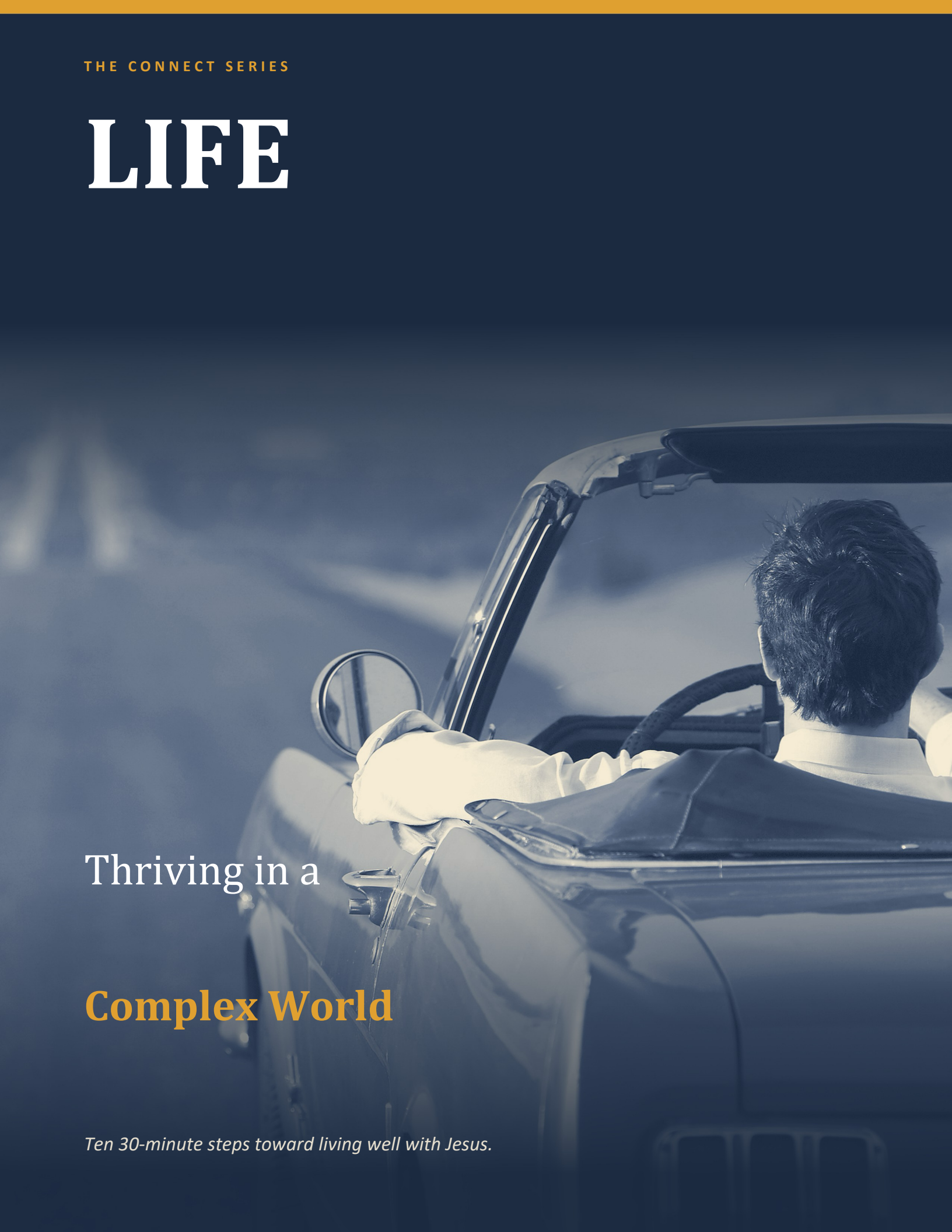
THE CONNECT SERIES

LIFE



Thriving in a

Complex World

Ten 30-minute steps toward living well with Jesus.

A personal and small-group study of time, money, work and more

THE CONNECT SERIES

LIFE

Thriving in a Complex World

Ten chapters, 30 minutes each

by Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Dennis Stokes and Christine Weddle



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Content development team: Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Dennis Stokes and Christine Weddle. **Original cover and interior design:** Christine Weddle. **Consultation:** Debbie Entsminger, Sara Wevodau and Christopher Morton. **This edition:** adapted for younger readers, with shorter chapters, plain language, safety notes and new images.

Some of the stories in this book are true to life and used with permission. All other stories are composites or made up, and any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental.

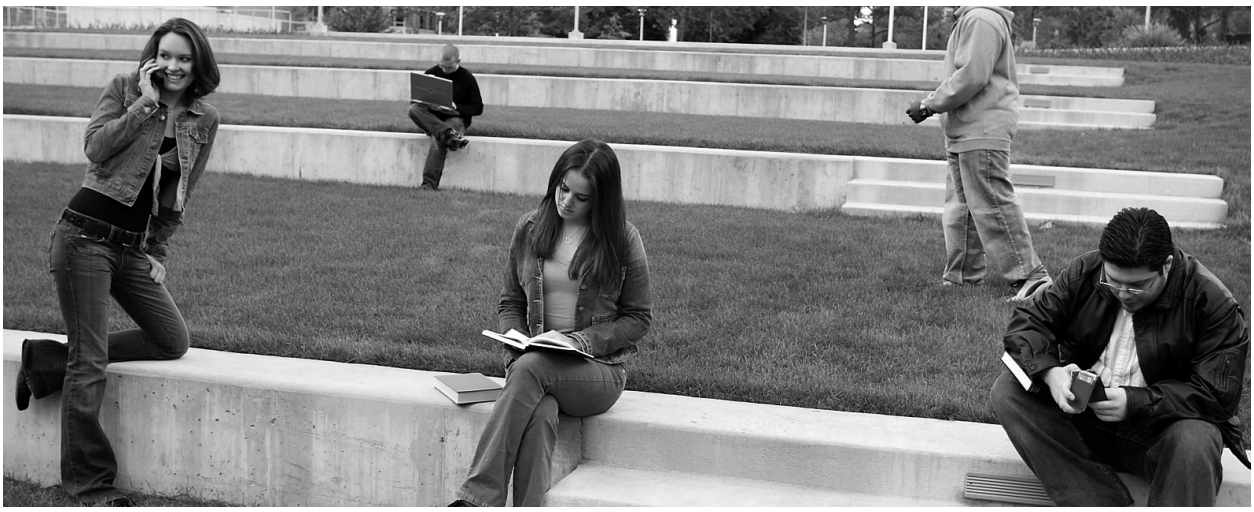
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INSIDE

Your ten steps

Each chapter starts with a question you may already be asking. Each one takes about 30 minutes.

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WELCOME

Life is complicated

Classes, work, money, your body, friends, church, the news and a future you can't see yet: it's a lot. Almost everyone wonders how to **live well** in the middle of it all.

This study isn't about rules. It's about **living well with Jesus** in the real parts of life, like time, money, work and decisions. Other Connect studies explore receiving God's love (GOD), who God says you are (IDENTITY and SOUL) and loving people (RELATIONSHIPS). This one is about everyday life. You can do them in any order.

IS THIS THE RIGHT TIME?

- **Go at your own pace.** Some chapters, like Beauty and Pleasure and My Body, touch sensitive things. Skip anything that's too much.
- **Don't do it alone if you can help it.** It works best with a trusted friend, mentor or small group. If you're in a group, start with Chapter 1 together.
- **If you're in crisis,** talk to a counselor, pastor, parent or doctor first. A study can't replace professional help.

You can work through it on your own, with a friend, or in a group. If a question hits a sore spot, that's okay. Skip it, come back later, or talk it through with someone you trust.

HOW IT WORKS

Think of each chapter as a short trip

Every chapter follows the same path, so after the first one you will know what to expect. You stop four times along the way. A timer helps: the whole trip is about 30 minutes.

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

The story	A short story to get you thinking. Some are true to life, and others are made up from common experiences.
Pause 1 *Exploring what God says*	You look at what the Bible says about the topic, often through a real person like Solomon, Moses or Paul. Most verses are printed for you.
Pause 2 *Exploring your reality*	You get honest about where you are right now, and how you got there. No one has to see your answers.
Pause 3 *Coming alive to God*	You respond to what you've read, with a few words, a prayer, or by memorizing a verse. This is where it moves from your head to your heart.
Pause 4 *Journeying forward*	You pick one small step for this week, journal, and close in prayer.
Digging deeper *(optional)*	Extra questions and ideas if you want more. Skip it and you won't miss anything.

ABOUT THE PICTURES

Each chapter has photos and graphics to help you think and feel. Spend a minute with them, and picture yourself in the scene. If a picture bothers you, ask yourself why. Every chapter also gives you one verse to memorize, with a card you can save as a lock screen.

THREE HABITS

Get the most out of every chapter

1

Read slowly

Read each verse like a message meant for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand it.

2

Be honest

Write or draw something for every question, even 4 or 5 words. Honest beats polished.

3

Pray as you go

Not only when a question says "pray." Tell God what you're thinking, even if it's "I'm scared of this."

Finding your rhythm. Most people finish a chapter in one 30-minute sitting. If that's too much, try three 10-minute sessions, or one Pause a day. Pictures are part of the study. Look at them and picture yourself in the scene. If an image bothers you, ask yourself why.

If you're doing this in a group

A group works best when everyone feels safe. Read these agreements out loud together at your first meeting.

1. **What's said here stays here.** Don't repeat what you hear in the group to anyone outside it.
2. **Share only for yourself.** Use "I" statements. Talk about your own life, not "we" or "you."
3. **Listen, don't fix.** Skip the advice and the "me too" stories. Accept how others feel without trying to change it.
4. **Go at your own pace.** Nobody has to share. Nobody gets pushed. Silence is okay, and some questions can stay unanswered.
5. **All feelings are allowed.** Tears, anger and quiet are all welcome. Ask before you hug or touch.
6. **God does the changing.** The group's job is to make a safe place for His love. The Holy Spirit does the rest.
7. **Know the limits.** A group isn't therapy. If someone needs more help, encourage them to talk to a pastor, counselor or trusted adult. If someone is in danger or being hurt, tell a trusted adult right away.

> **TALK ABOUT IT TOGETHER**
>
> After you read these agreements, finish this sentence out loud: *"One thing I need from this group to feel safe is …"* Then pray together before you start.



THE STARTING LINE

Before you start

Take about five minutes. Be honest. You'll come back to this page after Chapter 10 to see what has changed.

1 Finish this sentence: *When I think about my life right now, I feel …*

---

2 How well is my life working right now? Circle a number.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

0 = not well at all *10 = very well*

3 Which area of life is hardest for me right now? (Time, money, body, work, decisions, authority, church, the world, my future, something else?)

---

4 What do I hope to get out of this study?

A PRAYER TO START

God, life feels complicated. Help me be honest as I read. Teach me to live well with You, one day at a time. Amen.

IF THINGS FEEL HEAVY

Some chapters touch hard things like debt, body image, addiction and loss. If you're going through something painful, talk to a trusted friend, pastor, counselor or parent. If you're thinking about hurting yourself, call or text **988** (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the U.S.), or call **911** if you're in danger.

