

# THE SANDS OF TIME

A SIX-WEEK GROUP STUDY ON BIBLICAL LESSONS FROM HISTORY

“The Sands of Time: Biblical Lessons from History”  
Copyright © 2020 by Shepherd Church

Requests for information should be addressed to:

**Shepherd Church**  
**Attention: Life Groups**  
**19700 Rinaldi St**  
**Porter Ranch, CA 91326**

Or email:

**[lifegroups@shepherdchurch.com](mailto:lifegroups@shepherdchurch.com)**

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes are taken  
from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®  
Copyright 1973, 1978, and 1984 by International Bible Society.  
Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishing House.  
All rights reserved.

Any website, book or other recommendations made by this  
book are offered as a resource to you.

We are in no way endorsing any of the resources, nor do we  
vouch for their content for the life of this book.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in  
any form or by any means -  
electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording,  
or any other without the prior permission of  
Shepherd Church.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to “ <b>The Sands of Time</b> ”	4
Meet the Speakers	5
Outline for Each Session	6
Life Group Agreement	7
<b>1</b> The Candlelight Painter	8
<b>2</b> The Mind of Magellan	17
<b>3</b> An Abolitionist’s Autobiography	26
<b>4</b> Washing Death From His Hands	35
<b>5</b> Miss Unsinkable	44
<b>6</b> The Tour Guide Spy	53
Becoming a Leader	62

# INTRODUCTION

Dear Life Group Member,

## **Why should I be in this group?**

Life Groups are designed to help you experience the life God has for you by helping you CONNECT with other believers, helping you GROW to be more like Christ, and making an IMPACT with the gospel.

Every time a group meets, they spend time connecting through building relationships, growing through a discussion-led Bible study, and making an impact by supporting each other through prayer and service. As a result, group members experience growth, belonging, and care. A Life Group is your chance to pursue healthy relationships and spiritual growth. You can't grow spiritually without connecting relationally.

## **How will this series help me?**

There's an old adage that is just plain true: "If we cannot learn from the past, then we are doomed to repeat it." That is why in this 6-week Life Group series, we will dive into some of the lesser-known stories of history in order to learn surprising lessons from Scripture. There is a spiritual practice that each of us needs to master: The practice of looking at the history of humanity through the lens of God's truth. Because when we read the stories of the past through the filter of God's Word, it transforms how we see our present and our future as well.

Over the course of this series, you will be surprised to see how the truths of God continue to appear throughout history in unexpected ways. Many of the stories you will hear during this series are filled with mystery, intrigue, adventure, and even some comedy. But all of them will teach us God's Word in a profound way.

## **What is my role in this group?**

As you attend a weekend service and participate in this Life Group series, you will be equipped to live the life that God desires for you. Of course, the bottom line is, it comes down to you. Only you can share in your group, pray about the things God is teaching you, and take action to allow Jesus to work in you and through you. Enjoy the encouragement and challenges that God desires as His grace abounds in your Life Group.

Sincerely,  
**Life Groups Team**

# MEET THE SPEAKERS

## **SHAWN WALDEN**

Born and raised in Oklahoma City, Shawn answered the call to ministry at the age of 12. He was ordained in 1988 and married his best friend, Susanne, in 1989. They were called to minister at Shepherd Church in January of 2000, where Shawn currently serves as Outreach Pastor. They have three grown children: Taeler, Katelyn and Caleb. Shawn received his Master of Arts in Biblical Studies from Grace University in Omaha, NE. His greatest loves in life are Jesus, his wife, his kids, and Oklahoma Sooners football.

## **DALE PENN**

Dale and his wife Karen have belonged to the Shepherd Church family for over 30 years. He owns a commercial insurance and privacy consulting firm. For many years, Dale and Karen have been actively involved at Shepherd Church, Hillcrest Christian School and Los Angeles Baptist (now Heritage Christian). Currently, Dale serves on the Board of Elders at Shepherd Church and attends the Woodland Hills campus. The Penn's have 5 children and 3 adorable grandchildren.

## **JEFF CRAVENS**

Jeff was born and raised in the San Fernando Valley and gave his life to Jesus at age 9. Jeff currently serves as the Worship Pastor for Shepherd Youth and Shepherd Young Adults, where he leads worship, teaches, and mentors future leaders. He has been happily married to his wife Jessica since 2012, and they had their first child, Nolan, in 2016. Jeff recently graduated from Hope International University receiving a Bachelor of Science in Ministry and Biblical Studies. He is always trying to grow and learn how to better serve Jesus and His church.

