

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

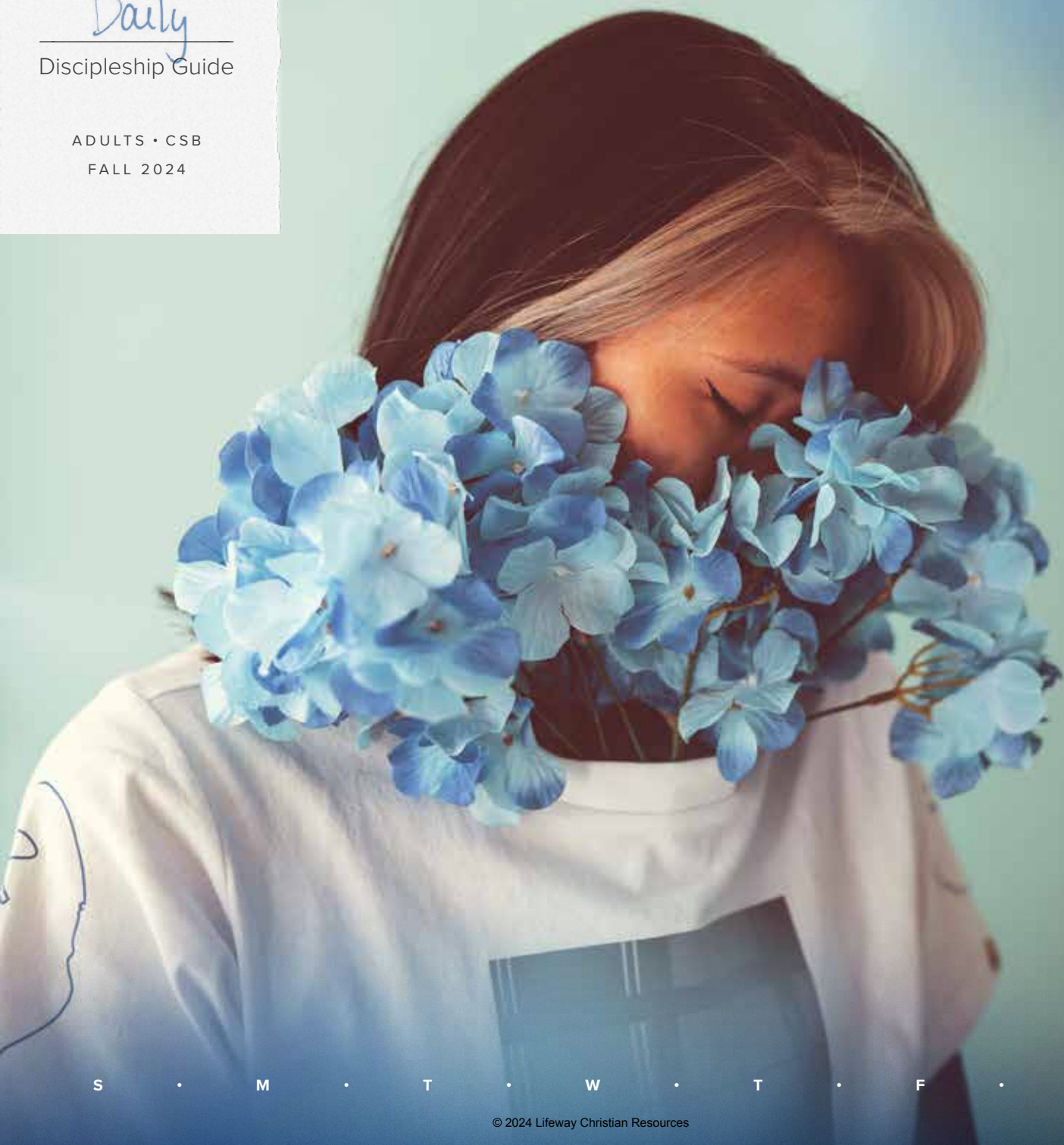
Daily

Discipleship Guide

ADULTS • CSB
FALL 2024

THRIVE: LIVING ON PURPOSE

NAVIGATING FAMILY CONFLICT



LEADING SOMEONE TO THE GREATEST DECISION OF ALL

One of the great joys of leading a group in Bible study is seeing group members deepen their walk with Christ. Everyone's walk with Christ begins with an initial decision to follow Him in repentance and faith. There may be people in your group who haven't made that decision yet. Take advantage of your time with them to talk about becoming a Christian.

As you tell your own story about coming to Christ, share these key truths:

1. We're all sinners and each of us needs to acknowledge that truth before God. That acknowledgment involves repentance, which is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Refer to Romans 3:23, 6:23, and Acts 3:19.
2. The only way a person can receive the gift of forgiveness is by faith in Jesus as God's Son. Use verses like Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; and John 14:6 when talking about faith in Christ.
3. Confessing your faith in Jesus Christ means both believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth that He is Savior and Lord. Share Romans 10:9-10,13.

Invite anyone ready to follow Christ to pray a prayer similar to this:

"Dear God, I know I'm a sinner and have rebelled against You in many ways. I believe Jesus died for my sin and only through faith in His death and resurrection can I be forgiven. I now turn from my sin and ask Jesus to forgive me and come into my life as my Savior and Lord. From this day forward, I choose to follow Jesus. Thank You, Lord, for loving me and forgiving me. In Jesus name I pray, Amen."

