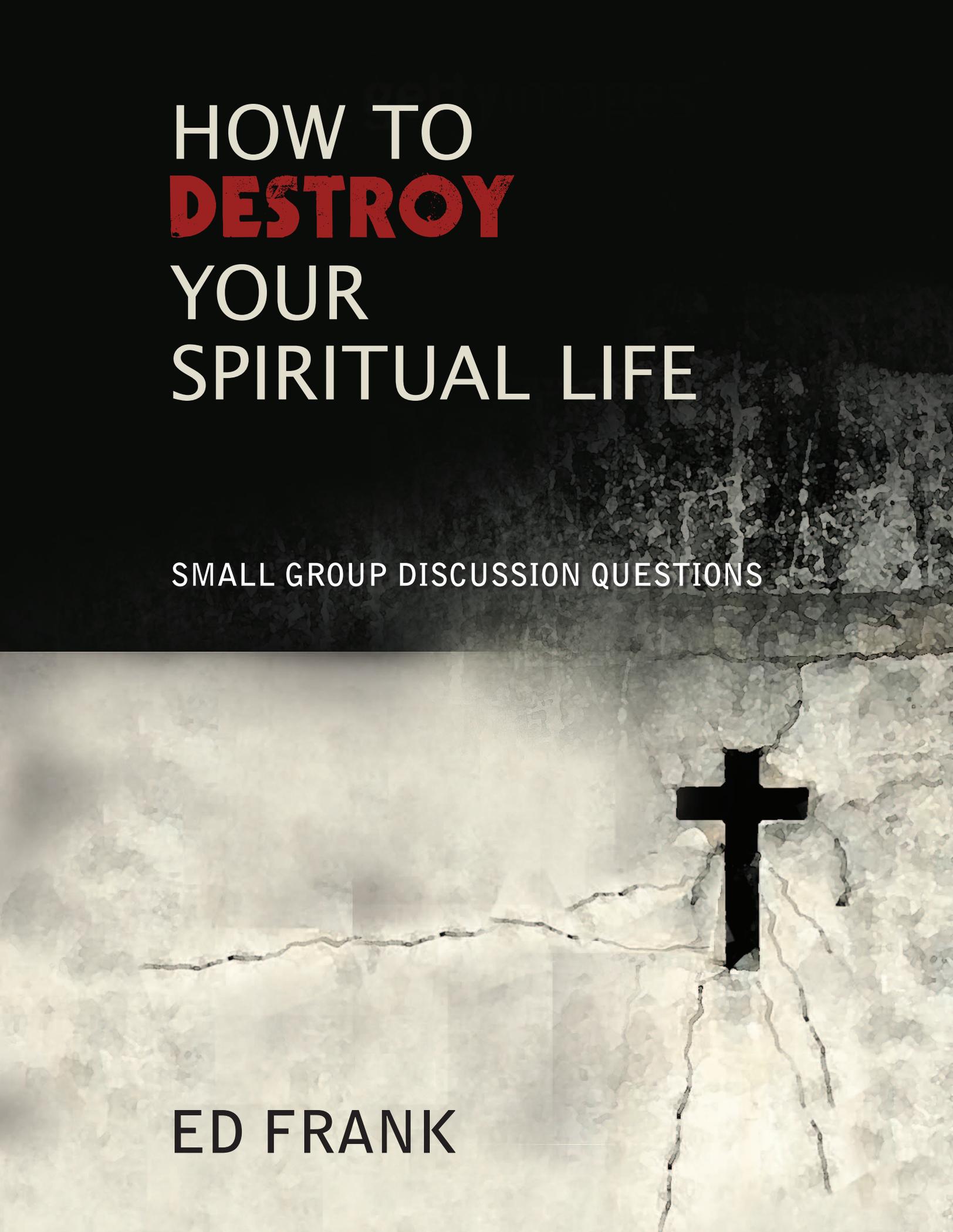


HOW TO **DESTROY** YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ED FRANK



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Small Group Discussion Questions:

How to Begin the Spiritual Life

- 1) Read Jas 1:27. What do you think of the phrase “spiritual but not religious” that individuals (both believers and non-believers) often use to describe themselves? Is it theologically accurate? What are people trying to convey with this designation?

- 2) In our day and age, what do you believe are some of the major factors keeping people from considering Christ? In essence, do you think they are much different from those of times past? If so, in what ways?

- 3) Read Eph 2:1. What do you feel would be the reaction of most people if you conveyed to them that the Bible declares anyone without Christ is spiritually dead (especially many of those who declare themselves “spiritual” but not religious)?

- 4) What would you say to a person who says they are a good person and thus everything is good between them and God? Please provide scriptural support for your position.

- 5) Read Matt 7:13–14; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Pet 3:15. If someone were to say to you that “all roads lead to God” how would you attempt to persuade them otherwise without seeming like a spiritual bigot or elitist?

- 6) Why is it important to convey to those considering the faith that believing in Christ will not make all of their problems go away?

- 7) If an unbeliever were to ask you what is the gospel message and thus how to be saved, what would you say? Look up three to four Bible verses to support your position.

Exercise: Someone share their personal experience of how they came to trust Christ.

1.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Take a Passive Approach towards Your Spiritual Growth

8) How would you define spiritual growth and why do you think it is so important to the Lord that we apply ourselves to it?

9) Read John 15:5; Phil 2:12–13; 1 Tim 4:7; 2 Pet 1:3. Does the old cliché, “let go and let God” legitimately apply to spiritual growth? In other words, what do you think are the divine and human roles within it?

10) 1 John 2:15–17. What does it mean to “love the world”? Does this mean we cannot enjoy life and search after some of the sights, pleasures, and experiences within it?

11) Read Phil 3:16 (and its context). How would you describe a season of spiritual stagnation (or a “spiritual rut”)? Is it always caused by sin?

12) What have you found to be the best way(s) to get out of a “spiritual rut”? Do you think getting out of one is always a matter of our choice?

13) Besides the “Reactionary Response” and “Quick Interaction” modes, do you think there are any other “mode titles” that could summarize the walk which many believers have with the Lord? If so, please describe.

14) If every believer diligently applied themselves towards growing spiritually, what are some things you think would be immediately evident within the local church? How about in the world abroad?

