



GROW BOOK

A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

GROW BOOK

A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL GROWTH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Note To The Leaders.....5
A Note To The Students.....7

WEEK 1 RELYING ON THE VINE.....10

- What’s this week about?
- Leader Guide
- Devotionals

WEEK 2 IDENTITY IN CHRIST.....22

- What’s this week about?
- Leader Guide
- Devotionals

WEEK 3 TO SIT AT HIS FEET34

- What’s this week about?
- Leader Guide
- Devotionals

WEEK 4 OPENING OUR HEARTS46

- What’s this week about?
- Leader Guide
- Devotionals

WEEK 5 ROOTS OF OUR SIN.....58

What’s this week about?

Leader Guide

Devotionals

WEEK 6 GROWING TOGETHER.....72

What’s this week about?

Leader Guide

Devotionals

A NOTE TO THE LEADERS

Welcome to the Grow Book. The hope is that this book can assist students in learning what it means and looks like practically to grow spiritually in Christ. That being said, we have learned that the “secret sauce” of leading a group is not curriculum. Rather, groups are made or broken based on how they are led. They need intentional leaders who act as shepherds, pointing their students to the life that Jesus has to offer. Our hope is that this curriculum can support you in as you as you walk through life with your specific students.

HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

“WHAT’S THIS WEEK ABOUT?” SECTION

This section is designed to get help you and your students better understand the theme of each week. You will want to read it before your group gathering as part of your prep.

LEADER GUIDE

As leaders, we know that your time is limited. That is why we have created a detailed Leader Guide to help you lead your group time. You will still need to plan and prepare for your group time, but hopefully this will cut down some on that time. These guide are broken into three main parts:

- 1) An Interactive Teaching component designed to engage your students and get them thinking about that week’s topic,
- 2) A Scripture Discussion guide that is meant to get the group talking about God’s word together,
- 3) A Prayer Experience that is intended to bring students in prayer to God that they might experience him for themselves.

Remember, you will know what your students need far more than a curriculum. Don't be afraid to edit it, add to it, and subtract from it. Look for ways to make it relevant for your specific students.

DEVOTIONALS

In addition to this Leader Guide each week will include three short "Grow On Your Own" Devotionals for your students. These optional devotionals are meant to supplement the weekly group time and encourage your students to take steps toward spiritual growth in their own personal time. We've found it best to encourage (not pressured) your students to take advantage of these devotionals when they can. As a leader, we encourage you to do these devotionals alongside your students.

SUPPLIES

Each week your Group time will require different supplies for the lesson. Be sure you come prepared each week with the proper supplies.

A NOTE TO STUDENTS

Welcome to the Grow Book. The hope is that this book can assist you in learning what it means and looks like practically to grow spiritually in Christ. Allow this book to support you and your group as you seek God and His growth for you!

Instead of viewing this book as another task to complete, what if you viewed it as a chance to deepen your relationship with Him? In all you do open up your heart to Jesus and His transformation. Let's see what He wants to do in your life.

HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

“WHAT’S THIS WEEK ABOUT?” SECTION

This section is designed to get help you better understand the theme of each week. Feel free to read it before or after your group gathering.

DEVOTIONALS

We recognize that no curriculum can transform you. That power comes from God alone. That is why each week we have provided you with three short “Grow On Your Own” Devotionals for you to go through on your own time. These optional devotionals are meant to enhance your experience of going through this book. They are based on themes that come up in your group time each week.

Please do not feel burdened or guilty by these. Your leader is not collecting these as homework. Devotionals are meant to serve you and assist you in your spiritual growth. Do what you can, without worry about what you cannot. Our hope is that by taking time to connect in relationship with God, you would experience the growth that God has for you.

LEADER GUIDE

We have created Leader Guides to help your leader guide your weekly group meeting. Feel free to skip these pages in your book. But so you know what to expect, your group time will be broken into three main parts:

- 1) An Interactive Teaching component designed to engage you and get you thinking about that week's topic,
- 2) A Scripture Discussion guide that is meant to get you and your group talking about God's word together,
- 3) A Prayer Experience that is intended to bring you in prayer to God that you might experience Him for yourself.

Do your best to be present and involved during these group times. The more you invest into them, the more you will get out of it.

SUPPLIES

What you will need for your Group Time:

- Your Grow Book
- Your Bible (ask your leader if you do not have one)
- A positive attitude
- A willingness to participate

What you will need for your devotional time:

- Your Grow Book
- Your Bible
- A pen
- 15 minutes

WEEK 1

RELYING ON THE VINE

WEEK 1 what's this week about?

RELYING ON THE VINE

Have you ever felt as though you should be further along in your spiritual growth? Maybe you look at your pastor, life group leader, or favorite person from the Bible and ask yourself, "How do I go from where I am spiritually to where they are?" And when we think of actually being transformed to be like Jesus, it's easy to become discouraged, thinking, "This seems impossible! How can I ever grow that much?"

You are not alone. Many Christians of all ages and levels of maturity feel the same way. The good news is that we do not need to be discouraged. Growth is a process and this process looks different for everyone. However, the question still remains: How do I actually grow closer to Jesus and become more like Him?

Spiritual Growth can be defined as the process by which someone becomes closer in relationship to God. Some of us have the perception that the best way to grow is simple: love more, sin less. But no matter how hard we work, those two seemingly simple tasks overcome us. Or maybe you think that growth is the result of some kind of equation: Reading your Bible + Praying Regularly + Going to Church + Making Good Choices = Spiritual Growth. The problem is that even the most disciplined of us are rarely able to keep that pace. And even if someone could, that equation doesn't necessarily lead to spiritual maturity.

