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Relationships are tricky, and that’s an understatement. We really up the ante when we talk about family relationships. When a couple gets married, there are a lot of people involved in that marriage. I don’t just mean the wedding ceremony, but the actual marriage. There’s his family going back a couple of generations. There’s her family going back a couple of generations. Then, there is their family when they start adding children. It’s complication upon complication.

But, despite the complexity, family is a wonderful gift! Maybe you don’t think so right now? Maybe you’re up in the middle of the night changing diapers? Perhaps you’re up in the middle of the night waiting for your teenager to come home? Lets be honest: Despite these things, you wouldn’t trade your family for anything.

A man and woman fall in love, and then the problems start. Couples go into marriage believing they have so much in common and that love will
conquer all only to find out that they are very different from each other and that it takes commitment to make a marriage work.

When kids enter the scene, it doesn’t make the relationship easier. It escalates everything.

Being married and raising kids doesn’t happen on autopilot. There is “Some Assembly Required”. I hope as we explore God’s Word together, we will learn to use some new tools that will help to produce great relationships in your family.

God bless,

Pastor Ray R. Harris
Using This Workbook
1. Notice in the Table of Contents there are three sections: (1) Sessions; (2) Appendices; and (3) Small Group Leaders. Familiarize yourself with the Appendices. Some of them will be used in the sessions themselves.

2. If you are facilitating/leading or co-leading a small group, the section Small Group Leaders will give you some experiences of others that will encourage you and help you avoid many common obstacles to effective small group leadership.

3. Use this workbook as a guide, not a straightjacket. If the group responds to the lesson in an unexpected but honest way, go with that. If you think of a better question than the next one in the lesson, ask it. Take to heart the insights included in the Frequently Asked Questions pages and the Small Group Leaders section.

4. Enjoy your Small Group experience and have fun together.

5. Pray before each session—for your group members, for your time together, or wisdom and insights.

6. Read the Outline of Each Session on the next pages so that you understand how the sessions will flow.
WEEKLY MEMORY VERSES.
Each session opens with a Memory Verse that emphasizes an important truth from the session. This is an optional exercise, but we believe that memorizing scripture can be a vital part of filling our minds with God’s will for our lives. We encourage you to give this important habit a try. The verses for our five sessions are also listed in the appendix.

INTRODUCTION.
Each lesson opens with a brief thought that will help you prepare for the session and get you thinking about the particular subject you will explore with your group. Make it a practice to read these before the session. You may want to have the group read them aloud.

SHARE YOUR STORY.
The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. You build that connection by sharing your story with a few people who really know you and who earn your trust. This section includes some simple questions to get you talking—letting you share as much or as little of your story as you feel comfortable doing. Each session typically offers you two options. You can get to know your whole group by using the icebreaker question(s), or you can check in with one or two group members, your spiritual partner(s), for a deeper connection and encouragement in your spiritual journey.

HEAR GOD’S STORY.
In this section, you’ll read the Bible and listen to teaching, in order to hear
God’s story—and begin to see how His story aligns with yours. When the study directs you to, you’ll pop in the DVD and watch a short teaching segment. You’ll then have an opportunity to read a passage of scripture, and discuss both the teaching and the text. You won’t focus on accumulating information but on how you should live in light of the Word of God. We want to help you apply the insights from scripture practically and creatively, from your heart as well as your head. At the end of the day, allowing the timeless truths from God’s Word to transform our lives in Christ should be your greatest aim.

STUDY NOTES.
This brief section provides additional commentary, background or insights on the passage you’ll study in the Hear God’s Story section.

CREATE A NEW STORY.
God wants you to be a part of His Kingdom—to weave your story into His. That will mean change. It will require you to go His way rather than your own. This won’t happen overnight, but it should happen steadily. By making small, simple choices, we can begin to change our direction. This is where the Bible’s instructions to “be doers of the Word, not just hearers” (James 1:22) comes into play. Many people skip over this aspect of the Christian life because it’s scary, relationally awkward, or simply too much work for their busy schedules. But Jesus wanted all of His disciples to know Him personally, carry out His commands, and help outsiders connect with Him. This doesn’t necessarily mean preaching on street corners. It could mean
welcoming newcomers, hosting a short-term group in your home, or walking through this study with a friend. In this study, you’ll have an opportunity to go beyond Bible study to biblical living. This section will also have a question or two that will challenge you to live out your faith by serving others, sharing your faith, and worshiping God.

**FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY (OPTIONAL).**
If you have time and want to dig deeper into more Bible passages about the topic at hand, we’ve provided additional passages and questions, which you can use either during the meeting, or as homework. Your group may choose to read and prepare before each meeting in order to cover more biblical material. Or, group members can use the additional study section during the week after the meeting. If you prefer not to do study homework, this section will provide you with plenty to discuss within the group. These options allow individuals or the whole group to expand their study while still accommodating those who can’t do homework or are new to your group.

**DAILY DEVOTIONS.**
Each week on the Daily Devotions pages, we provide scriptures to read and reflect on between sessions. This provides you with a chance to slow down, read just a small portion of scripture each day, and reflect and pray through it. You’ll then have a chance to journal your response to what you’ve read. Use this section to seek God on your own throughout the week. This time at home should begin and end with prayer. Don’t get in a hurry; take enough time to hear God’s direction.
Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Matthew 2:24

Marriage can be a challenge between two people. Steven Curtis Chapman once said, “It’s been a 30 year tug-a-war.” Marriage is both a struggle and a joy. This struggle is amplified when extended family, especially parents, still play a significant role in the marriage. God created marriage as a union between one man and one woman. When that union is heavily influenced by their mothers and fathers, the marriage struggles and is often undermined. In this lesson, you will discover how to leave and cleave as God intended.
Each of us has a story. The events of our life—good, bad, wonderful or challenging—have shaped who we are. God knows your story, and He intends to redeem it—to use every struggle and every joy to ultimately bring you to Himself. When we share our stories with others, we give them the opportunity to see God at work.

When we share our stories, we also realize we are not alone—that we have common experiences and thoughts, and that others can understand what we are going through. Your story can encourage someone else, and telling it can lead to a path of freedom for you and for those you share it with.

Open your group with prayer. This should be a brief, simple prayer, in which you invite God to give you insight as you study. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting, or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion.

Before you start this first meeting, get contact information for every participant. Take time to pass around a copy of the Small Group Roster on page 102, a sheet of paper, or one of you pass your Study Guide, opened to the Small Group Roster. Ask someone to make copies or type up a list with everyone’s information and email it to the group during the week.

