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# Welcome . . .

*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into his likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

–2 Corinthians 3:18



Thanks for being willing to help others grow and become more like Jesus!

We all have the genuine privilege of discovering and embracing the Triune God. The *CONNECT* series is designed to help you experience God by exploring the amazing ways, truth and life of Jesus. We long to see you enjoying life as a member of God's kingdom and family, deeply experiencing His presence, knowing His truth, resting in His love, and confident in His hope. These studies are designed to be used in small groups where people can encourage, trust, and support each other on their spiritual journeys.

This Leader's Guide has been developed so you can have a positive and successful experience leading your group. It includes suggestions on how to enjoy your role as a leader and building community, some practical tips, and an evaluation, to help you invite your group members into engaging conversation over God's Word. (Note: an specific Guide is included with each Chapter.)

## A Connect Series Overview

The six study books in the *CONNECT* series take us on a journey of what it means to "Behold the Triune God 24/7," and are anchored in Jesus' Great Commandment and Great Commission. Three of the books ("God", "Identity" and "Soul") focus on learning to accept and love yourself appropriately (the second part of Jesus' Great Commandment). Why? Because seeing ourselves through God's eyes sets the stage for the rest of the Great Commandment—loving others—and His commissions to make disciples and steward the earth. They help you discover your true identity in Christ and learn how to live out of who God says you are, not the false identities that we pick up from others or carve out for ourselves.

Growing in your love for God, for others, and for yourself while managing your personal life in ways that honor Him—now that is a real spiritual journey!

To simplify all this, imagine the *CONNECT* Series being built on three pillars...three things our Triune God has commissioned and commanded us to do in our world.

- Jesus gave His followers the greatest commandment of them all—to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).
- Before Jesus descended into heaven He commissioned His disciples to "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

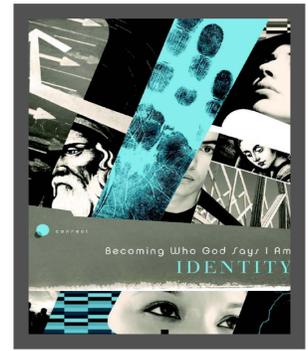
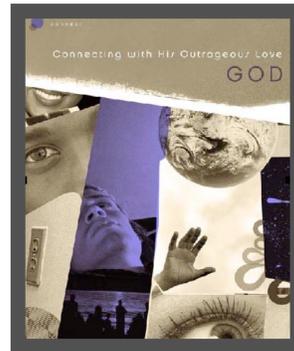
- From our creation God desired for us to “rule over” or nurture the earth by taking good care of it (Genesis 1:28).

If we focus on these three things, just about everything else falls into place as we live life, beholding the Triune God.

**The six study books in the CONNECT series are:**

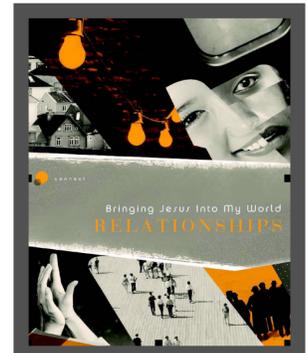
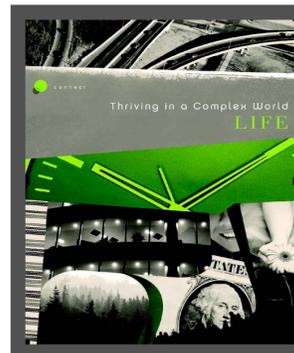
**GOD: *CONNECTING WITH HIS OUTRAGEOUS LOVE***

Focusing on the first part of the Great Commandment—loving God and learning to believe and experience His amazing, gracious, protective, and jealous love for us. It also invites you into deeper intimacy through creative ways to connect with Him. As you lead the way, you’ll have the privilege of embodying and offering love to those in your group. For some, it may well be their first taste of God’s love.



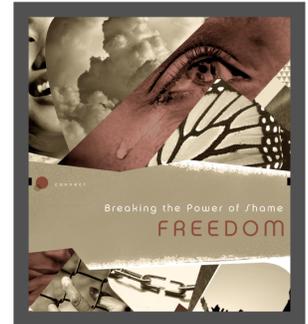
**IDENTITY: *BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM***

Exploring what it means to be created in God’s image and then have that image restored after we’ve blown it with sin. You’ll also explore how God has designed you with particular strengths and gifts, and where to find meaning and purpose in your life.