A Special Note about "Purpose Restored" (Session 3 of "Thrive: Living on Purpose")

As your group studies and discusses this session, use it as an opportunity to lead unsaved group members and guests to faith in Christ. Use "Restored and Made New" on the inside front cover of the Daily Discipleship Guide to connect the session with each member's own need to place their hope and trust in Christ and receive His gift of salvation. The inside cover is a guide for understanding how Jesus provides the one thing we truly need.

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DON'T MISS THIS!

eBook

Bible Studies for Life is also available as an eBook. You can order a copy at lifeway.com/bsflebook.

EXTRA!

Every week, you'll find additional discussion questions and creative teaching ideas to help you tailor each session to the needs of your group. You'll also find links to magazine articles and the *Family Connection* page for parents.

www.BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra

Podcast

Get free weekly insights for every session of *Bible Studies for Life* with our podcast. Each 20-minute episode will help you get the most out of your upcoming study. Listen at the gym, on the drive home, or wherever is best for you. Just search "Bible Studies for Life Adults" on your favorite podcast app to start listening today.

Social Media

Connect with a community of *Bible Studies for Life* users. Post responses to questions, share teaching ideas, and link to great blog content. Facebook.com/BibleStudiesforLife

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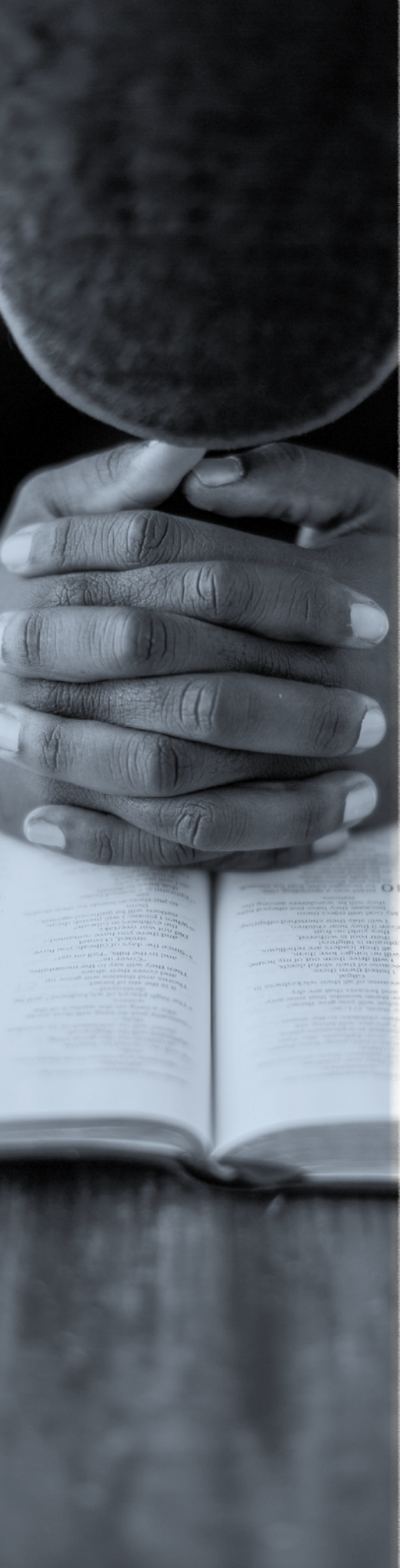
We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit Lifeway.com/DoctrinalGuideline.

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Bible Studies for Life: Daily Discipleship Guide often lists websites that may be helpful to our readers. Our staff verifies each site's usefulness and appropriateness prior to publication. However, website content changes quickly so we encourage you to approach all websites with caution. Make sure sites are still appropriate before sharing them.

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WELCOME

The study of God's Word is important. The fact that you're holding this book likely means you agree with that statement—and that you're committed to teaching others God's Word as well. I pray you'll be transformed as we look into God's Word together.

“Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Prayer should go hand-in-hand with reading God's Word. God speaks to us through His Word, and in turn, we speak to God about what we read and discover in that Word. I want to encourage you to pray as you study—and to encourage your group to pray as they study. Periodically throughout this Leader Guide, you'll find prayer prompts to encourage you to pray individually and as a group. We also included several individual prompts in the Daily Discipleship Guide. These prompts aren't labeled as such, but they're there: calls to pray about what you read, directions on turning a passage into a prayer back to God, and so forth. An example based on 2 Timothy 2:15 would be:

Father, help me to be diligent in teaching Your Word. Open my eyes so that I will correctly handle Your word of Truth.

May God richly bless your time with your Bible study group!

