



Week 1 Life Group Guide

A BETTER You

Icebreaker

If you could teach a class on one thing, what would you teach? (This can be as silly or as serious as you would like!)

Opening Prayer

Father God, thank you for this new year. Thank you for the ways that you have sustained us and led us, even through difficult times. God, help us to begin this year as people committed to you, your mission, your ways, your commandments. Let 2022 be another year where we grow into the kind of Christ-followers that you would have us to be. Amen.

Discussion Questions

We hear a lot of talk about having a mission, having a purpose, and yet a lot of people don't think intentionally about these things. Do you have any sort of personal mission or vision statement? What difference does it make to have that statement?

Read Jeremiah 29:11. What speaks to you in this passage? Do you believe this promise? What are some of God's "up-to date" plans for you? What are you doing to activate God's plans for you?

Does God really need you? Does God really have you? Do you believe that God cares for you in your day to day life?

How does the world describe a good life? How would Jesus describe a good life?

Read the second to last paragraph on day 1. Read it out loud as a group. Talk about the questions from that paragraph. What do you think other people would have to say about your purpose and mission?

On day 2, the devotional stated quite strongly that what you do matters. You matter. You matter immensely? Do you agree? Do you think you matter to God and matter in God's plan?

What happens if you don't do the works that God has planned for you to do?

On day 3, the focus was on responsibility and accountability. We discussed being a life-long learner. What are the ways you learn best? How much time per week do you invest in your own learning and growth? (By the way, time spent listening to sermons, reading devotionals, participating in Life Groups – that time counts!)

For the new year that has started, what are 2-3 PRIORITY areas for learning and growing?

Read the following passage from Marianne Williamson's book *Return to Love*:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our Light, not our Darkness, that

most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the World. There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won't feel unsure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. As we let our own Light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

What is holding you back from becoming all that God intends for you to be?

As a group, read Philippians 3:12-16. Paul has what is called a growth mindset. He was passionate about his own maturity. He was passionate about pressing ahead to those things that God had for him. How passionate are you about your own maturity? What are you straining toward?

Closing Prayer

God, you know the plans that you have for us. At the start of this new year, we ask your Holy Spirit to continue to guide us and lead us in the paths that you have for us. Help us to continually focus on you, to be intentional about growing into Christlikeness, to live as people on mission for you. Please keep us from the things that would distract us from our calling. Be with us, God. We love you. Amen.



Week 2 Life Group Guide

God's Plan for a BETTER Church

Icebreaker

From time to time, the church interviews a person for a new staff position. We want your Life Group to come up with the best three questions you think should always be asked during an interview of anyone who will work at Living Word. Have fun and we look forward to what you come up with!

Opening Prayer

God, thank you for this group. Thank you for this little slice of the church that gets to meet together, learn together, and grow in friendship together. God, we pray that you continue to work in this group. Help us to be a community that represents you well. We love you. Amen.

Discussion Questions

Someone in the group read 1 Peter 2:4-12. Make a list of the qualities of the church. Use your notes from the devotional resource where you started working on that list. Which descriptions of the church (of you, of your Life Group) gets your attention? Why?

How would we live differently and do church differently if we really believed that the church was all of these things?

How does a church become a better church?

Who is responsible for creating a better church?

For Living Word to be a better church, what are some of the next steps we should take?

What are you doing to make Living Word a better church? What steps are you taking?

When Paul talks about the Christian life and the life in the Church, he uses the phrase “a more excellent way.” Read 1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:1-8, 13. What is at the heart of the more excellent way God has planned for his people? How are you helping create that better way at Living Word?

In his sermon, Pastor Brian used the biblical concept of *covenant*.

Covenants are one of the most important themes in the Bible because they act as the skeletons upon which the entire redemptive story is built. They're like the backbone of the Bible. From Genesis on, God enters into one formal relationship after another (i.e., covenants) with various humans in order to rescue his world. These divine-human relationships push that narrative forward until it reaches its climax in Jesus. Thus, to tell the story of God redeeming his people through Jesus is to tell the story of God's covenantal relationship with his people. (The Bible Project, Covenants: The Backbone of the Bible)

Covenants depend on the character of the people in those covenants, and character comes from

Christ. The church is the covenant people of God. Essentially, those people are people of Christlike character and at the core of that character is the virtue of LOVE.