15) Read Matt 16:23; Luke 22:31; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 11:13–15; Eph 4:26–27; 6:11; Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8. How do you think the devil operates and seeks to undermine our spiritual lives? Also, discuss how some believers seem to see the devil involved in almost every difficulty they face, while others hardly see him as being involved in anything.What do you think the right balance is? Finally, if a difficulty is brought by Satan, do you think it is essential for us to even know that it originated with him?

16) Do you have a favorite spiritual discipline? If so, please share what is, as well as how you practice it and the benefit it gives you (and possibly others).

17) Have you ever put off addressing a “difficult thing” (as mentioned in the entry, such as forgiving someone) and then when you finally did, you ended up experiencing a new sense of freedom, joy, and spiritual growth? If so, please share your experience.

18) Read Rom 12:1-2. What does it mean to offer our bodies as living sacrifices?

2.

Small Group Discussion Questions: **Compartmentalize Your Spiritual Life**

- 1) Read Ps 119:133; Prov 3:5–6; Matt 22:34–40; 2 Cor 7:1; Jas 2:10–11. What does it mean to compartmentalize our spiritual life (do not just think in regards to outward actions but inward attitudes and biases as well)? Also, what do you feel are the primary areas believers are tempted to compartmentalize?

- 2) Read Prov 28:13. Have you ever seen an otherwise moral person have a “compartment” in their life? If so, what was it? How did it affect them and others? And if it was mentioned to them, how did they respond?

- 3) What roles do you think ignorance, desensitization, despondency, fear, shame, and willful disobedience have to play in the compartmentalization of the spiritual life? Please spend time breaking down each one of these and how they lead to “compartments.”

- 4) In what ways do people sometimes try to make up for willful compartments they have in their life?

- 5) Read Heb 12:5–6. Have you (or anyone you know) ever experienced God’s discipline because of a compartment? If so, please share your story. Were you (or they) “prompted” in some way to give it up beforehand. If so, how?

- 6) How can we keep an area that we have struggled with in our life (for perhaps years) from becoming compartmentalized? Or does this mean we have in fact already compartmentalized it?

3.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Forget Your Spiritual History

- 1) Read 1 Sam 17:36–37. Are there any benefits of recalling our spiritual history other than the ones mentioned in the entry (confidence, empathy, and as a testimony to others)?

- 2) Read Deut 8:10–11, 17–18. What are some dangers of forgetting our spiritual history other than the ones mentioned in the entry (thinking life was better by not being a child of God, forgetting lessons learned in avoiding moral failure, and not giving due praise to God)?

- 3) Read Titus 3:3 and 2 Pet 1:5–9. Has recalling your spiritual history ever helped you to relate to or empathize better with unbelievers or fellow believers (particularly new believers) in some manner? If so, in what way?

- 4) Have you ever forgotten one of God's great interventions in your past (particularly during a difficult time) but when you recalled it you were encouraged to face a later difficulty in a different manner? If so, what was it and how did recalling it help?

- 5) Read Rom 15:4. How is the spiritual history of other believers in times past also ours as well?

- 6) Read 2 Cor 1:3–4. Have you ever been encouraged by someone else who recounted to you a great intervention by the Lord on their behalf—especially in regards to a similar situation you were facing? If so, what was it and how were you helped?

- 7) Have you ever had the Lord intervene differently to a situation you had than he did with someone else with a similar situation as yours? How did this make you (as well as them) feel? How do you resolve this if there is no favoritism with the Lord?

- 8) Read Josh 4:4–7. What are ways we could “memorialize” one of God’s great interventions in our life so that it could help us to recall our spiritual history as well as serve as a testimony to others (and even to the next generation)?

4.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Don't Actively Study the Bible for Yourself

- 1) How would you define the word “actively” as it relates to the title of this entry, “Don't Actively Study the Bible for Yourself”? In other words, what does it take to “actively” study the Bible (daily, weekly, or perhaps something else)?

- 2) Read 2 Tim 2:15. What would you think of a carpenter who didn't know how to use a saw or an installer who was not aware of the details in the installation manual? In light of this, how can we go about getting more proficient with the Bible? Also, what are some supplemental ways we can get the Word of God into our hearts and minds?

- 3) Read 2 Tim 3:16–17. If the Bible is not looked upon as the final authority on issues relating to faith in God, moral conduct, as well as our overall world view, what are the ramifications?

- 4) Read Ps 119:105; Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Eph 4:14; Heb 5:12–14. In what specific ways does studying the Bible help us to mature in our faith?

- 5) Read Acts 17:11; Eph 4:11–14. Can we go too far in relying on others (particularly our pastors and other Bible teachers, etc.) for our Bible knowledge and the application of it? If so, in what ways? What is the proper balance?

- 6) What do you say to those who are skeptical of the Bible because there are so many different translations?

- 7) What do you say to those who ask you why you think the Bible is inspired by God?

- 8) Read Phil 4:13. How is this verse commonly used by many (especially athletes)? Now read the full context (the verses both before and after)—now what do you think it means?

5.

Small Group Discussion Questions: **View Trials as Merely Obstacles to Overcome**

1. What are the differences between God's discipline and retribution? Do you have biblical proof for your answer?

2. Read Jas 1:2-3. When a difficult situation is suddenly sprung upon you, what are usually your initial thoughts, especially those in regards to your relationship with God?

3. Read Heb 12:5-6. How does our view of God's love, sovereignty, and fatherhood affect how we view and face trials? Please address these three individually. Also, according to these verses what do you think is meant by making "light" of the Lord's discipline? And in what ways does "losing heart" show itself?

- 4) Read Pss 30:6; 119:71. Have you ever had a trial that seemed to make no sense at all, only to be shown later that it was actually very beneficial to have gone through it? If so, please share the details and what you learned from it.

- 5) Read 2 Cor 4:17. Have you ever had a trial that seemed to make no sense at all when you went through it *and it still doesn't seem to make any sense to you at all?* If so, please share the details and your current perspective on it.

- 6) Read Rom 8:28. If a believer and unbeliever were going through virtually the same exact trial, would you try to encourage them each the same? If not, how would the encouragement differ?

- 7) Read Prov 19:3. Have you ever known anyone who was blind to the fact that they were the main cause of their own difficulties (and were mad at God because of it)? Did things begin to change once (if) they recognized this fact?

- 8) In what ways do you think God primarily shapes us in our trials when we seek him during them? How essential is it for us to go through trials "God's way" or do you think we can equally learn through our failure to go through them properly? Also, how do we often go through them improperly?

