

VICTORY HILL WINTER-SPRING SMALL GROUP SEMESTER

Belong.

Finding Your Place & Purpose

By Chad Hunt

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“For I know the plans I have for you,”
declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you
and not to harm you, plans to give you hope
and a future. **Jeremiah 29:11**

Prologue

When I was entering sixth grade, my parents bought a home in a different school district, which resulted in changing schools. It felt strange to leave all of my friends and familiars, only to walk through the doors of a new school where nothing or no one was familiar.

I wasn't sure how this was going to go. Would I make new friends? Would I be the last person picked for the dodgeball team (no one wants to be that person)? I wasn't sure how or where I would belong in these new surroundings.

I think we have all experienced those moments, when we weren't sure how everything was going to play out. As adults, we still experience times like this. Starting a new job, moving to a new neighborhood, or attending a new church can certainly create moments of anxiety. Even joining a small group for the first time can be a little scary. Will I fit in? Do I belong here? What's my role? If such moments create stress, why not opt out of belonging or finding purpose? Why not live in the land of isolation?

The answer is simple. God created us to belong. He wired us to get stuff done. His idea of belonging is much deeper than simply being a part of a group. He wants each of us to have a deep relationship with Jesus and one another. And he wants our relationships to be lived out with passion and purpose. His purpose.

During this study, we are going to learn about men and women who found their place and their purpose. We'll identify with their struggles and wrestle with some the same convictions they wrestled with. We will also learn about the gifts and tools that God offers us to walk in our purpose.

God chose us to serve him and live out His purpose, even before the earth was created. The Bible says, "Even before he made the world, God **loved us** and **chose us** in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes." Ephesians 1:4 NLT

1. Being Secure in your Own Skin

1 Samuel 17:38-49 NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

Feeling insecure can be one of the worst feelings ever. Insecurity can cause people to do foolish things and/or make bad decisions. And sometimes, it can result in missed opportunities. In our story, we will learn about a young man named David. David's story is one that is threaded throughout the Old and New Testament. We first meet David as a teenager, where he had to make a decision to trust God, despite the odds that seemed to be stacked against him.

Throughout the Old Testament, God led his people through the mouths of leaders and prophets. In the book of 1 Samuel, there is a paradigm shift. In chapter eight, the Israelites petition Samuel (a prophet) saying, "We want a [flesh and blood] king like all the other nations" (8:4). Despite Samuel's disapproval, they persist and get what they asked for. A man named Saul is appointed as the first king of Israel. Saul, however, did not make good choices. As a result, God told Samuel to go to the house of Jesse, and there, he would find a new king for Israel. This is where we first meet David (1 Samuel 16).

When Samuel arrived, he asked Jesse to bring out his sons. When Samuel saw Jesse's strong-looking son, Eliab, he said, "Surely this is the Lord's anointed!" But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. **The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.**" (1 Samuel 16:6-7 NLT). After the rejection of all seven sons, Jesse was instructed to call on his last son, David, who was shepherding in the fields. When Samuel saw David, God said, "He's the one!" The Bible says, "So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah." (1 Samuel 16:13 NLT).

Although he was named and anointed as the next king, David did not instantly take the throne. He was invited to play music for King Saul, but other than that, he was still shepherding his father's sheep and goats.

In 1 Samuel 17, David is instructed by his father to take food to his brothers who are serving in the Army of Israel. Now the anointed-shepherd-king is transitioned into an Uber Eats delivery boy for his older brothers. I would probably be thinking, "But I'm supposed to be king, not a delivery boy!" But not David. His heart remains humble. When David arrives at the camp, he learns that Israel and Philistia have been standing toe to toe for forty days (1 Samuel 17:16). The Philistines have a warrior named Goliath, who has been strutting before the armies of Israel, daring anyone to challenge him. When David learns about what's going on, he becomes involved in the conversation, and offers to fight the giant. David's brother scolds him, asking, "Why are you even here?" (1 Samuel 17:28). Yet, David persists and is allowed to fight...and this is where our story begins.

2. TELL THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3. READ THE STORY

"Then Saul gave David his own armor—a bronze helmet and a coat of mail. David put it on, strapped the sword over it, and took a step or two to see what it was like, for he had never worn such things before. "I can't go in these," he protested to Saul. "I'm not used to them." So David took them off again. He picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them into his shepherd's bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd's staff and sling, he started across the valley to fight the Philistine. Goliath walked out toward David with his shield bearer ahead of him, sneering in contempt at this ruddy-faced boy. "Am I a dog," he roared at David, "that you come at me with a stick?" And he cursed David by the names of his gods.

