

40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

SIX-SESSION STUDY GUIDE

ROMANS

IN THE GRIP OF GRACE

MAX LUCADO

WITH KEVIN & SHERRY HARNEY

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40 Days Through the Book: Romans Study Guide
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The themes of this study are drawn from the video study of the same name by Max Lucado. All other resources, including the session introductions, small group discussion questions, prayer direction, and the 40 Days learning and reflection exercises and have been written by Kevin and Sherry Harney in collaboration with Max Lucado.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Welcome to the *40 Days Through the Book* study on Romans. During the course of the next six weeks, you and your fellow group members will embark on an in-depth exploration of Paul's message to the church in Rome. During this study, you will learn when Paul wrote the book, the audience for whom it was written, and the background and context in which it was written. But, more importantly, through the teaching by Max Lucado, you will explore the key themes that Paul relates in the book—and how his teachings relate to you today.

SESSION OUTLINE

The *40 Days Through the Book* video and study guide are designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small group gathering. Each session begins with an introduction reading and question. You and your group will then watch the video message. There is an outline provided in the guide for you to take notes and gather your reflections as you watch the video. Next, you will engage in a time of directed discussion, review the memory verse for the week, and then close each session

with a time of prayer. (Note that if your group is larger, you may wish to watch the videos together and then break into smaller groups of four to six people, to ensure that everyone has time to participate in discussions.)

40-DAY JOURNEY

What is truly unique about this study, and the other studies in the *40 Days Through the Book* series, are the daily learning resources that will lead you into a deeper engagement with the text. Each week, you will be given a set of daily readings, with accompanying reflection questions, to help you explore the material that you covered during your group time.

The first day's reading will focus on the key verse to memorize for the week. In the other weekly readings, you will be invited to read a passage from the book of Romans, reflect on the text, and then respond with some guided journal questions. On the final day, you will review the key verse again and recite it from memory. As you work through the six weeks' worth of material in this section, you will read (and, in some cases, reread) the entire book of Romans.

Now, you may be wondering why you will be doing this over the course of *forty* days. Certainly, there is nothing special about that number. But there is something biblical about it. In the Bible, the number forty typically designates a time of *testing*. Noah was in the ark for forty days. Moses lived forty years in Egypt and another forty years in the desert before he led God's people. He spent forty days on Mount Sinai receiving God's laws and sent spies, for forty days, to investigate the land of Canaan. Later, God sent the prophet Jonah to warn

ancient Nineveh, for forty days, that its destruction would come because of the people's sins.

Even more critically, in the New Testament we read that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, fasting and praying. It marked a critical transition point in his ministry—the place where he set about to fulfill the mission that God had intended. During this time Jesus was tested relentlessly by the enemy . . . and prevailed. When he returned to Galilee, he was a different person than the man who had entered into the wilderness forty days before. The same will be true for you as you commit to this forty-day journey through Romans.

GROUP FACILITATION

You and your fellow group members should have your own copy of this study guide. Not only will this help you engage when your group is meeting, but it will also allow you to fully enter into the *40 Days* learning experience. Keep in mind the video, questions, and activities are simply tools to help you engage with the session. The real power and life-transformation will come as you dig into the Scriptures and seek to live out the truths you learn along the way.

Finally, you will need to appoint a leader or facilitator for the group who is responsible for starting the video teaching and for keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Leaders may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. For more thorough instructions on this role, see the Leader's Guide included at the back of this guide.

INTRODUCTION

ROMANS

AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome c. AD 57, almost three decades after the resurrection of Jesus and the birth of the Church. It is fair to say that Rome was the “center” of the world in the days of Paul. The most famous poets, politicians, philosophers, and people came from Rome, moved to Rome, or longed to visit this influential city. Paul knew that if the gospel grew healthy roots in Rome, it could spread all over the world. If the church in Rome was gripped by the grace of God, it could influence and help believers far and wide.

THE BIG PICTURE

Some of Paul’s letters were written to dear friends, others to people he had mentored, and still others to churches that knew him well. The letter to the church in Rome was different. It was written to a group of believers who had not

met Paul and were actually a bit cautious about him. He was a controversial person they had heard about but did not know personally. Paul's hope was to visit the believers in Rome on his way to Spain. So, as a preamble to their meeting, Paul sent a letter that was inspired by the Holy Spirit and came from deep within his heart. Romans is one of the richest theological works ever penned, yet it is also deeply personal.

The first eleven chapters focus with laser precision on the core beliefs of the Christian faith. If a believer wants to dig into the central teaching of the Bible, almost all of the core doctrines can be found in the book of Romans. The theme of these chapters is correct belief, or what theologians would call *orthodoxy*. Paul is showing the Roman church that his beliefs were absolutely in line with the Scriptures and the teaching of Jesus.

Starting in chapter twelve, there is a shift. With one word, the focus moves from belief to action. When Paul declares "Therefore," in Romans 12:1, he turns the reader's attention to what scholars call *orthopraxy*, or right Christian living. Once we know what we believe, we can move into action and daily behavior that honors and glorifies God.

In this one letter, Paul shows the Roman church that his beliefs and practices are unquestionably in line with the truth they have been taught. He gives a Spirit-breathed clarification of what the gospel is and how Jesus' people are to think and live in the grip of God's amazing grace. Paul, with authentic clarity and deep transparency, thus goes from being a controversial stranger to the Romans to a brother and friend—before they ever meet him.

Paul's words to the Romans contained the power to save souls, shape minds, and transform lives for the glory of Jesus. The exciting thing is that reading this book of the Bible can

still do all of these things today! So brace yourself as you read this letter from Paul.

EPIC THEMES

There are several themes in Romans that are worthy of our focus. Some of these include:

- **The reality, danger, and power of sin.** Sin is the deepest problem that human beings face and has eternal consequences (see Romans 1–2).
- **God’s grace is real, amazing, and available to all people.** Through Jesus, every person is invited to enter a relationship with the Father and be cleansed of their sin (see Romans 3–5).
- **God has broken our chains and set us free, but the battle with sin continues.** Our old way of life is dead and we are alive in Jesus, but the process of spiritual growth and becoming like Jesus takes a lifetime and demands continual surrender to the will and ways of God (see Romans 6–8).
- **God’s beautiful story comes in four movements: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.** We are part of a spiritual family tree that spans the Old and New Testaments in the Bible. God is engrafting us into a bigger story and family than we can imagine (see Romans 9–11).

- **Christians follow in the steps of their Savior.** This means that we walk the pathway of love. In a world driven by selfish ambition and self-centered demands, we humbly serve and sacrificially love others (see Romans 12–13).
- **Followers of Jesus are like passengers on a ship.** We are all on the same journey. We are part of an amazing family of faith, and God calls us to live in fellowship with each other (see Romans 14–16).

In the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans, the apostle Paul lays out the core beliefs of the Christian faith with clarity and precision. Then, in the final five chapters, Paul reveals how to live in ways consistent with those beliefs. So, as you start this journey, ask God to help you *understand* your faith at a deeper level than you ever have before, and then pray for the courage and strength to *live out* what you learn in your daily life. In addition, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand God's grace, walk in that grace, and share it freely with every person you meet.

SESSION 1

THE PROBLEM WE FACE

ROMANS 1-2

There is a problem that every human being faces called sin. It leads to consequences that are bigger than we realize. Try as we might, we can't solve this problem on our own. Thankfully, God has a solution, and he desires to deal with our sin.

WELCOME

When you look at the top-grossing movies of all time, there is one fascinating common trait that stands out: *heroes!* From the *Star Wars* movies to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy to the *Avengers* franchise, about 60 percent of the top movies are stories of heroes. Even *The Ten Commandments*, which was made in 1956, shows up in the top ten-grossing movies of all time and presents Moses as a type of hero—and God as the ultimate hero.

