

Small Group Guide: Finding God in "It's a Wonderful Life"

Opening Prayer & Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

Ice Breaker Question: If you could see what the world would be like without one person (besides yourself), who would you choose and why?

Key Scripture Passages

- John 1:1-2, 14
- Exodus 1:15-22; 2:1-10
- Romans 8:28
- Jeremiah 1:5
- Psalm 139:13-16
- Philippians 2:6-8
- Matthew 20:28
- Luke 9:23
- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Sermon Summary (5 minutes)

Have someone briefly summarize the main points of the sermon, focusing on:

- The central theme of "It's a Wonderful Life" - how each person's life impacts others
- What the world would be like if Jesus had never been born
- The importance of self-sacrifice and community
- The value God places on every individual life

Discussion Questions (30-40 minutes)

Part 1: The Value of One Life

1. **Personal Reflection:** The sermon asked, "What if you had never been born?" Without being morbid, how do you think your family, friends, or community would be different if you weren't part of their lives?
2. **Biblical Application:** The sermon highlighted how Moses almost didn't survive infancy. Can you think of other biblical figures whose lives seemed unlikely or insignificant at first but made tremendous impacts? What does this teach us about God's perspective on human life?
3. **Modern Context:** In our culture that often measures worth by productivity, wealth, or social status, how does the biblical truth that each life is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) challenge our thinking?

Part 2: A World Without Jesus

4. **Historical Impact:** The sermon listed numerous ways Jesus' birth changed civilization (healthcare, education, women's rights, children's value, etc.). Which of these impacts surprised you most? Why?
5. **Personal Impact:** Share how your life would be different if Jesus had never been born. What would you be missing spiritually, emotionally, or practically?
6. **Evangelism Opportunity:** How can understanding what the world would be like without Jesus help us share the gospel more effectively with unbelievers?

Part 3: Self-Sacrifice and Service

7. **George Bailey's Choice:** George repeatedly gave up his dreams to serve others (saving his brother, running the Building & Loan, staying in Bedford Falls). When have you had to make a similar choice between your desires and serving others? What was the outcome?
8. **Jesus' Example:** Read Philippians 2:6-8 together. How does Jesus' "kenosis" (self-emptying) challenge the way we approach our daily lives and relationships?

9. Practical Service: George Bailey made deposits in others' lives without expecting returns. Who in your life needs you to make such a deposit right now? What specific action could you take this week?

Part 4: The Power of Community

10. Friendship Matters: Clarence wrote, "No man is a failure who has friends." How have friendships kept you from "failing" at what matters most in life?
11. Church Community: The sermon emphasized that "this is a reason for church. We need each other." How well is our group fulfilling this purpose? Where could we improve in carrying one another's burdens?
12. Isolation vs. Connection: In our increasingly isolated society, what practical steps can we take to ensure no one in our group or church family feels alone, especially during difficult times?

Key Takeaways (5 minutes)

Have group members share one key truth that stood out to them:

- Every life matters: God has a purpose for each person from conception
- One life impacts countless others: We may never fully know our influence
- Jesus changed everything: Christianity transformed civilization and offers personal salvation
- Self-sacrifice reflects Christ: Denying ourselves to serve others is following Jesus' example
- Community is essential: We need each other to live a truly wonderful life

Practical Applications (10 minutes)

This Week's Challenge (Choose 1-2):

1. Gratitude Exercise: Write down 5-10 specific people whose lives would be significantly different if you had never been born. Thank God for the privilege of impacting their lives, then reach out to at least one of them this week to encourage them.
2. Service Opportunity: Identify one person in your sphere of influence who needs help (like George Bailey helped others). Make a specific plan to serve them this week without expecting anything in return.
3. Friendship Investment: Following Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, reach out to someone who may be struggling alone. Invite them to coffee, offer to pray with them, or simply let them know you're available.

4. Christmas Evangelism: Use the Christmas season to share with someone what the world would be like without Jesus. Explain what Jesus' birth means personally to you.
5. Family Discussion: If you have children, watch "It's a Wonderful Life" together and discuss the spiritual themes from the sermon. Talk about how your family impacts others.

Accountability

- Pair up with someone in the group to check in mid-week about your chosen application.
- Share at the next meeting how your application went.

Prayer Time (10-15 minutes)

Prayer Focus Areas:

- Thank God for the gift of life and the purpose He has for each person
- Pray for anyone struggling with feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness
- Ask God to help us see opportunities to serve others sacrificially
- Pray for those who don't know Jesus, that they would understand the true meaning of Christmas
- Lift up specific burdens that group members are carrying

Prayer Method: Consider praying in groups of 2-3, or have each person pray for the person on their right, focusing on the burdens and needs shared during discussion.

Closing Thought

"Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many others. When he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" - Clarence, *It's a Wonderful Life*

Your life matters. You are making a difference. Don't underestimate the impact of your presence, your prayers, and your service to others.

For Group Leaders

Preparation Tips:

- Watch "It's a Wonderful Life" before the meeting if possible

- Be prepared to share your own vulnerable moments about questioning your worth or impact
- Have tissues available - these topics can be emotional
- Be sensitive to anyone who may be struggling with depression or suicidal thoughts
- Have resources available for mental health support if needed

Time Management:

- This guide contains more questions than most groups can cover in one session
- Select questions most relevant to your group's needs
- Don't rush through to cover everything - depth is better than breadth
- Save some questions for future discussions if needed

Follow-Up:

- Check in with group members during the week, especially those who seemed particularly moved
- Share testimonies at the next meeting about how applications went
- Consider planning a group service project based on this discussion

Additional Discussion Questions

How would your community and the lives of those around you be different if you had never been born, and what does that reveal about the purpose God has given you?