"Come over here, and I'll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!" Goliath yelled. David replied to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven's Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And everyone assembled here will know that the Lord rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the Lord's battle, and he will give you to us!" As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd's bag and taking out a stone, he hurled it with his sling and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in, and Goliath stumbled and fell face down on the ground." 1 Samuel 17:38-49 NLT

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. What makes you feel the most insecure? How do you respond to insecurity?
- B. In our introduction, we learn David wasn't a candidate for king. Even his own father did not call him until Samuel instructed him to do so. Has there ever been a time in your life where you were overlooked or passed on? How did that make you feel? How did you respond?
- C. Although David was given Saul's armor, he had to give it back. It wasn't designed for him. Has there ever been a time where you felt like you were being asked to "wear someone's armor?" (e.g. "you should be more like your brother, you can't do this on your own, you have to do it my way...")

- D. David picked up five smooth stones for his slingshot that would eventually bring Goliath down. David's slingshot experience wasn't acquired in military training; it was learned by protecting sheep and goats while shepherding. He wasn't secure with the armor, but he was with his slingshot. What special skills or gifts has God **developed in your life**? How can these be used to make a difference in the lives of others?
- E. As David approached the Giant, he said, "Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head." In other words, God had His part to do and David had his. What does this mean to you? How can understanding this principle help you **find and follow** your God-given purpose?

2. Pursuing Your Purpose

Matthew 8:18-22, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

So often people ask, “How do I find my purpose? How am I supposed to know what I am called to do? As a pastor, I have used spiritual gift assessments to help people discover how God has wired them. Honestly, I am not a fan of those. In my experience, discovering purpose happens best when you answer the question, “What am I passionate about?” Almost always, purpose follows passion. However, there is a next step after identifying our passion and purpose; we have to pursue it. Pursuing purpose requires two actions most people aren’t comfortable with; stepping outside of our comfort zone and dying to self. The enemy will always whisper, “You can’t do it! You’re not smart enough! You don’t know enough about the Bible to serve in the church! You don’t have enough time!” When we give in to such thoughts, we instantly go from making the right decision to making excuses. The end result is missing an opportunity to be used by God.

In our story, we meet a couple of people who want to follow Jesus. Jesus’ reply instantly reveals two important principles that speak to walking in the purpose and plan God has called us to.

2. TELL THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3. READ THE STORY

“When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he instructed his disciples to cross to the other side of the lake. Then one of the teachers of religious law said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” But Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head.”

Another of his disciples said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.” But Jesus told him, “Follow me now. Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead.””Matthew 8:18-22 NLT

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. What are you most passionate about? Which area of belonging and/or serving best aligns with your passion?
- B. Attending church is certainly a part of following Jesus, but attendance isn't the end all. What are other attributes or examples of following Jesus?
- C. Describe your first experience of getting involved in the church (serving, groups, speaking, etc). What were your fears? If you aren't currently involved, what are your fears?
- D. Describe a time in your life where **you felt called** to serve or become involved, but talked your way out of it. What was your learning?
- E. What do you think Jesus meant when he answered the religious teacher with the comment about the foxes and the birds? How does this help us understand part of the expectation of following Jesus? Of walking in purpose?
- F. Jesus' response to the second man seemed crude. Why didn't Jesus allow this person to go home and bury his father (and for the record, the man's father wasn't dead yet...this language was part of the Jewish culture). What did Jesus mean when He said, "Follow me **NOW**." How does **NOW** change the conversation? Why **NOW** and not **LATER**?

3. Purpose and Power

Mark 6:30-44, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

Last week we talked about how purpose follows passion. Whatever you're passionate about is usually where your purpose lies. Once we find purpose, we soon discover God gives us strength and power to accomplish that purpose. Empowerment begins with an act of obedience. Sometimes that act of obedience is super public and requires a lot of courage. Other times the Holy Spirit leads us to do something that's more behind the scenes. Regardless, there is no such thing as a small or large act of obedience. The Bible teaches that whoever is faithful with little, the same will be faithful with more (Luke 16:10).