- 9) Read 2 Cor 1:3-4. Have you been able to use the lessons learned from a trial you experienced to help others? If so, in what way? Also, have the trials of someone else ever been useful in helping you to go through your own? If so, in what ways?

10) Read Matt 16:23; Luke 22:31; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 11:13–15; Eph 4:26–27; 6:11; Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8. Do you think it is essential to know which trials we are experiencing are because of Satan? Why or why not?

6.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Demand Instant Gratification for Everything

- 1) Do you feel the demand for instant gratification by individuals in society today is greater now than for the previous generation? If so, why do you think this is the case? Also, in what specific areas is this so?

- 2) Read Gen 25:32–34. Similar to Esau, what are some areas we can “sell out” (ourselves, others, and the Lord) by seeking to acquire something now instead of waiting until the appropriate time? Please spend time examining all three areas individually.

- 3) Read 1 Sam 1:1–19. Have you ever obtained something you requested from the Lord much later than when you initially wanted? If so, please tell what it was and what the benefits were of getting it when you did (particularly in the development of godly character).

- 4) Have you ever witnessed beneficial examples of delayed gratification in the lives of others? If so, what were they and how did they benefit them and potentially others?

- 5) Read Col 3:12. In what ways do you think the character trait of patience helps a believer in their spiritual development?

- 6) Read Ps 37:7; Luke 18:1–8; Rom 12:19; 1 Thess 5:15; Jas 5:7–11. When we are wronged we often have an innate desire for instant gratification in the form of justice. Based on these verses, how should we instead respond?

- 7) Read 1 Cor 10:13. What are some ways we can overcome the demand for instant gratification in our lives?

7.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Covet the Lifestyle of the Rich and Famous

- 1) What do you feel are the underlying reasons that so many people want to be rich, famous, or prominent?

- 2) Read Ps 73:2–5; Matt 6:24; 1 Tim 6:9–10. While recognizing there is nothing inherently wrong with being rich and/or famous, what do you see as the potential negatives and greatest temptations involved with each, especially as it relates to the spiritual life?

- 3) Read Prov 30:8–9. Have you ever personally witnessed the life of a believer destroyed through the desire for great wealth or relative fame? If so, what happened?

- 4) Read Matt 13:18–23. Jesus spoke of the “deceitfulness” of riches—in what ways do you think riches are deceitful?

5) How can you tell the difference between immoral greed or legitimate ambition as the driving force within a person's life?

6) Read John 10:10. In contrast to many of the messages conveyed to us in advertisements, what would you describe as a full and meaningful life, especially as it relates to living for and serving the Lord?

7) Read Col 3:5. In what ways can greed be equated with idolatry?

8) Read Phil 4:12–13 (also examine Eccl 5:10, 18–19; 6:1–2). Whether in wealth or want, Paul said he had discovered the secret of being content. What is this secret?

9) Read Luke 18:18–30: Jesus seems to say that anyone who fully follows him will receive great reward in this life, such as houses. What do you think he meant when he said this?

10) Do you know of any wealthy or famous people who have used their wealth or fame to benefit the kingdom of God? If so, in what way(s)?

8.

Small Group Discussion Questions: **Never Consider Your Last Day on Earth Could Be Today**

- 1) Read Jas 4:13–15. If it was possible to know exactly when you were going to die, would you want to know? Why or why not? Do you think having this knowledge would change the way you are currently living and should it?

- 2) Read Pss 39:4–5; 90:12. What is the balance of fully contemplating, embracing, and preparing for death without being morbid about it?

- 3) Read 1 Thess 4:13. How should the funeral of a dedicated believer be different from that of an unbeliever?

- 4) Read Num 20:28–29; Acts 8:2. Some often speak about what their ideal wedding or life would be like. As morbid as it initially may sound, what would be the ideal funeral for yourself? What do you hope family, friends, the local news, unbelievers, etc. would recollect about you, particularly in regards to your faith?

- 5) Read Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–60; Heb 11:35–38. Many great servants of God have died right in the prime of their service to him. If God is sovereign and he wants to expand his kingdom—why do you think he allows this to happen? What should this say to us?

- 6) What are some practical ways we could prepare for our death that could also be beneficial to the kingdom of God after we are gone?

9.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Don't Get Enough Rest

- 1) Read 1 Kgs 19:1–4. What are some negative ways we are often affected spiritually when we do not get enough rest?

- 2) In what ways could pride, guilt, or a lack of faith keep us from getting the rest we need? Please discuss each individually.

- 3) Most believers see no problem with using caffeinated drinks to keep them going when they are tired. What do you feel about this? Is there ever an instance when using caffeine (or any other legal stimulant) can negatively affect a believer's spiritual life or testimony?

- 4) Read Exod 20:8–10. Without being legalistic, how can we establish a day (or period) of rest during the week? What could this look like?

- 5) To assist us in our spiritual life we often need to “listen to our body” better and react accordingly. What do you think this involves?

- 6) Read Mark 6:30–31. Jesus had his disciples take some time away from people to get some rest, even though many of them had legitimate needs. What are some potential implications for us?

- 7) Read Matt 11:28. In what way(s) does coming to Jesus grant us rest?

10.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Continually Be in a Hurry

- 1) Read Prov 14:17. Can you recall someone (or yourself) making a foolish mistake or unwise decision of some sort simply because of being in a hurry? If so, what was it?

- 2) What are some of the most obvious problems or incidents caused by hurriedness that you witness most frequently?

- 3) Read Luke 10:38–42. In your own life how would you describe the difference between a hurried day and a busy one? In particular, what are your differing reactions and interactions to problems, delays, and people?

- 4) What are some practical ways we can keep a busy day from becoming a hurried one, especially as it affects our spiritual life?

- 5) Have you ever been the “victim” of someone else having a hurried day? What were the circumstances surrounding the incident and how did that make you feel?

11.

Small Group Discussion Questions: **Allow Your Mind to Be a Personal Pigpen**

- 1) Read Ps 119:9–11, 33–37, 97–105. In what ways can a regular input of Scripture help keep our minds from becoming a personal pigpen?

- 2) Do you think that what mass media produces (particularly Hollywood) primarily influences the behavior in society or merely reflects it? Or perhaps something else? Please explain.

- 3) In what specific areas and ways do you think mass media can and does desensitize us to biblical standards?

- 4) Read Job 31:1 and Matt 5:28. Job said that he made a covenant with his eyes not to look upon a woman lustfully (which would thus contribute to his mind being a personal pigpen). What are some ways we too could make a covenant with our eyes?

