

START!

TO FOLLOW

Small Group Discussion Guide





Discipleship Inside Out®

NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

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Start! To Follow Book by Greg Laurie

Greg Laurie is the senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California and Harvest Orange County in Irvine, California. He began his pastoral ministry at the age of 19 by leading a Bible study of 30 people.

Since then, God has transformed that small group into a church of some 15,000 people. Today, Harvest is one of the largest churches in America, and consistently ranks among the most influential churches in the country.

In 1990, Laurie began holding large-scale public evangelistic events called Harvest Crusades. Since that time, more than 4,408,000 people have attended Harvest Crusades events around the United States, ranging from the annual event at Angel Stadium in Anaheim to Madison Square Garden in New York City. Greg spoke to 50,000 people at a 2011 Harvest Crusade in Los Angeles' Dodger Stadium. Harvest Crusades have also been held internationally in Australia and New Zealand. More importantly, more than 371,300 people have registered professions of faith through these outreaches.

Start! To Follow Small Group Guide by Rick Howerton

Rick Howerton is national small-group strategist for NavPress, spearheading NavPress's small-group publishing efforts. An experienced ministry veteran, Rick has degrees from Campbellsville University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He spent ten years involved with college ministry; in 2003, he planted The Bridge, a church centered on small groups. Rick served as associate teaching pastor and small groups pastor at Living Hope Baptist Church in Bowling Green, Kentucky, for seven years and ten years at Lifeway Church Resources as a small-group-ologist/specialist. He is the author of several books, including *A Different Kind of Tribe: Embracing the New Small-Group Dynamic*.



Helps for Small Group Leaders

Leading a *Start! To Follow* small group is a great opportunity and a revolutionary obligation. By helping group members understand and embrace a disciple's lifestyle, you have the ability to change the world. Realize this: You are guiding a small band of Christians down the same path Jesus directed the twelve apostles to follow. It was through Jesus' leading a small group to engage in this kind of life that the world was revolutionized.

Unlike many small groups, you are unearthing expectations often perceived as outrageous by many people, unfortunately even to most consistent church attenders. A few things to keep in mind:

1. These discipleship principles are not required to earn salvation but are the resulting evidence of following Christ. Therefore, it is not a matter of *if* Christians will choose to follow Christ in a life of a discipleship but rather *when* we will experience this abundant life as His disciple.
2. You will be the model for your group members. If you are not fully engaged in living the life of a disciple, it is essential that you make this commitment prior to the first session.
3. Some of your group members may long to make the commitment to live as Jesus' disciple but are not yet willing or able. Be patient with them while consistently reminding everyone that stepping across the line from simply believing in Jesus to following Him as His disciple is an essential step on the journey. This is what Jesus expects of every Christian for whom He lived, died, and was raised again. Again, the question is not "Should we commit to a disciple's lifestyle?" The question is "When will we commit?" Help group members see the awesome reality that Jesus is worthy of our wholehearted commitment now and forever.

The Book

This small-group discussion guide follows the same general outline and builds upon the same biblical truths as Greg Laurie's book *Start! To Follow*. To get the most out of the experience, every group member will want his or her own copy. (Be sure to plan in advance to make books available at the first gathering.) The book lays out clear, challenging truths from God's Word regarding the life of a disciple. A free personal reading and reflection guide is also available for download. The reflection guide walks individuals through the chapters of the book and related Scriptures during the week between group sessions.



The Makeup of Your Group

Your group will either consist of young believers possibly unfamiliar with “Christianese,” as Greg calls it on page 95 of his book, or of established Christians who may be so comfortable with theological terms that it becomes easy to take for granted the deeply personal nature of such truths. Because of this you will need to:

1. Use terminology everyone understands. Avoid using theological terms. Terms such as *sanctification*, *saved*, and *redeemed* may flow from your lips instinctively but new believers have not been exposed to these terms and will only be confused if you consistently use them. If you do find it necessary to use church jargon, be certain to explain the meaning of the terms and the context in which you are using them. Encourage mature Christians to put theological terms in their own words also, helping them process and internalize these life-changing realities of salvation and discipleship.
2. Be willing to answer any questions individuals might have. If you are asked a question to which you don't know the answer, simply explain that you'll research the question and seek out another church leader's insight. Don't be embarrassed; you are modeling the importance of seeking out answers to spiritual questions. This example will help everyone immensely as they continue their own discipleship journey. In fact, when you answer the question, let them know where you found the answer so group members can begin to create a mental list of trusted resources that are helpful and available (including other mature Christians).

The Group Covenant

The first week's study ends with a group covenant. It is vital that all the group members agree to the expectations noted in the covenant. Speak with any hesitant members after the meeting and see if you can alleviate their tensions concerning these essentials. Agreeing to the group covenant sets the boundaries as well as creates a safe environment for real, authentic, and open conversation.

The Gathering... the Format (and time allotments)

Follow the same outline for each small-group meeting. This is purposeful and strategic. Some group members may never have experienced a Bible study of any kind. Simply attending a Bible study may be intimidating to them. Keeping the format the same quickly diminishes the level of tension they are feeling, making it much more possible for them to engage in the conversational Bible study you will be leading. For other group members who may be very familiar with small groups, continuity is still beneficial in building comfort levels. Knowing what to expect helps people feel safe and therefore more likely to share honestly and openly what they are feeling, thinking, and experiencing. The flow of each study is as follows:

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Introduction (1 minute): This is a very important time. Your introduction reminds group members of a commitment made or a truth learned the week prior. Repetition is vital to learning. You don't need to read the introductions verbatim, but it will be important to use the information found in the scripted introduction. Feel free to voice these ideas in your own words.