Lynn H. Pryor

Team Leader, *Bible Studies for Life*

HOW TO USE BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

INVITE THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GUIDANCE

Because God is the guide for your study, invite Him to show you how to be the best facilitator for your group. Read the Bible passage several times with the Holy Spirit showing you its meaning and application.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

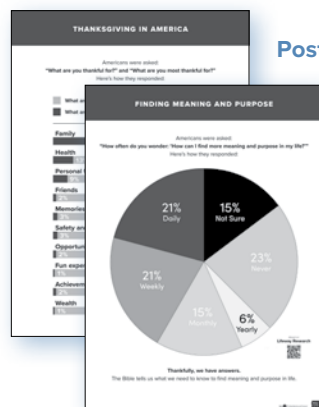
Everyone in your group will need a copy of the *Daily Discipleship Guide*. This resource includes:

- **Group pages.** This is the content you will study in your weekly gatherings. This material is also included in this Leader Guide.
- **Live It Out.** This section is designed to help your group apply the study content in the form of actions they carry out during the week. Encourage them to choose at least one action to pursue further.
- **Talk It Out.** This section is designed to encourage two or three individuals to gather during the week and discuss further the passage, its relevance to their lives, and ways they can live it out.
- **Daily Study pages.** Five daily readings provide an opportunity to dig deeper into the Scripture text and Bible study material. Encourage your group to study this content during the week.

LEADER GUIDE

This Leader Guide provides valuable, customizable content for use in your weekly group meetings. As you prepare to lead your group sessions:

- Begin by asking God to open your mind and heart to His Word. Read the passage in your Bible, noting key words and phrases.
- Review the Group Plans and make adjustments to fit the needs and personality of your group. These plans will guide you to engage your group in discussion around the Bible passage.
- Read the commentary for the passage. Share insights from the commentary as needed during your group discussion.
- Occasionally you will see a QR code in this book. Use your phone to open the QR code for bonus digital content.
- Gather the Leader Pack items you plan to use in your group time.



Posters



Handouts



To learn how to best use these resources, watch this brief video.



LEADER PACK

The optional Leader Pack is designed to enhance the group experience, especially for visual learners. Pull in the Leader Pack items as referenced in the group plan. The Leader Pack also provides access to a variety of digital files, including:

- JPG files of the two main study images that you can use with any presentation software (ie., PowerPoint). (Promote the study by placing these images into an announcement slideshow or display the images during the sessions to reinforce the study topic.)
- PDF file of each pack item. (Create multiple posters; during your sessions, display images on a screen using any presentation software; post images on social media to promote the study.)
- Sample email messages to post prior to your Bible study time to raise awareness and promote the session topic.
- An electronic version of the group plans that you can customize and print.
- Promotional videos to introduce both of the studies in this quarter.
- *Biblical Illustrator* articles that allow you to go deeper in your study.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

Additional discussion questions and teaching suggestions for leaders are available online at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

A twenty-minute podcast is available for each session, providing an overview and insights to help you prepare. Search “Bible Studies for Life Adults” on your favorite podcast app or go to MinistryGrid.com/BibleStudiesforLife.

FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO DEEPER

The **Advanced Bible Study** is written for group members who desire more extensive commentary. It includes exposition of each session’s Scripture passage, an examination of key words, an introduction to the setting of the passage and biblical life and times, questions to guide the study, and interactive responses to help readers apply God’s truths to their lives today.



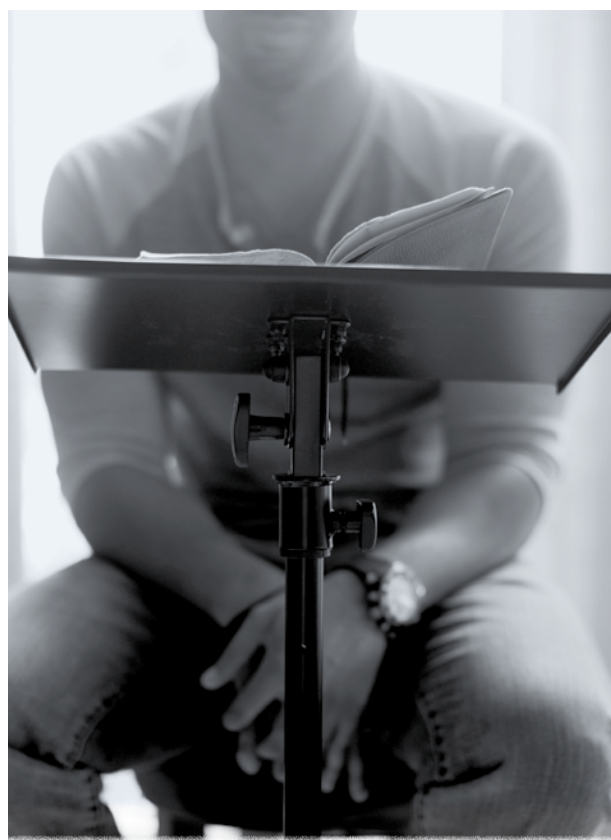
The Three Roles Your Bible Study Group Needs

By Dwayne McCrary

For me, nearly forty years of marriage has meant wearing many hats, including, but not limited to, plumber, exterminator, cook, mover, and petroleum exchange engineer (better known as filler of the gas tanks). None of these titles were explicitly included in our wedding vows. The key word is *explicitly*, since they're covered under words and phrases like "cherish," "for better or worse," and "I pledge my word." The other hats come with wearing the ring.

Accepting the responsibility of leading an ongoing Bible study group may come with a variety of hats as well; some of them are expected, but not all. Walking alongside a grieving class member as he or she buries a loved one, especially a child or spouse, probably wasn't what we thought about when we said yes to leadership. Nor was setting up chairs or training another person to do what we do. Even if we didn't fully grasp it at the time we signed on to lead, these things come with the territory.