Then, begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking.
Activity

In the next 5 minutes, use pipe cleaners/and or play-dough to create a model of your family so that you can introduce them to us! Let your artistic side show!

- What brought you here? What do you hope to get out of this group?

- What’s the hardest thing (furniture, toys, etc.) you’ve ever had to assemble?

- Whether your group is new or ongoing, it’s always important to reflect on and review your values together. On page 94 is a Small Group Agreement with the values we’ve found most useful in sustaining healthy, balanced groups. We recommend that you choose one or two values—ones you haven’t previously focused on or have room to grow in—to emphasize during this study. Choose ones that will take your group to the next stage of intimacy and spiritual health.

- If your group is new, welcome newcomers. Introduce everyone—you may even want to have name tags for your first meeting.

- We recommend you rotate host homes on a regular basis and let the hosts lead the meeting. Studies show that healthy groups rotate leadership. This helps to develop every member’s ability to shepherd a few people in a safe environment. Even Jesus gave others the opportunity to serve alongside Him (Mark 6:30-44). Look at the FAQs in the Appendix for additional information about hosting or leading the group.

- The Small Group Calendar on page 96 is a tool for planning who will host and lead each meeting. Take a few minutes to plan hosts and leaders for your remaining meetings. Don’t skip this important step! It will revolutionize your group.
To be overcome by Your Presence Lord
Watch the Video

Use the Notes space provided to record key thoughts, questions and things you want to remember or follow up on. After watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God’s Story section and direct the discussion among the group. As you go through each of the subsequent sections, ask someone else to read the questions and direct the discussion.
Read Genesis 2:20-25.

The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- What are the drawbacks to cleaving, but not leaving?

- In the video, Pastor Ray mentioned some of the ways people continue to cleave to their parents: physically, relationally, emotionally, financially, or spiritually. Which of these has been an issue in your relationship? If you are not married, have you ever seen this happen in your family?

- What’s the difference between leaving your parents and honoring your parents?

- In the video, Pastor Ray said, “When we multiply one person’s brokenness into another person’s brokenness, we get reduced in marriage to less than we were before we went into the deal.” How has your brokenness impacted your marriage or other relationships?

- How do you prevent the urgent from crowding out the vital when it comes to cleaving to your spouse?
Adam (v.20-25). The Hebrew name “Adam” literally means “man.” Adam’s name and gender are interchanged throughout this passage.

Made into a woman (v. 22). “Made” can also be read as “built.”

Woman (v. 22-23). The Hebrew words for woman (ishshah) and man (ish) sound similar. Adam gives the definition of woman, “taken out of man.”
God wants you to be part of His kingdom—to weave your story into His. That will mean change—to go His way rather than your own. This won’t happen overnight, but it should happen steadily. By starting with small, simple choices, we begin to change our direction. The Holy Spirit helps us along the way—giving us gifts to serve the body, offering us insights into scripture, and challenging us to love not only those around us but those far from God.

In this section, talk about how you will apply the wisdom you’ve learned from the teaching and Bible study. Then think about practical steps you can take in the coming week to live out what you’ve learned.

- What can you do to repair the brokenness in your marriage? If you are not married, what is new to you from Pastor Ray’s teaching?

- If you are married, what is one purposeful time you can create with your spouse this week? This is your assignment for the coming week. Your group will check-in with you next week.
• Take a look at the Circles of Life diagram below and write the names of two or three people you know who need to know Christ. Commit to praying for God’s guidance and an opportunity to share with each of them. Perhaps they would be open to joining the group? Share your lists with the group so you can all be praying for the people you’ve identified.

Share in the fun of this study with other grow groups! Take a group photo of everyone and text that photo to 260-277-0456 or post on social media with the hashtag #MyGrowGroupTPC.
• Also consider someone—in this group or outside it—that you can begin going deeper with in an intentional way. This might be your mom or dad, a cousin, an aunt or uncle, a roommate, a college buddy, or a neighbor. Choose someone who might be open to “doing life” with you at a deeper level and pray about that opportunity.

• This week how will you interact with the Bible? Can you commit to spending time in daily prayer or study of God’s Word? (Use the Daily Devotions section to guide you). Tell the group how you plan to follow Jesus this week, and then, at your next meeting, talk about your progress and challenges.

• Stack your hands just a sports team does in the huddle and commit to taking a risk and going deeper in your group and in your relationships with each other.

• Ask, “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 101.

• Close your meeting with prayer.
If you feel God nudging you to go deeper, take some time before the next meeting to dig into His Word. Explore the Bible passages related to this session’s theme on your own and jot your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. A great way to gain insight on a passage is to read it in several different translations. You may want to use a Bible app or website to compare translations.

**Read Ephesians 5:21-33**

- What does it mean for a husband to love his wife the way Christ loved the church?

- According to verse 33, husbands and wives need different things. What does a wife need from her husband? What does a husband need from his wife? How can this be lived out?

- Submission can be a controversial topic. Who should submit to whom according to Ephesians 5? What is submission? What is it not?

- What’s the result of husbands and wives submitting to each other and to Christ? If only one is willing to submit, how can this break down in a relationship?
DAY 1
Read 1 Peter 4:8.

*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

**Respond:** How well do you love your spouse unconditionally? How well do you love others unconditionally?

DAY 2
Read Colossians 3:19

*Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*

**Respond:** How well do you encourage your spouse? What could you do today?

DAY 3
Read Mark 10:8.

*And the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.*

**Respond:** What is the level of openness and intimacy in your marriage? What could improve this?

DAY 4
Read Song of Solomon 4:9.

*You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart.*

**Respond:** How well do you captivate your spouse? Why or why not?
DAY 5

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Respond: How closely are you united with your spouse? What is getting in the way of your unity? What produces more unity— in your marriage and in your communities?

DAY 6

Use the following space to write any thoughts God has put in your heart and mind about the things we have looked at in this session and during your Daily Devotions time this week.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________
For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Exodus 20:5-6

It may seem odd to think of God as being jealous. But, He is very straightforward in demanding that His people serve Him and no one else. This doesn't mean that God is insecure. God knows what's best for us. Just like you know what's best for your children, God wants us to make choices that will lead to our success and His blessing rather than choosing things that will interfere with our relationship with God and cause us harm.
As we said last week, when we share our stories with others, we give them the opportunity to see God at work. Your story is being shaped, even in this moment, by being part of this group. In fact, few things can shape us more than community.

