



VOL. 4

People & Creation

# MILESTONES

Connecting God's Word to Life



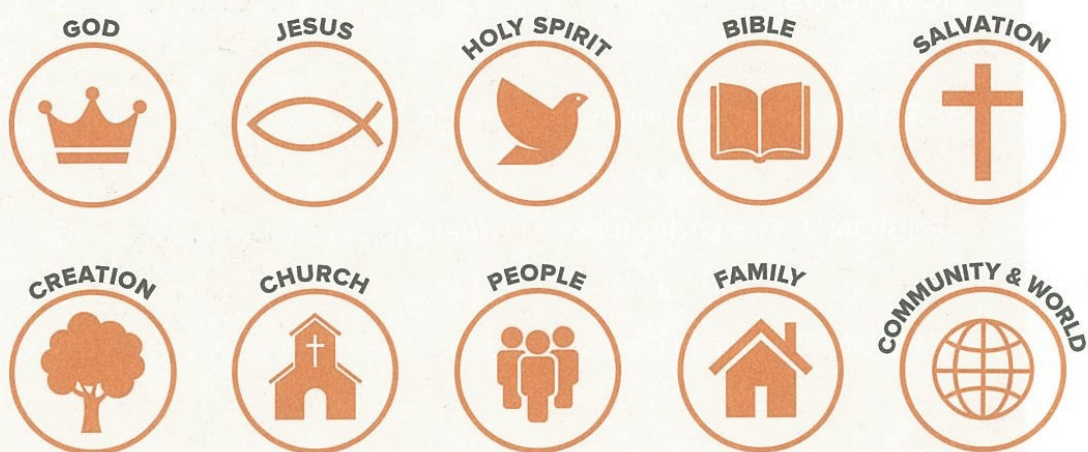
# Table of **CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION .....	4
HOW TO USE .....	5
SESSION 1: The Testimony of Creation .....	6
SESSION 2: The Orderliness of Creation .....	16
SESSION 3: Made in God's Image .....	26
SESSION 4: Consequences of Sin .....	36
SESSION 5: Knowing God's Will .....	46
SESSION 6: Becoming Like Jesus .....	56
SESSION 7: Living By The Spirit .....	66
SESSION 8: Filled With Joy .....	76
LEADER GUIDE .....	86



# MILESTONES / INTRODUCTION

*Milestones* was developed by the creators of *Bible Studies for Life: Students*, which exists to point students and student leaders to the application of biblical teaching to everyday life through weekly group Bible studies and additional resources. Every lesson within *Bible Studies for Life* contains a bible study that points students to Jesus, is rooted in Scripture, and provides application for living in today's context. The topics and subjects chosen in each quarter of *Bible Studies for Life* fit within a larger framework called *Levels of Biblical Learning*. *Levels of Biblical Learning* consists of ten theological topics we believe students should grasp before graduating high school. These include:



Within these ten topics are 52 theological statements, which make up the core content students would be exposed to and learn each year as they go through *Bible Studies for Life*. The quarterly topics and Scripture passages that make up each lesson in *Bible Studies for Life* are tied the framework of *Levels of Biblical Learning*, which guides the Scripture selection.

While we are able to connect students to the *Levels of Biblical Learning* and the theological statements in each lesson of *Bible Studies for Life*, we wanted to provide a resource capable of going deep into the weight and significance these levels have for personal faith and discipleship. This is what *Milestones* seeks to do. Over the course of six volumes, each of the 52 theological statements will be explored in depth, noting both the theological importance and personal application each has for everyday life. By going through these six volumes, we hope students will grow in their personal knowledge and understanding of God and His world. We also pray that God will use these resources to equip another generation to boldly proclaim the truth of the gospel in a world where Jesus—the truth—is desperately needed.



# MILESTONES / HOW TO USE

This Bible-study book includes eight weeks of content for group and personal study. Each session is divided into the following components:

## ENGAGE

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Each session opens with a *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement*, which gives an overview of the session's topic. Following the statement, each session contains an introduction to help your group as you begin your time together, setting up a natural transition into the material for each week.

## DISCUSS

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The Discuss section expands upon the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement*. During this time, groups will explore Scripture, answer questions, and engage with additional content to help explain the session statement.

## LIVE IT OUT

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The Live It Out section is designed to close out your group time by calling out three specific points of application under the headings of Christ, Community, and Culture. By doing so, this section seeks to demonstrate specifically what the session material teaches us about Christ, how to live in Community, and how to engage with Culture.

## DOING, BEING, AND APOLOGETIC STATEMENTS

This section also contains Doing, Being, and Apologetic statements. These statements are directly related to the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement*, and provide opportunity for the group to expand on what these doctrinal truths communicate about us as individuals, how we are to live, and how we might engage culture apologetically.

## DEVOTIONS

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Three personal devotions are provided for each session to take students deeper into Scripture and to supplement the content introduced in the group study. With biblical teaching and introspective questions, these sections challenge students to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to respond in faith.

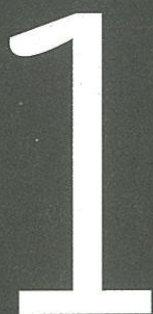
## LEADER GUIDE

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At the back of this book, you'll find a leader guide to help you prepare each week. This guide will help you gain a broad understanding of the content and learn ways to engage with students throughout your time together.



# THE TESTIMONY OF CREATION



## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



*God is Creator, and all creation is a result of His work and exists to glorify Him. Creation testifies to the existence of God, and because His power and nature are understood through what He has made, people are without excuse for their disbelief and disobedience.*

What do Superman, Spider-man, the Hulk, and Batman have in common? Sure, they are all fictional comic book characters. Yes, they all possess remarkable abilities. But something even more unique to these superheroes is the fact that they choose to keep their identity hidden. They go to great lengths to keep their true identity hidden from the majority of the world, only revealing their true selves to a small and intimate group of friends.

Of course, keeping secrets and hiding things about oneself isn't exclusive to the world of comic books—real people do this every day. For good or bad, people are desperate to keep secrets and hide things about themselves from even those closest to them. People's reasons for hiding their identity vary. But maybe this makes you wonder: Does God keep His identity from us? Are we left in the dark wondering about His character and purpose for creating us? Absolutely not! God's work of creation is a testimony to His desire to be both known and glorified among His creation.

**In what ways has God purposefully revealed Himself and His glory to His people? To you personally?**

## **GOD IS THE CREATOR OVER ALL CREATION**

***Read Genesis 1:1 and Colossians 1:16.***

**What did God use to create the world?**

**What things fall under the category of “creation”?**

**What does “all things have been created through Him and for Him” mean? Who is this verse talking about?**

When the Bible talks about God’s creation of the universe, it is referring to things both visible and invisible. When we say God created all visible things, it’s another way to say God created everything in the material (physical) universe out of nothing. This includes everything from planets and people to the atoms and molecules that make them up. When we say God created all things invisible, we affirm that God also created immaterial things (not made up of physical parts), such as the human soul. In other words, there isn’t anything in existence—material or immaterial—that doesn’t find its origin in God Himself.

