



**A 7-WEEK STUDY GUIDE**

# **LEADER'S NOTES**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Please remember these notes are only for reference if you need them. They are a supplement to the discussion. The goal is not to get to the answers provided below, but instead to engage in open and honest discussion. Please give adequate time for group members to respond to the questions before referring to these notes.

<b>1 LOVED, GAVE // BELIEVE, HAVE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 THE ROAR FROM ZION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3 A BAPTISM LIKE NO OTHER</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4 HOW WE KNOW WHAT LOVE IS</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5 GOD'S WORD TO YOU</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>6 NEITHER HOT NOR COLD</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>7 GIVE ME A LITTLE PEACE</b>	<b>21</b>

## SESSION ONE — LOVED, GAVE // BELIEVE, HAVE

*When it comes to flying a plane or leading a Life Group, the takeoff is very important. One of your main goals as a Life Group leader is to create an environment where group members feel safe to openly and honestly share their true opinions and answers. It has often been said, “Your group will only go as deep as the leader.” It is our hope and prayer that your Life Group would not only be a safe place, but that members would be transparent and “go deep” when it comes to answering the questions. Therefore, the best way to cultivate this atmosphere in your group is to lead the way.*

*Because this is the first week of the series, you may have to start the conversation by being the first to answer the questions. This is especially true when it comes to the personal, introspective questions. Remember to encourage your group members when they answer, and at all costs, fight the urge to give hasty advice or quick fixes. We believe that God—through your group, His Word, and His Holy Spirit—will guide and correct people.*

*Have a great group!*

*As you begin your group discussion, take some time to talk about some interesting points that your group members picked up from watching the lesson. This is a good time to discuss something that was mentioned in the teaching or testimony that may not be addressed within the questions of the lesson.*

1. You will notice that each session during series will begin with this very question. The theme of this series is simple: Just one verse can change everything. With this question, we seek to put that very theme to the test and to really see how one verse can completely change the way we view God, the way we view ourselves, and the way we conduct our lives.

In reality, we should treat every verse of Scripture with this kind of care and reflection! Instead of carrying around our assumptions about who God really is, we should be willing to reconsider how we look at Him based on what He has revealed to us about Himself through the Scriptures. Instead of sticking to the same old stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, we should dive into the stories of Scripture and see how much God loves us. Instead of following the same well-worn patterns that lead us into misery and regret, perhaps we should allow the truth of the gospel to transform the decisions and choices we make—in order to lead us to joy and freedom from sin.

Since this question is largely a personal one, the notes should not weigh too heavily on how your response. We shall simply offer a few simple thoughts to send you and your group members in a helpful direction.

First, John 3:16 teaches us to rethink how we think about God. In this verse, we learn that God is loving, rather than vengeful. His desire and aim is not to punish the world for their sins, but rather, to save the world from them. In the past, we may have believed that God’s aim for us was to weigh our actions on a scale and determine whether the good outweigh the bad or the other way round—saving paradise for the good people and torment for the bad. But this simply isn’t true. God’s character begins and ends and begins again with love.

Second, John 3:16 teaches us to rethink how we view ourselves. We may come to believe that there is a particular burden upon our shoulders—that we are worthy of love only if we prove we are worthy of it. However, this is carrying the burden of conditional love. God has shown that we are already worthy of His love simply by being created by Him, and He proved this by sending His Son.

Finally, John 3:16 teaches us to change how we behave in the world. Quite simply, eternal life begins with belief in God. When we place our faith in God, that means that we trust in Him to provide the deepest needs of our humanity—our yearning for goodness, our longing for love and acceptance, and our search for truth. When we find satisfaction for these strivings through our faith in God, we will not look for them elsewhere. And when we do not need to look for

them elsewhere, we find freedom from the sins and unhealthy habits that plague us.

However, these are not the only answers. Allow each group member time to really dig into this question. And in fact, if this is the only question you are able to cover during your discussion time, it may have been time well spent indeed.

2. It is essential for Christians to understand that love and self-sacrifice are the foundations of Christian character. And in fact, we can easily say that love and self-sacrifice are one and the same. After all, this matches the teaching of Jesus in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

Love is the great distinctive of Christian character. Without love, we could not say that anything we do follows after the example of Christ. In fact, any accomplishment or achievement or really anything at all that does not love at its core is essentially meaningless. This is what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 when he writes, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Meanwhile, sacrifice is the primary means by which we understand the will of God. In order to truly grasp God's purpose for us, we must lay down the purposes we have constructive for ourselves. This is what we see in Romans 12:1-2, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

If love and sacrifice are the goals of the Christian life, then certainly the love of God and the sacrifice of Christ are the engines of that life. We are not able to love unconditionally under our own power. We love because God is love and because love unfurls from His being into ours. We are able to sacrifice only because Jesus sacrificed His life for us.

3. This is a good opportunity for members in your group to share their personal testimony. It may be the case that everyone in the group does not know the testimonies of the others in the group, and so, encourage everyone to go around the circle and share how they came to faith in the Lord. Keep in mind, however, that some members in your group may not have made this decision just yet. If not, ask them to share the state of their journey so far. Doing so may open an opportunity to discuss why they haven't made the full commitment to Christ.

4. This question comes from John 3:19-21, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

We may typically think of the light of God as a fluorescent beam, cold and sterile. And in fact, we often view the judgment of God in this way—we envision God sitting in a judge's seat and looking down upon us with a disapproving glare. However, the words of John 3:16-21 are actually meant to convey a very different and more truthful picture of God.

The light of God is in reality a warm and loving and glorious light, burning with eternal brilliance from the courts of heaven and filling every corner of the universe. After all, this is precisely what happened when Jesus gave up his life on the cross. The light of God's love burst throughout all of creation.

In the end, the choice is ours. If we choose to shrink back from God's light, then it is only because we believe that doing so will turn out poorly for us. We believe that it is better to hide our sins and wrongdoings. Rather than step into the light and reveal that we're not completely righteous in our actions, we prefer to hide and shroud our actions in darkness.

In this way, we judge ourselves. We punish ourselves by refusing to accept God's love, and we create our own torment.

However, if we accept God's love, it is like stepping into the light of truth. When we accept God's love, we realize and recognize that God loved us even while we were sinners. And therefore, we no longer need to hide. In this way, God's love allows us to see the truth.

5. Allow your group members to take some time to consider this question. Many of your group members may not believe there are barriers standing between them and God's love, but it may help to simply assume there's at least one small obstacle standing between you and the full acceptance of God's love. Some in your group may think that they need to prove themselves worthy of God's love before they're allowed to receive it. Others may think that God's love isn't necessarily an important thing to receive and that there are other more valuable pursuits in life. Still others may believe that God is unloving at His core.

Whatever the barrier may be, remember that this is not an occasion to "fix" the other members of our group. This is an opportunity for them to identify one of their own barriers and to figure out a person plan for how to get past it.

