

Life with God

A JOURNEY OF RELATIONSHIP



GRAFTED LIFE
MINISTRIES



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Dear fellow sojourners,

I'm excited you are interested in the *Life with God* study series. At Grafted Life, we believe that nurturing our relationship with God is the journey of a lifetime. Our team has experienced the Lord's provision, guidance, and support as we have traveled with Him to produce *Life with God*. We trust that His hand will also guide you as you consider your involvement in this Bible-based small group experience.

On the following pages, you will discover what *Life with God* is about, its scope and design, and how it might fit into your community. We've also included sample pages from the first semester to help you gain a feel for the content and structure. As you digest this material, I invite you to contact us with any questions.

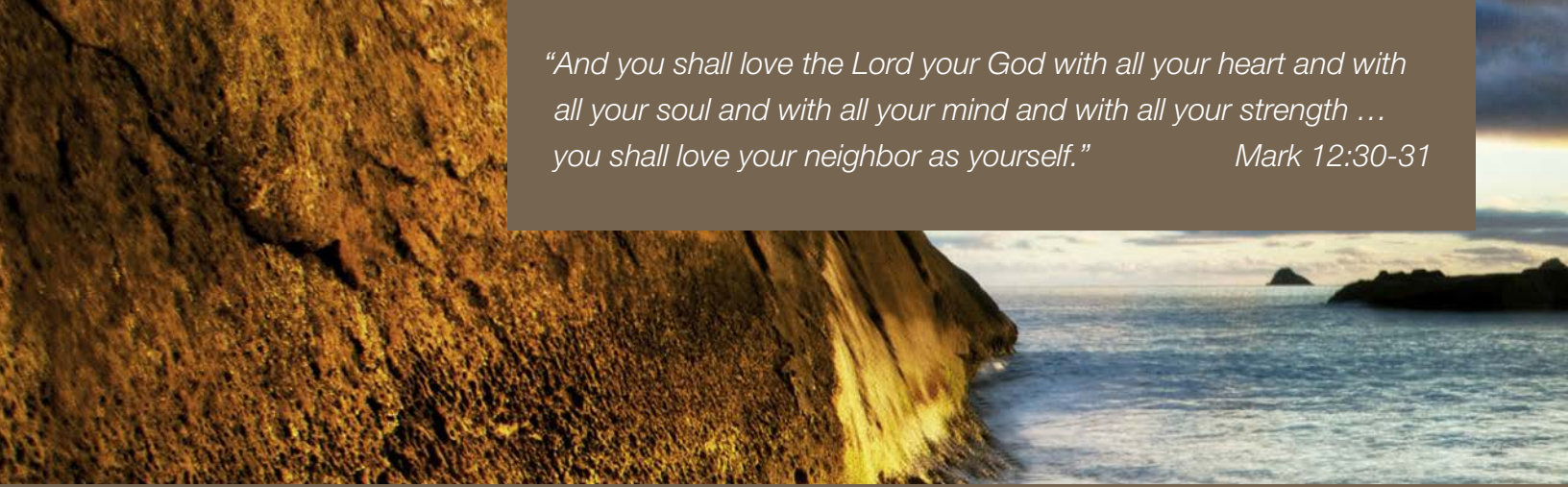
Blessings to you as you consider this journey,

Debbie

Debbie Swindoll

Executive Director, *Grafted Life Ministries*

debbie@graftedlife.org



“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength ... you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Mark 12:30-31

What is Life with God?

Life with God is a series of immersive, interactive studies that engage, strengthen, and mature our relationship with God.

Transformation through Relationship

Often Christians are eager for personal transformation, but go about it in ineffective ways. Simply put, many believers go it alone. They attempt to disciple themselves into Christlikeness and find that the sum of their individual efforts is failure and fatigue.

Life with God invites us to follow God. Through interaction with the Word, the Spirit, and the Body of Christ, believers learn how to build strong, deep relationships that affect personal transformation over time. They come to depend on the Lord and one another. They discover God amidst daily life.

Retreat in Real Life

Life with God blends features of Bible study, spiritual retreat, and recovery ministry into a unique format for small group participation.

- » Each week, *Life with God* examines a biblical story in its relational context.
- » Participants listen to and reflect on audio recordings of Scripture and teaching, then interact with God using notebooks for prayer and journaling.
- » Groups meet for as little as one hour a week to discuss their experiences, operating under a group covenant.
- » We individually train the group leader to mentor the community interaction in a safe and discerning way.



