
**WELCOME TO THE
REVOLUTION**

**A SMALL GROUP STUDY BASED ON THE BOOK
*WELCOME TO THE REVOLUTION***

Something is happening inside you and around you that you can't fully explain. You can't help but think it must be God. And yet you're unsure about a whole lot of things that Christians are "supposed" to believe.

You don't know what to think about creation and evolution? Fine. You're uneasy about the idea that Jesus was fully God and fully human? Okay, whatever. You don't want to start looking like a televangelist? Good choice.

You've entered into a journey. You don't have to believe everything and do everything right now.

All we're asking is for you to know that Jesus came to bring you life, and to take hold of that offer of life by receiving him and following him.

This is a study for people who need to know the essentials of the Christ-following life— people who want an exciting, ever-deepening relationship with Jesus without all the spiritual clichés and added-on rules. This is a study for people who want to run toward something, believe in something, fight for something.

If you're a follower of Jesus, you haven't just joined a club, signed a set of beliefs, or learned a secret handshake. You have joined a Revolution. You're about to have your world turned upside down. More than that, you're going to play a part in turning the rest of the world upside down too.

WELCOME TO THE REVOLUTION.

This study is designed as a launching pad for you on your journey in following Christ. It is based on the book *Welcome to the Revolution: A Field Guide for New Believers* by Brian Tome. While you do not need the book in order to use this study, it is a valuable companion that will enable you to have a richer and fuller experience than the study alone.

RHYTHM

In general this is how this study will work. You start with a synopsis based on different sections of *Welcome to the Revolution*. From there you will be asked to do some individual exercises based on some core disciplines that are part of the Christ-following life. These include bible reading, prayer, and journaling. Then you will bring what you experienced to share with your peers in community.

This process will be followed over the course of this study. There are seven sections in the study, some groups may decide to meet weekly and some may decide that they need more time between meetings to fully explore the individual exercises. Your group will have to decide what works best for you. But, we have found that not completing the individual exercises detracts from the group experience.

SMALL GROUPS

A very important part of this journey is your small group experience. Small groups are designed to be a fun, safe and informal way to grow in the context of community. If you're reading this study, we're assuming you've already found a small group. You won't all just be sitting around in a circle with Bibles in your laps, nodding off while your host dazzles you with how many verses she's memorized. If you find yourself in that situation, you might consider an intervention.

Remember this is informal. We want to experience the Kingdom of God in an authentic way. It might feel awkward at times, but there are no "incorrect" answers. This is a time to share where you've been, where you are and where you want to go with a group of people that encourages you no matter where you are.

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISES

We all recognize that we need structure, discipline and intentionality if we are to accomplish the things we set out to do. You don't just wake up one day and have the natural ability to run a marathon. You have to train. The individual exercises are designed as a launching pad for you to engage in the Kingdom of God, like learning to walk before you run. We will explore certain core exercises that need to be practiced by everybody who wants to follow Jesus and engage in the Kingdom beyond the surface.

This study will be your guide from the basics (navigating through Christian kitsch at the bookstore) to the practical (Bible reading, building community and mission) to the profound (concepts of forgiveness and using imagination in prayer). To those people who have previously dismissed the "Christian" life, or those who want to learn more about God in an accessible way, this study will help clear the air and help launch you into a life of following a revolutionary God.

W

WEEK ONE

REVOLUTION

As Brian Tome was talking to a new Christ-follower in his office, he realized that he had nothing on his bookshelf that would give her the “straight talk” on the radical new life she was about to begin. So he wrote *Welcome to the Revolution, A Field Guide for New Believers* as a guide to joining the ever-advancing Kingdom of God. “The Revolution,” as Tome calls the Christian life, is already underway, and while it is both exhilarating and fulfilling, it’s challenging and confusing at times.

As someone who is just stepping out to follow Christ, there may be a whole host of things that Christians are “supposed” to believe that you are unsure of—or maybe that you don’t believe at all.

You don’t believe that God created the world in six literal days six thousand years ago? **Fine.**

You’re uneasy about the idea that Jesus never committed a sin? **Okay, whatever.**

You don’t want to start looking like a televangelist?
Who does?

You’ve entered into a journey. You don’t have to believe and do everything right now. In fact, there are things that you and other followers of Jesus believe and live out that might later be found untrue. It’s all part of the full and surprising adventure of being in relationship with God. It’s what makes God’s Kingdom different from any other.

THE REVOLUTION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Look around you, it's everywhere. We live in a world that is infiltrated by chaos, despair, pain and isolation. It's hard to deny that something isn't quite right about the world we live in. And we can't help but feel that a change is needed. Not some minor, surface change, but a change in the core. The kind of change that requires a revolution.

Jesus wasn't content to give people a new belief system to replace their old ones. That stuff doesn't reach the heart; it just layers on rules, breeds guilt and causes people to rebel because they can't keep up with it or they realize it's all for show. Jesus came to start the revolution to advance the Kingdom of God.

The revolution is about your freedom. Contrary to popular belief, God doesn't want to take away your freedom. He wants you to live in a freedom like you've never known before. That is the way he designed the world to work. But, something went horribly wrong a long time ago when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve. Since then, the human race has experienced things that we were never meant to experience because of our separation from God.

The revolution that Jesus brought is about recovering what once was. It's about recovering the freedom that only God can give us. It's about being reunited with God in a way that only Jesus is able to provide.

The Kingdom of God is not something that some religious elite dreamed up to gain allegiance. The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven (they're used interchangeably) are talked about well over 100 times in the New Testament. When Jesus spoke to a huge crowd, in what's known as "The Sermon on the Mount," He explained how to pray, and that prayer asks for God's Kingdom to be brought to earth just as it exists in heaven. What does that mean to you and me today? God is telling us to bring the Kingdom here. Now. No wonder this requires a revolution.

Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God almost entirely in parable (a story with a moral or spiritual principle). He says the Kingdom of God is:

- **Inside people** – Luke 17:20, 21
- **Approached through understanding** – Mark 12:34
- **Entered through accepting like a child** – Mark 10:15
- **Spiritual rebirth** – John 3:5
- **Doing the will of God** – Matthew 7:21

WAYS OF THE WORLD / THE WORLD:

A pattern or system that plays itself out on earth, but is contrary to the law and love of God.

KINGDOM OF GOD:

A holistic movement or force pushed by God, in line with His law and His love.

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISES

Each week you're going to be asked to do some individual work following the reading. The general rhythm is to read a selected part of the Bible, use the prompts provided to journal and write about what you're experiencing over the course of the study, and pray about the things you're learning and experiencing.

The Bible is a love letter from God to you. It is a personal message to each and every one of us. In the next part of this study we will look more deeply at the Bible, what it is and what it isn't. But, for right now we have included a few parts of the Bible that speak about this week's topics. Read them. Think about them. After this week we won't print them for you any more. So, you'll want to get your own Bible (available free at the Info Center).

