



VOL. 6

Family, Community & World

MILESTONES

Connecting God's Word to Life



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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

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

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

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

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

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.

GOD'S DESIGN FOR THE FAMILY

1


ENGAGE

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



Families are a part of God's plan for filling the earth with His image-bearers, and are responsible for providing for the spiritual, physical, mental, social, and emotional needs of family members.

Physical traits and characteristics get passed from parent to child. Physical traits like height and hair color, as well as eye color and even dimples come from the genes we inherit from our parents. In this way, at least physically, we are like our parents.

Similarly, as people created in God's image, we are to be like our Father in heaven. Because of our salvation, we are transformed by the power of the Spirit, and we have our Father's DNA. This means we'll be characterized by features a lot like His. As we spend time with Him, we'll learn to love the things God loves, and we'll pick up characteristics and mannerisms like His. And as we demonstrate natural gifts and abilities (which He gave us in the first place according to His purposes), our Father will teach us and work with us to help us grow. He does all this to help us fulfill our purpose of reflecting His image to the world.

What are ways we show we're children of our Father in heaven?

MADE IN HIS IMAGE

New York City is a popular tourist destination. In fact, if you've ever been to New York, you probably know that it has an unending supply of cliché keepsakes—the city cab snow globe, the “I Love New York” t-shirts, and the miniature Statue of Liberty replicas.

When have you bought into the hype of something that was totally cliché?

If you've ever visited the real Statue of Liberty and seen it up close and personal, you quickly discover that the two-dollar plastic representation falls incredibly short of the real thing.

When God established creation, He did it in order to bring glory to Himself. And the way He chose to most clearly demonstrate His character throughout creation was through shaping people in His image (Gen. 1:26-27).

In people, God wove several attributes characteristic of Himself:

- **Rational:** God created us with the capacity to think and grow understanding. Further, He gave us the ability to make choices and act willfully.
- **Emotional:** We aren't simply thinkers, but we feel things deeply, which deeply affects the way we live.
- **Relational:** Though some of us are more private or independent than others, all people have been made to live in meaningful connection with other people.
- **Moral:** God wired into each person the understanding that there is right and wrong. We may not always agree about what those are, but our conscience convicts us of this reality.

Having been created in God's image, we are like Him in many ways. But just like little Statue of Liberty is an “image” of the real thing, we are small representations of our much bigger God. When we live like Jesus, the perfect human and the exact representation of God in human form, others see God in us and are reminded of who He is.

When has an “image” reminded you of the real thing?

How do you live so that others see Christ in you?

FILL THE EARTH

When God created people, He created us as “male and female” (Gen. 1:27). Here’s the reason. From the beginning, God’s plan was to fill the earth with His image-bearers (Gen. 1:28). This way, no matter where on earth we may find ourselves, we’d run into other people who reflect the image of God. And with each encounter, we’d see something unique about God in others, and they’d see something in us.

How do you see God in the “uniquenesses” of the people you know?

To actually fill the earth, God built into the physiology of the people He created the means to reproduce. As long as Adam and Eve obeyed and reproduced, God’s plan would be accomplished exactly as He desired. But we know the story. They didn’t. Sin’s curse upon creation marred the image of God in us, but it didn’t destroy it. And thankfully, God had a plan to deal with our rebellion.

But God chose a man named Abram, through whom He would spread His image throughout the world (Gen. 22:17-18). Adam and Eve failed to obey God and their descendants chose to ignore God’s calling on their lives. The Bible does say “that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5). So, God used Abram to accomplish His original plan.

Later, God told David, “I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. I will make a great name for you like that of the greatest on the earth” (2 Sam. 7:8-9). Much like Abram, God blessed David. God made David’s name great among the nations so others would look to him as an example of what it means to be blessed by God and to live in ways that reflect God’s character.

In Matthew’s gospel, we read of another man who was blessed by God, to whom God would give a great name: Jesus (1:1). Jesus came from the line of Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, and from David, Israel’s great king. When we follow Jesus and live like Him, we are involved in God’s command to Adam and His promise to Abraham and David to fill the earth with those who’d reflect God’s image to the world.

Why is it so important to God that the earth be filled with His image-bearers?

MEETING OUR NEEDS

There are undoubtedly times when your parents, or others in charge of raising you, exercise their authority in ways you don't appreciate. They say no to things you want, and they tell you to do things you don't really want to do.

When have you been asked or told to do something you didn't appreciate, but that was good for you?

We may not always like it, but these kinds of experiences help us to grow up. In fact, if life was always easy for us, and we got exactly what we wanted all the time, we'd remain immature our whole lives. Jesus was very clear that we'll face things difficulties in our lives (John 16:33), and learning to deal well with these is essential to becoming mature in Christ.

One of the greatest responsibilities God has given to families, particularly to parents, is that we would love each other well and help one another grow into healthy, mature individuals. Parents are called to discipline their children in order to foster their growth (Prov. 13:24). Parents are to keep in mind that this is always to be done in a loving manner. If not careful, parents may discipline in a way that does as much harm as good.

Of course, though parents do have responsibility in the lives of their children, kids are people too. They have their own personalities and preferences, and will make their own choices. The Bible speaks to this and calls children to partner with their parents in their growth (Col. 3:20).

When parents provide for their children's needs—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—and when children honor their parents in a healthy way, this establishes the best environment for young people to grow in maturity.

When have you received loving discipline you didn't necessarily appreciate at the time?

How have your parents, or others who've raised you, provided for your growth physically, emotionally, and spiritually?

BEING // Because we were meant to live in relationship, God's design is that we would experience love, acceptance, support, and guidance through an earthly family. Further, God's children are part of a spiritual family—the church—where we experience these things. We also find all of these perfectly in God, our Father.

DOING // We are called to honor God in the ways we treat our family. Therefore, we should work to intentionally show family members love and forgiveness.

APOLOGETIC // Many people today believe the definition of marriage is subjective and flexible, and that as long as people “love” each other, they have the right to be “married.” However, the Bible clearly defines marriage as a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life.

CHRIST

God intentionally designed the family to carry out His plans for filling the earth with His image. As families continue to grow in their relationship with Christ, they continue carrying out God's plan.

How can you help cultivate devotion to Christ within your own family?

COMMUNITY

Whether or not we have an earthly family, God gave us the church to serve the purpose of being a spiritual family.

What can you do to serve and encourage your church family?

CULTURE

God's desire for families is often not lived out in our world today as a result of sin's curse on the world.

How can you display God's plan for the family in your daily life?

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 1

ENGAGE

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

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

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

- 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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GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

2



ENGAGE

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



God's plan for the family involves one man and one woman, who have different but complementary roles, committing to one another in a lifelong covenant relationship as a reflection of God's love for His people.