A Journey of a Lifetime

What keeps believers from intimacy with God, and others in the Body of Christ? In what ways does the Holy Spirit personally interact with us? How do I journey with others? *Life with God* explores fundamental questions in a believer's daily walk.

Change does not happen overnight, and it rarely happens in a six week program. *Life with God* is a three year journey that

respects the time and intentionality required for lasting change. It adapts to a semester schedule or to your own pace.

The *Life with God* design team have years of education and experience in Christian ministry, formation, and direction. Each study is crafted to lead Christians to lifelong spiritual maturity.

"I craved a study that would strengthen and grow my relationship with God. I yearned for a community who were not afraid to be raw, exposed, and talk deeply about the Lord. I longed to discuss the struggles that we go through every day.

"*Life with God* helped me rediscover my relationship with God, how much He desires to be with me every day and every hour. I loved the way the study worked and the tools it uses. The questions it asked each week were very challenging and thought-provoking."



Caroline
Vongkaseum
Life with God
Participant



Biblical Themes

The *Life with God* study series closely follows the lives of our spiritual forebears, as traced by Scripture. The teaching offers insight into the way God cultivates relationship with His people.

First Year Foundations

The first two semesters of *Life with God* are the required starting point of the series. Year one explores how God reconciles and invites us into a loving relationship with Him. If possible, participants stay with the same group cohort and leader for both studies, learning together how to love and listen.



Semester 1:

The Genesis of Relationship

Biblical Text: Genesis (Creation)

Theme: Relationship

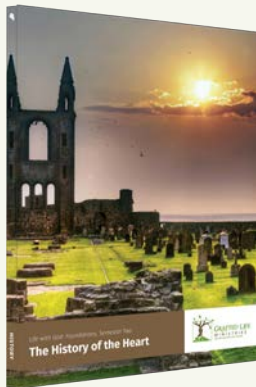
The Genesis of Relationship examines the creation story: how God intended for us to relate with Him, and how the fall of humanity introduced harmful relational habits we still suffer from today.

Christy Summers
Life with God
Participant

“The teaching on Cain and Abel was amazing. It opened my mind and heart to how God seeks after us when we sin because He loves us and wants to walk us through confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation.”



“Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us ... go on to maturity.” Hebrews 5:14-6:1



Semester 2:

The History of the Heart

Biblical Text: Genesis (Patriarchs)

Theme: Dependence

The History of the Heart examines how God called Abraham, Issac, and Jacob to a life of dependence, and how the willful and passive tendencies of our own hearts keep us from fully knowing the grace of God.

Second and Third Year Journeys

After the first year, participants are free to join the remaining studies in any order. Years two and three explore how we can respond to God’s relational invitations with a heart that loves Him in return.

A Call to Desire and Discern

Biblical Text: 1 and 2 Samuel

Looking at the life of King David, we open our hearts to assess our desire for God and to recognize His activity in our lives.

Daily Abiding with Jesus

Biblical Text: The Gospel of John

Looking at the story of Christ, we discover the fulfillment of human life in abiding with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

From Bondage to Freedom

Biblical Text: Exodus

Looking at the journey of Israel, we assess common patterns of growth in our ever deepening relationship with God and others.

Bearing the Fruit of Love

Biblical Text: Acts

Looking at the early church, we explore our personal call and our commission to share Christ’s love with the world.



Designed for Depth

Each *Life with God* study relies upon a weekly rhythm of activities that help participants encounter God in the Bible, in prayer, and in community.

Audio Podcasts

Like most contemporary Bible study materials, *Life with God* uses multimedia to immerse believers in the words of Scripture. We have endeavored to be minimalistic and leave room for the imagination.

Each week, participants listen to a teaching podcast, roughly 30 minutes in length, and an audio track of the relevant biblical passages read aloud. We determined that delivering the content in audio format would allow participants to listen when and where they chose, and stimulate their thinking on the ideas we present.

Interactive Prayer

After participants have listened to the weekly teaching, *Life with God* invites them to take a personal, one-hour retreat in the context of their daily lives.

