

Facilitator's Guide

Revealed: *What the Bible Can Teach You About Yourself* is designed to be used as a six-week study. You may choose to meet as a group for seven weeks to allow for one meeting for group members to get to know one another better and to discuss the Introduction, or for eight weeks to allow for an introductory meeting and a final wrap-up meeting as recommended in the final Takeaway Challenge. To complete the group study in six weeks, you can combine the Introduction with Week One. If you combine them, you'll likely need to pick and choose among the discussion questions as you probably will not have time for all of them.

This guide offers a structure for the group facilitator to follow each week. The facilitator can be the same person each week, or the group can meet with a rotating facilitator role, giving each person in the group a chance to facilitate. This may be a helpful strategy if no one wants to be the group's constant facilitator.

The facilitator's job is to help the group plan and observe a meeting time and place, get the discussion going, and keep the group on task. The discussion questions in this guide should provide a good start for a sixty- to ninety-minute group meeting. You may choose to start with an informal social time for the first fifteen minutes. Each week, the format includes the following:

A written prayer to pray together as a group. This prayer will be a way to join together with a common intention at the beginning of your discussion and set a tone of spiritual focus. The group facilitator may read the prayer aloud, or the group may read it aloud together in unison. Another option is for each member of the group to read the prayer silently together. If you are the facilitator, do what feels comfortable for you and your group. Please note that the prayer printed in this guide is longer and more detailed than the version printed in *Revealed*. If using this version, consider printing copies for all group members or reading aloud to the group.

Discussion questions. There are several questions in each section designed to help facilitate discussion of the material for each week. The group facilitator

should not feel rigidly tied to these particular questions or feel that every question needs to be discussed. If one question leads to a spiritually helpful conversation among the group, that may be enough. You may choose to remain flexible as a group with the option of extending the discussion of one section into the next week if it seems there is more to discuss than the time constraint of your group allows. It's important as the group facilitator to honor the amount of time your group has agreed to set aside for the group.

A method for processing the practice. You can supplement the value of the weekend practices by processing the experience together. Invite group members to share their experiences of the weekend practice and what they learned from it. In this way group members can learn from one another.

A takeaway challenge. Each section of the Facilitator's Guide contains a takeaway challenge related to the five readings from that week. This allows group members to act on what they read during the week in a meaningful way and to support one another in living out the ideas and truths discovered during this study.

A suggested time for prayer requests and a closing prayer. A prayer is a great way to end the group time. It allows the group to transition from a deep, thoughtful, spiritual interaction to a lighter social interaction. In my experience facilitating small groups, prayer requests can become lengthy. Try to allow enough time at the completion of the main discussion for each member to share some brief requests. If you've already used the group time for discussion, it is wise to close with a brief prayer. You may find that an email chain or text group is helpful to allow for the exchange of prayer requests throughout the week in between meetings if you consistently run out of time for each person to share requests during the group time. Again, it is important to honor the agreed-upon time set aside for the group meeting. I have included a suggested Psalm reading for each week. You can read the Psalm aloud before closing in prayer, or you can use the suggested psalm as the closing prayer.

Suggested Schedule for 90-minute Meeting

Informal social time together (15 minutes): The facilitator should be sure all group members have met one another and introduce any guests at each meeting.

Open in prayer and review main points (5 minutes): Begin by spending time in prayer asking God to lead your group's discussion and reveal what group members may need to learn about themselves from the Bible stories. Ask one group member to describe briefly the week's main topics.

Discuss the week's reading (40 minutes): Allow the discussion questions to prompt and guide your conversation, and allow the conversation to flow naturally. Keep the discussion on-topic and make space for all group members to participate in the conversation.

Process the practice (15 minutes): Discuss the weekend practice and members' experiences with it. Highlight and encourage group members to participate in the takeaway challenge as they read next week's reflections.

Prayer requests and closing prayer (15 minutes): Allow time for each group member to share prayer requests. Consider having someone record these requests and email them to group members after the meeting. Read the suggested Psalm or another scripture passage and close in prayer.

Helpful Principles to Keep in Mind as the Group Facilitator

Preparation. Prepare for the study each week by praying for each group member and reading the material you'll be covering.

Confidentiality. Encourage group members to keep group discussions confidential. Doing so creates an environment of trust and encourages group members to share vulnerable feelings, stories, and prayer requests.