Because God created the entire universe—material and immaterial—all of creation is completely dependent upon Him for its existence. Sure, there are some who think nature has ultimate control, often hinted at in the phrase “Mother Nature.” But this is clearly mistaken. If God is the author of creation, this means He is not only sovereign over all parts of it, but He also uses it to accomplish His purposes and will. Creation points us to a loving and sovereign God, bearing the marks of His power and goodness much like a potter leaving fingerprints in his own work.

***Now, read Psalm 19:1-4.***

**What evidence of God do you see in creation?**

**What are some ways creation reveals God’s glory?**



**BEING** // God created a universe which was whole and good, but humanity's sin brought brokenness, pain, and relational separation between God and people. However, those who are part of God's family are new creations in Christ, and will dwell with God in the new heavens and earth.

**DOING** // As those whom God has entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing His creation, we should steward well all the things God gives us in a way that honors Him and points others to Jesus.

**APOLOGETIC** // God created the world, therefore, it belongs to Him. Upon placing people in the garden, He called us to rule over the world as an expression of His authority. Because we have the responsibility of caring for the world and all its resources, we must steward it well as God would.

## CHRIST

As Paul stated in Colossians 1, all things have been created by Christ and for Christ. Think about that. Everything from Saturn's rings to pepperoni pizza has been created by Jesus and for the praise of Jesus. This is the purpose of all creation. In fact, Isaiah 43:6-7 says, "Bring my sons from far away, and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who bears my name and is created for my glory." We, like the rest of creation, were created to glorify God. And the great news is that we, unlike the rest of creation, get to do so in a unique way—by bearing His image and reflecting Him in all we do.

**How are you seeking to glorify (make much of) Jesus in the rhythms of your life?**

## COMMUNITY

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When we think about creation our attention is usually directed upward to galaxies and solar systems. However, the vastness of those aspects of creation should never overshadow other parts of God's creation that are even more valuable and meaningful, although smaller in size. One of those being the creation and gift of friendship and community God originally designed in the opening chapters of Genesis. It was always clear from God's design that humans were intended to thrive in community with each other. We have been hardwired for community, and deep down each of us want to belong. Having meaningful relationships are extremely important if we are to grow in Christ-likeness. And we should be extremely grateful when those meaningful relationships in our lives happen.

**What are some of the most meaningful relationships in your life? Why do you consider them meaningful?**

## CULTURE

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The fact that creation isn't eternal but had a beginning in time and space is a momentous argument in favor of the Christian worldview. As mentioned before, atheists can't give an answer as to why something is here rather than nothing, and they can't explain through science or plain reason how something can come from nothing. But the Christian worldview has the advantage here. We can affirm that creation had a beginning and offer an explanation as to the cause (God) that brought it into existence.

**How can you use that the Universe had a beginning as evidence of a Creator?**



# LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 1

## ENGAGE

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Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 6. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

## DISCUSS

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Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 7-9 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

## LIVE IT OUT

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After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 10-11. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

## WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

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- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 1, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 12-15 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 1.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

## WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

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# 2

## THE ORDERLINESS OF CREATION



### LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT

*God's creation functions in an orderly way and serves His purposes as He exercises sovereign rule over it all.*



The Christian worldview clearly states that we are here—our universe is here—by the purposeful intention and design of our Creator. We are not here by chance or necessity, but by design. But how does that notion settle with the science? Does science support that belief? It does. Discoveries from cosmology to biology all reveal not only our universe, but we ourselves are so intricately designed that to believe it all happened by chance would require one to have way more faith than that of a Christian. Consider just a few fine-tuning conditions relating only to our planet itself:

1. If the earth were merely one percent closer to the sun, the oceans would vaporize, preventing the existence of life.
2. If our planet were just two percent farther from the sun, the oceans would freeze.
3. We have to have a large moon with right planetary rotation (which stabilizes a planet's tilt and contributes to tides). In Earth's case, the gravitational pull of its moon stabilizes the angle of its axis at a nearly constant 23.5 degrees. This ensures relatively temperate seasonal changes, and the only climate in the solar system mild enough to sustain complex living organisms.

**If you were an expert studying in one of these fields and following the evidence where it leads, what would you conclude about these findings?**



## ORDER AND DESIGN POINT TO GOD

**Read Genesis 1:1-25.**

**What do you think verse 2 means when it says creation was “formless and empty?”**

While the opening verses of Genesis assure us God is the author of creation, it doesn't stop there. Creation was formless and empty, which is another way of saying it was chaotic and uninhabitable, lacking the necessary order and structure for God's plans of making a world where humans could thrive. So, God creates, and then goes to work on His creation, putting things in order and establishing the laws and structures to make the world a habitable place. He establishes order where there was once chaos. He creates a world that reflects Him by demonstrating the same type of rationality and orderliness we find in Him.

**Why is the idea of God bringing order out of chaos comforting on a personal level?**

**When has He brought order and peace out of a chaotic time in your own life?**

When you think about it, the order and structure of the universe serves to support the Christian worldview. In fact, the doctrine of creation, with the order and structure that resulted from God's creative acts, served as the foundation for modern-day science (the approach to science that came out of Renaissance Europe). Think about it—science can only operate within a system of reliable laws that demonstrate order and rationality. The Christian worldview provided the framework for science to operate, which is why the majority of the early great scientists were believers. They believed that the Creator of the universe was orderly and rational, and that His creation displayed those same characteristics, making science possible. If things were not orderly, then there would be no regularity within nature; without regularity, there would be no science.

## **GOD MAINTAINS AND PRESERVES HIS CREATED ORDER**

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***Read Psalm 24:1-2 and Colossians 1:17***

**According to Psalm 24, what parts of creation are outside God's control?**

**What does it mean that by Christ everything is held together (Col. 1:17)?**

It is one thing for an artist to compose a new song or paint a new picture using musical notes and paints that already exist. It is something entirely different to create something from nothing. Still, it is something else to create something and stick around to make sure it is preserved and used for an intended purpose. God not only creates from nothing, He preserves His creation so it will serve His intended purposes.

Humans are in the preservation business as well. People all over the globe work diligently to preserve the past artistic works of individuals like Michelangelo and Leonardo DaVinci. They work with local and state governments to preserve the structural integrity of historic homes and landmarks. They even work to preserve our National Parks, making sure the beauty there is conserved for future generations to enjoy. In fact, this is why anyone conserves anything. To save a painting, sculpture, or landscape is to do so with the idea that saving it will benefit those who may enjoy it in the future.

God's creation is much the same way. Instead of winding it up like a clock and allowing it to run its course, God decided to create the world and stick around to uphold it so it would serve His intended purposes. Those purposes would be to point back to Him and His glory, as well as reminding us that God is powerful, good, and always in control.



## GOD'S INVOLVEMENT IN HIS CREATION SHOWS HIS GOODNESS

**Read Job 42:2 and Matthew 6:26-34.**

**What are the benefits to us in knowing God is sovereign over His creation?**

**How should knowing this encourage us in facing the day-to-day worries of life?**

The fact that God is sovereignly in control of His creation and upholds it, sustains it, and preserves it for His intended purposes should be a tremendous encouragement to us. It reassures us that we don't live in a world where the day-to-day is outside of God's ultimate control. Everything from planetary motions to molecular movement is under God's jurisdiction. Yes, God is even still sovereign over the aspects of creation affected by humanity's fall (which happens to be all of them), and they still serve His intended will.