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.

-Jesus (Luke 4:18)

What does this mean to you?

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

—Paul (2 Corinthians 3:17)

What does this mean to you?

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves
be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
—Paul (Galatians 5:1)*

What does this mean to you?

*Once, having been asked by the Pharisees
when the kingdom of God would come,
Jesus replied, “The Kingdom of God does
not come with your careful observation, nor
will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’
because the Kingdom of God is within you.”
Luke 17:20, 21*

What does this mean to you?

JOURNAL

Writing things down on paper can help significantly in our journey. Sometimes in our transition from seeking God to walking with Jesus we can experience feeling lost, frustrated, confused and even as though we are spinning our wheels. But as time goes on, we will look back and notice significant and distinct growth in ourself. We'll see transformation. One of the best ways to see where we've been and where we are is to write notes to God and to ourselves. Some people call this journaling. We will give you space in this booklet to write down some of your thoughts, but as time goes on, and you finish this study, you may want to get your own notebook.

To get started, try writing down your thoughts around these questions. You can write as though it is a letter to God, or however you'd like. You may even want to discuss these questions in your small group time.

Have you ever thought about what a religious person looks like to you? What about a revolutionary? Describe them. Are these two things compatible?

What kind of ideas have you had about Jesus? Have you made any decisions about who He is or what kind of relationship you would like to have with him? What kind of relationship do you desire with Jesus?

[illegible]

[illegible]

PRAYER

Prayer is a conversation with God. You may get distracted, fumble what you think you want to say, or even fall asleep while you pray. But, prayer is the thread that holds your relationship with Jesus together. We'll be talking a lot more about prayer in the next few weeks and chances are you've had some experiences with prayer already. So, why not just jump in with both feet? Don't worry, you can't do it wrong. Pray out loud or pray in your head. It doesn't matter. Go for it!

Suggestions:

Tell God what you think of him.

Ask God what he thinks of you.

Tell God how you want to be.

Tell God what you'd like to change.

Thank God for what you wouldn't change.

Tell God what you want to give up to him.

Say whatever is on your heart.

(This is where you actually do it.)

SMALL GROUP EXERCISES

A very important part of this journey is your small group experience. A small group is a group of people who come together to grow in community and walk in their journey together. They are intended to be a fun, safe and informal way to experience the revolution. We are assuming that if you're reading this part of the study you are in a small group. If not, find one.

Since this is a fun and safe environment, why don't you all take a turn and tell each other an embarrassing story about yourself? No, really, go ahead, build some trust.

Talk about your views of religion and revolution. **What do people who are a part of each of them look like? Do they wear uniforms, or have special bumper stickers? Are they compatible ideas?**

We talked this week about the reality of living in a "fallen" world, meaning that the world we live in is a seriously messed up version of what God actually created and intended. **What are some examples of this that you see in your everyday life? What, if anything, could you do to change those things?**

Share your experiences with reading the Bible, writing and praying over the last week. **What was it like for you? Was it easy, hard, frustrating, confusing or what? What would you like it to be?**

If you have time left, talk about where you hope this journey will go. **What are your dreams or desires?**

W2

TRANSFORMATION

WEEK TWO

A lot of people see the Bible as great information, some of it even practical. But the Bible goes way beyond that. It's a personal letter from God to you! Don't dismiss that, or breeze past that. The Bible is a personal letter of love, encouragement, correction and inspiration that washes over you and takes you on a journey that will change your life.

Yes, everybody can read the same words that you do, but what you take away from reading it and what you hear God saying is uniquely yours. And God doesn't want to just fill your head with a bunch of knowledge about things that happened thousands of years ago, he wants to speak to you and affect you on a very personal level. God wants to equip you as a revolutionary so you can advance his kingdom here on earth.

But to be equipped as a Revolutionary you have to listen and act on what is being said in the Bible. God isn't interested in your sitting back and becoming a Bible egghead. As you read the Bible, God's spirit is talking directly to you, equipping you to do every good work that God wants you to do. This is transformation. He wants the information that is contained in His love letter to you to transform your life and, in turn, to transform everything you touch. And the only way this works is to actually read the Bible and do what it says.

THE BASICS

So you're sitting there with your Bible, and one of the first things that must be going through your mind is, this is a big book. Where do I start? Many people plan to read the entire Bible from cover to cover. They figure on plowing through all 66 books of the Bible right from Genesis to Revelations.

BOOM! DONE!

But then you're going to hit Leviticus, and you'll burn out. Guaranteed. You'll get bogged down in the subtle nuances of the mildew eradication regulations found in Leviticus, even though they show the love of God for the physical health of his people. Or, your brain will go numb as you read through a page or two of genealogies.

You need a reading strategy that will help you get into the habit of reading and give you some momentum. You need to start with books of the Bible that are easier to read and that have immediate impact on your life. The reading strategy laid out here will give you some grounding as to who Jesus is and what the Bible is all about. Then you'll have a great foundation when you venture into other parts of the Bible.

One claim the Bible makes for itself is that it is "living and active" and "sharper than any double-edged sword." That's a claim you can test—but only if you engage the Bible on a personal level. Start reading the Bible every day and see for yourself what happens. And while you're reading or before you read, ask God to make it clear to you what message he wants you to hear.

You will see what it means to say that this book is "living and active." The Spirit who inspired the Bible will begin to stir inside of you—and the academic exercise of "proving" that the Bible is true or untrue will seem strangely irrelevant.

You have the opportunity to be taught by the Spirit of God as you read His Word. **Enjoy what God is about to do in your life.**

READING STRATEGY:

READ THE BOOK OF JOHN.

The book of John is the best book in the Bible for communicating who Jesus is and the impact that truth can have on your life. You'll be exposed to some of Jesus' miracles and teachings, and you will encounter people who are very similar to you. *(Five-week reading plan located on page 15.)*

READ THE BOOK OF JOHN AGAIN.

By going right back to this book and reading it again, you will gain insights you missed the first time around. This isn't just because you zoned (well, sometimes it is), but because God's Word is "living and active."

READ EPHESIANS.

This is a letter written by one of Jesus' apostles, Paul, to members of the early church. Ephesians has some great applications for how to live life in the here and now.

READ GENESIS.

This is the first book of the Bible and will be a great way to ease yourself into the Old Testament. There is a reason why this is the first book. It is because the truths contained here are the foundation on which the Bible builds.

READ ROMANS.

This is another letter written by Paul to Christ-followers in Rome about what it means to have a life devoted to God. Rome has much in common with our modern society, and therefore we have a lot to learn from what Paul wrote.

MEANWHILE, BE READING PSALMS AND PROVERBS.

While you are reading the above, I recommend having a daily goal of reading a few verses from Proverbs and a chapter from the book of Psalms. If you want to read more, do it. If you want to read less, that's fine too.