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

6. The questions center around Jesus' statement in John 14:6, when he says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." But one major key toward unlocking some of the truth behind these questions comes by reading the verses that come after, especially in John 14:9-11. In those verses, Jesus claims that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father and that the Father is in him and he is in the Father. And while the disciples had a difficult time understanding what he was teaching, today we understand more clearly. Jesus is God Himself, the Son of God, and the second person of the Trinity. Therefore, a simple answer to the question is this: Jesus is the way to God because He is God. Jesus is the truth about God because He is God. Jesus is the life that comes from God because He is God.

However, we could spend a little more time untangling this by diving into the original Greek words that the author John used to capture Jesus' teaching. The Greek word for "way" is *hodos*, which means "road" or "pathway." And so, we should understand Jesus much like a road that leads to the destination we seek—God Himself. If we want to find God, then the road that leads us to Him is Jesus Christ. By placing our faith in Him and by being baptized in His name and by studying His teachings and by seeking to live like Him, Jesus becomes a road that leads us to God. There is no other road to God except for Jesus because Jesus Himself is God.

The Greek word for "truth" is *aletheia*, which means "what is sure" or "what is genuinely real." For instance, consider the goal of a detective attempting to solve a crime—her aim is to discover who committed the crime and what genuinely happened. Or consider the goal of a scientist—he wants to understand the reality behind a black hole or a strand of DNA. Each of us carries a desire for truth, to see the world as it truly is and to see ourselves as we truly are. In order to understand this, we must discover our origin—where we came from and how we came to be, as well as the purpose for which we were created. This truth is discovered only through Jesus.

Finally, the Greek word for "life" is *zoe*, which means "the physical vitality of organic beings." *Zoe* is the thing that separates organic from inorganic. Plants have this kind of life. Animals have this kind of life. Human beings have this kind of life, and they have it in eternal abundance when they enter the Lord's presence. The source of this very life is Jesus Christ, and the reason why we can look forward to eternal life in God's presence is because of the sacrifice Jesus paid through his death.

7. The key to understanding Jesus' words in John 14:12 centers around what he means by "greater." When Jesus says that the one who has faith in Christ will do "greater" things, what exactly does he mean? Certainly, none could top the works of Jesus in terms of quality. After all, Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the whole world and then rose from

the dead three days later. There is certainly nothing that we could ever accomplish in terms of quality that would be “greater” than what Jesus did on the cross and in the tomb.

Therefore, we must consider the word “greater” in a different light, and many scholars agree that Jesus was speaking about the magnitude and scale of the work. After all, Jesus’ ministry was confined to a small geographical area, to modern-day Palestine. But the followers of Jesus would carry his ministry to the ends of the earth.

For Jesus, this was a motivating statement to his disciples and to us as well. Jesus was the foundation and the seed of his ministry—the salvation of the entire world. And we have the privilege of seeing the fruit that he planted. We get to witness the magnitude of Jesus’ work on the cross, to see hundreds and thousands and even millions of lives changed by what Jesus accomplished. Through our faith in Him, we get to join in His work. What’s more, we get to see the incredible multiplying effect that the gospel can have in the world.

## **SESSION TWO — THE ROAR FROM ZION**

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*Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or perhaps missed by others.*

1. Each session during series will begin with this very question. The theme of this series is simple: Just one verse can change everything. With this question, we seek to put that very theme to the test and to really see how one verse can completely change the way we view God, the way we view ourselves, and the way we conduct our lives.

Since this question is largely a personal one, the notes should not weigh too heavily on how your response. We shall simply offer a few simple thoughts to send you and your group members in a helpful direction.

First, in this verse we see that the Lord roars, which is an interesting word to use about Him. The Hebrew word that Joel used when he wrote the words of Joel 3:16 is *sha’ag*, which refers to the deep and rumbling cry of a lion. For the Israelite people, many of whom were shepherds, lions were ruthless and feared killers. And in the hill country of Judah, the roars of the lion could be heard for miles around. The sound of the lion’s roar was a sound of power and dominion. What does this say about the Lord? That the sound of His voice inspires power and strength. When the Lord speaks, we should listen, much like an Israelite shepherd would certainly listen if he heard the roar of a lion nearby.

Second, we might learn that people need refuges. This verse uses two words to describe the kind of protection that the Lord gives to His people—first, a Hebrew word that refers to a shelter that keeps you out of the rain; second, a Hebrew word that refers to a fortress on top of a mountain. When you put these two words together, you recognize that the Lord protects from trouble that comes from above us and trouble that comes from below—meaning that His protection is complete. We cannot protect ourselves in the way that the Lord protects us, and so, we must recognize that the Christian life contains an element of reliance upon the Lord.

Finally, we learn from this awe-inspiring portrayal of the Lord that we must treat Him with all due respect and honor. As we love the Lord and deepen our relationship with Him, we must recognize a key element to love—respect. The Lord does not exist simply as a supernatural hired hand, ready to meet the often-inconsequential longings of our hearts. He is truly a fearsome Lord, roaring from Zion. Therefore, as we pray to the Lord, we cannot treat Him as a heavenly vending machine. We must approach Him as He deserves—the thunder-shaking Creator of the universe.

2. In order to answer this question, we may find some help from borrowing from other Scriptures in order to amplify the wisdom of these words. First, we could look to Proverbs 9:10, which states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." And so, looking for moments to stand in awe of God's power is useful for us because it guides us onto a path of wisdom.

We could also find help from the words of Psalm 112:1-7...

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever... Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.

We may come to believe that blessing in life comes from valuing ourselves highly and putting ourselves first. But this is far from true, and in fact, when we practice standing in awe of God and fearing Him, we will find blessing and courage in all situations.

3. Since this question features a more personal edge to it, make sure that each group member has an opportunity to share at least one example of something that causes them to stand in awe of God. It may be something as magnificent as the expanse of the galaxies. It may be something as impossibly and infinitesimally small as the structure of a single cell. If your group members have trouble identifying something, then feel free to pose the question in a different way: What is something in the universe that confuses you or baffles you? What is something that causes you to wonder about how God made it?

4. One helpful way to answer this question is to go through each of the verses, one at a time, and see how the Lord promises to give us refuge. In these notes, we will offer some background information that might help give some extra depth for your discussion:

In Psalm 46:1, we see that the Lord is "ever-present." That word is translated from a Hebrew phrase that means "you can find God a lot." And actually, that's a wonderful way to think about God's omnipresence from the standpoint of the Christian life. You can find God a lot, especially in places where you don't really think you would find Him. The reason why the Lord is such a great refuge for us is because we can find Him in so many surprising and unique places. He is always there for us, especially in the moments we don't expect to find Him.

