



Living
The Good and Beautiful
LIFE

L E A D E R G U I D E

by Matthew Johnson

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THE APPRENTICE SERIES SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDES & SUPPORTING MATERIALS.

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INSTRUCTIONS

This document is the second installment of the Apprentice study. It begins with Session 12 which covers chapter 1 of *The Good and Beautiful Life*. This study also includes a Silent Retreat and a Closing Retreat. As the leader of the group, you will need to make arrangements for both of these retreats. Review the schedules for the retreats and make plans accordingly.

At the completion of *The Good and Beautiful Life* your group could continue the study by reading the third and final book in the series, *The Good and Beautiful Community*, and doing the study.

HOW TO USE THIS LEADER GUIDE

This Guide combines the Small Group guide Appendix in the book with additional questions and activities for leading the group through each session. Some questions and suggested activities from the Small Group Guide have been omitted or expanded to enhance the experience when the group has a leader—like you!

You will need only one copy of this Leader Guide to use in class. Occasionally you will have to make copies of handouts for the class. They immediately follow the session or are part of the supporting materials listed on the home page and in the Table of Contents. To help make each Guide more useful and readable, headings are printed in CAPS/SMALL CAPS, instructions are in a regular font, and any part that should be read to the group is in *italics*. Visit www.apprenticeofjesus.org for more information and resources.

STUDY SCHEDULE

Week	Session	Chapter	Length of Session
1	Session 12	Chapter 1: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
2	Session 13	Chapter 2: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
3	Session 14	Chapter 3: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
4	Session 15	Chapter 4: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
5	Session 16	Chapter 5: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
6	Silent Retreat	A day without words	Friday evening to Saturday evening
7	Session 17	Chapter 6: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
8	Session 18	Chapter 7: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
9	Session 19	Chapter 8: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
10	Session 20	Chapter 9: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
11	Session 21	Watch documentary <i>Affluenza</i>	90 minutes
12	Session 22	Chapter 10: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
13	Session 23	Chapter 11: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
14	Session 24	Chapter 12: <i>The Good and Beautiful Life</i>	90 minutes
15	Closing Retreat	Celebrate the Past, Discern the Future	Friday night to Sunday Morning

PLEASE NOTE: Please be aware of conflicts such as holidays. See “Becoming a Group Spiritual Director” for a schedule that includes suggested dates.

CHAPTER 1, SESSION 12: THE GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL LIFE

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Thus we begin book two of the Apprentice Series. Unlike many studies, books one and two have always existed as one continuous study. However, in *The Good and Beautiful Life* the focus turns specifically to the Sermon on the Mount and the teachings of Jesus. The implication is that as we have come to know the Good and Beautiful God, we will naturally begin to live a Good and Beautiful Life just as Jesus did.

It will be most helpful to the group if they remain aware of what they learned in *The Good and Beautiful God*, and allow that knowledge to inform their reading and discussion of *The Good and Beautiful Life*. As the leader of the group, invite the participants to name correlations they see between both books.

SUPPLIES

- ✂ Butcher paper taped to the wall of the classroom
- ✂ Markers for writing on the paper (make sure the markers won't bleed through the paper and ruin the wall)

WELCOME

If you have used the suggested schedule for meetings, your group is coming together for the first time in a few weeks. As folks enter, encourage a time of conversation about how everyone is doing. Allow sufficient time for everyone to become reconnected.

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Throughout the remainder of the class, Colossians 3:1-17 will be recited from memory to help center participants for the silence, as well as helping to reinforce the passage in everyone's memory.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

God of all life, we give you thanks for the chance to come back together. We give you thanks for the sense of community that you have built among us as we have grown as your Apprentices. We ask for the grace to persevere together as we continue this study. We ask that you grant us patience to keep "pickling" in your good news. May we come to know the fullness of life you revealed in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Master Teacher. Amen.

GETTING BACK INTO THE GROOVE

After taking a few weeks off, it can be difficult for some people to return to the class with the same level of commitment they had during the fall session of Apprentice. Remind the group of their commitment to the class and how necessary that commitment is to the on-going power of this experience. If necessary, review the suggested weekly schedule so participants can again consider how they will organize their schedules to follow through on the class. Allow this to be a compassionate encouragement to your class.

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Have anyone who is comfortable share their letter, the soul-training exercise for chapter 1. After they have shared, consider these questions:

1. What spoke to you as others in your group shared their letters?

2. What insights did you gain as you wrote your own letter?
3. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30 minutes]

THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF THIS CHAPTER is that all humans desire happiness, but not all narratives lead to happiness. The narratives of Jesus are the best guide to a good and beautiful life.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all these questions.

1. In this chapter we read about Ben (pp. 18-19), a man who lived an ambitious, selfish, even sinful life, but he also found redemption and radiance before his life was over. What people have you known who, in old age, were living the fruit of their narratives (good or bad)? What wisdom can you gain from them?
2. On pages 20-21 the author gives us multiple false narratives about acquiring happiness. Review those paragraphs and discuss the narrative that you see most at work in the world, and, if you are comfortable, share the false narrative you see most at work in your own life.
3. “Sin is always ugly, and genuine virtue is always beautiful. Sin leads to ruin; virtue to greater strength. And this is why everyone, even atheists, loves Jesus. Jesus was pure virtue. He lived a good and beautiful life, which he is calling his apprentices to live” (pp. 24-25). Describe in your own words what it means that Jesus lived a virtuous life.
4. “Narratives . . . try to guide us, to orient us, to tell us which way to turn” (p. 29). Can you think of a time in your life when one of your narratives was proven wrong? How did you work through this change? How is your life different now? How do your narratives compare to Jesus’ narratives?
5. The author points out that we should not ask the question, “What will I have to give up to follow Jesus? but rather, What will I never get to experience if I choose not to follow Jesus?” (p. 31). What is your answer to the second question? Share it with the group.

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD

The suggested Scripture in the Small Group Guide Appendix has been removed in this study. Instead, the class will read and discuss the entire Sermon on the Mount as part of the “Experiencing Transformation” aspect of the class.

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [25 minutes]

This session’s experiential component is made up of two steps. The first step is identifying the “idols” we turn to for happiness, and what voices tell us those idols can make us happy. The second step is to turn our attention to the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus’ sermon will serve as the primary voice for the remainder of this study.

Read the following paragraph and questions:

In describing the “six steps to ruin” the author writes, “Someone, or something must take the place of God. We would like a god who would do a lot of good for us and ask very little in return. The solution: create an idol” (p. 22).

1. As a group, brainstorm a list of “idols” we, as a society, tend to worship. Write these idols on a large sheet of butcher paper that is taped to the wall.
2. Next to the “idols” write what we hope they will do for us.
3. Discuss what “voices” deceive us into believing these “gods” can give us what we desire.

Now, we're going to listen to a different "voice" by reading aloud the entire Sermon on the Mount, which will be the focus for the rest of this study (Matt 5-7). The author gives us this teaching about the Sermon on the Mount:

We should read the Sermon on the Mount this way. Jesus is not demanding we live his way in order to get his blessing or get into heaven when we die; he is simply telling the truth about reality. He warns against lust, not because he is a prude, but because he knows it destroys human lives when unchecked. He tells us flatly not to worry, not because it will give us ulcers, but because people who live with him in the kingdom of God need not worry; it is a waste of time. Lust and worry, judgment and anger, retaliation and pride, are never good or beautiful, and never lead to freedom. In fact, they are a flight from freedom (p. 30).

In light of these words, read aloud Matthew 5-7, allowing anyone to read who would like to, and then discuss these questions:

1. In the sermon, Jesus is giving us the truth about reality. How does this truth agree or disagree with your own understanding of reality?
2. What other questions and insights come to you from this passage, based on the first chapter of *The Good and Beautiful Life*?

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read these words from the first chapter aloud.

Each day, Jesus says to each of us, "Come, follow me." If we say yes, we can be sure that a good and beautiful day awaits us. And when we string those days together into months, years, and decades, we will have lived a good and beautiful life. And that life is destined to echo a benediction of love for all of eternity to hear (p. 32).

Go from your meeting with these words ringing in your ears! Amen.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 2, which explores Jesus' primary message of the kingdom of God. The soul-training practice for the week will be play!

CHAPTER 2, SESSION 13: THE GOSPEL MANY PEOPLE HAVE NEVER HEARD

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

For many people this will be the first time they have heard that the kingdom of God is something other than “where we go when we die.” Not only that, but they will also be discovering that the kingdom of God is in their midst—right now. This major shift in thinking can result in confusion, anger or resistance. As the leader of the group, do not worry yourself with convincing anyone to believe what the author is writing; that is not necessary. Instead, encourage them to stay with their questions, uneasiness or doubts. Over time the Spirit will lead them into the truth.

If this paradigm shift is a major challenge to your entire group, be prepared to set the session plan aside and allow the conversation to go where it needs to go. In that case, keep going back to the chapter for insights, and then go to the Gospels to see what Jesus really had to say.

And just as a word of encouragement—for many people this teaching is a paradigm shift, but it is also the most exciting spiritual discovery they have made as adults. Be ready to watch God do amazing things in the lives of your fellow apprentices.

SUPPLIES

- ✎ Blank paper and pens for the “Experiencing Transformation” activity

WELCOME

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

At the end of the silence you may offer a prayer of your own or simply say “Amen” or chime a meditation bell.

SOUL-TRAINING [10 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to help you process your experience of the soul shaping exercise of “play.”

1. How did you play this week?
2. What surprised you as you attempted this practice? What challenged you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [35 minutes]

JESUS’ PRIMARY MESSAGE, his central teaching, his Good News, was the availability of the kingdom of God.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. Prior to reading this chapter if someone asked you, “What is the gospel Jesus preached?” how would you have answered? How does your answer compare and contrast to the author’s answer on page 35?
2. The author interprets this phrase, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,” as “Change the way you have been thinking—a life of intimacy and interaction with God (the kingdom of God) is now in your midst”

(p. 37). How does this interpretation differ from your own? How do you respond to the author's interpretation on both an intellectual and emotional level?

3. Why do you think the message of the kingdom of God has been lost in so many churches?
4. If you were having a conversation with a friend who said, "I believe the kingdom of God is just a promised future, not a present reality" what would you say to help them see it as both a future promise and a present reality? (For help check pages 41-42, the paragraph beginning "There is no doubt that the kingdom of God has not been fully established.")
5. The author speaks of the kingdom of God having "authority and power" (p. 43). Can you recall a time when you felt connected with a power outside of yourself that was good and loving? What happened? How did it feel? Although your story may seem odd or unusual, if you are comfortable share this experience with others in your group.

BREAK [5 minutes]

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [15 minutes]

The author writes, "...children do not need to be in control. They have very little authority or power, and live each day in dependence and trust, receiving everything as a gift. And this, I believe, is what Jesus is advocating" (p. 44).

Give each participant a blank sheet of paper and read the following instructions:

☞ Take a few minutes to write down on a blank sheet of paper two or three areas of your life where you "need to be in control."

After 5 minutes say:

☞ Spend a few minutes in silence recalling a time when you surrendered control of a situation to God.

- What impact did your surrender have on you?
- How did the situation turn out?

☞ With your group spend time exploring the deep challenges of letting go of control.

ENGAGING THE WORD [15 minutes]

Have a volunteer in your group read aloud Luke 17:21-22. If members of your group have different translations, you may want to note how they differ. Reflect on these questions:

1. How does this passage confirm the teaching of this chapter?
2. Review the author's definition of the kingdom of God (p. 42). With that definition in mind discuss what Jesus might mean when he says, "the kingdom of God is among you."
3. Spend 5 minutes in silence with your eyes closed. Breathe deeply and meditate on the fact that the kingdom of God is among your group right now. When the 5 minutes have passed, share with each other how it felt to ponder this beautiful truth.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read these words from the chapter aloud:

Change the way you have been thinking—a life of intimacy and interaction with God is now in your midst (p. 37).
Amen!

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 3, which explores the inclusivity of God's kingdom.
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week will be hospitality, so you will need to make plans early in the week to try this practice.
- ☞ Don't forget about the silent retreat which is only a few weeks away.

CHAPTER 3, SESSION 14: THE GRAND INVITATION

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Our perception of the world is “upside-down” according to Jesus. To call Jesus’ teaching a paradigm shift is an understatement. So when the class reads this chapter, they will probably be encountering a new teaching on the Beatitudes as well as a new way of looking at the world. That is a lot to digest, and it will take some time.

Most people find it very liberating to hear that the Beatitudes are not “prescriptions” we must fulfill to be blessed by God. Make sure they savor this good news. However, there is possible temptation for individuals who aren’t on the list of Beatitudes; in our comfort we may assume that we don’t need God. It is this danger that leads us to Luke 6, where Jesus adds to the Beatitudes with a list of warnings for those who are rich, full, laughing and well thought of by others. As much as possible, allow your group to live in the tension between these two lists, because at certain times we all find ourselves on one or more!

SUPPLIES

- 🎧 CD player
- 🎧 Recording of Rich Mullins singing “Surely God is With Us,” from *The Jesus Record* (recording available on iTunes or www.amazon.com)
- 🎧 Dry erase board or large sheets of paper for the two lists created in the “Experiencing Transformation” activity

WELCOME

After everyone has arrived, spend a few minutes confirming the plans for the silent retreat and confirming who will be able to attend.

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

At the end of the silence you may offer the following prayer or a prayer of your own.

O Lord, with your preaching and with your life you proclaimed that we should change the way we have been thinking, because through you a life of intimacy and interaction with God is now possible. May your Spirit lead us during this time so that we can live such lives. Amen.