How do others demonstrate that they love you?
How have you experienced others serving you?
How have you loved someone else through service?

Read Ephesians 4:16. When we serve, it is an expression of love. Every person needs to find their niche for serving. In 2022, where can you serve in Living Word?

Note: When we use the word “serve” we are primarily describing serving within the church. When we use the word “reach” we are describing serving in our community.

Closing Prayer

God, thank you for the gift of our church. Thank you for all of the ways that you have and continue to bless Living Word as a community. Thank you for the Church globally that represents you. God, we know that the church has problems. We know that we are fallen people and that we make mistakes. Help us to love the way that you loved, Jesus. Help us to serve the way that you served. Help us to represent you well. We love you. Amen.

Current Serving Needs at Living Word

Check out <https://lwccyork.com/serve/> to find a list of ways you can get involved in serving at Living Word. We currently have many pressing needs in our kid::life ministry.



Week 3 Life Group Guide

Reach Local for a Better Community

Icebreaker

The New Year is always a time for resolutions. Make a list of the top five resolutions you think Americans make. How long does it take before people break their resolutions? After your discussion, have someone in the group do a Google search on your phone for some answers.

Opening Prayer

God, thank you for our local community. Thank you for putting this group together in this particular place at this particular time. Help us to use this time together to learn more about the plans you have for us. Holy Spirit, continue to reveal where you would want us to serve. Amen.

Discussion Questions

Note: When we use the word “serve” we are primarily describing serving within the church. When we use the word “reach” we are describing serving in our community.

How does it make you feel to know that Christianity is a minority position in America? How do you feel knowing that we live in a post-Christian culture and it will increasingly be a challenge to follow Jesus?

For most of history and in most places, committed followers of Jesus have always been in the minority, even when a nation may have had

a generic Christian worldview and a nominal (in name only) Christian ethic. The New Testament was written to believers who were a very small minority in their culture. How do these facts encourage you about being a committed follower of Jesus today?

Why is sharing our faith (or evangelism) challenging for many Christians? Is it hard for you? Make a list of reasons why it is difficult to do evangelism today. As you look at the list, which ones work against you sharing your faith?

Who is your best non-Christian friend? How does your Christian faith influence that relationship?

“Just One” is our strategy for reaching our non-Christian friends. We encourage everyone at Living Word to think of “just one” person in their life who needs a relationship with Jesus. Who is your “just one” that you want to influence for Jesus? What are several things you can do all through the year for that non-Christian friend?

How compassionate are you toward those in need? Are there any particular groups of people in our community (e.g., the homeless, refugees, children in need, those with health needs, etc.) that you have extra compassion for? What more can you do to exercise compassion?

As you have the time, talk about your place of work and your role as a citizen.

Work

Where do you work? Do you like working there? How do you think you influence others in your workplace? Author Jim Collins says that people can create a “pocket of greatness” in their places of work, even if they aren’t in charge. Where you work is an opportunity to create a pocket of greatness and honor Jesus in the process. How can you honor Jesus in your workplace by doing good work? Are you doing excellent work? Are you doing ethical work?

Citizenship

Good citizens are involved in their local community. Every Christian should be involved in one place in their local community to make that place great. Where is one place in your community where you would like to be involved this year?

Read Jeremiah 29:1-7. The first three verses describe Jeremiah writing a letter from Jerusalem and sending it to the Babylonian exiles. Remember, large numbers of Jews were carried into captivity and exile, taken away from their land, home, family, and spiritual way of life. Talk about experiencing disruption!

Focus on verses 4-7. These are God’s “better plan” for using the exiles to serve the city and love the people of Babylon.

Spend some time in your group thinking about this passage and discuss how it applies to our work as “exiles, sojourners, aliens, and strangers” (Hebrews 11:13-16) in York, PA. And be sure to notice verse 7 in Jeremiah. What a promise!

Closing Prayer

Today, your group will have an extended prayer time for needs in York. Jeremiah 29:7 says, “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

- Pray for the peace and prosperity of York.
- Pray that we will become a community that loves and serves the vulnerable among us.
- Pray for an end to the all-too-common gun violence that plagues York City.
- Pray for the resources and support needed by students who are lacking them.
- Pray for those in leadership in our cities, municipalities, county, and state.
- Pray for local social workers and others who serve at-risk youth.
- Pray for our local ministry partners who represent Jesus with ministries of compassion and justice.
- Pray for God to reveal your own place in working for the peace and prosperity of York.



