


**HOW TO LEAD
IN A
WORLD
OF
DISTRACTION**



*MAXIMIZING YOUR INFLUENCE BY
TURNING DOWN THE NOISE*

STUDY GUIDE | SIX SESSIONS

CLAY SCROGGINS

 **ZONDERVAN
REFLECTIVE**

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How to Lead in a World of Distraction Study Guide
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ABOUT THE STUDY

I'm so easily distracted. I am guessing you are as well. None of us are immune to the growing cacophony of distractions around us. In the last few years, I've asked many people a simple question: *Are there more or fewer distractions in our world today than there were ten years ago?* The answer is always . . . wait, gimme a minute. Just need to check an email.

Okay. The answer is always a resounding, "More!" We all feel it. We are drowning in distractions everywhere we go. It's not just a problem in the workplace. It's an epidemic in our homes as well. I have too many stories of missing something in my kids' lives because my mind was consumed with something else. I actually have a story of missing *a kid* because of not being attentive in the present. Call it a "parenting fail."

My wife and I have five kids, and we were managing bath time for all of them. Our youngest, Whit, was finished with his bath and waiting on me to put on his diaper and pajamas. Evidently, he felt that he had waited long enough. I was distracted, fixing something on the camera in his room, and somehow I didn't notice him quietly crawling away.

It was only when my wife asked me to put Whit to bed that I realized . . . Whit was not there. He was not in the room. The

gate on the stairs was open, so I headed downstairs to continue my search. Whit was not in the kitchen. Or in the living room. Or in the front hallway. That's when I saw the door leading outside was open. Whit was not in the *house*. I found him making his way down the street . . . completely naked. It was quite an amusing show for the four neighbors' houses that he passed.

We later laughed at the consequences of that distraction, but not all our distracted moments are so comical. Distractions take a toll on our marriages, our families, our friendships, our ability to think and manage tasks at work—and our ability to lead others. Distractions cost us in terms of opportunities we miss because we are not paying attention. Distractions pull us away from the important things in our lives. Distractions can keep us from living the best life that God has for us.

Distractions are often like white noise. They mask things we don't want to confront. In this study, we will look at how we can recognize these masking elements to uncover the feelings they are hiding. I believe we do this by adopting four practices:

- Finding simplicity
- Speaking to yourself
- Getting quiet
- Pressing pause

With these tools, you'll be empowered to replace the chaos in your busy world with an emotional competence that leads to a calmer, less stressful, and more fulfilling life.

Sound intriguing? Then I invite you to join me in this study. Together, we will discover how to turn down the white noise so we can lead ourselves and others—even in a world that is overrun with distractions.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

GROUP SIZE

This study has been written with different groups in mind. Whether you're a leader at your organization or a stay-at-home parent, we believe the concepts will help you understand the problem of distractions, how to limit them, and how to adopt some practices to help your team deal with them and function more efficiently.

You can use this study in groups of all different sizes. But we think the ideal group size is eight to twelve adults or four to six married couples. Why? Because that's a large enough group to provide the diverse opinions that drive conversation, yet small enough that group members can hold one another accountable.

Accountability is absolutely crucial to the group dynamic. Reading this material, watching the videos, and having some discussions probably won't create a big, sustainable change in your personal life or in your leadership. That will only happen if you apply what you learn. And you'll probably succeed in application only if you have a group of people who are willing to encourage you and hold you accountable.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Here are the things you'll need for this study:

- This guide
- The accompanying teaching videos
- Something to write with
- A copy of the *How to Lead in a World of Distraction* book (optional for the group meetings but recommended for the between-sessions study)

That's it.

TIMING

The suggested time for each group session is 90 minutes. This can be broken down as follows:

Conversation Starter: 10 minutes

The Conversation Starter is designed to tee up the session's topic while helping you to get to know one another a little better. This is especially helpful if your group is new.

Video Teaching: 15 minutes

After the Conversation Starter, watch the session video teaching together. It will present the content that you'll discuss as a group.

Group Discussion: 45 minutes

Spend most of the session having a conversation about the content you watched together. Use any of the Group Discussion questions to guide the conversation.

My Leadership Challenge: 15 minutes

My Leadership Challenge provides a simple way to begin to apply what you're learning. Don't skip this section of the study. It will help you change and grow.

Session Wrap-Up: 5 minutes

The Wrap-Up helps you to put a bow on the session, so to speak. It's an opportunity to reiterate the bottom line of the session's topic. It's also an opportunity to close the meeting in prayer, if you so choose.

Note that there are also suggested personal study activities for you to complete on your own in between the main group sessions.

FACILITATION

You probably have a mental picture of what it will look like to lead—what you'll say and how group members will respond. Before you get too far into planning, there are some things you should know about leading a group discussion.

Cultivate Discussion

It's easy to assume that a group meeting lives or dies on the quality of your ideas. That's not true. It's the ideas of everyone

in the group that make a meeting successful. Your role is to create an environment in which people feel safe to share their thoughts. That's how relationships will grow and thrive among your group members.