Prayer is an essential part of a believer's life. It is more than intercessory; it is active, responsive, bodily, and creative. Our study materials prompt believers to interact with God like the Psalmists did. We guide participants to reflect with God on their personal experiences, and we encourage them to seek His understanding.

Covenantal Community

Life with God communities abide by a group covenant that upholds safe and honest interactions between their members, similar to the rules of a recovery group.



*“Life with God is a thoughtfully designed curriculum that creates space for the Spirit to shape the heart of the believer. The teaching gently and skillfully opens new horizons in contemplating God’s Word. The listening exercises encourage new ways of meditating on God’s Word. Because the time spent outside the group is so well crafted, the community experience is full and rich without the leader having to force anything. I highly recommend the *Life with God* curriculum for those who desire to deepen their experience with the Father.”*



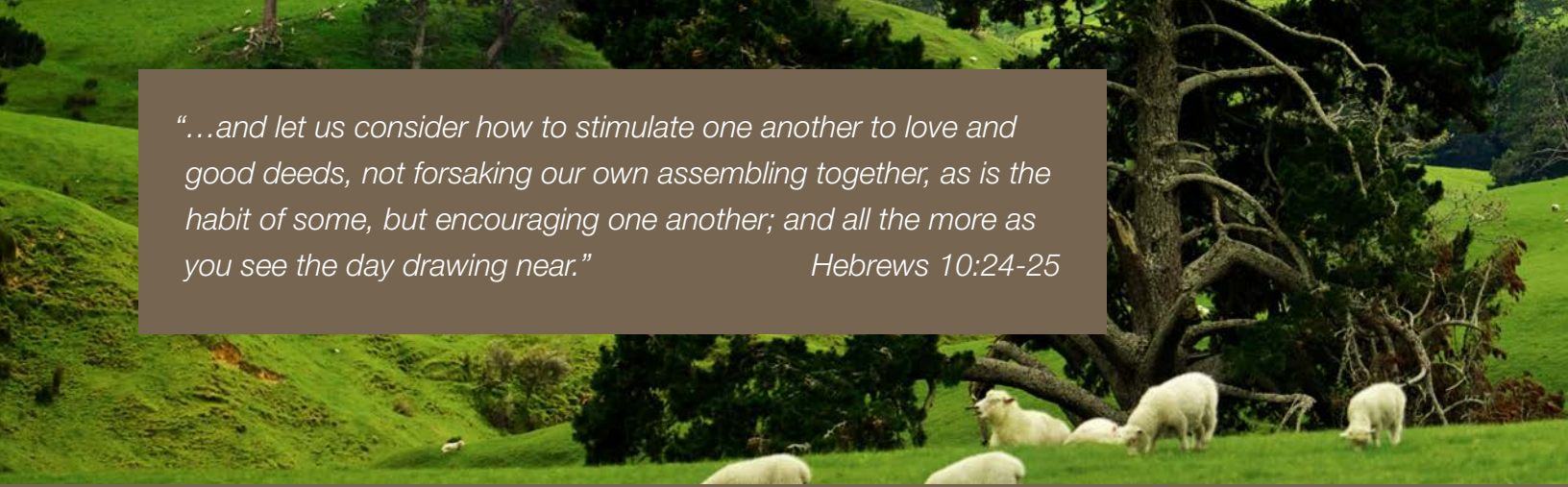
Ted Wueste
Life with God
Trained Leader

Members design their group covenants around the relational values considered most important to the group. When the community gathers each week to share their experiences, the covenant provides a safety net for love, honor, and trust.

Life with God seeks to radically enhance our connection to others in the Body of Christ. Our small groups learn how to listen without “fixing” one another, how to share

openly and honestly about our lives, and how to attend to God’s shepherding of His people.

We interview and train each *Life with God* leader to ensure that every group is a safe and discerning environment for sharing. Participants have in their leaders a model and guide to better relationships.



“...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”
Hebrews 10:24-25

Getting Started in Your Community

1. Contact Us

Short consultation

2. Train Leaders

Online certification

3. Order Materials

Start semester 1

We believe that Christians are transformed by loving relationships, not by programs. For this reason, *Life with God* is only available for purchase by Grafted Life trained and certified leaders.

Leader Training Process

We invite any pastor, community leader, or lay person to apply as a *Life with God* leader. We select leaders who are qualified to shepherd others on the basis of their spiritual readiness and ministry experience. After we review your application and references, we will schedule a phone interview between you and our staff.

