

A Small Group Bible Study Series for Young People

Book 1

WHO AM I?

Produced by

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SOME IMPORTANT POINTS ABOUT SMALL GROUP FAITH-SHARING

- A faith-sharing group listens prayerfully to the Word of God.

- Each one of us is being led by God on our own faith journey. We all, therefore, have something very important to contribute to the group. This means we need to show real respect for one another and for what each person has to say.

- The group can appoint a leader responsible for guiding the group through the sessions and for creating, with the group, a warm and friendly atmosphere that will help it to grow and flourish.

- The leader will draw on the resources of the group and enable the group to share, pray and listen to the Word of God in the way which they find most appropriate.

- Respect confidences so that people trust the group and can be open and honest with each other.

- You need to share only on a level at which you feel comfortable. If you do not want to say anything at all, that's fine too. No one will press you to speak.

- Wait to share a second time until those who have not yet shared have had a chance to contribute.

- Sometimes questions will arise that will need to be raised outside the group. If the leader is unable to answer them, he/she will resort to someone who can give guidance on the questions.

- Moments of silence are valuable especially in giving us a chance to reflect and pray, both before sharing begins and during sharing. Do not let silence worry you!

- Above all - the hope is that our prayer and sharing of the Word of God will lead to ACTION. As a community of believers, the group members offer one another support in bearing witness to Christ's teaching in our lives as Christians in today's world.

WEEKLY FORMAT

➤ **WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER**

➤ **INTRODUCTIONS**

If there are any new members, it would be good to spend some time on introductions.

➤ **CASE STUDY/STORY**

The case study/story of the week is read aloud.

➤ **SCRIPTURE READING**

The reading for the week is read.

➤ **READ BACKGROUND TO THE SCRIPTURE**

We read the background to the scripture to put it into context. [Turns can be taken in reading]

➤ **REFLECTION**

Reflect on the case study/story and/or a word or phrase from the scripture which has touched you personally? Do not discuss any contribution, even though some may not share personally but comment instead.

➤ **SHARE THE WORD**

➤ **SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES**

These are designed to enhance your private times with God and, in turn, to help you invite Him into all aspects of your life, even the everyday routines.

➤ **PLAN FOR ACTION**

Discuss any task which you or your group may be called to do.

➤ **CONCLUDING PRAYERS**

Anyone who wishes may pray spontaneously.

Session 1

Being Real

BACKGROUND TO THE SCRIPTURE READING

The author, John, was probably living in Ephesus, which was a large, multi-ethnic centre of trade, commerce and culture. Many Greeks and Romans resided there, so following a multitude of gods was within their practice. This was very problematic to the Christians.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he focuses on life applications – teaching believers unity in the Spirit. [Read Ephesians and Act 19]. It is within this framework that John's first letter is written possibly to the church in Ephesus, about 25 – 30 years after Paul wrote to the people in Ephesus. There were many different teachings, which was confusing and causing the church to become divided on their views, allowing them to look past their morals and spiritual maturity. Here John reiterates what Paul had been teaching. John's message urges them to remain rooted in Christ and His teaching.

John draws them back to their first love, to live a righteous life, to know that they are children of the living God. To know and understand their true identity in Christ and who He is.

SCRIPTURE

1John 2:28-3:10

CASE STUDY/STORY

Bobby has been very pessimistic about the future. He feels threatened by the things surrounding him. His community is riddled with a drug problem, domestic violence, an increase in crime and his parents becoming another statistic in the divorce courts.

As he looks around him today he is faced with materialism, commercialism, ethnic diversity, religious and philosophical doctrines and beliefs that is just as confusing.

He is alone, blaming himself for his parents' divorce, leaving him feeling isolated and unloved and looking for a way out. The circumstances compounding this dilemma are clouding his judgment and he feels weak and inadequate about changing things. A number of ideas have been creeping into his head – running away, turning to drugs, getting involved in a gang to find love and security etc.

He knows that he is loved by God and that he can make a difference in his life and in the lives of his community. He is a regular church goer but is beginning to doubt and is further influenced by his friends. The decisions he makes can be two-fold, he can decide on his current circumstance or he can allow God's Spirit to guide and direct him.

REFLECTION

A period of silence should be observed to allow God to speak to you.

SHARE YOUR REFLECTIONS

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- How would you feel if Jesus returned today? Will you be ready to meet Him?
- Reflect on 3:1-3 again – what does this say about your self-image?
- At the end of this week, reflect on where you experienced God’s lavish love upon you.