Throughout the generations many great teachers have come up with creative ways to help their students remember and internalize the concepts they wanted to pass on. Likewise, God is our great Teacher. He has also used many symbols, types, and analogies to help us understand spiritual truths. Jesus (who is God) taught that the people of God are like a city on a hill to be seen by others (Matt. 5:14). He also taught that the gospel is like seeds to be spread, and it will land on different types of hearts which will produce different measures of fruit (Matt. 13:1-9). In the Old Testament, God worked through Moses to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt as an image of Jesus' delivering us from slavery to sin (Ex. 12:29-40). Also, Abraham's sacrificing Isaac pointed forward to Jesus' being sacrificed (and raised) by His Father (Gen. 22:1-19).

Another powerful image that helps us understand a spiritual truth is marriage. The relationship between a husband and wife was established by God to reflect the reality of God's love for His church. When we fail to understand this, people commonly approach marriage from a self-centered, what's-in-it-for-me perspective. These people they find marriage frustrating and bring dishonor to the name of God. God has a plan for marriage. When we follow it, He is glorified and we experience all the benefits He desires for us in marriage.

Why do you think most people get married? Why is marriage such a powerful illustration?



ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN

Throughout the week of creation, God looked upon the things He made and saw that it was “good” (Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25). Then, on the sixth day when He created man, God described what He saw as “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God placed Adam in the garden, and as he was assigning names to the animals, Adam noticed they all had companions, but he didn’t (Gen. 2:20). Because people were created to live in relationships, God described as aspect of His creation as something less than good: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18).

So, out of Adam’s rib, God fashioned a woman who would be the perfect complement to Adam (Gen. 2:21-22). And in giving Adam and Eve to one another, God established marriage as a special relationship between a husband and wife and performed the first wedding.

First, it’s important that we understand God established the standard for all future marriages when He performed Adam and Eve’s wedding. Here are the defining elements:

- **Husband and Wife:** Scripture teaches that Adam, a man, was united with his “wife.” This refers specifically to a woman, and there’s no place in Scripture where we see marriage as anything other than the relationship between a man and woman.
- **For a Lifetime:** Eve was formed from Adam’s rib, so they were literally “one flesh.” The union that existed between them was special and permanent. When Jesus addressed this specific idea, He said, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt. 19:6).
- **One Man, One Woman:** A “man” is bound with his “wife” (Gen. 2:24). Both of these are singular, and there’s no provision whatsoever for multiple husbands or wives.

Throughout history, people have rebelled against God and manipulated His words to suit their own desires. Therefore, it’s no surprise that our culture has pushed to redefine marriage. However, for those who desire to live faithfully devoted to God, we must follow the standards He has established in Scripture. Marriage is a gift from God to people He loves, and when we do it His way, we will be blessed as He originally intended.

How has our culture pushed to redefine marriage?

Why is it so important that we agree with God on His standards for marriage?

DIFFERENT ROLES

The United States Declaration of Independence is the official statement where the 13 original colonies stated that it was necessary for them to dissolve the ties that bound them to Great Britain. It includes the following statement with which we are all familiar: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ... that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.”¹

In your mind, what does it mean that all people are created equal?

The founding fathers were right: All people have been created equal. Here’s what this means. Because we’ve all been created in the image of God, we all have equal value. Every human life, from the moment of conception until God takes us from this earth, has immeasurable value, and God has placed His love upon us all. However, this doesn’t mean we’re all the same. We can clearly see this in many areas of our lives, including our schools. Some are great students who have been created with a greater intellectual capacity than others. Some have a bit more athleticism, or artistry, or an outgoing personality. Though certain areas of strength are desirable, having them or not makes us no more or less valuable than another person. And our world depends on people operating in different roles according to their strengths to work as it should.

The Bible teaches that God created us with differences. Specifically, He created us as male and female, and to each He gave certain responsibilities within the husband-wife relationship (Gen. 1:27). Husbands are to serve as leaders in their family, providing for the needs of their wife and children, and giving protection in all regards, including physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Eph. 5:25-26; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:7). Wives, on the other hand, are called to love their husband and children and to provide a nurturing environment at home (Titus 2:4-5). And through each partner’s fulfilling their own specific responsibilities, there are many blessings:

How does the world fight against the roles God designed for husbands and wives?

What value is there in following God’s design for roles within marriage?

COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

A covenant is different from a contract. A covenant is a solemn promise, designed to be unbreakable. Contracts are mutually agreed upon terms, but can be breached by either party. One is the total committing of oneself, whereas the other is only in it so long as it is mutually beneficial.

We serve a God of covenants, and He made promises to the following people.

- **Adam:** God blessed Adam and gave him one rule, to obey. If he did that, he would experience the joys and pleasures of Eden forever and a perfect relationship with God.
- **Noah:** God promised to never again destroy life on earth with a flood.
- **Abraham:** God told Abraham, He would bless the whole earth through his offspring.
- **Moses:** To Moses and all of Israel, God promised blessings if they obeyed, but curses if they rebelled.
- **David:** God promised David his kingdom would never pass away.

All these men experienced the blessings associated with God's covenants. However, none of them were blessed in the ultimate sense during their time on earth. However, Jesus changed this. As He was enjoying His last Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus instituted the Lord's supper. Upon giving them the cup of wine, Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). The New Covenant Jesus established with the people of God is that all people have the opportunity to come to God through genuine faith in Christ, .

This New Covenant is the fullest expression of God's love for people. When a man and woman pledge themselves to one another in covenant love, they engage in a similar promise to one another. A husband says to his wife, "I love you so much that I'm willing to live and die for you." A wife similarly says to her husband, "I love and trust you so much that I'm willing to live in humble submission to your leadership." And in fulfilling their covenant vows to one another, the couple provides a beautiful representation of Christ's sacrificial love for the church and the church's love and honor for Him (Eph. 5:32).

What is a covenant? Why are the covenants of Scripture so important?

What does the covenant of marriage represent?

BEING // Because we were meant to live in relationship, God's design is that we would experience love, acceptance, support, and guidance through an earthly family. Further, God's children are part of a spiritual family—the church—where we experience these things. We also find all of these perfectly in God, our Father.

DOING // We are called to honor God in the ways we treat our family. Therefore, we should work to intentionally show family members love and forgiveness.

APOLOGETIC // Many people today believe the definition of marriage is subjective and flexible, and that as long as people “love” each other, they have the right to be “married.” However, the Bible clearly defines marriage as a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life.

CHRIST

Biblical marriage is between a man and a woman, both of whom are honoring Christ while living in obedience to Him.

Write down a few verses about the roles of men and women in marriage. What do these verses teach us?

COMMUNITY

God uses our Christian brothers and sisters to be an example for us. There are couples within your church honoring God with their marriages.