Leaders who are approved may register for our five-week online training course. These sessions will orient you to the *Life with God* study materials and methodology. We discuss our theological foundations, code of ethics for leaders, and the range of dynamics typically seen in *Life with God* small groups.

Once leaders have completed training, they are granted access to our online resource center. They may order materials for group participants, download handouts, and stay in touch with other *Life with God* leaders.



Curriculum Prices

Life with God Leader Training

\$ 225.00 per leader

Discounts for ESDA members

*Includes Leader's Guides
for the first year*

Life with God Study Materials

\$ 24.95 per notebook

\$ 29.95 for the Leader's Guide

*Includes online access
to audio podcasts*

Discounts available for large organizations, starting at 5 leaders and 50 participants.

For Your Reflection

On the following pages, you will find two sample weeks from the Leader's Guide to *The Genesis of Relationship*, the first *Life with God* study. As you look over the content, we invite you to...

- » Observe the reactions of not just your mind, but also your heart to the process

- » Reflect on how our materials differ from other studies you have seen or done
- » Consider the effect that this study might have on specific people you know
- » Ask God if He is inviting you to journey with others through *Life with God*, and how it might fit in your community



Life with God: Foundations, Semester One

The Genesis of Relationship



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Each *Life with God* study is 12 weeks long and develops a biblical theme. *The Genesis of Relationship* explores how we were made to relate.



Week 3

God: The Sovereign Creator and Giver of Life

Every relationship requires that we know the people involved and that we deepen that knowledge over time. Since God represents our prime relationship in life, how can we know Him better? We start at the beginning. Relationally, God is the source. He is the giver and sustainer of life. He sets the relational terms and establishes the function of His relationship with His creation and their relationship to each other. He is good, generous, gracious, involved, satisfied, and loving. He delights in the works of His hands.

Key Passages: Genesis 1:1-2:3, Psalm 19, John 1:1-5

Download the ***Scripture and Teaching Podcasts***
for *The Genesis of Relationship*, Week 3
at <http://graftedlife.org/sample>

Teaching Summary

Since we have been reconciled with God, establishing our relationship with Him as our heavenly Father, everything changes. There are implications of this important relationship that affect every aspect of our lives.

Every relationship requires that we know the people involved and that we deepen that knowledge over time. This week we focus on knowing God since His is our prime relationship in life. We need to start at the beginning. Genesis 1 gives us a place to begin. The creation story allows us to see God in His activity and to reflect on how the creative process reveals His characteristics and His relationship to us.

As we gain new knowledge about God from Scripture, this understanding challenges us to confront conflicting ideas that we may be holding in our hearts regarding God's character and actions. What we think about God is very important to the texture of our relationship with Him. Since we desire a real relationship with Him, we need to understand and embrace who God actually is and to discover and discard any false ideas or images that we have about Him.

What can we learn about God from Scripture's account of creation? The list could be infinite but here are four observations to begin the dialogue.

- God is abundantly creative.
- God gives His creation relational order.
- God is blessedly generous with the environment and the creatures of His creation.
- God is holy and restfully appreciative of the goodness of His work.

He sounds like the kind of God that would be good to know and have as a Father and friend. Observing the character of God in His creation activity gives us an opportunity to reflect on how these qualities of God might influence, integrate and inform our relationship with Him.

The **Teaching Summary** is a written overview of the podcast content and a space for participants to take notes on the teaching.

Interactive Project

Make sure to schedule a time to engage in this project this week because waiting until the last minute may not work!

We'd like you to experience some of God's Sabbath this week by resting and reflecting on God's work in creation.

Set aside a period of time—anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour or more—to interact with something that God has created.

Think about what you would like to do in nature. Some ideas could be walking barefoot on the beach or in the grass at the park, holding a child or grandchild, planting some flowers in the dirt, hiking on a trail, using a magnifying glass to observe flowers or leaves, simply sitting in nature and watching the birds, etc. Whatever it is, choose to focus on and interact directly with something that God created.

Use this activity to reflect and ponder what impresses you about the nature of God as you consider His free gifts in the created world. How do they reflect God's goodness?

Consider the reality that God is a personal being who joyfully engaged in the creative formation of the world.

