

# SCHOOL OF INFLUENCE

WHERE ARE YOU ENROLLED?



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# Essentials of Life Groups

We **GROW** in Life Groups

Four key ingredients should be a part of every Life Group:

**The Word of God:** Whether we study straight from the Bible or study the Bible through devotional books/guides, we are committed to GROWING from the Word of God in Christ.

**Growth:** We are here because we want to GROW and see our lives transformed to be more like Christ. As part of this GROWTH we commit to pray for each other. We seek to encourage each other and hold each other accountable in the steps of our discipleship process: **CONNECT · GROW · SHARE.**

**Acceptance:** As members of this Life Group we seek to accept each other unconditionally as Christ does, seeking to build strong friendships rooted in Him.

**Confidentiality:** Everything shared in this group stays with this group. Gossip and slander are unacceptable. Like Christ, we seek the best for each other.

# How to Use this Book

Each session in this booklet corresponds to the video teaching you will be watching with your Group. This format is set up for groups that meet for 1 ½ hours. You can adjust the times depending on the time limits for your group. Each week the format will be as follows...

## **Welcome, Introduction and Opening Prayer** *(10-15 Min.)*

We encourage you to spend a few minutes getting to know each other and reviewing the Essentials of Life Groups.

## **Video** *(20 Min.)*

Watch the video teaching for the week and write down anything that you find particularly relevant.

## **Discussion Questions** *(30-40 Min.)*

We know that you might not be able to answer all of the questions. But spend some time discussing the content of the video and the connected Bible verses.

## **Closing Prayer** *(10-15 Min.)*

Please take time to note any praise reports and prayer requests. Please keep these in prayer during the week.



# INFLUENCE/O



# 1



## Welcome

Introduction & Icebreakers



## Prayer



## Video

The apostle Paul's words are packed with relevance to us today. "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed." Paul's concern is with form! The form of the pattern of this world versus the form of faith. Paul doesn't say that we shouldn't conform. To be human is to choose patterns, models, schools of thought and influence that provide meaning in life. The question is not whether you should conform, but rather to what should you conform. In Romans 8:29 Paul says that we should conform to the likeness of Jesus – Conformity must be patterned after Jesus Christ. – that's what it means to be enrolled in God's school!

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you in this week's video lesson? Why?

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2. What are some of the influences in your life?

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3. What influences your thoughts and actions the most?

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4. What lessons of God's grace and truth do you need to review and turn to again and again?

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5. Have you ever thought about how influential your life is?

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6. What lessons are you teaching with your life?

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## INFLUENCE OF THE WORD

1. Read Romans 12:2. What are some of the patterns of the world we may unconsciously conform to? What practical steps can we take to unlearn them? Look at Colossians 3:16 and Hebrews 10:24-25.

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2. Read Matthew 13:3-8 and 18-23 about the parable of the four soils. Can you identify with any of the soils? What happens when we become focused on the cares of the world (verse 22)? Take another look at verse 23. What must happen before we bear fruit? How can a Life Group aid in this?

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3. Read 1 John 2:15-17 and discuss what this looks like in the life of a Christ follower.

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For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. **Romans 8:29** NIV

4. Pastor Hayes read from Romans 8:29. Paul says that God conforms us to the likeness of Jesus. What does that mean?

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# DEEPER INFLUENCE

1. Re-read **Romans 12:2**. Renewing means that we must do two things. First we must unlearn the corrupt ways of the world – hurt, doubt, fear, lust, self-centeredness, bitterness etc. We must confess and repent and give it to God. After we have “put off” the sins of the world, then we can “put on” the mind of Christ. In this way we renew when we exchange one way of thinking for another. How do we get God’s thinking in us? How would regular participation in a Life Group help to “put on” the mind of Christ?
2. Dr. Ciocchi talked about how many Christians today accept the notion that faith is private. Do you see this relevant in your family life, social life, and work life? While sharing the Gospel with our words is essential, what other ways can you be a Christian witness? **Matthew 5:14-16, 2 Corinthians 5:20**

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*(optional - to do or think about during the week)*

- Who has been a major spiritual influence in your life and in what way? If possible, send them a thank you note.
- What does it mean to you to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind”?
- What has the World’s School taught you that you have a hard time unlearning? What teachings from God’s school do you have a hard time embracing? Pray to God and ask Him to renew your mind in these areas.