In Psalm 46:4, we see that the Lord is a river with streams flowing throughout His city. In an arid region like Israel, rivers were essential for civilization. The great Egyptian dynasties that we read about in history were only possible because of the Nile River and the fertile soil that it brought. Meanwhile, the famous city of Babylon was situated along the banks of the Euphrates River. The city of Jerusalem was not famous for having a major river run through the city, though the nearby Gihon Spring that surged out of the Kidron Valley to the east of the city provided a majorly necessary water source that made the city of Jerusalem itself possible. What this tells us, then, is that the reason why the Lord is a refuge for us is because while He provides us safety from the troubles of life, He is also able to help us thrive in the midst of the troubles of life. We do not need to be free from difficulty in order to flourish, especially when the Lord is on our side.

However, these are not the only answers! Dig deep into each verse to discover how the Lord provides security to us from the storms of life.

5. There is a very interesting story behind the Hebrew word for "be still." The word is *rapha*, which means "to be sunken down" or "to be lowered down." This is an excellent word picture for what it means to be still. Imagine an Israelite farmer who hurriedly goes about the business of his day. He is always moving, always working, always fixing something, always running some errand. But in a moment of vital reflection, he is able to find an hour in the midst of his day and sit down. As he sits down and closes his eyes, he lets the anxiety of the day lift from his shoulders and he feels himself



“sink down” in order to find a moment of meditation with the Lord.

Therefore, we learn that we must “sink down” like this in order to really know God. This is a game-changing realization because many of us would likely believe that if we wanted to understand something, we would need to launch ourselves out in order to find out about it. If you want to learn about chemistry, then you need to go to the lab and conduct experiments. If you want to learn about flying, you need to get into an airplane. But where do we go if we want to learn about God? He is not in a location where we can go and find Him. Instead, the truth of Psalm 46:10 is wonderfully profound. We must go to the place of stillness within ourselves. We must cease our endless searching and working, we must sit down, and then we must “sink down” into ourselves and simply spend time with the Lord. This is how we come to know Him—through prayer and meditation with Him.

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

6. The Hebrew word for “conspiracy” is *qesher*, which means “to bind together with a rope.” In the context of human relationships, this is a word used to describe people who bound together in a common purpose. Sometimes, people are bound together in love or in compassionate community. However, many times, people are bound together in order to carry out ill intent. After all, sin and evil are more easily carried out in groups rather than as individuals.

Therefore, in these verses, Isaiah delivers an essential prophecy to the people of Israel: Do not continue to fear the people of this world who are bound together in order to do evil.

There is something especially alarming and intriguing about conspiracies. Human beings are social creatures by nature, and we inherently understand that we are stronger together and capable of great things if we work together. But there is something especially terrifying about having groups of people work together against something in your best interest. If you were to walk into a room of people and notice that a group of them was whispering to each other while looking at you, there is little doubt you’d become nervous about it. Why? Because we inherently fear groups of people working together and conspiring together in order to hurt us.

However, Isaiah we should not fear this. Why? Because no matter what hidden plans anyone may form against us, they will never be able to defeat the Lord who sees and knows everything. No plan is hidden from Him. No conspiracy formed against Him could ever prosper.

7. The Hebrew word for “stumble” is *kashal*, which means “to physically fall over.” For the ancient Israelites, this word was a metaphor for a happenstance in a person’s life. After all, the Israelites referred to a person’s life as their “walk.” For the Israelites, a person’s life could be thought of as walking along a path from birth to death. And if a person physically fell over while walking on this path, then it meant that he had fallen into failure or personal ruin. Therefore, the Hebrew word *kashal* means “to fall into failure or ruin.”

In Isaiah 8:15, the Lord speaks about how many of the people in Jerusalem at the time would fall into personal failure and ruin after coming into contact with the Lord. Why is this true? Perhaps we can find some additional wisdom from some of the verses of Scripture. Here is what Isaiah 55:8-9 says on this matter...

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,”  
declares the Lord.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”



Here is what Romans 12:1-2 says...

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

And here is a story about Jesus in the moments before he was handed over to be crucified, from Matthew 26:36-46...

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

... Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

... He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

... Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Here is the truth, as we see it in Scripture. God has a plan, and we have a plan. God's plan is simple—He desires for all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Therefore, if our plans do not align with God's, then we will not find eternal life. Instead, we will find ruin and misery and failure.

Doing the Lord's will can be difficult. We see that in the story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, struggling to do the Father's will, especially since doing the Father's will meant going to the cross to die. But Jesus carried out the Father's will, and as a result, salvation is open to all who will simply accept it.

However, in order to follow the Lord's will, we must give up our will. Sometimes, then, we must find failure in the aims of our lives in order to find success according to God's aim for our lives. In this way, failure and ruin can be a good thing—especially if they lead us to God.

### **SESSION THREE — A BAPTISM LIKE NO OTHER**

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Since this question is largely a personal one, the notes should not weigh too heavily on how your response. We shall simply offer a few simple thoughts to send you and your group members in a helpful direction.

First, we learn something quite powerful and world-shattering about God in these verses. We learn that He has a Spirit and that He has a Son. In fact, this is one of the clearest verses that we have that demonstrates the Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We learn that God is certainly One, but He is also Three Persons—all of whom are united in essence and in purpose.

Second, we learn something quite powerful about ourselves. Even though Jesus was sinless, He still wanted to be baptized by John the Baptist. What this teaches us about baptism specifically is that it isn't just for the purpose of washing away sins. Baptism is also a vow to the Lord to send away sins for the rest of our lives. It is a decision to set our eyes firmly in the direction of the kingdom of God.

Finally, we learn from Jesus' example that the spirit-filled life begins with our baptism. In this story, we see that the Spirit of God came and descended upon Jesus after He rose from the waters of the Jordan River. In the same way, our baptism marks the beginning of the spirit-filled life, where we can rely on the Spirit of God to guide us through whatever lays ahead of us. Therefore, in our thoughts and in our actions, we should seek the guidance of the Spirit. In everything, we should constantly ask the Spirit questions about how we should approach situations or handle the decisions we need to make.

2. This question is an opportunity to revisit a very specific season of life—the season that led up to a person's decision to give his or her life to Christ and to pass through the waters of baptism. Life Group members may be able to respond quickly to such a question, but if they have difficulty, feel free to ask some follow-up questions in order to help them think things through: What was the thought that went through your mind when you decided to get baptized? What was the thing you heard a sermon or from a friend that moved you to make that decision? What was an experience in your life that moved you closer to making that decision?

3. Ignatius of Loyola often taught to practice this very thing when it comes to a story from Scripture, a practice that can reap some rich rewards. If you want to mix up your Bible study, try this: Read a story from Scripture involving multiple characters, and then take time to put yourself in the sandals of every single character in the story—whether it's a good character or a bad character. Therefore, in this story, take time putting yourself in the place of every character. Envision what John the Baptist would have seen, seeing his cousin Jesus walk up to him and ask to be baptized by him. Envision what Jesus would have seen. Envision what one of the onlookers would have experienced. You could even imagine what the Holy Spirit would have seen, descending from heaven as a dove!

There is no correct answer for this question, so allow your group members to take time and imagine what they would have experienced. Encourage your group members to come up with their own unique answers. You could even help them along in this way: Imagine that this story took place today, and that Jesus had come forward after a message and asked to be baptized by you.