What can you learn from some of the godly couples in your church?

CULTURE

Even though the world has twisted God's plan for relationships and marriage, we can be a light to those who don't know Him.

How can you represent God's plan for relationships to someone who doesn't know Jesus?

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



ENGAGE



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT

God calls children to honor their parents throughout their lives as a reflection of honor and love for Him. Further, we are to demonstrate love toward all members of our families, including siblings, extended family, and those who God brings into our families as a result of fostering, adoption, or remarriage.

"Dad! Johnny won't leave me alone. Please make him leave my room!"

"Mom! Susie hit me!"

Every parent (at least those with more than one child) has probably heard this, or some version of this, echo down their hallway and into their eardrums. Brothers and sisters fight like cats and dogs—that's just the way it is.

How have you experienced sibling conflict?

There are many reasons brothers and sisters may not get along. But what it all boils down to, is this: because of Adam's sin and the fact that he passed it down to us, we are born with a nature inclined toward sinning and selfishness. So, we act this out toward our siblings (and others). However, when we follow Christ, we are called to live lovingly toward all people, including our families—even our brothers and sisters! And when we do, we'll find that these are some of the most rewarding relationships God gives us.

How does following Christ affect the ways you relate specifically to your brothers and sisters?



CHILDREN—HONOR YOUR PARENTS

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, He responded, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-39). Fifteen-hundred years earlier when God delivered to Moses the Ten Commandments, He had essentially the same message. The first four commands God gave Israel instructed them about how they were to demonstrate love and honor to God, and the following six commands concerned loving their neighbors well.

The first command concerning our relationship with others addresses children: “Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Ex. 20:12). It’s no coincidence that this command is the first to follow instructions about how we’re to relate to God Himself. The purpose for which people were created in the first place is to reflect God and to multiply that image of God through our children. Parents’ responsibility is the reproducing (including teaching their children how to follow God), and kids’ responsibility in turn is to follow their parents in reflecting God.

Fulfilling this calling involves honoring our parents, as well as other authorities in our lives. However, in our culture we’re seeing an increasing attitude of anti-authority. Many people disrespect their teachers, complain about laws and gripe about government leaders, protest the police, and perhaps worst of all, live with complete disregard for their parents.

It’s important that we live with a healthy respect for all authorities in our lives, no matter how imperfect they may be. In fact, God commands this: “Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God” (Rom. 13:1). And the place where we first learn and practice submission to authority is in the home.

This command involves our submitting in at least two ways.

- **Actions:** As long as we’re in the home and under our parents’ authority, honoring them means obeying. God calls us to immediately follow through on the things parents ask (or tell) us to do.
- **Attitudes:** Obedience involves not only our action, but submitting with the right attitude. Jesus condemned those who honor God externally, but whose hearts weren’t in it (Matt. 15:8). The same applies concerning honoring our parents—it must be both external and internal.

When are you tempted to dishonor the authorities in your life?

LOVE ALL FAMILY MEMBERS

If you have siblings, you know that brothers and sisters don't always get along perfectly. And how could they?! Little brothers are going to get their hands into all your things. Older sisters (who know everything) are going to boss you around relentlessly. Despite driving each other crazy and being tempted to treat each other in ways that are less than kind, our families are to be the place where we experience our closest and most loving relationships.

How do your brothers or sisters (or someone else close to you) drive you crazy at times? Keep it nice!

The idea of family was introduced in the very first chapter of the Bible. God created Adam and Eve, united them in marriage, and called them to have kids. The purpose was that we would all be provided with an environment where we would grow into healthy, God-honoring individuals. However, people are sinful and it didn't always work out that way.

In Genesis 4, we read that Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. In a jealous rage, Cain killed his brother. Cain had lived in a manner completely contrary to God's calling on his life. Today, we need to be careful not to fall into the same patterns. As Christians, God is our Father, and He calls us sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18). God expects us to love all people, but beyond this, we're to love those who belong to our faith family in a special way. As Paul taught us, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

As we grow in our relationship with God, one of the defining marks will be the ways we live lovingly and sacrificially toward others. The Bible speaks in terms of "brotherly love" as the result of our being purified by the Word (1 Pet. 1:22). With this in view, devote yourself to knowing God's Word. Live in a close relationship with God. A sign that you're growing in Christ-likeness will be this: All your relationships, especially those in your family, will be marked by your desire to see them blessed by God and your seeking their good in the ways you treat them.

Why do we sometimes have trouble getting along with our siblings?

What does it mean that we are called to "keep" one another?

REFLECTION OF LOVE FOR GOD

As teenagers, the relationships we have are very important. In fact, they can be some of the most important things about us because, to a large degree, our identity is wrapped up in who we spend time with. For instance, if we spend time every day with other athletes at football or volleyball practice, others will naturally think certain things about us. If we spend time with the artsy types or those with an academic bent, we'll take on their characteristics and we'll be associated with a certain lifestyle.

How would others describe you based on the people you spend time with?

This is the great benefit—and sometimes the cost—of belonging. When we identify with people who share our interests and passions, we're naturally going to be encouraged to pursue those things. However we'll sometimes find we're connected with people with whom we don't necessarily relate. This can make it difficult to make good choices.

From the time of Abraham, God chose Israel as His own special people, whom He would set apart for a unique purpose on the earth. God worked in their lives and history to accomplish His plan. It culminated with Jesus, the long-promised Messiah, coming to earth to live among the people of God. However, they didn't respond to Jesus' love and service as they should have. In John 1:11-12 we read that "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name."

The Jews should have been Jesus' greatest supporters, after all, they were His people—His family. But they rejected Him. In the kingdom of God, the spiritual reality is greater than even the most important earthly realities. Jesus' people and family weren't defined by natural, physical bonds, but by spiritual ones. Since Israel rejected Jesus, they proved they weren't His family. Instead, the true children of God are those who live by faith in Christ.

We prove we are the children of God when we love our family well—both our natural family and our spiritual family. This is one of the greatest signs that God is at work in our hearts.

How have you experienced the love of God in your church family?

Describe the great privilege of being called a child of God.



BEING // Because we were meant to live in relationship, God's design is that we would experience love, acceptance, support, and guidance through an earthly family. Further, God's children are part of a spiritual family—the church—where we experience these things. We also find all of these perfectly in God, our Father.

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APOLOGETIC // Many people today believe the definition of marriage is subjective and flexible, and that as long as people “love” each other, they have the right to be “married.” However, the Bible clearly defines marriage as a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life.

CHRIST

If we want God to bless our lives, we must honor our parents and live lovingly toward the rest of our family.

Confess to God the times you've lived unlovingly toward your family.

Memorize 1 Peter 1:22 and ask God to help you live more lovingly toward your parents and family.

