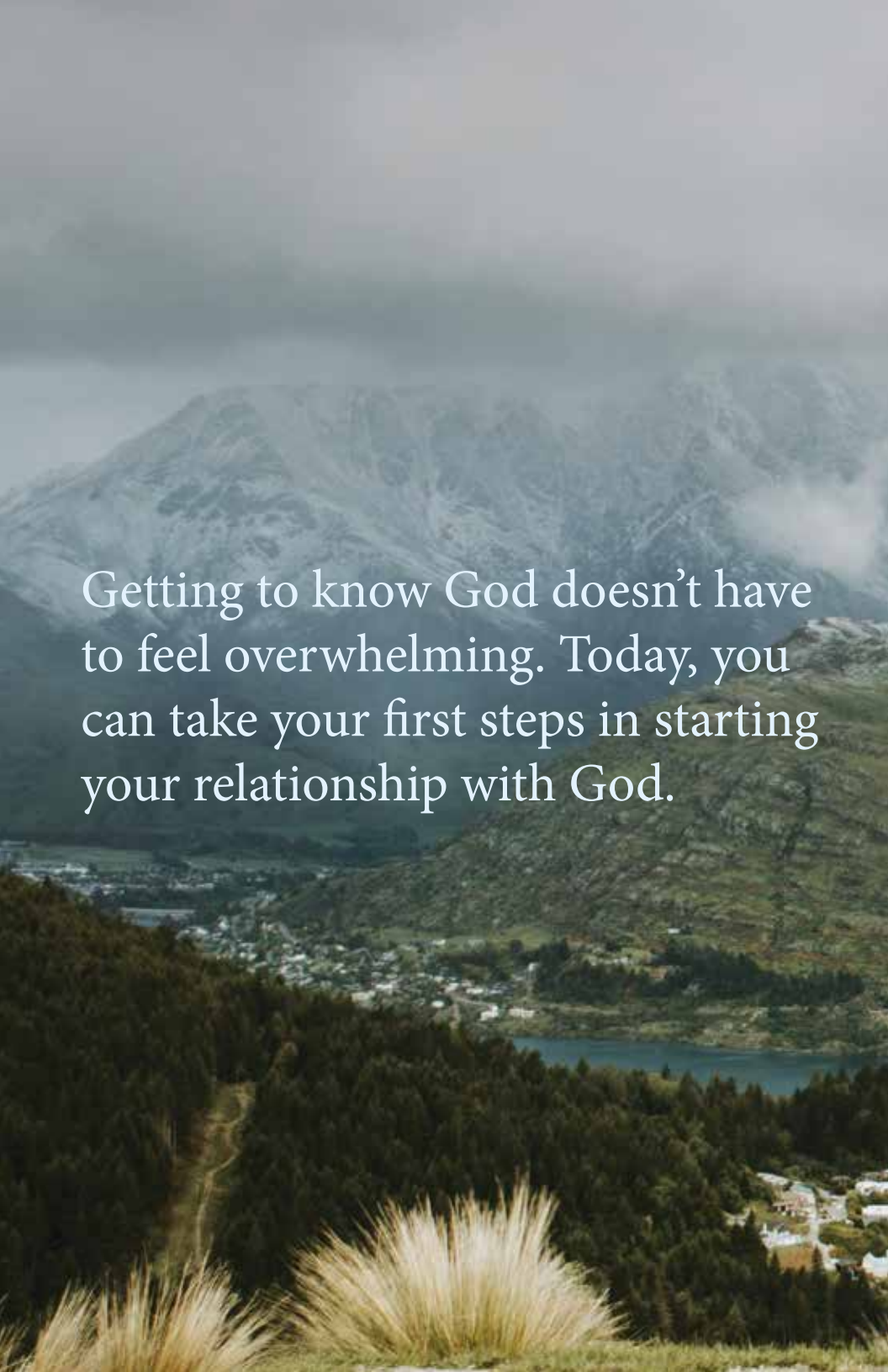


A person wearing a dark hoodie and a cap stands on a grassy hillside, looking out over a city. The city is visible in the background, with a winding road in the foreground. The overall tone is dark and contemplative.

explore God™

TABLE GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



Getting to know God doesn't have to feel overwhelming. Today, you can take your first steps in starting your relationship with God.