Our Story (12 minutes): This section of the experience is written for four purposes: (1) to get group members to know one another's stories and realize they have real-life experiences in common with one another, which leads to deeper levels of intimacy and trust, (2) to create a conversational environment, (3) to help group members step out of their comfort zones, and (4) to encourage group members to consider their own journeys in light of the discussion that will take place later in the conversation.

The "Our Story" section consists of two questions that each person answers. It is vital that you make sure each person answers each question aloud and that you limit the amount of time each person has to answer the question. This will leave ample time for the more transformational conversation to come.

Prayer (1 minute): It is always wise to focus hearts and minds on hearing from God in the reading of His Word and asking for His guidance in your conversation. Sometimes there will be direction concerning what to pray for as the group meets. Other times you will need to pray as you see fit. This plan is purposeful, as we want group members to realize that guided prayer is as valid as praying from the heart.

Transition (1 minute): This is simply a paragraph or two moving the minds of the group members from personal reflection to focusing on what God is saying to them through His words found in the Bible.

His Story (25 minutes): The "His Story" section of the experience helps make the group members aware of what God has to say. For those of you who have led stereotypical small-group studies in the past, you'll notice that there is much more time spent acknowledging what God is saying than delving into the motive behind the statements and discussing what is going on in the minds and lives of the biblical characters. Because the goal of this small-group study is to establish the principles and practices of a disciple, more time is given to establishing these ideas and expectations than in most small-group experiences. You will get to the heart issues of group members in relation to these topics when you get into the next section of the experience, "The Journey."

The Journey (20 minutes): This section helps group members conclude what obstacles might keep them from living what they have learned, establishing an ideology or principle, embracing a truth, or committing themselves more fully to what God is asking of them. Group members will spend time in personal evaluation and reflection, considering the importance of committing to a disciple's lifestyle.



Prayer Time (15 minutes): One practical way to help people open up personally and to ensure the group times are fruitful is to simply ask for ways group members can pray for one another in applying the biblical truths discussed. Ask for a summary of the main thing each person learned and ask for ways group members can pray for one another in applying the Biblical truths discussed. Also invite group members to share other prayer requests at this time. Although you certainly want to pray for the needs of people outside the group, be sure not to neglect personal growth and encouragement of group members. As these requests are voiced, write them down and then pray for each of the requests that have been voiced. As you see others becoming more confident in their journeys with Christ, ask them to pray aloud for these requests. Tell the group each week that you'll be e-mailing or texting the requests to them and ask them to pray daily for the situations that are on the list. Each week, as you begin prayer time, ask for reports concerning what God is doing, take new requests, and pray immediately for new and past requests.

Snack Time (15 minutes): Most groups will have snacks at the beginning or the end of the gathering. This is a great idea and will enhance conversation each week. This should be very relaxed. It may be best to do this at the end of the experience, creating a comfortable environment for group members to talk to you about issues that have arisen while allowing others a chance to leave if necessary.

Facilitating a Start to Follow Discussion

Each "Gathering" (lesson) of this guide offers specific, verbatim dialogue for you to use at each group session. Feel free to put the information into your own words; this is just a guide to give you the general idea. When the text is not in brackets, it contains the words that should be spoken to your group; when the text is bracketed, it contains instruction for you as the group leader rather than words to say to your group. Most of the time, italics indicates questions to ask your group.

Facilitating a conversational Bible study demands that the leader of the group keep a few essentials in mind:

1. You are facilitating a conversation, not teaching. A great conversational Bible-study leader talks less than 20 percent of the time. Utilize the questions to create a conversation. At times, you'll be asked to verbalize a truth, but you'll notice that these moments are always leading to a question for discussion.
2. You need not use all of the questions. This study has been purposefully created with more than enough questions for each week's study. If you try to discuss all of the questions, you may become frustrated. Prior to meeting, consider the makeup of the group. You may find that some questions are more appropriate for your group than are others. Pray that God would lead you to the best questions for your group. Feel free to make note of your own questions as you prepare for discussion. During your group's conversation, utilize a question that continues the thought process of the group at that time. This may mean skipping questions or jumping from question to question without following the progression in the study.
3. Utilize the "Our Story" questions. Some group members may not like the idea of answering the "Our Story" questions. The questions may seem trite or unnecessary to them. It is vital that you discuss at least the first of the two questions. The goal of this question is to get everyone speaking early in the experience. People who talk early and feel heard will almost always talk later. Be sure everyone answers this question and then, following the comments, be encouraging with such phrases as "Thanks for that. I'll look forward to hearing your wisdom later," "Thanks for sharing. I always enjoy hearing what you have to say," "I appreciate your honesty. I really look forward to hearing what you have to say when we get into deeper discussions later tonight," and so on.



4. Engage those who remain silent. Some group members might try to hide in the shadows and put the burden of conversation on the rest of the group. If you have someone like this in your group, graciously invite the person into the conversation by directing a question to him or her. Be very wise about this, though; you don't want to drive someone out of the group.
5. Don't allow any one person to dominate the conversation. Sometimes there is someone who is part of a group who talks too much, keeping others from being part of the discussion. This person also keeps a conversation from ever having a natural flow. In this instance, direct questions to someone else purposefully. Another option is to thank the overly talkative group member for his or her input, but say something like, "Let's see what someone else has to say this time." If it gets really out of hand, speak with the overaggressive talker between meetings to communicate that it's important that everyone in attendance be heard from.
6. You'll find that every question is italicized; teaching points or transitional statements are not. This very simple method should make it easy for you to differentiate between questions and script. Directions for you as the leader are in brackets.
7. Because you may be leading new believers or those not as familiar with personal Bible study, it is important that they learn to seek out truths in the midst of a passage of Scripture. For this reason, many of the "His Story" questions ask group members to look back at the passage and find specific truths. Because doing so is sometimes tricky, at the end of this guide, you'll find answers to most of these types of questions.
8. Page numbers in parentheses throughout this guide refer to the *Start! To Follow* book. You may want to mark these pages in advance for easy reference or context.
9. For week 1, you will need to have an index card for each attendee. No other materials will be needed for week 1 or any other week.

