matthew 13

REFLECT

What do you think Jesus meant by "the Kingdom of Heaven"? What do you think it is or will be like? Why should we be concerned about it?

APPLY

Take a walk outside sometime today and look at a garden and some weeds. Reflect on what they teach you about the Kingdom of Heaven.

PRAY

Lord, keep my mind and spirit watchful and alert to see signs of Your Kingdom all around me.

59

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

PRAY

Lord God, as I get to know You better, I want to share more and more of Your heart and concerns.

READ

Luke 10:25-37

REFLECT

Who do you consider to be your neighbors? What makes one a "neighbor"? How are you exercising your responsibilities as a "neighbor" to others?

APPLY

Identify a "neighbor" in need—whether nearby or not—and decide how and when you can be a "Good Samaritan" in a practical way.

PRAY

God, make me a good neighbor to anyone I can help. I want to be a "Good Samaritan," too.

60 LOST AND FOUND

PRAY

Lord, I thank You that You love me so much and that You'll always hold on to me and never let me go.

READ

Luke 15

REFLECT

What might these parables, especially the parable of The Lost Son, teach you about God? How does that make you feel? Does anything in these parables surprise you?

APPLY

Think of something very special that you've ever lost and then found. Remember how you felt and then imagine how God feels when a "lost" person is found.

PRAY

Praise God for his unfailing love and care for you, for all his children and for all creation.



[illegible]

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Purpose: To discover some major teachings of Jesus and what they say about living as one of his followers.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Matthew 5:1—6:4

- What would you say is the secret to true happiness? How does one achieve it?
- How would you describe Jesus' idea of true happiness given in the Sermon on the Mount? How does it compare with that of most people in our society?

Matthew 6:5—7:29

- What do you suppose Jesus would say to people he met who were walking through a shopping mall today?
- Which parts of the Sermon on the Mount are most challenging to you? Why?

Matthew 13

- Jesus used some parables to talk about the Kingdom of Heaven. How would you explain the Kingdom of Heaven to someone you know? To a skeptic?
- Why do you suppose Jesus talked so much about the Kingdom of Heaven? Why is it so important?

Luke 10:25—37

- When he was asked, "Who is my neighbor?", Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. In our global community, what does it mean to be a "neighbor"?
- Who do you consider to be your neighbor(s) today? What is your responsibility towards that person or persons?

Luke 15

- How would you have felt and reacted if you were the father in the parable of The Lost Son? Explain why.
- What do you think is the main point Jesus is making through the three "lost" parables in Luke 15? What impresses you most about them?

Before the Next Time: During the next week, reflect on the things that you think, say and do. Are they mainly culturally conditioned or signs of the Kingdom that reflect Jesus' teachings? Ponder how you can live so that you help bring Jesus' teachings and God's Kingdom into your community to a greater extent.

The Miracles of Jesus

In this section, we read about the remarkable things that Jesus did during his three years of earthly ministry. His miracles range from feeding over five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish, to healing a man born blind, to raising Lazarus from the dead. Miracles such as these don't fit with the way most people today think the world works. Are they just "fairy tales" or is Jesus showing us that there is more to life than we often think? Let's read on and see for ourselves.

61

FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND

PRAY

Thank God that he feeds you the food you need each day and offers to feed you from his Word, also.

READ

Luke 9:1-36

REFLECT

Many people today are skeptical of the miracles in the Bible. What's your perspective? How would you explain Jesus' miracle of feeding 5,000 people to a skeptic?

APPLY

At each meal today, be sure to thank God for feeding you so generously. Consider making a generous donation to a local food pantry, also.

PRAY

Lord, I am truly thankful for Your faithfulness in feeding me. Help me never to take Your care for granted.

62

WALKING ON WATER

PRAY

Great God, I acknowledge You and Your Son, Jesus, as the God of all power, the God of miracles.

READ

Matthew 14:22-36

REFLECT

What "storms" have you faced recently? How did you cope? How did your faith help you deal with any fear or danger? What have you learned to help in future storms?

APPLY

Think of a situation that is causing you fear or stress. With that in mind, say aloud several times, "Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid."

PRAY

Lord, when those inevitable storms of life come to me, help me to remember Your presence and power with me.

63

HEALING A BLIND MAN

PRAY

Lord, continue to open my eyes and heart to the wonder of who You are and all that You have done.

READ

John 9

REFLECT

Some people claim to be miraculously healed by God today. Others deny it happens. What do you think? Does God still heal miraculously? Have you seen it happen?

APPLY

The blind man, when healed, said "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see." Sing or read aloud the first verse of the well-known hymn *Amazing Grace*.

PRAY

Good Lord, I pray that You will heal me of any spiritual blindness so I can see You more clearly today.

64

HEALING A DEMON-POSSESSED MAN

PRAY

Thank You, Lord, for the many kinds of freedom You give me. I'm very grateful for all You do for me.

READ

Mark 5:1-20

REFLECT

Do you believe in the existence of evil in the world today? Where have you seen or experienced it personally? How can this story help you deal with evil?

APPLY

If you see or experience an example of evil today or this week, stop and pray that Jesus' power will quickly overcome and defeat it.

PRAY

Lord, You know the evil in the world. I'm powerless against it but I'm thankful that You're not.

65

RAISING LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD

PRAY

Lord God, You alone are the creator and the true source of all life. I honor and thank You.

READ

John 11

REFLECT

What does it mean to you to know that Jesus has power even over death? How does that knowledge affect the way that you think about your own death?

APPLY

Memorize Jesus' words: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

PRAY

Lord, when I face the death of a loved one, or my own death, help me be comforted by Your promise.



61-65

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

Purpose: To explore Jesus' miracles and ask what they tell us about him and what he was teaching when he performed them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Luke 9:1-36

- Do you believe that miracles still happen today? Why or why not? Have you been involved in any?
- What's your view of the miracles of Jesus? Do you believe they actually happened as reported in the Bible? Does it matter? Why or why not?

Matthew 14:22-36

- What does the miracle of Jesus walking on the water teach you about him?
- Have you ever trusted God during a stormy period in your life? What happened?

John 9

- Why do you suppose the religious leaders were so skeptical about the blind man's healing? Would you have been? Explain.
- Why do you think so many people are skeptical about faith issues today? Is there any way to overcome that skepticism?
- What does this miracle—the healing of the blind man—teach you about Jesus?

Mark 5:1-20

- What is your view of evil? How would you define it? What's a clear example of evil in the world today?
- The demon-possessed man was captive to a powerful force of evil. How is the power of evil generally portrayed in the media today? Is it accurate? Explain.
- What does the healing of a demon-possessed man teach you about Jesus?