Oftentimes, our primary focus is on what we must do and how we need to act in order to grow spiritually. As followers of Jesus, we sometimes have the outlook (often without even realizing it) that "Jesus

was responsible for my salvation. Now I am responsible for my growth.” But God does not ask us to grow ourselves. While talking to His disciples Jesus gave this illustration,

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:4-5

Jesus’ illustration is simple: in the same way a branch needs to be connected to a vine or a tree to grow and bear fruit, we need to be connected to Jesus to grow spiritually and bear spiritual character similar to Him. A vine is the life source for a branch. It is responsible for collecting and providing all the nutrients and water that the branch needs in order to grow. The branch’s job is simply to receive. But Jesus is clear that the branch must be open to receiving from the vine. The vine will not force the branch; the branch must remain.

Jesus’ phrase “remain in me” in simplest terms means, “be open to what Jesus will do to transform you.” The first and absolute primary step in spiritual growth is openness to Jesus, remaining in Him as He remains in us. Over the coming weeks we will explore what that means for our lives in depth. So your goal this week is to be open, to receive. Let us not rely on our own strength, but to give control of our spiritual growth to the true vine, Jesus. Apart from Him we can do nothing.

WEEK 1 LEADER GUIDE

RELYING ON THE VINE

Primary Take Away: Spiritual growth cannot come from our own effort. It can only come from Christ.

INTERACTIVE TEACHING

Fill a mug or small pot with dirt and plant a small branch broken from a tree in it (the goal is that it looks as much like a plant as possible). Ask your students, “What it would take to help this small plant grow?” (Light, water, etc.) Next, ask them to envision the small plant as their relationship with Jesus. What would it take to help that relationship grow? (Prayer, Bible, Serving, Church community, etc.) Of those things, which is most important when it comes to growing closer to Jesus? (Maybe this stumps them)

Let’s see what Jesus has to say...

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

Read **John 15:4-5** Together

1) What illustration does Jesus use to describe the spiritual life? Who represents the vine? Who represents the branch?

Remove the “plant” from the soil revealing to actually be a branch. Point out to them that a branch is not responsible for collecting and providing all the nutrients and water that the branch needs in order to grow. That is the job of the vine (i.e. Jesus). The branch’s job is simply to receive.

2) How would you summarize this passage? What is Jesus' primary point?

In the same way a branch needs to be connected to a vine or a tree to grow and bear fruit, we need to be connected to Jesus to grow spiritually and bear spiritual character similar to Him.

3) What is Jesus' only command in this passage? (i.e. the most important part of spiritual growth)

***To Remain:** Jesus' phrase "remain in me" in simplest terms means, "make your home with Jesus." That can only happen if our hearts are open to Him. The first and absolute primary step in spiritual growth is openness to Jesus, remaining in Him as He remains in us.*

Though the things we do are important (prayer, Bible, serving, church community, etc.), they are not what brings about spiritual growth. Only Jesus can grow us! We must remain in him if we are to truly grow spiritually

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Have your students write to God about what they thought of spiritual growth before this lesson. Have them ask Jesus what He wants to teach them in the weeks to come. After taking a minute or so to listen to God, have them write what they think God might be saying (even if they have to guess what they think he might say). The hope is to help them to learn to both talk to God and receive.

WEEK 1 DEVOTIONALS

RELYING ON THE VINE

DAY 1

Read John 15:5-8

Remember from this weeks lesson, Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. The vine provides all the nutrients and water necessary for the branch to grow and produce fruit. Our primary role in spiritual growth is to receive from Jesus, to be open to what He will do.

Practice Prayer

- If you had to guess, what do you think God wants you to receive from Him today? Spend a few minutes talk to God about that guess.
- Talk to God a bit about what you would like to receive from Him.



DAY 2

Read Proverbs 3:5-6

Practice Prayer

Where in your life do you “lean on your own understanding” the most? Tell God where it is the most difficult to trust him. Ask him to help you surrender these areas to Him.

DAY 3

Read John 15:9-15

Practice Prayer

Take a walk with Jesus. Spend some time just talking to Him about whatever is on your mind and heart right now. Speak to Him like you would speak to a close friend.

WEEK 2

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

WEEK 2 what's this week about?

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Before anything else, transformation starts with what Christ did on the cross. Without the grace available through Him, growth is impossible. As we will discuss in *Week 5*, sin and brokenness can have a lasting impact on our hearts. But we can take refuge in the fact that in Christ we have right standing with God. We have a new identity through Christ!

Your identity is what makes up who you are. Jesus came, died, and rose again that you may gain the power of his identity as God's child. Because of our sin, we were identified as far away from God, strangers, and orphans.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household." Ephesians 2:13, 19

Your new identity in Christ is that you are fully forgiven and fully accepted. Your new identity in Christ is as a part of His household, a son or daughter of God. This, however, is only the of start this journey with Christ. Though we are already sons and daughters, we must learn what it means to be who we already are.

Some of you may soon be off to college. As soon as you enroll in classes you technically have the identity of a college student. You, however, must learn what that identity means and how to fill that role. You have to learn about class schedules, dorm rooms, and all night cramming in the library. You have to learn to be who you already are.

