

Weekly Study Guide

The week of January 10, 2016

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SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

Option 1:

Christian growth takes practice. Nobody runs a marathon with their first step out the door. Use these weekly "soul training exercises" to help you practice cooperating with the Holy Spirit so that you can hear and follow the Spirit's leading all throughout your life.

Each day this week, find a moment to reread Psalm 51:10-12 and ask God simply to restore you and to restore your joy in him. Then look around you and notice something that's working perfectly, just the way it should: a light that lights up a room, an animal keeping warm in the winter, a stove that cooks your food every time you turn it on, etc. Then ask God to help you imagine what it would be like to be restored to all that God made you to be.

Option 1 & 2:

Regular habits of private Bible reading strengthen our relationship with God and teach us how to follow Jesus. In addition to the thematic exercise above, you can use this guide each week to lead you through relevant sections of the Bible.

MONDAY

Mark 1:1-13

TUESDAY

Mark 1:14-15

WEDNESDAY

Mark 1:16-20

THURSDAY

Mark 1:21-28

FRIDAY

Mark 1:29-34

SATURDAY

Mark 1:35-39

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Group Discussion

CONNECT

Who do you know that is good at fixing things? What is something you have seen that was repaired or beautifully restored?

THIS WEEK'S LEARNING GOAL

We are learning that God can and wants to restore us. This means restoring our relationship with him, restoring the shape of our own lives, and restoring us in community with others.

LEARNING FROM THE BIBLE TOGETHER

God used the ancient prophet Ezekiel to speak to the hearts of his Israelite people a long time ago. He spoke to them in a time when they had wandered far from God, and he spoke words of God's promised restoration. **Read Ezekiel 11:19-20 and 36:26-27** in your group.

- God describes the problems of people's hearts in two different ways, one in each of these two readings. What are those two different problems?
- One of our problems is having a "divided" heart. What's wrong with having a divided heart?
- The other problem is having a "hard" heart. When or where do you see we might be hard-hearted toward someone?
- What does God promise to give his people instead of hard and divided hearts?
- If God would give us "new" or "soft" hearts or give us his Spirit, how would that help us be restored?

Jesus restored people from many different kinds of brokenness to a fuller experience of life. **Read Mark 9:14-29**. This is an intriguing story that may leave us with open questions. You might be left wondering if the disciples weren't already trying to pray (verse 29) or what modern medicine would say about this boy's condition. We don't have to answer all these questions to see Jesus' work of restoration.

- Try to imagine the feelings of the people in this story. How do you think the boy felt about his condition? How do you think the boy's father or parents experienced life with their son's affliction?

- What is the significance for the people in the story that this problem had been happening repeatedly and for a long time?
- This particular story is about someone with a physical ailment. There are other ways that people keep hurting themselves over and over again with frustrating regularity. How do you think we might do this without actually falling into fire or water like the boy in this story?
- From what life-stealing pattern, attitude, or behavior in your life would you like Jesus to restore you?

Read Psalm 51:10-12. This Psalm is traditionally understood as a prayer prayed by King David after his adultery with Bathsheba was uncovered by the prophet Nathan. David begins this prayer in confession, and then prays in these verses for God’s restoration.

- David realized that following his own desires had resulted in broken hearts and lives. **Read Psalm 51:3-4.** You don’t have to share anything you’re uncomfortable sharing, but have you ever felt the burden of your own sin like this?
- David also realized that real joy isn’t found where he was seeking it. He prayed “restore to me the joy of your salvation” (verse 12). What might real joy in God’s restoration of your life look like?

SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

As a group, look at the soul training exercises on the front of this Study Guide and get ready to practice them this week. Is there a particular time of day or some other specific commitment that would help you succeed in doing the exercise this week?

PRAY

Share your prayer concerns with one another. In your prayers, remember to ask God to restore you and to restore your joy in Him.