COMMUNITY

Our families aren't perfect, but we're still expected to love and encourage one another.

What are some acts of kindness you can show to your family?

CULTURE

One of the best ways the world will see we're different is by the way we choose to love each other, and this starts in our families.

How can you be a God-honoring family member around others?

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

GOD'S GRACE FOR BROKEN FAMILIES

4

ENGAGE

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



When families experience brokenness, such as conflict, abuse, or divorce, God desires to bring healing and unity and to use the broader family of God to minister to hurting families during difficult times.

Relationships can be messy, even with those closest to us. However, relationships are necessary. Don't forget, God created us as relational beings. Sure, some of us may prefer a few close friends while others prefer several, but we all need healthy relationships to be healthy ourselves.

The reason relationships can be so messy and confusing is because it involves two parties, both of which are sinners and both of which are bringing their sin into the relationship. This is true for platonic friendships, romantic relationships, and even familial relationships.

When it comes to family relationships, it is important to recognize that no family is perfect, and we're going to disappoint, offend, and hurt each other. But when this happens, through our commitment to following Jesus in the ways we love our family, God has a way of bringing healing.

When have you walked through tough circumstances with family members?

BROKENNESS IN FAMILIES

Many times, when people come to faith they expect that the Christian life means being free from all the trouble of our past, and everything will be happy and care-free. However, this simply isn't the case.

When have you been tempted to believe that the Christian life will always be easy? How has your experience compared with this?

Though it grieves God deeply that we experience the brokenness and pain that is part of our lives in this world, the truth is we will face many hardships because of sin. Jesus even promised we would face trouble as a result of sin, and even more when we seek to follow Him (John 16:33). Job also said it well—"humans are born for trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

God intended for our families to provide an environment that is safer than any other. In our homes we should experience stability, comfort, security, and love like no other place on earth. However, even our families aren't immune to the effects of sin. Tragically, many today grow up in homes that aren't a great reflection of God's design.

Children and teens today experience all the following:

- **Conflict:** God wants us to be kind and gracious to one another, even to the point of preferring others above ourselves. However, many people selfishly demand that others yield to their opinions. When you have two people who are unwilling show others preference, conflict happens.
- **Abuse:** Many parents and siblings respond to the pressures and frustrations of life with anger and cause a lot of damage to those in their lives. Sometimes this is expressed in words, resulting in emotional abuse. Some take this further to the point of physical abuse.
- **Divorce:** The divorce rate in the United States has never quite reached 41 percent, but divorce is still a reality for many around us.¹ Although the divorce rate for Christian couples is about 35 percent lower than the average, even Christian families don't always provide an environment that's as nurturing as it should be.²

When we live in ways outside God's design and desire, real damage is done. However, we need to keep in mind that there's no sin too big for God to forgive. If we confess and repent, God is willing to pardon our sins and to help us take steps toward a healthy future.

GOD DESIRES HEALING

When bad things happen in our lives, our natural response is often to become angry or defensive. Being defensive means we behave in ways—often unhealthy ones—that serve to protect against unwanted emotions or an undesirable view of ourselves.

How do you deal with difficult things you face?

One of the most difficult things anyone would ever face is brokenness in the family. When parents—whose very purpose is to provide love and safety—treat their children in ways that cause them to experience fear and insecurity, it's natural that the children would develop all sorts of dysfunctional ways of thinking and feeling. And these problems naturally get worse into the teen years.

One of the most immediate ways young people respond is in anger. Often, when we're angry, we'll lash out with our words, maybe even our actions. Another way people respond to the brokenness in their families is with an overwhelming sense of bitterness. This is a smoldering resentment that burns slowly inside, and we have trouble putting it out.

Paul addresses both of these, saying, "Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ" (Eph. 4:31-32). God has commanded us to make the conscious choice to put away anger and bitterness, no matter what we face or what wrong has been committed against us.

Certain situations may seem hopeless and beyond repair. However, since God can forgive us, then we can experience forgiveness and healing. The power of Jesus is that great! When you're hurt, repent of your own unhealthy responses, and allow yourself to experience the healing power of Christ. Then be ready to forgive those who have offended you.

How do anger and bitterness affect our relationships?

Why is it so important to be ready to forgive?

OUR FAMILY—THE CHURCH

Early in the Book of Luke, the angel Gabriel went to Mary with some amazing news! He told Mary “you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). Even though she was a virgin, he said she would conceive a Son by the Holy Spirit who would be the Son of God and be the Messiah to sit on the throne of David. Mary responded, “May it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Before Jesus was even born, Mary had a clear perspective on who her Son was.

Years later, Jesus found Himself in a situation where His family demonstrated that they’d forgotten what Gabriel said. Jesus entered a house to teach about the kingdom of God, and a great crowd followed Him there. Jesus’ family heard about what was happening and thought they would simply go fetch their half-brother and bring Him home (Mark 3).

As He was teaching, someone told Jesus that His mother, brothers, and sisters were there. He responded by saying, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Looking at those sitting in a circle around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother”’ (Mark 3:33-35). Jesus was not saying our earthly families are not important. In fact, failure to love our families well is considered a denial of the faith and worse than to live as an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8).

Jesus was teaching that the lives of children of God are not defined primarily by natural, physical realities. In the kingdom of God, the spiritual reality is equally real. Jesus was rejected by not only His immediate family, but He was rejected by Israel as well (John 1:11-12).

It’s important that we love our families well. However, there may be times our parents or siblings—our own people—don’t support our faith. Thankfully, God has brought us into His family and surrounded us by spiritual brothers and sisters. As we love and serve one another in the church, we receive the support and encouragement we need, even when our natural families aren’t always there for us.

What did Jesus mean when He said those who did God’s will were His family? Explain.

BEING // Because we were meant to live in relationship, God's design is that we would experience love, acceptance, support, and guidance through an earthly family. Further, God's children are part of a spiritual family—the church—where we experience these things. We also find all of these perfectly in God, our Father.

DOING // We are called to honor God in the ways we treat our family. Therefore, we should work to intentionally show family members love and forgiveness.

APOLOGETIC // Many people today believe the definition of marriage is subjective and flexible, and that as long as people “love” each other, they have the right to be “married.” However, the Bible clearly defines marriage as a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life.

CHRIST

When our families experience hardships or brokenness, we should recognize Christ as the only answer to our problems.

What biblical promises can you cling to when your family is hurting?

COMMUNITY

Relationships are often messy, and God's family needs encouragement when our earthly families deal with brokenness.

How can you love, serve, or encourage a hurting family in your church?

CULTURE

Many people we know may come from broken or hurting families, and we have the opportunity to point them to our heavenly Father who will welcome them into His family.

Who is someone with whom you can share what it means to be a part of God's family?