Ready? Turn the page to Chapter 1: Time

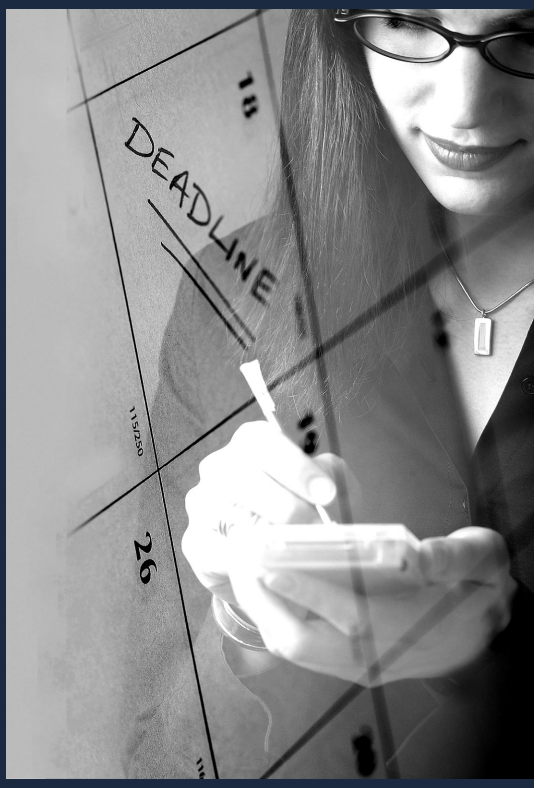
LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 1

Time

Spend it well. Rest it well.

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Time is a gift, and you can't get it back. In this chapter you'll see how God looks at time, check what your hours say about what you value, and learn how to rest well even when life is full.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** how God views time.
- **Check** what your hours say about your values.
- **Try** one way to rest on purpose.
- **Say** Psalm 90:12 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. **Psalm 90:12 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Where did the day go?

A story from the original study, updated.



Illustrative photo

Josh feels like he never has enough time. Between classes, his shifts at the grocery store and his group chats, he's wiped out by nine every night. He means to spend time with his family, with God and with friends. Instead he scrolls and plays games to "relax."

Tonight he stopped mid-scroll and asked himself: **"Where is my life going? I feel like I'm on a treadmill. Is this all there is?"**

Q1 Can you relate to Josh? How?

Q2 When two good things want the same hour, how do you decide? Give an example.

PACING TIP

Short on time? Do one Pause a day. Each Pause is a few minutes. Be honest with your answers. That matters more than finishing fast.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

God's view of time

"I just don't have enough time!" We all say it. But is it true? Look at what the Bible says.

FIVE VERSES ABOUT TIME

Read each one slowly. What does it say about how God sees time?

ECCLESIASTES 3:11	He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart.
MARK 6:31	"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."
JAMES 4:14	You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.
2 PETER 3:8	With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.
REVELATION 1:8	"I am the Alpha and the Omega... who is, and who was, and who is to come."

Q3 When you look at time from God's side, what do you see?

Q4 In Luke 16:19–31, a rich man ignores a poor man named Lazarus, and later regrets it. What might he regret about how he used his time? Have you ever wished you could go back and spend a day differently?

Q5 Galatians 6:7–9 says we "reap what we sow." Give one example, good or bad, when you reaped what you sowed with your time.

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Your time shows your values

Your calendar tells the truth about what you value. Look at the list, circle your top three, then answer.

WHAT DO YOU VALUE RIGHT NOW?

Circle your top three. They shape how you spend your hours.

○ Freedom	○ Fun	○ Financial security
○ Feeling meaningful or safe	○ Efficiency	○ My image before people
○ Health and fitness	○ Intellect	○ Relationships with people
○ Beauty	○ Power and influence	○ My own space and stuff
○ Nature	○ Intimacy with God	○ Other: _____

Q6 How do your top three values show up in how you spend your time? (Example: I value efficiency, so I get work done fast.)

Q7 When you have free time, what do you usually do? How much sleep do you get, and how does it affect you?

Q8 Have you ever stayed busy to avoid something, like a hard feeling, a problem friendship or being alone? What?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

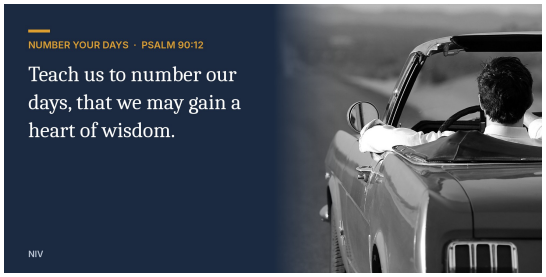
Use time wisely, and rest

"Be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity" (Ephesians 5:15–16). But God also models rest. He "blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Genesis 2:3), and Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Q9 How do you tend to waste time "carelessly"? What is one wiser step?

Q10 Is resting easy or hard for you right now? What would "resting well" look like this week (Psalm 23:2–3a)?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Number your days, Psalm 90:12. Teach us to number our days,"
2. Say the second half three times: "that we may gain a heart of wisdom."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- Time is a **gift.** You can't keep it, but you can spend it on purpose.
- What you sow with your time, you will **reap.**
- **Rest** is not wasted time. God made it holy.

> **CUT YOURSELF SOME SLACK**
>
> "There is a season for everything" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). In finals week or a double-shift season you'll sleep less. That's okay. You can't have everything at once, but you can live well in every season.

Take one step

1. **Look.** Check your phone's screen-time report. Circle the one app that takes the most time. Is it worth it?
2. **Rest on purpose.** Block 20 minutes this week for a walk, a nap or quiet with God. Put it in your calendar.
3. **Decide.** Tell God one decision about your time. Write it down.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about time, about Himself or about me? What one thing will I do about it?

> **CLOSE IN PRAYER**
>
> *God, thank You for the gift of time. Teach me to number my days. Show me where I'm rushing, and help me rest in You. Amen.*

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Seasons. "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Each season of life, like school, a first job or caring for family, brings different time priorities. God gives you the present moment as a gift.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. What season of life are you in right now? What might God's main purpose be for you in this season?
2. How are you experiencing, or missing, God's presence in this moment?
3. Has God ever brought you to a moment that felt like the "right time" for something important? Describe it.
4. Read Psalm 39:4 and Ecclesiastes 7:2. How does thinking about death change how you spend your time?
5. Have you lost time, even a season, because of your choices or someone else's? Read Joel 2:25. What might it look like for God to "restore the years the locusts have eaten"?

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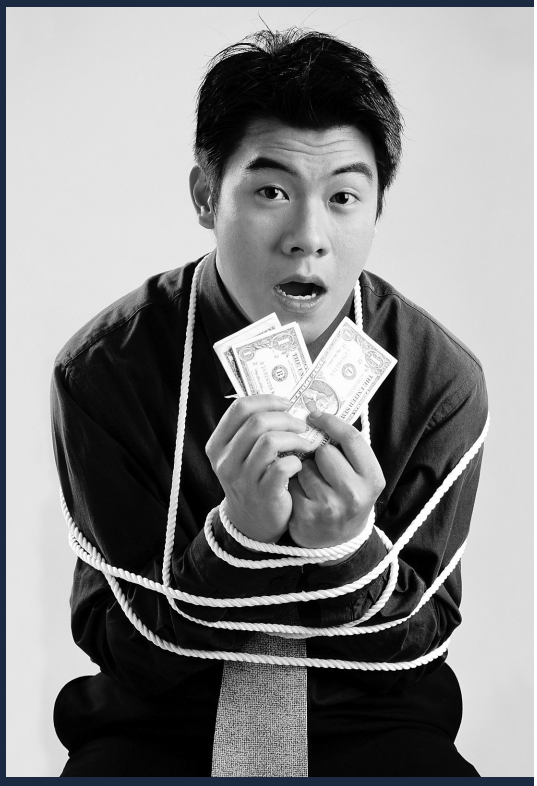
LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 2

Money

Treasure, trust and enough

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

God is the provider of everything, and He doesn't want you stuck in worry about money. In this chapter you'll see why greed is a trap, how to spend and save wisely, and how giving frees you to trust God.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** what Jesus says about treasure and worry.
- **Spot** what drives your spending.
- **Try** one habit for spending, giving or gratitude.
- **Say** Matthew 6:33 from memory.

KEY VERSE

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **Matthew 6:33 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Never enough

A story from the original study, updated.



Illustrative photo

Brandon barely scraped by at the campus coffee shop. After graduation he landed an assistant manager job and was sure he'd finally pay off his credit card and relax. Then came a car loan, a nicer apartment and a phone upgrade. A raise helped, but only for a while.

When a friend asked him to help support a summer mission trip, Brandon wanted to say yes. He couldn't. **Every time he made more, it was never enough.**

Q1 Can you relate to any part of Brandon's story? How?

Q2 What do you think Brandon is chasing? What might he be missing?

HONEST QUESTION

Money stress can feel heavy. If it's more than you can handle, such as debt you can't see a way out of, talk to a trusted adult, a pastor or a free credit counselor.

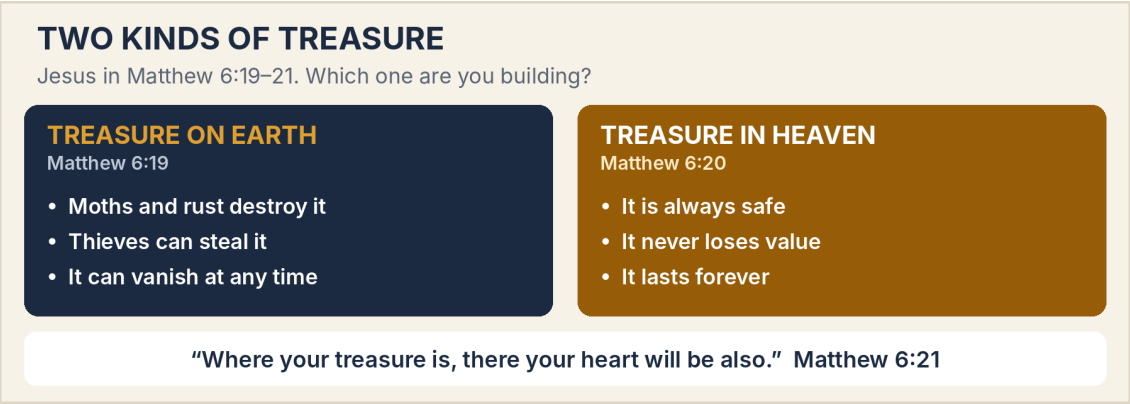
PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

What you treasure

Ads say, “Buy this and be happy.” But there’s a hidden price: money can wreck friendships, and chasing it can push God aside. In Matthew 6:19–34 Jesus talks straight about money. He also says, “You cannot serve both God and money” (v. 24).



Q3 If your home caught fire, what would you grab first? What does that say about what you treasure (vv. 20–21)?

Q4 Why do you think we can’t serve both God and money? What do you worry about most when it comes to money or things (v. 25)?

Q5 In Matthew 6:33, Jesus makes a promise. Rewrite it in your own words, using “I” and “me.”

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

What drives your spending?

Spending isn't the problem. Spending money you don't have is. Credit cards and "buy now, pay later" apps make it easy, and Colossians 3:5 warns that greed is a form of idolatry, trusting stuff more than God.

SEVEN WAYS TO RESIST IMPULSE BUYING

Check one or two you will try this month.

