



FOUNDATION

LIFE BUILT ON THE WORD OF GOD!

**WEEKS 1-2
LEADER GUIDE**



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LIFE BUILT ON THE WORD OF GOD!

WEEK 1

WATCH

Make sure everyone can see the screen and the audio is at a comfortable level.

READ

Take some time in advance to read and consider the Bible study questions and come up with personal examples to encourage discussion.

DISCUSS

We hope those who participate in the study walk away knowing, feeling, and doing differently as a result of amazing discussion.

GUARDING THE GOSPEL

NOTES

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GUARDING THE GOSPEL

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functioning, and even disrupting sleep patterns - impacting emotional well-being and overall quality of life. Like cement, scar tissue can be changed or moved early on, even as it begins to set. Once it sets completely, however, it is very difficult to shape or move, and must be treated before it gets to this point. Movement and exercise help to prevent scar tissue from forming and limiting range of motion. It requires much work, patience, and willingness to endure discomfort in order to heal!

In our spiritual lives, continual sin can harden the heart and dull the conscience, making it like scar tissue - unresponsive and insensitive. It can sneak into our lives, seeking to simply distract us by meaningless talk rather than the truths of God's Word. This week, we are reminded that we must be grounded in the truth of God's Word so that we can pick out the lies of the enemy. Instead of focusing on the minor details that can lead us away from God's purpose, we must constantly work to stay focused on the gospel message and rely on the power of God alone that can change lives and enable us to live righteously. Only then can we live out our true identity in Christ!

GUARDING THE GOSPEL

OPENING

When you buy something new that requires assembly, do you read the instruction manual first, or do you try to figure it out on your own? Why?

Have you ever followed instructions completely wrong because you misunderstood the rulebook? What happened?

What is a rule or instruction that you misunderstood when you were younger, but now appreciate as an adult?

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GUARDING THE GOSPEL

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(Open for discussion. Anything that teaches us how to achieve salvation on our own effort or merit, apart from God, is false teaching, whether by ritual, good deeds, or ceremony. The gospel message teaches us that our salvation is found in Christ alone!)

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(Open for discussion. The heart is seen as the “control center” of our thoughts, motives, and choices. A pure heart acts sacrificially, unselfishly, and in a godly manner. A conscience is the inner judge that accuses us when we have done wrong and approves when we have done right. A good conscience is one that lives without shame and with a sense of accountability with others. Sincere faith is one that exhibits genuine trust and confidence in God. When we have these three things, we are able to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, as well as love others as we love ourselves. It is a love that benefits others.)

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GUARDING THE GOSPEL

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(Open for discussion. Without a pure heart, one cannot express genuine love and concern for others. Without a good conscience, we cannot make godly choices in our lives to guide our decisions and actions toward others. Without sincere faith, we are guilty of empty, meaningless talk. All of these will lead us to a false faith that cannot produce God's love, but only builds our own egos and causes division.)

When has a rule or instruction in your life actually helped you love someone better instead of just making you legalistic or judgemental? How can we practically maintain a “good conscience” and a “sincere faith” in our daily decisions and actions?

(Open for discussion. We must be careful that whatever we do, we seek to act in a way that honors God. This includes exhibiting the fruit of the spirit, as well as confidence and contentment in Christ alone. We should always seek truth and desire to do what is right in God's eyes.)

GUARDING THE GOSPEL

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What are some spiritual “rabbit trails” or minor issues that most easily distract you from focusing on love and the core message of Christ?

(Open for discussion)

Why do you think it is so easy to drift away from clear, healthy teaching into meaningless talk (fruitless or vain discussion)?

(Open for discussion. Meaningless talk often leads us to a form of religious legalism. It allows us to “appear” holy without a true change of heart, much like a white-washed tomb - clean on the outside, but dirty on the inside. It doesn’t require us to make sacrifices and changes in how we live.)

GUARDING THE GOSPEL

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The law reveals God's holiness and goodness and shows us what He expects of us, but the law is also what leads us to the gospel. It reveals to us that we cannot obtain righteousness on our own. The law sets standards that are too high for us to reach. As a result, we are damaged by sin and in need of a Savior. It is in this that we can then experience the love of God, as we encounter the only One who saves!

(Open for discussion)

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GUARDING THE GOSPEL

DIGGING DEEPER

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: “The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.” This is especially true in the lives of those who follow Christ! Like Timothy, we will discover (if we haven’t already!) that we will face trials, hardships, and opposition as we follow Him. Our greatest enemy is the devil, and he will attack us any chance he gets, often using the world and our own sinful desires to fight against us. Through it all, we must remember to stay focused on the gospel message and the power of God to change lives as we remember 1 John 5:4: “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world - our faith.”