Between Gatherings

What happens between meetings is as important as what happens during meetings. It's important that you do a few things between meetings. Because you are the model of a growing disciple for your group members and have been given the role of disciple-maker, these are necessities.

1. Continue to spend time with God on a daily basis. Spend time in Bible study and prayer. The personal reading and reflection guide is an excellent resource for everyone's daily devotional time.
2. Pray for each group member's spiritual growth daily.
3. Get the group together to hang out and have fun. The quality of conversation that takes place during meetings is directly related to the amount of conversation that takes place between meetings.
4. Spend time reviewing the Scripture and questions that will be discussed during the weekly group gathering. You needn't memorize it, but knowing the material well allows you the freedom to follow the Holy Spirit's direction more easily.
5. If a group member is struggling with a personal issue or a truth that has been unveiled, get together between meetings to answer any questions and pray for the individual.



Gathering 1, The Commitment

Introduction

I'm thrilled that you're here. Showing up proves that you want to be a committed follower of Jesus.

The six weeks we're going to spend together will probably change the way you think, make decisions, and live. What we'll be discussing over these six weeks is revolutionary because it unearths what a disciple's life really looks like.

I'm journeying with you, and all of us are journeying together. Followers of Christ never go it alone. We gather in communities of like-minded believers all journeying together, learning together, growing together, and encouraging one another. We need one another if we are going to live the radical lifestyle Jesus calls each of us to: that of a disciple.

Today we're going to talk about the level of commitment necessary to be a disciple of Jesus. Before we do that, I'd like to ask each of you to answer a couple of easy questions.

Our Story

Question 1: When you were in high school, which of the following did you sacrifice the most for? In one sentence, tell why you were willing to sacrifice so much for that person, team, or job.

- my girlfriend
- my boyfriend
- my family
- my best friend
- my sports team
- my job
- Other: _____

Question 2: Would you describe yourself as one of Jesus' disciples? In one or two sentences, tell us why you answered the way you did.

Prayer by Group Leader

Transition

This is going to be a fun group, I can tell. I'm sure each of us has wondered what is required of us if we're going to be a disciple of Jesus. We need to keep in mind that "to be a Christian you need to believe in Jesus Christ, whom God sent, and then you will receive eternal life through Him. It's a *gift*. To be a disciple is to take up the cross daily and follow Him making His will your will. It's a *commitment*." (See page 22.) This commitment is a personal relationship.

In fact, "loving God more than anyone or anything else is the very foundation of being a disciple." (See page 13.)



His Story

[Have a group member read Luke 14:25-33 aloud]

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

*What is Jesus telling us to do before we consider declaring that we are one of His disciples?
(see verses 28 – 32)*

Why does Jesus want us to consider whether or not we are willing to make the necessary sacrifices before choosing to be one of His disciples?

Three times, Jesus says the phrase “cannot be my disciple.” Each time He uses this phrase, He’s telling those in earshot one of the nonnegotiable expectations of anyone who would become a disciple of His. What are the three expectations Jesus says are necessary for anyone who wants to be His disciple (see verses 26-27,33)?

Obviously, according to Scripture, Jesus doesn’t want us to hate anyone. What do you think Jesus means when He uses such strong language to describe a disciple’s other relationships in comparison to Him?

What are some indicators that we’ve elevated an earthly relationship above our relationship with Jesus?

What are the two things Jesus says any disciple of His must be willing to give up in order to be one of His disciples?

The Journey

What are some of the reasons believers allow family members to have control over their lives instead of allowing Jesus to guide their lives?

How might any of these relationships be affected, positively or negatively, if you choose to become a fully devoted disciple of Jesus Christ?

Which of the relationships or things Jesus mentioned is most apt to keep you from committing wholeheartedly to becoming one of His disciples?

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Which of the following things causes you to hesitation in becoming a fully committed disciple of Jesus? Choose more than one option if true of you.

I'll have to give up a relationship I enjoy.

There will be tension between me and someone else.

I'll feel guilty for allowing my heart to be more passionate about Jesus than about someone else who's important to me.

God will ask me to give up everything I've worked so hard for.

I fear death, and Jesus asks us to be willing to die for Him.

My spouse and I will not be on the same page, so our marriage will be affected.

Other: _____

J. Dwight Pentacost wrote about the seemingly radical Christian life (see page 19). He determined that believers fall into one of three categories: curious, convinced, and committed. Those who are curious “are attracted to the message, and maybe even to the Christian life, but they aren’t fully convinced it’s true.” Those who are convinced have concluded that Jesus is the Son of God. They have mentally grasped the essential understanding that Jesus is who He said He is but haven’t yet committed their entire life to Him. Those who are committed have not only concluded that He is God’s Son but also put their entire lives into His hands. He is their Lord, and they give Him the authority to guide their lives; they are His disciples.

I’d like for each of you to take the index card I’m giving you and write on that card which category you fall into. Are you curious, convinced, or committed? I’d be grateful if you’d also write your name on the card. I’m simply going to be praying for you that you’ll step into the committed category very soon if you haven’t already.

Prayer Time

[Explain that each week you’d like to hear one thing each person has learned and how you can be in prayer for them to apply that truth in their daily lives. Encourage openness and discuss the importance of having a safe, confidential environment for the group. After each person has shared personally, if time allows, invite any other prayer requests to also be shared. Pray for everyone’s growth and commitment as a disciple as you follow Christ together each day.]