### prayer requests

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# MONEY



# 2



## Welcome

Introduction & Icebreakers



## Prayer



## Video

I'm constantly amazed by the amount of pain that goes on regarding money and finance in our lives. Paul writes to Timothy, "But Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into this world and we shall certainly bring nothing out." [1 Timothy 6:6-7] Contentment is illusive. With a more - more - more mentality, it is impossible. We never get enough, ever, and that leads us away from contentment. God desires for us to have a sense of contentment with our lives and to live lives that reflect his generous spirit.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you in this week's video lesson? Why?

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2. How do you view money? Possessions? Resources? When it comes to these, have you found yourself listening to the world more than God?

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3. What influences your thoughts and actions the most when it comes to money, possessions and resources?

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4. What are the most common material temptations we face today? How do we differentiate our needs from our wants?

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5. What lessons are you teaching with your life in terms of stewardship and tithing?

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## INFLUENCE OF THE WORD

1. How do you define stewardship? What does stewardship mean to you? See Genesis 1:26-31 and Psalm 8.

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“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

**MALACHI 3:10** NIV

2. Look up Malachi 3:6-10. Have you seen this work? How could living this way affect your attitude toward giving? See 2 Corinthians 9:6-12 and Matthew 6:19-21.

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3. Sometimes, the pressures of the world make us become anxious and concerned about our financial affairs. How can you not conform to these pressures? See Matthew 6:25-34 and Hebrews 13:5-8.

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# DEEPER INFLUENCE

1. God calls us to give from our first fruits rather than from what is left over. Why do you think He does this?
2. How does the following statement, “all this stuff isn’t yours in the first place, God made it for you to manage” impact your lifestyle?

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

**ISAIAH 55:8-9 NIV**

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*(optional - to do or think about during the week)*

Consider God’s impressive track record with using unusual means to accomplish His purpose: He saved mankind by instructing Noah to build a large boat; He chose a young shepherd boy, David, to slay a mighty warrior with a rock; the walls of Jericho fell down when He instructed his people to march around the city and blow trumpets. These events and many more cannot be explained by the world. Clearly His ways are different from the world’s ways – Read Isaiah 55:8-9. Why would we expect his ways with money to be any different? A rule of thumb for financial success is to spend 80% of your income, save 10%, and give 10%. Reflect this week and see how the Spirit leads you to apply this in your life.

### prayer requests

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# WORK



# 3



## Welcome

Introduction & Icebreakers



## Prayer



## Video

The priesthood of all believers, to us, simply means that we are called to be God's first, and then we are to look to the responsibilities God has given to us here on earth. Only when we understand that first and foremost, we are called to be a Child of God, and everything else second, will we be the priest God desires for us to be. As a child of God our first call is to put God first in our life. We are not to find a place for God or carve in some God time, or try to squeeze Him in, we need to put Him first. We need to order our lives around his word, around prayer, around worship, around doing the work of sharing his love.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you in this week's video lesson? Why?

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2. When you think of your work, and the different roles you have in life, how do you view them? What comes first? What comes last?

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3. What lessons of God's grace and truth do you need to review and turn to again and again as you consider your various callings?

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4. Have you ever thought about how influential your life is? In what way is your work place a mission field?

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5. What lessons are you teaching with your attitude toward work?

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6. When life gets busy, what is one way you're able to re-focus your attention and priority on God?

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## INFLUENCE OF THE WORD

1. Look up Psalm 104:23 and Genesis 3:19. It is apparent that we have to work in this life. In Colossians 3:23, Paul says "Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men." What are ways that you can work for the Lord rather than others?

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2. Laziness is a serious sin against God, who created us and gave us talents and abilities. See 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. How can we avoid laziness, wasted time, disorder and lack of discipline in our daily lives?

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And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good

2 THESSALONIANS 3:13 NIV

3. Not all of us can sing praises or share Christ at work. What is the one thing each Christian can do while working?  
See 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18.

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# DEEPER INFLUENCE

Read 1 Peter 2:9. How does your God's call to you as part of a royal priesthood impact your life and the lives of those around you?

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 PETER 2:9 NIV

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*(optional - to do or think about during the week)*

Each person has been given at least one Spiritual gift. They are listed in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. Spend some time this week reflecting on your gifts. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal how you can use your gifts for His kingdom.

### prayer requests

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# GREATNESS



# 4



## Welcome

Introduction & Icebreakers



## Prayer



## Video

You are a child of the most high; made in His image. There is much work to be done. But if you want to be great, if you seek true greatness, Jesus teaches you that you must become a servant. You must look at greatness in the way that it was done by Him. Who, as the apostle Paul put it, "Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave"

*[Philippians 2:6 -7a]*

This radical way of living, turns everything on its head.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you in this week's video lesson? Why?