- 5) Read Pss 39:4; 90:12; 1 Cor 10:23–24. Can there ever be a time when consumption of media that could be deemed as “neutral” (and thus not immoral) still be too much? If so, in what ways and for what reasons?

- 6) Read Rom 12:1–2. How can we offer our bodies up as a living sacrifice especially in regards to our minds? Also, what are the beneficial results of doing so?

- 7) Based on the passive media input you receive each day, which you have no control over (such as in public, work, or recreational places), would you say it is primarily positive, neutral, or detrimental to you having a focus on spiritual things? Please describe your daily situation.

- 8) Read Phil 4:8. How can we actively fulfill the exhortation of this verse?

- 9) Read Mark 7:21–22. Do you feel this statement is true: “Just as our waistline can give us an indication of our physical health, so too, our thought-life can give us an indication of our spiritual health”? Why or why not? If so, in what way(s)?

10) Have you (or anyone you know) ever been so attached to a particular media that it didn't seem possible to break free from it, but you (or they) did? If so, how was it done?

11) What are some common types of media outlets that believers sometimes disagree on as to whether or not it is proper to view, read, or listen to?

12) Read Rom 14; 1 Cor 8:9–13; 10:23–33. Are there forms of media that we may legitimately participate in but perhaps should refrain from for the sake of others and potentially for our testimony to unbelievers? Or is it hypocritical to even consider such distinctions?

12.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Don't Flee Temptation but Flirt with It Instead

- 1) If it is not a sin to experience temptation, then what are the dangers to our spiritual life of not realizing this truth?

- 2) Read Jas 4:17. In your own life do you find yourself more tempted to do that which is wrong or to refrain from doing what you know is right?

- 3) Read Jas 1:13–15. Apparently some of James' readers felt that God was tempting them to sin. What could cause a person (especially a believer) to adopt such a perspective? Also, what are the dangers of having having this perspective?

- 4) Read Jas 4:7 and 1 Pet 5:8. Do you think it is important to know when it is Satan trying to tempt us to sin (rather than that of normal temptation which arises through the course of our life)? Or should all temptation be dealt with in the same manner? If not, how should we face it differently?

- 5) Read Heb 4:15–16. Does it matter if Christ actually felt an inward temptation to sin or that his temptations were merely opportunities to sin of which he felt no draw whatsoever to actually commit? If so, please explain why.

- 6) Read Rom 6:1–2 and 1 John 1:8–10. Because the Word of God says we will never be able to be sinless in this life, what are some proper perspectives towards temptation we should adopt because of this truth? Conversely, what are some improper ones we unfortunately take on as well?

- 7) Read Gal 6:1. In what areas do you think it is possible for individuals to experience moral failure because they were helping someone else get back on their feet after committing it?

- 8) Read Gen 39:9–10; Job 31:1; Gal 6:1. In what scenarios can we make preventative decisions so that the opportunity to sin is either greatly limited or that it does not even get the chance to present itself? Have you (or anyone you know) ever had to do this? If so, in what instance?

- 9) Read 1 Cor 10:13–14. When we are faced with temptation why do we all too often try to deal with it ourselves instead of speaking openly to the Lord about it (or with others)?

13.

Small Group Discussion Questions: **Allow Your Conscience to Become Polluted**

- 1) Read Rom 2:14–15. How would you define the conscience? And do you believe the conscience is an accurate guide into moral matters? Why or why not?

- 2) Read Rom 9:1 and 1 Cor 4:4. How do you think the Holy Spirit and our conscience interact in assisting us to live morally?

- 3) Read Jas 4:17. Do you feel it is easier to get desensitized to things that we should do or to things we should not do? Why?

- 4) Read Rom 2:12–16 and Gal 5:16–21. Why do some unbelievers actually live a life that is morally superior to that of many believers? Also, does this affect the unbeliever's salvation status before the Lord? Why or why not?

- 5) Read 1 Cor 15:33. Have you ever had to distance yourself from “bad company”? If so, what were the circumstances and how did you do so? Also, what was the “bad company’s” reaction if they knew why you were distancing yourself and how did you respond?

- 6) Is it possible for two believers to have either participated in or refrained from the same activity and yet one of them sinned in the process, whereas the other person did not? Why or why not? Prove from Scripture.

- 7) Read 1 Cor 8; 10:27–28. Can you think of any modern day examples when “ignorance is bliss” regarding matters of conscience? In other words, in certain situations is it best to not ask too many questions about the nature of something that doesn’t on the surface appear immoral (e.g., inquiring about the labor laws surrounding something you have purchased). Or should we try and gather all of the facts, all of the time?

- 8) Have you ever witnessed someone whose conscience appeared to be polluted in one area but seemed healthy in others? If so, in what manner? And did this end up negatively affecting this person (or others) in some tangible way(s)?

- 9) Read Rom 14; 1 Cor 8:9, 13; 10:28. What are some modern day examples when the exercise of our faith could cause others to legitimately stumble? Also, is the exercise of our freedom always at the mercy of other believers who say they would be “stumbled” by our actions?

14.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Become Guilt-Ridden by Sin

- 1) What do you think is the difference between feeling guilty because of sin and feeling guilt-ridden because of it?

- 2) Read Ps 51:5 and Rom 7:21–25. How should having a basic understanding of the depth of our sinfulness and Christ’s work on the cross to pay for it, help us to avoid becoming guilt-ridden by sin?

- 3) Read Rom 3:25–26 and 1 John 1:9. How can God be infinitely holy and yet so freely forgive us when we confess our sin?

- 4) Read Rom 6:1–2 and Titus 2:11–13. How should the full forgiveness that Christ provides for our sin encourage us to avoid taking sin lightly?

- 5) Read Jas 3:2. How does knowing that our struggle with sin will never cease in this life make you feel in regards to desiring to live holy? In essence, is it a futile cause? Why or why not?

- 6) Read 1 John 1:9. If we adopt the perspective that we should quickly confess our sin and *immediately* move on in our relationship with God without guilt, how do we then avoid becoming desensitized to sin?

- 7) Read Rom 5:8; 8:38–39; and Eph 3:17–19. Does God love us any less when we sin? If not, then what are the reasons we often act like this is true?

- 8) Read Luke 15:11–32. When precisely did the Father feel compassion for his wayward son? And what are the implications for us when we sin or if we have been involved in a long period of sin such as the prodigal son was?

