



Week 1 Small Group: The Greatest Story

OPENING PRAYER:

God of all nations, we invite you into this place. Jesus, we light this candle as a sign of your presence. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, enlighten us. We pray that we keep our hearts and minds open to new ideas and that we may grow in our understanding of your ways. Amen.

To be a person is to have a story to tell. Isak Dinesen

BREAKING THE ICE:

Some people are of the belief that religion and politics are taboo subjects among friends; others thrive on these conversations. Where do you fall? How do you feel when you are in the company of those that are like-minded? How about those who have different convictions?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Act 17:22-34.

- Athens had a very forward-thinking culture, with great art, literature and philosophy. What was Paul's reaction to the culture around him in Athens?
- In what ways did Paul find common ground with the Athenians he was trying to reach? What did he challenge?
- What does Paul declare about this God that they did not know? What aspects of God's nature and character did he include?

NEXT STEPS:

- Where might we have built shrines to an "unknown god" in our culture?
- Paul communicated in a way that people wanted to hear more. How did Paul invite others to think about his message about God?
- What are some specific ways you would explain the gospel differently to a person without any church or religious background?
- How has the practice of your faith impacted your family? Your community? The world?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Gracious God, help your church be a place where love is evidenced in extraordinary ways. Give us words and actions that demonstrate humility, patience, courage and faith. Help us to live in a way that leads to belief in you. Amen.



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Week 2: The Whole Story

OPENING PRAYER:

God of all nations, we invite you into this place. Jesus, we light this candle as a sign of your presence. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, enlighten us. We pray that we keep our hearts and minds open to new ideas and that we may grow in our understanding of your ways. Amen.

O love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee. I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine oceans depths its flow. May richer fuller be. George Matheson

BREAKING THE ICE:

Describe a time a parent, teacher, or boss made you feel special. Did that change you in any way?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17.

Paul shares his own faith and failings; how might this help his audience? How does it help the church today? In verse 17 Paul offers a doxology, words of praise to God. Write your own doxology as a group sharing the most praise worthy attributes of God to you.

NEXT STEPS:

- Paul thanks Jesus, who has given him strength. Jesus gives strength to all who follow him; how do we lean on this strength?
- Paul shares that God has shown great patience with him; how are we called to be patient with others?
- Name ways you can live out the grace you have received.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, we thank you for the way you are with us in all circumstances. We are grateful for those who journey with us, sometimes for just a moment, others for a life time. Keep our hearts and minds focused on sharing joy and love that come from you. Amen.



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Week 3: God, Where Were You?

OPENING PRAYER:

God of all nations, we invite you into this place. Jesus, we light this candle as a sign of your presence. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, enlighten us. We pray that we keep our hearts and minds open to new ideas and that we may grow in our understanding of your ways. Amen.

Jacob didn't have to climb his ladder to bilk heaven of the moon and the stars, even if that had been possible, because the moon and the stars looked like peanuts compared to what God and the angels were using the ladder to hand down to him for free. Frederick Buechner

BREAKING THE ICE:

Give people a minute or two to think of three clues that describe, but don't give away, a place they dream of visiting. Let the group guess from the clues; then have the person share why this is their dream.

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Genesis 28:10-19a

- Often Jacob went on his own instincts rather than trusting God. How does this story line up with this habit?
- What does it mean that Jacob receives the same promise from God as Abraham and Isaac?
- How does Jacob react to the dream? During his life, Jacob wrestles with God; do we see this evident in this story?

NEXT STEPS:

- In the Bible, dreams are a way God communicated directions or information. How do you believe God communicates today?
- How do you act on that communication?
- Jacob found himself in a bad place; his decisions and actions led to desolation. Have you ever found yourself in a bad place? Were you able to sense God's presence despite your circumstances?
- How do we set up reminders of God's faithfulness so we are uplifted in times of trouble?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear God, sometimes it is hard to take that first step in faith. Help us to rely on your almighty power as well as your provision and care. Be with us in times of challenge, direct us when we are wandering, open the way so we can cross into the promises you offered us. Amen.



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Week 4: News Worth Sharing: A Life Worth Living

OPENING PRAYER:

God of all nations, we invite you into this place. Jesus, we light this candle as a sign of your presence. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, enlighten us. We pray that we keep our hearts and minds open to new ideas and that we may grow in our understanding of your ways. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

Share about how a story has influenced your life, maybe a movie, a book or something that you witnessed personally.

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Acts 1: -9, John 9:1-12

- How does Jesus respond to the disciples' attitude towards the blind man?
- Why do the Pharisees have such a hard time with the man being healed?
- The man's parents are fearful of the Pharisees; how do we allow others to influence us today?

NEXT STEPS:

- How can we be blind to what God is doing for us?
- Have we ever challenged what the good God is doing for someone else? Why?
- The man's testimony to Jesus' actions is powerful. Each of us has a faith/transformation story to share. How will your story be told in a way that others can come to know God and live a transformed life here and now?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, we thank you for the days filled with sunshine and calm. We also thank you that in the days filled with struggles and darkness that we can trust that you are with us. Help us to share words and actions that bring grace and peace into our world. Amen.



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