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MasterWork: Essential Messages from God's Servants

Summer 2026

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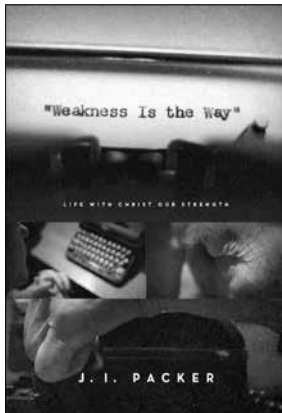
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Books of Study

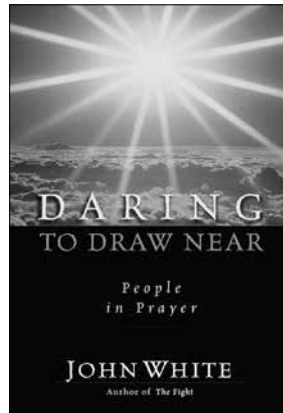
Further in-depth Bible studies by the authors presented this quarter in MasterWork® are available in their full-length books. To purchase your own copies to read and study, visit lifeway.com. Or you can order a copy by calling 1.800.458.2772.



Weakness Is the Way

J. I. Packer

Crossway
ISBN: 978-1-4335-6383-6



Daring to Draw Near

John White

InterVarsity Press
ISBN: 978-0-87784-788-5

How to Use

Here are a few suggestions to help you get the most out of this resource:

Group Members

1. Read Day 1 through Day 5 prior to attending the group time . Complete the personal learning activities in bold type . Record your notes and questions .
2. Review your notes and questions a few moments prior to the group time as a means of preparing to be an active part of the group .
3. In the margins of this book, record insights gained during the group time .

Group Leader

1. Complete step 1 above .
2. Identify the one main idea and goal for the session . The main point of the session and the goal are printed on the leader guide pages at the end of each session . (See p . 19 .) Focus on the session goal as you lead the session .

The main point of this session is: God's grace through Jesus's sacrifice transforms our spiritual ruin into righteousness through faith.

Focus on this goal: Salvation is not earned by works but is a free gift available to all through faith in Christ.

Key Bible Passage: Romans 3:23-24

Leader Guide

- Read and study the key Bible passages listed at the top of the teaching plan.
- Develop a group time plan. Two options are offered in this book.
 - One option is to follow the leader guide at the end of each session.
 - A second option is to use the discussion questions in the margins of the session. Some group leaders use a combination of both group time plans.

written by forty authors over 1,600 years. Sixty-six books tell one seamless story about God who redeems us, and has a future for us. Let's explore the beautiful story of Scripture. How does it fit so successfully in with Christians was

DISCUSS
When might a visit to a library be overwhelming? When might it be exciting?

Discussion Questions

- Customize the electronic versions of the suggested teaching plans, available on the Internet at masterwork.lifeway.com to fit your group.
- Review and refine your teaching notes as you move toward the group time.
- Arrive early, praying for the group time.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: God's grace through Jesus' death and resurrection is sufficient for all sinners through faith.

Focus for this goal: Set out on a journey that will lead to a heart of grace and faith in Christ.

Key Bible Passage: Romans 3:24-26

Before the Session

- You'll continue to use the large paper titled "Grace" throughout this session. Today you look at it in Step 1 and discuss it in Step 2.
- Bring an item from home that has been repaired or refurbished. If the item is broken, take a picture and be ready to share that with your class. You'll do that in Step 3.
- Bring hymns to read again, or hymn lyrics to "Holding Out the Word of God" made by Step 2.

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Important Discussion

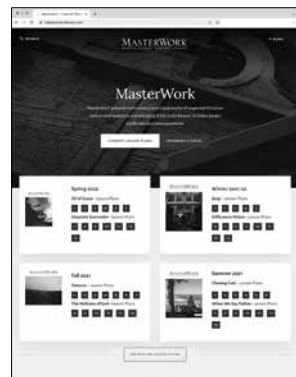
Open class by reading, hearing, viewing to the restored item (or photo of an item) you brought to class.

Show how the work was accomplished, how long it took, and so on.

When you are done, point out that when we feel we're not doing it right, then we give up or our actions, when we are not prepared to be responsible for the transformation.

Prayer for the group: "Grace" gather your hearts on that word and pray for when you discussed.

Leader Guide



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Study Series: Romans
Author: Angus Scobie

Lesson Title: "The Beginning" (pp. 6-19)
Session 1
September 4, 2022

The main point of this lesson is: God begins to reveal the essential revelation of the plan from the opening of the Bible.

Focus for this goal: The Holy Spirit offers the empowerment of the beginning to our work with Christ.

Key Bible Passages: Genesis 1-13

Before the Session

1. Prepare TBS (Step 2).
1. Gather TBS (Step 2).

During the Session

Step 1: Title

Scripture ability to include it? If they're more equal before we worked together that were part of a plan. It's possible to read the Bible or work the management of order and will more than "TBS" the value of reading or watching that is correct?

Make reading or watching and listening in order given on a better group of the overall story and a deeper understanding of the scriptures, and to help us see how all the stories fit together. **Remember: That's the story of Scripture on earth. We can know and love individual Bible**

Customizable Teaching Plan



Weakness Is the Way



ABOUT THE WRITERS

J. I. Packer

(1926–2020) served as the Board of Governors' Professor of Theology at Regent College. He authored numerous books, including the classic bestseller *Knowing God*. Packer also served as general editor for the English Standard Version Bible and as theological editor for the ESV Study Bible.

Amy Summers

wrote the personal activities, discussion prompts, and teaching plans for this study. She graduated from Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In *The House at Pooh Corner*, we meet fussy mother Kanga, who deems it vital that, whatever else he does, her happy-go-lucky, into-everything offspring Roo should regularly take his strengthening medicine. Why? To grow up strong, of course. And what does that mean? Strength is physical, moral, and relational. Strong people can lift heavy objects, stand unflinchingly for what is right against what is wrong, lead and dominate groups, and in any situation, make a difference. Strong people carry personal weight, which, when provoked, they can effectively throw around. Strong people win admiration for their abilities and respect for their achievements. Kanga wants Roo to be strong, as other parents want their children to be strong, and as commandants and coaches want those they instruct to be strong—strong, that is, in action.

This is the way of the world, and from one standpoint it is God's way too. It is proper to aim at being spiritually strong and improper to settle for being anything less. For what is weakness? The idea from first to last is of inadequacy. The truth, however, is that in many respects, and certainly in spiritual matters, we are all weak and inadequate. Sin has disabled us. We need to be aware of our limitations and let this awareness work in us humility and self-distrust, and a realization of our helplessness on our own. Thus we may learn our need to depend on Christ, to practice dependence as one of the constant habits of our heart, and to discover what Paul discovered before us: "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Our present purpose is to take soundings in 2 Corinthians to illuminate that the way of true spiritual strength, leading to real fruitfulness in Christian life and service, is the humble, self-distrustful way of consciously recognized weakness in spiritual things.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: True strength in the Christian life comes through weakness, as believers live to please Christ, remain faithful to Him, and rely on His power rather than their own .

Focus on this goal: Embrace weakness as God's means of shaping faithful disciples who serve as Christ's ambassadors, motivated by His love and sustained by His strength .

Key Bible Passages: 2 Corinthians 5:9-10,14-15,18

Before the Session

Write on a board: Eat your _____, so you can grow up _____ .

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Draw the group's attention to the statement on the board and **invite** them to fill in the blanks with what parents may say at meals .

State: *What parent has ever said, "Eat your candy so you can grow up weak"? Parents want children to grow up strong.*

Examine why we value strength .

Read aloud the title for this study and **ask** why it might fly in the face of everything we believe about succeeding in life .

Use remarks from the Introduction to **indicate** how Paul's teachings in 2 Corinthians illuminate that weakness really is the way . This session will challenge the group to embrace weakness, understanding it's how we gain true strength in the Christian life .

STEP 2 - Bringing Pleasure to Christ

Discuss Day 1, activity 1.