Read Exodus 17:8-16

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Throughout their time in Egypt, and even in their escape, the nation of Israel did not have to fight - God did it for them! Now, however, they had to fight in order to learn to trust Him and see His glory revealed through their obedience to Him!

What happened physically when Moses raised his hands, compared to when he lowered them? Why do you think the victory in this physical battle was tied to Moses holding up his hands and the staff, rather than just the military strategy on the ground?

(Open for discussion. When Moses' hands were raised, the Israelites were victorious. When he lowered them, the Amalekites prevailed. For them, raised hands were a symbol of prayer and total dependence on God. Joshua and the army's strength came from Moses' intercession for them. This in turn, drained Moses of his strength. He was supported by Aaron and Hur, the priests. In the same way, we must remember that Christ, our High Priest, is always there to support us, but we must be willing to accept His help in order to experience victory!)

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After the victory, Moses built an altar to the Lord to honor God for His answer to prayer and help for His people. He named it Jehovah Nissi - “the LORD is my Banner”. What does it mean for God to be your banner or rallying point during times of struggle or difficulty?

(Open for discussion. Moses had chosen to build his life and actions on God's direction and guidance, and he encouraged the people to do the same. The banner served as a rallying point or signal for the people. It was a future reminder that God Himself had allowed them to have victory, and He would continue to do so, but only if they stay focused on Him. In the same way, God will fight for us, but we must always be ready and willing to be used by Him, as His instruments, in the battles we face.)

GUARDING THE GOSPEL

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(Open for discussion)

PRAY

Consider the following as you pray together:

- Which of these qualities - a pure heart, a good conscience, sincere faith - would you most like to cultivate in your own life? What difficult task would that help you face?

GUARDING THE GOSPEL

- When you reflect on your recent interactions with others, how much was spent on meaningless talk or speculation versus words that build others up in faith? In what area of your life is God calling you to purify your motives (a pure heart) so that you can love others more effectively?
- When you study the Bible or discuss theology with others, is your ultimate goal to grow in love for God and others, or is it merely to be right or knowledgeable? What is one practical step you can take this week to ensure your faith remains sincere and your conscience remains good?
- Whose banner do you wave? Where do you find your basic identity and pledge your highest allegiance? Is it in your job, your status, your achievements, or in God?

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WEEK 2

WATCH

Make sure everyone can see the screen and the audio is at a comfortable level.

READ

Take some time in advance to read and consider the Bible study questions and come up with personal examples to encourage discussion.

DISCUSS

We hope those who participate in the study walk away knowing, feeling, and doing differently as a result of amazing discussion.

JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING!

NOTES

Maritime travel has been around for thousands of years, aiding in the development of civilizations and the increase in trade. Early water travel was not predictable; it relied completely on favorable weather and seasonal winds. Without these, shipwreck was inevitable. One of the most haunting and controversial shipwrecks in the history of the Great Lakes was that of the Edmund Fitzgerald, often called the "Mighty Fitz" - a massive freighter that hauled taconite iron ore pellets across the Great Lakes and regularly set records for cargo hauling. On November 9, 1975, the ship began its final voyage, headed for a steel mill in Detroit. The Edmund Fitzgerald, with a crew of 29 men, encountered a severe storm on November 10th, with hurricane-force winds near 100 mph and waves up to 35 feet high. The captain began reporting difficulty around 5:30 PM. At 7:10, he sent his final message: "We are holding our own." Shortly after, the ship sank in Canadian waters, 17 miles from Whitefish Bay. All 29 crew members perished, and no bodies were recovered. The cause was never determined, but possibilities included rogue waves that flooded the ship or structural failure caused by stress

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fractures and ineffective maintenance. The shipping culture often underestimated the power of the Great Lakes. Ships were viewed as unsinkable and expected to set sail, storm or not. The Edmund Fitzgerald changed that mindset forever. This catastrophe resulted in major changes to shipping practices on the Great Lakes, including new search and rescue protocols, revised crew training, loading guidelines, changes in navigational charts, and revisions to predicting wave heights. As a result, no major commercial shipwrecks have occurred on the Great Lakes in 50 years.

We can encounter spiritual shipwrecks in our own lives, when we ignore our moral and spiritual compass, abandoning the truth of God's Word. In this week's study, we are reminded that the most powerful defense against spiritual shipwrecks is a life that has been changed by Christ Jesus. As followers of Christ, though we were all sinners, by God's grace and mercy, we are saved from the destruction that comes from a life without Him. As a result, we must hold firmly to the truth of God's Word, share the gospel message with others, and defend the faith as we lead others to Him.

JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING!

OPENING

Think of a major “plot twist” or turning point in your life. How did your direction change after that moment?

If you had to pick a humorous or light-hearted “worst at...” title for yourself, what would it be, and why?

If you had to explain the concept of mercy or grace to a young child using a real-world example, what story or analogy would you use?

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JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING!

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How does Paul's past make his appointment to ministry so surprising? What does this teach us about how God qualifies people to do His work and who He can use?

(Open for discussion. Paul's testimony is living proof that the gospel of the grace of God really works! Paul had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man, but Jesus Changes Everything! No matter how sinful or shameful our past may be, God can still use us to do His work. Christ didn't just come to show us how to live a better life or to challenge us to be better people. He came to offer us a new life that He can use!)

JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING!

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(Open for discussion)

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How do you feel about talking about your past life when you share your faith? How does sharing our past struggles or failures impact our testimony to others?

(Open for discussion. When we share our weaknesses, struggles, and failures with others, we allow them to see the patience God has for us as He shows us grace and mercy, rather than judgement, when we choose to believe in Him.)

Why is the statement “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” the absolute center of the Christian faith?

(Open for discussion. This is what sets us apart from every other religion - God sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sin, in order that we could be justified through Him and restored to fellowship with Him. He defeated sin and death, paying the price for our sin and offering forgiveness to all who follow Him! Nothing we could ever do would satisfy that!)

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Paul calls himself “the worst of sinners” to show how patient God is. Do you ever feel like the “worst” sinner? How does Paul’s perspective change how we view our own unworthiness in comparison with God’s grace and mercy?

(Open for discussion. Like Paul, our lives should be full of humility and gratitude for all that Christ has done! Because of God’s great mercy and grace, He deserves all of our praise! We should value our faith in Christ more than anything else.)

How does experiencing God’s grace practically change the way you show love to difficult people in your own life?

(Open for discussion. If God in His holiness can show love, grace, and mercy to us, we should do the same to those around us. We may be the example of hope they need to see in order to help them draw near to God!)

JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING!

Paul tells Timothy to fight the battle well. Why does the Christian life often feel like a battle or war? What does spiritual warfare look like in the everyday life of a follower of Christ today?

(Open for discussion. When we choose to follow Christ, we will face struggles as we honor Him and seek to live holy lives. Fight, battle, warfare - all of these terms symbolize a hostile environment. When we choose to live for Him, we will face opposition, but we can rely on Christ alone to experience a fulfilled and fruitful life in Him!)

What specific battles are you facing in your faith right now? What “weapons” or spiritual disciplines can you use to fight them?

(Open for discussion)

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What are some modern-day distractions or compromises that can “shipwreck” people’s faith today, causing it to go off course? How can we stay on course in our own lives?

(Open for discussion. When we face spiritual battles, we must be certain of the truth and hold on to it firmly. Regardless of what we face, we must not be pulled away from God’s way! We must be careful not to just proclaim our faith with our words, but also live it out in our daily lives.)

What does it look like practically to maintain a clean conscience in a culture that compromises on the truth?

(Open for discussion. We must hold on to the truth of God, preach the gospel, and lead others to Christ as we defend the faith. We ought to do God’s will, no matter who is watching or what they might say.)

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(Open for discussion)

“Draw water from the wells...” embodies living according to God’s principles and design for our lives, participating with joy as we look ahead to the blessings He will provide!

What does it mean for you right now to “draw water from the wells of salvation” with joy rather than weariness? What are the daily or weekly spiritual practices you use to draw joy and strength from God’s salvation? What daily distractions tend to keep you from drinking deeply from God’s spiritual provision?

(Open for discussion)

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JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING!

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PRAY

- Paul considered himself to be the worst of sinners. When you look at your own life, do you have that same level of humility, or do you find yourself comparing your sins to others to make you feel better? Do you see God's mercy as clearly as Paul did, or do you carry guilt?

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- How might God want to use your story, struggles, or background as an example of hope for someone who feels they are too far gone?
- How has God uniquely strengthened you for the specific roles or ministries He has placed you in today? How is your life currently serving as visible proof of God's patience and grace to those around you?
- What practical guard rails can you build in your life right now to protect your heart from drifting toward spiritual shipwrecks?
- When was the last time a realization of God's grace naturally led you to deep, spontaneous praise? What are three specific things that God has done for you recently that you can thank Him for today? How can you cultivate that kind of gratitude this week?

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