All of this raises the question as to why we people are so drawn to heroes. But before we can answer that question, we first have to consider what a hero is. One simple definition is, “A person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.” In movies, these characters tend to do things that are far and above what “ordinary” people could or would choose to do. A war hero rushes back into battle to drag injured soldiers out of harm’s way. A superhero flies in to save the day, or summons sea creatures to do their bidding, or throws a massive hammer that returns to their hand after defeating their enemies.

We are drawn to heroes because they have the courage, noble qualities, and power to change the world that we desire for our own lives. We admire these traits because they are rare in this world today. In fact, most of us would likely say we have never met a true hero.

Or have we?

If a hero is truly someone who lives with courage, achieves great things, and does that which is noble, then maybe we have met more heroes than we have recognized. When a person loves Jesus and follows his will, he or she might just qualify as a hero. Maybe your prayer-warrior grandmother was a hero. Maybe that faithful Sunday school teacher who opened the Bible and shared with middle school kids for three decades was a hero. Perhaps ordinary people who dare to follow God and obey his Word can become heroes.

Movies are nice, but what we need to see in this life are *real* people who live heroically as they follow Jesus, the ultimate hero. As we begin our forty-day journey through the book of Romans, we meet such a hero in the apostle Paul. His devotion to Jesus, his boldness to speak (and write) the

truth, and his understanding of God's grace all serve as examples that we can seek to follow as we walk through the book of Romans.

SHARE

Think about the definition of a hero as being someone who has lived courageously with outstanding achievements and noble qualities. Who is someone you know who has lived such a heroic life? What is it about this person that makes them a hero in your eyes?

WATCH

Play the video for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or key points that stand out to you.

Paul, an unusual but true hero (Romans 1:1–2)

Setting the scene: a prelude to a visit from Paul

SESSION 1

A clear presentation of Christian doctrine from an unlikely source

The bad news first: the reality of sin and wrath (Romans 1:18–20)

How do we respond to sin?

Hedonism: pretending God does not exist (Romans 1:18–23)

Judgmentalism: ignoring our sinfulness and condemning others (Romans 2:1–3)

THE PROBLEM WE FACE

Legalism: trying to use religion to earn our way to God
(Romans 2:17–29)

The bottom line: *grace!*

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

1. What impacted you the most as you watched Max's teaching on Romans 1–2?

- 5. Read Romans 2:1–4.** What are signs or indicators that we are focusing on the sins of others while ignoring our own failings? Why is this so dangerous?
- 6. Read Romans 2:17–24.** If we compare ourselves to people who are living deep in sin and are rebellious toward God, how can this bolster a false sense of self-righteousness? If we compare ourselves to Jesus, what does this do to our arrogance and self-reliance?

MEMORIZE

In each session, you will be given a key verse (or verses) from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verse is from Romans 1:16:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Have everyone recite this verse out loud. Then go around the room again and have everyone try to say the verse completely from memory.

RESPOND

What will you take away from this session? What is a practical next step you can take that will move you toward fully embracing the grace of Jesus rather than being hedonistic, judgmental, or legalistic? Take a few moments to write down your thoughts.

PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have pursued your own hedonistic desires and forgotten to surrender to God's will for your life.
- Ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to help you stop judging others and look honestly at the need for repentance in your own heart and life.
- Pray for freedom from legalism and for deep understanding of God's grace in your life.

YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

SESSION ONE

Reflect on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin with a day to preview the biblical theme from the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of Romans, reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, on the last day, you will review the epic theme of the session, reflect on what you have learned, and review how it has impacted your life.

DAY 1

Memorize: Begin this week's personal study by reciting Romans 1:16:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Now try to say the verse completely from memory.

Reflect: What does this tell you about the power of the gospel in your life?

DAY 2

Read: Romans 1:1-17.

Reflect: Among other things, the book of Romans is an introduction of the apostle Paul to the Christians in the city of Rome. If all you knew about Paul was found in these opening seventeen verses of the letter, what would you learn about his heart, relationship to Jesus, and care for God's church? Think about how you would picture Paul after reading these words.

Journal:

- As you read Romans 1:16-17, what do you learn about the gospel?

- Our faith is central to the gospel. What do you learn about the place of faith in this passage? How is your faith growing (if indeed it is)?

Pray: Ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to help you live by faith every moment of the day.

DAY 3

Read: Romans 1:18–32.

Reflect: As you read Romans 1:18–32, notice the recurring line in verses 24, 26, and 28: “God gave them over.” It paints a picture of a downward spiral deeper and deeper into sin. What does this spiral look like in our world? In your own life?

Journal:

- Why do you think God, who loves us and wants us to be gripped by his grace, would give us over to our sin and allow us to keep running from him?

- What can you do to break the pattern of this downward spiral in your own life?

Pray: Confess where you see yourself running into sin and resisting God. Ask for power to turn back to God.

DAY 4

Read: Romans 2:1-16.

Reflect: We are all tempted to wear the judge's robe and spend too much time focusing on the sins and problems of other people. Think about your attitude toward others. What are some ways you can identify that you sit as "judge and jury"?

Journal:

- Why is God opposed to you and me sitting as the judge over other people?

- What are two or three ways that you tend to have a judgmental attitude?

Pray: Ask for forgiveness for any judgmental attitudes and actions and pray for eyes to see others the way God does.

DAY 5

Read: Romans 2:17–29.

Reflect: In the days of the apostle Paul, there were many people who lived with spiritual pride, religious arrogance, and bloated egos. The temptation to be a legalist and glory in our own “super spirituality” still exists today. Think back over the past week and take note of times that your attitudes, actions, or words were legalistic. What can you do to show more grace and respond with a less legalistic attitude toward others?

Journal:

- What were some of the legalistic and spiritually arrogant attitudes in the lives of the people to whom Paul was writing?
- What are some of the patterns of religious pride and legalism that can capture the heart of a Christian today? Reflect on your own life to make sure you are not exhibiting any of these patterns.

Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where legalism or religious arrogance has crept into your heart.

DAY 6

Read: Romans 2:21–32.

Reflect: We are messed up because of sin, and God wants to make us whole and healthy. This is the epic theme of these opening chapters of Romans. If we miss the truth that sin is more prevalent and dangerous than we think, we have not

read this passage closely enough. If we begin to see the greatness of God's grace and willingness to deal with our sin, we are starting to get the big message. What is one step you can take in your own life to stop the downward spiral of sin pictured in this passage?

Journal:

- How do these chapters in Romans open your eyes to the reality of sin and the vastness of God's grace?
- Write a brief prayer of thanks for the gift of grace God has lavished on you.

Pray: Thank God that sin does not have the final word, but that his grace is greater than all our sins.

DAY 7

Memorize: Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting Romans 1:16:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Now try to say the verse completely from memory.

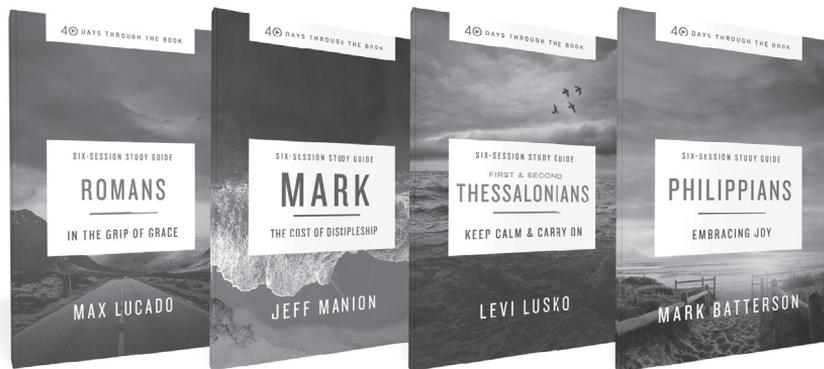
Reflect: What does God's gift of salvation mean to you personally?