Note that Paul speaks up in defense of himself not out of self-protection or pride, but for the sake of the gospel. **Guide** the group to **analyze** the difference between defending self and defending the gospel.

State: *One difference is whether we are promoting our way or the way of Jesus.* **Invite** a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 13:4.

Determine what else from Jesus's life seemed weak to the world. **Declare:** Weakness is the way because it was Jesus's way. **Note** another difference between defending ourselves or the gospel is our motive. Paul related his motivations in 2 Corinthians 5.

Request a volunteer read 2 Corinthians 5:9. **Identify** Paul's first motivation.

Invite responses to Day 1, activity 2.

STEP 3 - Found Fully Faithful to Christ

State: *Paul's second motive was to be found fully faithful to Christ on judgment day.* **Invite** someone to read 2 Corinthians 5:10. **Consider** why some believers might find this verse concerning.

Examine why no believer needs to fear the final judgment. **Explain** Paul is referring to rewards for faithful service.

Ask: *Why might we be uncomfortable with the idea of serving for a reward? Why is it legitimate to anticipate rewards at the last judgment?*

Invite responses to the first question of Day 2, activity 1.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 3:11-14. **Evaluate** how believers can discern whether they are building with gold, silver, and precious stones, or with wood, hay, and straw.

State: *Paul wasn't motivated by physical reward but by the reward of his service honoring Christ and lasting for eternity.* **Invite** someone to read the last paragraph of Day 2.

STEP 4 - Motivated By the Love of Christ

Identify Paul's third motive by reading aloud the first sentence of Day 3.

Describe the purpose and action of *agape* love. **Invite** responses to Day 3, activity 1.

Ask: *Is it Christ's death or resurrection that brings about our salvation?*

Use Day 3 remarks to add to the discussion .

Invite someone to read the Day 3 paragraph that begins with “So now we are different people .” **Request** the group to listen for differences Christ’s active love makes in believers’ lives as you **read** 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 .

Call for responses **Explore** what it means to have a new way of thinking about people .

Examine what J.I Packer means by saying that 2 Corinthians 5:17 indicates a new way of existing among people **Invite** volunteers to share their responses to Day 3, activity 2.

STEP 5 - Reconciled to Christ

State: *Paul’s motivations of pleasing Jesus in all things, being found fully faithful, and being compelled by the love of Jesus meant that he didn’t defend his ministry out of protection or pride but focused all the attention on God’s gracious work of reconciliation through Christ.* **Request** a volunteer read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 .

Discuss Day 4, activity 1 .

Request the group define reconciliation and describe the method God used to achieve reconciliation **Consider** why Packer calls this “the stupendous exchange.” **Request** the group identify the messengers of reconciliation .

Discuss Day 4, activity 2.

STEP 6 - Weakness and Vocation

Read the first sentence of Day 5 aloud and **ask:** *Has anyone been wondering that?*

State: *Before we can experience reconciliation and have our sin exchanged for Christ’s righteousness, we must acknowledge we are weak and inadequate to save ourselves.* **Guide** the group to explore how they can look to Christ, love Christ, and lean on Christ. **Discuss** Day 5, activity 2 **Read** the last two paragraphs of Day 5.

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Write on the board, “Embrace your _____, so you can ……………”

Invite the group to fill in the blanks with truths they gained from this study .

Ask: *What might it look like for you to embrace weakness this week? How can we pray for you about that?*

Close in prayer.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: Christians reveal true strength not by what they keep but by what they give—faithfully stewarding God’s resources with gratitude, generosity, and joy as acts of worship and dependence on Him .

Focus on this goal: View giving as both a spiritual discipline and a rightly embraced expression of weakness—trusting God as Provider, serving others through generosity, and glorifying Christ with every resource entrusted to them .

Key Bible Passages: 2 Corinthians 8:9; 9:6-8

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Guide the group to determine necessary parts of a good strength training regimen .

State: *Strength isn’t just built by what’s taken in as proper nutrition, but what is expended out through exercise. Christians build and reveal true strength not by what we take in and keep, but by what we give away. Explore why a study about weakness would examine giving.*

State: *Any conversation about strength vs. weakness must include a conversation about money because money is one of the main ways we gauge strength in our society. If we’re going to embrace Jesus’s way of weakness, we must embrace generous giving.*

STEP 2 - Money Matters

Ask: *What is money?* **Invite** a volunteer to read 1 Timothy 6:9-10 . **Evaluate** why money can be a pitfall . **Request** the group identify the black and white statement Jesus makes in Matthew 6:24 .

Ask: *How might we try to serve both God and money? Why can’t we?*

Discuss Day 1, activities 1 and 2.

STEP 3 - What is Christian Giving?

Explain one of the primary reasons Paul wrote 2 Corinthians was to ensure that when he arrived, the Corinthian church would have completed a collection of money for him to deliver to the poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem. He feared the Corinthians wouldn't take his call to complete that collection seriously because they thought he was weak and self-serving. Paul spent half of this letter trying to reestablish the church's trust in him. He finally addressed the topic of giving in chapters 8 and 9 where he teaches all believers a great deal about Christian giving. Before we dig into those chapters, we need to examine the question: *What is Christian giving?*

Request someone read the first bolded statement in Day 2.

Ask: *If we don't have the spiritual gift of giving, are we still to give? Explain your reasoning.*

Use Day 2, activities 1 and 2 to explore the other bolded statements that define Christian giving.

Ask: *When it comes to considering how much we should give, what percentage do you think really matters to God?*

State: *We're not to juggle with percentages thinking, "I'll give 10% to God and keep the other 90% for myself." The percentage that matters is giving 100% of ourselves to God. The question isn't, "What percentage can I afford to give?" but "God, how much of the money You've entrusted to me will You allow me to give back to You?"*

STEP 4 - Why Should Christians Give?

State: *Another essential question to explore is: Why should Christians give?*

Request the group identify the first reason from Day 3.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Discuss Day 3, activity 1.

Identify the second reason Christians should give.

Ask: *Why does embracing giving require that we love, rather than label, others? Evaluate how generous giving "makes good our claim to be Christ's disciples." Discuss Day 3, activity 2.*

STEP 5 - How Should Christians Give?

Discuss Day 4, activity 1.

Ask: *How might the phrase, “God loves a cheerful giver” be misapplied or misinterpreted? Does it mean if we can’t give cheerfully that we’re not to give at all? Does it mean God doesn’t love us if we don’t feel very cheerful about giving? What’s a proper understanding of 2 Corinthians 9:7?*

Declare: *We don’t earn or lose God’s love based on how much money we give. However, cheerful giving is evidence Jesus is Lord of our lives, including our finances, and God loves to see that!*

Invite a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 8:12-15.

Explore what those verses teach us about deliberate giving combining “readiness with realism.”

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

Evaluate what these verses teach us about how Christians should give.

Ask: *Why are we more likely to give when we have a plan to give?*

Invite volunteers to share their plans for regular giving.

STEP 6 - How Does Money Bear on Weakness?

Ask: *What does this whole discussion about money and giving have to do with walking the pathway of weakness?*

Discuss Day 5, activities 1 and 2.

Read the last paragraph of Day 5.

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Point out that in 2 Corinthians 8:7 Paul urged the Corinthians to excel in the grace of giving.

Guide the group to determine what they have gained from this study that indicates: (1) Why believers should excel in the grace of giving and (2) How believers can excel in the grace of giving.

Say: *This week, let’s determine by God’s grace to walk the way of weakness and reveal true strength not by what we take in and keep, but by what we give away.*

Close in prayer.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: Christian hope sustains us in weakness by fixing our eyes on Christ and the unseen, eternal glory He promises, so we endure present afflictions with courageous joy .

Focus on this goal: Practice the discipline of hope—interpreting present troubles through Christ’s promised future, living courageously, and persevering in faithful service .

Key Bible Passage: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Ask: *What are some things you cannot live without?* **Write** responses on the board . If nobody mentions “hope,” write that on the board as well .