John 11

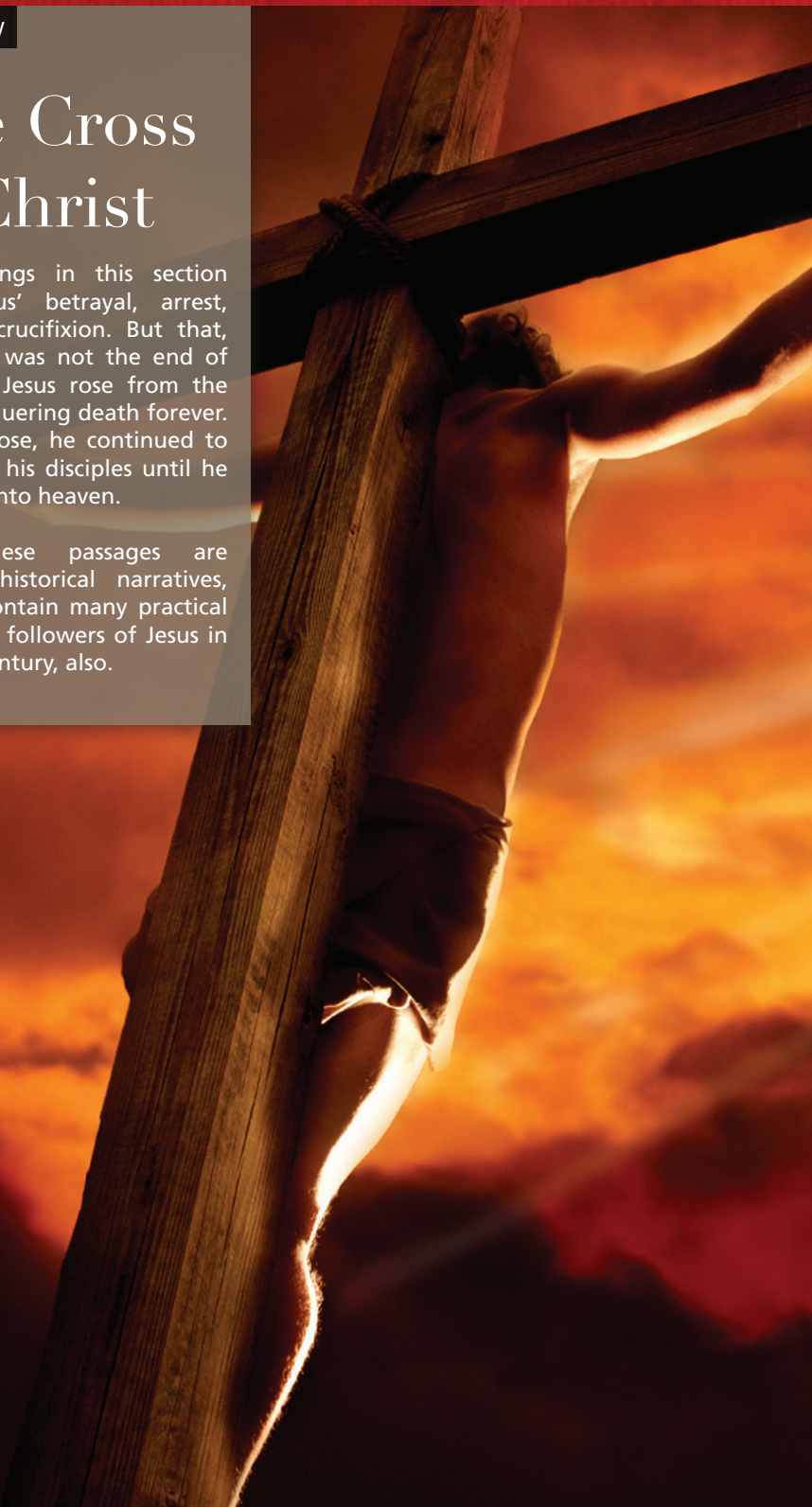
- What does the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead teach you about Jesus? What do you think those who witnessed it felt and thought?
- How do you feel about your own death? Explain why you feel that way. What is your greatest source of hope for the future?

Before the Next Time: When Jesus performed his miracles, he was sending a message about who he was and what he came to do. Before the next set of readings, ask yourself what these miracles tell you about Jesus and how that might help you know him better and trust him more fully, especially in any challenging situation you may be facing.

The Cross of Christ

Our readings in this section cover Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trial and crucifixion. But that, of course, was not the end of the story. Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death forever. After he rose, he continued to meet with his disciples until he ascended into heaven.

While these passages are primarily historical narratives, they do contain many practical lessons for followers of Jesus in the 21st century, also.



66 THE LAST SUPPER

PRAY

Lord, no matter what I read from Your Word today, I pray that I will attend to it well.

READ

Luke 22:1-46

REFLECT

What does this passage say to you about Jesus? What does it say to you about Peter and the other disciples? About you?

APPLY

The next time you prepare to take communion, say aloud, perhaps as a whisper, the words Jesus spoke over the bread and wine.

PRAY

Thank God for the Last Supper and for every "last supper" celebrated since that night.

67 ARREST AND TRIAL

PRAY

Lord, when I face pressures and "trials" for my faith, help me to be strong and faithful to You.

READ

John 18

REFLECT

What do you think Peter was thinking that night? Have you ever been in a situation like that? Have you faced pressures to "deny" Jesus? What does it mean to deny him today?

APPLY

Imagine you were in this story. What pressures would you feel? Would you defend Jesus? How? What you would say to the religious leaders and to Pilate?

PRAY

Thank God that, unlike Pilate, you know what truth is and that you know where to find it.

68

THE CRUCIFIXION

PRAY

As you pray, ask God to enable you to fully enter into this familiar but horrific account of Jesus' death.

READ

John 19

REFLECT

In light of what Jesus did on the Cross, why do you think so many people still ignore him? Why should anyone care that Jesus died?

APPLY

Spend a few minutes today meditating on a cross (a picture or piece of jewelry, for example). Think about what Jesus did there and thank him for all that means.

PRAY

Lord, I can't begin to imagine what You went through on the Cross. How much You must love me!

69

THE RESURRECTION

PRAY

Lord, I come to You today with an open heart and mind, ready to listen and learn what You have for me.

READ

John 20–21

REFLECT

Many people say the resurrection is just a "myth" or the result of wishful thinking. What do you think? Why is it important that it's true?

