

THE REAL GOD

HOW HE LONGS FOR YOU TO SEE HIM

SMALL GROUP STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Many of us have formed opinions or a picture of God from impressions we've picked up throughout our lives. This has left us with a limited or inaccurate view of God.

This study is an invitation to develop a clear picture of God and to learn something new about Him in every session. What you think about God shapes your whole relationship with Him. In addition, what you believe God thinks about you determines how close you will grow toward Him.

A.W. Tozer writes, "Without doubt, the mightiest thought the mind can entertain is the thought of God, and the weightiest word in

any language is its word for God. Thought and speech are God's gifts to creatures made in His image; these are intimately associated with Him and impossible apart from Him."

Through this curriculum, you will study the attributes of God and have the opportunity to dive into scripture and discussion, challenging one another to think deeply about Him and ultimately drawing closer to Him. Everyone of us longs to experience a fulfilling, intimate relationship with God that comes from knowing who He is.

It's my desire that you fall deeper in love with your savior and the Lord of the universe as you discover how He longs for you to see Him.



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HOW TO START YOUR OWN SMALL GROUP

The fact that you are even reading this page says a lot about you. It says that you care about people and you are open to God using you to lead a group.

Facilitating a small group can sound intimidating, but it really doesn't have to be. Think of it more as gathering a few friends to get to know each other better and to have some discussion around spiritual matters.

HERE ARE A FEW PRACTICAL TIPS TO HELP YOU GET STARTED.

1. Pray

One of the most important principles of spiritual impact is to realize you can't do this on your own. No matter how long you've been a Christian or been involved in ministry, you need the power of the Holy Spirit. Lean on Him... He will help you.

2. Invite some friends

Don't be afraid to ask people to come to your group. You will be surprised how many people are open to a study like this. Whether you have 4 or 14 in your group, it can be a powerful experience. You should probably plan on at least 1 ½ hours for your group meeting.

3. Get your materials

The Real God materials online at venture.cc/curriculum or contact Venture Christian Church.

4. Be prepared to facilitate

Just a few minutes a week in preparation can make a HUGE difference in the group experience.

Each week read through the appropriate chapter in *The Real God* book and review the discussion questions in curriculum. If you don't think your group can get through all the questions, select the ones that are most relevant to your group.

5. Learn to say “I don’t know”

These sessions will spark some lively and spirited discussions. There are lots of different opinions when it comes to significant spiritual matters. When tough questions come up, it’s ok for you to say “I don’t know”. Take the pressure off. No one expects you to have all the answers.

6. Love your group

Maybe the most important thing you bring to the group is your personal care for your group members. If you will pray for them, encourage them, call them, email them, involve them, and love them, God will be pleased and you will have a lot of fun along the way. Be certain each week to:

- Welcome and introduce any new people to the group
- Periodically remind the group of the basic guidelines
 - <http://venture.cc/sg-guidelines>
- Give vision to the group why it’s important to meet together on a regular basis
 - Grow spiritually
 - Build transformational community
 - Become other centered
- Thank each person for their contributions to the group discussion

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS EXPERIENCE

As a church, God has called us to be a catalyst to transform the Bay Area and subsequently the world for Christ. Each and every one of us plays a special and unique role in accomplishing this challenging call. We will be discussing how we can catch this amazing vision for His kingdom plan.

Before starting to facilitate your group, read through each section below to get familiar with the structure of each weekly study session. It provides hints to help your group get the most out of the experience. There will be additional tips in the content of each session specific to its study topic.

ICEBREAKER

This is an important step in stimulating conversation among group members and transitioning people from their busy day to focusing on studying the Word of God. Start with prayer, lean in and have fun.

REFLECTION

It is important for us to prepare our hearts and minds to listen to His truth. During this section you will introduce a key thought, definition or truth that will help prepare the group for deeper learning and discussion. This also creates a central talking point that unifies the group.

TALK IT OVER

We not only grow by listening to God's word and applying it, but we grow "in community." The friendship and insights of those in the group will enrich your learning experience. Several discussion questions are provided for your group to further engage the teaching content. Keep the following guidelines in mind for having a healthy group discussion.

- Be involved. Jump in and share your thoughts. Your ideas are important, and you have a perspective that is unique and can benefit the other group members.
- Be a good listener. Value what others are sharing. Seek to really understand the perspective of others in your group and don't be afraid to ask follow up questions.
- Be courteous. People hold strong opinions about the greatest needs in our world. Your views might differ from else's, but that's ok. We all come from different places and at the start might see things very differently. The purpose of this study is to come together and be united as one church in a dark world. Spirited discussion is

great. Disrespect and attack is not. When there is disagreement, focus on the issue and never allow the discussion to turn into a personal attack.

- Be focused. Stay on topic. Help the group explore the subject at hand, and try to save unrelated questions or stories for afterwards.
- Be careful not to dominate. Be aware of the amount of talking you are doing in proportion to the rest of the group, and make space for others to speak.
- Be a learner. Stay sensitive to what God might be wanting to teach you through the lesson, as well as through what others have to say. Focus more on your own growth rather than making a point or winning an argument.

