**Creekside LifeGroup Study**

**LEADER NOTES**

**January 19th, 2020**

**Time to Grow!**

**Part 1 of 2**

Hi LifeGroup leaders! Here are some notes to guide your study time with your group. “Time to Grow!” is a 2-part LifeGroup study designed to raise the value of growing in our walk with God (part 1) and to give a practical tool for planning next steps for growth (part 2). To start off your time together in group, read the introduction below, then dive into the ICEBREAKER. Read the ICEBREAKER and then ask your group members to pick one from the list, or to tell you one of their own. Have fun!

What do you think about new year resolutions? Do you make them? Do you resist them? Whatever you think about them, we know that good things can come from making a commitment to grow and improve our lives. This is especially true in our walk with God. God is honoured when we make commitments to grow closer to Him. In this two-week study, we’ll explore the value of commitment. We’ll look at the call God gives us to commit to following Him. Then in week two we’ll look at a practical tool we can use to commit to growth in our walk with God this year. Are you ready to grow? Let’s go for it!

**ICEBREAKER:**  Here are some top resolutions people are making for 2020 (according to the internet ☺) If you could choose just one to pursue this year, which one would you choose? What is it about this resolution that draws you to it?

 Take control of the device that is stealing my time

 Get healthier (diet, exercise, weight)

 Improve my finances

 Manage my stress

 Improve a relationship

 Set aside time for myself

 Stop procrastinating ☺

 Quit a bad habit

 Get a new job

 Learn a new skill

**VIDEO:** Watch the video after your group does the icebreaker. You can stream the teaching video for this study at <https://vimeo.com/385313213>

**STUDY:**

After watching the video, ask the group – what is a highlight for you from what Jeff said on the video? Then, read Creekside’s mission statement below. Have everyone in the group say our mission out loud together – “Follow Jesus. Love God. Love People.” Then ask someone in the group to read Matthew 22:35-37 out loud and someone else to read Matthew 16:24.

At Creekside, our mission is to help people Follow Jesus, Love God and Love People. This is the high commitment God calls us to.

Here are two key teachings Jesus gave:

**The Great Commandment**

***35****One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:****36****“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*

***37****Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+22%3A35-37&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23910a)*]*

Matthew 22:35- 37 NIV

**The Cost of Following Jesus**

***24****Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*  Matthew 16:24 NIV

* Based on these two teachings, see if you can come up as a group with a one sentence mission of what it means to follow Jesus.

You might help prompt your group by asking them, “What key words or phrases do you see in these teachings from Jesus?” Using those key words, build your sentence. Here’s an example, “Following Jesus means loving Him by denying myself and choosing to live for Him.”

Following Jesus means …

FOLLOWING JESUS: 3 REALITIES

Read the following sentence to your group to set up this discussion of three realities around following Jesus.

There’s no doubt about it, Jesus gives us a clear and compelling call to follow Him. But how do we do that and how do we know if we’re making progress? Let’s explore three realities to help guide our way.

Read this first reality – none of us measure up – and then read the paragraph below. Ask, “So, how do you feel about your walk with Jesus these days?” This is an opportunity for you and your group members to be authentic about our experience of being “caught between disappointment and hope.” It may be helpful for you to begin as a leader by sharing how you can identify with this feeling “I don’t measure up.”

1. Our Reality: None of Us Measure Up

How do you feel about your walk with Jesus these days? Have you arrived? Do you have it all nailed down? John Ortberg says the normal experience of spiritual growth is we are “caught between disappointment and hope.” We’re not where we want to be. We know we fall short. Yet, we have this hope that God is at work in us. He’s not finished with us yet.

Read the following verse as a group: Ask everyone to read this verse out loud together.

*“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can to the good things he planned for us long ago.”* Ephesians 2:10 NLT

* What does it mean to you to be God’s “masterpiece”?

The NIV says, “For we are God’s workmanship …”. We are His work of art. Imagine the painting in the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral, or Michelangelo’s David. Although we don’t see ourselves this way, this is how God sees us.

* To be honest, lots of days I feel like anything but a masterpiece. I can identify more with being an old can of paint in the basement! ☺ How does this verse encourage you that we are more than we appear or feel?

The reality of who we are is not based on how we feel about ourselves or see ourselves or what others tell us. Our identity is based on who our Creator says we are. Ephesians 2:10 is a wonderful reminder of this reality!

When it comes to following Jesus, the reality is, all of us fall short. Our sin, life’s distractions, a lack of will power or just plain laziness keeps us stuck. When we look inside and evaluate how we’re doing with following Jesus, it’s natural and normal to feel disappointed with ourselves. But our experience doesn’t end there. God offers us His power, our hope for becoming the person He has called us to be.

