



WHAT ON EARTH AM I HERE FOR?

Leave me alone!" I said it a million times when I was a teenager. "Leave me alone!" Even though the words came quickly from my lips, aimed at my parents, sisters, and friends, in my heart I didn't feel that way. If I would have been able to identify and express my feelings, I would have said something like this: "I'm lonely! I don't want to go through life without anyone. Don't leave me alone. I need people in my life. Don't believe me when I say, 'Leave me alone.' The more you pay attention to me, the happier I'll be. But I'm afraid to say that I need you. What would I do if you reject me?"

I didn't say what I should have said. Instead I pushed a lot of people away.

Over the years I've learned how to have strong relationships with others—the type that go deeper than the usual superficial level. I've learned plenty of lessons about love and life in these relationships. The more I learn, the better I understand how God created me to be one of the players in a number of relationships—first in relationship with him and then in growing relationships with others. Life hums along at its best when I'm solidly connected to God and people.

The same is true about you. You'll live a deeper, richer, more rewarding life if you can let others get to know the real you. You'll find out how important relationships are to you. No more "leave me alone" cries.

Congratulations for making a commitment to be in a small group. It has the potential to create an environment that enables you to develop strong relationships and to learn about God's purposes for your life. You're about to begin a journey that will give you opportunities to learn more about yourself, others, life, Jesus, and God's Word. What you learn will change you forever.

Begin your journey by committing to reveal the real you. Watch people draw close to you. Life isn't meant to be lived alone. Doing life together is a gift from God.

Let the journey begin.



FELLOWSHIP: CONNECTING Your Heart to Others'

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

Everyone hides behind a mask to some degree or another. (Mine is the receding hairline kind of ugly mask.) We naturally don't reveal too much too soon. Little by little, we test the security of our relationships, only revealing private information when we know we're safe.

Ultimately before others can get to know the real you, you have to take some risks to be more open than may feel comfortable. If you stop hiding, you'll be taking the first steps in creating strong relationships. You may not be able to be completely transparent right away, but stretch yourself. You'll find the rewards worth the risks. Besides, you don't expect everyone else to be perfect; others don't expect you to be perfect either. Sometimes our imperfections bond us together the tightest.

Having said that, you won't be able to share for unlimited amounts of time and still get through the entire session. Divide the time allotted among the number of people in the group. Assign someone to watch the time. You'll have many more sessions together to get to know each other better.

As others share their stories, pay attention to what they're saying. Listening carefully when others are talking communicates how much you value them. Active listening is a key skill you'll be developing throughout these sessions.

1 Share information about yourself that will help others know you better—family life, hobbies and interests, the food you hate to eat, animals you hate to pet, what makes you laugh, what makes you smell bad. (You can mix serious information with humorous stuff! Laughing with your small group is a good thing!)

2 Answer the following question with only one sentence: What's the purpose of life?

If you haven't discussed the **Small Group Covenant** on page 88, take time to read it together and discuss it now. Make commitments to one another that your group time will reflect those values. As a reminder, you may want to have one person read the covenant to the group before you begin each lesson.



Use the **Small Group Roster** (page 90) to record the names and contact information of the small group members.



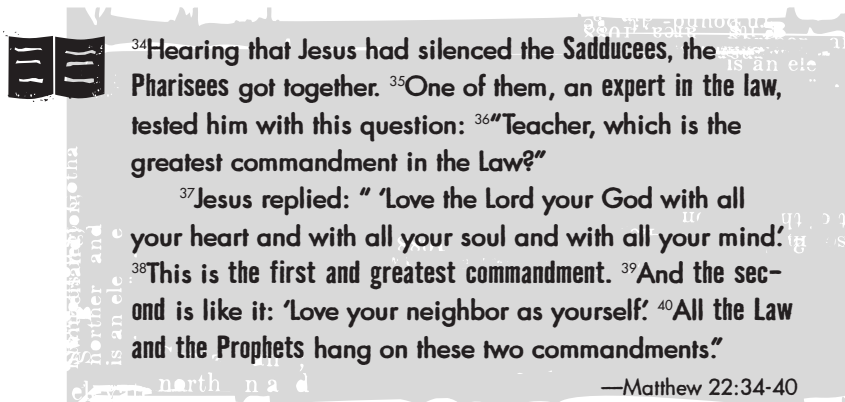
DISCIPLESHIP: GROWING to Be Like Jesus

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

Everyone eventually wonders about *the big question*. It can be phrased several ways:

