



Verses
We Know
By

Heart

*Discovering the Details of
Familiar New Testament Passages*

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LEADER'S GUIDE

Dear Small Group Leader,

Welcome! I am so excited that you have answered God's call to teach the Word in a small group setting. I pray that God will bless you and bring you much joy. My goal in providing this study guide is simple: *to get people into the Word of God for themselves*. As you teach, encourage the participants to really jump into Scripture and study what God is saying through the pages of the Bible. I am praying that this six week journey will help believers cultivate a deeper walk with God.

Through the next six sessions together, you and your group will discover many new things about some of the most familiar New Testament passages of our faith. As a teacher, you are more than merely a facilitator—you are a mentor, friend, and discipler. Come along side the participants in your group and support them during this season through prayer, discussion, and follow-up. I challenge you to commit to praying for each of the students. Get to know your class, and look for ways to encourage them. Pour yourself into their lives, and share your heart with each person who meets with your group. I promise that the benefits of small group gatherings far surpass the pages of a guide! Expect the unexpected, and prepare to forge new friendships. Delight in the ways that God has brought your group together for such a time as this.

I'm assuming you'll have to decide whether you'll be meeting in a church setting, a community room, or even in someone's living room. Sometimes we have to get creative with our meeting spaces, don't we? Whatever venue you choose, the space you use can negatively or positively impact your meetings, depending on how intentional you are about providing a safe place to share feelings, desires, and questions of faith. Be sure that the participants turn their cell phone ringers off so that noise is to a minimum. Our goal is to create an appropriate environment for conversation, transparency, and prayer during each session.

Some quick questions about the overall study setting:

Have you decided how you would like the room to be set up?

Will you be in an informal setting with chairs in a circle or more formal rows of chairs? Do you prefer a classroom setting with long tables and access to a chalkboard?

Do you like to teach while standing at a podium, sitting in a chair, or leaning on a stool?

These may sound like simple questions, but they will shape the dynamics of your group interaction. Figure out which setup is most comfortable for you, and what type of teaching environment you would like to foster. Informal chair placement (circle, etc) is more conducive to discussion, and rows of chairs facing a podium provide more of a lecture setting. Both work well. This is your class—go with what God impresses on your heart, and be ready to change if necessary.

Each week, consider providing the following things:

- Nametags (they really do help foster a sense of familiarity, especially with people like me who are terrible of remembering names!)
 - Prayer list (make time each session to pray for each other, and a list helps the group keep track of how God is moving in the lives of those we pray for.)
 - Roster (do you want to keep in touch, and foster new friendships? A roster is a great way to provide the resources needed to cultivate a network of friends.)
 - A willing spirit and open mind!
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In this guide, there are some suggested questions and thoughts for you. These hints and helps are designed to complement what is provided in the study guide, but they are in no way intended to limit you as a leader. Feel free to come up with additional challenging questions and thoughts. Look up relevant news stories that relate to the passage, research commentaries on the passages, and interject your own stories when you can. God has placed you in the lives of this group for a reason—be ready to share from your heart.

You will notice that this leader resource has a supplement for each of the six sessions, and gives you extra information and details to help with your planning. For each week, we will include three supplemental segments: teacher thoughts, quick questions, and suggested extras. Hopefully these added features will help you incorporate discussion points and teaching tools that will augment the study guide used by the students. I also encourage you to journal your thoughts during your preparation time. I suggest you use whatever journal is most comfortable and useable—some people use pretty books, while others use spiral or composition notebooks. Find what works for you, and use it! Journaling is a great way to process feelings, thoughts, and insights. It also gives you a glimpse into your spiritual growth journey.

If you have any questions for me, or need clarification on any part of the study material, please feel free to contact me through my website, www.ministryforlife.com. We are on this road of faith together my friend!

Praying for you, and thanking God for your servant heart,

Jennifer

Introductory Class

If you planned an introductory session, where you will hand out books and have a welcome time, here are some hints:

- Go around the room and have each person share her name and an interesting fact about her life.
- Pass the roster around so each person can add her contact information, and have a prayer request and prayer time.
- Distribute books, and go through an overview of the study guide.
- Emphasize the fact that we will be looking into some of our favorite “sound-byte” New Testament verses, and will be discovering some of the background information of these passages.
- Highlight the introduction text, and set the stage for the next six sessions together.
- Looking at the chapters, ask the students which passages are most familiar to them.
- If you have extra time to prepare, you can type out the six main passage addresses, print out the list, and hand them out to the class.