When we share our stories, we can encourage someone else, and learn. We experience the presence of God as He helps us be brave enough to reveal our thoughts and feelings.

Open your group with prayer. This should be a brief, simple prayer in which you invite God to be with you as you meet. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting, or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion.

Begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking.
Take 5 minutes and walk 100 feet in any direction to find an object that best represents your family of origin! Maybe you grab your cell phone which represents that your family had great communication or a broken phone represents terrible communication. Use your imagination and get creative with your group!

- Have you ever caught yourself saying or doing something your mom or dad would say or do?

- Last week you made a goal to have one purposeful time with your spouse, how did it go? OR what happened? If it didn’t work out last week, then make it a goal for this week.

- In the last session we asked you to write some names in the Circles of Life diagram. Who did you identify as the people in your life who need to meet Jesus? Go back to the Circles of Life diagram on page 23 to help you think of various people you come in contact with on a regular basis; people who need to know Jesus more deeply. Consider ideas for action and make a plan to follow through on one of them this week.

- Pair up with someone in your group. (We suggest that men partner with men and women with women.) This person will be your spiritual partner for the rest of this study. He or she doesn’t have to be your best friend. Instead, this person will simply encourage you to complete the goals you set for yourself during this study. Following through on a resolution is tough when you’re on your own; it makes all the difference to have a partner to cheer you on.
Watch the Video

Use the Notes space provided to record key thoughts, questions, and things you want to remember or follow up on. After you finish watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God’s Story section and direct the discussion among the group. As you go through each of the subsequent sections, ask someone else to read the questions and direct the discussion.
Read Exodus 20:1-6.

And God spoke all these words, saying, 2“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3“You shall have no other gods before me. 4“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5“You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6“but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

- What is your initial reaction to the statement, “punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me?”

- What does this passage say about God?

- What does this passage say to you?

- What is something you inherited from your family that you’re glad you have?

- What is something you inherited from your family that you wished you didn’t have?

- When you think about your family’s history, what did your family go to as a little “g” god? Think about things like finances, lack of truth telling, commitment, pride, envy, anger, rage, or something else.
The land of Egypt…the house of slavery (v.2). The people of Israel were slaves in Egypt for 400 years from approximately 1550-1175 BC.

You shall have no other gods before me (v. 3). This can also be read as “You shall have no other gods besides me.

Carved image or any likeness (v.4). Worship should be directed to God, Himself, and not directed toward a picture, statue, image, or any other created thing depicting God. This does not prohibit people from having religious symbols, painting, statues, or other works of art. The issue comes with worship something created instead of worshiping God.

Jealous (v. 5). God loves His people so much, He will not stand for them to worship anyone or anything else.

Iniquity (v. 5). Sin, serving false gods, or turning one’s back on God.
In this section, talk about how you will apply the wisdom you’ve learned from the teaching and Bible study. Then think about practical steps you can take in the coming week to live out what you’ve learned.

- How can you overcome the issues you inherited from your family to make life better for your children and the generations to come?

- How do you model putting God first to your family?

- How can the family of God help you in reforming the habits and sin that were passed down to you?

- Have you committed your life to Christ? If not, talk to your leader during the meeting about how to receive Christ.

- Here are some simple ways to connect with God. Tell the group which ones you plan to try this week, and talk about your progress and challenges when you meet next time:

  1. Prayer. Commit to personal prayer and
daily connection with God. You may find it helpful to write your prayers in a journal.

2. Daily Devotions. The Daily Devotions provided after each session offer an opportunity to read a short Bible passage five days a week during the course of our study. In our hurry-up world, we often move too quickly through everything—even reading God’s Word! Slow down. Don’t just skim, but take time to read carefully and reflect on the passage. Write down your insights on what you read each day. Copy a portion of Scripture on a card and tape it somewhere in your line of sight, such as your car’s dashboard or the bathroom mirror. Or text it to yourself! Think about it when you sit at red lights or while you’re eating a meal. Reflect on what God is saying to you through these words. On the sixth day summarize what God has shown you throughout the week.

- Ask, “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 101.

- Close your meeting with prayer.
If you feel God is nudging you to go deeper, take some time between now and our next meeting to dig into His Word. Explore the Bible passages related to this session’s theme on your own, jotting your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. Want to go deeper? Select a few verses and try paraphrasing them: writing them in your own words. If you like, share them with the group the next time you meet.

**Read Ephesians 3:13-21.**

- Why does Paul say he does not lose heart? What keeps you from losing heart?

- How does God empower His people to both understand Him and serve Him? How is this demonstrated in your daily life?

- Verse 19 states “to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.” How does God’s love defy logic or knowledge? How is it possible to know something that surpasses knowledge? What does this kind of love mean to you?

- When you think of the generations of your family going forward, what does it mean to you personally that God is able to do abundantly than all you can ask or think? How do you access that kind of power from God going forward? What does that look like practically in your life?
DAY 1
Read Exodus 20:2.

*You shall have no other gods before me.*

**Respond:** What do you ever turn to other than God? Why?

DAY 2
Read Romans 8:15.

*You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*

**Respond:** What does it mean to be able to call God “Daddy?”

DAY 3
Read Proverbs 13:22.

*A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, but the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous.*

**Respond:** What kind of inheritance are you leaving for your children – financially, spiritually, or otherwise?

DAY 4
Read Matthew 22:37.

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*

**Respond:** How do you love God with your whole being?
DAY 5

Read Matthew 6:33.

*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

**Respond:** How can you put God’s kingdom first today?

DAY 6

Use the following space to write any thoughts God has put in your heart and mind about the things we have looked at in this session and during your Daily Devotions time this week.

_________________________________________________________________

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_________________________________________________________________
God, you test the heart and are pleased with integrity.
1 Chronicles 29:17

Did you ever think the value you place on parenting is actually important to your child? It matters. In fact, you are the biggest influence in your child’s life over media, entertainment, or anything else. In addition to taking your role as a parent seriously is being a role model for your children. This doesn’t mean you have to be perfect, but it does mean standing for the right things. Do you stand for the right things?

*SESSION 3
What Kids Need From Adults
PART 1

God, you test the heart and are pleased with integrity.
1 Chronicles 29:17

Did you ever think the value you place on parenting is actually important to your child? It matters. In fact, you are the biggest influence in your child’s life over media, entertainment, or anything else. In addition to taking your role as a parent seriously is being a role model for your children. This doesn’t mean you have to be perfect, but it does mean standing for the right things. Do you stand for the right things?
Open your group with prayer. This should be a brief, simple prayer in which you invite God to be with you as you meet. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting, or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion.