15.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Believe You Couldn't Commit the Hideous Sins of Others

- 1) Read 2 Sam 12:1–13. How do you think King David got so blinded to his own sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah the Hittite? And is there a teaching for us to grasp?

- 2) Read Ps 119:53 and Matt 7:1–5. What is the difference between righteous indignation at the sins of others and judgmentalism towards them?

- 3) Read Matt 7:1–5 and Titus 1:12–13. By making such a character evaluation of the Cretes, does Paul contradict, in practice, the teaching of Jesus? If not, what does this mean for us?

- 4) Read Gal 6:1 and Jude 22–23. The Apostle Paul said that we should be careful when restoring others who have sinned because we ourselves could be tempted. Can you think of any scenarios in which this might happen? What are some personal safeguards we should have in place?

- 5) Read Eccl 8:11 and Rom 13:1–5. Should the realization that all humans could commit the very same heinous sins of others (in either manner or extent) have any bearing on our criminal justice system? If so, in what ways? Also, should this knowledge have any influence on how one should view the death penalty?

- 6) Read 1 Tim 1:15–16. Has there ever been anyone you thought would never come to Christ, only to be shown otherwise? What was their story (or perhaps even yours)?

- 7) Is there someone you know of that committed a hideous sin you never thought possible for them? What was their story (or perhaps even yours)? How did they get entangled in or enticed to sin?

- 8) Read Jas 4:7. What does it look like to resist the devil by submitting to God? How do we even know when it is Satan causing the temptation and does it even matter?

- 9) Read Matt 6:9–13. How can we overcome our natural tendency to be passive in regards to praying preventatively on our own behalf?

16.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

When You Sin Against Others Don't Call It Like It Is

- 1) Read Matt 5:23–24. What are some reasons we as believers may wrongly delay in asking forgiveness from those we have sinned against? Are any of these legitimate reasons?

- 2) Read Gen 3:11–13; Exod 32:22–24. When public figures “confess” their sin, what are some of the most frequent words and phrases they use to mitigate their offense? Why do you think they do so, even though most of the listeners know what really happened? Have you ever had someone confess their sin against you in a similar manner? If so, how did it make you feel?

- 3) Read Rom 12:18; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13. In what ways do we harm others when we do not ask for their forgiveness for the sin we have committed against them? Also, in what ways can we potentially harm the body of Christ in this regard?

- 4) Do you agree with the entry when it says that “moral fortitude” is developed by clearly confessing our sin? If so, how would you define moral fortitude and how can the development of such a character trait help us to live better for God in other areas?

- 5) Read Exod 32:22–24. Have you ever had someone sin against you, but not fully confess what they did? Did it make it harder for you to forgive them? And if so, should it?

- 6) Read Acts 5:1–10. Can you think of any specific instances when it may be best to *not* tell someone you have sinned against them? If so, is it possible in such an instance to keep this from hindering our relationship with the Lord?

- 7) Read 1 Cor 11:29–31; Heb 12:4–13; Jas 5:14–16. How can we reconcile the fact of God's love for us and yet his seeming willingness to discipline us with sickness, especially for our unconfessed sin against others? (Note: As the entry states, we can be certain that most sickness in the life of the believer is not a direct result of sin, but is most commonly the result of living in a fallen world while inhabiting fallen and fragile bodies.)

17.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Frequently Involve Yourself in Quarrels

1) Read Prov 20:3; 2 Tim 2:23–24. How would you define what it means to quarrel?

2) Read Matt 12:19. The Lord Jesus frequently rebuked, corrected, and debated others. How was he able to do so without quarreling?

3) Read Prov 20:3. What things do you most frequently hear people quarrelling over? What percentile of these things would you say even merit the emotion given to them?

4) Read Prov 26:17; 1 Thess 4:11. Have you ever involved yourself in a quarrel that was not yours and regretted it later? Please describe the situation, why you involved yourself, and what led to your regret.

5) Read Prov 13:10; 26:17; 1 Thess 4:11. Why is it so difficult in many cases to mind our own business? Is minding our own business always a virtue? When is it and when is it not?

- 6) Read Eph 4:29; Col 4:6; 2 Tim 2:25; 1 Pet 3:15. When does a healthy, even animated, debate with another person go too far and become a quarrel? Also, when does it go too far so that even though we may win the argument (particularly over matters of the faith), we may “lose” the person (especially the potential opportunity to share Christ with them)?

- 7) Read Prov 20:3. When you feel a debate with another person is starting to get too heated, do you have any tips to avoid further escalation, especially in those instances when a resolution has to be reached relatively quickly?

- 8) Read Acts 15:36–41. With the background of Paul and Barnabas in mind, what lesson(s) can we learn from them when we strongly disagree with others? Also, is the adage “Let’s agree to disagree” always a virtue? If not, in what instances?

- 9) Read Prov 13:10. The Word of God says that human pride is ultimately the cause of many quarrels. Can you think of instances where this is particularly the case?

- 10) Read Prov 15:1, 18; 26:21; 29:11; Jas 1:19–20. Have you ever had to tell a friend that the reason they were involved in a quarrel (or perhaps many of them) is because they are too easily offended? If so, how did they receive your comment?

11) Read Prov 22:24-25; 1 Cor 15:33. What are the dangers of being closely associated with those who like to quarrel (even beyond those mentioned in these verses)? Also, what are some tips to interacting and dealing with them?

18.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Dehumanize the "Down and Out" and "Others" of the World

1) Read Prov 22:2. How would you define the "Down and Out" And "Others" of the world?

2) Read John 4:9. How would you define what it means to "dehumanize" an individual or group of people? Can you think of examples (either historical or contemporary) where a group of people was dehumanized and what were the results?

3) From a biblical standpoint why is the practice of dehumanizing others wrong (attempt to bring relevant Scripture to the matter)?

4) Read Esth 3:8-9. What does the practice of dehumanizing others look like within the context of each of the following "isms": Racism, sexism, elitism, nationalism, and evolutionism? Also, what can it look like in our own life towards the "Down and Out" and "Others" we come across?

- 5) When individuals “dehumanize” others, do you think it is always blatantly obvious to the individual or group doing the dehumanization? If not, what are some seemingly “innocent” ways people dehumanize others?

- 6) What are common presumptions that many make towards the “Down and Out” and “Others” that are certainly not always true?

- 7) Read Gal 4:12–14. How do we overcome the sometimes initial sense of repulsion we may feel towards the “Down and Out” and “Others” and instead interact and minister to them in love as Christ would have us?