For an extra challenge, have the class memorize the passage or the verses you select from that passage each week. Give incentives or make up songs or clever ways to help the verse memorization. For your convenience, I have listed one memorization verse at the end of each week’s teacher guide for you to use. You’ll notice that sometimes it isn’t the sound-byte verse but a different part of the passage. This is intended to help cultivate a new perspective in the student—but you are welcome to use which ever verse you like for your memorization activity!

You may want to suggest that each person in the group use a journal in addition to the study book. You could also invite them to journal extra thoughts in the margins of the study guide. There are many ways to encourage learners to track their thoughts and Scripture discovery—and this is a good thing!

Week One

Welcome to the first week with your class! I trust that your time of preparation has gone well, and that you are ready to jump into this study with enthusiasm and excitement. I pray that you will have an awesome class session this week, and that God will speak to each person in your group in a special way.

Did you decide which kind of room setup suits your teaching style? Are you prepared with nametags, class syllabus with dates and your contact information, and extra pens and pencils?

Teacher Thoughts:

As you study the most famous passage in the New Testament, John chapter 3, read the story as if you've never seen it before. Journal about the ways your perception of the story about Jesus and Nicodemus has changed. What details of the story haven't you noticed before? What new insight have you gained?

When your group gets together, you may want to ask your group this same question as an opening exercise. Engaging the group in discussion right from the start will foster a deeper relational setting for the duration.

*** Take your time to nurture discussion and budding friendships. Be mindful that everyone has a chance to participate, and that no one person dominates the discussion. Keeping communication flowing and balanced is a fine art, so be patient with yourself and others!*

Quick Questions:

1. In Day One, we talk about how easily we find ourselves complacent when looking at such a familiar passage of Scripture. Ask the group if they have grown almost too familiar with the passage, and how they reacted to this realization in their time of study.
2. In Day Two, we talk about Nicodemus going to Jesus under "cover of darkness." Have there been times in your life when you've called out to Jesus in the quiet hours of the night? Relate this concept to the participants, and ask them what life situations have caused them to search for God in secret.

Suggested Extras:

Talk about the ways you see John 3:16 displayed in Christian gift items, decorations, and in our culture. If you have any gift items or decorations with John 3:16 written on them, bring them in for examples. Go to www.cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) and print out some of the popular John 3:16 items for sale, or bring a catalog into class to show the class how many ways the verse is displayed in today's Christian culture.

Emphasize that there is nothing wrong with gift items, or displaying the verse creatively, but stress the importance of standing firm on the truth of the words. Consider the idea that the sound-byte generation has done a disservice to the magnitude of the truth tucked in John 3:16.

Challenge the participants with the following question: "Do you think the commercialization of the passage and verse has led to the complacency we feel to the richness of God's gift of salvation?"

A good activity for the group would be to take each day's *focus verse* section and discuss the connection between each 3:16 segment, and the other corresponding passage verse listed in the daily assignment. We linked the segmented verse to the secondary verse, in an attempt to show the connection between the sound-byte and the context of this bigger picture of salvation. Ask the group to evaluate the separate parts of John 3:16, and how the segments help them understand the passage better as a whole.

Memory Verse:

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” – John 3:3

Week Two

Congratulations! You've made it through the first lesson, and have established the conversational flow of your small group experience. Are you praying for your attendees? Are you praying for God to use you in mighty ways in their lives? Times of small group interaction are rich in relationship as well as learning. Take time to minister to the needs and hearts of your group; showering them with the love of Jesus.

Teacher Thoughts:

Romans Chapter 8 reminds us of so many encouraging truths in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Everyone has felt defeated in some area of life. Many in your class may be dealing with negative emotions or defeated thinking *this week*. Use the class discussion to really encourage attendees in their walk with the Lord.

Emphasize the victory we have in Jesus Christ! Encourage your participants to embrace the teachings found in this week, and help them to understand the loving presence of God in all life's challenges.