In our story, we see a powerful picture of what it looks like when purpose and power meet. The disciples, who feel under-resourced, are called upon to meet a need. Then, there's conversation and finally action. In many ways, this is what it looks like when God wants to move in our life. He taps us on the shoulder and says, "Did you notice what's going on over there?" And then he asks, "What are you going to do about it?" That's purpose. And when we act, He acts.

As we unpack this story and what it means to walk in purpose, think deeper than the church. Think about the opportunities and moments where the Holy Spirit invites you to impact people in your workplace, school or community. God's purpose for our lives far exceeds the church walls; it seeps into every area and people in our life.

2. TELL THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3 READ THE STORY

"The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. Then Jesus said, "Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile." He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat. So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone. But many people recognized them and saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and got there ahead of them. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Late in the afternoon his disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the nearby farms and villages and buy something to eat." But Jesus said, "You feed them." "With what?" they asked. "We'd have to work for months to earn enough money to buy food for all these people!" "How much bread do you have?" he asked. "Go and find out." They came back and reported, "We have five loaves of bread and two fish."

Then Jesus told the disciples to have the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of fifty or a hundred. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he kept giving the bread to the disciples so they could distribute it to the people. He also divided the fish for everyone to share. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftover bread and fish. A total of 5,000 men and their families were fed." Mark 6:30-44 NLT

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. Have you every experienced or witnessed a miracle? Explain.
- B. What do you believe your unique purpose is right now (purpose can change with the seasons of life)?
- C. What is the most public faith step you have ever taken? What was the role of the Holy Spirit in your action (Did He give you courage, boldness, etc)?
- D. What is your most memorable experience where the Holy Spirit purposely led you to meet a need in someone's life, when you felt under-resourced?
- E. When Jesus recognized a need, he had compassion. Why is compassion such an important part of purpose?
- F. Jesus saw this need as an opportunity. The disciples saw it as an obligation. How does seeing our purpose as an opportunity change how we take action?
- G. How is our action impacted when we view purpose as an obligation?
- H. Jesus "broke the bread" before giving it to the disciples who served the people. Sometimes "brokenness" is required before we see the power of God. Can you share an experience where your own brokenness preceded God moving in your life?

4. The Stewardship of Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:7-11, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

To be a good steward means using and managing resources wisely and strategically. Usually, when we hear the words resources and stewardship in the same sentence, we think about money.

There are some people who have been blessed with finances. Good stewards of money manage it well and practice generosity. There are similar benchmarks for all acts of stewardship.

This is true with the resource of spiritual gifts. To be a good steward of spiritual gifts we should use them to serve others, while operating within the parameter of God's Word. The apostle Peter teaches us that every person has a spiritual gift. The apostle Paul breaks it down even further by detailing some of the spiritual gifts, which by the way, isn't the exhaustive list of gifts. (See 1 Corinthians 12:28, 13, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:11-16)

Belonging to the body of Christ means inheriting all of the promises of God, and spiritual gifts is one of those promises. Although everyone's gifts and abilities may look different, they are all important, because they were given to us for a reason. When we fail to use our spiritual gifts, we also struggle to fulfill our purpose. It would be like trying to fix a car without using any tools. As we journey through these scriptures, be open to the Holy Spirit, as you may discern what your gift(s) may be.

2. TELL THE STORIES IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3 READ THE STORY

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another." 1 Peter 4:10 NLT

"A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.

It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have." 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 NLT


4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. What are you best at stewarding (time, money, some other resource)? In what area do you need improvement?
- B. What is your spiritual gift? If you're not sure, what would you like it to be?
- C. Both Paul and Peter give a clear meaning for why God gives us spiritual gifts. What is it?
- D. What are some of the spiritual gifts you see in others around you?
- E. Describe a time when someone served you by using their spiritual gift.
- F. Which spiritual gifts do you recall Jesus using?
- G. Out of Paul's list of spiritual gifts, which one is the most clear? Which one is the most confusing?

5. The Purpose of Serving Others

Philippians 2:3-8, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

 ne of the greatest moments in scripture is found in John 13:1-5 when Jesus demonstrates servanthood. He is hours away from the cross and He and the disciples are sharing a meal.

Suddenly, Jesus stands up and pours a basin of water and begins to wash and dry the feet of the disciples. In Jewish custom, this would have been the duty of a house servant; yet here we find the Son of God showing what it means to truly love others, by selflessly serving.