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

GOD'S MISSION IN THE WORLD

5



ENGAGE

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



God continues to work in the world, and as we join Him in His work, He uses people to accomplish His eternal purposes.

Car manufacturers put a lot of design and effort into making new vehicles: new technology, a more comfortable driving experience, better fuel efficiency. Why? Because they want consumers to make the invest and buy. Once someone comes along and does buy a new vehicle, the dealerships move on to the next potential buyer. They're concerned that the person makes payments, for sure. And if something goes wrong, the person has a warranty for a certain period of time. But in the big picture, once they turn the vehicle over to someone, they're no longer really concerned about all the hard work that went into making the vehicle.

Many people think this is the way God relates to the world. He came up with this great plan, manufactured the parts, spun it into motion, and turned it over to us. They believe He then walked away, having washed His hands of the whole matter. Maybe, from time to time when we really need something or make a big enough mess of things, God will intervene. But in the big picture, He's off in some distant space doing His own thing.

This couldn't be further from the truth. The world isn't some product God designed to sell for profit. Instead, He created it as the environment where He would live in relationship with the people He loves.

How can you see God at work around you?

GOD IS AT WORK

When God established creation, He did it by working. The creation account reveals that God spoke things into existence. Take Genesis 1:3, for example, where God spoke and there was light. This may seem like no work was required. After all, God needed only to speak, and creation came to be from nothing. However, the next verse teaches that God went to work separating the light from the darkness (Gen. 1:4). Following this, He created the oceans and the atmosphere. Then He caused dry land to appear. All of this involved God's working.

Since God is all powerful, what does it mean that He “works”?

After working six days, God rested on the seventh. Many people believe God has rested perpetually since then—that He set creation in motion, then stepped back to let it run its course. However, this simply isn't the case. The truth is that God has never ceased working among us. It was God who called Abraham and taught Him to walk faithfully in obedience. It was God who freed the Israelites from Egypt, gave the Law through Moses, and led His people through the wilderness. It was God who fought on behalf of His people to bring them into the promised land. God spoke through the prophets, disciplined His children who rebelled, and brought about the plan to deliver His people from sin.

On one occasion, when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, the Jews were upset and accused Jesus of breaking the Law (John 5:1-16). Jesus response to them was this: “My Father is still working, and I am working also” (John 5:17). Whereas our resting on the Sabbath points to the eternal rest we have in Christ, Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and pointed out that God is still at work accomplishing His purposes.

From the beginning of time, God had a plan for how He would bring glory to Himself, including dealing with the sins of people who rebelled against Him. Scripture teaches that God always had a plan that involved acting—working—on behalf of His people (Isa. 64:4). When we trust in Christ, God works in our lives, and He will not stop working until His purposes are fulfilled and our salvation is complete in Christ (Phil. 1:6).

How did God work in creation?

How is God actively involved today in bringing about His purposes?

INVITED TO JOIN IN

People have been created to work. When God made Adam, He placed him in the garden of Eden to work there and oversee the garden (Gen. 2:15). Today, we continue in this way. We see it in our dads going every day into the office, our moms taking care of the kids and the home (and sometimes working outside the home on top of this). The fact that we have dentists, mechanics, and computer technicians is a reflection of God's creating us to work. Plus, you experience this every day in your own life. Students are responsible to work hard at academics, extracurriculars like sports, music, or art, and even in your chores and responsibilities at home.

In what areas do you find yourself doing hard work?

At times, we may be tempted to see work as difficult, and we may have trouble imagining being required to work before the fall. However, the truth is that God intended all along for people to work diligently. Work only became difficult after the curse, when God pronounced that producing food from the ground would involve painful labor and be hindered by thorns and weeds from that point on (Gen. 3:17-18). This wasn't originally the case, though.

God called Adam to work to be a picture of God's character. God worked in creation, and Adam's working was a reflection of this. The same applies to us today. We're supposed to work from our hearts like we're doing our work for God rather than to please other people (Col. 3:23). This principle doesn't relate only to efforts that are explicitly religious, such as serving the church or sharing our faith. It applies to "whatever you do." Our attitude in doing homework, our obeying our parents, the ways we approach sports and music, and our relationships with friends—these are all acts of faith. We should pursue them as opportunities to honor God. And should always give our best, not as a matter of obligation, but because we see every opportunity to bring honor to God as a privilege.

When we do our very best with the opportunities God gives, we are joining in the work God has invited us to do.

Why do you think God includes us in His work?

How do our everyday activities serve God's purposes?

GOD USES PEOPLE

When we work hard at anything we do with a heart to please God, He receives honor through our efforts. However, God hasn't just called us to point to Him in a general sense. He's called us work explicitly for the purpose of glorifying His name.

As Jesus was teaching His disciples only hours before He would hang on the cross, He talked about the work the Father has for us: "Truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do. And he will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

While Jesus was on earth, He devoted Himself fully to living in obedience to the Father, which involved serving others and proclaiming the truth of the gospel. Further, He included the disciples in His day to day ministry, pouring into them so they could learn and grow. It was Jesus' plan for His followers to carry on His mission when He left the earth. In fact, after Jesus ascended to the Father, Jesus said His disciples would do even "greater works." This doesn't mean we will accomplish bigger and better things than Jesus did. Jesus was saying our works would be greater in number because the church would consist of many people throughout many generations.

Jesus' work was to shine the light of the gospel into a world that was dark. Today, we are called to continue shining that light so others would see the truth and glorify God. As we live in obedience to God, we are doing the works He has for us. As we study Scripture and share what we know with Christian brothers and sisters to encourage them, we are doing God's works. As we share the good news of Jesus with people who don't know Him, we are working for the kingdom.

We have been created in God's image and called to work in order to reflect His character. When we live in obedience to God, we are joining in God's working to accomplish His purposes.

What is Jesus' mission that we're called to carry on since He's left the earth?

What are the "greater works" we're called to do?

BEING // As God's people, we are ambassadors called to reach the world with the gospel.

DOING // As God's representatives, we should devote our lives to loving all people well and reaching them with the gospel so they could be reconciled to God.

APOLOGETIC // Many people today believe the universe exists as the result of some great cosmic accident and people evolved from simpler life forms. However, the Bible teaches that our loving Father created us to live in relationship with Him and to reflect His glory to others. Therefore, every person possesses inherent dignity and worth.

CHRIST

It's a privilege to know God chooses to accomplish His work through people like us. God has big plans. If we follow Him, He will continue to use us to carry out His plans.

What can you do to align yourself with God's will?

COMMUNITY

The church has a considerable responsibility with regards to God's purposes on earth. We, the church, are involved in carrying out His work in the world.

How can you be involved in God's work through your specific church family?

CULTURE

Carrying the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth so others can be a part of God's eternal kingdom is one of the greatest causes God uses us to accomplish.