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISES

Reading the Bible

By now you should have a Bible of your own. If not, go get one. Turn to the inside cover or the very first blank page and write, “Dear (Your Name).” Now go to the very end of the Bible, and on the very last blank page write, “Love, God.”

The first suggestion we made about reading the Bible was to come up with a reading strategy that would help you get into the habit of reading and give you some momentum. You may want to consider creating some space on a consistent basis. Otherwise your reading just falls into your leftover minutes before bedtime, or you forget about it altogether. And the transformation that the Bible is all about, waits to be unleashed in your life.

Here is a very do-able strategy for reading the book of John in the next five weeks. You’re even given time off on the weekends. This isn’t a legalistic formula for growing closer to God or some mark that you need to hit to be spiritually successful. But it is a great way to get in the habit of reading the Bible.

Pray before you begin, and ask God to speak to you or show you the areas where he wants to grow you.

The Uniqueness of John’s Gospel

Only in John does Jesus talk at length about himself, including a substantial amount of material Jesus shared with the disciples only.

There are only a few examples of Jesus praying recorded in the Bible, some of which are small snippets. But John records a very long prayer of Jesus’ before his death in chapter 17.

John recorded only seven miracles in the first half of the book, but at the end he says, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30, 31)

A FEW ROADBLOCKS:

When you start reading the Bible, you’re probably going to have some thoughts and feelings that you think you shouldn’t have. You’ll get bored. You’ll read things that make you mad. You’ll have doubts. I want to reassure you: all of that is perfectly normal. It doesn’t mean you’re a bad person or a bad Christ-follower. So let me give you some strategies for dealing with some of these “roadblocks.”

“I’M BORED.”

You can come back to those parts later—maybe many years later—when you’re ready for them.

“I DON’T LIKE WHAT I’M SEEING IN THE BIBLE.”

When you come to a part of the Bible that you don’t like, stay there for a while. Sit in it. You’ll be amazed at what God does in your life.

“I DOUBT THAT.”

At some point, everyone doubts something they read in the Bible.

WHO WAS JOHN?

A fisherman.

The Beloved Apostle.

John the Evangelist.

The author of several New Testament works including: the book of John, first John, second John, third John and Revelations.

First a disciple of John the Baptist and later of Jesus.

One of the 12 apostles of Jesus.

READING PLAN FOR THE BOOK OF JOHN

WEEK ONE	MON	John 1	the word
	TUES	John 2	wine
	WED	John 3:1-21	love
	THURS	John 3:22-36	bridegroom
	FRI	John 4:1-42	the well
WEEK TWO	MON	John 4:43-5:14	signs
	TUES	John 5:15-47	testimony
	WED	John 6:1-59	bread
	THURS	John 6:60-7:24	desertion
	FRI	John 7:25-8:11	division
WEEK THREE	MON	John 8:12-59	claims
	TUES	John 9	blindness
	WED	John 10:1-21	shepherd
	THURS	John 10:22-42	sheep
	FRI	John 11	raise
WEEK FOUR	MON	John 12:1-36	king
	TUES	John 12:36-50	which glory
	WED	John 13	servant
	THURS	John 14	the way
	FRI	John 15	the vine
WEEK FIVE	MON	John 16	grief to joy
	TUES	John 17	prayer
	WED	John 18	trial
	THURS	John 19	death
	FRI	John 20, 21	afterward

JOURNAL

Continue to write down your thoughts and experiences throughout this week in the space provided. (Remember, you may want to get your own notebook.) A couple of starting points for you might be:

Have you felt any sort of nudging or prompting, or had any ah-ha moments?

As you read your Bible this week, was there anything you were challenged by, or anything you felt prompted to do?

We talked this week about the Bible being alive and active, and how the Holy Spirit can work in our heart as we read. Has any part of the Bible become “alive” or “active” for you?

[illegible]

[illegible]

SMALL GROUP EXERCISES

Share your experiences with the Bible growing up. **Did you ever read it? What opinions did you have about it?**

The Bible can sometimes be pretty challenging to read, especially if we're just starting out. **Have any of you experienced any roadblocks in reading the Bible? Were you able to get through them? If so, how?**

We talked this week about how the Bible was for your transformation, not just information. A big part of that is being open to hearing from God through the Bible.

In your reading of the Bible the last couple of weeks or anytime prior, **did you ever feel like God spoke to you through something you read, or changed you as a result of something you read?** If you've haven't experienced that yet, talk about what transformations you desire and if you think the Bible is a place you think you could find them.

One way the Bible can come alive to us is by reading it with other people and talking about what it means and how it impacts us. **Read John 1:1-5 out loud and discuss.**

Any remaining time you have together you can discuss whatever you like about your experiences with the Bible, prayer or the journaling that you've done over the last couple of weeks. Were there high points? Struggles? Confusion? Questions? Discuss what you'd like. Feel free, that's the way God made you.

W3

WEEK THREE

PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

"When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one'."

Matthew 6:6-13

When you decide to be a part of the revolution, prayer is key. Prayer is not ceremonial religious babble or holy talk designed to impress people or memorized incantations that have no personal meaning. Prayer is relational connection. Prayer is being with God, your Father, and asking for things to be different. It is trusting that He can change the physical and spiritual world around you and be your intimate ally in the revolution.

In any relationship, communication is the means to getting on the same page and advancing in whatever you are trying to accomplish together. And just like any other relationship, being allied with God and communicating with him includes seasons of great joy as well as that of complete distraction, irritation, satisfaction and every other emotion.

But prayer is more than just keeping company with God. Prayer is about bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth and becoming God's intimate ally to change the world for other people. When Jesus' followers asked him how they should go about praying, Jesus replied with what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer.

When you become part of the revolution, one of the things that Jesus says takes hold of you is a desire for change. And the model prayer that Jesus gives his followers includes praying for the Kingdom of Heaven to be manifest in our everyday lives. We become about changing the world to look more like how God designed it. This is about bringing the entire created universe back to the original design. God's Kingdom come, his will be done.

God's chosen vehicle for this radical change is you, and the fuel for the revolution is prayer. Maybe it's a hard thing to believe, that our prayers matter beyond ourselves, that we can ask and receive and create huge change, but we can. Our prayer does motivate God. Our prayer does call down the heavens. Prayer goes beyond just you and God. Prayer is about the revolution. Prayer is about bringing the kingdom to earth and working with God to change the world for other people.

That's a lot to think about, especially if you're new to praying. So how does one go about stepping out in a new prayer life? First, you have to create space in your life to pray. Without intentionally setting aside time with God, prayer will become an afterthought. Second, mark a spot that is where you are going to spend time with God, and do nothing else. No phones, kids, TV's or other distractions, your spot will be like holy ground. Third, keep your prayers simple. We tend to over-complicate prayer and get lost in trying to find the right words. As Jesus said:

"When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen... And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Jesus is telling us to create space: make time ("when you pray"), make a place ("go into your room"), and make it simple (see "do not keep babbling like pagans"). Don't just make a goal to "pray more." General goals like that don't work. Goals that work are the ones linked to a specific plan.

