



LIFE **BEYOND** BELIEF

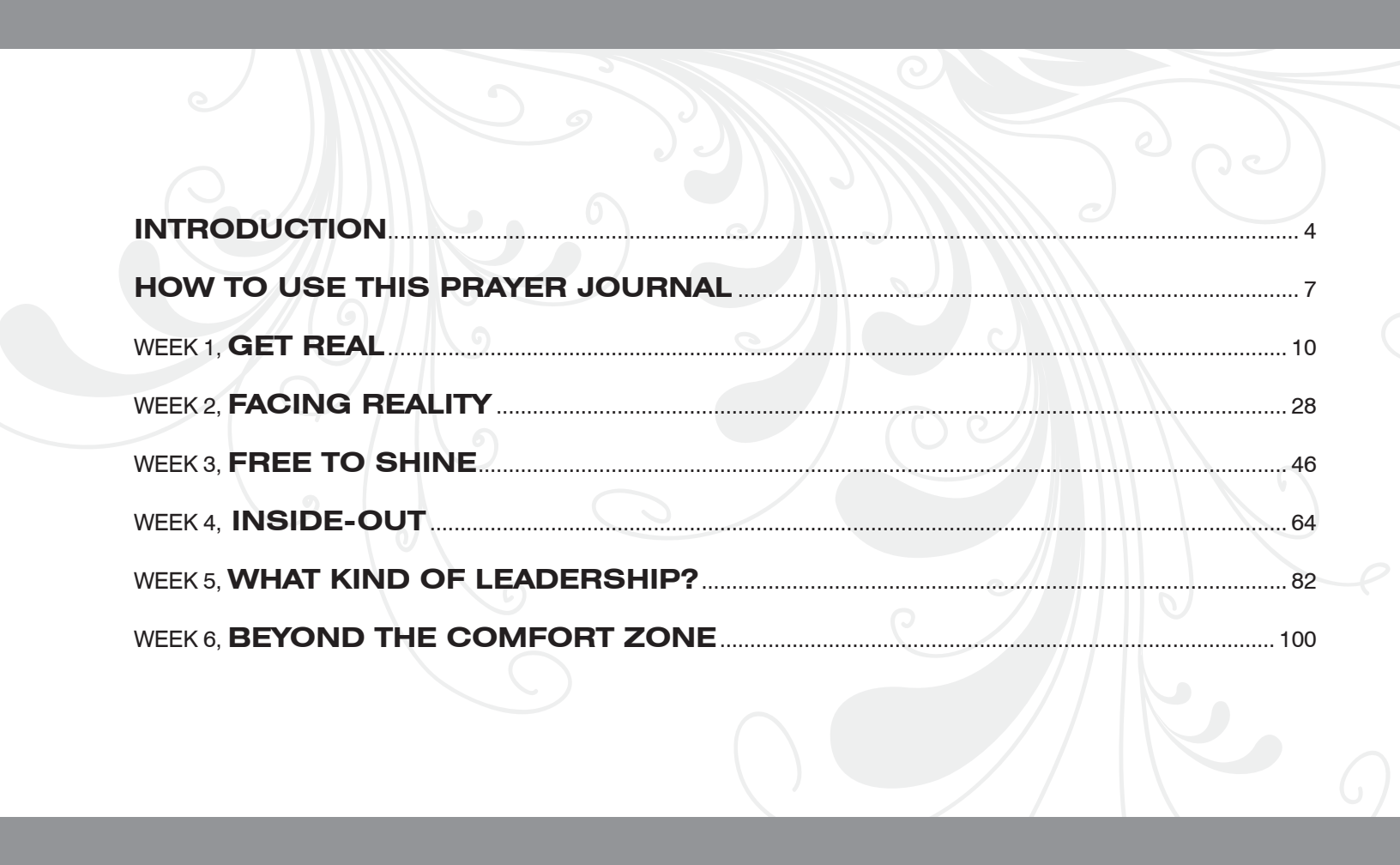


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# INTRODUCTION

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A “CHRISTIAN”? Most Americans seem to assume that being a Christian is primarily about believing certain things. You’re a Christian if you believe in God, Jesus, the Bible and things like that.