4. In order to enrich this conversation, here are some verses about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives:

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26).

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 16:13-16).

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with cries that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will (Romans 8:26-27).

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

From these verses, we can see that remaining within a life of sin would run against the work that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in our lives. We cannot accept the truth of Christ while also accepting the lies that sin tells us. We cannot ask the Spirit to speak for us if we continue to be ensnared in our sins. We cannot find freedom in a life with the Spirit if we remain enslaved to sin.

5. If your group members have a difficult time sharing or opening up concerning this question, here is an interesting activity to try: Have each group member tear off a slip of paper and write down a word of encouragement that they need to hear from the Lord. Then, store that slip of paper in a place where they would find it again—either in the pages of their Bible or in a desk drawer or in the glove compartment of their car. After some time, we may forget about that slip of paper and then find it again and experience the encouragement that we really need to hear.

Use this question as an opportunity to speak with your group members about their prayer lives. What do they hear from God in their hearts when they pray and listen to Him? What words of encouragement and inspiration do they need at this stage of their lives?

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

6. One helpful technique for answering a question like this is by going through each verse within the defined reading and coming up with an answer from that singular verse. For instance, in verse 1 we see that we are baptized in order to leave behind the wrongheaded notion that our sin increases God's grace. In verse 2, we see that baptism is part of the process by which we become "dead" to our old sinful lives. In verse 3, we discover that during baptism, we actually join Jesus in the death He experienced on the cross and in the tomb. In verse 4, we see that we are baptized in order to find a new life following Christ. And so on, and so forth. By continuing in this way, we actually use the Scriptures to answer questions about the Scriptures, and what's more, we develop a strong framework to help us understand even the complicated and complex parts of the Bible.

In regards to the question about uniting with Christ, we could find some additional insight by diving into the original Greek words that the apostle Paul used when he wrote this letter to the Romans. In Romans 6:5, the Greek word that Paul used is *sumphutos*, which means "to be planted together" or "to grow up together." It's a word you would use if you planted a number of rose bushes in your garden. As you plant the seeds and then nourish them with fertilizer and fresh water and clean sunshine, the roses will grow and blossom. And as you look out at the sight, you could certainly say that those roses were planted together and grew up together.

Therefore, this clues us in on what it means to be united with Christ. It means that we are planted together with Christ in the same soil. In this instance, the soil we are talking about is what Christ experienced through His death on the cross, His burial, and His resurrection. When we go through baptism, we are symbolically going through what Jesus went through. When we go under the water, we die and are buried. But when we come up from the water, we rise to a new life. And therefore, death no longer holds any power over us—just as Jesus defeated death and gained mastery over it.

When we are baptized, we are in essence planted in the same soil as Jesus. We join Jesus as He carries us through the waters of death itself and brings us up to new life on the other side. And this is why we find salvation in Christ, because we are joined to Him and the work He accomplished.

7. In Romans 6:7, the Greek word that Paul uses for “freed” is *dikaioo*, which means “to become righteous” or “to be declared in the right.” Here is perhaps the best way to understand this word: Imagine that you are in a courtroom at the end of your life, and God sits as the judge. You are sitting on the side of the defense. The devil stands and pulls out a very lengthy sheet of paper, and he begins naming each of the sins that you committed throughout your life—one by one. Each of the named sins piles on you on a chain. Even before the devil has barely begun to list your sins, you feel as if you are already defeated. You can feel the handcuffs on your wrists. You know that you will be sent away for a very long time for the wrongs you have committed.

When the devil finishes after what feels like an eternity, he sits down. And then, your defense attorney stands—Jesus Christ himself. He doesn’t spend His time listing all of the good things you did during your life. There would be no point in such an exercise because all Jesus says simply is, “I died for this person. I bore the blame. I bore the punishment on the cross.” And then, He sits down.

Finally, God offers His ruling, saying, “You have been declared in the right. You are free from all charges.”

This is a good understanding of righteousness—to be declared “in the right” and to be freed from all charges. And so, when Christ sets us free from our sins, it means that He sets us free from the weight of punishment that awaits us. He allows us to live in a different way—no longer imprisoned by our guilt and shame. He allows us to live a truly free life, a life of acceptance and grace.

## **SESSION FOUR — HOW WE KNOW WHAT LOVE IS**

*Please remember these notes are only for reference if you need them. They are a supplement to the discussion. The goal is not to get to the answers provided below, but instead to engage in open and honest discussion. Please give adequate time for group members to respond to the questions before referring to these notes.*

*Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or perhaps missed by others.*

1. Each session during series will begin with this very question. The theme of this series is simple: Just one verse can change everything. With this question, we seek to put that very theme to the test and to really see how one verse can completely change the way we view God, the way we view ourselves, and the way we conduct our lives.

Since this question is largely a personal one, the notes should not weigh too heavily on how your response. We shall simply offer a few simple thoughts to send you and your group members in a helpful direction.

First, we learn that the love of God is rooted in sacrifice. If you read through the Old Testament, you’ll read about many stories where characters offered animals to the Lord as a sacrifice. You’ll also read many rules and regulations about the kinds of sacrifices that you need to offer in certain situations. And all of those verses might seem strange, but with every sacrifice the Israelites offered to God, they were actually learning something about Him. They were learning the very nature of love.

Because even though the Israelites sacrificed many bulls and sheep and crops to the Lord, He sacrificed His Son. He sent His Son to die an excruciating death on a cross so that we could live in eternity with Him. That sacrifice reveals to us the extent of how much God loves us.

Second, in this verse, we learn the essence of what it means to be human. To be human means to love, for we were made in the image of God—the God who is love. And in order to love, we must lay down our lives on behalf of others, meaning that we must seek their good before our own. This, then, is how we can truly see humanity: By seeking the

good of others, we show our love, and they in turn show their love to others. And in this way, we all discover the love of God and see the goodness that God prepared for us.

Finally, we see that sacrifice is an essential aspect of life. We cannot love without sacrifice because love requires we seek the good of another before our own good. But this is not a drudgery—instead, this is a gift! By seeking another person's good before our own, we discover a life far better than anything we could have imagined. There is nothing better in this world than to live a life of selfless love.

2. In order to dig deeply into this question, it may help us to consider an important verse in this read. We should look at 1 John 3:12, which says, "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous."

In Genesis 4, we can read the story of Cain and Abel. They were brothers, the two sons of Adam and Eve. The story ends in tragedy—Cain kills his younger brother Abel out of jealousy. In the story we read, they both offer sacrifices to God. Abel received blessing from the Lord for his offering, meaning that the Lord caused Abel's flocks to grow enormously. Meanwhile, Cain did not receive favor for his offering, meaning that Cain didn't receive the rain he needed for his crops to grow.

Abel received blessing while Cain did not. And Cain did not like this turn of events. He did not like that Abel had something that he didn't. So, Cain killed Abel out of jealousy.