Ten years ago, in their book *3 Roles for Guiding Groups*, David Francis and Ken Braddy defined the roles we play when assigned a leadership position in a Bible study group as teacher, shepherd, and leader. (You can download a free copy of their original work at www.lifeway.com/trainingresources.) These three roles can help us handle the expectations that come with saying yes to leading a Bible study group.



TEACHER

This role is the most obvious. Regardless of what else we may think we're to do, teaching seems to be at the top of the list. Francis and Braddy define this role as our ongoing goal of guiding group members to discover and apply biblical truth. They say that for this to happen, group members need to talk as much as we do.

The phrase “ongoing goal” stands out. The idea here is that we do this task week in and week out. We aren’t coordinators or part-time teachers; we’re to be regular in carrying out this role. As a teacher of preschoolers as well as adults, I understand the value of being present every week. Preschoolers get accustomed to the patterns we follow. Seeing the same face each week eases some of their angst when they’re dropped off by a parent. Patterns bring security and give the child a framework for the learning experience. The same is true when teaching adults. They also need that same type of framework and security. We may hand over the teaching role to an apprentice on occasion, but ultimately, we’re the ones who must consistently fulfill the teacher role if we want the class or group to gel and become a safe place to share and learn.

SHEPHERD

Most likely, before your first day leading a class or group, you were presented with a ministry list of people assigned to your group. This ministry list was assigned with the idea that you would care for the individuals on that list.

Teaching and shepherding seem to go hand in hand. If we think about our favorite teachers over the years, we most likely identify people who also had some type of relationship with us. As shepherds, we know the needs of our individual sheep, which should make us better teachers. We can tailor the group Bible study time in light of these known needs. Our shepherding should also influence how we lead our group time, knowing who we can call on to share an experience that illustrates the main point being examined.

We may naturally find it easier to shepherd those who attend our group more regularly. But we can’t forget those who rarely or never attend. There’s a reason they’re on the ministry list assigned to us. In a triad of parables, Jesus pointed to a lost sheep, lost coin, and lost or prodigal son (Luke 15). Jesus pointed out the shepherd will search for that single lost sheep until it’s found. We’re responsible as shepherds assigned to a specific number of sheep who also have names.

LEADER

Teaching and shepherding automatically give us influence, and we become leaders by proxy. We see this in how we help our classes or groups understand the mission of reaching, teaching, and serving.

Ongoing Bible study groups carry some responsibility in reaching people who are far from God. As leaders, we have to keep reminding our groups of that responsibility. Otherwise, we’ll become comfortable with our Christian huddles to the exclusion of others. As we reach more and more people, there comes a point when we’re unable to teach and shepherd effectively. That’s one reason to plant a new group once twelve to eighteen people are attending your current one. Someone must lead the group to recognize the need to plant a new group and apprentice others who can teach/shepherd/lead. The more groups we plant, the greater the potential to reach our communities with the gospel, which is our ultimate mission.

GOOD NEWS, KINDA

None of us are gifted in all three of these areas; therefore, we need others to come alongside us if we’re going to be successful. This is good news, but with a caveat. The three roles are interwoven. We can hand off a role, but the three stay closely connected by assignment and also by relationship. All three require us to build relationships with the people included on our assigned ministry list. If we neglect one of the roles, the other roles will suffer. With God’s help, we can become the teacher/shepherd/leader that the people on our ministry list need and that our church needs to reach the communities in which God has placed us.

Dwayne McCrary is the manager of adult ongoing Bible studies at Lifeway.



10

12 BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

THE PATHWAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Growing in Christ is a journey—a lifelong journey—but what does that look like? Lifeway’s research reveals eight markers consistently present in the lives of believers who are growing spiritually. Each year, *Bible Studies for Life* engages all eight of these areas. Following this intentional plan for discipleship ensures progress on the pathway to becoming more like Christ.

Visit www.BibleStudiesforLife.com for a fuller picture of this discipleship plan through 2025.

	FALL 2024	WINTER 2024-25	SPRING 2025	SUMMER 2025
LIVE UNASHAMED	Thrive: Living on Purpose			
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS	Navigating Family Conflict			
SHARE CHRIST		Looking Forward to Christmas		
SEEK GOD		The Heart of Worship		
ENGAGE WITH SCRIPTURE			All Signs Point to Jesus	
SERVE GOD AND OTHERS			Elisha: Seeing the Hand of God at Work	
OBEY GOD & DENY SELF				Character Counts
EXERCISE FAITH				Risk Takers: The Adventure of Walking by Faith

THRIVE: LIVING ON PURPOSE

How this study supports the Discipleship Plan:

LIVE UNASHAMED. Knowing the purpose God has given us helps us live with confidence. When we're living out God's plan and desire for us, the reaction of the world around us is of little consequence.

- Session 1** Purpose Questioned • Ecclesiastes 1:1-14
- Session 2** Purpose Abandoned • Psalm 8:1-6; 14:1-7
- Session 3** Purpose Restored • Acts 3:14-26
- Session 4** Purpose Lived • Galatians 5:16-26
- Session 5** Purpose Expressed • Galatians 6:1-10
- Session 6** Purpose Exemplified • Philippians 1:1-11

NAVIGATING FAMILY CONFLICT

How this study supports the Discipleship Plan:

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS. Among our human relationships, none is more important than the relationships within the family. By considering both positive and negative examples from the book of Genesis, we discover how to build relationships in a Christ-honoring, positive way.