APPLY

When you are outside today, look for evidence of new life. How do you see examples of resurrection all around you? How do these examples remind you of Jesus?

PRAY

Lord, it's amazing and hard to comprehend but help me to take in the wonder of Your resurrection.



THE ASCENSION

PRAY

Lord, how You continue to amaze me with the wonder of Your power and Your goodness!

READ

Acts 1:1-11

REFLECT

What “convincing proofs” could you offer someone that Jesus is alive today? Do you believe Jesus will return to earth some day? Why does it matter?

APPLY

Look up into the sky and imagine that you were there that day that Jesus ascended into heaven. Imagine what it must have been like to witness that event!

PRAY

Thank God that Jesus is alive in heaven and has promised that he will return to earth someday.



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Purpose: To take a fresh look at the death and resurrection of Jesus and what that means for his followers today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Luke 22:1-46

- Imagine you were at the Last Supper. What might you have felt and thought at this “first communion”?
- What helps or causes you to “remember Jesus”? Explain how and why. Does anything ever cause you to “forget Jesus”? If so, explain how and why.

John 18

- How would you explain the motives and actions of Caiaphas, Pilate and Peter during the arrest and trial of Jesus? What was their attitude toward him?
- Pilate asked “what is truth?” Do you believe there is such a thing as “absolute truth”? Why or why not? How can we know?

John 19

- Why did so many people seem to hate Jesus? Do people still feel that way about him? Why do you think they feel that way?
- What is the significance for you of Jesus’ death on the Cross?

John 20–21

- What is the most convincing evidence for you of the resurrection of Jesus?
- Some people say that Jesus’ resurrection is the “lynchpin” of the Christian faith. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Acts 1:1-11

- Imagine that you had witnessed Jesus’ ascension into heaven. How do you think you would have felt? Explain.
- Do you think that Jesus will return to earth some day? If so, how does that affect the way you live now?

Before the Next Time: Think about what Jesus’ death and resurrection means for the way you will live this next week. What practical difference will it make? Re-read Acts 1:1–8 and ask God how he wants you to carry out your witness for him in “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

The Church is Born

The birth of the church and its early history was a period of remarkable growth. The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and enabled the disciples to continue doing the miracles that Jesus had done. The Holy Spirit also enabled the church to form a strong community and to face opposition and persecution with boldness and faith. These early chapters of Acts contain much to challenge and encourage us who live so many centuries after these world-shaking events.



THE DAY OF PENTECOST

PRAY

Thank You, God, that You sent Your Holy Spirit into the world to teach and lead us in Your ways.

READ

Acts 2

REFLECT

How did people react to the coming of the Holy Spirit on that Pentecost Day? What do people you know think about the Holy Spirit today? What do you think?

APPLY

If you, like Peter, could speak to a large crowd about the Holy Spirit, what would you say? Take a moment today to outline your key points.

PRAY

Lord, help me to understand more and more about the Holy Spirit and what the Spirit means to my life.



GROWTH AND PERSECUTION

PRAY

Lord, some people might think I don't have much but I'm thankful to have You and Your Word in my life.

READ

Acts 3–4

REFLECT

Have you ever had a conflict with authority over a matter of faith? What was the result? What principles guide the way you act in such a challenging situation?

APPLY

Identify some people or groups who are being persecuted for their faith (use news sources if you need to) and then pray for God to give them courage and help.

PRAY

Pray to know when it's necessary to stand publicly for your faith and for courage to do it.



THE FIRST MARTYR

PRAY

Lord, I want to grow in my faith and grow more faithful to You. Help me as I read Your Word now.

READ

Acts 6:8—8:8

REFLECT

Why do you think people get angry, even hateful, when Christians speak out about their faith? Has that ever happened to you?

APPLY

What would be a clear but non-confrontational way that you could share your faith with a neighbor, friend or co-worker in the next few days or weeks?

PRAY

Ask God to show you how best to share what you believe with someone who is open to hearing it.



SHARING THE WORD

PRAY

Thank God for the people in your life who have helped you to learn and grow in your spiritual journey.

READ

Acts 8:26-40

REFLECT

Phillip felt a “nudge” from God to help the Ethiopian. Have you ever felt a “nudge” from God? How would you recognize it? What did you do about it?

APPLY

Prepare yourself to help someone spiritually by gathering 3–4 key Bible verses about faith in Jesus. Think through how you would best use each one in the conversation.

PRAY

God, I want to be alert to Your “nudge” and ready to help someone who wants to know more about You.



GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

PRAY

Good God, I'm thankful that You want people of all backgrounds to have a relationship with You.

READ

Acts 10:1—11:18

REFLECT

Peter had to overcome prejudice in order to welcome Cornelius. Are there prejudices (perhaps unintentional) that exclude people from your church fellowship?

APPLY

The next time you go to church, either bring someone from a different background or make an effort to welcome someone you don't know.

PRAY

Ask God to show you if you have any unconscious prejudices and, if so, to help you overcome them.



MY BIBLE JOURNAL

RECORD YOUR INSIGHTS FROM THESE FIVE PASSAGES.

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE CHURCH IS BORN

Purpose: To examine the events surrounding the birth and growth of the early church and discover what they might mean for us today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Acts 2

- The Holy Spirit came upon believers that first Pentecost. What do you believe about the Holy Spirit? Does the Holy Spirit still “fill” people today? Explain.
- Have you ever sensed the Holy Spirit at work in your life? If so, how?

Acts 3–4

- Share your view of the church. What should it be like? Why does it exist?
- What would you suggest as the best “church growth strategy”? Explain.

Acts 6:8—8:8

- Why do you think the religious leaders were so threatened by Stephen’s sermon? What “threatens” the religious people you know? Why? Is it bad to be religious?
- Have you ever been ridiculed or persecuted for what you believe? If so, share why and tell what happened.

Acts 8:26-40

- Some people say “religion may be important but it should be kept private.” Do you agree? Explain.
- The new church grew as people like Philip shared their faith. Have you ever shared your religious beliefs with another person? If so, what happened?