God's active management and direct oversight of His creation tells us a lot about His character: He isn't willing to just create and move on to something else. No, even in its fallen state, God is still at work in the creative process. His sovereignty is still displayed in not only upholding what He has made, but also in the day-to-day process of restoring what has been lost and broken so it can be made right once more. He is in the process of making all things new, and that process includes us!

**BEING** // God created a universe which was whole and good, but humanity's sin brought brokenness, pain, and relational separation between God and people. However, those who are part of God's family are new creations in Christ, and will dwell with God in the new heavens and earth.

**DOING** // As those whom God has entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing His creation, we should steward well all the things God gives us in a way that honors Him and points others to Jesus.

**APOLOGETIC** // God created the world, therefore, it belongs to Him. Upon placing people in the garden, He called us to rule over the world as an expression of His authority. Because we have the responsibility of caring for the world and all its resources, we must steward it well as God would.

## CHRIST

Since the time of the Greeks, philosophers have asked questions about ultimate reality. They wondered, not unlike our own scientists today, how everything holds together. *What unites all things together?*

Speaking to philosophers at the Aeropagus in Acts 17, the apostle Paul answers this question. He said that in Christ, we live and move and exist (v. 28). In other words, the answer to the age-old question of what unites all things and holds all things together, is Christ. He holds all things together, because all things were created through Him and for Him. We can investigate things like atoms and human anatomy, but none of these things ultimately make sense apart from the One who created them.

**If Jesus holds together even the tiniest details of creation, how encouraging is it to know He holds even the tiniest details of your life?**



## COMMUNITY

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The personal encouragement and assurance we receive from knowing God is at work to restore all things to Himself shouldn't stop there. Though it is an amazing encouragement personally, that truth should be shared and enjoyed in community with other Christians. Remember, we are a forgetful group of folks. We often get tunnel vision in our lives when things get too busy or too stressful. We need the reminder from other believers that whatever trials and difficulties we face aren't encountered alone: God is with us and so is His church. God's Word is always there to remind us of this truth, but God has also designed His church to help in that reminding process.

**Who can you encourage this week with the truth that God is at work in their lives, no matter how difficult it may seem right now?**

## CULTURE

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The truth of God's sovereignty over all parts of creation and His continual work to restore its brokenness throughout is a word of hope to the world around us. As people continue to face natural disasters of all kinds—tsunamis, earthquakes, wild fires—the people of God are capable of providing them with a word of hope in the midst of these crises. We can offer them the truth that God is in control and working through these things for our ultimate good. We can also demonstrate our belief in this truth in the way we respond to suffering when it comes into our lives.

**What are some ways you can be a voice of hope to those who are hopeless? What would be your message to them if given the opportunity?**

# LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 2

## ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 16. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

## DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 17-19 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

## LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 20-21. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

## WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 2, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 22-25 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 2.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

## WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

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# MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

# 3



ENGAGE

## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



*People are God's most loved creation and have been given responsibility for overseeing His creation. As we steward it for His purposes, we reflect God's character and authority.*

When we imagine the garden of Eden—in books, paintings, or movies—there seems to be a lot of lounging around. Adam and Eve are reclining, relaxing, and eating grapes as dopey lions look on and lazy lambs loaf about. It looks like a vacation in a Florida orchard or an Italian vineyard, a low-energy place that isn't so much harmonious as it is sleepy. While Eden looks restful, it doesn't look inspiring. It doesn't look exciting. If it appeals to us at all, it's because we like the idea of a quiet place to lie down for a while or because most of us might think it would be fun to play fetch with a vegan lion.

At the heart of these images and our reaction to them, is a great misconception about God's original creation. It wasn't a perpetual day spa with hot spring baths, massages, and smoothies. Instead, it was a vibrant, active community, a place where Adam and Eve had work to do and showed up to do it six days a week. Far from the "work stinks" attitude of our world, the Bible presents work as something intrinsic, human, and good, and part of what it means for us to reflect God.

**Why do you think people tend to either hate working or become obsessed with it? What is the danger in both?**

## RULE WISELY

When we talk about being created in God's image, most people assume this means God must look like us in a physical sense—He must have two arms, two legs, and be slightly taller than average. However, the Bible teaches that God is Spirit, so bearing God's image must mean something beyond human physical features.

**Read Genesis 1:26-31.**

**Based on these verses, what might the image of God refer to?**

As the story of the creation of man and woman unfolds, we begin to see what being created in God's image entails. Here's part of it: God calls Adam and Eve to rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth. His command for humans to fill and subdue the earth is an invitation to bear His image—to reflect Him by doing what He has just done in creating the heavens and the earth. Just as He filled the world with stars, vegetation, and living creatures, we are called to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth with life. And just as He brought order from chaos in separating the land from the seas, we are called to subdue the world in such a way that brings harmony and accord.

It is clear from the first chapter that God is the ruler, and bearing His image means we too must rule. God has created and called us to be His stewards, His co-managers of the created order. But to reflect Him properly, we must rule wisely. Unfortunately, because of our sinfulness we tend to either worship creation or abuse it, to hold it up as if it were a god or to trample it as if it has no value. God's call to care for creation should lead us to worship Him for the good things He has given us, not to worship the good things themselves.

**When was the last time you thought of fish, birds, or even worms as living creatures God has entrusted to you to care for? Why is it important we take our job of ruling wisely seriously?**



## WORK AND REST

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Of course, reflecting God goes beyond simply being called His stewards and co-managers. We reflect God in the way we work and rest.

**Read Genesis 2:15.**

A lot of people have wrongly assumed that the command to work was a result of man's sinning and rebelling against God. But the creation narrative shows us that God created work for man as part of His good world. Work is just as beautiful as the sunset, and just as purposeful as the rain.

Work isn't something God gave man as a curse after the fall into sin; the toil of work is what came with sin, but work itself is designed to give us fulfillment and provide us an environment to reflect God.

Work didn't come as a result of the fall, and work isn't just something we do in order to make money. When viewed rightly, our work can reflect God. But not only does our work reflect God, our resting does as well. In Genesis 2:1-3, God did not rest because He needed it, as if He were tired or worn out. He gave us an example of rest to show that even though we are unlike any other creature because we are the most "like" God, we are not God. There is an unbridgeable difference between God and us. And one of the most critical ways we can reflect Him to the world is by showing that we are not God.

**In what ways does our culture diminish the value of work?**

**How have you diminished the idea of work in your own life? What steps can you take to correct this?**

## THE FALL AND A NOW DISTORTED IMAGE

Of course, even though we were commissioned to reflect God's image in by being His stewards over creation, working hard to establish the order and structure that God began, and in relating rightly to Him and other on a personal level, we have all failed. The fall of Adam and Eve in the garden fractured the divine image within us. From that point on, we would no longer rule and work as we should, and our relationships with God and others would experience brokenness as well. The image would need to be restored, but God would need to take the initiative in doing so.

**In what areas in your own life have you witnessed the effects of the fall?**

***Read Genesis 3:8-16.***

Even though this story is a sad scene of fallenness and judgment, there is a thread of mercy. Before casting Adam and Eve out of paradise, God clothed them with animal skins. God provided the covering for Adam and Eve's nakedness.