- Session 1** Cain and Abel: Family Responsibility • Genesis 4:1-12
- Session 2** Abram and Lot: Family Rights • Genesis 13:5-11,14-18
- Session 3** Isaac and Rebekah: Family Favorites • Genesis 25:24-28; 27:5-13
- Session 4** Jacob and Esau: Family Rivalry • Genesis 27:35-37,41; 33:1-4,8-11
- Session 5** Joseph and His Brothers: Family Jealousy • Genesis 37:1-4,19-24,31-34
- Session 6** Joseph and His Brothers: Family Reconciliation • Genesis 42:3-5,21-24a; 45:1-5



THRIVE: LIVING ON PURPOSE

Why am I here?

While this question has always been important, the levels of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness in the world have given it a new sense of urgency. We look around and see people of every background struggling with the same sense of meaninglessness. Though we might try and fill that void through relationships, achievement, or power, the void remains. Like an itch we can't seem to scratch, there lingers in us an idea that we were made for more.

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote: "If I find in myself desires which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." He was right. God created us with purpose, and when we discover that purpose in Christ, life takes on a meaning and richness the world can't offer. We don't need to settle for just living when we can thrive.



Study Introduction:

Here's why this six-session study is important.

AUTHOR

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COMMENTARY WRITER

Gregory T. Pouncey has previously pastored churches in Alabama and is now senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Clinton, Mississippi. Gregory and his wife, Cathy, have two sons and one daughter.

PURPOSE QUESTIONED

THE POINT

Apart from God, life is meaningless.

THE PASSAGE

Ecclesiastes 1:1-14

LIFE CONNECTION

The world claims a lot of things will give us security, happiness, and a sense of well-being. Chase any one of these, though, and we discover they fail to deliver. We're still left with a feeling of futility. Solomon made that discovery centuries ago, but it's not the end of the story. When God is in the picture, we see life from an infinitely better perspective.

BACKGROUND

Ecclesiastes falls into the category of the Bible's wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) and is a reflection on the meaning of life, specifically that a life without God, no matter how much one attains or acquires in this world, is ultimately without meaning. The English title is derived from the Septuagint's (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) title *Ekklesiastes*, which is a translation of the Hebrew *qoheleth*. Both terms refer to one who presides over an assembly.

GETTING STARTED



5 MINUTES

DISCUSS: Give your group an opportunity to discuss **Question #1** on page 15 of the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG): **What’s something you get tired of doing over and over again?**

RECAP (DDG, PAGE 16): Invite a volunteer to read **The Bible Meets Life** to introduce the session:

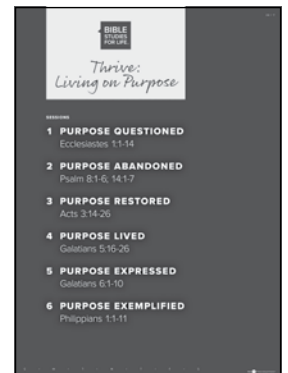
The first U.S. patent for a treadmill “training machine” was issued in 1913, but that wasn’t the first treadmill. Before then, the machines were used not for exercise but for punishment in prisons. Some today would argue that not much has changed. Whether for exercise or punishment, a treadmill is a machine that requires the expense of energy to go nowhere. Sometimes life feels like that; we put effort into relationships, work, family, and more, and it feels like we’re going nowhere. The first several verses of Ecclesiastes capture this reality well and sum it up in one word: futility.

TRANSITION: As you introduce this unit of study, consider showing the study introduction video (see the QR code on the **Introduction** page) to your group.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 1**, the **Thrive: Living on Purpose** poster, and give a brief overview of the session titles in this study.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 16 of the DDG. Invite the group to fill in the blank: **Apart from God, life is MEANINGLESS.**

PRAY: Transition into the study by thanking God that through Him our lives can have true meaning. Ask God to teach us how to stop searching for purpose in things that fail to deliver but instead to focus on Him and the life He intends for us.



TIP: When helpful, use this “Notes” column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

NOTES

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-7

1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem. **2** “Absolute futility,” says the Teacher. “Absolute futility. Everything is futile.”

3 What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?

4 A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

5 The sun rises and the sun sets; panting, it hurries back to the place where it rises. **6** Gusting to the south, turning to the north, turning, turning, goes the wind, and the wind returns in its cycles. **7** All the streams flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT (DDG, PAGE 16): Solomon is regarded as the wisest person to have ever lived. He was wealthy beyond imagination. He was powerful and influential throughout the known world. He had the means to pursue any desire to the fullest extent. And yet despite it all, he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, a text which we might find to be difficult if not depressing. Solomon, despite all his resources, reflected on the meaningless nature of virtually all of life.