Flexibility. Remain open to how the group unfolds each week. Follow the structure, but balance structure with the flexibility to spend more time on one discussion question if it is particularly relevant for group members. It is not necessary to address every discussion question during every group meeting. Rather, use the questions to guide your discussion of the reading. At the same time, if the discussion veers far away from the topic, gently bring the group back to one of the questions relevant to the week's topic.

Curiosity. Difficult questions about life and suffering may come up during group discussions. As the facilitator you don't need to have all the answers. You can seek wisdom from scripture, from pastors and leaders in your church, and from other group members. Remain curious together and make space for difficult questions to be asked and discussed. It is always okay to say, "I don't know, that's a tough question," or to ask others in the group for their perspectives.

Prayer. Prayer is an important aspect of the study. Encourage group members to share requests, but honor the time period you've decided on for the group. If prayer requests continue to the end of the allotted time, pause to do a closing prayer and invite people to stay afterward to talk more if needed.

Introduction

Opening Prayer

Loving God, we come to you with questions about ourselves, as works in progress. We ask that you will reveal what you want us to know about ourselves through this study. Whatever our experiences with the Bible, we pray that your love and truth will be evident to us in new ways through our experience during this study. Provide the courage we need to face ourselves with self-reflective honesty and compassion and to encourage one another to navigate our questions together, find rest and renewal, and connect with one another as we seek your love and truth in the Bible. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. How have you approached and used the Bible over different periods of your life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood)?
2. What do you associate with the Bible in a positive way? in a negative way? What are your overall feelings toward the Bible?
3. How could you approach the Bible as if it were a person?
4. In what ways would you like to approach the Bible during this study? How are these different from your previous ways of approaching the Bible?
5. How do you relate to Noah? What are the floods in your life? What are you building that is meaningful to you? What would you like to build in preparation for the storms that may be ahead of you?

Process the Practice

Ask group members to share, as they are comfortable, any of the three questions about themselves that they identified. Allow them to share more about where the questions come from and what they are hoping to get from the study.

Takeaway Challenge

Read your three questions about yourself daily this week. When you reflect on your questions, pray for God's guidance and provision of peace during the self-reflective work you will do on your journey through this study. Pick any passage of scripture to read each day, and practice maintaining an open mind and considering that the Bible can teach you something about yourself. If you have trouble choosing a passage, try Psalm 23. Write down any insights you have.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Ask each group member to share prayer requests for the coming week. Consider recording these requests and emailing them to all group members after the meeting. Read Psalm 1 and close in prayer.

Week One: What You Already Have

Opening Prayer

Loving God, we come to you acknowledging a deep thirst. We have climbed the mountains of success and achievement. We've quested for self-worth. We still strain to see you from the treetop, and we want to come down. We need to be equipped with five stones rather than weighed down by unwanted armor. We know you alleviated suffering for the wounded traveler through the provision of the Good Samaritan. You are present in our daily lives, and you know the areas of our hearts where we feel pain and suffering. Show us how to seek healing in the places in our hearts that reflect your truth. Help us receive your guidance. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you seek to climb higher in measures of wealth, status, achievement, or appearance? What is your "tree"? How do you feel Jesus calling you to "come down"?
2. In 1 Samuel 17, Saul's armor weighs down David and would prevent him from effectively facing Goliath. What "armor" weighs you down in the face of a current challenge?
3. In what ways might others experience your efforts to help them as a burden or hindrance?
4. In the parable of the good Samaritan, the priest and Levite recognized the traveler's suffering but walked right by on the other side of the road. When have you had that type of response to your own pain or suffering? What part of your internal life today would you rather not stop to address? What are you concerned may happen if you did stop to address it?
5. How did the Bible change your perspective on life this week? How can it help you to remember that we only see part of God's whole truth?

Process the Practice

Invite group members to read aloud their Modern Creeds. Note the similarities and differences in each creed. Discuss together what you see as common threads that tie the creeds together. Discuss individual differences as well.

Takeaway Challenge

Read aloud your Modern Creed each morning in the coming week. Consider whether there is anything you notice happening differently in your day as a result of reading your creed.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Ask each group member to share prayer requests for the coming week. Consider recording these requests and emailing them to all group members after the meeting. Read Psalm 121 and close in prayer.

