

TRAVELING LIGHT

LEADER GUIDE INTRODUCTION

We belong to groups in order to become like Jesus. The early church gathered in small numbers and in homes to share their gifts, talents and resources with one another. But they didn't get together simply to find like-minded friends or to hide from the outside world. The first Christians gathered to experience the transforming power of Jesus and cheer others on to do the same.

We want to create communities within the church to take people to the next level of their spiritual journey, so we have committed to producing life groups that invite their members to chew on the things they absolutely need to become more like Jesus (transformational) and to do it in a way that invites all to participate (conversational). As a result, every Christian who commits to being a part of one of our life groups should be a little more like Jesus in at least one area of their lives.

Our life group leaders play a vital role in personally investing in their groups. The right question, a timely word of encouragement or a meaningful prayer can be just what a Christian needs to take the next step in their faith. We want to prepare each leader the best we can to stimulate growth alongside the work of the Holy Spirit, so we have prepared a short video series to develop our leaders, refresh some of their skills and equip them for the challenges ahead.

We encourage all our life groups to begin and end with prayer. Christians have few opportunities to pray corporately in a way that all can participate in freely. We share some tips and address some of the challenges of group prayer in the videos.

The church is committed to providing our groups with content that is Biblically faithful, interesting and personally challenging. *Traveling Light* is an exploration of the book of Philippians with an invitation for Christians to cast aside some of the spiritual weights they were never intended to carry. The hope of this series is that participants will be able (1) identify areas of insecurity and adopt a God-centered approach to what we do, (2) identify uncertainties about one's faith and discover the confidence to magnify Jesus in every situation, (3) identify ways that self-importance contributes to

conflict and imagine how humility can move one's relationships forward, (4) distinguish religion from connection to God and visualize what it is like to trust God for change and experience him personally and (5) identify areas of worry, reflect on what God has provided and keep a hopeful eye on the life to come.

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LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

Questions can be powerful vehicles for personal transformation. They encourage their recipients to take personal ownership and responsibility of the subject and invite them to experience something new. There are many types of questions, and we encourage all sorts of questions. But the best questions for a life group setting (1) avoid obvious answers, (2) challenge people to think and (3) invite personal involvement. As a result, our group questions will primarily focus on life application. Discussions on minute theological points may be of interest to some. But the goal of a life group is to take on Jesus' life and not simply examine it from afar or make participants feel comfortable.

Each session has more questions than any group should be able to get through. This is to help leaders and not hinder them. Identify the questions you think will have the greatest chance of achieving your weekly goal ahead of time so you can make the most of your time together. We have set apart the questions we think do a better job of accomplishing the goal of each session with a **bold** font. Questions with an asterisk (*) by them have possible answers in a supplementary packet if you get stuck. We encourage you to write your own questions too. But keep your questions focused on the goal of each session as best as you can.

SESSIONS:

1. Introduction (Acts 16:6-40)
2. The Weight of Insecurity (Philippians 1:3-11, 2:12-18, 2:25-30, 4:10-19)
3. The Weight of Uncertainty (Philippians 1:6, 1:12-26)
4. The Weight of Self-Importance (Philippians 1:27-2:11, 2:19-25, 4:2-3)
5. The Weight of Religion (Philippians 2:13, 3:2-4:1)
6. The Weight of Worry (Philippians 4:6-19) & Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

Acts 16:6-40

Goal: to become familiar with the setting of Philippians and connect with life group members

Follow up questions from the lesson:

1. Read Acts 16:6-40. What are some things we can learn or surmise about the city of Philippi and the church therein? *
2. As you get a sense of the setting of the church and the happenings of the city, what potential problems can you foresee rising up in the church? *
3. As you anticipate our examination of Paul's letter to the Philippian church in the coming weeks, what do you hope to discover?
4. We'll be exploring how God unburdens us from insecurity, uncertainty, self-importance, religion and worry in the coming sessions. Is there a particular weight that you carry that you most hope to unburden during this time together?

1. THE WEIGHT OF INSECURITY

Philippians 1:3-11, 2:12-18, 2:25-30, 4:10-19

Goal: to identify areas of insecurity and adopt a God-centered approach to what we do

General questions about insecurity

1. What are some ways that insecurity manifests itself? *
2. What does insecurity reveal about what a person values? *
3. How have you seen insecurity damage relationships?