Sharing personal stories builds deeper connections among group members. Begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking.

- As we approach the halfway point on this journey, what has been memorable for you about this study?

- What kind of people do you want your kids to be?

- Sit with your spiritual partner. If your partner is absent or you are new to the group, join with another pair or someone who doesn’t yet have a partner. If you haven’t established your spiritual partnership yet, do it now. (See Share Your Story in Session Two on page 30.)
Watch the Video

Use the Notes space provided to record key thoughts, questions, and things you want to remember or follow up on. After watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God’s Story section and direct the discussion among the group. As you go through each of the subsequent sections, ask someone else to read the questions and direct the discussion.
Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the teaching and stories you just experienced on the video teaching and the Bible passage below.

**Read Deuteronomy 6:5-8.**

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.  
6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.  
7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.  
8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

- How much do you value your parenting? Why? Did you value the ways you were parented? Why or why not?
- How available are you to your children?
- This passage from Deuteronomy demonstrates parents teaching their children in the ordinary course of their lives. How and when can you teach biblical truths to your children as you sit, walk, and lie down?
- What is one thing you could do to make yourself more available and present with your children? Or, if you do not have children, how can you make yourself more available and present with those around you and who look up to you?
- Who was your role model growing up? Why? Are there children or younger people who look up to you as a role model now? How can you serve them?
Love God...with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (v.5). The meaning here is to love God with everything you’ve got – your passions and emotions, your mission and your desires, and your energy and effort.

Teach them diligently to your children (v.7). Parents are to teach their children about spiritual things. Some teaching will involve discussing things. Most teaching comes through setting an example for them.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand... frontlets between your eyes (v.8). God is not commanding parents to literally wearing His commands on their hands and foreheads. The implication is God’s commands will be demonstrated in what parents think and do.
God wants you to be part of His Kingdom—to weave your story into His. That will mean change. It will require you to go His way rather than your own. This won’t happen overnight, but it should happen steadily. By making small, simple choices, we can begin to change our direction. The Holy Spirit helps us along the way, by giving us gifts to serve the body, offering us insights into scripture, and challenging us to love not only those around us but those far from God.

In this section, talk about how you will apply the wisdom you’ve learned in this session.

- What are you currently doing that takes time away from your kids? From your family? From those who look up to you?

- What do you model for your children? What do you model for those around you who may be looking to you?

- What do you think about apologizing to your kids when you blow it? Why?
• How would an apology from your parents have had an impact on you?

• What is the first step you can take in modeling faith for children this week?

• Ask, “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 101.

• Close your meeting with prayer.
Take some time between now and our next meeting to dig into God’s Word. Explore the Bible passages related to this session’s theme. Jot down your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. You may even want to use a Bible website or app to look up commentary on these passages. If you like, share what you learn with the group the next time you meet.

**Read Philippians 3:12-21.**

- According to verse 12, what is the goal of your efforts if it’s not perfection?

- How do you feel about the thought of someone imitating your life? What would you encourage people to imitate? What would you prefer your children not imitate?

- How many of your priorities are set on earthly things?

- Considering that for believers, the future is in heaven. How much effort should you be applying to eternal pursuits like preparing your children for building God’s kingdom?
DAY 1
Read Philippians 4:9.
*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

**Respond:** How confident would you feel in making this statement to your children or others? What is lacking in your example? How can you change that?

DAY 2
Read 1 Timothy 6:11.
*But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.*

**Respond:** How well are you pursuing these things?

DAY 3
Read Colossians 2:6-7.
*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

**Respond:** Are you experiencing the benefits of walking in Christ? Why or why not?

DAY 4
Read 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12.
*You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and*
blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Respond: How well are you directing and encouraging your children to follow God?

DAY 5

Read Titus 2:7-8.

Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

Respond: How can you be a model of good works?

DAY 6

Use the following space to write any thoughts God has put in your heart and mind about the things we have looked at in this session and during your Daily Devotions time this week.
Careless words stab like a sword.
-Proverbs 12:18

As children, we often heard the saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That’s simply not true. Words have a powerful effect on us. Words, especially from a respected adult, shape what we think about ourselves. Some of the limiting or harmful words still affect us today. The words you use are important to the children in your life.
Share Your Story

Open your group with prayer. This should be a brief, simple prayer, in which you invite God to be with you as you meet. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion.

As we have said in previous lessons, sharing our personal stories builds deeper connections among group members. Your story may be exactly what another person needs to hear, and your listening to others’ stories is an act of love and kindness to them—and could very well help them to grow spiritually. Begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking.

- How has someone encouraged you recently?

- Last week, you took on an assignment to be more present and available for your children. How did that go?

- Sit with your spiritual partner. If your partner is absent or if you are new to the group, join with another pair or someone who doesn’t yet have a partner. If you haven’t established your spiritual partnership yet, do it now. Share one prayer request and one thing you want to thank God for. Spend some time praying about what you’ve shared. (See Share Your Story in Session Two on page 30.)

- Take some time for each person to share about how they’re doing on the challenge of inviting the people on the Circles of Life to church or your small group. What specific conversations are you praying about for the weeks to come?
Watch the Video

Use the Notes space provided to record key thoughts, questions, and things you want to remember or follow up on. After you finish watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God’s Story section and direct the discussion among the group. As you go through each of the subsequent sections, ask someone else to read the questions and direct the discussion.
Read Matthew 12:35.

A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.

Read Proverbs 3:11-12.

My child, don’t ignore when the Lord disciplines you and don’t be discouraged when He corrects you for the Lord corrects those He loves just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.

- Who had a positive influence on you as a child?

- In the video Pastor Ray says that a “modifier” is a descriptive word that a kid grows up to embody like “my shy Jill” or “Duane, my demon child.” What modifiers do you use to describe your children? Did you have a modifier that others would use to describe you as a child?

- In the video Pastor Ray said, “When you move past performance and inquire, what your children get is your interest and that’s what they want.” Tell about a time when you got your child’s interest.

- According to the video, parents discipline their children according to the stage they’re in. Preschoolers need control. Elementary kids need direction. Teenagers need less direction. Adult children need consultation. What stage are your kids in? How has your parenting adjusted? Where does your parenting need to adjust?
Treasury (Matthew 12:35). Literally the good things that are in them.

Discipline (Proverbs 3:11-12). Direction or correction. Not punishment.
• Describe one practical personal application from this lesson that you intend to practice this next week.