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2. What do you think about greatness? Do you want to be great?

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3. How does the world portray greatness?

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4. What lessons of God's grace and truth do you need to review and turn to again and again?

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5. What lessons are you teaching with your life?

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6. Thinking about people in your own life, who do you admire? Why do you admire them? Is it because they wanted you to admire them or was it because they did something great and worthy of admiration?

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# INFLUENCE OF THE WORD

1. In Genesis 1:26, Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” We may find great strength and comfort in knowing that we are made in God’s image. Read Philippians 2:1-11 and discuss Christ’s humility as opposed to the world’s pursuits of greatness. What are some practical ways you can show humility?

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2. Read Genesis 3:1-6 to learn about what many have described as the oldest sin. Take a close look at verse 5. Was Eve trying to elevate her status? Who was she trying to be like? How can we overcome the temptation of pride?

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

MARK 9:35 NIV

3. Read Mark 9:33-37. Describe a time when you witnessed a simple act of service that inspired you.

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# DEEPER INFLUENCE

1. We cannot do anything to earn our salvation. Jesus paid our debt “in full” by shedding His blood on the cross. Attempting to add anything to what He has already done is blasphemy. How can we ensure our acts of service are a response to this wonderful gift and not an attempt to be good enough to earn our salvation?
2. As human beings, we desire approval - in your life whose approval has been important to you? Why?
3. What have you found is the most difficult part of being a servant?

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*(optional - to do or think about during the week)*

The world, my flesh, seeks recognition and approval. Hidden service is good because it allows me to realize that God’s approval is all I need. This week do a secret act of service. You can mow your neighbor’s lawn when they are not home, or anonymously pay someone’s bill, be creative. Here’s the hard part, tell no one! Do it without the possibility that anyone other than God will know what you did.

### prayer requests

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# THE BODY



# 5



## Welcome

Introduction & Icebreakers



## Prayer



## Video

We have been purchased with a price. Paul writes, “You are not your own, you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

*[1 Corinthians 6:20]*

None other than Christ himself has given his body for yours. Jesus didn't merely die a spiritual death, he physically died. In his death he reclaimed you and your body. Your body belongs to God as does your entire being.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you in this week's video lesson? Why?

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2. What influences your thoughts and actions the most when it comes to sex and the body?

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3. What lessons from the world about sex and the body do you need to unlearn?

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4. What lessons of God's grace and truth do you need to review and turn to again and again?

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5. What lessons about sex and the body are you teaching with your life?

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## INFLUENCE OF THE WORD

1. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. How does God's word help us think about the body? Who is the body meant for? Is your body your own? Why are sexual sins so damaging? Verses 19-20 talk about the fact that we have been bought at a price. Because of that, we are to honor God with our bodies. Why is this both freeing and demanding?

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Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20 NIV

2. How we relate to each other is more about love than about sex. Sex is a great gift to express love, within marriage. When loving others is our priority, we honor God and each other. Read 1 Corinthians 13 out loud in your group. Now reread verses 4-7 silently and insert your name instead of the word love. Discuss the thoughts and lessons that come to mind as you inserted your name in the verses.

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3. Reread 1 Corinthians 13:11. This verse describes the opposite of love. How are childish ways the opposite of love? How can we love better as we mature and put childish ways behind us?

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# DEEPER INFLUENCE

1. What does fleeing from sexual immorality look like in our culture? How should we react to TV or popular music with sexually explicit content? How does it affect us?
2. Rehearse in your group how you should speak to your child regarding sexuality? Should you sermonize? What's your tone? How does the gospel predominate in any conversation regarding sexuality?
3. Google search sexual addiction or jump on [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). How does this information inform our decisions regarding sexuality?
4. Has your view of sexuality changed as our culture has become more open, permissive and accepting of sex outside of marriage?

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*(optional - to do or think about during the week)*

In an adult confirmation class, the Pastor was teaching on the sixth commandment. He told a story about how we can teach our pets/dogs not to make messes in the house. If we can teach something so basic to an animal that doesn't even speak our language, we certainly can teach our children about God's principles of sexual relationships and to consider our bodies as God's temple.

### prayer requests

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# FAITH



# 6



## Welcome

Introduction & Icebreakers



## Prayer



## Video

St. Paul points out that this faith in Jesus is for all people. God wants all to return to a state of righteousness – to how they ought to be! He has called us to bring that message of hope to the whole world. There's a whole sea of people out there... drowning in their sins... drowning in brokenness... drowning in unrighteousness... drowning in an existence that is not as it ought to be... God has called us to action... to throw them the life preserver – to give them Jesus! To save them... to bring them a righteousness that comes from faith in Jesus!

