

STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO
FOUR SESSIONS



I AM RESTORED

HOW I LOST MY RELIGION
BUT FOUND MY FAITH

LECRAE

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BUT FOUND MY FAITH**

STUDY GUIDE | FOUR SESSIONS

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HarperChristian
Resources

I Am Restored Study Guide

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Introduction

Welcome to the *I Am Restored* small-group study. This study guide is meant to be a companion to my book *I Am Restored*. Here's why this study is so important. Throughout my journey to restoration, I've learned the simple truth that we can face our past willingly, or our lives will force us to face it. This choice is not always easy, but it is often painfully clear. We can drown in our dysfunction, or we can choose to go down into what often feels like the valley of the shadow of death—filled with our shame and trauma—to search for hope and healing.

This is where we find restoration. But digging into the deep corners of our souls and excavating our past is the uncomfortable part of the process. It often involves dealing with our own “stuff” from our family of origin so that we are able to find healing and stop duplicating the same patterns—in our rituals or in the ways we raise our kids.

I thought I could find my own restoration by the strength of my own sheer will. But I couldn't outrun the wounds of my past. And as a result, I couldn't ignore the brokenness I experienced. Truth is, I'm still broken. I'm still trying to unpack the effects of my abuse and my father wounds to this day. I've worked hard to purge bitterness and hatred from my heart, but ignoring what was robbed from me isn't easy.

Recovering from my father's absence has been a lifelong process—a painful but necessary engagement with a dark time in my life. Add to that the trauma of abuse, and the trauma of a black kid growing up under systemic racism and violence, and the weight of the dysfunction of my world made me want to run. I was afraid that if I faced the turmoil and the chaos of my past, it would consume me. And I had too much to risk in the present for that: *my music, my family, my fame, my faith, my wife, and my life*. So I found ways to numb myself from the pain. And in doing so, I came dangerously close to sabotaging the beautiful family and the wonderful life God gave me. That is, until I found hope and healing.

As Christians, we have a lot of growing to do when it comes to talking about healthy ways to handle trauma and turmoil. In all my years of learning about theology, the church, and the Bible, I hadn't heard anything about trauma or its effect on the human body, even though countless biblical characters clearly struggled with melancholy or depression. Even Jesus wrestled with inner turmoil and pain that drove him to his knees in prayer. But I believe this growth is possible when we start to recognize the gifts God has given some of our brothers and sisters who work as trained counselors and therapists in our communities. When chaotic things happen, we need a narrative to help us make sense of things so that we can put them into context. This is what therapy does for us . . . and this is how we find healing.

Know this: God is making a masterpiece out of our mess. My brokenness made me stronger than before. The fire of it all forged something new in me. This is the hope of Christ who makes all things new in Jesus. And this is my hope for you—that through this study you will come to know the presence of God, the hope of Jesus, and that you begin to take steps toward healing as well. May you be able to say, "*I am restored.*"

—Lecrae

How to Use This Guide

The *I Am Restored* video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small-group gathering) and also as an individual study. Each session begins with a welcome section, two questions to get you thinking about the topic, and a reading from the Bible. You will then watch a video with Lecrae, which can be accessed via the streaming code found on the inside front cover. If you are doing the study with a group, you will then engage in some directed discussion. You will close each session with a time of personal reflection and prayer.

Each person in the group should have his or her own copy of this study guide and a Bible. You are also encouraged to have a copy of the *I Am Restored* book, as reading the book alongside the curriculum will provide you with deeper insights and make the journey more meaningful. See the “For Next Week” section at the end of each between-studies section for the chapter in the book that corresponds to the material your group is discussing.

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the video content for the week, ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other

members. If you choose to only go through the motions, or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you're looking for during this study.

Second, remember the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a safe place. This means being honest about your thoughts and feelings and listening carefully to everyone else's opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the guide for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, resist the temptation to fix a problem someone might be having or to correct his or her theology, as that's not the purpose of your small-group time. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, reflect on the material you've covered by engaging in the between-session activities. For each session, you may wish to complete the personal study all in one sitting or spread it out over a few days (for example, working on it a half-hour a day on different days that week). Note that if you are unable to finish (or even start!) your between-sessions personal study, you should still attend the group study video session. You are still wanted and welcome to the group even if you don't have your "homework" done.