So how, exactly, do you pray? Nope, not gonna to fall for that one. There is no "exact" way to pray. But you still need to have an idea of how to get started. During your individual exercises we will take a look at one format for prayer that is a great launching pad for communication with God. It is not a rigid formula, but it's a great way to get started.

CREATE SPACE:

You need to have a plan, because otherwise prayer falls into our leftover minutes before bedtime, or we forget about it altogether.

MARK A SPOT:

It's sort of like declaring holy ground. It's important to stake out holy ground, to have a place reserved for one-on-one time with God. This will help us focus and help us get through some of the common roadblocks that we will encounter as we connect and communicate with our Creator.

KEEP IT SIMPLE:

Prayer is a lot simpler than we make it out to be. We have trouble being simple and trusting as children. All of us, however, are children of God.

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISES

Reading the Bible

By now you have begun reading the Bible and should be well on your way into the book of John. Have you been underlining or highlighting parts that struck a chord with you? Now might be a good time to look back and review some of those passages. And continue with your reading plan this week.

There are many ways to read the Bible and none are more correct than another. We've laid out a reading plan for five weeks in the book of John. This is a great plan, but the goal is not to plow through the Bible. The important thing is to listen to what the Bible is saying to you. As you read, there may come a time when something really strikes you. (We often call these *ah-ha moments*.) Stop there. Pray about that and journal about it. Even if you don't finish the rest of the reading plan for that day, you will have listened to what God is saying to you in that moment. That can't be wrong.

AH-HA MOMENT:

A personal message from God. An epiphany, revelation or a moment when God speaks to us and we truly listen, we "get it" a little more. Our relationship with God becomes richer, deeper, and we grow in wisdom. Each experience molds us more into the person who God created us to be.

TIP

Reading about a person in the bible can be fascinating. You can really dig into the relationships of people to God and see how and why things happened

around them. Sometimes you can even find a bit of yourself in a person and see their reactions to situations and how it plays out in a good or bad way.

TOP TEN WAYS [NOT] TO STUDY THE BIBLE

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 10. Watching Charlton Heston in "The Ten Commandments" | 5. Every Sunday on the screen |
| 9. In bed | 4. Pick a page, any page |
| 8. James Earl Jones reads "The Bible" | 3. Just read margin notes |
| 7. The Bible "Cliffs Notes" | 2. Wikipedia |
| 6. Every Christmas and Easter | 1. Osmosis |

JOURNAL

One format for praying that has worked for a lot of people is the acronym PRAY. Easy to remember, isn't it? PRAY stands for Praise, Repent, Ask and Yield.

PRAISE

A big part of praise is expressing our gratitude, not just in a general sense, but specifically. As you've probably experienced yourself, the more specific people are when voicing their appreciation for you, the more you believe what they're saying. When you're really into something you can hardly help yourself from expressing how great it is or how much it means to you.

REPENT

After you've praised God for who he is and what he's done, it's time to recognize your own shortcomings. To do this is to repent. Repenting is just recognizing our sin and then turning away from it. Taking responsibility for our own sin includes asking for forgiveness.

ASK

Now we have the foundation for the fun part. Let's ask God for some stuff. There's nothing sacrilegious about that. You don't want to be one of those people who feels guilty or unworthy of asking God for anything.

YIELD

As we said earlier, prayer is two-way communication. So once you've made your request to God, it's time to get quiet and listen. Yielding is when you put your hands in the air and say, "yeah, I surrender." When you're in a posture of submission, you can do nothing but wait for the one in authority to tell you what to do.

Go through each letter in the PRAY format and write down any ideas that you have for each one.

PRAISE

REPENT

ASK

YIELD

PRAISE:

REPENT:

ASK:

YIELD:

Sandwiched right between “your kingdom come” and “on earth as it is in heaven” is where Jesus models yielding when he says, “your will be done.” We don’t say, “I know what your kingdom is supposed to look like. I know what you’re supposed to do.” We trust and yield to God and wait for his kingdom to be revealed to us in a way and time of his choosing.

PRAYER

Hopefully by this point you've given some thought to creating space in your schedule and marking the spot for you to pray. You can use the list of ideas in your journal for each of the letters and PRAY and open up the lines of communication with God.

Remember, there is absolutely no way possible for you to get this wrong.

You may want to use this technique of writing your PRAY stuff down for as long as you feel like it. Eventually, you may not need it anymore. And eventually, you'll need it again, just to jumpstart your conversations with God.

Writing Prayers

Many people view written prayers as inferior to spoken prayers, but written prayers have a long tradition and are a great way to communicate with God.

The book of Psalms in the Bible is full of written prayers. Most of these prayers were written by David and set to music to be sung. In Psalms you will find David communicating a wide range of emotions with God: joy, love, anger and disappointment—the same things we experience today.

Writing prayers is a great way to gain clarity or to become focused. While God knows what we are thinking and praying about, if we don't have focus it becomes more difficult to hear what God is saying to us.

Name what is going on in your life. Sometimes simply by naming and articulating what we are thinking, feeling or experiencing—such as “I’m thinking about changing careers” or “I feel lonely” or “I feel hopeless about...” or “I am overwhelmed”—can help us gain focus. Writing it down, composing a short prayer and giving it to God can be empowering. Many people find keeping a prayer journal to be a helpful exercise.

[illegible]

SMALL GROUP EXERCISES

Welcome back! This week you have been concentrating on prayer and how that works into a life that's about the Kingdom of God. We saw last week that the Bible was about transformation and having God's written word becoming alive and active in your life. This week we'd like to talk about how prayer is the fuel that drives the revolution. But before we start talking about where we're headed, it's always good to talk about where we've been.

As we were growing up, we were all exposed to prayer in some way. It could have been in the movies, on TV or our parents calling out to God while driving on the expressway, but we've all had some notions around prayer. **Take a couple of minutes each to talk about what you've thought about prayer growing up, or what your experiences with prayer have been like? Or, what is the most ridiculous thing you've ever prayed for?**

Now take a couple of more minutes each and talk about what you would like prayer to be for you.

Anyone can answer this question, but you all don't have to answer if you don't want to. Often times when we pray it can feel like a performance. So right now everyone needs to pray out loud. *Just kidding.*

But how did that make you feel? Have you ever felt like prayer is a performance? Or, been put on the spot to pray?

One of the biggest roadblocks that we can experience in prayer comes from not having a plan for how and when we talk with God. That is why we talked about creating space in our time, marking a spot and keeping it simple. **Were you able to do those things? If, yes, how did it work out for you? If, no, what happened?**

When Jesus began to take his message out to the countryside, he chose twelve men to work with him. They were new to the revolution and didn't always get it. Whenever we are new to something, it often helps to have a plan or a model to work with. That's why Jesus gave his new disciples a model for how to pray, which has come to be known as The Lord's Prayer.