Agreeing to the group covenant:

It is vital that each of us understands and agrees to the same expectations. By doing this, we will all be on the same page and know for sure that we can talk about anything together. Let’s see if we can all agree to the following expectations:

1. We will all attend the group gathering every week.
2. Everyone will engage in the conversation each week, but no one will be allowed to dominate the conversation.
3. No one will give advice to another group member unless it is requested.
4. We will keep everything discussed between group members confidential.
5. We will welcome one another’s opinions and be respectful of one another even when we disagree.

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Weekly reading

Before we go, I'd encourage everyone to take advantage of this personal reading and reflection guide during the week between our gatherings. (Pass out the guides.) This will help us all get the most out of our journey through what it means to follow Christ as His disciple. The *Start! To Follow* book will help you further explore the biblical truths introduced each week during our gatherings. The guide will suggest a chapter to read from the book and also a few related Scriptures with daily thoughts for your personal reflection. (Pass out books if you or your church provided books; otherwise, encourage everyone to pick up a copy.)

Dismissal



Gathering 2, Abiding

Introduction

It's great to see each of you again. I'm guessing that, like myself, many of you spent some time thinking about our discussion last week. You may recall that as we ended our conversation, we each had to determine what category of commitment we are. Either you are curious, convinced, or committed. If you are curious, you are attracted to the message and maybe even to the Christian life but aren't fully convinced it's true. If you consider yourself to be in the convinced category, you have mentally grasped the essential understanding that Jesus is who He said He is, but you haven't yet committed your entire life to Him. If you are committed, you not only believe that Jesus is the Son of God but you have committed every aspect of your life to Him. He is the Master of your life and you are allowing Him full control. You are learning from and living for Him. You are His disciple.

Last week was telling for me. I had to ask myself which of these categories truly described me. At the end of this conversation, I'll tell you where I stand. Then I'd like for each of you to let the rest of the group know which category best describes where you are.

During this gathering, we're going to talk about what it means to abide in Christ. Last week we focused on our commitment to Him; this week we'll begin to explore His commitment to us. To allow us to continue getting to know one another and to give us some understanding about where each of us stands when it comes to abiding in Christ, I'd like each of you to answer a couple of questions.

Our Story

Question 1: What one person has most influenced who you are today? Which of the following best describes what trait you picked up from them?

___ *My humor*

___ *My ability to be calm when in an argument*

___ *My inability to be calm when in an argument*

___ *My work ethic*

___ *My sense of style*

___ *My athleticism*

___ *Other:* _____

Question 2: What activity are you so passionate about that, if you're not careful, will become more important to you than God is?

Prayer

Transition

Today we're going to journey into what it means to abide in Christ. "To abide in Christ means that we're sinking our roots deep into a love relationship with Jesus. It's not simply walking with and serving Him when it's easy, convenient, or popular. When we abide in Christ, we remain in fellowship with Him daily, regardless of outward circumstances or inner emotions." (See page 26.) Just as a football is the key element in a football game, abiding in Christ is a key element in being effective disciples of Jesus. When we abide in Christ, we desire what He desires, we are obedient when He makes requests of us, and we bear spiritual fruit that glorifies Him and is evidence that we truly are His disciples.



His Story

[Have a group member read John 15:4-11 aloud.]

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

This is one of the passionate conversations Jesus had with His disciples just prior to His crucifixion. In these comments, He makes three promises to them. *What are those promises (see verses 4,5,7)?*

Do any of these three promises sound too good to be true? If so, which ones?

Jesus tells His disciples that if these promises are to come to fruition, we must first "remain in the vine." *When talking about plant life, what does it mean for a branch to remain in the vine?*

What happens to a branch that doesn't remain connected to the vine (see verse 6)?

How does a disciple of Jesus remain in His love (see verse 10)?

What is the outcome of remaining in Jesus' love (verse verse 11)?

The Journey

Why do you think Jesus wants to make sure those of us who are His disciples know we can't accomplish anything on our own?

Why do you think it's often difficult for us to embrace the perfect love Jesus has for us—the same kind of love God, His Father, has for Him?

In order to be a disciple who is connected to Jesus, remains in His love, and experiences joy, we must obey His commands. *How can we overcome Satan's continual lie that obedience is a curse and not a blessing, a sign of weakness and not a source of strength?*

There are four elements working in the life of a committed, mature disciple of Jesus: (1) A disciple will boldly tell others about Jesus, (2) a disciple will learn and know Scripture, (3) a disciple will be a person of prayer, and (4) a disciple will be persecuted.

Many of us have Christian friends and family members who have not chosen to commit to following Jesus. *How should we respond when they don't understand the new mindset and lifestyle we've embraced?*

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Last week we each wrote down a category describing our commitment level in relation to Jesus. As I mentioned earlier, I had to do some real soul-searching. In the end, I realized that I was _____ (curious, convinced, or committed). I want to reemphasize that following Christ is an ongoing journey, so regardless of our current category, nobody has fully arrived as a disciple. I was wondering if any of you would be real honest and tell us where you are in your journey? I'm hoping we all will so we can pray for one another.

Prayer Time

[After asking how to pray for everyone in what God has revealed to them, explain that you will open and close in a time of prayer, allowing group members to prayerfully encourage one another. Pray aloud for your group and then briefly for the person on your left, modeling personal prayer and removing any anxiety or uncertainty as to what is expected. Then ask each group member to pray for the person to their left. Clarify that if people are uncomfortable praying aloud, they can pray silently, but remind everyone that the group is a safe environment for taking new steps in their relationship with God and each other.]