SOUL-TRAINING [10 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to help you process your experience of the soul shaping exercise of hospitality.

1. Were you able to practice any of the suggestions for hospitality this week? If so, which ones?
2. What did you learn about God’s presence in the lives of those who are different than you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself through the exercises?
4. Discuss the soul-shaping exercises from previous chapters that you continue to practice. Do you notice any long-term effect from these practices?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25 minutes]

THE BEATITUDES ARE NOT PRESCRIPTIONS for blessedness but descriptions of the kinds of people who are invited into the kingdom of God.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. The author opened the chapter with a beautiful story of a young man named Kevin and the testimony he shared. What was your reaction to the story of Kevin's testimony?
2. Take a few moments to review the section "Jesus' Narrative: The Beatitudes Are Invitations of Inclusion" including the author's interpretation of each of the Beatitudes (pp. 55-62). Compare and contrast the author's interpretation with what you have been taught about the Beatitudes.
3. In discussing Luke 6:20-26, the author writes, "Jesus' stern warning is born of love. He knows that we try to find solace in our wealth and fulfillment in our bellies. And we confuse fleeting pleasure with joy. When all is well in the kingdom of this world we are tempted to think we have no need of the kingdom of God" (p. 63). Can you identify times when success led you away from or difficulties drew you closer to God? If you are comfortable, discuss these with the group.
4. Near the end of the chapter, the author reflects, "When I heard Kevin speak that day I was watching a living beatitude. His condition seemed unbleisable in the kingdom of this world. According to society's values he has nothing going for him. He is marginalized, outcast, ostracized and neglected. No one would choose his situation. And yet, he is welcomed, esteemed and valued in God's kingdom, which is why he smiled" (pp. 64-65). Have you known someone who is a "living beatitude"? If so, describe this person to your small group.

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD—EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [30 minutes]

Read the following:

We may not think of people being "inside" or "outside" the kingdom of God as Jesus' audience did, but we probably think of people being blessed and cursed because of their abilities and external circumstances. To help us relate to Jesus' message, we are going to spend a few minutes brainstorming two lists: those who are "blessed" in our world's eyes, and those who are "cursed" in our world's eyes.

Make two separate lists—"Blessed" and "Cursed"—using the dry board or paper. After you have created them, ask: *How would these two groups feel about Jesus' Beatitudes?*

As part of the discussion, have someone in your group read aloud Luke 6:20-26.

Ask: *Looking at our list of those who are "blessed" in our world's eyes, is Jesus' warning appropriate for them? Why or why not?*

Following that discussion, ask: *How can we, as followers of Jesus, live out the message of invitation with people on both lists?*

Finish the experience by listening to the song "Surely God Is with Us." Below are the lyrics.

Who's that man, says he's a prophet?
well I wonder if he's got something up his sleeve?
Where's he from? who is his daddy?
There's rumors he even thinks himself a king,
of a kingdom of paupers, simpletons and rogues, the whores all seem to love him,
and the drunks propose a toast, and they say

surely God is with us,
surely God is with us,
they say, surely God is with us today

who's that man, says he's a preacher?
well he must be, he's disturbing all our peace
where does he get off? what is he hiding?
well, every word he says, those fools believe,
but who could move a mountain?
who could love their enemy?
who could rejoice in pain, and turn the other cheek?
and still say...

chorus

blessed are the poor in spirit, heaven belongs to them
blessed are those who make peace, they are God's children
I am the bread of life, I am the way,
do you hear that man? believe what he says?

who's that man, they made him a prisoner?
tortured him and nailed him to a tree
was he so bad? who did he threaten?
did he deserve to die between two thieves?
see the scars and touch his wounds, his risen flesh and bone
now the sinners have become the saints, and the lost have all come home, and they say . . .

chorus

Give the group a few minutes to respond to the message of the song.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by reading these words aloud.

Go from this place trusting that as you discover your identity as one "in whom Christ dwells," you will be empowered to live as a Beatitude: a walking, talking blessing to the world.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 4, "Learning to Live Without Anger."
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week will be keeping a Sabbath, so you will need to read the chapter early in the week and make necessary adjustments to your calendar.

CHAPTER 4, SESSION 15: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT ANGER

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

With this chapter, and the chapters that follow, the great challenge is not in the command itself—in this case, “every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.” The challenge is to keep our focus on the condition of the heart. Over and over, it will be tempting to turn to the external evidence of what is happening in the heart. What the group must strive to do is acknowledge the external results (getting angry) but more importantly recognize the narratives that lead to that external result. This focus is more abstract and less measurable, but if we are to follow Jesus, this must be our goal.

As the leader, be mindful of any connections to the first book in the series, *The Good and Beautiful God*, because our narratives have been under construction since then, and hopefully there is evidence of the fruit of the new narratives we learned about God during that book. For example, as we grow in seeing God as a loving Father rather than an angry judge, we will become more loving and less angry.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ Photocopies of the handout “Exploring Anger” for each person in the group

WELCOME

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O, Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

—The Prayer of St. Francis

SOUL-TRAINING [10 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to help you process your experience of the soul-shaping exercise of Sabbath keeping.

1. Were you able to observe a Sabbath this week? If so, describe what you did and how you felt about it. Remember it is acceptable to start small!
2. Were you able to experience a connection between Sabbath and anger? If so, how are they related for you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from your Sabbath rest?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that anger is caused by unmet expectations mixed with fear.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. This chapter opens with the author's honest account of getting angry during a trip. What aspects of the author's story can you relate to?
2. The author gives us multiple "false imperative narratives" (FINs) (p. 73). Which FIN is most common in your life? How does it lead you to anger?
3. "Jesus' narrative is that God permits nothing to happen to us that he cannot redeem and use for good. In the kingdom of heaven God is always near. We are never alone and never need to be afraid. When I live with this reality deep in my mind and heart, anger cannot get a grip on me" (p. 77). Do you have any evidence in your own life of anger diminishing as you come to know that God is near to us and working for our good? If so and you are comfortable doing so, describe your experience to the group.
4. In the chapter we read this definition for righteous anger: "Righteous anger consists in getting angry at the things that anger God, and then seeking a proper remedy to correct the wrong" (p. 78). Give examples of righteous anger in today's world.

BREAK [5 minutes]

Due to time constraints, this week does not include an "Engaging the Word" segment.

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [40 minutes]

The goal of this week's "Experiencing Transformation" segment is to help everyone in the class take ownership of their anger, where it comes from, and what can be done about it. To simplify this process we have created the handout "Exploring Anger." As the leader, monitor the time, allowing 15 minutes for journaling and 15 minutes for discussion in groups of three or four, followed by 10 minutes of reflection in the overall group.

Distribute a photocopy of the handout to each person, explaining to the group that they have 15 minutes to work through the four steps.

After 15 minutes of silent reflection, invite everyone into groups of three or four. Ask everyone to share what they learned from this process. They do not have to share what caused their anger unless they want to. Encourage each group to end their time with prayer for one another as they work through this difficult emotion.

End this experience by having the groups come together as one group and discuss any highlights from the exercise and the conversation that followed.

Conclude the activity by reminding the group that earlier in this study they looked closely at the nature of God and used specific spiritual practices to help see God the way Jesus saw God. From *The Good and Beautiful God*, the author's understanding of The Lord's Prayer in chapter 2, "God is Good," as well as "living and breathing" Psalm 23 from chapter 3, "God is Generous," are two excellent practices that help change our narratives.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read the serenity prayer aloud.

SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.

—Reinhold Niebuhr and William Spence

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 5, “Learning to Live Without Lust.”
- ☞ The soul-training practice is a 48-hour media fast. For this exercise, like Sabbath, participants will need to adjust their schedules early in the week.

EXPLORING ANGER

The author gives multiple insights into the cause of anger and how to deal with it. To help apply this teaching to your life, work through the steps below.

1. List three or four times when you were angry during the last few weeks. (This list is for your eyes only)
2. Identify the unmet expectations and fears that were at work for each item on your list.
3. What false imperative narratives (p. 73 in *The Good and Beautiful Life*) were at work within you?

Examples of false imperative narratives are:

☞ “I am alone.”

☞ “Things always have to go as I want them.”

☞ “Something terrible will happen if I make a mistake.”

☞ “I must be in control all of the time.”

☞ “Life must always be fair and just.”

☞ “I need to anticipate everything that will happen to me today.”

☞ “I need to be perfect all of the time.”

4. Use the series of questions below to discern a proper response for the items on your list when you were angry. Invite God to give you new insight into handling those situations.

1. Is this matter really worth my attention?

If no, then give it to God and walk away.

If yes, explore question 2.

2. Is my anger justified?

If no, then give it to God and walk away.

If yes, explore question 3.

3. Do I have the right or ability to control the situation?

If no, then give it to God and walk away.

If yes, then explore step 4.

4. Take appropriate action, led by the Spirit.

CHAPTER 5, SESSION 16: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT LUST

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Even within a group that has developed strong trust, it is difficult to speak honestly about our experiences of lust. Particularly in mixed-gender groups this challenge will be present. While it is not necessary for participants to talk openly about all their struggles, it can be damaging to the group if people are not willing to share at some level. The silence of the Church is the easiest path when it comes to this topic. As the leader, don't push anyone to talk about their struggles; however, tell the group they should feel comfortable speaking openly about any of the subjects that are covered by this series. Those who do not struggle with a particular issue should not judge another person because of their struggle, but instead should stand beside them prayerfully encouraging them along the way. Be sensitive to anyone who seems to be unusually quiet, you may want to visit with them after class.

Again, as with each chapter, the point of the chapter is to turn our attention to what will bring us wholeness and health in our relationship with God, others and even ourselves. Cultivate this inner awareness in any way that you can.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ A chime or bell for the “Experiencing Transformation” activity
- ☞ For prayer station #1 you will need a table with lit candles set on it, inkpads, a pad of paper, baby wipes for removing ink from hands, several photocopies of Psalm 139:1-18 and three or four copies of the instructions for the table
- ☞ For prayer station #2: photocopies of Matthew 14:22-33 and the reflection questions
- ☞ For prayer station #3: a table with lit candles and photocopies of the Instructions and Meditation

WELCOME

Remind folks of the dates, location and cost for the silent retreat. This is also a good time to inform the group of the final plans for the closing retreat.

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

You may say the following prayer, a prayer of your own or simply say “Amen” to end the silence.

Loving God, when you look at us you see us as we truly are—immense spiritual beings who were created to reign with you in your kingdom. So often we settle for lesser images of ourselves and others. We look upon others as objects for our pleasure. Set us free, O Lord, to see others and ourselves as you see us. Amen.

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to help you process your experience of fasting from media.

1. Were you able to fast from media this week? If so, describe what you did and how it felt.
2. What connections were you able to see between the media fast and lust?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the media fast?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER: is that lust (*epithumia*) is the creation of a false image or persona wherein we objectify that persona or image in an attempt to fill a deep need for intimacy, which can only be met by our union with God in his kingdom.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. What messages have you heard at church about sex? What has been implied about sex through silence?
2. On pages 91-92 the author connects *epithumia* and adultery, and he notes that in both cases, “valuing the other as a sacred being is tossed aside.” Do you agree or disagree with the comparison between lust and adultery? If you are comfortable, explain.
3. The author explores “*Epithumia* for Women” on pages 92-93. In what ways do you agree or disagree with the author’s observations?
4. Near the end of the chapter the author makes several points about how living in the kingdom of God is the cure for lust:
 - ☞ “In the kingdom we know who we are and whose we are. The need to feel loved, to be important, and to be sacred and special is met in our oneness with Christ” (p. 95).
 - ☞ “When I set my heart on things above (the kingdom) I discover that I am part of something thrilling and exciting—the divine conspiracy—and everywhere I turn God is at work. Now I have the drama I seek and I have a place to channel my energies” (p. 95).
 - ☞ “Finally, because I know who I am and am secure (God is good and desires my good) I am free to see others in a new way. I no longer see them as objects to exploit but as real persons who God dearly loves” (p. 95).
5. What is your reaction to the triangle of appropriate physical intimacy (p. 96)?

BREAK [5 minutes]

This week’s “Engaging the Word” is included in the “Three Prayer Stations” activity.

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION—THREE PRAYER STATIONS [45 minutes]

For this experience, you will need to create three prayer stations that explore topics from the chapter. The first station addresses our identity as “one in whom Christ dwells.” The second station invites participants to catch a vision for something bigger than their sexual desires. The third station encourages participants to see others the way God sees them.

The stations can be set up in a large room (gym or fellowship hall) so the music and readings don’t distract the others or in separate rooms that are near to each other. As the leader you will need to have an appropriate way to notify the group when there are 5 minutes remaining and when the time is over (a chime works well). Following the time at the prayer stations, leave about 10 minutes for the group to come back together and share their experiences.

Give these instructions to the group:

Living in the kingdom of God begins to diminish our lust by addressing three different issues: first, we come to see ourselves as ones “in whom Christ dwells” —deeply loved and valued by God. Second, we catch a vision for something bigger than our sexual desires—the kingdom of God is active and dynamic all around us, and we have been invited to participate in that action. Third, we come to see others as God sees them—not as sexual parts designed and assembled for our pleasure but as spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God’s kingdom. This session’s experience involves three prayer stations that look at these three sources of healing.

The prayer stations can be done in any order, so feel free to go to the station that attracts you most. If you don’t complete all three prayer stations in the given time, that is alright.