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you in this week's video lesson? Why?

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2. What is your definition of faith? Is it in line with God's definition?

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3. What lessons from the world regarding faith do you need to unlearn?

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4. Have you ever thought about how influential your life of faith is?

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## INFLUENCE OF THE WORD

1. One theologian says, "Faith is not a naturally human power that we are to offer to God. Faith is the instrument by which believers receive God's blessings." Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Have you ever made faith into a work?

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2. Read Luke 17:5-6. Share a time when God increased your faith.

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3. Read James 2:19. Even the demons believe in God. We come across many people who state they believe in God, but as this verse reads even the demons believe there is a God and shudder. What is true faith? What do we entrust ourselves to and where do we find our identity? Where does the world tell us to put our faith?

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He did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

ROMANS 3:26 NIV

4. Read Romans 3:20-31 – Paul states that righteousness is given through faith and that faith is found in Jesus alone. Despite what the world says, faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to exist as we ought to be and as we were created to be. Do you find it easy or difficult to hold on to this truth? In what ways does the world's school try convince us otherwise? Discuss with the group.

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# DEEPER INFLUENCE

1. How are you personally able to keep your faith in Christ and His word when times are difficult, chaotic or traumatic?
2. Pastor Mike used the analogy that life is like being in the middle of the ocean. If you have faith in yourself, or in an anchor, shark, or anything other than a life saving device you will drown. We live in a world that says there are many different faiths. Discuss this ocean analogy in your group. How can we show people that only faith in Jesus will save them?

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*(optional - to do or think about during the week)*

Hebrews 11-12:2 is often called the faith chapter. Read this to give you confidence that God is trustworthy, all His promises have been kept, and without fear we can invite the Holy Spirit to influence us as shining lights in the world, not of the world.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Hebrews 11:1-3 NIV

### prayer requests

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# LEADER NOTES

On all Discussion Questions: Pick one of the opening questions to discuss with your group. Beginning groups might want to answer all of them. Groups that want to go deeper may want to jump straight to the Influence of The Word questions and deeper questions.

As you work through the questions with your group, watch your time and be sure to discuss some or all of the Bible questions section.

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## Session 1:

### Opening Questions:

Pick one question to discuss with your group.

### Influence of The Word - suggested answers:

*Answer as many as you have time for.*

1. The next five lessons will talk about the world's patterns on money, work, greatness, sex and faith. Practically speaking, unlearning the lessons of the world first involves being aware of their influence on us. Also, spending more time being influenced by God helps us to conform to God and his Word. Worship, Life Groups (Hebrews 10:24-25), sharing Christ, reading/studying the Bible (see Col 3:16) all contribute to unlearning the world's lessons.

2. Let people talk about the soils. If we focus on the cares of this world we don't bear fruit. If we hear the Word and understand it, that will produce fruit in our lives, for the benefit of ourselves and others. A Life Group provides healthy soil so we can grow, thrive and produce fruit!

3. As Christians, we continually grow by seeking God's will instead of our own. Knowing that the world and its desires will pass away helps us to realize that our cravings, lusts, and boastings will never really fulfill us.

4. Ultimately when Jesus comes again we will conform to Jesus' likeness in that just as he has been raised from the dead so too will we. However, here and now, through God's Word we grow and mature and become more like Christ – thinking and acting like Him and His Word.

## **Deeper Questions:**

1. Getting God's thinking into us happens by coming to church to worship, reading the Word daily, talking about the Word with others and living out that Word in our lives. Studying the Word with other believers and receiving encouragement and challenge from them helps us mature as believers.
2. Living an upright and moral life, loving your family, acts of service, giving generously to church and other organizations are all ways to let your faith be known in the World. We are God's ambassadors and he has chosen to change the World through us, his people.

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## **Session 2:**

### **Opening Questions:**

Pick one question to discuss with your group.

### **Influence of The Word - suggested answers:**

1. Stewardship is managing all of God's creation and all that he has entrusted to us. We are managing His possessions, not ours.
2. God wants us to give generously. It is good for our hearts to give. Jesus cares about our hearts.
3. When we seek the kingdom of God first, everything else falls in to place. The greatest riches man can experience is the presence of Christ with us forever.

## **Deeper Questions:**

1. Giving to God first demonstrates where are our priorities are. It helps our hearts to give to Him first.
2. Open ended question.



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## Session 3:

### Opening Questions:

Pick one question to discuss with your group.