1. Walk away from it for 24 hours.
2. Compare the price in three places.
3. Buy only what you need and can use.
4. Make a simple budget. Share it with someone who will help you keep it.
5. Use cash or debit, or pay your card off in full each month.
6. Turn off sale alerts. Unsubscribe from shopping emails.
7. Delete saved cards and skip "buy now, pay later."

Q6 Write the number of one or two tips you will try this month. Why those?

Q7 Describe a time an ad, post or friend made you feel you "needed" something, or ashamed you didn't have it.

Q8 Do you owe money (card, loan, "buy now, pay later")? How does it make you feel?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

Be content. Be generous.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it" (1 Timothy 6:6–7). And giving is worship: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Q9 Is there an attitude that keeps you from being content? What is one practical way to practice contentment? (Example: when you buy something new, give away something old.)

Q10 Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). When have you felt that? What is one next step of giving, with money, time or help?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Seek God first, Matthew 6:33. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,"
2. Say the second half three times: "and all these things will be given to you as well."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- **God provides.** You don't have to carry money worry alone.
- You can't serve both God and money. **Choose your treasure.**
- **Contentment** and **generosity** break greed's grip.

GRATITUDE PAUSE

Pause and list everything you're thankful for: people, places, food, chances. About 1 in 4 people in the world still lack safe drinking water at home (WHO and UNICEF, 2025). Let your thanks turn into praise.

Take one step

1. **Count.** Write five things you're thankful for. Say thank you to God for each one.
2. **Start.** Pick one tip from Pause 2 and use it for the next 30 days.
3. **Give.** Decide on one gift of money, time or help this month, and do it.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about money, about Himself or about me? What one step will I take?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, everything I have is Yours. Free me from worry and greed. Teach me to be content, to give gladly and to seek You first. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. What is the point of Craig and Jason's story? What did Craig gain by saving early?
2. What would it take for you to start saving, even $20 a month?
3. Read Luke 16:10–12. When were you trusted with someone else's money or things? How did you handle it?
4. Read Luke 21:1–4. What was special about the poor widow's gift? What might it have cost her?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6–15. What promises and results of giving do you see?

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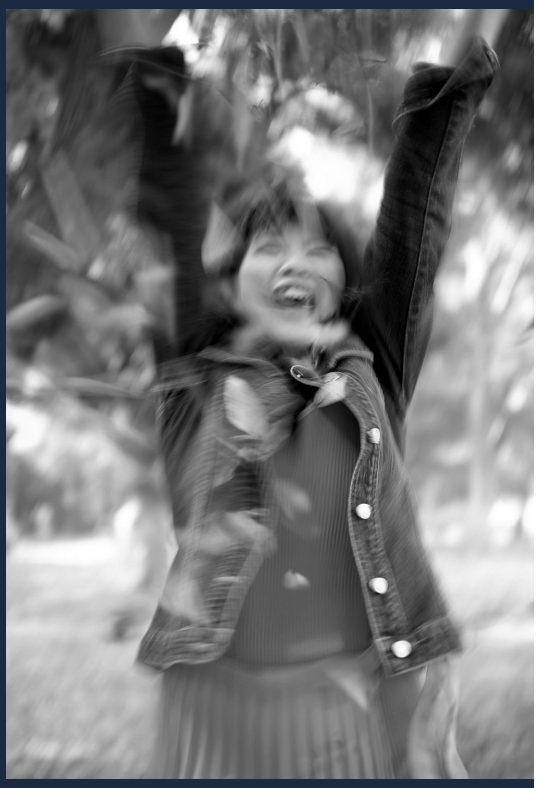
LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 3

Beauty and Pleasure

Enjoy it. Protect it. Find God in it.

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

God made you to enjoy beauty and pleasure, and He enjoys it with you. But in a broken world, pleasure can become an escape. This chapter helps you enjoy good things, set healthy boundaries, and see how God brings beauty out of brokenness.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** why God made beauty and pleasure.
- **Notice** what you use to escape or numb pain.
- **Look** at how God brings beauty out of ugliness.
- **Say** Psalm 16:11 from memory.

KEY VERSE

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. **Psalm 16:11 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Two ways to escape

A story based on the original study, rewritten.



Illustrative photo

Mia grew up on stage. Drama let her be anyone. At 15 she found a new stage: social media. Every like felt good. But the harder she worked for attention, the more she felt like she was performing just to be wanted. She longed for joy that didn't feel so temporary.

Jason loves coding, games and photographing nature. But when he feels lonely or "ugly" inside, he disappears into hours of screens, and sometimes a few drinks, to numb the feeling.

Q1 How do Mia and Jason use fun or attention to avoid pain?

Q2 What kinds of beauty and pleasure are part of your normal week?

A QUICK NOTE

If an escape feels out of your control, like drinking, vaping, drugs, porn or gaming, you're not hopeless. Tell a trusted adult, counselor or pastor. If you're in crisis, call or text **988** (U.S.).

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

God made it good

Enjoying beauty is part of being human. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1). Even a sunset or a great game can stir something deep in you. King Solomon, the wisest man of his day, tried everything the world offered. Read **Ecclesiastes 2:1–11** if you can.

SOLOMON TRIED IT ALL

Ecclesiastes 2:1–11. Pleasure was not the problem. Pleasure as the goal was.

WHAT HE TRIED

- Parties and fun
- Houses, gardens and parks
- Wealth and great collections
- Everything he wanted

HIS VERDICT

“Smoke.”
“Chasing the wind.”
Nothing lasting, apart from God

God is not against enjoyment. He “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Timothy 6:17). He wants pleasure to point you back to Him.

Q3 Think of a place where you’ve felt nature’s beauty. What do you think beauty “says” about God (Psalm 19:1–4)?

Q4 Solomon never said pleasure is wrong, only empty as a goal. Why do you think he felt meaningless in the middle of it all?

Q5 Why do you think God made us to love beauty and pleasure? How sure are you that He wants you to enjoy life?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

What do you enjoy?

Pleasure comes in different flavors. **Recreation** refreshes your mind or body. **Entertainment** amuses you or takes your attention. Both are fine, but they feel different afterward.

RECREATION OR ENTERTAINMENT?

Both are fine. Notice which one you reach for, and how you feel after.

RECREATION
Refreshes my mind or body

- A hike or a run
- Playing a sport with friends
- Making music or art
- Time in nature
- A real conversation

ENTERTAINMENT
Amuses me or takes my attention

- Streaming a show
- Scrolling social media
- Video games
- Binge-watching clips
- Music on in the background

Q6 Quickly list five things you enjoy. Mark each R (recreation) or E (entertainment). What do you notice?

Q7 Has anything numbed your ability to enjoy good things? What boundaries protect you? Is there something you've seen or taken in that you wish you could erase?

Q8 Try this: give up one screen habit for a week. Which one? What do you think you'll notice?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

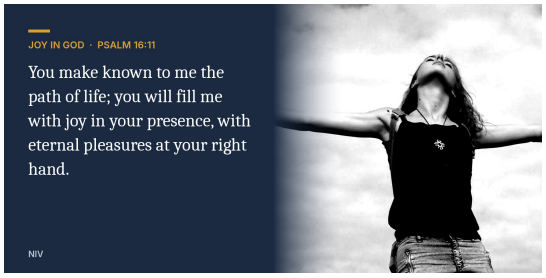
Beauty from brokenness

Ugliness is real. But God specializes in turning ashes into beauty (Isaiah 61:3). Moses gave up the pleasures of Egypt to stand with his people (Hebrews 11:24–26). Jesus "for the joy set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). And David wrote, "One thing I ask… that I may gaze on the beauty of the Lord" (Psalm 27:4).

Q9 Can pain and beauty exist together? Has anything good or beautiful come out of something hard in your life?

Q10 What do you find beautiful about God? Is anything "entangling" you that God may be asking you to throw off (Hebrews 12:1)?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Joy in God, Psalm 16:11. You make known to me the path of life;"
2. Say the second half three times: "you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- God made beauty and pleasure, and He **enjoys them with you.**
- Pleasure is a **gift, not a savior.** When we use it to numb pain, it leaves us emptier.
- God turns **ashes into beauty.** He is the most beautiful of all.

BEAUTY PAUSE

Spend five unhurried minutes with Psalm 104:1–4 or 1 Chronicles 16:27–29. Notice how God's beauty touches your longings, and which cheap imitations you sometimes pick instead.

Take one step

1. **Notice.** Go outside for five minutes, phone away. Look for something beautiful and thank God for it.
2. **Swap.** Pick one numbing habit. This week, replace it once with something from the "recreation" list.
3. **Tell.** If an escape feels out of control, tell one safe person. You don't have to fight it alone.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about beauty, pleasure, Himself or me? What one step will I take?

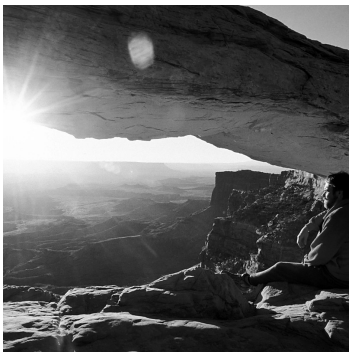
CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You for beauty and joy. Show me what feeds my soul and what numbs it. Bring beauty out of my broken places, and help me enjoy You most. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Counterfeit pleasure. When we chase pleasure apart from God, it can dull our hearts (Ephesians 4:19) and make us "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4). Real joy draws us closer to Him.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. What long-term results come from chasing short-term pleasure apart from God?
2. How can you admire beauty without it turning into lust or envy?
3. How could you fill your life with pleasure in God so it pushes out the counterfeits?
4. Read Hebrews 11:24–28. What did Moses give up for a while? What did he gain for good?
5. What does Jesus' example in Hebrews 12:1–3 say about enduring something ugly for a beautiful future?

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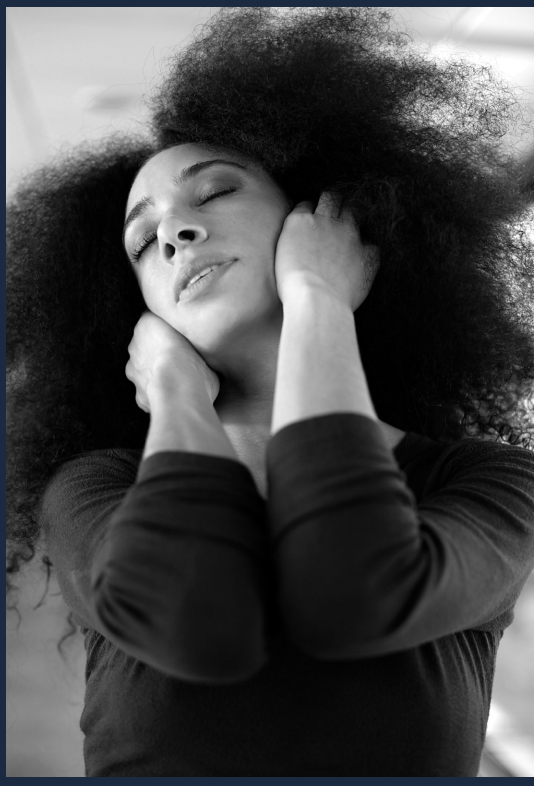
LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 4

My Body

Honor it. Accept it. Let God shape it.