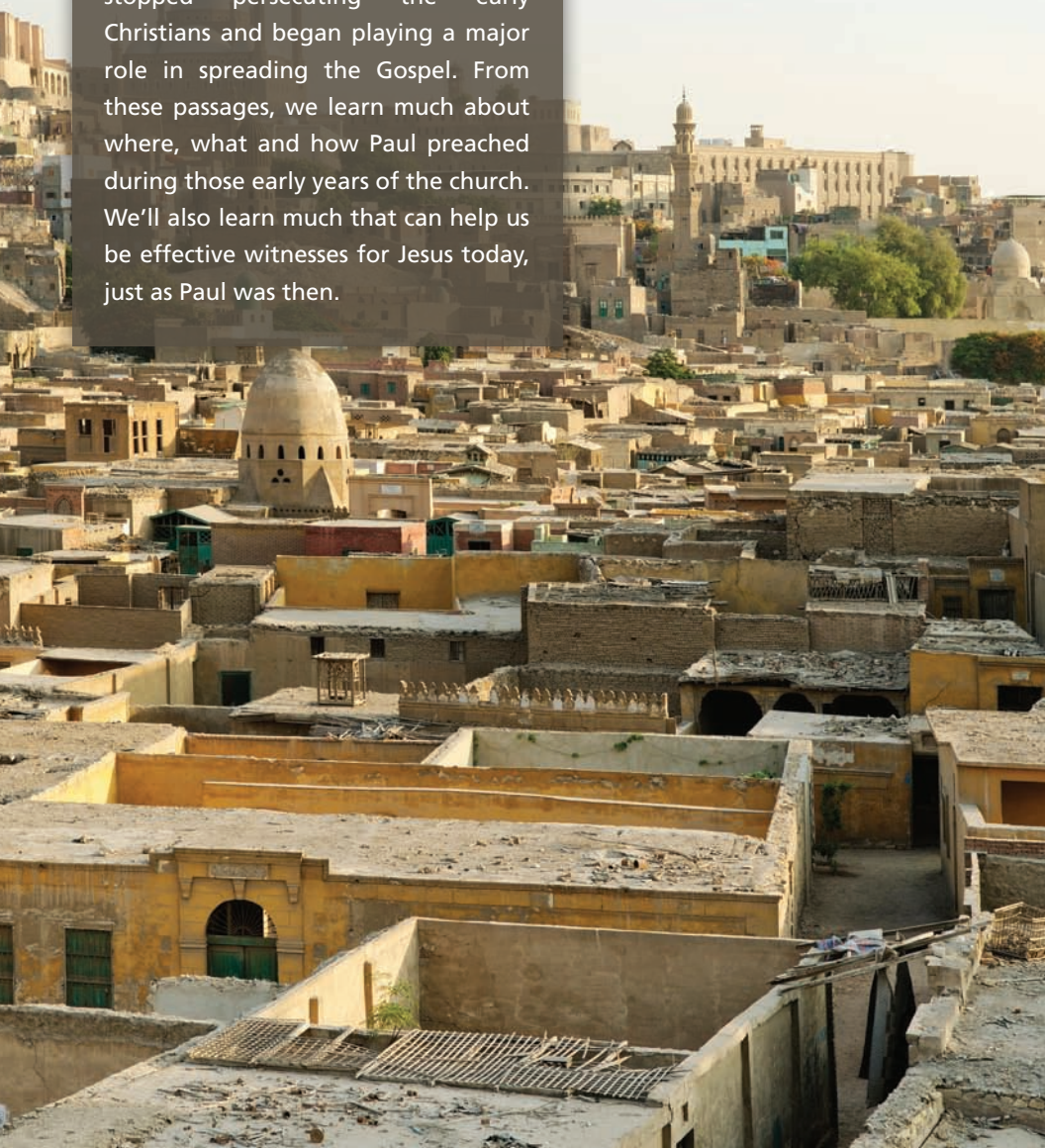
Acts 10:1—11:18

- How would you describe the good news of the Gospel? Is it good news to you? Explain why.
- Peter learned to accept Cornelius, someone very different, and not exclude him from fellowship in the early church. Do you think the church today is inclusive or exclusive? Why? What should it be like?

Before the Next Time: Set aside time soon to reflect on the significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth and growth of the church. What can you learn from the community life of the church and the way its members faced opposition? Ask God to show you any actions or changes you need to take as a result.

The Travels of Paul

These readings begin with Paul's dramatic encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus—so life-changing an encounter that Paul stopped persecuting the early Christians and began playing a major role in spreading the Gospel. From these passages, we learn much about where, what and how Paul preached during those early years of the church. We'll also learn much that can help us be effective witnesses for Jesus today, just as Paul was then.





THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

PRAY

God, I just want to bow in humility before You now and bask in the wonder of being in Your presence.

READ

Acts 9:1-31

REFLECT

Paul “saw the light” about Jesus. How did you “see the light” about him? What changes did it make? Do you think there is one special way everyone comes to Jesus? Why?

APPLY

Close your eyes and try to walk around your home or office blind. Imagine what Paul must have felt like until Ananias helped him regain his sight.

PRAY

Lord, I confess that I, too, can be blind to You and Your plans for me. Open my eyes wherever needed.



THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

PRAY

My God, life is an amazing journey every day. I thank You that I can take this amazing journey with You.

READ

Acts 13-14

REFLECT

Paul and Barnabas provoked severe opposition. Why do you think that was so? Is there still a place for missionaries in this high-tech, globalized world of ours?

APPLY

Make a list of 2-3 missionaries that you know of, perhaps from your church. Write them a letter of encouragement and pray for them.

PRAY

Lord, missionaries often have it real tough. I pray that You will encourage and protect them today.

78

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

PRAY

Ask God to quiet your spirit and remove any distractions from your mind so you can focus on being with him.

READ

Acts 15

REFLECT

Have you experienced a disagreement with another Christian? What was the problem? How was it resolved? What did you learn from it?

APPLY

Think of a major disagreement you had or still have—in your church or family. Distill some principles from this passage and use them to try for a resolution.

PRAY

Lord, I want to be a peacemaker, not quarrelsome. Show me how to begin with situations around me.

79

MORE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

PRAY

Lord, I'm thankful that, although I don't know the future, You are leading me as I go through it.

READ

Acts 16–20

REFLECT

The Holy Spirit led Paul and Barnabas in their journeys. Have you ever been conscious of the Spirit's leading? In what ways does the Holy Spirit lead you?

APPLY

If someone asked you, "What must I do to be saved?", how would you answer? Prepare just a few sentences to use as a ready reply.

PRAY

Lead me each day, Lord. I don't want to live any day without the consciousness that You are leading the way.

80 THE TRIP TO ROME

PRAY

Lord, this is the day that You have made and lovingly given to me. I am very thankful for it.

READ

Acts 25–28

REFLECT

There's a challenge that says "If you were on trial accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?". What evidence would you present?

APPLY

At his trials, Paul gave a "spiritual biography" and defense of his life. Set aside time soon to write your own, brief "spiritual biography."