**SOUL: *EMBRACING MY SEXUALITY AND EMOTIONS***

Exploring how to embrace your gender, live life well as a sexual being, and what jealousy reveals about God’s purpose for creating sexuality. You’ll also explore what your emotions are telling you, what it means to be emotionally healthy, and how to experience God’s healing in emotional pain.



**RELATIONSHIPS: *BRINGING JESUS INTO MY WORLD***

Focusing on relationships with others—all kinds and sizes and colors of others! You’ll explore biblical examples and principles for relating to family, friends, spouses and children, those in and out of the church, and those who are different from you in many ways. Loving others and responding to the Great Commission are themes in this book. All of you will have opportunities to practice what you’re learning right in the midst of your group.

**LIFE: *THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD***

Exploring some very practical life realities like money, time, beauty and pleasure, our bodies, work, etc. You’ll learn how to live life well even if you’ve made some serious mistakes in these areas in the past.

**FREEDOM: *BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME***

Looking at the universal human experience of shame and how to experience healing. You’ll unpack the stories of many people from the Bible who struggled with shame as you also unpack your heart. Throughout the study you will discover the difference between guilt and shame, identify hiding styles and types of shame, and even consider shamelessness. Sometimes shame happens when we’ve really blown it and done something we deserve to be ashamed of. This

comes from being part of the sin-prone human race and is embedded in our identity as sinners. At other times shame is heaped on us from outside over things we aren't responsible for and don't deserve. It can drive people into utter darkness, desolation, and separation from life. Into this sense of shame, the power of the gospel and the cross can enter to bring hope. God's many voices of mercy bring us into God's healing presence, into the bath of His forgiveness, and into the streams of His freeing love. God's mercy can touch and transform every ounce of shame.

As a leader, you'll help your group members discover principles and truths about the Triune God. Each of these studies will move you forward on the lifelong journey of spiritual transformation through relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## EXPERIENCING SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

So what is spiritual transformation? And how does it happen?

Spiritual transformation is the mysterious work of God's Spirit maturing the human soul into the likeness of Christ. It is the life-long change process by which God restores His image in us that was marred by sin. He does this by transforming our hearts, minds, wills, and bodies over the course of our lifetime, all for His glory. He also brings healing influence to our brokenness, difficult life issues, unresolved sin, wounding and relationships—with ourselves, our family, friends, the lost, society, and within the Church.

While God is the initiator and sustainer of our transformation, we participate with Him in the process with an attitude of humble dependence and submission. It's not just about skill in facilitating. Our example of **admitting that we're broken—to ourselves, to God, to others—releases God** to continue His deep work within us. So we lead by humbly offering our whole selves to God. God can really use us to influence others when we, as leaders, are responsive to His healing work, and released to relate to others out of our brokenness rather than our pseudo have-it-all-together-ness. Cultivating lifelong habits of beholding God and worshipping Him 24/7 become **powerful examples** of our leadership.

Biblical spiritual transformation stands in sharp contrast to the many alternative views of spiritual formation offered by Scientology, Hinduism, Buddhism and many others. Biblically, the power to experience such deep change comes from four sources:

- 1) through the life and continuing prayers of Jesus
- 2) by the indwelling work of God's Holy Spirit
- 3) through the Living Word of God in the Scriptures
- 4) and among an authentic community and Body of believers (1 Corinthians 12)

The heart of spiritual transformation is becoming more and more like Jesus. These changes in YOUR life can become a powerful model to those you are trusting God to influence in your group.



## ENJOYING YOUR ROLE AS A LEADER

What images come to mind as you think about leading a group through a CONNECT study? Do you imagine your group members expecting you to have it all together? . . . Or to be an expert on the Bible? . . . Or to offer profound answers to their tough life questions? If so, you can relax! Even if such a person exists somewhere, that's not really what your group members need from you.

Your most important role as a leader is to be an **authentic, growing person and let God's Spirit use the designed process**. You don't have to have it all together. Be willing to consider sharing your brokenness, shortcomings, and barriers as well as breakthroughs, victories, and strengths with others in the group. Authentic journeyers influence more than instruct . . . encourage more than enlighten . . . and gently draw out the truth as the Holy Spirit nudges. They keep it real and invite others to join them on their journey of lifelong transformation in Christ.