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Your body is one of God's best and most mysterious gifts, and He chose it as His home. In this chapter you'll see how to honor your body without worshiping it or hating it, and how God meets you in your body struggles.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** why God calls your body good.
- **Spot** the two extremes: obsessing or neglecting.
- **Pick** one habit that honors God with your body.
- **Say** Psalm 139:14 from memory.

KEY VERSE

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. **Psalm 139:14 (NIV)**

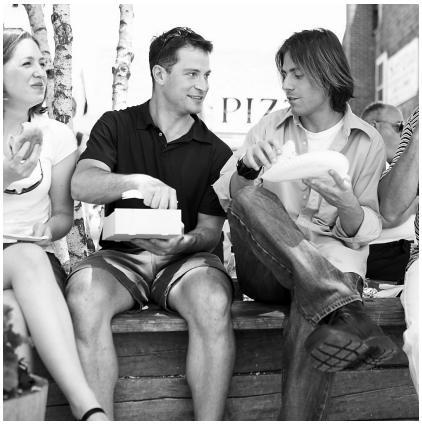
START HERE

A short story

4 min

Four mirrors

Stories from the original study, shortened and updated.



Illustrative photo

Jillian spends hours on skincare, outfits and the mirror. She wonders, “Am I doing the right things for the wrong reasons?”

Jake works out but isn’t “buff.” He asks, “How can anyone see my inner strength if I don’t look strong?”

Sarah has fought acne and changes she didn’t choose since middle school. She asks, “Will anybody see the real me?”

Tim eats when he isn’t hungry and wonders, “Why do I do this?”

Q1 What might be driving how each person thinks about their body? What need might they be trying to fill?

Q2 Which person do you connect with most? Why?

IF THIS FEELS HEAVY

If you hate your body, if eating feels out of control, or if you’re hurting yourself or thinking about ending your life, please tell a trusted adult or doctor today. In the U.S. call or text **988**. For eating disorders, the National Alliance for Eating Disorders (allianceforeatingdisorders.com) can help you find support.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

God made your body good

It's easy to put your body at the center of your life, or to hate it when it doesn't match what the world calls perfect. But God made you as a whole person, inside and out. He looked at everything He had made and called it "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

THREE TRUTHS ABOUT YOUR BODY

God made it, God owns it, and God lives in it.

1 MADE GOOD
Genesis 1:31

"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

2 GOD'S HOME
1 Corinthians 6:19–20

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You were bought at a price.

3 FOR HIS GLORY
Romans 12:1

Offer your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Q3 What do you think was so "good" about our bodies in God's eyes?

Q4 According to 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, who owns your body, and who doesn't? What difference could that make in your daily choices?

Q5 Write two ways you can honor God with your body. (Example: "I won't go into debt for clothes just to be in style.")

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Where do you drift?

Taking care of your body can go too far in either direction. People around you can pull you toward either side, or toward the healthy middle.



Q6 Where do you tend to drift: neglect, pampering or the healthy middle? Give an example.

Q7 Think about your eating, sleeping and exercise. If you could change one, what would it be?

Q8 Warning lights: constant comparing, shame about your looks, fear of getting sick, being bullied, feeling down or anxious. Which have you struggled with? Talk to God about one.

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

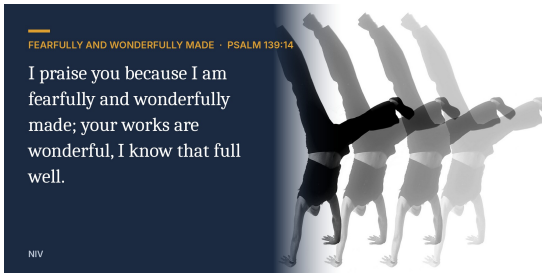
Gifts, limits and grace

God gave your body good gifts: sleep, food, movement and rest. Even Paul had a body struggle. He asked God to take it away, and God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Your body’s limits don’t cancel God’s love.

Q9 Which gift (sleep, food, movement or rest) do you want to use better? Name three things your body does for you that you’re thankful for.

Q10 How might you lean on God’s grace in a body issue or limit? Who is on your team to help you care for your body?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: “Wonderfully made, Psalm 139:14. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;”
2. Say the second half three times: “your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- God made your body **good** and chose it as His **home.**
- Honor it, but don't **worship** it or **punish** it.
- One day God will give you a **new body** (Philippians 3:21).

CELEBRATE YOUR BODY

Pause and thank God for what your body does for you, instead of what it can't do. Let Philippians 4:8 guide you toward what is good and lovely, and what it shows you about Him.

Take one step

1. **Thank.** Write three things your body does that you're grateful for. Tell God thanks.
2. **Care.** Pick one small habit for the week: sleep, water, a walk or stretching.
3. **Reach out.** If body shame feels heavy, tell one safe person. You don't have to carry it alone.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about my body, Himself or me? What one step will I take?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You for making me. Forgive me for the times I've hated or abused my body. Help me honor You with it, and heal what hurts. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Give your body to God. Take ten unhurried minutes. Quiet yourself, then slowly hand your body to God, one part at a time. Ask Him to fill it with His life. Then praise Him with your whole self. (Adapted from Dallas Willard.)

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. How do friends, family and social media shape how you treat your body?
2. What comfort do you find in Philippians 3:21 and 1 Corinthians 15:42–44 about your future body?
3. How could you support a friend with a disability or health limit?
4. Write about "handing" your body to God. What did you notice?
5. Take a Sabbath rest this week. What does it show you about trusting God?

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LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 5

Work

Thrills, thorns and purpose

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Work is a gift from God, and it can also be hard. In this chapter you'll see why God made us to work, why it can feel thorny, and how a job, school or everyday task can honor Him.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** why God gave us work.
- **Name** the thrills and thorns in your own work.
- **Learn** what the Bible says about work attitudes.
- **Say** Colossians 3:23 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters. **Colossians 3:23 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Stuck in the same routine

A story from the original study, updated.



Illustrative photo

Cole feels powerless and bored at his warehouse job. It's the same routine every day. He still lives with his parents and can't afford to move out. He doesn't love going to work with a bad attitude, but he's not sure what he wants except more money and more free time.

Then a thought hit him: **Jesus was a sweaty carpenter for years.** Did the Son of God ever feel his work was pointless?

Q1 Can you relate to Cole in any way? How?

Q2 Does your job or school feel like a blessing, a curse, or something in between? How does that change how you do it?

SHORT ON DIRECTION?

Not sure what you want to do yet? That's normal. Talk with a mentor, a pastor or a school counselor about your interests and gifts.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Why God gave us work

Work isn't only a job. Much of your best work might not be paid at all, like caring for family, leading a team or making art. Work began in the Garden, before anything went wrong, and it is good.

WHY GOD GAVE US WORK

Work started in the Garden, before anything went wrong.

1 MAKE THINGS
Genesis 1:28
"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth." God invites us to build, create and grow culture.

2 CARE FOR CREATION
Genesis 2:15
God put the man in the garden "to work it and take care of it."

3 DO GOOD WORKS
Ephesians 2:10
We are God's handiwork, "created in Christ Jesus to do good works."

Q3 How might your work or schooling help make something good or care for the world?

Q4 What is the difference between "doing work" and "having a job"? What unpaid work are you most passionate about?

Q5 Since the Fall, work has thorns (Genesis 3:17–19). What part of your work or school feels thorny to you? What part gives you a thrill?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Your work reality

Solomon looked hard at work and said it can feel "meaningless," but also, "there is nothing better than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot" (Ecclesiastes 3:22). Enjoying your work is a gift from God (5:19).

THE THRILLS AND THORNS OF WORK

Both are real. Genesis 3:17–19 and Ecclesiastes 3:22.

THRILLS	THORNS
• Using my gifts	• Boredom and routine
• Making something good	• Pressure and deadlines
• Helping people	• Low pay, tough bosses
• Earning my independence	• Dead-end feelings
• Enjoying my work as a gift	• Feeling like it means nothing

Q6 Mark finished college and turned down three good job offers because he thought he deserved more pay. If he asked you for advice, what would you say?

Q7 When you were a kid, what did you imagine doing someday? What happened to that dream?

Q8 How important is a high income to you, and why? What would make work feel meaningful?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

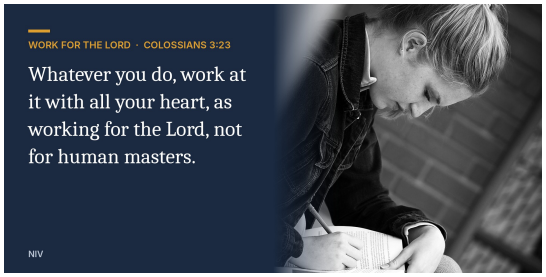
Work as worship

Paul wrote, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Colossians 3:23). That means working hard even when no one's watching and respecting your boss. And Jesus worked as a carpenter for about thirty years before He began His ministry (Mark 6:3).

Q9 Do you think Jesus' years as a carpenter were meaningless? What might they have given Him?

Q10 How could your job or school show God's kindness and truth to others? What one step could move you toward more independence or toward your dream?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Work for the Lord, Colossians 3:23. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,"
2. Say the second half three times: "as working for the Lord, not for human masters."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- **Work is good.** God made it before anything went wrong.
- Thorns are real, but God can use even a **dull job** to shape you.
- Work as if you are working for **God.** He sees you.

THREE WORK PRINCIPLES

Attitude: work with all your heart. **Ethics:** work hard when no one is watching. **Relationships:** respect those over you and treat people fairly (Ephesians 6:5–9; Colossians 3:22–4:1).

Take one step

1. **Offer it.** Before your next shift, class or task, pray, "This is for You."
2. **Notice.** Write one way your work helps someone, even in a small way.
3. **Move.** Pick one step toward independence or a dream, such as a budget or asking a mentor. Tell someone.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about work, Himself or me? What one step will I take?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You for work. Forgive my bad attitudes. Help me work with all my heart for You, and show me how to use my gifts to serve others. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

FIND YOUR FIT

Pick one from each column, then combine them.

PEOPLE I ENJOY	NEEDS THAT MOVE ME	TALENTS I ENJOY
• College or young adults	• Education	• Teaching
• Children	• Healthcare	• Music or art
• Athletes	• Housing	• Photography
• Seniors	• Environment	• Cooking
• Internationals	• Relationships	• Writing
• Families	• Safety	• Organizing

Combine one from each. Example: Children + Education + Cooking = “I could be a dietitian in a school.” Try three of your own: I could…

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. What one dream keeps crossing your mind? Is God calling you to it? Is now the time?
2. How does your work, or school, help you connect with others and build community?
3. How could your work open doors for spiritual influence or give glory to God?
4. What would you feel if you could never work? What does that say about what work means to you?