Now, beliefs are of course important. But Jesus didn’t come to earth and die on a cross just to give us a set of true beliefs. If that’s all God wanted, he could have sent down a theology textbook rather than sending his own Son! No, Jesus didn’t come just to correct our beliefs. He came to set us free “so that we might have *life*, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). He came to free us from the devil’s bondage and empower us to participate in God’s own life. He came to build his Kingdom *in* us and *through* us. This is the abundant life God always intended humans to enjoy.

Believing certain things is a *prerequisite* for entering into this abundant life, but Kingdom living obviously goes far

beyond believing. Kingdom living is *beyond belief*, for it transforms every aspect of one’s being. And it’s *beyond belief* because the abundant life one finds as they allow themselves to be transformed is, to our normal way of thinking, *unbelievable*.

Listen to this prayer from the Apostle Paul:

*I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:17-19)*

Wow! This inspired prayer reflects God's dream for all of us, individually and as a community. God wants us to "grasp" the expanse of "the love of Christ" that "surpasses knowledge" so we may be "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." And God wants us to trust that he can do "immeasurable more than all we ask or imagine" through the "power that is at work within us."

The life God wants for us is beyond anything we can ask or imagine. It is, in a word, unbelievable!

Who wouldn't want that?

The catch is, wanting is not enough. Without realizing it, we may have beliefs, attitudes and behaviors we've absorbed from our American culture that keep us from fully experiencing Kingdom life. We may believe the right things, go to church, volunteer in ministries and participate in small groups, and yet our lives seem far removed from the fullness of life Paul prayed we'd experience.

In this series, we're going to explore common things in American culture that keep people from experiencing and manifesting the fullness of Kingdom life. And we're going to provide ways for each of us to see what is going on in our life so we can allow the Spirit of God to set us free from hindrances.

God certainly wants us to believe true things. But the life he dreams for us goes far beyond belief. Let's together discover how to be set free from everything that keeps us from experiencing this unbelievable fullness of life.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Greg Boyd". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first letters of "Greg" and "Boyd" being larger and more prominent.

Greg Boyd

## HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER JOURNAL

There are many ways to listen to what the Spirit of God is saying to us today. Sermons, books, devotionals, discussions with friends and reflective prayers are just a few of the different ways that the church has encouraged people to hear God's voice. There isn't just one way to spend time with God and hear him speaking. Just as good experiences with a friend require some creativity, we need to practice different ways of relating to God.

During this series, we are inviting you into a different way of listening to God. Instead of telling you what to think about a specific passage in the Bible, you will have the opportunity to engage the scriptures for yourself. Each day, you will be led through a prayer experience that will open up new ways of listening to God through the scriptures.

This exercise is based on a way of reading the scriptures that is over 1500 years old. It is called "spiritual reading." There is nothing fancy or difficult about it. It is just a simple way of slowing down enough to interact with a specific scripture passage and asking the Holy Spirit to use the reading to speak to your heart.

The effectiveness of this way of reading the scriptures is not based on how smart you are or how spiritual you are. You don't need to have a lot of experience with God or know a lot about the Bible. This kind of reading works because God is alive and the Holy Spirit lives within you. God does not want to leave His children confused and "in the dark." God is light and there is no confusion in God. Since this is true, God speaks to his people through the Bible, the book that has been given to the Church.

## FOUR LISTENING QUESTIONS

Each day there will be a scripture passage for you to read. On the next page, you will find four questions or interactive statements to help you listen to the passage:

- **Read the passage.** *What stands out to you?*
- **Reflect on this point.** *What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?*
- **Pray the point.** *Turn any insight you have into a prayer.*
- **Wait on God.** *What do you sense God speaking to you?*

The first question leads you to read the text again and see what it says. The second will require a little more time so you can meditate and ponder on what you are seeing in the passage. In response to the third question, think of a way to pray the scripture, asking the Lord to do in you what you are seeing in the passage. Then finally, the last is meant to encourage you to take a couple of minutes to simply listen to the Spirit and see what God might be saying to you.