This week we gave you something called the PRAY method to help you out in your conversations with God. **Was there anything about that model that made talking with God either any easier or more difficult? If you'd like, you could mention a few of the things that you listed in the individual part of the study.**

SOME PRAYERS OF THE BIBLE

GENESIS 18:

Abraham's plea for Sodom.

EXODUS 15:

Moses says song to the Lord.

EXODUS 33:

Moses meets with God.

2 SAMUEL 7:

David's response to God's promises.

1 KINGS 8:

Solomon's dedication of the Temple.

2 CHRONICLES 20:

Jehoshaphat prays for victory.

EZRA 9:

Ezra's prayer for the People's sends.

PSALM 22:

A cry to God for help.

PSALM 104:

A prayer of praise.

DANIEL 9:

Daniel's prayer for salvation of Jerusalem.

MATTHEW 6:

The Lord's Prayer.

JOHN 17:

Jesus prayer for his disciples.

COLOSSIANS 1:

Paul's prayer for thanksgiving.

W4

WEEK FOUR

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

The only
requirement
is to be
authentic
before God.
There is no
prescribed
way to pray.

Newcomers to prayer often worry that they're not "doing it right." For that matter so does everybody else. Maybe you've heard eloquent prayers from a pulpit or passionate words in a darkened auditorium and thought to yourself, "I could never do that." Maybe you're afraid to pray out loud in a group, and even shy away from private prayers for fear of saying the wrong thing.

Just from the sheer variety of prayers, it would be impossible to come up with some sort of formula for "doing it right." There are the pleas from a victim of injustice, the sobbing and crying out of a broken heart, the mechanical repetition of memorized prayers, the desperate pleas of the persecuted across the world, private prayer languages that no one else knows, monotone deliveries and passionate outcries, humble repentance and deep confessions, words to flatter a distant King and words to please a loving Father. You get the idea; it's all across the board.

We were all created differently. We have different personalities and live in different ways. Some people will find their best prayer times while commuting to work, others while sitting next to a stream. Some will pray while lying half awake first thing in the morning or last thing before they fall asleep. Prayer is not a contest, it is communication and relation. And newcomers to prayer have just as much opportunity, and sometimes more, to have a meaningful prayer life as church professionals.

Somewhere along the line we have gotten the idea that prayer is a verbal or written exercise. While putting your prayers into words is a great way of clarifying your needs and hopes, to think that is the only way to have an effective prayer life puts too much emphasis on ability. And that simply isn't the case.

You may not be good at making speeches or writing, but you do have the ability to imagine. It's one of the most fundamental things that separate us from monkeys. Before you say, "Actually, I'm not very imaginative," ask yourself a few questions. How do you plan? You imagine the future, and then you work toward it. How do you relive pain and tragedy? You replay the pictures and scenes in slow motion through your memory.

Your imagination is the most powerful communication tool you possess. It can create images crisper than HDTV, sounds as clear as surround sound, and memory that works faster and lasts longer than any amount of RAM. This capacity was created by God, and is so powerful and so effortless that you use it without even thinking.

As the revolution takes hold in your life, be patient to learn this new way of experiencing God. Don't feel discouraged if you spend time alone with God and find it hard to harness your imagination. Don't feel bad if your imagination goes in weird directions. Don't beat yourself up if there isn't an ah-ha experience. You've gotten into a relationship with God where communication has to be learned, practiced, explored. He's not a math table to be memorized. He is a being to be known. Patiently using all kinds of prayer techniques will help you come closer to knowing him and seeing him move more powerfully in and through you.

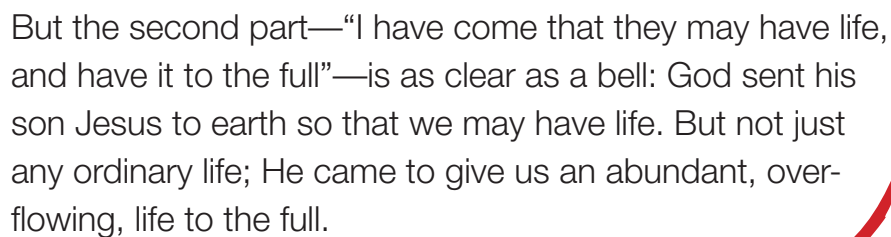
And while you pray, know this: God's Holy Spirit is praying for you. The Spirit is interceding on your behalf—fighting relentlessly without pause. And that is how much you matter to God.

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISES

Reading the Bible

By this time you should be into your third week of reading the book of John in the Bible. How's it going? Are you still underlining or making notes in the margin? Some of this stuff can be quite confusing can't it? It's not language that we're used to, and it deals in subject matter that is difficult to comprehend. Jesus himself did most of his teaching in parables, or stories that don't always translate well to today. I mean, when was the last time you saw a sheep?

But it's okay to not understand everything. None of us ever will. Too often we concentrate on the things we don't understand and don't take to heart the things we do. For example, in your reading this week (John 10:10), Jesus says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The first part of that verse about the thief can be hard to understand.



But the second part—"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"—is as clear as a bell: God sent his son Jesus to earth so that we may have life. But not just any ordinary life; He came to give us an abundant, overflowing, life to the full.

That's certainly something worth underlining. Maybe even a star, or a checkmark or big red circle. We may not understand how Jesus does it, or how it's all is going to play out, but it's a promise that we can count on. We can take it to heart.

THE THIEF

In John 10:10 Jesus talks about a thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy. The Thief is another name used for Satan.

The Bible calls Satan by many different names. Each name has a slightly different meaning. The many other names for Satan give a fuller picture of who Satan is and what he does.

Here are a few:

- Accuser
- Adversary
- Deceiver
- Devil
- Enemy
- Father of lies
- Tempter
- Ruler of this world

PRAYER

This week's time of prayer may get difficult. But hopefully, we have given you enough tools to get through some of the barriers that commonly interrupt our prayers. You may want to review some of these barriers so that you're not surprised when you face them.

This week is about resting in Christ, and receiving from him. Too often we feel like we need to perform or strive in our relationship with Christ. Sometimes we just need to rest and receive. It is very important that you carve out plenty of time and go to your holy spot, or a place that is conducive for prayer. We will give you a couple of sentences that Jesus said about you and me. And then you'll use your imagination to picture Jesus saying these words directly to you. What images you use of Jesus or where you see him, where you see yourself, or what you are doing is up to you. Don't worry if Jesus looks like Frodo Baggins and sounds like Morgan Freeman.

I will say that the goal is to sense, as vividly as possible, Jesus communicating these truths directly to you. You could visualize them going through your chest and into your heart where they can become a part of you. Use color, smells, feeling, sounds, wind, warmth and other senses. You could visualize being on a beach in Hawaii, a special place you had as a kid or someplace you may need healing. You may already know these things that Jesus said, but knowing and experiencing them are two different things.