Welcome

Hi friends,

I'm so glad you are jumping into this journey of exploring the meaning of life, the big questions of faith, and what it means for your purpose on earth. The next few weeks can literally change your life.

Whether this is a new quest for you or an opportunity to deepen your understanding of the questions you've been wrestling with for many years, I believe God is greatly pleased with your desire to seek Him and deepen your understanding of truth.

In fact, thousands of years ago, God gave a promise to humanity that I believe still applies today. He said, *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."* Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)

As you begin this journey, I encourage you to press through the discomfort of meeting new people and discussing these big topics. Commit to attending your Table Group every week, open yourself to new friendships, and come with a posture to learn and listen.

I'm praying for you and believing that these few weeks together will lead to your life and purpose flourishing to another level.

Sincerely,

Filipe Santos
Lead Pastor, Echo.Church

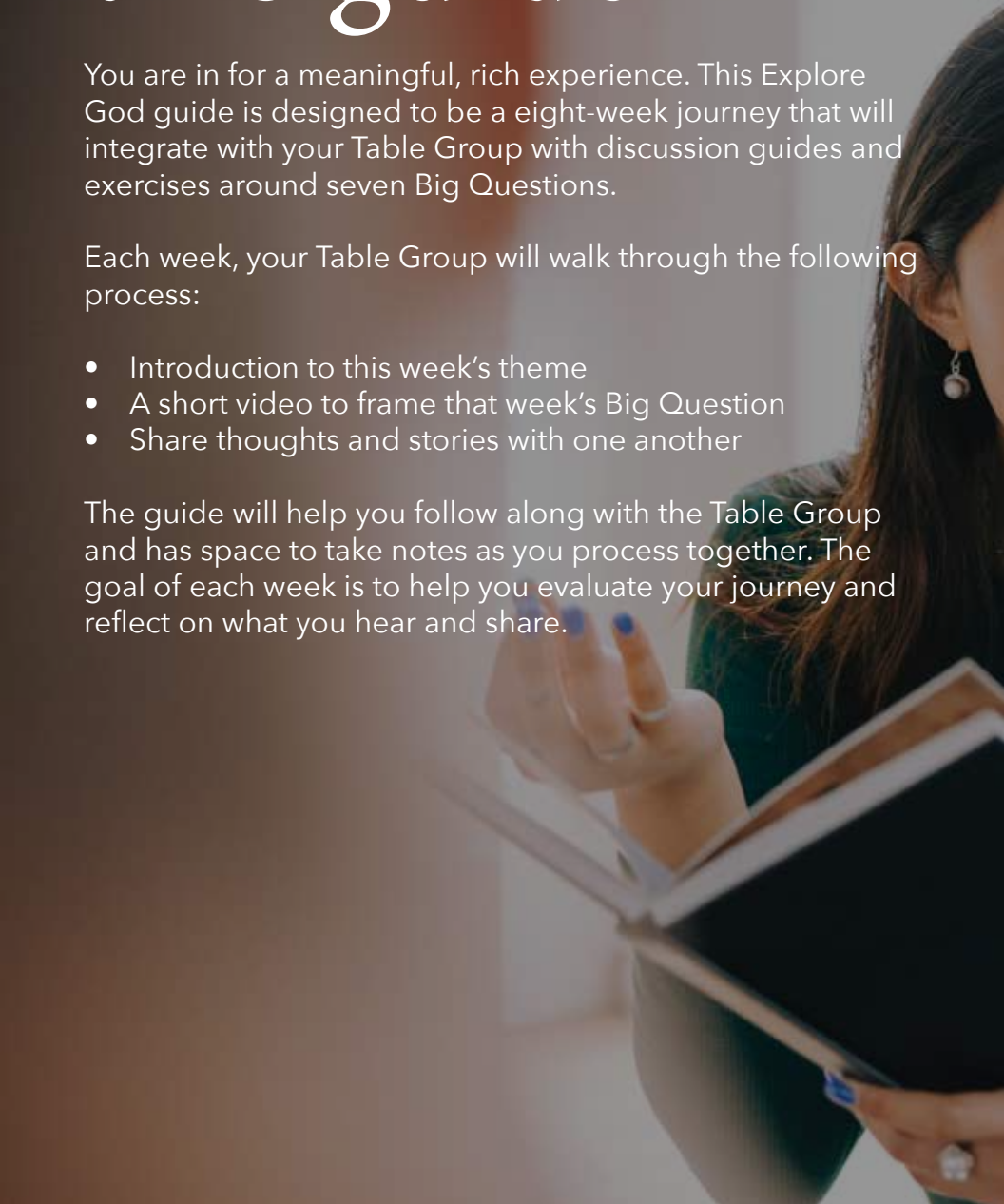
How to use this guide

You are in for a meaningful, rich experience. This Explore God guide is designed to be a eight-week journey that will integrate with your Table Group with discussion guides and exercises around seven Big Questions.

Each week, your Table Group will walk through the following process:

- Introduction to this week's theme
- A short video to frame that week's Big Question
- Share thoughts and stories with one another

The guide will help you follow along with the Table Group and has space to take notes as you process together. The goal of each week is to help you evaluate your journey and reflect on what you hear and share.





Using the GROUP method



Scan to access the Explore God
videos and resources for Table
Group leaders.

GATHER

Get together. Whether in person at a home, a coffee shop, a park, or on Zoom, get together with the *intent* to encourage one another and grow in your faith. You'll be amazed at how your life improves by getting together with others once a week for the next two months.

READ

Read the passages *out loud* together. This part is important! The Bible was originally written to be read out loud to groups of people just like you, your family, and friends. Hearing with others will give you fresh ears.

OBSERVE

Share your observations about the passage with your Table Group. Is there anything that stood out to you? Did you all notice something completely different? How did the Holy Spirit speak to you through something someone else said? Share that with them!