Dismissal



Gathering 3, Treasuring

Introduction

Thanks for being here. It's great to see you. I don't want to take much time with preliminaries. We're about to dive into some super-exciting stuff.

As we do every week, let's get to know each other's story a little better through answering a couple questions.

Our Story

Question 1: What food do you love so much that you'd declare, "I can't live without it"? Where's the best place to get it?

Question 2: Which of the following best describes how your parents related to the Bible when you were a kid?

___ *They didn't believe in God, so they didn't believe the Bible.*

___ *They took out their Bibles only when they were going to church.*

___ *They used the Bible as ammunition when in an argument or to manipulate us to act the way they wanted us to act.*

___ *I saw them reading the Bible often. It shaped the way they lived their lives, how they treated one another, and how they raised me.*

___ *Other: _____*

Prayer

Father, thanks for every person in this room. We are honored to be together again and are aware that you are in the room with us. Before we leave this room tonight, please instill in each of us the importance of Your words found in the Bible. Please help us understand what You're telling us as we study the Bible. Amen.

Transition

For the past two weeks, we've established that being a disciple is a mutual commitment in relationship with God. We commit to following Him, and He commits to empowering us. Only by His Spirit can we live out this committed life as His disciple. Today we'll begin focusing on how to relate to God in our daily lives.

At the moment we became followers of Christ, we received a new nature. This week we'll see that "if we want to be closer to Christ and live a life pleasing to Him, we need to cultivate and nurture our new nature. The moment we stop strengthening and building up the new nature is the very moment the old one will come back to haunt us." "It takes very little encouragement for the old nature to cause us trouble. All we need to do is neglect the new nature." (See page 43.) So how do we cultivate this new nature? There are disciplines every believer must maintain if he or she wants to live the Christian life as it was meant to be lived (see page 44). Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31, NKJV). If you and I want to truly be disciples of Jesus Christ, we must continue to abide in (stay attached to) the Word of God. To a great measure, success or failure in the Christian life depends on how much of God's Word we get into our hearts (see page 44).

If we're going to nurture the new nature, we need to treasure and receive God's Word (see Proverbs 2:1), pray for God to help us understand it as we study it (see verse 3), and spend time memorizing some of it (see Psalm 119:11).



His Story

[Have a group member read Psalm 19:7-11 aloud.]

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant
giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.

The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and altogether righteous.

They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.

By them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Why do you think God gave Jesus' future disciples these extraordinary eight sentences?

What are the four payoffs for learning and living God's expectations revealed in the Bible (see verses 7-8)?

What does the phrase "the precepts of the Lord are right" mean (see verse 8)?

Why is it important that Jesus' disciples embrace wholeheartedly that God's words are right and that any ideas, principles, and expectations that contradict His are inaccurate?

The Journey

What phrases in Psalm 19:7-11 inspire you to spend time with Him in the Bible each day?

Many people get frustrated when reading the Bible. This can be a matter of perspective, so think of studying Scripture as getting to know God and understanding your relationship with Him. It's relational, not academic. Here are some key questions you might ask yourself as you open the Bible and study a passage of Scripture (from chapter 4 in your *Start! To Follow* book).

- What is the main subject of the passage?
- Who are the people revealed in the passage?
- Who is speaking?
- About whom is the passage speaking?
- What is the key verse?
- What does it teach us about Jesus?

As you read, it is important to ask how the text might apply to your daily living. When reading a passage, ask yourself these questions:

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- Is there a sin mentioned that I need to confess or forsake?
- Is there a command given that I should obey?
- Is there a promise made that I can look to in my current circumstances?
- Is there a prayer given that I could pray?

I think it'd be great if we did this together. This will give us a chance to help one another learn how to do this. Let's use Proverbs 2:1-5. I'll read it, and then we'll go through these questions together.

My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding,
and if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.

- *What is the main subject of the passage?*
 - *Who are the people revealed in the passage?*
 - *Who is speaking?*
 - *About whom is the passage speaking?*
 - *What is the key verse?*
 - *What does it teach us about Jesus?*
-
- *Is there a sin mentioned that I need to confess or forsake?*
 - *Is there a command given that I should obey?*
 - *Is there a promise made that I can look to in my current circumstances?*
 - *Is there a prayer given that I could pray?*

Earlier, I mentioned memorizing Scripture. This is very important for anyone who is going to become a mature follower of Jesus. Let's all memorize a very short verse this week and then come back and share it from memory with one another next week. Let's do Psalm 19:7. It reads, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple." I think the best way to memorize is to write the verse and post it somewhere you will see it often. Do this with a literal sticky note or card or as a reminder on your cell phone or computer—whatever is highly visible and works for you. Repeat the verse over and again until you have it memorized.

Remember, this is God's Word. If we are going to trust and follow Him with our lives, we want to know what He has said to us. Communication is critical in any relationship; our relationship with God is no different. The Bible is the primary way God has chosen to clearly communicate with us. Next week we'll explore another way we communicate with God.

Prayer Time

[After everyone shares what he or she has learned, pray for your group or ask for a volunteer to close in prayer.]

Dismissal



Gathering 4, Conversing

Introduction

Hello all. We're halfway through understanding and embracing what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. *What aspects of being a disciple that we've discussed are most challenging for you?*

Realize that all of us struggle some at first. Satan doesn't want us to become mature disciples, so he's trying to make us lose our passion for discipleship. Don't give up or give in.

Last week we focused on a primary way God communicates with us: through the Bible. But remember, this is a mutual relationship; communication is a two-way street. Today we're going to talk about how we converse with God. Many believers know about prayer but don't know how to pray. We're going to learn how to pray like a disciple prays. We're going to learn how to pray sincere and effective prayers that make a difference and bring glory to God.