Not only that, but God told the serpent that the day was coming when a Son will be born through Eve, and even though the serpent would strike His heel, this Son of Eve would crush the serpent's head (v. 15). A Savior will come, and the serpent will be defeated. The evil unleashed in the garden would be eradicated when the Son of Eve arrived.

God's initiative here points forward to His Son's atoning work, when He would take away the guilt of our sin and cover our shame with His righteousness through His own sacrifice. Because of sin, Adam and Eve were banished from paradise. Their sin separated them from God's presence with no way back in except through the angel's sword. But the day would come when the sword would fall on the Son of Eve on the cross. The Son would be banished by the Father so that we might be reunited. He would face the sword so that we could return from our exile.



**BEING** // Because God created us, we belong to Him, and He has the right to direct our lives for His purposes.

**DOING** // In order to fulfill God's purposes in our lives, namely reflecting His glory and character, we must know Him personally. Therefore, we should devote ourselves wholeheartedly to living in relationship with Him.

**APOLOGETIC** // Many today believe, until a baby is born, he or she is not a living person. However, Scripture teaches that, from the time we are conceived, all people are living spiritual beings with great worth.

## CHRIST

Bearing God's image today the way we were intended is quite daunting. Because of our sin, we don't reflect His goodness and glory or represent Him the way we should. But the good news is that Jesus came to be the perfect image of the invisible God. He is the only One who rules wisely over the world. He upholds all things by His power, and all of creation awaits in eager anticipation for His return. He is the only One who perfectly relates to God and others and can restore our broken relationships with God and others. And because of Jesus' good work on our behalf—His perfect life, death in our place, and glorious resurrection—the image of God within us is being continually renewed as we now reflect Christ in our lives.

**How can you reflect Jesus in the different areas of your life?**

**List some ways your life can demonstrate the priority of your relationship with God.**

**What are some signs that your relationship with God is not your priority?**

## COMMUNITY

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Bearing God's image is a tangible reality that shows up in our day-to-day lives. Not only does it show up in our relationships, but it also shows up in the way we steward the earth God has given us, as well as in the way we work and rest. No matter how old they are, all people work (home, school, sports, etc.), rest, and contribute—for good or bad—to the little corner of this planet God where has placed them.

**How will you begin to treat friends, family members, and even strangers differently based upon the truth that they are created in God's image?**

**What are some ways you can begin to reflect God by being a better steward of the world He has given us?**

## CULTURE

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Since God created humanity in His image, each individual person on planet earth possesses inherent worth, value, and dignity, no matter how big or small they are or the color of their skin. It causes us to see people in a new light, knowing they are each unique and deserving of full respect because they were made in God's image, no matter how distorted that image may be. This understanding influences the way we see others. The image of God in humanity should cause us to feel differently toward others as well, both Christians and non-Christians. This fundamental belief within Christianity should make us stand out within our culture given that the equal treatment and worth of individuals (regardless of their gender, race, or ethnicity) is something each of us bears as being created in the image of our Creator.

**Why should we be grieved when we see image bearers of God living in a way contrary to the way God intended?**

**How will you begin to treat friends, family members, and even strangers differently based upon the truth that they are created in God's image?**



# LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 3

## ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 26. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

## DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 27-29 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

## LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 30-31. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

## WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 3, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 32-35 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 3.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

## WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

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# CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

# 4



## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT

*People are created as moral beings and are responsible for their choices and the consequences of their choices, including the ways we treat others.*



A quick look around our culture and government system reveals that we consider ourselves accountable for our actions. And not just ours, but virtually every culture throughout history has accepted the notion that people are responsible for their actions. If they cross the line, whether that be with formal laws or tribal customs, they should be held responsible. Now, the consequences each culture imposes may differ from one another, but the fact remains: We intuitively know from our own consciences that we are accountable for our actions. We know this not only from our own consciences, but even more so we know this to be true based upon God's Word to us.

**Why would it be unjust for people to not be held accountable for their actions?**



## RESPONSIBLE AGENTS

**Read Romans 2:12-16.**

**What does Paul teach us about the human conscience here?**

**Why is it important to affirm we all have a conscience?**

Unlike the rest of creation, God created humanity as moral beings capable of discerning between right and wrong. We were created to display good ethics in our task of co-managing God's creation. We are also called to display upright ethical behavior in our relationships with other people by treating them as people created in God's image.

Part of our considering others means thinking about how our choices and decisions might affect them. Our actions, and even our inactions at times, have consequences; those consequences can have a ripple effect to those around us. Take sin as an example. We normally think of sin as being a private affair, hurting only ourselves, but that isn't the case. Sin has relational consequences for those around us, causing them to suffer and experience the negative side-effects from our poor decisions.

In addition to having a moral conscience and being able to discern between right and wrong, being a moral agent created in God's image also means we ultimately will be held responsible for the decisions we've made. Unlike the rest of creation, humanity alone will one day give an account for our individual actions here on earth.

## CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

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***Read Romans 3:23.***

**How does this verse define the essence of sin? How is this different from the way you have normally understood sin?**

***Now, read Isaiah 59:1-2.***

**What is one clear consequence because of sin?**

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden of Eden, some consequences followed immediately. In fact, if we look back to the Genesis 3 account on, we see how humanity's fall negatively affected three relationships: humanity's relationship with God, humanity's relationship with creation, and humanity's relationship with one another. Adam and Eve were no longer allowed to walk and commune freely with God in the garden on account of their rebellion. There was an immediate separation, illustrated by Adam and Eve's eviction from the garden. There was a rift between individual people and between people and creation, but even more significantly between God and people. And only God was capable of restoring that broken relationship.



## REPENTANCE

**Read Luke 5:1-11.**

**How would you define repentance in your own words?**

There is a difference between repentance and remorse. There are ways to make yourself feel bad about doing something or to manufacture the feeling of remorse. Repentance, on the other hand, is sorrow for sin in light of God's goodness and power. We can see an example of true repentance in this story of Peter who, in encountering the goodness of Jesus, immediately recognized his own sinfulness and responded in repentance and worship.

Of course, remorse may be the starting point of repentance but it is not all repentance entails. For example, Judas felt remorse after betraying Jesus but his grief was worldly, leading to suicide. But Peter felt remorse after denying Christ, his grief leading to a life on mission for Christ's kingdom.

**Now, read Acts 26:15-20.**

**How would you define repentance based on these verses?**

Repentance begins with remorse but it quickly moves to a renouncing of sin and embracing of the Savior. Paul called for faith and repentance in his commission to spread the gospel. In this passage, conversion is expressed in three ways: turning from darkness to light (v. 18), turning from the power of Satan to God (v. 18), and turning from sin to "do works worthy of repentance" (v. 20).

**BEING** // Because God created us, we belong to Him, and He has the right to direct our lives for His purposes.

**DOING** // In order to fulfill God's purposes in our lives, namely reflecting His glory and character, we must know Him personally. Therefore, we should devote ourselves wholeheartedly to living in relationship with Him.

**APOLOGETIC** // Many today believe, until a baby is born, he or she is not a living person. However, Scripture teaches that, from the time we are conceived, all people are living spiritual beings with great worth.