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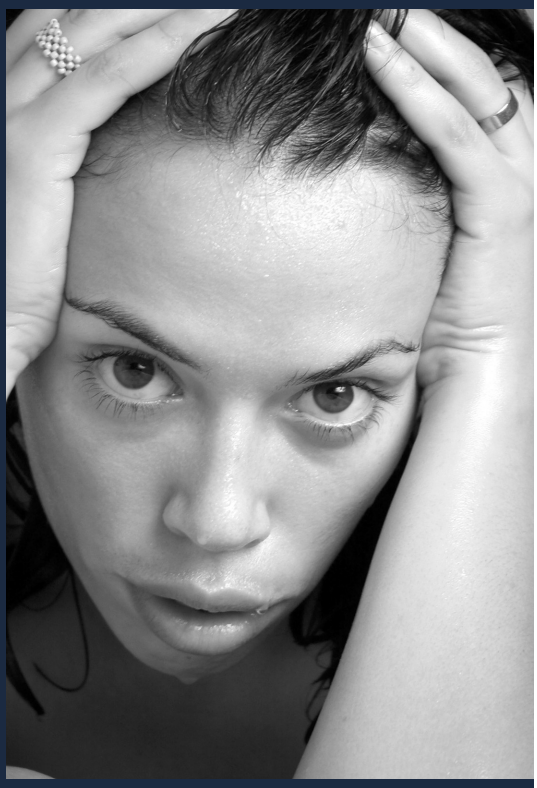
LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 6

Decisions and Commitments

Choose well. Keep your word.

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

God wants you to make good choices and keep your promises, even when it costs you. In this chapter you'll learn how to tell right from wrong in everyday life, check your own choices, and learn from people who honored God under pressure.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Learn** two bases for good decisions: ownership and faithfulness.
- **Check** your own everyday choices honestly.
- **See** how Obadiah and Rahab chose under pressure.
- **Say** James 5:12 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Let your "Yes" be yes and your "No," no, or you will be condemned. **James 5:12 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

The lease

A story from the original study, updated.



Illustrative photo

Danielle needed a car to drive her younger brother, who has a learning disability, to his special school. The dealer talked her into a lease she couldn't really afford. A few months later she was missing payments. Then a legal letter came, full of tiny print. She was scared and confused, so she tossed it aside. Two ignored letters later, she was accused of car theft.

Danielle dropped out of school at 17 and can barely read.

Q1 Who do you think is to blame for the mess in Danielle's life?

Q2 Does knowing she can barely read change your view? What practical help does she need?

GOOD TO KNOW

If you ever get a legal or money letter you don't understand, don't hide it. Show it to a trusted adult, a pastor or a free legal aid or credit counselor right away.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Telling right from wrong

Spiritual maturity means learning to "distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14). God gave the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17) as a guide. Two ideas run through them and help with everyday choices.

TWO BASES FOR GOOD DECISIONS

When you're not sure what to do, start here.

OWNERSHIP

What's mine, yours, ours and God's

- Don't steal or copy what isn't yours
- Don't covet
- Return what you borrow
- Respect other people's time and work

FAITHFULNESS

Keeping your word

- Do what you say you will do
- Honor your agreements
- Let your yes be yes (James 5:12)
- Be someone people can count on

Q3 Read Exodus 20:1–17. What do the commandments show about God's heart? Name a commandment that protects ownership and one way people break it today.

Q4 Jesus told about two sons in Matthew 21:28–32. One said no and then went. One said yes and didn't go. Which are you more like?

Q5 Is it hard for you to say "no" when it might disappoint someone? Why?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Check your own choices

PERSONAL ETHICS CHECK

Mark each one: A (usually agree), D (usually disagree) or NS (not sure).

		A	D	NS
1.	Downloading pirated movies, music or games is fine if I don't sell them.	☐	☐	☐
2.	It's okay to cheat a little on a test to stay competitive.	☐	☐	☐
3.	Scrolling my phone on the clock is fine if it's under an hour a day.	☐	☐	☐
4.	It's okay to borrow money and not pay it back if I can't afford to.	☐	☐	☐
5.	If no one sees it, it doesn't matter.	☐	☐	☐
6.	It's okay to live off friends or family without helping with costs, because they love me.	☐	☐	☐
7.	It's okay to lie to protect someone's feelings.	☐	☐	☐

Q6 Which statement surprised you most? Why?

Q7 Which two or three things influence your decisions most? (My desires, parents, friends, God's Word, conscience, mentors, media.) Give an example.

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

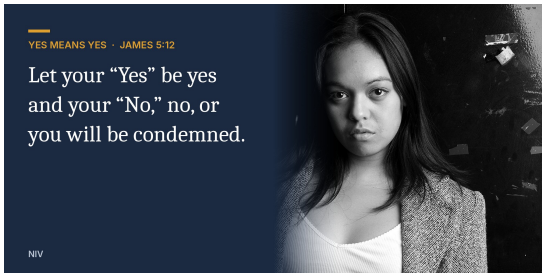
Please God, not only people

Obadiah worked for the wicked King Ahab, yet he stayed faithful to God and hid God's prophets (1 Kings 18:3–4). Paul said, "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God?" (Galatians 1:10). Jesus also showed that motives matter. We can give, pray or fast for the wrong reasons (Matthew 6:1–8, 16–18).

Q8 Think of a recent decision. Were you mostly pleasing people, God or yourself? What pressure were you hearing?

Q9 Is there a promise you haven't kept? What will you do about it? How can you show grace to yourself and others when someone falls short?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Yes means yes, James 5:12. Let your "Yes" be yes and your "No," no,"
2. Say the second half three times: "or you will be condemned."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- Good decisions rest on **ownership** and **faithfulness.**
- **Motives matter.** God cares why you do something, not only what you do.
- God keeps **every promise** He has made to you.

PRAYER PAUSE

Has anyone broken a promise to you? Tell God how it hurt, and ask Him to heal any bitterness. Thank Him for keeping every promise. Then ask Him to speak to you about your own promises.

Take one step

1. **Make one right.** Fix one small broken promise this week: apologize, pay back, or finish what you said you would.
2. **Practice a clean no.** Next time, say a kind no instead of a yes you won't keep.
3. **Ask for backup.** Name one person who can check in on a decision you're facing.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about decisions, Himself or me? What one step will I take?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You for keeping every promise. Give me wisdom to choose well, courage to tell the truth, and strength to keep my word. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



A hard case: Rahab. Some choices are not black and white. Rahab hid two Israelite spies and lied to protect them, risking her life (Joshua 2). Hebrews 11:31 still praises her faith.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. What dilemmas did Rahab face? How did her choice affect the spies, her family and Jericho?
2. Why do you think Hebrews 11:31 praises Rahab even though she lied?
3. Your boss tells you to say a product is in stock when it isn't. What guidelines from this chapter would help you decide?
4. Who should help someone like Danielle: family, church, government, you? Why?
5. Which Ten Commandment feels hardest to keep in your world today? Why?

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LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 7

Authority

Respect it. Use it well. Serve like Jesus.

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

God holds all power, and He created the idea of authority. But people can abuse it. In this chapter you'll look at your own attitude toward bosses, teachers, parents and leaders, and learn to use authority the way Jesus did.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** where authority comes from.
- **Check** your own attitude toward authority.
- **Learn** when and how to respectfully say no.
- **Say** 1 Peter 5:6 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 1 Peter 5:6 (NIV)

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Pushing the limits

A story from the original study, updated.



Illustrative photo

Claudia can't stand authority. She loves pushing limits and knows how to avoid getting caught. Her dad dominated everyone in her family. Her teachers squashed her ideas. She sees power abused almost everywhere.

Since following Jesus, she's noticed her rebellious streak, which she used to call her "creative side." **Submitting to God feels more like death than the freedom that drew her to Him.**

Q1 If you were Claudia's friend, what would you say to her?

Q2 When you hear the word "authority," what's the first thing you feel or think?

IMPORTANT

If anyone in authority is hurting you, whether a parent, coach, boss or church leader, tell another trusted adult, counselor or pastor. In the U.S. you can call the Childhelp hotline at **1-800-422-4453** or call **988** if you're in crisis. Being hurt is never your fault.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Where authority comes from

Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). Everything, including “kings, kingdoms, rulers and authorities,” was made through Him (Colossians 1:16). Romans 13:1 says human authority is established by God, so we respond with respect and pray for leaders (1 Timothy 2:1–4). But Jesus also showed a different way to lead.

TWO WAYS TO USE AUTHORITY

Jesus in Matthew 20:25–28

THE WORLD’S WAY

“Lord it over” people

- Use power to get your way
- Look down on others
- Demand to be served
- Be great by being on top

JESUS’ WAY

“Whoever wants to be great must serve”

- Use power to protect and build up
- Lift others up
- Serve instead of being served
- Be great by giving your life

Q3 How do you feel knowing that all human authority, local to global, comes from God? Does that mean every leader is right?

Q4 What do you think happens when nobody is in authority? (See Judges 21:25.) Why does respecting leaders lead to “peaceful and quiet” lives (1 Timothy 2:2)?

Q5 What does it mean to “lord it over” someone (Matthew 20:25)? Have you experienced it or done it? Is it okay to want to be great?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Your history with authority

Your past shapes how you respond to authority today. Be honest. Look at the words and circle the ones that fit you.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT AUTHORITY?

Circle the words that fit you most. Think about parents, teachers, bosses and leaders.

○ Respect	○ Trust	○ Go along	○ Fear
○ Resist	○ Suspicion	○ Anger	○ Relief
○ Confusion	○ Pushing limits	○ Eye-rolling	○ Not sure

Q6 How were parents, teachers, coaches or bosses with their authority? Are strong feelings still attached?

Q7 How does your attitude (the words you circled) affect how you act with authorities now?

Q8 Who is under your authority (a sibling, a team, a class)? How are you handling it? If Jesus texted you about authority, what might it say?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

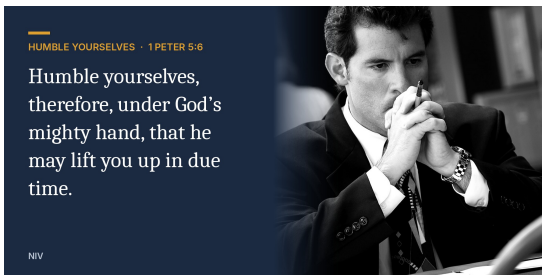
When to say no, and why humility

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego respectfully refused King Nebuchadnezzar's order to worship a gold statue, even though it could cost their lives (Daniel 3:12–30). They obeyed God first. Peter says, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble'" (1 Peter 5:5). Jesus Himself submitted to the Father (Philippians 2:8) and is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:14).

Q9 What dilemma did the three friends face? Have you or someone you know faced a time when people's demands clashed with God's ways? How can you honor authority even when you must say no?

Q10 How does your heart feel about following Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knowing He gave His life for you?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Humble yourselves, 1 Peter 5:6. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand,"
2. Say the second half three times: "that he may lift you up in due time."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- God holds **all authority.** Human leaders answer to Him.
- Respect leaders, but **obey God first** if they clash.
- Authority is for **serving,** not controlling.

PRAYER PAUSE

Ask God to bring to mind any people or past experiences that shaped your attitude toward authority. Ask Him to forgive any rebellion and heal any hurt. Then ask how to honor and serve people over you and under you.

Take one step

1. **Pray.** Pray for one leader you find hard to respect: a boss, teacher, parent or politician.
2. **Honor.** Do one thing this week to show respect or thanks to someone over you.
3. **Serve.** Pick one person under your authority and find a way to serve them.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about authority, Himself or me? What one step will I take?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, You hold all authority and You use it to serve. Heal my hurts with authority, forgive my rebellion, and teach me to lead like You. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



The Good Shepherd. "The Lord is my shepherd… he restores my soul" (Psalm 23:1–3). "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:14). Jesus uses His authority to protect and care for you.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. Read Ezekiel 34:1–10 and Luke 11:46. How did spiritual leaders misuse their authority? How does God feel about people who misuse it, and about those who were hurt?
2. Have you ever been hurt by a spiritual leader? Talk to God or a trusted friend about it.
3. Read Ephesians 6:10–13 and James 4:7. How can we resist evil in Jesus' name?
4. How do submitting to God and resisting the devil go together in your life?
5. Read 1 Peter 5:1–7. What does it say about leading, and about following leaders?