In what ways do you see yourself making deposits in the lives of others without expecting a return, similar to George Bailey's sacrificial investments in his community?

The sermon mentions that Moses almost perished as a baby and never should have survived—how does recognizing God's providence in preserving lives throughout history strengthen your faith in His plan for your own life?

What does the doctrine of kenosis—Jesus emptying Himself of divine privileges to become human—teach us about how we should approach serving others in our daily lives?

George Bailey repeatedly gave up his dreams to serve others, ultimately discovering his life had profound meaning—when have you struggled between pursuing personal ambitions and sacrificing for the needs of others?

The movie shows Bedford Falls transformed into the dark, immoral Pottersville without George's influence—how are you actively working to bring light rather than darkness into your sphere of influence?

If Jesus had never been born, the sermon lists countless ways our world would be darker and more hopeless—how does contemplating this absence deepen your gratitude for Christ's incarnation?

Psalm 139 declares that God fashioned each person with intentionality before birth—how does this truth combat feelings of worthlessness or the belief that your life doesn't matter?

The film illustrates that one life touches countless others in ways we cannot fully comprehend—are there ways you've minimized your own impact or failed to recognize how God is using your ordinary faithfulness?

Solomon wrote that a threefold cord is not easily broken, emphasizing the power of friendship and community—in what practical ways can you invest more deeply in carrying others' burdens within the church body?

5-Day Devotional: The Value of One Life

Day 1: You Were Born for a Purpose

Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 139:13-16

Devotional: Before your parents ever conceived you, God conceived a purpose for your life. The sermon reminds us that God's fingerprints are visible in the process that brought you into being. You are not an accident or a mistake. Like George Bailey discovering his worth, you need to recognize that your life touches countless others in ways you may never fully comprehend. God has orchestrated your circumstances to positively impact people in your sphere of influence. Today, resist the temptation to minimize your importance. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, fashioned by the Creator with intentionality and love. Your existence matters profoundly to God and to those around you.

Reflection Question: How has your life already touched others in ways you might not have recognized?

Day 2: The Incarnation - God With Us

Reading: John 1:1-14; Philippians 2:5-11

Devotional: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This Christmas truth transforms everything. Jesus didn't remain distant and unapproachable; He emptied Himself of divine privileges to experience our broken reality. Like the actor who played Jesus in "King of Kings" later portraying the flawed pharmacist Mr. Gower, Christ descended from glory to mingle with struggling humanity. He tasted our alienation, felt our pain, and experienced our temptations—yet without sin. This doctrine of kenosis, or self-emptying, reveals a God who loves you enough to meet you where you are. You serve a Savior who understands your struggles because He walked through them Himself. He is Emmanuel, God with us.

Reflection Question: How does knowing Jesus experienced human struggles change your perspective on your current difficulties?

Day 3: A World Without Jesus

Reading: Romans 8:28-39; Colossians 1:15-20

Devotional: Imagine winter without Christmas—bleak, cold, and hopeless. That's what our world would be without Jesus. No forgiveness, no hope, no salvation. The sermon challenges us to consider how drastically different history would be if Christ had never been born. Children would remain devalued, women treated as property, and God viewed as unapproachable. But Jesus came, and everything changed. He elevated the overlooked, dignified the marginalized, and opened the way to the Father. Because He was born, lived, died, and rose again, you can have assurance of forgiveness and confidence in the Creator's acceptance. Your sins can be washed away by His sinless blood. This is why Christmas matters—not for presents or traditions, but for the Person who makes salvation possible.

Reflection Question: What aspect of salvation through Jesus are you most grateful for today?

Day 4: Carrying One Another's Burdens

Reading: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Galatians 6:1-5

Devotional: "No man is a failure who has friends." This truth from the movie reflects biblical wisdom. God designed us for community, not isolation. When George Bailey faced his darkest moment, friends surrounded him with sacrificial love. The church exists for this very purpose—to edify, lift up, and help carry burdens. Two are better than one because when one falls, the other can help them up. But woe to the one who is alone. You need the body of Christ, and the body needs you. Your presence in someone's life may be the difference between their falling and standing. Don't underestimate the power of showing up, encouraging, and bearing another's load. This is the heart of Christian community—tangible expressions of Christ's love through friendship and fellowship.

Reflection Question: Who in your life needs you to help carry their burden this week?

Day 5: The Gift of Salvation

Reading: Luke 2:8-20; Ephesians 2:1-10

Devotional: Clarence the angel told George that someone was about to throw away God's greatest gift—a human life. But there's an even greater gift: salvation through Jesus Christ. You cannot earn it, manufacture it, or deserve it. It's a gift of grace, freely offered to all who believe. Jesus came to this earth, lived a sinless life you could never live, and shed His blood so your sins could be washed away. He died, was buried, and rose again three days later, conquering death and offering you eternal life. This Christmas season, have you received this greatest gift? If you've wandered from God, He's calling you back. If you've never trusted Christ, today is your day of salvation. Don't throw away God's greatest gift. Receive it with open hands and a grateful heart.

Reflection Question: Have you personally received the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ? If so, who needs to hear about this gift from you?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of life and the even greater gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Help me to recognize my value in Your eyes and the impact my life has on others. Give me a

heart of service like Your Son, who came not to be served but to serve. Surround me with Christian friends who will help me carry my burdens, and make me faithful to carry theirs. Most of all, help me never to take for granted the incredible gift of Christmas—that You loved me enough to send Your Son to die for my sins. In Jesus' name, Amen.

