

# The Genesis of Relationship

*Life with God: Foundations, Semester One*

**LEADER'S GUIDE**



**GRAFTED LIFE**  
MINISTRIES



*Lord, You chose to have a relationship with me before  
the foundation of the world. Lead me as I seek to know  
You more fully from Your Word. Search me and reveal to  
me the intentions of my heart as I come honestly before  
You and share my life in community.*



Dear friends and fellow sojourners,

Welcome to *The Genesis of Relationship*, the first semester of the *Life with God* study series. Over the following weeks, you will take your first steps on a journey to deepen your relationship with God and with others in your community.

We created the *Life with God* series as a “retreat-in-real-life,” a way to experience the Word, the Spirit, and the Body of Christ in your daily life. The topics and activities of *Life with God* are grounded in Scripture, but they go beyond the scope of a typical Bible study. They are meant to help you grow in your capacity to love God and your neighbor as yourself, as Jesus commands in the gospels.

In the introduction, you will read about the different activities of this study and how you can get the most out of your experience.





*Life with God* will be different from other studies you have used, so it may take time to get your bearings. When questions about the nature of this study come to mind, write them down and feel free to discuss anything with your *Life with God* leader during your community meetings.

We bless you as you embark on this relational adventure. May you find your conversations with God and others and the companions who travel beside you life-changing treasures.

*Debbie*

Debbie Swindoll  
Executive Director, *Grafted Life Ministries*

*The Genesis of Relationship*  
*Life with God: Foundations, Semester One*

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# Introduction

Welcome to the first semester of the *Life with God* study series. *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. Over the next 12 weeks, we invite you to take up this study with personal interest. Allow it to influence your prayers, your schedule, your readings, and your conversations with others.

*Life with God* uses audio recordings and prayer exercises which you will experience prior to your weekly group meetings. To get the most out of this study, you will need to understand and make room for these activities.

**Podcasts:** audio recordings of Scripture and teaching content that serve as your starting point each week

**Interactive Projects:** prayer, journaling, and other creative activities that help you connect with God in your daily life

**Community Experiences:** your weekly *Life with God* group meetings

On the following pages you will find a description of each activity, along with practical information like

- How to individualize your notebooks
- How much time to schedule to complete the activities each week
- How to access the weekly Scripture and Teaching Podcasts

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- How to become comfortable with components that seem unfamiliar at the beginning

Taking the time to read through these pages, recording any questions that you have for discussion in your *Life with God* group, will help you start off on the right foot.

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## Personalizing Your Notebooks

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We don't think of *Life with God* as a "fill in the blanks" kind of experience, but more as a "color outside the lines and see where the Holy Spirit will take you" opportunity.

This book features wide outside margins and plenty of white space for note-taking. Feel free to write, draw, doodle, and diagram your thoughts and feelings during your experience with *Life with God*. Additionally, we encourage group members to tape, clip, or paste in other items to their notebook as they would in a scrapbook.

Feel free to be creative and include whatever helps you to chronicle your journey with God. You might include the following:

- Printed journal pages from your computer
- Any written prayers, poems, exercises or notes on spiritual disciplines that you feel supplement the material
- A printed copy of a particular portion of Scripture that is significant to you or portions of Scripture that you desire to memorize through the course of the study
- Any handouts that your leader supplies such as schedules, contact information for other community members and additional or alternative interactive/prayer exercises
- Notes from a sermon or conference that compliment what you are learning
- Photographs or artwork that enhance your reflective process and are meaningful in your relationship with God

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## The Podcasts

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### The Scripture Podcasts

There are two different podcasts for each week of the study. The first is a recording of the Scriptures for the week which we suggest you listen to five days a week. The recordings are anywhere from five to ten minutes in length.

#### *Listening to the Scriptures*

We are specifically focusing on listening to the Word of God, partly because building good relationships involves listening well. By listening to God's Word, we are able to take in the Scriptures in a way that mirrors how we relate in other relationships.

We are a very literate culture. Some Christians tend to be practiced in reading and studying our Bibles. A focus on biblical literacy is a great gift to the church and an important element of our growth in Christ.

However, reading the Scriptures is only one way to engage with God's Word. Throughout this study, we will be inviting you to interact with Scripture in other ways to enhance your experience with the Bible.

#### *“Hear O Israel...” (Deuteronomy 6:1)*

Through the span of history, widespread literacy—and therefore, personal Bible study—appears quite recently. Before the modern age, most people gained their knowledge of the Scriptures by hearing them read aloud. The Bible itself records many times when Israel would gather together to hear the Word of the Lord read to them. (Deuteronomy 5, 2 Kings 23, 2 Chronicles 34, Nehemiah 8, Jeremiah 36, etc.) Many of the Epistles were written to be read aloud to the churches who received them. The Gospels specifically illustrate that Jesus Himself read a passage from Isaiah 61 aloud in the synagogue (Luke 4).

The Scriptures were written to be heard as well as read. There is something about listening to God's Word that allows us to receive it differently than when we read it. We have to focus our attention in a different way. Themes or words may catch our attention in ways that we would not necessarily have

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noticed when reading. We attune our ears and our hearts to truly hear what it is that the Lord is saying.

By listening to the Word of God, we can come to know the Bible in a different way than by only reading. Some people find the concepts stay with them longer, returning to them throughout the day, and others find they end up memorizing sections or phrases without even trying! In fact, studies show that listening involves using more working memory, helping us to remember more than we do when only reading. Additionally, reading and listening involve using different parts of our brains; improving one function helps improve the other.

### *Practical Help in Listening*

If listening regularly to the Scriptures is new to you, you might find it challenging at the start. Your mind may wander or you may lose your place in the passage. If you find it hard to concentrate, feel free to read along as you listen. This can help you keep your focus at first. (We are using the English Standard Version translation.)

You might also enjoy reading what comes before and after each Scripture passage in order to place it in its wider context.

A third approach that might also be fun is to read what comes just before the passage, then set your Bible down as you listen to the Scripture Podcast. The chapters or verses preceding the Scripture to which you're about to listen can help prepare you.

Other tips to help you as you start out:

- Find a place where you can focus on what you're listening to—where you will have the least possible interruptions or distractions. This could be as varied as your car during your commute to work, before you get out of bed or in a comfy chair in your home.
- Feel free to listen while you are doing another activity that engages your hands—like washing the dishes, cooking or getting ready for the day—but that leaves your mind free to listen.
- Plan to listen at the same time every day. While not necessary, this can be helpful for setting up a daily routine.

- If you like, try listening to the verses as a family. This can be a great way to include your spouse and your kids as you engage God's Word.
- If you accidentally skip a day, don't beat yourself up. Just pick up with your routine again the next day. God's mercies are new every morning.
- If you simply cannot focus after repeated attempts, take that difficulty as an invitation from the Lord to talk with Him about what is grabbing your attention instead. He'd love to hear whatever is truly on your heart.

Each week you will listen to the same collection of passages each day. That means you will listen to the same Scriptures at least five times over the course of the week. We have found that this process allows us to discover more connections and depth in God's Word than one might think. We hope that you, too, will come to find the richness in listening to the Word of God.

## The Teaching Podcasts

The second podcast is the Teaching Podcast. It provides an opening reflection on the Scripture and how it applies to our relationship with God and others. Our intention is for you to listen to it after you have heard the Scripture Podcast and before you do your Interactive Project. It will run approximately twenty-five to thirty minutes.

We have provided a written Teaching Summary for you each week as well as space to record personal notes, thoughts and questions which arise from the Teaching Podcast or the Community Experience.

## Accessing the Podcasts

Each week of *The Genesis of Relationship* has Scripture and Teaching Podcasts that you will need to listen to before you engage in the Interactive Project. You can stream or download the podcasts on the Grafted Life website.

- Visit [graftedlife.org](http://graftedlife.org) and log in with an existing account, or register a new account. You can create a free account using the "Member Login" menu on the main navigation bar.
- From the account dashboard, click to "Listen to Podcasts and Add Online Content."

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- Input the following case-sensitive code to add the podcast series to your account: HSTKNY7P

It will take approximately 45 minutes to listen to the podcasts each week. We recommend that you listen to the Scripture Podcast once a day, and listen to the Teaching Podcast early in the week to allow time for the Interactive Project.

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## The Interactive Projects

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The weekly Interactive Projects are an important aspect of the *Life with God* study. They will give you time to consider, process and integrate the material you are hearing into your day-to-day life. They can last anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour each week. We have designed them in such a way that you may choose the duration and intensity with which you'd like to engage in the material.

Each week's project should be completed after you hear the Teaching Podcast but before the Community Experience meeting. Sometimes you may be able to complete a project in one sitting; sometimes it involves a few minutes every day. It is best to look over the Interactive Project at the beginning of each teaching week in order to plan when you can best complete the project.

The goal of all the *Life with God* material is to evoke reflection and encourage relationship. The Interactive Projects are no different. Though they may seem to be activities that you complete by yourself, we hope you will do them in an awareness of God's presence with you.

This does not mean that you will necessarily feel God's presence. But the truth is that God is with us at all times. Remembering this simple fact, no matter what we are feeling, can allow us to engage in these projects with a relational focus and openness.

We trust, too, that the Holy Spirit is always active in your life for your good and for your growth. As you come to these projects, they may seem a bit forced or even a little silly to you. We simply ask that you take the time to engage with what is before you—in other words, to give it a try. If you will open your heart before God in this way, He may have some surprises in store for you.

There isn't anything magical about the projects. We have designed them to work with the Scripture and Teaching Podcasts simply as opportunities for you to engage more deeply with that material in light of your relationship with God.

If you have difficulty with one or more of the projects, please speak to your *Life with God* leader about it. Your leader will help discern if there might be other projects that are better suited to your particular situation.

Not every project may seem the most exciting or interesting to you. That's okay! We simply ask that you be willing to try them for the duration of this twelve-week study.

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## The Community Experience

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The Community Experience meetings are times when your *Life with God* group gathers to share experiences, questions, concerns, and discoveries from the week's activities and from your daily life. These meetings are a place to practice listening and learn about others in the Body of Christ. Your *Life with God* leader will guide the Community Experience, helping create a safe and discerning place for sharing.

Unlike group studies you may have joined in the past, the *Life with God* Community Experience is not a place for debating ideas, for determining right answers, for giving advice, or for fixing personal problems. The energy you would normally direct toward responding to another person will be redirected toward listening well, asking questions, and praying for your group.

One of the tools that *Life with God* uses to assist your group in these goals is the Group Covenant. During the second week, you will be invited to ponder both God's design for healthy relationships and your own past experiences with small groups. You will then bring your thoughts to the Community Experience. Under the guidance of your leader, everyone in the group will share their desires for how they want this new group to relate to one another. Together you will create a list of guidelines that will be written down and distributed to each member by the leader. The covenant can then be revised at any time throughout the semester. If you find along the way that you want to add or change something, simply bring it up during any group meeting. Your leader will be ready to listen to your suggestion and offer it to the whole group.



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You may never have discussed these kinds of relational expectations in your previous experiences with small groups. But we have found the covenant to be a powerful tool to help members practice and grow in good relational dynamics.

To that end, the leader will also be incorporating the following Group Sharing Guidelines into your experience with *The Genesis of Relationship*.

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## Guidelines for Group Sharing

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### 1. Every person is invited to share.

The purpose of the Community Experiences is to learn how to deepen our love—for God and for our neighbors as ourselves. By sharing your experiences interacting with the study—no matter if they are positive or negative—you create an opportunity for love to be given and received.

### 2. No one has to share.

Sometimes what we have experienced feels too personal to share with a group of people. Only share if you feel internally prompted and ready. Sometimes your presence is more important than your words.

### 3. When sharing, try to keep your focus on one subject.

Ask the Lord what He wants you to share. A lot can happen in one week! But by keeping our sharing focused on one subject, we can communicate the most essential things and still allow time for the others in the group to share.

### 4. Each person shares uninterrupted.

(Except by the leader, for sake of time and space for others.) In these busy times, we are used to being distracted. It is not often we experience the gift of uninterrupted time. It may feel awkward at first, but the opportunity to freely speak and for others to truly hear is an important part of relationships.

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# Leader's Guide: Introduction to The Genesis of Relationship

Learning to love God, ourselves, and others is a lifetime project directed by the Holy Spirit. It does not happen overnight or in a six-week program. *The Genesis of Relationship* is the beginning of a potential three year *Life with God* experience. We developed the time frame of the study series to reflect the growth curve we observed in our own lives, in the lives of others with whom we work, and in the example of Christ's work with the apostles.

*Life with God* is not intended to offer a journey to complete maturity, but rather we intend to provide a tool that invites participants to honestly and regularly engage in their relationship with God and members of the Body, in the hope that over time new habits will form in their lives.

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## About the Leader's Guide

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We designed the Leader's Guide to supplement your resources as a leader, and also to let you see and experience *Life with God* from the participant's viewpoint. Where pages are marked with regular page numbers, the material corresponds exactly with the material in the participant notebooks. This enables you to always "be on the same page" with participants as you work through the material. Where pages are marked with an "L" and an outside vertical band, the material is unique to the Leader's Guide. These pages

should be easy to identify and reference if you are working with a co-leader or consulting with Grafted Life or another *Life with God* leader.

At the end of each week we have included several pages of leader's only material that will help you administer the Community Experience. These sections are labeled "Leader's Guide" and include the following guidance:

- **Weekly Intentions:** key goals for the week, corresponding with the Teaching Podcast, Interactive Project, and Community Experience
- **Group Dynamics:** how the week fits within the scope of the semester, how your group members might react to the material, and how to help them engage appropriately with one another
- **Special Preparations:** helpful advice on arranging your meeting room to facilitate the Community Experience
- **Preparing Your Heart:** a guide for your prayer as a leader
- **Special Materials:** any additional supplies that you will need at the Community Experience
- **Community Experience Outline:** a recommended run sheet for your group meeting, including key questions for dialogue, advice for handling potential content difficulties, and group prayers
- **Group Reminders for Next Week:** a heads-up for your group members regarding upcoming projects and community events
- **Leader Reminders:** prompts to help you stay oriented both personally and spiritually between meetings

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## Semester Objectives

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The focus and pace of *The Genesis of Relationship* leads participants in a developmentally appropriate way, not only in respect to its sequence of biblical concepts, but also to stages of personal, relational, and spiritual growth and the formation of healthy group relationships. Observe the developmental progression in the study objectives for each semester.

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The first year of the *Life with God* series (semesters one and two) reflects the foundational concept that God is always the initiator in our relationship. We explore how God reconciles and invites us into loving relationship with Him.

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*Overall Objective:* For participants to deepen awareness and honesty in their relationships with God, themselves, and others.

This first semester is an introduction to a way of engaging in relationship with God and others in the Body of Christ. For some, the topics we cover might not seem new. For others, this may be the first time they've experienced anything like this. Each participant should engage with the material as much or as little as they want or can. Regardless of where they are on their journey with God, the aim of *The Genesis of Relationship* is to grow in relational openness with God and others.