READ: Ask someone to read aloud Ecclesiastes 1:1-7 on page 16 of the DDG.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to statement 1 on page 16 of the DDG. Invite the group to fill in the blank: **Without God, what we do in life can feel POINTLESS.**

RECAP (DDG, PAGE 16): “Futility” (v. 2). That’s the word Solomon used to describe all of life. Like the proverbial treadmill, the impression we get from the “Teacher” (v. 1) is that life is an endless series of efforts, labors, and tasks that have no meaningful result. To underscore his point, Solomon described the cyclical nature of days and nights, the seasons of the year, and even the weather patterns. For him, life is like all those things—it comes and goes, then comes and goes again.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): See the optional activity (on page 27 in this Leader Guide) to give your group an opportunity to identify things that have left them feeling unsatisfied, discouraged, or like life is “futile.”

DISCUSS Question #2: Which of the images in these verses captures your attention?

GUIDE: Use the commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to generate more conversation based on the answers to the discussion question.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that without God, what we do in life doesn’t satisfy.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are some things we should consider when choosing a path in life?

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-7 *Commentary*

Connection to The Point: The Teacher saw everything in life as meaningless.

The Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem (v. 1).

This book has traditionally been attributed to David's son, Solomon. These identifiers, along with "king over Israel in Jerusalem" (v. 12), imply Solomonic authorship. Solomon was the only descendant of David who reigned over a united Israel, as the nation split in two after David's death (1 Kings 12:1-17). Solomon wrote not as a king handing down decrees, but as a teacher seeking and providing understanding regarding the meaning of life.

"Absolute futility" (v. 2). This is a translation of the double use of the Hebrew word *hebel* for emphasis, hence the use of the term "absolute." *Hebel* means "breath" or "vapor." It is used as a synonym for the wind (Isaiah 57:13; see Ecclesiastes 1:14). The word is also used to contrast the Lord, who is the believer's strength and refuge in trouble, with the emptiness of idols that cannot deliver those who worship them. In the context of Ecclesiastes, *hebel* refers to the insubstantial and transitory nature of life.

Gain (v. 3). A commercial term which refers to "profit" or "advantage." It has the sense of searching for real advantage or what is truly excellent in life. It comes from a verb that means "to be left over" or "to remain." No one finishes life having a net gain for all their striving, hard toil, and suffering.

Efforts (v. 3). Refers to hard physical labor, usually in relation to the unpleasant factors associated with work. At the fall, God cursed the ground so that it would only yield its produce by hard toil (Genesis 3:17-19). From a worldly perspective, the **labors** of this life are vain and futile. They require exhausting work and yield drudgery, anguish, and misery; even that which is achieved by such efforts ultimately does not last.

Under the sun (v. 3). Refers to what existence looks like from an earthly perspective without God, an afterlife, or a final judgment. Solomon's

presupposition was that he had restricted the scope of his inquiry to only those things that were under the sun. Although he acknowledged the existence of God (Ecclesiastes 1:13) and the wisdom in fearing Him (5:7; 7:18; 8:12), only in chapters 11–12 did Solomon's focus shift to an understanding that a meaningful life is one in which a person has a relationship of reverence and obedience to the Lord (12:13).

Generation (v. 4). Can refer to a period of time or to those living in a specific time period. The Hebrew term can also refer to the cycles of nature. While commentators differ on its meaning in Ecclesiastes, the context allows for the term to refer to generations related to both humanity and nature.

The earth remains forever (v. 4). The size and expanse of the world remain constant throughout all generations.

Panting (v. 5). The word can have positive or negative connotations. It can be used of a woman in labor (Isaiah 42:14). It describes the longing of the psalmist for God's Word (Psalm 119:131). It also means to trample (Psalm 56:2). Here it could mean either the sun joyously rushes from sunrise to sunset or the sun toils from sunrise to sunset with no rest.

Earth . . . sun . . . wind . . . streams . . . (vv. 4-7).

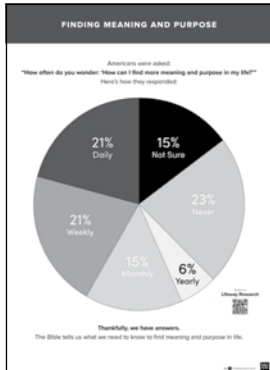
Dependent on the land, water, and weather for their food, the ancient Israelites understood the yearly growing cycles related to planting, tending, and harvesting their various crops. However, they did not have our modern, scientific understanding of the "earth" (v. 4), "sun" (v. 5), "wind" (v. 6), and "streams" (v. 7). Nature was monotonously predictable but at the same time incomprehensible. The sun rose, set, and rose again. The yearly seasons came one after another. The wind moved in cycles, but the cycles seemed random and without purpose. Streams ceaselessly flow into the sea, but the streams are never emptied, and the seas are never full. Wind and water are ever moving, but seemingly never accomplish anything.

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

NOTES



ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Why do so many people feel unsatisfied, no matter how much they accomplish?

ECCLESIASTES 1:8-10

8 All things are wearisome, more than anyone can say. The eye is not satisfied by seeing or the ear filled with hearing. **9** What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. **10** Can one say about anything, "Look, this is new"? It has already existed in the ages before us.

READ: Ask someone to read aloud Ecclesiastes 1:8-10 on pages 16-17 of the DDG.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to statement 2 on page 17 of the DDG. Invite the group to fill in the blank: **Without God, what we do in life does not SATISFY.**

DISCUSS Question #3: Where do you see evidence that people are experiencing weariness in our culture?