Cain had hatred for his brother Abel because he perceived that his brother was better than him and closer to God than him. On the great ladder of life, Cain was many rungs lower than his brother Abel. And so, in order to climb over Abel, he ended his life.

Cain did not desire what was good for Abel. Instead, Cain desired only what was good for himself. He was narcissistic and uncompassionate. But love calls us to something different. The love of God calls us to seek the good of someone else before we seek our own good. It means that we desire what was best for someone in our hearts. It means that we actively think about what would be good for others. And it means that we act in ways that seek the good of others before seeking our own good.

From the story of Cain and Abel, we see something important: Seeking our own good first causes division. Meanwhile, seeking the good of others brings unity and solidarity and mutual compassion.

3. This question may prove critical for your group study. As we reflect upon the importance of sacrifice, it may be difficult for us to discuss the concept without connecting to something we've witnessed. It is good to reflect upon the occasions when others in our lives showed their love for us by sacrificing on our behalf. By reflecting upon these memories, we better understand the love that Christ had for us on the cross. What's more, reflecting upon these memories helps embrace the full power of Jesus' grace upon us—by accepting the truth that Christ loves us and that we do not have to prove ourselves worthy of His love.

Allow your group members time to think of a story when they received love from another person through their sacrifice. It may take some time, so be patient here and encourage your group members to search their memory banks. When we can envision a sacrifice we've witnessed, we can gain a better handle upon Christ's sacrifice for us.

4. While this may seem like a biblical question with a definite answer, this is actually far more of a personal question for your group study—an opportunity to discuss the practical and emotional sides of Scripture. In order to dive into this question, it may help your group to envision a person who only talks about loving people but doesn't actually show that love in any practical way. Or instead, you could envision a person who talks a great deal about the loving things they could do but never actually brings any of them to reality. As we envision a person like that, how do we feel?

What opinion might we draw of a person like that?

It may also help to think of the word “truth” in 1 John 3:18 in a slightly different way—integrity. Perhaps we should read the verse by saying, “Dear children, let us not love with words or with vocal sounds, but with actions and with integrity.” If our words are not backed up with action, then they are inherently untruthful. Those words unfortunately turn out to be lies, empty sounds signaling no truth in the physical world. Therefore, the purpose for which we ought to love with actions is to maintain our integrity in the world. If we were known as a person who talks a lot about loving others but never does it, then we would be known as an imposter and a liar. But if we were known for backing up our words with actions, then we would carry a reputation of integrity.

5. This may be a difficult question for your group members to answer honestly. However, the nature of the question pushes us to aim for the very center of our hearts. There is at least one thing that God is asking us to sacrifice so that we might love others more completely. For some, they may need to scale back their work hours in order to spend more time with their family. For others, they might seek to forego a major expense—like a larger house or a recreational vehicle—so that they can bless an organization that serves the poor or those who are homeless.

There are many potential answers, and each answer will be deeply personal to the group member who shares it. Therefore, choose to spend this time simply listening and asking follow up questions rather than making any determinations. If your group finds a difficulty time opening up, seek to share one potential sacrifice you could make in your life. Your honesty may open the door for another person in your group to be honest as well.

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

6. In order to get beyond the surface of the text and find some treasures beneath it, we could use a helpful tool to which we often turn in these Leader Notes—the original Greek language of the New Testament. We must remember that when the apostle John wrote down the words of his gospel, he wrote them in the Greek language. And if we study the original Greek word that John used, we may be able to paint a clearer picture of what John meant as he presented the teachings and stories of Jesus.

In these verses, then, the Greek word for “remain” is *meno*, which means “to stay in one place” or “to dwell.” This Greek word actually gives us a phenomenal picture of what a vibrant Christian life can look like. In the Old Testament, this Greek word was used to describe how God endures. We, of course, live in a world that is temporary. All of the matter surrounding us will exist only for a certain amount of time, and then it will disappear. But God is different. He endures. He remains. He stays.

Following God, then, requires this very practice. The Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock once wrote about a man who “flung himself upon his horse, and rode madly off in all directions.” That’s a powerful picture of the life of the common person—we are going in far too many directions. We desire far too many things. But the issue is quite clear: If we try to accomplish too many separate things in our lives without any focus at all, then we will become irritated and anxious and unsatisfied.

Meanwhile, the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard brilliantly wrote: “To will only one thing, which one thing is the good, is to be pure of heart.” And certainly this is true, and it points us toward the meaning of what it means to “remain in Christ.”

To remain in Christ means that we center ourselves upon the one thing in this universe that is eternal. Nothing is eternal except for God. We can spend our whole lives chasing moments of happiness, flinging ourselves madly in all directions. But we will only end up lost. Therefore, in order to find real peace and well-being and stability for our lives, we have to plant ourselves in the one place that is eternally secure—Jesus Christ.

When we do this—when we seek the will of Christ in all things and forsake all other pursuits— we will become pure and



focused powerfully in one direction. We will learn what it means to “remain in Christ.”

This posture is necessary because without it, our love becomes quite unlovely. If we torn in multiple pursuits of life, then how could we love others with the perfect love of Christ? We would simply be too busy, too caught up in our own aims, and too distracted in order to love someone perfectly. Therefore, the goal of the Christian life is to seek God’s will and only God’s will—for then, we will have the focus and the momentum of life that propels us toward sharing Christ’s love with others.

7. The secret to what Jesus means in John 16:13 is found one verse earlier, in John 16:12, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” We may certainly take this to mean something quite simple, that Jesus is essentially telling the disciples, “Look, I am about to show my love for you by sacrificing my life on the cross; and you should love each other with the same kind of love I’m about to show you.” This would certainly be a true perspective.

But we should also pull in a clear example that the disciples witnessed only a few hours before Jesus uttered the words of John 16:13. If we look back a few chapters in the gospel of John, we will read this story in John 13:3-17...

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him...

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Many sermons over the story we just read have made essentially the same historical point: During the time of Jesus, washing another person’s feet was considered the lowest task imaginable. It was considered completely disgusting by the Jewish people. What’s more, such a feat was truly disgusting. All Jewish people wore open-toed sandals and would often walk through dust, mud, and animal excrement during the day. The task of washing another person’s feet was so menial, that even slaves were permitted to refuse it without receiving any punishment.

This is an essential aspect of “laying down one’s life.” It means deliberately placing yourself beneath another person’s status. We do not love others in order to feel spiritually superior to them. We love others to feel close to them. And the only way we can feel close to them is by putting their good first before ours—through sacrifice.

## **SESSION FIVE — GOD’S WORD TO YOU**

Please remember these notes are only for reference if you need them. They are a supplement to the discussion. The goal is not to get to the answers provided below, but instead to engage in open and honest discussion. Please give adequate time for group members to respond to the questions before referring to these notes.

Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or perhaps missed by others.