Then write a half page reflection of your experience. More than writing down what you did, use this page to write down what you experienced. What was it like for you to do this?

The ***Interactive Project*** is a guided exercise in prayer and communion with God, lasting up to an hour long, to be completed during the week.

The **Community Experience** is the group meeting, the culmination of the week's activities. Leaders run the meeting using the Leader's Guide.

Next, invite each group member to take his/her personal list and spend some individual time assessing before God how they feel about the status of their relationships (this week's Interactive Project). They can do this right there in the room together in silence, or you can disperse the group to find nearby quiet spaces for this prayer time. This can take anywhere from fifteen to thirty minutes, depending on the length of your session and your discernment of what is best for the group.

Gather the group back together again and spend the rest of the time inviting people to share their experience of the Interactive Project. Answer any questions they have from the Teaching or Scripture Podcast.

Reminders for Next Week

Before the people leave the space, make sure they understand the following:

- How to access the podcasts.
- The procedure of listening to the Scripture Podcasts each day. If they are having difficulty, refer them to the reference page in their notebooks about Listening to the Scriptures for help.
- The requirement to complete next week's Interactive Project (in the notebook) by the next Community Experience
- The need to bring their Bibles and *Life with God* notebooks to each Community Experience
- That you will be praying for them until you meet again

These pages are from the **Leader's Guide** of *The Genesis of Relationship* and do not appear in the participant notebooks.

Week 1

*The Saving
Invitation*



Week 4

Man: Created in the Image of God with Relational Responsibilities

What can we learn about mankind from the original creation story? God created men and women in His image, and they received all of creation as a gift from Him. He charged them to subdue and rule, in His image, over the rest of creation, including the plant and animal life. He designed them and charged them to function in cooperation with His ultimate rule for the goodness, growth and fulfillment of His earthly design. In essence, God designed mankind to manage His gifts and to flourish in the created goodness of the environment.

Key Passages: Genesis 1:26-2:17, Psalm 8, Ephesians 2:8-10

Download the ***Scripture and Teaching Podcasts*** for *The Genesis of Relationship*, Week 4 at <http://graftedlife.org/sample>

Teaching Summary

At the apex of the creation account, there is a Trinitarian sidebar recorded in Scripture: “Let us make man in our own image.” This holy decision set the scene for the unveiling of the creature, man, and the place that humankind has in the mind of God and in the created, relational order.

The psalmist asks in Psalm 8, “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?” The answer there and in the Genesis 1 and 2 account affirms that man is the blessed and honored creation of God to whom God gave dominion over the works of His hands. Man is the image bearer of God, designed to rule under God, managing the gifts of God and thriving in the created goodness of the environment.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God? How can it affect our life today and our relationship with God?

- Being created in the image of God affects our core identity as humans. We need to be in a relationship with Him, as our Creator, in order to see ourselves correctly reflected in His evaluation of us.
- Being created in the image of God affects our ability to relate as humans. It means that humans uniquely have the capacity to be lovers of God and, conversely, to reject a relationship with God.
- Being created in the image of God affects our understanding of our vocational call in life. As our creator, God is the only one who deeply understands our purpose and the work that He created for us to accomplish. We need to be in a relationship with Him in order to fulfill our vocational responsibilities to the rest of creation.

Although we no longer have the option to return to Eden in order to re-establish our relationship with God, through Christ we are reconciled with God and reconnected with our true identity, our relational capacities and the good works that God prepared for us before the beginning of time.

Interactive Project

Make sure to pick a day for focusing on this project.

This week we're going to spend some time considering how the image of God in mankind relates to your life.

The teaching focused on three relational implications of God making us in His image:

- our Identity
- our Ability to Relate
- our Vocation

Which of these are you most drawn to ponder? Which one is an area where you need to grow?

Choose one of these to focus on one day this week.

In the Morning

Begin by writing the phrase you have chosen to focus on today—"My Identity," "My Ability to Relate," or "My Vocation"—on a card or piece of paper. Place it somewhere you will see it several times during the day.

Next, start your day by praying and asking God to make you aware of how the concept you've chosen relates to your life. Ask Him to help you notice when you are living in accord with this concept and where you can grow in integrating this concept more fully in your life. This could be apparent in your actions, your feelings or your thoughts.

