

LEARNING TO LOVEWELL

Small Group Discussion Guide

WEEK 1

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPENING QUESTION

What does loving well mean to you and why do you think it's so important to our call as followers of Jesus, and our call as communities of faith?

HEAD

1. Read Genesis 1:26-31, together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Notice the shift in language from the other days of creation. In days 1-5, it was "let there be..." With humans, it's "let us make..." Why do you think the language changes? And why are the pronouns "us" and "our" important?
3. Why does God bless them before they do anything?
4. God actually invites humans to participate in his work of creation by inviting them to be fruitful and multiply. Why is this important?
5. Do you think reigning over someone or something before sin was different than what we think it means to reign over someone or something now? If so, how?

HEART

1. Who is someone in your life right now that you need to remember are first and foremost, image-bearers of God? What are some ways we can help each other remember that we all bear God's image, even if that image is far from the surface in how we behave or treat others?
2. What were you taught about God growing up, that you had to earn his favor or that you have his favor because you exist? Why does the difference matter so much?
3. Why do you think you and I crave meaningful work?
4. God designed us to work in partnership with him. He did so in the Garden, and he does so with the creation of his church as seen in Matthew 28:18-20, and Acts 1-2. What does it mean to you that God wants to partner with you, and how do we seek to be good partners in that relationship?
5. Why do you think we are designed to love?

HANDS

This week, think about someone in your world that you struggle to love and to see as an image-bearer of God. Ask God to soften your heart in some way towards them. At the end of the week, think of some way to shine God's light of love into their life, even if that means simply letting them know you're praying for them.

WORDS TO LIVE BY

12 No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

1 John 4:12, NLT

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WEEK 2

INTRODUCTION

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OPENING QUESTION

Where is somewhere you have truly felt the spirit of belonging recently? What was it about that place or experience that helped you feel you belonged?

HEAD

1. Read Genesis 3:8-21, together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. The devil's action wasn't just about causing us to question God, but separating us from God. Why is isolating us from God such a focus of his work?
3. Who goes in search? Does God's creation seek him out, or does God seek them out?
4. What do you think it was like for God to hear that his creation was afraid of him?
5. When God asks Eve, "What have you done?" only he really knows the answer to that question at this time. We understand it better now. What had we done and what was it going to cause?
6. In order to clothe Adam and Eve with skin, what did God have to do? How is this like the plan of salvation?

HEART

1. Adam and Eve clearly felt shame after choosing to distrust God, which is why they hid. What do you think is the difference between guilt and shame? Are they both bad? Can one be good? Do you think God uses shame or is it a tool of the devil?
2. Do you know that God has been pursuing you since before you were born? What does this truth mean to you and how you view God?
3. We love to blame others for what's wrong with us. Why is taking ownership an important part of our healing and growth?
4. "You will strike his heel." God had a plan since before the fall, to save us should we fall. What does this say about God and what does it say about you?
5. You and I belong to God. How do we also belong to each other and seek to create communities of belonging?

HANDS

This week, think of someone in your community who may feel on the outside instead of on the inside. What is something you could do for them this week that may help them feel as if they belong a little bit more?

WORDS TO LIVE BY

1 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. **2** For he laid the earth's foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths.

Psalms 24:1-2, NLT

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WEEK 3

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPENING QUESTION

Share with the group a practice or two that you particularly enjoy when it comes to spending time with God. What is that practice? How and when do you do it? And what is meaningful to you about it?

Then, share with the group a practice that has been harder for you and why you think that might be?

HEAD

1. Read John 15:4-5, 15, James 1:17, Revelation 3:20, Genesis 3:8-9, together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Why do you think Jesus used the metaphor of a vine and branches to describe how a relationship with him works?
3. James tells us that God never changes, but does that mean that his methods for reaching us never change, or that our understanding of him can't change? Explain.
4. If you have heard Revelation 3:20 before, what have you been taught about it? Did you learn about a God who initiates and pursues us, or something else?
5. Why did Adam and Eve hide? God knew where they were hiding, right? So why ask, "Where are you?"

HEART

1. When you were growing up, were you taught about how to have a relationship with Jesus, or were you taught knowledge about Scripture, or both?
2. How do we remain in Jesus when our lives are so busy and full of noise?
3. What are some of the good gifts God has given you lately?
4. How do you define shame? Why does it make you hide from the One who seeks you with all his heart? How do we let go of shame?
5. Why do you think we, as people, struggle to be authentic with each other? With God?
6. God chases after us to restore our broken relationship, and ultimately to bring us back to a place where we will once again walk with him in a garden in the cool of the day. What does that picture and that hope mean to you? What's one thing you look forward to doing or asking or saying when you do get to walk with him in the garden?

HANDS

This week, try a spiritual practice that has been harder for you in the past. Do so to stretch yourself? Spend time learning about the practice in Scripture, do some outside reading and investigating, and try the practice for 7 days. Then reflect on what you learned and whether or not the practice opened you up to something new about yourself, or about God, or about others.

WORDS TO LIVE BY

27 *"His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. **28** For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your[[g](#)] own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'*

Acts 17:27-28, NLT

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WEEK 4

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPENING QUESTION

Share with the group a phrase someone younger than you uses that you don't understand, or a song you don't get, or a fashion trend that makes no sense to you? Does not understanding mean you aren't relevant? Discuss.