Serving others isn't always easy. Sometimes people are rude or mean. Other times they are unappreciative. Serving others can also be done for the wrong reason or the wrong motive. Yet, when we get it right and serve with a pure heart, there's nothing more rewarding or fulfilling.

I'll never forget when we took our youngest daughter on her first mission trip. We went to the Dominican Republic to serve Haitian villages by sharing the gospel, providing medical care and constructing orphanages. Our daughter was only 12 years old. One day, while working in the village, one of the Haitian women invited our daughter to join her in shelling beans. She reluctantly said yes and went to work. We kept an eye on her throughout the day and noticed that she seemed to enjoy it. At the end of the day, her heart was full. She couldn't believe the joy she saw in the people, who possessed very little in the way of material things, but were so happy and gracious. On one side, it looked like our daughter was serving them; but the reality was, they were serving our daughter. They made a life long impact that she'll never forget.

Belonging to something (like the body of Christ, a.k.a. the church), requires a level of servanthood. As we journey through this passage, let's be sure to lean into the power of serving with the right heart.

2. TELL THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3 READ THE STORY

"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross." Philippians 2:3-8 NLT

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. Describe a time in your life where you served in order to meet a real need. What made it special for the person(s) you served? What made it special for you?
- B. What is it about serving that you find hard to do? What has prevented you from serving in the past?
- C. How does the attitude of selflessness and humility empower serving? What does serving look like when these things are absent?
- D. We know what it means to “think of others better than ourselves” but what does that look like? Can you share a real life example?
- E. Paul said Jesus gave up his divine privileges [to become a servant of all]. What’s are some things you have or should give up that would make you a better servant?
- F. In what way(s) are you or could you serve people at our church each weekend? What seems like a good fit for you?
- G. There are serving roles that are never seen on Sunday (prayer partners, community service, large donors, etc). What “non-Sunday” serving action have you seen or participated in? How does this scripture help guide us as we serve in those opportunities?
- H. Is it possible to belong to a people group, church or organization and not serve and still find fulfillment? Why or why not?

6. The Value of Persistence

Philippians 4:10-13, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

The church has an adversary. Our adversary (Satan) has two primary roles; A) to frustrate the work of the church (Ephesians 6:10-12) and B) to keep unsaved people from receiving the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). As Christians, our primary purpose is to defend both of these. We should always strive for unity and love within the body of Christ and we should be on mission to help people meet Jesus. Of course, when Christians pursue mission, they attract satanic attack. Life can throw some mean punches; couple that with spiritual attacks, and it can be a real challenge. The enemy's goal is to rob us of our potential and purpose. He wants to wear us down so that we will quit. Usually this results in people saying things like, "I'm burned out, I can't make a difference, it's too hard" or "I just have too much going on to serve Christ." We should be mindful to invest time in our families and honor the sabbath (a day of rest). But we should never allow the enemy the pleasure of stealing an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of other people.

In our story, we find the apostle Paul writing to a church in Philippi from a Roman prison cell. He expresses gratitude for their generosity and heart for his ministry. Sitting in chains, he reminds us that despite his own circumstances and challenges, he remains **persistent in pursuing** the purpose God has called him to. As a Christian, I can tell you that purpose without persistence is usually short-lived. Sidebar: Verse 13 is a scripture that is commonly taken out of context. Christians sometimes reinforce a "super-Christian" mentality, instead of seeing the strength of Jesus in Paul's life that gave him the ability to be content despite his suffering. Being persistent isn't about being problem free, it's about pursuing and fulfilling purpose despite the problems that surround us.

2. TELL THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3 READ THE STORY

""How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. 'Philippians 4:10-13

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. Describe a time in your life where persistence paid off. What motivated you to keep going?
- B. Have you ever felt like walking away from church? From God? Explain. What helped you change your mind?
- C. In what ways are you content? Which area of your life needs more contentment?
- D. How do you think a good attitude helps with persistence and contentment?
- E. What did he mean when he said, "...I have learned the secret of living in every situation..."? Why do you think Paul used the word, "secret?"
- F. Paul acknowledges the support of the church. That was an important part of his support system. How has your church, groups and/or friends helped you to keep going and not give up?
- G. In what way is Satan attacking you right now? How can your small group pray for you at the end of your small group gathering?