Quick Questions:

1. Ask the group, "Have you ever felt all alone, as if no one was there to rescue you from a terrible situation?" Allow time to share about these moments. Then ask, "How did God help you through that time?" Use this topic to reinforce that as Christians, we are never really alone—God is with us at all times. Hopefully as you finish up this part of your discussion, the group will realize that God will sustain us even in our deepest trials.
2. In Day Four, we talk about God being with us through even the fiercest storms of life. Discuss with the class how God is with us in our trials. Focus on stories of praise for God's presence and provision.
3. Day Five challenges readers to encourage someone else. Talk about who you know that needs encouragement this week, and commit as a class to follow through with those words of affirmation and compassion.

Suggested Extras:

This week's focus has been on our victorious standing with God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, but how can we convey that to a person who is experiencing the reality of a tough situation? Personal testimony is a powerful tool of encouragement. Plan an after class get together this week that will focus on sharing testimonies of God's steadfast love.

If scheduling allows, block off extra time after this week's class. Have an area set up with tea, coffee, and some light snacks set up. Ask the class members to share their testimonies of God's sustaining presence in their lives. Relax, and listen. Share lives, open hearts, and allow God to use each one of you to lift the others up with praise reports of how God has fulfilled this week's verses in the group's lives.

Memory Verse: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" – Romans 8:31

Week Three

Welcome to Week Three! Hopefully your group of participants is getting to know each other, and you are forming a bond and a friendship that will last long after our six weeks together are finished. This week, we move into the Beatitudes, a wonderful sermon given by Jesus. Encourage the participants to share their experiences and spiritual growth testimonies as you discover all Jesus shared in this pivotal passage of Scripture.

Teacher Thoughts:

Have you heard the Beatitudes before? As you studied this week's lesson, what new insights you have about these Christian principles? Take time to praise God for what new understanding you've gained, and journal about what you've learned.

The takeaway for the group this week is the process of sanctification that each believer goes through in her Christian life. The more we grow in faith, the more we will understand that this is a life-long journey of discovering what it means to be a Christ-follower.

Quick Questions:

1. Ask the group which part of the Beatitudes is the most difficult for them to live out. Are they struggling with meekness? Humility? Being merciful? Hungering for righteousness? Talk about the whole list, and how we exhibit these qualities.
2. At the end of Day One I post a question about a stranger in a coffee shop who feels "empty inside." Discuss this scenario as a group. Learn from each other about how you can reach out to a person in need with the gospel.

Suggested Extras:

If the group has the time to do so, read Randy Alcorn's book, *Safely Home*, and have a book club type discussion where you simply talk about the book and how it affected you. You won't be disappointed! Even though it is a fiction work, this book opens our eyes to the reality of Christian persecution.

Memory Verse: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great..." – Matthew 5:12

Week Four

The Lord's Prayer is recited around the world, and used as a common prayer for all Christianity. We've much to learn from this week's lesson, and it is worth digging deeper than sound-byte level into the truths tucked in the passage. Prayer is our mode of communication with God. It is more than useful; it is essential to the authentic Christian life.

Teacher Thoughts:

What surprised you about this passage? What changes do you need to make in your personal prayer life? Write a letter to God in your journal and tell Him how you will improve your communication with Him. Praise Him for His provision in your daily life.

Quick Questions:

1. Talk with the class about the importance of prayer. Share ideas about how to best set aside time to pray, and how you prefer to pray (in a quiet room, outside in nature, during daily quiet moments, etc.).
2. Day One talks about showy prayer, and meaningless repetition in prayer. Discuss the ways you've seen prayer focus on man instead of God. Talk about the dangerous outcome of the influence of eastern religious traditions such as meditation, chanting, etc, in a Christian's prayer life.
3. Discuss the importance of a right heart attitude when praying.
4. Talk about Day Four's focus on forgiveness. Who do we have the hardest time forgiving? Refer to the list at the end of Day Four, and reinforce that all are forgiven who will accept the gift of Jesus' sacrificial atonement.

Suggested Extras:

Take a few extra minutes at the end of class to pray as a group. Pray for each other, your families, your church, and community. Then, pray for our nation, world, and those who don't know Jesus. Follow God's lead and pray for other things as the Holy Spirit leads you. Allow everyone to have an opportunity to pray as you go from one person to the next. End the time with a song of praise.