Being a son or daughter of God means that you need to learn how to walk, talk, and think like Christ. And this is a life long adventure that is both scary and exciting.

Even with your new identity as a son or daughter, you will still be tempted to live as you once did. You will be tempted to embrace your old identity as a stranger far from God who gives into temptation and falls into sin. Sin can have a powerful hold on our hearts and we should flee from it at all cost.

But no matter how far we stray, how ashamed we feel, how unlovable we believe we have become, we must remember the grace of God through Jesus. He will never stop pursuing us, never stop forgiving us, never stop loving us. You are His child. Let us learn to be who we are.

WEEK 2 LEADER GUIDE

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Primary Take Away: Spiritual growth is not about salvation. It is about becoming who we already are in Christ.

INTERACTIVE TEACHING

This example may be helpful as an opening thought:

Some of you may soon be off to college. As soon as you enroll in classes, you have the identity as a college student. You, however, must learn what that identity means and how to fill that role. You have to learn about class schedules, dorm rooms, and all night cramming in the library. You have to learn to be who you already are.

The same is true about your identity in Christ. Your new identity in Christ is as a son or daughter of God. Your new identity in Christ is that you are fully forgiven and fully accepted. This, however, is only the of start this journey with Christ. Though we are already sons and daughters, we must learn what it means to be who we already are.

Have students share what they believe makes accepting this identity in Christ most difficult for people (habits of the past, allure of sinful behavior, peer pressure, etc.). Try to have most of the students share something. The goal is to get them talking and thinking.

Let's see what Scripture has to say...

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

Split your students into 3 groups. Assign each group one of the following passages to look into: Ephesians 2:11-22; Romans 6:1-7; 1 John 3:1-5. It can be helpful to print out these passages on sheets of paper so each member of the group has the same translation in front of them. Give them 10 minutes or so to work together in their groups to answer the following questions for their passage:

- 1) Are there any words or phrases that need to be defined in this passage? How would you define those?
- 2) How would you summarize this passage in your own words?
- 3) What do you learn about our identity in Christ from this passage?

Next bring the group back together and have each group take turns reading their passage out loud and sharing their findings with the rest of the group. Try to make this as interactive as possible, encouraging other students to ask questions.

At the end review what you have learned from these passages about your identity in Christ.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Have your students break back into their groups to pray for one another. Have each student share 1) how they are thankful to God for their new identity, 2) what the part of this identity is most difficult to accept for you, and 3) what part of the old identity is most difficult for you to let go of. Have them take turns praying for each student in their group.

WEEK 2 DEVOTIONALS

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

DAY 1

Read Galatians 3:23-28

Practice Prayer

Remember, because of what Jesus has done on the cross, you already are children of God. What do you think it looks like to start living as a child of God? Ask God what He desires for you as His child.

DAY 2

Read Romans 8:31-39

Practice Prayer

Do you ever feel separated from God and His love? How so? Spend a few minutes talking to God about those times.

DAY 3

Read Ephesians 2:13-19

Practice Prayer

Take 10 minutes to rest in the fact that Jesus has saved you. Spend time being a son or daughter who doesn't need to earn it. Just rest with Jesus.

WEEK 3

TO SIT AT HIS
FEET

WEEK 3 what's this week about?

TO SIT AT HIS FEET

What if you received an amazing gift? A gift so great you felt compelled to work incredibly hard to pay it back? But it is a gift in the truest sense of the word; it requires no payment. You need not earn it or work hard to make it happen. We should understand spiritual growth in this same way. It is 100% a gift from God that we do not need to (and cannot) earn.

It is common for Christians of all ages and maturity to believe that, though they were saved by what Jesus did on the cross, they must earn spiritual growth with a lot of hard work. If this were true, following Jesus and drawing closer to Him would be all about working hard for Him and about our strength. Christians would spend all their time trying to *earn* closeness with Christ, something that was already achieved by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Jesus paints a very different picture of what it looks like to follow Him.

As Jesus and His disciples were traveling, they came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Jesus. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all of the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42

In this story we see two sisters reacting very differently in the presence of Jesus. It says that Martha was distracted by preparations, ones that undoubtedly were for Jesus Himself. Mary on the other hand sat at Jesus' feet and listened to what He said. Both were with Jesus, but each felt compelled to act differently. Jesus said that Mary chose what was better. While Martha was distracted working for Jesus, Mary spends her time with Jesus.

We too can easily fall into the trap of acting as Martha did: to be distracted by work for Jesus, while neglecting to spend time with Jesus. Martha was focused on earning something she already possessed, closeness with Jesus. We want to make sure this is not the case here, while you read these pages.

In this story, Jesus is already with Martha. She has no need to earn his affection, attention, or love. The same is true for each of us. Jesus came, died, and was raised to new life just so He can be with us. In the same way that we are saved by the power of Christ, we also grow spiritually by the power of Christ. No amount of work can make Him love or desire you any more or less. No amount of work can make you grow closer to Him, even if it is what's considered "holy work" (going to church, studying the Bible, evangelizing to others, etc.). Take a moment and ask yourself, "Have I spent time trying to earn this free gift of spiritual growth?"

None of this is to say that God will never ask us to do things in obedience to Him. Because of what He has done we are completely forgiven and completely accepted. In light of this fact, Jesus desires those who love Him to make being with Him the priority, rather than working to earn growth. Jesus has already come to us. Let us let go of the distractions of earning His affection and simply sit at His feet.