Name one person you can share the gospel with this week.

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

THE PURPOSE OF AUTHORITY



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



We demonstrate honor for God when we respect the earthly authorities God has placed in our lives, including parents, pastors, teachers, coaches, police, and government.

Even from very early in life, people don't like to be told what to do, particularly, when it goes against what we want for ourselves. Before long, the baby's "no" turns into the seven-year-old saying, "You're not the boss of me." When she's 14, it's "I can't wait until I'm older and I can do what I want."

Have you ever said anything like this?

From the beginning, for people to experience all the good things God desired for us, we had to live in submission to God's commands. Yet Adam and Eve decided they'd rather do things their own way. All these centuries later, we still struggle with the same issues. Rather than listen to others, who many times know what's good for us, we do whatever we like. Instead, we need to recognize that God has established the authorities in our lives—however imperfect they may be—to help us: teachers, coaches, church leaders, parents, and so forth.

We may not always recognize it, but the authorities in our lives generally provide benefits. If we'd live in submission and with a good attitude, we'd experience those benefits in real ways.

When are you tempted to resist authority?

HONOR GOD

In Revelation 4, we're given a picture of events in heaven. The 24 elders represent Israel's tribes and the Apostles—the universal church. When they are in the presence of God, they throw their crowns at His feet. This is an expression of honor to the One who provided every blessing they had ever experienced. They were simply giving it back to God as an expression of gratitude and worship.

The elders declared that God is worthy to receive (Rev. 4:11):

- **Glory:** Refers to the inherent, intrinsic worth of God. God is glorious simply because of who He is. Nothing can add to or take away from that.
- **Honor:** This has to do with appreciation for who God is. When we perceive His glory, and our hearts are moved to genuine appreciation of His worth, God is honored.
- **Power:** God is infinite in power, so we could never increase His strength. Yet, God receives glory and honor when we recognize His power expressed through creation and in salvation and when we acknowledge His strength.

God's glory and power are intrinsic to God's nature by definition and depend in no way upon us. However, for God to receive honor requires it to be offered to Him.

Honor is a matter of recognizing God's character and authority. The Bible teaches that all authority on heaven and earth belongs to Jesus (Matt. 28:18). When we live for His purposes, we bring honor to God.

What is the difference between glory and honor?

How are we called to honor God with our lives?

HONOR YOUR PARENTS

When Jesus was asked about which law was most important, He said that it essentially all boils down to this—love God and love people (Matt. 22:37-40).

So His people would know clearly how to follow Him, God gave them the Law, initially through the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). The first four commandments revealed the ways people were to live toward God: no others Gods, no idols, don't misuse God's name, and remember the Sabbath. The following six commands dealt with relating to others. And the first of these is about how we treat our parents: "Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you" (v. 12).

It's interesting that the first commandment regarding our relationships with other people had to do with our parents. Before addressing stealing—before even addressing murder—God told us to make sure we treat our parents with honor. Honor means to esteem or to express value for someone through the ways we live. This fact alone should let us know that relating to our parents with respect is of the highest importance. Here's why Our character is formed from an early age. When we learn to submit to authority, follow rules, and respect the perspectives and feelings of others from the time we're young, it becomes naturally ingrained and remains more natural throughout life.

When God gave the Law to Moses, the command to honor our parents came with a promise "that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12). Honoring parents is associated with blessing (Eph. 6:1-3). In contrast, disrespect toward parents is a sign of a "corrupt mind," which receives eternal condemnation (Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2). Through respecting our parents authority, we learn healthy submission, a disposition that will help us live in right relationship with God for our entire lives.

Why do you think God promised a blessing associated with honoring parents?

How does honoring our parents come to bear on our relationship with God?

AUTHORITIES IN OUR LIVES

We live in an age where people are hostile to authority. Adults and teenagers alike are tempted to push back when others seek to exercise control or place limitations on us. For instance, many drivers think breaking the speed limit isn't so bad. Or many teens have decided, despite what the law says, that it's no big deal to drink at a party.

In what ways are you tempted to rebel against the authorities in your life?

Not only have the authorities declared that all these are illegal, but God has declared that they are immoral because the failure to submit to the authorities in our lives is rebellion against God's standards. We may not appreciate the rules put in place to regulate our lives. We may even feel that others are downright bad. But, as the Bible teaches, every authority is put in place by God. Every time we feel the urge to go against a rule, it's sinful pride tempting us to go against the authorities God has established in our lives—and against God Himself. And, by living this way, we are inviting judgment upon ourselves (Rom 13:2), which is the complete opposite of the promise associated with submitting to our parents.

One specific level of authority God has placed in our lives is the church. God has placed leaders over the church to provide direction and ensure doctrinal purity. Scripture teaches that we're to submit to our church leaders, knowing "they keep watch over your souls" (Heb. 13:17) and will give an account for the way they've shepherded their people.

Instead of living pridefully and in all the ways we'd want, we're called to humility, living sacrificially in service to others. This involves honoring our parents—and all the other authorities in our lives—as a picture of our joyful willingness to submit to God. When we do this, we put ourselves in the position to receive God's promised blessing, and our hearts grow in humility toward God.

Why has God placed multiple levels of authority in our lives? (Consider reading Romans 13:1-5.)

How does rebellion against authority affect our relationship with God? What about submission?

BEING // As God's people, we are ambassadors called to reach the world with the gospel.

DOING // As God's representatives, we should devote our lives to loving all people well and reaching them with the gospel so they could be reconciled to God.

APOLOGETIC // Many people today believe the universe exists as the result of some great cosmic accident and people evolved from simpler life forms. However, the Bible teaches that our loving Father created us to live in relationship with Him and to reflect His glory to others. Therefore, every person possesses inherent dignity and worth.

CHRIST

We often struggle to submit to authority, but proper submission starts with honoring God and living obediently to His Word.

What areas of your life are you struggling to give up in order to submit to God?

Pray for God to remove any of your pride so you can humbly submit to Him.

COMMUNITY

God has placed many authority figures in our lives—parents, leaders, pastors, and more—and we're expected to submit to the authority God has given them.

How can you submit to your church leaders in a way that honors God?

CULTURE

Our world has a problem with authority, which is fleshed out in the conflict and rebellion we see throughout our culture.

What steps can you take to ensure you're submitting to the authority figures God has placed in your daily life?

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

7

THE VALUE OF ALL HUMAN LIFE

ENGAGE



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT

God values all people—born and unborn, young and old, male and female, all ethnicities, those of opposing faiths—and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost across the street and around the world through prayer, giving resources, loving actions, and sharing the gospel.