## CHRIST

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Christians turn from their sin (repentance) and turn to Christ for salvation (faith). When it comes to faith, we are not only turning from sin but also from self. We are renouncing any effort to try and purchase our own salvation, acknowledging that Jesus alone can save us. In other words, salvation comes through Jesus alone, but our faith shows itself in our actions. The more we trust in Jesus, the more we are to become like Him. Growing in our faith means growing in our resemblance to Him.

**Why is it important to see repentance from both sides—turning from sin and turning to Christ?**

**Is it possible to be a Christian without repenting of sin? Explain.**



## COMMUNITY

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Even though our relationships are imperfect and suffer the consequences of the fall even until today, our repentance and faith in Christ make it possible for our relationships to be renewed in the same way Christ is renewing us.

**What are some practical ways we can treat others within our circles with the love Jesus shows us?**

**What are some relationships we have that need to experience the type of renewal and reconciliation our relationship with Jesus brings?**

## CULTURE

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The repentant person is not content to step into the light and leave everyone else in the dark. We should not be content with celebrating our freedom from Satan's tyranny while we dismiss the countless people around us still in chains. Repentance entails a life of mission. As we walk worthy of repentance, we call others to follow Jesus.

**How might a lack of repentance in our lives hurt our witness to others?**

**What is the connection between repentance and our mission as Christ's followers?**

# LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 4

## ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 36. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

## DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 37-39 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

## LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 40-41. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

## WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 4, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 42-45 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 4.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

## WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

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### LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



*God has a purpose for every person, and we can know His plans by understanding and applying the truth of Scripture.*

Ever heard of the Rosetta Stone? It is arguably one of the greatest archaeological artifacts ever discovered, dating about two centuries BC. Found in 1799, the stone contains an Egyptian decree in three different languages—hieroglyphics, demotic, and Greek—allowing a parallel display that proved to be a linguistic key to understanding hieroglyphics, a script made up of pictures and had become a lost language in human history. With the Rosetta Stone, scholars of the early 19th Century were able to use the Greek writing on the stone to unlock the mysteries of the hieroglyphs, opening the way for Egyptian hieroglyphics to be understood.

As the Rosetta Stone served as a key for unlocking the mystery of Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Bible (God's Word) is the key to our understanding of Him, His World, and His will for our lives.

**What are some treasured truths you have learned from your personal study of God's Word?**

## KNOWING GOD

**Read Psalm 119:2,7-8,10.**

**Why should we read God's Word, according to these verses?**

**Do you prioritize spending time in God's Word? If not, why?**

**How has God's Word helped you grow spiritually?**

First and foremost, we read the Word of God so we can know Him better. We grow in our understanding of God and in our relationship with Him as we come to know Him better through the Scriptures. Where else would we learn about the character of God as holy, or about the kindness and grace of God, or about the acts of salvation He has carried out for His people? Apart from the words of the Bible, we would know nothing about many particulars of God's nature, purpose, actions, or plans for the future.

Simply put: We could not know God Himself apart from Scripture since we would have no understanding of His message of salvation through Jesus if not for the revelation we find in Scripture. Jesus is the epitome of God's self-revelation (Heb. 1:1-2), for in the person of Jesus, God Himself stepped onto planet Earth, showing us what He is like and inviting us to be sons and daughters of God (John 1:12). So, the Bible both establishes our relationship with God and helps us grow in relationship with Him. In fact, as Psalm 119 illustrates, seeking or knowing God is often associated with knowing the words of God.



## KNOWING GOD'S WILL

**Read Psalm 119:1,3-6,9-11.**

**What are some additional reasons these verses suggest for us to read the Bible?**

Another reason we should read God's Word is because doing so will help us understand God's will and how we might live it out in the world. In the first verses of Psalm 119, the commands and instruct of the Lord are front and center. The Lord's instruction is vital for a life well lived. Through His Word, God teaches us the truth about life and the paths we should take. He shows us the wisdom and principles that should guide our actions, attitudes, and relationships. He guards us by warning us against certain paths. In other words, God's Word trains us in His ways and provides an ever-present guide for living. How can we live under the constant influence and power of the Lord's Word? By treasuring His Word in our hearts (Ps. 119:11).

We might ask ourselves how careful we are with the Word of God. Have we packed it away like treasure in our hearts? Do we treat it as precious and valuable? Do we memorize the Word so the Spirit of the living God can bring it to our hearts and minds at any moment? The psalmist suggested this is a key to living well. Staying on the right track in life may seem difficult at times, which is why we need supernatural help. And one of the resources God has given us is His Word.

**What are some places or resources people turn to understand the best way to live?**

**Why is the Bible not only the best but only resource available in learning how to live the good life?**

**What is something you "treasure" or hide away somewhere because it is so valuable to you? How does your value for this treasure compare to the value you place on God's Word in your life?**

## KNOWING HOW TO LIVE RIGHTLY

**Read James 1:22-25.**

**Why is both hearing the Word and living out what the Word teaches important?**

**Now, read Luke 6:46-49.**

**What do you find challenging about these verses, if anything? Explain.**

**What point was Jesus trying to communicate here?**

We've talked about the importance of reading the Bible and its importance in knowing God's will for our lives, but there is still the matter of applying the truth of Scripture in our everyday decision making. When we talk about applying God's Word to our lives, we aren't referring to some vague idealism. Instead, the Scriptures challenge us to adjust our lives in very specific ways based upon the truth God reveals.

When it comes to applying God's Word, three specific actions are represented in Scripture: worship, belief, and action. Thus, we may read a passage like Psalm 19:1-6 and be moved deeply at how the heavens declare the glory of God. We might respond to this psalm by falling on our faces in worship, and that would be a valid application. Or when we read the Word or hear a sermon preached on the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, we might respond by becoming deeply convicted about the unreached people groups across the globe. In this sense, we are adjusting our previous way of life and beliefs to be more in accordance with God's will. However, the application doesn't stop at just our beliefs and motivations changing—it changes our actions as well. After changing our beliefs based on a growing desire to see unreached people hear the good news of Jesus, our next response may be one of action where we decide to participate in whatever way possible in the mission of talking the gospel to the nations. Our participation may range from being a passionate and active sender, whereby we support those going to that of an active goer, where we participate by actually going to the nations ourselves. However it changes, our previous behavior has changed in specific ways based upon the application of God's Word.



**BEING** // Because God created us, we belong to Him, and He has the right to direct our lives for His purposes.

**DOING** // In order to fulfill God's purposes in our lives, namely reflecting His glory and character, we must know Him personally. Therefore, we should devote ourselves wholeheartedly to living in relationship with Him.

**APOLOGETIC** // Many today believe, until a baby is born, he or she is not a living person. However, Scripture teaches that, from the time we are conceived, all people are living spiritual beings with great worth.

## CHRIST

Part of following Christ means learning to follow His instructions by living them out step-by-step in our lives. We may feel handicapped spiritually in some ways, but Christ is our guide. By the way He has lived and by what He taught, He has shown us how to apply the truths of God's Word in tangible ways in our lives.

**How can you better hear the voice of Christ this week?**

**How can you better obey the voice of Christ this week?**

## COMMUNITY

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While Bible reading and study should certainly be an individual discipline in our lives that we engage in each day, it shouldn't remain only at the personal level. Bible reading and study was always intended to be done in community with other believers. Churches and groups of Christ followers would examine Scriptures together, noting how the content challenged them on an individual level and corporate level. They realized that the commands and instructions applied to them together as one body of Christ, not just as individual believers. Also, doing Bible study in a group context allows for greater depth and clarity of study, can provide theological safeguards, and can offer a level of accountability and encouragement that wouldn't exist otherwise.