• Pastor Ray said, “Biblical discipline is guidance not punishment. Kids need clear boundaries.” What boundaries have you established for your children?

• How is your discipline delicate and wise? If it’s not, what do you need to adjust?

• What is one way you can encourage each of your children this week?

• Each of you in the group has different gifts and abilities. And every small group has tasks and roles that need to be done. How could you serve this group—perhaps with hospitality or prayer, by organizing an event, research or study of a topic, by worshipping or inviting new people?

• Spend some time praying
about those you know who might respond to a simple invitation: to come to a church service, to join your small group, or even to just have coffee and talk about spiritual matters. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind people you can pray for.

- Groups grow closer when they serve together. How could your group serve someone in need? You may want to visit a shut-in from your church, provide a meal for a family who is going through difficulty, or give some other practical help to someone in need. If nothing comes to mind, spend some group time praying and asking God to show you who needs your help. Have two or three group members organize a serving project for the group, and then do it!
For Additional Study

Take some time between now and our next meeting to dig into God’s Word. Explore the Bible passages related to this session’s theme on your own. Jot down your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. You may even want to use a Bible website or app to look up commentary on these passages. If you like, share what you learn with the group the next time you meet.

**Read Hebrews 12:3-17.**

- How is God disciplining you these days?

- How does discipline bring about respect?

- When has discipline in your life, either as a child or an adult, seemed painful, yet produced godly character in your life?

- What lack of discipline has produced an obstacle in your relationship with God? What are you willing to sacrifice in order to live in obedience to God?
DAY 1
Read Proverbs 12:6.

_The words of the wicked are like a murderous ambush, but the words of the godly save lives._

**Respond:** Are your words “murderous” or life savers? Why?

DAY 2

_Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it._

**Respond:** How does this verse give you confidence in your parenting?

DAY 3
Read Proverbs 27:12.

_A prudent person foresees the danger ahead and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences._

**Respond:** Are you taking precautions when it comes to guiding your children or are you flying blind? What will happen if you continue parenting the way you are right now? Does this verse apply to other areas of your life as well?

DAY 4
Read Proverbs 2:3-4, 6.
Cry out for insight and understanding. Search for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure... the LORD gives wisdom!

Respond: How intently do you search for insight and understanding?

DAY 5

Read Proverbs 29:17.

Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.

Respond: How are you experiencing the dividends of disciplining your children? What does this verse make you think about “discipline”?

DAY 6

Use the following space to write any thoughts God has put in your heart and mind about the things we have looked at in this session and during your Daily Devotions time this week.

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SESSION 5
What Kids Need From Adults
PART 3

Dear Children, let us stop saying we love each other. Let us show it by our actions. 1 John 3:18

If anyone asked you if you loved your children, you would say, “Of course, I do.” In this session, your group will discuss two important actions in showing love to your children: Showing Affection and Instilling Responsibility. Love isn’t only expressed in words. Appropriate physical touch is huge in a child’s emotional development. And, it’s not loving to do everything for your child. In fact, if you do, you’re handicapping him or her.
Open your group with prayer. This should be a brief, simple prayer, in which you invite God to be with you as you meet. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion.

Telling our personal stories builds deeper connections among group members. Begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking. Sharing our stories requires us to be honest. We can help one another be honest and open by creating a safe place; be sure that your group is one where confidentiality is respected, where there is no such thing as “stupid questions,” where you listen without criticizing one another.

• On a scale of 1 to 10, how affectionate are you? (1 being a statue, and 10 being a hugger).

• Last week you accepted an assignment to encourage your children. How did it go? What did you do?

• Sit with your spiritual partner. If your partner is absent or if you are new to the group, join with another pair or someone who doesn’t yet have a partner. If you haven’t established your spiritual partnership yet, do it now. Answer this question: how has being in this group impacted your personal relationship with God? (See Share Your Story in Session Two on page 30.)
Watch the Video

Use the Notes space provided to record key thoughts, questions, and things you want to remember or follow up on. After you finish watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God’s Story section and direct the discussion among the group. As you go through each of the subsequent sections, ask someone else to read the questions and direct the discussion.
Read Romans 12:10.

*Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other.*

Read Proverbs 27:12.

*A prudent person foresees the danger ahead and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.*

- In the video, Pastor Ray said, “From the moment you were born, you had a skin hunger that needed a healthy, loving touch.” How well do you show your children healthy affection?

- If you have teenagers, do you tend to push them away or show them affection? Why or why not?

- How are you instilling responsibility in your children?

- Pastor Ray said, “If the problem is apathy, let’s stop solving their problems.” What are you doing for your children that they could do for themselves?
Love each other (Romans 12:10). The word “love” used here is from the Greek word “philadelphia” or “brotherly love.”

Genuine affection (Romans 12:10). Here this term gives the idea of “devotion.”

Foresees (Proverbs 27:12). Foresee, here is not used in terms of prophecy, but in using common sense to discern what’s ahead. When the prudent people foresee danger for their children, they take action. They don’t remain passive.
God wants you to be part of His kingdom—to weave your story into His. That will mean change. It will require you to go His way rather than your own. This won’t happen overnight, but it should happen steadily. By making small, simple choices, we can begin to change our direction. The Holy Spirit helps us along the way—giving us gifts to serve the body, offering us insights into Scripture, and challenging us to love not only those around us but those far from God.

In this section, talk about how you will apply the wisdom you’ve learned in this lesson.

- How have you allowed your children to face the consequences for their actions?
- How can you show healthy, loving affection to your children this week?
- What is one area of responsibility that you need to transfer from yourself to your child?
- Spend some time praying
about those you know who might respond to a simple invitation: to come to a church service, to join your small group, or even just to have coffee and talk about spiritual matters. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind people you can pray for.

- A strong group is made up of people who are all being filled up by God, so that they are empowered to love one another. What specific steps will you take this week to connect with God privately, so He can “fill you up?” If you’ve focused on prayer in past weeks, maybe you’ll want to direct your attention to Scripture this week. If you’ve been reading God’s Word consistently, perhaps you’ll want to take it deeper and try memorizing a verse. Tell the group which one you plan to try this week. Then, at your next meeting, talk about your progress and challenges.

- Ask “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 101.

- Close your meeting with prayer.
Take some time between now and our next meeting to dig into God’s Word. Explore the Bible passages related to this session’s theme on your own. Jot down your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. You may even want to use a Bible website or app to look up commentary on these passages. If you like, share what you learn with the group the next time you meet.