## Teaching Podcasts

*Objective:* To explore the origins of relationship with God, ourselves, and others through the Creation and Fall stories in Genesis

In order to understand and engage in our relationship with God we need to start at the beginning. Using the first four chapters of the book of Genesis we will discover the essence of who God created us to be and see glimpses of how God designed us to function in our relationship with Him and others.

Then we will observe what happened when sin entered the world and delve into the relational consequences that resulted. This semester sets the foundation for appreciating God's goodness and His love for us and for recognizing our great need for Him.

## Interactive Projects

*Objective:* To participate in prayerful, honest reflection about God and self

The purpose of the Interactive Projects is to create a structure that helps the participants will spend some intentional time engaging in their relationship with God. There is no right answer to discover or some specific experience they are required to produce. The projects invite participants to open their

hearts to the current state of their relationship with God and to engage in an honest conversation with Him.

Some group members might have difficulty with this rhythm at the beginning. Sometimes performance issues can get in the way of people simply being honest with God and themselves. You can assist struggling participants by reminding them of the intended objective, which might help alleviate some anxiety by decreasing the pressure to “get it right” or “do it perfectly.”

Additionally, pay attention to specific feedback regarding the Interactive Projects and note if anyone is distressed by overwhelming sadness or fear. This kind of person might need a project that is not as probing, perhaps one that involves meditating on specific, more comforting Scriptures.

Also, note if someone is simply too disconnected from the project to fully engage with it. Prayerfully discern whether you need to help them through any specific resistances or if it would be better to craft a different Interactive Project for them that specifically relates to their circumstances.

## Community Experiences

*Objective:* To begin telling our story in community and practice listening well to the stories of others

The two key emphases during this study are sharing and listening. Your role as leader is to help create an environment where the group members can feel safe to share honestly and openly with one another. Simultaneously, those witnessing someone’s sharing need to be encouraged to listen attentively and compassionately, taking time to reflect on their own internal reactions.

Verbal responses to sharing should come primarily from you as the leader, rather than from the rest of the group. This study is an opportunity for you to model loving and healthy responses, which the group will then practice in Semester Two. Feel free to gently limit others’ responses, particularly if group members are prone to fixing or problem solving.

As the semester progresses, if you discern the group catching on to your model of responding, feel free to begin inviting healthy responses from the group. But be ready to help guide or instruct the group in how to respond.

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## Laying Proper Foundations

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While *Life with God* materials share the same essential design, each study has components that are unique to its particular objectives. As you prepare to lead *The Genesis of Relationship*, keep in mind the following aspects that are distinctive of this semester.

### Focusing on Listening

Our ability to listen is fundamental to our capacity to relate to God and each other. *The Genesis of Relationship* exercises the skill of listening on a weekly basis. Participants practice listening when they sit with the Scripture and Teaching Podcasts each week, as well as when they come together for the Community Experience.

In the Community Experience, participants are invited to listen attentively as other members share without offering their own response or opinion. Responses from group members to other group members (cross-talk) are not encouraged during *The Genesis of Relationship* since they typically come at the cost of learning to relate well. Listening intently and not commenting verbally will be a challenge for many, and group members may even question it as a valuable practice.

Leaders are responsible to hold and guide the structure of the Community Experience, inviting members to share, to listen to each other, and to refrain from adding their own response. Be ready to gently, but firmly correct members who respond to what another has shared by reminding them that listening is more important during this semester than responding.

Unlike group members, leaders may reply to what individuals share for the purpose of modeling appropriate relational responses.

### Creating a Group Covenant

During the second week, participants will spend time in the Community Experience drafting a group covenant. The covenant is developed by the group based on their ideas and desires for group interaction and participation. The Scripture and Teaching Podcasts and the Interactive Project for that week will help prepare participants for this process by inviting them to consider God's design for their relationships with Him and others, as well as their



# Sample Group Covenant

A covenant between Juan Amigo, Jennifer Cho, John Doe, Sally Jones, Geoffrey Peterson, Tonetta Smith, and Mary Yamaguchi.

In seeking to practice the greatest commandments of loving God and loving one another, we agree to uphold the following qualities of relationship with each other in our *Life with God* meetings:

- Respect* We will seek to respect each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, honoring what each of us says, feels, and expresses in our group.
- Commitment* We are committed to attending our group meetings regularly and completing our weekly assignments in advance so that we can meaningfully participate in the discussion. We agree to arrive on time. If we have to miss a meeting, we will inform our group leader ahead of time.
- Listening* We agree to give space to one another as we share, and to listen well to each other (and to God) before we respond.
- Confidentiality* We will not divulge anything that is shared in this group to anyone outside of this group without the express permission of the person who shared it. If we have any concerns about something we hear, we will bring them up with our group leader.
- Truth and Love* We agree that when one of us is bothered or offended by another's words or actions, that person will go to them and work toward understanding, giving and receiving forgiveness. We will work towards reconciliation of all relationships in the group.
- Confession* We agree to be a place where we can confess our faults to one another—both personal faults and those against one another in the group. We agree to accept one another's confessions in love and safety.
- Forgiveness* We will practice forgiveness with one another and ourselves.
- Prayer* We will pray for each other regularly.
- Contact* We agree to share our contact information with one another to help facilitate better communication between group meetings. We agree not to share this information outside the group without permission. We agree not to abuse this contact information, but to use it only for group facilitation and for friendship.
- Love* Ultimately, we will seek to treat each other with love and care, as our Savior commanded us to.

*Compiled by James Todd, group leader, on September 14, 2011*

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personal experiences with small groups from their past. The covenant makes clear from the outset what kind of relational standards the group will choose to uphold with one another during the entire study.

Stating a group's relational expectations from the very beginning will likely be an unusual experience for most participants. Talking so openly about relational expectations might even make some feel uncomfortable, as might the seriousness of the agreement into which they are entering. Your role as leader will be to help guide the discussion, assist those to share, and ease their fears and concerns.

### **Reacting to God's Goodness and Man's Sinfulness**

The first half of *The Genesis of Relationship* is distinct in focus and texture from the second half. Weeks 1 through 6 concentrate on God's goodness and graciousness to mankind and the world. Weeks 7 through 12 consider how sin affects our relationship to God, the world, and each other. Some participants may bask in the joy and delight of God's goodness and find the switch to looking at sin painful and disappointing. Simultaneously, other people find contemplating God's goodness to be uncomfortable and unnatural, while looking at sinfulness and its effects feels more realistic and true to them.

As a leader, be ready to invite, welcome, and identify with both responses. Each preference may seem foreign and bizarre to the other side and normalizing their experiences will help the group accept each other more graciously in the midst of these differences.

### **Leader's Prayer after the Meeting**

We believe that one of the best ways to continually recognize God's activity in your *Life with God* group is through prayer—before, during and after your group meeting. Each week, you will be reminded to pray after the meeting with a prompt that is specific to the themes of the week.

Additionally, we have written the following suggested prayer guide to help you focus your prayers. We invite you to linger with each section, taking the time to remember, review and consider with God what you witnessed in the group and what you experienced as a leader.

# Leader's Prayer Guide for After Meeting

*The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Philippians 4:5-6*

“Lord God, I affirm Your love for this *Life with God* group and Your sovereignty over it. You have granted me a leadership role for this group, and I desire to grow in love as I serve the group and You. As I reflect on the most recent meeting, guide me with your perspective and wisdom.”

## **What did I see?**

*Lord, help me recall any expressions or actions that may be important to note.*

## **What did I hear?**

*Lord, help bring to my mind any sharing or responses that would be wise to consider with You.*

## **What did I feel?**

*Lord, help me understand how my heart reacted to what I witnessed.*

## **How did I respond?**

*Lord, help me know how my responses and actions may have helped or hindered the group in growing in love for You and each other.*

## **Is there anything I need to follow up on?**

*Lord, show me...*

*...if I need to pray for someone.*

*...if I need to speak to someone.*

*...If I need to ask for prayer.*

*...If I need to ask for help.*

*...If there are any next steps You desire me to take.*

“God, thank You for the privilege of serving You and the group in this leadership role. Bless each member of this *Life with God* group through Your wisdom and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.”

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## Getting Started

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Leading a *Life with God* group involves some planning and initiative on the part of the leader to find participants and set up the logistics.

### Gathering Participants

We designed *Life with God* to work for participants at various stages of their spiritual growth. However, we do not recommend using it with children or young teenagers, as some of the concepts may be beyond what they can grasp.

The largest recommended size for a *Life with God* group is fifteen participants. The smallest recommended group size is four people.

We have found that the best groups are those where the participants personally choose to engage in *Life with God* as opposed to groups where the leader decided on behalf of a group. Conducting an Informational Meeting (see below) can help give people the resources they need to make a decision about participating.

If you are working with a church, make sure to get proper approval to offer *Life with God* to your church body. This may take a few weeks so plan accordingly.

### Finding a Location

*Life with God* groups have successfully met in church classrooms or in someone's home. The most important thing is to find a place that is private, where the group won't be interrupted for the duration of the meeting.

Also, there needs to be ample seating and space so that participants can sit in a circle without anything blocking them, such as a table or desk.

### Ordering Materials

*Life with God* notebooks can be ordered at [graftedlife.org](http://graftedlife.org). Log in to your Grafted Life account and browse the member dashboard for a link to order notebooks.

From the time you place your order, please allow up to two weeks for fulfillment and shipping. Participants will need access to their notebooks prior to Week 1 to complete the first assignments at home.

## Setting a Schedule

We designed *The Genesis of Relationship* as a consecutive 12-week semester. However, you can set a schedule that works best for you, your church and/or your participants. You may want to meet each week, but have to skip a week or two due to holidays and your own availability. Or, you might want to slow down the process and take double the time (twenty-four weeks) to complete the whole semester.

Regardless of what you choose, we recommend writing up a meeting schedule document that will allow interested people to visually see the time commitment they will be making.

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## Holding an Informational Meeting

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We recommend that leaders hold an informational meeting for people in their church or Christian community who wish to learn more about *Life with God*. Ideally, this meeting is held 2-6 weeks before Week 1 of *The Genesis of Relationship*. We've assembled some ideas here to help you get started.

The purpose of the meeting is to give people a feel for what participating in *Life with God* will be like, how it may be different from other Bible studies, and what they can expect the time commitment to be each week.

Attending an informational meeting is helpful, but not mandatory for *Life with God* participants. However the meeting is advertised, make sure others know that they can still participate in *Life with God* even if they cannot make it to the meeting.

That said, you have freedom to run the informational meeting however you like. Below are our suggestions for how to structure a meeting:

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### The Genesis of Relationship

## Materials Needed

- Any appropriate written materials about *Life with God*, such as brochures, sample pages, etc.
- Copies of a written Meeting Schedule
- Copies of the handout titled “Should I Participate in *Life with God* Now?”

## Meeting Administration

Begin your time with a prayer.

Introduce yourself and explain why you are leading *Life with God*. Take 5 to 10 minutes to share a personal story about why you are involved, and why you feel this is important for your life and the lives of others.

Give an overview of the objectives for this semester and each of the component pieces involved: the Teaching Podcasts, the Scripture Podcasts, the Interactive Projects and the Community Experiences.

Share the cost per participant for the semester. Explain that the cost includes an interactive notebook and access to all the Podcast recordings.

Note that the Podcast recordings are available exclusively online and can be listened to over one’s computer, downloaded onto their phone, tablet or MP3 player, or burned onto a CD. If someone doesn’t have access to the Internet in order to download the podcasts, let them know that you can make them CDs of the material (if you have that capability).

Allow time to answer any questions about *Life with God*—both philosophical and logistical.

Pass out your meeting schedule and go over it. If someone indicates that they are going to have to miss several of the sessions, you might want to encourage them to wait for another season to participate in *Life with God*.

Highlight that participants should listen to the Teaching and Scripture Podcasts for Week 1 before the first meeting.

Near the end, pass out the handout entitled “Should I Participate in *Life with God* Now?” Explain that this is a discerning exercise to help them dialogue



**GRAFTED LIFE**  
MINISTRIES  
Becoming One with Christ

## Should I participate in *Life with God* now?

As you consider this question, the following reflections may help you in your discernment process. Whatever the outcome, we trust that God is guiding your life to His good and to yours. Begin with a brief time of prayer prompted by these verses from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (ESV):

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.”

In light of this Scripture, take some time to consider with God...

- Is this the season for me to engage in *Life with God*? What kind of season am I in right now?
- Am I feeling drawn to come together in a small group to learn more about God, myself, and my relationships with God and others?
- Can I make the time to listen daily to the Scriptures and weekly to the Teaching, complete the weekly Interactive Project, and be present for the Community Experience meetings? If so, am I willing to make the commitment?
- Is there something else that God might be calling me to give my time and attention to?

You might also want to talk with your family and friends. What do they think about you participating in *Life with God* at this time?



## Introduction

### The Genesis of Relationship

with God about what He desires for this season of their lives. It is also a good example of the kind of material covered in the Interactive Projects.

Tell them that you will need to know if they plan to participate by a date at least 2 weeks prior to your first meeting, in order to have their materials ordered and shipped.

Thank everyone for coming.





# The Genesis of Relationship

*Life with God: Foundations, Semester One*





## Week 1

# The Saving Invitation: Be Reconciled to God

Every journey begins with a single movement. The first movement of the Christian journey is to span the relational chasm that separates us from a life with God. Christ's finished work of salvation is the bridge that makes it possible to be reconciled in a real relationship with Him. This is where we begin the conversation. Welcome to *Life with God: The Genesis of Relationship*.

**Key Passages:** Colossians 1:15-23, Ephesians 2:11-22,  
2 Corinthians 5:14-21

# Week 1

## The Saving Invitation

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## Teaching Summary

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*Prior to reading this summary, listen to the Scripture and Teaching Podcasts for Week 1. Follow the instructions for accessing the podcasts on page 13.*

Here is the good news—the best news. God has been pleased to accept the saving work of Christ as the means to reconcile sinful man with Him, restoring their relationship. Paul saw this as the defining point of his own ministry—a ministry that he has taken up to follow Christ’s example and to reflect Christ’s love. “Be reconciled to God,” Paul urges the Corinthians. Because of the complete and finished work of Jesus, there is no longer any impediment to the believer’s relationship with the Father.

### **What are the important points to our reconciliation with God?**

- Our reconciliation is complete and solely dependent on Christ’s work. We cannot earn our way into relationship with God, but our participation does influence the quality of our relationship just like it does in our other relationships.
- Our reconciliation by definition presumes previous relational terms. We need to understand those to re-enter the relationship God designed and desires.
- Our reconciliation is one-sided. God has not been in the wrong; we are the reconciled party. Additionally, God knows how to have a relationship with us, but we need to learn how to practically enter into a relationship with Him. Adding new habits is not enough. We also need to put off our old relational habits, with God and with others, which often includes their discovery . (Put off the old man and put on the new man.)

### **What are the important questions to ask regarding our reconciliation and relationship with God?**

- Are we stuck in independent patterns?
- How do we have a real relationship with a Spirit?
- How does our relationship with God affect our relationship with others?