Before you begin your imaginative prayer time, get to a place inside yourself where you can honestly and authentically ask the Holy Spirit to help you experience Jesus; and to make him become real to you. Then ask the Holy Spirit to do just that.

Here are Jesus' words to you:

I have come so you may have life, and have it to the full.

If you drink the water that I give you, you will never thirst again. The water I give you will become a spring welling up to eternal life.

Your sins are forgiven.

If you follow me you will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

The truth will set you free.

Receive these words and rest.

YOU ARE...

God's beloved child (*John 1:12; Ephesians 1:5*)
Christ's dear friend (*John 15:5*)
Declared perfectly righteous (*Romans 5:1*)
Free from condemnation (*Romans 8:1; Col 2:14-16*)
One spirit with Christ (*1 Cor 6:17; Ephesians 5:31*)
A member of Christ's body (*1 Cor 6:15, 12:27*)
Filled with the fullness of God (*Ephesians 3:19*)
A holy one (saint) (*Ephesians 1:1*)
Blessed with every spiritual blessing (*Ephesians 1:3*)
Holy and Blameless (*Ephesians 1:4*)
Bathed with wisdom and understanding (*Ephesians 1:8*)
Possessed with the mind of Christ (*1 Cor 2:16*)
Inseparable from God's love (*Romans 8:35-39*)
One who will never be abandoned (*Matthew 28:20*)
One over whom the Lord rejoices (*Zeph 3:17*)
A recipient of God's own peace (*John 14:27*)
One in whom Christ's joy is fulfilled (*John 15:11*)
Made perfect forever (*Hebrews 10:14*)
Made complete in Christ (*Col 2:10*)
Indwelt by a fearless Spirit (*2 Tim 1:7*)
One of God's precious works of art (*Ephesians 2:10*)
Indwelt by a spirit of power (*2 Tim 1:7*)
A branch chosen to bear fruit (*John 15:16*)
A co-worker with God (*1 Cor 3:9*)

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 1039-1043.

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

SMALL GROUP EXERCISES

This week we have again concentrated on prayer. Last week we talked about some of the infrastructure of prayer. Creating space, marking a spot and keeping it simple, are great ways of getting started in prayer. Then we used the PRAY acronym to help facilitate and focus our prayers.

This week was much more of a free-range kind of prayer experience. We gave you a starting point and told you to let your imagination take you where it would. The goal this week was to rest and receive God.

Worrying about “doing it right” doesn’t just apply to prayer. Most of us spend a lot of time, without even realizing it, thinking about whether we’re doing things right or not. Usually this is beneficial. “Am I taking the right way home?” or “I should really keep my thumb away from this knife while cutting these carrots.” But when it comes to prayer, there’s no wrong way. As long as you’re talking with God, you’re on the right track.

What worries or insecurities do you have about how you pray?

Jesus taught a model prayer but otherwise gave few rules about praying. **The three general principles that he gave were: keep it honest, keep it simple, and keep it up.** Talk about what these principles mean to you and why you think they were important to Jesus.

How have these principles played out in your prayer life so far, and which one is most difficult for you to maintain?

Using our imaginations can be difficult. Sometimes it’s much easier just to write down a list of things we want to say. And there’s nothing wrong with that, but it can be very much a one-way conversation. Our imaginations are a powerful way for us to experience and receive from God. The flow of our imaginations can be directed by the Holy Spirit in ways that verbal or written prayers may not.

Share with your group any experiences that you would like about your time in imaginative prayer this week. Did any images or communications come to you that you felt were helpful? How did you feel about these experiences?

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER GROUP EXPERIMENT

This might be the most difficult group experience that you'll have throughout this whole thing. Group imaginative prayer is at the same time very powerful and very difficult. Use the rest of your time to pray together. Just as an insight, there may be a lot of time in silence, so that you can listen to God. If it's not working for you guys, that's OK. Don't sweat it. You can take the rest of the time and just talk about life.

After you experience a time of imaginative group prayer, take time to discuss anything about the experience that you like.

Ready? Choose one person to read the Prayer Experiment Guide out loud. As they're reading, everyone should close their eyes and follow along, letting your imagination come alive as a way to interact with God.

Imaginative Group Prayer Guide

As the person speaking reads this story that Jesus told, imagine yourself as the child. Try to visualize, what the scene looked like, smelled like, time of day and every other detail that you can imagine.

[Please read slowly]

There was once a man who had a child. The child said one day, "Father, I want my inheritance right now." So the father divided the property and gave his child the money. It wasn't long before the child packed up, took the inheritance and left. While far from home, the child quickly squandered away everything in wild living.

[Pause for an extended time]

After the father's child had gone through all the money, there was a bad famine all through that country. Since he had no money, the child got a job taking care of a man's fields and slopping pigs. Without food, the child became so hungry that the corn cobs in the pig slop looked good, but he had none.

[Pause]

That brought the child to edge, saying, "All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, 'Father, I've let you down; I don't deserve to be called your child.

But, could you take me on as a hired hand.'" Getting up, the child went straight home.

[Pause]

When the child was still a long way off, the father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced, and kissed his child. The child started the speech, "Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your child ever again."

[Pause]

But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, "Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes. Get the jewels and shoes. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My child is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!" And they began to have a wonderful time.

[Pause]

God is your Father. You are a child of God. Imagine what he would say to you when you come back home. How would He adorn you, feed you or encourage you?

[Pause]

Imagine having a wonderful time with God.

[Pause. Close out in prayer if you'd like.]

W5

WEEK FIVE

COMMUNITY

One of the worst illusions in the life of someone trying to follow Jesus is that isolating yourself from the people around you and the world you live in will bring you closer to God. There are times to get away from it all, and certainly times to protect your self from people that would do damage, but you can't be a part of the revolution and advance the Kingdom of God without being in community.

Over the last few weeks we've talked a lot about reading the Bible and praying. We've talked about these as largely individual pathways of learning, growing and worshiping. But we've also talked about them in a relational way, as communication and as a flow with God of giving and receiving. Basically being in community with God. And just like any relationship, you've probably experienced highs and lows, frustrations and joys. But, God hardly ever works alone. He works through people.

Most of your great moments of spiritual growth will happen around other people. In fact, there are very few great things God will do in your life outside of community. Many of your ah-ha moments about God and about yourself will come from other people. And the times when you see the kingdom advancing will be most powerful when you are with a group of people working on a mission.

Two Communities

There are basically two types of communities that you as a Christ-follower need to be a part of: a church community and a friendship community. Church communities come in all different shapes and sizes, and you may feel strongly one way or another about the type of church community that you want to be involved with. But the important thing is that you be involved.

The book of Acts in the Bible is the account of the early church after Jesus was crucified. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that the church community you become involved with has to be just like the early church, but certainly Jesus' first followers were intimately aware of his teachings and thankfully wrote down what it was like for them. There are six verses—**Acts 2:42-47**—that give us a great model for what to look for in deciding if a church community is a healthy place to become involved.