Guide the group to analyze whether it’s possible to live without hope .

State: *In this session we will examine how Christian hope sustains us in weakness and be challenged to practice the discipline of hope.*

STEP 2 - The Quest for Hope

Explore what people typically hope for in each stage of life .

Ask: *Think about a time you really hoped for something—how did you feel once you attained it? Why do you think that is?*

Evaluate why the elderly may struggle with feeling hopeful .

Declare the Bible assures us all believers have something to hope for no matter our age or life stage .

Discuss Day 1, activities 1 and 2 .

Ask: *How can declaring “we do not give up” make us salt and light in this world?*

STEP 3 - Upbeat in Weakness

Ask: *Who is the most upbeat person you know? What do you think makes them that way?*

Invite someone to read the first paragraph of Day 2.

Declare: *We can see Paul's upbeat hope in the bookends to his letter we know as 2 Corinthians.*

Explain bookends are opening and closing statements of Bible books, chapters, or passages that give us insight into what that book, chapter, or passage is about. **Note** the group has already seen one example of a bookend in 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 16, which indicate chapter 4 is about hoping and not giving up.

Invite someone to read the first bookend to Paul's letter in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

Explain what Paul meant with the term "comfort."

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 again, replacing "comfort" with some form of the phrase "renewal of strength through encouragement."

Discuss Day 2, activity 1.

Invite a volunteer to read the closing bookend in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

Ask: *What is Paul's firm hope in his weaknesses?*

Invite responses to Day 2, activity 2.

STEP 4 - Supernaturalized Living

Discuss Day 3, activity 1.

Ask: *Why might a cracked clay jar reveal even more treasures of God's extraordinary power?*

Explore how believers today experience the afflictions described in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9. **Ask:** *What can keep us from giving up when trials seem to crack us?*

Encourage the group to underline in Day 3: "Christ's messengers are sustained, energized, and empowered, despite external weakening factors, by a daily process of renewal within."

Invite a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. **Analyze** whether Paul is making light of our trials by calling them "light."

Read what Paul said about his own afflictions in 2 Corinthians 1:8. **Note** even Paul needed a renewal in perspective which led him to a hopeful conclusion.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:9-10. **Draw attention** once more to 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, and **ask**: *What determines whether weakness and affliction in this life causes us to either give up or press on in hope?*

Declare: *Believers practice the discipline of hope when they maintain an eternal perspective, interpreting present troubles through Christ's promised future of glory.*

Guide the group to define "glory." Then **explore** the three aspects of glory described in Day 3. **Invite** responses to Day 3, activity 2. **Ask** a volunteer to read the last paragraph of Day 3.

STEP 5 - Hope Fulfilled

Ask: *What are some things you cannot see but know are real?*

Declare: *Just because we can't see the eternal glories that are ahead doesn't mean they're not real. Paul used images to emphasize what we have to look forward to.*

Discuss Day 4, activity 1.

Request adults identify words from 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 that indicate Paul had a certain hope. **Ask**: *How could Paul know these truths with confidence? Can we have that same confident knowledge? How?* **State**: *We can be confident we will be given a new dwelling place.*

Ask: *How many of you have ever been tent camping? Ask: Would you want to live in a tent all the time? Why? How are our physical bodies like tents?* **State**: *We can also be certain we will be given new clothing which is a new resurrection body.*

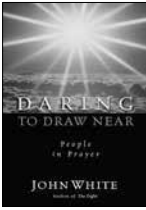
Discuss Day 4, activity 2. **Use** the final paragraph of Day 4 to explore the new home life believers can be certain we will be given.

STEP 6 - Look Forward and Look to Christ

Invite a volunteer to read the Day 5 paragraph that begins with "Neither I nor anyone ..." **Discuss** Day 5, activities 1 and 2.

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Ask: *How can Christian hope sustain us in weakness? How can we practice the discipline of hope?* **Read** Romans 15:13 as a closing prayer.



Daring to Draw Near

ABOUT THE WRITERS

John White

(1924–2002) was the author of twenty-five books, including *Daring to Draw Near* and *The Cost of Commitment*. He served as a medical missionary, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Manitoba, and a church planter. A much sought-after speaker, he lectured around the world at churches, conferences, and leadership events.

Leslie Hudson

contributed learning activities, discussion prompts, and teaching plans for this study. A member of First Baptist Church, Dickson, Tennessee, Hudson helps others find “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” in God’s Word. She practices praying God’s Word for her family, Sunday School class, and community.

This is a book about ten specific prayers recorded in the Bible, not about the topic of prayer. I have done this because too many books already exist about prayer, and especially about how to pray. What we have lacked was the insight that comes from eavesdropping on some of the most significant prayers in human history. They were recorded for our learning, and I felt they were being neglected.

I always realized that a book about the prayers the Bible records would differ from a book about prayer. Yet I never realized how profound the difference would prove. When I began, I assumed that in looking at prayers I would learn about prayer. And so I have. But I have learned much more.

If you want to learn about windows, you will do well to take a look at a few of them. The problem will be that you will not only look at, you will look through. And if your curiosity is anything like mine, the windows themselves will at times disappear.

Bible prayers are like that. It is what you see through them that matters. For they are windows on eternity, looking out on the profoundest issues of life and death. Before long you forget you are dealing with a prayer, so startled are you by what you see beyond it. It has been difficult to know what prayers to include and which to leave out of this book. I have tried to select those prayers in which we know something about the persons who prayed and the circumstances driving them to prayer.

I have widened the definition of prayer beyond what some people would consider appropriate, looking at it in the broader sense of a divine-human interaction.

Yet in this sense, the lesson that has become more basic to my thinking than any other is that prayer begins and ends with God. To me the adventure of preparing this book has been one of growing more deeply aware of who and what God is.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: God invites His friends into bold, reverent intercession that appeals to His justice and mercy, and in praying we are the ones changed—our view of God grows larger and truer.

Focus on this goal: Respond to God’s initiative by listening and praying courageously for others, appealing to God’s character with humble confidence and trusting His righteous mercy.

Key Bible Passages: Genesis 18:22-33

Before the Session

1. **Label** a board with two headings: “Bold” on the left and “Reverent” on the right. You’ll use this in Step 1.
2. **Read** through Genesis 12–17, paying attention to God’s interaction with Abraham, and be ready to give an overview in Step 2.

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

To open class, **direct** learners to the board. **Ask** for a few volunteers to give some synonyms for “bold” and “reverent,” writing them under the appropriate heading.

Ask: *Are people who are bold often people who are also reverent? As a group, consider why those two attributes are rarely found in the same person. If anyone knows someone who embodies both, invite them to share how they’ve seen both attributes in that person.*

Read aloud the Main Point, explaining that the new book, *Daring to Draw Near* by John White, will help you learn to be bold and reverent in your prayers.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins with the phrase “If you want to learn about windows ” as well as the next paragraph, from the Introduction .

STEP 2 - Conversation With God

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the opening paragraph of Day 1 and give a brief overview of God’s contact with Abraham in Genesis 12–17, noting that God was the initiator in every interaction .

Read aloud the paragraph that begins “God is always speaking” from Day 1, and **engage** learners in considering the definition of the word “hear” as having the meaning of “to pay heed”

Ask: *Whose phone calls would you always pick up? Whose would you let go to voice mail?*

Point out that our ability to recognize and heed God is the starting point for our prayers .

STEP 3 - Abraham’s Guests

Invite a volunteer who is familiar with Genesis 18 to briefly summarize verses 1-15 .

Point out that Abraham “ran” (v 2) from his tent to meet them, “bowed” (v . 2) before them, served them (vv . 4-5), and “served” (v . 8) them a meal.

Ask: *When do you think Abraham realized that these visitors were not simply travelers?*

Turn attention to Sarah’s laughter (v 12) and the reaction of the Lord (vv 13-15), stressing Sarah’s denial and imagining the tone of voice in the Lord’s response .