# Week 1

## The Saving Invitation

- How does the quality of our relationship with God affect our spiritual growth?
- What does the Bible say is possible in our relationship with God?

These are the questions that *Life with God* will address as we journey together through the pages of Scripture, through the realities of our own hearts and within our group relationships.



# Week 1

## The Saving Invitation

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## Interactive Project

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*To be completed during the first Community Experience group meeting.*

Write a quick list of the important relationships you have in your life (e.g. husband, wife, mother, father, son, daughter, friend, employee...).

As you spend some time in quiet, look over this list and ask God to be with you as you consider what you are seeing and as you ponder the questions below. Talk to God and yourself silently about your answers. Write them below.

- Would you rate your relationships in general as healthy, thriving, struggling, unsatisfying or neglected?
- As you ponder the more positive relationships, what beneficial qualities do you find in them?
- Do those with whom you associate ever complain about the condition of their relationship with you? What would they like to see change?
- How would you describe your relationship with God? What aspects of it are satisfying? What aspects would you like to be different?

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Personal Notes

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Week 1

The Saving  
Invitation

# Week 1

## The Saving Invitation

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To create a vision for the wonder of being reconciled and accepted into a relationship with God
2. To create a question about the practical implications and possibilities of having a relationship with God
3. To invite a reflection of the current state of the participants' relationship with God and others

### Group Dynamics

The first Community Experience is an important one. It will help to set the tone for how the group will continue together throughout the experience. Make note of how people introduce themselves to each other and be as welcoming of each person as possible.

### Special Preparations

Try to have the room set up ahead of time so that everyone can sit in a circle (as much as possible) and without desks or a meeting table separating them from one another. We often use desks and tables to protect ourselves and close ourselves off from others. Keeping the space open between people also helps them to stay open to each other.

Check the space ahead of time to determine whether the Interactive Project would best be completed in the room with everyone together or with the group dispersed to other areas for more privacy. Pray as well over which option would best suit this particular group.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before anyone arrives, spend some time in prayer:

**Invite** God's will and protection into this first group meeting time. Pray for each participant and what they will experience. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you welcome and receive each person in love.

### Special Materials

- Your Leader's Guide and Bible
- Writing instruments—pens or pencils, one for each member for completion of this first Interactive Project together
- Name tags and pens

### Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
50%	Introductions and Relational Brainstorming
25%	Completing the Interactive Project
25%	Sharing and Questions

#### *Introductions and Relational Brainstorming (50%)*

Make sure everyone puts on a name tag, if needed, as they enter.

Begin with a prayer, committing the meeting time to God.

Ask everyone to introduce themselves and to share how long they have been in a relationship with God. Also, ask them to share two or three sentences about any relationship that is on their mind.

Next, ask the group to brainstorm about the key relationships they have in life. Each person makes their own personal list of their main relationships, which they write in their notebook. Give them three to five minutes to write their own lists and then spend five to ten minutes having people share what they listed.

# Week 1

## The Saving Invitation

### *Completing the Interactive Project (25%)*

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.

### *Sharing and Questions (25%)*

Gather the group back together again and spend the rest of the time inviting people to share their experience of the Interactive Project. Ask:

- What did you discover from the Interactive Project?

Answer any questions they have from the Teaching or Scripture Podcast.

End the meeting with a prayer.

## **Group Reminders for Next Week**

### *Confirming the Basics*

Before your group leaves 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

### Leader Reminder

#### *Pray after the Meeting*

Spend time in prayer after the meeting, talking with God about what you witnessed and how you feel about your leadership. Use the Leader's Prayer Guide in the Introduction, if you find it helpful. If you have a co-leader, try to pray together.

# Week 1

The Saving  
Invitation

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## Personal Notes

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## Week 2

# The Purpose of Relationship

Jesus described the ultimate goal of relationship: living out the great commandments to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This goal is not merely a series of actions but is a “posture of the heart” that desires the good for ourselves and others, knowing that the good always comes when we are freely following the will of God.

**Key Passages:** Mark 12:28-34, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, John 15:12-17,  
1 John 4:19-21



## Week 2

### The Purpose of Relationship

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## Teaching Summary

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God-designed relationships in Scripture are all about love in action: learning and growing deeper in our love for God and our love for each other (our neighbor). So the measure of our journey through this study will not be how much we can learn about relationship but how much we grow in love.

How do we measure love? We evaluate our behavior and the motivations of our hearts. Are we doing the will of God out of obligation or duty? Or possibly fear or guilt? Are we growing in our affection, desire, passion, identification, brotherhood and friendship with God? We can be asking these questions regularly of ourselves and our community members to evaluate the quality of our spiritual love life.

When upon reflection we find that we are not the lovers God calls us to be, there are two relational invitations on the table.

- The first is to open our hearts and ask God to provide a deeper experience of His love toward us. We love because He first loved us. As we grow to accept and embrace God's love toward us, we will be able to love God and others in deeper ways.
- The second is that we can practice loving the brother and sister that we can see. The church is a great place to practice and hone the commandments and callings of our life in Christ. Our community group is particularly a place where we should practice and demonstrate love as we journey together through this study.

During the course of this study, we will have many opportunities to participate and accept each of these invitations to grow in our love for God and others. This will help us to live out relationships in the way God desires.

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## Interactive Project

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## Week 2

### The Purpose of Relationship

*To be completed at home before the next Community Experience.*

Spend some time reading and considering Proverbs 18. Pay close attention to verses 1-2, 4, 6-8, 13-15, and 17-21.

Ponder what it says and write what you observe regarding being wise in relationships, about listening and speaking. What catches your attention?

In light of what you've just read and written, spend some time talking to God about what you desire from a loving community of people.

Think about other groups in which you have participated. Were there aspects you appreciated that you would like to see implemented in this group? Have you been hurt in groups in the past?

Considering these proverbs and your past experience, how would you like to be treated? How would you not like to be treated? How would you like others to treat each other?

Write down whatever ideas come to you, and make sure to bring this to the next group Community Experience.

## Week 2

### The Purpose of Relationship

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

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

### Group Dynamics

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.

Speaking openly about relational expectations may seem unusual or uncomfortable for some members. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to share, if they want to. You are both the leader and a member of the group, so make sure your ideas/desires are included as well.

### Special Preparations

You will need to attach a sheet of butcher paper to the wall or board before you start, 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.

### *Writing Up the Group Covenant*

Your job will be 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 for a brief discussion of the purpose of the covenant.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before anyone arrives, spend some time in prayer:

**Ask 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. Ask God to guide you as you lead the group.

### Special Materials

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

### Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
25%	Group Dialogue
75%	Creating the Group Covenant

#### *Opening (3 minutes)*

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.

## Week 2

### The Purpose of Relationship

#### *Group Dialogue (25%)*

Begin a brief dialogue around this question:

- What caught your attention this week in the Scripture and Teaching?

Let the group talk to each other, but answer any questions that would help clarify and support the Teaching.

#### *Creating the Group Covenant (75%)*

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. Ask the group:

- What do we want to include in our group covenant? How do we want to treat each other over the course of this study to help us grow in love?

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.

Bring up these topics for discussion if the group doesn't mention them:

- Commitment to attendance and participation in the weekly assignments
- Being on time (If your group meeting time is limited this could be very important)
- Confidentiality
- Confession—both general confession and when there is a wrong between group members
- Forgiveness

- Regular petitionary prayer for one another
- Exchange of contact information

Before the time ends, make sure everyone is genuinely on board with what you've written down. Invite some disagreement in the process, normalizing that this is truly a safe moment to show concern or disagreement.

Tell them you are going to take the butcher paper home and write up the group's covenant. Tell them you will bring copies for everyone next week.

End the meeting with a prayer.

## Group Reminders for Next Week

### *Planning for the Next Interactive Project*

Remind the group to read this next week's Interactive Project earlier in the week than later because it involves spending a period of time engaging in nature which may need to be scheduled.

## Leader Reminders

### *Available for Questions*

Be available for any administrative questions the group members may have before they leave the space.

### *Writing the Covenant*

Before next week, you will need to formally write the covenant for the group— based on the material they discuss and you record. Week 3 you will bring a copy for each member of the group. It's best to write up the group covenant within a day or two of the group meeting so that it is easier to draw on your recollection of what happened in the meeting as well as the notes on the butcher paper.

Download a template for a group covenant on the podcast page for *The Genesis of Relationship*. The sample template we provide is only a guide. Feel

## Week 2

### The Purpose of Relationship

free to vary from this format in any way that might better represent your group.

#### *Pray after the Meeting*

Take time to pray about what you experienced in this meeting time. How are you feeling about how this group might progress relationally with one another and with God?

# Week 2

## The Purpose of Relationship



# Week 2

The Purpose of  
Relationship

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## Personal Notes

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## 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

## Week 3

God: The  
Giver of Life

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### Teaching Summary

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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.

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## Interactive Project

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## Week 3

God: The  
Giver of Life

*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?

# Week 3

God: The  
Giver of Life

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To introduce the focus for the next ten weeks: growing in our knowledge of God and ourselves
2. To offer an opportunity for reflection on the character of God gleaned from the creation story
3. To invite a comparison of the God portrayed in Genesis 1 and the way we normally think of God

### Group Dynamics

This week is the first week where the group will spend a significant portion of time sharing about their experiences from their Interactive Project. This is the beginning of the primary focus of the Community Experiences: inviting participants to share honestly with each other in a safe, loving atmosphere.

Invite group members to share positive experiences, but also invite them to share negative or uninspiring experiences. The goal is to normalize everyone's experience, especially for the participants that are disappointed by the result. Invite and welcome all responses.

If even one person had a negative or uninspiring experience, talk with the group about how God is still present and working even when we don't "feel" as if He is. Posit that maybe He, in His wisdom and love, is allowing us not to feel His work or presence for some other reason. Invite the group to respond to what you share.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before anyone arrives, spend some time in prayer:

**Thank God** for this opportunity to be together. Ask for His grace upon the time and that the group might feel safe to share with one another. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your leadership of the group.

## Special Materials

- Copies of the Group Covenant, one for each member.
- Name tags and pens

## Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
25%	Approving the Covenant
25%	Group Dialogue
50%	Sharing Experiences

### *Opening (3 minutes)*

Make sure everyone has a name tag, if necessary. Begin by taking two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud Psalm 19:1-4. If appropriate for your group, follow your reading with silence and then prayer.

### *Approving the Covenant (25%)*

Hand out the copies of the Group Covenant. Make sure that each member of the group gets one. Give them some time to look it over.

Ask the group if the Covenant reflects what they expressed in the last meeting. If anyone mentions something that is missing or any changes to be made, write them down. Tell the group that you will incorporate those changes and come back next week with a final document. This is their document, and you are facilitating its completion for them.

If everyone approves the document as written, remind them that this is the covenant they are all agreeing to for the next nine meetings. If someone wants to propose an amendment at any time, they can bring it up for the group to decide.

## Week 3

God: The  
Giver of Life

### *Group Dialogue (25%)*

Move the group into a dialogue around the first question:

- What caught your attention from the Scripture and Teaching?

Let the group talk to each other, but answer any questions that would help clarify and support the Teaching.

### *Sharing Experiences (50%)*

- What was your experience with the Interactive Project like? Did it affect your experience of God?

The group can refer to their writings on their Interactive Project, if they like. Welcome all experiences, both positive and negative.

End the meeting with prayer.

## **Group Reminders for Next Week**

### *Planning for the next Interactive Project*

Before the group leaves the space, tell them that next week's Interactive Project involves focusing on an idea for one day. Make sure they look that over and choose a day ahead of time.

## **Leader Reminder**

### *Pray after the Meeting*

As you review the meeting with God, note how your understanding of each group member has already changed or been affirmed. Invite God to alter your assumptions as He sees fit.

# Week 3

God: The  
Giver of Life



# Week 3

God: The  
Giver of Life

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## Personal Notes

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## 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

## Week 4

### Man: Relational Responsibilities

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## Teaching Summary

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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.

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## Interactive Project

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## Week 4

Man: Relational  
Responsibilities

*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: (1) our Identity, (2) our Ability to Relate, and (3) 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?

*Continue on the next page...*

## Week 4

Man: Relational  
Responsibilities

### 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?

## Week 4

Man: Relational  
Responsibilities

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.*

# Week 4

Man: Relational  
Responsibilities

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To see the vision of God's good design and intention for man
2. To reflect on how man is made in the image of God
3. To correlate and connect our relationship with God to a right understanding of our identity, ability to relate and vocation

### Group Dynamics

This week you will spend the majority of the time allowing the group to share from their experiences of the week. Your role as leader is to continue to set the example for everyone to share in a safe, loving atmosphere.

Note each week who shares and who does not. Then begin next week by inviting those who did not share the previous week to go first. They are free to refuse, but offering them the opportunity communicates that they are seen and welcomed.

The leader's role at this point is to orchestrate the group's sharing. You are not inviting the group to respond to what others say. The goal is for members simply to get comfortable with the idea that they can share deeply and honestly with the others in this group.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before the members arrive, spend some time in prayer:

**Invite God** to fill the space with His Holy Spirit, to lead the time and to give the courage to speak to members who might need it. Ask God to help create a safe and loving atmosphere for all. Also pray as you are led, thinking of the previous meeting times.

## Special Materials

- Name tags and pens for the name tags

## Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
33%	Group Dialogue
67%	Sharing Experiences

### *Opening (3 minutes)*

Make sure everyone has a name tag, if necessary. Begin by taking two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud Psalm 8:3-5. If appropriate for your group, follow your reading with silence and then with a prayer.

### *Group Dialogue (33%)*

Move the group into a dialogue around the question:

- What struck you from this week's Scripture and Teaching?

Make sure everyone has opportunity to share and that no one monopolizes the time. Answer any questions that would help clarify and support the Teaching.

### *Sharing Experiences (67%)*

Invite the group to share on the following question:

- How did thoughtfully considering God's intention in creating you in His image affect you this week?

Participants can refer to their writings on their Interactive Project, if they like.



# Week 4

## Man: Relational Responsibilities

Invite the group members to share honestly about their experiences—whether they are positive, negative, middling or even if they did not engage in the material at all. The goal still is to invite participation and normalize everyone's experience, especially for members who are disappointed—either in themselves or in the result. Welcome all responses as not only normal but also expected.

End the time with a short prayer. Either you can pray, or you can invite one of the members to pray on behalf of the group.

### **Group Reminders for Next Week**

#### *Name Tags*

Ask your group about the name tags. Do they still need to use them, or are they ready to try without them next week? Follow their lead.

### **Leader Reminders**

#### *Available for Questions*

Try to take a few minutes at the end of each group meeting as members are leaving to be available for any administrative or personal questions. If people are struggling, this will be the time they'll probably come and talk with you.

#### *Pray after the Meeting*

Thank God for any positive developments that you are noticing and ask for His influence on people who are showing resistance.