## **ADRIANNA CERVANTES**

Since a young age, Adrianna has sought to serve boldly wherever the Lord has planted her. She currently works full-time as the Programming Coordinator for Shepherd Youth and Shepherd Young Adults, where she leads worship, teaches, and coordinates youth and young adult programs. She is also a featured teacher for Christ in Youth. She is currently pursuing her Master's in Ministry at Hope International University in Spiritual Formation.

## **AMY FRIZZELL**

Amy is a wife to Dusty and a mom to Asher and Silas, and she loves supporting her family in any way she can. She and her husband have served at Shepherd Church for 15 years with Shepherd Youth and Shepherd Young Adults, and she currently leads a Life Group of young adult women. Amy graduated with a Master's in Elementary Education from St. Mary's University. She enjoys cooking, gardening, and hanging out with youth and young adults at Shepherd Church.

# OUTLINE FOR EACH SESSION

Every session is structured to reflect the values of the Life Groups Ministry: Connect, Grow, and Impact. Therefore, the sessions are designed to help each group member connect with others, grow to be more like Christ, and impact the community with the gospel.

## **CONNECT**

The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. This section of each session is designed to allow group members to get to know each other. You can do this by using the icebreaker questions provided, or by asking light, easy-to-answer questions of your own that invite involvement from everyone.

To begin the session, play the Session Video.

## **GROW**

Together, you will process the video teaching you watched as a group. The focus is not gaining information, but on how we should live according to the Word of God. Each question is designed to apply insights from Scripture both practically and creatively, using your heart as well as your head. At the end of the day, our greatest aim is allowing the timeless truth from God's Word to transform us.

## **IMPACT**

This section is about putting what you learned into action and applying the insights and principles in the lesson. We ask that all groups perform a community project together at some point during each series. Many groups have found that they were able to make significant contributions to the community as well as a lasting impact on people's lives for Christ. This is also a good time to make an impact in each other's lives through prayer. We encourage you to provide time, if the schedule allows, for people to share their prayer requests and praise reports at the end of each session.

# LIFE GROUP AGREEMENT

Every group should put into words their shared values, expectations, and commitments. Such guidelines will help you avoid unspoken agendas and unmet expectations. We recommend that you discuss your guidelines in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience. Feel free to modify anything that does not work for your group.

## **We agree to the following values:**

**Clear Purpose** To encourage and challenge each other to live the life that God has called us to live (John 10:10 and Matthew 28:18-20).

**Group Attendance** To give priority to the group meeting (call if I am going to be absent or late).

**Safe Environment** To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes).

**Confidentiality** To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group.

**Spiritual Health** To give group members permission to help me live a healthy, balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God.

**Welcome Newcomers** To invite our friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers.

**Building Relationships** To get to know the other members of the group and pray for them regularly.

1

# **The Candlelight Painter**



**Each session will begin with a few questions to help you connect with and get to know one another. Since this may be your first time together (or since you may have new members), take a few minutes to make sure everyone knows each other.**

Would you consider yourself an “early bird” or a “night owl?”

Who is your favorite artist? What about their art do you find beautiful or inspiring?

**Play the “Session One: The Candlelight Painter” video.**

What stood out to you in the video?

“

**I think the real challenge  
for us is that if we  
are truly going to be  
like Jesus, then we too—  
after having been  
brought out of  
darkness—that we too  
will enter into the  
dark places of this  
world and help bring  
others out of the  
darkness into the light.**

SHAWN WALDEN

**In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussion to apply insights from this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few questions to discuss in your group.**

**Read John 1:1-14 & John 9:1-12**

1. Describe a time in your life when you experienced a “light bulb moment,” when you received a burst of insight or when you suddenly “connected the dots.” What was it like to see the world in a new light?

2. What does it mean when the Bible says that Jesus is the “light of the world?” How does Jesus bring illumination to our world?

3. Why do you think John says that the darkness does not understand the light? In what ways do people who live in darkness misunderstand the truth of Jesus Christ? Why might those living in darkness even avoid the light of Christ?

4. Tell about a person from your life or from history who was changed by the light of Christ. What did the light expose in their life? How did their lives change as a result of being transformed in Christ?

## **Read John 3:16-21 & 1 John 1:5-7**

5. On a piece of paper, describe the experience of a person who is living in spiritual darkness. What do they feel? What is their daily life like? Then, describe the experience of a person living in the light. Compare the two lists.

6. What does a person experience when they are exposed to the light? In what ways might stepping into the light of Christ be painful? In what ways might it bring relief?

7. Why might believers continue to walk in darkness during the Christian life? How does walking in the darkness prevent them from growing in Christ? How might walking in the darkness hinder them from telling others about the gospel?

8. How did your life change when you stepped into the light of Christ? What has the light of Christ exposed in your life?

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

### Read Matthew 5:13-16 & Ephesians 5:8-20

9. Why does Jesus use the symbols of salt, light, and a city on a hill to describe his followers? What was Jesus telling us?