**Share about a group Bible study time that benefited you personally.**

**What are some other benefits to participating in a regular study of Scripture with other people?**

## CULTURE

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Think about the positive influence and potential change we could see in our surrounding culture if Christians really focused on being doers of the Word and not just hearers. The areas of influence are limitless: changes within the home, changes in politics, changes in how we address hot topic issues, and so forth. Changes would be inevitable because only Jesus can change the heart of a person. We are simply living out obedience to Jesus and introducing people to Him.

**What are some ways you can engage your surrounding culture with the love and message of Jesus this week?**

**What are some areas where you need to change from being just a "hearer" of the Word to a "doer" of it?**



# LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 5

## ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 46. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

## DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 47-49 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

## LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 50-51. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

## WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 5, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 52-55 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 5.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

## WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

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## ENGAGE

**LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT**

*Growing in Christ-likeness is accomplished as we act intentionally to pursue Christ and as God works in our lives.*

When it comes to growing healthy plants and trees, there is an assured technique for success that seems completely counterintuitive. The technique is called pruning and involves the deliberate cutting of certain branches from the plant or tree to make it healthier. It may seem a bit crazy, but it works. Caring for plants and trees goes beyond giving them shelter or nicer soil conditions—it involves active pruning.

For Christians, growing in Christlikeness is much the same way. We need to prune away some things from our life, just we need to focus on and continue to develop other things. As is often the case, pruning those unhealthy habits can help us reorient ourselves to adopting the healthy habits we need to grow.

**What are some unhealthy habits that keep you from pursuing Christ? What are some healthy habits that help you?**



## LOOKING TO JESUS

**What do you think it looks like for a person to pursue Christ?**

**How would you describe “Christ-likeness” in a person?**

***Read 1 Corinthians 3:9-17.***

**How important is it to build on a solid foundation? What are some examples of things that need a strong foundation?**

The apostle Paul used different metaphors throughout his letters to describe the church. In this instance, he compares Christians to a building, with Christ as the foundation of that building. Paul knew what he was doing when thinking about this metaphor because the foundation is the first and most important part of any building project. If the church is to survive, it must have a strong, solid, and sustaining foundation. Truth is, there are many things we can build our lives on: our abilities, relationships, money, hobbies, or other passions we may have. But only a life whose foundation is built upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus will stand.

In addition to having Christ as the foundation of our lives, it is also important to emphasize another aspect of what it means to grow in Christlikeness.

***Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.***

**In your own words, describe what the apostle Paul means here.**

Simply put: Paul is saying you become what you behold. If we want to be more like Jesus, talk more like Jesus, think like Jesus, and treat others as Jesus would treat them, then we need to focus our attention on Jesus and His Word. As our focus is fixed on Jesus, change takes place. We begin to become, little by little, more like the person we are beholding.

We know this to be true in our own lives with other things. If we focus on and immerse ourselves into hobbies, relationships, or worldly pursuits, then our lives change by taking on the characteristics of what we focus on. We begin to become defined by those relationships or pursuits, reflecting them in a way that was never intended.

## FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

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**Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.**

**What specific aspect of Christlikeness did Paul identify here? Was this surprising to you? Why or why not?**

In addition to having Christ as our foundation and focusing on Him in our daily lives, the Bible also makes being indwelt by the Holy Spirit a key indicator of growing in Christlikeness. In fact, this biblical reality of being indwelt by the Spirit of God goes nicely with the metaphorical language of being built into a building. As we know throughout the Bible, God has always desired to dwell among His people. We see this in the garden with Adam and Eve, we see it with the construction of the tabernacle as God manifested His presence, we see the same thing take place with the finishing of the temple, and most significantly, we see God's desire to dwell among His people in the incarnation of Jesus. But it doesn't stop there. God no longer desires to simply dwell among His people. He desires to indwell them with His Spirit.

**What are some of the implications of having the Spirit of God within us?**

As believers who are indwelt with the presence of God, we should live in such a way that God's presence flows out from us in all the things we do. This means our choices and actions matter. We should make choices and act in holy ways marked by love for God and others. Because God is holy and dwells within us, we are to be holy in all of our conduct. We are to be set apart, sacred, different, and distinct from our surrounding culture.

**How does (and should) it make you feel knowing that the Holy Spirit dwells within you as a believer? What comfort does this bring?**



## LIVING AS KINGDOM CITIZENS

**What are some other aspects to pursuing Christ? What does growing in Christlikeness look like?**

Pursuing Christlikeness involves having Jesus as the foundation for our lives and His Spirit indwelling us, as well as living as kingdom citizens here while anticipating Jesus' future return. Think back to the opening chapters of the Bible. The Lord created man and woman and placed them in the garden of Eden. He commissioned them to cultivate the garden and to bear His image by ruling over and bringing order to the world they now lived.

As Christians, our responsibility is still much the same. We are still living in a world of chaos and disorder, and we are to reflect God in the way we engage with the chaos around us. We have been tasked to help others see that things aren't the way they were meant to be, that things could be different. Scripture has opened our eyes to behold a new future place and time where chaos ceases to exist; a place free from disease, sickness, sorrow, and death; and a time where heaven comes to earth and makes all things new.

**What other characteristics should be true of our kingdom identity? What should a citizen of heaven be known for?**

As we wait patiently for Jesus' return to make all things new, our character here in this kingdom should be characterized in at least two ways: sharing the gospel and good works.

**Read Luke 14:12-24.**

As in the parable, we are like the servants compelled to go out and invite folks in. We are, as Jesus says elsewhere, commanded to go and make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). So we make it a point to share Jesus in hopes that others may come to know Him.

We should live like children of God. This doesn't mean we will be perfect—not by any means—but it does mean we are now empowered by God's Spirit to fight the war against the remaining sin in our lives. It doesn't mean we will get every decision right, but it does mean we rest securely in a heavenly Father who loves us and demonstrated His love by giving His Son. It means that, unlike every other world religion, our focus isn't about earning God's favor through works and good deeds. No, that way won't work. Grace alone, by faith alone, through Christ alone is the only way. The good works we strive for are the outflow of an internal transformation accomplished by God's Spirit. They are outward evidence of an internal commitment to Christ within our hearts.

**BEING** // Because God created us, we belong to Him, and He has the right to direct our lives for His purposes.

**DOING** // In order to fulfill God's purposes in our lives, namely reflecting His glory and character, we must know Him personally. Therefore, we should devote ourselves wholeheartedly to living in relationship with Him.

**APOLOGETIC** // Many today believe, until a baby is born, he or she is not a living person. However, Scripture teaches that, from the time we are conceived, all people are living spiritual beings with great worth.

## CHRIST

Pursuing Jesus and growing in Christlikeness is the result of God's grace at work within our hearts and lives. Apart from God and His love for us, we never would have pursued Jesus at the beginning of our Christian life, and we wouldn't continue to pursue Him apart from His sustaining grace at work within us. This is why we stress "as God works in our lives" at the end of the *Levels of Biblical Learning* statement for this session. Yes, we will grow in Christlikeness and intentionally pursue Jesus, but we will do these things through the grace and love of God as He continues to work in our lives.