Read Ephesians 6:1-10.

• How do you restore someone caught in sin?

• How do you balance carrying each other’s burdens (v. 2) with “each one should carry their own load” (v. 5)?

• Verses 7-8 reveal some harsh consequences or wonderful benefits from what a person sows. If you interfere with your child receiving appropriate consequences, how does it short circuit the law of sowing and reaping? What will your child learn about responsibility?
DAY 1
Read Ephesians 6:4.

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Respond: Does your relationship with your children look more like training or exasperation?

DAY 2
Read Psalm 127:3.

*Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.*

Respond: When you are not cynical or frustrated, how do you genuinely feel about your children?

DAY 3
Read Proverbs 29:15.

*To discipline a child produces wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child.*

Respond: How does discipline produce wisdom? How did you gain wisdom?

DAY 4
Read 1 Peter 4:8.

*Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.*

Respond: When has love covered a multitude of sins in your life?
DAY 5

Read Proverbs 29:17.

*Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.*

**Respond:** How are you teaching your children responsibility?

DAY 6

Use the following space to write any thoughts God has put in your heart and mind about the things we have looked at in this session and during your Daily Devotions time this week.

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But watch out! Be careful never to forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren.

Deuteronomy 4:9

Some of the best memories from childhood don’t always come from well-made plans. In fact, some of the best memories come from the unplanned or accidental things that happen in families. Family traditions give children something they know they can count on as well as great memories of their family. Another gift parents can give their children is a peaceful home. Kids need to know they are safe from the world in the refuge of their home.
Share Your Story

Open your group with prayer. This should be a brief, simple prayer, in which you invite God to be with you as you meet. You can pray for specific requests at the end of the meeting, or stop momentarily to pray if a particular situation comes up during your discussion.

As we have said in previous lessons, sharing our personal stories builds deeper connections among group members. Your story may be exactly what another person needs to hear to encourage or strengthen them. And your listening to others’ stories is an act of love and kindness to them—and could very well help them to grow spiritually. Begin your time together by using the following questions and activities to get people talking.

- What traditions did your family celebrate - traditional or unique to your family?

- Last week the group talked about transferring responsibility to your children. How did it go this week?

- Take time in this final session to connect with your spiritual partner. What has God been showing you through these sessions? What positive changes has your partner noticed in you? Check in with each other about the progress you have made in your spiritual growth during this study. Make plans about whether you will continue your relationship after the group has concluded.

- Take some time for each person to share about how they’ve done with inviting the people on the Circles of Life to church or your small group. What specific conversations are you praying about for the weeks to come?
Watch the Video

Use the Notes space provided to record any key thoughts, questions, and things you want to remember or follow up on. After you finish watching the video, have someone read the discussion questions in the Hear God’s Story section and direct the discussion among the group. As you go through each of the subsequent sections, ask someone else to read the questions and direct the discussion.
Read Deuteronomy 4:9

*But watch out! Be careful never to forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren.*

Read Colossians 1:20

*By [Jesus] God reconciled everything to Himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of His blood on the cross.*

- How do you create memories with your kids?

- In the video, Pastor Ray said, “You can redeem negative memories by making positive memories in the life of your kids.” How can you make your children’s lives different from your childhood?

- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being a war zone and 10 being heavenly, how peaceful is your home?

- What creates a lack of peace in your home? Why?

- What is one thing you can start doing or stop doing that will bring more peace into your home?
The things your eyes have seen (Deut. 4:9). In context of the chapter, these things include standing at the foot of Mount Sinai, when Moses brought down the 10 Commandments.

Reconciled everything to himself (Col. 1:20). The true path to peace is possible through Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross. Any person or any home who desires peace must first start with making peace with God.
How has God changed your story during this six-week study? What new things is He asking you to do? What truth has transformed your heart? Think about specific steps you want to take to live a new story, to walk more closely with God so you can be part of His story, engaged in His kingdom.

- How is God’s presence acknowledged in your home?

- In the video, Pastor Ray said, “We don’t have a shot at creating a peaceful home without being connected to the prince of peace, Jesus.” Where are you in your relationship with Jesus?

- Pastor Ray gave several examples of ways families can create memories including a Picture Night, a Vacation, an Adventure, a missions trip, escape rooms, paintballing, golf ball hunting, and so forth. What is one adventure you can have or at least begin planning this week?

**ACTIVITY**

- In the last 6 weeks, Pastor Ray has covered 8 things that kids need from the adults in their lives. Which of the 8 things do you need the most work on? In the back of your book, there is a top secret envelope. You may open the envelope now! Follow the directions inside the envelope.

**DO NOT OPEN UNTIL WEEK 6**
• What would be one lasting item of value you are taking away from this study?

• As this is the last meeting in this study, take some time to celebrate the work God has done in the lives of group members. Have each person in the group share some step of growth they have noticed in another member. (In other words, no one will talk about themselves. Instead, affirm others in the group.) Make sure each person gets affirmed and noticed and celebrated—whether the steps they’ve made are large or small.

• If your group still needs to make decisions about continuing to meet after this session, have that discussion now. Talk about what you will study, who will lead, and when you will meet.

• Review your Small Group Agreement on page 94 and evaluate how well you met your goals. Discuss any changes you want to make as you move forward. If you plan to continue to meeting, and your group starts a new study, this is a great time to take on a new role or change roles of service in your group. What new role will you take on? If you are uncertain, maybe your group members have some ideas for you. Remember you aren’t making a lifetime commitment to the new role; it will only be for a few weeks. Maybe someone would like to share a role with you if you don’t feel ready to serve solo.

• Close by praying for your prayer requests and take a couple of minutes to review the praises you have recorded over the past five weeks on the Prayer and Praise Report on page 101. Spend some time thanking God for all He’s done in your group during this study.
Explore the Bible passages related to this session’s theme on your own, jotting your reflections in a journal or in this study guide. You may even want to use a Bible website or app to look up commentary on these passages.

**Read John 16:32-33.**

- How has the world caused trouble for you and your family?
- How does faith in God sustain peace during troublesome times?
- How is peace possible in a troubled world?
- How do you create a lack of peace in your home? What can you do to change that?
DAY 1
Read Proverbs 15:13

*A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.*

**Respond:** Are you seeing more cheerful faces or crushed spirits in your family? How can you bring more cheer into your family’s life?

DAY 2

*I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.*

**Respond:** How much are you enjoying your life? If you’re not, what’s in your way?

DAY 3
Read John 10:10.