Here's a basic truth about spiritual growth within the context of community: the study materials aren't as important as the relationships through which those materials take practical shape in the lives of the group members. The more meaningful the relationships, the more meaningful the study. The best materials in the world won't change lives in a sterile environment.

Point to the Material

A good host or hostess creates an environment where the people in the group can connect relationally. He or she knows when to help guests connect and when to stay out of the way when those connections are happening organically. As a group leader, sometimes you'll simply read a discussion question and invite everyone to respond. The conversation will take care of itself. Other times, you may need to encourage group members to share their ideas. Remember, some of the best insights will come from the people in your group. Go with the flow, but nudge the conversation in the right direction when necessary.

Depart from the Material

We've carefully designed this study for your group. We've written the materials and structured the questions to elicit the kinds of conversations we think will be most helpful to your group members. However, that doesn't mean you should stick rigidly to the materials. Knowing when to depart from

them is more art than science, but no one knows more about your group than you do.

The stories, questions, and exercises are here to provide a framework for exploration. But different groups have different chemistries and different motivations. Sometimes the best way to start a discussion is to ask, “Does anyone have a personal insight you’d like to share from this week’s material?” Then sit back and listen.

Stay on Track

This is the flip side to the previous point. There’s an art to facilitating an engaging conversation. While you want to leave space for group members to think through the discussion, you also need to keep your objectives in mind. Make sure the discussion is contributing to the bottom line for the week. Don’t let the discussion veer off into tangents. Interject politely in order to refocus the group.

Are you ready to begin? Then let’s jump into the first session of *How to Lead in a World of Distraction*.

SESSION 1



THE DANGER OF DISTRACTION

As someone said, you will never get to the end of your journey if you stop to shy a stone at every dog that barks.

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL,
FROM *CHURCHILL BY HIMSELF*

WELCOME

Welcome to *How to Lead in a World of Distraction*. I'm glad you've decided to take this journey. This study is about getting back on track in a world that will distract you right into the ditch.

You can certainly relate. Our society is perhaps the most stressed, depressed, and anxious group of humans ever to walk the planet—and that trend is accelerating. The types and frequency of the distractions have never been greater. The result? Shallow lives that lack focus, self-awareness, and passion. I'm not okay with this. I'm guessing you're not either.

My hope in this study is to set the stage for some group discussion that will help you realize the cost of these distractions in your life, understand what those distractions are masking, and then discover some simple practices for turning down the noise. This is essential, because before you can *lead others*, you first have to *lead yourself* by overcoming your own distractions. I've seen this transformation happen in countless lives, and I've experienced it on a personal level in my own life. I promise you—you can do it, and it is worth it.

When you first meet, do your best to let go of all distractions! Put aside your smartphones and be present in the

moment with your group. Start by going around the room and introducing yourselves. Agree to be honest, engage fully, cheer each other on, and keep what's said confidential. You share a common desire to grow as leaders in this area. So commit to lean in and learn together!

SESSION OVERVIEW

None of us are immune to the distractions that are all around us. In fact, when CareerBuilder conducted a survey on distractions a few years ago, seventy-five of the 2,000 people surveyed said they lost two or more hours per day in productivity due primarily to smartphones, the internet, email, and social media. But the truth is we are losing so much more . . . and we need to recognize the toll that our distractions are taking on our lives.

You're the only one who can honestly judge your distractions, look at what they're costing you, and then do something about them. This is about learning to limit the distractions so you can gain traction on the path that reflects your true spiritual desires and be fully present to pursue the people and things that matter most. What could be more important than that?

CONVERSATION STARTER

Share a recent situation that went sideways because you were too distracted to be fully present. What were the consequences? How did you feel afterward?

VIDEO TEACHING

Watch the video segment for session one. A summary is provided for your benefit as well as space to take additional notes.

Summary

I imagine your life is filled with distractions. That's probably why you decided to go through this study. If you're anything like me, the chances you'll even get through this first session without being distracted are slim to none. Let's face it. **Distractions are real, distractions are significant, and distractions affect almost every area of our lives.**

I don't need to spend a lot of time telling you how distracted our world is. You already know that is true. There are more distractions today than ever before in the history of the world. Consider that we have a law that prohibits you from operating a motor vehicle while staring at your phone. That we even need this law is ludicrous—and it's a symptom of a deeper problem. It just stands to reason that if you're operating a machine of moving metal, you should probably focus on what's ahead. (I'm talking to myself at this point.)

Distractions know no age—this is not a generational thing, or a gender thing, or a temperament thing. I see distracted Baby Boomers. A good friend of mine called before Christmas and said, “My sixty-five-year-old parents are more distracted by their iPads than my five-year-old son. I honestly think I'm going to put restrictions on their devices!”

I see it in the Gen Xers. Not only is this generation of adults using their devices forty minutes more each day than their younger peers, but they are also the most likely to pull out their phones at the dinner table. Much of their device use

is work related and commonly justified as necessary. That *need* to stay in touch with friends, keep up with the emails at work, and manage life can easily lead to habits of distraction.