40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

Study Books of the Bible with Trusted Pastors

The 40 Days Through the Book series has been designed to help believers more actively engage with God's Word. Each study encourages participants to read through one book in the New Testament at least once during the course of 40 days and provides them with:

- A clear understanding of the background and culture in which the book was written,
- Insights into key passages of Scripture, and
- Clear applications and takeaways from the particular book that participants can apply to their lives.



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MARK

IN THE COMPANY OF CHRIST

JEFF MANION

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INTRODUCTION

MARK

AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

John Mark was not one of the original disciples of Jesus. His name first appears in the book of Acts, after Peter miraculously escaped from prison and made his way to a home that belonged to John Mark's mother (see Acts 12:12). From there, the young man became a traveling companion of Paul and Barnabas, until he deserted them in Pamphylia, causing a rift between the two men (see 12:25; 13:13; 15:39). John Mark went on to travel with Barnabas, but scholars believe he maintained a close association with Peter, from whom he learned about the Savior. John Mark penned his fast-paced Gospel just a few decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the early AD 60s, to believers in Rome and around the Roman world. This was a time of severe persecution, and his Gospel brought hope to those who were feeling discouraged. It also gave clarity for anyone who wondered what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

THE BIG PICTURE

While the three other Gospel writers—Matthew, Luke, and John—focused on details of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection, Mark gets right to the heart of the matter. A few decades had passed since Jesus’ ministry, and some people were growing a bit fuzzy about what it meant to be a follower of the Messiah. Persecution of Christians was intensifying, and there was a temptation among the believers to compromise, apologize, or simply give up on their faith. Sadly, some were doing exactly that!

So, Mark needed to take the early Christians back to the basics. With clarity and precise language, he pulls no punches as he explains exactly what it means to be a follower of Christ. As we read his words, we discover an invitation to ask: *Who is this Jesus? What does he expect of me? Is suffering a normal part of the Christian life? What will encourage and strengthen my trust in Jesus?* These are questions that all who put their faith in Jesus—at some point in their lives—will ask themselves, maybe again and again. These questions are not born of a lack of faith but serve to strengthen and stabilize our relationship with the Savior.

As we read John Mark’s rapid-fire account of the ministry of Jesus, we find answers to these questions . . . and many others. When we embrace these biblical answers, our faith will solidify, our hope will deepen, and our pathway forward will grow clear. We will find that God’s strength fills us as Jesus draws near. So lace up your running shoes. Open your heart and mind. And come with your questions! Get ready to move as Mark’s Gospel reveals what it means to follow Jesus. Your life will never be the same.

EPIC THEMES

There are several themes in Romans that are worthy of our focus. Some of these include:

- **Jesus has been given all authority.** This authority was clear for everyone to see. Jesus had power over the natural world, spiritual forces, sickness, and even death. As people encountered the Savior and recognized this, they were either drawn to him or resisted him (see Mark 1–3).
- **Jesus calls us and sends us out.** There were many people who flooded to Jesus and were drawn to his ministry. But out of the many, Jesus called twelve men to be with him and to go out with his message to the world. Jesus calls people near to him, and then he sends them out (see Mark 3–6).
- **Jesus was always willing to reveal God’s truth.** Even those who walked closest to Jesus and witnessed his power, ministry, and character did not fully understand who he was or what he expected of them. Although many others seemed to be deaf to the truth of God and blind to who he was, Jesus was always ready to open ears and give sight to the blind (see Mark 6–8).
- **Jesus redefined greatness.** Jesus told his followers that he would suffer and die. He also declared on multiple occasions that after he died, he would rise

from the grave. He wanted his followers to understand that humble service was the path of discipleship. Greatness is found in following him and walking the path of sacrifice (see Mark 8–10).

- **Jesus is the King of heaven and ruler of an eternal kingdom.** Near the end of Jesus' life, as he came to Jerusalem, he presented himself as the King. The crowds celebrated this declaration, but the religious leaders challenged his authority at every turn and eventually had him put to death (see Mark 11–13).
- **Jesus rose from the grave.** Jesus, the servant King, was arrested, mocked, abused, tried, crucified, and executed on a cross. He was placed in a tomb and was dead for three days. But then he rose again in glory, power, and eternal authority over hell, death, and the grave. Jesus is still the King of all kings and rules today and for eternity (see Mark 14–16).

Those who prefer a slow and ambling journey through the life of Jesus that fills in every blank and has a flourish on every sentence will struggle with Mark's Gospel. But those who love to get to the point, who prefer direct communication, and who appreciate it when others tell it like it is, will delight in Mark's approach. So, as you start this journey, take a deep breath, say a prayer, and get ready to move at the rapid pace of Mark's Gospel.

THE INVITATION

MARK 1:1–3:6

In the opening chapters of Mark, we see the meteoric rise of Jesus. We then witness conflict when the religious leaders decide they do not like what Jesus is teaching and how the crowds are drawn to him. Jesus is helping the people of his day understand who he is and what he expects of those who make the decision to follow him.

WELCOME

When expectations are crystal clear, everyone benefits. Just consider the workplace. Employers who give their new employees a written job description with detailed responsibilities and expectations avoid all kinds of future problems. Just imagine a boss telling a brand-new employee, “We don’t have job descriptions or specific responsibilities for our employees. We just hope you figure things out as you go!” It would be a recipe for disaster.

Likewise, couples repeat vows at their wedding ceremony to set up clear expectations. The couple vows to stick together and love each other “in sickness and in health, for better and for worse,” for as long as they both shall live. We have all heard these words at weddings. Why do they matter? Because any significant commitment involves setting up clear expectations and declarations of how the parties will conduct themselves.

In our modern world, we often end up skimming over words of commitment and rashly clicking the approve button. Just think about those agreements or contracts that pop up on a computer or tablet. When was the last time you actually *read* every word in these agreements? Most of us just scroll to the end and click “agree” without a second thought.

In the Gospel of Mark, we find that Jesus gave us clear expectations about *who he was* and *what he expects of us*. When it comes to following Jesus, we are wise to slow down and read the fine print. There is nothing better than being a disciple of Jesus, but there is also nothing that will call us to greater commitment and sacrifice.

So, as you begin this study, pay close attention to the words of this powerful biography of Jesus. It will reveal who Jesus is with staggering precision. It will also show who you are to be and what is expected if you are going to bear his name and accept the call to follow him.

SHARE

Think about when you first made the decision to follow Jesus. What did you think was expected of a Christian? How has your understanding changed and matured over time?

WATCH

Play the video for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or key points that stand out to you.

Background information on Mark's Gospel

Two key questions in the Gospel of Mark:

Who is Jesus?

What does he want?

John the Baptist prepares the way (Mark 1:2–8)

Jesus is introduced (Mark 1:9–13)

SESSION 1

Calling the first disciples—a mission of “kingdom expansion”
(Mark 1:16–20)

Jesus’ growing popularity (Mark 1:21–45)

Growing tensions with the religious establishment:

Conflict over **forgiveness of sins** (Mark 2:1–12)

Conflict over **friendships** (Mark 2:13–17)

Conflict over **fasting** (Mark 2:18–22)

Conflict over **working on the Sabbath** (Mark 2:23–28)

Conflict over healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1–6)

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

1. What impacted you the most as you watched Jeff's teaching on Mark 1:1–3:6?
2. **Read Mark 1:2–3, 7–8, 10–11, 24, and 27.** What do you learn about who Jesus is as you read these passages from a variety of different perspectives? How would you respond if a non-believing friend asked you, "Who is Jesus?"
3. **Read Mark 1:16–20.** When did you first accept the invitation to follow Jesus? How have you tried to live out the expectations that Jesus lays out in this passage?

4. The people of Jesus' day were amazed at his authority. In the opening chapter of Mark, we read how Jesus had power over demonic forces (see 1:21–28), illnesses (see verses 29–34), and relationships between people (see verses 40–45). How have you seen Jesus set a person free from the influence of sin? How have you seen Jesus bring healing into a person's life? How have you seen Jesus heal a broken relationship?