1. Each session during series will begin with this very question. The theme of this series is simple: Just one verse can change everything. With this question, we seek to put that very theme to the test and to really see how one verse can completely change the way we view God, the way we view ourselves, and the way we conduct our lives.



Since this question is largely a personal one, the notes should not weigh too heavily on how your response. We shall simply offer a few simple thoughts to send you and your group members in a helpful direction.

First, we learn what God seeks to communicate with us. This is a profound thing to realize about God! We do not serve One who does not wish to speak with us or who typically ignores us. Though we may go through seasons of our lives where we feel as if God is not speaking to us, nothing could be further from the truth! Perhaps, then, the reason we feel like God is not speaking to us is simply because He is not saying what we want to hear.

Second, we discover something essential about ourselves—we cannot fully know God under the power of our own intellect and searching. This is a necessary truth to discover because it combats a lie that many of us hold in our minds without actually realizing that it's there. The lie says, "I already know who God is." When we believe this lie, we do not put forth any effort into studying God's word or spending time with Him in prayer to learn more about Him. However, if we acknowledge that there is much more we need to understand about the Father, then we will submit ourselves to His word and learn from it.

Finally, we discover that the Christian life is one long training montage—much like you might see in an action film. We are constantly working to improve and to become spiritually stronger. We are consistently seeking to mature and to correct poor behavior. Every day is an opportunity to grow and strengthen our faith. If we submit ourselves to this process, then we will become spiritually healthy and wise. But if we neglect our spiritual conditioning, then we will become inert and ineffective.

2. This question may prove touchy for some of your group members, if only because people typically don't like to admit when they are ignorant or unfamiliar. We usually like to appear like we understand whatever is happening in front of us, and we don't like to appear foolish or unknowledgeable. Therefore, it may help your group if you begin by admitting some things about Scripture that have confused you or frustrated you in the past. Feel free to open up about whether or not you feel comfortable with the Scriptures. If you do feel handy with the Bible, then explain how you arrived there. If you don't feel confident in your Bible study abilities, then open up and share that in order to allow your other group members to share their feelings.

3. Fortunately for us, Pastor Rick explains the words of 2 Timothy 3:16 excellently during his video teaching, especially regarding the four main Greek words we find in the text. It may help us to revisit those Greek words in order to find greater depth for our discussion regarding this question.

In order to help us become mature, the word of God (1) teaches us, (2) rebukes us, (3) corrects us, and (4) trains us in righteousness.

First, the Greek word for "teach" is *didaskalia*, which means "to instruct" or "to impart information or skills to another." For instance, when many of us used Zoom for the first time in order to speak to others via video chat, we had to be taught. We needed someone to come along and give us the information and the skills necessary in order to properly use the software application.

Second, the Greek word for "rebuke" is *elegmos*, which means "to show where someone went wrong" or "to show disapproval for someone's actions." This is the word we use when we "call someone out" for improper behavior. If, for instance, you have a family member with a proclivity for speeding while driving, especially at dangerous speeds, you might sit down as a family and call out that behavior and explain why it is wrong and harmful to himself and the people in his life.

Third, the Greek word for "correct" is *epanorthosis*, which means "to restore" or "to reform." This is largely the process you might expect to find in a 12-step program, where you are helping addicts correct some harmful mindsets and habits in order to restore them to health. The correction process, then, is all about restoration.

Finally, the Greek word for “train” is *paideia*, which means “to rear up a child.” It’s a word that describes the kind of home education that children would receive in the Greco-Roman world—not just education in mathematics and rhetoric, but also education in social etiquette and character. It is the kind of education meant to bring a child up to maturity.

Therefore, from these four words we have an understanding of how the word of God brings us to spiritual maturity. The word of God: (1) gives us the information and skills we need to succeed, (2) shows where we went wrong and calls out troublesome behavior, (3) restores us back to spiritual health, and (4) provides us the necessary basics while continually raising us up into spiritual maturity.

4. In order to add some additional flavor to this discussion, we can throw in some interesting nuggets from the Greek words that the apostle Paul chose to use when he wrote 2 Timothy 4:3. We will move quickly through them and then piece everything together at the very end with a summary.

When Paul writes that men won’t put up with “sound” doctrine, he uses the Greek word *hugiaino*, which means “healthy.”

When he writes that men wish to suit their own “desires,” he uses the Greek word *epithumia*, which means “an impulse to do wrong” or “the waywardness of mankind, acting against what they know to be right.”

When he writes that men “gather” teachers around them, he uses the Greek word *episoreuo*, which means “to heap up” or “to pile on.” Think of a farmer who has heaping up hay into a large pile in order to feed his animals.

When he writes that men gather teachers to say what their “itching” ears want to hear, he uses the Greek word *knetho*, which means “to have your ear tickled by something you want to hear.”

Therefore, let us put that all together: Paul says that men don’t want to put up with healthy teaching, with the teaching that is good and nourishing for their souls. Instead, they want to follow their bad impulses and pile up voices who speak comforting sounds into their ears.

We could easily liken this to food. We know the food that is healthy for us—vegetables, healthy proteins, and vitamin-rich foods. But sometimes, the impulse for sugar and fatty foods is far too strong, and so instead of reaching for a salad, we reach for fast food. What’s more, we reach for too much fast food because the strong taste of the food fulfills the unhealthy impulse.

The truth is that the words of Scripture can often be difficult and uncomfortable for us to hear. And when we hear something that challenges our hearts, we can make two choices: Either we listen to that truth and use it to improve our Christian walk, or we try to silence that truth by reaching for people who say what we want to hear. We can very easily do this with talk radio, social media, web forums, YouTube channels and 24/7 news stations.

But we should constantly be wary of this. We should not be listening to what we want to hear. We should be listening to teaching that challenges us and confronts what we believe. We should treat our spiritual walk much like a session in a weight room—if we’re not feeling “the burn,” then we aren’t going to see much improvement.

5. Some of your group members may not have a ready answer for this question, and that’s okay! If your group members don’t feel like they could name or identify a book of the Bible to discuss, then this could be a wonderful opportunity to choose one. You can very easily open up a Bible to the Table of Contents or Google a list of Bible books and help your group members select one. If you’re unsure of what a Bible book is about, one excellent resource is The Bible Project, whose videos can be found on YouTube. They have uploaded video summaries of each of the books of the Bible, which serve as phenomenal resources.

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

6. In order to treat this question with a bit more depth, we can actually borrow from the previous reading of 2 Timothy 3:16. When the apostle Paul writes that all Scriptures are “God-breathed,” he is very intentional. By speaking about the “breath of God,” Paul is pointing to a specific story from the beginning of Scripture, the story of Adam from Genesis 2. In Genesis 2:7, the Bible says, “the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

We could also add the pivotal verse from Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

In these verses, we see that the Scriptures take on an organic quality. They are alive and vibrant, capable of movement. The Lord breathed life into the Scriptures in the same way He breathed life into a mound of dust and raised Adam to life.

