

Weekly Study Guide

The week of March 6, 2016

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God Transforms

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 walk by the Spirit's leading all throughout your life.

One of the passages in our study guide this week includes Romans 6:4. This verse is a short summary of God's transforming power in our lives. Read this verse once or twice each day. See if you can memorize it by the end of the week. If you haven't been baptized yet, you might want to contact one of our pastors about being baptized. Whether you are already baptized or not yet, in Christ God sets you free from sin and death.

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.

Daily Readings

MONDAY

Mark 12:18-27

TUESDAY

Mark 12:28-37

WEDNESDAY

Mark 12:38-44

THURSDAY

Mark 13:1-31

FRIDAY

Mark 13:32-36

SATURDAY

Mark 14:1-11

Group Discussion

CONNECT

Have you ever seen anything transform? A flower blooming? A tadpole becoming a frog? A caterpillar and a butterfly? A superhero in a movie? Share some examples.

THIS WEEK'S LEARNING GOAL

We are learning this week that God transforms. He not only forgives sin and opposes it, but he also transforms us and sets us free.

LEARNING FROM THE BIBLE TOGETHER

One of the most important stories in the Bible is the Old Testament story of the Exodus; the time when God emancipated ancient Israel from slavery in Egypt through the leadership of a prophet named Moses and then led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. One of our goals this week is simply to learn that story. The following excerpts are meant to help your group learn the general shape of that story.

- Read **Exodus 1:8-22**. What was the situation of the Israelites in ancient Egypt?
- Read **Exodus 3:1-12**. Moses was an Israelite, who had been raised as an Egyptian and then became a refugee in the wilderness. What did God call Moses to do?
- Read **Exodus 5:1-9**. As you read this passage, it may help to understand that Pharaoh thought of himself as a god. This was a clash between Yahweh (the god of Israel) and Pharaoh (the god of Egypt). They were different rulers, and the character of their kingdoms was as different as they were.
- Read **Exodus 12:1-14, 33-42**. What are the important features of the Passover meal?
- What is the purpose (or effect) of celebrating a meal like this over and over again, as Jews have done now for thousands of years?
- After leaving Egypt the Israelites crossed the Red Sea into the wilderness and eventually crossed the Jordan River on their way into the promised land. God gave them a law to govern their lives in these new places. Read **Deuteronomy 5:6-15**. This is the first half of the Ten Commandments. The events of the Exodus have become central to God's identity (v. 6), and even the observance of Sabbath is rooted in the Exodus (vv. 12-15, providing rest for those who labor because the Israelites themselves used to be in forced labor). What does it say about the importance of the Exodus story to see the role it plays here?

Read **Matthew 26:17-30**. This is one of the Biblical accounts of Jesus' "last supper." This meal is the inspiration for the "Lord's Supper" or "Communion" that Christians still celebrate today.

- This meal was a Passover meal. What were Jesus and his disciples almost certainly thinking about and remembering that day?

- Jesus escalated the conflict leading to his death at Passover. He interpreted the meaning of his death in the terms of the Passover meal. This is a question with no single right answer, but what do you think that means? What questions does it raise for you or make you wonder about?
- Jesus seems to say in these symbols that God is creating a new Exodus in him. If that's true, from what does God set people free through Jesus?

Read **Romans 6:1-23**. As you read, remember that Paul (the author of this letter) was a trained Jewish rabbi who had seen and decided to follow Jesus, the resurrected Jewish Messiah who had been baptized in the Jordan River and crucified at Passover. In this chapter, Paul writes about passing through water (in baptism) to be liberated from slavery (to sin).

- Paul asks in v. 1, "Shall we remain in sin?" (Some translations say "go on sinning," but this misses the sense of the original language of Romans.) How might remaining "in sin" be like remaining in Egypt in the Exodus story?
- Christians aren't liberated by being led out of Egypt on foot. What happens to us instead (vv. 3-4 and following)?
- Wandering in the wilderness on their way to the promised land, the Israelites sometimes talked as if they'd rather just go back to Egypt. Why might that return to Egypt have seemed attractive?
- Verses 12-14 and verse 19 tell us not to go back into slavery to sin. Why might that return to sin seem attractive?

SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

As a group, recall last week's soul training exercise (reflecting on God's self-sacrificial love in Philippians 2). Did you learn or experience anything you'd like to share with your group? Now, 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 these exercises?

PRAY

Share your prayer concerns with one another. Also, in your prayers today, reflect on God's holiness. Ask God to help you share his love and grow in godly holiness.



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