- 8) Have you ever been tempted to underestimate (or perhaps dehumanized) a “Down and Out” and “Other” person only to be amazed at the story of their life or devotion to the Lord? If so, please tell the story and the feelings you experienced about them as well as yourself.

19.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Don't Have Any Unbelieving Friends

- 1) Read Rom 10:14. What are some reasons many believers do not have any unbelieving friends? And how can they change this?

- 2) Read Matt 28:16–20. In spite of the call of Christ, why do you think many believers are not active in sharing their faith?

- 3) What do you believe are some of the **most** effective ways to share the gospel in this day and age? Why do you feel this way?

- 4) What are some of the **least** effective ways you have seen individuals or groups attempt to share the gospel? Why do you feel this way?

- 5) Read 1 Cor 9:19–23. Notice that the Apostle Paul was willing to sacrifice his usual manner of life and comfort zone so that he could “become all things to all men” and thus reach them with the gospel. What are ways we can do the same? What are the limitations/precautions we should apply as well?

- 6) Read Acts 20:24. If our ultimate goal in having a friendship with an unbeliever is their salvation, do you think this is insincere—sort of like a “bait and switch” type of situation? Why or why not?

7. What do you feel about “missionary dating” wherein a believer dates an unbeliever with the (sometimes supposed) goal of leading them to Christ? Please support your position from Scripture.

- 8) Read Rom 2:21–24; 2 Cor 8:21; Phil 2:15; 1 Tim 6:1; Titus 2:8–10; 1 Pet 2:12. What is the balance of sharing with unbelievers that Christ does indeed make a difference in our lives, but yet not feeling like we have to be “perfect” in front of them? How do we often go about this wrong and even hypocritically?

- 9) If an unbeliever were to ask you what is the gospel message and thus how to be saved, what would you say? Share 3–4 Bible verses to support your position.

10) Read 1 Cor 5:9–10; 1 John 2:15–17. What do these verses mean and do they have any relevance to the relationships we develop with unbelievers?

20.

Small Group Discussion Questions: **Yoke Yourself with the Unbelieving As Well As Disobedient Professors of Christ**

- 1) Read 2 Cor 6:14. How would you define what it means to be “yoked” with the unbelieving?

- 2) Is it possible to have an “emotional yoke” that could perhaps fall under Paul’s prohibition against being yoked with unbelievers? If so, in what way?

- 3) Read 1 Cor 5:9–10. What is the balance between loving unbelievers and developing true relationships with them but yet not becoming “yoked” to them? In what instances does the line get crossed?

- 4) If you knew of a believer who was dating an unbeliever and they asked you for advice on what to do, what would you say based on Scripture, especially if they felt the other person may be “the one”?

- 5) Read Matt 18:15–20; 1 Cor 5:9–11; 2 Thess 3:6, 14–15. How should church discipline be enacted towards disobedient professors of Christ?

- 6) Why do you think church discipline is not often exercised towards disobedient professors of Christ in churches today?

21.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Don't Forgive Others but Instead Hold Onto Your Grudges against Them

- 1) Read Matt 18:15–17. Based on these verses how are we to approach a fellow believer if we believe they have sinned against us? Instead of following this process, what unfortunately often happens instead? Why do you think the church is called upon to possibly get involved and do you feel doing so is practical in our day and age (especially in light of the other fellowship options for the one being disciplined as well as the possibility of a lawsuit by them)?

- 2) Read Luke 17:3–6; Col 3:13. Why is it so hard to forgive others especially when we as believers have been forgiven so much? What do you think are usually the main factors involved in harboring unforgiveness and how can believers overcome them?

- 3) Read Matt 6:14–15; 18:21–35; 1 John 1:5–7. If we do not forgive others, how is our fellowship with God negatively affected? And why do you think our forgiveness of others is so important to God?

- 4) In what ways does unforgiveness often inwardly damage the one harboring it? Also, how does it potentially damage the one who would like to be forgiven but is not?

- 5) If we have truly forgiven someone does this mean we will never have negative thoughts or anger towards them specifically because of what they did to us? If not, then how should we deal with these thoughts when they arise?

- 6) Read 1 Cor 13:4–5. If we have truly forgiven someone does this mean we have to treat them just as if their sin against us has never happened (in other words “forgive and forget”)? If so, does making them earn back our trust violate the principle of true forgiveness?

- 7) If we as believers are unforgiving of others, what message does this send to unbelievers about God, the gospel, and the church?

- 8) Read 1 Cor 6:1–7. If someone has sinned against us does this mean we cannot seek for justice and recompense on our behalf?

- 9) What if someone who has sinned against us is no longer alive (or is currently out of our lives completely). In both cases, how should we proceed in forgiving them?

10) Have you ever experienced a great feeling of liberation after having forgiven someone? What was the situation?

11) Read Luke 17:3-4. We are called to forgive regardless of how many times we are sinned against. Does this change based on the sincerity of the person asking for our forgiveness? Also, what if they do not ask for forgiveness or show any remorse? What do we do about relationships where our forgiveness seems to be taken advantage of by the other person?

22.

Small Group Discussion Questions: **Strive To Be Esteemed by Others**

- 1) Read Rom 12:17; 2 Cor 8:21; Gal 1:10. Examine the context of each verse. Is there any difference between the desire to be well thought of by others and wanting to be esteemed by them? If so, in what ways?

- 2) Read Luke 20:46–47; Acts 5:1–10. What are some ways in which we might try to be esteemed by others in the things WE DO (don't just think of the obvious, showy stuff, but also in subtle things as well).

- 3) What are ways in which we might try to be esteemed by other in the things WE DO NOT DO (don't just think of the obvious, showy stuff but also in subtle things as well)?

- 4) Read 2 Cor 8:21 (and its context). Even though the Apostle Paul was acting with total integrity before the Lord in handling and administering the finances, he still thought it very important to establish accountability so that he was above reproach by others. Thus, he cared what people thought. In light of this, can you think of any situations where, even though we are acting with total integrity before the Lord, we should still seek to do so in a way that is respectable in the eyes of others—particularly unbelievers?

- 5) Read Prov 16:2; Jer 17:9; 1 Cor 4:4. Often we can be blinded as to our own true motives for doing certain things. Can you think of areas and situations where this may be more apt to be true, especially as it relates to the desire for the esteem of others (e.g., sometimes certain prayer requests may be nothing more than self-promotion)?