What do we mean when we say that the Scriptures are “alive?” We mean to say that they continue to engage us in different ways at different points of life. The Scriptures function like a dialogue partner, like a friend who challenges you and inspires you and encourages you—telling you what you need to hear.

If the Scriptures were the invention of man, then they would not have this living quality to them. But since they were breathed out by God, they are truly alive and capable of speaking to us again and again and again.

7. We find special confidence in the words of 2 Peter when we realize that the man who wrote them happens to be the very same Peter who spent three years with Jesus and watched each and every one of his miracles up close. It is helpful to know that the words of the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John were written by two of Jesus’ disciples, men who knew Jesus well. In fact, every book of the New Testament was either written by a person who personally knew Jesus during his ministry or by a person who relied upon the eyewitness testimonies of people who knew Jesus.

Eyewitness testimony brings reliability. We can know for sure that the words of Jesus we read in the Bible were Jesus’ actual words and not something invented or made up for fun. They were likely challenged and checked in a community of people who knew Jesus and his teaching intimately. Having this knowledge allows us to put our faith in God’s word and its authority for our lives.

## SESSION SIX — NEITHER HOT NOR COLD

*Please remember these notes are only for reference if you need them. They are a supplement to the discussion. The goal is not to get to the answers provided below, but instead to engage in open and honest discussion. Please give adequate time for group members to respond to the questions before referring to these notes.*

*Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or perhaps missed by others.*

1. Each session during series will begin with this very question. The theme of this series is simple: Just one verse can change everything. With this question, we seek to put that very theme to the test and to really see how one verse can completely change the way we view God, the way we view ourselves, and the way we conduct our lives.

Since this question is largely a personal one, the notes should not weigh too heavily on how your response. We shall simply offer a few simple thoughts to send you and your group members in a helpful direction.

Typically, in these Leader Notes we have taken some time to look at how the 3:16 verse in question changes the way we think about God, ourselves, and the way we live and act in the world. But we can likely address all of those aspects quite simply. In these verses, we learn a fundamental truth about the nature of our relationship with God—that He is a willing participant in it!

We cannot treat God like an abstract idea. We cannot simply assume that the Lord is some distant spiritual force that always showers us in love and acceptance and mercy. And while God certainly is love, we also need to remember that the Lord is a Person. God has a personality. He has a will. And He is a participant in our relationship with Him.

Therefore, we cannot afford to take the Lord for granted. The Christians in Laodicea took God for granted. They thought they were rich in their faith, but they weren't—their relationship with God had deteriorated to the point that it made the Lord sick to think about it. We should remember that the Lord is a person who involved with us as much as we are involved with Him!

2. In order to add a richer dimension to the conversation surrounding this question, it may help us to define precisely what the apostle John means when he uses the word “rebuke.” The Greek word that the apostle John uses in Revelation 3:19 is a powerful one—the word *elencho*. It means “to shame through exposure” or “to bring someone into contempt.” It ought to be difficult for us to understand how causing a person to feel shame might actually be a loving act toward them. However, this is something for which we should take note.

Shame is a powerful emotion, and we must be wary that it does not control our lives. When we are controlled by shame, we come to believe that we are worthless and that we are not worthy of love. We come to believe a terrible lie—namely, that there is something deeply wrong at our very core and that there is nothing we can do to change it or heal it.

Fortunately for us, Jesus saves us from those terrible feelings and from our shame. As it says in Romans 10:9-11...

...if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

However, we must also understand that shame is a useful emotion. Shame is the emotion we ought to feel when we have done something wrong. It reminds us that we have boundaries and that other people have boundaries, and that we should respect them. When we take something that belongs to another person, we should feel a healthy sense of shame about that. When we intentionally seek to hurt another person emotionally, we are stepping into a personal space that is reserved for them and God. We should feel shame for doing a thing like that.

Therefore, because Jesus loves us, He causes us to feel shame when we have done something awful. This emotion actually protects us—it keeps us aware of how we should treat others and how we can find a healthy life. Much like a surgeon must cut flesh in order to heal the organs beneath it, the Lord sometimes cuts with His words with the intention of healing us.

3. The personal nature of this question may evoke some silence from your group members. If your group members are unwilling to share a story like this, do not feel as if you need to press them. The second part of the question can function as the center of a discussion, all on its own. Spend some time as a group speaking about the differences between the criticism and correction that is loving and unloving.

4. The city of Laodicea was in a unique position within their section of the world. Today, the ruins of the ancient city are found in modern-day Turkey. But back during the time of the writing of Revelation, Laodicea was located in a region of the world called Asia Minor. Now, Asia Minor was part of the Roman Empire, but they were so far from the city of

Rome that the cities of Asia Minor developed their own methods for taking care of each other. In particular, Laodicea acted as the banking center for that region. The city saw lots and lots of gold.

The city of Laodicea was founded by Antiochus II (261-246 BC) and was named after his wife Laodice. It sat at the junction of two important trade routes, having been called a “knot on the road-system.”

The city was marvelously wealthy. During the time of the Roman Empire, it was by far the richest city in the region of Phrygia. Its region was incredibly fertile and its citizens found great success. The surrounding country was excellent for raising sheep and the Laodiceans made a living by selling the black wool of their flocks to the nearby textile industries. The banks were very prosperous in that city and highly trusted.

Such was its wealth that after an earthquake leveled the city in AD 607, Laodicea was able to rebuild its infrastructure with their own wealth without any assistance from Rome whatsoever.

The city was famous for its medical school, which was attached to the cult of Men Carus, a local pagan god. The school was known for attempting strange medicines in order to cure curious diseases. Laodicea was also home to a large Jewish population.

The main problem of the city was its lack of natural resources, especially water. The water had to be piped in from the hot springs near Denizli, which was six miles away to the south. By the time the hot water arrived in Laodicea, however, it may have become lukewarm and good for nothing.

The people of this city almost certainly struggled with materialism, which is why Jesus challenges them in Revelation 3:18, “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich...”

Refiners would test the purity of gold by melting it down. After the gold was heated and turned to liquid, the impurities in the gold would naturally rise to the top, which the refiners would skim away. But bankers would likely not practice such an art. Their job was to make more gold, not to melt it all down and make less of it. Therefore, we can likely assume that the banks and the economy of Laodicea engaged in mixing gold with other metals in order to make more wealth for themselves.

Jesus’ words to the Laodicean Christians are clear: Your gold is not pure, and it is valueless. You should buy gold from me, because it has been tested in pure fire. Of course, Jesus is not speaking of physical gold. He is speaking of the riches of heaven and of the spiritual life following Him.

5. Do not let this question pass idly by. Make sure that each group member gets an opportunity to share. When we are given free rein and focused time to speak about what causes us to feel joy or sorrow—whatever causes us to feel passionate—we are able to test those passions for ourselves and understand our own hearts on a far deeper level.

If your group members have difficulty coming up with an answer to this question, feel free to use further prompts to guide them ever deeper: What is something that breaks your heart? What is something you in this world that causes you to become angry? What is something in this world that brings you absolute joy?