ACCELERATE (20 MINUTES THAT TURNS CONCEPTS INTO CONVICTIONS)

Inspiration comes from hearing God's Word; motivation grows by discussing God's Word; transformation occurs when you study it for yourself.

If you want to "accelerate" your growth, a short bible study is provided that you can do at home each week. Our convictions become even stronger when we dig into Scripture and discover truth for ourselves. To help you get the most out of this exercise, consider partnering up with somebody in your group who will also commit to do the assignment this week. Then, after you have each done the assignment, agree to spend 10-15 minutes by phone to share what you learned and what you are applying.

SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION

As we get started in our small group, spend some time getting to know one another, laying out some basic SG guidelines and becoming familiar with the series. It will be helpful for each person to have read Chapter 1 and 2 of *“The Real God”* before the group discussion. If people have not read it yet, do a brief summary of the chapter to provide context for discussion.

GETTING STARTED • ICEBREAKER

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN STIMULATING CONVERSATION AMONG GROUP MEMBERS AND TRANSITIONING PEOPLE FROM THEIR BUSY DAY TO FOCUSING ON STUDYING THE WORD OF GOD. START WITH PRAYER, LEAN IN AND HAVE FUN!

- Pair up with someone you don't know and ask: What are the top 3 characteristics you would use to describe yourself and why?
- Bring everyone back together and ask a couple different people to share what they learned about the person they paired up with. This is a great way to learn about people in your group.
- Segue into the small group study by connecting how each characteristic you learned about one another helps you know and understand them more. The same is true when we get to know the attributes of God. The more we learn and understand them, the more we know Him.

REFLECTION

Romans 1:21-23 shows us the importance of knowing God and His attributes. Without this understanding, we will reduce God to manageable, controllable terms.

“What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” A.W. Tozer • *The Knowledge of The Holy*

How we relate to God affects everything about us.

- If we are rightly related to God, we find peace, wisdom, contentment, and hope—abundant life in Christ is the result.

TALK IT OVER

STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What do you think about God? Where are you on the spectrum below? (There is no wrong answer)

- I haven't thought much about Him
- I feel numb or indifferent
- I am confused
- I think about Him often

2. What do you think He thinks about you?

Read Psalm 103 aloud as a group. Take time to make observations about what Psalm 103 tells us regarding God's character and attributes. Have someone write them down so that you can rebuild the passage and refer to your findings as you discuss the following questions:

1. What does Psalm 103 tell us about God?

2. What does Psalm 103 tell us about how God thinks about me?

3. Based on your observations, how is He described differently than you thought of Him in your mind? What have you learned that surprised you?

Tip: Take time this week to pray and meditate on Psalm 103. Here are some ideas for application:

- Write down a few key verses on a 3x5 card to memorize
- Personalize the passage by inserting personal pronouns and meditate on them.
 - *Example:* who forgives my sin and heals all my diseases, who redeems my life...
- Turn this Psalm into a prayer of thanksgiving—"Thank you Lord, that you forgive all my sins and heal my diseases..." "Thank you that you don't treat me as my sins deserve..."

GROUP PRAYER

Take turns thanking God in prayer for who He is (there is no pressure to pray).

ACCELERATE

In preparation for next week:

- Read Chapters 3-4 of *The Real God*
- Meditate on Isaiah 40:25-31

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are ways you can reduce God to someone He is not? How does this impact your life and faith? (dig deep and reflect)

2. What are some of the ways Isaiah 40:25-31 reveals that God is not like us?

3. What is the promise for those of us that wait on the Lord and believe in His sufficiency?

²⁵ “TO WHOM WILL YOU COMPARE ME?
OR WHO IS MY EQUAL?” SAYS THE HOLY ONE.
²⁶ LIFT UP YOUR EYES AND LOOK TO THE HEAVENS:
WHO CREATED ALL THESE?
HE WHO BRINGS OUT THE STARRY HOST ONE BY ONE
AND CALLS FORTH EACH OF THEM BY NAME.
BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT POWER AND MIGHTY STRENGTH,
NOT ONE OF THEM IS MISSING.
²⁷ WHY DO YOU COMPLAIN, JACOB?
WHY DO YOU SAY, ISRAEL,
“MY WAY IS HIDDEN FROM THE LORD;
MY CAUSE IS DISREGARDED BY MY GOD”?
²⁸ DO YOU NOT KNOW?
HAVE YOU NOT HEARD?
THE LORD IS THE EVERLASTING GOD,
THE CREATOR OF THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.
HE WILL NOT GROW TIRED OR WEARY,
AND HIS UNDERSTANDING NO ONE CAN FATHOM.
²⁹ HE GIVES STRENGTH TO THE WEARY
AND INCREASES THE POWER OF THE WEAK.
³⁰ EVEN YOUTHS GROW TIRED AND WEARY,
AND YOUNG MEN STUMBLE AND FALL;
³¹ BUT THOSE WHO HOPE IN THE LORD
WILL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH.
THEY WILL SOAR ON WINGS LIKE EAGLES;
THEY WILL RUN AND NOT GROW WEARY,
THEY WILL WALK AND NOT BE FAINT.