10. In the verses from Ephesians, Paul says that we were once identified as “darkness.” How are those who live in darkness actually part of the darkness itself? How are those who live in light actually part of the light itself?

## A PRAYER FOR THE PRESENT

Each week during this series, we will provide a simple prayer exercise that you can use either in a group or on your own. While looking into the stories of the past, we need to ensure we are also dealing with the challenges of the present. Prayer and meditation are wonderful resources for connecting to and relying on God, especially during seasons when the world does not make sense.

When faced with an uncertain future, we typically allow worry and anxiety to take over our lives. However, it is liberating to know that we are not enslaved by our worries and that we can actually step away from them. Use the following prayer and meditation to begin stepping away from fear and stepping into the arms of a comforting Father.

- 1** Read Philippians 4:6-7. After reading these words, close your eyes and spend a few moments in silence, focusing on nothing but the sound of your breath. When you reach a moment of stillness, imagine you are sitting next to Jesus. In a calm voice, he says, “I am here with you.” Focus on the sound of his voice and on his presence.
- 2** Imagine that your worries and anxieties are a heavy coat that sits upon your shoulders. Focus on the weight of the coat and how it constricts you. After a few moments, envision Jesus asking you to remove the coat and to hand it over to him. Feel the weight leave your shoulders as you remove the coat and give it to Jesus. Meditate on how our worries are merely thoughts that we can remove like a coat.
- 3** Silently focus on this line based on Philippians 4:7, “The peace of God rises above all thoughts.” As you breathe in and out, consider this truth. Speak with the Lord about what it means and how you might step away from your anxious thoughts and into his peace.
- 4** Close your prayer by thanking God for the times He has removed your worries in the past and for everything He has provided. After you close your prayer, discuss either in your group or with a loved one what you experienced.

## REWRITING YOUR HISTORY

As we look back at the stories of history, we should remember that each of us has a history as well. Each of us has a story that we tell to ourselves ... about ourselves. Some of these stories are good, nourished by the grace and goodness of God. But some of these stories are unhealthy, claiming we are unworthy of God's love and that we have no value.

The stories we tell ourselves guide how we live. Therefore, we should become familiar with these stories, so that we might have an opportunity to rewrite them. During each week for this series, we will provide a simple prompt and an opportunity to journal and rewrite the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.

- 1** What is a wrong or a hurt that someone committed against you in the past? How did that wrong impact you at the time? How has that wrong continued to affect you into the present?
  
- 2** How have you tried to forgive the person who committed that wrong against you? How have you discovered freedom for yourself through forgiveness?
  
- 3** How might God use the hurt and the pain of your past to transform you in the present? How did God bring you through that difficult period of your life and strengthen you as a result?

# PRAYER AND PRAISE

**This is a place where you can write each other's prayer requests and make notes when God answers prayer. Pray for each other's requests out loud together as a group. If you're new to group prayer, you may pray silently.**

## **Prayer Requests**

## **Praise Reports**



2

**The Mind of  
Magellan**

**Each session will begin with a few questions to help you connect with and get to know one another.**

If you had limitless financial resources, what would you use it to discover?

If you were to sail around the world, what would you name your boat?

**Play the “Session Two: The Mind of Magellan” video.**

What stood out to you in the video?

“

**Our mandate as Jesus followers is clear.**

**When we look at others who may be different from us, we should not see something terrifying or inhuman. Instead, we need to see the very image of God within them.**

DALE PENN

**In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussion to apply insights from this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few questions to discuss in your group.**

**Read Matthew 14:13-21**

1. The word “compassion” in these verses can also be translated to mean “a deep feeling of emotion in your stomach.” When was the last time you experienced an emotion so strong you felt it in your stomach? What thought or memory causes a strong emotion like this?

2. Even though Jesus needed to be alone, he still had compassion upon the people who needed his help. How does God call us to sacrifice our needs in order to serve those who need help?

3. In this story, the disciples gave an excuse to Jesus for why they could not feed those hungry men, women, and children. How do our potential limitations keep us from meeting the needs of others? What obstacles prevent us from helping those who are in need?

4. Describe a time in your life when you were in need and received compassion or help from someone. How did that act of compassion move you to show compassion to others?

## **Read Luke 10:25-37**

5. Imagine you are the priest or the Levite in Jesus' parable. What reasons might you have for avoiding the beaten man on the side of the road? How do those reasons compare to God's command to love others?

6. How did the Samaritan go above and beyond the call of duty to help the man on the side of the road? What lessons can we learn from his example for how we might go above and beyond to help others?

7. According to these verses, the second greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself." Why should we show compassion to ourselves? Why is it essential for showing compassion to others? How does seeing the humanity within ourselves help us to see the humanity within others?