WEEK 3 LEADER GUIDE

TO SIT AT HIS FEET

Primary Take Away: Spiritual growth is a free gift from God that cannot be earned. Our Role is to sit at Jesus' feet and receive.

INTERACTIVE TEACHING

Remind your students of the **primary take away** from week 1: *Spiritual growth cannot come from our own effort. It can only come from Christ.* Some of us have the perception that the best way to grow is simple: love more, sin less. But no matter how hard we work, those two seemingly simple tasks overcome us. Or maybe you think that growth is the result of some kind of equation: Reading your Bible + Praying Regularly + Going to Church + Making Good Choices = Spiritual Growth. The problem is that even the most disciplined of us are rarely able to keep that pace. And even if someone could, that equation doesn't necessarily lead to spiritual maturity.

Have each student your students write down on a sheet of paper all the ways that people try to earn closeness with God (religious rituals, good deeds, seeking perfection, etc.). Have them be as specific as possible. Next have them circle all the ways that they have tried to earn His closeness. Have them share some of those ways with the whole group

Let's see what Jesus has to say...

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

Read **Luke 10:38-42** together

-What do you think motivated Martha to act as she did? What made her so upset with her sister?

The point is to see that though Martha is well intentioned, she misunderstood.

-What is the primary point that Jesus wants to make to Martha? What did Mary choose that was “better”?

-What is this passage saying to us today? What is it saying to you personally?

It may be important to point out to your students that the things that we do for God are not necessarily bad. We do not, however, need to work to earn anything from God. Like grace, spiritual growth is a gift from him.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Lead your students through this prayer slowly, one section at a time, giving at least one minute of silence between each section:

Without asking Jesus to do anything for you, talk to Him about the last 24 hours of your life.

- 1) Tell Him about the events of your day that stand out.*
- 2) Talk to him about the people you encountered and the interactions that stand out to you.*
- 3) Present before him the emotions that you felt today. Share both the highs and lows.*
- 4) Ask God what he might want to say to you about your day. Sit at His feet with out trying to earn anything. You are fully loved and fully forgiven.*

WEEK 3 DEVOTIONALS

TO SIT AT HIS FEET

DAY 1

Read Luke 10:38-42

Practice Prayer

Write down a few areas in your life might you be trying to earn love from God or achieve spiritual growth. Talk to Jesus about what makes you feel as though you have to work for Him. Ask Him what it would look like for you to sit at his feet today. Write down what you think He might be saying to you.