So relax! As an authentic journeyer, you don't need to be an expert. Your role is to come **alongside** your group members and help them process whatever they are discovering. You are not alone in leading. God's Spirit will work AND use others in the group to minister to each other. This includes:

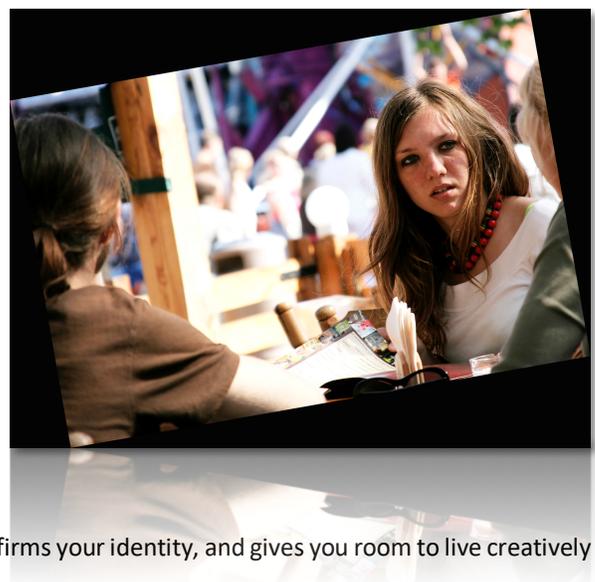
- taking the initiative to keep things moving ahead by asking good questions (more than giving "right" answers).
- listening to the views of your group members (even if you don't agree).
- giving room for the Scriptures to teach (rather than doing the teaching yourself).
- helping the group create and develop an environment where each one offers safety and grace and truth to the others.

In addition, what you do outside of the small group time may be just as important as what happens when you get together to discuss your study. So be creative when it comes to deepening relationships life-on-life. You could pray for group members, call, text, or e-mail them throughout the week. You could just do life together, grab dinner or work, play, or hang out together. Some in your group may even want to consider a casual or intensive mentoring relationship. This Leader's Guide will help you build relationships on your journey with Christ.

## BUILDING AN ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

What do spiritual friends actually do for each other? Among other things, they create and protect a relational environment packed with "grace upon grace," truth, authenticity, and creativity. An environment of grace is a place where:

- all of us can bring our condemnation, shame, guilt, and sin out of hidden darkness
- we receive unmerited favor, acceptance and love from God and others
- my grace motivates and provides safety for you to mature, affirms your identity, and gives you room to live creatively
- guilt and shame aren't used as methods to motivate, discipline, or manipulate



People are invited into a safe place where they can bring their sin issues and shame out of hiding and into the light where there is hope of healing in Christ.

In such an environment anchored by the truth of Scripture to guide, correct, and instruct, God asks us to experience Him as *the Truth* in the midst of a culture jaded by spin, hype, relativism, and outright lies. Our truthfulness admits when things aren't working in relationships, offers alternatives, and identifies obstacles to grace and love. When kindness like this leads to repentance, the painful realities of our sinful and broken condition are exposed and handled gently. Truth flourishes in non-manipulative and non-legalistic environments where people experience trust, respect, understanding, and empathy.

In this kind of environment, followers of Christ experience the fertile soil of profound life transformation as described by Larry Crabb:

*In the middle of the wild ocean of shattered dreams and broken lives, the community of Christ celebrates God's forgiveness; they believe in what each other could become, they never minimize sin but they love to maximize grace. They are carriers of Christ to each other. That's what spiritual friends do when they act together on a journey to God.* —Dr. Lawrence Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*<sup>1</sup>

A good group discussion involves trust. As people in your group develop trust among themselves, the quality of your discussions will deepen. You can guide this process by sharing your struggles and failures, not just your successes and growth. Each time you meet, trust is being developed or eroded. You can also help nurture trust by praying specifically for God to build a safe environment among your group. You may from time to time address this issue by encouraging people to be honest and to keep what is shared in the group confidential.