Many people find that writing down their responses to these questions is helpful. The point is to reflect and listen. You are not looking for a “right” answer. These questions are meant to help you connect to God and listen to what the Spirit might be saying to you.

## TWO OPTIONS

Each week will focus on a different passage from Luke 11:27-12:12, which will form the foundation for this Life Beyond Belief series. On the first and usually the second day of the week, the reading will come from this section of Luke. On the other days, you will find scriptures that are related in some way to the Luke passage. There are two ways that you can use this:

**OPTION 1:** Follow the readings as they are quoted for each day of the week. This will give you a broad exposure to some scriptural themes.

**OPTION 2:** Instead of moving on to a new passage every day, return to the Luke passage quoted on Day 1. Read the passage and focus on a different part until you have worked through it in an exhaustive fashion. This will allow you to reflect deeply on one set of verses. If you choose this option, you can still use the questions

on Days 2-5 to write down your thoughts and prayers.

This approach to listening to God may be new to you. If so, great! This is your opportunity to open up new doors in your relationship with God. Enter in and see what might change in your life.



**WEEK 1**



**GET REAL**





When Jesus entered a village he stood out. This is true for a couple of reasons. First, most of Jesus' ministry occurred in rural settings. If you lived in Capernaum or Bethsaida, you would have known when a band of 13 people (Jesus and his disciples) wandered in because the village probably only had 50 to 100 people in the first place.

But there is another reason why Jesus stood out. His actions got attention. He healed sick people, he gave sight to the blind, and he multiplied food. In the middle of Luke 11, we read the story about Jesus driving out a demon who caused a man to be mute.

After Jesus drove out this demon, Luke tells of a woman who came up to Jesus and said, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." This woman was basically saying, "Way to go Jesus. Your mother is blessed because of you and what you are doing." It was as if she was giving Jesus applause for all the good

things he was doing.

In response, Jesus says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." With these words, he is not rebuking her. He is simply saying, "Yes, that is okay, but even more blessed are those people who really get what I am saying and participate in it." Applause is okay, but it is not the point.

Understanding what Jesus told this woman is crucial for us in our modern culture. We are surrounded by entertainment where few perform and most just passively observe and give their applause. Think about it. When you go to the movies, you are a passive observer who plays no role in what transpires. Watching others do everything is all that is asked.

This spectator mentality can creep into our view of being a God follower. *This is a huge road block to participation in God's ways in the American church.* We can

turn church into a spectator sport where the focus lies on how great the preacher did or how wonderful the music was. We do this all the time in American Christianity. If we are not careful, we can turn Christianity into something that is done by a few people on a stage once per week. And all the rest of us have to do is observe what happens.

### **ROAD BLOCK TO PARTICIPATION: CHURCH AS A SPECTATOR SPORT**

A prominent Christian speaker told a story of a conversation with someone who had just heard him speak. She told him, “Wow, you did great!” He responded, “How did you do?” This speaker did not really care much about how he performed for the people. He was more interested in how people participated in what God was saying through the preaching of God’s word.

We hear sermons so that we can participate in what is

being said, not so we can say, “Don’t we have a great preacher. I really enjoy what he says.” The point of worship and preaching is not a time for spectating so that those on stage can be blessed because of what they do. It is a time for us all to hear what God is saying so that we can participate. This is how we are blessed.

Next time you listen to a sermon, ask yourself, “How did I do?” It might start to change everything.

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out,  
“Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.”  
He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”

**LUKE 11:27-28**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**ROMANS 12:1-2**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

**MATTHEW 7:24-27**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

The LORD your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. You have declared this day that the LORD is your God and that you will walk in obedience to him, that you will keep his decrees, commands and laws—that you will listen to him.

And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.

**DEUTERONOMY 26:16-19**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 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."