PRAY

Confirm in my heart and mind, Lord, what I believe and know about You so that it can never leave me.



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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE TRAVELS OF PAUL

Purpose: To see how God can use the most unlikely people to spread the Good News about Jesus and to think about how we can do it, too.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Acts 9:1-31

- Paul had a dramatic experience of God on the road to Damascus. Have you or someone you know had a dramatic experience of God? What happened?
- Do you think it is possible to “see the light” about Jesus without having a dramatic experience like Paul’s? Explain.

Acts 13–14

- What is your view of missionaries? Are they a positive influence in the world? Why or why not?
- It seems that Paul and Barnabas risked mistreatment or death almost everywhere they went. What risks have you taken for what you believe?

Acts 15

- The Council of Jerusalem settled a big disagreement among early Christians. Who do you think has more disagreements—Christians or non-Christians? Why?
- What does the passage on the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) teach you about how to resolve disagreements in the church? In your family? In other relationships?

Acts 16–20

- Paul traveled all across Asia sharing the Gospel in spite of long distances or fierce opposition. Why do you think he was such a tenacious witness for Jesus?
- Paul detoured from his intended destination to go to Macedonia. Has God used a detour in your life to accomplish something good for you or others?

Acts 25–28

- During the time he was on trial, sailing to Rome and then in prison, how do you think Paul felt—that things were out of control or all going according to plan?
- Paul’s purpose in life was to fulfill the call God gave him on the road to Damascus. Do you have a God-given purpose in life? If so, what is it? How are you fulfilling it?

Before the Next Time: The story of the spread of the Gospel in Acts is unfinished. Every believer is called to play their part in fulfilling Acts 1:8. Spend time in the week ahead asking God where and how you are to be his witness and ask for a specific strategy or means of witness to follow.



Paul to the Churches

This section of readings introduces the teachings of the Apostle Paul in his letters to five churches. The letters focus on Christ, the cross and resurrection and the new relationship we have with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the Trinity—through Christ. Paul's concern is that this new relationship each believer enjoys be reflected in every area of our lives. His teachings provide much concrete, practical and sound counsel for living a life that is pleasing to God.

81

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

PRAY

Great God, I'm thankful today that there is nothing I can face that You can't help me through.

READ

Romans 8

REFLECT

What does it mean to be "more than conquerors"? Are you one? With all the suffering around us, can we really say God works all things together for good?

APPLY

Think of one situation where you feel helpless or out of control. Ask God to help you be "more than (a) conqueror."

PRAY

Lord, give me the faith I need to believe that You are working all things together for my good.

82

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

PRAY

God, You know what my life is like and what I want it to be. Make it a fruitful life, I pray.

READ

Galatians 5:16—6:10

REFLECT

What habits, desires or attitudes threaten to make you a slave to sin? How can you combat them and grow a freer, more fruitful life?

APPLY

Memorize the list of the fruit of the Spirit in this passage. Choose one or two that you think you most need to cultivate in your life and ask God's help to grow them.

PRAY

Ask God to help you understand all that it means to live in the freedom he intends for you to have.

83 THE ARMOR OF GOD

PRAY

Ask God to share wisdom from his Word about how to resist the many temptations that come at you every day.

READ

Ephesians 6:10-20

REFLECT

Some people dismiss the idea of spiritual warfare as superstitious. What do you think? What evidence of it have you seen?

APPLY

Make a list of the “full armor of God” listed here. Memorize the “pieces” and make a plan to “put on” or strengthen as many of them as you can in your life.

PRAY

Lord God, I want to have the strength and maturity I need to “fight the good fight” and win.

84 REJOICE IN THE LORD

PRAY

Lord, You’ve given me so very much to be thankful for. I want to have a grateful, joyful spirit today.

READ

Philippians 4:2-9

REFLECT

What does it mean to rejoice? Is it different from being happy? Can a person with big problems “rejoice in the Lord always.”? How?

APPLY

Sometime today, think of things you can rejoice about and then do it! Every time you take a break from your activities, repeat the words “Rejoice in the Lord always”.

PRAY

Rejoice to God that no matter what life is like, you are not alone or unloved. God is with you.

85 THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

PRAY

Lord, the more I get to know You, the more I realize that there really is no one like You.

READ

Colossians 1:1-23

REFLECT

What new or surprising thing(s) did you learn about Jesus from this passage? How does that expand your understanding of God?

APPLY

When you go outside at night look at the stars and planets. Remind yourself that Jesus created them and holds them all in place by his mighty power.

PRAY

Tell God how amazed you are at who Jesus is and all that he does. Thank God for taking good care of everything.



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MY BIBLE JOURNAL

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

PAUL TO THE CHURCHES

Purpose: To discover more about the nature of Jesus, and how his death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit shape what we believe and how we are to live.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Romans 8

- Would you say anything “controls” you? If so, what?
- What might it mean to be “controlled by the Spirit”? Are you?

Galatians 5:16—6:10

- Which of the qualities of the “fruit of the Spirit” do you think are hardest to cultivate in one’s life? Which are hardest for you?
- What “fruit” would you like to see more of in your life? How can you cultivate it?

Ephesians 6:10-20

- Do you believe there is such a thing as spiritual warfare? If so, what is it like?
- Have you ever been in a spiritual battle? If so, what happened?

Philippians 4:2-9

- Paul tells that church to “rejoice in the Lord always.” Is that really possible? Why or why not? Is rejoicing a regular part of your life? Why or why not? How could you rejoice in the Lord more?
- What would you say is the key to real, inner peace? Have you experienced it? Explain your answer.

Colossians 1:1-23

- How did Paul describe Jesus? How would you? “He is....”
- “If you act like a Christian, you are a Christian, whether you believe in Jesus Christ or not.” Do you agree? Explain. Is the reverse true (“If you don’t act like a Christian...”)?

Before the Next Time: Make a list of what you have learned about Jesus and his ways in these readings. Then, take time to thank him for who he is and for what he has done for you in his death and resurrection—and rejoice!

Paul to the Leaders

These readings in Paul's letters cover a wide range of topics. Paul gives encouragement to his disciple and "son in the faith," Timothy, sets forth standards for church leadership, teaches about money, and describes what will happen to Jesus' followers when Jesus returns. Paul warns against false teachers who seek to mislead the church and he encourages Timothy to be faithful to the Bible, the Word of God, which enables every believer to grow and mature. There's a lot of really common sense, practical teaching and wise counsel in these passages!