Ask: *What does Sarah’s laughter reveal about the situation? What does God’s reaction reveal about Him?* **Read aloud** a paragraph or two that helped bring the scene to life .

STEP 4 - God’s Confidant

Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 18:16-19 aloud from their Bible . As a group, **consider** the significance of God’s conversation with Himself, **reading aloud** the first two paragraphs of Day 3 .

Challenge your group with the question asked in the next paragraph: *Why should God bother to take Abraham into His confidence?* and **use** the explanation given by our author to help guide learners to see the trusting friendship between God and Abraham .

Invite a volunteer to read John 15:15 aloud and **ask**, *How can we honor God through our friendship with Jesus?*

STEP 5 - Praying With Boldness

Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 18:20-22 aloud .

Direct your group to consider the impact of God’s explanation to Abraham: a nearby city was going to be obliterated; how would they respond to such information?

Read aloud the paragraph from Day 4 that begins with “For one thing ” as well as the next paragraph .

Use the rest of the Day 4 content to consider the boldness of Abraham’s prayer: he wasn’t seeking to “try out” a request to see if God approved, and he wasn’t bargaining; rather, he was seeking to understand God’s heart and God’s standards .

STEP 6 - How Could God Be Like That?

Read aloud the opening paragraph of Day 5, and then **read aloud** Genesis 18:22-33 .

Instruct your group to read the paragraph that begins “God has never defended...” silently, **considering** carefully the heartfelt testimony of our author .

As a group, **notice** Abraham’s humility and yieldedness to God, even as he dares to ask for mercy and a change of plans **Encourage** your group to hear Abraham’s emotions, see His body posture, and feel His pain .

Remind your group that we, like Abraham, must take our every request and doubt directly to God .

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Read aloud the paragraph that begins “Why did Abraham stop at ten?” from Day 5, followed by the last two (very short) paragraphs from that day .

Share how this week’s study has challenged you, emboldened your prayers, forced you to seek God’s character, and brought up questions for which you may never know the answers .

Close in prayer, seeking God’s prompting this week each time your group comes before the throne to pray .

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: God initiates the “wrestling” to break our self-reliance, and true victory in prayer comes when we cling to Him in helpless dependence and receive His blessing .

Focus on this goal: Abandon self-sufficiency, confess our need, and cling to God—learning to trust His mercy rather than strive in our own strength .

Key Bible Passages: Genesis 32:24-32

Before the Session

Enlist a member of your class or congregation to share a five-minute recounting of his or her experience on a wrestling team . You’ll do this in Step 1 .

Spend time studying Genesis 32:1-21 and be ready to summarize it in Step 5 .

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Introduce your enlisted guest, a wrestler, if your class does not know him .

Invite him to share a few favorite memories about wrestling and why he chose to be a wrestler . Follow up by **asking**, *What were some of the hardest things you did physically while wrestling? How was wrestling difficult in other ways? What were the benefits of all this training and struggling?*

Point out that the idea of “wrestling” often has a different connotation; we wrestle with a problem, a situation, or even a thought .

Explain that today’s passage looks at one of the most famous wrestling matches in all of history: when Jacob wrestled with God .

STEP 2 - The Man Who Wrestled with God

Read aloud Genesis 32:24 and **explain** that this week's theme was, "Why did God wrestle with Jacob?"

Point out that there is not a simple answer, and that it takes quite a bit of Bible study to see Jacob's life and the culmination at this moment.

Encourage your group to ask any questions that arise from the simple statement of verse 24.

Use the Day 1 content to point out that Jacob was not the aggressor, that God somehow reduced Himself to Jacob's size, and that Jacob had been struggling against God his entire life.

Point out that many believers have the same testimony: I've struggled against God.

Encourage your group to prayerfully consider if God is revealing this truth to them today.

STEP 3 - The Struggle Begins

Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 25:21-26, **pointing out** that, even in the womb, Jacob was doing his best to unseat his brother. Use the Day 2 content to give a brief overview of Jacob and Esau in terms of their physical description and their relationship with their parents.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins "Jacob surely must have realized all this."

Ask: *How can you see the wrong action or belief in the lives of all four people in this family: Rebekah, Isaac, Jacob, and Esau?*

Challenge your group to consider that their own attempts to help God fulfill His promises will not bring peace and blessing; we must trust and wait for His fulfillment.

STEP 4 - Neither Peace nor Protection

Explain that Jacob had managed to "buy" Esau's birthright for a bowl of soup (Gen. 25:29-34) and stolen Esau's birthright from their father (Gen. 27); because of that, he headed east to escape Esau's murderous anger (27:41-46).

Read aloud Genesis 28:14-15, explaining that God's promise to Jacob was for descendants, land, protection, and fulfilled promises. Then **enlist** a volunteer to **read aloud** Jacob's response in Genesis 28:20-22.

Use the Day 3 content to consider that the vow's wait-and-see approach revealed a lack of trust in the Lord.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins with "Do I work," as well as the following paragraph.

STEP 5 - The Wolf's Bared Throat

Direct your group to turn to Genesis 32 in their Bibles, **pointing out** that Jacob knew that Esau (and his army) would meet them the next day.

Give a brief overview of Genesis 32:1-21, **pointing to** the psychology and appeasement that Jacob planned for his confrontation with Esau.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins "Ethologists have observed" from Day 4 and **explain** that Jacob was "presenting his throat to Esau" in offering gifts, praise, and unprotected family.

Engage your group in considering our author's approach to "pray through" and how our determination in prayer may honor or dishonor God, depending on our faith and actions.

STEP 6 - Conquered By Dependency

Read aloud Genesis 32:24-32.

Invite several volunteers to read aloud from the Day 5 content with lines or paragraphs that stood out to them.

Return to the original question in Step 2: *Why did God wrestle with Jacob?*

Help learners see that Jacob's struggling against God had to be conquered; only in this moment did Jacob relent in dependence and faith.

Re-read aloud Genesis 32:26, followed by the paragraph that begins "They are words . . ." from Day 5.

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Invite your group to bow their heads and spend a moment in silence.

Read aloud the last two paragraphs of Day 5 slowly. Pause to consider the impact of these words. **Give** your group time to reflect and respond.

Encourage your group to spend time this week choosing to let go of striving and trust God's path for their lives.

Close with prayer.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: Bold intercession is born from a blazing love for God and His people: Moses appeals to God's unchanging holiness and mercy, seeks His very presence, and is transformed to reflect His glory .

Focus on this goal: Recover a holy view of sin and a desire for God's presence, practicing courageous, Scripture-anchored intercession that pleads God's character for the good of His people .

Key Bible Passages: Exodus 32:11-14

Before the Session

1. **Write** the word "intercession" on a board or a large piece of paper . You'll use this in Step 1 .
2. Be comfortable enough with all of Exodus 32 that you can **summarize** it in your own words . You'll do this in Step 2 .

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

As learners arrive, **direct** them to the board labeled "intercession" and **invite** them to write what they understand intercession to be in their own words .

Gather the group together and **read aloud** some of the definitions .

Share a time in your own life when your situation or faith was impacted by the intercessory prayers of someone who loved you .

Say something like, *Most of us understand intercessory prayer as praying for others. Some call it 'standing in the gap,' or 'holding up' another believer. In today's study, we're going to look at one of the most powerful intercessory prayers in the Bible.*

STEP 2 - Two Loves

Give a brief overview of Exodus 32, excluding verses 9-14: *Moses is on top of Mount Sinai meeting with God while the people build a golden calf; Moses came down and confronted the people, who were punished by the Levites and a plague.*

Ask: *If this forming and worshiping of a golden calf were to happen today, would we respond as Moses did?*

Use the Day 1 content to **point out** how Moses viewed the horror of the sin of the Israelites and **read aloud** the paragraph that begins “About one thing we may be clear.”

Read aloud Exodus 32:7-10, and **ask**, *What is God offering Moses here? Is He sincere? Is it a test?*

STEP 3 - The Persistence of Moses

Read aloud the opening paragraph of Day 2 and **ask**, *Let’s be honest; if God had made this offer to you, what would you have said?*

Contrast your group’s (hopefully honest) answers with that of Moses’s response: he begged God to consider His promises and His reputation.