Before we do, let's answer a few questions.

Our Story

Question 1: Who do you like to talk to more than anyone else? In one sentence, tell us what it is about that person that makes him or her so easy to talk to.

Question 2: Matthew 6 tells us three ways to pray that are insincere and ineffective. Which of these annoys you the most?

___ *When someone tries to pray eloquent prayers so they can impress the other people in the room (see verse 5)*

___ *When the person praying believes that the longer the prayer, the more spiritual he or she is (see verse 7)*

___ *Listening to someone pray who is trying to convince God to do what he or she wants Him to do instead of accepting His will in the matter (see verse 8)*

Prayer

Transition

"A disciple must be a person of prayer. Prayer is one of the essentials of discipleship. It's the key to having passion and power in our witness for Jesus Christ." (See page 53.) Not only that, "The great, indescribable value of prayer is that it keeps us in touch with God. God wants you to get to know Him through prayer. He wants to reveal Himself to you through prayer. Prayer brings us to depend on God." (See page 54.)

Today we're going to be discussing what is often called "The Lord's Prayer." Many of us may have the old King James Version memorized. Let's say it together:

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13, KJV)

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Your book will explore this familiar prayer from the gospel of Matthew in greater depth this week. Today we'll look into a less familiar version of the same prayer so we can see it from a fresh perspective.

His Story

Have you ever wondered what prompted Jesus to pray that prayer?

[Have a group member read Luke 11:1-4 aloud.]

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation."

Because this prayer gives us a template for our own prayers, it's often called, "the model prayer." Let's talk about this prayer then I'll show you that template so you can use it when you pray.

What do you think was so impressive about Jesus' prayer that, after hearing Him pray, the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray?

We are to pray our prayers to God whose name is "hallowed." The word hallowed means, revered or holy. *What can you think of that God has done in the past or is able to do in the future that proves there is no one like Him and that He deserves to be revered above all others?*

"A person can't really pray, "Your kingdom come," until he or she can first pray, "My kingdom go." (See page 61.) *Why do you think this statement is true?*

What are we to ask God for? (See verses 2 – 4)

The Journey

If you had been one of Jesus' disciples the day this happened, what questions might you have asked Him when He finished praying the model prayer?

What might keep you from enjoying sincere and substantial times of prayer?

Because prayer is not just a passive act of asking God to do things for us, how can we proactively be a part of the answer to some of these things Jesus modeled in prayer? In other words, what does it mean for God's name to be honored, for His kingdom to come, and for Him to meet daily needs, forgive and empower us to forgive others, lead us in holiness, and guard us from temptation?

Sincere and substantial prayer times will be much easier if you use the template Jesus provided in this prayer. It has often been outlined it like this (ACTS):

Start! To Follow Small Group Discussion Guide



Adoration—I adore God and praise Him.

Confession—I confess my sins to God.

Thanksgiving—I give thanks to God for all He has done and is doing for me.

Supplication—I make requests of God.

This week, on a daily basis, use this as a guide for your prayer time. When we get together next time, we'll talk about your daily prayer times.

Prayer Time

[As always, ask for everyone's prayer request. Then, using the ACTS template, model a prayer for your group before encouraging everyone to spend a few moments silently praying on their own, using ACTS as their guide.]

Dismissal



Gathering 5, Edifying

Introduction

Hello all. I hope you've had a great a week. So how did your prayer times go this week?

Spending time with God by praying is an amazing way to find ourselves in a positive mindset. It's a daily reminder that we're not alone in trying to do things for Him; we live with Him. That's a major difference!

If you struggled to make time for prayer this past week, this may have been because you don't have a time and place set aside for prayer. There are three things that will help you to not only spend time praying but also make it possible to spend time reading and studying the Bible each day:

1. Set aside a specific time each day. Put this special time on your calendar.
2. Set aside a specific place that is quiet and will have no interruptions.
3. If you are married and have children, work out an arrangement with your spouse or someone else to have your children cared for and not interrupting you while you spend time with God.

Let's learn more about one another by answering one of these questions.

Our Story

Question 1: Which of the following best describes what church was like for you when you were a teenager?

- I never went to church, so I have no opinion.
- My parents dragged me to church, but I didn't like it.
- I was very involved in the youth group, and most of my friends were part of the group too.
- I was so busy partying that I never thought about church.
- Church was for kids who didn't fit in anywhere else.
- Other: _____

Question 2: In one sentence, why do you think many people are cynical about church today?

Prayer

Let's pray that as we study the Bible, God will help us realize what His church looks like.

Transition

Today we move from how we interact with God to how we interact with people. We cannot separate a relationship with God and a relationship with other people; both are vital in the life of a disciple. "So far, we have looked at two essentials for our growth as disciples of Jesus Christ: Bible study and prayer. The third essential involves the significance of church in the life of a disciple." (See page 67.) The mistake many people make is asking what they can get from the church. This consumer mentality will ultimately leave us unfulfilled. A healthy church will be filled with believers desiring not only to get but also to give. The more we give, the more we connect. I'm talking about more than money; I'm talking about giving of ourselves: our time, energy, passions, and abilities. The more we open up, the more capacity we will find in ourselves to receive what God has for us.



His Story

Have a group member read Acts 2:42-47 aloud.]

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

How is the church you see described here different from church as it is stereotyped by society today?

What one word is the key to describing the relationships of the first church (see verse 42)?

What activities were disciples in the early church devoting themselves to (see verse 42,45)?

Notice the driving force behind their devotion; voluntary devotion was the natural response to their salvations (described in previous verses). This is a key to fellowship.