ISAIAH 40:25-31(NIV)

SESSION 2

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

As we dive into week 2, it is important to make time for relationships to form. Be sure new people are introduced and people have the opportunity to get to know one another. Briefly review the SG guidelines again so that everyone understands the group expectations. The heart and goal of this study is to grow in our understanding of God, the relationship we have with Him, and how knowing Him helps grow our relationships with others.

GETTING STARTED • ICEBREAKER

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- Pair up with someone and ask: In what ways have you witnessed natural wonders or blessings this week that reveal God's goodness?
- Bring everyone back together and ask a couple different people to share what they learned about the person they paired up with and even about God.
- Segue into the small group study and discussion by relating how each person's recognition of the goodness of God is not just a casual occurrence but actually God's disposition to be creative, merciful and generous.

REFLECTION

Read this quote aloud: "The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men. He is tenderhearted and of quick sympathy, and His unfailing attitude toward all moral beings is open, frank and friendly. By His nature He is inclined to bestow blessedness and He takes total pleasure in the happiness of His people." (A.W. Tozer in *The Knowledge of the Holy*)

- How has God revealed His goodness?
 - Natural Blessings—Psalm 145
 - Through His deliverance—Psalm 107
 - In Jesus—Romans 8:31-32

TALK IT OVER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How have you seen or experienced God's goodness in your life?

2. What do you wish for? What do you think God wishes for you?

READ MATTHEW 6:25-33 ALOUD FOR CONTEXT, AND THEN READ AND DISCUSS MATTHEW 7:7-12.

Tip: Context is vital in discovering a correct understanding of a given passage. Misunderstanding a portion of the text can lead to misapplying it in our lives as well as teaching something wrong to others. It also protects us from wanting to make the passage say what we want it to say instead of what it really means.

1. How does this change how you view God and what you think He desires for you?

READ ROMANS 8:31-32 ALOUD.

1. How does this passage relate to Matthew 7:7-12? What is God's greatest gift to us? How does this affect how you view your circumstances and ability to trust God?

2. In view of Romans 8:32, what are you unwilling to trust Him with? Be honest.

3. How do you need to respond to God's goodness today? If need be, refer to pages 78-83 of *"The Real God."*

GROUP PRAYER

Spend time praying together thanking God for all the ways you have seen His goodness in your life.

ACCELERATE

In Preparation for next week:

- Read the chapter on the Sovereignty of God in *"The Real God"*
- Meditate on Romans 8:28

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When you personally declare that God is sovereign, what are you actually saying? Be specific with your definition. Does it align with Who God says He is? What is misaligned?

2. How will you gain the belief and perspective that nothing has or will come into your life today that He did not either allow or decree for your ultimate good? What faith steps do you need to make in your heart?

AND WE KNOW THAT
IN ALL THINGS GOD
WORKS FOR THE GOOD
OF THOSE WHO LOVE
HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN
CALLED ACCORDING
TO HIS PURPOSE.

ROMANS 8:28 (NIV)

SESSION 3

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

We will discuss one of the most important attributes of God, His sovereignty. Even though there can be theological debates over this subject, make it your goal to discover the awe, wonder, power and control of God. While it is important we discuss the different positions as people come to comprehend the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility, we will look at His sovereignty through the belief that in His love, He allows free will.

GETTING STARTED • ICEBREAKER

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- Gather in groups of 2 or 3 and discuss a time when you got the “raw deal” that seemed terrible but ended up really good in the end.
- Bring everyone back together and ask a couple different people to share what they learned from the people they talked with.
- Segue into the small group study and discussion by relating how these stories lead to outcomes that are under the authority of our sovereign God.

REFLECTION

Webster's defines sovereignty like this:

Sovereign—adj. 1: above or superior to all others; chief; greatest; supreme 2: supreme in power, or authority 3: of or holding the position of ruler; reigning 4: independent of all others 5: excellent; outstanding - n. 1: a person who possesses sovereign authority or power; specifically, a monarch or ruler.

- How has God revealed His Sovereignty?
 - Through His Titles
 - Through His Promises
 - Through History
 - Through Fulfilled Prophecy
 - Through Jesus Christ, the Messiah

TALK IT OVER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-18 ALOUD.

1. What do we learn about the supremacy and sovereignty of Christ in this passage? Do your best to “unpack” this passage for discussion. Refer to pages 93-95 of *The Real God* book for more scripture references.

2. What are the two extremes that people fall into when they think about God’s sovereignty and human responsibility? How did you grow up thinking about God’s sovereignty? Listed below are a couple of resources to help you think through some of your own questions. Reference pages 106-108 of *The Real God*.

The Problem with Pain—C.S. Lewis

Chosen But Free—Norman Geisler

The Real God—Chip Ingram

Tip: It is important to not allow your discussion to become argumentative or divisive. There is tension between sovereignty and free will. Do your best to have grace for the mystery of these two important truths, recognizing the great comfort and responsibility we feel from both.

3. Chip shares that God’s sovereignty raises two questions: A) If God is really in control and above all things, why does He allow pain and suffering? B) If God is sovereign over all people and events in history, doesn’t that make a sham out of human responsibility? Discuss these questions as a group. Reference pages 106-107 of *The Real God*.