**JOHN 14:23-27**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.” He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”

**LUKE 11:27-28**

# GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read the two verses from Luke (Luke 11:27-28). What stands out to you?
2. In what ways does modern Christianity promote church as a spectator event?
3. Why is proper thinking about God not enough?
4. What do you think that Jesus was telling the woman?
5. How does participation in the things of the Kingdom relate to obedience?

A black and white close-up photograph of a man's face, smiling broadly. The image is centered on the man's face, showing his eyes, nose, and mouth. A thick black horizontal bar is superimposed across the middle of the image, containing the text "WEEK 2" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

**WEEK 2**



**FACING REALITY**





When you visit a country where you don't speak the language everything gets turned up-side down. Not only is the language different, but many assumptions about life are too. For instance, driving in China is overwhelming, not just because of the sheer number of cars but because everyone honks their horns at each other. As an outsider, all the horn-honking makes no sense. But you cannot understand another culture if you expect the people of that culture to think and act like you do.

In many ways, following Jesus is like a cross-cultural experience. As God, Jesus comes from a different culture than us. And Jesus' way of being God does not fit how we would imagine being God. He does not fit our expectations. It is absurd to think that God, with all of his power would come to earth and be a servant of servants and die the most horrible death imaginable. Such a God does not just confront our expectations. He shatters them.

## ROAD BLOCK TO PARTICIPATION: PREDETERMINED EXPECTATIONS

In the passage for this week, Jesus speaks about how people of his time were not willing to receive him. He uses the word "repent," which basically means in this context "change your thinking" or "reframe your perspective," or "turn away from following that expectation and align yourself with this expectation." The people of Jesus' time wanted a Messiah who would come with great military might and drive out the enemies of Israel, thereby restoring their country to power and glory. They had expectations of God, but Jesus came from a different culture, one that is defined by God's very nature and being. The Bible tells us that this nature is encapsulated by the word love, and love does not shape the cultures of this world.

In this passage, Jesus mentions a couple of stories from the Old Testament. The first is about the Ninevites, a

group of outsiders to whom the prophet Jonah preached. When they heard God's word, they turned away from their expectations and aligned themselves with God. You can read about this story in Jonah 3. The second is about another outsider to Israel, the Queen of the South. This is the Queen of Sheba from 1 Kings 10 who traveled to meet King Solomon and observe the blessings of God upon the people of Israel. With these two stories, Jesus is making a radical point. These supposed outsiders got it more than those within earshot of Jesus were getting it. These outsiders were willing to let go of their expectations of God and repent so that they could align with God, but those listening to Jesus that day were limiting God by holding on to their expectations.

This is not to say that we should come to God without expectations. That is unrealistic. We all have them. Rather, it is to say that we must be willing to let go of our expectations and preconceptions about God and have an attitude of repentance. We must be constantly ready

to repent – to realign our thinking and acting according to God's word to us.

As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom; and now one greater than Solomon is here. The people of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now one greater than Jonah is here.

**LUKE 11:29-32**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

**JONAH 3:6-9**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

**PSALM 51:16-17**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

[The Queen of Sheba (the South)] said to the king [Solomon], “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes.

Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard.

How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!

Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel.

Because of the LORD’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness.”

**1 KINGS 10:6-9**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.

At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

**2 CORINTHIANS 7:10-11**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom; and now one greater than Solomon is here. The people of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now one greater than Jonah is here.

**LUKE 11:29-32**

# GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read the Luke passage (Luke 11:29-32). What stands out to you?
2. When you hear the word “repent” what comes to your mind?
3. How is repentance more than just repenting for immoral deeds (i.e. lying, stealing, etc)?
4. What do you think hindered people who were near Jesus from turning (“repenting”) and following Jesus?
5. How have you expected God to give you a “sign” before you align your life with Jesus and the Kingdom? How has this hindered your relationship with God?

A black and white close-up photograph of a woman's face. She is smiling broadly, showing her teeth. She has dark hair with bangs and is wearing glasses. A thick black horizontal bar is superimposed across the middle of her face, containing the text "WEEK 3" in white, bold, sans-serif font. The background is a soft, out-of-focus pattern.