We've provided suggested questions for each week's discussion to help focus the conversation and allow you to share what this journey is teaching you. Feel free to ask your own questions, too! Note where you are experiencing difficulty in understanding a passage. Maybe you got something fresh or different in the light of this series. Observe what the Holy Spirit is saying *in* the passage.

Perhaps you are feeling overly familiar with the passage and are having a hard time not just skimming through. If so, try reading it in another translation to get a fresh perspective.

UNDERSTAND

How can you apply what you've learned from this passage? How can your Table Group help support and encourage you in this?

PRAYER

Conclude with prayer. Share prayer requests and praises. Have one group member capture prayer requests and praises in a text to group members. You can ask if anyone is comfortable praying at each meeting, but don't force everyone to participate, as they might not be ready.

A close-up, profile view of a man's face, looking slightly upwards and to the right. He has a thoughtful expression. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a window with light coming through. The overall tone is contemplative and soft.

Week 1

Does life have a purpose?



MESSAGE BIG IDEA

We were created to live in a relationship with God. Life is meaningless without God, but God gives everything meaning.

VIDEO

www.echo.church/week1exploregod

SCRIPTURE

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 & Matthew 6:25-34

ICE BREAKER

What's the weirdest thing you've ever had to Google?

OPENING THOUGHT

The goal of today is to have an open conversation. This is a safe place for questions; no one has all the answers. When tackling big questions, it's easy to think others have already figured it out and we're left behind, but we're all seekers and questioners on this journey today, talking about purpose and significance. What are some of the ways you've heard others define life's purpose?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. Read Ecclesiastes 1:2-11, what stood out to you? What is author saying here?
2. Have you ever had a period when life felt meaningless? If so, what was it like?
3. Read Matthew 6:25-34, how does this compare to the message of the Ecclesiastes scripture?

LIFE APPLICATION

1. Have you ever felt that if you find the right job, meet the right person, or have the right bank balance, life would satisfy you? What are some ways you've sought significance or satisfaction?
2. What are ways you've envied other people's lives? Read this quote from Jim Carrey and discuss: "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer."
3. Can you share both a time when life seemed like a random series of events and a time when it seemed like an intentional plan was unfolding?
4. How might someone's view of eternity affect their sense of meaning and purpose?
5. If you believe we all have a purpose, what role does God play in that, if any? What role is God currently playing in your life?