Week 4 Life Group Guide

Working With God for a BETTER World

Note: We are providing a little more content with this Life Group guide because global missions needs more explanation.

Icebreaker

What do you think would be the benefits and the challenges of living for a full year in a country where you don't speak the language and the living conditions are less or lower than what you are accustomed to right now?

And a second icebreaker (keep your answers brief): For those who have been on a short-term trip overseas, share with the group one of the most important lessons you learned on the trip.

Opening Prayer

You will do something different for this lesson. Turn to Psalm 96. It is a prayer of thanksgiving. Go around your group (if possible) and have everyone take a turn reading out loud one verse after the next. For verses 3 and 10, have everyone in the group read those verses out loud together. Amen.

Scripture Study

While the sermon and sermon notes briefly referred to many (out of the hundreds) verses in the Bible that talk about world mission, we want you to look at a truly staggering passage. This passage would have been literally mind-boggling,

paradigm-shattering, and frankly, unfathomable to the Jewish people. Yet, this is God's Better Plan for the World.

Read Isaiah 19:16-25. It starts out with a word of God's judgment on Egypt. And all God's people said, "Yay, God!" But in verse 18, the work of God takes a sudden twist and turn in a new direction. And all God's people said, "Whoa ..wait ..what did you just say?" As you read these verses, keep in mind that God is talking about two of the great empires that were enemies of Israel, and of each other. Look at what God plans to do with these nations, particularly in verses 24 and 25. If you need to, go back to Genesis 12:1-3. God is going to keep his promise to bless the nations.

One more hard question to think about: God says we are blessed to be a blessing to the nations. If we decide we do not want to be a blessing to the nations, what are the implications for God's continual blessing to be upon us?

Discussion Questions

This will follow the sermon closely. You may want to refer to your sermon notes. Each of the following statements are stepping stones for your group to talk over.

1. Living Word is deeply committed to God's global plan to bless the nations. Living Word needs you to be a part of being God's blessing to the world. How do you respond to God's plan, Living Word's part,

and your part?

2. We talked about the 10/40 Window and the Unreached Peoples of the world (mostly Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and the Chinese). There is a staggering number of unreached people and only a fraction of the global missionary force is trying to reach them. Why is that? Why are we so behind on getting to those people groups? What holds us back? What do you think Living Word should be doing about that great lag in God's global plan?

3. There are a number of important strategies that shape how Living Word does global missions. Talk about any of these strategies. What do you think? Are we on the right track with these strategies?

Focus on a few areas and not everywhere. It is a big world. We can't help everyone. Focus, prioritize, and concentrate on ministry in a few places. We call these places HUBs. We invest a lot of resources there.

Build strong partnerships at those HUBs. In particular, connect with very competent nationals who already know the culture, language, and needs of the people.

Do holistic ministry. Evangelize, make disciples, plant churches, feed the hungry, take care of the poor, start micro-businesses, do medical work, and above all, do it for those who have the least amount of resources.

Invest in training nationals for leadership in their areas. Raise up the next generation of leaders.

4. These strategies are what we do OVER THERE. We have one more strategy for what we do RIGHT HERE at Living Word. Jesus wants you to be one of his missional friends. As far as the world is concerned, he wants you to be a World Christian. A World Christian is someone who thinks about the world in the way Jesus thinks about the world and engages with the world the way Jesus wants us to engage with the world. So, here is the strategy:

Living Word exists to empower you to live as a World Christian, as a missional follower of Jesus who is working with him to make a better world!

Remember what was said in the sermon on week three about the three buckets that are the source of happiness, satisfaction, and contentment? The purpose and meaning bucket is a big one that remains largely empty. What if you were to seriously commit to the purpose and meaning God has for you and become a World Christian?

A World Christian prays for the world and the work God is doing in the world. Get our monthly prayer guide and start praying for the places where Living Word is at work. What will help you pray for the world and what will keep you from praying for the world?

A World Christian gives financially to support the missional work God is doing around the world. We would love for you to start giving to Reach Global or, if you are already giving, to increase your giving so we can do even more. Your financial support of our global partners is how you are blessed to be a blessing and how you help Living Word bless the world.