Addressing insecurity in ourselves

4. Are there areas of sensitivity that you find yourself more easily offended by than others?
5. Have you ever *wrongly* felt used or overlooked by your employer, a church leader or a loved one?
 - a. What was your initial response?
 - b. How did you learn your feeling was wrong?
 - c. How would you have responded differently in hindsight?
6. What does it look like to have healthy expectations of others? *
7. In Philippians 2:12-13 Paul encourages the church to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”
 - a. How might that statement be misunderstood? *
 - b. How might that statement help the church preserve a more complete understanding of God? *

8. **What does it mean to have a God-centered approach to all that we do? ***
9. **How might a God-centered approach to what we do relieve us from the burden of insecurity? ***
10. What are some other benefits to a God-centered approach to what we do? *
11. **How might one of your relationships improve if you took a more God-centered approach to it?**

Responding to insecurity in others

12. Is insecurity something that should be confronted? Why or why not? *
13. **A lot of people feel overlooked or underappreciated when in reality, they are not. What should we do with those feelings when we are confronted with them? ***
14. Have you ever had someone question whether you genuinely cared for them?
 - a. How did you respond?
 - b. Do you wish you would have responded differently?
15. **What are some of the ways Paul handled the insecurity coming out of Philippi? ***

2. THE WEIGHT OF UNCERTAINTY

Philippians 1:6, 1:12-26

Goal: to identify uncertainties about one's faith and discover the confidence to magnify Jesus in every situation

Questions about uncertainty

1. Have you ever had the opportunity to share your faith and failed?
 - a. How did you feel afterward?
2. **What are some ways your faith has been tested?**
3. If you were put in a life threatening-situation over your faith, how do you think you would respond?
4. **Have you ever felt like God began a work in you spiritually that never came to completion? Explain.**
 - a. **What obstacles might keep one from claiming the promise of Philippians 1:6? ***

Questions about suffering

5. **Read Philippians 1:27-30 again. Why do you think Paul frames opportunities to suffer for Christ as gifts from God? ***
6. What stories of believers suffering on behalf of Christ inspire you?
7. **How do you reconcile the apparent lack of persecution of Christians in America with the suffering of Christians in other parts of the world? ***
8. How would you respond to someone who says that a real Christian should expect a successful marriage, a great family and financial prosperity? *
9. What did Paul mean when he said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"? (Philippians 1:21) *

- a. How would you respond to someone who says Paul seemed a little excessive about his devotion to Jesus? *
10. What are some untrue things we say or believe about death to soften the thought of its inevitable blow? *

Questions about confidence

11. Why does faith like Paul's seem unachievable?
- a. What are some things we say to justify our hesitation to live out our Christian faith in similar ways?
12. How have you seen prayer work?
- a. Why do you think Paul shows particular confidence in the effectiveness of the Philippians' prayers? *
13. What counsel would you give to a Christian who has learned that sharing their faith could get them fired from their work? *
14. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. We don't know what Paul's "thorn" was, but there is a good chance it was an ailment of some kind. How might verse ten contribute to the thought that we can suffer for Christ even if we are not being persecuted for our testimony specifically? *

Further exploration

15. The traditional Christian hope has always been to be raised from the dead and not live as an unembodied spirit. Paul affirms that in Philippians 3:11 and 3:21. It's a part of the earliest Christian creeds. What could Paul possibly be referring to when he says he desires to depart and be with Christ instead of remaining in the body? *

3. THE WEIGHT OF SELF-IMPORTANCE

Philippians 1:27-2:11, 2:19-25, 4:2-3

Goal: to identify ways that self-importance contributes to conflict and imagine how humility can move one's relationships forward

Questions about conflict

1. In what ways have friendships with other believers given you strength and joy?
2. Have you ever had a conflict with someone that didn't feel like it could be resolved?
3. **How does self-importance contribute to conflict? ***
4. What do psychologists mean by the "narcissism of minor differences"? *
5. **What are some ways Christians exaggerate differences with other like-minded Christians to preserve some sense of identity? ***

Questions about humility

6. **How does Paul define humility in Philippians 2? ***
7. How can humility heal a broken relationship and create stronger bonds in functional ones? *
8. **How would you encourage humility in someone who has a diminished sense of self-worth? ***
9. **What are some ways you might create more space in your schedule to demonstrate the importance of other people? ***
10. What are some instances it might *not* be wise to put the interests of others before your own? *
11. **Read Philippians 4:2-3. Paul mentions some individual he refers to as "my true companion" and asks this person to help Euodia and Syntyche. Why might have Paul specifically asked for the assistance of an**

individual instead of inviting the entire church to help with the conflict?
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12. What are some obstacles you see in becoming a person who “values others above yourselves”? *

13. Can you imagine an argument with someone going differently if you had been more humble? Describe how you think it might have unfolded.