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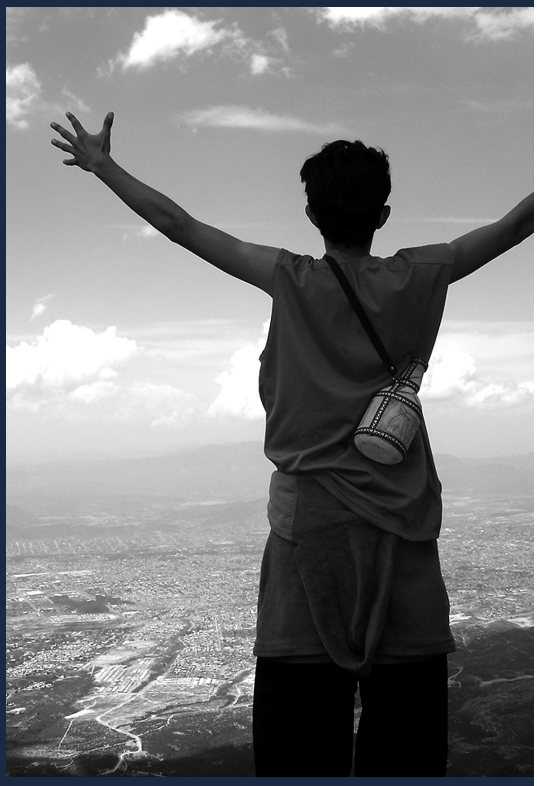
LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 8

Church

Christ's beloved Bride. Your family. Your mission.

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

The Church isn't a building or a program. It's people God loves. Jesus calls the Church His Bride, His Body and His family. In this chapter you'll see what the Church is for, why you need it and how you can belong, even if church has been messy for you.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** how Jesus views His Church.
- **Discover** what the Church is for.
- **Think** honestly about your own connection to church.
- **Say** Romans 12:5 from memory.

KEY VERSE

So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
Romans 12:5 (NIV)

START HERE

A short story

4 min

New city, no church?

A story from the original study, updated.



Illustrative photo

Tim just moved for a new job. It's exciting, but he's lonely and misses his friends and family. He used to go to church with his parents. Now he wonders if it's worth it. Isn't church for older people and families? Can't he just talk to God on his own?

Then he reads about Andrew, a young businessman in Belarus. Andrew found Jesus and feels fully alive with his church community. But his government blocked the new church building, and his pastor was thrown in prison for holding worship services on a farm. Andrew is ready to go to prison too. **Tim wonders if he's been missing something.**

Q1 What gets your attention in Tim's or Andrew's story? What questions does it raise for you?

Q2 Right now, what is your honest opinion of church? Where does that opinion come from?

IMPORTANT

If a church leader or church people have hurt you, that matters to God and to this study. You can be honest here. If you've been abused or harmed by someone at church, tell a trusted adult, counselor or another pastor. In the U.S. you can call **988** if you're in crisis. It's never your fault.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

The Church is Christ's Bride

When Jesus looks at the Church, He doesn't see a building, an "it" or an organization. He sees His beloved Bride. "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy… and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle" (Ephesians 5:25–27). The Bible also calls the Church a body, a temple and a family.



Q3 How do you feel about being part of Christ's Bride, whether you're a guy or a girl? What does it show about God's heart?

Q4 Pick the picture (bride, body, temple or family) you connect with most. Read its verses. How is the Church like that?

Q5 Read Acts 2:42–47. What did the first Christians do for each other? Why confess struggles to a few trusted people, not just to God (James 5:16)?

Q6 Read Acts 1:8 and 2 Corinthians 5:18–20. What is the Church for besides caring for each other?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Where do you stand with church?

Your history shapes your feelings about church. Circle the word that fits you today. You can come back to it later.

WHERE DO YOU STAND WITH CHURCH?

Circle the one that fits today. There's no wrong answer.

Connected	Drifting	Hurt	Curious	Never been
○	○	○	○	○

Q7 How would you describe your family's spiritual life growing up? Are you part of a church or Christian group now? How is it affecting your walk with Jesus?

Q8 Is there any pain or resistance in you toward church or a church leader? Describe it.

Q9 If a friend asked, "Why should I get involved in a local church?", what would you say? Over the next ten years, how would you like to give to the Church and receive from it?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

One Church, many streams

Before He was arrested, Jesus prayed that His followers "may be one… so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). Unity doesn't mean we're all alike. God made over 350,000 kinds of beetles, so He allows variety in His Church too. Each of these six "streams" stresses a different part of following Jesus.



Q10 Which one or two streams fit your faith best? How could another stream help your walk with Jesus? Who are your "heroes of the faith" (see Hebrews 11:32–12:1)?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "One body, Romans 12:5. So in Christ we, though many, form one body,"
2. Say the second half three times: "and each member belongs to all the others."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- The Church is **Christ's beloved Bride,** a body, a temple and a family.
- The Church exists to **love each other** and to **share Jesus** with the world.
- One day people from **every tribe and nation** will worship Jesus together (Revelation 5:9).

PRAYER PAUSE

Ask God what He's saying about your connection, or disconnection, with church. Tell Him about any hurt. Ask how He wants to heal you, use you or stretch you through a community of believers. Don't rush.

Take one step

1. **Connect.** Visit a church or Christian group this month, or invite a friend to join you.
2. **Share.** Tell one trusted person about a struggle or a prayer need.
3. **Pray.** Pray for your church, for persecuted believers and for people who've been hurt by church.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about Himself, the Church or me? What one step will I take?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for loving Your Church. Heal what church has hurt in me, connect me with Your people, and use me to love them and Your world. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

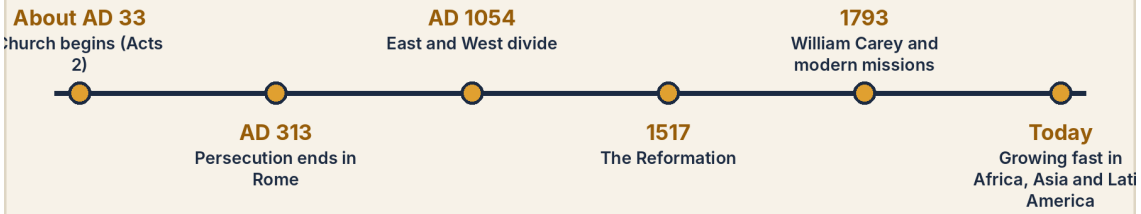
Digging deeper



The journey of the Church. Luke recorded the early Church in the book of Acts: how it grew, argued, suffered and kept going. Read a few passages (Acts 2, 6, 8, 13, 15) and notice how God used ordinary people.

A QUICK TIMELINE OF THE CHURCH

From a small group in Jerusalem to every part of the world.



QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. Which event on the timeline do you know least about? What would you like to learn?
2. Believers in many places face prison or worse for following Jesus. How can you pray for them, and what might you do?
3. Read Acts 13:1–3. How did a local church send people out? Who might your church send, and where?
4. What is one way you could serve or be served by a church community this year?

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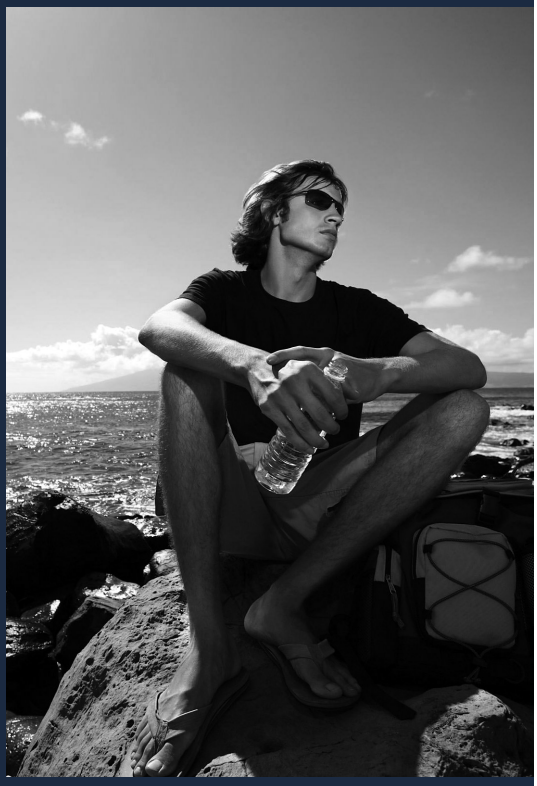
LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 9

Global Issues

Hope when the news feels like too much.

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Wars, disease, climate, politics: the news never stops. You can feel scared, numb or angry. Jesus gave us a bigger story. In this chapter you'll look at what He said about the future, how to care for the world now, and where your hope comes from.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Read** what Jesus said about the end of the age.
- **Name** how global issues make you feel.
- **See** God's big story for the earth and its nations.
- **Say** Psalm 4:8 from memory.

KEY VERSE

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety. **Psalm 4:8 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Is it fair to dream?

A story from the original study, updated.



Illustrative photo

Terrell and LaTanya are dating and talking about the future. But one night, after scrolling headlines about wars, diseases, shootings and a warming planet, they wonder, “Is it fair to bring kids into this?”

And then there’s the other question: isn’t Jesus coming back soon? **They don’t know if they should plan for the future or just wait.**

Q1 Do you think about global issues a little or a lot? What feelings come up?

Q2 If you were Terrell or LaTanya’s friend, what would you say?

IMPORTANT

If news, fear or worry about the future feels too heavy, you’re not weak, and you’re not alone. Talk to a trusted friend, pastor or counselor. In the U.S. you can call or text **988** any time if you’re in crisis.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

What Jesus said about the future

Our story is part of God's story, and He has given us glimpses of what's ahead. Read **Matthew 24**, where Jesus describes the "end of the age." Christians read some details differently, but the main message is clear: **be ready, not afraid.**



Q3 Jesus calls the early troubles "birth pains" (v. 8). Why do you think He used that picture instead of a "dying" world?

Q4 What will make the difference between those who are deceived (vv. 5, 11) and those who aren't? Why does love grow cold for many (v. 12)? How is the world affecting your love for Jesus?

Q5 How is being "ready" (vv. 42–44) different from being "afraid"? How does your belief about His return change how you live now?

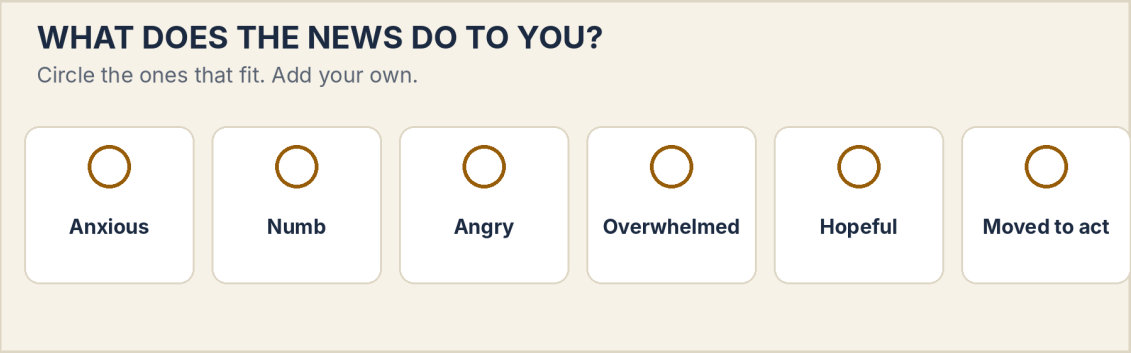
PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

What the news does to you

Be honest about what you feel when you hear about the world's problems. Circle the words that fit you, or add your own.