# Week 4

Man: Relational  
Responsibilities

# Week 4

Man: Relational  
Responsibilities

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## Personal Notes

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## Week 5

# God and Man in Relationship: Opening to Self-Knowledge

God knows what we need to function in health and in happiness, but we may not. In Genesis 2 we observe God leading Adam on a relational journey of discovery. He brings the animals to Adam and asks him to name them. Through this process, Adam discovers that the animals are not a suitable partner for him, and he awakens to a deeper relational need. God helps Adam to grow in this self-knowledge. Every relationship requires that we grow or deepen in knowledge, not just about the “other” in the relationship, but also about ourselves.

**Key Passages:** Genesis 2:18-20, Psalm 139:1-6, Hebrews 4:11-16

# Week 5

## Opening to Self-Knowledge

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## Teaching Summary

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Five hundred years ago the great reformer John Calvin wrote at the beginning of his classic work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

“Our wisdom, insofar as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”

Although on the surface this observation sounds simple, in reality it can become complicated in the application. When we start on the journey to know God, we soon realize that He is vast, mysterious and “other” from everyone else we know. So we focus on increasing our knowledge about ourselves, and before too long we start to suspect that we are more mysterious and harder to know than we were aware.

Self-knowledge is a complex subject. We are not going to cover self-knowledge in one week! But we can learn a few things about it from our Genesis passage. Let’s start by exploring this little set of verses in Genesis 2 and see what we discover.

I love this little story. Right in the middle of the creation account is a journey of self-discovery. Have you ever thought about that before? And it’s initiated and directed by God. How cool is that?

What is important about this story?

- This story teaches us that self-discovery is God directed, encouraged and approved.
- This story illustrates that our need for self-discovery is a fact of our creation. God did not create us with complete self-knowledge.
- This story comforts us that growing in self-knowledge takes time. It appears that God has the time.

If God has the desire, the plan and the time for us to grow in self-knowledge, how can we respond?

- We can embrace our relationship with God. Self-discovery can happen on our own, but it is safer in relationship. On our own, we

## Week 5

### Opening to Self-Knowledge

can disintegrate into selfishness and self-deceit. God knows us and speaks the truth to our hearts when we are willing to listen.

- We can open our awareness to the reality of our internal world. We can intentionally reflect on our experiences, reactions and feelings, and ask God to help us to understand it all.
- We can exercise our faith—literally, giving it a workout. As we discover things in our hearts that we can not fix or control, we will be challenged to trust God. If our discoveries are uncomfortable, we will need to trust that God has a purpose and a good in mind for this process of gaining self-knowledge.

I wonder what God has in mind for you to discover about yourself this week? Is there a deep desire, need or emotion that He wants to bring to your attention? I hope the illustration of Adam's story in the Garden of Eden is an encouragement to you to trust God's lead, to engage in personal reflection and to exercise your faith that God will be present in the discovery.

# Week 5

## Opening to Self-Knowledge

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## Interactive Project

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*Make sure to schedule up to one hour to focus on this project.*

This week we will engage in a relational exercise in deepening self-knowledge. Find a comfortable, quiet place to spend up to an hour with God. Bring your notebook, your Bible and pen or pencil. Feel free to talk out loud, walk or sit. You can do this at home or even outside, like in a park. Just find a place where you feel comfortable to spend some relational time with God.

Read Matthew 7:7-11. Consider what this passage says about God—that He is a loving and giving Father. Remember, too, the theme of the Genesis passage this week: He wants you to learn more about yourself.

Take a few minutes to prayerfully consider the desires or needs of your heart.

Ask God to help you feel what He wants to reveal from your heart. Try not to qualify or judge the feelings you discover; rather give yourself permission to take note of even things that may seem petty. (You won't be forced to share what you discover in the group, so feel free to talk openly with God.) Keep praying as they come to your attention. What are your desires? Your needs? Your feelings? Write them down.

## Week 5

### Opening to Self-Knowledge

Now take a few minutes and look over what you've written. Can you see any connections? For instance, are there several that revolve around your family or work? Or are there desires or needs related to your physical body? Group your desires, if applicable, and think about how you would prioritize them. Which are strongest? Which have you had the longest? Which have you almost given up on? Write down your new organized list.

Next, take a few minutes and choose one desire or need to talk to God about. Tell God about your feelings, longings, disappointments, dreams, discouragements and hopes related to this issue. Write down any thoughts that seems significant or any feelings that surface that you were not aware of before.

*Continue on the next page...*



## Week 5

### Opening to Self-Knowledge

Lastly, spend some time in quiet listening for any response that God may want to give you. Pay attention to any impressions that come from the listening. It's okay if you don't hear, feel or sense anything. Just give God the space in case He wants to reveal any truth to your heart. End by writing a short reflection on how this whole experience felt. What was it like to pray in this way?

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Personal Notes

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Week 5

Opening to  
Self-Knowledge

# Week 5

## Opening to Self-Knowledge

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To see a vision for the importance of both the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self
2. To understand that God desires, plans and provides the time for us to get to know ourselves
3. To open to an experience of internal reflection and growth in self-knowledge within relationship with God and the community group

### Group Dynamics

This week the group will be coming back after having had a potentially intense prayer time with God in the Interactive Project. Be aware that some people may be coming in a little vulnerable and raw, and others may come in rather defensive, if God brought up something that is difficult for them.

It is important to maintain good structure, but simultaneously deal with the individuals in your group gently.

Because the experience might be revealing for some people, consider letting volunteers begin. God might also give you a sense of someone who needs to share. If that happens, make sure you invite that person to share, though they are free to choose not to.

It is possible that someone might become vulnerable with the group during this session. This past week's prayer experience can be very powerful. So this might be a moment for the group to rally in support of one of its members. Help them to do that by inviting one or more people to pray for the vulnerable person after they share or at the close of the session.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before the members arrive, spend time in prayer:

# Week 5

## Opening to Self-Knowledge

**Ask God** to prepare and support those who are going to share. Ask that the group would be able to attend to and receive well whoever ends up sharing, and that God would give you sensitivity and insight into the needs of the group.

### Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
33%	Group Dialogue
67%	Sharing Experiences

#### *Opening (3 minutes)*

Begin by taking just two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud Psalm 139:1-4. If appropriate for your group, follow your reading with silence and then with prayer.

#### *Group Dialogue (33%)*

Next, move the group into a dialogue around the question:

- What caught your attention in this week's Scripture and Teaching?

Let the group talk to each other, but answer any questions that would help clarify and support the Teaching.

#### *Sharing Experiences (67%)*

Invite the group to refer to their writings on their Interactive Project for the following question.

- How did your experience of self-knowledge—considering your desires or needs before God—affect you? Your relationship with Him? With yourself? With others?

# Week 5

## Opening to Self-Knowledge

Before anyone responds, make it clear to the group that no one needs to share their actual desire or need if it feels too personal. They can if they want, but it is not necessary for this discussion. Instead, the focus should be to share the experience of recognizing their desire or need before God—the experience of self-knowledge.

As always, invite all possible responses and normalize them—good, bad, indifferent or avoidant.

Again, you are not inviting the group to address anyone's sharing. But be ready to gently rein in people who feel compelled to react because their own buttons are pushed. Remind them that for now the group is just practicing listening to and receiving one another.

End the time with a short prayer. Either you can pray, or you can invite one of the members to pray on behalf of the group.

## Group Reminders for Next Week

### *Planning Enough Time for the Interactive Project*

Note that next week's Interactive Project involves a bit of time each morning and evening for three to five days, so encourage the group to look over the material and start early, so that they can complete the whole project before the next meeting.

## Leader Reminders

### *Available for Questions or Concerns*

Make yourself available after this group session, if possible. Someone in the group may need to share their experience with you personally before being ready to share with the entire group. This happens more frequently than you might think. Some people need to risk first being open with the leader before they can risk being open with the group.

## Week 5

### Opening to Self-Knowledge

### *Preparation for Week 6*

During the Week 6 Community Experience meeting, there will be an exercise that involves each member having a small clean rock and a permanent pen to write on it. Make sure to collect or acquire those this week.

### *Pray after the Meeting*

Note how this habit of talking with God about the meeting afterwards is affecting your thinking and feelings towards the group members.

# Week 5

Opening to  
Self-Knowledge

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## Personal Notes

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## Week 6

# God and Man in Relationship: The Experience of Being Known

God's invitation for Adam to recognize his relational need ends in fulfillment beyond Adam's expectations. The gift is perfectly suited and instantly recognized as the fit for Adam. What does this say about God? What does this say about our relationship to Him? He knows us perfectly and fully. He wants to fulfill our deepest desires as only He understands them. He is not stingy, nor is He upset that we find fulfillment in the gifts of His creation. But He also wants us to know Him as the giver, to be secure and safe in that foundational relationship. When we are, we can freely enjoy the gifts that He has given without shame or divided loyalty.

**Key Passages:** Genesis 2:21-25, Psalm 92, Matthew 6:25-33



## Week 6

### The Experience of Being Known

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## Teaching Summary

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Last week we left Adam with his need—a new self-awareness discovered in his encounters with the animals. Today as we finish this story with the creation of Eve, we will discover more fully why God gave Adam the experience of self-knowledge.

God has set up a beautiful relational experience. By requiring Adam to feel his deep desire and need for a companion, before He gifts him with Eve, God invites Adam into an experience of relational intimacy. We often see the relational intimacy that Adam receives from Eve, but we might miss the precursor intimacy that Adam first experiences with God.

What does God want Adam to know?

- He is the giver.

*Adam has nothing to do or say about the creation of Eve. God takes complete control of her creation.*

- He knows Adam perfectly.

The gift is recognized as perfectly suited for Adam and completes humanity.

*What does it mean to us relationally that we are so perfectly known by God? How do we take that in? Experience it? Believe it?*

- He wants Adam to receive this gift in the context of his relationship with God.

*Adam received, embraced and relished the gift without shame.*

**Ultimately, God wanted Adam to know that He could be trusted to know and supply Adam's needs.**

How do we receive gifts from God? How do we live with them? Do they build our trust in God and our relationship with Him?

When trust is absent or small, we can fall into fear. Fear inhibits our ability to receive gifts from God in the way in which He invites us. Fear can keep us from receiving gifts from God. We can become one of the following:

## Week 6

### The Experience of Being Known

- Reluctant to accept the gift for fear it will be taken away or won't last
- Tempted to cling to the gift instead of God
- Resentful that the gift is not really suited to us

If we are going to live life with God, reconciled into a real relationship, we need to face the way we receive God's gifts because that is what life with Him is all about. God knows us completely and plans to give us what is best. We need to trust His place in our life and what resides in His heart.

This story from the life of Adam is a good illustration of what kind of giver God is. How does that match up with how you normally think about God? Do you trust that He knows you fully? Are you proficient in the art of receiving from God, or are you more controlled by fear? I hope your conversations with God and others this week help you discover what resides in your heart.

## Week 6

The Experience  
of Being Known

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### Interactive Project

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*You will need to focus on this project in the morning and evening, three to five days this week, so make sure to plan accordingly.*

At the beginning of the week, choose a gift that God has given you in your life. If something doesn't immediately come to mind, ask the Lord to point something out to you. Don't worry too much about whether it is the "right" gift for this project; any gift from God will do.

Every morning, for three to five mornings, begin your day by praying and asking God to reveal something to you this day about why He gave you this particular gift. Ask Him to help you see how it reflects His knowledge of you and His love for you.

Then each evening spend a few minutes reflecting on the gift and what God may have revealed to you that day. In the presence of the Lord, record a sentence or two each night about how this gift has been good for you. Ask yourself how this gift has surprised you and caused you to grow or to know yourself better in unexpected ways. Or perhaps the gift has been difficult to accept. Write down whatever you discover.

On the last day look over your week and what you observed. What does the gift say about how God knows you and cares for you? How does it feel to be so fully known? Did you discover places in your heart that have difficulty receiving the gift? What does that tell you about your relationship with God? Respond to the Lord honestly about what you have discovered. Then write a reflection of your experience.

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Personal Notes

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## Week 6

The Experience  
of Being Known

# Week 6

The Experience  
of Being Known

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To recognize God's desire to have an intimate relationship with us
2. To reflect on how fully God knows us
3. To evaluate the level of trust or possible fear we experience in our relationship with God

### Group Dynamics

This week the group will be coming back after having pondered God's loving action towards them through a specific gift. The intention of this Interactive Project is to help the participants have an experience with their level of trust in God. By focusing on a concrete item that represents God's love and goodness towards them, participants also have had the opportunity to notice how their image of God might differ from how God presents Himself in these Scriptures.

This is the last week we explore the goodness of God and the goodness of man, pre-Fall. Next week we will begin to look at the effects of the Fall on our ability to relate with God and each other. This is an important time to stop and consider what the group has learned thus far. We are halfway through the semester and, by nature of the material, the second half will take on a little different texture.

This week you will be leading the group to share, not only from their experiences with Week 6, but also from consideration of what they have learned over the last six weeks about places their hearts agree or disagree with their understanding of God in Scripture. Because this focus is different from what the group has experienced so far and might be expecting, be prepared to ease the group into this different focus.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before the members arrive, spend some time in prayer:

**Ask God** to be with you as you lead the group, to be with each group member and the group as a whole, and to lead the sharing time by His Holy Spirit. Pray for inspiration and protection for the group. Also, pray however else you feel led.

### Special Materials

- A collection of small rocks (collected from the ground or purchased at your local craft store)—one for each person
- Markers (like Sharpies™) for writing on the rocks

### Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
25%	Sharing from this Week
50%	Midpoint Reflection
25%	Creating a Memorial

#### *Opening (3 minutes)*

Begin by taking just two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud Psalm 92:4-5. Follow your reading with silence and then with prayer.

## Week 6

### The Experience of Being Known

#### *Sharing from this Week (25%)*

Start a dialogue around this question:

- What did you discover this week from the Scripture, Teaching and/or the Interactive Project?

Welcome both positive and negative experiences.

#### *Midpoint Reflection (50%)*

Explain to the group that this is the halfway point in the study. For the last six weeks, we have been focusing specifically on God's goodness towards man relationally and man's pre-Fall response. This is a good time to pause for a moment and consider what we have learned so far, about God and His posture towards us, and about ourselves and our posture towards God.

Give everyone a moment to consider this question:

- Looking back over Weeks 1 through 6, what have you learned so far about who God is and how He relates to you?

Allow for some silence as participants prayerfully consider that question, and suggest that they look back over their notes from the last six weeks.

After sufficient time for reflection, invite answers from the group.

Following a bit of sharing, ask:

- "Have the experiences of these past six weeks challenged or altered anyone's perception of who God is? If so, how?"

As always, invite all possible responses and normalize them—good, bad, indifferent or avoidant. Again, we are not inviting the group to address what anyone else shares.

#### *Creating a Memorial (25%)*

Pass out the small rocks, one to each person, along with the markers. Explain to the group that one way people in Scripture would acknowledge God's work was to create a memorial—a physical representation of what happened—like Jacob setting up a stone at Bethel.

# Week 6

## The Experience of Being Known

Ask each person to think of one word that encapsulates a characteristic of God they want to hold onto for the coming weeks. Have them write it on the rock.