### Influence of The Word - suggested answers:

1. It is important to remember that we can serve God by serving others. Our example of being a faithful worker testifies to who God is.
2. Realizing that God desires us to work hard is the first step. Also, we do well to remember that God has redeemed and renews us when we fail at this.
3. Pray and give thanks to God.

### Deeper Questions:

On the one hand it should remind us that we are part of God's great work in redeeming humanity. On the other hand, it moves us beyond ourselves to bringing the light of Jesus to those in darkness.

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## Session 4:

### Opening Questions:

Pick one question to discuss with your group.

### Influence of The Word - suggested answers:

1. Christ's humility means salvation for us. Discuss ways that you can seek the best for others at home, at work, in your neighborhood, etc.
2. Eve was trying to be like God, pursuing a greatness that she could never attain. Overcoming pride comes with a humility that sees how sinful we are and how gracious our Lord is in Jesus Christ. From there we can do truly great things by serving others.
3. Children were regarded as nothing in ancient times, mere property really. The fact that Jesus welcomed them and elevated their status shows a true servant's heart. Think of a time when someone else has done something so counter-cultural yet so loving and servant oriented. We may think of people like Mother Theresa and Father Damien (lepers).

## **Deeper Questions:**

1. Always praying and being aware of our thoughts and motives. This may be one of the hardest things for a Christian. Each week we have a chance to confess our sins and assess ourselves before God in Worship.
2. Open ended.
3. Most will talk about complete selflessness. This is completely counter-cultural.

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## **Session 5:**

### **Opening Questions:**

Pick one question to discuss with your group.

### **Influence of The Word - suggested answers:**

1. Our bodies are meant for God. They are part of the body of Christ. Christ purchased them with his blood. When we sin sexually we sin against Christ, ourselves, the other person and the Holy Spirit that lives within us. Because we have been bought, we are free from all the sexual sins we have committed. This command to honor God with our bodies is extremely challenging as we still live in a broken and sinful state.
2. This question is good for focusing on the love side of honoring each other, which includes the body.
3. Childish ways only seek self. Sometimes we do this with sex, making it only about ourselves. Thinking about other's needs first happens as we mature as believers.

## **Deeper Questions:**

1. Different reactions may come from people. You might want to discuss finding a good balance between keeping away from the bad things in culture yet still being aware of the culture.
2. Important to discuss that parents need to be talking about God's design for sex. This should happen often throughout a child's life.

3. Sexual sins, addictions and diseases have brought much damage to many lives. This reality calls for us to talk about and deal with these issues candidly and directly.
4. It is important for us to realize how much our culture has affected us and to discuss how we might maintain God's design for sex.

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## **Session 6:**

Since it's week 6 and the group should hopefully feel pretty comfortable, the group leader may consider opening the group up to share their testimony - how they came to have faith. Who in their life helped lead them to their faith? Even mature Christians struggle with their faith. What "hang-ups" or "questions" do you sometimes get stuck on and have you consulted with anyone to help reconcile those questions?

### **Opening Questions:**

Pick one question to discuss with your group.

### **Influence of The Word - suggested answers:**

1. Ephesians reminds us that even faith/belief is a gift.
2. Increased trust in Jesus allows us to weather the storms of life more readily and be more bold as a witness for Him.
3. True faith rests in Jesus. In Jesus we find our true identity. The world tells us to place our faith in ourselves, our possessions, other people, the way people view us, etc.
4. The world would have us think that faith in anything is fine just as long as you have faith. The Bible is very clear; faith in Jesus is the only saving faith.

### **Deeper Questions:**

1. Open ended
2. Living lives that reflect faith in Jesus speaks volumes to a world of people searching for truth.

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# Ice Breakers

to do with group if time allows

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1. Take something from your wallet/purse and tell how it relates to you.
2. Tell the most positive conversation that you had today.
3. Tell the most interesting thing that happened to you today.
4. Tell the most humorous incident that you experienced in the last year.
5. My favorite fun activity when I was a child was...
6. The thing that drives me crazy is...
7. We celebrated Easter when I was a child by...
8. My favorite movie of all times is...
9. My idea of a great vacation is...
10. My favorite food is...
11. If I could visit any era of history, I would visit...
12. My favorite childhood memory is...
13. My favorite leisure activity is...
14. Tell about the best birthday present you ever received.
15. Share one of the happiest days of your life.
16. Describe what your day was like today.
17. If you had to move and could only take three things with you, what would you take?
18. While growing up I saw God as...
19. What would you do if someone willed you a million dollars?
20. If you could do anything you want this time next year, what would it be?