Keep in mind the videos, discussion questions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your thoughts so you are open to both what God wants you to hear and how he wants to apply it to your life. As you go through this study, listen to what God is saying to you as you consider your own journey in light of Lecrae's journey of losing his religion and finding his faith as told in *I Am Restored*.

SESSION ONE

Facing the Turmoil

In my distress, I called to the LORD;

I called out to my God.

2 SAMUEL 22:7

Welcome

A few years ago, at the height of my career and peak of my influence, I realized my life was in disarray. At first, I just felt “off,” but then I had a few episodes of problematic behavior that quickly sank into a spiral of anguish. Maybe I was fooling people on the outside, but on the inside my life was a wreck. I was a sickly mashup of addiction and self-medication.

Looking back, I can see signs that something was happening. But I wasn’t willing to face it at the time. I was on tour with a bunch of other artists and teachers I admired. And I had just written about most of my story in my bestselling book *Unashamed*. I seemed to be at the pinnacle of my life and career, and yet on the inside, deep turmoil was brewing in my soul—a restlessness that’s hard to describe.

I pushed it away . . . for weeks, then months, and then years. But something was happening that I could no longer ignore. Underneath my problematic behavior, an uncomfortable shift was taking place in my life that threatened to derail all the greatness I had achieved. All the awards and accolades could no longer hide the weakness of my heart. I was broken and had lost sight of myself.

It's easy to say that part of the difficulty of being a public figure is people not recognizing your humanity. But the truth is, the most dangerous part of being a public figure for me was not recognizing my *own* humanity. Regardless of my popularity and professional status, when the lights went off, I was forced to live with myself.

In the middle of all this pain, I realized I didn't have the right "Christian" response. Meaning, I had to dig deeper than just saying I had "struggles" and "trials," as Christians like to call them. I had to acknowledge that I was actually dealing with *trauma* . . . and this trauma required me to address deep root issues from my past.

I was challenged by specialists and friends to interrogate my past and take an honest look at dark places I thought I had overcome. If I truly wanted to heal, I *had* to face the turmoil in my life. And I'm here to tell you, if I can do it, you can too. I am living proof that there is hope and healing on the other side of the chaos and pain if you're willing to face the turmoil.

Share

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to kick things off, briefly discuss one of the following questions:

- What is one hope or expectation you have for this study?

— or —

- What are some of the common ways you see people dealing with turmoil and emotional distress?

Read

Invite someone to read aloud Genesis 32:9–32. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then discuss the questions that follow.

⁹ Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, LORD, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’

¹⁰ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. ¹¹ Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. ¹² But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”

¹³ He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: ¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ He put them in the care of his servants, each herd

by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds."

¹⁷ He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?' ¹⁸ then you are to say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.'"

¹⁹ He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: "You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. ²⁰ And be sure to say, 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.'" For he thought, "I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me." ²¹ So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.

²² That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

³¹ The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

Why was Jacob in great fear and distress? What is significant about his wrestling with God?

What kind of distress is causing you to wrestle with God right now?

The Context

Jacob was the son of Isaac and Rebekah, brother to Esau, and husband to Rachel and Leah. Before Jacob became the founding father of the nation of Israel, he was an opportunist, a liar, and a conspirator. He was negligent and untrustworthy at times and was a husband and father who picked favorites. In other words, Jacob was just like us. He had a past full of shame, failure, and regret. He needed to confront the issues of his past so he could move forward with God. This passage represents the turning point in his life: the moment he had to stop running and come face to face with God.

Watch

Play the video segment for session one (see the streaming video access provided on the inside front cover). As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Facing the past in the present

The realization that the past affects the present

Facing the pain of childhood abuse and trauma

Telling your story as a first step to restoration

Emotional wounds must be addressed to be healed

God's presence can bring health, healing, and restoration

God promises to never leave us or forsake us

But this doesn't mean we will all be instantly healthy

Unhealthy attitudes we can bring into our relationship with God

The shift: starting to see the chaos

The brokenness of Christians heralded as a picture of health

The different perspectives in the church and society on race

How we as Christians tend to face pain

We minimize it

We over-spiritualize it

We memorialize it

Look at your story . . . and admit where you need God's healing

Character Study

In the Gospel of John, we read the story of Peter's denial. In chapter 13, the disciples are celebrating the Passover Feast in the upper room of a house. Jesus has just finished washing the feet of the disciples and is talking about some kind of betrayal. In fact, he dismisses Judas on the spot to "do quickly" what he was about to do—betray Christ. Then Jesus starts talking about leaving sometime soon, and he gives the disciples a command to love one another as Jesus has loved them. Confused and surprised, Peter asks Jesus where he's going and if he can follow Jesus. He confesses that he would lay down his life for Jesus. But Jesus answers Peter, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!" (verse 38).