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

6. In order to answer this question, it may help to pull out a piece of paper and a writing utensil and make a side-by-side list of the characteristics of the two churches we are observing—Philadelphia and Laodicea. Here are a couple of examples in order to get you heading in a good direction:

(1) The Christians in Philadelphia were undergoing a persecution of their faith while it seems like the Christians in

Laodicea were not. It is remarkable what happens to our faith when it is challenged as opposed to when it is not challenged. The Christians in Philadelphia faced opposition, and therefore, they were strong. Meanwhile, the Christians in Laodicea did not experience opposition and so their faith wilted.

(2) God shows His love differently to these two churches. In Philadelphia, God shows His love by promising to make their enemies face the music and acknowledge God's presence with them. In Laodicea, God shows His love through rebuke and bringing the evil deeds of those believers into the light.

These are not the only answers! Dive deep into those words and try to see the differences between those two church communities.

7. This is a question that can be answered by what biblical scholars call "literary context." Sometimes, when we read a verse of Scripture, we forget that the single verse is part of a larger paragraph and even larger chapter and an even larger book. The verse fits into the book like a puzzle piece fits into the larger puzzle.

Therefore, in order to answer this question, we can take some clues from the verses immediately around the verse we've identified—Revelation 3:8.

In Revelation 3:8, Jesus says that in addition to keep His word, they also did not deny His Name. In the context of persecution, this means that the Christian believers did not deny they knew Jesus when asked.

In Revelation 3:10, we see that these Christians "endured patiently." The Greek word for this is *hupomeno*, which means "to stay back and wait for a hostile attack" or "to stand your ground." The absolute perfect picture for this word is from the movie *BRAVEHEART* (1995), where William Wallace's Scottish forces are waiting for the English to attack them because they have laid a trap for them. As the English cavalry charges in, William says over and over one word: "Hold."

As he says that word "hold," he is asking his forces to wait and hold their ground, even in the face of an enemy charging at them. Why? Because they laid a trap for the English, and they wanted the English to fall into it.

The sense of this word is "holding fast." It is keeping your feet as a storm sweeps over you. It is keeping your shield up and standing your ground as an enemy descends on you.

In Revelation 3:11, we see Jesus encouraging the Christians to hold onto what they have. While they may not have great strength, they can still hold onto what they currently have and that is enough. And in Revelation 3:12, Jesus promises that the victorious believer will become a "pillar" in the temple of God. A pillar, of course, is a symbol of great strength—an architectural feature that supports the weight of the entire building above it.

If we put this together, we see that even though the Christians in Philadelphia had little strength, they still had enough strength. It is essential for Christians to understand that we have enough strength to endure whatever may happen to us. If we continue to stay true to Jesus and if we stand still in the face of trouble and if we hold onto the salvation that Christ has given us—then we will become pillars in God's temple and in God's Kingdom.

## **SESSION SEVEN — GIVE ME A LITTLE PEACE**

*Please remember these notes are only for reference if you need them. They are a supplement to the discussion. The goal is not to get to the answers provided below, but instead to engage in open and honest discussion. Please give adequate time for group members to respond to the questions before referring to these notes.*

*Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your group members thought were the*

*highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or perhaps missed by others.*

1. Each session during series will begin with this very question. The theme of this series is simple: Just one verse can change everything. With this question, we seek to put that very theme to the test and to really see how one verse can completely change the way we view God, the way we view ourselves, and the way we conduct our lives.

Since this question is largely a personal one, the notes should not weigh too heavily on how your response. We shall simply offer a few simple thoughts to send you and your group members in a helpful direction.

Again, like in the Leader Notes for Session 6, we can answer this question quite easily. We learn in this verse that the Lord is a Lord of peace. He is not a Lord of disorder or of conflict or of strife. He seeks well-being and peace in everything. Therefore, we should understand that God has created us specifically for peace; He has created us to find rest in Him. Therefore, we should make every effort to discover how that peace can be found. Our aim should be making peace with others, offering forgiveness and reconciliation to all.

2. Use this time in your group to brainstorm and identify the unhealthy ways we try to seek peace in the world. You may find your discussion gravitating toward using a chemical like alcohol or sugar in order to develop a sense of peace within. Or you may find that some in your group seek peace by scrolling through social media or by burning hours watching television shows or movies. Or still, some seek to quiet the unease in their minds through constant work.

Whatever it is, we should do well to recognize the ways we seek peace in the world and to ask honestly if that method is a healthy one.

3. Here is one helpful practice for answering this question as a group. Go through each verse, one by one. For each verse, try to come up with as many practical ways to turn the words of that verse into reality. Here is an example from Philippians 4:4, which reads, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

(1) Peace comes from regularly going to church and joining other believers in worshipping the Lord.

(2) Peace comes from finding moments during the day to savor what the Lord has done in our lives. We can take a few brief minutes to rejoice about all of the good things the Lord has given to us.

(3) When we are discouraged, instead of spiraling down on the difficulty of our situation, we can find a worship song on YouTube and sing along to it. When the song fades, enter into a simple time of prayer where you rejoice with the Lord and work together to find a solution to the issue facing you.

4. Allow your group members time to answer this question. Do not fear if your group members take some time after this question to really consider it. The important part of this discussion is helping your group members see how the Lord is involved in our lives and how He brings peace consistently. Some of your group members may be reluctant to see God's presence in their past, but this question is a great opportunity to erase the reluctance.

5. Whatever you do, don't let your group members off the hook! Don't let an opportunity for real life change pass you by. Use the power of accountability to keep you walking toward a good life following Christ.

## **DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS**

6. The words of James 3:1-18 are among the wisest in all of history. There are many observations we could make about this chapter of James, but for the purposes of these notes, we will look at three simple observations.



Second, in James 3:6, we see that the tongue can “corrupt” a person and set his life on fire. The Greek word for “corrupt” is *spiloo*, which means “to stain your clothes.” This word is usually used in purposes of morality. A moral and innocent person does not have a stain upon her life; meanwhile, the immoral and guilty person bears many stains that may prove difficult to wash away.

Finally, in James 3:7-8, we see that the author likens the tongue to a wild and poisonous animal. In the context of the animal kingdom, the most important thing is survival. Animals must seek to survive at all costs, and some animals can cause great harm in that pursuit. To the end of their own protection and safety, animals will use what is available to them—razor claws, sharp teeth, and poison. Likewise, our speech is only interested in its own survival, and it will tear down anyone that gets in its way.

7. Quite simply, if anyone wants to find the strength to do the right thing, then they must focus on bringing peace. They must forgive those who have wronged them in the past. They must seek reconciliation and heal broken relationships. They must develop moments of rest and quiet in the Lord’s presence. They must consistently pursue prayer and meditation.

This is the work that goes into righteousness—into doing the right thing. If we consistently seek our spiritual well-being in the Lord’s presence, then our actions will naturally gravitate toward the love Jesus showed during His ministry.