Week Two: What to Do with Your Pain

Opening Prayer

God of our deserts, we come to you aware that we like having a sense of control over our lives. We attempt to exercise control over our schedules, our families, and other people. We want to be free of our thorns. Remind us that your grace is sufficient to help us keep moving forward in spite of the thorns that may continue to pierce us. Teach us how to learn from them. Help us identify “rooftops of discontent” in our lives. Help us prevent wandering that leads to regrets. Help us have faith when what we hope for does not come to pass. Help us feel your comfort as you weep with us when we face life’s most challenging questions. Lead us in your ways with the loving support of other faithful believers. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. In 2 Corinthians 12:6-10, Paul pleads for his thorns to be removed. In the reflection, the author identifies her thorns of self-doubt and self-criticism. What are your thorns?
2. Ask one participant to read aloud the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). Share a time when you found yourself on a “rooftop of discontent.” How did you respond to your discontent?
3. What seduces you? How do you allow your seductions to lead you toward a corner that may result in pain or regret?
4. What is an example in your life, or the life of someone close to you, of something good that you have hoped and prayed for, but has not yet come to pass? How do you make sense of where you are in this process? How do you continue to hope and pray for this good thing?
5. Consider a time when you struggled to understand the events of your life. Recall how you felt Jesus’ presence or absence. How can you embrace the idea of Jesus weeping with you through difficult events in the future?

Process the Practice

Invite members to share their experiences with journaling. Encourage those who completed a time line to share one or two things they noticed if they are comfortable doing so. Discuss experiences of spiritual comfort during painful times.

Takeaway Challenge

In your journal, list three things for which you are thankful each day. Note whether any of your impulsive behaviors shift as a result.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Ask each group member to share prayer requests for the coming week. Consider recording these requests and emailing them to all group members after the meeting. Read Psalm 69 and close in prayer.

Week Three: Where You Find Truth

Opening Prayer

Loving God, you provide peace amid our trials. You show us your peace through retreats. You show us how to alternate between spiritually challenging times and spiritually restful times. You challenge us to live a life free of worry, where we can more acutely tune into what you want to say to us. Help us listen for your peace and guidance through other people and our own emotional experiences, even in unexpected places. Thank you for guiding us toward truth in the ways we need to hear it. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. What is it like for you to think of God as a place?
2. Which places best represent God to you? Describe the ways those places help you envision, experience, and understand God.
3. Where are your unexpected sources of truth? How do you listen for truth in everyday, unexpected places? How can you listen to parts of yourself that you readily seek to silence?
4. How readily do you acknowledge the limits to your own wisdom?
5. How much do you tend to worry? What steps can you take to be less worried and more secure in the true fear of God?

Process the Practice

Invite group members to describe their sacred spaces. Allow some time for everyone to share how they chose their sacred spaces and how creating a sacred space has been helpful.

Takeaway Challenge

For one day this coming week, approach every place, person, and experience you have as an opportunity to learn something from God. At the end of the day, write down what you learn in your journal.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Ask each group member to share prayer requests for the coming week. Consider recording these requests and emailing them to all group members after the meeting. Read Psalm 139:1-12 and close in prayer.

Week Four: How Your Relationships Heal

Opening Prayer

Lord of the whole body, when we face challenges, help us heal through one another's supportive, silent presence. Help us love ourselves as our neighbors and our neighbors as ourselves. When we are drawn to unhealthy patterns in relationships, help us snap the bowstrings and choose another path. Help us recognize our potential and the unique gifts you've placed into each of our lives. Show us how our individual gifts fit into a bigger picture of collective gifts within our church and community. Help us release the pressure to be perfect and whole in ourselves, and teach us to be an interdependent body of believers. Remind us that when everyone in the village wanted to condemn the woman caught in adultery, you did not condemn her. You remind us of our status as dust and our potential for life. Show us how to drop our stones of accusation and instead to self-examine. Help us move forward with renewed hearts today. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. Recall a time when you shared in Job's pain in some way. How did your loved ones help you through that time? How do you try to help others make sense of pain?
2. Which comes easier to you, loving yourself or loving others? How does one affect the other?
3. Identify one relational pattern (keeping the peace, rescuing others, criticizing others, avoiding conflict, etc.) that you tend to repeat, even when it is not in your best interest. What can you do differently to try to break one of those patterns and move forward in a relationship in a more positive way?
4. Have every group member find a piece of blank paper and create two columns. Choose one participant to read Proverbs 31:10-31 aloud very slowly. As the rest of the group listens, ask group members to jot down characteristics of the Proverbs 31 woman that they embody in the first column. In the second column, group members should jot down characteristics with which they struggle. Reflect aloud on qualities you embody and those with which you tend to struggle. Point out characteristics in each other that you see as strengths, and begin to consider the passage as a group challenge rather than an individual challenge.