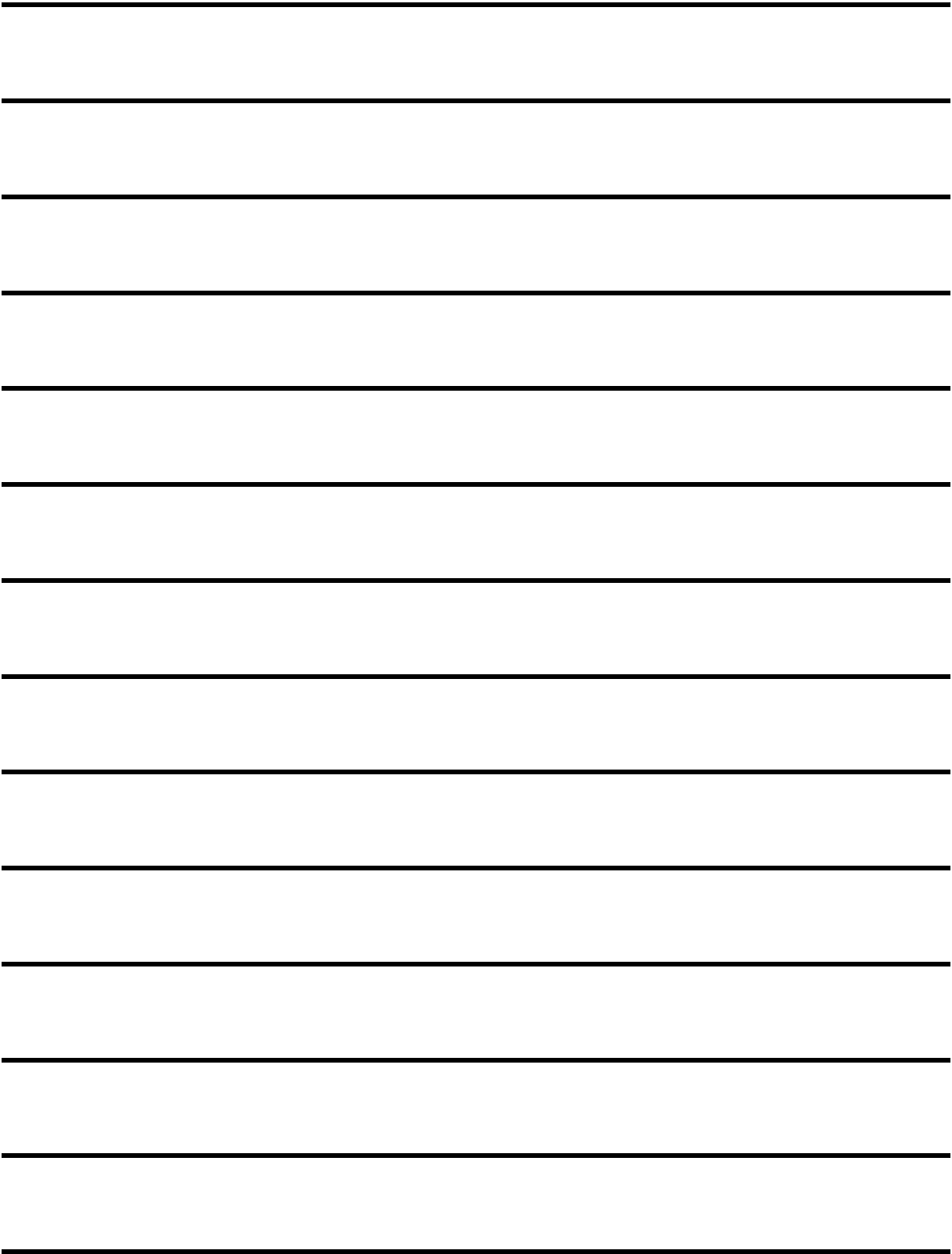
DAY 2

Read Matthew 11:28-30

In Jesus' time, a young ox was trained by pairing it with an older stronger ox. Jesus is the strong ox of your spiritual growth. He will carry the heavy load. You get to come to him and learn.

Practice Prayer

Come to Jesus to find rest for your soul. Tell Him about the places that in your heart that most need rest. As you close, take a few minutes just to thank him for carrying the burden of your spiritual growth.



DAY 3

Read Psalm 23 Slowly

Shepherd is responsible for caring for, guiding, and protecting their flock. Jesus is your Good Shepherd. He wants to serve you in this way.

Practice Prayer

What part of this Psalm stands out to you? Tell God where you need him to be your shepherd today.

WEEK 4

OPENING OUR HEARTS

WEEK 4 what's this week about?

OPENING OUR HEARTS TO GOD

Often we treat our hearts like castles protecting valuable contents behind its walls. We fortify it, protect it, and work hard to keep the castle gate sealed. To open the gate to someone is to say that we trust that person to not harm the contents of this castle in anyway. Our hope this week is to take a closer look at how we might open the gates of our heart to the Holy Spirit through prayer.

Prayer is one of your heart's primary ways to know and be known by God. The Bible teaches that prayer is powerful, that in Jesus' name God will hear our prayers, and is faithful to answer them (but not always in the way we would expect). Jesus teaches that we do not need to use special words in our prayers (Matthew 6:5- 6). God wants to hear from you, not some pretend religious you.

Furthermore, Jesus encourages us to avoid making our prayers a show to impress others (Matthew 6:7). Though praying together and for one another is a beautiful thing, God also wants a personal one-on-one relationship with you in prayer, where you let down your guard with Him and allow Him into the heavily protected parts of your heart.

By opening our heart through this kind of personal prayer we allow the Holy Spirit to know us, so much so that the Spirit can even pray for us when we cannot find the words.

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Romans 8:26

However, how much we let God in is up to us. The Holy Spirit will not bully His way into your heart. His power is both gentle and filled with patience. Though He knows everything there is to know about you, He desires to be welcomed into each layer of who you are. Why then do we so often lock God out of our heart? Despite everyone's deep desire to know and be known by God, to open your heart in prayer requires deep vulnerability.

Vulnerability means to allow oneself to be open to the love or harm of another. In more simple terms, to be vulnerable with someone is to trust him or her with the power to love you or to hurt you. This vulnerability requires a great deal of trust in the person you are opening up to. Therein lies the dilemma. Though we deeply desire to be loved and known for exactly who we are, we fear the vulnerability that would allow that. To be fully known requires one to let down the protective walls of the heart and allow another in.

What a risk, huh? Jesus is asking us to trust Him to love even though He would have the power to harm or neglect us. This proves especially hard when faced with the fear that if we are 100% known, with all of our faults and flaws, we would be unlovable. We believe the lie that true love cannot exist when faced with true vulnerability. Christ, however, wants to expose this belief for what it truly is, a lie. Obviously it would be unwise for us to trust just anybody with the vulnerable parts of our heart. This, however, is the kind of intimacy that Jesus desires with us, and that we ultimately desire with Him. He yearns to know us and be known by us. Jesus longs to show you that even the darkest parts of your heart could not make Him love you any less. Will you open the gate your heart to Him? For this sort of prayer leads to a new experience of healing and love.

WEEK 4 LEADER GUIDE

OPENING OUR HEARTS TO GOD

Primary Take Away: Our role in spiritual growth is opening our heart to God. Spiritual disciplines can be helpful in opening our hearts to God's transformation.

INTERACTIVE TEACHING

Remind your students of the **primary take away** from week one: *Spiritual growth cannot come from our own effort. It can only come from Christ.* So what then is our role in spiritual growth? As we saw last week, Jesus commands us to “remain in him” (make our home with him). It seems that our role is to open the doors of our heart and allow Jesus in. He will not bully His way into your heart. He wants to be welcomed into even the darkest areas.

This can be easier said than done, but God has given us **spiritual disciplines** to help us to open our heart to Him. It is important to note, spiritual disciplines do not transform our hearts. Only God can do that. Spiritual disciplines can be defined as *the activities that open or point a person's heart to God.*

Hang an XL Post-It Notes on the wall and write this definition on top. After a giving a couple examples, ask your group to shout out some spiritual disciplines they know or have found helpful. These can be traditional disciplines (Bible study, silence, worship, journaling, serving, fasting, etc.) or unconventional ones (art, exercise/recreation, special ways of praying, singing, etc.)