7. The Purpose of Wisdom

James 1: 5-8, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

If there one thing we all need, it's wisdom. Wisdom is much more than simply "knowing the right answer." Matter of fact, it is possible to do the right thing, and still not do the wise thing. I will never forget a time when I had to let a staff member go. There was no doubt it was time for this person to move on. While it was the right thing to do, I certainly didn't handle it in a wise way. When I look back, I can see how I could have had a different conversation and things would have probably went a lot better for him and me.

Wisdom can save us a lot of heartache. It can also enable us to help people who are trying to navigate through difficult situations. In the book of James, we are reminded that wisdom is on tap for people who follow Jesus. God wants us to have wisdom, because he wants our decision-making to reflect His heart. He also gives us wisdom through other people. That's the great thing about belonging to the church; there's usually people around who possess such wisdom. And the reality is, you can be one of those people too.

As we read this scripture, be open to what God wants to say to you about a specific situation in your life or something that you are yet to encounter. Remember, God is for you. He is with you. And when we walk in the wisdom of God, it doesn't take long for others to see His favor on your life, which creates an opportunity to share Jesus with others.

2. TELL THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3 READ THE STORY

“If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone.

Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.’ James 1:5-8

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. What is the wisest decision you ever made (apart from becoming a Christian)?
- B. Describe a time in your life when you needed wisdom. Who did you reach out to? What was the outcome?
- C. Share an experience where you gave someone wise counsel to help make a decision.
- D. James said, "Be sure that you have faith in God alone." What other things have you put your faith in that failed you?
- E. What do you think James meant about divided loyalty? Have you ever been in that place?
- F. Has there ever been a time in your life where you felt unstable? Where was your relationship with God during that time?
- G. Where do you need God's wisdom in your life today?

8. The Purpose of Prayer

Matthew 6:5-13, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

I became a Christian at the age of twenty-two, despite the fact that I was raised in church most of my life (thank God for grace!). I remember my dad baptizing me and the peace and joy I felt in my heart. I also remember my dad talking about the importance of prayer. When it came to praying, I only knew how other people prayed. In the church I attended, many times whoever was praying used old English (King James Version) language, which sounded something like this, "Father in Heaven, I beseech thee to come hither and allow thy Spirit to make thy abode with us." It didn't take me long to realize I wasn't very good at praying like that. I also struggled with questions like, "How often should I pray? Do I have to kneel? How do I know He is listening?" Later on, with the help of my wife, parents and other people God placed in my life, I learned that praying wasn't about impressing God with a spiritual vocabulary; neither did it require rigid guidelines and practices. I finally realized, God just wants to talk to me and wants me to talk to Him.

In our story, I love the way Jesus opens up His teaching right before going into the well-known "Lord's Prayer." He says, "When you pray..." not "If you pray..." In other words, there is an expectation for every believer to engage in daily prayer with God. This expectation doesn't exist for our mere discipline; but rather because prayer is how we get to know God more and is the medium in which God moves in our lives and the lives of others. So if you're the person who prays aloud using King James old English, in hopes to impress God, stop it. You can't impress God. And if you're the person who struggles to pray, it's ok. God hears you. God simply wants you to be you.

2. TELL THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3 READ THE STORY

When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get.

But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

"When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need,. and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.' Matthew 6:5-13

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. Jesus talked about wrong ways to pray. What is the strangest prayer moment that you have ever experienced?
- B. What is the most spiritual (or moving) prayer moment you have ever experienced?
- C. Describe your daily conversations with God. What do you regularly pray for?
- D. What does Jesus mean when He says, "...go away by yourself and shut the door?"
- E. Read Philippians 4:6. How does this scripture give us further guidance on what our prayers should look like?
- F. One translation says, "Lord, help us not fall into temptation." In what ways has God helped you overcome a temptation?
- G. Describe a time in your life where God delivered you from evil. How did prayer play into that rescue?
- H. Pair up with someone in your group and pray for one another. If you've never prayed aloud (for someone else) before, just be you and pray what's on your heart.

9. The Call to Make Disciples

Matthew 28:18-20, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

The purpose of every Christian on the planet is to make disciples. This is part of the Great Commission that Jesus gives the church (Matthew 28:19). Making disciples can't be optional. Yet, so many churches struggle in this area. In my consulting experience, discipleship is always one of the top five core issues in churches of all sizes. I believe there are two primary reasons for that. First, we have an enemy who works hard to prevent us from fulfilling the Great Commission. If he can keep us content with attending church only, our mission becomes stalled. True disciples make disciples through sharing, loving and relationships. Secondly, it's much easier to keep relationships with people who are already Christians than sharing our time and faith with unchurched people. To make disciples, we must also reach people who aren't yet Christians.