Memory Verse: "Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name." – Matthew 6:9

Week Five

Are you praying for each person in your group? Be sure to take time for prayer requests and prayer time during each session. If someone hasn't been to class in a few weeks, take time to call them or write them a quick email to see how they are doing. You never know what season of life they might be experiencing!

This week we discover the beautiful passage of love. Quoted often; overlooked in daily life even more often.

Teacher Thoughts:

If you are married, did your wedding ceremony include this passage? If not, have you attended a wedding where these verses were quoted? Reflect on that time, and think about how God's words spoken at that moment in life were significant. Journal about how the magnitude of God's love empowers and equips us in our quest to be a loving person.

Quick Questions:

1. Other than wedding ceremonies, how is this week's passage lived out in the Christian life? Refer to Day One's story about the shoebox ministry.
2. Discuss the meaning and significance of self-sacrifice. How does a servant heart reflect God's love?
3. In Day Four we talk about rejoicing in truth as an aspect to love. Discuss a time when standing firm in God's truth was the most significant way you could show love to another person.

Suggested Extras:

Talk about your wedding memories, and if you are married, bring in a photo from your wedding day. Have other married people in the group bring in their photos as well. Talk about how important it is to have God as an integral part of marriage, and how His love in our life helps us love other people.

Memory Verse: "But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." -- 1 Corinthians 13:13

Week Six

Welcome to Week Six! How does it feel to be on your last session together? Thank you for your commitment to this study material, and to the group the Lord has given you in this class. May He bless you for your obedience to His call, and your delight in His Word!

Teacher Thoughts:

As we've grown together in God's Word over the last six weeks, hopefully the group has shown signs of new spiritual growth. The fruit of the Spirit is a great lesson to leave our time together with. See, to me, this section of Galatians is one we will keep going back to through out our lives. We always need the reminder that living according to God's ways will produce a change in our reactions and interactions with others. Journal and/or pray about how you have changed during this season of teaching, and how the fruit of the Spirit is more evident in your life than it was before.

Quick Questions:

1. Ask the class how they've changed since they became a Christian. Talk about the concept of being a new creation in Christ Jesus.
2. Day Two talks about the desire of the flesh versus living by the Spirit of God. Ask the participants to share what kinds of temptations or fleshly desires keep them from focusing completely on God.
3. Remind the class that the fruit of the Spirit is evident in our life because we are walking by the Spirit – because we are believers in Jesus Christ.
3. End the class with a praise-filled thought on how we are truly living this life with a hope of eternity. Share how wonderful it is to know that as a believer, we will escape the perils of hell, and enjoy eternal fellowship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. If you have anyone in your group who is not a believer, or you are not sure if she has truly made Jesus Lord of her life, take time to present the gospel—this is the perfect segue to do so. Give an opportunity for questions and for a prayer of commitment.

Suggested Extras:

If you want to end with a fun activity, you could make a bookmark, wall hanging, or other craft item with the focus verse on it. Decorate it with pictures, rubber stamp images, drawings, or stickers of fruit. Be creative. Find a new way to keep the familiar verse tucked in your heart.

Memory Verse: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control; against these things there is no law.” – Galatians 5:22-23

Final Thoughts

If you are going to teach another class right after this one ends, take time either at the beginning or end of the last session to share what study material you'll be using, and ask people to sign up for the next study. Believe me, sign up sheets work, and they help people stay motivated in their pursuit of small group interaction.

You may want to arrange for a social or potluck gathering to follow the last class. Such closing activities help nurture an ongoing relationship between class members. Take time to enjoy each other and the trek you have been on together! If you do have a special time of fellowship, be sure to tell the group that I praise God for you and for them! Your dedication to Jesus and His Word is a joy to my soul.

Thank you for joining me on this journey. Be sure to check out my website, www.ministryforlife.com for information on my speaking ministry, twelve-week Bible study, *Life Principles for Christ-like Living*, six-week Bible study, *Verses We Know by Heart: Discovering the Details of Familiar Old Testament Passages*, and updates on upcoming books and studies.

Much love in Christ,

Jennifer