If there is time, you can have volunteers share their word.

Tell them that the rock is theirs to keep as a reminder of this aspect of God as they move on to Weeks 7 through 12.

End the meeting with prayer.

### **Leader Reminders**

#### *Available for Questions or Concerns*

Again make yourself available after this group session, if possible. This tends to be the time when people who are afraid to speak up in the group will approach you personally with questions or concerns. Discern whether to answer their questions there or to encourage the person to bring up their issues in the group meeting the following week.

#### *Pray after the Meeting*

After you pray about the meeting, take time to reflect with God on how the group is doing at this halfway mark. Consider your growth in your leadership as well.



# Week 6

The Experience  
of Being Known

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## Personal Notes

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## Week 7

# The Relational Temptation

The story of creation is amazing. But as we turn the page to Genesis 3, the story takes a sharp turn. A serpent appears on the scene and tempts the first couple away from their dependent relationship with God. Can God be trusted? Is He a good giver or is He just trying to keep the couple under His thumb? Tragically, this ancient conversation calls into question every relational term set up by God to order His creation; it is an indictment of the rule of God and the rule of man.

**Key Passages:** Genesis 3:1-7, Psalm 51, 1 John 1:5-10

## Week 7

### The Relational Temptation

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## Teaching Summary

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This week we want to try and see this familiar passage of Scripture with fresh eyes—without the usual theological or emotional preconceptions. What is the story all about? What is the temptation all about? How does this story invite us to see ourselves?

In Genesis 3, the wonder of the garden narrative is broken by the voice of a dissenter: a serpent that questions Eve about God’s message and motives while encouraging her to defy His directive and partake of the forbidden fruit. The serpent proclaims that it will open her eyes and make her like God, insinuating that taking control of her life instead of living relationally dependent under God is a smarter and safer move.

The unspoken relational premise of the conversation was that God could not be trusted. He was lying to the young couple, denying them their full potential of godliness by denying them the knowledge of good and evil.

When Eve and then Adam succumb to this temptation and eat the fruit, their eyes are opened as the serpent foretold. But what they see is not the glory of becoming gods, but the guilt and shame of their own rebellion, reflected in the awareness of their nakedness. This realization compels them to try and hide their offense by sewing fig leaves to cover themselves.

Frankly, we aren’t told enough to understand why a brief conversation with a serpent tipped them into this rash behavior, which seems to contradict everything they had experienced of God. But this story invites us to look into our own hearts and see where we have made the same decision—where we have chosen our own way and will, over receiving our lives as a gift from God and surrendering to His will.

As we live with “our eyes open,” what do we see in our hearts? Are we trying to hide, to cover up what’s there or maybe just ignore our hearts all together? We can bring the things we discover in our hearts into Christ’s light and find love and forgiveness. Contrary to the serpent’s warning, God is completely trustworthy and is waiting to invite us into the relationship He has designed for us.

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## Interactive Project

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## Week 7

### The Relational Temptation

*Set aside about an hour of time this week in a quiet place to reflect on this project.*

What does it look and feel like to live with our eyes open? This week's Interactive Project is a process of writing and reflecting. It is an exercise in the more uncomfortable side of self-knowledge: discovering and reflecting on things about ourselves that we may not like.

Begin by spending some time reflecting on 1 John 1:5-10. What do those verses mean to you? What do they tell you about God and your relationship with Him?

Next, choose some sin from your past—a time or season when you succumbed to a temptation and felt the effects of that choice in your life. (You won't have to share what this is in the group.)

In a spirit of prayer and openness to God as found in the 1 John passage, write out the circumstances of the situation you are remembering. What happened? Where were you? Who was with you? What was going on in your heart and mind at the time? What were the immediate effects of your choice? Were there long-term effects of your choice? If so, what were they?

As you write, ask God to help you understand the situation as you reflect on it.

*Continue on the next page...*

## Week 7

### The Relational Temptation

Can you remember what your relationship with God felt like at the time of this event or season? Did He seem close? Distant? Loving? Punitive? Trustworthy? Unfair? Was your relationship with God a non-issue or seemingly non-existent? Write down a description of Who He seemed to be to you at that time.

Now, stop and take a moment to imagine what it would have felt like to invite God into the situation while it was happening.

What might have been different?

Don't assume the answer; consider that God is there with you right now and record any thoughts that come to you.

What would you have wanted to express to God, the good, giving God, about your needs, desires at that time? Write down what you would have wanted to tell Him.

## Week 7

### The Relational Temptation

What do you want to tell Him right now?

# Week 7

## The Relational Temptation

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To understand the relational temptation of the Fall
2. To reflect on how each person has fallen prey to this temptation
3. To “open our eyes” to the truth of our own hearts

### Group Dynamics

This week, the group will be returning from another potentially intense experience with the Interactive Project. This is the first week when we begin to consider the effects of our sin on our relationship with God.

When we move people to look, even gently, at their sin, it can be a difficult and scary thing for them. Consider this as you set up and lead this week's group meeting.

Watch for how resistance may manifest itself in the group members. This might take many forms, but look for members who try to run from the subject matter, avoid it entirely, act overly optimistic (“but there's a bright side”) or attempt to “fix” other members of the group and their “problems.”

It's important at this juncture to lovingly hold the group to their covenant standards and remind them to receive others sharing openly, through good listening, empathy and confidentiality, rather than responding.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before the members arrive, spend some time in prayer:

**Ask God** for His protection for the tender hearts of the group members. Ask His Holy Spirit to empower you as you lead the group. Pray for those who are going to share, that the others may receive them with grace, truth and love.

### Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
33%	Group Dialogue
67%	Sharing Experiences

#### *Opening (3 minutes)*

Begin by taking two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud 1 John 1:7. Follow your reading with silence and then with prayer.

#### *Group Dialogue (33%)*

Open the dialogue by asking the group:

- What caught your attention in the Scripture and Teaching this week?

Let the group talk to each other, but answer any questions that would help clarify and support the Teaching.

#### *Sharing Experiences (67%)*

Let everyone know that this will be focused on how they experienced the Interactive Project. Assure them up front that no one is expected to share what their actual temptation or sin was, but if someone wants to or feels the need to share their sin or temptation, the group will be open to receiving them in love. Remind the group that our love for one another is acted out through our Group Covenant. Remind them in particular of their commitment to confidentiality, and that grace is most important when we talk about these vulnerable places in our lives. Invite the group to extend that grace to one another as individuals share.

Most importantly, remind the group that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice cover our sin more effectively than the leaves covered Adam and Eve.



# Week 7

## The Relational Temptation

The questions for the group this week are:

- What was your experience with this week's Interactive Project?
- What is it like to know that God is available to talk to in the midst of one's temptations?

Continue to invite all possible responses and normalize them—good, bad, indifferent or avoidant. Again, we are not inviting the group to respond to anyone's sharing.

Ask the group members to pay attention to their own internal reactions to someone else's sharing. Often we don't recognize that our internal reactions are trying to tell us something about ourselves and our relationship to God.

If you notice someone having a strong reaction, ask the group questions such as the following:

- Is someone else's story touching on something in your own life? Does it make you feel uncomfortable or angry? Or are you feeling relieved and not so alone?

The array of reactions can be vast, but each of them is important and worth considering prayerfully. Encourage them to ask God the following:

- What does my reaction say about me and my relationship with You? How does my reaction affect my ability to listen to You and others?

End the time by praying or asking one of the group members to pray on the group's behalf.

## Leader Reminders

### *Available for Questions or Concerns*

As before, make yourself available after this group session, if possible. Someone in particular may have a sin to confess, but they may not be able to confess it in the group. Be prepared to set aside some time to hear them or to refer them to your pastor or some other helping professional, if necessary. While it is important to be open, it's just as important to have healthy boundaries.

## *Pray after the Meeting*

As you review the meeting, if you find yourself concerned about any member of the group, talk with God to get His perspective and guidance.

# Week 7

## The Relational Temptation

# Week 7

The Relational  
Temptation

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## Personal Notes

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## Week 8

# Fallen But Not Forsaken: Relational Chaos

Life after the Fall is full of relational consequences. When Adam and Eve's eyes were opened—hiding, deflecting, blaming, covering, lying and experiencing shame and guilt seemed to be instinctive moves of their hearts. Shutting their eyes to personal responsibility and living under the cover of darkness and blame further deteriorated their relationships. But although they experienced relational brokenness with God and each other, God was still present and relating to them.

**Key Passages:** Genesis 3:8-13, Psalm 14, John 3:16-21

## Week 8

### Relational Chaos

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## Teaching Summary

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The closer we look at Adam and Eve's situation after their sin, the more devastating and broken it appears, especially when we look at the relationships. But even though it is hard to contemplate, we need to know how the Fall affected their relationship with God and each other and how it continues to affect us as well.

What are important points to notice about God in this passage?

- Initially it is important to notice how God responds to the couple. He initiates relationship after Adam and Eve sin. How does that fit with your normal image of God?
- Also, there is evidence of a prior, on-going relationship in the garden. They recognized the sound of God's presence—there was familiarity. Although we are uncertain about the frequency, there was a relational pattern of contact and conversation operating between them.

What are important points to notice about Adam and Eve?

- They reacted in fear and physical withdrawal. The latter severely inhibited their freedom to engage in a relationship with God.
- The former also caused them to emotionally withdraw from their disobedient acts. They chose to cover and avoid the exposure they felt from the shame and guilt of eating the fruit. This emotional withdrawal inhibited their freedom to engage in a relationship with one another.
- When God leads Adam to the cause of their distress—their disobedience—they each deflect the responsibility of their actions on another rather than accept their personal involvement. This blaming behavior now inhibits our freedom in all of our earthly relationships as well.

This reaction introduced a new wrinkle in relational reality. Their sin created self-inflicted wounds in their souls. We saw this in the first two relational consequences. But this third consequence also inflicted upon their souls the relational wounds of another, something that until this point was not present in their experience. They now became both perpetrator and victim in their relationship with each other.

## Week 8

### Relational Chaos

What did it feel like for Eve to get thrown under Adam's blame bus? What does it feel like when you do the throwing? Can you feel how these offenses cause our souls to shrink? Can you feel the relational isolation and loneliness?

Can you relate to these realities in your own relationship with God and others? When you are honest, can you feel the loneliness of all this loss?

Our condition would be hopeless but for one truth: God is still present and unchanged. He is still offering us relationship through His Son. But it is not a relationship that allows us to remain in darkness, hiding our deeds. It is one that invites us into the light of truth.

Continuing to live in the dark, hiding from God after we have been reconciled and restored to relationship with Him through Christ, holds back the possibilities. Only when we come into the light can we receive from God practical, relational healing— with Him, with ourselves and with others. Think about what it might mean to you to have that kind of open relationship with God.

The good news is, there is time. What in your life needs to be brought out of darkness and out of hiding? Where do you need to feel the light of Jesus shining in your heart, on your sins, on your shame? Maybe you will feel like Adam, and all you will discover is how scared you are. Admitting that fear to God would be a great place to start. He knows how to take it from there. Whatever the topic of your conversation with God this week, I pray you will be aware of His love for you, His presence with you and His invitation for you to discover the truth about how sin has affected your heart and life.

# Week 8

## Relational Chaos

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## Interactive Project

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*This will take up to an hour of time to reflect deeply on a piece of Scripture.*

This week's Interactive Project involves us inviting God to gently reveal places in our hearts that we might be hiding from ourselves and trying to hide from Him.

Find a quiet, safe and comfortable place to spend some time talking with God.

Begin by remembering that God is the One who initiates our relationship with Him.

Slowly and thoughtfully read through Psalm 139. As you read, consider what it means that God is so present and knows you this well. If certain verses or phrases catch your attention, take a moment and talk to God about them. Be honest with Him about how these words make you feel, whether you experience comfort, fear, joy, anger or even if you feel nothing at all.

When you get to the end of the Psalm, pray verses 23 and 24 as an invitation to God. Ask Him to search your heart and show you what is there. Then take some time to simply wait and see what happens.

If something comes to your mind, talk to God about it. Take your time. Don't push yourself or try to create an experience. Simply trust that God will bring to your attention what He wants to bring up.

If after several minutes nothing seems to be happening or you feel uncertain about hearing from God, talk to Him about the situation. Express to Him how you are feeling.

(If you are interested and have the time, you could pray verses 23 and 24 again, and see if there is anything more that God would like to reveal to you.)

End by writing a half-page reflection about your experience during this time of prayer.

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Personal Notes

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Week 8

Relational  
Chaos



# Week 8

## Relational Chaos

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To observe the relational consequences of Adam and Eve's sin
2. To understand how the human heart naturally withdraws from relationship with God, itself and others after the Fall
3. To reflect on how each person has personally experienced these relational consequences because of their own sin

### Group Dynamics

You will guide a time of sharing and dialogue about how this experience has affected the group members' relationship with God.

This week's Teaching Podcast and Interactive Project were designed to allow God the opportunity to reveal something to the participants about their own hearts which they may have been hiding from themselves. We allowed room for the participants to ask God to take the lead in showing them what they themselves may not be aware of in their hearts.

In our experience, we have found that this particular Interactive Project can reveal to people surprising things about themselves and/or unexpected things about God. Be ready to welcome whatever they bring to the group. It will be very important for you as the leader to practice empathic listening as individuals share since this will demonstrate to the rest of the group that it is okay to be that open and honest.

Some people might be silent about what they experienced. For them sharing in the group could still be too scary. If you experience a good amount of reticence, don't forget that God often is doing profound work in silence. But still create the safe environment and give the invitation for the person to share, if they choose.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before the members arrive, spend some time in prayer:

**Ask God** to prepare everyone for what He has planned for them during the meeting. Ask the Lord to empower you as the leader to care well for this group right where they are. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire and empower the group to truly love one another, no matter what they share.

## Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
33%	Group Dialogue
67%	Sharing Experiences

### *Opening (3 minutes)*

Begin by taking just two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud John 3:17. Follow your reading with silence and then with prayer.

### *Group Dialogue (33%)*

Open the dialogue by asking:

- What struck you from this week's Scripture and Teaching?

Let the group talk to each other, but answer any questions that would help clarify and support the Teaching.

### *Sharing Experiences (67%)*

Invite the group to share with one another around this question:

- In your experiences this week, what did you learn about your relationships: with yourself, God and/or others?

# Week 8

## Relational Chaos

Before anyone answers, remind them again about the Group Covenant and how we have all agreed to be with one another; particularly mention confidentiality.

After someone shares, ask the group to be aware of their internal responses to what someone else has shared. Ask questions like the following:

- Do you resonate with what the others are saying?
- Does that help you to really hear them, or is that a distraction? Is what the other person shares somehow distasteful or repulsive to you? What does that mean? And is that distracting you from really hearing and receiving the other person?

Remind everyone that their internal reactions are invitations to have a conversation with God.

Continue to invite all possible answers and normalize them—good, bad, indifferent or avoidant. Again, we are not inviting the group to respond verbally to anyone's sharing.