Those classified as marginalized may be defined as a group of people considered by society to be on the fringes. These would be individuals on sidewalk benches who are barely conscious due to the narcotics in their bodies. These would be others pushing stolen shopping carts filled with literally everything they have to their name. And there are people standing on street corners and holding signs that say things like, “Anything Helps—God Bless” or “Down on Luck—Spare a Buck.”

When have you encountered people facing these types of struggles?

Most people walk right by those considered marginalized, but this isn’t at all the way Jesus treated them. Instead of neglecting the sick and hurting, Jesus touched them, sat down and ate meals with them, and offered them genuine love. Why? Because God genuinely loves all people. Every man, woman, and child has been formed in His image and created to live in a relationship with Him.

When have you intentionally chosen to show kindness to someone when it wasn’t easy? How did it impact them? How did it affect you?



DISCUSS

GOD VALUES ALL PEOPLE

When God established creation, His final touch was placing people created in His image in the world He'd made. He then gave us a very special blessing:

- The opportunity to live in relationship with Him—because He loves us so much— and to reflect His character in whatever we do.

Today, we often speak in terms of there being multiples races of people. However, the truth is that there is only one race: humans! Despite being commanded to spread throughout the earth, for some reason people thought they knew better than God, and decided to do things their own way and settled down in Shinar, refusing to disperse any further (Gen. 11:2). This was unacceptable to God, so He confused their language, and sent people scattering throughout the world. Over the generations, cultures emerged with their own languages and values, and specific genetic traits were expressed due to genetic isolation.¹ However, every descendant of Adam (by the way, that's every person who has ever lived) was the object of God's blessing and love despite all the differences.

Because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, the curse of sin came into our experience. However, this never changed God's love, and this is why He initiated a plan to redeem us from sin's consequences. Romans 5:7-8 teaches that "rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Although all people are sinners, God loves us anyway. In fact, He loves us so much that He was willing to send Jesus to die in our place.

Many have asked, Why wouldn't God just judge people's sin and destroy the earth, even from the moment of the first sin? We find the answer in Peter's second letter: "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). God doesn't want anyone to suffer the ultimate punishment for sin. In fact, one reason He is patient in exercising judgment is that He wants us to have the chance to repent of our sins, turning instead to Christ in faith. This applies to all people. God doesn't want "any" to die spiritually.

How do we know that God loves all people?

Why is God patient in exercising judgment and bringing about His promises?

ANY AGE—INCLUDING UNBORN

You've probably heard your parents or grandparents say to you, "I wish I still had your energy." In American culture today, people place an incredibly high value on youth. Many fight aging gracefully by investing into dyeing their hair or even spending large amounts on cosmetic surgeries.

What do you particularly appreciate about being young?

In a sense, this appeals to a healthy desire woven into our being. When our bodies were created, there was no sin and no curse. There was no idea of unhealthy aging or death. Therefore, fighting against these is perfectly natural. However, just like many other areas in our lives, when we value something good too highly, it becomes an idol in our lives. Many people idolize being youthful. In fact, it's not uncommon today for many to value youth so highly, that they devalue the older among us. To be honest, there are things young people are able to do that older people simply can't. In contrast, older people possess many strengths that young people don't, and the Bible speaks to both sides.

Paul commended Timothy, a young person, to set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity (1 Tim. 4:12). We also read of the value associated with a long life. Proverbs 20:29 teaches that "the glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is gray hair." Whereas a young person's strength is associated literally with the abilities associated with their young bodies and minds, the older person's "strengths" are tied to their years on this earth.

But the Bible also speaks of another "age" that is valuable to God. In Psalm 139:13,16 we read, "For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ... Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began." From the moment we're conceived, God knows us and has a plan for our lives. People become people at the moment of conception, not when we're born or when our heart starts to beat. Because God knows us from this moment, it's essential to recognize the value and right to life for the unborn.

What is the value, in God's sight particularly, of being young? Being old?

Why should we value the unborn just as much as any other person?

NO FAVORITISM WITH GOD

People naturally connect with others who share similar qualities or interests. It's very likely this is even a reality in your life. If you play in the band, chances are you have meaningful connections and spend a good bit of your time with others who play music. Most athletes hang out with other athletes. This principle applies in too many areas to count, and honestly, it's a good thing.

However, when shared interest turns into a we're-better-than-all-the-rest perspective, this is a major problem. This sort of favoritism, or prejudice, has been the root of more conflict and pain than we could ever truly understand. There are undoubtedly students in your school who feel left out or rejected because they don't seem to fit in with anyone. Others may have felt the brunt of bullying, perhaps because others label them as "different." Still others face discrimination based on qualities that are completely out of their control, such as the size of their ears or the color of their skin, the brand jeans they can (or can't) afford or their level of athletic ability.

Thankfully, this isn't true of God, and the Bible teaches that "there is no favoritism with God" (Rom. 2:11), and He loves us all no matter what.

When it comes to matters of faith and God's loving people, the Bible says "there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). God's offer of forgiveness has been extended to all people, and Jesus "died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them" will be raised (2 Cor. 5:15).

How do we show favoritism today? How do you specifically show favoritism?

How can we love all people but also show that God has called us to be separate and holy?



BEING // As God's people, we are ambassadors called to reach the world with the gospel.

DOING // As God's representatives, we should devote our lives to loving all people well and reaching them with the gospel so they could be reconciled to God.

APOLOGETIC // Many people today believe the universe exists as the result of some great cosmic accident and people evolved from simpler life forms. However, the Bible teaches that our loving Father created us to live in relationship with Him and to reflect His glory to others. Therefore, every person possesses inherent dignity and worth.

CHRIST

If we want to love people the way Christ does, we should start by praying for others on a regular basis. God uses our prayers to soften our hearts and motivate us to carry out His will in our lives.

List five people you can begin praying for each week.

COMMUNITY

In heaven, there will be people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. Churches often consist of people from all sorts of different walks of life, and there are many opportunities to connect with and love people who are different from us.

What kinds of differences do you see in your church?

Who can you begin developing a relationship with in your church who is outside of your normal group of friends?

CULTURE

We naturally cling to our friends and cliques, but God honors our efforts when we step outside of our comfort zone and reach out to others to share about Him.

Who in your neighborhood or school can you invest in so you can share God's love with them?

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

THE GREAT COMMISSION



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



God values all people—born and unborn, young and old, male and female, all ethnicities, those of opposing faiths—and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost across the street and around the world through prayer, giving resources, loving actions, and sharing the gospel.

In the children's book *You Are Special*, Max Lucado tells the story of a land of wooden people who place on each other stickers assessing their worth. Beautiful, talented, and smart Wemmicks receive stars. Plain-looking Wemmicks with average ability and intellect receive dots. A young Wemmick learns the secret of refusing to receive either the acclaim or disdain of his peers when he is introduced to the woodcarver, Eli.¹

Society rewards with attention people who have brains, bucks, or beauty. These are often the people popular at school or in society. Their faces grace magazine covers, their lives provide fodder for blogs and TV shows.