The word fellowship is a multidimensional term. It speaks of friendship and intimacy. God wants us to have friendship and intimacy not only with Him but also with one another. It anticipates we'll be involved in four activities. *Which of the expectations of fellowship is most foreign to us in our present culture?*

1. Working with one another
2. Praying for one another
3. Worshipping together
4. Meeting each other's needs

Why do you think these young Christians were willing to set aside things they had been involved in before becoming disciples of Jesus so that they had time for this lifestyle?

The Journey

Which of the expectations of fellowship is most natural for you (helping one another, working with each other, praying for one another, worshipping together, meeting the needs of others)? Why do you think so?

Which of the expectations of fellowship is most awkward for you (helping one another, working with each other, praying for one another, worshipping together, meeting the needs of others)? Why do you think so?

What are some things you may have to consider letting go of so that you have time to devote yourself to Jesus' church?

We've seen now that we are committed to God, He is committed to us, we relate and communicate with Him, and now we are committed to sharing this life with other Christ followers. The Christian life can't be lived alone. Our heavenly Father is with us, and so are His children, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need Him, and we need each other.

Start! To Follow Small Group Discussion Guide



Prayer Time

[Conclude with a summary of what group members been challenged or encouraged by and how the group can pray for their lives to be changed as a result.]

Dismissal



Gathering 6, Sharing

Introduction

It's hard to believe, but this six-week study is complete today. It's been an incomparable, life-changing experience. We've been made aware that being a disciple is an extraordinary, radical, and exhilarating lifestyle. In some people's minds, those of us who have given Jesus complete control of our lives are perceived as fanatical or overzealous. This doesn't deter us; it only reminds us that we are experiencing what Jesus forewarned His disciples in every generation. He told us, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:18-20). We will be questioned and maybe even abandoned by some of our friends, but we choose to follow Jesus wholeheartedly because we are His disciples.

Our opening questions relate to our journey in the here and now. This should give each of us a chance to know how to pray for one another as we move on from here.

Our Story

Question 1: Describe how being part of this group has changed the way you view your commitment to Jesus.

Question 2: If you could help one person know Jesus so they might become His disciple too, who would that person be?

Prayer

[Ask God to help the people in your group as well as yourself be disciplemakers.]

Transition

We started this study by talking about the foundation of a mutual commitment with Christ. This led to focusing on how we practically relate and communicate with Him and how this transforms the way we relate to people. Last week we focused on how we relate to other Christians. Today we focus on how we relate to the rest of the world: those who do not yet know this life-changing relationship with Christ. This is the last and most important conversation we're going to have. This is true because we're about to climb into Jesus' final word to His disciples, and that includes us. The words we're about to read are the declaration Jesus spoke to His disciples after His resurrection and just before He ascended into heaven. The next time His disciples will see His face will be when He returns to take us to heaven to dwell with Him forever.

What we're about to read is called the Great Commission. It tells us that we have a duty not only to be a disciple but also make disciples. "Jesus didn't suggest that we might carry the gospel to the world if we had time and felt like it. Rather, He commanded it. And that same command holds true in our day too. If I am a disciple, then I am commanded to go and make disciples of others. And if I am not making disciples of others, then I am not really being the disciple He wants me to be." (See page 80.)



His Story

[Have a group member read Matthew 28:18-20 aloud.]

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Why does Jesus have the right to command anything of us (see verse 18)?

How far does Jesus’ authority extend (see verse 18)?

What does it mean to make disciples (see verse 20)?

Verse 20 defines making disciples as “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Simply put, it is not only sharing our faith with others but also living it out so that people have the opportunity to observe it in action. Jesus was the perfect example of how a disciple should live. His actions are what draw people to Christianity. *What do you recall about the way Jesus treated others that would make people want to consider becoming one of His disciples?*

Who promises to be with us when we’re talking to others about Jesus and discipling them (see verse 20)?

The Journey

What are some reasons we tend to question the commands of those in authority over us?

Why do you think many Christians are afraid to talk to their friends and family members about Jesus?

Which of the following best describes how the person you want to talk to about Jesus might react when you mention the name “Jesus”?

- “I don’t discuss religion. It’s too polarizing.”*
- “You’ve turned into some kind of a fanatic. Let’s just not talk about stuff like this.”*
- “I used to go to church when I was a kid, but I’m not interested in that anymore.”*
- “I’ve been thinking about what happens after I die. Let’s talk.”*
- “I was burned by the church once, and it won’t happen again.”*
- “I can see a difference in your life lately. What’s going on with you?”*
- Other: _____*

“The hardest thing about sharing your faith with unbelievers is getting started, forcing those first words out of your mouth.” (See page 124.) *Why do you think that might be? Why might that conversation get easier once you get the ball rolling?*

Prayer Time

[Conclude with a summary of what group members have been challenged or encouraged by during the six-week study and how the group can pray for their lives to be changed as a result. Ask if there are specific people each person knows whom the group can be praying for.]

Dismissal



ANSWERS TO SOME OF THE QUESTIONS

Gathering 1, The Commitment

What is Jesus telling us to do before we consider declaring that we are one of His disciples (see verses 28-32)? COUNT THE COST.

Three times, Jesus says the phrase “cannot be my disciple.” Each time He uses this phrase, He’s telling those in earshot one of the nonnegotiable expectations of anyone who would become a disciple of His. What are the three expectations Jesus says are necessary for anyone who wants to be His disciple (see verses 26-27,33)? (1) HATE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN, HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS, EVEN HIS OWN LIFE, (2) CARRY HIS OWN CROSS, AND (3) GIVE UP EVERYTHING HE HAS.