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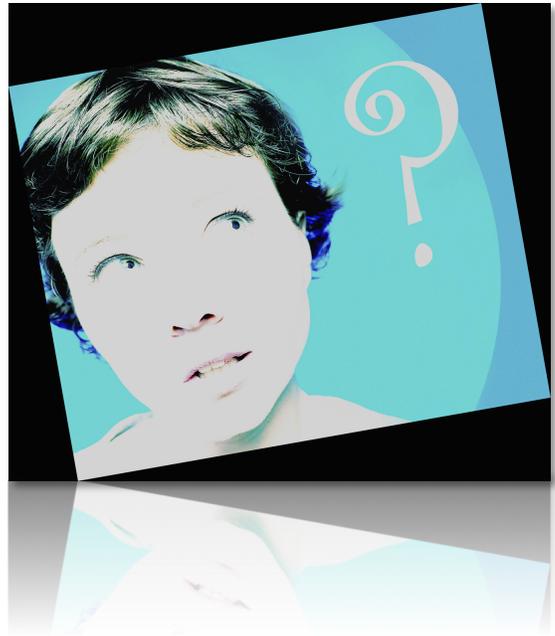
<sup>1</sup> Dr. Lawrence Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth* (Nashville, TN: 1999, W Publishing Group, a Division of Thomas Nelson, Inc.) p. 179

## WHERE TO BEGIN?

### WHO TO INVITE INTO YOUR GROUP?

The CONNECT series is for everyone who desires to follow Jesus. The series can be used by motivated high school students, college students, or adults. It is for married couples and singles, men and women. This series is appropriate for smaller and less formal groups, such as home Bible studies, “growth” groups, and businessmen’s meetings. People who are already followers of Jesus, along with those who want to explore Jesus’ life and ways can all be invited to participate.

Usually a group size of six to ten is best for discussion. If your group is larger, consider dividing into smaller groups. Also consider asking someone to assist you in leading.



### WHICH STUDY SHOULD YOU SELECT?

That depends on where you all are in your spiritual journeys and what interests you most. The studies can be used in any order. It may help to look over the chapter titles in each study to get an idea of the variety of topics each one explores. However, we recommend that you not begin with **SOUL: Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions** or **FREEDOM: Breaking the Power of Shame** until your group has developed a higher level of trust and vulnerability with one another.

### WHAT PREPARATION IS NECESSARY?

Those who are considering a CONNECT Bible study should be aware from the beginning that individual **preparation for each group discussion really is necessary**. Why? Because you want to hear first from God and His Word; then you can process and share what you are learning when you get together. In the beginning you will want to show them the study and page through one of the chapters to let them see how much weekly preparation is involved. On average, people devote 60-90 minutes to preparing the whole chapter. Some have enjoyed using their daily devotional time to prepare their study. This personal preparation time spent alone with God reading and meditating on the passages and questions is often the most valuable time of all—with the group discussion inviting others into our journeys. Encourage group members to write something down for each question, even if it is only four-five words.

You will probably have at least one participant who comes without having done any preparation. Life has a way of interrupting even the best-laid plans! How will you respond? What if you don’t respond? You might invite them to participate but urge them to do the study later in the week. If someone habitually comes unprepared, you might get together during the week and actually do part of the study with them in order to catch up with the group.

### HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE?

One important decision for your group to make together is whether you’ll to devote one week or two weeks to each chapter. Many groups study one chapter per week, devoting 60-90 minutes to personal preparation and then spending 60-90 minutes discussing selected questions from the whole chapter. If your group is fairly small and they know each other well, one chapter per week would work well for you. Other groups prefer a more leisurely pace; they may take two weeks to prepare and discuss the chapter in more detail (discussing Pauses 1 and 2 during the first week and discussing Pauses 3 and 4 during the second week). This approach might be better for a larger group or with people who don’t know each other very well yet. You could start out covering a whole chapter in one week, and then re-evaluate your pace after a few weeks.

Either way, don't feel compelled to discuss every single question! The Holy Spirit will direct you and your group members to discuss just those questions that are particularly relevant to your group. (More on this later.) At the pace of one chapter per week, a typical group will spend about three months completing one book.

#### HOW WILL THIS BIBLE STUDY CONNECT WITH OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS AND ACTIONS?

It is important that we engage with Scriptures at both a head level and a heart level. That's why you'll be asked some questions that invite you to explore your feelings and emotions—not just your head observations. Proverbs 4:23 suggests that many of the real issues of life are often heart issues. So don't be surprised to find questions like these:

*"What feelings surface within you as you consider [this passage or this section]?"*

*"How do you feel about [being created in God's image]?"*

Don't forget that every person in your group (including you) is on a journey spiritually. This includes discovering truth cognitively *and* embracing it with the heart. Many of us may not realize we can become disconnected from our hearts and emotions and the effect it can have on our souls. So how will you allow people to be "in process" in their maturing and in your group times? Forced agreement isn't the goal; inviting people to share where they are is more helpful. When you ask, "Does anyone have a different opinion or perspective?" versus asking "Do you agree with [someone or something mentioned]?" you are inviting them to think for themselves rather than to just conform to what the group thinks.