In 1 Peter 5:7 it says...

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION (REDUCED)

Read **1 Peter 5:7** Together

-What do you think keeps people from sharing certain parts of their heart with others? What do you think keeps people from sharing with God?

Have a short discussion and do your best to get everyone involved.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE (EXTENDED)

This is a helpful spiritual discipline. Have a sheet of paper ready for each student with a large heart drawn in the center. Perhaps you could even write the verse from 1 Peter at the top of the page as a helpful reminder. Have some colored pencils and crayons ready for people to share. Instruct your students to draw where their heart is today as an act of prayer, presenting all of it to the Lord. Give them 10 minutes or so for this prayer exercise.

Once they have finished have them break into groups of two or three and share the hearts they have drawn. After each student has shared, have the other students in that group pray for them. If you have time, it can be a powerful unifying experience to have your entire group share and pray together.

WEEK 4 DEVOTIONALS

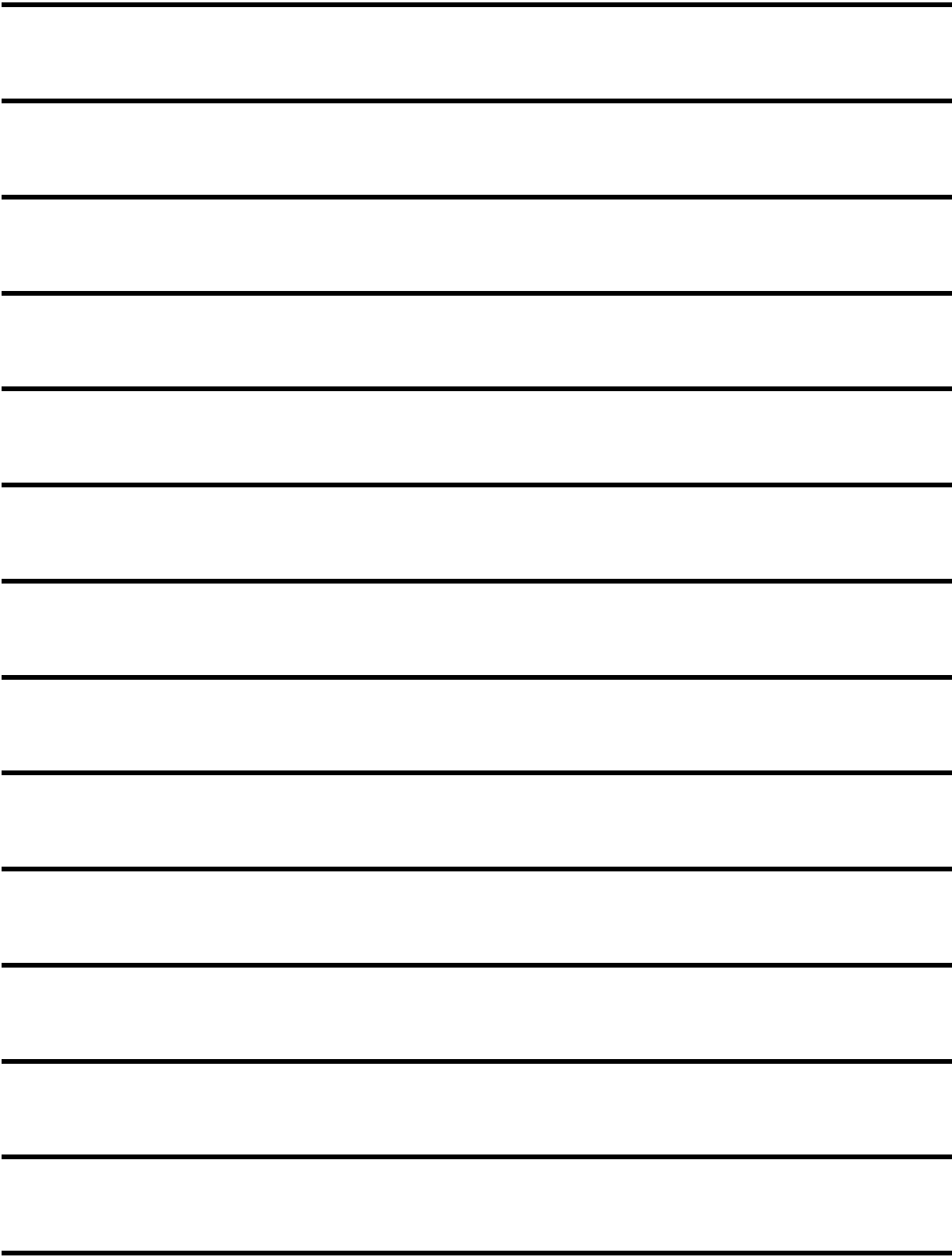
OPENING OUR HEARTS TO GOD

DAY 1

Read Ephesians 3:16-21

Practice Prayer

Silence is one of the easiest ways to open up your heart. Take 5 minutes to sit in silence with God. As things come to your mind write them down. Once 5 minutes is up, take a couple minutes to talk to God about the things you wrote down.



Day 2

Read 1 Peter 5:7

Practice Prayer

- Take a moment to think about and write down a few parts of your story or life that you do not normally share with others. If you want, you can write it in a way that only you would know what it is.
- Talk to God about why you might be protecting these things from others. Are you embarrassed, ashamed, afraid?
- Without asking God to do anything, just spend time opening up to Him about those things. Note the emotions you experience while opening to God.