4. How do you reconcile God being sovereign over all events and yet He still giving us free will?

While the sovereignty of God has many times led to intense debate, it is God’s desire that our study and contemplation of Him would lead us to surrender our lives to His control (Romans 12:1-2) and to worship Him with our very lives.

GROUP PRAYER

As you break out into groups of two or three, pray over an area in your life that you know God wants you to surrender and trust His sovereignty.

ACCELERATE

In Preparation for next week:

- Read the chapter on the Holiness of God in “*The Real God*” and study the three aspects of Holiness on pages 135-136.

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is justification so important to you becoming holy in all you do?

Tip: For a more in-depth understanding of justification, study Romans 3:21-26

2. What does practical holiness look like in your life? What habits or tendencies do you need to surrender in your sanctification process?

3. Think about glorification and your future state in heaven. How does this help you in the highs and lows of being sanctified?

THEREFORE, I URGE YOU, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY, TO OFFER YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND PLEASING TO GOD—THIS IS YOUR TRUE AND PROPER WORSHIP.

ROMANS 12:1 (NIV)

SESSION 4

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

We all approach the topic of Holiness from a different reference point based on our individual life experiences. This study and discussion will help shed light on God's definition of holiness and lead us to reflect on it in our lives. This attribute is one that takes deep thought and reflection to grasp. Be patient and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart as you process this study and allow God's holiness to impact your life.

GETTING STARTED • ICEBREAKER

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- As a group discuss the stereotypical concepts and views of holiness from our culture and past experiences.
- Segue into the small group study and discussion by relating how these observations and experiences do not accurately describe the Holiness of God.

REFLECTION

1. What is Holiness?

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

Hebrews 12:14 NIV

WEBSTER'S 1828 ENGLISH DEFINITION OF HOLINESS:

n. [from holy.] The state of being holy; purity or integrity of moral character; freedom from sin; sanctity. Applied to the Supreme Being, holiness denotes perfect purity or integrity of moral character, one of his essential attributes

"When applied to God, holiness is that which divides Him from everyone else." —Chip Ingram

"We cannot grasp the true meaning of the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it."

—A.W. Tozer • *The Knowledge of the Holy*

- Scripture describes various ways that God has revealed His Holiness. It is important that we grasp holiness in order to understand the heart and behavior God desires from us. As a group briefly run through these bullet points: Ref. *The Real God* pages 123-133

- Through His People
- Through Places
- Through the Law
- Through the Prophets
- Through His Wrath and Judgment
- Through His Son - His life
- Through His Church

TALK IT OVER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Who and what were some specific people, places and actions where God revealed Himself that we see in the Bible?

2. How is the holiness of God described in Isaiah 6:1-7? Look for keywords that describe His holiness and what sets Him apart.

3. How is being holy possible if we are fallen?

On page 125, Chip says, “When we begin to see God for who He really is instead of who we make Him out to be, the experience starts upward and then moves inward. We see God and then we see ourselves. When we get a high view of God, we stop comparing ourselves to others because we understand how much we fail to measure up to Him. Instead of trying to figure out how close we can get to sin without actually sinning, we begin trying to figure out how we can get as close to His purity as possible.”

1. Keeping the above quote in mind, read Galatians 5:16-26 aloud. What internal conflict are you wrestling with between the Spirit and the flesh? What choice will you make to walk by the Spirit to overcome this conflict?

Tip: For a more in-depth understanding of this passage, read Romans 8:1-11.

2. What does 1 John 1:8-9 promise us about walking in light and in the Spirit? What assurance do we have?

GROUP PRAYER

As you break out into groups of two or three, spend time praying together over areas of your life that you know God wants to change in you to be set apart and pure.

ACCELERATE

In Preparation for Next Week: Read Chapter 7 of *The Real God*—“The Wisdom of God” and meditate on Romans 11:33-36.

³³ OH, THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES OF THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! HOW UNSEARCHABLE HIS JUDGMENTS, AND HIS PATHS BEYOND TRACING OUT!
³⁴ “WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD? OR WHO HAS BEEN HIS COUNSELOR?”
³⁵ “WHO HAS EVER GIVEN TO GOD, THAT GOD SHOULD REPAY THEM?” ³⁶ FOR FROM HIM AND THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM ARE ALL THINGS. TO HIM BE THE GLORY FOREVER! AMEN.
ROMANS 11:33-36 [NIV]

SESSION 5

THE WISDOM OF GOD

This week as we dive into God's wisdom, let's be praying that this helps everyone in our group take one step closer to being fully surrendered to God. In our last session studying God's holiness, it brought up the areas of our lives that are in conflict with the Spirit. God's wisdom reminds us that He has our very best in mind, but He asks us to trust Him completely so that we can begin to see and experience how He works out the "best possible results, by the best possible means, for the most possible people, for the longest possible time." As we come to a place of really believing God's goodness and wisdom, it becomes much easier to let go of the areas that can hold us down (habitual sin) and free us to live out God's will for our lives.