It is also important to take steps of action, putting whatever you've discovered or God has spoken to you about into action. That's why Pause 4 contains some practical application questions to respond to.

#### WHY HAVE LOTS OF IMAGES?

Another key component of the CONNECT series is the use of images. Maybe you're more familiar with Bible studies consisting entirely of words. In today's culture, the impact of visual images is increasing while the impact of the written word seems to be decreasing. In fact, images actually create meaning and unlock the heart for many of us. For those of us under the age of 40, images profoundly influence how we look at life. Images often connect deeper than words with our hearts because they are inexact and layered with meanings. Images will be interpreted by people in many different ways, especially across cultures.

In the CONNECT series, in each chapter we've included pictures and artwork to help you reflect on the topics. They are there to stimulate your imagination and heart. The images are considered an essential part of the content. In fact, we strongly encourage you to discuss the images (not just the verses and questions) by asking what meanings and feelings they communicate to each individual. Encourage group members to take time to gaze at the images and place themselves within these visual stories and to consider how Scripture "speaks into" our world of images. If a photo disturbs you or a group member, that's okay; try to figure out why.

Through dialogue about the images you will know the participants in your group at a deeper level than from the questions and text alone.



## WHY READ FROM DIFFERENT BIBLE TRANSLATIONS?

Typical Bible studies provide scripture references only for participants to look up in their own Bibles for study. This is always a good idea because it helps them become familiar with God's Word. However, there may be participants in your group who may not be that familiar with the Bible—the location of the books and how to look up verses. The CONNECT series assists all participants by printing about 75 per cent of the verses and passages right in the study.

In this series, the *New International Version* (NIV) is the primary translation used. Other translations and paraphrases are also quoted in the studies where indicated, such as *The Message* (MSG) or the *New Living Translation* (NLT). They were carefully selected to provide a fresh, contemporary rendering that might connect with younger participants. If you or someone in your group is not comfortable studying from these Bible versions, feel free to study exclusively from another accurate translation.

## WHY MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE?

The Bible mentions the value of memorizing key verses of Scripture in many places. Jesus memorized Scripture; so did Paul. We are encouraged to “store up God's word in our hearts” (Psalm 119:9) by meditating on it and memorizing it. So in Pause 4 of each chapter, you will find one verse selected from the chapter that captures the chapter topic well. You and your group members are encouraged to commit yourselves to memorizing that verse every week.

However, memorizing Scripture may not come easily for some people. You can stimulate your group members by being the first to memorize and review the memory verses. You'll find tips for motivating and training your group to memorize at the end of each study. Perhaps a good way to start is for the group to actually memorize the verses for the first three chapters together. Another option is for some to memorize while others use the key verses primarily for meditation. This may be an opportunity for your group to think together creatively on how to “store up” the Word of God in your lives.

## HOW CAN I SHARE THE ROLE OF LEADING?

As you initiate this group experience and get to know each member, ask God to raise up an assistant for you to mentor who will help facilitate the group. This is important for several reasons. As God draws people into His Kingdom and into His family, our role becomes that of discipling or providing spiritual parenting. This can help others grow in their experiential knowledge of Jesus and make progress on their lifelong journey of transformation (Matthew 28:19-20). In cultural contexts where so many biological generations are fractured by divorce and abuse, many young people would welcome the gracious influence of a spiritual “parent” or mentor. This mostly life-on-life process provides the context for Gospel truths to grow deep roots. There is perhaps no joy greater than when God uses us as a conduit to help mature the next generation in His family! As you help develop a co-leader in knowledge, skills, and heart, you are multiplying the laborers in His Kingdom.

## HOW DOES PRAYER FIT IN?

As a leader, praying for and with your group members and modeling a prayer life will be a tremendous gift to them. Yes, other things are important—your skills as a facilitator, the hours you spend preparing, the healthy environment you create, and the relationships you deepen. Remember, the CONNECT series is only a tool, a resource—God and His Spirit does the actual work of spiritual transformation. And prayer is an integral part in deepening our relationship with God and each other.