DAY 3

Read Matthew 6:5-13

Practice Prayer

- Alone And In Your Own Words, Take A Moment To Slowly Pray Through The Prayer Jesus offers to His disciples in verses 9-13.
- Note the parts of the prayer that stand out to you or are confusing. Talk to God about those parts.
- Take 5 minutes to talk with God about what is on your mind right now.

WEEK 5

ROOTS OF OUR SIN

WEEK 5 what's this week about?

ROOTS OF OUR SIN

Often we think that we can simply choose to change our sinful behavior. It can be tempting to believe that our sin is simply about our external actions, but sin does not spring out of nowhere. Without understanding this, we run the risk of trying hard to stop sinning without allowing the Holy Spirit to heal the root causes. Jesus used this illustration.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.” Matthew 23:25-26

It is clear that no one can become fully free by merely managing sin on the outside. A weed is a helpful analogy. If a weed is only broken off above the surface, it will certainly grow back. The roots of the weed need to be removed. In the same way, we need the Holy Spirit to perform a delicate surgery to remove the root of our sins from our hearts. Ask the question: Where did this sin come from?

The roots of sin describe the deeper causes of why we have a particular sin in our life. It may be a wound from your childhood or a particular way you view yourself, the world, or God. There are lots of explanations as to why a certain sin might have influence in your heart and life. It's important for us as Christ followers to explore some of these possible reasons, to invite Jesus in to remove those roots and bring healing to the damage they leave behind.

Take a look below at some potential sins and spiritually damaging behaviors you may be struggling with. Next, look at some of the different roots that might be causing that behavior in your life. It is important to note that the roots themselves are not necessarily sin (though they can be), but their impact has led to sin. What weeds under the first list stand out as a struggle for you? Can you connect any of them to a potential cause or causes? Circle all that apply and pray, inviting Jesus into those areas. Do this privately and together as a group.

WEED/SIN OR BEHAVIOR

Sexual impurity, Jealousy, Hate,
Lust /Seductiveness, Using others, Pornography,
Pride, Lying, Idolatry, Apathy, Selfishness, Greed
Stealing, Control, Worry, Bitterness, Materialism, Eating
Disorder, Self-mutilation

POSSIBLE ROOTS/CAUSES

Bitterness, Sexual Past, Self-Pity, Death Of A Parent,
Being Used By Others, Blaming Others,
Resentment, Sexual Abuse, Rejection As A Child,
Being Bullied, Absent Parent, Death Of Someone Close,
Poor Body Image, Unforgiveness,
Betrayed By Parent Or Trusted Guardian, Self-Hatred,
Loneliness, Traumatic Event, Childhood Abuse

WEEK 5 LEADER GUIDE

ROOTS OF OUR SIN

Primary Take Away: Sin is caused by deep internal brokenness. One cannot merely deal with surface behavior. God must deal also with the root causes to find lasting freedom.

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

Read **Matthew 23:25-26** together.

What makes the teachers of the law and Pharisees in the passage above hypocrites? What does Jesus' illustration mean?

The word hypocrite is an acting term and referred to one who was pretending to be one way but in fact was another way. Jesus was pointing out that the teachers of the law and Pharisees seemed righteous on the outside but below the surface they were "full of greed and self-indulgence." They must allow God to "clean" their internal world, if they expect to also be "clean" (righteous) externally.

What is Jesus' primary point in this passage?

There is an internal reality that needs to be tended to if we expect to see true transformation in the way we live.

What does this reality mean for us today? What does this passage teach us about overcoming sin?

We must realize what are the root-causes of our sin is and open that part of our hearts to God, if we are to find lasting freedom from sin

INTERACTIVE TEACHING

Another helpful illustration is of a weed. Hang an XL Post-It Notes on the wall and draw a horizontal line through the center of it. On top of the line draw a weed and below the line draw the roots (be sure to leave room around the weed and roots for you to write in). Ask your students, “What happens if you only get rid of the top part of the weed without getting rid of the root?” The obvious answer is that the weed will grow back.

Now, ask your students to list as a group the common sins that students their age struggle with. Have them be as specific as possible. As they shout them out write them down above the horizontal line next to the weed (could be fun to use a student as a scribe here). Once you have a good list of 10 or so, pick a sin they have listed and ask what might cause a person to sin that way (e.g. anger at school could be caused by a parents divorce). Refer to the list below for more examples. Write those examples below the horizontal line next to the root. Go through different sins on your list until you have a good-size list of root-causes.

Like a weed, if you only try to stop sinning without bringing the root cause of the sin to God, sin will likely grow back. It may look a little different, but rest assured, healing comes only with opening ones heart to God.

It is important to note that the roots themselves are not necessarily sin (though they can be), but their impact has led to sin.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

This may be a particularly heavy lesson. First, help them remember their identity in Christ (fully forgiven, and fully accepted). Lead them through a prayer of confession and forgiveness. Next, break your

students into groups of 3 or 4 and have them share a particular sin and what they believe the cause might be. Have them encourage and pray for one another.

Use these lists to assist you in this week's lesson...