PRAYER STATION #1—OUR IDENTITY

The author writes, “The need to feel loved, to be important, and to be sacred and special is met in our oneness with Christ” (p. 95). One of the most powerful passages of Scripture to solidify our identity as a beloved and sacred child of God is Psalm 139. At this station, set a few lit candles on a table with several copies of Psalm 139:1-18. Participants are invited to read the passage as many times through as they would like using *lectio divina*. After this time of silent prayer and fellowship with God, they can touch their fingers and thumbs to the inkpads and leave their unique fingerprint on the pad of paper in the center of the table as a symbol of their uniqueness and sacredness.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TABLE

For this prayer station, you are invited to discover your identity as described by the psalmist in Psalm 139:1-18. Read this text using the steps of lectio divina. First, read the passage all the way through, just getting a feel for the passage. Read the passage a second time inviting God to reveal any words or phrases for you to chew on. Spend a few minutes in silence repeating that word or phrase over to yourself. Read the passage a third time asking God why the previous word or phrase was drawn to your attention. Spend a few minutes in silent conversation with God, asking and listening, as you discover God’s word for your life. Following this conversation, spend time savoring God’s presence with you.

When your time of silence feels like it has concluded, go to the table and touch your fingers to the inkpad, and then leave your unique fingerprint on the blank paper in the middle of the table as a celebration of your sacredness.

PSALM 139:1-18 (NIV)

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.	even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.
You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.	For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.	I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.	your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.	My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.	When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?	your eyes saw my unformed body.
If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.	All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,	How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!
even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.	Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.
If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,”	When I awake, I am still with you.

PRAYER STATION #2—CHANNELING DESIRE TOWARD SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

For this simple station you will need photocopies of the Scripture passage Matthew 14:22-33 with photocopies of the reflection questions. Because the Scripture revolves around a boat and water, you may want to develop a nautical theme for the station.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TABLE

The desire within us that leads to lust is an important part of who we are. As Rob Bell writes, “It’s not about getting rid of desire. It’s about giving ourselves to bigger and better and more powerful desires. . . . Life is not about toning down and repressing your God-given life force. It’s about channeling it and focusing it and turning it loose on something beautiful” (p. 95).

This station is a reflection on how God is inviting you to step out of the boat and move into a new and bigger dream for your life.

Begin by reading Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV).

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Then journal your answers to these questions:

- ☞ What is Jesus inviting me to do?*
- ☞ What is the boat that Jesus is inviting me to step out of?*
- ☞ What fears keep me from moving into the bigger dream?*
- ☞ What simple, measurable step could I take to respond to Jesus’ invitation?*

If you have a sense of calling from God, pray for the courage to respond.

PRAYER STATION #3—SEEING OTHERS DIFFERENTLY

For prayer station #3, set the instructions and meditation on a table with candles lit for ambience.

INSTRUCTIONS AND MEDITATION

This prayer station is a meditation from the book Jesus, the Son of Man by Kahlil Gibran. It is based very loosely on the interaction between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Do not focus on the biblical accuracy of the meditation, but instead focus on the truth that is revealed. The meditation invites us to imagine the relationship that Jesus offered to women. Read it prayerfully allowing your imagination to picture the conversations.

It was in the month of June when I saw Him for the first time. He was walking in the wheat field when I passed by with my handmaidens, and He was alone.

The rhythm of His step was different from other men’s, and the movement of His body was like naught I had seen before. Men do not pace the earth in that manner. And even now I do not know whether He walked fast or slow.

My handmaidens pointed their fingers at Him and spoke in shy whispers to one another. And I stayed my steps for a moment, and raised my hand to hail Him. But He did not turn His face, and He did not look at

me. And I hated Him. I was swept back into myself, and I was so cold as if I had been in a snow-drift. And I shivered.

That night I beheld Him in my dreaming; and they told me afterward that I screamed in my sleep and was restless upon my bed.

It was in the month of August that I saw Him again, through my window. He was sitting in the shadow of the cypress tree across my garden, and He was as still as if He had been carved out of stone, like the statues in Antioch and other cities of the North Country.

And my slave, the Egyptian, came to me and said, "That man is here again. He is sitting there across your garden."

And I gazed at Him, and my soul quivered within me, for He was beautiful.

His body was single and each part seemed to love every other part.

Then I clothed myself with raiment of Damascus, and I left my house and walked towards Him.

Was it my aloneness, or was it His fragrance, that drew me to Him? Was it a hunger in my eyes that desired comeliness, or was it His beauty that sought the light of my eyes?

Even now I do not know.

I walked to Him with my scented garments and my golden sandals, the sandals the Roman captain had given me, even these sandals. And when I reached Him, I said, "Good-morrow to you."

And He said, "Good-morrow to you, Miriam."

And He looked at me, and His night-eyes saw me as no man had seen me. And suddenly I was as if naked, and I was shy.

Yet He had only said, "Good-morrow to you."

And then I said to Him, "Will you not come to my house?"

And He said, "Am I not already in your house?"

I did not know what He meant then, but I know now.

And I said, "Will you not have wine and bread with me?"

And He said, "Yes, Miriam, but not now."

Not now, not now, He said. And the voice of the sea was in those two words, and the voice of the wind and the trees. And when He said them unto me, life spoke to death.

For mind you, my friend, I was dead. I was a woman who had divorced her soul. I was living apart from this self which you now see. I belonged to all men, and to none. They called me harlot, and a woman possessed of seven devils. I was cursed, and I was envied.

But when His dawn-eyes looked into my eyes all the stars of my night faded away, and I became Miriam, only Miriam, a woman lost to the earth she had known, and finding herself in new places.

And now again I said to Him, "Come into my house and share bread and wine with me."

And He said, "Why do you bid me to be your guest?"

And I said, "I beg you to come into my house." And it was all that was sod in me, and all that was sky in me calling unto Him.

Then He looked at me, and the noontide of His eyes was upon me, and He said, "You have many lovers, and yet I alone love you. Other men love themselves in your nearness. I love you in your self. Other men see a beauty in you that shall fade away sooner than their own years. But I see in you a beauty that shall not fade away, and in the autumn of your days that beauty shall not be afraid to gaze at itself in the mirror, and it shall not be offended.

“I alone love the unseen in you.”

Then He said in a low voice, “Go away now. If this cypress tree is yours and you would not have me sit in its shadow, I will walk my way.”

And I cried to Him and I said, “Master, come to my house. I have incense to burn for you, and a silver basin for your feet. You are a stranger and yet not a stranger. I entreat you, come to my house.”

Then He stood up and looked at me even as the seasons might look down upon the field, and He smiled. And He said again: “All men love you for themselves. I love you for yourself.”

And then He walked away.

But no other man ever walked the way He walked. Was it a breath born in my garden that moved to the east? Or was it a storm that would shake all things to their foundations?

I knew not, but on that day the sunset of His eyes slew the dragon in me, and I became a woman, I became Miriam, Miriam of Mijdel.

—Kahlil Gibran from *Jesus, the Son of Man*

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read aloud this quote by Lauren Winner from her book *Real Sex*, page 159:

The process of *metanoia* is not merely a process of growing into a list of do’s and don’ts, but rather an increasing recognition that you have earned nothing that you have—not your life or your body, not grace, not salvation. It is a process of learning to live thankfully (or, if you will, eucharistically).

FOR THE COMING WEEK

At the end of this session’s “Experiencing Transformation,” participants can remain in silence for as long as they like and leave when they are ready. For this reason before you begin the meditation, discuss what needs to be done this coming week:

- ☞ Read chapter 6, which explores how living in the kingdom is the cure for lying.
- ☞ The soul-shaping practice for the week will be a day without words.
- ☞ Prior to the next session, you will have the silent retreat.

SILENT RETREAT

A DAY WITHOUT WORDS

One way to experience “a day without words” is to share in a silent retreat together. By participating in the silence as a group, people can see what role their words normally play in their interactions with others. One benefit of the retreat is the sense of camaraderie which comes through this type of shared experience. On a personal level, the silent retreat can be an excellent time for rest and renewal, so don't feel pressured to fill every minute of the retreat. A spacious schedule can give participants a chance to experience a Spirit-led pace of life.

If you choose this option you will need to find a retreat center that can accommodate your group. Considerations would include lodging for overnight, as well as appropriate gathering spaces. Will meals be prepared by the retreat center or by your group (adding this activity could be a real team-building exercise in silence)? Are there other activities that the group can enjoy during their time—hiking, prayer paths, Stations of the Cross, and so on?

SUPPLIES

- ☞ Bible
- ☞ Meditation chime or bell
- ☞ DVD *Be Still*
- ☞ Nooma DVD *Noise*
- ☞ DVD *Into Great Silence*. This documentary, directed by Philip Groning, introduces a world of austere beauty as it follows the daily activities of the resident monks in a Grande Chartreuse monastery whose silence is broken only by prayer and song. With no sound save the natural rhythms of age-old routines, it captures the simplicity and profundity of lives lived with absolute purpose and presence.
- ☞ DVD player and TV or computer and video projector

BASIC SCHEDULE FOR THE RETREAT

FRIDAY

- 6:30 p.m. Welcome and orientation
- 7:00 p.m. Worship leading into silence
- 7:30 p.m. Free time
- 8:30 p.m. Silent interaction

SATURDAY

- 8:00 a.m. Breakfast
- 9:00 a.m. Group scripture reading
- 9:30 a.m. Watch the film *Into Great Silence*
- Noon Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. Nature walk together as a group
- 1:45 p.m. Free time
- 3:00 p.m. Closing worship and sharing
- 4:00 p.m. Dismissal

Here is a more detailed explanation of the retreat.

FRIDAY

6:30 p.m. Orientation to the retreat center facilities and the schedule for the retreat

7:00 p.m. Worship leading into silence

Begin this time of worship with one or two songs and a simple prayer inviting God into this experience.

Following the song share these thoughts:

What do we experience in silence? We experience many things. This longer time of silence could be similar to our shorter observance of 5 minutes of silence. For some, a day without words can be a real struggle, while for others it can be a time of peace.

We begin this retreat with an awareness of words and how we often use words to control people. And so, in our time of silence together we surrender some of our control of each other. People will think whatever they will think about us, and we won't be able to use words to change that.

As part of this retreat, the schedule is largely optional because in silence we also have the chance to practice moving in the freedom of the Spirit. In this small window of time allow yourself to hear the Spirit's gentle whisper in your life and follow that leading.

Indeed, it is in silence and with space in our lives that we can more easily hear the whispered voice of God, just as Elijah did in 1 Kings 19.

Read 1 Kings 19:11-12 (NIV)

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

In the silence we also may encounter our dark side, whether it is insecurity, fear, pain or anger. If such emotions arise, do not run from them, but welcome them. Welcome them because while these dark aspects of ourselves are disappointing and sometimes frightening it is only in seeing them that we can offer them to God for dismantling and healing. For example, if you find yourself concerned that someone else in the group is perhaps angry with you prayerfully consider that emotion. Ask yourself, "Why does their silence make me think they are angry? What narrative is at work to lead me to that conclusion? Is there some way that Christ can heal that narrative?"

To send us into the silence we will watch a short video with Rob Bell. At the end of the video our silence will begin. Are there any final questions?

Watch the Nooma video: *Noise*

7:30 p.m. Free time for reading, resting and getting acquainted with the center

8:30 p.m. Silent Interaction

Watch the DVD *Be Still*, the menu item "Cloud of Witnesses." This twenty minute segment looks at various Christians throughout history who have entered times of silence and contemplation and have found God to be faithful and loving. Let the stories of their lives be an encouragement and inspiration to you.

Following the video, pass out the handout entitled "Scripture for Silent Reflection." Participants can use one of these passages to engage in *lectio divina*. Even though there is no speaking during this time of prayer, it can be powerful to share this time as a group.

At 9:30 ring a chime to let the group know they are dismissed to rest for the evening.

SATURDAY

8:00 a.m. Breakfast

9:00 a.m. Group Scripture reading: Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) This is the one time we can speak—when we read Scripture. Have one Bible available, and simply pass the Bible around the circle inviting everyone to read as much as they would like. When they are finished they can pass it on to the next person. Individuals are not required to read, they may pass if they wish.

9:30 a.m. Watch *Into Great Silence*, a film that quietly and gently reflects on the lives of monks who live mostly in silence. While the movie is lengthy (162 minutes running time) it is a wonderful illustration of how much we miss when we surround ourselves with noise and busyness.

For those who don't want to watch the film this could be a time of active silence with reading, knitting, beading, journaling, praying, napping or playing games like checkers or chess.

Noon Lunch

1:00 p.m. Nature walk together as a group

1:45 p.m. Free time

3:00 p.m. Closing worship and sharing

If you have a large enough group and the skilled people necessary, begin your worship together with a celebratory song such as “In the Lord” from the Taizé songbook, or the classic hymn “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” or a chorus such as “Shout to the Lord.”

As a group read aloud Psalm 16:7-11 (NIV)

I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I have set the LORD always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.
You have made known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Offer the following prayer or a prayer of your own:

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks for this time that we have been able to share. We are most thankful for the way your Spirit is at work in our lives—even when we are not speaking. May we continue to learn and grow from this experience even now, as we come out of the silence.

GROUP REFLECTION

Use these questions to help the group reflect on their experience of a day without words:

- ☞ What surprised you most about this time of silence?
- ☞ What, if anything, was difficult about the retreat?

- ☞ In what way did God feel present during the retreat?
- ☞ What did you learn about God or yourself during the silence?

Thank everyone for their willingness to try this experiment.

GO IN PEACE

May your hearts be tuned, more and more precisely to hear the still, small voice of God. Amen.