GETTING STARTED • ICE BREAKER

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- Gather in groups of 2-3 and ask: Who is the wisest person you know? Why do you consider them wise?
- Bring everyone back together and ask a couple different people to share what they learned from the people they talked with.
- Segue into the small group study and discussion by relating how these stories lead to outcomes that reveal the wisdom of God.

REFLECTION

In the wisdom chapter of *The Real God*, Chip talks about how to respond to God's wisdom. He says, "How do you and I respond to everything [good and bad] that God allows into our lives? The answer to those questions is deceptively simple: *we need to learn to live wisely.*"

God advises us, 'Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.' (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Wise living means we live according to God's Word. God's wisdom comes through His Word. And wisdom is the ability to apply God's Word, plan and purposes to our lives (relationships, decisions, how we spend our time, work) so that we experience God's best.

READ THE PASSAGE AND QUOTES ALOUD BELOW:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and unfathomable His ways!”

Romans 11:33 NASB

“The wisdom of God tells us that God will bring about the best possible results, by the best possible means, for the most possible people, for the longest possible time.”

—Dr. Charles Ryrie

“To believe actively that our Heavenly Father constantly spreads around us providential circumstances that work for our present good and our everlasting well-being brings to the soul a veritable benediction. Most of us go through life praying a little, planning a little, jockeying for position, hoping but never being quite certain of anything, and always secretly afraid that we will miss the way. This is a tragic waste of truth and never gives rest to the heart.

“There is a better way. It is to repudiate our own wisdom and take instead the infinite wisdom of God. Our insistence upon seeing ahead is natural enough, but it is a real hindrance to our spiritual progress. God has charged Himself with full responsibility for our eternal happiness and stands ready to take over the management of our lives the moment we turn in faith to Him.”

—A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*

TALK IT OVER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

- In your reading of Chapter 7, what did you learn about God’s wisdom? How did it give you comfort and hope? (Reference the two definitions above in your discussion.)
-
-

Tip: This is a great way to open your time and let people share, but make sure to transition to question 1 and the passage so that your group can begin to discover how to get God’s wisdom for their lives.

- Spend time together in group studying James 1:1-8. This passage holds the key to receiving God’s wisdom and will for our lives. This week, we are going to practice walking through how to study a passage together. Most of these questions can be used with any verse that you read in Scripture.

Tip: Please take time to do this study individually before coming to your group so that you have already done some thinking and praying over these questions. You may also come up with observations that your group did not even think of, which will be a rich discovery process together. As you dig into the text, encourage each other to stop, think, ponder, ask questions and dialogue.

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

1. What is the context of James 1:1-8? Who is writing it and who is the audience?

2. What do we learn about God in this passage? What do we learn about ourselves as humans?

3. How would you paraphrase what James is saying in your own words?

4. What are the circumstances that James describes in verse 2? Why do you think verses 2-4 precede verses 5-6? How are they connected?

5. Verses 5-6 give us three conditions for receiving wisdom. What are they? (Also look at Proverbs 9:10)

6. What kind of person is verses 7-8 referring to? Why is it that they cannot receive wisdom? What does it mean to be “double-minded”?

7. How does your faith relate to receiving wisdom? (Reference Hebrews 11:1)

8. How does God’s Word play a role in receiving wisdom in your life? (Reference Psalm 119:97-105)

9. Where do you need God’s wisdom in your life right now? Or, what big problem do you want Him to solve?

GROUP PRAYER

Break into pairs and pray for one another. Ask God to give you courage to completely trust Him and His Wisdom for the circumstances in your life. Be specific with your prayer partner about the wisdom you seek.

ACCELERATE

In Preparation for Next Week: Read chapter 8 of *The Real God*—“The Justice of God” and meditate on Romans 12:17-21.

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who in your life do you need to forgive? What do your steps to forgive look like?

2. What promises do you need to memorize in order to let God be judge in your circumstances?

3. How will you respond to an offense and yet not take revenge? What specific area of this relational process is hardest for you?

¹⁷ DO NOT REPAY ANYONE EVIL FOR EVIL. BE CAREFUL TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT IN THE EYES OF EVERYONE. ¹⁸ IF IT IS POSSIBLE, AS FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU, LIVE AT PEACE WITH EVERYONE. ¹⁹ DO NOT TAKE REVENGE, MY DEAR FRIENDS, BUT LEAVE ROOM FOR GOD'S WRATH, FOR IT IS WRITTEN: "IT IS MINE TO AVENGE; I WILL REPAY," SAYS THE LORD. ²⁰ ON THE CONTRARY:

"IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM; IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM SOMETHING TO DRINK. IN DOING THIS, YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ²¹ DO NOT BE OVERCOME BY EVIL, BUT OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.

ROMANS 12:17-21 (NIV)

SESSION 6

THE JUSTICE OF GOD

This is one of the most important attributes to know and discuss. Understanding the justice of God is so important to living a life free of bitterness and unforgiveness. It is God's desire that we live this out for the world to see. How we respond to evil and wrong doing by others really matters to God.

GETTING STARTED • ICEBREAKER:

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN STIMULATING CONVERSATION AMONG GROUP MEMBERS AND TRANSITIONING PEOPLE FROM THEIR BUSY DAY TO FOCUSING ON STUDYING THE WORD OF GOD. START WITH PRAYER, LEAN IN AND HAVE FUN!