- ❑ Are we there yet?
- ❑ Why am I here?
- ❑ What's the point?
- ❑ Does this life matter?
- ❑ Will I ever go on a date with a human? (Oops! That's an important question, but not the *big* one!)
- ❑ What's the purpose of life?

It's a natural question, and it's important to pursue answers. Jesus knew that at the core of who you are, you would crave significance and purpose. You need it. That's why Jesus gives the meaning of life in just a few words:



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

What do you know about the Sadducees and the Pharisees? Why would they try to test Jesus? What kind of test was this? (Would you flunk a spelling test if “Sadducee” was on it?)

Reread verse 40. What was Jesus referring to when he says, “all the Law and the Prophets”?

What does Jesus mean when he says, “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind?” How would we put this kind of love into action?

In your own words, what does it mean to love God?
Love your neighbor?

Jesus says to “love your neighbor as yourself.” What does he mean?

Does every person love himself or herself? Explain your thinking. In what ways do people with low self-esteem still love themselves? What implications do your ideas have about loving others the way Jesus commanded?

Jesus answers the legal expert's question with two great commands—the greatest and the second greatest. Is it possible to practice only one command without the other? How would you explain what Jesus means?



Do you find these two commands surprising? Why didn't Jesus say, "One of the great commands is to pursue your own happiness"? What are the implications for your life?

Which are you better at: loving God or loving others? Explain your answer.

What's one extreme act of love you've seen someone else show (either to you or someone else)?



MINISTRY: SERVING Others in Love

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

I hope you came to the conclusion that loving God and loving others can't be separated in daily living. Life together with God means life together with others, and life together with others means life with God. God has created a great relational system for us: when we love God, he will give us the power to love others. When we receive love from others, we're thankful to God and learn new ways to increase our love for him.

One of the main points of life on earth is *learning to love*. During the next five lessons in this book, your group will discuss five actions that move you along the path toward loving God and others better. In every lesson you'll be given an opportunity to either discuss ways to show love or you'll

be challenged to show love to others in some way. Some lessons will be fairly easy, while other will stretch your comfort zone.

14 Write a definition of what it means to serve others in love.

15 Share your definition with the group. Make notes of ideas others offer that you haven't included in your definition.

16 Take a moment to rewrite your definition, incorporating the best of the ideas shared.

17 What's one practical thing you can do during the coming week to love one of your neighbors better?



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]



At the beginning of small groups such as this one, you should decide whether your group is open to inviting friends to join your group. If the group is open, answer questions 18-21. Your small group leader or your youth group 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. If your group is closed now, skip to question 22.

If your group is open at this time

Take a few minutes to list names of friends you'll consider inviting to the group's next session.

Check the option that seems like the easiest way to invite others to your group. Share your answer.

- ☐ Call them.
- ☐ Talk to them at school.
- ☐ Talk with them when another person from the group is with you.
- ☐ Send them an e-mail.
- ☐ Kidnap their pets. Offer to release the pets if they come to your small group. (Okay, maybe not.)
- ☐ Other _____.

20

Discuss what might happen if everyone you invite comes to your small group. Could you handle them all? Do you have extra books for everyone? Could you launch another new group? Can someone from your group lead it? What other options do you have? What else do you need to consider?

21

As you think of some of the potential inconveniences of the new additions, keep in mind God's love for everyone. Love isn't meant to be kept to a few holy, special people. Love is meant to be given away.