5. **Read Mark 2:1–12.** Why were the religious leaders so upset that Jesus declared this man to be forgiven of his sins? Why does Jesus have the authority to forgive sins?

6. **Read Mark 2:13–17.** In the first century, a Rabbi would never have been seen sharing intimate table fellowship with tax collectors and "sinners." What do you learn about Jesus as you read this passage? What are some ways you can follow his example when it comes to helping broken and lost people encounter the love and grace of God?

MEMORIZE

Each session, you will be given a key verse (or verses) from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verses are from Mark 1:16–17:

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”

Have everyone recite these verses out loud. Then go around the room again and have everyone try to say them completely from memory.

RESPOND

What will you take away from this session? What is a practical next step you can take in the coming week as you seek to understand Jesus’ expectations of his disciples?

PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you learn more about who Jesus is as you walk through the Gospel of Mark together during the coming sessions.
- Ask Jesus to fill you with power to live in ways that fulfill his desires and expectations of his disciples.
- Praise Jesus for his amazing authority over all things and ask him to unleash that power in your life, home, church, and community.

YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

SESSION ONE

Reflect on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin by reviewing the key verses to memorize for the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of Mark, reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, on the last day, you will again review the key verses and reflect on what you have learned for the week.

DAY 1

Memorize: Begin this week's personal study by reciting Mark 1:16–17:

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

Now try to say these verses completely from memory.

Reflect: John Mark tells a story of *good news* from the beginning to the end of his Gospel. Jesus, the Savior, has come. He is God's beloved Son, and his kingdom is breaking into human history. Whether you are a new believer or a long-time follower of Christ, what good news have you experienced because of your relationship with the Lord? How do you express your thankfulness that God has brought this good news?

DAY 2

Read: Mark 1:1–15.

Reflect: This section of Mark begins and ends with the words “good news.” Mark starts by telling the world that the “good news” begins with Jesus the Messiah. Just fifteen verses later, we hear Jesus proclaim the “good news.” In his own words, he declares, “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news” (verse 15). The coming of Jesus is good news in every way possible. How is Jesus the source of good news in the world and in your life? What are some ways you can share the good news of Jesus with people around you who live in a world saturated with bad news?

Journal:

- What were some of the conditions in the world at the time Mark wrote his Gospel that made good news so needed and welcomed?
- What are some things in our world today that make the good news of Jesus stand out?

Pray: Thank Jesus for leaving heaven, entering our world, and bringing good news to every person who will receive what he has to offer.

DAY 3

Read: Mark 1:16–28.

Reflect: Jesus' invitation was simple but powerful: "Follow me." All four of the men Jesus invited to be his disciples freely left their careers and began a new life. They stopped fishing with nets and began to fish for people. They followed their Rabbi, Jesus, and walked with him, traveled where he went, learned from his teaching, and became like their leader. What have you left behind so that you could follow Jesus and

engage in his plan for your life? What do you still need to lay down and surrender so that you can fully live for Jesus?

Journal:

- How has it felt to leave things behind, make sacrifices, and surrender your will for the sake of Jesus?
- What is one thing that you are having a hard time letting go? What step can you take to lay this down and follow Jesus with greater abandon?

Pray: Ask God to give you wisdom to see what still needs to be laid down and left behind as you follow Jesus. Pray for the courage to follow Jesus no matter the cost or the sacrifice.

DAY 4

Read: Mark 1:29–45.

Reflect: This section of Mark starts with an intense day of ministry where Jesus heals, leads a revival meeting, and casts out demons. It ends with Jesus healing a man with leprosy. In the middle of this action, Jesus slips away early in the

morning to find a quiet place so he can talk with his Father. He takes a walk in the dark, finds a solitary place, and prays. It seems the more intense life became, the more Jesus needed to be in the presence of the Father. How does busyness and an intense schedule impact your prayer life? What can you do to make space to pray and meet with Jesus on a regular basis?

Journal:

- What are some of the habits, patterns, and disciplines you have developed that have helped you better connect with God?
- What experiences in your day seem to push you away from God? How can you make space to meet with God during those times?

DAY 5

Read: Mark 2:1-17.

Reflect: There are many characters in this story. As always, Jesus is central. But as you read this story, pay special attention to the religious leaders (the teachers of the law). These are religious professionals. As Jesus is speaking, they ask

themselves a great question: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (verse 7). The answer is important: “No one!” Only God can forgive sins. But this is Jesus’ point. He is God, fully divine, the Almighty One! Mark asks this question—“who is Jesus?”—again and again in his Gospel. Our Savior gives an answer in this passage . . . He is God! How has Jesus extended forgiveness to you as you walk with him each day? How will you pray for those in your life who need to know the forgiveness they long for is found in Christ?

Journal:

- As you think about this passage, what were the religious leaders right about? What were the religious leaders wrong about?
- Since Jesus is divine and fully God, how should this view the way you think about him, worship him, and follow him?

Pray: Lift up praise to Jesus as God Almighty, your Creator, and the One who paid the full price so that your sins could be washed away.

DAY 6

Read: Mark 2:18–3:6.

Reflect: There is a lot of intensity and emotion in this passage. A man with a physical ailment needs healing. The religious leaders are suspicious of Jesus and seeking to accuse him of breaking their laws. Jesus is deeply concerned for the man and cares about his condition. When he asks the religious leaders about the appropriateness of healing the man right then and there—on the *Sabbath*—they stay silent and stubborn. Jesus is angry and deeply distressed at the condition of their hearts. For them, religion had become more important than people.

At the end of the passage, Jesus heals the man. This should have brought joy to everyone—including the religious leaders. But they were so upset at Jesus breaking their rules that they want to have him executed. What are some ways religious rules and observances can actually get in the way of following Jesus? Are there any religious rituals, rules, or observances that are a roadblock to you following the Savior?

Journal:

- What are some of the man-made rules and regulations that can get in the way of following Jesus?

- In what ways do you need to focus more on your Savior and less on human regulations?

Pray: Thank Jesus for loving people more than upholding religious traditions. Pray for your heart and life to mirror his example of compassion and action that sets people free.

DAY 7

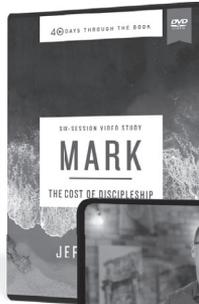
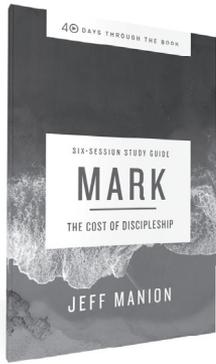
Memorize: Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting Mark 1:16–17:

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

Now try to say these verses completely from memory.

Reflect: Come follow me! Go out and live for me! This was Jesus' call to his first disciples—and his call to us today. What does it mean for you to follow Jesus in the flow of a normal day? What are some ways that you sense Jesus is calling you to go out and live for him?

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MARK

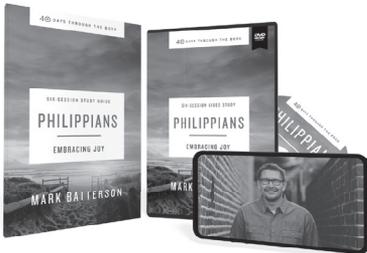
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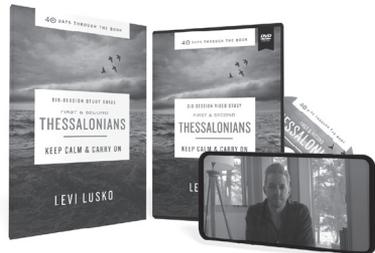
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4  DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

A WORLD-CHANGING FAITH

SIX-SESSION STUDY GUIDE

LEVI LUSKO

WITH KEVIN & SHERRY HARNEY



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40 Days Through the Book: 1 & 2 Thessalonians Study Guide

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The themes of this study are drawn from the video study of the same name by Levi Lusko. All other resources, including the session introductions, small group discussion questions, prayer direction, and the 40 Days learning and reflection exercises, have been written by Kevin and Sherry Harney in collaboration with Levi Lusko.