SCRIPTURE FOR SILENT REFLECTION

You are invited to prayerfully engage one or two of the following Scripture passages using *lectio divina*. As you may recall, *lectio divina* is a simple prayer practice involving four steps with the passage. The steps are: first to read the passage, second to reflect upon it, third to respond to God's word for you, and finally to rest in God's loving presence.

Job 33:31-33 (NIV)

- ³¹ Pay attention, Job, and listen to me;
be silent, and I will speak.
- ³² If you have anything to say, answer me;
speak up, for I want you to be cleared.
- ³³ But if not, then listen to me;
be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.

Psalms 62:1-2 (NIV)

- ¹ My soul finds rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from him.
- ² He alone is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

John 14:27 (NIV)

- ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Isaiah 32:17 (NIV)

- ¹⁷ The fruit of righteousness will be peace;
the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.

Psalms 34:18 (NIV)

- ¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Habakkuk 2:20 (NIV)

- ²⁰ But the LORD is in his holy temple;
let all the earth be silent before him.

CHAPTER 6, SESSION 17: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT LYING

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

This chapter presents two challenges from the one goal of learning to live without lying. The first challenge is for us to accept the fact that lying is highly pervasive in our lives. Sometimes this is a difficult reality to admit. Even though the evidence is strongly stacked against us, we may be tempted to think we are relatively honest people when in fact we are constantly shifting words, withholding truths and “fudging” on details.

The second challenge is the opposite of the first challenge; that is a tendency toward legalism. Because lying is so pervasive in our culture and in our lives, it is tempting to say you must never lie—ever! For anyone who leans this way it is helpful to remind them that the overall point of all of these teachings is to have our hearts transformed so that it becomes more and more natural to tell the truth. The chapter points this out clearly, but as the leader you need to be vigilant in helping the group to understand it.

As the leader you should also be prepared for the tension that surrounds the question, “What are the limits of honesty?” We would all prefer a rule here that tells us when it is acceptable to lie and when it is not. Unfortunately, there is no clear rule. Participants in your group may be able to speak of times they told the truth and deeply regretted it—not a bad topic to explore. They can also probably name times when telling the truth could cost them a friendship or a job. In the end, the only guideline we really have is to act in love for others. This is very helpful, but it certainly doesn’t make things easier. But a wonderful point cannot be lost here, namely that when we move beyond rules we enter into relationship. When we are faced with the dilemmas and struggles of telling the truth, we are given an opportunity to turn to the Spirit for wisdom and guidance. Would it be better to tell the truth and lose our job or lie and stay employed? Take it to the Spirit and see how the Spirit works through the question—and through the situation.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ DVD of the film *Liar, Liar* starring Jim Carey
- ☞ DVD player and TV or computer and video projector
- ☞ Copies of the “Scripture Immersion Worksheet” handout
- ☞ Bible for each participant

WELCOME

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

Open wide the window of our spirits, O Lord, and fill us full of light; open wide the door of our hearts, that we may receive and entertain [you] with all our powers of adoration and love. Amen.

—Christina G. Rossetti, England, 19th century., *United Methodist Hymnal*, No.477

SOUL-TRAINING [10 minutes]

For this week's session, the reflection on the soul-training exercise is only necessary if your group did not do the silent retreat, or if there were individuals within your group who did not participate in the silent retreat. If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to help you process your experiences of going a day without words and going a day without lying.

1. Which of the two exercises were you able to do this week? Describe what you did and how it felt.
2. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercises?
3. Spend a few minutes reflecting on the soul-training exercises that have been done up to now. Which disciplines are you still practicing? How are they affecting you?

LIAR, LIAR [10 minutes]

In this film Jim Carey plays Fletcher, a lawyer who uses lying in all of his relationships. His son, Max, made a birthday wish that Fletcher could not tell a lie for 24 hours, and the wish came true. Fletcher has struggled through his day discovering the consequences of telling the truth. In this scene, he has realized that Max's wish caused the "curse" (or is it a blessing?), so Fletcher goes to Max to un-wish the wish.

The clip begins at 38:16 and finishes at 40:06. [WARNING: this film contains vulgarity and scenes of inappropriate sexual activity—preview the clip prior to showing it so you know exactly where to start and stop it.]

- ☞ What are Fletcher's narratives about lying?
- ☞ Is there any truth in Fletcher's description of the adult world?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [20 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that we lie when disconnected from the kingdom and are unsure of our protection and identity and care, but in the kingdom we can dispense with lying.

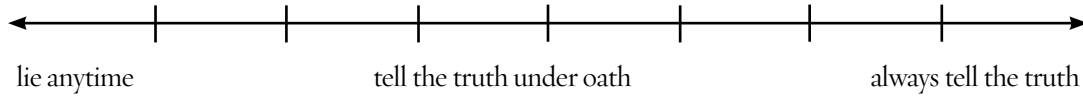
Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. The author gives an insightful list of lies we often tell. They are:
 - ☞ Yes, I have read that book (or seen that movie).
 - ☞ Yes, let's definitely get together soon.
 - ☞ He's in a meeting.
 - ☞ She's not home.
 - ☞ No, that outfit does not make you look fat.

As a group, add to this list by brainstorming lies we tell that seem harmless.

2. Two motives are given for lying: "in order to get what we want" or "to avoid something we don't want" (p. 108). If you are comfortable, discuss with the group which of these motives is most common for you. Are there any other motives you would add?
3. The continuum for this question is contained in the Small Group Guide Appendix in the back of the book (p. 236). Have participants turn to this page to answer this question: In discussing Jesus' narrative about lying, the author contrasts the "old law" with Jesus' teaching. He writes, "The standard of righteousness in Jesus' day was clear: You can tell lies and not be liable (until you get caught), but if you lie 'under oath' you are guilty. Jesus, as always, is aiming for something higher, for a new kind of person with a new kind of character. He is saying, 'Under oath or not, those who live in the kingdom can and should tell the truth'" (p. 110). Put an "X" on the continuum to represent where you think the average person stands regarding lying. Then draw a circle for where you see yourself.

Explain the locations of the marks.



- Have volunteers take turns reading aloud the first five paragraphs from “How Living in the Kingdom Can Cure Lying” on pages 112-13. Note the ways the kingdom of God sets us free from lying. As a group, discuss how your experiences of God’s kingdom have reduced lying in your life.

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD [25 minutes]

The Scripture Immersion Worksheet handout is a collection of Bible verses that address lying. Give each participant a copy and allow 10 to 15 minutes to write in each verse. When everyone has completed the worksheet, discuss these questions:

- What struck you about the passages that you copied down?
- How do these verses connect to the various points made in this chapter of *The Good and Beautiful Life*?

When this discussion has concluded, have one person in the group read aloud Colossians 3:9-10. In this passage, Paul refers to the “new self,” which can be seen as indwelt by Christ and as residing in God’s kingdom. The “old self,” which Paul invites us to take off, is isolated from God and God’s resources. As we put on the new self, lying is less necessary and less attractive because of who we are and where we are.

- How does living in God’s kingdom and being indwelt by Christ affect the necessity and attractiveness of lying?
- What soul-training exercises have helped you take off your “old self” and put on the “new self” that Paul speaks of?

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

The author writes of “giving grace” with our words in the forms of “kingdom encouragement” and “kingdom kindness” (pp. 113-14). Have your group divide into groups of two or three. Invite them to begin by silently reflecting on this last week, looking for times they could have spoken words of kingdom encouragement or kindness but did not. Then with partners have them pray for each other, inviting the Spirit to open their eyes to future opportunities to bless others with their words. Encourage everyone to continue praying for their partners during this coming week.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group pray this verse from the Psalms aloud:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer (Ps 19:14).

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- Read chapter 7, “Learning to Bless Those Who Curse Us.”
- The soul-training practice for the week will be praying for our competitors.

SCRIPTURE IMMERSION WORKSHEET

Look up, and write out, the following verses:

Psalm 12:2

Proverbs 12:19

Proverbs 12:22

Zechariah 8:16

John 1:14

John 18:37

Ephesians 4:25

CHAPTER 7, SESSION 18: LEARNING TO BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE US

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

This chapter continues to move us deeper into the reality of the kingdom. This is especially poignant through the stories of the chapter. First and last are the stories of Jane who suffered public criticism but was ultimately set free from those who would hurt her by focusing on her place in the kingdom. This chapter also features three very brief stories of extraordinary lives. These stories and the power of Jesus' words put the reader in a challenging place to continue exploring places where they are not yet open to the power and presence of the kingdom. Many of us have people that we struggle to love. This chapter moves us directly to that point and invites us to explore why the kingdom feels absent or insufficient in those relationships.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ Before class read through the instructions for the “Experiencing Transformation” exercise and set up the room as described
- ☞ Unlit candles on a table with one larger, lit candle in the center of the table
- ☞ A list of local churches plus any churches that have felt like “competition” to your own church
- ☞ Photocopies of the “Unison Prayer for Other Churches” for each participant
- ☞ Blank paper and pens for each participant to journal

WELCOME

At the beginning of this session discuss the details of the closing retreat with your group and begin listing those who will be able to participate.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

You may offer a prayer of your own, chime a quiet bell, or simply say “Amen” to end the silence.

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of praying for the success of your competitors.

1. What did you notice happening within you and around you as you prayed for the success of your competitors?
2. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that in the kingdom of God we are able to reach for something higher than retaliation and justice, and actually bless people who would harm us—just as Jesus did.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. When the author's friend lost her job as a basketball coach, he gave her these words of truth: "Just remember, Jane, the kingdom is not in trouble, and Jane is not in trouble" (p. 120). When your life has been thrown into turmoil, how would these words have helped you?
2. In the section titled "Kingdom Jujitsu," the author explores the four teachings of Matthew 5:38-42 (pp. 121-126). With this section in mind, discuss these questions.
 - a. How does understanding Jesus' cultural context change your understanding of Matthew 5:38-42?
 - b. The author discourages us from turning these teachings into law. Why is it tempting to make them into laws?
 - c. How does living in God's kingdom make it possible to follow this teaching?
3. What struck you when you read the section titled "Love Your Enemies"?
4. Miroslav Volf describes the person indwelt by Christ as "a rich self" and writes,

A rich self looks toward the future with trust. It gives rather than holding things back in fear of coming out too short, because it believes God's promise that God will take care of it. Finite and endangered, a rich self still gives, because its life is 'hidden with Christ' in the infinite, unassailable, and utterly generous God, the Lord of the present, the past, and the future (p. 129).

With a partner, describe in your own words why the one indwelt by Christ is a "rich self."

5. Return to the three stories of those who dared to be extraordinary (pp. 130-32). What wisdom do you gain from their stories? What situations in your own life need this type of daring?

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD [15 minutes]

Have one person in the group read aloud Matthew 5:38-48. Jesus gives specific situations as well as ways kingdom-dwellers would respond. The author notes, "Kingdom identity (I am one in whom Christ dwells) and kingdom awareness (I am in the strong and secure kingdom of God) are the keys to doing what Jesus calls us to do. With these we can learn how to become radically generous and to live extraordinary lives" (p. 130).

As a group, create three or four modern examples of the situations Jesus describes and how the follower of Christ might respond.

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

For this activity, you will need to set up a separate room with a table and candles. The table will serve as an altar space. On the table there should be one larger, lit candle, which represents Christ's presence in the world. Scattered across the table should be smaller, unlit candles that represent churches near you or perhaps churches that have felt like "competition" to your own congregation. Have one or two additional candles for each member of your group. Decide how you and the participants will light the candles and give each member a copy of the "Unison Prayer for Other Churches."

After completing the "Engaging the Word" segment, move to the room where you have set up the candles on the table. Once everyone is seated read the following:

The act of blessing those who curse us and praying for our enemies is very near to forgiving those who have hurt us and opening ourselves to receive healing. With this in mind, during our remaining time we will be praying for other churches, as well as our enemies and those who have hurt us. Our hope is to discover Christ's power within us to be healed and transformed when we pray for these groups.

If we consider our memorized passage from Colossians, when we engage in prayer for our "enemies" or competitors, we are actively taking off our "old self with its practices," and we are putting on "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

As we discover who we truly are in God, boundaries and definitions for separation begin to melt away, leaving us in union with Christ and at peace with others.

One of the most painful divisions to witness is the division and competition that exists between churches. To help heal this division, I have created a list of churches near us. I will say the name of a church and then together we will say the Unison Prayer for that congregation: God of Grace, may they come to know your kingdom of Love more fully, and may their ministries grow strong as they serve you and our neighbors. Then we will light a candle for that church.

After we have prayed for all of the churches, we will turn our attention to our enemies and those who have hurt us. During this time we will be in silent prayer together. Remember you should only pray for your enemies and those who have hurt you as you are able. Allow yourself to be in dialogue with the Spirit about such relationships. When we pray for those who have hurt us, our hope is to find freedom, healing and wholeness. However, we may still have to hold the person accountable for their actions. As you offer these prayers, you are invited to light one or two candles for those you lift up in prayer.

To begin, have a moment of silence, then lift up the first church on your list and lead the group in the Unison Prayer. After the prayer is spoken, light a candle to represent that congregation.

Once you have named all the churches, invite the group into a time of silence to pray for their own enemies, competitors, and perhaps those who annoy them. Remind them that they can light a candle for these persons as they desire.