Consider Moses’s boldness before God and **point out** that Moses’s great love for God and the people led him to this powerful intercessory prayer.

Use the Day 2 content to stress that Moses had just spent forty days atop Mount Sinai. Consider how Moses’s exposure to God’s presence had impacted his vision and his prayer.

Read aloud the last two paragraphs of Day 2.

STEP 4 - The Unchanging Character of God

Ask: *What does the word “immutable” mean? After a few learners have offered their definitions, explain that the word points to something that is unchanging or unable to be changed.*

Point out that God alone is immutable: friends, family, situations, and even our own bodies will change. **Read aloud** the second paragraph of Day 3 and then **ask**, *Why don’t we seek to glorify the holiness of God as Moses did?*

Use the information from Day 3 to **point out** that we must first experience it; just as Moses faced it on the top of the mountain, so we must see His holiness in His Word.

STEP 5 - Reflecting God's Heart

Invite a volunteer to read Exodus 32:15-30, repeating Moses's statement, "Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (v. 30).

Read aloud the paragraph that begins "The prayer that follows" from Day 4, **stressing** that we must adopt the same outlook: sin is sinful and terrible; we deserve no excuse or pass; only through mercy can we be forgiven.

Point out that, in addition to the sinfulness of sin, we desperately love those sinners and desire God's presence among us **Read aloud** the last paragraph of Day Four.

STEP 6 - Reflecting God's Glory

Invite a volunteer to read Exodus 33:12-17 aloud **Read aloud** the paragraph that begins "It is no longer....." from Day 5, as well as the next paragraph.

Stress the phrase in the second paragraph, "the passion that shook Moses will shake us too"

Challenge your group to consider the focus of the Day 5 study: as we know and believe God, our feelings, passion, and prayers will follow.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 33:18-23, and **lead** your group to consider how Moses's prayers, heart, and passion led to asking for and seeing God's glory.

Direct learners to the lasting effects of seeing God's glory: Moses's face shone (Ex. 34:29).

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Say, *God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into God's presence.*

Close by reading aloud the last paragraph of Day 5 **Look at** your group and **repeat** those questions: *Is there a God like this? What is His judgment on churches today? Do I want to be His friend?* **Challenge** your group to consider those questions solemnly.

Close in prayer.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: Real repentance owns sin without excuses before God, appeals to His steadfast love, and receives cleansing that restores joy, fellowship, and worship.

Focus on this goal: Justify God rather than self, confess clearly, seek inner renewal by the Spirit, and walk in restored fellowship that bears humble praise and obedience.

Key Bible Passage: Psalm 51:1-2,10-12,17

Before the Session

On a board, **write** “I’m sorry that you . . .” and “I’m sorry that I.....”
You’ll use these prompts in Step 1.

Study 2 Samuel 11:1–12:25 before class and be ready to give a summary of the passage. You’ll do that in Step 2.

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Make up an obviously fictional story about someone in the room offending you (For example, “Let’s say that as I was walking in this morning, I tripped on the curb and knocked Tom’s coffee out of his hand”)

As a group, **consider** the two prompts on the board and how apologies sound different depending on which statement is used (“I’m sorry that you didn’t have your lid on tightly” is not repentant; “I’m sorry that I caused you to spill your coffee” is much better)

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the Main Point from page 106.

Open with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to aid you in learning to repent without excuses.

STEP 2 - A Leader Without Excuse

Spend a few minutes giving a basic overview of the Bible passage of David and Bathsheba using your own study insight on 2 Samuel 11–12 and the information found in Day 1.

Read aloud David's response to the confrontation with the prophet Nathan: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13).

Ask: *What are some excuses people in David's position may have used to minimize or excuse his actions? What does this verse reveal about David's heart and repentance?*

Point out that David was in the highest position of responsibility (king, worship leader, recipient of God's promise) and fell into some of the foulest sins (adultery, lying, murder).

Point out that we may find ourselves, like David, needing to repent.

Read aloud the last paragraph of Day 1.

STEP 3 - Natural Consequences

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Romans 6:23.

Read aloud the opening question of Day 2: *"Why does David not face immediate death?"*

Use that paragraph to read 2 Samuel 12:13 from the New English Bible, **explaining** the different translations for this verse.

Ask, *Why was David pardoned? Does pardoning mean that there are no consequences for sin?*

Point out that though David received pardon from God, his earthly relationships were impacted for the rest of his life.

Read aloud Psalm 51:1-2.

Pointing out that David's repentance rested solely on God; he gave himself no excuse.

STEP 4 - Two-Dimensional Justice

Point out that Nathan confronted David's sin, not the individual acts but in his scolding of the Lord (see 2 Sam. 12:9-14).

Read aloud Psalm 51:3-4 and the second and third paragraphs of Day 3.

As a group, **consider** the sentences “we..... fail to see why sin against our neighbor is so wrong Our God is too small and our concepts of sin too innocuous” from the next paragraph, pointing out that our holy God is the mighty defender of the wronged, despised, and weak.

Read aloud the last sentence from Day 3 and **engage** your group in considering how this statement should change how we view our social sins .

STEP 5 - Where The Blame Lies

Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 51:5 aloud from his or her Bible .

Invite a different volunteer to read the opening two paragraphs from Day 4 aloud and **engage** your group in considering that we must view ourselves as sinful and still accept responsibility for our nature without dwelling in self-pity *Ask: What does this realization—that we are inherently sinful and still responsible—teach us about our dependence upon God?*

Instruct your group to look at a neighbor and **say**, *You're sinful, and so am I. We desperately need Jesus.*

STEP 6 - Repentance and the Acceptable Sacrifice

Read aloud Psalm 51:6-19, slowly and intentionally .

Invite your group to share aloud the phrases or words that point to the fact that David was fully dependent upon God for reinstating their fellowship and forgiving his sin .

Read aloud the paragraph that begins, “We could have no hope.....” as well as the two paragraphs following, from Day 5 .

Stress that David recognized his own inability to conquer his sin by looking at Psalm 51:16-17 as a group: neither sacrifice nor burnt offering would cover David's sin; only his own brokenness would bring about true repentance and restore their fellowship .

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Make the closing minutes of your group time focused on our own attempts to cover our sin with (present-day) sacrifices such as: trying harder, being kind, or spiritual disciplines Our only solution is to fully admit our sin and entrust God to put it right .

Provide time for prayer and reflection, **closing** with a prayer of your own words that lead others in true repentance Use a verse or two from Psalm 51 if that is fitting .

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: Daniel models Scripture-fueled, God-centered intercession that owns corporate sin, appeals to God's covenant mercy, and pleads for restoration "for Your name's sake."

Focus on this goal: Let the written Word create holy tension that drives honest confession, bold petition as well as praying and standing with God's people rather than over them.

Key Bible Passage: Daniel 9:3-5, 18-19

Before the Session

In the days leading up to this group time, **read** Daniel 9:1-19 each day and let your own prayer reflect Daniel's. **Be ready** to share that experience in Step 1.

Be prepared to give an overview of the book of Jeremiah using a book introduction from a Study Bible or a similar resource. You'll share this in Step 4.

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Briefly review the prayers studied in the past few sessions as you've explored *Daring to Draw Near* by John White. (You've looked at the prayers of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David.)

Invite a few volunteers to share prayer elements or specific phrases that have shaped their own prayer lives.

Explain that you've been praying in reflection of this week's prayer from Daniel 9 and share how it impacted your faith this week.

Say: *Each of the prayers we've studied have been God-centered, not human-centered. We'll find Daniel's prayer also appeals to God's promises and mercy.*

STEP 2 - The Written Word of God

Read aloud the opening two paragraphs from Day 1 .

Engage your group in considering the consistent theme throughout all the prayers you've studied thus far: God has called people to pray .