8. How do you believe God is calling you to show compassion in your community? What obstacles stand in your way from sharing the love of Christ? How will you overcome them?

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

### Read Genesis 1:26-27 & Galatians 3:26-28

9. According to these verses, humanity was made in God's image. How does this truth help us find compassion for others? How does this idea change the way we see other people?

10. In the verses from Galatians, the apostle Paul teaches that our differences disappear when we are united in Christ. How does Christ unite us to move beyond our differences?

## A PRAYER FOR THE PRESENT

Times of trouble provide us with a unique advantage; they give us an opportunity to see ourselves in a new light. In the midst of normal life, we cannot always identify the deep motives that drive us. That is why we often need occasions to step away from the norm and view ourselves with clear eyes.

As believers, we need to develop the spiritual practice of seeing ourselves from a distance, so that we can examine ourselves and test our motives. By doing so, we can look at ourselves from different perspectives—from the point of view of our friends, our family, or even our opponents. Use the following prayer and meditation to step away from yourself and to conduct a personal inventory.

- 1** Read Proverbs 20:5. After reading these words, close your eyes and spend a few moments in silence, focusing on nothing but the sound of your breath. When you reach a moment of stillness, imagine you are sitting next to Jesus. In a calm voice, he says, “I am here with you.” Focus on the sound of his voice and on his presence.
- 2** Picture your heart as a deep well. You and Jesus stand next to each other in front of this well. Together, you lower a bucket into the well and then pull it up. You know that no matter what comes up from the depths, Jesus’ love for you will not waver. What do you bring up from the well? Speak to the Lord about this.
- 3** Silently focus on this line from Proverbs 20:5, “A person of wisdom draws out their purpose.” As you breathe in and out, consider this truth. Speak with the Lord about what it means.
- 4** Close your prayer by thanking God for what He has revealed to you and for everything He has provided. Ask the Lord to continue to open the depths of your thoughts and to understand your own heart. After you close your prayer, discuss either in your group or with a loved one what you experienced.

## REWRITING YOUR HISTORY

Each of us has a story that we tell ourselves ... about ourselves. Some of these stories are good, nourished by the grace and goodness of God. But some of these stories are unhealthy, claiming we are unworthy of God's love and that we have no value. Use the following prompts as an opportunity to journal, to identify the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and to rewrite those stories in a profound way.

- 1** What is a sin you have struggled with throughout your life? How long have you struggled with it? How has that sin affected the way you view yourself? How does God view you despite your sin?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2** What longing or desire do you think you are trying to fulfill when you commit that sin? How might you be satisfying a good need in a bad way? Does your sin ultimately meet that need?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3** How can the love of God meet your needs in a way sin cannot? How might you replace the unsatisfying sin in your life by following the way of Christ?



# PRAYER AND PRAISE

**This is a place where you can write each other's prayer requests and make notes when God answers prayer. Pray for each other's requests out loud together as a group. If you're new to group prayer, you may pray silently.**

## **Prayer Requests**

## **Praise Reports**

# 3

**An Abolitionist's  
Autobiography**

**Each session will begin with a few questions to help you connect with and get to know one another.**

If you were able to read the personal journal of any character from history, whose would you choose?

If you wrote an autobiography, what would the title be?

**Play the “Session Three: An Abolitionist’s Autobiography” video.**

What stood out to you in the video?

**“**

**Your story may  
be the key to  
someone else's  
freedom.**

**So I encourage  
you to tell your  
story and be  
amazed at what  
Jesus can do.**

**JEFF CRAVENS**

**In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussion to apply insights from this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few questions to discuss in your group.**

**Read Romans 5:3-5 & 2 Corinthians 11:23-12:10**

1. Share a time when you learned from the struggles of someone else's life. Why is it important for us as believers to listen and connect to what others have gone through?

2. Imagine you are the apostle Paul, the author of these verses, remembering all of the difficulties you've endured throughout your life. Why would those memories cause you to rejoice? Why do you think Paul asks us to rejoice in our sufferings?

3. Why does the Bible say that suffering produces perseverance? How can times of difficulty and struggle create anything positive for us? How can followers of Jesus learn to become tenacious through tough seasons?

4. How does perseverance produce character? Describe a person either from your life or from history who developed character through persistence and resolve.

5. How does character produce hope? How can practicing daily spiritual disciplines—like prayer and reading Scripture—give us courage to look to the future and expect God will work mighty things?

6. Why does Paul say that hope will not disappoint us? How have you personally found hope through difficult times?

### **Read 2 Timothy 1:8-12**

7. Why might people be ashamed to testify about how the gospel has changed their lives? On the other hand, why might people be confident?