WEED/SIN OR BEHAVIOR

Sexual impurity, Jealousy, Hate,
Lust /Seductiveness, Using others, Pornography,
Pride, Lying, Idolatry, Apathy, Selfishness, Greed
Stealing, Control, Worry, Bitterness, Materialism, Eating
Disorder, Self-mutilation

POSSIBLE ROOTS/CAUSES

Bitterness, Sexual Past, Self-Pity, Death Of A Parent,
Being Used By Others, Blaming Others, Resentment,
Sexual Abuse,
Rejection As A Child, Being Bullied, Absent Parent,
Death Of Someone Close, Poor Body Image,
Unforgiveness,
Betrayed By Parent Or Trusted Guardian, Self-Hatred,
Loneliness, Traumatic Event, Childhood Abuse

WEEK 5 DEVOTIONALS

ROOTS OF OUR SIN

DAY 1

Read 1 John 1:5-2:2

Practice Prayer

Look back at the lesson from this week. First, talk to God about the sins you circled. Ask God to reveal any possible roots for those sins. Begin to lift those root causes up to Him in prayer. Ask for God's healing in those areas. Remember through out your time in prayer that because of Christ you are forgiven!

DAY 2

Read 1 John 2:1-2

When faced with this shame, it is often helpful to remember the love Jesus has for you that He demonstrated on the cross. Our shame can become a powerful reminder of His love.

Practice Prayer

Do you ever feel shame because of your sin? If your shame could talk what would it say about you?

Now consider Christ's love for you demonstrated on the cross. Ask God to speak to the shame. Even if you have to guess, write down what our God of love has to say in response you.

DAY 3

Read John 15:1-5

Remember from the first week, our hope is simply to receive from God as a branch would from a vine. In order to do that we must open our hearts to God's transforming power.

Practice Prayer

Ask God to open your heart and reveal the roots of your sin. Spend some time telling God about the roots that surface. Tell Him how they make you feel.

WEEK 6

GROWING TOGETHER

WEEK 6 what's this week about?

GROWING TOGETHER

As you journey past these pages and onward into your life following Jesus, you will hit dangers, struggles, fears, and times where you just want to quit. But God has not left you to fend for yourself. The Church is a community of believers that are called to know, love, guide, care for, and encourage one another. If you are to going to grow spiritually you need the support only Jesus' Church can offer.

Part of this will be how you set up this group. How are you all seeking to create a safe, confidential, and judgment-free environment? How are you all encouraging and keeping each other accountable? How are you all being real and bringing your hearts to the group?

But what does this support look like? Check out this incredible story of friendship and support as recoded in the book of Mark:

"A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Mark 2:1-5

Though the faith of these friends is amazing, the most striking thing about this story is who the paralytic's friends brought him to. A great

deal of honesty and accountability can go a long way, but it is also important to remember where the four men took their friend in the story above. Jesus is the only one that can truly heal and restore us.

Often friends bring each other to things that are of the world when they need help (self help, human wisdom, distraction, numbing, sin, etc.). Through these things can seem helpful in the short term, but in the long term they cannot truly heal and sustain us.

What if, instead, we brought them to the only true source of life, healing, grace, and transformation? The best way of supporting our friends in Christ is always to bring them to Jesus. What about you? Do you have a group of friends who will carry you to Jesus in your time of need?

WEEK 6 LEADER GUIDE

GROWING TOGETHER

Primary Take Away: If we are to going to grow spiritually we need to support one another. Our primary way of supporting others is bringing is bringing one another to Jesus.

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

Read Mark 2:1-5 together

1) What is the most powerful part of this story to you? What do you think motivated these four men to bring the paralytic to Jesus?

This is an opportunity to get all your students talking about this powerful story.

2) What did Jesus see that stirred him to forgive and heal the paralyzed man? What does this communicate about importance of community in the spiritual life?

The passage says when Jesus saw the faith of the paralytic's friends he forgave healed the paralyzed man. This means that the faith of others who bring us to Jesus can bring healing and forgiveness to us.

3) How should this effect the way you are a friend? How should this effect the way you choose your friends?

The hope is to get your students talking about what strong Christian community looks like. They should ask where they take friends when they are in need and where do their closest friends take them when they are in need.

INTERACTIVE TEACHING

On their own have each student write down a list of their 4 closest friends. Now have them look at each friend one by one and ask, “When I need forgiveness or healing where will this friend take me?” The answer may be Jesus or it may be somewhere else (e.g. sinful behavior, distractions, anger, ways to numb, etc.).

Now, have them ask God to reveal some friends that could support them in their faith and carry them to Jesus. Have them write the friends down that come to mind (some of them may be the same as the list before). Point out to them that some of those people may even be in this group. Have them ask God how He wants them to invest in these friendships for the future.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Have your students break into groups of 3 or 4 and pray for one another, each answering the question, “What part of your life do you need to bring to Jesus for healing?”

WEEK 6 DEVOTIONALS

GROWING TOGETHER

DAY 1

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Practice Prayer

Ask God to reveal some friends that could support you in your faith and carry you to Jesus. Write in this section the friends God reveals. Ask Him how He would want you to invest in these friendships for the future.

DAY 2

Read James 5:13-16

Practice Prayer

How do you need support from your brothers or sisters in Christ today? Ask God to reveal where you need to be accountable to others? Write down a confession that you might be willing to share with a close Christian friend.

DAY 3

Read Philippians 2:1-4

Practice Prayer

Ask God to reveal to you how you can look out for your brothers and sisters in Christ better. Who are the friends that God is calling you to support and bring to him? Write down three ways that you could committee to better supporting these friends.