## YOUR FIRST GATHERING

When your group meets for the first time, try to accomplish these three things:

- ❑ Establish a relaxed atmosphere, making sure everyone is acquainted and at ease with you and with each other.
- ❑ Tell them what they need to know about the CONNECT studies and about how your group will operate.
- ❑ Make sure everyone knows what to study in preparation for your next meeting, and how to do it.
- ❑ Spend some time in prayer.



**CREATE AN INVITING ATMOSPHERE FOR GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER.** This may include having snacks, coffee, or other drinks available. Have extra Bibles and pens on hand, too. To establish a relaxed atmosphere in a group of people who may not know each other well, spend a few minutes just getting acquainted. If you share about yourself first, it will put others more at ease.

**FAMILIARIZE GROUP WITH THE CONNECT SERIES AND THE BOOK YOU'LL BE STUDYING TOGETHER.** Make sure each group member has a copy of the CONNECT study you will be going through together.

- Read over “Contents” to see the topics you’ll be discussing.
- Direct members to the “Introduction.” Tell members that this series is designed to offer hope in a fast-changing, unsafe, and uncertain world.
- Read through “Chapter Flow.” Preview the sections of each chapter:
  - A short contemporary story
  - Pause 1: Exploring What God Says
  - Pause 2: Exploring Your Reality
  - Pause 3: Coming Alive to God and Others
  - Pause 4: Journeying Forward
  - Digging Deeper (Optional)
- Read about “Images.” Tell your group to take time to process the images along with the verses and questions. They will have time to discuss the images each week.

**TALK ABOUT WHY EACH MEMBER WILL BE EXPECTED TO PREPARE THE LESSON** individually before coming to the group. Preparing the study individually allows each person to meet with God and invites Him to speak to them and help them process His word and the questions; then they’ll have God-given insights to share with the group. Highlight “Your Journey Through Each Chapter.” Ask your group to spend at least one hour preparing for the study each week. Suggest that they spread their preparation over several days—perhaps one Pause per day. Ask if they can commit to this

because your conversations will be much richer when members have processed and prepared the material ahead of time. Also agree on a pace to start out—one or two weeks to discuss each chapter.

**DISCUSS HOW TO PREPARE THE LESSON.** Turn to the first chapter and ask someone to read the opening paragraphs. To help the group become familiar with the kind of preparation they will be doing on their own each week, answer together some of the questions in this first chapter. You may want to do three or four questions at the beginning, or select a few from other parts of the chapter.

Your aim is to help them hear from God through His Word as they complete their study. Have one person read the question aloud, and then have everyone look up the related Scripture reference. Then have someone else read aloud the Scripture passage. You may want to read it from various translations. Talk together about how you would answer the question, and then have each person write the answer in his/her book. Briefly look over Chapter One to see how long it is, and tell the group that this is the material they should complete by your next meeting.

**PREPARE FOR POSITIVE GROUP DYNAMICS.** The **CONNECT** series is full of great information and will add to one's Bible knowledge. But it is also designed to go much deeper—to impact, by the power of the Holy Spirit, group member's hearts. Trust God to bring genuine transformation and lasting life-change to each of you. So it is important to read the "Guidelines for Small Groups" together during your first meeting. This will help your group become a safe place for heart issues to surface.

**CONFIRM THE TIME AND PLACE FOR YOUR NEXT MEETING.**

## GUIDING A DISCUSSION

The group will be looking to you for leadership and direction, so lead out in a confident way. You'll probably want to select key questions to discuss (see "Chapter-by-Chapter Guide" for suggestions). But also relax! You don't have to have all the answers! You may want to experiment with various methods for discussing the material.



**PREPARING FOR EACH DISCUSSION:** Each group member should prepare the study ahead of time. This personal time with God over His Word allows Him to surface issues and speak to us individually. In addition, as the leader you should devote some time to preparing for the discussion. To help you focus on key concepts and promote effective discussions we've identified 8-12 questions from each chapter you may want to check or highlight in your study book (suggestions are included with each individual chapter). As you gain more experience guiding discussions of the Bible, you will find yourself thinking of your own effective questions in the midst of the discussion. May you experience the joy of co-laboring with Christ in His Kingdom as you lead others and influence them in their spiritual journey.