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INTRODUCTION

I AND 2 THESSALONIANS

AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

The letters to God's people in the church in Thessalonica were written by Paul, the Pastor. First and Second Thessalonians came from deep within his pastoral heart. Although there are clear theological underpinnings, Paul's primary focus in these letters is how we should live more than a deep exposition of what we are to believe. These profoundly personal letters were written around AD 50–52 and address what it looks like to live as a Christian. These letters were written to real-life people living in the largest city in Macedonia. This capital city was at the crossroads of the world. Positioned on the Via Egnatia and Thermic Gulf (both travel and trade routes), Thessalonica was a center of culture, religion (of every sort), and trade.

THE BIG PICTURE

When Paul and his ministry companions arrived in the city of Thessalonica, they came battered, bruised, and weary. They had just been in Philippi and had been stripped, flogged, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison. After being miraculously set free from jail and leading a revival meeting with the jailer and his family, they moved on (see Acts 16:16–40). The next stop was Thessalonica (see Acts 17:1–9).

Rather than find a quiet place to lick his wounds and have a little “me time,” Paul went right to the synagogue in Thessalonica and for three weeks in a row he preached the message of Jesus the Messiah. By the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit, some Jews became Jesus followers and many Greeks who were spiritually hungry also came to faith in the Savior.

Once again, conflict arose, mobs incited violence, and the Christians in the city packed up Paul and his ministry companions and sent them on to Berea. They were only in Thessalonica for a couple of months, but Paul fell in love with the people in this fresh new Jesus community.

What happened next is staggering and beautiful! It stands as an example for all Christians, in all places, at all times. The believers in the city of Thessalonica fell so in love with Jesus and followed the Savior with such passion, that word of their faith began to spread from city to city. Paul would show up in a new region to do ministry and the people there were already talking about how the Thessalonian believers had warmly welcomed Paul and his companions, how they had rejected idols and embraced the true and living

God, and how their lives were focused fully on Jesus (see 1 Thessalonians 1:7–10).

In response, Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write two short, power-packed letters to this group of passionate Jesus followers. The first letter is only 89 verses. The second is 47 verses. Think about it, Psalm 119 is 150 verses long. The two letters to the Thessalonian church are only 136 verses combined. Yet, Paul addresses many of the core beliefs and practices Christians of all maturity levels need to know about to honor Jesus and impact the world.

The books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians stand out as deeply pastoral and practical for all believers. If you want to remember what really matters about faith in Jesus and hear the call to follow Jesus on your daily adventure of faith, these books will propel you forward on your journey.

EPIC THEMES

There are several themes in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that are worthy of our focus. Some of these include:

- **The power of an effective witness.** Be a faithful and passionate follower of Jesus and the world will see and be impacted (1 Thessalonians chapter 1 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 1).
- **God delights in resilient faith.** Stand strong in your faith and hang in there, even when things get tough (1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 2).

- **Keep the gospel of Jesus central . . . always.** There are many things that matter, but at the center of our faith and lives should be the good news of Jesus (1 Thessalonians chapter 2).
- **Live with Christian love, care, and family tenderness.** We should be concerned for the well-being of others. Of all the commandments, Jesus was clear that loving people should always be central to who we are and what we do (1 Thessalonians chapter 3).
- **Let Jesus be Lord of all.** Follow Jesus and live for him in every part of your life. This is what it means to be his follower (1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 3).
- **This life is not the end of the story.** Jesus will come again! So, we are to live for our Savior every day and be ready to see him face to face for eternity (1 Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 2).

Thessalonica was positioned on major trade routes—a cultural center and a hub of all sorts of religious activity. If the good news of Jesus could take root in this place, it would spread across the known world. There were travelers in and out of this region daily and they were headed to the ends of the earth . . . literally! The simple truths that God taught these believers through the letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians were world-changing. They still are! These same truths can transform your life and continue through you to impact people all over your world.

THE WORD IS OUT

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

When we encounter Jesus, the Messiah, everything changes. When our lives are transformed by the power of the Savior, people notice, the word gets out, and the good news spreads.

WELCOME

What does it take for the word to get out? How fast does news spread? At the speed of thought, the typing of a message, and the hitting of a send button. In a world of social media and instant global communication, the word gets out in about thirty seconds.

Good news, bad news, world updates, personal secrets, accurate or inaccurate, news spreads faster than wildfire! It has not always been this way. Just a few short decades ago,

people used phones as a primary means of communication, and they would pass on information to one person at a time. Before that, they sent letters that were hand sorted and delivered days later. The word would get out, but it was much slower. If the average person wanted to get the word on newsworthy stories and topics, they had to wait until evening and turn on their television so they could hear a news anchor report on the day's stories.

In the ancient world of the New Testament, getting the word out was very difficult. No phones, no computers, no TV, no social media. Communication happened person to person and most of it was verbal. A vast part of the population did not read, and the cost of writing materials was high. Even if a letter was written, it had to be hand carried from one place to another. In the days of the apostle Paul, news traveled exceedingly slow.

What was staggering about the church in the city of Thessalonica is that in a world with no social media, phones, or postal services, the word about their faith and love for Jesus moved faster than the apostle Paul could travel. It seemed that everywhere he went, the story of their bold and deep faith got there first.

Imagine if this were to happen to you and your church. What if the story of your church and your personal faith was spreading all over your city, county, and state? What story would be told? What themes would emerge? If someone were to post pictures and stories about how you live for Jesus, would that be a good thing? Would the world be inspired by your example? Would your life of faith draw people to Jesus and bring glory to his name?

SHARE

If someone secretly followed you around for a week and took pictures of what you did and recorded what you said, what are some of the positive things they could tell others to get the word out on your life? What would they see that points to the presence, power, and beauty of Jesus?

WATCH

Play the video for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or key points that stand out to you.

A powerful overview of the Christian journey

1 and 2 Thessalonians is for everyone . . . for both the new believer and the mature follower of Jesus

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Meeting Levi, his family, and a dog named Tabasco

The **Why**: The word was out

The **Who**: Paul and his ministry team

The **First Connection**: Affirmation and Correction

The **Second Connection**: Communication and
Demonstration

The Third Connection: Tribulation and Jubilation

The Fourth and Final Connection: Reception and Transmission

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

- I. What impacted you the most as you watched Levi's teaching on 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10?

2. What are signs that we are growing in faith, love, and hope? Which of these three characteristics has been strongest in your life over the past month and how do you see this attribute growing?

What are indicators that a person's faith, love, and hope are waning and need to be rekindled? Which of these three needs more attention in your own life and what is one step you can take to increase it?

3. **Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4–7.** Tell about a person in your life who has clearly communicated the message of the Bible to you. Share one lesson you have learned from this person who models what it looks like to embrace the beauty of God's truth. How are you seeking to follow the example of this person and teach the message of the Bible to another person?

4. Describe different ways God pricks our heart, holds up a mirror for us to see something wrong, or wakes us up to an area of much needed growth. Why do you think God does this? Tell about a time God did this in the past or how he is doing it right now. What does God want to transform in you, and how can your group members be part of this journey of growth?

5. **Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6–10.** Describe, in your own words, what the people around the ancient world were saying about the Christians in the Thessalonian church. What would it mean in your community today if everyone was saying the same sorts of things about you and the members of your congregation?

6. Tell about a person who you long to come to faith in Jesus. How can your group members support you and inspire you in your journey of gospel transmission to this person?

MEMORIZE

Each session, you will be given a key verse from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verse is 1 Thessalonians 1:3:

We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have everyone recite this verse out loud. Ask for any volunteers who would like to say the verse from memory.