Obviously, because of what we see throughout Scripture, Jesus doesn’t want us to hate anyone. What do you think He means when He tells His disciples to hate their parents, spouse and children, and siblings? HE’S SAYING THAT WE SHOULD LOVE GOD MORE THAN ANYONE OR ANYTHING ELSE, SO MUCH THAT OUR LOVE FOR THOSE PEOPLE OR THINGS WOULD SEEM LIKE HATRED TO US.

What are the two things Jesus says any disciple of His must be willing to give up in order to become one of His disciples? EVERYTHING WE OWN, OUR LIVES.

Gathering 2, Abiding

This is one of the passionate conversations Jesus had with His disciples just prior to His crucifixion. In these comments, He makes three promises to them. What are those promises (see verses 4-5,7)? (1) IF YOU WILL REMAIN IN ME, I WILL REMAIN IN YOU, (2) YOU WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT, and (3) ASK WHATEVER YOU WISH AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU.

What happens to a branch that doesn’t remain connected to the vine (see verse 6)? IT DIES.

How does a disciple of Jesus remain in His love (see verse 10)? OBEY JESUS’ COMMANDS.

What is the outcome of remaining in Jesus’ love (see verse 11)? WE WILL HAVE COMPLETE JOY.

Gathering 3, Treasuring

What are the four payoffs for learning and living God’s expectations revealed in the Bible (see verses 7-8)? (1) REVIVES A DYING SOUL, (2) MAKES HUMBLE, TEACHABLE DISCIPLES WISE, (3) GIVES JOY TO THE HEART, and (4) DRAWS US TO THE ILLUMINATION OF GOD’S TRUTH, WHICH LIGHTS A RIGHT PATH FOR US.

What does the phrase “the precepts of the Lord are right” mean? THEY ARE PURE AND WITHOUT ERROR.



Gathering 4, Conversing

What three things are we to ask God for (verses 3-4)? (1) OUR DAILY PROVISIONS, (2) FORGIVENESS FOR ANY SINS WE'VE COMMITTED, and (3) TO OVERCOME THE TEMPTATIONS SATAN THROWS AT US.

Gathering 5, Edifying

Who created the motivation for these believers to be involved in the church (see verse 42)? THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES; THEY WERE SELF-MOTIVATED.

What activities were disciples in the early church devoting themselves to (see verses 42,45)? (1) LEARNING GOD'S WORD, (2) FELLOWSHIP, (3) COMMUNING TOGETHER, (4) PRAYER, and (5) MEETING ONE ANOTHER'S NEEDS.

Gathering 6, Sharing

Why does Jesus have the right to command anything of us (verse 18)? HE HAS BEEN GIVEN AUTHORITY OVER US.

How far does Jesus' authority extend to (see verse 18)? ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN; EVERYWHERE ANY DISCIPLE OF HIS WILL EVER DWELL.

What does it mean to make disciples (see verse 20)? TEACH OTHER DISCIPLES TO OBEY ALL THE TEACHINGS OF THE BIBLE.

Who promises to be with us when we're talking to others about Jesus and discipling them (see verse 20)? JESUS WILL BE WITH US.

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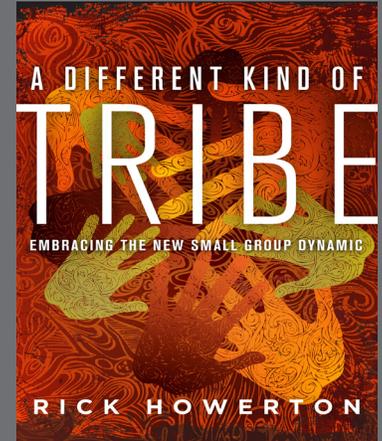
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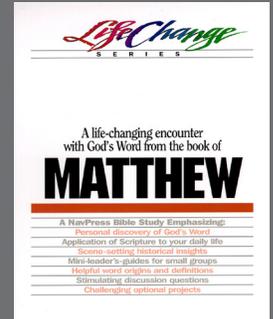
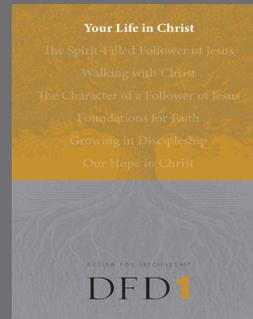
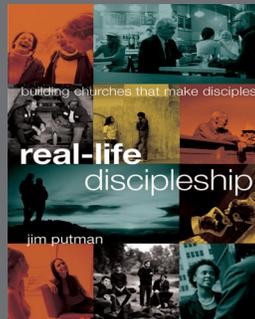
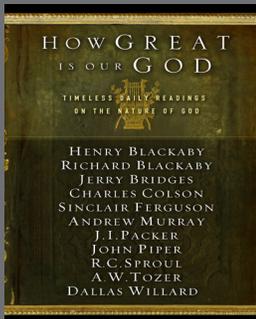
- Ed Stetzer author of *The Subversive Kingdom*

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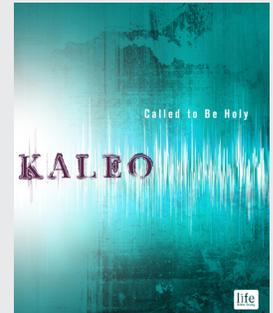
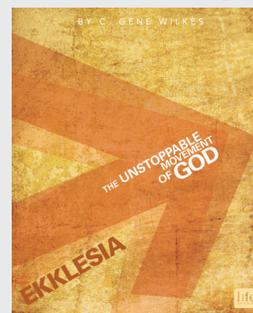
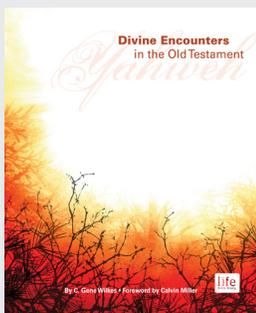
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