

GROWING to Be Like Jesus: 6 Small Group Sessions on Discipleship

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SPIRITUAL GROWTH ISN'T EASY

I'd like to have big muscles, but it won't ever happen. Big muscles require working out, and I'm not motivated to put my body through the pain to get the muscular gain. Too much sweat. Too much time in the gym. I'd rather eat.

Building muscles doesn't fit with my lifestyle. If I could get muscles from watching television or reading magazines by the pool, I'd be a ripped body builder. I like stuff that's easy and arrives quickly. My favorites are fast food, just-add-water recipes, and ads claiming instant success. I was raised on all of the slogans that told me I could get what I want right away. Quick, fast, and speedy are key words. Unfortunately, these slogans undermine the perseverance it takes to get big muscles.

Bodybuilding and spiritual growth have some principles in common. As you dig into this series of Bible study on spiritual growth, I'm sorry to tell you that there's no just-add-water routine for growing deeper in Christ. You may love fast food, but there's no such thing as a quick diet of Jesus. I know some people who have fast-food faith, but typically their faith doesn't last or make a difference in the world. If you're going to grow and be a follower of Jesus, you'll have to invest time and discipline. Sorry. Spiritual growth requires something from you. (But it's worth it!)

As you discuss how to grow spiritually, you'll discover that friends in your small group help you grow. They'll help you become more like Jesus, so don't take your friends for granted. Invite them into your life to help you grow in Christ. And you help them. It's a great adventure—though it's not easy or fast. This book and your small group are all about helping you develop spiritual muscles.



FELLOWSHIP: CONNECTING Your Heart to Others'

[goal: to have students share about their lives and listen attentively to others]

Strong friendships are key to growing deeper in Christ. We need the support. One way to strengthen friendships is to open up and reveal who we are when we take off our masks. Each time you're together with the members of this small group, be prepared to share a bit about your life—your inner life. Take a risk and share something personal. (But don't forget everyone needs a chance to talk, so don't go on for too long!)

1 Describe a time when you felt a close connection with God, what some would call a spiritual high. What happened? What was the result?

2 Describe your current relationship with God.

3 If you haven't discussed the **Small Group Covenant** on page 90, take time to read it together and discuss it now. Make commitments to one another that your group time will reflect those values. You may want to have one person read the covenant to the group before you begin each lesson as a reminder.

Use the **Small Group Roster** (page 92) to record the names and contact information of the small group members.



DISCIPLESHIP: GROWING to Be Like Jesus

[goal: to explore God's Word, learn biblical knowledge, and make personal applications]

Growing spiritually begins with Jesus, the central focus of a maturing faith. When Christians find themselves spiritually stagnant, usually they've lost their focus on Jesus. The verses you're about to discuss are filled with challenges to keep you focused and running the Christian race without giving up. You don't see them here, but just before these three verses in Hebrews is a list of spiritual survivors, champions, heroes of the faith. Chapter 11

is a hall-of-fame list of people who followed God faithfully, people such as Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. We're told they were rewarded (**commended** in NIV) for their faith.

Wouldn't it be great to live a life of faith and be listed among the faithful who lived their lives focusing on God? In order to focus on God you need to clear the hurdles that will slow you down, fix your eyes on Jesus, and not give up when life gets tough.



Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

—Hebrews 12:1-3

Terms that look like this are described in **Learn a Little More** near the end of the session.

Why should "such a great cloud of witnesses" inspire you to be more faithful?

4

What currently hinders or entangles your spiritual life?

Do you find that these hindrances are a regular or continual problem, or are you facing them for the first time?

6 According to this text, what are some ways you can keep free from the things that hinder and entangle us?

Why is perseverance a vital connection to faith?

How do you fit together these two truths: salvation is a free gift from God and we have to give our best effort to run the race?

9 Why are we called to run the race "marked out for us?" It's your life. Why don't you get to determine the race you run?

Why might Jesus be called the author and perfecter of our faith?

10

According to this passage, why did Jesus endure the cross?

11

What was the joy that was set before Jesus?

What does that joy mean for us? How do we access that same joy?

12

On a practical level, what does it mean for you to fix your eyes on Jesus? For the last two weeks, how have you done with this challenge?

13

Describe a time when you were discouraged spiritually. What happened? What was it like? What was the cause?

14

How does thinking about Jesus help to keep you from growing weary and losing heart?

15

This passage is all about the long haul. What are some practical habits you might begin developing to help you become a strong believer when you graduate? (If you'll be graduating soon, then think about remaining strong for the next two years.)



MINISTRY: SERVING Others in Love

[goal: to recognize and take opportunities to serve others]

One of the goals of a healthy small group is to provide support to one another. When you support one another, you serve one another. That's what ministry is—serving.