**WEEK 3**



**FREE TO SHINE**





How do you make the darkness in a room go away? Turn on the light. In the science of color pure black is the absence of any color or light, while pure white is all colors combined. Darkness then, is the absence of light and the way to drive out darkness is to simply introduce light.

Jesus explains how the same is true for our lives. In the first century, (before the modern biological understanding of how the eye works) it was assumed that light traveled from the inside of a person out through the eye. If a person was full of light, this light would shine out through a healthy eye. But if one was full of darkness, the eye would not be healthy. As a result, a person with an unhealthy eye would not be able to embrace Jesus' words and participate in his life. Jesus instructs, "See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness."

## **ROAD BLOCK TO PARTICIPATION: DARKNESS OF HEART**

No matter our understanding of how eyes work, darkness within is a huge hindrance to participation in the things of God. Darkness comes in all forms and in many different ways. Some deal with the darkness of guilt over something they have done. Others deal with shame about something done to them. There are people who just don't like themselves, and there are others who like themselves too much. Darkness is often associated in the Bible with selfishness, covetousness, and rebellion (See Deuteronomy 15:9; 28:54, 56; Proverbs 23:6; 28:22).

By contrast, light is associated with things like generosity, sincerity, freedom and love. Light is directly connected to the nature of God in 1 John:

*“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7).*

As the light of God shines within us, the darkness is driven out. God’s light sets us free from the darkness that hinders our ability to participate in the things of God. However, in order for this to occur, we must allow the darkness to be exposed to the light. In the verses immediately following those quoted above, John wrote:

*“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).*

God’s light will drive out our darkness if we allow him to do so. We need not be controlled by shame, fear, and guilt. We need not be held captive to our current situations. We can be free – free to shine with new light.

None of you lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead you put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.

**LUKE 11:33-36**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

**PSALM 34:3-5**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light  
(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

**EPHESIANS 5:8-10**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

**2 CORINTHIANS 4:6**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor;  
no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

**PSALM 84:11**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

None of you lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead you put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.

**LUKE 11:33-36**

## GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read the Luke passage (Luke 11:33-36). What stands out to you from this reading?
2. What is the central point of this passage?
3. How does internal darkness hinder your ability to obey God?
4. How has freedom from darkness brought light to you life and the freedom to obey?
5. What would it look like if God were to set you free from darkness at this time of your life?



**WEEK 4**



**INSIDE-OUT**





Imagine you are invited to dinner at the house of the Governor. Even if you don't agree with his politics or don't like him as a person, you would present yourself in a way that demonstrated respect for the occasion. You would dress a certain way. You would talk politely about the proper topics. And you would most likely avoid controversial issues.

Jesus was invited to dinner by a Pharisee, one who held a position of respect in the community. Pharisees were legal experts who sought to purify Israel by their strict and intense obedience to the law. They sought to control themselves and others through this legal enforcement for the purpose of pursuing God's ways.