- Share a time when you've questioned God's justice—either in your life or in a person you love. You may want to break into groups of two or three to discuss. Keep this time as brief as you can, recognizing this may be a sensitive question for some.
- In our reading this week, we learned that God is just. Essential in His nature is to be fair, righteous and just. But in a fallen world, we don't always experience the effects of His justice in the "here and now." (See pages 179-180 as a reference).

REFLECTION

1. What is Justice?

READ THE DEFINITION OF THE JUSTICE OF GOD AND ASK FOR ANY FEEDBACK OR EXTRA INSIGHTS FROM THE GROUP:

"God is just. That means that all He is and all He does is accomplished with perfect integrity, fairness, righteousness, and impartiality. Justice is not a standard God follows. He is the standard. Though full of goodness, infinite in love, and merciful to the repentant, God's justice demands moral equity and eternal retribution for deeds done in the body. God's justice means no one will receive a "raw deal" in the final analysis. I can trust that He will one day balance the scales."
—Chip Ingram, page 203 in *The Real God*

TALK IT OVER

STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. In your reading of Chapter 8, what did you learn about God's justice? How does this definition (see above as reference) compare to the revenge-soaked society that we live in?

Tip: This should be an 8-10 minute discussion

This week, we are going to study Romans 12:14-21. This passage is full of practical ways to respond to the injustices that we all face on this earth in light of a God Who is just and Who has provided justification for our sins.

READ ROMANS 12:14-21 ALOUD AS A GROUP.

Tip: To fully comprehend Romans 12, it's essential to understand the gospel. The single passage in the Bible that most clearly explains the gospel is Romans 3:19-26. Paul starts by telling us that we cannot be righteous before God by observing the law or being good enough as a person (Romans 3:20-23). He defines righteousness (the exact and perfect conformity to the law) as only satisfied by Jesus' act on the cross. Through the cross, we are declared innocent (justified) of our sin and unrighteousness by the redemptive work of the cross which we receive freely by grace through faith.

God is a just God who demands payment for sin. In His perfect, sovereign plan, He satisfied His justice by presenting Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for our sin. We are now declared innocent of our crime by the blood of Jesus and God's justice is fulfilled. As believers, because we are forgiven of our sins and are justified, we are able to receive grace for salvation and for our everyday lives. It's this same grace and forgiveness that we now extend to others that Paul exhorts us to do in Romans 12.

1. What do we learn about God in Romans 12:14-21?

Tip: Have someone track the group's findings and repeat them back for clarity. This helps the entire group summarize key discoveries. Do the same for question 4 below.

2. What do we learn about ourselves?

3. How would you paraphrase what Paul is saying in your own words?

4. Are there any commands to obey? What are they? How many are negative commands, how many are positive commands? Why are these commands given to us to practice?

5. What does it mean that "you will heap burning coals on their head" in vs. 20? (Paul is quoting Proverbs 25:21-22)

Tip: Context—Burning coals on their head is a picture of repentance—when we respond to evil with good, it often produces remorse in our enemy and leads them to a restored relationship with God. Romans 2:4—“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”)

6. How are we to respond to personal attack and injustice according to Romans 12:14-21?

7. How did Jesus model this concept of overcoming evil with good in His life? In His death?

8. What new insight have you gained to help you deal with the evil and/or injustice you have experienced in the past? What is your first step in overcoming evil with good? Who might help you take this first step and keep your commitment to God?

GROUP PRAYER

This may be a sensitive prayer time as there is often hurt related to this subject. Break into small groups and pray specifically for each person to have grace and wisdom as they navigate hurtful circumstances.

ACCELERATE

In Preparation for Next Week: Read chapter 9 of *The Real God*—“The Love of God” and meditate on Romans 8:38-39.

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How do you translate the ultimate love displayed on the cross to practical application in your own heart and mind?

2. What gets in your way from receiving God’s love? Be honest.

3. Who in your life does God demonstrate His love for you through? How have you linked this person’s love to that of God’s?

**38 FOR I AM CONVINCED THAT
NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE,
NEITHER ANGELS NOR DEMONS,
NEITHER THE PRESENT NOR THE
FUTURE, NOR ANY POWERS, 39
NEITHER HEIGHT NOR DEPTH,
NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL
CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO
SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE
OF GOD THAT IS IN CHRIST
JESUS OUR LORD.**

ROMANS 8:38-39 [NIV]

SESSION 7

THE LOVE OF GOD

IN THIS CHAPTER, CHIP OUTLINES THREE FACTS ON LOVE:

1. Everyone is looking for love.
2. Just as there is a universal quest for love, there is a universal answer to that quest.
3. There's a tragic disconnection between the universal need and the universal answer.

As we process these facts and the scriptural truth behind them, we will discover the Love of God. Let's dive into our study and discussion with expectation and excitement as God reveals Himself to us!

GETTING STARTED • ICE BREAKER:

1. What are the several kinds of love the world defines for us that misrepresent God's love? (Have a few people share their findings and then briefly talk about our hardwiring for love and the implications of discovering God's true love vs. the world's model.)

Transition from this discussion by reading the promises below that outline God's true love.