In John 18, the scene is set for Peter to deny Christ. Jesus has been arrested and is being questioned by the high priest. Peter is in the crowd watching. He hangs around outside the courtyard where Jesus is being questioned. He is identified not once, not twice, but three times as one of the disciples of Jesus. Peter denies the acknowledgment every single time.

It's easy to point a finger at Peter and accuse him of treason. But what would you do? In fact, what *do* you do when your life is "on the line"?

Peter knew the weight of denial—the shame, the regret, the failure of betraying one of his best friends, a man he looked up to and loved. And yet his story didn't end there. After Jesus's resurrection, he and the disciples gathered

around a fire for a meal. Jesus asked Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter replied, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you" (John 21:15). Peter and Jesus went back and forth in conversation. Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my lambs . . . take care of my sheep . . . follow me!" (verses 15, 17, 19).

In other words, Jesus not only forgave Peter but also gave him something purposeful to do for the kingdom of God. And that's what Jesus wants to do with you . . . if you're willing to face your denial.

Discuss

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. What stood out to you from listening to Lecrae today? How has the turmoil or chaos in your life shaped your own story?
2. Lecrae noted that the first step in his journey toward restoration was to admit that the wounds of his past were affecting his present reality. Why do you think we often overlook this truth that our past wounds have an impact on us today?

3. Read 2 Samuel 12:7–14. In this scene, David is confronted by the prophet Nathan to come to terms with a sin he committed in the past. Why do you think the Lord chose to expose David's sin in this way? What does this say about the process that God will often take us through to bring our past to light so we can move forward?

4. Lecrae mentions three unhealthy ways that Christians tend to deal with pain: *minimize* it, *over-spiritualize* it, or *memorialize* it. When have you been guilty using one of these strategies to cope with your pain? What is the best way to deal with pain from your past?

5. Lecrae discussed the rejection he felt from God's people when he began to confront the chaos in his past and in his present and how this led to him "lumping them in" with God. He felt that God had turned his back on him—because that is what God's people had done. Yet the reality is that God has promised to "be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). How does this promise stand in spite of how other Christians may be treating you?

6. Lecrae notes that sometimes we move too fast, when we would be better served to slow down and look through our story. As you look back, how has God turned your suffering into hope and healing? Where do you need more of God's healing in your life?

Respond

Briefly review the outline for the video teaching and any notes you took. In the space below, write down the most significant point you took away from this session.

Pray

Pray as a group before you close your time together. Ask God to open your hearts and minds and allow you to see the places in your own life and deep in your own heart where you're experiencing turmoil and chaos. Ask God for the hope and healing that only he can provide.

SESSION ONE

Between-Sessions Personal Study

Reflect on the material you have covered during this week's group time by engaging in the following personal studies. Each day offers a short reading adapted from *I Am Restored*, along with a few reflection questions to take you deeper into the theme of this week's study. (You may also want to review chapters 1–2 in the book before you begin.) Be sure to read the reflection questions and make a few notes in your guide about the experience. At the start of your next group session, you will have a few minutes to share any insights that you learned.

Day 1: Wounded and Broken

Read: Luke 22:7–30; Isaiah 53:1–12; 1 Peter 2:21–25

I was never tough enough for any of the men in my life. And my dad was never around. My only interactions with other men involved some sort of destructive behavior. My family members forced me to fight kids from their neighborhood at a young age. Every one of them seemed to challenge my manhood, but no one helped me find it.

The fighting made me feel like an animal, a prop for their enjoyment. In their minds, they were saving me from being a “mama’s

boy,” but I wasn’t into it. I was sensitive, artistic, and fascinated by the creative. I bobbed my head when the radio played a song I liked, and I dissected the intricacies of each piece because I thought music was beautiful—which, of course, meant I was soft and less of a man in their eyes.