HEAD

1. Read Mark 3:13-15, John 14:1-7, John 18:33-37, Galatians 5:22-23, Acts 9:1-6, 19-20, John 13:34-35, together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. How did Jesus model the importance of "being with him" before going out to do things for him? Do you think it was hard for the disciples to "retreat" so much, as opposed to simply retaking the throne in Jerusalem?
3. Why do you think Pilate asked the question, "What is truth?" to Jesus when he did?
4. How did Paul change so quickly from seeking to stomp out the followers of Jesus, to being one of his biggest cheerleaders? Can you identify with the other Jesus' followers who were initially scared of Saul/Paul? What about those who were quick to accept him?

HEART

1. What are some of your favorite ways to "be with" Jesus? And why do you think Jesus would care more about your witness, than your witness?
2. Jesus' early followers were actually called "followers of the Way" before they were called, "Christians." Which title do you like better and why?
3. So often we seem to focus on fixing people's behavior, instead of simply leading them to Jesus and letting Jesus go to work in their lives (i.e. fruit). Why is it so much easier to focus on the external behaviors, rather than the internal fruit that leads to external change?
4. Jesus said we are to be known by our love. Does how we show his love to others ever change? Has it changed over the centuries?

HANDS

Here's a challenge for this week: Look at one of the highest grossing films in the last six months and ask yourself why you think people were so drawn to the story? What was it about the stories struggle or outcome that you think people identified with and why? If possible, find someone in your circle who saw it and ask them directly. Then, through this process, spend time in prayer asking God to reveal to you one way you could impact the life of someone around you based on what you learned.

WORDS TO LIVE BY

34 *"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."*
John 13:34-35, NLT

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WEEK 5

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPENING QUESTION

Have you ever had the opportunity to serve on a mission trip, or some kind of mission experience? If so, what did you do, where did you go, and how did it impact your life?

HEAD

1. Read Acts 2:42-47, Luke 7:11-15, Mark 12:41-44, John 4:1-30, Luke 15:1-2, together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. In Acts 2, what do you think compelled the people to take care of each other the way they did? And do you think that kind of community had a part in attracting people to Jesus, or was it strictly the Holy Spirit working in people, or both? Explain.
3. In Luke 7, Jesus heals the son of the widow and restores him to life, but obviously, he didn't heal or fix every ailment on earth when he was here. He had to do some picking and choosing, and as far as we know, he didn't do these things before he went public with his ministry. Do you think it was hard for Jesus not to just fix everything while he was here? Any ideas on why he didn't?
4. Why do you think the woman at the well in John 4 kept trying to change Jesus' focus off of herself and onto other issues or topics?
5. Did Jesus have to tell the woman to go to her village and witness to them about him? If not, why did she do it? What was her motivation? Remember, these were people who would have judged her harshly for her life choices.

HEART

1. What are some of the ways we can get distracted from following Jesus, and just follow our own agendas instead? How do we correct this if we find ourselves off track?
2. Who are some of the invisible people in our society today? How can we practice seeing the people that Jesus sees?
3. How do we go about tearing down fences and building more wells so more people have access to communities of belonging, and ultimately to Jesus, today?
4. Why do you think it was the sinners and outcasts that were so attracted to Jesus, whereas many of the wealthy and religious elite, attacked him?

HANDS

This week, I simply ask you to memorize and pray the prayer we shared this week from Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, "Lord, break my heart with the things that break your heart." Then schedule some time at the end of the week to see if you feel "moved with compassion" or your heart opening up to a group or a people or a cause that maybe wasn't there at the beginning of the week.

WORDS TO LIVE BY

*No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to **walk humbly** with your God.*

Micah 6:8, NLT

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WEEK 6

INTRODUCTION

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OPENING QUESTION

What's one of the best restaurant experiences you have ever had and what made it so special?

HEAD

1. Read John 13:1-17, Luke 10:38-42, Matthew 5:14-16, Matthew 20:24-28 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Why do you think it was so hard for Peter to let Jesus wash his feet and why didn't the other disciples complain?
3. When Jesus said to do for others what he had done for us, in John 13, do you think he meant to go and wash each other's feet? Explain.
4. In your reading of Luke 10:38-42, have you seen Martha as the "bad guy" and Mary as the "gone one" or how have you interpreted that story?
5. For those of us that are busy bodies, how do we slow down to plug in to Jesus so we are serving from a good heart instead of a dry well?
6. How do you and I draw attention to God instead of ourselves in our acts of service? We love the applause, so how can we learn to seek his applause above any other?

HEART

1. Footwashing is a beautiful practice and ritual that doesn't translate well into our culture today. What might be some alternative ways we could teach the principles Jesus taught through that ritual today?
2. How do you see groups seeking to hoard and flaunt power over others today?
3. Is power a bad thing, or is it us that's bad? Can power be a good thing? If so, how?
4. Are there tasks you do, at work, at home, or at church, that are not in your "job description" but that you do anyway? If not, could there be? If so, are there other ways you could seek to be a blessing and draw even more attention to God?

HANDS

This week, look for some ways to bless those around you whether that's at work, at home, or at church. And if you're willing to go the extra mile, try to do so anonymously so you're not getting the attention for those actions. It's amazing how serving anonymously can help us hear God's heartbeat a little more clearly.

WORDS TO LIVE BY

3 But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

4 Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Matthew 6:3-4, NLT