8. How can your story be the key to someone else's prison? How might the freedom you've found in Christ prove to be the freedom for someone else? How will you take steps this week to share your testimony?

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

### Read Isaiah 61:1-11 & Luke 4:14-21

9. According to these verses, how does God liberate people from the shackles that hold them? Which of these verses struck you personally? What did you read in these verses that brought you joy?

10. In the verses from Luke, Jesus claimed that the words in Isaiah 61 were written about him. How does Jesus free us from what enslaves us?

## A PRAYER FOR THE PRESENT

During times of difficulty, believers may have trouble staying engaged and present in the moment. When the present is too painful, we often seek escape, either through reminiscing about the past or daydreaming about what could happen in the future. In fact, you can see this effect yourself by trying to stay present for thirty seconds. You will soon find your mind bouncing around, recalling memories from the past or playing out future scenarios.

For Christians, the practice of staying in the present moment is known by another name: joy. As we read in the Scriptures, joy is not based on our situation in life. It is based on our inward attitude, a willingness to interact with everything around us, no matter how difficult it might be. Use the following prayer and meditation to begin developing an ability to find joy in the moment without retreating to the past or the future.

- 1** Read James 1:2-3. After reading these words, close your eyes and spend a few moments in silence, focusing on nothing but the sound of your breath. When you reach a moment of stillness, imagine you are sitting next to Jesus. In a calm voice, he says, “I am here with you.” Focus on the sound of his voice and on his presence.
- 2** As you envision Jesus sitting with you, imagine he is holding a gift. Focus on how the gift is wrapped, on the colors of the packaging and the bow. Pay attention to how Jesus holds the gift in his hands. When you find your mind wandering, gently lead your attention back to the gift. Notice as many details about the gift as you can. Consider what the gift might be.
- 3** Silently focus on this line based on James 1:2, “All of this is joy.” As you breathe in and out, consider this truth. Speak with the Lord about what it means and how we might count all things as joy and as gifts for us, even the tough seasons of life.
- 4** Close your prayer by thanking God for spending time with you and for everything He has provided. Ask the Lord to continue to pour joy into your life despite what may be happening around you. After finishing your prayer, discuss either in your group or with a loved one what you experienced.



## REWRITING YOUR HISTORY

Each of us has a story that we tell ourselves ... about ourselves. Some of these stories are good, nourished by the grace and goodness of God. But some of these stories are unhealthy, claiming we are unworthy of God's love and that we have no value. Use the following prompts as an opportunity to journal, to identify the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and to rewrite those stories in a profound way.

- 1** What is a habit or a pattern in your life that you believe is holding you back from unleashing your full potential in God's Kingdom? How did that habit or pattern begin? How long have you struggled with it?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2** How do you think this unhealthy habit or pattern helps you? How does it protect you? How does it allow you to avoid discomfort?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3** How might God meet the need that your habit or pattern tries to meet? How might you be able to replace your habit with a healthy spiritual practice?

# PRAYER AND PRAISE

**This is a place where you can write each other's prayer requests and make notes when God answers prayer. Pray for each other's requests out loud together as a group. If you're new to group prayer, you may pray silently.**

## **Prayer Requests**

## **Praise Reports**

4

**Washing Death  
From His Hands**

**Each session will begin with a few questions to help you connect with and get to know one another.**

On a normal day, how many times do you think you wash your hands?

If you could instantly introduce a giant breakthrough for medicine, what would it be?

**Play the “Session Four: Washing Death From His Hands” video.**

What stood out to you in the video?

“

**We bring a message  
of eternal life,  
and we must continue  
no matter the cost.  
No matter how much  
the world turns  
away, we must keep  
preaching the good  
news... because there  
is no other way by  
which we can truly  
be clean.**

ADRIANNA CERVANTES

**In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussion to apply insights from this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few questions to discuss in your group.**

**Read Matthew 27:11-26**

1. Describe a time when you were part of a crowd. What was it like to be part of something bigger than yourself? How can it be exhilarating? How can being part of a crowd be dangerous?

2. Barabbas was a notorious murderer, and Jesus was a nonviolent rabbi. As a group, list some possible reasons why the crowd chose to free Barabbas on that day rather than Jesus.

3. Imagine you were standing in the midst of the crowd on that day, watching Jesus' trial before Pilate. Would you follow the crowd that day and chant "crucify him?" Or would you stand up for Jesus? Why?

4. Imagine you were Pilate, faced with a difficult decision. You could either free a clearly innocent man or keep the peace in Jerusalem by condemning him to death. If you were in Pilate's sandals, what would you decide to do? Why?

5. Imagine you were Barabbas on that day, having been freed from all your crimes. How would you feel? What would be the first thing you'd do that day?