My adolescent world respected force and authority above all else, which only made me shrink back. I never responded like the tough gangster or courageous movie character everybody else wanted me to be. I always backed down or ran away. I was beaten, molested, and shamed by words no young man should have to hear. And each time, I ran away from the abuse—physically, mentally, emotionally—no matter how often it happened.

Music was my ticket out, my release, my path to the top. Performing was the only way I knew how to numb the pain until I couldn’t feel it anymore. I was brave, and yet so broken. But slowly over the years, I have discovered that wounds have a harsh way of resurfacing when you numb them for too long. No amount of alcohol, pleasure, or medication would make mine go away. I knew eventually I had to face my wounds if I didn’t want to feel so broken anymore. Someday, you will have to face your wounds and brokenness as well. So let’s do this together.

What are some of the wounds you've experienced in your life and the ways you've felt broken?

In the passage you read from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus took the bread, broke it, and said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." What did he mean by this? How was the body of Jesus just like the broken pieces of bread?

What do Peter and the prophet Isaiah mean when they say, "By his wounds we are healed" (1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:5)?

What are the areas in your life where you are desperate for healing? How have the brokenness and wounds of Jesus been a healing message for you?

Pray: Talk with God about your own wounds and brokenness. Ask him to give you hope when you feel despair and healing when it seems impossible.

Day 2: Shake it Off

Read: Jonah 1–4; Luke 8:40–48

We are so wired to “fix” ourselves. We read books, listen to podcasts, attend conferences and seminars, and consume an insane amount of self-help material. We try hard to “shake it off,” thinking the pain or the turmoil will disappear if we can just find the right fix for whatever we’re going through. And if we grew up in the church, we likely participated in the common response to pain and trauma by *minimizing* it, *over-spiritualizing* it, or *memorializing* it.

While this response is meant to help, it actually does more harm. The truth is, we can only fix ourselves for so long before we need to get help from outside. *Yes, we need God’s help.* But when we can’t shake off what weighs us down, we also need help from specialists—people who are skilled and educated in medical science, health, and human services.

I know from my own experience that depression and anxiety are a dangerous force together and I simply couldn’t continue to push through all of it on my own. The more I tried, the more I compounded the trauma and the more I grew numb. I needed a therapist, not a theologian—someone who could interpret my life and make sense of why I was walking through chaos without hope of escaping the tunnel. And here’s what I learned: If we’re ever going to get healthy, we have to actually turn and face our turmoil with the help of others.

We can’t just shake it off on our own. We have to do it together. How did Jonah try to fix his own situation? How did that turn out for him?

The woman who touched the cloak of Jesus was sick for more than twelve years, but no one could heal her. What was it that finally healed her?

In what ways have you minimized, over-spiritualized, or memorialized your pain?

In what ways have you tried to “shake off” your own pain and turmoil?

Pray: Talk with God about the ways you’ve tried to shake off pain and turmoil on your own. Ask him to lead you to the next steps you need to take on your journey toward hope and healing.

Day 3: Searching for Hope

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1–12; Mark 12:28–34; Romans 5:1–8

Families shape our lives in ways we can't fully appreciate until we do the hard work of understanding the patterns that made us who we are. In my own life, family has always been a sore spot for me, a place of mixed results and feelings. It's been a place of influence and also a place of abuse and childhood trauma with a dangerous apathy towards pain and dysfunction.

While the wounds of my past motivated me to be the best possible husband and father I could be, they also created a sense of denial. When I came to Jesus, I was excited to gain a new family that would fill in the gaps I had felt in my childhood. And I was greeted by a host of father figures, mentors, sisters, and brothers who would walk with me in my faith journey. But I still needed healing from the wounds of my past. Without the hope of healing, I couldn't truly step into the true freedom I had received in Christ.

At one point, I convinced myself I had found healing in my relationship with God. But because I was still in denial about how my past was affecting my present, I was really just trying to earn the approval of God. It was a pattern that had served me well in childhood, but it felt empty to me as an adult. On stage, I appeared to be healed, unashamed, and restored. Yet in my private moments, without the applause and approval of a crowd, I would sit in silence and beg God to take away my shame and sense of worthlessness that stemmed from my past.

Eventually, in the silence, God whispered to me, "*I already have.*" God had already addressed my shame, my guilt, my shortcomings, and my healing. I just had to walk it out.