After the candles have been lit, allow a few minutes of silence, then offer this prayer or one of your own:

*Lord Christ, you see us
sometimes strangers on the earth,
taken aback by the violence,
by the harshness of oppositions.
And you come to send out a gentle breeze
on the dry ground of our doubts,
and so prepare us to be bearers
of peace and reconciliation.* — Brother Roger of Taizé from *Songs and Prayers from Taizé* (p. 25)

FOR FURTHER READING

An excellent example of reconciliation can be found in the Taizé community in France. The entire focus of the community is bringing about peace and reconciliation in the world through coming into deeper knowledge of the love of God. The community was born out of the violence of World War II. For an excellent book exploring their vision and vocation check out *A Community Called Taizé* by Jason Brian Santos.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read aloud this quote by Dallas Willard from *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 181:

We know that we will be taken care of, no matter what. We can be vulnerable because we are, in the end, simply invulnerable. And once we have broken the power of anger and desire over our lives, we know that the way of Christ in response to personal injury and imposition is always the easier way. It is the only way that allows us to move serenely in the midst of the harm and beyond it.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 8, “Learning to Live Without Vainglory.”
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week will be five acts of serving in secret. You will want to read the chapter early so you have plenty of opportunities to serve.

UNISON PRAYER FOR OTHER CHURCHES

God of Grace, may they come to know your Kingdom of Love more fully, and may their ministries grow strong as they serve you and our neighbors.

UNISON PRAYER FOR OTHER CHURCHES

God of Grace, may they come to know your Kingdom of Love more fully, and may their ministries grow strong as they serve you and our neighbors.

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UNISON PRAYER FOR OTHER CHURCHES

God of Grace, may they come to know your Kingdom of Love more fully, and may their ministries grow strong as they serve you and our neighbors.

CHAPTER 8, SESSION 19: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT VAINGLORY

At this point in the year you may want to begin conversation about future plans for your group. This should be an on-going discussion over the remaining weeks. For insight from previous groups' experiences see the document, "What Next?: Life After The Apprentice Series."

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Vainglory is a struggle for folks who are relatively mature on the Christian path and may only be evident to those who are very mature in their faith. However, it is easily present for someone who has grown up a Christian. For these reasons it is difficult to identify in our own lives. When all of these factors come together, it is easy to see why some people would be confused by this chapter. They might be wondering, "How is it possible to have a vice that only happens because of a virtue?"

To be prepared for this chapter, be aware of your own areas of vainglory and be willing to share those areas with the group. Also plan on evoking wisdom from those in your group who have been on the journey long enough to wrestle with their vainglory. If people aren't able to grasp the idea, don't fret. If they keep on the journey, they'll see it eventually.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ Paper, pencils and a fire if you will do the confession silently rather than with partners
- ☞ A bell or chime to notify the group when to switch roles during the confession
- ☞ Three photocopies of Isaiah 42:3-4 for the "Engaging the Word" section

WELCOME

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

You may offer a prayer of your own, ring a chime, or say "Amen" to end the silence.

SOUL-TRAINING [10-15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of serving in secret.

1. What was the most challenging aspect of serving in secret?
2. How did you feel as you were doing your secret acts of service? How did you feel after they were finished?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?
4. Discuss with your partners any previous soul-shaping exercises that continue to shape you.

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [20 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that vainglory is the need to be thought well of by others; it is driven by the notion that the opinions of others determines our worth. When this vice is fully grown in our hearts we find ourselves more interested in others' opinions of us than actually being a genuinely good person, or doing good for the sake of doing good.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. The author writes, "The world measures our worth on the basis of our appearance, production and performance—which seem to be the only thing that counts. This narrative says, 'Your value is determined by others' assessment'" (p. 139). With a partner, discuss ways you allow your value to be determined by others.
2. Have you ever caught yourself doing some good deed not for the sake of helping others but for the prize of praise? If you are comfortable, talk about it with your group.
3. The author gives us this great insight into Jesus' teaching:

Giving money to the poor. Praying. Fasting. All three activities are some of the most spiritual activities a person can do. So what about Jesus' harsh words? Actually, he is not speaking against these *practices*. He is attacking the way in which they are *being practiced*. He is not concerned with the *method* but the *motive*. As we have seen, Jesus starts with the world's standard of rightness (not murdering, not lying under oath) and then peels off the veneer to see if the heart is good. The same is true here. He takes three righteous and holy actions and then shows how the condition of a person's heart determines whether or not the discipline is a blessing or a hindrance (pp. 144-45).

To explore our motives, have individuals write down their three favorite spiritual practices. Then have them silently consider these questions:

- ☞ Do you long for approval and praise through any of these practices?
- ☞ Based on this chapter, what could you do to purify your motives regarding these disciplines?
- ☞ How could you apply the Puritan saying to "live for an audience of One" to your spiritual practices?

Invite the group to discuss their insights.

ENGAGING THE WORD [10 minutes]

The author writes, "No matter how many worldly 'trophy' we acquire, we won't be able to lay our head down in peace because we are only as good as our last success. But our loving Father—the only One who matters—tells us that we are loved, that we are of immeasurable worth" (pp. 148-49). Utilizing a group *lectio divina* approach, follow the steps listed below to read Isaiah 42:3-4 and encounter God's love for you.

1. Have a volunteer read aloud Isaiah 42:3-4. Simply hear the words and spend a minute in silence following the reading.
2. Have a second volunteer slowly read Isaiah 42:3-4 again. As you listen to the passage, pay attention to any word or phrase that resonates in the deepest places of your heart. Repeat this word or phrase to yourself during a few minutes of silence.
3. Have a final volunteer read the passage once more. When the reading is over, spend a few minutes in silent conversation with God. Give thanks, share concerns, or just listen. Savor this time of being with God.
4. End the silence by having someone in the group say a prayer or simply say "Amen."

ISAIAH 42:3-4 (NIV)

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love;
I lifted the yoke from their neck
and bent down to feed them.

BREAK [5 minutes]

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION—CONFESSION

This week's experience is one that was done during the first half of the study: the practice of Confession. To remind yourself of the key ideas of this practice, read "Confession" from *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster. It is an inspiring chapter.

Confession is a powerful tool against vainglory because it gives us the opportunity to be honest and open about our struggles. At the same time, as we are reminded of God's forgiveness, we can take the focus off of ourselves and turn it towards God and God's grace.

You will have two options for your group based upon the level of trust and intimacy that exists within your group. The first option is for the members of your group to partner off (you could establish the partners yourself or have them find a partner) and confess to one another. In order to do this, you will need a large open room where people can share without being heard. Set chairs in pairs around the room.

To have your group do verbal confession requires tremendous maturity on their part. Decide in advance if your group has two very important characteristics in order to do this activity. First, is everyone in the group mature enough to hear the flaws and struggles of the others in the group? If not, then do silent confession. Second, is everyone in your group mature enough to recognize that while our struggles and sins may be different, we all live in relationship with God by his grace alone? Again, if this is not the case for your group, then do the second option, which is a time of silent confession.

A second, much less intimidating approach is silent confession, inviting each participant to write down the sins the Holy Spirit brings to their mind and then bring those forward. It is best to have a contained fire (a chiminea for example) to put the confessions in to watch their destruction.

Following are thoughts regarding confession as well as some additional practical ideas to be shared with the group.

In the struggle with vainglory, we are tempted to hide behind a mask of holiness. One of the most powerful ways to take off our masks AND to experience God's healing forgiveness is confession. Here are a few important and practical teachings on confession.

We must be careful when we confess our transgressions or weaknesses to someone else. We need to be sure that the person receiving the confession is someone who lives "under the Cross," meaning, they are aware of their own depravity and weaknesses and will not judge us when they hear our confession.

It is also important to know how much to confess. The general rule of thumb is that we should only confess what the Spirit leads us to confess and no more. We do not need to begin confessing our sins from childhood, just those that the Spirit seems to be pressing on us to confess, because it will break the power of that sin as always happens when the sin is brought to the light.

When we confess we are not looking for advice or even counsel. Avoid getting into lengthy discussion about it and watch out for any tendency to rationalize the thing confessed. "Well, I struck back in anger because I was having a really bad day" or "Sure I have some lust

in my heart, but it isn't enough to need to mention." Just confess it. Say, "This is what I thought/said/did . . . I am ashamed of it, and I don't want to carry the shame for another day."

Your confession does not need to be some giant sin, but it should also not be so trivial as to have no effect. Let the Spirit lead by asking, "What, if anything, would it be good for me to confess to someone else?" Remember James 5:16, which teaches, "Confess your sins one to another that you may be healed." Confession is the path to healing and wholeness.

The listener should simply respond with these words, "By the blood of Jesus, you are forgiven."

Spouses should not confess to each other. Find a partner and begin. You will have about 10 minutes of silent reflection. Then you will have 20 minutes with your partner. The first person will have 10 minutes to confess; the second person will then have 10 minutes to confess. I will let you know when 10 minutes have passed.

When the time is over, we will regroup for our closing prayer.

Give everyone 10 minutes to reflect on what they will share during confession. Ring the chime when these 10 minutes have passed and it is time for them to share with a partner. After they have met with their partner for 10 minutes, ring the chime again so they will know to switch roles. After 10 minutes, ring the chime again to bring the group back together.

GO IN PEACE

Conclude by having one person in your group say this prayer which is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:

O divine Master, grant that I might seek
not so much to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
and not so much to be loved, as to love another.
Amen.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 9, "Learning to Live Without Avarice."
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week is de-accumulation.

CHAPTER 9, SESSION 20: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT AVARICE

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Perhaps the greatest challenge of chapter 9 of *The Good and Beautiful Life* is simply that it raises so many questions. It raises questions about kingdom economics. It raises questions about “adequate material provision.” It raises questions about consumerism and marketing. It raises questions about simplicity and poverty. These are huge questions with precious few answers. The impact and difficulty of this chapter will depend greatly upon the affluence and resources of your group. For example, groups comprised of upper-middle class individuals may feel overwhelmed by these ideas and the call to work through them.

There are two helpful thoughts to keep in mind as you lead the group through this chapter. First, questions and discomfort are good! For many years a majority of “Christians” in the western world have glided over Jesus’ words about materialism, greed and avarice. It is very good for us to now engage in the difficult work of looking at these areas and taking them seriously as they apply to our lives (just as we have been doing throughout this study). Second, it is important to keep in mind that at the heart of all of this is our trust in God. The point here is not to inflict guilt but instead to recognize areas where we can continue to grow closer to God. For example, I may not trust God enough to live without a retirement fund, but we know from all of our reading that this doesn’t mean God is disappointed with me or that God is going to “smite” me; it simply means there is an area of my life where I don’t have a radical trust of God. Encourage your group to be honest in naming the things they can’t imagine giving up. Put those items on the table and allow God to teach and guide your group by looking at those things. Hopefully, your group has developed enough trust with each other to dialogue about these fears. Then spend time inviting God to lead you into the deeper waters of the simple life. Usually when we think we’ve arrived is when we are most blind.

Also be aware that the next session is not based on a chapter in *The Good and Beautiful Life*, but instead is based on watching the documentary *Affluenza*. What is especially helpful about this additional session is that it gives your group more time to consider areas of avarice in their own lives.

LOOKING BACK

As you consider this chapter, it might be helpful to reference chapter 2 from *The Good and Beautiful God* titled “God is Good.” When we sacrifice our resources, we sometimes see the benefit. An example would be when Jim Smith loaned \$300 to a man who didn’t pay it back, yet Smith received \$500.00 from a different source when he needed it. However, there are other times when we may not see the benefit of our sacrifices. In these instances we may receive the “good that only the good know.” These paragraphs from “God is Good” illustrate the point:

Thus, the right things to focus our attention upon are “the good things peculiar to the good.” What does that mean? It refers to the blessings that are given only to those who strive to do good. That is the only justice, in a sense, we can count on.

For example, at the time I am writing this I am in Brazil working with two pastors. They have both been offering love and serving people and preaching to the people in Rio and Campinas for years. Though I do not yet speak fluent Portuguese, and I cannot understand what people are saying to them, I have watched them throughout the day as dozens of men and women who have been blessed by their ministries came forward to hug them and thank them. Pastors Eduardo’s and Ricardo’s face radiated with joy.

This is something unknown to those who do wrong. Those who are selfish and spiteful and mean will never know the feeling those two pastors know. It is something “peculiar” to those who do good. Conversely, Augustine says that we should also “give the widest birth to the evils peculiar to evil men.” To use the analogy above, those who are selfish and spiteful and mean are intimately acquainted with guilt, loneliness, remorse and self-hatred. They know what it is like to feel darkness surround them and overtake them. This does not

solve the problem entirely, but it gives us a glimpse into the goodness of God. God promises that those who love, those who serve, those who are honest, and those who are faithful will know—will know a kind of joy and peace that those who are evil will never know (pp. 46-47).

In understanding kingdom economics it is also helpful to return to chapter 7 of *The Good and Beautiful God* entitled “God Is Self-Sacrificing.” That chapter gave us important insight into the nature of God and the nature of the universe God created—it is filled with self-sacrifice rather than self-preservation. When we consider “avarice,” we should keep in mind this bigger vision of existence and how it calls us to live our lives.

SUPPLIES

- ✎ Paper and pens for the treasures list made during “Experiencing Transformation”
- ✎ Optional: dry erase board or tablet of paper

WELCOME

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

Generous God, everything belongs to you and is given by you to establish your kingdom on earth. Enliven our conversation throughout this class with your very Spirit, so that we might be set free to live in harmony with your will for all creation. Amen.

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of de-accumulation.