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

**Respond:** Are you experiencing an abundant life? Why or why not?

DAY 4
Read Romans 12:18.

*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*
Respond: Who is hard for you to live in peace with? Have you done everything possible? What else should you do?

DAY 5
Read Romans 8:6.

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Respond: What is your “mindset?” What is it producing in your home?

DAY 6
Use the following space to write any thoughts God has put in your heart and mind about the things we have looked at in this session and during your Daily Devotions time this week.

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*Appendices*

Resources to make your Growth Group experience even better!
Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT DO WE DO ON THE FIRST NIGHT OF OUR GROUP?
Like all fun things in life—have a party! A “get to know you” coffee, dinner, or dessert is a great way to launch a new study. You may want to review the Group Agreement (pages 94-95) and share the names of a few friends you can invite to join you. But most importantly, have fun before your study time begins.

WHERE DO WE FIND NEW MEMBERS FOR OUR GROUP?
This can be troubling, especially for new groups that have only a few people or for existing groups that lose a few people along the way. We encourage you to pray with your group and then brainstorm a list of people from work, church, your neighborhood, your children’s school, family, the gym, and so forth. Then have each group member invite several of the people on his or her list. Another good strategy is to ask church leaders to make an announcement or allow a bulletin insert.

No matter how you find members, it’s vital that you stay on the lookout for new people to join your group. All groups tend to go through healthy attrition—the result of moves, releasing new leaders, ministry opportunities, and so forth—and if the group gets too small, it could be at risk of shutting down. If you and your group stay open, you’ll be amazed at the people God sends your way. The next person just might become a friend for life. You never know!

HOW LONG WILL THIS GROUP MEET?
Most groups meet weekly for at least their first six weeks, but every other week can work as well. We strongly recommend that the group meet for the first six months on a weekly basis if at all possible. This allows for continuity, and if people miss a meeting they aren’t gone for a whole month.

At the end of this study, each group member may decide if he or she wants to continue on for another study. Some groups launch relationships for years to come, and others are stepping-stones into another group experience. Either way, enjoy the journey.

CAN WE DO THIS STUDY ON OUR OWN?
Absolutely! This may sound crazy, but one of the best ways to do this study is not with a full house but with a few friends. You may choose to gather with
another couple who would enjoy some relational time (perhaps going to the movies or having a quiet dinner) and then walking through this study. Jesus will be with you even if there are only two of you (Matthew 18:20).

WHAT IF THIS GROUP IS NOT WORKING FOR US?
You’re not alone! This could be the result of a personality conflict, life stage difference, geographical distance, level of spiritual maturity, or any number of things. Relax. Pray for God’s direction, and at the end of this six-week study, decide whether to continue with this group or find another. You don’t typically buy the first car you look at or marry the first person you date, and the same goes with a group. However, don’t bail out before the six weeks are up—God might have something to teach you. Also, don’t run from conflict or prejudge people before you have given them a chance. God is still working in your life, too!

WHO IS THE LEADER?
Most groups have an official leader. But ideally, the group will mature and members will rotate the leadership of meetings. We have discovered that healthy groups rotate hosts/leaders and homes on a regular basis. This model ensures that all members grow, give their unique contribution, and develop their gifts. This study guide and the Holy Spirit can keep things on track even when you rotate leaders. Christ has promised to be in your midst as you gather. Ultimately, God is your leader each step of the way.

HOW DO WE HANDLE THE CHILDCARE NEEDS IN OUR GROUP?
Very carefully. Seriously, this can be a sensitive issue. We suggest that you empower the group to openly brainstorm solutions. You may try one option that works for a while and then adjust over time. Our favorite approach is for adults to meet in the living room or dining room and to share the cost of a babysitter (or two) who can watch the kids in a different part of the house. This way, parents don’t have to be away from their children all evening when their children are too young to be left at home. A second option is to use one home for the kids and a second home (close by or a phone call away) for the adults. A third idea is to rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson or care for the children either in the same home or in another home nearby. This can be an incredible blessing for kids. Finally, the most common solution is to decide that you need to have a night to invest in your spiritual lives individually or as a couple and to make your own arrangements for childcare. No matter what decision the group makes, the best approach is to dialogue openly about both the problem and the solution.
Small Group Agreement

OUR PURPOSE
To provide a predictable environment where participants experience authentic community and spiritual growth.

OUR VALUES

Group Attendance
To give priority to the group meeting. We will call or email if we will be late or absent. (Completing the Group Calendar on page 96 will minimize this issue.)

Safe Environment
To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved. (Please, no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes.)

Respect Differences
To be gentle and gracious to fellow group members with different spiritual maturity, personal opinions, temperaments, or “imperfections.” We are all works in progress.

Confidentiality
To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group, and to avoid sharing improper information about those outside the group.

Encouragement for Growth
To be not just takers but givers of life. We want to spiritually multiply our life by serving others with our God-given gifts.

Shared Ownership
To remember that every member is a minister and to ensure that each attender will share a small team role or responsibility over time.
**Rotating Hosts/Leaders and Homes**

To encourage different people to host the group in their homes and to rotate the responsibility of facilitating each meeting. (See the Group Calendar on page 96.)

**OUR EXPECTATIONS**

- Refreshments/mealtimes ____________________________
- Childcare ____________________________
- When we will meet (day of week) ____________________________
- Where we will meet (place) ____________________________
- We will begin at (time) _______ and end at ____________________________
- We will do our best to have some or all of us attend a worship service together. Our primary worship service time will be ____________________________
- Date of this agreement ____________________________
- Date we will review this agreement again ____________________________
- Who (other than the leader) will review this agreement at the end of this study ____________________________
Group Calendar

Planning and calendaring can help ensure the greatest participation at every meeting. At the end of each meeting, review this calendar. Be sure to include a regular rotation of host homes and leaders, and don’t forget birthdays, socials, church events, holidays, and mission/ministry projects.

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**Spiritual Partners**

Briefly check in each week and write down your personal plans and progress targets for the next week (or even for the next few weeks). This could be done before or after the meeting, on the phone, through an e-mail message, or even in person from time to time.