RESPOND

What will you take away from this session? What is one practical next step you can take to carry the love and truth of Jesus to the unique places you go in the flow of a normal week?

PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Thank God for the people in your life who have lived as an example of mature faith.

THE WORD IS OUT

- Ask God to help you live in a way that communicates the love and good news of Jesus and that also demonstrates the love and grace of Jesus.
- Pray for your group members to experience deep and lasting joy, even in times of tribulation.
- Lift up a prayer for one person in your personal circle who really needs to receive the gospel of Jesus. Offer yourself to God and invite him to use you to share Jesus naturally with this person.

YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

SESSION ONE

Reject on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin by reviewing the key verse to memorize for the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, the last day, you will review the key verse and reflect on what you have learned for the week.

DAY I

Memorize: Begin this week's personal study by reciting 1 Thessalonians 1:3:

We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now try to say the verse from memory.

Reflect: Take time throughout the day to take note of your words, actions, attitudes, motives. Pay special attention to where your faith is alive and active. Think about what people see and might be saying about you and your faith. Be humble and honest. Without being prideful, what are ways you can let your faith in Jesus be noticed by the people you encounter in a normal day?

DAY 2

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1-2.

Reflect: We can speak well of other believers and local churches. Take time this week to learn about a church in your community (other than the one you attend). Browse their website. You may want to ask a friend or neighbor about the church they attend and what they love about their church family and the ministry of their church. Then, make a point of telling others (in your church, other churches, or even non-believers) about the good things you have heard about that church. Get the word out and bless that church. You might even write a note to their pastor and thank them for their ministry.

Journal:

- List ways you could affirm and celebrate the lives of Christians you know. Be specific and be sure these are doable and practical. Also, include one action you can take to get out the good word.
- What keeps you from affirming other people and churches? What can you do to overcome this obstacle?

Pray: Ask God for eyes to see the good things in other believers and churches. Then, pray for the Holy Spirit to give you courage to speak well of this person or church in public settings.

DAY 3

Read: 1 Thessalonians 3–4.

Reflect: Use your journal space below to make a list of three Christians you know who are really seeking to follow Jesus. Next to their names, write one or two positive behaviors or actions you see in their lives. Then, send them a text, email, or call to affirm them for being a wonderful example for you and others.

Journal:

- List of behaviors you see in mature Christians that inspire you to be more like Jesus.
- Write a prayer asking God to infuse you with Holy Spirit power to adopt one of these behaviors for yourself.

Pray: Ask God to give you courage to regularly and consistently affirm the people in your life. Pray for eyes to see the good examples of others and adopt these God-honoring practices in your own life.

DAY 4

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5.

Reflect: Make an effort to align your words and your actions. Look for times you say something but fail to act on it. Christians are notorious for saying things like, “I’ll pray for you,” and then

they forget to pray. If this happens to you, consider one of these solutions: (1) Don't say, "I'll pray for you." Instead, say, "May I pray for you right now?" Then, do it. (2) If you say you will pray, stop right then and there, and add a daily reminder on your phone so you have a pop-up every day for a week. (3) The minute you have open time following the encounter when you promised to pray, carve out a few minutes to lift up the need you promised to pray for.

Pick one area of your life where there is no alignment between words and actions and make a plan to correct it.

Journal:

- Write down the area you want to work on aligning your words and actions.
- Write down two or three ways you can take a practical step to make this alignment.

Pray: Ask God to open your eyes to see where your words and actions need to be consistent.

DAY 5

Read: 2 Thessalonians 1.

Reflect: Read Acts 16:16–40 and study the situation and attitudes of Paul and Silas. Read Philippians 4:4–7 and reflect on how these words relate to a situation such as the one Paul faced in Acts 16. Think about how you respond to hard times and what happens to your joy quotient in these difficult situations.

Journal:

- Write down your thoughts as you read Acts 16:16–40 and Philippians 4:4–7.
- Take note of how you tend to respond in hard times and how much joy (or lack of joy) you have when times are tough.

Pray: Ask God to help you keep your eyes on him and your heart joyful in the tough times of life. Pray for people you love who are going through painful situations right now. Ask the Holy Spirit of the Living God to breathe joy into their heart and lives.

DAY 6

Read: 2 Thessalonians 2-3.

Reflect: We all know people (family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers . . .) who have never received the amazing grace of Jesus. Take time to pray for each one, asking God to open their heart to the prompting and invitation of the Spirit.

Journal:

- Write the names of three to five people you know who are not yet followers of Jesus.
- Make a list of simple and practical ways you can serve them in the name of Jesus: pray for them, make a meal or do some other act of kindness for them, seek to share what your relationship with Jesus means to you.

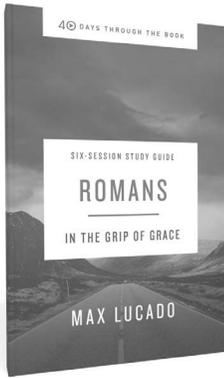
Pray: Ask God to give you the right words and courage to have a spiritual conversation with at least one person that you write about in the journal section above.

DAY 7

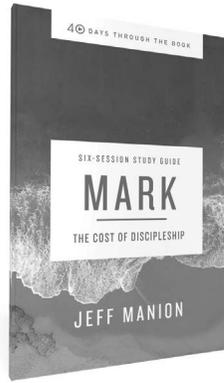
Memorize: Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting 1 Thessalonians 1:3:

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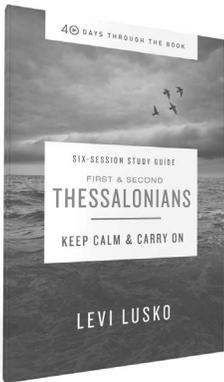
Reflect: Our words have power. More power than most of us recognize. Take ten minutes to review your recent texts and emails that are personal in nature. Honestly and humbly ask yourself if your words are thoughtful and gracious. Or, are they sharp and harsh? In the coming days, seek to be as gracious and kind as you can with your words—both written and spoken—while still communicating what needs to be said.



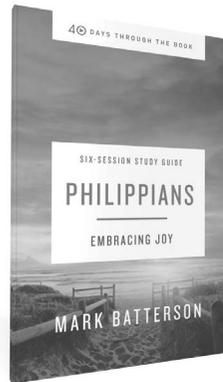
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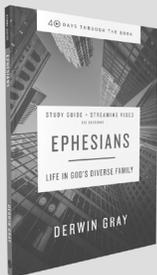
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40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

PHILIPPIANS

EMBRACING JOY

SIX-SESSION STUDY GUIDE

MARK BATTERSON

WITH KEVIN AND SHERRY HARNEY



HarperChristian
Resources

40 Days Through the Book: Philippians

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The themes of this study are drawn from the video study of the same name by Mark Batterson. All other resources, including the session introductions, small group discussion questions, prayer direction, and the 40 Days learning and reflection exercises, have been written by Kevin and Sherry Harney in collaboration with Mark Batterson.

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INTRODUCTION

PHILIPPIANS

AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi between AD 60 and 62. He was a prisoner and chained to a Roman guard. In this dark and discouraging place Paul's joy was not extinguished but continued to burn bright. The city of Philippi took its name from Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. It was one of his military strongholds in northern Greece. Fast-forward a few hundred years, and Philippi was conquered by the Romans in 31 BC. So, Paul is writing to Roman citizens. They spoke the Latin language. They wore Roman dress. Their coins had Roman inscriptions. The city itself was patterned after Rome, and it sat on the Via Egnatia, which was a major military road in the Roman Empire.

Philippi had a wide variety of religious influences. There were altars to Greek gods. Archaeologists have found sanctuaries to the Egyptian gods Iris and Serapis. And, of course, there

were monuments to the Caesars. The Imperial Cult, as it was called, was the official state religion. There was also a Jewish community that lived in Philippi. It was to these Christians in this pluralistic and secular environment that Paul wrote a letter of unparalleled joy.