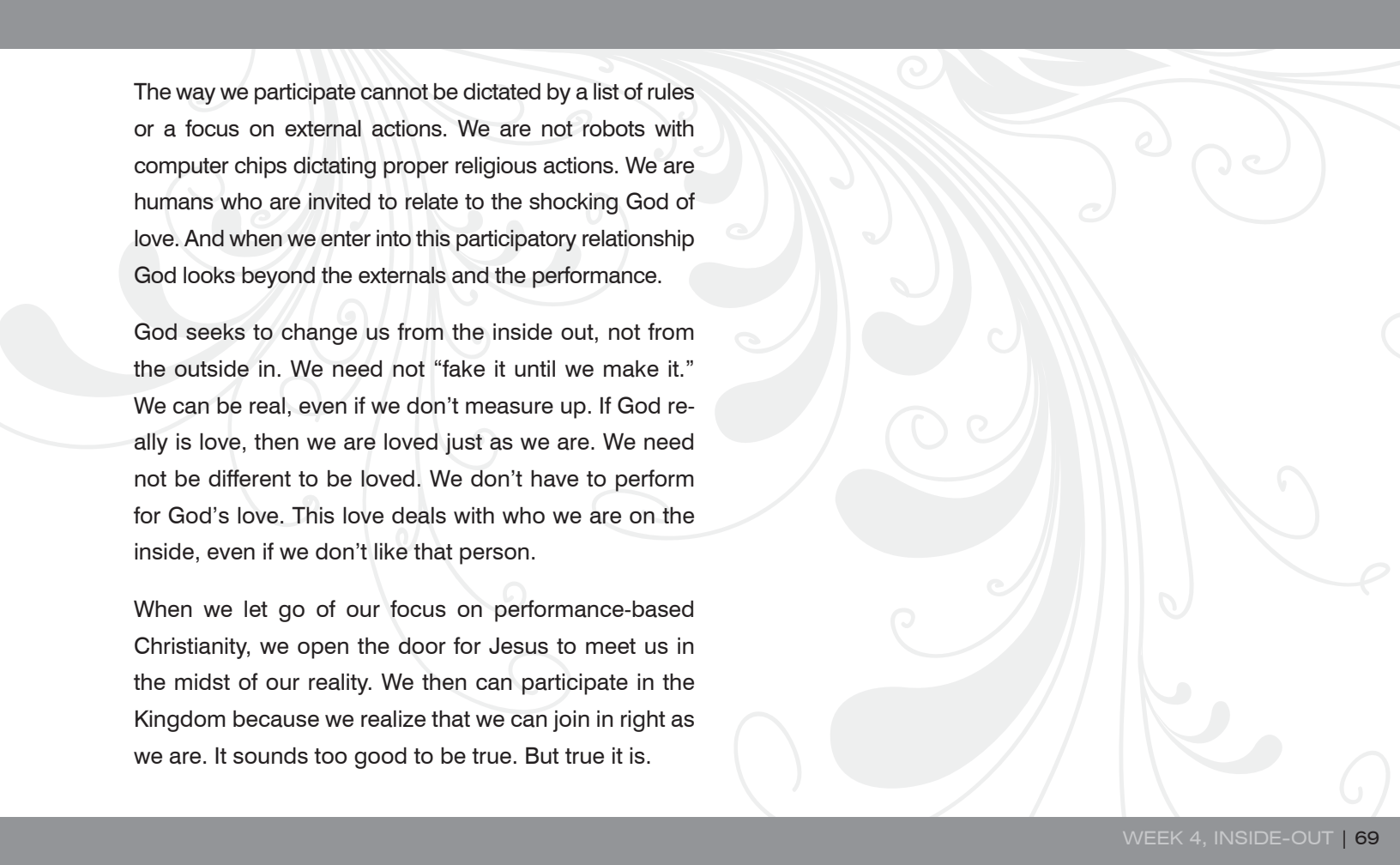
To eat with a Pharisee meant following a specific protocol. But Jesus bucked the system. He did not wash. This washing had nothing to do with hygiene but was a legal ritual the Pharisees added to the law, even though it was technically not part of the Old Testament law. Je-

sus intentionally challenged this religious and social custom to make a point.

## **ROAD BLOCK TO PARTICIPATION: PERFORMANCE-BASED CHRISTIANITY**

The Pharisees added rules like this to help purify Israel and expedite the coming of the Messiah. It was their way of initiating control in order to make something happen. And the only way they could control others was to focus on external actions, thereby turning everything related to the law into a performance.

The pattern of externally-based living has plagued the church throughout its history. It is a form of religion that gives us the feeling that we are in control. It gives us a way to judge ourselves and others and see how we measure up. The fact is, we like control. But this focus on externals actually serves as a hindrance to joining in Jesus' movement in a participatory way.



The way we participate cannot be dictated by a list of rules or a focus on external actions. We are not robots with computer chips dictating proper religious actions. We are humans who are invited to relate to the shocking God of love. And when we enter into this participatory relationship God looks beyond the externals and the performance.

God seeks to change us from the inside out, not from the outside in. We need not “fake it until we make it.” We can be real, even if we don’t measure up. If God really is love, then we are loved just as we are. We need not be different to be loved. We don’t have to perform for God’s love. This love deals with who we are on the inside, even if we don’t like that person.