14. Jesus isn’t the only model of humility that Paul mentions. Read Philippians 2:19-23. How does Timothy live out humility? *

For further exploration

15. What did Paul mean when he said that Jesus “emptied himself” in Philippians 2:7? (Note that the NIV translates this, “he made himself nothing”) *

4. THE WEIGHT OF RELIGION

Philippians 2:13; 3:2-4:1

Goal: to distinguish religion from connection to God and visualize what it is like to trust God for change, experience him personally and hope for a better life beyond

Questions about Religion

1. Read 1 Timothy 5:4 and James 1:27. What is good religion there? *
 - a. How is that different from the kind of religion we talked about in the lesson? *
2. **Self-reliance is a prized American virtue. But when it comes to connecting with God, it can make our faith religious and untrue. “God helps those who help themselves” is actually nowhere in the Bible. What’s wrong with self-reliance in a faith context? ***
3. **Religious duty has a sneaky way of disguising itself as loving obedience to God. How can we tell the difference between duty/ritual and obedience? ***
4. Have you ever gone through a season where you experienced religious pride as Paul did? What made you see differently?
5. How would you talk to religious friends about religion? *

Questions about Trusting in a Power that Changes

6. Have you ever had an experience where you felt like God changed one of your desires?
7. What is one of the most noticeable changes you’ve seen God bring about in a person?

8. **How would you respond to someone who has long prayed for God to change one of their desires without seemingly having received an answer to that prayer? ***
9. Read Philippians 3:12-16. At the beginning of the chapter, Paul led his readers to believe that he once considered himself the best of the best as far as religion was concerned. What are some of the ways Paul's attitude has changed? *
 - a. Why is our relationship with God something that is much more difficult to achieve perfect maturity in than religion? *
 - b. What would you think if a fellow Christian said that they had reached full maturity or used maturity language to describe their own faith? *
 - c. What do you think Paul believes about self-evaluation? *

Questions about Connecting to God

10. What does it look like to know Jesus personally and not just about him? *
 - a. Why might some people resist this sort of thing? *
 - b. What are some of the obstacles you see to maintaining a personal connection with Jesus? *
11. Respond to the following statements with a "agree," "disagree" or "not sure." Explain why you feel that way. *
 - a. "The litmus test of true Christian faith is a personal experience."
 - b. "Don't pursue feelings. Pursue Christ."

Questions about Hoping in a Life Beyond

12. **Why do you think it's such a challenge for many Christians to maintain excitement for the return of Jesus and all that brings? ***
13. What are some of the things you imagine when you think of the perfect world that God has in store for those who believe in him when he returns?

5. THE WEIGHT OF WORRY

Philippians 4:6-19

Goal: to identify areas of worry, reflect on what God has provided and keep a hopeful eye on the life to come

Questions about worry

1. What kinds of future possibilities cause you to worry the most?
2. Have you ever noticed worry holding you or someone else back from something good?
3. How are negativity and worry related? *

Questions about peace

4. How would you describe the feeling of inner peace? *
5. Describe a time when you experienced peace even when it didn't make much sense.
6. Reread Philippians 2:25-28. Notice that Paul himself had anxiety over a situation which he chose to address in a way that is different than what we discussed. What is something else we can do when we face anxiety? *

Questions about God's provision

7. How would you respond to someone who says that God would never let one of his own starve to death? *
8. What do you think Paul means by being content in Philippians 4:12? *
9. Read Philippians 4:13.
 - a. What are some ways that this well-known verse is commonly misapplied? *
 - b. How can we understand it more accurately within the context? *

10. What are some of the ways that God has provided for your needs?

- a. Why do you think it's so difficult to see God's provision when we have so much? ***

11. What are five small things in your life you can be thankful for?

Questions about becoming eternal minded

12. How can an eternal perspective help us address worries over immediate needs? *

13. What are some obstacles you foresee in becoming more eternal minded? *

14. What need do you most look forward to God eternally meeting when Jesus returns again?