23.

Small Group Discussion Questions: **Use Other Believers as Your Spiritual Measuring Stick**

- 1) Read Matt 7:1–5; Titus 1:12–13. Compare these set of verses. How do we reconcile the two— especially in regards to not judging others and yet making true character evaluations. How can this be done properly?

- 2) Read 1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17. Are there any benefits of spiritually measuring ourselves with other believers? If so, in what ways and how should it be done? Also, do you feel that in calling others to follow his example that the Apostle Paul is either being arrogant or self-assured?

- 3) Read Ps 19:12; Matt 23:23–24; Luke 18:9–14; 2 Cor 10:12; Gal 6:3–5. What are some dangers of spiritually measuring ourselves with other believers?

- 4) Read Luke 18:10–14. What are some of the personal standards of righteousness that we or others may rightfully develop and apply to our own life but then wrongly use them to evaluate (judge) the lives of others? Note: What is in mind here are things that are neither specifically allowed or prohibited in God's Word, but are of our own choices.

- 5) Read Matt 10:41–42; 25:31–46; Rom 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 4:29; Heb 6:10. What are some ways that we can *actively seek* to benefit the spiritual welfare of others?

24.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Put God in a Theological Box

- 1) Read Eccl 11:5; Isa 55:8–9. How would you define a “theological box”?

- 2) Read Isa 53:4; Luke 13:1–5; John 9:1–23; Acts 11:1–18 for examples in which individuals tried to put God in a theological box. What are some ways in which individuals (both believers and unbelievers) attempt to do the same today?

- 3) Read Job 42:2–3; Ps 147:4–5; Eph 3:20–21. Have you ever had a “theological box” for God, only to have him show you he is not contained in it? If so, what was it and what do you think caused you to put him in it in the first place? Also, how were you shown that your box was wrong and how did it affect you?

- 4) The community of Israel, and especially the religious leaders, had many theological boxes for God. How do you think the community of people around us can shape our view of God either for the negative or positive? And what are the ramifications for us?

- 5) Are there any things that you believe or do not believe about God that are not found in the Scriptures but are rather just a hunch (perhaps that he does or does not have a sense of humor or that he would or would not help you find lost car keys)? If so, what are they and why do you believe so?

- 6) What do you think are some reasons many believers do not feel more free to explore some of the struggles they may have concerning God and faith? In light of these, how can the church community make it more welcoming and beneficial for them to do so?

- 7) Read Acts 17:10–12. While appreciating the teachers the Lord has given to the church, what are some things we can learn from the Bereans?

- 8) Read 2 Tim 2:15. What are some ways we can go about fulfilling the exhortation from Paul in regards to God's Word?

- 9) Read 1 Pet 3:15; Jude 3. In practical conversations with unbelievers how can we earnestly hold to and contend for the faith without coming across as overly self-assured or narrow-minded?

10) Read Deut 13:1–4; Matt 7:15; 24:24; 2 Cor 11:14–15; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1. What are some ways we can detect false teachers of the Word of God?

25.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Believe that God "Owes" You

- 1) Read Luke 17:10. As believers should we just be happy we are going to heaven and not concern ourselves with seeking his blessing because of our service to him here on earth? Why or why not?

- 2) Read Deut 9:4. What are some common things that we as believers may feel that God "owes" us? And what are some underlying reasons that could cause us to feel that he does?

- 3) Have you ever been greatly disappointed with God because he did not fulfill something you felt that you were "owed"? If so, what was it and how did you come to grips with your feelings of disappointment? Also, have you known others who have experienced this as well? And how did they deal with it?

- 4) Read Matt 6:31–33. The Word of God says that if we seek first God's kingdom then he will meet our needs. Therefore, when we do seek his kingdom first does he "owe" it to us to meet our needs? Why or why not?

- 5) Read John 15:5 and Phil 2:13. How do these verses shed light on how we should view our service to the Lord? How should this affect our perspective on our potential rewards in heaven?

- 6) Read Matt 20:1–16. How does it make you feel when someone who does not seem to be diligent in serving the Lord receives what is obviously a blessing from him? Instead, how should you feel?

- 7) Instead of believing that God “owes” us, what in fact do we owe him?

26.

Small Group Discussion Questions: Continually Strive To Appease God

- 1) Read Rom 5:9. What do you believe are some of the reasons that cause believers to attempt to “appease” God? Based on these reasons, what are some of the ways in which believers try to do so?

- 2) Read Col 3:5–7; Heb 12:4–11. What is the difference between God’s discipline and his wrath?

- 3) Read Heb 12:4–11; Jas 1:2–8. How does knowing about the nature of God’s loving discipline help us to view and face trials in our life differently?

- 4) Read Rom 3:25–26; 8:18–25; 1 John 2:2. Based on these verses do you think “natural disasters” are caused by an angry God that needs to be appeased? Why or why not?

- 5) Read Rom 6:1–2; Titus 2:11–12. Do you think fear of God’s anger is a good motivator to combat sin in the life of a believer?

- 6) When we present the gospel to unbelievers should our appeal be based on God's love for them or on God's coming wrath upon them...or perhaps something else? Give scriptural support for your position (you may want to look at the gospel presentations of the early church particularly in the book of Acts).

- 7) How do we truly strive for God's heart and not his hand while at the same time desiring his blessing on our behalf?

Exercise: Using a concordance, do a New Testament word study on the word "please" (and its verb tenses) and look for specific examples of things that God is said to be pleased with.

27.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Focus on Trying to Discover God's Will Instead of Actually Doing It

1) Read Ps 143:10. How would you define the "moral will of God"?

2) Have you been so determined to find God's exact will about a non-moral, though important, decision you had to make, that when you did not find it, you ended up not doing anything at all? If so, what was it? What was the result? And do you have any regrets concerning this?

3) How would it make you feel to find out that God did not have a specific will in regards to the request that you are making other than whatever it is keeps love for him and others at the forefront? Do you see this as him being less caring, more empowering, or perhaps something else?

4) How can the perspective of God as a killjoy affect us as we seek to find out his will for a specific situation or decision we are facing?

- 5) In biblical times, God's sometimes gave his guidance through specifically requested actions, sacred objects (Urim and Thummim; cf. Exod 28:30), prophets, dreams, visions, and other special means. Is it legitimate to ask him to do so today as a means of finding his will? If so, what are the parameters we should place on the validity of these things?