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Memory Verses
Clip & Review
SESSION ONE
Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Matthew 2:24)

SESSION TWO
For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:5-6)

SESSION THREE
God, you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. (1 Chronicles 29:17, NIV)

SESSION FOUR
Careless words stab like a sword. (Proverbs 12:18, NCV)

SESSION FIVE
Dear Children, let us stop saying we love each other. Let us show it by our actions. (1 John 3:18)

SESSION SIX
But watch out! Be careful never to forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren. (Deuteronomy 4:9, NLT)
## Prayer and Praise Requests

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Small Group Leaders

Key resources to help your leadership experience be the best it can be.
Hosting an Open House

If you’re starting a new group, try planning an “open house” before your first formal group meeting. Even if you have only two to four core members, it’s a great way to break the ice and to consider prayerfully who else might be open to joining you over the next few weeks. You can also use this kick-off meeting to hand out study guides, spend some time getting to know each other, discuss each person’s expectations for the group and briefly pray for each other. A simple meal or good desserts always make a kick-off meeting more fun.

After people introduce themselves and share how they ended up being at the meeting (you can play a game to see who has the wildest story!), have everyone respond to a few icebreaker questions:

- What is your favorite family vacation?
- What is one thing you love about your church/our community?
- What are three things about your life growing up that most people here don’t know?

Next, ask everyone to tell what he or she hopes to get out of the study. You might want to review the Small Group Agreement and talk about each person’s expectations and priorities.

Finally, set an open chair (maybe two) in the center of your group and explain that it represents someone who would enjoy or benefit from this group but who isn’t here yet. Ask people to pray about inviting someone to join the group over the next few weeks. Hand out postcards and have everyone write an invitation or two. Don’t worry about ending up with too many people; you can always have one discussion circle in the living room and another in the dining room after you watch the lesson. Each group could then report prayer requests and progress at the end of the session.

You can skip this kick-off meeting if your time is limited, but you’ll experience a huge benefit if you take the time to connect with each other in this way.
Leading for the First Time

- **Sweaty palms are a healthy sign.** The Bible says God is gracious to the humble. Remember who is in control; the time to worry is when you’re not worried. Those who are soft in heart (and sweaty palmed) are those whom God is sure to speak through.

- **Seek support.** Ask your leader, co-leader, or close friend to pray for you and prepare with you before the session. Walking through the study will help you anticipate potentially difficult questions and discussion topics.

- **Bring your uniqueness to the study.** Lean into who you are and how God wants you to uniquely lead the study.

- **Prepare. Prepare. Prepare.** Go through the session several times. If you are using the DVD, listen to the teaching segment and Leadership Lifter. Consider writing in a journal or fasting for a day to prepare yourself for what God wants to do. Don’t wait until the last minute to prepare.

- **Ask for feedback so you can grow.** Perhaps in an email or on cards handed out at the study, have everyone write down three things you did well and one thing you could improve on. Don’t get defensive. Instead, show an openness to learn and grow.

- **Prayerfully consider launching a new group.** This doesn’t need to happen overnight, but God’s heart is for this to take place over time. Not all Christians are called to be leaders or teachers, but we are all called to be “shepherds” of a few someday.

- **Share with your group what God is doing in your heart.** God is searching for those whose hearts are fully his. Share your trials and victories. We promise that people will relate.

- **Prayerfully consider whom you would like to pass the baton to next week.** It’s only fair. God is ready for the next member of your group to go on the faith journey you just traveled. Make it fun, and expect God to do the rest.
Leadership Training 101

Congratulations! You have responded to the call to help shepherd Jesus’ flock. There are few other tasks in the family of God that surpass the contribution you will be making. As you prepare to lead, whether it is one session or the entire series, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind. We encourage you to read these and review them with each new discussion leader before he or she leads.

1. **Remember that you are not alone.** God knows everything about you, and He knew that you would be asked to lead your group. Remember that it is common for all good leaders to feel that they are not ready to lead. Moses, Solomon, Jeremiah and Timothy were all reluctant to lead. God promises, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Whether you are leading for one evening, for several weeks, or for a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.

2. **Don’t try to do it alone.** Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy leadership team. If you can enlist a co-leader to help you lead the group, you will find your experience to be much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is call and ask people to help. You’ll probably be surprised at the response.

3. **Just be yourself.** If you won’t be you, who will? God wants you to use your unique gifts and temperament. Don’t try to do things exactly like another leader; do them in a way that fits you! Just admit it when you don’t have an answer, and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it, and you’ll sleep better at night!

4. **Prepare for your meeting ahead of time.** Review the session and the leader’s notes, and write down your responses to each question. Pay special attention to exercises that ask group members to do something other than engage in discussion. These exercises will help your group live what the Bible teaches, not just talk about it. Be sure you understand how an exercise works, and bring any necessary supplies (such as paper and pens) to your meeting. If the exercise employs one of the items in the appendix, be sure to look over that item so you’ll know how it works. Finally, review “Outline for Each Session” so you’ll remember the purpose of each section in the study.
5. **Pray for your group members by name.** Before you begin your session, go around the room in your mind and pray for each member by name. You may want to review the prayer list at least once a week. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of every person uniquely. Expect God to lead you to whomever He wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead!

6. **When you ask a question, be patient.** Someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the question. Keep in mind, if silence doesn’t bother you, it won’t bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple “thanks” or “good job.” Then ask, “How about somebody else?” or “Would someone who hasn’t shared like to add anything?” Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren’t ready to say, pray or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time.

7. **Provide transitions between questions.** When guiding the discussion, always read aloud the transitional paragraphs and the questions. Ask the group if anyone would like to read the paragraph or Bible passage. Don’t call on anyone, but ask for a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

8. **Break up into smaller groups each week or they won’t stay.** If your group has more than seven people, we strongly encourage you to have the group gather sometimes in discussion circles of three or four people during the Hear God’s Story or Change Your Story sections of the study. With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they’re learning and ultimately get more out of it. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member. It can also help people feel more loved in your group. When you gather again at the end of the section, you can have one person summarize the highlights from each circle. Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud will feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won’t take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests. People are more willing to pray in small circles if they know that the whole group will hear all the prayer requests.
9. **Rotate facilitators weekly.** At the end of each meeting, ask the group who should lead the following week. Let the group help select your weekly facilitator. You may be perfectly capable of leading each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to lead. You can use the Small Group Calendar to fill in the names of all meeting leaders at once if you prefer.

10. **One final challenge (for new or first-time leaders):**
Before your first opportunity to lead, look up each of the five passages listed below. Read each one as a devotional exercise to help yourself develop a shepherd’s heart. Trust us on this one. If you do this, you will be more than ready for your first meeting.

   Matthew 9:36
   1 Peter 5:2-4
   Psalm 23
   Ezekiel 34:11-16
   1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12