86 ELDERS AND DEACONS

PRAY

Thank You, Lord, for my pastor and the other spiritual leaders You have given me.

READ

1 Timothy 3

REFLECT

Using your own words, rephrase the characteristics Paul gives for Christian leaders. Are they realistic? Why are such high standards so important?

APPLY

Schedule a time at least once each week to pray for your pastor, elders and deacons by name. Pray that God will enable them to be true and truly godly leaders.

PRAY

My God, help me to pray for, support and encourage my pastor and my church leaders.

87 THE LOVE OF MONEY

PRAY

Loving God, thank You for providing for me so well in so many ways. I always want to have a grateful spirit.

READ

1 Timothy 6:3-21

REFLECT

What does Paul say are some of the dangers of money? Have you experienced any of them? How could you pursue "godliness with contentment" today?

APPLY

Get your checkbook or look at your bank account online. How have you spent your money over the past 30 days? What does it show you about your priorities?

PRAY

Ask God to show you what it means for you to realize real "godliness with contentment" in your life.



GOOD SOLDIERS OF CHRIST

PRAY

Lord, I'm on Your side in life and I'm grateful that You have chosen to be on my side, too.

READ

2 Timothy 2

REFLECT

What do you think Paul is trying to teach Timothy here? What kind of person is "a workman who does not need to be ashamed"? How can you be or become that person?

APPLY

Twice Paul mentions the importance of avoiding quarrels. If you face any today, think about how you will resolve them now or avoid them in the future.

PRAY

Lord, help me to grow into a person who knows how to live well and wisely follows Your admonitions.



ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED

PRAY

Lord God, Your Word, the Bible, is a very special gift and I am very grateful to You for giving it.

READ

2 Timothy 3:10—4:8

REFLECT

Do you believe the Bible is true? Why? What role does the Bible play in your life? Have you ever encountered false teaching? How did the Bible guide you?

APPLY

Make a commitment to continue Bible reading and prayer after the E100 is over. Find a Bible reading plan to begin using on "day 101."

PRAY

Lord, impress on me again how important it is to know and live by Your Word, the Bible.



THE COMING OF THE LORD

PRAY

God, I want to know You and know more about You. Draw me closer to You today, I pray.

READ

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

REFLECT

What do you learn here about Christ's return? Does anything surprise you? What does it say about those who predict exactly when Christ will return to earth?

APPLY

Take a moment today to look up in the sky and imagine the Lord Jesus returning. Hear the trumpet blast and feel yourself caught up to meet the Lord as he returns.

PRAY

Lord Jesus, I can only imagine what it will be like when You return, but I want to be alert and ready!



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MY BIBLE JOURNAL

RECORD YOUR INSIGHTS FROM THESE FIVE PASSAGES.

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

PAUL TO THE LEADERS

Purpose: To learn more about the qualifications for leadership in the church, how to live a godly life, and the importance of the Bible.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Timothy 3

- Which leadership characteristics given by Paul in this passage are most common and most uncommon among Christian leaders you know?
- In what ways should a leader of a church or Christian organization be different from leaders of other organizations? Why?

1 Timothy 6:3-21

- How would you summarize Paul's teaching about money? Do you agree?
- What is our society's view of money? What is yours? How do they differ from the Bible's teaching on the subject? Explain.

2 Timothy 2

- What do Paul's images of a soldier, athlete and farmer teach you about being a follower of Jesus Christ?
- What are some things that tend to distract you from doing the things God wants you to do? How can you avoid those distractions?

2 Timothy 3:10—4:8

- Paul says that those who want to live a godly life will be persecuted. What do you suppose he meant? Has it happened to you? Explain.
- According to Paul, the Bible comes directly from God. Does it really matter if the Bible is true? Why? Do you believe it is? Explain.

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

- What do you think it means to be "alert" for Christ's return? Are you? Explain.
- How does the promise of Christ's return affect the way you live now?

Before the Next Time: Paul urges Timothy to be a faithful teacher of the Word of God, and to set a godly example in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity. He urges everyone to be alert and ready for Christ's return. Spend time this week asking God to show you how you can cultivate these qualities in your life more deeply. Make a plan to begin to implement what God shows you.

The Apostles' Teaching

These readings focus on teachings of the Apostles James, Peter, John and Paul. They were all inspired by the same Holy Spirit, yet each has a somewhat different emphasis or perspective that adds to our understanding of what it means to live a Christian life; a life of faith, love, hope and steadfastness in the face of trouble. As in all of the Bible, there is great richness and reward to be gleaned from these great teachers of the faith.



91

THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

PRAY

Thank You, my God, that You showed us what true love is when You sent Your beloved Son into the world.

READ

1 Corinthians 13

REFLECT

How would you describe the essence of real love? Which of the aspects of love that Paul mentions is most meaningful to you? Most challenging?

APPLY

Choose someone you love—a spouse, child, other relative or close friend—and show them your love today through one of the aspects of love Paul mentions.

PRAY

Ask God to help you to show real love to him and all of your family and your friends.

92

A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST

PRAY

Give God your thanks today for the new insights you are receiving as you read and study the Bible.

READ

2 Corinthians 4:1—6:2

REFLECT

In what way(s) do you feel yourself to be a “new creation” as a Christian? What does it mean to you that you are now “Christ’s ambassador”?

APPLY

Research the duties and privileges of an ambassador of your country, perhaps online. Then, decide how those may apply to you as one who is Christ’s ambassador.

PRAY

Lord, You’re not finished with me yet, but I am a new creation and I want to be a good ambassador for You.



A LIVING HOPE

PRAY

Lord, I pray that You will both challenge me and encourage me as I read Your Word today.

READ

1 Peter 1:1—2:12

REFLECT

What do you think it means to be holy? Is it really possible for a regular person to be truly holy, or is that only for “super saints”?

APPLY

Think of 2–3 steps you can take to grow in holiness in the week ahead. If you aren’t sure what to do, ask your pastor for guidance.

PRAY

Lord, it seems impossible for me ever to be holy, but I know that nothing is ever impossible with You.



FAITH AND WORKS

PRAY

Lord, You know my faith may be small much of the time, but such as it is, I place it in You.

READ

James 1–2

REFLECT

Is it really possible to consider trials and suffering “pure joy”? How? Have you had that experience? What differentiates “pure religion” from the rest?

APPLY

Take an opportunity this week to do at least one practical thing to demonstrate the reality of your faith (helping a needy neighbor, visiting the sick, etc.).

PRAY

Lord, show me how to make my faith more real and visible to those around me.