PLAN FOR ACTION

If this reflection has made you feel lonely and misunderstood, know that God has lavished you with His love. Write a poem or draw something that depicts His love for you.

Are there areas in your life that you need to repent of, spend some time in prayer asking God to guide you and to give you the strength to overcome them.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

Pray for each other or as a group.

“Lord Jesus, thank you that You call me Your son/daughter. Thank you for loving me unconditionally. Help me to choose wisely and guide me along the paths of righteousness so that I can be a shining light to others knowing that I am anchored in Your eternal truth. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

***“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!”
[1 John 3:1a]***

Notes

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Session 2

I am Unique

BACKGROUND TO THE SCRIPTURE READING

Israel was under the authority of the Roman Empire and had to submit to the Roman laws. Part of an unjust system was the fact that the Israelites were taxed and the tax collectors were dishonest people. As an oppressed nation under Roman government, it was often the tax collectors who knew the rate required by Rome and could easily inflate the rate and pocket the difference.

Zacchaeus worked for the Roman government and as a prominent tax collector, probably the head tax collector and prone to abuse the tax system, and was therefore even more despised by the Jews than other tax collectors.

Jericho was Roman territory and this gateway ensured that it was a main tax collecting site. Jesus was passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem for the Passover where He would celebrate the last supper.

People were following Jesus and wanted to hear His teaching and see the miracles He performed. Zacchaeus was curious too, but as a man that was small in stature he had difficulty seeing over the crowds. The only way to do this was to climb a tree.

Now for Jesus to meet and eat with Zacchaeus, who is regarded as a sinner, must have had a great impact on Zacchaeus. Not much is said about the conversation between them but we do know that it made an incredible change in Zacchaeus' life.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 19:1-10

CASE STUDY/STORY

Simon had a glandular problem which caused him to be overweight. He was a great student and he loved sports. He tried his hand at all the sports trials. Alas, he failed at all of them and his fellow mates often ridiculed him for it. They were unkind and said nasty things about his weight. This really impacted his self-esteem. He felt he was good for nothing.

Passing the music room one day he stopped. The sounds coming from the room stirred deeply inside him. Slowly he opened the door and peeped in. The music teacher invited him in. Every day after school he would spend time in the music room, wrapped in the notes that emanated from the piano.

Eventually he was coerced by the teacher to take lessons. The more Simon practiced, the better he became and he had such an ear for music that he could play tunes from memory. Actually he was doing so great that he was entered for recitals and walked off with many awards. His friends no longer ridiculed him and his self-esteem was lifted. He believed in himself and in the potential that God had planted deep in his heart. He was unique with special artistic talents.

REFLECTION

A period of silence should be observed to allow God to speak to you.

SHARE YOUR REFLECTIONS

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- Where did Jesus find you? [up a tree, on the sports fields, at a church camp]
- How do people see you as special or unique?
- What does this passage teach you about restitution?

PLAN FOR ACTION

Often we see things with our physical eyes but Jesus can work in and through us to enable us to see with spiritual eyes.

Look back in your life where you may have areas that need to be restituted. If you need to make amends to someone, how will you do it? Do it this week!

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

Pray for each other or as a group.

Heavenly Father, I live in an unjust world. Help me through Your Spirit, to realize the potential I have and know that I am unique and can make a meaningful contribution. Forgive me for the times I have erred and help me to re-align myself to Your invitation and calling on my life. Amen.

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”
[Lk. 19:10]

Notes

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Session 3

My Personality

BACKGROUND TO THE SCRIPTURE READING

About 2.5 kilometers from Jerusalem, at the foot the Mount of Olives, lies a small village called Bethany. It is here that we encounter Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus who were followers of Jesus. Jesus had formed a friendship with this family who offered Him hospitality and it may appear that He often stopped over to spend time with them. Their friendship became very intimate, as we recall in John 12, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with very expensive perfume, and this just before His entry into Jerusalem for the Passover and after raising Lazarus from the dead.

The story in this scripture depicts the relationship but moreover the individual personalities between Mary and Martha.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 10:38-42

CASE STUDY/STORY

John and James were identical twins born about nine minutes apart. Growing up had always been easy as they enjoyed the same things from food to movies to sports. People often commented that they not only looked alike but that they had the same mannerisms and personality. This however changed as they started coming into their puberty years. John was the sports fanatic and tried out for every event offered at school. James again pursued books and spent his afternoons in the library. John rebuked James for not wanting to play sports and felt that he was going to miss out and become overweight if he does not stay fit. James on the other hand enjoyed books and argued that knowledge was better than running after a ball on a big field.