But do those traits (intelligence, wealthy, beauty) give a person more value than others? Is the value of an individual based upon his or her level of performance or ability to perform certain functions? If so, then most people are not as valuable as the rich and famous. But what if the value of a person is found elsewhere? What if a person's value is tied to something deeper within, being distinct from personal traits and talents? What is it that gives us value? Or Who is it that gives us value?

Why is it false to think our value is tied to our performance or abilities?

CALLED TO MISSIONS

During Jesus' 33 years on this earth, the majority of His time was spent in relative obscurity. We know His earthly father, Joseph, was a carpenter (Matt. 13:55), and Jesus was likely His father's apprentice, as people also referred to Jesus as a carpenter (Mark 6:3). More importantly, we know Jesus devoted Himself to His heavenly Father, and throughout His life, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people" (Luke 2:52).

When Jesus was about 30 years old, "John came baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). Jesus approached John to be baptized, where the Father pronounced His affirmation and the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus to empower Him for what lay ahead (Matt. 3:13-17). Jesus was immediately driven into the wilderness where He'd face temptation. After He'd passed these tests, Jesus returned to Galilee he began His public ministry among the people who'd long awaited the Messiah, which was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Matt. 4:14-17).

Jesus served the people He encountered by meeting practical needs, such as feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and delivering those oppressed by demons. Further, He preached the truth in a way that was completely astonishing to those who heard Him. And in all He did, Jesus demonstrated love that had a powerful impact in people's lives.

As He carried out His ministry, Jesus included followers whom He would intentionally train, and Jesus knew He would leave the earth and leave the mission in the hands of His disciples. Shortly before He ascend to heaven, Jesus gave them what has come to be known as the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

This is a calling for all the church, not just the ones who heard the words come from Jesus' lips. Our mission, just like Jesus', is to make disciples—people who will follow after Jesus, seeking with all we are to live as He lived. And we are to do it in all the same ways He did.

How would you define Jesus' mission?

How specifically is God calling you to carry out this mission?

ACROSS THE STREET & AROUND THE WORLD

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He promised the Holy Spirit would come into the lives of the disciples and empower them to carry out His mission (Acts 1:8). To this point, Jesus' followers had bumbled and blundered, and when it mattered most—as Jesus was arrested and put on trial that would ultimately lead to His crucifixion—they'd deserted Him (Matt. 26:56). However, even this didn't change God's plans for using weak men to demonstrate His power.

Jesus said that His followers would be “witnesses” all over the world when the Spirit came (Acts 1:8). Witness refers to someone who has first-hand knowledge of an event due to having actually seen it and shares that experience as a testimony to the truth. We may not necessarily see this as requiring supernatural power, as if we needed the Spirit to help testify to what we've experienced. However, the term for “witnesses” Jesus used also included the idea of being willing to give one's life as a result of sharing. Jesus had given His life, and we are called to the same thing.

This call has been passed down over the centuries and through the church to us today. We are called to be witnesses, carrying the gospel to all people so they would hear the truth and turn to Christ in saving faith in the following areas. Commit to sharing your faith in:

- **Jerusalem:** Geographically, it refers to our immediate context—our city. This includes people with whom we're closest, such as family, friends, and neighbors.
- **Judea and Samaria:** The broader context, including our state and country. This applies to places we visit from time to time and people with some things in common, but whom we aren't necessarily close with.
- **The End of the Earth:** All places and all people. This includes people with whom we have very little in common, such as those with different languages or religions, and even those considered to be enemies.

Our responsibility as followers of Christ is to do our best to make sure the gospel goes out to all people.

In your own words, what is a witness from a biblical perspective?

How can you be involved in reaching all the areas to which Christ has called us?

THROUGH ALL MEANS

Throughout Scripture we have different metaphors that help us understand salvation. One of the most powerful pictures of salvation is that of slavery and freedom (Luke 4:18).

In the Old Testament, we read of Israel's spending generations as slaves in Egypt. But God heard their groaning and remembered the promise He made to Abraham (Ex. 2:23-25). God sent Moses as the deliverer through whom He'd work to set them free. Yet after only a short time, the Israelites forgot what God had done for them, complained about their circumstances, and fell back into another kind of slavery—slavery to sin, which brought God's judgments. But He promised He'd send a Messiah to rescue His people from bondage to sin. For generations, God's people anxiously awaited this Deliverer.

Notice that Paul pursued "every possible means" so that "some" people would be saved (1 Cor. 9:22). Everything that was within the spirit of what God's Word allowed, Paul was willing to try as a way of reaching the lost. For us today, this means examining our lives, and leveraging any opportunity to reach people, including:

- **Gifts and Abilities:** God has given us each strengths to use to reach people with the gospel.
- **Resources:** Everything good in our lives comes from our heavenly Father, and we are called to manage them well, investing in kingdom purposes.
- **Circumstances:** Every circumstance in which we find ourselves, whether seemingly good or bad, is an opportunity to reflect Christ.

We are to be serious about sharing our faith and fulfilling the mission Christ has given us. Therefore, we should devote ourselves to praying for the lost, using resources for God's purposes, and showing real love to others in an all-things-to-all-people approach to reaching the lost with the gospel.

Why was Paul willing to give up his freedom in order to reach the lost? How can you adopt this attitude?

What has God given you (abilities, resources, or circumstances) that you will leverage for sharing the gospel?

BEING // As God's people, we are ambassadors called to reach the world with the gospel.

DOING // As God's representatives, we should devote our lives to loving all people well and reaching them with the gospel so they could be reconciled to God.

APOLOGETIC // Many people today believe the universe exists as the result of some great cosmic accident and people evolved from simpler life forms. However, the Bible teaches that our loving Father created us to live in relationship with Him and to reflect His glory to others. Therefore, every person possesses inherent dignity and worth.

CHRIST

There are people all throughout the world who haven't been exposed to the gospel, and we're responsible to take it to them.

Pray for opportunities to share the gospel in the three different areas outlined in Acts 1:8. Jot down a quick note of how you'll pray for each one.

- Jerusalem (city)

- Judea and Samaria (state and country)

- the end of the earth (world)

COMMUNITY

God has made everyone in the church with unique characteristics and gifts, and we're much more effective at sharing the gospel when we do it together as a family.

Who can you partner with in your church to begin encouraging and holding each other accountable in sharing the gospel?

CULTURE

The only way we can see lasting change in our culture and world is to bring the hope of Jesus to those who don't yet believe.

What are some available opportunities you have to share the gospel with others?

Plan a time to go into your community to share your faith and invite others to church.

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 8

ENGAGE

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

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

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

- 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
