



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 1: DAY 4

*This session will focus on Day 4.*

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

There comes a point in many of our students' lives where they recognize their need for a Savior. In faith, they accept Jesus' sacrifice on their behalf and are welcomed into God's family. At some point this happened to them. And it was amazing. The problem is that for many students, their stories don't go much further than this. NEXT: Growing A Faith That Lasts helps students break out of this rut. NEXT helps them take their faith to the next level by equipping them to become the primary owners of their faith life.

**This small group guide is a powerful tool in helping students take on more leadership for their faith.**

By building four small group moments around this content, you add a layer of accountability to students' commitment to meet God in the Bible. And this layer of accountability makes all the difference in building meaningful habits.

## HOW THE NEXT SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY WORKS

This guide is designed to help you have a brief time of discussion and Bible study centered on what you and your students have read the previous week in NEXT. There are four sessions in this guide, one for each week of the book. The idea is that students would read a particular week of devotions, then go through that week's content in this guide. As such, you'll need A) to have read the previous week's devotions, B) to have your book, and C) to have access to a Bible, either a physical one or a Bible app.

### Three Sections Make Up Each Session

- *Looking Back* - A short time of reflection where you and your students collectively look back and make a note of any content that was particularly meaningful
- *Digging In* - A time of Bible study where you look at one of the passages you read during the week
- *Moving Forward* - A closing activity where you and your students will look forward to the week to come, paying close attention to the specific day you'll be covering in your next gathering.



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 1: DAY 4

*This session will focus on Day 4.*

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

#### LOOKING BACK (10 MINUTES)

FIRST, explain to students that you'll start each meeting with a time of reviewing what they've learned in the previous week. We've provided you with a set of questions to help prompt students to think about the past week, and to help encourage them to participate. Consider asking questions similar to the following to help students open up about what they're learning in *NEXT*:

- Was there a specific day that seemed to make more of an impact on you than the other days? Why? What was it about that day that jumped out at you?
- Overall, was your response positive or negative to Week 1? If positive, why? What did you like about it? If negative, what rubbed you the wrong way?
- What feelings did you feel as you worked through these activities?
- What questions do you have? Was there anything you didn't understand?
- What did you encounter that was completely new to you? Were there concepts that you hadn't run-in to before? How did it make you feel? What thoughts did it cause you to consider?

FINALLY, transition into your time of Bible study using the *Going Deeper* activity.

#### GOING DEEPER (10-15 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, remind students that Week 1 was sort of a general overview of why they are called to grow spiritually and to take charge of their faith. Explain that this "Going Deeper" will take more of an in-depth view of what it means to grow deeper in their faith relationship with Christ.

THEN, have a student turn to Week 1, Day 4. Explain that this day serves as a sort of definition of what it means to own your faith. Have him or her read the four truths on pages 17 and 18. Explain that you're going to be focusing on this first truth.

Ask students to think about how they interact with their friends. Ask something like the following:

- **If you want to go hang out at the mall, or the movies, or play video games with your friends, how does that usually happen?**
  - Answers will vary. But lead students to come to the conclusion that someone has to initiate it. Some one has to pursue one or more people in order to make hanging out happen.
- **Who among your group of friends is the one who usually initiates hanging out?**
  - Answers will vary.
- **Imagine a world where you didn't have cell phones or social media. How would you communicate to your friends that you wanted to hang out?**
  - Answers will vary.

Explain to students that like their relationship with their friends, their relationship with Christ depends a lot on their pursuit of Him. Friendships would be pretty lame if no one ever pursued anyone. Our relationship with Christ is similar; the



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 1: DAY 4

*This session will focus on Day 4.*

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

richness of our faith is directly related to how committed we are in pursuing Him.

NEXT, explain to students that the first step toward growing their ownership of their faith is found on page 17. To begin to own their faith, students must desire to follow Jesus. Read or have a student read Matthew 16:24-25. When you have finished, lead students in a brief discussion. Ask something like:

- **Jesus told His disciples that “coming after Him” looked a certain way. In other words, Jesus had some expectations for what a relationship with Him looks like. What expectations did He list here in these verses?**
  - Answer: Deny ourselves; take up our cross; follow.
- **Have you ever heard this phrase “deny yourself”? What do you think it means?**
  - Answer: To deny yourself means to push down, or fight those urges that are sinful or selfish in our nature. The idea is that our “self” is in opposition to God. The “self” Jesus mentions is representative of any desires or plans we have that run counter to God’s plans for us.
- **Can you think of some practical examples of what it looks like to deny yourself in order to follow Jesus?**
  - Answers will vary.
- **The part about taking up your cross can be a little tricky. Keep in mind that the cross was a symbol of shame for first century Christians. Only the worst criminals were crucified. Jesus was talking about identity here. He was saying that we need to identify with Jesus everyday. Who we are needs to be completely tied to who Jesus is. Why do you think Jesus gave this as a condition of following Him?**
  - Answers will vary. But help students see that we can’t follow our own leadership and Jesus’. We have to be fully on board with Jesus’ identity and mission.
- **In the world we live in, how is identifying with Jesus like carrying a cross? How is it considered “shameful” in the world’s eyes?**
  - Answer: People have so many different stereotypical notions about what Christians are. Identifying with Christ brings criticism, ridicule, and can even drive a wedge between you and others.
- **Jesus says that following Him will lead us to “lose our lives,” but this is actually a good thing. We will actually gain life by losing it. What did He mean?**
  - Answer: When we live for Christ, when His mission is our mission, when we wrap ourselves up in His identity, we gain an incredible life, not just spiritually but physically as well. Jesus is life, both on this earth today and in our life after this one. When we surrender our lives to Him, we gain more than we can ever imagine.

FINALLY, remind students that pursuing Jesus is a huge part of owning their faith. And in this passage, Jesus gives a great definition of what this pursuit looks like. Encourage students to reflect back on this definition as they go through the next few days. Challenge them to look for places in their own lives where they need to surrender more to Christ and pursue Him closely. Remind them that no one else can do it for them. Part of owning their faith is desiring to grow closer to Jesus.



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 1: DAY 4

*This session will focus on Day 4.*

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

#### MOVING FORWARD (5 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, ask students to turn to page 27.

THEN, read or have a student read the introduction to Week 2. Then draw students' attention to page 28. Explain that this will give them an idea of what's coming in Week 2. Make sure you make the following two points:

- Week 2, Day 3 could be a pretty important day. If students will slow down and think about it, it could be a great chance for them to really begin to think about their purposes in specific terms. Encourage them to spend some extra time here.
- Encourage them to pay special attention to Week 2, Day 4. You'll be going deeper into that day's content in your next meeting.

FINALLY, encourage students to look for activities in the upcoming week that are especially meaningful, or that cause them to ask questions. Remind them that they'll be asked to share these types of reflections at your next meeting. Encourage them to take notes or to circle or underline specific passages or activities so they can remember to talk about them.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to touch base with your students this upcoming week through texts, Facebook messages, or even a phone call. **By doing so, you will exponentially increase the likelihood that they stay with their commitment to study NEXT.**



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 2: WEEK 2, DAY 4

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

#### LOOKING BACK (10 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, remind students that, similar to Week 1, you'll start each meeting with a time of reviewing what they've learned in the previous week.

*Though students will need it less and less as you move forward, below you'll see a set of suggested questions to help get students in the "sharing mood."*

Consider asking questions similar to the following to help students open up about what they are learning in *NEXT*:

- **As you read through NEXT this week, what activity jumped out at you? What was it about that day's activity that got your attention?**
  - If possible, lead students to go deeper in fleshing out their answer to this question. It would be ideal if you could help them grasp how their answer practically applies to their daily lives.
- **What feelings did you feel as you worked through these activities?**
- **What did you learn new about how God wants to use you on His mission?**
- **Would you say that this week has helped grow your understanding of both God and your identity as His child? In what ways?**

FINALLY, transition into your time of Bible study using the *Going Deeper* activity.

#### GOING DEEPER (10-15 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, explain to students that they'll be going deeper into the concept covered on Week 2, Day 4. Consider saying something like:

- **Week 2 was all about owning your purpose and understanding what it means to be in mission for God. Day 4 was sort of a lighter day, content-wise, serving more as a challenge to you than any thing. It's a great opportunity for us to dig a little deeper into this concept. Let's jump in.**

NEXT, instruct students to look at the names of the people mentioned on page 37. See who among them can remember any details about any of the characters mentioned. Then, ask: What did each of these folks have to do with God's rescue mission? What role do they play in God's plan to save people from their sins? Depending on the level of your students' biblical knowledge, you'll have to help out some. Use the summaries below to guide you. (If your students are lacking in the biblical knowledge area and you find yourself having to provide all the info, don't feel like you have to cover all of these names. Pick some and keep the discussion moving.)

- **Adam and Eve:** Here we saw both God's judgment and His grace demonstrated for the first time. He punished Adam and Eve for their sin (kicking them out of the Garden), but He didn't take their life. He allowed them to live and prosper, blessing them with descendants.