1. What challenges did you encounter as you gave away some of your possessions?
2. How did it feel after you gave the items away?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25-45 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that we are all stewards of money we earn or are given, and we can invest them either in earthly or heavenly treasures.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. At the beginning of the chapter the author shares his story of buying a pair of Adidas Americanas. With your group recount a possession you desperately wanted and eventually bought. How did you feel once you owned it? What finally happened to the item?
2. We hear Suze Orman’s story of watching her father save the cash register from a burning building and how it formed an important narrative for her (p. 156). With one or two people from your group, tell a story from your childhood that explains your view of money.
3. Have someone in the group read the following summary of Matthew 6:19-24 on page 161:

There are two types of treasures that we can invest in (heavenly or earthly), two kinds of eyes (generous or stingy) and two deities we can serve (God or mammon). Earthly treasures are temporal; heavenly treasures are eternal. The wise choice is obvious. Stingy people are inwardly focused and do not experience joy; generous people are outwardly focused, give freely, and experience joy. Finally, mammon says it can produce peace and happiness, but it fails. God promises peace and happiness, and always delivers. Who will we give our allegiance to? Our loving, giving, endlessly able Father. Jesus is not trying to shame us, but is offering good investment advice. And that is because he understands the nature of the kingdom of God.

What insights and questions do you have about this quote and Matthew 6:19-24?

4. The author recounts a story about a time when he loaned money to an acquaintance, and from that loan he learned an important lesson about kingdom economics (p. 162). If kingdom economics are real, how will you live differently after reading this chapter? As a group brainstorm ways you can put into practice kingdom economics. Let it be a joyful experiment and see what God does!

BREAK [5 minutes]

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [10 minutes]

This simple activity is meant to increase the group's understanding of what we treasure and how those treasures can be both good and bad.

Say:

It is possible that our deepest, most reinforced narratives revolve around our money, possessions and the happiness that comes from consumerism. To experience transformation we must begin by taking an honest evaluation of what we "treasure." For a definition of what we "treasure," we will look at a quote on page 159, which you will want to find and follow along with as we work through a few questions.

This simple activity is meant to increase the group's understanding of what we treasure and how those treasures can be both good and bad.

What exactly is a "treasure"? Dallas Willard explains, "We reveal what our treasures are by what we try to protect, secure, keep." Humans are designed to treasure things. Jesus isn't telling us to not treasure things, he is telling us which kinds of things to treasure. We shouldn't treasure a car because it will not be around forever and cannot love back. Treasuring our spouse is a very good investment. He or she is an eternal spiritual being who can in return love us back and can bless the world.

On a blank sheet of paper, write a list of things you treasure based on Willard's definition, and then explore the following questions. (You may want to write these two questions on a dry erase board, or on a tablet of paper for all to see.)

☞ As you look at these "investments," which ones are earthly and which ones are eternal?

☞ In what ways would you like to change your list of "treasures"?

When the group has had enough time to study their list, move on to the "Engaging the Word" activity.

ENGAGING THE WORD [20 minutes]

To cultivate the inner reality of simplicity the author tells us that 1 Timothy 6:6-10 is a great passage to reflect upon. He writes, "Paul advocates contentment with adequate provision. Beyond that we are tempted to serve mammon and not God" (p. 167).

Have a volunteer read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 out loud.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (NIV).

Discuss the following questions:

1. What strikes you about this Scripture passage?
2. What soul-training exercises have helped you develop the inner reality of contentment and simplicity?
3. Make a list of 30 items you possess, then work through these questions from the chapter (p. 166).
 - a. Do I really need this?
 - b. Does this item give me kingdom joy or merely temporary happiness?
 - c. How much of the money I would spend on this item can I invest in heavenly treasures?
4. Regroup and discuss what you discovered. Identify any measurable steps that you could take to develop inner contentment and outer simplicity.

GO IN PEACE [15-20 minutes]

Close your time together by having a volunteer in the group read these valuable words:

Treasures in heaven relate to the things God is doing. And we know that God is helping people. Thus, the best way to lay up treasures in heaven is to live out Matthew 6:33: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (KJV, p. 159).

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Do not read chapter 10—yet. The next session will be spent watching the video *Affluenza* and discussing it. So for this coming week, return to any previous chapter that has especially challenged you and reread it. Spend time reviewing all the different soul-training exercises you have engaged in and see if there is a practice you should revisit for this week.

SESSION 21: WATCH AND DISCUSS *AFFLUENZA*

Affluenza is a documentary made in 1997 that explores consumerism and marketing. It includes interviews with authors who have already been quoted in the Apprentice study. The documentary, while slightly dated, is nevertheless packed with helpful facts and important insights into life in Western Civilization.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ *Affluenza* DVD; for a copy go to www.bullfrogfilms.com or check your public library
- ☞ DVD player and TV or computer and video projector
- ☞ Blank paper and pens

WELCOME

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Lord, help us to unclutter our lives,
to organise ourselves in the direction of simplicity.*

*Lord, teach us to listen to our hearts;
teach us to welcome change, instead of fearing it. Amen.*

—The Northumbria Community from *Celtic Daily Prayer*

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss soul-shaping exercises and the previous week.

1. What soul-shaping exercises have you continued to practice throughout this study?
2. What impact have these practices had on you?
3. What chapter did you re-read this last week?
4. What new insights did you gain from that chapter?

WATCH *AFFLUENZA* [56 minutes]

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20-25 minutes]

After the viewing, ask:

- ☞ What parts of the program really struck a chord with you? Why?
- ☞ What do you most value in your life? How does “affluenza” affect that part of your life?
- ☞ Based on this film, what narratives do you see at work in our culture?

Before concluding, ask:

- ☞ What are some obstacles that come to mind when you think about reducing your consumption and spending?
- ☞ Have everyone write an answer to this question: What would be one step you would feel comfortable taking in the coming weeks to begin changing your current consumption or spending habits? After everyone has had a chance to write their answer, have them form groups of three or four to reflect on their answers.
- ☞ Discuss ways you as a group can continue to support and encourage one another to overcome “affluenza.”

GO IN PEACE

Conclude the class by reading these lyrics to the Shaker hymn, “Simple Gifts”:

*Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
It will be in the valley of love and delight.*

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 10, “Learning to Live Without Worry.”
- ☞ The soul-training exercise is a specific form of prayer, which you will want to experience for as many days as possible before our next session.

CHAPTER 10, SESSION 22: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT WORRY

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

For many people the common struggle is that deeply rooted worry cannot be uprooted by reading one chapter, doing one spiritual practice, or participating in this entire study. For this reason some folks may resent the chapter because it implies that worry is easily addressed. Generally, however, individuals in the class find it very helpful to engage in prayer in such a specific way. For those who continue to struggle with worry even after reading this chapter, do not feel compelled to remove worry from their life. Encourage good discussion around the issue of worry, examining where it comes from and how it is lived out in their lives.

Also notice the subtle connection between the soul-shaping exercise of “prayer” and the idea in *The Good and Beautiful God* of putting our stories (narratives) within the context of God’s bigger story (meta-narrative). This idea may be helpful for the group in terms of understanding how narratives are at work in the midst of our worries and also our prayers.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ Blank paper and pens
- ☞ A copy of Matthew 6:33 for each participant
- ☞ Optional recording and lyrics to “Don’t Worry, Be Happy”

WELCOME

It may seem too obvious and a cliché, but a funny way to start class would be listening to the Bobby McFerrin song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” While we respect Mr. McFerrin’s musical ability, we aren’t convinced that these lyrics hold the key to eliminating worry. Listen to the song as a fun reminder that worry is a common problem without an easy solution.

Here’s a little song I wrote
You might want to sing it note for note
Don’t worry, be happy.
In every life we have some trouble
But when you worry you make it double
Don’t worry, be happy.
Don’t worry, be happy now.

Chorus

Don’t worry, be happy. Don’t worry, be happy.
Don’t worry, be happy. Don’t worry, be happy.
Ain’t got no place to lay your head
Somebody came and took your bed
Don’t worry, be happy.
The landlord say your rent is late
He may have to litigate
Don’t worry, be happy.

Chorus

(Look at me -- I’m happy. Don’t worry, be happy.
Here I give you my phone number. When you worry, call me,

I make you happy. Don't worry, be happy.)
Ain't got no cash, ain't got no style
Ain't got no gal to make you smile
Don't worry, be happy.
'Cause when you worry your face will frown
And that will bring everybody down
Don't worry, be happy.

Chorus

(Don't worry, don't worry, don't do it.
Be happy. Put a smile on your face.
Don't bring everybody down.
Don't worry. It will soon pass, whatever it is.
Don't worry, be happy.
I'm not worried, I'm happy...)

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

You may offer a prayer of your own, ring a meditation chime, or simply say "Amen" to end the silence.

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. The soul-training exercise for the week was prayer. Regarding the relationship between prayer and worry, the author writes:

God has instituted prayer as one of his means of caring for us. We are invited to turn our cares into prayers. And when we do, we put the matter into God's hands. This does not take away our responsibility in dealing with our concerns, but it places the concerns in the larger context of the kingdom. It allows God to use the resources of the kingdom to meet our needs. When we do this, Paul says, we discover a peace that surpasses our understanding (p. 180).

Use the following questions to discuss your experience of prayer.

1. In what ways did you see the kingdom of God at work in the areas you prayed about?
2. Did you find greater peace as you offered these prayers? If so, how did it affect you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [35 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that people who live in the kingdom of God never need to worry about their lives.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. The author differentiates between worry and caution. Describe the difference.
2. In this chapter we explore the relationship between the media and our fears. Reflect for a few minutes on the news media you consume. What fears do they play on? How does the media influence your awareness and openness to God's kingdom? Discuss these questions with two other people in your group.

3. Review the section entitled “Jesus’ Narrative: Things Not to Worry About” (pp. 175-78). As a group reflect on the various points from this section that you find either challenging or helpful.
4. Commentators Dale C. Allison and W. D. Davies note that “anxiety is foolish and accomplishes nothing except to put God out of the picture” (p. 179). Do you agree with this statement? Explain. Why are the kingdom of God and anxiety mutually exclusive?
5. In discussing Matthew 6:34, the author writes, “Jesus says that the kingdom operates only in the present moment. We can only live in the kingdom today. We can’t live in it tomorrow. So worrying about tomorrow is a useless distraction. Just as we count on God today, we can count on him tomorrow. But we aren’t in tomorrow, and never will be; we live only in the present, in *today*” (p. 180). How does this differ from our culture’s typical notion regarding tomorrow?

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD AND EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

The author tells us that Matthew 6:33 “is the key to the Sermon on the Mount” (p. 178). Go to the section “One Day at a Time” (pp. 180-81), and highlight points that are especially helpful or challenging to you. Once everyone has had a chance to discuss, prayerfully engage Matthew 6:33 using the following steps.

1. Give each person the photocopy of Matthew 6:33.
2. Have each person read the verse aloud, slowly. Leave a brief pause between each reading.
3. Once everyone has read the verse, spend 5 minutes in silence savoring the passage.
4. Read the following: *To apply the passage to our lives, write a list of your activities from yesterday on a blank sheet of paper. Allow time for everyone to complete a full list.*
5. Then say: *Ask yourself this question, “How do I seek first the kingdom of God in the midst of these activities?” This quote from the chapter may be helpful: “What does it mean to seek the kingdom of God first? It means making the reality and the principles of God’s kingdom our first and primary concern. ... We continually look to God and what he is doing in the midst of ordinary life” (p. 178).*
6. *Below your list write ways you can seek first the kingdom of God in the midst of ordinary life.*
7. *Form groups of three or four and discuss the ideas you have generated so far for seeking first God’s kingdom. Allow the conversation to be creative—perhaps new ideas will surface as you share and discuss.*
8. Regroup and have the sub-groups share ideas they created.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Close your time together by having a volunteer in the group read this quote:

As long as we live in fellowship with our good and beautiful God in his mighty kingdom, we have nothing to fear, not even fear itself. For nothing in life or death can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). When we know this to be true, we can let go of worry and begin living with confidence and joy (p. 182).

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 11, “Learning to Live Without Judging Others.”
- ☞ The soul-training practice is to go the entire day without gossiping.

CHAPTER II, SESSION 23: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT JUDGING OTHERS

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

It certainly takes patience and faith to avoid using condemnation engineering on people. But underneath it all, the great challenge of this teaching is surrender of control. When we judge and condemn others, we feel active in changing them. When we take Jesus' approach and begin with prayer, followed by asking, we are giving up our power and our ability to control the outcome. It is important for the group to realize that judgment and condemnation only *feel* like power and control. In reality judging someone doesn't give us any real control. As we realize this, we will be more comfortable embracing Jesus' approach ourselves.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ Photocopy of John 8:1-11 (see below)
- ☞ Worshipful room with table and chairs
- ☞ Two candles for each person in the group

WELCOME

Once everyone has arrived, remind them of the plans for the closing retreat and confirm those who will be able to attend.

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

You may offer this prayer, one of your own, or simply end the silence with the word "Amen."

Lord, Jesus Christ, you have taught us that you love us just as we are—not as we should be. Through this radical love we are slowly transformed into the people you created us to be. Grant us now the grace to learn how to love others and treat them as we would be treated rather than judging them. Amen.

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the following questions to discuss your experience of going a day without gossiping.