6. What do you think Jesus felt when he heard Barabbas' name called instead of his name? How do we find the courage to bring a message of salvation, knowing that many will reject us?

### **Read Matthew 21:33-46**

7. Why did the chief priests and the Pharisees want to punish Jesus for telling this story? In your opinion, why didn't they listen Jesus' warning and change their ways? Why might we look to punish those who preach truth to us rather than make a change in our lives?

8. According to this parable, each of us has a responsibility to accept Jesus rather than reject him. How are you choosing to accept Jesus daily? What does that look like in your everyday life?

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

### Read Mark 7:1-23

9. In this story, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law enforce a cruel tradition not taught in the Bible—that Jewish people should wash their hands before eating a meal in case they came into physical contact with a Gentile (a non-Jewish person). On the other hand, there are numerous health benefits to washing your hands before a meal. According to this story, why does the intention behind an action matter so much?

10. How do our human traditions conflict with the message of God today? How can we get past what we are so certain is true in order to hear the truth of God?



## A PRAYER FOR THE PRESENT

One of the most famous prayers ever written was the Serenity Prayer, developed by Reinhold Niebuhr during the 1930s. The prayer begins with this familiar line: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

One of the most powerful forces in a believer’s life is acceptance, the realization that there are things in this world that we cannot change or control. During his ministry, Jesus often debated with the Pharisees, who sought to control every aspect of the religious life. In response to that, Jesus taught that his way of life was easy and his burden was light.

The truth is that there is much we cannot control, and in order to find a life of joy and freedom in the present, we must learn to accept what is beyond us and embrace the easy burden to which Jesus calls us. Either as a group or on your own, use the following prayer to accept the difficulties of life with grace.

- 1** Read Matthew 11:28-30. After reading these words, close your eyes and spend a few moments in silence, focusing on nothing but the sound of your breath. When you reach a moment of stillness, imagine you are sitting next to Jesus. In a calm voice, he says, “I am here with you.” Focus on the sound of his voice and on his presence.
- 2** Imagine you are dragging a heavy burden, a bag full of all the issues in your life and the issues in the lives of your loved ones and all the problems of the world. Focus on what is inside that bag, everything you wish you could control. And then imagine that Jesus touches you on the shoulder and says, “Leave it behind, and follow me.” How does it feel to let go of that burden?
- 3** Silently focus on this line from Matthew 11:30, “My burden is light.” As you breathe in and out, consider this truth. Speak with the Lord about what it means and how we might accept the difficulties of life and allow their weight to fade away.
- 4** Close your prayer by thanking God for spending time with you and for everything He has provided. Ask the Lord to continue to pour joy into your life despite what may be happening around you. After you close your prayer, discuss either in your group or with a loved one what you experienced.

## REWRITING YOUR HISTORY

Each of us has a story that we tell ourselves ... about ourselves. Some of these stories are good, nourished by the grace and goodness of God. But some of these stories are unhealthy, claiming we are unworthy of God's love and that we have no value. Use the following prompts as an opportunity to journal, to identify the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and to rewrite those stories in a profound way.

- 1** What is a regret or a mistake you made in the past that you still think about in the present? What causes the regret? How has that past regret affected the way you view yourself today?
  
- 2** Step outside of yourself for a moment and imagine you are one of your close friends. Write a letter to comfort and console yourself.
  
- 3** How could the Almighty and All-Powerful God transform your regret and the mistakes of your past into something good for you in the present? How has God already transformed you and used past regrets to strengthen you?

# PRAYER AND PRAISE

**This is a place where you can write each other's prayer requests and make notes when God answers prayer. Pray for each other's requests out loud together as a group. If you're new to group prayer, you may pray silently.**

## **Prayer Requests**

## **Praise Reports**

**5**

**Miss  
Unsinkable**

**Each session will begin with a few questions to help you connect with and get to know one another.**

If you were shipwrecked on a desert island, what are the three most important items you would keep with you?

What is one quirky fact about you that people don't typically know?

**Play the "Session Five: Miss Unsinkable" video.**

What stood out to you in the video?

“

**Our character is  
cumulative. And  
when we choose  
to constantly  
work on improving  
our character,  
that is how we can  
strive toward being  
unsinkable.**

AMY FRIZZELL

**In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussion to apply insights from this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few questions to discuss in your group.**

**Read 2 Peter 1:3-11**

1. Share about someone from your life whom you would say is a person of character. How have they shown character?

2. From the list of character virtues we see in these verses, what would you say is your strength? How has God developed that strength in you over time?

3. From that same list, what would you say is an area of growth for you? How is God currently developing you in this area?

4. How has your character in Christ grown over the past ten years? How has God developed you and formed you over a long period of time?