CHALLENGE

Spend some time this week thinking through what your life is oriented around. Can you pinpoint a set of values or beliefs that underpins your decisions? Are you happy with those values and beliefs, or is it time for re-evaluation and a potential change? Whether you're already a Christ-follower or simply searching for answers, consider praying Blaise Pascal's famous prayer every day this week: "God, if you are real, make yourself real to me."

NOTES



Week 2

Is there a God?



MESSAGE BIG IDEA

When we are open to the possibility of God's existence, we'll discover many indicators of his presence.

VIDEO

www.echo.church/week2exploregod

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 19:1, 1 John 4:8 & John 1:14

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

1. When was the first time you started asking questions about the existence of God?
2. Last week the challenge was to pray, "God, if you're real, make yourself real to me." What was your experience praying that this week?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. Read Psalm 19:1-6. What is this poem saying about the relationship between God and the world around us?
2. Read 1 John 4:8. If God's very nature is love, then what might this mean for human relationships?
3. Romans 1:20. Paul says the nature of God is evident in creation. What do you think of that statement?

LIFE APPLICATION

1. Many "pointers" exist in our world that suggest a loving being is at the center of the universe. What pointers do you see that suggest to you a loving creator?

2. If you don't believe in God, what would it take for you to re-evaluate that position? If you consider yourself a Christ-follower, have you ever had a time when you wanted to walk away from faith? Explain.
3. We live in a fast-paced world, and many forces compete for our time and attention. How might a relationship with God keep us grounded in something deep and real?

CHALLENGE

As we close our time today, let's keep praying for God to make himself real to us and keep an eye out for pointers to his existence. In addition to this prayer, look for an opportunity to talk with another person about our discussion tonight. Is there someone at home, at work, or in your neighborhood that might resonate with the deep things we're exploring and experiencing?

NOTES

Week 3

Why does God allow pain
and suffering?



MESSAGE BIG IDEA

While God does not provide the reason for painful experiences, through Jesus He provides a way to face suffering with hope and courage – rather than bitterness and despair.

VIDEO

www.echo.church/week3exploregod

SCRIPTURE

Habakkuk 1:1-4 & John 16:33

ICE BREAKER

Share a story where you've experienced physical pain – maybe a broken bone, sprained ankle, or cracked tooth. In that moment, what brought you comfort?

OPENING THOUGHT

Today's question, "Why does God allow pain and suffering?" is one of the hardest because it's not just an intellectual question; it impacts us personally through our pain and the pain of those we love. We feel this question, which makes navigating it difficult. The goal is not to solve the issue of pain and suffering but to wrestle with the question honestly and openly. As we discuss the topic, try to avoid common yet often unhelpful responses like, "Everything happens for a reason," or, "You just need to pray harder."

BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. Read Habakkuk 1:1-4. What stood out to you? What "misery" comes to your mind as you read this? How does acknowledging all the pain and suffering in the world make you feel?

2. Read John 16:33. What stands out to you? What emotions does this passage evoke?
3. Compare the two verses. How are they similar? What makes them different?

LIFE APPLICATION

1. Every day, we are bombarded with media telling us we deserve to be happy. How do you think that affects our ability to navigate the pain and suffering in our lives? How do we avoid feeling the weight of pain in our lives? In what ways might sheltering people from pain cause more harm than good?
2. Karma says, "If I am good, I will be rewarded, and if I am bad, I will be punished." The Christian tradition is about grace, which says, "You don't get the punishment you deserve, and you receive the love you didn't earn." What difference would having a mindset of grace instead of karma make? How would this impact your self-talk during a time of suffering?
3. In our fast-paced world, we often don't make room for the slow process of healing and restoration. Widows used to wear black for an entire year to symbolize their grief process; now, we provide three days of bereavement pay. How does the expectation of being OK influence our ability to heal and be restored? Where in your life do you need permission not to be OK now? How can you give that permission to others?
4. Often, our pain and suffering can feel isolating. Like Habakkuk, we cry, "Where are you, God?" Author Tim Keller writes, "It can't be that (God) is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself." How does that influence your understanding of God?





Week 4

Is Christianity too narrow?



MESSAGE BIG IDEA

God provided a way for everyone to find their way back to Him. Most religions boil down to humanity trying to reach God, but Christianity is about God reaching humanity.