RECAP (DDG, PAGE 17): Not only is life pointless, but it also doesn't satisfy, and Solomon should know. Given his great resources, he was able to chase any of his pursuits to their end. Whether education, food and drink, or sexual gratification, Solomon found that his thirst couldn't be quenched; his hunger wouldn't go away.

The result is a constant sense of disappointment. What promises to be new and exciting is really just a warmed-over version of something else. What promises to be fulfilling inevitably falls short.

GUIDE: Use the commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to discuss further what Solomon meant by life not satisfying.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 2**, the **Finding Meaning and Purpose** poster, and discuss the pie chart. Emphasize that the Bible tells us what we need to know to find meaning and purpose in life.

DISCUSS Question #4: What are some ways people try to fill the void in their lives?

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that without God, what we do in life is a miserable task.

ECCLESIASTES 1:8-10 *Commentary*

Connection to the Point. This meaningless life made the Teacher weary and unsatisfied.

Things (v. 8). Literally means “words,” and has the meaning of “to speak.” It is used in reference to such things as commands, promises, and pronouncements. Solomon used the term in this verse to refer back to the forces of nature (Ecclesiastes 1:4-7). The cyclical, never-ending movement of the sun, wind, and water are examples of the seemingly absolute futility of life.

Wearisome (v. 8). The primary use of this Hebrew word means to work until one is tired or exhausted. It comes from a verb that describes the farmer’s labor in producing a harvest (Joshua 24:13), as well as the foolish pursuit of wealth that wears a person out (Proverbs 23:4), and the person who wearies himself from spells and sorceries (Isaiah 47:12,15). It can also describe those who grow tired in their pursuit of God (Lamentations 5:5). In the context of Ecclesiastes 1:3-8, the term summarizes the meaninglessness of both human life and the world itself—all is vain repetition.

More than anyone can say (v. 8). This phrase is interpreted in two ways. First, the wearisome pursuit of life under the sun left Solomon wanting more of an explanation. Second, it could also be translated, “No one is able to speak.” Faced with the monotonous drudgery and seeming meaninglessness of life, Solomon had no words to say.

The eye is not satisfied by seeing (v. 8). Solomon turned to the senses of sight and sound to see if he could find the meaning of life. The examination of human life and nature left him unfulfilled. His eyes could see, but this was not satisfying. Seeing is only part of the process. Perceiving someone or something does not automatically lead to understanding who that person is or what that thing is. Seeing the nature of life and the world did not provide Solomon with the answers he was seeking.

The ear . . . hearing (v. 8). All that Solomon heard neither satisfied him nor gave him the answers he sought. The Hebrew term generally means “to hear.” It can also be used of listening to someone in the sense of paying attention (Job 33:1; Psalm 81:11), of obeying God’s commandments (Ecclesiastes 5:1), of God hearing and answering someone’s prayers (Genesis 16:11; Judges 13:9; Psalm 10:17), of hearing with understanding (Genesis 11:7), and of listening critically. The words Solomon had heard, even from those considered to be wise (Ecclesiastes 8:1), failed to provide a meaningful explanation of the nature of the world and life. They left Solomon wanting more.

What has been is what will be (v. 9). While the actors may come and go on the world stage and nations rise and fall, at the most basic level life and nature are cyclical, repetitive, closed systems. The sun rises, the sun sets, and the sun rises again. People are born, live, die, and others are born and repeat the same process. In this basic sense, nothing changes.

Nothing new under the sun. . . . It has already existed (vv. 9-10). Solomon was not stating that technology could not advance and improve how we live life. But new inventions cannot break the cycle of sin, suffering, and death. Furthermore, people of every generation pursue the same things—fame, power, wealth, happiness, and so forth—and these things remain for the most part elusive. Even those who achieve such goals at the end of their lives find having those things changes nothing. Death still comes and all of one’s accolades, accomplishments, and possessions are left behind.

Even with all the advances and improvements by humanity in how we live, the central issue in life remains the same—sinful people need the love and forgiveness of God found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Apart from God, human experience and history for the most part consist of repetitive lives of toil, anguish, drudgery, and futility.

STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

NOTES

ECCLESIASTES 1:11-14

11 There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them.

12 I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. **13** I applied my mind to examine and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied. **14** I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind.

READ: Ask someone to read aloud Ecclesiastes 1:11-14 on page 17 of the DDG.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to statement 3 on page 17 of the DDG.

Invite the group to fill in the blank: **Without God, what we do in life is a MISERABLE task.**

RECAP (DDG, PAGE 17): It wasn't that Solomon wasn't looking for meaning; he certainly was, and yet he found all of life devoid of it. It's no wonder he came to the conclusion that life isn't satisfying. At best, we find ourselves at a pace of busyness, so we don't have to think about those desires inside of us. We're certainly not purpose-filled people; we're only occupied by our tasks.

We all feel the disappointment. But the disappointment isn't the end. In fact, it's necessary for us to deeply feel the disappointment of life so that we might look beyond these pursuits to the source of real life and satisfaction.

DO: Direct the group to the **Engage** activity on page 17 of the DDG (page 27 of this Leader Guide) to give them an opportunity to identify something that causes them to ask, "What's the purpose?"