Q6 What big changes do you expect in the world in the next 25 years? What emotions come up when you think about it?

Q7 How has fear of terrorism, violence or disasters shaped your thoughts or choices? How do you feel about someday having kids in an uncertain world?

Q8 God used people in politics, like Joseph and Daniel, and some failed, like Saul. Do you think He still uses people in government today? Why or why not?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

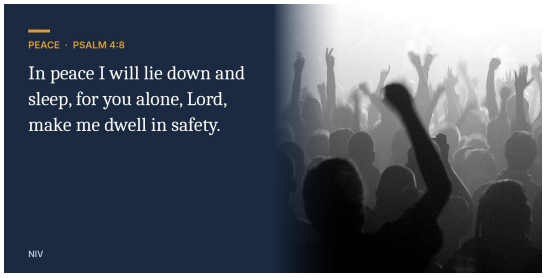
Care now, hope always

God told humans to "work" the garden and "take care of it" (Genesis 2:15), so caring for creation is part of following Him. The whole creation is "groaning" for freedom (Romans 8:19–22). Nations rise and fall, and God is in charge (Ezekiel 28). Our brokenness starts inside us (James 4:1–3), so healing starts with humbling ourselves and praying (2 Chronicles 7:14). And the story ends with every nation worshipping Jesus together.



Q9 What is one thing you can do to care for your environment? How can you stay steady when everything around you is shifting?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Peace, Psalm 4:8. In peace I will lie down and sleep,"
2. Say the second half three times: "for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- Jesus says be **ready,** not afraid. He holds the future.
- God cares about the **earth and every nation.** So can we.
- In Christ, we have real **hope** (Psalm 33:20–22; Revelation 21:1–5).

PRAYER PAUSE

Spend a few quiet minutes with God. Tell Him your fears and your hopes for the future. Rest in His presence. Ask Him how He wants you to get involved in the world.

Take one step

1. **Limit.** Pick one way to cut down on doomscrolling this week.
2. **Care.** Do one thing for your local environment or community.
3. **Pray.** Pray for one country or group of people in the news.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about Himself, the future or me? What one step will I take?

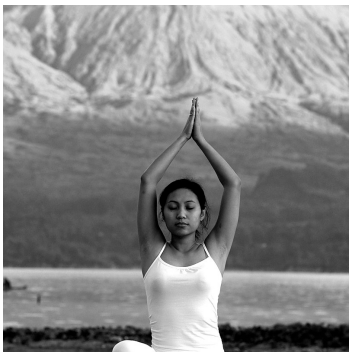
CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, the world is big and scary, but You are bigger. Give me peace, keep my love for You warm, and show me how to care for Your world. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Other spiritualities. There are many belief systems in our world, such as atheism, humanism, nature spirituality and pantheism. Each one answers, "What is beyond me?" differently. In the end, we choose someone to trust. Christians trust the Triune God, "the great King above all gods" (Psalm 95:3), and share that faith with love, not arrogance.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. What strikes you most about the idea that we all choose someone to trust?
2. Who do you find trustworthy, and why?
3. How can you share Jesus with a friend of another faith with respect and without arguing?
4. What questions do you still have about the future, or about other beliefs? Bring them to your group.

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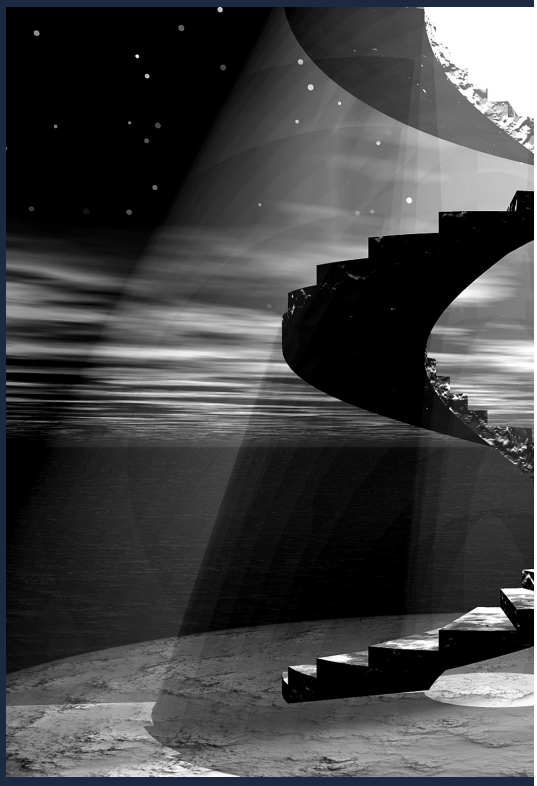
LIFE: THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD

CHAPTER 10

Lifetime Journey

You're being transformed. Keep going.

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Following Jesus is a lifetime journey, not a quick fix. There will be fruitful seasons, hidden seasons and hard ones. In this last chapter you'll look back at how far you've come, name where you are now, and choose what to do next.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Compare** your growth to a branch, a seed and a race.
- **Name** the season of life you're in.
- **Hold on** to what you can count on, whatever happens.
- **Say** Philippians 1:6 from memory.

KEY VERSE

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Yellow the caterpillar

Retold from Hope for the Flowers by Trina Paulus, as used in the original study.



Illustrative photo

Yellow is a caterpillar who wants more out of life. She hears about becoming a butterfly and asks, "How do you do it?" The answer: "You must want to fly so much that you're willing to give up being a caterpillar."

"You mean die?" she asks. "Yes and no," says the other caterpillar. **"What looks like you will die, but what's really you will still live."**

Q1 A caterpillar has to go through a cocoon to become a butterfly. How is that like spiritual growth?

Q2 Who decides "what's really you"? Explain.

IMPORTANT

Some seasons feel dark, like the cocoon. If sadness, hopelessness or thoughts of hurting yourself ever feel too heavy, please tell a trusted person right away. In the U.S. you can call or text **988** any time. You matter to God and to us.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Pictures of a lifetime of growth

Words can't fully describe spiritual change, so the Bible uses pictures. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). That life grows through a lifetime, with ups and downs.



Q3 Read John 15:5–17. What does it mean to "remain" in Jesus? How can you practice that this week? What fruit have others seen in you?

Q4 Read John 12:23–25. How was Jesus' life like a seed? What would it look like for you to live like a seed in this season?

Q5 Hebrews 12:2 calls Jesus the "author and perfecter" of our faith. How does that encourage you? Which picture (branch, seed, race or another) fits you best right now?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Where you are right now

Spiritual growth isn't a straight line. Think of your life as a book God is writing. Circle the season you're in now.



Q6 If you could pick three words for your journey with Jesus so far, what would they be? What title would you give this season of your life?

Q7 How has Jesus met you so far? How has the Holy Spirit helped you? Who has walked with you as a friend or mentor?

Q8 Have you experienced "what looks like me died, but what's really me lives"? Explain.

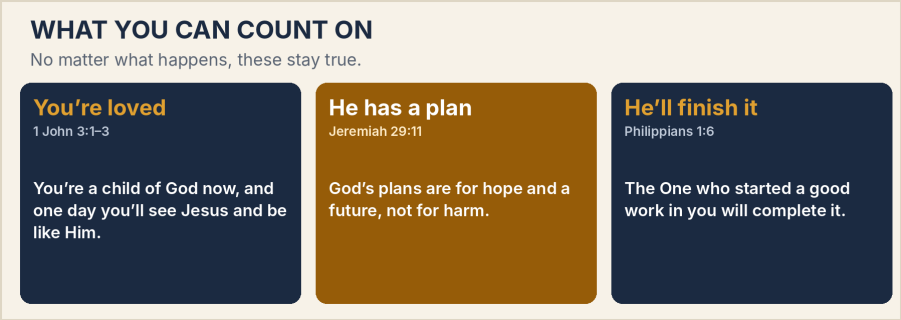
PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God and others

8 min

Hard seasons and hope

Most of us want only "healing, dancing, laughing" seasons. But Ecclesiastes 3 also lists "tearing… and weeping," and God uses those too. We want to know Christ's resurrection power, but we also share in His suffering (Philippians 3:10). Even then we're not losing control. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17).



Q9 Which of these three promises gives you the most hope right now? How would you want your friends to help you through a hard season?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Finished, Philippians 1:6. He who began a good work in you will carry it on"
2. Say the second half three times: "to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- Growth is a **lifetime** journey with many seasons.
- You don't grow by trying harder. You grow by **staying connected to Jesus.**
- Jesus began the work in you and **He will finish it.**

PRAYER PAUSE

Tell God how your journey has gone so far. Thank Him for the hope and joy He's given. Be honest about where you still feel anxious, angry or hopeless. Thank Him for His love that never quits.

Take one step

1. **Choose.** Pick one spiritual habit to keep for the next six months (see the next page).
2. **Commit.** Write one lifelong commitment you want to make to Jesus.
3. **Connect.** Ask one person to walk with you, and invite another friend into this study.

JOURNAL

A What has God shown me about Himself or me? What one step will I take, and who will walk with me?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for starting a good work in me. Keep me connected to You in every season, and finish what You began. I trust You with my whole life. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Spiritual habits for life. Growth is more a by-product of looking at Jesus than of doing things right. Through history, people close to God practiced a few simple habits. Dallas Willard named solitude, silence, study and worship as central. Choose one or two to keep.

SPIRITUAL HABITS FOR LIFE

Habits don't earn God's love. They help you pay attention to Him.

HABITS OF SLOWING DOWN

Pause some good things so you can hear Jesus.

- ◯ Solitude
- ◯ Silence
- ◯ Fasting*
- ◯ Frugality
- ◯ Sacrifice

HABITS OF DRAWING CLOSE

Do things that fix your eyes on Jesus.