Ask: *Have you ever felt God calling you to pray? How did you respond?*

Use the information in Day 1 to remind learners that we don't need a voice or vision or a wrestling match from the Lord; we have His Word and His Spirit that impels us to pray .

Enlist a volunteer to read Daniel 9:1-2 aloud and point to the fact that (1) Daniel was in God's Word, (2) he understood it, and (3) he turned his attention to God in response .

STEP 3 - Between the Word and the World

Ask: *Is conflict typically good or bad? Have you ever had an inner conflict between your life and God's Word?*

Invite a volunteer to read Daniel 9:3 aloud .

Ask: *In just these verses, what do we observe about Daniel's reaction to the prophecy of Jeremiah?*

Point out that the prayer, fasting, sackcloth, and ashes point to a definite choice by Daniel to come to grips with the conflict between God's promises and Daniel's situation: at almost seventy years after the fall of Jerusalem, God's people were still exiled .

Read aloud the paragraph from Day 2 that begins "Where Scripture and your experience clash ." as well as the next paragraph .

STEP 4 - Expectation and Agitation

Share a general overview of the book of Jeremiah, briefly focusing specifically on Jeremiah 25:1-12 and 29:1-14 .

Use the opening paragraphs of Day 3 to **point out** that Daniel was not fixated on the seventy years, but the warning from God from the time of Moses until the time of exile almost 800 years later .

Invite volunteers to read Daniel 9:4 from a few different translations .

Use information from Day 3 to **point** to Daniel's awareness of God's character and power, with no inconsistency between the severity and the

mercy of God. **Ask:** *How did Daniel's knowledge of God and understanding of the Bible lead him in prayer?*

STEP 5 - No We/They Dichotomy

Read aloud Daniel 9:4-19, slowly and intentionally. As you read, **invite** your group to circle the word "we" each time it appears in their Bibles.

Remind your group that Daniel is one of the few people in the Bible in whom we see almost no sin; yet he aligned himself with every sin of his people.

Use the content of Day 4 to **explain** that Daniel and his people were one; those long dead and even Daniel himself all bore the seed and guilt of sin that rests in every human.

Ask: *How does this passage reveal that we must consider ourselves also guilty as we pray for others?*

STEP 6 - Beyond Self

Consider as a group the opening three paragraphs of Day 5, **contrasting** God's jealousy with human jealousy.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins "It seems evident....." from Day 5, **pointing out** that this type of praying is God-centered, or theocentric.

Ask: *What grade would you give your own prayer life with regard to being God-centered?*

Challenge your group to consider their own prayer lists and prayer habits, taking each prayer time as an opportunity to honor God's name and seek clarity in His promises.

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Read aloud the last paragraph of Day 5.

Instruct your group to glance back through Daniel 9:4-19 in their Bibles, calling out one phrase they can adopt into their own prayers this week as a reminder to seek God's honor and glory for each item in our prayers.

Close in prayer.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: God welcomes honest, directed prayer for personal needs—using pain to draw us to Himself, align our hearts with His purposes, and replace anxiety with peace and consecrated trust .

Focus on this goal: Lead participants to pour out their griefs to God without bitterness, trust His character in the tension between Word and circumstance, and respond to His gifts with gratitude and surrender .

Key Bible Passage: 1 Samuel 1:10-11,17-18

Before the Session

On a board **write** “My home needs . . .” “My car needs.....” “My family needs . . .” and “My boss/job needs . . .” You’ll use those in Step 1 .

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

As learners arrive, **direct** them to the board and **invite** them to write an answer to any of the prompts you’ve written; be sure you’ve already written your own answers .

To begin group time, **read aloud** some of the answers and **engage** a few volunteers to add to the list if they want .

Ask: *How easy is it to pray for the needs of others? Is it easier or harder to pray for your own needs?* On the board, **add:** “I need ” and **ask,** *When was the last time you really thought about your needs? What did you do with that need?*

Read aloud the Main Point and **open with prayer** asking that God would help your group learn to pray in pain for their own needs .

STEP 2 - Prayer for Personal Needs

Explain that last week's focus was the prayer of Daniel, in which He prayed a national confession and sought God's glory .

Using the Day 1 content, **point out** that we should never think that praying for our personal needs should be neglected as we mature in our prayer life .

Read aloud Philippians 4:6 and **stress** that God invites us to bring our sorrows and heartaches to Him; Hannah's prayer will remind us all that "we shall never outgrow the need of childlike prayer for personal needs."

STEP 3 - Beloved But Barren

Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 1:1-8 .

As a group, **use** the passage to **verbally describe** Elkanah, Hannah, and Peninnah, one at a time .

Re-read 1 Samuel 1:8, **pointing out** that Elkanah was either clueless about Hannah's pain or he was dismissive of it .

Share a time in your own life that your broken heart was either ignored or dismissed by someone who should have helped you and how that lacking response intensified your pain .

Carefully point out that Hannah's ongoing, daily pain was made worse at a time when most people were celebrating; **be aware** that this truth is going to be all too real for some members of your group . **Be compassionate** and **gracious** to those who are hurting .

STEP 4 - Purpose in Pain

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 1:9-11 aloud .

Summarize the first three paragraphs of the Day 3 content by **pointing out** that Hannah's plight—though personally devastating—did not primarily concern the nation of Israel .

Help your group see, though, that it actually did: Hannah's prayer was the impetus for a turning point in Israel's history, a point in which God answered Hannah's prayer with His plan for His people: Israel's monarchy .

Point out that Hannah's son, Samuel, would lead the nation and anoint its first two kings .

Read aloud the last paragraph of Day 3 .

Ask: *What pain from your past led you to where you are today and are you able to rejoice?*

STEP 5 - Spiritual Surgery

Ask for a show of hands to the question, “Who in here has experienced suffering at some point in your life?”

Point out that most everyone has known suffering, and most everyone wonders why the suffering is occurring.

Read aloud the opening paragraph of Day 4, followed by the first sentence of the next paragraph.

Say: *Our author calls suffering ‘divine surgery’ that will heal and correct the defects in our growth if we respond with trust in God’s goodness and mercy.*

Use the information from Day 4 to *point out* Hannah’s prayer does not teach us to bargain with God but to accept every answer from God as an act of His grace.

STEP 6 - Longing Shot Like an Arrow

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 1:12-18.

Use the Day 5 content to **explain** how Hannah’s prayer of longing and heartbreak was longingly shot like an arrow from her heart to God.

Invite a volunteer to read Hebrews 11:6 and James 4:8 aloud, **reminding** your group that our response to heartbreak and sorrow should always be to draw nearer to God in prayer.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins “As Christians we often.....” and **engage** your group in discussing the dangers of both mistakes.

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Invite your group to glance at 1 Samuel 1:19-28 in their Bibles, **pointing out** that Hannah’s request of God was answered.

Read aloud verses 27-28, **stressing** that Hannah saw God’s blessing and acknowledged Him as she devoted Samuel to the Lord.

Lead your group in a time of prayer, asking God to give your group His peace, direction, and strength in their suffering **Pray** that you will cling to God and honor Him, believing He walks with you through heartbreak.

Close in prayer.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: God humbles us into reverent silence so prayer becomes worship marked by awe, repentance, and right view of self .

Focus on this goal: Seek intimacy with God that honors His holiness—learning to cover the mouth, abandon self-justification, and adore the sovereign Lord who cannot be arraigned .

Key Bible Passages: Job 38:1-7

Before the Session

In the week before class, **find** a video of someone getting too close to a bison at a national park. **Be prepared** to share it with your group in Step 1 .

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Ask: *What do you know about the American bison? Some people call them buffalo, and the calves weigh thirty to seventy pounds at birth. They are herbivores, and an adult male can be six feet tall and weigh up to 2200 pounds. Despite their size, they are really quick; they can reach 35 miles per hour.*

Show the video you found of someone getting too close to a bison; as a group, **consider** how comfortable or familiar we (humans) should be around bison and the best way to respect their power .

Explain that in today's passage, Job is going to recognize that casual familiarity with God is also unwise, and he is humbled when God speaks .