Have someone in your group read Philippians 1:6 – God is at work in you!

When it comes to following Jesus, none of us measure up. We can’t do it on our own. We are stuck between disappointment and hope. Here comes the hope part. Read the introduction to part 2.

1. Our Hope - To be Transformed.

Planted deep in each of our hearts is a desire to change and grow. This desire is given to us by God and is part of His amazing plan for you!

Read the following verses as a group.

*“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God* ***transform*** *you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”* Romans 12:1-2 NLT

Ask your group – “What are some key words or phrases for you in these verses?” This question can help your group members dig into the meaning and power of Romans 12:1-2. Then, focus in on the key word, “transform”.

The word “transform” or “*morph”* comes from the Greek word *morpho*, which means “the inward and real formation of the essential nature of a person.” The term was used to describe the formation and growth of an embryo in a mother’s body.

* In Romans 12:2 we read, “Don’t copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God ***transform*** you into a new person …”. As a group, see if you can come up with 3 or 4 examples of what it might look like practically to no longer copy the behaviour and customs of our world, but instead to be transformed by God.

Read the example below to your group and let them brainstorm together. Here are some other examples you might use.

Behaviour/Custom of the world Transformed Outlook or Response

Look inside myself for purpose. Look to God for my purpose.

Focus on the here and now. Focus on eternity.

View the world as mundane. See the sacred all around me.

**ROMANS 12 TRANSFORMATION APPLIED**

**Behaviour/Custom of the World** **Transformed Outlook or Response**

Example

I compare myself to others for my identity. I look to God for my identity as His child.

1.

2.

3.

Read John Ortberg’s quote, below, then ask – “What about John Ortberg’s quote helps you understand transformation more?”

“God is in the business of transforming ordinary people like us so that we express his character and goodness in our whole being. This is real transformation from the inside out – learning to think as Jesus would think, to feel what he’d feel, to perceive what he’d perceive, and therefore to do what he would do.” John Ortberg The Life You’ve Always Wanted

After discussing John Ortberg’s quote, move to the third reality in our journey to follow Jesus – Our Goal: To Train Wisely. Have someone read John’s quote, below, then read the paragraph below the quote.

1. Our Goal: To Train Wisely

“Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder but of training wisely.” John Ortberg

Think about how freeing that statement is. Following Jesus is not about trying harder. Too often we make it just that. Like, when is the last time you’ve thought, “I need to try to be more loving.” Or, “This week I’m going to try to be more self-controlled.” Or, “I need to try to be more like Jesus!” Following Jesus isn’t about trying harder. It’s about *training wisely*.

Read the following verses as a group:

*“Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their* ***training****. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete,* ***training*** *it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.”* 1 Corinthians 9:24-26 NLT

Ask the following questions of your group. The goal of this part of the study is to get your group members to differentiate between trying and training. Many of us can become stuck in our journey because we are “trying” to follow Jesus, rather than “training”.

* Have you ever trained for a sporting event? What was that training like? What did you learn from it? Share with the group.
* How might we apply this training principle to our commitment to follow Jesus?

So, what is the difference between trying and training? Take a look at some of the differences in the chart below, then talk about them as a group.

Have various group members take turns each reading one comparison. For example, one person can read, “TRYING means “I can do it.” TRAINING means “Christ will do it.” The key to this exercise is to contrast these two approaches, to move from TRYING to TRAINING in our journey of following Jesus.

TRYING vs. TRAINING

I can do it. Christ will do it.

A one time event. An ongoing process.

Addresses the fruit. Addresses the root.

Focus is on action. Focus is on the heart.

Failure makes me a loser. Failure teaches me a lesson.

* Why is *trying* so appealing to us?

Trying is appealing because it can give us a sense of control. We are taught in our culture we need to try in order to get ahead. We are driven by performance in order to feel accepted and successful. Some of your group members may have been raised in a church environment that emphasized *trying* – doing things to earn favour with God. You might ask, “Has this been your experience growing up?” “If you attended church growing up, did you believe that *trying* was the way to grow in your walk with God?”

* What examples can you give of *training* rather than *trying*?

Spiritual disciplines such as reading the Bible on my own, spending time in prayer, journaling, fasting, serving others can be done in a spirit of training. They are not ends in themselves (trying) but they are a means to further our walk with God who fully accepts and loves us just as we are.

* What is a key takeaway for you from this study?
* What next step might you take to train in your walk with God?

You can let your group members know that next session we’ll be looking at a practical tool that can help them to plan for how they can train in their walk with God.

**PRAY**

Spend some time asking God to teach you more about what it looks like to train wisely. Ask Him to do His transforming work in your life this week!