End the time by praying or asking one of the group members to pray on the group's behalf.

### **Leader Reminders**

#### *If You Run Out of Time This Week*

It can happen that someone who really wanted to share something this week may find that the time runs out before they have the opportunity.

If someone asks if they can begin the next week by sharing their experience from this week, ask them to fully engage in this upcoming week's material, and if upon coming to the next Community Experience, they still feel compelled to share about this past week, tell them that you will give them just a few minutes at the beginning to do so.

## Week 8

### Relational Chaos

### *Pray after the Meeting*

Talk with God about what you're noticing about the group's growing dynamic. It can help to jot down notes after this prayer that you can refer to before you begin next week's meeting.

# Week 8

Relational  
Chaos

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## Personal Notes

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## Week 9

# Fallen But Not Forsaken: The Gift of Consequences

What was God's response to man's disobedience in the garden? Anger? Revenge? Immediate death? Surprisingly, God gave Adam and Eve the dignity of their free choice. He set in motion the consequences and futurity of the life they had chosen. It was not the life designed for them or for which they were designed. But it was a gift and ultimately a deep act of love.

**Key Passages:** Genesis 3:14-24, Psalm 107, Luke 15:11-20

## Week 9

### The Gift of Consequences

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## Teaching Summary

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Last week we observed the relational chaos and loss of freedom that Adam and Eve experienced after their sin. This week we are looking at the consequences that God imposed.

A consequence is the effect, result or outcome of a particular action. Not all negative circumstances in life are consequences. We see this in the book of Job and in Christ's conversation with the disciples in John 9. But this passage shows that God does allow natural consequences and, at times, uses specific consequences in our lives for His purposes.

Last week, we observed the natural consequences that unfolded in all the relationships, specifically the loss of freedom that the first couple experienced. That loss of freedom was partly caused by their tendency and desire not to feel their new spiritual reality. But their break with God had further repercussions.

What is the essence of these additional consequences?

- God gave them a physical way to feel their loss of freedom—a reminder.
- God gave them an experience of frustration because of their choice of independence. Life was meant to be received as a gift from God, but now it would be frustrating for them to preserve life on their own.
- God gave them a limited lifespan to highlight the ultimate futility of life apart from Him.

What is the purpose of these consequences? Were they punitive? Why does God do these things?

In a nutshell, God implements these consequences so they will return to a right relationship with Him. Life without God should not feel good. Adam and Eve's frustration and pain was meant to be a tutor or corrective experience that humbled their hearts and caused them to seek reconciliation with God.

It is here that we see the full range of God's love and grace, God's freedom and health in His relationship with us as humans, His awesome parenting. He extends grace by not giving them everything they deserve and, at the same

## Week 9

### The Gift of Consequences

time, extends to them perfect love by giving them everything they need to find their way home.

Psalms 107, a lovely piece of poetry and wisdom literature, illustrates this aspect of God's relationship with us. The perfectly tailored corrective experiences invite the different groups of people portrayed in the poem to return to God. The parable of the prodigal son is also a compelling illustration of how God does not limit our freedom of choice but hopes that the negative consequences of that choice will eventually bring us home.

How do you normally feel about the consequences and frustrations of your life? Have you ever thought of them as a gift from God—a corrective experience that helps you to recognize how you may be living life on your own? Is that a new thought for you? Would it be a paradigm shift for you to believe that God's corrective experiences are ultimately a great demonstration of His love rather than an example of His disappointment, wrath or punishment?

What might you need to talk over with God this week? Are there areas in your life where you feel frustration or the consequences of some choice that you have made? Might these be invitations from God to explore what He is allowing to happen in order to draw you closer to Him? I pray that your conversations with God and others this week will help you to understand in a deeper way the many aspects of God's generous and constant love, and the varied ways He is inviting you into deeper relationship with Him.



# Week 9

## The Gift of Consequences

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### Interactive Project

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*We will be revisiting our topic from Week 7. Make sure you have those notes handy, and set aside up to an hour to ponder and consider.*

This week's Interactive Project looks at the gifts of frustration and consequences as holy invitations to relationship.

Find a quiet, safe and comfortable place to spend some time in reflection and conversation with God.

Begin by remembering what Psalm 107 expresses about God's steadfast love and how He exhibited it to all those different groups of people.

In Week 7, you reflected on a sin from your past—a time or season when you succumbed to temptation. This week we're going to return to that reflection and expand upon it, looking specifically at the consequences of your actions.

Look back over your notes from Week 7 and again remember that time in your life. What were the immediate effects of your choice and actions? On yourself? On others? (Think about physical, emotional and relational consequences.) Were there any immediate frustrations that followed? Write down what you remember.

Have there been any long-term consequences that affect you or others in your life?

## Week 9

### The Gift of Consequences

What about your relationship with God? How did you feel about Him in the wake of your sinful choice? How do you suppose He felt about you?

As you look back over the consequences of your actions, is it possible for you to see them as a loving gift from God? What do they seem to communicate to you about Who God is? Ask God if there is something that He would like for you to know about Him.

If the consequences of our sinful actions are indeed invitations back to relationship with God, what might that mean to your life? What would this change in how you react to your circumstances? What might this affect in your relationship with God? Write down whatever thoughts come to you.

# Week 9

## The Gift of Consequences

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# Leader's Guide

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## Weekly Intentions

1. To observe how God often doesn't give us what we deserve but as a gift always gives what we need
2. To understand how God's consequences can be received as a gift in our relationship with Him
3. To personally reflect on how feeling the consequences of our actions affects our relationship with God, ourselves, and others

## Group Dynamics

This week's Teaching Podcast and Interactive Project invited the participants to consider what may be a new and revolutionary idea: that the consequences God gives them due to their sin are actually a loving invitation back to deeper relationship with Him.

This idea could seem so counter to what some of your group members believe it might rattle them. Some might bring up questions about this idea specifically, want to talk about it, and/or bring up possible difficulties with the concept. You might want to prepare yourself for some of these more theological questions. Remember that quite often theological inquiries are driven by deeply felt personal experience. It can help to ask the person directly if their question relates to some personal experience. If they can share their experience, it will bring them into closer relationship with you and the others and keep the discussion from devolving into an intellectual debate.

Additionally, we are inviting the participants to re-visit the sinful experience that they already reflected on in Week 7. This invitation might also stir up some concerns and, possibly, some resistance in your group members. Some people are taught to not "dredge up old wounds" in this way, and that once something is dealt with and is in the past, it should be ignored; everyone should just "move on." People often aren't invited to look more deeply at something that could make them feel uncomfortable.

It might be helpful to reassure the group that it is okay if they are discovering things about themselves that they may not like. Encourage the group that

discovering areas in which they need to grow is growth in itself. God is present and directing the discovery process. What might He be able to do if we are open to considering these things that make us uncomfortable?

### Preparing Your Heart

Before the members arrive, spend some time in prayer:

**Ask God** for His wisdom when working with the group today. Thank the Lord for how He has worked with the group members all through the week. Ask the Holy Spirit to protect each person as they come and as they choose to share. Pray as you are led.

### Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
33%	Group Dialogue
67%	Sharing Experiences

#### *Opening (3 minutes)*

Begin by taking two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud Psalm 107:43. Follow your reading with silence and then with prayer.

#### *Group Dialogue (33%)*

Ask the group the following question:

- What have you learned about God this week through the Scripture and Teaching that you did not realize before?

Let the group share with one another, but make sure no one monopolizes the time.

## Week 9

### The Gift of Consequences

#### *Sharing Experiences (67%)*

After the group talks for a bit, then ask the following question:

- What did you learn about yourself this week that you did not realize before?

After some more sharing, bring up this third question:

- How might these new discoveries be affecting your relationships with God, yourself and the others in your life?

Continue to invite all responses and normalize them—good, bad, indifferent or avoidant. Again, we are not inviting the group to respond to anyone's sharing, and confidentiality is key.

End the time by praying or asking one of the group members to pray on the group's behalf.

#### **Group Reminders for Next Week**

##### *Preparing for Next Week's Sharing*

Next week, each participant will be asked to share something personal with other members of the group. The Interactive Project is focused on preparing them for this potentially vulnerable exercise. Let the group know that this is coming, and that as we grow in intimacy, we also grow in risking with one another. That might make people feel uncomfortable to the point where they find themselves avoiding the exercise altogether. Let them know that such reactions are normal but that taking the risk is well worth the effort. Hopefully preparing them for the emotions they could feel will help ease their anxiety.

#### **Leader Reminders**

##### *Preparing to End the Semester Well*

After this session, there are only three more meeting times before this semester of *Life with God* ends. Begin to think about how you might want to prepare for your group's last session. Pray about how you might best help

## Week 9

### The Gift of Consequences

your group to end well together. We are including some suggested closing activities to help people say goodbye, but are there other elements you might want to add as a gift to your group, such as food, tokens of remembrance, etc.

#### *Pray after the Meeting*

As you pray, note how God is using your role as a leader to grow and stretch your faith and dependence on Him.

# Week 9

The Gift of  
Consequences

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## Personal Notes

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## Week 10

# Fallen But Not Forsaken: Still Fully Known and Loved

Looking back at the origins of sin and the damaging consequences of disobedience to the human heart can connect us with feelings of shame and guilt. In order to confidently continue the journey of God-directed self discovery, we need to be grounded in the relational reality of our life in Christ. There is now no condemnation for those in Him. We can engage deeply and honestly with God because He fully knows and fully loves us.

**Key Passages:** Ephesians 2:1-10, Psalm 73:21-28, Romans 8:1



## Week 10

Fully Known  
and Fully Loved

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### Teaching Summary

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This week we are breaking from Genesis to have a “come to Jesus meeting.” Throughout our spiritual journey, it is wise to routinely refocus our hearts on the truth that God fully knows and constantly loves us. Because of Jesus, we can come out of hiding and enter freely into our relationship with God.

For the last several weeks we have been focused on self-knowledge, but in order to continue to deepen our understanding in this area, we need to continue to deepen our knowledge of God. I am not talking about our ideas of God only, but rather how our ideas affect our awareness and experience in our relationship with God. Ideas have very little effect on our hearts. Ideas can tutor us and open us up to new experiences, but it is experiences that actually change our hearts and grow our relationships.

So what kind of experiential knowledge do we need about God to continue to deepen self-knowledge? There are two essential things.

1. We need to understand and experience that God knows us fully which includes the extent of our sin. There is nothing that we discover about ourselves that God does not already know. In fact, in our earthly lives God may not even require us to learn everything negative about ourselves. He will always know more about us than we do.
2. We need to know and experience that God loves us constantly even in light of our sin.

One truth that has greatly impacted me through preparing these last few weeks of this study is the stability of God. Even though life in the garden has turned upside down, God has not been volatile. He is rock-solid. I don't mean that in a way that impinges His freedom. He is not necessarily predictable because He is too vast for us to know Him fully, and certainly He is not controllable, but He is stable in a way that makes Him the only completely safe place for our souls.

The truth that God fully knows and loves us is foundational to our relationship with Him. In fact, having an experience with God that helps us to feel and embrace these truths alleviates the loneliness that we carry with us as a result of the Fall. As we are drawn by the Holy Spirit deeper and deeper into the reality of our hearts, we will need to go back to these truths again and again because we will uncover new places where we struggle to believe.

## Week 10

Fully Known  
and Fully Loved

And frankly, these are truths that Satan does not want us to embrace because they have the power to revolutionize our lives and relationships.

Other things also stand in our way. Our circumstances may lead us to certain conclusions which may be contrary to these truths. Psalm 73 gives one example of this.

Our other relationships may tutor our hearts to be cautious. The brokenness of our earthly relationships can cause patterns to form in our interactions with others and with God.

We need many corrective experiences with the love of God to change these patterns. We can open our hearts to these experiences by the following:

- Being attentive to our internal reactions
- Asking God to reveal truth to us about ourselves
- Asking God to give us a new experience of His love
- Paying attention to what happens next and continuing the dialogue with God

If we are going to grow and deepen our relationship with God, having experiences that assure us that God fully knows and loves us will be critical. We will need regular “come to Jesus meetings” where we can get honest with God without the fear of condemnation and rejection. Jesus makes that possible. Growing spiritually is a balance of looking within at the truth of our hearts and looking up at the truth of God. Embracing the truth that God knows us, loves us and has a plan for our redemption journey gives us the courage to press on.

## Week 10

Fully Known  
and Fully Loved

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### Interactive Project

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*Take up to an hour this week for this important preparation for the Community Experience.*

This week's Interactive Project should prepare you for the upcoming Community Experience. When your group next meets, you will be put into smaller groups of three to share (disclose, admit, reveal) something about yourself so that others may know you more fully.

This exercise is designed to give everyone an opportunity to feel what it is to be known and loved—by God and by His people. So, this week you will not only have an opportunity to share of yourself, but also to receive other's sharing about their lives.

Begin the Interactive Project by spending several minutes talking to God. Ask Him what He would like for you to share with the other members of the group. It could be something about yourself that you deeply value but which others often misunderstand, a quality about yourself that can seem embarrassing, a secret you need to confess openly or an experience that has caused you shame and pain. Consider if there is something about yourself that you often withhold from others because you have not received much love in that area and you fear their reaction or rejection.

As you ponder, listen for God's leading or impression regarding what He might think is important for you to share with this group. Don't move on in this project until you have determined one thing you will share.

Then consider whether you have shared this truth about yourself with God. Remember that while God already knows everything about you, you may never have honestly talked with God about this issue. If you haven't, do so now.

Afterward, spend a few minutes simply resting in the truth that God already knows what you have shared and loves you constantly. Rest in His love.

## Week 10

Fully Known  
and Fully Loved

Next, spend some time praying for the other members of your group as they prepare. Ask that they would feel God's leading and love as they do this project. Ask that your heart will be prepared to accept what it is that you will hear from them. Ask God to impress upon you how loving, caring and gracious He has been to you as you have shared yourself with Him, so that you may extend that kind of love, care and graciousness to the others in your group.

End by writing a half-page reflection about your experience during this time of prayer.

# Week 10

Fully Known  
and Fully Loved

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To reorient our hearts to the love of God after looking at our sin for several weeks
2. To understand the integration and inter-play of double knowledge: knowledge of God and knowledge of self
3. To deepen our experience of being fully known and loved by God

### Group Dynamics

The group experience this week is focused around helping the participants to more deeply share with one another in an atmosphere of love. Each member will share, within a triad, something from their life that they have discerned from the Interactive Project. It will likely be something they would not usually talk about with others. It is an invitation for the sharer to be more vulnerable with the group and an opportunity for the listeners to practice truly receiving their fellow member in love.

Because this will feel risky, it is particularly important that you as the leader discern what your group will need in order to complete this exercise. Your role will be to assist your group members by creating and sustaining an atmosphere of safety among them.

You will be responsible for separating the group into triads. Pray through how to divide the group. Take into consideration such things as gender issues— from what you have learned of your group so far, are there some people for whom it would be best if they shared with people of the same or different gender? Consider if it is better for a married couple to stay in the same triad or to go into different triads. Sometimes it is best to put one of your warmer listeners with someone who is either still tentative or someone needing emotional containment. Pray for each person in your group individually about what they might need. Then pray again about what they have to offer the other members of the group.