Discipleship really has two parts. As mentioned above, sharing our faith is one of those parts. Becoming a Christian is the first step; and by the way, that only happens by the work of the Holy Spirit. The second part is helping (new) Christians grow in their faith. This is where you and I come in. In our story, Jesus doesn't make suggestions, He gives commandments. In other words, the only alternative to making disciples is direct disobedience to Jesus Himself.

2. TELL STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3 READ THE STORY

'Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" Matthew 28:18-20

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. What is a disciple? What do disciples do?
- B. Who disciplined (or is discipling) you?
- C. Jesus said He was *given* all authority on heaven and earth. Who gave Jesus this authority? Why is it important for Jesus have earthly authority if He is in Heaven?
- D. What is the meaning for baptism? Why is it important?
- E. What are some ways you could help people become a disciple and grow in their faith?
- F. How should this commandment challenge us to think outside of the United States? What does discipleship look like in other countries?
- G. There are many parts of discipleship (sharing your faith, learning, growing, relationship, etc). Which part(s) are the hardest for you in terms of helping someone become a disciple? Why?
- H. In the final words of the commandment, Jesus gives us an assurance. What is it? Why should this encourage us to be bold in discipling other people?

10. The Purpose of Tithes & Offerings

Malachi 3:8-12, Matthew 23:23

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

Unfortunately the words money and church usually never pair well when used in the same sentence. And even worse, there are churches and church leaders that have created this stigma. Most of us have seen the late night prosperity preacher, asking people to send money, and in return, expect a massive monetary blessing from God. Churches large and small have made headlines where money was mishandled or used inappropriately. These things give the church a black eye. Money can make people do crazy things. I have seen people make change in the offering plate; I know of churches where people were caught taking money out of the plate instead of putting in; and I have seen pastors pass the plate an extra time or two because he wasn't satisfied with the offering amount. None of these things please God and are certainly not even close to what God intended tithes and offerings to look like.

Tithing wasn't created solely for the New Testament church (as we'll see in our story). Actually, tithing goes all the way back the Old Testament (Genesis 14:18-20, Leviticus 27:30–34), as well as the New Testament. Tithing was never man's idea; it is God's idea. Tithes and offerings are God's financial plan to fund the work of the mission of the gospel. Therefore tithing is worship.

Tithing also forces us to check our hearts. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus talks about the power of money and says this, "**No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.**" Money is power and has the ability to control and gratify. And anything that has those abilities can get in the way of our relationship with God.

If you struggle with generosity, don't get nervous. Your small group probably isn't going to take up an offering at the end of gathering. In our story, we will learn that being generous will bring fulfillment to your life and the people around you.

2. TELL STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3 READ THE STORY

""Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! "But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?' "You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me.

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.' Malachi 3:8-12

""What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. ' Matthew 23:23

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. How was your childhood in terms of money? Did you grow up poor, middle class or wealthy? How did your upbringing influence your generosity?
- B. Read Matthew 6:21. What did Jesus mean by this statement? How would you explain it?
- C. What is the difference in a tithe and an offering? How is giving a form of worship to God?
- D. In our story, Malachi talks about the “storehouse.” In our context, how would your church **serve** as your storehouse?
- E. The scripture talks about the **windows** of heaven (plural), meaning there are many ways God blesses us other than wealth. What windows of blessing has God opened in your life?
- F. Read Proverbs 3:9-10. How does that passage correlate with Malachi’s passage?
- G. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. What life experience can you share that validates this passage?
- H. In Matthew 23:23, the religious teachers are confronted by Jesus. They do tithe, but lack in other areas. What areas are you lacking in?

11. The Purpose of the Resurrection

Luke 24:1-12, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

If our small group schedule hasn't been interrupted with snow or sickness, we should be celebrating Easter next week. I felt like this would be a great opportunity to talk about the purpose of the resurrection, which in turn, brings even more clarity to our mission as believers. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the only reason we can say we belong to God. The resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us who believes, which is how we supernaturally walk in Kingdom purpose.