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 2: WEEK 2, DAY 4

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

- **Abraham:** God made Abraham the father of the Israelites. God sent Abraham and Sarah a son, Isaac, even though they were super old and couldn't have kids. God made a binding agreement with Abraham (called a covenant) to never leave the Israelites. God eventually sent Jesus through His chosen people.
- **Joseph:** God worked through great hardships in Joseph's life to create a way for the Israelites to grow and thrive in Egypt. God also knew this would lead to their enslavement. But through their enslavement, God was able to deliver them, serving as a forerunner of the deliverance Christ would bring to all people.
- **Ruth:** Ruth played an unlikely role. She was a Moabite woman who showed great faithfulness to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Through her faithfulness, God allowed her to marry Boaz. Ruth would end up becoming the great-grandmother of King David, thus becoming part of Jesus' lineage.
- **David:** David was the greatest leader Israel ever knew. He was called a man after God's own heart. But the most important thing is that thousands of years before Jesus was born, prophets predicted the Messiah would come from the line of David. Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, was of David's lineage.
- **Peter:** The unofficial leader of the disciples, Peter could be brash and impetuous. But he also was instrumental in the spread of the Gospel. He allowed himself to be used faithfully by God. His life and his writings helped spread God's love to the world.
- **Paul:** Outside of Christ, Paul is perhaps the most influential voice in the spread of Christianity. Which makes Paul's early beginnings so fascinating. He was an enemy of the church and of Christians. But Jesus changed Paul's life. Paul wrote more books of the New Testament than any other writer. God spoke through Paul to share His message of love and forgiveness.
- **James:** James was one of Jesus' most trusted disciples. While we don't know a ton about him, it's safe to say that he was instrumental in spreading the Gospel message.
- **John:** John was often called "the beloved disciple," in part because he was probably the youngest of the 12. He went on to be a powerful voice for the spread of Christianity, writing his Gospel, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Revelation. Through him, God spread His story of redemption and rescue.

THEN, help students see that these people were totally normal. None of them (except maybe Paul who was from a super-well known family and studied at the best schools) were really that out of the ordinary. And yet God used them to do powerful, amazing, world changing things. Ask students if they have ever considered the following thought:

- **What is keeping God from using me to change the world? What impact could my life have if I gave it completely to God?**

FINALLY, allow students to soak in the question for a bit. Then, challenge them to wrestle with it for a few days. Encourage them to really think about how they're putting themselves in a position to be used by God. Remind them that there is something to be said for making themselves available to God to be used as He sees fit. It doesn't happen by accident. Encourage them to do what it takes to make themselves perfectly willing to do whatever God asks of them to do.

### MOVING FORWARD (5 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, ask students to turn to page 42.

THEN, read or have a student read the Week 3 Preview. Then draw students' attention to page 43. Explain that this will give them an idea of what's coming in the Week 3. Make sure you make the following two points:



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 2: WEEK 2, DAY 4

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

- Have students pay close attention to Week 3, Day 3. Explain that this page could be really important to how they view their commitment to reading the Bible. Challenge them to really dig in to this day's devotion and to let its words impact them. Explain that this day can go a long way toward helping them rediscover their passion for God's Word.
- Encourage them to pay special attention to Week 3, Day 2. You'll be going deeper into that day's content in your next meeting.

FINALLY, encourage students to look for activities in the upcoming week that are especially meaningful, or that cause them to ask questions. Remind them that they'll be asked to share these types of reflections at your next meeting. Encourage them to take notes or to circle or underline specific passages or activities so they can remember to talk about them.

As a reminder, don't miss out on the opportunity to touch base with your students this upcoming week through texts, Facebook messages, or even a phone call. By doing so, you will exponentially increase the likelihood that they stay with their commitment to study NEXT.



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 3: WEEK 3, DAY 2

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

#### LOOKING BACK (10 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, just as you have in Weeks 1 and 2, open with a time of reflection on what stood out to students from the last week of engaging with *NEXT*.

If needed, here are a few questions to help get students reflecting on what they've studied:

- **As you read through *NEXT* this week, a week that was all about spiritual practices, what activity jumped out at you? What was it about that day's activity that made such an impression on you?**
  - If possible, lead students to go deeper in fleshing out their answer to this question. It would be ideal if you could help them grasp how their answer practically applies to their daily lives.
- **What connections do you see between what you learned in Weeks 1-2, and Week 3?**
- **This week's material was all about practices, or habits. Think about this:**
  - Is there a specific habit or practice you'd say you're strong at right now?
  - What is the one practice or habit you are in most need of implementing in your life?
- **What emotions did this week's activities stir up in you? How did they make you feel?**
- **What new thoughts do you have on taking your faith to the *NEXT* level that you didn't have before you began studying this week's activities?**

FINALLY, transition into your time of Bible study using the *Going Deeper* activity.

