

enthusiasm: RE-ENGAGE THE ONE TRUE GOD

Introduction to the group discussion guide

Dear group leaders

For the last two years people have been locked-down and disrupted. But even before that, so many were over-loaded. Some of us had become disillusioned. Others were questioning their faith. And yet the cry within all of us is to re-connect with God - to know the power of his Spirit and the encouragement of his voice.

Our word 'enthusiasm' comes from a Greek word that meant being inspired by a god. *This series will kickstart the next season of your life with enthusiasm from the one true God.*

This discussion guide is designed to be used with a small group who meet regularly to discuss the message from the previous Sunday. Each week will be an opportunity to unpack the message, explore the passages and themes, and discuss what this content looks like in your lives.

Feel free to adjust the guide as much as you need to, to suit the way your group works best. As we are preparing the Sunday messages each week it's possible that some of the themes or passages that are already in this discussion guide will change in the message, but the guide should still be helpful.

We will also be sending devotional emails each week to everyone on the church mailing list. These emails will provide some more thought-provoking input along with the themes from Sundays and your small group discussion. If anyone in your group doesn't receive emails from the church, they can email geoffs@thelakes.org.au and I'll sign them up.

I'm praying that this series does what we're preparing it to do - kickstart the next season of our lives with enthusiasm from the one true God.

Geoff

Group discussion guide: Week 1

Share from your past a defining moment where your life took a new direction from that point on. Was it an event; a key conversation; a relationship; an opportunity, or perhaps a God-encounter?

Did your defining moment have any connection or ramifications to your journey with Christ, and how that worked out later in life?

In which direction are you heading?

Over the last two years, the social circuit-breaker of Covid has disrupted the rhythm of many people's lives, impacting their church attendance and other habits. When it comes to your own spiritual passion, where would you place yourself on the spectrum below, with the middle representing no movement at all, and the ends indicating that you are trending towards one side or the other.

Getting sleepier < > Stalled < > Seeking more

What factors have contributed (blocked/helped) to where you are at presently in your spiritual life?

Wealth – the great litmus test.

Read together: Luke 19:1-8; Mark 10:17-22

Zacchaeus and the rich ruler had vastly different reactions to Jesus' gospel – demonstrated in the way they viewed their wealth. It has been said that you, *"aren't truly free until you are free to give"*.

Discuss together your own thoughts on why for both men wealth was the indicator of their response, and how you might have responded in the same situation.

Evolution versus Revolution

How addicted are you to the "gamified life" where it is always about the next upgrade or improvement? Consider your response in terms of your possessions; vocation; hobbies; sport etc.

The "gamified life" is one that pursues the next marker, whilst aware that we aren't there yet. In what areas of life are you where you want to be, and in what areas are you not?

If Jesus were to offer you a more powerful and closer walk with Him, but it required you to take a new path in life that excluded some of these other things, what would be your response, and why?

Time to reset?

Is there a facet of your life that is tracking in a direction away from God's plan for you? Perhaps your relationships at home, your priorities of time, your fears or something else is driving you away from the type of life Jesus offered, ie: peace, righteousness and joy (Romans 14:17). What area of your life is due for a reset, and what might be blocking that choice for you?

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Group discussion guide: Week 2

Share your story. Below are three simple diagrams representing the polarised difference between living powerfully with God, or choosing a different path in one of three areas. Choose one of the diagrams and share with the group how you have at some point in your life journeyed off that path and onto the other. For example, what it was like to move from rejecting Christ to being reconciled with Christ.

Mark on each diagram where you are now in relation to all three areas, and where you would like to be in a year from now.

Discuss together what it means to you to be where you are at now, and how it will look to be more empowered by the Spirit. Discuss how you envisage getting to where you would like to be, and how the group can help.

Rejection	<	>	Reconciled
I cannot accept the nature and reality of the God of the Bible			I have accepted Christ, united with God

Rebellion	<	>	Responding
I do what I want, not what I should			I constantly follow God's leading

Religion	<	>	Freedom
I follow the rules because I feel obliged and able			I live a holy life as a response to and fruit of walking with Christ

How do you see God?

How we see God greatly determines the vision and motivation we have for life. If we see God as a distant judge who is focused on our sin, we will be tempted to drift towards rebellion or religion. If we see him as gracious Father offering all we need to overcome and make a difference to the world, we will lean into him for that.

If you close your eyes and think of God, how do you picture him? How do you think he views you, and how easily do you approach him for what you need? Share with the group as vulnerably as possible about these aspects of your relationship with God.

Discuss together how your view of the nature of God has been formed through your family history and church experience. Do you believe these things have made a big impact? Has the impact been mainly positive or negative; accurate or distorted?

Spend time praying for each other in response to the discussion. Read and pray the blessings of Ephesians 3:16-19 over each other.

Group discussion guide: Week 3

Share your story. One of the most elusive and hard to explain dynamics of the Christian life, is how God's presence makes a tangible difference in our life. Sharing a story about it happening is a bit easier than explaining it. If you are able, share a story with your group of a time when the Spirit met your needs in any one of these three areas: Power; Peace; Purpose, and did it in a way that was obviously more than human strength could produce.

Where do you most need God's provision?

Read together Philippians 4:4-13.

Paul had hacked the issue of hardship, realising that provision for our pain comes as we experience our pain. Therefore, the important question is: where are you in pain? Where do you most often feel the tension between what is happening in your life, and what you want or need to happen?