While being part of a healthy church community is extremely important, your individual friendships will have a profound influence on your personal journey. While Jesus had thousands of followers at any given time, it was his core friendships with the twelve apostles that were most significant to the revolution. These were the people that he ate with, struggled with, prayed with and above all, did life with.

Just as we can't read the Bible for very long without seeing community, you can't live very long without knowing that people are messy and that friendships can be hard. Some of the friendships we have are good and some are unhealthy. One sign that you are growing in your relationship with Christ is that you are also growing in your friendships. Healthy friendships rarely just happen. You have to be strategic about them.

Just as the saying goes "you are what you eat," you are who you spend your time with. We can't be spiritually healthy if we aren't relationally healthy. But what does it mean to be relationally healthy? Basically it means to be aware of what people in our lives do to us spiritually.

A HEALTHY CHURCH COMMUNITY

Devotes itself to teaching the Bible

Believes in the power of prayer

Does life with one another

Has a good reputation
in the community

Grows numerically

ACTS 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. *Acts 2:42-47*

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISES

“Welcome to the Revolution, A Field Guide for New Believers” talks about examining your individual relationships in a very specific way. It says that by examining our one-on-one relationships and discovering whether individuals increase our energy and passion or drain our energy and passion we can be intentional about having our relationships help grow us into the person God wants us to be. This is very similar to being able to set good boundaries so that we are able to remain healthy and grow.

You will be journaling this week about how to remain relationally healthy. Relational health doesn't just happen, it takes some work. Some of this may sound a little odd, but it's really just information that you can use to evaluate your friendships and relationships. All we are looking for is recognition of what various people do to us spiritually. You may have to come back to this time and again, and it should certainly take longer than just this week.

Write down some of the major players in your life, people that you do life with or are in relationship with. Now spend some time and assess how each person affects you spiritually. You can use the categories that are discussed in the book or you can get the general idea from the list below.

CATEGORY	RELATIONAL	COMMENTS CHARGE
VERY ENERGIZING PERSON (VEP)	TRIPLE POSITIVE + + +	BUILD YOUR PASSION
VERY SIMILAR PERSON (VSP)	DOUBLE POSITIVE + +	SHARE YOUR PASSION
VERY TEACHABLE PERSON (VTP)	POSITIVE +	RECEIVE YOUR PASSION
VERY NICE PERSON (VNP)	NEUTRAL	ENJOY YOUR PASSION
VERY DRAINING PERSON (VDP)	NEGATIVE -	DRAIN YOUR PASSION

Then think about and write down how you might be able to adjust the amount of time that you spend with different kind of people in order to amplify your energy and your spiritual growth.

As an example, Jesus had a ratio of 12:1 of positive energy to negative energy. Jesus' very draining person was Judas. If Jesus needed 11 people to offset his very draining person (VDP), how many do you think that you would need?

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[illegible]

Reading the Bible

This week in the Bible you should be reading chapters 12 through 15 in the book of John. While you're reading (or if you've already read), go back and take a look at when Jesus washed the disciples feet (John 13:1-20) and see what characteristics of a very energizing person you can see in Jesus.

PRAYER

Pray this week about how you can become a very energizing person (VEP) for the people in your life. Ask God about what you can do to become an energizing person. You can also spend time each day in prayer about those people that you are journaling about. Pray for them, pray for your interactions with them and/or seek God's words about them.

SMALL GROUP EXERCISES

Prior to reading this study, how would you have defined or described “church?”

What kind of experiences have you had with church, good or bad?

Since you’re doing this group exercise, you are obviously in a small group of people that are meeting on a regular basis and sharing your life with each other. “Welcome to the Revolution” defines community as “people you love and who love you back, people you serve, deeply know, and celebrate... And people who give you all those things in return.” Using that definition, talk about where you see that kind of community in your life.

Using the above definition, talk about how you can find or create that kind of community to be a part of. Do you even want that kind of community?

Without getting specific about individuals, talk about where you see yourself on the relational health meter. For example, zero would be you have absolutely no one who builds into you and everybody drains you. A 10 would be, you’re on cloud nine, everybody builds into you and nobody drains you.

WEEK SIX w6 MISSION

None of us wake up in the morning and think to ourselves that God wants us to have an average life. Most of us sense that there is something unique that God wants to do in us and through us. In the last couple of weeks we've taken a look at reading the Bible, praying and our church and friendship communities. Mostly we've looked at these as a way of God growing us and building into us. But here's the kicker: God doesn't build into us just so we can kick back. He builds into us so that we can advance His kingdom. He grows us so we become love machines.

Love is often an overused word. We say things like, "I love french fries; I love the Beastie Boys; I'd love to kill you; I love my car, my TV, my football team."

And when Jesus says, "love your enemies" he's not talking about having a warm squirmy feeling about them. What he's talking about is a concrete way of blessing them.

That's what it means to be a love machine. It's to be a blessing to those around you, to concretely love on those who you come in contact with. Blessings are designed to flow through us to others. And the closer you get to Christ, the more you are a blessing; the more people want to be around you.

There is conflict going on all around us, all the time, on every square inch of this earth. And God has not called us to live like we are on vacation in the middle of this war zone. He's called us into the revolution to take on the ways of the world and love the hell out of it (pun intended). We are each to become a giant love machine and spread God's blessings into the dark parts of the world. Ignoring that call to action is to miss an incredible opportunity.

Other than the Bible, the world's best-selling book is "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. Why? Because all of us want to know our purpose, our mission. If you ever get the opportunity to talk to a large group of people, ask them if they've ever read "The Purpose Driven Life." You'll find that a lot of them have. Then ask them, "What's your purpose?" You'll probably get a lot of shrugs.

People think that they have to polish up their mission and do it Bono-style or mother Theresa-style. They think they need to end world poverty, fix the American education system, or cure cancer. But in the end, very few of us will knock out these huge things. **What we are going to knock out is the day-by-day loving.**

The vast majority of the work God has for you is probably going to happen right where you live. Maybe it's the guy down the street who sits on his porch all day. Give him company; make him laugh. What about the mother who never has time to be alone? Go watch her kids for a few hours. Cook a meal for someone. Sit down with someone who's trying to get a job, and go over his or her resume. Give someone exactly what he or she needs.

But how do you know if you're on the right mission? That's a question to be asking yourself as you pray, listen to others you're in community with, and think through this new way of life.

Here's a simple test: **any thought or idea you have that you think Jesus would like is a good thing to do. So do it. That's your mission.**

And if you're hearing something you don't like hearing, but keep hearing it, and you know that doing it would make Jesus smile, that's definitely your mission.

HERE'S A TIP:

Never pray for something you aren't willing to be the answer for. If you have the heart for something, it's probably your mission.

