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# Foreword

I'm thrilled you are taking a deep dive into the J-Curve, the idea that the gospel isn't merely something we believe, but something we reenact. That is, Jesus's death and resurrection for us function like a map for the Christian life, resetting our idea of the normal Christian life.

My goal with this discussion guide is to help you retell your own stories in light of his story of dying and rising. I find that doing so gives me incredible hope even in dark times. If I have a map (the J-Curve) and a compass (this discussion guide) along with a light (God's Word), I can (Lord willing!) make my way out of even deep darkness. You see, the gospel is all about hope. And it's an amazing, non-American hope, a hope that "does not disappoint" (Romans 5:5).

My heart's desire is that you will come out of this study with not only an entirely different way of looking at your life, but a brightness in your eyes and a spring in your step. That's what dying and rising with Jesus does.

Once you've finished this study, you might consider doing a *J-Curve* Interactive Bible Study (available at [seeJesus.net](http://seeJesus.net)). I wrote the Bible study prior to the book, and I "tested" it multiple times by doing the lessons in seminars and Sunday school classes. I love seeing people come alive as they make discoveries on their own. Because the J-Curve is such a new paradigm, you may find that experiencing it from different angles helps you get the gospel map on your heart.

Enjoy!

Paul E. Miller

# Preface

As Paul Miller says in the foreword to this discussion guide, we wrote these questions to help you learn how to retell your everyday life stories in light of Jesus's death and resurrection. Whether you use this guide with a small group or for personal reflection, we pray that the Spirit will move in your heart in such a way that you vividly rediscover what Jesus's dying and rising mean.

An 18-week reading schedule is provided, but feel free to divide the chapters in whatever way best serves your context.

We are grateful to Tommy Thompson and Michele Walton for insights along the way and to Paul Miller for allowing us to be part of what God is doing through *J-Curve*. May this book and discussion guide bless the church!

Patricia Clarke & Julie Courtney

# 18-WEEK READING PLAN

- Week 1: Chapters 1-2
- Week 2: Chapters 3-4
- Week 3: Chapters 5-6
- Week 4: Chapters 7-8
- Week 5: Chapters 9-10
- Week 6: Chapters 11-12
- Week 7: Chapters 13-14
- Week 8: Chapters 15-16
- Week 9: Chapters 17-18
- Week 10: Chapters 19-20
- Week 11: Chapters 21-22
- Week 12: Chapters 23-24
- Week 13: Chapters 25-26
- Week 14: Chapters 27-28
- Week 15: Chapters 29-30
- Week 16: Chapters 31-32
- Week 17: Chapters 33-34
- Week 18: Chapters 35-36

PART 1

# DISCOVERING THE J-CURVE



What Is the J-Curve?

What Is the Larger Theological  
Framework of the J-Curve?

What Is the Connection between the  
J-Curve and Justification by Faith?

## Chapter 1

# “I Will Never Do This Again”

### The J-Curve and How It Helps

1. Paul Miller writes, “The work of love that happens in a J-Curve exposes our hearts in unexpected ways” (20). What does Paul’s travel disaster expose about his heart?
  
2. Share about a time when your attempt to love someone brought about a mini-disaster. Was it a mistake, or would you do it again?



3. How does the J-Curve, the pattern of dying and rising with Christ, reframe Paul's airport experience? What about your experience?
  
4. Think of an "everyday moment"—like sitting miserably in the back of an airplane—when things didn't go your way or you were disappointed. When you reflect on that experience, what do you learn about your heart (positive or negative)?
  
5. What would the voice of the "manager" or the "therapist" tell you to do in the situation described above? How is the "manager" or the "therapist" different from the J-Curve?
  
6. How does the J-Curve affect the situation? What does the work of love—both Jesus' sacrificial love for you and your love for others—look like in this circumstance?



## Chapter 2

# “I Take Your Place”

### The Substitutionary Nature of Love

1. Recall Paul's story with Ed the sheep. Discuss what struck you most about that situation.

2. What do you think the apostle Paul means when he says that we “complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions”?

3. How can you “complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” in one close relationship?
  
4. Think of a situation in your life, and rewrite Paul’s sentence from page 30 for that situation: “This isn’t complicated. I can substitute my \_\_\_\_\_ for [his/her] \_\_\_\_\_.” Share with the group if you feel comfortable.
  
5. What brings out low-level irritation in you? How could love transform those moments?
  
6. What scares you about living a life of substitutionary love?



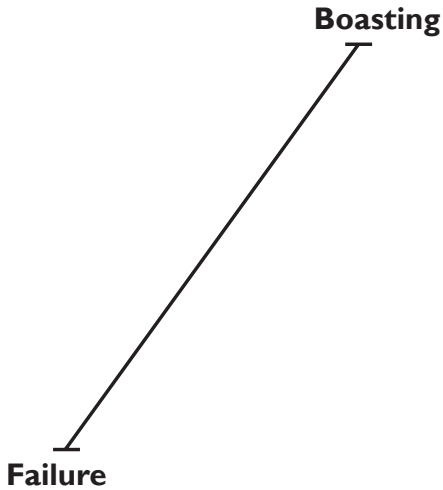
## Chapter 3

# Marketing the Self

### What We Do Instead of the J-Curve

1. Write your own version of Philippians 3:4-6, detailing your reasons to have confidence in the flesh. Share it with the group.

2. Now draw your own Failure-Boasting Chart below.



These questions may help you get started:

- a. What do you naturally boast about?
  - b. How do you boast through false humility?
  - c. What do you judge others for doing?
3. Paul Miller writes, “Our flesh reverses the two great commandments: instead of loving others, we love ourselves (pride); and instead of loving God, we seek other gods (idolatry)” (35). Discuss how pride and idolatry affect the way you relate to others. How does idolatry influence how you spend your time?

4. Describe a time when you were tempted to market yourself. What would it have felt like to be silent? What feelings needed to be reshaped?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Describe what you think Paul means by “alternative source of life.” What are alternative sources of life for you? How do you feed those sources? What do you want to do differently to hunger for Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. How do you experience having a “clear vision of what [you] shouldn’t be” and “a dull vision of what [you] should be” (40)?