Should your group need you to participate in order to fill a triad, consider carefully what you should share. As the leader, you need to make sure that

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you are leading by example, so what you share should be at an appropriate depth and level of openness. However, be careful not to share something so vulnerable that it will put the focus entirely on yourself and pull you out of your care for the entire group. Issues that are tied to deep and needy places in your soul are best shared with a safe person outside the group, such as a pastor, close friend, prayer supporter or spiritual director. To that end, if something particularly difficult comes up during the week, make sure to take the time to tend to your own soul before meeting with the group, so that you won't be distracted and can truly be present to the needs of the group as a whole.

Since the group knows that they will be coming to share something that will make them feel vulnerable, be ready to experience some resistance, such as nervous laughter, stalling, and possibly even people not coming to the meeting! Be gentle with your group, but continue to invite them into this exercise, as it could be a very powerful experience for them.

## Special Preparations

Begin with the chairs in a circle since you will be addressing the group as a whole before they all split up into triads. Make sure there is sufficient space for them to move their chairs into the smaller groups after the introduction.

## Preparing Your Heart

Before the members arrive, spend some time in prayer:

**Because** this might be a particularly vulnerable time, specifically ask for God's supernatural protection over the time and each member who is coming. Pray that each person will have the courage to risk and share from their hearts, and that each listener will have the grace to receive the others well. Ask the Lord to be particularly present with your group today and that His will may be done.

## Special Materials

- A watch or a clock to keep time

# Week 10

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and Fully Loved

- Papers or cards with the following phrase printed on one for each group member: *“Thank you for sharing that with us. We receive what you have shared in love and with the honor of confidentiality.”*

## Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
25%	Group Dialogue
75%	Personal Sharing from the Interactive Project

### Opening (3 minutes)

Begin by taking two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud Psalm 73:26. Follow your reading with silence and then with prayer.

### *Group Dialogue (25%)*

Begin a dialogue by asking the group:

- What did you notice in the Scripture and Teaching this week?

Let the group talk to each other, but answer any questions that would help clarify and support the Teaching.

### *Personal Sharing from the Interactive Project (75%)*

Remind the group that today, they will be sharing with one another what they prayed about in the Interactive Project this week. You will be putting them into triads, and they will spend most of the time today taking turns sharing with one another and listening to each other.

Remind them of the Group Covenant and how important it is to live by those standards as we risk being vulnerable with one another. What you hear in this room should never be repeated elsewhere. What the person shares with you continues to be theirs. You are merely a witness at this time, which is an opportunity to lovingly listen in this moment.

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Explain that each person will take a turn sharing what they determined in the Interactive Project this week. Instruct the listeners that they are not to interrupt and that they are to respond afterward, with these specific words:

“Thank you for sharing that with us. We receive what you have shared in love and with the honor of confidentiality.”

Hand out the papers or cards with those phrases that you prepared in advance. Explain that while it might feel awkward to respond with these exact words, the statements provide a great way to practice receiving one another well.

Explain that after one of the listeners speaks that written response, the triad should all take a minute to pray silently and ask God if there is something that He would like for them to say to the sharer in loving response and blessing. This is not a time to respond with a personal story in return or a word of advice, but rather to give a short word of affirmation and blessing. If you don't hear anything specific from God—which is perfectly fine!—simply say, “God bless you, my friend.”

Once everyone has their instructions and you have answered any questions, break up the group into the triads you determined beforehand. Give the group a sense of how much time they will have collectively and how much time each person individually will have. They don't need to rush. You will call them back to the full group for the last ten minutes of the meeting time.

(If a triad ends early, the members will probably start talking loudly, due to relief! You might have to ask them to quiet down for the sake of the other triads still sharing.)

When ten minutes remain, call the group together and have them arrange their chairs in the full circle. Ask them:

- What was this experience like for you?

Give a few people a chance to process.

End the time by praying or asking one of the group members to pray on the group's behalf.



# Week 10

Fully Known  
and Fully Loved

## Leader Reminder

### *Pray after the Meeting*

As we are coming to the end of the semester, your group members are probably going to be feeling a lot of different emotions, regarding both ending and the possibility of continuing on in the *Life with God* study. Make sure to be in prayer specifically regarding how they are processing the ending and what it might mean to continue on with what they've learned.

# Week 10

Fully Known  
and Fully Loved

# Week 10

Fully Known  
and Fully Loved

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## Personal Notes

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## Week 11

# Refusing God's Relational Intervention: The Story of Cain

What happens when God comes to us and wants us to change? How do we respond when God reveals to us a bit of self-knowledge that we don't like or don't want to face? In the story of Cain and Abel, God invites Cain into an honest reflection of his heart motives and he responds to God's intervention.

**Key Passages:** Genesis 4:1-16, Psalm 95, Matthew 23:37-39

# Week 11

## Refusing God's Intervention

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## Teaching Summary

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Since we are coming to the end of this semester in *Life with God*, it is time to examine our hearts and see how we are feeling about having an intimate relationship with God. Often, after we spend time allowing God to reveal deeper issues of our hearts, we can become tired and resistant to further internal reflection.

You may be secretly glad that we are almost done, and you don't have to expose anything else in your heart. Maybe you are wondering if this is really necessary to growth in your relationship with God.

This week we are going to look at the story of Cain and Abel and see what we can learn that may encourage or caution our tired hearts.

What are the important points?

In the course of time, an issue came up in Cain's heart.

*God came to Cain. He was the initiator.* God inquired about Cain's emotional life. He asked probing questions. He offered hope and a caution. He invited Cain into a relational dialogue.

Our emotions are avenues into deeper issues of our hearts. God's "why" question was informative in a couple ways.

- It invited Cain to stop, reflect and discover if something deeper was going on in his heart.
- It invited Cain to recognize how the emotion was affecting his relationship with God.

What was Cain's response?

- Cain didn't engage in a conversation with God but with his brother instead.
- He didn't probe the reason for his anger but allowed it to fester.

Cain is a sobering example of someone who was unwilling to deal with the issues in his relationship with God, and instead those issues came out in his relationship with his brother.

## Week 11

### Refusing God's Intervention

God again caused the consequences to give Cain the true experience of his choices: the dignity of his life which awakened Cain to his deep vulnerability.

#### **What is cautionary in this story for us? What is hopeful?**

God's invitation to reflect on the deeper issues of our hearts and the source of our emotions is an invitation into deeper relationship with Him. We are free to reject that invitation, but denying this aspect of our lives will likely lead somewhere we don't want to go. We won't be happy, and tragically, others that we are in relationship with may suffer as well.

Many times the fear of dealing with the issues God brings to our attention is more daunting than the reality. If we have spent a long time constructing an image of ourselves for the world, then it may take a while for that structure to get taken down.

Living in the reality of who we really are is the only place where we can experience the deep love of God and where we can love Him in return. It is also the place from which true love for others flows.

Salvation is about being reconciled to God. Do you still want the fullness of a relationship with Him? He is inviting you into a life with Him in which He will teach you how not to go astray in your heart. Will you persevere? Will you continue to let Him examine your heart?

# Week 11

## Refusing God's Intervention

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### Interactive Project

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*Set aside up to an hour in a quiet place for this week's project.*

This week, we're going to consider our own "negative" feelings and how we tend to deal with them.

Find a quiet and comfortable space to sit with the Lord and muse for a while.

Think about what you learned from the story of Cain this week.

Can you recollect a time recently when negative emotions surfaced in you—such as anger, disappointment, frustration, jealousy, sadness, irritation or aggravation—in regard to another person's actions (or lack of action)? Write down what you recall. What were the circumstances? Who was involved? How did it make you feel? Be as honest, bugged, irritated, etc. as you felt at the time.

Do you remember what you did with your feelings at the time? Did you talk to the person about it? Did you complain? Say something snarky? Get loud? Was there a fight? Where did your emotions take you? Or did you just stuff down what you were feeling and try to move on, ignore it or be "mature" about it? How did you react? Write down what you remember.

## Week 11

### Refusing God's Intervention

Now that you're thinking about it, what was it that was really bothering you about this situation? Was it unfair? Thoughtless? Hurtful? Unloving? Did the person's actions keep you from getting what you expected, wanted or needed? Write out what you discover.

Now consider the following: what if emotions like this are an invitation to engage with God? What if your issue is really with God, first and foremost, instead of the other person? After all, He is God. He could have changed your circumstances if He wanted to. So then, what would you say to God about all this? Can you be that honest with Him?

What would you have wanted God to do instead? Do you feel you need something from Him that you didn't get? Is there something you need to admit before God about this? Do you need to humble yourself before God (which Cain was unwilling to do)? Can you experience God's love for you here, even if it doesn't feel like what you would expect? Talk to God about any of these questions that catch your attention.

*Continue on the next page...*



# Week 11

## Refusing God's Intervention

Take some time to listen for how God might want to respond. See if a Bible verse or an impression comes to mind. If God has allowed all of this to surface, what might He want to say about it?

After talking all this through with God, do you see the situation differently or is it still bothering you? Do you need to talk to God some more? Do you sense God leading you to approach the other person in this scenario again? How? Where does this leave you?

End by writing a half-page reflection about your experience during this time of prayer.

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Personal Notes

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# Week 11

Refusing God's  
Intervention

# Week 11

## Refusing God's Intervention

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To become aware of any resistance that may be brewing in our hearts toward continuing to look internally
2. To observe the consequences in Cain's life for refusing to engage with God
3. To reflect on our commitment to continue to allow God to examine their hearts

### Group Dynamics

This is the next to last week of the semester, and we have continued to invite the participants deeper into personal discovery and time with God through both the Teaching Podcast and the Interactive Project.

Since we are coming to the end of the semester, we'd like to utilize this next-to-last Community Experience time to help the participants process where they are now in their life with God and what it might mean to continue—either through another semester of the *Life with God* study or simply practicing this kind of relationship with God on their own.

By opening up this week's discussion to an honest consideration of how they feel about what they've experienced so far, it will help make next week's final meeting a reflection of praise, thanksgiving and celebration.

Be ready to invite any kind of honest reaction—both positive and negative—and normalize it for the group. We need to keep accepting people where they are, and for some, this might be all they are ready to experience.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before the members arrive, spend some time in prayer:

**Ask the Father** for His loving protection for each participant. Ask the Lord to give courage to those who will share. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and inspire the time.

### Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
25%	Group Dialogue
75%	Processing the Ending and Going On

#### *Opening (3 minutes)*

Begin by taking two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud Psalm 95:7a. Follow your reading with silence and then with prayer.

#### *Group Dialogue (25%)*

Start a dialogue by asking the question:

- What struck you about this week's Scripture and Teaching?

Let the group talk to each other, but answer any questions that would help clarify and support the Teaching.

#### *Processing the Ending and Going On (75%)*

Share with the group the following:

*“We have all journeyed relationally with God and with each other these last ten weeks. For a season, we have given ourselves to practicing openness and attending to God's relational invitations. In conjunction with that, this week's Teaching Podcast ended with a question: Do you have the courage to keep going down this path—to persevere in this kind of relational openness to God, yourself and others?”*

# Week 11

## Refusing God's Intervention

Invite the group to talk honestly about this topic. Ask them:

- How do you feel now as this study is ending? Are you relieved that this will be coming to an end, and life can get back to “normal”? If so, what about this experience has been difficult for you?

Invite positive responses as well:

- Are you sad that the study is ending? Has this been a unique experience for you? Is this a way of life that you've been longing for?

Welcome and normalize all answers, including ones with no strong feelings at all. In fact, a mixed answer will probably be the most common.

Then ask the group:

- How might God be involved in whatever you're experiencing? What might He be inviting you to?

After people have shared for a bit, talk about how we have been engaging in a intentional process of living our lives with God. We don't have to be in a study like this in order to continue the process of discovering ourselves, others and God in this way. We can continue what we've practiced here in our day-to-day lives.

As *The Genesis of Relationship* comes to an end next week, discuss the plans for the second study in the *Life with God* series. *The History of the Heart* examines how God called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to a life of dependence, and how God calls us to surrender the willful and passive tendencies of our own hearts, so that we may know His grace more fully. Encourage the members of your group to pray and ask the Lord if He might be leading them to continue *Life with God*.

End the time by praying or asking one of the group members to pray on the group's behalf.

## Group Reminders

### *Preparing for the Last Session*

Remind everyone that next week is the last week of the study. Let them know that the Teaching Podcast, Interactive Project and the Community

Experience will all be geared towards reflecting on what has happened over these twelve weeks, and celebrating together what God has done. If you need information from them about food or other special ways to end, make sure to ask them before they leave.

### **Leader Reminder**

#### *Pray after the Meeting*

As you pray, note your personal reactions to what group members shared about continuing in this relational way of life with God and others. Are you excited, disappointed, pleased, worried, etc? Talk over your reactions with God.

# Week 11

Refusing God's  
Intervention

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## Personal Notes

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## Week 12

# Review, Reflect and Celebrate

Where has this journey led you? Each week we have had some time for reflection on specific events of our lives. Now we want to pull our perspective back and see God's hand in broader strokes. Has there been a theme God has been teaching you? Is there an invitation from God for further conversation and discovery as you reflect on the ending of this semester?

**Key Passages:** Psalm 136, Romans 8:31-39



# Week 12

Review, Reflect  
and Celebrate

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## Teaching Summary

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The last few weeks we have encouraged you to value and practice staying current in your relationship with God regarding your awareness of your heart issues. To truly engage in our relationship with God, we need to be present and responsive to talk with God about whatever we are feeling and experiencing, not to ignore things or let them fester.

Today we want to talk about other ways that we can be reflective in our lives.

### **What kind of reflective activities do we see in Psalm 136 and this passage in Romans 8?**

- Reflection about a specific attribute of God
- Reflection about the character of God
- Reflection on God's specific action in Israel's experience
- Reflective correlation of God's action with His attributes
- Reflectively grouping many actions around a single theme or attribute
- Historic reflection
- Projective reflection

### **How can we apply this to the work we have done this semester?**

We can look back over these weeks and observe any patterns or themes, asking ourselves and God what we should notice and in what ways we can see God's character reflected in our experience.

We can pay attention to how the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves integrate and deepen over time. We can only deepen in our knowledge of self safely if we are balancing that with a true and deepening knowledge of God.

In addition we can ask God if there is an issue on which He wants us to continue to reflect.

## Week 12

Review, Reflect  
and Celebrate

### **How can we continue to reflect on these issues going forward?**

The fundamental concepts we discussed in this semester from the Creation and Fall stories continue to be worthy subjects for reflection. From their depths we can always discover new realities about God and about ourselves. We can use various forms of media and art to stimulate our reflection as well.

We can schedule a time once a quarter or twice a year to reflect on segments of our lives.

We can continue through the *Life with God* study since Semester Two will build on these foundational principles. We will grow deeper in our knowledge of God and ourselves as we explore His relationship with the patriarchs of the nation Israel. I hope you will join us as we continue the journey.