THE BIG PICTURE

Just four chapters, 104 verses, and Paul mentions his Savior more than forty times. Every theme and truth found in Philippians is saturated in the presence and power of Jesus. It is in this book that we find the great Christ hymn that gives a vision of Jesus' incarnation, humiliation, sacrifice, and ultimate glorification. Joy is everywhere in the book of Philippians, and that is because Jesus is present in all places, even in persecution. While incarcerated and chained, Paul's heart is free, and he can rejoice.

History does seem to repeat itself. When Paul came to the city of Philippi his plan was to proclaim the gospel and lift up Jesus as the Messiah. After sharing the good news with a group of women outside the city along a river, a businesswoman named Lydia came to faith in the Savior and was baptized along with many members of her family (Acts 16:11–15). After being taunted by a demon-possessed woman for many days, Paul cast out the evil spirit, which led to a major uproar in the city (Acts 16:16–24). The Roman leaders responded swiftly and severely. Paul and his ministry team were all publicly stripped, beaten with rods, severely flogged, put in prison, thrown in the inner cell, and fastened in the stocks.

At midnight the other prisoners and the guard were treated to a worship concert and prayer meeting. In a shocking and reflexive act of faith, Paul and his companions burst into songs of praise and prayers of adoration. Joy and music filled the prison! These bruised and battered Christians were not cursing God, government, or guards through clenched teeth. They were celebrating the grace of Jesus with open mouths and hearts.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, he was in jail again. He was rejoicing again. He was willingly suffering with a smile on his face, prayers on his lips, and a song in his heart. History was repeating itself.

EPIC THEMES

There are several themes in Philippians that are worthy of our focus. These include:

- **Love-filled prayer.** The recipients of this letter are not strangers but friends, family, beloved partners in the gospel. You can feel Paul's affection for these people all through this prayer and the whole letter (see Philippians 1:1–11).
- **Evangelistic hopefulness.** Paul actually finds joy in the fact that his unfair incarceration has given him an up-close chance to share Jesus with each and every guard to whom he was chained. Before you knew it, the whole palace guard knew Paul's story and the story of Jesus (see Philippians 1:12–26).

- **The humility and exaltation of Jesus.** In one of the first recorded hymns of the early church we see the willing heart of Jesus to leave glory, live perfectly, die sacrificially, and rise in victory. Because of this, every knee will bow to him and every tongue in all creation declare that Jesus is Lord (see Philippians 2:1–11).
- **When we know Jesus, we are transformed.** Paul calls all followers of the Savior to grow in faith, adjust their attitudes, and walk in holiness. To help us have a picture of what this can look like, we get snapshots of two faithful and humble servants: Timothy and Epaphroditus (see Philippians 2:12–30).
- **A contrast of human righteousness and the righteousness of Jesus.** Legalism and trust in human religious devotion is always a temptation, but Paul teaches us that this is all garbage compared to the cleansing and glorious grace of Jesus (see Philippians 3).
- **Keep your eyes on Jesus.** How do you resolve conflicts? How do you stay joyful in hard times? How do you keep keeping on when you are weary? The answer to all three of these questions is: keep your eyes and focus locked firmly on Jesus (see Philippians 4:1–9).
- **Contentment and a generous heart grow out of a love for Jesus.** The transformational power of our Lord will change us at the deepest level . . . even the temptation

INTRODUCTION

to be possessed by possessions can be overcome by the power of our risen Lord (see Philippians 4:10–20).

The heartbeat of Philippians is for believers to have a Jesus-centered vision of life. How do we find joy in all of life's ups and downs? Jesus! How do we grow in contentment and generosity? Jesus! How do we grow in contentment and generosity? Jesus! Where should our focus be so that our life makes sense? Jesus! Perhaps these words from the prayer of Saint Patrick summarize it best: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me . . . Christ when I lie down . . . Christ when I arise."

A LOVE LETTER

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-8

As followers of Jesus, we have heard the call to love God with all that is in us and to love our neighbors as ourselves. In this letter, we get a vision of how we should feel about other followers of Jesus and how we should express these feelings openly to them.

WELCOME

All throughout history, people have been writing love letters in an attempt to express the passions of their heart. But a few notable examples stand out above the rest. As a young military officer, Napoleon Bonaparte met Josephine in 1795 and fell in love with her. He wrote letters to her while he was at war, though she rarely wrote back to him. In one of these notes, he stated, “A few days ago I thought I loved you; but since I last

saw you, I feel I love you a thousand times more. All the time I have known you, I adore you more each day.”

Ludwig van Beethoven was a famous German composer who works rank among the most performed in all of classic music. He first began writing music in 1802 and continued to compose works until his death in 1827—even in spite of increasing deafness. Beethoven’s passion rang out in his music, but as it turns out, he could be passionate in his words as well. After his death, an unsent love letter was found among his papers in which he expressed these sentiments: “My thoughts rush to you, my immortal beloved, now and then joyfully, then again sadly, waiting to know whether Fate will hear our prayer—to face life I must live altogether with you or never see you.” The intended recipient of this letter remains a mystery.

But the most famous love letter of them all is found in the Bible. The book known simply as the “Song of Songs” is a passionate dialogue between a man and his beloved. In one section of the letter, the man uses this descriptive language to describe his beloved: “How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. each has its twin; not one of them is alone” (4:1–2).

The book of Philippians is also an ancient love letter. But it is not a letter between a man and a woman. Rather, it is a letter sent from the heart of God to his church, his people, his bride. The words are inspired through the apostle Paul to the church in the city of Philippi. But the words of this letter are clearly a message from the heart of God to his beloved . . . to you and me.

SHARE

Who is a person God has placed in your life that you have deep and sincere affection for (other than people in your small group)? What have you experienced together that has forged this kind of rich relationship?

WATCH

Play the video 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, questions, or key points that stand out to you.

The setting and the writer of Philippians

Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting Scripture (Pardes)

Peshat . . . Simple, plain, devotional Bible reading

Remez . . . Cues and clues in the text of Scripture

PHILIPPIANS

Deresh . . . Connecting the dots as we interpret Scripture

Sod . . . When the Holy Spirit speaks to us through Scripture

The when, where, and who of Philippians (Philippians 1:1–2)

A Love Letter (Philippians 1:3–8)

God closes one door and opens another (Acts 16:6–25)

Responding to hardship . . . whining or worship?

A serious challenge: Prophecy your praise . . . praise God before he does it

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

1. What impacted you the most as you watched Mark's teaching on Philippians 1 and Acts 16?

2. Some people regurgitate what they hear from culture, media, and society. They act like a thermometer that reflects the world around them. Others declare the revelation of God and, like a thermostat, they raise the temperature and change the environment, the conversation, and sometimes the world. What do Christians sound like when we are simply regurgitating the prevailing voices of our culture? What will we sound like when we are articulating the timely revelation of God's Word in a bold and transformational way?

- 3. Read Philippians 1:3–8.** What do we learn about Paul’s relationship with the believers in the city of Philippi from this passage? As you think about the Christian community where God has placed you, what can you thank God for about this body of believers (God’s church)? What are ways you can show affection and love to the members of your church?

- 4. Read Acts 16:6–10.** Tell about a time you had your plans and future all laid out and God surprised you with a whole different agenda. How did you see God work through this process? How did God bring glory to himself (and blessing to you) through his divine change of your plans?

- 5. Read Acts 16:16–18.** Mark talks about how the enemy of our soul wants to dominate and control our lives, and that we must exercise spiritual authority and fight back. What are ways we can resist, push back, and overcome the enticements and work of the enemy? Tell about a time you did this and saw God win a battle.

6. When times of hardship, suffering, or loss hit our lives, what are some of the very real ways (good or bad) we respond? What do you learn from the response of Paul, and how can you follow his example?