- ◯ Bible study
- ◯ Worship
- ◯ Celebration
- ◯ Service
- ◯ Prayer
- ◯ Fellowship
- ◯ Confession
- ◯ Scripture meditation
- ◯ Giving

If you have a health condition or have struggled with food or eating, skip fasting from food. Fast from something else, like social media, or talk with a doctor or pastor first

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

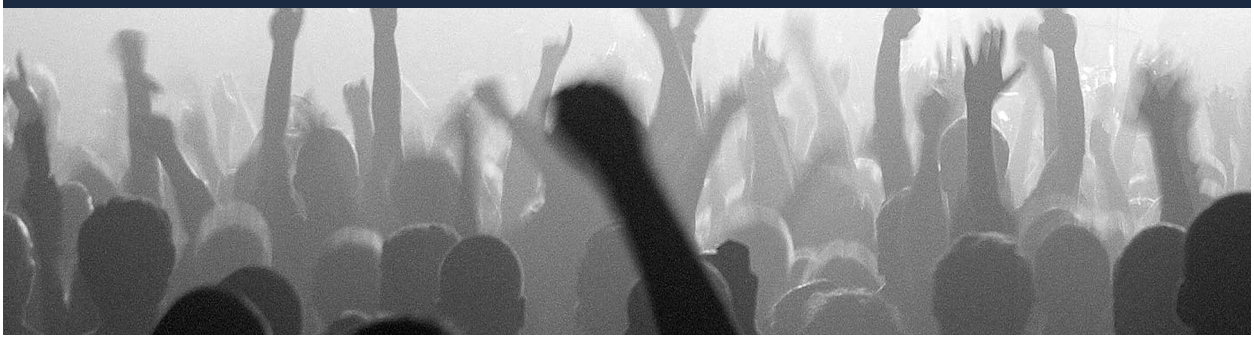
1. Which habit will you try over the next six months? What might get in the way?
2. What other areas of life do you want Jesus to transform (such as relationships, identity or freedom)?
3. Who could you invite to study with you, or help lead a new group?

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AFTER CHAPTER 10

Celebrate your group

You finished. Notice what God has done.



You've spent ten chapters looking at how to live well: time, money, beauty, your body, work, decisions, authority, church, the world and the long road ahead. Before you move on, **pause and celebrate.** Set aside one meeting (45–60 minutes is plenty), bring snacks, and walk through the four moments below. Jot down your answers to "Reflect back" ahead of time. Studying on your own? Do this with a friend or mentor, or write in a journal.

1 · REFLECT BACK

1. How have you benefited from this group of fellow travelers?
2. How has your walk with God changed? What is different in your daily life?
3. Which chapter challenged you most? Which one gave you the most hope?
4. What feelings come up when you think about your time together?

2 · LOOK AHEAD

1. What do you need most from God in the next season?
2. What setting would help you get it? A church, a campus group, a mentor, another Connect study?
3. How will this group stay connected? A group chat, a monthly dinner, a weekly walk?
4. Who else could use this study? Could two of you start a new group?

3 · SAY THANKS

Go around the circle. Tell each person one thing you appreciate about them: how they showed up, or something they said that stuck with you.

Be specific. Two real sentences beat "you're awesome."

4 · PRAY TOGETHER

Thank God for this part of the journey. Praise Him for who He is. Read Psalm 90:12–17 aloud, taking turns.

Then **linger.** No rush, and nobody has to pray out loud.

A PRAYER FOR THE ROAD

"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:12 (NIV)

YOUR RESPONSE

My next season

Turn what you learned into one small step in each area.

You're not trying to "manage" life better. You're inviting Jesus to change you from the inside out, and living well is the result. Write **one small thing** you'll do in each area over the next month. Share it with a friend who will ask you about it.

AREA	ONE THING I'LL DO
Time Ch. 1	
Money Ch. 2	
Beauty & pleasure Ch. 3	
My body Ch. 4	
Work Ch. 5	
Decisions & commitments Ch. 6	
Authority Ch. 7	
Church Ch. 8	
Global issues Ch. 9	
Lifetime journey Ch. 10	

WHERE ELSE I WANT JESUS TO CHANGE ME

Think of relationships, identity, sexuality, freedom or anything else.

MY

One

KEEP IT WITH YOU

Why memorize Scripture?

Words hidden in your heart are there when you need them.

You won't find the word "memorize" in the Bible, but the idea is everywhere. God's people are told to **treasure** His words, **store them up,** and **write them on their hearts.** Here's what that looks like, and what it does for you.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS TO DO

- **Treasure** God's words and guard them like your most precious possession (Proverbs 7:1–3).
- **Write them deep within your heart,** like a necklace you always wear (Proverbs 3:3).
- **Let them sink in,** and pay close attention (Proverbs 4:20–22).
- **Think about them** day and night (Joshua 1:8).
- **Talk about them** at home, on the road, when you lie down and when you get up (Deuteronomy 6:7).

WHAT IT DOES FOR YOU

- **Helps you resist sin:** "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).
- **Brings life and health** (Proverbs 4:22).
- **Builds your trust in the Lord** (Proverbs 22:18–19).
- **Helps you do what it says** (Joshua 1:8).
- **Brings joy:** "Your words were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jeremiah 15:16).

TWO PEOPLE WHO KNEW IT BY HEART

Jesus. In the wilderness, Satan tempted Him. Jesus answered each time with a verse of Scripture (Matthew 4:1–11). He knew God's words well enough to use them in the moment.

Peter. On the day of Pentecost, a huge crowd gathered. He had no time to look anything up, yet he spoke from the Old Testament, including the Psalms and the prophet Joel (Acts 2). About 3,000 people believed that day.

HOW TO START (PICK TWO)

- ☐ **Put it on your phone.** Lock screen, notes app, or a daily reminder.
- ☐ **Say it out loud.** Walking or driving works great.
- ☐ **Write it out** until you can get every word right.
- ☐ **Pray it back to God,** line by line.
- ☐ **Text it to a friend** with one sentence on why it matters.
- ☐ **Review before you sleep.** Fall asleep thinking about it.

CARRY THESE WITH YOU

Verses to know by heart

One from each chapter. Check the box when you can say it.

1 NUMBER YOUR DAYS

Psalm 90:12

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

☐ I can say it

2 SEEK GOD FIRST

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

☐ I can say it

3 JOY IN GOD

Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

☐ I can say it

4 WONDERFULLY MADE

Psalm 139:14

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

☐ I can say it

5 WORK FOR THE LORD

Colossians 3:23

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.

☐ I can say it

6 YES MEANS YES

James 5:12

Let your "Yes" be yes and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

☐ I can say it

7 HUMBLE YOURSELVES

1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

☐ I can say it

8 ONE BODY

Romans 12:5

So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

☐ I can say it

9 PEACE

Psalm 4:8

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

☐ I can say it

10 FINISHED

Philippians 1:6

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

☐ I can say it

Scripture quotations are from the NIV (2011), written from memory. Check any verse against your own Bible.

MORE VERSES FROM THE ORIGINAL STUDY

The original LIFE study suggested these verses for the same chapters: Ephesians 5:15–16 (Time), 1 Timothy 6:17 (Money), 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (My Body), Hebrews 5:14 (Decisions and Commitments), Romans 13:1 (Authority), Ephesians 5:25–27 (Church) and Matthew 24:12–13 (Global Issues). Add any of them to your list.

IF YOU WANT MORE

Dig deeper

Ideas from the original study, and where to read more.

Three ways to keep growing

KNOW YOUR "STREAMS"

The Church has many traditions. Richard Foster describes six streams: **contemplative, social justice, evangelical, charismatic, holiness** and **sacramental.**

Ask which one is yours, and which one you could learn from.

BUILD HABITS THAT LAST

Dallas Willard argued that **solitude, silence, study** and **worship** are central to growth.

Pick one habit for six months and ask a friend to check in with you.

What do you do with a hard season?

Spiritual growth isn't a straight line. Seasons of loss, waiting or doubt aren't a sign God has left. They're often where roots go deep. Try these:

- **Name it.** Tell God and one trusted person what season you're in.
- **Stay connected.** Keep going to your small group, church or friend, even when you don't feel like it.
- **Hold on to what's sure.** 1 John 3:1–3, Jeremiah 29:11 and Philippians 1:6 are true in every season.
- **Get help.** A pastor or licensed counselor can help when sadness or anxiety lasts. In the U.S., call or text **988** if you're in crisis.

Books mentioned in this study

Some are written for adults. Choose a few with a mentor you trust.

Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water* (HarperOne)

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (HarperOne)

Trina Paulus, *Hope for the Flowers* (Paulist Press)

Andrew Comiskey, *Strength in Weakness* (InterVarsity Press)

Richard Foster, *Renovaré* newsletter (Oct. 2006), cited in the original study

The other books in the Connect series (see the next page)

WHAT'S NEXT

The Connect series

Keep going. There's more to discover.

Connect is a series of personal and group studies built to help you know God's truth, rest in His love, and live in His hope. They're made for small groups, where friends can encourage, trust, and support each other on the journey. Jesus said what life is all about:

> **MATTHEW 22:37–39 (NIV)**
> *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Growing in love for God, for others, and for yourself, and living in ways that honor Him: that's a real spiritual journey. Here's the whole road.

1 GOD	**Connecting with His Outrageous Love** Receive God's love, and love Him back.
2 IDENTITY	**Becoming Who God Says I Am** Discover who God says you are, and learn to live out of that true identity.
3 SOUL	**Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions** See how loving God, others, and yourself helps you handle your inner life in ways that honor Him.
4 RELATIONSHIPS	**Bringing Jesus to My Community** Learn to love people, all kinds of people. If you're loving God and yourself, loving others follows.
5 LIFE	**Thriving in a Complex World** YOU ARE HERE Explore time, money, decisions, commitment, church and more, and how they fit into living well with Jesus. This is the study you just finished.
6 FREEDOM	**Breaking the Power of Shame** Face shame, whatever its source, and experience God's mercy, healing, and freedom.

> **OUR PRAYER FOR YOU**
> *That you will grow in deeper closeness with God, from a heart of worship, as you humbly follow Jesus' way, His truth, and His life.*

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THIS STUDY

About the authors

Ralph Ennis

Intercultural Training and Development, The Navigators

Ralph and his wife, Jennifer, have served with The Navigators since 1975, from military bases in Norfolk to Princeton University, Richmond, and The CoMission in Moscow. Ralph has a master's degree in Intercultural Relations. They live in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Judy Gomoll

Resource Development, The Navigators National Training Team

Judy was an educator who specialized in curriculum development. She and her husband, George, served as missionaries in Uganda and Kenya for fifteen years. She helps research and field-test tools for spiritual transformation, and lives in Parker, Colorado.

Rebecca Goldstone

Consultant, The Navigators National Training Team

Rebecca helped pioneer a cross-cultural urban ministry in Santa Ana, California, and serves as a training consultant, life coach and faculty member at Hope International University. She and her husband, Marc, live in Irvine, California.

Dennis Stokes

National Training Director, U.S. Navigators

Dennis has served with The Navigators since 1973 as collegiate staff, trainer, and coordinator for The CoMission project. He speaks in the U.S. and twelve other countries. He and his wife, Ellen, live in Erie, Colorado.

Christine Weddle

National Training and Staff Development, The Navigators

Christine joined The Navigators in 1997 through The CoMission Training Team and has helped plan staff training events in the U.S., Russia and Ukraine. She specializes in adult learning environments and visual resources.

This edition

Adapted for a younger audience

Chapters, stories and images in this edition were rewritten and redesigned for a younger reading level and a 30-minute rhythm, with safety notes added.

Author information is from the original 2007 edition.

Notes and sources

Chapter 10. The caterpillar story is retold from Trina Paulus, *Hope for the Flowers* (Paulist Press, 1973), as used in the original study.

Chapter 8. The six streams of faith are adapted from Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water*.

Chapter 2. The compound-interest example is for illustration and uses rounded numbers. Real returns vary and are not guaranteed.

About the stories. Stories are adapted from the original study or made up for this edition. Names and details are changed. Chapters 3, 4 and 6 use new stories or examples in place of mature or news-based ones.

Memory verses. The original study left the memory-verse lines blank in each chapter, and listed a different set at the back. This edition picks one verse per chapter and notes the originals on page 4 of this section.

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