STEP 2 - Intimacy's Counterfeit

Explain that Day 1 focused not on Job, but on the difference between familiarity and intimacy.

Encourage your group to consider what they gleaned from the Day 1 content concerning how we may be familiar but not intimate with someone.

Invite a volunteer to read Hebrews 4:14-16 aloud from their Bible.

Ask: *How do these verses show us that we should not be merely familiar with God when approaching Him in prayer? How do we see both intimacy and reverence in this passage?*

Read aloud the last two paragraphs of Day 1.

STEP 3 - Death Wish Road

Use the information from the opening three paragraphs of Day 2 to present an overview of the book of Job.

Invite your group to put themselves in Job's shoes for just a minute and **speak aloud** the questions they would ask of God in Job's situation.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins "It is too simple" as well as the next paragraph, from Day 2.

Invite a few volunteers to read Job 9:3-4; 12:14; and 23:1-4.

Ask: *Overall, what did this time of suffering do to Job's faith?*

Help your group see that Job had moments of great faith but also periods of bitter anger.

Point out that Job knew his friends' theology (that God was punishing him) was wrong, but he also felt slighted; how could God let this happen to him?

STEP 4 - Small is Healthy

Invite a volunteer to read Job 38:1-7 aloud.

Dwell on these words as a group, one verse at a time, and **consider** why God responded to Job's prayer for acknowledgment in this way.

Ask: *Do you think this is the answer Job expected from God?*

As a group, **summarize** what God was saying to Job and **consider** how it may not have been the answer Job expected, but it was the answer Job needed to hear.

Read aloud Job 40:1-5 and **consider** the significance of Job's response in light of God's answer using insight from the Day 3 content.

Read aloud the last three paragraphs of Day 3.

STEP 5 - Sounds of Silence

Invite a volunteer to read Job 42:1-6 aloud.

Using the insight from the Day 4 content, **point out** that Job was not only repentant, but he quoted God twice (vv. 3,4) and responded directly in humility.

Read aloud the paragraph from Day 4 that begins, "Repent? He has changed completely," and **engage** your group in considering the extent of Job's repentance, both in words and actions.

Point out that repentance, brought to light through God's presence, is part of worship and also leads us to worship.

STEP 6 - A Richness Greater Than Riches

Enlist a few volunteers to look up the word "reverence" from dictionaries or concordances on their phones.

Ask: *How can we see Job display reverence for God in these last few chapters?*

Point learners to the first few verses of Job 38, 40, and 42 for examples.

Ask: *How can we come to a place of intimacy with God that we, like Job, display this reverence?*

Read aloud the opening paragraph of Day 5, **challenging** your group to make God's reverence a primary focal point for your Bible reading and study.

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Read aloud Job 42:10-17, and **ask**, *Is this ending just another way of saying that Job lived happily ever after?*

Use the Day 5 content to **point out** that Job's pain brought about his correction from God, restoring his perspective.

Close with a prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to help each member of your group see himself clearly, see God clearly, and keep a biblical perspective of self, others, and God's Kingdom each and every day.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: True worship holds exuberant joy and holy reverence together—celebrating God’s presence while honoring His holiness by obeying His ways rather than managing Him .

Focus on this goal: Cultivate worship that is both wholehearted and obedient, pairing glad praise with godly fear in posture, practice, and daily life .

Key Bible Passages: 2 Samuel 6:13-15

Before the Session

Bring from home two different versions of the same thing . (For example, a tuxedo jacket and an old sweater; an old napkin and a nice cloth one .) You’ll use these item in Step 1 .

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Before your group arrives, **set** your two items in a prominent place in your room and **engage** members in considering the relationship between the two items as they arrive .

To begin class, **ask**, *How are these items similar? How are they contrasting? Is there ever a situation when you would use both of these items at the same time?*

Explain that in today’s passage, King David worships the Lord holding two contrasting items together: exuberant joy and holy reverence .

Explain that believers should seek to cultivate worship that is both wholehearted and obedient; David’s prayer will show us that today .

STEP 2 - God's Portable Shrine

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the opening two paragraphs from Day 1 .

Explain that in today's session, you'll see some contrasting approaches to worship: one from the Philistines and two from David and the Israelites .

Engage your group in considering the retelling of 1 Samuel 5:1–6:12 found in Day 1 .

Ask: *What was the attitude of the Philistines toward the ark? Would you describe this as worship? Why or why not?*

Help your group see the hand of God working in this story: the fallen statue of Dagon, the outbreaks and plague on the citizens of Ashdod, and the “offering” sent back to Israel with the ark .

Stress that, though the Philistines feared the Lord, they were not truly worshipping Him .

STEP 3 - Rejoicing Turned to Terror

Invite a volunteer to summarize 1 Samuel 6:13–7:2 (**be prepared** to do it yourself just in case).

Use the insight from the Day 2 content to reveal the rise and fall of the situation: the harvesters rejoiced to see the ark, something went wrong as some of the men inspected the ark, and then all mourned at the deaths of seventy from their community .

As a group, **explore** the questions we can be sure the people of Bethshemesh asked: “What happened? What did we do wrong?”

Share a time in your own life when you asked similar questions .

STEP 4 - Death and Good Fortune

Point out that twenty years elapsed between 1 Samuel 7 and 2 Samuel 6 .

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 6:1-11 aloud from their Bible .

As a group, **consider** the similarities between the first moving of the ark (1 Samuel 5:1–7:2) and this one: the cart, the disaster, and what looked like a worshipful setting turning into tragedy .

Ask: *What questions can we imagine the Israelites were asking about God after this situation?*

Read aloud the paragraph that begins, “It seemed as though the history” from Day 3 .

Stress how repeated sorrow had wearied the Israelites and made them afraid even to worship.

STEP 5 - The End of a Marriage

Invite a volunteer to read 2 Samuel 6:12-16.

Point out that David saw God's blessing on Obed-edom's family and recognized that the ark was not ultimately a source of wrath but of blessing.

Read aloud Exodus 25:10-22 and Joshua 3:1-6, **pointing out** that the Torah and the story of Joshua clearly stated how to carry the ark: on the shoulders of the priests.

Ask: *We see that the main change in carrying the ark was obedience to the law; what does that reveal about David's heart? What does that reveal about reverence in worship?*

As a group, **look closely** at the description of David's worship (2 Sam. 6:12-15) and Michal's response (v. 16).

STEP 6 - Rejoicing Without Reverence

Invite a volunteer to read 2 Samuel 6:17-23 aloud. **Follow** that passage by **reading aloud** the opening paragraph of Day 5.

Engage your group in considering how disinhibited praise may offend others, but our focus must be only on God's opinion of our worship.

Use the information from Day 5 to **stress** that rejoicing and reverence must exist together in our worship and prayer; the absence of either is sin.

Ask: *What does rejoicing look like? (singing, smiling, movement, etc.) What does reverence look like? (gratitude, praise, thanksgiving, etc.)* Continue to **explore** the idea of reverence by leaning on the concept that our reverence begins with fear (Day 5).

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Share with the group how your understanding of rejoicing and reverence has shaped your own heart this week: have you felt a leading to worship or pray differently? **Invite** a few volunteers to share how they can bring their own reverence and worship before the Lord, seeking His approval alone.

Read aloud the last paragraph of Day 5.

Close in prayer.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: Paul models Scripture-fueled, God-centered intercession that thanks God and asks Him to open believers' eyes to their hope, their worth to Him, His resurrection power, and the vast love of Christ—so they grow into His fullness .

Focus on this goal: Pray Paul's prayers over others regularly—soaking in Scripture as the fuel, giving thanks first, and making specific petitions for enlightened hope, recognized value, experienced power, and deepening love .

Key Bible Passages: Ephesians 1:17-19; 3:16-19

Before the Session

Bring a candle to class . (Check with your church for permission if needed . You won't need to light it for the illustration .) You'll use it in Steps 1 and 7 .

Be prepared to summarize or highlight Paul's words in Ephesians 1:1-14 . You'll do that in Step 2 .