95

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

PRAY

Loving God, Your love is truly amazing. It never wavers, it never wanes, it never fails.

READ

1 John 3:11—4:21

REFLECT

How do we know what the essence of true love is? How does this kind of love differ from the kind we see in our popular culture? When have you experienced love?

APPLY

Identify a nearby family in need (in your church or at the city mission). Help meet their need and tell them you're doing this because God and you love them.

PRAY

Lord, I want to love others with Your love. May my love be a reflection of Your love for me.



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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE APOSTLES' TEACHING

Purpose: To explore in greater depth more of what it means to live a life that pleases God and reflects his Spirit working within us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Corinthians 13

- First Corinthians 13 is often called “the love chapter” because it describes the essence of real love. What’s the greatest example of love you’ve seen or experienced?
- Why do you think that Paul says love is the greatest virtue? Do you agree? Explain your answer.

2 Corinthians 4:1—6:2

- In what ways do you think one becomes a “new creation” as a result of following Jesus? What was your own experience?
- How can an ordinary person be an effective ambassador for Christ? Do you know one? If so, share.

1 Peter 1:1—2:12

- Do you think it’s possible to be sure about matters of faith? Why? How would you explain your own certainty?
- Peter speaks of our “living hope” through Christ’s resurrection. What makes you the most hopeful in life?

James 1–2

- What are the biggest trials you’ve faced? Did they make you a better person? If so, how?
- What do you think is the proper relationship between faith and works, that is, good deeds? How do they relate in your life?

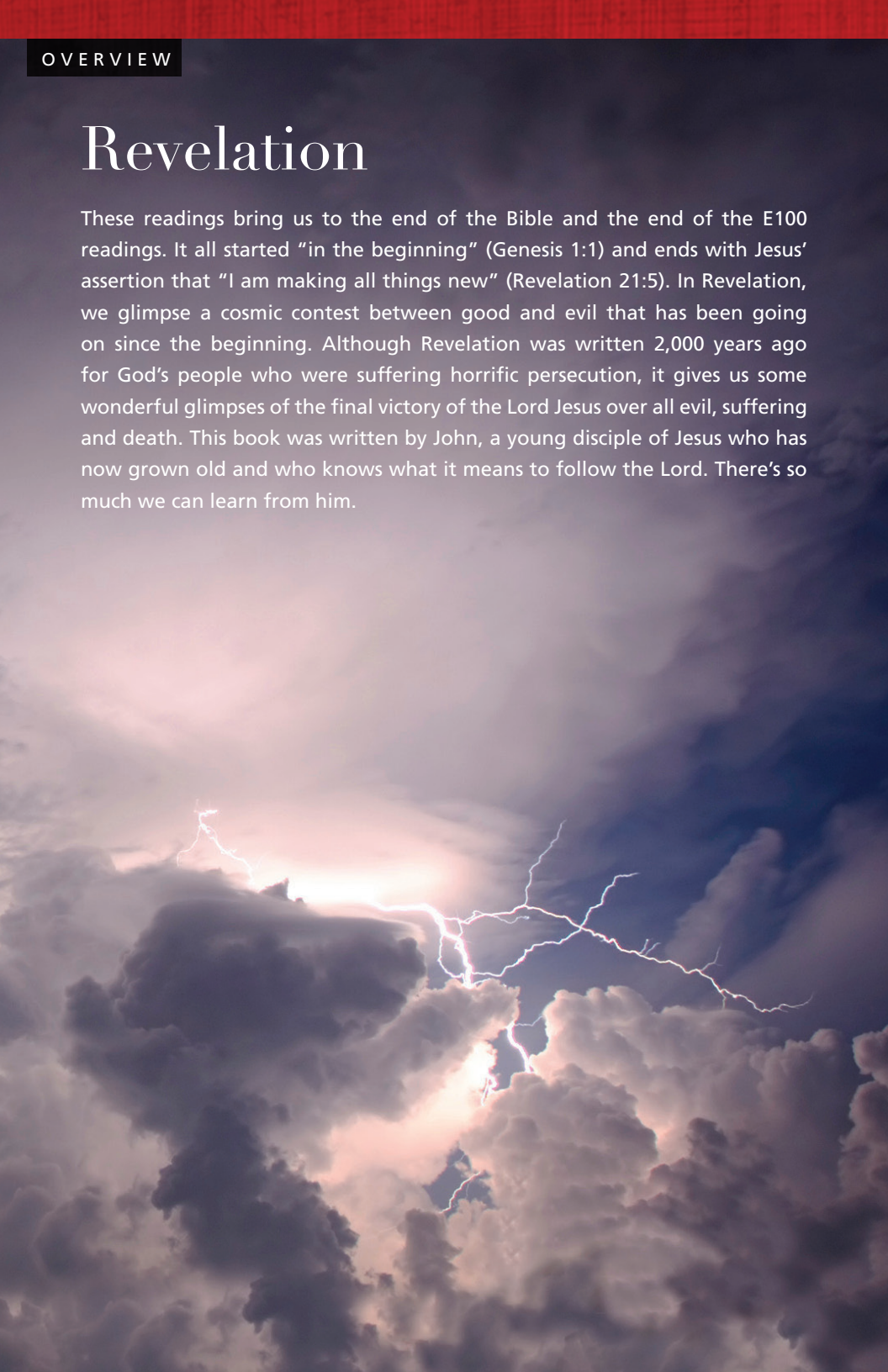
1 John 3:11—4:21

- What would you say are the marks or characteristics of a true Christian? Why do you say that?
- Do most Christians you know exhibit the characteristics John gives? Explain.

Before the Next Time: Plan now to set aside time this week to reflect on these passages and what you have learned. Ask God to help you love with his love and be an effective ambassador for him. Bring to God any “trials” you face and pray that you will grow and mature through them.

Revelation

These readings bring us to the end of the Bible and the end of the E100 readings. It all started “in the beginning” (Genesis 1:1) and ends with Jesus’ assertion that “I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5). In Revelation, we glimpse a cosmic contest between good and evil that has been going on since the beginning. Although Revelation was written 2,000 years ago for God’s people who were suffering horrific persecution, it gives us some wonderful glimpses of the final victory of the Lord Jesus over all evil, suffering and death. This book was written by John, a young disciple of Jesus who has now grown old and who knows what it means to follow the Lord. There’s so much we can learn from him.



96

A VOICE AND A VISION

PRAY

Thank You, Lord God, that one day everything will finally be just the way You intended it to be.

READ

Revelation 1

REFLECT

What does this passage tell you about Jesus, about who he is, what he has done and will do? Is there something new or surprising that you learned about Jesus here?