VIDEO

www.echo.church/week4exploregod

SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:11-32

ICEBREAKER

How did you leave home? Would you change anything if you could? Why or why not?

OPENING THOUGHT

What do you think about the statistic that “nearly half of all U.S. adults believe it doesn’t matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons?”

VIDEO DISCUSSION

1. Watch the Curiosity Collective video, “Is Christianity too narrow?” Was there anything in the video that connected with you? What was compelling or intriguing?
2. In the video, Corey discusses the statement that “All religions are the same.” This statement is often an attempt to be humble and tolerant, but he goes on to claim it is arrogant and disrespectful to every religion. Why would that be?

LIFE APPLICATION

1. Every religion is narrow and makes exclusive claims. What is the difference between being narrow and narrow-minded?
2. What exclusive claims do you hold?
3. Read Luke 15:11-32. If we understand the father in the story to represent God, what does this parable say about God's character and nature?
4. How might this parable influence how we engage with people, no matter how they live or think?

CHALLENGE

The parable of the prodigal son or the lost son is a story that gives us insight into what a loving Father God is to us. His forgiveness and grace are available to everyone, everywhere, regardless of their sins and condition in the world. Are there people you know who need help finding their way back to God in your life? Commit to purposefully praying for those individuals as a small group this week. Next week, share how you saw them move closer to God.

NOTES

Week 5

Is Jesus really God?



MESSAGE BIG IDEA

With intention or by default, every person answers the question, "Is Jesus really God?" The overwhelming evidence points to the truth of his divinity.

VIDEO

www.echo.church/week5exploregod

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 16:13-20

OPENING DISCUSSION

1. According to the Barna Research Group, 67% of U.S. adults say they have a personal relationship with Jesus. Does that surprise you? Why or why not?
2. What do you think it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus?

VIDEO DISCUSSION

1. Watch the Curiosity Collective video. In what ways can you identify with the stories? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
2. What do you think Leonce meant when he said, "Religion says, 'I do, therefore I'm loved.' Jesus says, 'You're loved; therefore you do?'"

BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. Read Matthew 16:13-20. What do you notice about the text for the first time?

2. Caesarea Philippi was far north near a grotto devoted to the worship of the Greek deity Pan; Herod also dedicated a temple to worship Caesar there. Against this backdrop, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Jesus chose this location to ask this question, and the writer points it out. Why might this have been important for his disciples? What might it mean for us today?
3. We all have to answer the question, "Who do you say I am?" How would you answer that for yourself?

CHALLENGE

The question, "Who do you say I am?" is the same, but we all are on different points of the journey, and we may hear that challenge differently. Some of us may need to try following some of Jesus' teachings to find out if his way is compelling and life-giving. Some may be ready to agree with Peter's declaration and take the next step of baptism. Still, others have already decided to follow Jesus. In what way can we all follow him more closely this week?

NOTES

A blurred background image showing a person with long brown hair reading a book. The person is wearing a dark green sweater. The setting appears to be a library or a study area with stacks of books visible in the foreground and background.

Week 6

Is the Bible reliable?



MESSAGE BIG IDEA

The Bible can be shown to be a reliable document, accurately recorded and transmitted through history, and relevant to life in the 21st century.

VIDEO

www.echo.church/week6exploregod

SCRIPTURE

John 5:39 & 2 Timothy 3:16-17

ICEBREAKER

What's something dumb you wish you had never done, like rollerskate down a big hill or tie your loose tooth to a doorknob?

OPENING THOUGHT

We all long for reliability in our lives. We count on reliability for many small things that make up our daily lives. Finding reliable and trustworthy people is also important. It's our foundation for healthy relationships and lifestyles. What does it mean for someone in your life to be reliable?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17, what stood out to you or struck you?
2. Read John 5:39, what could it mean to lose sight of God even as you study the Bible?

LIFE APPLICATION

1. In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in the Curiosity Collective video? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
2. What are a few of the various sources of truth that people consider?
3. Read this quote from Peter Enns and discuss what it could mean for our use and understanding of the Bible: "The Bible doesn't say, 'Look at me!' It says, 'Look through me.'"
4. How relevant is the Bible to your everyday life? Why or why not?
5. Read the following quote from Pastor William Sloane Coffin and discuss how this could change the way we approach talking about the Bible with other people.