If you're praying about it, work on it. You are very likely to be the answer to the prayers you pray. You've heard the expression "be careful what you ask for, you just might get it." If God put something on your heart to pray about, chances are you're the solution he's looking for. That doesn't mean that God is not involved. He's with you every step of the way, cheering you on and working for you. You're his hands, his feet, and his eyes. His love machine.

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISES

Reading the Bible

This week you will finish the book of John. As you're reading, think about your mission as a love machine. Write down any thoughts you have about Jesus being a love machine in his interactions with the people around him, his enemies and his interaction with God, his father.

PRAYER

Spend time this week asking God to give you a mission. Look for images of people that you know or specific situations you're aware of. It could be a neighbor, spouse, friend, your kids or coworkers that come to mind in your time of prayer. Don't question it, just make a quick note in your journal of who came to mind. Chances are you already know what they need, whether it's just your time, some words of encouragement, or something a little more tangible. Whatever it is, write that down.

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JOURNAL

This week is going to be a little bit different. Before you journal this week, we'd like you to pray. Hopefully during your time of prayer you will be given ideas to journal about. You can expand on the notes from your prayer time if you'd like. Write down any thoughts or feelings that you have.

[illegible]

[illegible]

MISSION

Go and do the mission you just prayed and wrote about.

SMALL GROUP EXERCISES

Have you ever been the recipient of God's "love machine?" In other words, **has anyone ever done anything completely unexpected and awesome for you during a time of need? What was that like?**

Most of us don't wake up in the morning and say, "Boy, I hope I have an average life today," but that's often how we feel, and we know deep down that this can't be the way God created us to live. **Have you ever had the sense that God has something unique in mind for you? What do you think that might be? What have you done about it?**

The Bible says to "love your enemies" and to "bless those who persecute you." **Do you think you could bless people that you're at odds with? What would that look like to you?** Just rattle off a few ideas. Try thinking about some ways that you have been blessed by other people if you get stuck.

What do you think would happen to you and to the people around you if you started treating every day as a mission to love anyone and everyone? What would the world look like if everyone did that?

Take the rest of the time and think about how you as a group can be a love machine. **Make a list of ideas about how you can be a blessing to someone or some other group. Then choose one idea to execute together as a group.** Set up a time, place and whatever logistics you need, and go do it.



CREDIBLE WITNESS

Jesus is calling all of his people to go out into cities and states in America and to other countries to tell people about the love and power of God. We are to be credible witnesses of what we have seen God do. We need to be able to personally vouch for the power of the Holy Spirit because it has grown our hearts. If we are going to be taken seriously, we've got to be credible.

One of the problems is that very few nonbelievers ever spend any time with a credible witness for the Christian faith. Very few people have seen with their own eyes what happens when God gets involved in a person's life, but most people have seen plenty of witnesses who aren't credible. Just turn on a Christian television station and you'll see what I mean.

Do you know why Christians appear out of touch? Because most of the time we are out of touch. We are out of touch with normal people who don't know Jesus. If you aren't around them and they aren't your friends, how can you be in touch with them?

So exactly how do you become a credible witness? You must have authentic character, stay in touch with what's happening in the world, and clearly communicate the kingdom by living it out.

Having authentic^a character means being real and honest about who you are. It means you aren't putting on an act. When people see you for who you are, warts and all, they see a person of character. And a person of character is a credible witness.

For instance, if you saw a highly visible Christian proactively confessing his shortcomings (not just confessing when they got busted), you would probably appreciate their honesty and vulnerability. The apostle Paul was open about his issues when he said things like, "I don't do the things I want to do, and I do the things I don't want to do." This was part of the power of his ministry: honest living.

Nothing communicates more powerfully than an authentic person telling their story. A person's story or "testimony"^b is what they would say on the witness stand to communicate what happened in their life as a result of their relationship with Jesus. This week you will be highly encouraged to take time and write your story out on paper. The process of organizing your thoughts will enable you to communicate very clearly and you'll be able to share it with greater ease. Though you're not going to be reading it verbatim and you'll be changing it on a person-to-person basis, breaking your story down will give you some extra confidence.

CREDIBLE WITNESSES:

Have authentic character.

Stay in touch with unbelievers.

Clearly communicate why and how.

Know the moment to engage.

Know their own story.

YOU AREN'T GOD'S SALESPERSON:

Being a credible witness isn't the same thing as being a salesperson. You may have known people who seem always to be accosting friends, family, and even strangers in hopes of "saving the lost" or "winning souls."

One of the problems with this is the mistaken assumption that he or she is God's salesperson, responsible for getting others to buy in or sign on. We aren't responsible for selling Christ to our friends. This is a common—albeit innocent—mistake. It has led many well-intentioned new followers of Christ to actually do damage to others.

^a **au•then•tic** | adjective

1) True to one's own personality, spirit, or character

2) Worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact

^b **tes•ti•mo•ny** | noun | pl. **-nies**

A verbal articulation of what Jesus has done in your life.

See also, *Your Story*

[illegible]

PRAYER

[illegible]

JOURNAL

Every story of faith in Christ should have three sections: the past, the point, and the present.

The past is what your life was like before having a relationship with Jesus. The point is the time where you started turning towards Jesus and began serving God instead of yourself. The present is the tangible difference God has made in your life.

This week, spend most of your time in your journal writing down your story. You can either start writing using the past, point and present guidelines, or you can start by making lists. What are some key words you would use to describe your life before knowing Jesus? What were some of the key things going on in your life at your turning point? And then list words that describe differences in your life. After that you can build a narrative and write down your story using those key words.

PAST WORDS

THE POINT / TURNING POINTS

PRESENT WORDS

MY STORY

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

SMALL GROUP EXERCISES

This week will be a time to share your story with the group. You can use your journal as a reference if you'd like. But, it's a time to talk about what your life used to be like, the point you decided to follow Jesus and what your life is like now. You don't have to do this at all perfectly, and you can share only what you feel comfortable sharing. There should be absolutely no pressure in this, it's just a way to practice and become more comfortable with telling your story. No one is expecting you to have it all figured out, and you may be so new to following Christ that you don't even realize how your life has changed. That's OK, just say that. It's authentic. You can even talk about the struggles you're having as God's revolution plays out in your life. That's real, too.

A couple of guidelines for the group:

Don't interrupt.

Don't fix.

Encourage.

Everyone gets a chance.

EPILOGUE

If you've ever seen the cross section of a tree you know that there is a pattern of rings. For the entire period of a tree's life, a year-by-year record is formed that reflects the climate conditions where the tree grew. Adequate moisture and a long growing season result in a wide ring. A drought year may result in a very narrow one.

It would be great to wrap up this study in a nice little bow and say, **"THERE YOU GO."**

But, that's not how the Kingdom of God works, or how the revolution works in and through you. This is just the beginning of the journey. Some years you'll be in the groove and really connect with God. Other years will be a drought.

Our desire for this study is to minimize the drought and give you the right climate conditions to grow. And as the Bible says, you will be "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he [you] does prospers." *Psalms 1:3*