## **Read Matthew 7:24-27 & Matthew 14:22-36**

5. Imagine you are the disciple Peter. Jesus is asking you to step out of the boat. What would be going through your mind? What would you choose to do?

6. What happens when we accept that the storms of life will come and that they are out of our control? How do we find comfort through acceptance of tough times?

7. How do the teachings of Christ help us withstand the storms of life? How does listening to God help us keep our heads above the waves?

8. Share a storm from your life that required trust in God. How did your character help you stand firm? How did God help you walk through that storm?



## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

### Read Proverbs 10:1-32

9. The teachings of wisdom in the Proverbs are meant to provide guidance in the midst of life's uncertainties. How might these verses give direction to believers during unstable times?

10. In verse 9, the Bible says that a person of integrity walks securely or on firm ground. How does a life of integrity and truthfulness keep us on firm footing?

## A PRAYER FOR THE PRESENT

When we encounter tough times, we may struggle to know what we ought to do. Uncertainty can paralyze us. What choice should I make? Where should I focus my time? What am I supposed to do?

Many wise Christian teachers have offered the following advice: When you don't know what to do, simply take the next right step. However, knowing the next right step and taking it may not be so easy. Either in a group or on your own, use the following prayer and meditation to determine the next right step and then find the courage to take it.

- 1** Read Matthew 14:27. After reading these words, close your eyes and spend a few moments in silence, focusing on nothing but the sound of your breath. When you reach a moment of stillness, imagine you are sitting next to Jesus. In a calm voice, he says, "I am here with you." Focus on the sound of his voice and on his presence.
- 2** Imagine you are Peter, standing in a boat and looking at Jesus walking on top of the water. The waves crash around you. The storm howls. Jesus asks you to step out of the boat and walk toward him. Imagine how it feels to step out onto the water. What is the current storm you are facing? What would it mean to step onto the water?
- 3** Silently focus on this line adapted from Matthew 14:27, "Take courage, and do not be afraid." As you breathe in and out, consider this truth. Speak with the Lord about what it means and how you can take the next right step in your life.
- 4** Close your prayer by thanking God for what He has revealed to you and for everything He has provided. Ask the Lord to continue to give you courage to take the next right step. After you close your prayer, discuss either in your group or with a loved one what you experienced.

## REWRITING YOUR HISTORY

Each of us has a story that we tell ourselves ... about ourselves. Some of these stories are good, nourished by the grace and goodness of God. But some of these stories are unhealthy, claiming we are unworthy of God's love and that we have no value. Use the following prompts as an opportunity to journal, to identify the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and to rewrite those stories in a profound way.

- 1** What would you say were the goals of your past? What was your life pointed toward? As you grew up, how did the purpose and the striving of your life change?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2** What would you say is the goal of your life today? If you conducted an audit and looked at the amount of time and money you spend on a monthly or annual basis, what would you learn? What is the current priority of your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3** What is the purpose to which you believe God is calling you? If you lived completely dedicated to that purpose, how would your life change? Spend some time writing about what a normal day would be like if you were living it to fulfill the purpose to which God has called you.

# PRAYER AND PRAISE

**This is a place where you can write each other's prayer requests and make notes when God answers prayer. Pray for each other's requests out loud together as a group. If you're new to group prayer, you may pray silently.**

## **Prayer Requests**

## **Praise Reports**

6

**The Tour Guide  
Spy**

**Each session will begin with a few questions to help you connect with and get to know one another.**

Have you ever gone into training for a sport or a job? What was the process of training like?

What is an uncommonly known story or fact from history that you happen to know?

**Play the “Session Six: The Tour Guide Sky” video.**

What stood out to you in the video?

“

**I want to challenge  
you to live your life  
in such a way that  
serves others, loves  
others, even if no  
one ever notices.  
Claim this promise  
that God Himself  
sees and He  
will reward you.**

SHAWN WALDEN

**In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussion to apply insights from this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few questions to discuss in your group.**

**Read John 15:1-17 & 1 John 3:11-24**

1. Describe a memory of someone sacrificing for you or serving you. What happens when you remember that act of compassion?

2. How can sacrificing for others bring us total and complete joy? How might the world today disagree with that message?

3. Is it possible to share the love of Christ without remaining in Christ? Why or why not? What do you think would happen if someone tried to share the love of Christ without actually spending time with Christ?

4. The apostle John brings up the story of Cain, who killed his brother Abel because he was jealous of him and compared himself to him. How does comparison prevent us from loving others? How can we stop comparing ourselves to others?



## **Read Matthew 6:1-18**

5. Imagine you are a Jewish man or woman during the time of Jesus. You witness a religious teacher make a big show as he gives an extreme amount of wealth to the poor. Then, he delivers a long-winded prayer on a street corner as everyone around him listens. How would you feel as you watched this? Would those actions inspire you to give and pray as well? Why or why not?