5. Name one instance in your life where you need to drop a stone of accusation. How can focusing on our common need for God help you with this goal?

Process the Practice

Ask group members to share what they learned through their practices of forgiveness toward themselves and toward another person. Emphasize the difference between forgiveness (an individual choice and practice) and reconciliation (a practice for two or more people who work together to repair a relationship).

Takeaway Challenge

Bring two smooth stones with you for each person in your group. Write on one stone some of the sins you do not struggle with much but tend to evaluate in other people. On the other, write some of your own sins, the ones that are most painful to bring to mind, that you know have caused pain in your life and/or the lives of others. Then visit a nearby pond, lake, or stream. Drop the stones of accusation you tend to carry toward others and toward yourself. Drop the stones into the water, and pray that you'll remain mindful of your shared humanity and treat yourself and others with the compassion of Jesus.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Ask each group member to share prayer requests for the coming week. Consider recording these requests and emailing them to all group members after the meeting. Read Psalm 32 and close in prayer.

Week Five: Why Your Faith Needs Fun

Opening Prayer

Dear God, we learned that play and flow experiences are central to the health and vitality of our faith. Show us playgrounds where we can thrive. Help us carve out time to be with you and others in enjoyable ways. Remind us that conflict is part of every growing relationship, including our relationship with you. As we enjoy a life of faith, help us remember to visit thrills but return to a baseline, calm experience. Help us return to you and remain in you. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. Name an adult you know with a carefree sense of play. What can you learn from the person? What one step can you take to bring more play into your life?
2. Imagine the daily life of Jesus' first disciples. When do you think the disciples experienced flow?
3. When have you readily entered conflict? When do you shy away from it? What has healthy conflict looked like in your relationships? How could your conflicts be healthier?
4. What are some ways you "visit" excitement? How do you establish and return to a steady, calm, go-to spiritual place?
5. How can your healthiest intimate relationships help you better understand your relationship with God?

Process the Practice

Discuss how much time and energy group members currently devote to play. Ask them to share their experiences of play in the past week. Discuss the connection between the ways they have enjoyed play in the past and the activities they chose for the weekend practice.

Takeaway Challenge

Beginning this week, carve out some weekly time to devote to play. Experiment with at least three different ways of experiencing play in the coming month, and

note how your experience of faith changes as a result of giving yourself permission to play.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Ask each group member to share prayer requests for the coming week. Consider recording these requests and emailing them to all group members after the meeting. Read Psalm 33 and close in prayer.

Week Six: What Is Next for You

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, you know our past and present, and you lead us into our future. Grant us insight and persistence as we move forward in our lives as works in progress. Remind us that you are always present as a compassionate and understanding companion and guide. Enable us to create order in our lives where there is chaos. Help us build emotional coping skills that will withstand the floods of life. Give us the courage to act upon what we already know rather than being immobilized by the unknown. Open our eyes to miracles that are already occurring in our lives. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. What internal renovations are you pursuing or do you want to pursue? How might you experience Christ coming alongside you with compassion and understanding as you work on internal vulnerabilities and challenges?
2. Which developmental stage of Creation do you identify with at this point in your life?
3. What are your best emotional coping skills? Consider skills that involve others as well as skills that you use when you are alone. How can you hone your skills so that they represent an ark that can withstand emotional floods?
4. Recall a time when you felt as though you were knocking on doors and persistence was required to meet your goal. How did it turn out?
5. What steps can you take this week to act in the face of the unknown and to create more of what you want in your life?

Process the Practice

Invite group members to share the miracles they envisioned in their faith journeys. Encourage them identify ways that small pieces of their miracles may already be occurring. Then invite group members to share the ways they feel challenged to act in their lives of faith.

Takeaway Challenge

Encourage group members to schedule a time to meet again in about a month to check in with one another about how they are doing with their plans and how

they have continued to reflect on this study. This can be a more casual, social event or a formal meeting similar to those you've had thus far.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Ask each group member to share prayer requests for the coming week. Consider recording these requests and emailing them to all group members after the meeting. Read Psalm 23 and close in prayer.