When we let go of our focus on performance-based Christianity, we open the door for Jesus to meet us in the midst of our reality. We then can participate in the Kingdom because we realize that we can join in right as we are. It sounds too good to be true. But true it is.

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.”

**LUKE 11:37-41**

## **READ**

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Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

**EZEKIEL 36:26-27**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

**1 PETER 1:22-23**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

**2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-19**

## **READ**

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Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again."  
"How can anyone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

**JOHN 3:3-6**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.”

**LUKE 11:37-41**

## GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read the Luke passage (Luke 11:37-41). What stands out to you from this reading?
2. Why is inside-out transformation so crucial in our walk with Jesus?
3. How does a focus on externals deter us?
4. How does being generous to the poor relate to inner transformation?
5. In what ways has a focus on external performance hindered you in your life with God?

A black and white close-up photograph of two women smiling. The image is split horizontally by a solid black band. The top half shows the women's eyes and foreheads, while the bottom half shows their mouths and teeth. The text "WEEK 5" is centered in the black band.

**WEEK 5**



**WHAT KIND OF  
LEADERSHIP?**





Imagine being in a meeting with someone who has an attitude like this, “I know what needs to be done. You can express your opinion, but my ideas are really what matter.” You walk away from the meeting wondering why you even attended. People with such an “I’m right” perspective often see themselves as good leaders. They assume that having the “right” approach is the key to leading others.

In many ways, this is exactly what the Pharisees and the “lawyers” of Jesus’ time were doing. They were the self-appointed keepers of the Old Testament law. They knew how the law worked and they had every legal alternative figured out. All someone needed to do was to ask them. They had a solution.

But Jesus challenged their solutions. He challenged their greed, their pride, and their purity. Neglecting justice relates to greed, loving honor relates to pride, and calling them “unmarked graves” is a symbolic way of

labeling them as impure. Jesus looked into the hearts of these religious leaders and called out what he saw.

## **ROAD BLOCK TO PARTICIPATION**

### **FALSE LEADERSHIP**

Jesus was none too kind to the religious leaders of Israel. His words to them and about them were often harsh, critical and one might assume, unloving. Within the context of Judaism, Jesus was playing the role of a prophet who was called to challenge those appointed to spiritual leadership. He was expressing love for the people who were being oppressed by such leadership. When we recognize Jesus’ unique role as a prophet to Israel, we can see that this does not give us a blank slate to go around criticizing those in leadership.

At the same time, we must recognize that leaders in God’s church are far from perfect. Sadly, many of the same patterns Jesus saw in the religious leaders of the

first century have crept into the church and caused a lot of harm to trusting people. As a result, the church in America is full of people who are paralyzed by pain caused by such false leadership. They cannot participate in the things of God because of the pain they have experienced from interacting with such leaders. They need God's healing and help to reframe a healthy pattern of church leadership.

We don't need more critics of Christian leaders. That won't get us where we need to go. But we do need more restoration of those who have been hurt. For some this will mean forgiveness of those who have caused the pain. Such a step may prove overwhelmingly huge, but is essential to be free.

Other people in the church must develop a more realistic set of expectations about Christian leadership. In the past, they put so much faith in leaders that when they revealed a weakness it shattered their ability to

trust. Such unrealistic expectations can only lead to disappointment because human idols always fall off the shelf.

In order for the church to be the church, God works through leaders. In our world of extreme individualism, we often think we don't need to work with leaders, that we can minister without help and guidance. One aspect of participating in the things of God is to learn how to work with the leadership God has called to guide and shepherd the church. When we do this, leaders participate with others as co-workers, not overlords who feel that they need to control. With this attitude we listen to the Lord together and work toward a radical new way of being God's people.

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.” One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.” Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.” When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.

**LUKE 11:42-54**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

**JEREMIAH 3:15**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths his name's sake.

**PSALM 23:1-3**

## **READ**

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Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

[Paul said,] “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

**ACTS 20:35**

## **READ**

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Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

[Paul said] “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”

**ACTS 20:28**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.” One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.” Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.” When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.