"It is a mistake to look to the Bible to close a discussion; the Bible seeks to open one."
6. What might make you inclined to rely on the Bible as a source of truth or guidance for your life?

CHALLENGE

Sign up for a Bible Reading Plan if you don't already use one. Commit to reading the Bible daily and praying: "God, if you're real, make yourself real to me through your Word."

NOTES

Week 7

Can I know God personally?



MESSAGE BIG IDEA

The way to know God is not by striving and trying harder. It's through knowing and following Jesus.

VIDEO

www.echo.church/week7exploreGod

SCRIPTURE

Romans 3:9-24

ICEBREAKER

Growing up were you more of a rule breaker or a rule follower? Share a story from childhood that reflects that.

OPENING THOUGHT

What does it take to know someone? What does that mean? What might it mean to know God?

VIDEO DISCUSSION

1. Watch the Curiosity Collective video. In what ways can you identify with the stories? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
2. What might be some reasons people resist knowing God personally?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. Read or listen to Romans 3:9-24. What details stand out to you about this passage?
2. What is the author, Paul, saying about the character of humankind and the character of God?

LIFE APPLICATION

1. Paul says everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glory. He's saying we've all disrupted the harmony of the world and the lives of others, which falls outside of the glory of God and what He's planned for us. Our response to sin is often one of the following: trying to be perfect, trying to be good enough (trying to balance out the bad with the good, then God will accept us), or we give up trying. What tends to be your response to sin?
2. To be justified meant to be "declared righteous," a courtroom image of the judge finding in your favor and giving you the status of righteous. The term righteous can also be understood in a relational sense: to be in a right relationship with God. We are in a right relationship because of God's grace and faithfulness. How is that different than the three responses to sin in question 5?
3. What are some ways you can be in a relationship with God? How does that work?

CHALLENGE

All of us are in a different place in our relationship with God. Some of us have been walking with God for a long time, while others are just exploring. What response do you have to the discussion tonight? One way we can respond to God's grace is through baptism. Another way is to live a life of connection to God through prayer. In what ways would you like to continue exploring a relationship with God?

NOTES

Week 8

The power of gratitude





MESSAGE BIG IDEA

Gratitude is so important to Jesus and contains so many benefits for us.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 17: 11-19

ICEBREAKER

It's easy to get caught up in our daily to-do list and the work to be done. What are one or two things that you can be grateful for in the past 24 hours?

OPENING THOUGHT

Before we close this chapter in our church's history, it's important we pause, reflect, and say, "Thank you!" Reflect on your Explore God journey and share your highlights. Receive it with gratitude.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

After reading Luke 17:11-19, what is different about the one leper that returned?

LIFE APPLICATION

Practicing gratitude helps us to view life through a more positive lens, prioritize optimistic thoughts over pessimistic ones, and focus on solutions rather than problems. What are some ways you can incorporate gratitude in your life?

CHALLENGE

It's said that it takes three weeks to form a habit and another three weeks to solidify it. Here are some examples that may help

you practice gratitude in your life:

1. Keep a gratitude journal. When you write your positive thoughts down, it helps commit them to your consciousness.
2. Do you often eat a meal in a rush, or eat while you work or watch something on TV? How often do you sit and savor a meal, perhaps while having a meaningful conversation with someone you care about? Take the time to notice the flavor and be fully present with a person.
3. In the age where communications are often instantaneous with technology, take the time to write a letter or a thank you card to someone to express your gratitude, even to yourself.

There are many ways to practice having gratitude in your life, but it comes down to the intentionality to engage in it for it to work.

With that, we are grateful that you journeyed with us through this guide.

NOTES





Congratulations!

You completed the Explore God journey with your Table Group. Through it, you had the opportunity to reflect, pray over, and act on these seven Big Questions. As a result, we hope you find yourself bolder and more comfortable continuing your journey in learning more about God.

This is our prayer for you in the days ahead:

May God seem closer to you as you seek Him more. May He bless you and reveal Himself more in your life.





The journey is not over!

How was your Explore God Table Group? We'd love to hear about your experience and how we can make future resources more helpful for you and others.



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