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Set a candle in a prominent place in your room and **ask**, "*How does a candle work? When I light the wick, what makes it burn?*" (If you need to explain it: the flame melts the wax, the wick draws the wax upward, and the heat melts the wax into a gas that burns . That gas reacts with oxygen, producing light and heat .)

Stress that the fuel (wax) gives energy that is turned into a flame .

Read aloud the Main Point of today's session, **inviting** your group to think of this candle when they consider their own prayer life: Scripture-fueled flame that ascends to the throne .

Open with prayer.

STEP 2 - The Fuel and the Flame

Give a brief overview of Ephesians 1:1-14 to set the stage for Paul's prayer for his friends in Ephesus.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins "Prayer can be relatively easy" from Day 1, and **invite** a few volunteers to share how they've experienced that very thing: strong prayer life for a while, but lacking prayer life in the daily grind.

Read aloud the next two paragraphs following the one you just read, **stressing** that Scripture is the fuel for prayer.

Challenge your group to share how a passage of Scripture inspired them to pray for someone this week.

STEP 3 - Praise Where Praise is Due

Invite a volunteer to read Ephesians 1:15-16 aloud, stressing the words "giving thanks for you" (v. 16).

Share a person for whom you gave thanks to God this week and how that prayer changed your spiritual outlook.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins "Begin your prayer with thanksgiving" from Day 2 as well as the paragraph following it **Ask:** *Who grew up in a house in which 'please' and 'thank you' were common courtesies? How are you impacted today when someone actually says 'thank you'?*

As a group, **consider** why thanking God for other believers turns our hearts and minds toward Him, leading us to praise and worship.

STEP 4 - Smashing Carnival Mirrors

Invite a volunteer to read Ephesians 1:17-21 aloud as your group reads along in their Bibles **Ask:** *What did Paul specifically pray for his brothers and sisters in Ephesus?* **Instruct** your group to underline those items as they are shared aloud.

Use the Day 3 content to consider the deeper meaning of the word "bless," not as an unspecific request, but seeking God's goals for the life of another.

Read aloud the sample "partnership of prayer" in the paragraph that begins "Are these the things " **Challenge** your group to seek precise, future-oriented, spiritual prayers for one another.

STEP 5 - Hope, Value, and Power

Invite a volunteer to read Ephesians 1:18-19 aloud. As a group, **break down** this long sentence by seeing that Paul's overarching prayer is that believers' hearts may be enlightened, in order that they would have hope, wealth (sometimes translated "value"), and power.

Engage your group in looking back through the Day 4 content and reading aloud the statements that gave them insight into the concepts of hope, wealth, and power. Be sure to **share** some of your favorite quotes as well. Stress specifically that hope means certainty, that we are valued by God because of His investment in us, and that the power of God inhabits our inner being.

STEP 6 - The Hands of Love Reach Down

Invite a volunteer to read Ephesians 3:14-21 aloud, slowly and with emphasis.

Ask: *How would your day go differently if you knew one of us was praying this prayer over you every morning?*

Instruct your group to underline the word "love" every time it appears in this passage.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins "Let us examine the requests....." and **engage** your group in considering the significance of each implication.

Refer to the author's realization that he was frightened of being loved, and how God revealed His love gradually.

Ask: *If a new believer told you she didn't feel she was rooted in love, what would you share with her?*

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Hold up the candle that you used in the opening illustration.

Say: *I know that earlier I explained how a candle worked, but let's consider how prayer works.*

Point out that God's Word is the wax, the Spirit is the wick, and the flame is the outward expression of our response to God: our prayer for love, an enlightened heart, confident hope, value in Christ, and His power in us.

Close in prayer.

Leader Guide

The main point of this session is: Jesus’s final prayers reveal true intimacy with the Father—honest anguish, willing submission, radical forgiveness, and confident entrustment—modeling how we face suffering, temptation, and death in reverent obedience.

Focus on this goal: Practice “Gethsemane-shaped” praying: watch and pray honestly, submit our will to the Father, intercede with forgiveness for others, and entrust ourselves to God amid darkness.

Key Bible Passages: Matthew 26:36-46; 27:45-46; Luke 23:34,46

Before the Session

In the days leading up to group time, **challenge** your class to consider what they would like their final words to be. You’ll share them in Step 1.

Be prepared to give a brief overview of Matthew 26:1-35. You’ll share this in Step 2.

During the Session

STEP 1 - Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

Say: *It’s been reported that Leonardo DaVinci’s last words were, “I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.”*

Remind your group that you encouraged them to consider their own last words, and invite any who are willing to share them. **Ask:** *What are the significance of last words? Why do they hold more weight than other things people say?*

Read aloud the Main Point and challenge your group to consider today’s words with the proper reverence due them. **Open with prayer.**

STEP 2 - A Yearning for Companionship

Give a brief overview of Matthew 26:1-35 to set the stage for Jesus's prayer .

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 26:36-38 aloud .

Use the opening paragraphs of Day 1 to consider the solemnity and reverence of these last words of Jesus; **read aloud** a sentence or two that stood out to you as you prepared .

Stress Jesus's desire for the companionship of His friends in verse 38: "Remain here and stay awake with me ."

Engage your group in considering that Jesus knew what would come that next day: He would be separated from His Father .

Ask: *If you knew you were walking into your darkest moment, who would you invite to walk through it with you?*

Stress that we, like Jesus, find strength from other believers as we seek the face and comfort of God .

STEP 3 - The Storm Subsides

Read aloud Matthew 26:39-46 .

Ask: *How do you hear Jesus's voice as you consider Him praying these words?* **Challenge** your group not to hear the words like they would normally read them, but with the passionate, crying despair that was certainly our Lord's .

Read aloud the paragraph that begins "Jesus the Son of Man" as well as the paragraph that follows it **Share** a time when you said words by faith but not by feeling .

Engage your class in sharing aloud some Scriptures, songs, prayers, or quotes they have clung to in a desperate situation, assuring the group that there is no "competition" with Jesus's suffering; we suffer, too .

STEP 4 - "Father, Forgive Them"

Invite a volunteer to read Luke 23:34 aloud **Stress** the selfless, sacrificial prayer of Jesus on the cross at the same time that the very people He's praying for are gambling for His clothing beneath Him .

Ask: *What do we learn about forgiveness if we focus on this scene of Jesus's last few precious breaths?*

Read aloud the paragraph that begins “The unselfishness of His prayer.....” and **engage** your group in considering what you can observe about Jesus in this one verse **Point out** that Jesus intercedes for us even today, and He will carry this very prayer to the Father .

STEP 5 - Forsaken

Read aloud Matthew 27:45-46 If a member of your group has a translation that words Jesus’s quote differently, **invite** them to share it .

Then **read aloud** Psalm 22:1, **pointing out** that Jesus was quoting David’s words from a song of despair .

Use the Day 4 content to **guide** your group to understand Jesus’s question: His question was not meant for intellectual understanding but instead was an expression of agony .

Share a time in your own life when you felt such emotions that it seemed beyond your own understanding .

Read aloud the last three paragraphs of Day 4 and **encourage** your group to carry their “Why?” questions to God just as Jesus did .

STEP 6 - The Last Prayer

Invite a volunteer to read Luke 23:46 aloud .

Read the statement found in the Day 5 content: *The prayer of Jesus must not be regarded as something peculiar to His redemptive work. He was showing us how to die.*

As a group, **consider** what you can observe about Jesus’s death, not only in Luke 23:46 but in all the passages you’ve considered in today’s group time .

Point out that believers are called not to cringe at death but to remember that it’s a step of faith into a life we’ve never experienced and can’t truly know until death .

STEP 7 - Practical Application – Live Out the Session

Provide time for your group to reflect on the prayers you’ve studied over the past ten weeks **Challenge** yourself and others to continue to seek prayers in the Bible, consider their significance, and use them as prayers for your own life .

Close with prayer, thanking God for these recorded prayers and the direction they give us in faith, life, and death .