Millennials are the generation that grew up with the internet. They are the we-don't-have-to-*not*-know generation. This awareness that somewhere out there the answer can be found has created an unprecedented level of distraction. Consider all the options we have now—Google it, or Shazam it, or Wikipedia it, or ask Alexa. We no longer have to *not* know.

Generation Z is distracted as well. Just walk onto any college campus and you will see every student staring at a screen. There is not enough ADHD medicine on the planet to allow me to focus in an environment where I have the internet, FaceTime, texting, or any other screen right in front of me and still try to listen to my economics professor. No chance.

But the greatest problem with distractions is that **none of us have a plan for handling them**. That is what this study is about: *how we can lead ourselves better in a world where the distractions are growing and growing*. But before we jump into that content, we first need to know why it's so important to have a plan for handling distractions.

There are three costs at stake. The first is the **opportunity cost of the unknown**. When economists and sociologists talk about opportunity costs, they are speaking of the benefits you miss out on by choosing one thing over another. What you don't know definitely *will* hurt you. What you don't know is what you're actually missing out on because of the opportunity cost of distraction. Every opportunity lost has a cost.

The second cost is a **lack of traction**. The word *distract* comes from the term *tract*, which is “to draw,” and *dis*, which means “away from.” So a distraction is something that draws

you away from the traction you have. Traction is important. Just think of what it means when you're driving down the road. Traction compels you forward in life. If you're not careful, your distraction-filled days can lead to a traction-less life.

A third cost is the **failure to live your best life**. I think we're all done with the hashtag "living my best life." But the truth is there is a failure on your part and my part to live the best life we could live if we don't pay attention to the distractions in our way. The difference between where you are right now and where you want to be is the way you handle distractions. Distractions will hamper your ability to live your best life.

What's ultimately at stake is your own emotional health. After you've given in to a distraction and satisfied that urge, you won't even be glad you did it. But you will stop thinking about whatever it was you were thinking about—most likely something important.

As it turns out, **the best leaders in the world are the most emotionally healthy people**. This is why it is critical to have a plan to deal with the distractions that will keep you from becoming a better version of you. That is the goal of this study—not only to guide you on how to turn down the distractions but also to help you arrive at that better place.

Notes

Notes

GROUP DISCUSSION

Choose the questions that work best for your group.

- 1.** Do you believe there are more or fewer distractions in the world today than ten years ago? Give a few reasons to support your answer.

- 2.** What are the main things that cause you to lose focus or not remain present to what's going on around you? What draws you to these specific distractions?

- 3.** Journalist Nellie Bowles once said, “Technologists know how phones really work, and many have decided they don’t want their own children anywhere near them.” How does this quote make you feel? Why?
- 4.** What are the opportunity costs of some of your distractions—in other words, what could you have done or experienced had you spent that time being fully present or pursuing what really matters?
- 5.** Where are you spinning your wheels and stuck in the same routine? What would you like to do if you could gain traction in those areas?

MY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

Complete this exercise on your own. Take up to fifteen minutes.

In the space below, name the cost of distractions in the following areas:

Marriage

Children

Work

Hobbies

Rest

Faith

SESSION WRAP-UP

The danger of distraction is real . . . and costly. In this session, we've identified the problem and named what we lose when we allow ourselves to stay distracted. As leaders of ourselves and others, we're responsible for limiting our distractions so we can be present to those around us—from business relationships to family and friends.

SESSION 1

PERSONAL STUDY




If you want to enhance your group study experience, consider doing any of the following activities on your own before the next meeting.

READ

Read chapter 1, “The Danger of Distraction,” in *How to Lead in a World of Distraction*. Write down some of your key takeaways from this chapter.

DO



Try an experiment. Pick a day to turn off your phone and stay off social media from dinner until the next morning. Notice how much more present you are to those around you and the new opportunities it frees up for you. If it's a positive experience, would you consider making it a daily practice? Why or why not?

Think about some of the devastation and mayhem that a loss of traction can cause when you are driving in snow or a blizzard. Consider this dramatic imagery as you picture areas in your life where you aren't moving forward. Name one strategy for gaining traction that you are willing to try based on this week's study.

REFLECT

Read Matthew 4:1-11:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came

to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Reflect on these questions:

How did Jesus resist the enemy's temptations to be distracted from his mission? What would have been



the cost if he had allowed himself to be distracted from his purpose?



What insights does Jesus' example give about how you can resist distractions in your life?

Read Luke 10:38–42:

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

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

Reflect on these questions:

What do you think Jesus meant when he said that Mary had chosen “what is better”?

What has been a costly personal consequence of your being distracted? When is a time that you—like Martha—risked missing an opportunity because you were distracted?

APPLY

Whom do you trust to offer you honest feedback on your level of distraction? Are you willing to seek that person’s input and—without challenging their opinion—simply listen?