Despite being twins, their personalities differed but that did not make the one twin more superior to the other. In fact, their personalities were enhanced when John became a sports celebrity and James a medical doctor who specialized in sports injuries.

REFLECTION

A period of silence should be observed to allow God to speak to you.

SHARE YOUR REFLECTIONS

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- Comparing your personality to Mary and Martha, which of them are you more like?
- If you could change something about your personality, what would you change?
- Are you able to say 'no' when the demands on you and your time become overwhelming?

PLAN FOR ACTION

Reflect on your life, are there areas where you feel you need to become more of a servant?

Set time aside this week to spend it with Jesus. Imagine He is visiting with you, what is it that you would like to hear Him say to you or what would you have been providing for Him.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

Pray for each other or as a group.

²Heavenly Father,

You have carefully and lovingly put me together. You know me even before I was born, You fashioned me to Your own design and yet I am unique and made in Your image.

You have prepared good works for me and I have a meaningful contribution to make. Keep me ever faithful and true to Your plan so that everything that I do will be to Your honour and glory and may I reflect this into the world.

I ask this not because I deserve it but because You are a God whose nature is always to be merciful.

Amen.

“...you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed...”
[Lk. 10:41-42]

Notes

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Session 4

My Abilities

BACKGROUND TO THE SCRIPTURE READING

The letter to the Romans was Paul's way of introducing himself to the Roman Christians. Paul did not plant the church in Rome but it may have been started by Roman Jews who were converted on the day of Pentecost, [Acts 2:10-11]. The church was made up of Jew and Gentile believers and there was tension between the two groups. In this passage Paul shows how believers ought to live in response to the lavish grace of God.

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:1-8

CASE STUDY/STORY

Janice and Megan are two friends that attended an interdenominational youth camp. They thoroughly enjoyed the discussions, friendships and interactions. One evening around camp fire, the conversation turned to differences in denominations and which was the top or best one to be part of. There were opposing comments from Anglo-Catholics, Pentecostals and Independent churches. It took a lot of courage from the camp leaders to avert a very contentious argument.

The big question posed by the camp leaders was, "Let's discuss what church means to you". This quickly emanated into a lively discussion and diffused a lot of the misconceptions some had regarding 'church'.

REFLECTION

A period of silence should be observed to allow God to speak to you.

SHARE YOUR REFLECTIONS

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- In what ways do you conform to the world? And how does the 'renewing of your mind' happen?
- Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? If not, check how you can ascertain this.
- What holds you back from using your gifts more fully?

PLAN FOR ACTION

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

Pray for each other or as a group.

³*Almighty Father,*

I know that you have a plan for me. Help me through Your Spirit to transform my mind so that it is aligned with Your will. You have given me gifts, help me to use them to bring You glory and to edify others in the body of Christ. When I use my gifts to bless others, Your grace abounds in them and me. Nothing can separate me from Your love and through this love I am able to love others. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“...be transformed by the renewing of your mind”
[Rom. 12:2]

Notes

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Session 5

My Strengths & Weaknesses

BACKGROUND TO THE SCRIPTURE READING

The book of Judges may have been written during the early reign of David. After Joshua's death and Saul's rise, the Israelites were scattered across the Promised Land and many tribes were formed. The whole area was heavily influenced by the Canaanites who enforced their culture and religion on God's people living in the area. Israel was continuously being drawn away from worshipping God coerced into follow false gods.

They disobeyed God and followed the Canaanite gods. The first few chapters deals with the rebellion by God's people; God raising up foreign oppressors to punish or discipline them; a cry out to God from the Israelites, till God raises up someone who is able to defend the land and rescue the repentant people. Even in dark, chaotic times, God is in control. The whole theme of the Book is that God is merciful and long-suffering despite the sin of His people.

SCRIPTURE

Judges 6:1-40

CASE STUDY/STORY

The pastor at a local church was facing some challenges with members in his congregation all in the space of one week. He felt a bit overwhelmed by it all as he listened to their cries for help.

Anthea is a God-fearing young adult that feels God has been calling her to the ordained ministry. However, as she spoke to some elders, she felt more and more disillusioned by their comments, "you are too young", "women don't make it in our church as leaders", "you need a Master degree to be able preach properly", and so the critics continued. Her passion is to offer what God has laid on her heart to the congregants, both young and old. Will she be able to cross this barrier that judges and isolates her from her community?