A World Christian connects with parts of the world and goes on short-term trips to be an in-person blessing. But when you get there, you find out you are the one being blessed. While short-term mission trips are still "iffy" because of COVID, they will start up again. Start praying about going on a short-term trip.

5. Final discussion (if there is time): Everyone share the ONE thing that God has most impressed on your heart and mind about REACH GLOBAL.

Closing Prayer

Pastor Aaron shared about our Ethiopia HUB and partners. Pray for Ethiopia as you end. Pray for Dr. Frew, who leads PAAV; Pastor Misikir in Dire Dawa; our sister church in Djibouti; and Melese Wogu and Ethiopian Outreach Ministry. Even a simple prayer like this would be wonderful: God bless _____ (add the name) and God use us to bless _____ (add the name).



Week 5 Life Group Guide

A BETTER Legacy

Icebreaker

Was there a pastor, teacher, or coach that meant a lot to you when you were a kid? Tell the group about that relationship and how it affected you.

Opening Prayer

God, thank you for this group and our time together. Thank you for the weeks that we have considered how you might want us to be better. Today, God, help us to think about what will be left behind from our lives—the relationships, the investments, the legacy. Guide our conversation, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Part One: Talking about your Legacy and Finishing Well

Define the word eulogy and legacy. If you have a dictionary app on your phone, look up the definitions and especially additional words listed in the thesaurus. A eulogy is what people will remember about who you were and what you did. A legacy is what you will pass on to others. Here are the facts. Everyone (assuming Jesus does not return in the “near” future) is going to have a eulogy and a legacy. The only questions are: (1) What will yours actually be if you die this year? (2) What would you like your legacy to be if you start making changes now? (3) What does Jesus want your eulogy and legacy to be?

Read 2 Timothy 4:7. Paul anticipates that his life

will soon end. He is writing his own eulogy. It is from this verse we get the idea of “finishing well.” Not finishing poorly. Not even finishing okay. Finishing well! We want you to finish well. Your family and friends want you to finish well. Jesus wants you to finish well.

As a group, describe, in general terms, what it means to finish well. Come up with a good composite list. As always – make it personal to you. Are you following Jesus in such a way that you are going to finish well?

Do you remember what is said about trees? The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is today. The same is true for a legacy. The best time to start was 20 years ago. The second best time is today. Don’t waste any time regretting what you didn’t do 20 years ago. Instead, by faith, hope and love – start building a BETTER LEGACY today.

Part Two: Stewardship is a Vital Part of Your Legacy.

There are some obvious realities in the Bible.

The Bible talks about money and possessions a lot. It is obviously of great concern to God that His people follow his will about their resources.

Jesus talked about money more than any other topic except the Kingdom of God. And Jesus said some very direct and challenging things about the

use and misuse of money.

Our culture generally does a pretty bad job with money. We overspend and we don't save nearly enough. We go into great debt. We live on the financial edge. And we don't follow the teaching of the Bible and Jesus on generosity. The Bible knows that tendency to misuse our money and speaks about it. It is not a new thing.

It is always best if we are inspired by a vision of good stewardship that honors Jesus and builds his church and mission. Motivation (or manipulation) out of fear, guilt, and shame doesn't last. But we have to be intentional about connecting with good motives. That is what the devotional focused on this week. It contained five days and many positive motives for faithful generosity.

Pull out your devotional guide (on the APP or a hard copy) and spend time talking about which biblical ideas and motives are most powerful to help you be faithful to God's will for your financial life. If some members of your group were not able to spend time doing the devotional work, they can get some ideas even doing a skim reading of it while your group discussion is going on.

Closing Discussion

Assuming there is time left, each person in the group can take turns answering the following questions. Try to do so in 1-2 sentence answers.

What is the ONE most important biblical insight that has been stirring for you during the discussion?

What is the ONE most important next step you can take to grow in financial faithfulness?

Closing Prayer

God, thank you for the gift of our lives. Help us to steward this gift well. Help us to dedicate ourselves to good, meaningful relationships. Help us to live each day with the consideration of what our legacy will one day be. Help us to take the

conversations from this time together to make some needed changes in our lives this week. Help us to be financially faithful. Amen.