6. Why do people want to receive recognition for their good works? What motive stirs us to seek the praise of others?

7. Why does Jesus teach us to conduct our good deeds in privacy rather than in public? Why is it essential that we give and pray and fast in secret?

8. What are some creative ways in which we can bless others without telling them about it?

## DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

### Read Luke 9:18-27 & Luke 9:57-62

9. The word for “deny yourself” in Luke 9:23 can also mean “to say no to yourself.” What does Jesus mean when he asks us to say no to ourselves? How do we strike a healthy balance between meeting our real needs and also denying ourselves?

10. In these verses, Jesus tells potential followers that the mission of the gospel is more important than even having a home and spending time with family. Why does Jesus go to such an extreme degree to communicate the importance of following Him?

## A PRAYER FOR THE PRESENT

Whenever we endure difficulties in the present, we need to make sure we are heading in the right direction. If you were the captain of a ship, you would set a course for land if a storm were coming your way. Nothing would be as disastrous as getting hit by a storm the very moment you realized you were off course. As the troubles of life heap up, we must ensure we are not adding to them and making our lives harder than they need to be.

In order to determine if we are heading in the right direction, we must value what Christ values. After all, our values determine the direction of our lives. If we value wealth, then we will pursue wealth. If we value power, then we will pursue power. But if we value Christ and His Kingdom, then we will pursue Christ and His Kingdom, and we will find eternal life as a result.

Use the following prayer as a meditation to assess what is valuable in your life and to confirm it lines up with what Christ values.

- 1** Read Philippians 4:8. After reading these words, close your eyes and spend a few moments in silence, focusing on nothing but the sound of your breath. When you reach a moment of stillness, imagine you are sitting next to Jesus. In a calm voice, he says, “I am here with you.” Focus on the sound of his voice and on his presence.
- 2** Imagine you are walking with Christ along a path through the woods. The path twists and turns. You come to a fork in the road. You want to go in one direction, but Jesus wants to go in a different direction. What does the fork in the road represent to you? How does it feel to walk on a path apart from Jesus? What is it like to walk together with Him?
- 3** Return to Philippians 4:8. Consider each line thoughtfully. How can we value the truth of Christ? The nobility of Christ? The love of Christ? Spend a few moments on each line, considering how your might take the path that Christ takes and value what he values.
- 4** Close your prayer by thanking God for walking alongside you and for everything He has provided. Ask the Lord to continue to guide you and to reveal what He values to you. After you close your prayer, discuss either in your group or with a loved one what you experienced.

## REWRITING YOUR HISTORY

Each of us has a story that we tell ourselves ... about ourselves. Some of these stories are good, nourished by the grace and goodness of God. But some of these stories are unhealthy, claiming we are unworthy of God's love and that we have no value. Use the following prompts as an opportunity to journal, to identify the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and to rewrite those stories in a profound way.

- 1** After thinking through your previous journaling sessions during this series, what is the story you told yourself about yourself in the past? How did you see yourself? How has that story continued into the present?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2** If God were to tell the story of you, what would He say? How would He describe you? How would He show His love for you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3** What do you want to be the story of your life? Imagine you were writing the autobiography of a life you haven't yet lived. What would be the major movements of your life? How would God's love impact that story?

# PRAYER AND PRAISE

**This is a place where you can write each other's prayer requests and make notes when God answers prayer. Pray for each other's requests out loud together as a group. If you're new to group prayer, you may pray silently.**

## **Prayer Requests**

## **Praise Reports**

# BECOMING A LEADER

## What does it take to be a leader?

Have a heart for people.

Open to hosting people in your home or online.

Serve some coffee or soft drinks.

Tell others about the group!

All you need is a desire to apply the Bible to your life, as well as a desire to share it with others. The group does not have to meet at your home, and you do not have to have a Bible college degree to lead. You only need some basic people skills and a drive to grow in the Lord. You could even lead your group virtually using Zoom or FaceTime! The tools are easy to use, and we can instruct you on how to lead a virtual Life Group.

## How can you become a leader?

First, you must be a member of Shepherd Church. To become a member, you must complete the **101: Saved in Christ** class. These classes are usually about two hours long and are offered every two months. You may call the church office at **818.831.9333** to find out when the next class will be held. You may also visit: **[shepherdchurch.com/member](http://shepherdchurch.com/member)**

Second, you need to sign-up for the New Life Group Leader Training. It is a two-hour training and orientation on Life Groups. Here you will learn the philosophy of Life Groups and how to effectively begin leading a group. Completing this course does not obligate you, but does allow you to become a new leader. To register online and find more information, please visit: **[lifegroups.org/leader](http://lifegroups.org/leader)**