Read **How to Keep Your Small Group from Becoming a Clique** on page 92.

If your group isn't open at this time

22

When is the right time to bring friends to our youth ministry?

23

How do new people feel when they come into our ministry?

How can each person in our group make new people feel comfortable?

24



WORSHIP: SURRENDERING Your Life to Honor God

[goal: to focus on God's presence]

Sessions will usually end with prayer. This is your opportunity to submit to God's ways and to connect your heart to God's heart.

Especially if your small group is just beginning, don't feel the pressure to have everyone pray out loud if they're not comfortable with it yet. Group members can pray in the silence of their hearts: "God, help me to be a more loving person. I need help loving _____."

Another option is to close this prayer time by praying for the people whose names you listed on page 27.

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.

Take some time this week to answer the questions on the **Spiritual Health Assessment** (pages 95-103). The goal is to evaluate your spiritual journey honestly, not to get a high score. If you don't have time to write answers for all the questions, make sure you at least circle the numbers on the scale that best apply to you. (It should only take a few minutes.) You may have the opportunity to share your results during your next session.

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.

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. All I'm encouraging you to do is take time to read God's love letter—the Bible. You'll find helpful tips in **How to Study the Bible** (page 105).

Memory Verses

Memorizing Bible verses is an important habit to develop as you learn to grow spiritually on your own. **Memory Verses** (page 108) 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

You'll find blank pages for journaling beginning on page 113. 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 110).

Choose one or more questions to reflect on:

- ☐ Write about any fears you experienced the last time you took a risk to get to know someone on a deeper level.
- ☐ Why do you find it difficult to open up with others?
- ☐ What keeps you from loving God like you want to?

Wrap It Up

Write out your answers to the session questions your group didn't have time to discuss.

This week share with the others in your group which option seems most appealing to try during the coming week. During other weeks, take time to share with the group what you did **At Home This Week**.



STARTING to go where God wants you to be

LEARN A LITTLE MORE

Sadducees, Pharisees, experts in the Law

The *Sadducees* were a politically active group of Jews who were in charge of the temple and its services. They were wealthy aristocrats, descendants of the high-priestly line. They accepted only the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) as authoritative. They didn't believe in the resurrection.

Pharisees taught that the way to God was through strict obedience to the law, which included the entire Old Testament and the oral traditions added to it. They exercised great influence over the Jewish people because they controlled the synagogues. Paul, the apostle who wrote most of the New Testament, was a Pharisee at one time.

The *experts in the Law* were experts in the Mosaic Law (the Torah).

These groups often opposed each other because of their differing views, but they united to oppose Jesus because he was a threat to their power, wealth, or prestige. Most people in the Gospels who were opposed to Jesus came from one of these groups.

The first and greatest commandment...and the second

The first commandment is greater because obeying the first—loving God—will lead to the second—loving people. Obedience to the second commandment does not necessarily lead to the first. Many people love other people yet do not love God.

Just because the second command isn't *the* most important doesn't mean the second command is *unimportant*. A heart that works properly is more important than eyes that work properly, but this doesn't mean we want to live without our eyes.

The Law and the Prophets

A term for the Old Testament.

Neighbor

Sometimes we look for loopholes to excuse us from our responsibilities. A narrow definition of *neighbor* means we have to love only a few people: "Well, that person isn't my neighbor, so I don't have to love him."

According to the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37, Jesus identifies a neighbor as anyone who crosses our path and has a need. Even if you're not an observant person, you can see that we all have a lot of neighbors to love!



Heart...soul...mind

The precise meanings of these terms overlapped in the Jewish usage. The point Jesus was making emphasizes the call to love God with every part of us—emotions, reasoning, imagination, passion, will, energy, and actions. Loving God is not simply an emotion or belief. It extends to the will and to actions.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Leviticus 19:9-18

Deuteronomy 6:4-5; 10:12-13

Proverbs 4:23

1 John 3:16-18

1 John 4:7-12, 20-21

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