1. What struggles did you discover when you couldn't gossip?
2. How did your perspective of other people change during this exercise?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that judging others is a common way we try to control others, but it fails. Jesus' method is to pray for, to ask, to seek and to stand with those we want to see change.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. The author summarizes why judging fails by saying, “Condemnation engineering fails because it doesn’t come across as loving, it doesn’t allow the person to own the need for change, it doesn’t offer help toward change, and it may be entirely inaccurate” (p. 190). What would you add or remove from this list of condemnation engineering flaws? Why?
2. Do you have family members who have used “condemnation engineering” on you? If so what was the result?
3. The author takes a different approach to Matthew 7:7-11’s ask, seek and knock (pp. 195-197). What is your reaction to his interpretation?
4. The author tells us that judging others comes from a desire to change others or a need to feel better about ourselves as beloved by God and living within God’s kingdom. Have there been times you felt more connected to the kingdom of God and as a result were less judgmental? If so, discuss these experiences with the group.

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD [15 minutes]

Have a volunteer read John 8:1-11, then discuss these questions as a group:

1. What stated and unstated motivations did the Pharisees have for judging this woman?
2. Imagine yourself in the place of the woman caught in adultery. How might this experience change you?
3. What wisdom and encouragement can we gain from the Bible when it comes to our relationships with people that we want to change?

JOHN 8

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (NIV).

Move directly from your discussion of the Scripture passage to the following prayer experience.

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

This guided prayer experience is intended to be read to the group as a way of directly engaging in non-judgment. You may need to set up this exercise in a separate room. Arrange chairs in a semi-circle facing the table upon which are one lit candle and one unlit candle for every member of your group.

With the meditation, read each sentence slowly. Whenever the group is invited to a specific action, such as naming someone they want to change or identifying their desire to change someone, give a few minutes so everyone can have something or someone in mind. Begin the experience with two or three minutes of silence, inviting the group to relax and become fully present.

Read:

We all have people in our lives that we want to change. Sometimes our desire for them to change is intense, other times it is more passive. Sometimes we are motivated by love for them, other times we are motivated by selfishness. To help us experience a path that is different from judging, we will be engaging in this guided prayer experience.

Begin by recalling the process of transformation you have experienced throughout this study. This process involves identifying your narratives, engaging in soul-training exercises, being in a supportive community, living with an awareness of God's kingdom. Above all it requires the Holy Spirit. Notice these factors in your own life and give thanks to God for the way they have helped you along this journey.

Next, think of someone you want to change. Specifically identify for yourself what about this person you want to change.

Now imagine a scene similar to the Scripture passage of the woman caught in adultery. Imagine that you have brought the person you have identified in front of Jesus. Begin by telling Jesus what it is about this person you want to change and why.

What might Jesus say to you about this person and this situation?

What might Jesus say to the person?

How does it make you feel to hear Jesus speaking to the person you want to change in this manner?

In the Scripture passage, the Pharisees walk off in silence; they are not apprentices of Jesus. We are, and our desire is to learn to do things as Jesus did them. With this in mind, spend time praying for the person you want to see change. Pray that this person would have a spiritual awakening, falling deeply in love with God and discovering God's kingdom in their life.

Next, pray for God to show you ways to ask them about the situation that troubles you, ways to hear their struggles and understand their journey better.

When you are ready, I invite you forward to light a candle for them as a symbol of God's love being borne in them in a deeper, more powerful way.

Once everyone has had a chance to light a candle, offer this prayer:

Let us pray. God of transforming Grace, we give you thanks for the gift of this class, the fellowship of this group, the wisdom of your Son, Jesus Christ, and the power of your Spirit at work within us. We now offer to you the individuals who are represented by these candles. Empower us to love them boldly and to treat them as we would want to be treated. Amen.

Spend a few minutes discussing any insights or questions that surfaced for individuals during the prayer time. It is important to mention to the group that this meditation can be done individually again, and don't forget that often we condemn ourselves as much or more than others. We drag ourselves before Jesus expecting him to condemn us. It could be very helpful to put ourselves in the position of the woman caught in adultery.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTION: *How might this teaching of non-judgment apply to people or groups on a national or international level?*

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

The author finishes the chapter by reflecting on the situation with his son. Close your time together by having someone in the group read this paragraph aloud:

If we really want to see someone change, we have to be willing to come alongside and participate with them, to make sacrifices of our own time and energy. I am so thankful that I have the privilege of prayer and the resources of the kingdom of God. Even if Jacob's problem had not been solved, it still would have been a great blessing. We learned about doing the hard work required of all life's endeavors, and in the process my son and I grew closer. Building your life on the commands of Jesus, though sometimes challenging, is building on a solid foundation (pp. 200-01).

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 12, which explores how living in the kingdom is a way of life.
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week is to live a day devotionally. You may want to observe this practice for several days, so read the chapter early to give yourself time to try it.

CHAPTER 12, SESSION 24: LIVING IN THE KINGDOM DAY BY DAY

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

As we read Jesus' closing words from the Sermon on the Mount, we may be tempted to fall back into the legalism that has been addressed throughout this study. To avoid this tendency, you may want to return to the opening sections of the Sermon on the Mount. There we are reminded that we "are the salt of the earth and the light of the world." With this identity in place Jesus concludes the Sermon by describing the results of our choices. The better life comes through obedience, and obedience only results from action.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ If you have a group of 12 or more:
 - Slips of paper for each participant
 - Pens or pencils
- ☞ Large tablet of paper for creating the group rule
- ☞ Permanent marker

WELCOME

The celebration of finishing the book will happen during the Closing Retreat. However, because things are wrapping up, you may want to have refreshments available to set that tone for this session as well. Confirm the arrangements for the closing retreat.

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Almighty God, King of all Creation, Ruler of our hearts
You alone are the firm foundation we seek for our lives.
You alone bring us forgiveness and healing when our pride leads to our downfall.
You alone are the Master builder who can guide us into wholeness of life.
Surround us with your grace that we might see you for what you are. Amen.*

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of living one day (or more) devotionally.

1. What changes did you have to make in your daily routine to follow Madame Guyon's rule?
2. What changes would you make to this daily rule to continue living it?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that we cannot live an effective and joyful Christian life if we do not practice the spiritual exercises.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. At the beginning of the chapter, the author compares caring for his devotional life to tending a fire. What was your reaction to this illustration?
2. This chapter addresses two false narratives: (1) “What matters is having faith in Jesus, not having an ongoing relationship with him,” and (2) “The only way to be a good Christian is to keep all the rules” (pp. 206-07). How have these narratives shaped your own faith journey?
3. In explaining John 15:5-8 the author writes, “To abide in Christ involves spending time with Jesus. For me, this happens when I keep my mind and heart set on his presence with me” (p. 209). What practices help you abide in Christ? What impact does this have on your life?
4. Of the four images Jesus gives at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (wide vs. narrow gate; inner vs. outer reality; people claiming to know Jesus who don’t; and building on sand vs. rock) (pp. 209-14), which one is the most challenging to you? Why?
5. As you grow in seeing yourself as being indwelt by Christ and living in the unshakeable kingdom of God, have you been able to endure life’s storms differently? Describe the difference.

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD [10 minutes]

Have a group member read Matthew 7:24-27 aloud, then discuss these questions as a group:

1. If you were explaining this passage to a friend, what would you tell them?
2. Given what you have learned from this book, what steps can you take in the days ahead to build your spiritual house on the solid foundation of Christ’s teachings?

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

This session’s experience involves writing a rule that the entire group can continue to follow even when the class is finished. The first goal of writing a group rule is to create a continued sense of community. It is encouraging as we go through our day to know that other members of our group are in prayer for us and to know that, as we observe a few minutes of silence, we are joining together in a great cloud of witnesses that includes our companions from this class. A second goal is accountability. We are more committed to soul-training exercises when we know others are doing these practices as well and that we will have the opportunity to share our discoveries with them. A third goal of creating a group rule is that the soul-training exercises on the list may not be the disciplines we would individually choose for ourselves, therefore we are stretched to engage in practices outside of our preferences. Finally it creates an on-going connection so that group members don’t feel abandoned when the study comes to an end. Instead, they can feel connected to one another even though the amount of time they spend together is reduced.

As you follow the steps for creating the group rule, keep in mind the last chapter of *The Good and Beautiful God* which taught us that change happens slowly. It may even be helpful to read to the group the story of the college president who compared our spiritual lives to an oak tree—slow in growing and filled with periods of growth and then solidifying. This analogy should give your group a little grace. It also serves to point out that you may be concluding a period of growth and now entering a period of solidifying. Do not approach the group rule (or your personal rule for that matter) as the secret to attaining limitless spiritual growth. If you do, you will find only disappointment and failure. So humbly embrace the practices that will nurture your soul and heal your narratives.

If you have a group of twelve to fifteen people, have each participant write on a slip of paper a soul-training exercise that has been a blessing to them and that they would like to continue doing. Gather those slips of paper and put all of them on a list.

If you have a group of less than twelve, have each participant name aloud a soul-shaping exercise they would like to continue doing. Write suggestions on a large sheet of paper.

Regardless of your group size, once the list is done go through it looking for duplications and combining appropriate disciplines. Then work through the list deciding what days or weeks during the next month you will practice these disciplines. Some disciplines may be done corporately with the group coming together for that discipline, but other disciplines can be done individually. The soul-training exercises may also be practices not found in The Apprentice Series. Here is an example of a completed group rule:

- ☞ Practice silence for 10 to 20 minutes each day.
- ☞ Drive the speed limit and be aware of God's presence with you. Bless each car that passes you.
- ☞ Lift up each member of the group daily in prayer.
- ☞ Read from the Sermon on the Mount daily for about 15 minutes.
- ☞ Take a nature walk as a group at a participant's house on the first Saturday of the month.
- ☞ Observe a Sabbath on the 3rd Sunday of the month. During the Sabbath read from the Gospel of John for 1 hour.
- ☞ Gather again in one month to modify this rule, encourage one another, and hold each other accountable in seeking God's kingdom first.

Once the rule is agreed upon, have members write it down in their journal, or have one person write it down and then e-mail it to the group within the next day or two.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Close your time together by having a volunteer in the group read this paragraph:

The only way to nurture my relationship with Jesus is to set my heart and mind on the kingdom of God. The fundamental building block of an apprentice of Jesus is living closely to Jesus in our ordinary lives. If we can learn how to spend an ordinary day with our minds set on things above we will have learned one of the most important spiritual exercises in the Christian life (p. 214).

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Encourage the group to begin living their group rule and to continue practicing any other soul-training exercises that have nurtured kingdom narratives within them. One additional spiritual practice would be praying about the future of the group: How would God like to see this experience continued and shared with others?
- ☞ Remind the group of plans for the closing retreat.

CLOSING RETREAT

PURPOSE

The purpose of the closing retreat is to celebrate the completion of the second book and all God has done in and through your group. It is also an opportunity to consider future plans for your group.

Just as considering where to go for the silent retreat there are several questions to consider when looking for a location for the closing retreat. You will need to find a retreat center that can accommodate your group. Considerations would include lodging for overnight, as well as appropriate gathering spaces. Will meals be prepared by the retreat center or by your group? Are there other activities that the group can enjoy during their time—hiking, prayer paths, Stations of the Cross, and so on?

SUPPLIES

- ☞ Participants will need to bring their copy of *The Good and Beautiful Life* as well as a Bible and journal
- ☞ Blank paper and pens
- ☞ Basic worship supplies such as candles, a cross, CD player, meditative music, instruments and songbooks if applicable for your group
- ☞ As many art supplies as you can transport: blank paper, watercolors, colored pencils, crayons, markers, chalk, clay, magazines for collages, scissors, glue, tape, etc.
- ☞ Photocopies of “Reflection for Discerning the Path Forward” contained at the end of the retreat schedule
- ☞ Photocopies of “A Fellowship of Apprentices: Leading Meaningful Follow-up Sessions” available at www.ApprenticeofJesus.org
- ☞ Communion supplies if you will be taking communion during the closing worship
- ☞ A priest or pastor to lead in communion/Eucharist/The Lord’s Supper if your denomination/church requires one

SCHEDULE

The retreat begins Friday evening and finishes Saturday afternoon.

FRIDAY NIGHT PARTY!

- 7:00 p.m. Worship
- 7:15 p.m. Naming the blessings
- 9:00 p.m. Socialize and play

SATURDAY

- 8:00 a.m. Breakfast
- 9:00 a.m. Morning worship
- 9:30 a.m. Looking ahead
- 10:30 a.m. Break
- 10:45 a.m. The “Sermon on the Mount” project
- Noon Lunch followed by Sabbath rest
- 3:00 p.m. Re-group to share insights from “Sermon on the Mount” project
- 4:06 p.m. Finalize plans for future meetings and/or accountability groups
- 5:06 p.m. Closing worship—with communion/Eucharist/The Lord’s Supper

DETAILED SCHEDULE

FRIDAY NIGHT PARTY!

- 7:00 p.m. Begin with a brief and simple worship to set the tone. Sing a few songs if your group is comfortable. Then read Acts 2:1-4.
- When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.
- Say a prayer of thanksgiving, then sing another song.
- 7:15 p.m. Naming the blessings you have received—creatively.
- ☞ To help everyone reflect on this experience start with 5 to 10 minutes of silence with everyone using their journals to write down answers to these three questions:
 1. How have the books *The Good and Beautiful God* and *The Good and Beautiful Life* blessed you during these last eight months?
 2. How have the individuals in your group blessed you during this study?
 3. How has your relationship with God changed during this study?
 - ☞ Once everyone has had a chance to reflect individually on the class, have them move to the “creation station” which should have as many art supplies as possible. Give everyone 45 minutes to create art, poetry, prose, skits or songs that express their answers to the three reflection questions. Emphasize that no one is being judged for their artistic ability, but instead this is an opportunity to express deep feelings of gratitude in a different way.
 - ☞ When the creating is finished (or the 45 minutes are up), give the group a 10 minute break to enjoy refreshments (what’s a celebration without food?).
 - ☞ Regroup and invite the group to share their creations with everyone else. People do not have to share, but it would be great to have everyone say a little something.
 - ☞ Conclude the sharing with a prayer of thanksgiving and a song.
- 9:00 p.m. Socialize and play
- ☞ Depending on your group’s personality and interests, you could either have a time of relaxation and conversation, or perhaps you could share in a few board games. Whatever you do, simply enjoy each other’s company and the friendships that have been formed.
- Stay up as late as you like. (We won’t tell Madame Guyon.)