Richard had been married for ten years and has held a top position in his company for most of his married life. Now he has been retrenched and is worried whether he will find a job soon to provide for his family.

Margaret is a godly woman who has been suffering with rheumatoid arthritis for many years. She has been prayed for, has prayed herself and is beginning to doubt whether she will be released from her pain.

REFLECTION

A period of silence should be observed to allow God to speak to us.

SHARE YOUR REFLECTIONS

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- How would you respond to one of the people in the case study/story above?
- Have you doubted or ever questioned God's work in your life?
- When have you resorted to using Gideon's fleece"? What happened? Were you tempted to do it over again and why?

PLAN FOR ACTION

If you have doubted or questioned God's work in your life, then repent and step out in faith and obediently trust Him. Believe His promises and move from fear to faith. God will always perform what He promises.

Gideon built an altar and tore one down overnight. What would you like to 'tear down' in your life and what would you like to 'build up' to the glory of God?

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

Pray for each other or as a group.

⁴Heavenly Father,

Often I am tormented by thorns in my flesh and through my pride and arrogance it brings me suffering and pain. When I become humble and admit my sin and weakness, I can reach for You and find shelter in the shadow of Your wing.

Although I am weak in Your presence, I can look upon Your face, and I become strong and am touched by Your grace. Lord often I hurt so much from the rejection and battering that I take in the world that I cannot see Your grace, but it is only because of Your constant presence and Your outstretched hand that I am lifted up.

Always remind me Lord that when I am heavy laden that You will give me peace, and that when I am weak in Your presence, I shall never be overcome.

In Jesus' Name. Amen

***"The Lord is with you, mighty warrior"
[Judges 6:12]***

Notes

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Session 6

God's Call on My Life

BACKGROUND TO THE SCRIPTURE READING

It was customary for Jewish rabbis to gather students around them to teach the Torah. These were often theological professionals and elitists from the community. Jesus comes along and calls fishermen, tax collectors, former revolutionaries and sinners into His community. Obviously, Jesus' ways and teaching does not conform to that of the Jewish authorities. His ministry is centred on those He had called to serve with Him. In this passage He not only performs a miracle, but teaches and disciples them around mission and who is qualified for it.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 5:1-11

CASE STUDY/STORY

Benjamin has been a regular at his local church for many years. He however, never got involved in any form of ministry. Many had approached him to join various groups, but he always felt he was not good enough to serve.

One Sunday morning the pastor preached about God calling each one to be of service in His Kingdom. He particularly mentioned that there was someone sitting in the pews that he felt had a gift that could build up the church

As a young boy, Benjamin used to listen and watch his father play the guitar. One day he decided to pluck away at the strings. Much to his father's delight, Benjamin had been listening and without an inkling of reading music, played like a maestro. Unfortunately this gift was never nurtured and Benjamin thought he was not good enough.

Now sitting in the pew that morning, there was a deep stirring in his spirit and after church he spoke to the worship leader and asked whether he could join the team as a guitarist. This was a major step for Benjamin and today he heads up that very same worship team and draws people closer into worship to God.

REFLECTION

A period of silence should be observed to allow God to speak to you.

SHARE YOUR REFLECTIONS

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- Re-read verse 8 – when did you perhaps respond to Jesus like Peter does in this verse?
- What does it mean for you to leave your ‘net’ behind and follow Jesus? What is your ‘net’ and what prevents you from following Him?
- What does it mean for you to be ‘catching people’ for Jesus?

PLAN FOR ACTION

Are you part of a small group? What new insights can you bring to the group?

If you are not part of a small group, then join one or find some friends to start a group of your own.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

Pray for each other or as a group.

⁵*Lord God Almighty,*

When You call on me, I feel unworthy because I am a sinner and live amongst sinners, but You show me Lord, that You are far more ready to forgive than even I expect. You do not expect me to have the ability but if I am prepared to make myself available, You can use me.

Lord when You need somebody to send, let me not find excuses or reasons not to respond but grant me grace to step forward and to have the courage to repeat the words which Isaiah spoke, “Here am I. Send me!”

I ask this in the precious Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Don’t be afraid, from now on you will catch men”
[Lk. 5:10b]

Notes

A series of 25 horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

Reference List

1. New International Version, *Serendipity Bible* 1998, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House
2. Burgess, L.E. (Ed.) * *A Word for You*, 2005, Woodstock Copy Shop 2005
3. <https://bible.org>

* *Prayers 1-5 at the end of each session are excerpts from the book*

The case studies/stories are all fictional and does not reflect any person/s whatsoever