**Why is it important to stress God's role in our growth in Christ-likeness? What is the potential danger if we don't?**

**What should our response be to knowing God is actively involved in our sanctification?**



## COMMUNITY

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Pursuing Jesus is not just an individual affair. In fact, we could argue that God has designed it in such a way that we will not be able to reach certain aspects of Christlikeness apart from having other believers actively involved in our lives. There are so many “one another” passages in the Bible instructing believers how to live in light of the gospel. However, if we only try to live our faith apart from the church, then we will never understand what it means to live out the gospel in our relationships with others.

**Are you actively involved at church? Why or why not?**

**What benefits have you seen come from being involved with other believers?**

## CULTURE

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As we’ve seen, pursuing Christ involves pursuing good works—not as a means to gain favor with Christ or become saved, but as a response to the salvation and transformation Christ has brought into our lives. When the world looks at Christians, it should notice that they live at a higher ethical standard than the rest of culture, and that they humbly refuse to take the credit for their ability to live that way. They are always, even through their achievements, trying to make much of God because they know He is the ultimate cause of their transformed lives.

**Why is it important to emphasize to the world that our good works don’t earn us favor with God but are an overflow of God’s work of grace within our hearts?**

**Why are works important for Christian's lives if they don't earn us favor with God?**

# LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 6

## ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 56. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

## DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 57-59 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

## LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 60-61. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

## WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 6, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 62-65 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 6.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

## WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

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# LIVING BY THE SPIRIT



## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



*Our response to God's love is to remain pure in all aspects of life—with our bodies, thoughts, attitudes, actions, and speech—and He empowers us to obey His commands as we live by the Spirit.*

Have you ever been in a situation where you were upset or indifferent to someone you know, maybe a parent or family member? But the person you were upset with treated you with kindness, respect, and loved you by giving you something unexpected?

**If that has happened, how did you respond? If it has never happened, how do you imagine you would respond?**

Our attitude and behavior usually changes in such scenarios. Just as a kind word is able to calm down a contentious discussion or a generous act is capable of cheering us up, God's love toward us in Christ motivates us to respond to Him positively in certain ways.

## SET AN EXAMPLE

In the previous session, we emphasized God's active role in the sanctification process, where He is continually at work to make us look more and more like Jesus. We also mentioned that the good works of a Christian are done out of response to God's work of grace within us, the outward overflow of an internal transformation. Here we want to focus on several aspects of life where it is appropriate to respond to God's love.

### **Read 1 Timothy 4:11-16.**

**Paul emphasized to Timothy to stand out in the following areas: Why would this be important for a Christian leader in the church and community? Why are they important for us?**

**Why do you think Paul emphasizes these specific areas?**

- **Speech:**
- **Conduct:**
- **Faith:**
- **Love:**
- **Purity:**

**In which areas do you feel as if you are currently setting an example? How can you do better in the other areas?**

Paul tells Timothy to “set an example” in these areas. It’s interesting that the word “example” here comes from a Greek word better translated as imprint, indentation, or impression. It was a term associated with making coins and the indentation left after Caesar’s face was impressed onto the coin. In other words, Paul was telling Timothy that his behavior in these areas should leave an indentation on the people who see his life—a lasting impression that Timothy was indeed a leader worth following.



## REMEMBER YOUR NEW IDENTITY

Of course, the reason Christians can set examples in these areas isn't because they are inherently better people or even more ethical than others. In fact, Scripture emphasizes that before coming to Jesus, Christians were sinners separated from God.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.**

Paul said, "And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (v. 11). Paul was reminding Christians in Corinth that they were also sinners separated from God, and he was reminding them of the change that took place when they trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. Paul was reminding them: "Yes, you were once this or that, but then you were saved and now God's Spirit resides within you. As a result of who you now are: Live differently. Don't go back to your old way of life; that's no longer who you are. Instead, live according to your new identity in Jesus."

**Focus on the phrase "you used to be like this." How should this affect the way we view people who do not yet know Christ?**

**Why is it important to consider our own attitudes toward unbelievers?**

**When can it be tempting to think negatively about those who don't know Christ?  
What steps can we take to counteract this?**

## STAY CONNECTED TO JESUS

The key to living a life of fruitful obedience to God starts with a saving relationship with God through Jesus. During His earthly ministry, Jesus claimed to be the living water that will satisfy human thirst. He claimed to be the Good Shepherd who takes care of His sheep, as well as the bread from heaven. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus claimed to be the true vine and promised that good fruit would come from the branches attached to Him.

**Read John 15:1-8.**

**What elements are necessary for a plant to grow and reach its full potential? What will stop or hinder a plant from growing?**

When you look at a tree from a distance, you usually see the leaves and branches first. As you get closer to the base of the tree you can look up and see how all the branches are connected organically to the trunk. There is an organic link and unity to the trunk of a tree and its branches. In the same way, there is a spiritual link and unity between Jesus and His people. Being united to Christ means we are in Him, and He is in us. There's a unity to who we are in Christ, and because of that unity there is a power to do good. Jesus was pretty clear: without Him we can do nothing (v. 5).

**Why is it important to understand the proper relationship between union with Christ and good works? What could be the result if this relationship were misunderstood?**

**Why is it important to be connected to Jesus as the true vine? What is our service like when we seek to do work in our own power?**



**BEING** // Because God created us, we belong to Him, and He has the right to direct our lives for His purposes.

**DOING** // In order to fulfill God's purposes in our lives, namely reflecting His glory and character, we must know Him personally. Therefore, we should devote ourselves wholeheartedly to living in relationship with Him.

**APOLOGETIC** // Many today believe, until a baby is born, he or she is not a living person. However, Scripture teaches that, from the time we are conceived, all people are living spiritual beings with great worth.

## CHRIST

When we read about our union with Christ it's easy to think: *That's wonderful to know, but what do I do?* We don't always feel like we're united with Christ, do we? We know our ongoing sins and failures, our temptations and doubts. We walk through periods of darkness and uncertainty. How can we grow in our experience of being united with Christ? How can we increase the fruitfulness of being united with Him? Answer: Remaining in Him and allowing His words to remain in us (John 15:4,7). The way to grow closer to Christ is not to seek a deeper, more mystical union with Him, but to be fully saturated in His Word.

**How has your love for Christ grown through more engagement with the Word?**

**What do your Bible study habits look like? If non-existent, what can you do this week to change that?**

## COMMUNITY

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As we seek to grow in our union with Christ, we cannot forget the role the believing community plays in that growth. Yes, our relationship with Christ has a personal dimension, as we are in Him and He is in us. However, we are also connected with other believers, in the way individual branches are connected together through their common union with the base and roots of a tree. We need each other, not only to grow in our understanding of God's Word and His ways, but also as a means to spur one another onto further holiness in our lives.

**How can you create a deeper connection with the believers around you? What about the people participating in this study with you?**

## CULTURE

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Imagine the impact Christians could have on culture if we set an example in the areas Paul mentioned to Timothy. Not in the power of our own strength, of course, but through our constant union with Christ and in the power of His Spirit. Imagine the impact Christians could have throughout their schools, in sports, in politics, and in pop culture in general if we lived out our true identity in Christ each day through our speech, conduct, love, faith, and in purity. Maybe the world would see changed individuals who live radically different from the way they used, and they would see Christ in us, the hope of a better life united with Him.