SATURDAY

- 8:00 a.m. Breakfast
- 9:00 a.m. Morning worship
- ☞ Begin with a few songs to help get everyone’s heart pumping.
 - ☞ Read Psalm 103 (NIV, notice it mentions God’s kingdom)

Praise the LORD, O my soul,
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,

who redeems your life from the pit
 and crowns you with love and compassion,
 who satisfies your desires with good things
 so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
 The LORD works righteousness
 and justice for all the oppressed.
 He made known his ways to Moses,
 his deeds to the people of Israel:
 The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
 slow to anger, abounding in love.
 He will not always accuse,
 nor will he harbor his anger forever;
 he does not treat us as our sins deserve
 or repay us according to our iniquities.
 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
 so great is his love for those who fear him;
 as far as the east is from the west,
 so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
 As a father has compassion on his children,
 so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
 for he knows how we are formed,
 he remembers that we are dust.
 As for man, his days are like grass,
 he flourishes like a flower of the field;
 the wind blows over it and it is gone,
 and its place remembers it no more.
 But from everlasting to everlasting
 the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
 and his righteousness with their children's children—
 with those who keep his covenant
 and remember to obey his precepts.
 The LORD has established his throne in heaven,
 and his kingdom rules over all.
 Praise the LORD, you his angels,
 you mighty ones who do his bidding,
 who obey his word.
 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,
 you his servants who do his will.
 Praise the LORD, all his works
 everywhere in his dominion.
 Praise the LORD, O my soul.

- 🎵 Sing another song of celebration.
- 🎵 Have a volunteer read Matthew 28:16-20.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.
 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said,
 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of
 all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and
 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the
 very end of the age."

☞ To add insight to this passage read aloud this commentary from *The Life With God Bible*:

“The eleven do go to Galilee and Jesus appears as promised. Jesus says he has been given all authority, and then he authorizes his disciples to make disciples of all nations, which is said to involve baptizing in the Trinitarian name and teaching the converts to obey all that Jesus commanded. But Jesus does far more than just authorize and empower his ‘learners.’ He promises to be with them (Immanuel) as the divine power, presence, and Wisdom of God until the close of the age. Never again will they be bereft of him. Thus, the Gospel closes with a presentation of Jesus as God’s Wisdom, his wise presence, who dwells within the People of God and guards and guides them. As God’s people we are called to live and call others to live according to the counterorder wisdom of Jesus the sage” (p. 58).

Imagine you are one of the eleven disciples. You have shared in the amazing adventure of following Jesus. You’ve also witnessed his brutal death. You’ve known those dark nights of his absence. Then you experienced the breathtaking wonder of his resurrection. With all of that in mind, what feelings stir inside of you when Jesus says, “I am with you always, to the end of the age”?

As an apprentice of Jesus today, how do you feel knowing that Jesus is with you always, to the end of the age?

☞ Prayer

In following you, O Christ, we choose to love and not to harden our hearts, even when the incomprehensible happens. As we remain in your presence with perseverance, day after day, and pray with simplicity of heart, you come and make us into people who are a leaven of confident trust by the way we live. And all that your Gospel calls us to, all that you ask of us, you give.

—Brother Roger of Taizé from *Songs and Prayers from Taizé* (p. 25)

☞ Song

9:30 a.m. A time for looking ahead

This segment of the retreat is intended to lead the group into discerning God’s plans for life after this study. This section serves as the first half of the process. The second half will occur in the afternoon of the retreat. Below are listed specific options for continuing the Apprentice experience, however, it is good to remember that we can live as an apprentice of Jesus and do many different types of studies and provide different types of leadership.

Share these thoughts with the group:

As we come to the end of our study, it is important to reflect and celebrate, which we did a little last night. It is also important to spend time listening to God regarding our future plans. We will do this in two ways during two segments of our retreat. During this first segment I will give you each a handout with questions. You will have some time to work on these questions during the next hour. We’ll take a break and then regroup at 10:45 to look at a reflection project involving the Sermon on the Mount. You will then have a few hours to work on this project, but also to give more thought to the handout. Later in the afternoon we will regroup to reflect on your worksheet and to begin the second segment of discernment, which will involve conversation, prayer and brainstorming.

Pass out photocopies of “Reflection for Discerning the Path Forward” to each participant. Spend a few minutes looking over the handout and giving any clarification to the group as needed. Offer a simple prayer inviting God to lead you all as you seek to do his will. Remind the group that you will gather together at 10:45 for an explanation of the next activity.

10:30 a.m. Break

10:45 a.m. The “Sermon on the Mount” project

This project has two goals. The first goal is to help participants review what they have learned as they worked through *The Good and Beautiful Life*. The second goal is to help each person make a more personal connection to the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest person who ever lived. Understandably, many will be challenged or intimidated by this project. Encourage everyone to do the best they can,

and simply allow the exercise to reveal to them just how much they have learned. Read the following instructions to the group:

Over the next four hours you will have a chance to do one last activity for the Apprentice study. The instructions are simply this: rewrite the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7 in your own words, using the knowledge you have gained from book two, The Good and Beautiful Life. You don't have to interpret all three chapters—you could focus on a few passages in particular—though there is great benefit in pulling all of the pieces together as Jim Smith suggested it should be read. Your project is for your eyes only, however, when we regroup at 3:00 this afternoon, we will reflect together on what you learned from the project, and perhaps there will be a sentence or two that you would be willing to share with the rest of the group.

The goals of the project are to help us review and reconnect with the material we've studied during these last few months as well as helping us understand even better how Jesus' words apply to our lives. As your starting point, you can use whatever translation of the Bible you brought with you on the retreat.

This activity is meant to be spread out over your Sabbath time, so feel free to work for a while, nap for a while, walk, snack and then do more work on the project. As always, just do what you can during the time you have.

Are there any questions?

Once all the questions have been addressed, remind everyone where and when lunch will be served, and dismiss them.

Noon Lunch

Following lunch, everyone should continue interpreting the Sermon on the Mount and enjoy some Sabbath rest.

3:00 p.m. Re-group to share what you discovered/learned, and some of what you wrote as you interpreted the Sermon on the Mount. Use the following questions to guide the discussion.

- ☞ What surprised you as you started working through the text?
- ☞ How would your interpretation have been different nine months ago?
- ☞ What passages were especially difficult to put into your own words?
- ☞ Who is willing to read a small passage from your rewrite?
- ☞ What questions about the Sermon surfaced as you worked through the passage?

3:50 p.m. (15 minute break)

4:06 p.m. Finalize plans for future meetings and/or accountability groups

The goal of this time is to see what direction or directions your group feels led to go after going through this experience. Begin by gathering information from everyone based on their answers to the handout. It is always difficult to anticipate how people will respond to options for the future. Your group may feel content to conclude their time together and go their separate ways, or they may desire to remain together and keep going deeper, or something in the middle.

Be aware that there are two separate items being discerned by the group. The first area of discernment is what individuals feel called to do, and the second area is what the group is being called to do. Begin with the first area and allow that information to form and shape the second area. Give each person an opportunity to answer the following questions. As each person answers, everyone else should listen closely to see how that person's experience might connect with their own sense of calling and also to notice how God might be calling the person who is speaking.

1. *Based on your answers to the handout, what direction do you think God might be calling you to go individually? (There are no wrong answers here.)*
2. *After everyone has answered, ask: As others have answered, is there anything you would add for yourself or for others? Please don't tell other people what they should do, but definitely encourage others. For example, perhaps someone*

in the group has blessed you with their grasp of the material, and you think they would make a great leader. But when they spoke they seemed reluctant to lead a group. Simply share your observation as something for them to consider.

3. What patterns do you see surfacing as we share our different sense of calling? Write down these answers on a dry erase board or a large tablet of paper.

Take a 5 minute break for people to reflect and get some refreshments.

When you regroup say:

We had a few minutes to discuss and then to reflect. We have named some patterns that we saw surfacing. In terms of “pre-formatted” Apprentice options we can do the following:

- ☞ *As a group move on to the third book in the series, The Good and Beautiful Community; however, we may wish to take some time off. During the break we may continue meeting intermittently as an accountability group (see “A Fellowship of Apprentices: Leading Meaningful Follow-up Sessions” as an example);*
- ☞ *repeat The Good and Beautiful God or The Good and Beautiful Life;*
- ☞ *form new Apprentice groups with some of us serving as leaders;*
- ☞ *form accountability groups (hand out photocopies of “A Fellowship of Apprentices: Leading Meaningful Follow-up Sessions” and give everyone time to read about this option);*
- ☞ *meet monthly as a large group to check-in on life in the kingdom*

As a group decide if any of these five options match up with the sense of calling among your group. There may be some who feel led to one area while others feel led to something different. Another possibility is to find your own path that is not listed here.

As these plans become clearer, establish the necessary steps to make these plans happen. Who is providing leadership? Who is helping? When will those involved meet again? How will new people be included in the plans? Working through these questions will make action more possible.

5:00 p.m. (5 minute break)

5:06 p.m. Closing worship—with communion/Eucharist/The Lord’s Supper

If this time of closing worship includes communion/Eucharist, plan on it taking 30 to 45 minutes. If you do not include communion/Eucharist/The Lord’s Supper as part of the experience, plan on the service taking 20 minutes.

Begin with 2 songs that your group knows well and enjoys singing.

Read Psalm 150 (NIV). If everyone has the same translation each person could read one verse aloud.

Praise the LORD.

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

praise him with the harp and lyre,
praise him with tambourine and dancing,

praise him with the strings and flute,

praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD.

Sing a song of celebration!

Read Luke 10:1-2 (NIV).

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Discuss what meaning these words have for your group.

Read Luke 10:17-18 (NIV).

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

As you consider your future plans as a group, what might Jesus be saying to you with the hope and joy of this passage?

Say: *May the words we have just heard from Luke 10 serve as a challenge and encouragement to each of us individually and as a group.*

If you will be sharing in communion/Eucharist/The Lord's Supper together, use a liturgy that your group will be comfortable with.

Following communion/Eucharist/The Lord's Supper, share in a song of thanksgiving.

Read Isaiah 55:10-12 (NIV) as a sending forth.

As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

You will go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands.

Amen and Amen!

REFLECTION FOR DISCERNING THE PATH FORWARD

Prayerfully work through the questions below to help determine future plans for your group.

1. Number the list below in order of importance to you:
 - Go through *The Good and Beautiful God* and *The Good and Beautiful Life* again to understand and apply more of the information.
 - Study *The Good and Beautiful Community* with my group.
 - Continue to grow deeper in the kingdom with my current group, but take a break from the books specifically.
 - Take a break and meet monthly just to stay in touch and keep some of this teaching in mind.
 - Invite friends to share the same experience that I have had.What other observations would you make based on this list?

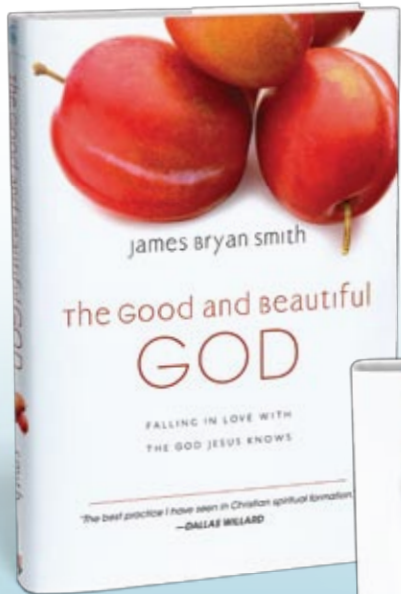
2. If a new group was formed to study *The Good and Beautiful God* and *The Good and Beautiful Life*, do you feel led to:
 - Lead a group?
 - Co-lead a new group with someone from my current group?
 - Participate in a new group, serving and supporting the leadership?
 - Try something completely different?

3. How can you use the information you learned in this study to be a blessing to the other people in your life? Be creative, and allow the Spirit to guide your answer to this question.

4. Who can you think of that would benefit from studying *The Good and Beautiful God* and *The Good and Beautiful Life*?

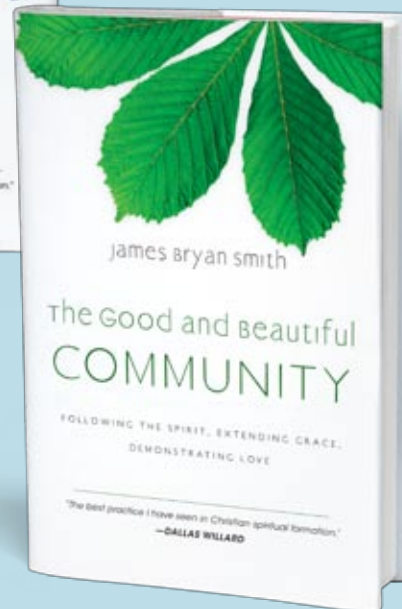
5. As this study comes to an end, do you notice anything that seems missing or lacking in your faith practices right now? If so, what resources might help meet those needs?

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