REFLECTION:

In our reading this week, we learned that God is love. His disposition for all of us is love. The magnitude of His love is beyond the words we attempt to use, but even with our limitations, He desires for us to seek and search for His essential love. Read the scripture references below aloud:

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"
1 John 3:1 NIV

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
Ephesians 3:17-19 NIV

AS WE READ THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S LOVE BELOW, ASK FOR FEEDBACK OR EXTRA INSIGHTS CONCERNING GOD'S LOVE:

“God’s love is a holy disposition toward all that he has created that compels him to express unconditional affection and selective correction to provide the highest quality of existence, both now and forever, for the object of his love.”

“Love is giving someone what they need the most, when they deserve it the least, at great personal cost.” (As modeled perfectly by Jesus on the cross).

Chip Ingram, *The Real God*

TALK IT OVER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

In your reading of Chapter 9, what did you learn about God’s love? How does this definition (see above as reference) compare to the world’s definition that perverts our pursuit of it?

This week, we are going to study 1 John 4:7-21. This passage defines God’s love, informs us of how His love changes us, and shows us how it transforms the way we treat and relate to others.

READ 1 JOHN 4:7-21 ALOUD AS A GROUP.

1. What is the context of 1 John 4:7-21? Who is the author and who is the audience? (*Hint: How does the writer address his readers in each of the chapters? Why does this help us understand the heart of the writer? What was the writer’s relationship with Jesus like?)

2. What do we learn about God in this passage?

3. What do we learn about ourselves?

4. How would you paraphrase what John is saying in your own words?

5. Are there any commands to obey? What are they? How are all of these commands given as specific ways to practice God's love?

6. What must you do to receive and believe that nothing can separate you from God's great love?

GROUP PRAYER:

Break into partner prayer groups and pray for one another to have the capacity to give God's love away to another. This is often the best way to receive it! Share who you will specifically go and share love with.

ACCELERATE

In Preparation for Next Week: Read Chapter 10 of *The Real God*—"The Faithfulness of God" and meditate on Lamentations 3:21-24.

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In your life, what areas do you experience the most doubt? What in your past may be behind that thinking?

2. In Lamentations 3:21 when Jeremiah says "Yet I will call to mind and therefore have hope", what promises will you call to mind to give you hope?

3. Hope is whatever you count on to support your life and provide significance. What specifically about God's faithful character and promises gives you hope? Be specific.

**21 YET THIS I CALL TO MIND
AND THEREFORE I HAVE HOPE;
22 BECAUSE OF THE LORD'S GREAT
LOVE WE ARE NOT CONSUMED,
FOR HIS COMPASSIONS NEVER FAIL.
23 THEY ARE NEW EVERY MORNING;
GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS.
24 I SAY TO MYSELF, "THE LORD IS MY
PORTION;
THEREFORE I WILL WAIT FOR HIM."
LAMENTATIONS 3:21-24 (NIV)**

SESSION 8

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

As we study the Faithfulness of God this week, we will start by discussing the object of our hope. As a group it's important that we honestly assess those things we place our hope in. When we are able to see and experience God's faithfulness, our hope grows. This study will reveal God's promises and certainties, anchoring us with the peace and joy of the Lord.

GETTING STARTED • ICE BREAKER

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- As a group, discuss the things we can put our hope in apart from the Lord. Briefly talk about why counting on these things are not dependable.
- Transition from this discussion by reading the scripture below, discussing the attributes and characteristics of God we see in the passage below.
- “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22-23

REFLECTION:

In Chapter 10 of *The Real God*, we have read what God’s faithfulness is, how He reveals it and how we are to respond to it. As we start our discussion, read aloud the quotes and definition below:

“God’s Word is true regardless of any circumstantial evidence to the contrary. He keeps his promises, he’s consistent with his character, and he will come through for you 100 percent of the time. In fact, God’s faithfulness applies to everything else about him. It shines through all his attributes.”
—Chip Ingram, *The Real God*

“All of God’s acts are consistent with all of his attributes. No attribute contradicts any other, but all harmonize and blend into each other in the infinite abyss of the Godhead. All that God does agrees with all that God is, and being and doing are one in Him.”
—A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Definition: Faithfulness embodies the idea of someone true to one’s word, promises, vows, etc. One who is steady in allegiance or affection; loyal; constant, reliable, trusted, or believed. Something adhering or true to fact, a standard, or an original; accurate.

TALK IT OVER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

- 1. In your reading of Chapter 10, how does the definition on the left compare to what you have learned about the faithfulness of God? Find the common threads of this definition with the character of God.

- 2. Who are some of the people we see in the Bible that God has revealed his faithfulness through? How do these stories help us believe that God is faithful?

- 3. In what ways do we see the attribute of faithfulness manifested in the life of Jesus? List specific instances and the words of Jesus to support your observations.

4. What are some ways God demonstrates His faithfulness in our lives? (See I John 1:9, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

5. In what ways can we respond to God's faithfulness? (See Matthew 11:28-30, Lamentations 3:21-24, Psalm 71:14-16)

6. What circumstances are you going through that you need to apply the faithfulness of God to? How will you do it? Be specific.