Fear: What are the types of moments or circumstances you most try to avoid in life? Fear for the Christian is often rooted in our lack of belief that God will get us through that situation. Think about out some of your most common fears, such as: death; irrelevance; loneliness; failure; sickness; vulnerability; poverty.

Lack: Where do you sense that you don't have what you really need in life. It may be include: relationships; money; health; vocation etc.

Discuss your responses: Share together your responses and what might be the root causes of your belief about God's provision. Some of these causes may well have validity, some may not. Where there is a potentially unhelpful root cause, spend some time in prayer together about it.

Group Exercise: Putting up the "Shield of faith".

The things we fear often don't go away, and our enemy has a tactic of shooting sharp arrows at us with the name of our fears on them. They pierce our thoughts and tempt us to react wrongly. But Ephesians 6:16 teaches us to 'hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.'

By going through the exercise above we have 'named' those arrows and brought them to light. Now we can go into effective spiritual warfare by calling on God to place a shield of faith over each person, with the name of their greatest fear upon it. We then declare God's sufficiency to protect, and rely on him to empower us to overcome in that area.

Group discussion guide: Week 4

Share your story. God speaks to us in varied ways, some of which mentioned in the message on Sunday are: Scripture; Circumstance; Community; Confirmation. How about you? Share with your group which of these four modes are most often helpful for you. Are you able to give a recent example?

Am I hearing the Master's voice? God's word can flow through us constantly via the Holy Spirit. For example, we might receive revelation of truth in a supernatural work of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:17- 19). However, our mode of perception can vary with our personality type.

In his book, *Sacred Pathways*, author Gary Thomas explains other valid modes:

1. *Naturalist*. Loving God outdoors.
2. *Sensate*. Loving God and worshipping him with the senses.
3. *Traditionalist*. Rituals, symbols, sacraments, sacrifice, structure, church attendance.
4. *Ascetic*. Loving God in solitude and simplicity, living a mainly internal existence.
5. *Activist*: Loving God through confrontation, standing against evil and calling for repentance.
6. *Caregiver*: Loving God by loving others.
7. *Enthusiast*: Loving God with mystery and celebration.
8. *Contemplative*: Loving God through adoration.
9. *Intellectual*: Loving God with the mind.

A separate study guide for group or individual use is available for direct download here: www.thelakes.church/sacredpathways

Discuss together which of these nine modes of engaging God is most effective for you.

Hearing and following require us to reorient our life. We must be in alignment with Christ in our priorities and passion. In which areas of life would you say you are well aligned, and which might need adjustment?

Following includes movement: The difference between a "Fan" of Jesus and a "Follower" is our trajectory. Followers are moving in response to his general and specific guidance.

- a) Share together the aspects of your life that are a direct result of you following Jesus' word.
- b) Are there any areas of life where you don't seek and follow God's guidance? Why might that be?
- c) Where would you like to receive and follow more of his guidance?

Group discussion guide: Week 5

What is my wall?

All of us come to the point where we haven't found breakthrough. These crossroads are an opportunity to choose how we want to live and what we want to do, but often we don't feel like we have a choice. Whenever we are presented with "something", we seem to inevitably go down a path of regret. The crossroads look like a wall we can't get around, rather than a choice we get to make.

For some of us the "something" is when we are confronted. For others the "something" is when we feel unjustly treated. For others the "something" is lust or jealousy, or perhaps when we suddenly feel inadequate.

Are you able to identify and share what your typical walls are? Share together something that seems to bring you constant regret and which you would like to change.

Are you able to articulate or understand exactly why that wall is an issue for you, when for others it might not be?

Where does the path lead when you choose unwisely?

What is the fruit of the wrong path when you take it? And what might be the result if you continue with that choice as a way of life?

The Kingdom is at hand ...

What is the alternative path you can take when you hit one of those moments? Is there an alternative picture of abundant life and peace ahead when you make that choice? What might be a more preferred future than the road you normally take?

What thinking needs to change?

How might you need to think differently when you encounter one of those moments?

How can you rely on Jesus?

2 Peter 1:3-4 says: 'By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvellous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.'

What does Jesus promise you?

Group discussion guide: Week 6

Being revived **in** spirit is different from being revived **by** the Spirit. As human souls (saved or not) we are able to find rest and revitalisation in any number of ways without God necessarily being involved. But this is far from the power and peace that God can give (eg: Philippians 4:7).

To actually engage the one true God-within in a way that he can revive us, we must position ourselves to be able to receive and rest in his presence. The part we have to play doesn't give us peace but does position us to receive it.

King David knew this well. He would '*Find strength in the Lord his God,*' (1 Samuel 30:6) and find rest by proverbial still waters to receive refreshment for his soul (Psalm 23:2-3).

How do you most effectively revitalise yourself in spirit? Would you say this practice also involves reviving by the Spirit? Explain.

Can you recall and explain a time when God himself did revive, strengthen and restore you in a way that was obviously more than physical rest alone could provide?

Resolve: The final choice in this pathway.

Julius Caesar once famously said that "*If you want to take the island you have to burn the boats.*" By removing the way of an easy exit, we become more motivated to press forward.

As you commit to the way of Jesus, how might you burn the proverbial bridge that allows you to go back to the path you were previously on?

Series Recap.

As we conclude this series, we can reflect on what has been shared and discussed.

Share with the group what principles you have heard that may have inspired you to re-engage with God in a new way and choose some different paths in your way.

Is your enthusiasm for God any greater as a result of this series?