#### GOING DEEPER (10-15 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, explain to students that they'll be going deeper into the concept covered on Week 3, Day 2. Consider saying something like:

- **Week 3 was all about the practices that help lay the foundation for *NEXT* level faith. Let's take a deeper look at one of these practices: engaging with God in the Bible.**

Have students go back and look at page 46 in *NEXT*. Remind students that this devotion asked them to discuss their attitude toward reading the Bible. Ask if anyone feels comfortable enough sharing what they wrote on the blanks on page 46. Explain that the goal is not to make anyone feel bad or guilty, but instead, to start a conversation on how we approach the Bible. Say something like:

- **The vast majority of Christ-followers have, at some time or another in their life, struggled with their attitude toward reading the Bible. It's normal to have days where you can't get enough of God through reading the Bible. And there are days when it seems like reading the Bible is a chore. If you have moments where you don't feel like reading the Bible, there's nothing to be ashamed of. The goal is to re-think how you're approaching the Bible and see if you can address your attitude from this perspective.**

THEN, have students look at the list of verses at the bottom of page 47. Inform them that you will be focusing on Psalm





## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 3: WEEK 3, DAY 2

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

1:2-3. Have a student read the verses out loud. When he or she has finished, lead them in the following discussion. Ask something like:

- **These verses describe someone who is delighting in reading or hearing God's Word. Let's step back a moment. What does it mean to delight in something?**
  - Answer: It means to take great joy in it. To become super happy when you encounter something.
- **What are some things in your life that you delight in? (This isn't necessarily a spiritual question. It could be anything.)**
  - Answers will vary.
- **Choose one of them and try to describe what it is about it that causes you to feel such joy. Why does it make you happy?**
  - Answers will vary.
- **Now, let's focus on God's Word. Do you delight in it? It's a simple question: yes or no?**
  - Answers will vary.
- **If you answered yes, could you try and explain what it is about the Bible that leads you to delight in it? If you're honest and you answered no, can you identify any factors that cause you not to have a lot of joy when it comes to reading the Bible?**
  - Allow students to answer as they will. Encourage their openness.

NEXT, after students have responded, explain to them that taking delight in God's Word is actually not something that is completely optional for us as Christ-followers. It's actually pretty essential. Read Psalm 1:3. Then, ask:

- **Describe the tree that is pictured here. What do we know about it?**
  - Answer: It's alive. It's healthy. It's fulfilling its purpose. Most importantly for your purposes, it's planted beside a water source.
- **If this tree weren't planted where it could access water, what would happen?**
  - Answer: It would not be as healthy. It may not produce fruit. It could possibly die.
- **So, let's connect the dots. This psalm says that the person who delights in God's Word is like this tree. How so?**
  - Answer: Like the water nourishes the tree, the God's Word nourishes our lives. When we don't delight in God's Word and we don't actively pursue meeting God in the pages of the Bible, we'd be like the tree removed from the source of water.

FINALLY, remind students that God gave us His Word so that we would know Him. Part of following God, and a HUGE part of taking more control of their faith, is learning to enjoy God as you encounter Him in the Bible. Encourage students to read the Bible whenever they can. Remind them that the best way to develop a hunger to read God's Word is to read God's Word! Challenge them to commit to finding time each day, even if it is a few minutes, to listen to or read Scripture. Encourage them. Help them process through any bad habits or attitudes when it comes to engaging with the Bible.

### MOVING FORWARD (5 MINUTES)

FIRST, ask students to turn to page 56.



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 3: WEEK 3, DAY 2

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

THEN, read or have a student read the introduction. Then draw students' attention to page 57. Explain that this will give them an idea of what's coming in the Week 4. Make sure you make the following two points:

- Have students pay close attention to Week 4, Day 1. Explain that this day really introduces the concept of influence. If they miss this day, or rush through it, the rest of the week may not make as much of an impact on them.
- Encourage them to pay special attention to Week 4, Day 2. You'll be going deeper into that day's content in your next meeting.



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 4: WEEK 4, DAY 2

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

#### LOOKING BACK (10 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, as you've done the last three weeks, open with a time of reflection on what stood out to students from the last week of engaging with *NEXT*.