Ministry doesn't always include traveling to foreign countries or helping the homeless. Often ministry happens with those closest to you. Ministry opportunities can happen inside and outside of your small group. One of the ways you'll serve those in your small group is to help them grow spiritually and cheer them on in their growth efforts.

Over the next five lessons, you can have a ministry to the others in your small group by encouraging and challenging one another to develop regular habits that promote spiritual growth.

Pair up with a person next to you and answer the following question:

Which one or two of the following activities would you like to focus on during this season of your spiritual journey? Why? Consider circling one or two that would be new to you.

Prayer

Bible study

Confession

Solitude/silence

Personal time with God

Accountability with another Christian

Tithing

Journaling

18

Which of the activities listed in the previous question have become regular habits for you?

Make it a goal to encourage one another's spiritual growth between sessions of your small group. Call or e-mail one another to ask about progress on these activities that can be life-changing. One result of doing this is that you'll grow stronger in your walk with God when you experience life together with another Christian friend.



EVANGELISM: SHARING Your Story and God's Story

[goal: to consider how the truths from this lesson might be applied to our relationships with unbelievers]

Fortunately, you're not running the Christian race alone! We have more fun and motivation to run the Christian life when we run with others who are supportive and cheer us on.

How does your spiritual growth relate to your ability to make an impact in the lives of the unbelievers you know?

Describe a time when you allowed your life to be entangled with sin. (You don't have to give all the gruesome details.) How did it damage your credibility with a non-Christian?

Who is one person you know who isn't in the Christian race? Write this person's name down and pray for them during the week.

At the beginning of small groups such as this one, you should decide whether your group is open to inviting friends to join. If your group is open, list who you would like to invite and make plans for talking with them. Your small group leader or your leadership team may have already determined the group is closed at this time. If so, a good group respects and follows that decision. You may be able to invite friends to join you in the next LIFETOGETHER book.

Read **How to Keep Your Small Group from Becoming a Clique** (page 94) when you're at home.



WORSHIP: SURRENDERING Your Life to Honor God

[goal: to focus on God's presence]

The writer of Hebrews described the Christian life as a race. Any race that requires endurance always has a break station where people can rest and be refreshed.

Each time your small group gets together, when you get to this point in the session, be refreshed through a time of prayer to focus on God's presence. He loves you so much, and this break is an opportunity to take the focus off yourself, express your love back to him, and surrender your plans to his plans. You'll find that you can do this in a variety of ways.

Have members of the group share one specific way the others in the group can pray for them. Write down the prayer requests. (See the **Prayer Request Log** on page 132.)

22

You'll find three prayer resources in the back of this book. By reading and discussing them, you'll find your group prayer time more rewarding.

- **Praying in Your Small Group** (page 126). Read this article on your own before the next session.
- **Prayer Request Guidelines** (page 128). Read and discuss these guidelines as a group.
- **Prayer Options** (page 130). Refer to this list for ideas to give your prayer time variety.

23

Spend some time thanking God for the people in your group and be sure to praise him for the unique qualities each person has. All the group's qualities combine to make everyone a stronger follower of Christ.

Before your group breaks, read **At Home This Week** together. (If everyone in the group has already done this in another LIFETOGETHER book, you can skip the introduction if you'd like.)

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AT HOME THIS WEEK

Each week, you'll have at least four options to help you grow and learn on your own—which means you'll have more to contribute when you return to the group.

Daily Bible Readings

On page 104 you'll find **Daily Bible Readings**, a chart of Bible passages that correspond with the lessons—five for each week. If you choose this option, read one passage each day. Highlight it in your Bible, reflect on it, journal about it, or repeat it out loud as a prayer. You're free to interact with the Bible verses any way you want, just be sure to read God's love letter—the Bible. You'll find helpful tips in **How to Study the Bible** (page 107).

Memory Verses




Memorizing Bible verses is an important habit to develop as you learn to grow spiritually on your own. **Memory Verses** (page 110) lists six verses—one per week—for you to memorize if you want to plant God's Word in your heart. Memorizing verses (and making them stick for more than a few minutes) isn't easy, but the benefits are undeniable. You'll have God's Word with you wherever you go.

Journaling

Use **SCRIBBLE** pages, 115-125

You'll find blank pages for journaling beginning on page 115. At the end of each session, you'll find several options and a question to get your thoughts going—but you aren't limited to the ideas in this book. Use these pages to reflect, to write a letter to God, to note what you're learning, to compose a prayer, to ask a question, to draw a picture of your praise, to record your thoughts. For more suggestions about journaling, turn to **Journaling: Snapshot of Your Heart** (page 112).

This week, choose one or more questions to reflect on.

-  *How would you describe your spiritual journey?*
-  *Where are you now spiritually?*
-  *Where do you want to be spiritually?*