- For instance, if you chose Identity, consider what it means that you receive your identity through God in Christ. Notice when and how you maintain a sense of your identity throughout your day, and when you tend to forget it.
- If you chose Ability to Relate, consider that the image of God gives you the capacity to love. Look for ways that you are engaging in that capacity to love throughout the day and places where you can grow.
- If you chose Vocation, consider how you go about the responsibilities that you have. When are you engaging in that work in relationship with God? What does relating to Him change?

In the Evening

Take time for reflection and prayer as you look back over your day, and ask the Lord to remind you what you experienced around the concept you chose. What did you notice about yourself? Write down what comes up.

Did your reflection on your Identity, Ability to Relate or Vocation affect how you viewed yourself and your place in the world around you? If so, write down what you discovered.

How did this experience affect how you viewed others? Were you able to see the image of God more clearly in others than in yourself?

Continue on the next page...

What might God want you to remember from this experience?

– OR –

Maybe you find yourself at the end of this day and realize that you didn't really notice anything different in particular. What else captured your attention and why? Talk to the Lord about what comes up. Then write down a bit about what happened.

***Note:** If you are interested in delving deeper into this material, why not try this project another day this week? You can focus on the same concept again or choose one of the remaining two traits.*

Leader's Guide

Weekly Objectives

1. To understand that the goal of this study is to deepen our love for God and one another
2. To begin the discovery of places in our hearts where we do not love well
3. To craft a community covenant that will hold the group to agreed upon standards of conduct that demonstrate love in action in their group relationships

Context

In this second group experience, your role will be to facilitate the members' discussion of ideas for their group covenant. You'll want to invite their responses, write them down on a sheet of butcher paper and organize them into appropriate categories.

Preparing the Space

You will need to attach a sheet of butcher paper to the wall or board before you start, even if there is already a white or blackboard there, because you will be taking home what you write down.

It would be best if you can set up the chairs in a semi-circle so that everyone has a good view of the butcher paper.

Before anyone arrives, spend some time in prayer, asking God to lead the time. Ask that He will help the group bring up just the subjects that they will need for their covenant, and that all will feel safe to share.

Necessary Materials

- Your Leader's Guide and Bible
- Seating for each member

- A large sheet of butcher paper and tape to tape it up
- Markers for the butcher paper
- Name tags and pens

Guidelines for Writing up the Group Covenant

Your job in this task is to record everything the group expresses for their covenant and gather it together on a piece of paper so that the members have a physical reminder of their commitments to each other. Revisit “Laying Proper Foundations” in the Leader’s Introduction to *The Genesis of Relationship* for a brief discussion of the purpose of the covenant.

Download a template for a group covenant on the podcast page for *The Genesis of Relationship*.

Note: The sample template we provide is only a guide. Feel free to vary from this format in any way that might better represent your group.

Community Experience Outline

Make sure each person has a name tag. Begin by taking just two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud these verses from the key passage of the week—Mark 12:30-31. If appropriate for your group, following your reading with silence and then with a prayer.

Next, explain that they have a unique opportunity to decide as a group what loving interaction will look and feel like in the community they are building with one another. Tell them that before they leave today, they will have created a covenant with one another which everyone in the group will agree to uphold for the duration of their group commitment. It will describe how they want to act toward one another. It will outline the disciplines they will engage in as a group, calling their hearts to love and helping them know how to enter into reconciliation and forgiveness as necessary.

Invite members of the group to share what they have brought with them from the Interactive Project and from the Teaching, but also anything that occurs to them during this time. Write their answers on a piece of butcher paper that you have hung in advance.



“We founded Grafted Life Ministries as a help for people who resonate with the desire to grow in relationship with God, but who lack the resources to journey forward. If you feel the need for a community with which to practice these ideas, then I invite you to get connected to *Life with God*.”

Curt Swindoll
*Board Chairman,
Grafted Life
Ministries*

What's Next?

Interested in bringing *Life with God* to your community?

- » If you would like to start a *Life with God* group by becoming a leader, you can apply online at <http://graftedlife.org/lwg>. The process takes about ten weeks from the time of application to the end of training.
- » If you are an administrator and would like to coordinate the training of multiple leaders from your community, we welcome you to contact our Executive Director, Debbie Swindoll, at debbie@graftedlife.org. We will explore the needs of your particular community and set up a training that works best for your leaders.