**KEEP TIME:** Your group will really appreciate it if you ensure that they stay within the agreed-upon time limits. After some brief socializing, you will want to devote at least 60 and preferably 90 minutes to the discussion. Consider structuring your time this way:

Opening story: 5-10 minutes

Pause 3: 15-20 minutes

Pause 1: 15-20 minutes

Pause 4: 10-20 minutes

Pause 2: 15-20 minutes

Don't hesitate to move the discussion on gently in order to honor your time limits.

**KICKING OFF THE DISCUSSION (Opening Story):** Begin by spending no more than 5-10 minutes on the opening story. This allows members to connect with the theme of the chapter.

**EXPLORING THE TOPIC (Pauses 1, 2, and 3)**

**APPROACH 1:** For groups with very little Bible study experience, one simple approach is to discuss the chapter **question by question**. You can do this by going around the group in order, with the first person giving his/her answer to the first question (followed by discussion). The second person reads and answers the second question (followed by discussion), and so on. The obvious structure of four Pauses gives them a sense of confidence, and they can easily follow the direction of the discussion. It may take two meetings to cover one chapter with this method. That's okay because the whole idea is slowing down, focusing on relationship with God versus filling the head with more information about God.

For Approach 1, ask someone to read the first question and respond to it briefly. Go around the circle, allowing others to contribute if they want to.

**APPROACH 2:** For groups with a bit more experience in Bible study, another discussion method is the section-by-section approach. This can provide more spontaneity. Don't try to discuss every question! Instead, go section by section (one Pause at a time). But as the facilitator, you select ahead of time 2-5 key questions from each Pause for the group to discuss. *See the last section of this leader's guide entitled the "Chapter by Chapter Guide" for two-five questions we would suggest for each pause.*

For Approach 2, read the questions you pre-selected to discuss in each Pause, and invite people to respond to each. Also invite them to discuss any other questions that particularly impacted or disturbed them.

**APPROACH 3:** For an even more open-ended approach, you could invite people to share highlights from each Pause. Again, don't expect to discuss every question. Do expect to cover the chapter in one meeting with this method.

For Approach 3, start the discussion by asking the group for its impressions of Pause 1. Say something like:

*"What impressed you most from this pause?"*

*"From this first pause, what stood out to you about [how God created us]?"*

This lets members know that you won't be discussing every question in order, but that they are free to share a highlight or observation from *any* question in this section. Of course, starting with such an open-ended question assumes that members have actually completed their own preparation. Remember to direct your question to the entire group, rather than to a certain person. These are "open-ended questions." That is, they can't be answered with a "yes" or "no."

USING FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS: Your discussion will be more engaging as you follow up people's comments with good questions. For instance, you could invite someone to go a bit deeper by asking:

*"That's interesting, Craig. Would you explain that a bit more?"*

*"Would you give us an example of what you mean?"*

*"What does that mean to you?"*

You can have others share their answers to the same question by asking:

*"What do others think about that question?"*

*"Are there any other thoughts on that?"*

Feel free to contribute your own discoveries and observations now and then, but don't try to add your two cents' worth to every question. After talking and asking questions to stimulate further discussion, go on to the next section. **Please remember, you are not obligated to discuss every question.** The point of discussing the lesson is to share the significant things the Holy Spirit has taught them during their time alone with Him.

WRAPPING IT UP (Pause 4): Even if you don't cover Pauses 1-3 thoroughly, be sure that you leave time to discuss Pause 4. This is where the practical application and heart issues are crystallized and where we put "feet" to what we've learned. Just as there are several kinds of questions you can ask to get a good discussion going, so there are also several ways to bring a discussion to a close.

- You might want to provide a brief, broad overview of the chapter by covering the key ideas and how they relate to each other. (Note: it is also good to provide a short review of the previous week's topic at the beginning).
- You could also ask a general summary question such as, *"Let's summarize the chapter. As you consider this chapter as a whole, what one or two truths most stand out to you?"*

**But even if you have not discussed every question from the study, you will want to leave the last five to ten minutes of the group time to do one or two of the following closing activities—not all of them.**

***Images And Quotes:*** Each chapter includes one or more quotes, as well as several photos and other images. Sometimes they move us—while at other times they might disturb us. Either way, you may want to invite people to comment on any image or quote in the chapter that they connect with.