MEMORIZE

Each session, you will be given a key verse (or verses) from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verses are Philippians 1:3–4:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy . . .

Have everyone recite these verses out loud. Ask for any volunteers who would like to say the verses from memory.

RESPOND

Paul's relationship with God's people in the city of Philippi was forged through struggles, pain, public turmoil, and partnership in ministry. Why is it that some of our deepest and longest lasting relationships have included times in the furnace of life together? How did God forge a deep relationship

between Paul and the Philippian Christians through difficult and painful times?

PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Thank God for the people he has placed in your life who you love deeply and for whom you have sincere affection. Ask for God's blessing on their lives.
- Pray for courage to learn from the apostle Paul's example so that you can express your love and appreciation for the people God has placed in your life.
- If you, or someone in your group, are in the middle of a spiritual battle, pray for God's victory, for awareness of the tactics of the enemy, and for the power of the Holy Spirit to be unleashed.

YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

SESSION ONE

Reject on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin by reviewing the key verse(s) to memorize for the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of Philippians, reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, the last day, you will review the key verse(s) and reflect on what you have learned for the week.

DAY 1

Memorize: Begin this week's personal study by reciting Philippians 1:3-4:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy . . .

Now try to say these verses from memory.

Reflect: There is power in our memories. Think back over your time being part of God's family. In particular, reflect on good memories, kind people, meaningful sermons, and life-impacting moments. Thank God for the people in the family of God who have been a blessing in your life. If you want to go one step deeper, send one or more of these people an email, text, or letter expressing a memory of them that is meaningful to you.

DAY 2

Read: Philippians 1 and take time to focus on Philippians 1:1-2.

Reflect: What comes to your mind when you look at yourself in a mirror first thing in the morning? Try this on for size. "I am a saint. I am a holy one of God." This is not what most of us think when we reflect on who we are at the start of the day or when we put our head on the pillow at night. But it's true! The apostle Paul refers to the people of God in the city of Philippi as "God's holy people." Another way to say this is, "God's saints." Through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for our sins, we are cleansed and made holy. Amazing! Take time this week and try to see yourself through the eyes and finished work of Jesus. Be reminded that the holy God of heaven looks at you and sees one of his saints. Believe it and grow into that reality.

Journal:

- Why do I have a hard time seeing myself as one of God’s “holy people”?
- How I can grow in seeing myself as a saint of God (i.e., how can I adjust my words, attitudes, and actions to reflect this spiritual reality)?

Pray: Praise God for his holiness and ask for the power of his Spirit to help you embrace who you are in Jesus as you seek to become more like your Lord.

DAY 3

Read: Philippians 2 and Philippians 1:1-2.

Reflect: Grace and peace. What beautiful and powerful words! What a greeting! Paul not only used these words to begin his letter to the church, but he sought to bring peace wherever he went and extend grace to each person he met. What are ways you can bring peace to the people you encounter in your neighborhood, workplace, church, and everywhere you go? How can you bear the grace of Jesus as you interact with believers and with people who do not yet follow him?

Journal:

- What are places and situations you will enter this week that really need peace? How can you be sure to bring peace and not more tension and turmoil?
- In our graceless world, people hunger for signs of kindness, goodness, and grace. Consider someone you will encounter this week who needs a touch of grace? How can you bring the grace of Jesus into this situation?

Pray: Ask God to bring reminders to you throughout this week of how you can bear his peace and grace wherever you go.

DAY 4

Read: Philippians 3 and Philippians 1:6.

Reflect: There are two truths that Paul unveils in Philippians 1:6. First, God is at work in you. The Maker of heaven and earth is intimately involved in your life. He is close and active. He has a plan for your life. Second, God is not done growing you. He will bring his work to completion, but you are still on the journey. You can receive these truths with joy and confidence:

God is near and working in me. God will accomplish his purposes and plans in me. What is God doing in you today and how can you partner in his wise and good plan?

Journal:

- What are ways that God has been working in you, growing you, and making you more like Jesus?
- How can you partner with God to keep taking steps forward in these areas of growth?

Pray: Ask for courage and power to keep taking steps forward in God's will for your life. Ask the Spirit to show you if there is a place of needed growth where you are stalled and need to begin pressing forward today.

DAY 5

Read: Philippians 4 and Philippians 1:7.

Reflect: Love is never chained. Though Paul was in chains, he still felt deep affection for his friends in Philippi and

communicated his love to them in this letter. He was incarcerated because he confidently followed Jesus and boldly proclaimed the gospel. But even from jail Paul wrote words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that lavished God's people with love from heaven. When we feel confined, trapped, and bound up, we can still receive, enjoy, and share the love of God. What can you learn from Paul's example of being chained but still free to share the love of Jesus?

Journal:

- What situations and circumstances in life tend to bind you up and keep you from expressing love and care for others?
- How can you continue speaking and showing love no matter what life circumstances come your way?

Pray: Ask God to help you speak words of love and take actions that reveal the love of Jesus, no matter how hard your life becomes.

DAY 6

Read: Philippians 1:8.

Reflect: The affection of Jesus. What an amazing idea! Paul's longing for the Christians in Philippi was straight from the heart of the Savior. What do we do when our energy runs low and our heart becomes a bit calloused? How do we live for Jesus when our body is tired, our schedule jam-packed, and we are feeling weary? In those moments (and they come for all of us) we live and love in the power of Jesus. Have you ever asked Jesus to grow your love and longing for other people? Have you dared to say, "Jesus, make your longing my longing—make my heart and love like yours"? These are powerful prayers. Dare to lift them up today.

Journal:

- Where has your love grown cold and your heart become calloused?
- How can you walk closer to Jesus so that your heart will become more and more like his?

Pray: Dare to pray that the heart, love, and longing of Jesus would flood your life so that you will look and live more like the Savior.

DAY 7

Memorize: Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting Philippians 1:3-4:

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy . . .

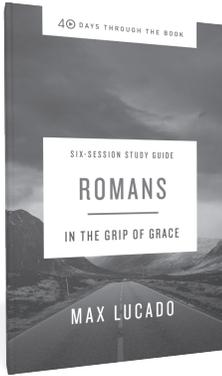
Reflect: There is power in joyful prayers. These can be prayers of praise to God, supplication for the needs of others, or thanksgiving for God's goodness. As you lift your heart in prayer, be sure you are not getting into such a routine that you say the words, but your passion is waning. Pray for joy to fill you to overflowing and for your prayers to be filled with passionate celebration. What is the joy level of your prayers and how can you increase it for the glory of Jesus?

Study Books of the Bible with Trusted Pastors

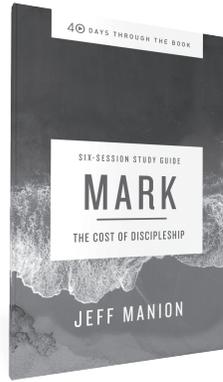
The 40 Days Through the Book series has been designed to help believers more actively engage with God's Word. Each study encourages participants to read through one book in the New Testament at least once during the course of 40 days and provides them with:

- A clear understanding of the background and culture in which the book was written,
- Insights into key passages of Scripture, and
- Clear applications and takeaways from the particular book that participants can apply to their lives.

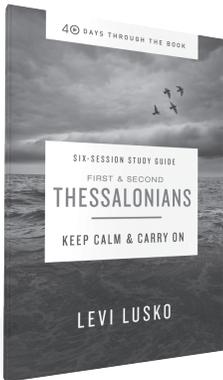
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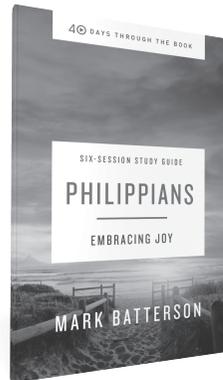
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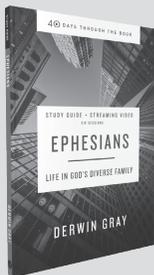
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