GROUP PRAYER:

Break into partner prayer groups and pray for one another to trust the faithfulness of God by praying His promises over each other.

HELPS FOR FACILITATING YOUR GROUP

FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERS

GROUP AGREEMENT

Small group relationships can be some of the most rewarding, life changing experiences we can have. It is our desire to clarify expectations and group guidelines at the start of a group to ensure the healthiest environment possible.

The following Group Agreement is a tool to help you discuss specific guidelines during your first meeting. Be sure to discuss these priorities in a winsome, relational way. Discuss the questions in the section called Our Game Plan. These answers will bring clarity and help you have an even greater group experience!

WE AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING PRIORITIES:

- 1. This is a safe group.**
We will all do our part to create an environment where every person can be real, open, and honest with their struggles and victories.
- 2. Confidentiality is very important.**
What is shared in the group remains in the group. Integrity with someone being vulnerable is key to a trusting environment.
- 3. We will not crosstalk.**
Crosstalk is a conversation during discussion time that leaves others out or is talking to another while someone is sharing. This can be hurtful.
- 4. We will not fix each other.**
We are not here to fix each other. Jesus does that part. Often people just need to be heard. They will ask you if they need advice.
- 5. We want everyone to have an opportunity to share.**
As a group member, be sensitive about the amount of time that you share, and encourage others to share.
- 6. We will commit to resolving conflict Biblically.**
Matthew 18 addresses a sin against you. Not everything done to you is a sin issue.
- 7. We will start and stop our group on an agreed upon time**
Groups often start at 7pm and end at 8:30pm. You decide times in your group.
- 8. We will commit to make living life in Biblical Community a priority.**
Consistent group attendance helps create a healthy, safe, stable environment while positioning ourselves before God to grow spiritually.

OUR GAME PLAN

1. What day and time will we meet?

2. Where will we meet?

3. How long will we meet each week?

4. What will we do for refreshments?

5. What will we do about childcare?

TIPS FOR FACILITATING YOUR GROUP MEETING

BEFORE THE GROUP ARRIVES:

6. Be prepared.

Your personal preparation can make a huge difference in the quality of the group experience. We strongly suggest previewing both the teaching and the study guide. Know how you would personally answer the discussion questions and identify the main application point at the end of the discussion.

7. Pray for your group members by name.

Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of every person attending. Expect God to challenge and change people as a result of this study.

8. Provide refreshments.

There's nothing like food to help a group relax and connect with each other. For the first week, we suggest you prepare a snack, but after that, ask other group members to bring the food so that they share in the responsibilities of the group and make a commitment to return.

9. Relax.

Don't try to imitate someone else's style of facilitating a group. Conduct the group in a way that fits your style and temperament. Remember that people may feel nervous showing up for a small group study, so put them at ease when they arrive. Make sure to have all the details covered prior to your group meeting, so that once people start arriving, you can focus on them.

TALK IT OVER

HERE ARE SOME GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATING THE DISCUSSION TIME:

10. Make this a discussion, not a lecture.

Resist the temptation to do all the talking, and to answer your own questions. Don't be afraid of a few moments of silence while people formulate their answers. A good rule is the leader does no more than 20% of the talking.

11. Don't feel like you need to have all the answers.

There is nothing wrong with simply saying "I don't know the answer to that, but I'll see if I can find an answer this week".

12. Encourage everyone to participate.

Don't let one person dominate, but also don't pressure quieter members to speak during the first couple of sessions. Be patient. Ask good follow up questions and be sensitive to delicate issues.

13. Affirm people's participation and input.

If an answer is off track, steer it back by rephrasing it or steer it to another person. Whenever people get together to discuss something, there can be differing ways to look at it. If a disagreement arises, don't be too quick to shut it down! The discussion can draw out important perspectives, and if you can't resolve it there, offer to research it further and return to the issue next week.

14. Detour when necessary.

If an important question is raised that is not in the study guide, take time to discuss it. Also, if someone shares something personal and emotional, take time for them if it is not a weekly occurrence. Stop and pray for them right then. Allow the Holy Spirit room to maneuver, and follow his prompting when the discussion changes direction.

15. Subgroup.

One of the principles of small group life is "when numbers go up, sharing goes down". So, if you have a large group, sometimes you may want to branch into groups of 4-6 for the discussion time. This is a great way to give everyone, even the quieter members, a chance to share. Choose someone in the group to guide each of the smaller groups through the discussion. This involves others in the leadership of the group, and provides an opportunity for training new leaders.

16. Prayer.

Be sensitive to the fact that some people in your group may be uncomfortable praying out loud. As a general rule, don't call on people to pray unless you have asked them ahead of time or have heard them pray in public. But this can also be a time to help people build their confidence to pray in a group. Consider having prayer times that ask people to just say a word or sentence of thanks to God.

PRAYER AND PRAISE

One of the most important things you can do in your group is to pray with and for each other. Write down each other's concerns here so you can remember to pray for these requests during the week!

Use the Follow Up box to record an answer to prayer or to write down how you might want to follow up with the person making the request. This could be a phone call, an e-mail or a card. Your personal concern will mean a lot!

DATE											