See if students will open up about some general observations about the last few weeks of working through *NEXT*. Consider asking questions similar to the following:

- **Have you had any thoughts lately about what it means to take more ownership of your faith? What has God been teaching you? And what are doing about it?**
- **Have you thought about your purpose differently since you've been reading through *NEXT*? What has changed about how you see your life plugging in to God's mission?**
- **Have you noticed a change in how you approach *NEXT*-level spiritual practices? Have you been able to engage with God more in prayer and Bible reading? Why or why not?**
- **Would you say that *NEXT* has helped you have more of an awareness of your faith and the need to grow closer to Christ?**

By this point, students should be openly sharing things that were significant to them over the course of the week. Encourage them to share, affirm their observations, and answer any questions as needed.

THEN, after having them respond to what they covered last week, ask students if they could narrow in on one specific thing that made the most impact on them over the last four weeks. If you remember a particularly meaningful comment or exchange, remind the group. Don't be afraid to share your own reflections. It might be the prompt students need to articulate what has been the most meaningful aspect of their study of *NEXT*.

FINALLY, transition into your time of Bible study using the ***Going Deeper*** activity.

#### GOING DEEPER (10-15 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, explain to students that they'll be going deeper into the concept covered on Week 4, Day 2. Consider saying something like:

- **Week 4 was all about the importance of understanding and embracing the influence you have on others. Week 4, Day 2 was about the people you have influence over. We're going to take a more in-depth look at the idea of influence with a very specific focus in mind: What happens when our lives don't match up with our identities as Christ-followers. There is nothing more damaging to our influence. Let's look at an example from Scripture.**

THEN, instruct your students to turn to Matthew 12. Read or have a student read Matthew 23:1-12. Remind students that the Pharisees were Jewish religious leaders who put an incredible focus on their outward actions and how their hyper-strict focus on doing good things made them more righteous in God's eyes. Then, lead students in a brief discussion.



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 4: WEEK 4, DAY 2

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

- **What does verse 3 tell us about these guys and how others were supposed to react to them?**
  - Answer: They were saying all of the right things. But they didn't "practice what they preach." Jesus acknowledged this disconnect was hurting people.
- **In verse 4, Jesus talks about how their behavior was affecting others trying to follow God. What did He say about it?**
  - Answer: Instead of helping people follow God like they were supposed to do, they burdened people, in effect, coming between God and people with all their rules.
- **How does Jesus describe them in verse 5-7?**
  - Answer: These men did everything for "show." They wanted the world to notice how awesome they were.
- **What is the point Jesus is trying to make in verses 8-10?**
  - Answer: Jesus isn't saying that people aren't allowed to be Dads or teachers (that's what rabbi means). He was referring to the titles that these religious people held. They wanted to be called something extraordinary to stand out from the crowd as the best for God. In contrast Jesus is telling us here that what matters to Him is where our hearts are.
- **Here's the big finish. Looking at verses 11 and 12, what does Jesus say about those that really have the greatest influence?**
  - Answer: It surely wasn't the Pharisees whose actions didn't line up with their faith. No, the most influential people are those who live out their faith, humbling themselves like Christ repeatedly did, and serving others.
- **How does this look in our lives practically?**
  - Answer: It can be hard to fully understand what it means that those with the greatest "influence" are truly servants. Those of us who just want to "look" like Christians, God will look at our hearts, those who just want to be close to Jesus have the greatest influence.

FINALLY, lead students to see that ultimately, the Pharisees influence was negative because their actions, the things they did, didn't line up with who they professed to be. Say something similar to the following:

- **Each of you has influence on others. The point is that you can positively influence others, or negatively influence them. And the truth is that when our actions don't line up with our professed faith, we turn people away from God. We have a negative influence. Our actions don't make us good or bad in God's eyes. Our "goodness" is accomplished by Jesus' work on the cross. But, our Christ-like actions will positively influence others. Just as our un-Christ-like actions have the real chance to negatively influence them.**

Challenge students to take this idea with them as they go through their week. It's almost impossible to have zero influence. Either positive or negative, we all influence others.

### MOVING FORWARD (5 MINUTES)

---

FIRST, make sure you allow time for students to voice any last-session thoughts or reflections.

THEN, instruct students to turn to page 70. Read or have a student read the closing. Consider using this time to build on the challenge Andy makes in the closing pages, particularly page 71. Personalize it and make it your own.



## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### SESSION 4: WEEK 4, DAY 2

# NEXT

GROWING  
A FAITH  
THAT  
LASTS

FINALLY, consider closing your final group time by saying something similar to the following:

- **The most important thing we can do is use this time we've been spending together as a launching point for a deeper commitment to knowing and following Christ. We've learned so much together. How cool would it be if in a few years, you look back on this time as one that really set the tone for your spiritual growth? Let's let that be all of our goals. Let's not waste the chance to use the work God has been doing in our lives.**

FINALLY, close in prayer, and commit to following up with students personally in the next few weeks.