What holds you back from addressing difficult things from your family of origin?

Why is it so radical that Jesus expanded the original Old Testament command to love God to include “love your neighbor as yourself”?

How does loving God and loving others lead to hope and healing?

Paul states that we have hope in the glory of God and in the glory of our sufferings. What kind of hope have you found in God? What kind of hope has been found in your suffering?

Pray: Talk with God about your search for hope and healing. Ask him to help you find the courage you need to take hold of the hope and healing that he has waiting for you.

Day 4: Following God's Script

Read: Genesis 35:9–15; Genesis 41:1–57; Acts 9:1–43; Philippians 3:12–14

When I was at one of my lowest points, I spent a lot of mental energy searching for the right way to think or act my way out of the depression and anxiety I was feeling. The more my past affected me as a person, the more depressed and anxious I became, and the more these dangerous forces affected me as a parent and a spouse.

I was desperate for some kind of script or guide on how to live a better life. It was then I remembered reading the work of a professor who wrote about rules for priests in the Torah, the law of the Old Testament. He said there were detailed scripts of what the temple *priests* were supposed to do, and yet no specific rules in Scripture for being a *king*. This sunk deep within me. There was no script for how to rule, no script for how to lead, no script for a king's loyalty and duty in God's Word. As strange as it may sound, this gave me hope as a fatherless kid who was still looking for a father-figure, a role model, a family, and a place to belong.

I couldn't follow the family script that came from the violent or absent men in my life, but God had a script for me to follow and that gave me hope for my own healing. God's script was simply to love him completely and love others—love my family well, love my neighbors faithfully—and navigate life in light of these two commands. God's script was my way out of the darkness and back into the light. God's script was my roadmap to healing.

Both Jacob and Joseph had a troubled past, yet God turned their shame, regret, and failures into something good. What was God's "script" for Jacob? What was it for Joseph?

God had a script for Paul as well. How does understanding the context of Paul's conversion story in Acts bring greater clarity to his words, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on . . ." (Philippians 3:13)?

In what ways have you experienced the script God has for you? What stories or verses from the Bible stand out to you and keep you moving forward regardless of your past?

Pray: Talk with God about the script that he has for you. Ask him to help you "forget" what is behind you so you can press toward the life ahead that he has in store for you.

Day Five: Pursuing Healing

Read: Mark 10:46–52; Luke 19:1–10; 1 John 1:5–10

At my lowest point, I remember crying out, “God, I am emotionally and relationally broken. Lead me to the people and the processes that will bring about healing.” And he did.

Now, this wasn’t immediate. And it took some time before I found my footing and could actually say that I was on the road to healing. But I definitely sensed God’s presence was with me as I took steps to pursue healing. First, I needed to own up to and confess the denial I had about my destructive behavior and the reality of my depression and anxiety. Then, I needed to pause and reconnect with God, with myself, and with my wife.

We took a vacation just to catch our breath together. That is when I realized the severity of my depression and anxiety. Two steps forward felt like three steps back, as I had a panic attack while just chilling out in our hotel room. That episode was my catalyst for taking a much-needed sabbatical from work. Pursuing healing meant I had to face who I was without the fame and recognition of being on tour or collaborating with music greats I adored. I had to face how my past was affecting my present and how my body was responding to the pain of my past even when my mind was telling me I was okay.

This led me to take the steps necessary to get the help I needed. I found a good therapist and started taking care of my body, getting the rest I needed, and being consistent with exercise, medication, and healthy food. And here’s what I learned in the process: Healing doesn’t happen on its own. Healing requires action. That’s why I talk about my pursuit of healing: confessing, pausing, reconnecting, and taking necessary steps to get healthy.

How did Bartimaeus pursue physical healing? How did Jesus respond to him?

How did Zacchaeus pursue spiritual healing? How did Jesus respond to him?

What role does confession play in our pursuit of healing?

In what ways will you choose to “live in the light” and pursue healing today?

Pray: Talk with God about your pursuit of healing. Ask him to help you find your footing by confessing, pausing, reconnecting, and taking the necessary steps toward healing.

For Next Week

Use the space below to write any insights or questions that you want to discuss at the next group meeting. In preparation for next week, read chapters 3–5 in *I Am Restored*.