***Digging Deeper:*** These are "bonus" questions provided as an optional way for people to go a bit deeper into the topic, if they want to. Since it is an optional section, expect some not to complete it. For others, this section may have been a key part of their study. As you are closing, you might ask a general question such as, "Would anyone like to share what they learned from the Digging Deeper section?"

***Application / Journal:*** Remember to always save time to discuss your personal applications to the Scripture. Otherwise your group may miss an essential part of growing together. Every chapter already includes one or more questions specifically designed to invite members to apply the truths to their lives. However, if this kind of sharing has not occurred as you reach the end, you might ask a general application question like this: "As you reflect back over your study of Scripture, how have these passages impacted you this week? How do you think God wants you to apply these to your daily life during the coming week?" Occasionally you should share how God has impressed you to apply the study, which will give an example to others in your group about application.

***Scripture Memory:*** Members are encouraged to memorize one key verse from the study. This discipline is a valuable way to store God's word in our hearts, and it can really help change lives. If your group decides to commit to Scripture memory together, you will need to teach them why and how to memorize, as well as keep them motivated. You might encourage members to review their memory verses in pairs as soon as they arrive, or do the review all together at the close of each session. More suggestions for helping others build the invaluable habit of memorizing Scripture are provided at the end of each study.

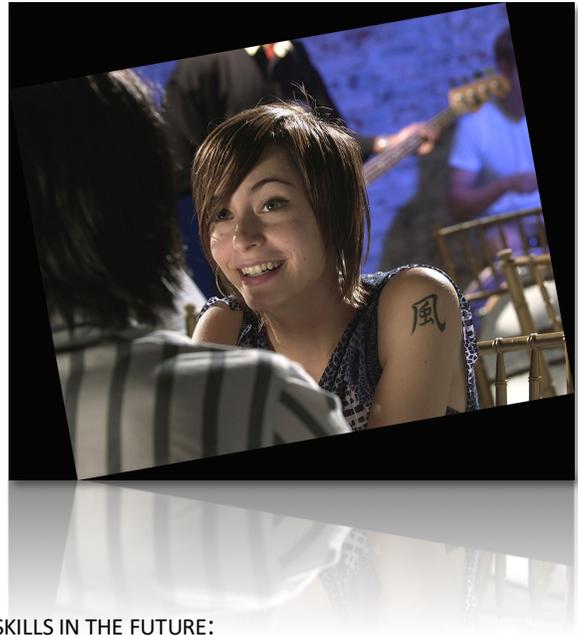
**PRAYER:** Plan to spend the last few minutes in prayer. Be aware that some of your group members may not be comfortable yet praying aloud. Invite people to share particular requests briefly, and to pray over their applications from this lesson. Agree with your group members that personal matters shared in the discussion or for prayer should be kept confidential within the group.

Regularly trusting God together as a community can refresh and revitalize, like living water!

## EVALUATING YOUR EXPERIENCE

Evaluated experience is one of the most valuable development processes you can go through. This is not so much a critique as it is an opportunity for you to grow and develop as a leader.

While you can do a self-evaluation, this process will be richer if you have input from another person. Your group co-leader is an obvious first choice, but if you do not currently have a co-leader, you might consider asking one of your group members to help you in this evaluation from time-to-time.



THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE DESIGNED TO HELP YOU IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS IN THE FUTURE:

- Did you know the material well enough to have freedom in facilitating your small group?
- Did you listen closely to others' answers in order to ask follow up questions?
- Did you discuss the major points in the chapter?
- Are people growing in trusting each other? Are they sharing their hearts as well as their minds?
- Was the discussion practical?
- Was the discussion relaxed and conversational?
- Did everyone participate?
- Did you begin and end on time?
- Do you need to adjust anything for your next meeting?
- Are there any group members you should contact individually before you meet again?

# CONNECT Series

The six study books in the CONNECT series are:

**GOD: *CONNECTING WITH HIS OUTRAGEOUS LOVE***

**IDENTITY: *BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM***

**SOUL: *EMBRACING MY SEXUALITY AND EMOTIONS***

**RELATIONSHIPS: *BRINGING JESUS INTO MY WORLD***

**LIFE: *THRIVING IN A COMPLEX WORLD***

**FREEDOM: *BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME***