**LUKE 11:42-54**

# GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read the Luke passage (Luke 11:42-54). What stands out to you from this reading?
2. How can inauthentic leaders stand in the way of others following Jesus?
3. How can unmet expectations of leaders cause hurt and hinder someone's ability to follow Jesus?
4. Spiritual abuse by leaders can cause great damage. While we do not need to bash those who have hurt us in the past, it is important to recognize the hurt and release the leader(s) who caused the pain. Will you choose to forgive these people and release the situations to the Lord?
5. What does a healthy relationship with church leadership look like?



**WEEK 6**



**BEYOND THE  
COMFORT ZONE**





Air conditioning, running water and indoor plumbing; cable television, wireless web access and cell phones; cars that talk, computers as thin as a booklet and music on a little pod; all of this stuff for our convenience – cool stuff to make our lives easier, even more comfortable.

We live in an era that provides more comforts to human beings than any other period of history. And more of them are being offered to us every day. While there is nothing wrong with living in a climate controlled home or using an MP3 player, we must be aware of the impact that such comfort can have on our thinking. If we're not careful, we can easily start to assume that personal comfort is a right and that anything that hinders that comfort should be avoided.

Our expectations about personal comfort can creep into our understanding of what it means to be a Jesus follower. When personal comfort becomes a personal priority, we can start to expect Jesus to add to our sense

of comfort and ease. But a fixation on personal comfort can actually hinder our walk with Christ.

## ROAD BLOCK TO PARTICIPATION

### PERSONAL COMFORT

While it is true that the Bible refers to God as a comforter (see Jeremiah 8:18) all the allusions to God comforting occur when people experience distress or sorrow. This kind of comfort is different than expecting God to add to our personal comfort. In fact, in Luke 12:1-12 we find Jesus telling his disciples to expect persecution and possible death as they proclaim his lordship. Disciples in America today may not face radical challenges such as this, but we should expect to be moved out of our “comfort zone” as we live under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

This discomfort can take many forms. It may come from friends and family who don't understand why you passed

up a lucrative promotion simply because it requires you to spend less time ministering to others. It may take the form of sacrificing for the poor and the advancement of the Kingdom instead of chasing the American dream. It may take the form of forgoing personal preferences to enter into relationships with people whose ethnicity is different from your own. It may take the form of having to forgive someone you'd rather not forgive, or loving and serving someone you find difficult to tolerate. For teenagers, it may take the form of parents who don't understand why you postpone college for a year to spend time on the mission field. There's an endless number of ways that following Jesus may bring us discomfort, but the point is that all followers are called to expect it and embrace it.

Yet, while Kingdom people are called to forgo the comforts of the world that most Americans think is their right, God offers us a unique kind of comfort the world can never give. For as Jesus tells us in Luke 12, however uncomfortable our circumstances may be, God offers us the Holy Spirit to empower us and lead us as we proclaim with our words and our lives the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever publicly disowns me will be disowned before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.

**LUKE 12:1-12**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.  
For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

**ROMANS 10:9-10**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.

**PSALM 37:39-40**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

In that day you will say: "I will praise you, LORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid.

The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation."

**ISAIAH 12:1-2**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election.

For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**2 PETER 1:10-11**

## **READ**

---

Read the passage. What stands out to you?

## **REFLECT**

---

Reflect on this point. What comes to mind as you reflect on the passage?

## **PRAY**

---

Pray the point. Turn any insight you have into a prayer.

## **WAIT**

---

Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever publicly disowns me will be disowned before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”

**LUKE 12:1-12**

# GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read the Luke passage (Luke 12:1-12). What stands out to you from this reading?
2. How do we divide our private beliefs about God from the way we live publicly at work, and with our friends and family?
3. Why do you think Jesus places such a huge value on public acknowledgement of him?
4. What does hiding Jesus from the life we live outside of church reveal about what we really believe about God?
5. According to this passage, what is the role of the Holy Spirit?