The resurrection of Jesus is what separates Christianity from every other religion on the planet. No other religion claims their god or deity became man, died for our sake and then was resurrected into a glorified body. Christianity is the only *religion* that teaches salvation can't be earned by good works or living a good life (all other religions teach there's something you have to do in order to receive salvation).

Christianity teaches that salvation is a gift from God (Ephesians 2: 8-9). We owe a debt that we can't pay. Yet, Jesus paid for **all of our sins**; our sins yesterday, today and the sins we will commit tomorrow. That, was the purpose of the resurrection. As we read our story and other places in scripture, we'll gain more clarity about the day Jesus rose from the dead and changed the world forever.

2. TELL STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

3 READ THE STORY

'But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day." Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.' Luke 24:1-12, NLT

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. What is your favorite Easter tradition?
- B. What would have been your initial reaction if you were the first person at the tomb?
- C. How would you have told the other disciples what had happened? Would it look differently than what Mary and Martha said?
- D. While the disciples didn't believe their story, Peter was the first to jump up and run out the door. Why do you think that is? (Read Mark 14:66-72).
- E. What do you think was running through Peter's mind when he came to the tomb?
- F. Read Romans 8: 9-11. How can resurrection power impact your life today? How will the resurrection impact you in death?
- G. Read Hebrews 10:1-10. How does this unpack the heart of the resurrection and why Jesus had to go to the cross?
- H. Read Colossians 1:4-6. Paul talks about the fruit of life change as a result of sharing this "good news." How can sharing the true meaning of the resurrection produce life change in the lives of your family and friends?

12. The Purpose of Invite

John 1:35-50, NLT

1. READ THE INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to grow a church; conducting outreach, hosting events and marketing are just a few. Despite the latest greatest growth strategies, research proves friends inviting friends is still the most effective way to bring new people to church. When people become intentional about bringing their unchurched friends to church, they witness life change up close and personal...and when that happens, the church moves into a *culture* of invite.

A healthy invite culture must be designed around the why more than the what. The why is always about the gospel. It's about loving people people who aren't following Jesus enough to pray for them.

Studies over the years (and even recent studies) shine light on the importance of invite. One study shows that 82% of unchurched people are somewhat likely to attend if invited. Thom Rainer (pastor, consultant and former CEO of Lifeway) conducted research about inviting. Here's what he learned, *"Only two percent of church members invite an unchurched person to church. Ninety-eighty percent of church-goers never extend an invitation in a given year."* That isn't a fact to accepted. That is **a problem to be solved**.

Can you imagine what would happen at your church if we really believed that one invite could change a life? What would happen if half of the congregation started inviting unchurched friends and family? It would be explosive! Lives would be changed forever!

Inviting is the on-ramp to belonging. Imagine what would happen if YOU invited unchurched family and friends to church. Sunday morning isn't the only place people can hear the gospel and follow Jesus, but it certainly is A PLACE.

2. TELL STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

33 3 READ THE STORY

"The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, "Look! There is the Lamb of God!" When John's two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus. Jesus looked around and saw them following. "What do you want?" he asked them. They replied, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" "**Come and see**," he said.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to **find** his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have **found** the Messiah" (which means "Christ").

Then Andrew **brought** Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, "Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas" (which means "Peter").

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He **found** Philip and said to him, "Come, follow me." Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's hometown. Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, "We have **found** the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth." "Nazareth!" exclaimed Nathanael. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" "**Come and see** for yourself,"

Philip replied. As they approached, Jesus said, "Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity." "How do you know about me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus replied, "I could see you under the fig tree before Philip **found you.**" Then Nathanael exclaimed, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!" Jesus asked him, "Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." John 1:35-50 34

4. LIFE QUESTIONS

- A. What was your very first invite experience? Who invited you? What was the outcome?
- B. How many (unchurched) people have you invited to church in the last six months? What was the outcome?
- C. In our story, Jesus was the first to invite, using the words, "Come and see." Pretend like the person sitting next to you isn't a Christian. Invite him or her to church this Sunday, starting with the words, "Come and See."
- D. Notice the words, **come and see, find, found, and brought** are used throughout the story. It appears these people knew one another and were intentional. What does this teach us about being an inviter?
- E. One pastor coined the phrase, "Found people find people." What does that phrase mean to you?
- F. Who is someone you personally know that isn't a Christian? Share this person's first name with the group and ask them to pray for him or her and for you to have the courage to invite that person to church.