**What are some ways you can seek to impact your community positively with the gospel this week?**



# LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 7

## ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 66. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

## DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 67-69 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

## LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 70-71. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

## WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 7, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 72-75 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 7.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

## WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

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# FILLED WITH JOY



## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



*Because of Jesus, people can live with joy regardless of circumstances, as joy is rooted in an eternal perspective and not in earthly circumstances.*

Did you know that the Bible talks an awful lot about joy? Have you ever wondered how the prophets, disciples, and apostles were able to endure the suffering they experienced all the while being filled with joy? Take Paul, for instance. Here we have someone who endured not only verbal persecution, but was also imprisoned, beaten, stoned, flogged, and shipwrecked, just to name a few. And yet, Paul himself talked repeatedly about being filled with joy even in the midst of these sufferings. He even said they were light and momentary when considering of the greater joy and glory he would one day behold when Jesus returns.

What we learn from these biblical saints and heroes is the simple truth that joy is determined by your circumstances in life. Instead, joy—the ever-increasing, eternal joy we all long for—is rooted in a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Why do we often allow our daily circumstances to dictate our level of joy? How can we avoid this?**





## DISCUSS

## JOY IS ESSENTIAL

**Read John 15:11-17.**

Being united to Christ not only means we bear fruit and remain in God's love. It also means our joy is made complete. Regardless of the struggles and suffering we may experience in this life, we can face them with joy due because we are no longer enemies of God but are now united with Christ. We go from being enemies with God to being friends of God through the forgiveness provided in Christ.

Jesus wants our joy to be complete, and the way our joy will be complete is when His joy is in us (v. 11). Where did Jesus' joy come from? His relationship to the Father and His obedience to the Father's will. In fact, the author of Hebrews said Jesus went to the cross for the joy set before Him (12:2). Jesus' joy is formed by His mission to seek and save the lost.

**Have you ever thought about the fact that God cares about our joy? Why do you think Jesus desires for our joy to be complete?**

**What is the difference, if any, between obeying God out of duty versus delight?**

God does not want dutiful Christians who see life as a drudgery of compliance. He wants us to obey out of delight, not duty. Being obedient to God shouldn't be a begrudging acceptance of His will and commands. God wants us to find joy in Him, since He Himself is the source of true and lasting joy.

## JOY IS ROOTED IN CHRIST, NOT CIRCUMSTANCES

Our joy is important to God. As Jesus said, He desires our joy to be complete. But we must remember our joy isn't dependent upon our circumstances but on our relationship with Christ and the inheritance we have awaiting Jesus' return.

**Read Hebrews 10:31-36.**

**What, if anything, strikes you as odd in this passage?**

**What brought the people joy in the face of persecution?**

First century Christians faced many tough decisions as the message of the gospel spread throughout the various regions of the Roman Empire. After the gospel spread and began taking root in various parts of the empire through believing communities, Roman officials saw this as a threat to their pagan religions. The gospel was disrupting things on a religious scale and politically, as people were no longer buying idols or giving money to the pagan temples. Because of this, persecution of Christians spread. Christians were not merely threatened because of their faith, but were actively persecuted by means of having their property and possessions seized by the state government.

All of this created a situation where the believing community faced a decision. They could visit their Christian brothers and sisters who had already been imprisoned, but in so doing they would essentially be signaling to the state that they too were Christians. This could endanger them, their families, and their possessions. Or they could take the easy way out and not visit their Christian brothers and sisters who were suffering for the gospel in prison. Even that action would carry consequences, though, namely of conscience. According to the author of Hebrews, these Christians chose the former route. They chose to visit their brothers and sisters and identify as Christians themselves, and they did so joyfully with the full understanding that they would receive similar punishment by the state.

The author tells us these Christians were able to do this joyfully because of the greater possession they have in Christ that will one day be made complete. Operating from that perspective, we can experience joy even in the face of heartache and trouble.



## FUTURE PROMISES FUELS PRESENT JOY

**Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.**

**What was the “treasure” Paul referenced in verse 7?**

**How was Paul’s outlook similar to that of the Hebrew Christians?**

**What are some momentary afflictions we face in this life?**

Much like the Hebrew Christians, Paul understood that we are able to face trouble in this life because of our sure belief in the life to come. In fact, not only can we face these troubles and difficulties, but we can confidently say they are light and insignificant given the joy and weight of glory we will one day behold.

Think of it this way. You come to find out that a distant uncle has passed and left you an inheritance. On the way to collect that inheritance, your car breaks down a mile before arriving. One response would be to whine and complain about your car breaking down. Another response would be to say, “Who cares! I’ll walk this last mile knowing I have millions waiting ahead!”

The illustration isn’t perfect (no illustration is), but the idea is there. We can go through life wining about all of the difficulties and hardships, or we can face them one by one. We can recognize that, while they hurt, they don’t compare to what awaits. We can have joy through these hardships because of the promise that Jesus will one day return and make all things right again.

**BEING //** Because God created us, we belong to Him, and He has the right to direct our lives for His purposes.

**DOING //** In order to fulfill God's purposes in our lives, namely reflecting His glory and character, we must know Him personally. Therefore, we should devote ourselves wholeheartedly to living in relationship with Him.

**APOLOGETIC //** Many today believe, until a baby is born, he or she is not a living person. However, Scripture teaches that, from the time we are conceived, all people are living spiritual beings with great worth.

## CHRIST

Jesus is concerned about our joy. He wants us to have true and lasting happiness. Not in earthly things or possessions, because He knows those ultimately disappoint. No, He wants us to find true and lasting happiness in Him, the fountain of joy. As the psalmist said, "You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures" (Ps. 16:11).

**What are some things you have been pursuing joy in other than Christ? Why can't these things bring ultimate fulfillment?**

**What are some ways you can begin to pursue your joy in Christ this week?**



## COMMUNITY

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Joy is something that can be experienced in a first-person sense, for sure. But we can also allow others to rejoice with us and rejoice with them. In fact, one could say joy is meant to be shared. We share in the joy of a man and woman on their wedding day as they become one in sharing their vows. We share in the joy of a friend who gets his or her license or graduates from high school. And much like the Hebrew Christians, we can share in joy when we encourage other believers to stay strong and hopeful as they face difficulties in this life.

**Who can you share your joy in Christ with this week?**

**Who can you encourage with a hopeful word this week?**

## CULTURE

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The surrounding culture often thinks Christianity is more about doing one's duty and not about joy. However, this thinking couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, a major theme throughout the Bible is God helping people see that ultimate happiness isn't found in pursuing things here on earth, even though those things can be good. Instead, ultimate happiness is found in the One who created it and freely offers it to those who seek Him. God wants us to be happy and experience joy in the greatest source of joy in all the universe: Himself!

**Why is it important for the world to see Christians as joyful?**

**What impact do you think it will have if the surrounding culture sees Christians maintaining their joy even in the midst of sufferings and difficulties?**

# LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 8

## ENGAGE

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Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 76. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

## DISCUSS

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Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 77-79 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

## LIVE IT OUT

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After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 80-81. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

## WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

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- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 8, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 82-85 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 8.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

## WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

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