- 6) Have you ever had a convergence of things such as circumstances, inner witness, godly counsel, etc., come together so that you thought you acquired the will of God in a matter—only to find out that perhaps you were wrong? How did this make you feel? What did you do about it? Also, how does this affect you today?

- 7) Are there any benefits of not knowing if God has an exact blueprint for our life? If so, what are they?

- 8) Do you think there is only one perfect will of God for our lives such as one particular spouse for us, one specific mission, one certain job to have, as well as one place to live, etc.? If so, why? Also, what are the ramifications of this belief upon our spiritual life?

- 9) Read Ps 37:4–5; Prov 16:3. What if we do not truly know what the desires of our heart are but instead only know that the current life we have right now is not what we want? What should we do?

10) Read Prov 2:6; Rom 11:33; 12:1–2; Eph 5:15–16; Col 1:9–10; Jas 1:5–6. What are ways in which we can best obtain wisdom from the Lord?

11) Read Matt 22:35–40. The main entry suggests that loving God and others is the basis for discovering God’s will. What do you think about this?

12) Read Rom 8:28. Should finding and fulfilling God’s will always look “successful” and place us in pleasant circumstances? If not, how could this be if God loves us and wants the best for our life?

Exercise: Read these verses and discover explicit examples of what God’s will is for us: John 6:40; Eph 5:17–18; 1 Thess 4:3–10; 5:18; 1 Tim 2:3; 1 Pet 2:13–15; 2 Pet 3:9.

28.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Neglect Your Role as a Manager of God's Blessings and Belongings

- 1) What is your initial reaction when you contemplate that you are not only a child of God but a “manager” as well?

- 2) Read Luke 12:42–43. How do we go about “actively” pursuing the role as manager of God's gifts and resources?

- 3) Read Matt 25:21. Do you believe that how we manage the things we have been entrusted with here on earth will have any bearing on our lives in eternity? If so, in what ways? Do you have scriptural proof?

- 4) Read 1 Cor 12:4–11; 1 Pet 4:10. If you do not know what your spiritual gift is can you still be an effective manager? If so, in what ways?

- 5) What areas beyond our spiritual giftedness and material resources do you think are involved in being a manager of God's blessings and belongings?

- 6) When Jesus said, "*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,*" is he saying to start depositing your treasure in heaven through faithful stewardship and your heart will follow? Or is he saying that if your heart is already directed heavenward your treasure will follow because that is where you will be directing your earthly efforts? Or could it be something else? Please discuss.

- 7) Read Mark 12:41–44; 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 9:6–8; Phil 4:14–20. What are some principles of giving we can draw from these verses? Also, how do you think these principles relate to tithing? Do they supplement it, work in tandem with it, or perhaps supersede it?

- 8) Read 1 Tim 6:9–10. How do you think the "love of money" is the root of all evil? What are some examples of evil in the world that are primarily caused by the love of money? How can the love of money destroy our own life? Have you witnessed it destroy others?

- 9) Read 2 Cor 9:6–8. What if our heart feels somewhat stingy when the offering time comes around at church. Should we wait until our heart changes before giving? Why or why not?

10) Read Matt 6:25–33; Phil 4:19. When we speak of God meeting our material needs, at the bare minimum, what are they in reality?

11) Read Eph 1:18–20; 3:20–22. Often when we think of the Lord’s ability to provide we only think of material things. What about his spiritual provision—in what ways does he provide in this regard?

12) Read Deut 8:17–18. How do these verses relate to us when we think of things as being “ours,” especially those things that we may have sacrificed and worked hard for? Are there any actions we should take towards our possessions in light of these verses?

Exercise: Take a moment to mentally go through every possession you have (perhaps naming them) and to declare them to be the Lord’s. While you are doing this, contemplate ways in which you can better use them to serve God and others.

29.

Small Group Discussion Questions: **Constantly Try To Find Your True Purpose in Life**

- 1) The entry says that as believers our true purpose in life is found in loving God (which includes obedience to his commands), loving our fellow humans (which includes service to them), and also sharing the gospel with them. What do you feel about this? Is this too broad or narrow? Or does our true purpose have to be one specific thing alone?

- 2) Read Esth 4:12–14. Are there any potential dangers in believing that you are living at this particular time and place in history for a particular reason? If so, what are they? Also, are there any dangers in believing that you are not here for any specific purpose?

- 3) In what ways can we become so earthly-minded that we are little to no heavenly good? Conversely, in what ways can we become so heavenly-minded that we are little to no earthly good?

- 4) Read Matt 7:12; 22:36–39; Jas 2:8; 1 John 3:16–18. Do you agree that “*we indeed can truly show love to people (even those who have animosity for us) through our actions without necessarily feeling an emotion of love for them*”? Why or why not?

- 5) Read 1 John 4:20. The Apostle John said that anyone who does not love their fellow humans whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. Why do you think he says this?

- 6) Read Matt 28:18–20. What do you think of the statement that “*sharing the gospel is the greatest social cause*”? Do you agree or disagree and why?

- 7) Do you believe there is a difference between “sacred” and “secular” in regards to social causes? Why or why not? Also, even if a believer were involved with a social cause with no direct spiritual implications is there a way they can still make an impact for the kingdom of God in participating in the cause? If so, in what way(s)?

Exercise: Read 1 Cor 13. Based on this chapter take some time to discuss what the expressions of love should look like in all of our relationships. Also, discuss the difficulties of expressing love in these ways and how to overcome them.

30.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Compete Against Fellow Laborers in the Service of God

- 1) What are seemingly “passive” ways that competition can, and often does, happen between fellow laborers in the service of God (not only at the individual level but organizationally as well)?

- 2) Read Num 11:27–29; Mark 9:38; 3 John 9. Have you ever witnessed a clear-cut instance of improper competition between servants of God (whether individuals or institutions)? What was it and how were people (perhaps yourself) as well as the kingdom of God overall, negatively affected?

- 3) Read Phil 1:12–17. If we sense others are competing against us, how are we often tempted to act? Instead what should we do?

- 4) In what areas and ways can we work with those of a different faith (or those with no faith)? In what matters could we *not* work with those of a different faith (or those with no faith)? Also, can you think of any instances when we could not work with those of our same faith?

- 5) Can there ever be times when competition is good between believers as well as between believing communities? If so, in what way(s)?

- 6) Read Mark 9:35. Why is true “greatness” in God’s kingdom accomplished through servanthood?