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verse 14 on the next page of this Leader Guide to contrast those things which are futile with what really matters.

DISCUSS Question #5: In your experience, what are some key ingredients of a meaningful life?

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

In what ways does where we focus our eyes affect our hearts and minds?

ECCLESIASTES 1:11-14 *Commentary*

Connection to the Point. The Teacher looked for purpose but only found futility.

No remembrance (v. 11). Can refer to a memorial in the sense of a memorial day, a memorial action, a memorial object, or a memorial record. In this verse, it may refer to the mental act of remembering. Ancestry was important in Hebrew culture. It provided for one's identity as a child of Abraham and a member of God's covenant community. One of the constant themes God emphasized to the Israelites was to remember Him and what He had done for them, so that they would not forget and go after the false gods and goddesses of the nations around them (Deuteronomy 8:1-20).

But Solomon noted that ultimately most people, their deeds, and the memories of them are forgotten with time. Few are those who make such a mark under the sun that they are remembered and memorialized. But even such "remembrance" is in the end forgotten; the physical memorials may remain (for a time), but the significance of the people and events behind such memorials mean little or nothing to **those who will come after**.

I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem (v. 12). Solomon, king of the united monarchy of Judah and Israel, had the advantages of great wisdom, education, power, and wealth.

I applied my mind (v. 13). The term for "mind" means "heart." The Hebrew word literally refers to the internal organ which pumps blood but is also used in reference to the totality of a person's inner being, as well as one's emotions, mind, and will. This clause describes the focused and intentional manner with which Solomon searched for the meaning of life—he had set his heart (his whole being) on this search.

Examine and explore (v. 13). "Examine" means "to seek." "Explore" means "to search out with care" or "investigate." Solomon was making an intentional, detailed study in his quest for the meaning of life.

Miserable task (v. 13). The writings of ancient wisdom and philosophic literature considered the search for wisdom to be the highest calling in life, by which a person gained lasting fulfillment and significance.¹ However, Solomon labeled such a search a "miserable task." The word "miserable" can be translated as "bad" or "disagreeable"; in the ethical sense, it means "evil." The search for the meaning of life in wisdom was a hopeless task because the answer was not to be found there. Wisdom and philosophy that leave God out of the equation can and do mislead; they also redirect the focus of one's life away from a relationship with Him.

Keep them occupied (v. 13). Encompasses all the pursuits of humans, including moral, ethical, and religious activities—"all the things that are done under the sun" (v. 14). It also includes Solomon's pursuit for wisdom and understanding. Solomon did not despise education and human pursuits. He merely recognized that they had their limitations in a life that does not include God.

Futile, a pursuit of the wind (v. 14). Solomon again acknowledged that all human pursuits apart from God are ultimately without lasting meaning and significance. Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon noted the futility of searching for meaning and purpose in the pursuit of such things as wisdom and knowledge, wealth and possessions, pleasure, work, and politics. These pursuits easily can and do become idols themselves.

Like chasing after the wind, all things done under the sun are a never-ending pursuit that leaves the pursuer unsatisfied and empty-handed. Only one who has a saving relationship with God (12:13-14) through Jesus Christ will find true meaning in life.

LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

NOTES

ASK: What actions will you take in response to today's study?

GUIDE: Direct your group to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 18 of the DDG. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform how they determine what is truly meaningful and deserving of their focus this week.

- **Give thanks.** Memorize Ephesians 2:10 and thank God that He made you for a purpose.
- **Evaluate.** Consider the areas of your life where you're frustrated and lacking purpose. Ask God to help you look at these situations through a new lens—His lens.
- **Reflect.** Take twenty minutes and write an answer to the following question: "Where do I find meaning in life?"

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 18 of the DDG) to guide their discussion. Encourage your group to spend time each day in God's Word with the **Daily Study** section (pages 19-24 of the DDG).

NOTE: Encourage the group to participate in the survey by scanning the QR code on page 21 of their DDG (or clicking on the link if they're using an eBook).

RECAP: Read or restate from page 16 of the DDG.

Sometimes we put effort into relationships, work, family, and more, and it feels like we're going nowhere. We feel the disappointment. But the disappointment isn't the end. In fact, it's necessary so that we might look beyond these pursuits to the source of real life and satisfaction.

PRAY: Close your group time with prayer, asking God to help us recognize and avoid pursuits that are futile, instead replacing them with that which brings meaning to our lives—a relationship with Him.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra

ENGAGE

Life can sometimes be difficult, but God is always there to help us process and learn. What's one thing that has you asking, "What's the purpose?" Write your response and spend some time in prayer, asking God to help you see His purpose.

T

NOTES

BONUS CONTENT

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In **advance**, gather enough balloons for everyone in the group to have one. Also gather permanent markers to write on the balloons.

- Pass out the balloons and have the group blow them up.
- **Ask:** What is something in your work, relationships, home life, or finances that has left you feeling unsatisfied, discouraged, or like life is "futile"? Instruct the group to write their responses on their balloons with the permanent markers.
- Invite volunteers to share their responses, as well as how their situation can become meaningful by bringing God into the picture.
- Then take a moment to pop your balloons of meaninglessness and thank God for bringing meaning into your lives.