APPLY

Later today, write down in just a few sentences what you have learned throughout the E100 about who Jesus is and what his life, death and resurrection means to you.

PRAY

Lord, help me to hear, understand clearly and take to heart what You want me to know about Jesus.

97

MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES

PRAY

Lord, Your Word has both encouragement and warnings. Help me to listen carefully to both.

READ

Revelation 2–3

REFLECT

These seven churches are very different and face different challenges. What does Jesus commend in them? What warnings does he give them? What lessons do you see?

APPLY

Before you next go to church, think about whether your church shares any of the characteristics or dangers of these seven. Pray about any challenges it faces.

PRAY

Lord, I'm thankful for my church and I pray that You will keep it faithful to You no matter what challenges it faces.

THE THRONE OF HEAVEN

PRAY

God in heaven, I join my spirit with all the angels in heaven to offer You my praise and worship.

READ

Revelation 4–7

REFLECT

What picture of heaven do you get from these chapters? How does it make you feel? Who is the focus of the worship taking place there?

APPLY

Take a moment to read aloud the parts of these chapters that are words of praise to the Lord Jesus. Say them slowly and reverently as your own words of praise.

PRAY

Lord, You and You alone are the One worthy of all worship, both in heaven and on earth.

HALLELUJAH!

PRAY

Thank God now for his constant and good care for the earth which he so lovingly created.

READ

Revelation 19–20

REFLECT

What are some of the reasons that the heavenly hosts give for hailing Jesus in this way? What reasons do you have for enthusiastic worship and praise of Jesus?

APPLY

Think of a chorus or hymn of praise that you would offer to Jesus if you were in heaven today. Or maybe compose a new song of praise. Then, sing it!

PRAY

Lord, I can hardly think of words that are adequate to offer You the worship You deserve from me.



THE NEW JERUSALEM

PRAY

Lord, You've promised to make all things new and I look forward to that great day when You do!

READ

Revelation 21–22

REFLECT

What are you most hoping that a new heaven and earth will be like? What do you think it will be like to live in a city where God and the Lord Jesus are with you?

APPLY

When you turn on a lamp today, think of Jesus as the “lamp” and light of the new Jerusalem whose radiance and power will provide all the light that you need.

PRAY

Great God, I pray that You and Your Son Jesus will be my true light today and all the days of my life.



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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

REVELATION

Purpose: To understand how the end of this age will herald the beginning of the next, and to see how Christ and his followers continue to be an integral part of God's plan for the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Revelation 1

- What would you say are the benefits and dangers of wanting to know more about the future? What can and can't we know?
- What do you learn about Jesus in the first chapter of Revelation? Does any of it surprise, confuse or upset you? Explain.

Revelation 2–3

- After reading John's letters to the seven churches, how do you think Jesus would feel about your church and churches in your area? What might he say to them?
- What's your view of heaven? What is it like and who is it for?

From Revelation 4–7

- If God asked you "Why should I let you into heaven?", what would you say? Are you confident you'd get in? Why or why not?
- The later chapters of Revelation speak of the final judgment and the return of Jesus Christ. Do you think this could happen in your lifetime? Explain.

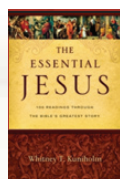
Revelation 19–20

- What is your view of a "final judgment"? How is your view different from that of the people you work with or who live on your street?
- Does the reality of a final judgment affect the way you live now? If so, how?

Revelation 21–22

- How does the idea of a "new heaven and a new earth" strike you? Why? What do you think the "new earth" will be like?
- Are you looking forward to the return of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

For The Final Time: Congratulations! You've completed the E100! We've come to the end of the Bible's story; but the end of the story is not the end of all things. It also signals a new beginning; a continued life with God, serving and worshipping him. With that in mind, think about ways that you can prepare now for what is to come, in this age and the next.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

MORE BIBLE READING HELP—FOR “DAY 101” AND BEYOND

CONGRATULATIONS on completing the **E100® CHALLENGE**! But don't stop now. Scripture Union has publications and programs to help you meet God every day in the Bible and prayer. To order, simply call, write...or go online.

- **Discovery**, the **E100®** follow-up Guide for individuals and groups. Takes you through portions of every Bible book in four years and is built on the same Pray, Read, Reflect, Apply, Pray method as this *E100 Challenge Guide*. Also included life-related commentary and practical applications. Quarterly. \$22 per year.
- **Encounter with God**, for experienced Bible readers. Takes you through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice every five years. Quarterly. \$22 per year.
- **The Essential 100 Challenge**, a church-wide Bible reading program that enables people to get the big picture of the Bible without getting bogged down. For more information: www.E100Challenge.com.
- **The Essential Jesus Challenge**, a church-wide Bible reading program that follows God's story of salvation, which culminated in Jesus, through 25 Old and 75 New Testament passages. For more information: www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com.

To order, call 1-800-621-LAMP (5267), go to www.ScriptureUnion.org, or write to Scripture Union, P.O. Box 215, Valley Forge, PA 19481-0215

ABOUT SCRIPTURE UNION

Scripture Union is an interdenominational Christian ministry, founded in 1867, with a twofold mission:

- Helping people of all ages meet God in the Bible and prayer
- Reaching children with God's Good News

Scripture Union publishes daily Bible reading guides for individuals and groups: *Discovery®* and *Encounter with God®*. These are distributed to thousands of individuals and churches every quarter.

In addition, Scripture Union has two Bible reading programs for churches and groups, *The Essential 100 Challenge* and *The Essential Jesus Challenge*. Scripture Union has partnered with the American Bible Society to promote these Bible engagement programs in the United States.

Scripture Union also conducts Bible-based programs for at-risk children including *SuperKids®* summer missions and *PrimeTime®* after school programs. Scripture Union has partnered with The Salvation Army to implement these children's outreach programs in the United States.

Scripture Union is Charter Member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability and has national ministries in 121 countries around the world. We welcome your interest, prayers and support.

The Essential Bible Guide



The E100® Bible Reading Challenge

is based on the book by Scripture Union President, Whitney T. Kuniholm, entitled *The Essential Bible Guide*. In it, Mr. Kuniholm provides story-filled devotional commentaries for each of the E100® passages, and includes prayers, practical applications and a helpful Bible Journal. The book is the perfect companion for those who could use life-related explanations of each Bible passage.

“Provides an excellent overview of God’s big picture.”
– Christianity Today

To order individual or bulk discount copies:
www.E100Challenge.com



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