# Week 12

Review, Reflect  
and Celebrate

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## Interactive Project

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*This project can be done in one sitting, but it may be more beneficial to spread your reflection over several days.*

This week we want to review our journey with God over the course of the last eleven weeks. Using Psalm 136 as a template, craft your own song of remembrance. For each week of the study, spend some time reviewing your notes and Interactive Project experience. Think about what happened in the Community Experiences as well.

As you remember what you learned about God, yourself, others or the nature of your relationships, try to capture the essence of that week in a summary sentence.

Pray over this exercise, asking God to help you see the significance of each week.

Write your summary sentences for each week here.

Week 1:

Week 2:

Week 3:

Week 4:

Week 5:

Week 6:

Week 7:

Week 8:

Week 9:

Week 10:

Week 11:

## Week 12

Review, Reflect  
and Celebrate

Once you have completed a summary for each week, read them over as a whole. Do you see any common themes, any repetition? Write down what you discover.

Ask God if there are any issues or themes He'd like you to continue to explore with Him going on from here. Give Him some time to respond.

End with a time of thanksgiving, thanking God for what He has done and what He will continue to do in your life.

# Week 12

Review, Reflect  
and Celebrate

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## Leader's Guide

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### Weekly Intentions

1. To gain an understanding of the many ways that we can use reflection in our lives
2. To review our journey with God this semester
3. To see a vision for where we can journey from here

### Group Dynamics

As mentioned in your leader training, the termination stage of any group process can generate surprising responses. Endings tend to be difficult to process, and group members can react in a wide variety of ways—from denial to not even showing up for the last session! Be ready to respect and normalize some members' reactions that may seem strange.

If someone does choose to skip the last session, make sure to leave an empty chair in the circle to represent the person's presence, and ask a group member to say a short prayer for that person. This will help the rest of the group to process the person's departure and keep the group cohesive until the end.

If you choose to bring food, be mindful of what is allowed in your space, and make sure that it's something that won't be too disruptive to the reflection and sharing process.

Also, as the leader, if you feel led to add other closing activities or perhaps notes or gifts to each member, please feel free to add that into the group time. Items and acts of remembrance can be helpful during an ending process.

### Preparing Your Heart

Before the members arrive, spend some time in prayer:

**Remembering** that people can react in a variety of ways to endings, ask God to be gentle and merciful to those for whom this will be difficult. Ask the

Lord to bless the time together with a sense of joy and wonder. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill the room and go with everyone as they leave.

## Week 12

Review, Reflect  
and Celebrate

### Special Materials

- Papers or notecards with the following written on it: “*Give thanks to the Lord, for His steadfast love endures forever.*”
- Information about the next *Life with God* study *The History of the Heart*

### Community Experience Outline

Time	Meeting Agenda
3 min	Opening
25%	Information about Continuing
50%	Remembering Together
25%	Celebration and Praise

#### *Opening (3 minutes)*

Begin by taking two or three minutes to allow everyone to quiet and focus their hearts by reading aloud Romans 8:38-39. Follow your reading with silence and then with prayer.

#### *Information about Continuing (25%)*

Talk to the group about what they might do next, now that the study is ending. Point out the Recommended Reflective Activities page in their notebooks, and offer the information you have about the next *Life with God* study, *The History of the Heart*.

## Week 12

Review, Reflect  
and Celebrate

### *Remembering Together (50%)*

Explain that for this last session, the group will be engaging in a time of remembrance and celebration.

Ask each member of the group:

- Please share one thing you are going to be taking away from your *Life with God* experiences.

Give them a little time to think about it and even to write down what they come up with, so that they can fully listen to what each person is going to offer.

Invite everyone to respond, one at a time.

### *Celebration and Praise (25%)*

Have everyone open their notebooks and turn to their writings on this week's Interactive Project. Explain that as a final prayer, blessing to one another and a song of praise to God, we're going to create and speak out our own Psalm 136. Ask each person to choose one summary line from their Interactive Project to share out loud when their turn comes in the circle.

Hand out the papers or cards you have prepared, and explain that after each person shares, the group as a whole will respond:

“Give thanks to the Lord, for His steadfast love endures forever.”

End with everyone repeating the response one final time together.

Thank everyone for their participation and be available for any comments or questions afterward.

## Leader Reminder

### *Pray after the Meeting*

Spend this prayer time reflecting on what you witnessed God doing in and through the group. Thank God for all He did for each group member and for you as their leader. Bless and release each group member to God as they go on their way.

## Week 12

Review, Reflect  
and Celebrate



# Week 12

Review, Reflect  
and Celebrate

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## Personal Notes

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# Recommended Reflective Activities

Often when we finish a series, Bible study or other study, we wonder, “What’s next?” We can become accustomed to someone guiding or leading us and might feel a little lost as to how to continue to grow in our relationship with God on our own. Even if you are continuing to another semester in the *Life with God* series, you may have some down time before it begins, but you don’t want to lose the momentum and rhythm of reflection with God that you have come to enjoy in your life.

In light of this reality, we have compiled some resources that may help you to transition through this season. Each of them supports a theme that we have talked about during this semester. It would help to keep the following in mind as you consider what you might like to do.

- Don’t forget that God has a plan and is the true leader of your relationship. Take the time to talk with Him as you consider the options below.
- Some of the options are more secular than others. As you are evaluating, remember that a work of art or entertainment does not have to be specifically Christian to spur us to reflection about our relationship with God. Many secular film makers, artists and authors have insights into the human condition that can lead us to deeper truth when we bring that reflection into our relationship with God and prayer.

## Appendix

### Reflective Activities

- Experimentation is fun in our relationship with God. Maybe you have never considered how a piece of art or film can be an opportunity for reflection and a cool way to have a conversation with God. What would it feel like to go with God to a museum? To schedule a time of prayer after a movie? Doing these kinds of activities with God can enliven our relationship and help us to grasp how truly available God is in our lives.
- Any of these activities can be an opportunity to continue your relationship with your community members. Maybe you would like to host a movie night and invite your community group to watch and have a conversation after the movie. Maybe you would like to read a book together and get together for shared reflection. Be creative about how you can use these resources to keep nurturing the relationships you have built.

Following are a few suggestions with some brief comments about why we feel these resources relate to this semester of study. May you each be blessed as you continue to reflect and participate in your relationship with God.

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## Reading

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### From Our Library

*Do You Love Me? Exploring of Our Relationship with God and Others*  
by Debbie Swindoll. Published by Grafted Life Ministries, 2013.

*Do You Love Me?* is a deep exploration of our relationship with God. *Life with God* author, Debbie Swindoll, draws out God's relational invitations from the Bible and offers examples from her own spiritual journey. This easy-to-read book is an opportunity to explore the biblically relational context that inspired the *Life with God* series. It also includes questions for reflection by Monica Romig Green at the end of the chapters which makes it a perfect companion for personal rumination and group discussion.

## Theology

*From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible*  
by Albert H. Baylis. Published by Zondervan, 1996.

Albert Baylis's book is a great companion to a study of the Old Testament. He regularly emphasizes the relational aspects of the Old Testament text and explains its integration with the life of Christ. He wrote it with the lay reader in mind, but the book also has extensive chapter end notes for those seeking further theological depth. It is a supplemental resource for reflection on Creation and the Fall and will be useful in other semesters of *Life with God* as well.

## Fiction

*Perelandra* by C.S. Lewis.  
Published by Scribner, 2003. Originally published in 1943.

This second book in Lewis's space trilogy explores what Eden should have been like, fancifully considering the birth of life on the planet we refer to as Venus. The story provides a wonderful opportunity to consider the power of God's creative act and the effects of the Fall by painting a picture of the beauty of God's work to bring the world into being and to thwart the threat of evil. Though part of a three-part series, this book can be read alone and is a haunting and thoughtful tale by a master storyteller and theologian.

*East of Eden* by John Steinbeck.  
Published by Penguin, 2002 (originally published in 1952)

This classic book of American fiction is a symbolic recreation and meditation on the story of Cain and Abel, set in California's Salinas Valley. While not written from a Christian perspective, this book nevertheless ponders deeply what the classic biblical story is trying to communicate in terms of the challenges, struggles and the hope present in the brothers' struggle.

## Appendix

### Reflective Activities

## Spirituality

*Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*  
by David G. Benner. Published by IVP Books, 2003.

This small but powerful book is a meditation on the profound truth of God's unceasing love for us and how we can come to embrace this truth more fully. It provides a wonderful opportunity to consider deeply what God's love means to our lives.

*The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*  
by David G. Benner. Published by IVP Books, 2004.

This book explores the value of knowing ourselves authentically. Benner correlates the gift of self-knowledge with our ultimate transformation into the person God wants us to be.

*One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*  
by Ann Voskamp. Published by Zondervan, 2011.

Writing from her own experience, the author poetically shares her challenge to live her life with gratitude in the midst of life circumstances.

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## Film

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*Planet Earth. The Complete BBC Series (2007).*  
Narrated by David Attenborough.

*Life. A BBC Earth documentary (2010).*  
Narrated by David Attenborough.

Most nature DVD's will give you an opportunity to reflect and wonder about God's creation of the earth and the life that resides here. The series *Planet Earth* narrated by David Attenborough is a beautiful example. Although many of these nature series present an evolutionary explanation for the origins of earth, the images continue to declare the glory of God. Don't let the lack of theology keep you from enjoying and relishing these amazing landscapes and glimpses of God's work.

*Shadowlands* (1993). Directed by Richard Attenborough.  
Starring Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger.

This movie adaptation of the development of C.S. Lewis's relationship and marriage to Joy Gresham leads us on an emotional journey. It illustrates from Lewis's life the process of integrating intellectual knowledge with the experiential circumstances that enter one's life. It invites reflection on what it means to become a whole person and to truly feel the realities of our lives. Available on Netflix.

*Tree of Life* (2011). Directed by Terrence Malick.  
Starring Brad Pitt, Sean Penn and Jessica Chastain.

This PG-13 movie is more an impressionistic experience than a typical narrative. The film follows the life journey of Jack through the innocence of childhood to his disillusioned adult years as he tries to reconcile a complicated relationship with his father (Brad Pitt). Jack (played as an adult by Sean Penn) finds himself a lost soul in the modern world, seeking answers to the origins and meaning of life while questioning the existence of faith. Through imagery and prayer, we see how both brute nature and spiritual grace shape not only our lives as individuals and families, but all life.

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## Activities

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Below are some suggested activities that you can do alone or in the company of your community members. Participating in a physical activity often opens new avenues of reflection and allows us to see issues from a different perspective. Many of these opportunities also give us a tangible way to practice our faith and deepen our experience of what it means to be in relationship with God and others. As you engage, pay attention to what it feels like to present your body to the love and service of God.

### **Appreciating God's Creation**

- Visit a local botanical garden or nature park, and spend some time appreciating the beauty of God's natural creation.
- Go camping. Immerse yourself by living in nature for a while.

## Appendix

### Reflective Activities

- Spend a day at your local zoo or aquarium to notice the variety of God's creatures.
- Enjoy an evening program at your local planetarium where you can gaze at the expanse of the heavens.

### **Serving God's Creation**

- Gather the group together and spend some time tending to the landscaping at your church.
- Offer to do yard work for an elderly neighbor or church member.
- Plant or work in a garden. Plant a tree.
- Start a community garden.
- Gather the group together to pick up litter around your city or town.

### **Artistically engaging with God's creation**

- Spend some time taking nature photos.
- Paint or sketch *en plein air*.
- Go to a farmer's market and create a meal from the fresh foods you find there.
- Make a collage about what this semester has meant to you. Recycle the images from old magazines.

# About Life with God

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## The Authors

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### *Debbie Swindoll*

Producer, Author

Debbie is the founder and Executive Director of Grafted Life Ministries. She received her Masters degree in Spiritual Formation and Soul Care from the Institute for Spiritual Formation at Biola University. A trained spiritual director and member of the Evangelical Spiritual Director Association, Debbie writes, speaks, and consults on issues of relational theology and spiritual leadership.



### *Monica Romig Green*

Author

Monica specializes in creating interactive prayer exercises and small group experiences for Grafted Life Ministries. She has been offering spiritual direction since 2003 and was the founding director of the Evangelical Spiritual Directors Association (ESDA), a ministry of Grafted Life. With degrees from Stanford University and Talbot School of Theology, Monica combines her background in theatrical improvisation with her spiritual direction work to offer her creative *Pray Thru Play* retreats across North America.



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## The Workbooks

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The *Life with God* 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 and how we respond to God's relational invitations with a heart that loves Him in return.

Learn more about *Life with God* and our leader certification process at [graftedlife.org](http://graftedlife.org)



### The Genesis of Relationship

*Foundations, Semester One*

**Biblical Text:** Genesis (Creation)

**Theme:** The Nature of 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.



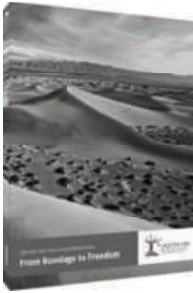
### The History of the Heart

*Foundations, Semester Two*

**Biblical Text:** Genesis (Patriarchs)

**Theme:** Dependence on God

*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.



## From Bondage to Freedom

**Biblical Text:** Exodus

**Theme:** Journeying through Resistance

*From Bondage to Freedom* looks at the journey of Israel. We assess common places of resistance in our ever-deepening relationship with God and others.



## A Call to Desire and Discern

**Biblical Text:** 1 & 2 Samuel

**Theme:** Understanding Desire

*A Call to Desire and Discern* looks 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

**Theme:** Learning to Abide

*Daily Abiding with Jesus* looks at the story of Christ. We imagine and discover what it means for us personally to be a disciple following Jesus.



## Bearing the Fruit of Love

**Biblical Text:** Acts

**Theme:** Discovering Vocation

*Bearing the Fruit of Love* looks at the early church. We explore our personal call and our commission to share Christ's love with the world.



Thank you for journeying with us. We hope God continues to lead us all closer to His heart and deeper into His Kingdom. If you have benefited from your experience with Grafted Life Ministries, we welcome your support in the following ways:

## **Give**

Grafted Life is a not-for-profit ministry. What we charge for our materials only covers a portion of our actual costs. The rest is made up from God's provision, often through financial gifts from people like you.

Give safely and securely online at [graftedlife.org/donate](https://graftedlife.org/donate)

## **Share**

Help us spread the good news of an abiding relationship with Christ by telling others about us and what we offer. If God has impacted your life through your experience with us, let us and others know in honor and worship of God!

Tell us about your experience. E-mail us at [info@graftedlife.org](mailto:info@graftedlife.org)

## **Pray**

As we've helped people grow deeper in their relationships with God and others, we've heard many stories of how God has used our resources to free lives from the bondage of autonomy, reconciling and transforming lives, friendships, families, and communities. That puts us on the front lines for spiritual warfare. We could use your spiritual support.

If you have a moment, would you pray to God right now on our behalf?



**GRAFTED LIFE**  
MINISTRIES

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