



A 4-WEEK
STUDY FROM THE
GOSPELS & PSALMS ON

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

FROM OUR ANNUAL *TEACHING STRATEGY*



WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED WITH . . .

PHILLIP LEWIS & ARELI ORTIZ

SERIES OVERVIEW

It's not easy to stay focused. Especially these days, when we're connected to a never-ending stream of new notifications, ads, messages, videos, posts, and entertainment, it makes sense if we feel a little distracted sometimes. Maybe you've struggled recently to stay focused on your homework, or on the story your friend was telling you, or on the movie you were watching – but have you ever struggled to stay focused when you were spending time with God? In this four-week series, we're going to get honest about how difficult it can be to stay focused when we're trying to pray, read the Bible, or grow in our faith. Each week, we'll explore passages from Psalms and the Gospels as we challenge ourselves to focus on practicing four spiritual disciplines that can help us grow. Together, we'll try focusing on **what God has said**, on **giving something up**, on **talking to God**, and on **rest**.

WEEK 1

This week, we'll explore the time Jesus was tested in the wilderness and hear how to ask God for direction from the Psalms.

- **BIG IDEA:** Focus on what God has said.
- **BIBLE:** Matthew 4:1-11, Psalm 119:9, 33-37

WEEK 2

This week, we'll focus on what Jesus had to say about prayer and fasting, along with realizing God is our source of strength from the Psalms.

- **BIG IDEA:** Focus on giving something up.
- **BIBLE:** Matthew 6:16-18; Psalm 121:1-8; Romans 12:9-11

WEEK 3

This week, we'll unpack Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well and an example of asking God for help from the Psalms.

- **BIG IDEA:** Focus on talking to God.
- **BIBLE:** John 4:5-30; Psalm 18:6; Philippians 4:6

WEEK 4

This week, we'll discover the time Jesus fed the five thousand and what it means to rest from the Psalms.

- **BIG IDEA:** Focus on rest.
- **BIBLE:** Mark 6:30-32; Psalm 23:1-6; Exodus 33:14

MEMORY VERSE: "Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight." – Psalm 119:33-35 (NIV)

WEEK 1

DISCUSSION GUIDE

focus

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THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on what God has said.

BIBLE

Matthew 4:1-11,
Psalm 119:9, 33-37

QUESTIONS

- What's one thing you could focus on for hours?
- When is it most difficult for you to focus? Why do you think that is?
- What are some ways a lack of focus might make it difficult to grow closer to God?
- Have you ever tried to read the Bible but struggled to focus? What made it so difficult?
- Like Jesus was tempted to lose focus from his mission, what are some things that tempt us to lose focus on God? Are any of those true for you?
- When we focus on God's words, how does it help us grow?
- Do you have any questions or hesitations about the Bible that make it difficult for you to focus on what it says? If so, what are they and how can we help?
- What are some things that might make reading or studying the Bible easier for you?
- Read Psalm 119:9. If you wanted to start memorizing Scripture, where would you start? How would you choose a verse? How would you memorize it?
- This week, what's one way you're going to practice focusing on what God has said?



Share your habit stacks with each other! See if anyone has identified a habit stack that would be helpful to someone else in the group.

Focus on what God has said.



focus

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WEEK 2

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THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on giving something up.

BIBLE

Matthew 6:16-18; Psalm 121:1-8;

WHAT IS FASTING? Fasting is a spiritual discipline that's been around for a long time and is practiced by just about every faith tradition. Fasting simply means giving up one thing, for a set period of time, in order to gain something else.

- **What's one thing you couldn't go a day without?**
- **Have you ever given up something you really liked for a good reason? What happened?**
- **Why do you think fasting is such a popular way for people to get close to God?**
- **Have you ever tried fasting from something before? If so, what was the most difficult part?**
- **What are some of the ways you think fasting could be misused?**
- **Have you ever been tempted to do something because it would make you seem more "holy"? What happened and how do you feel about it now?**
- **How can you tell if you're fasting for good reasons or selfish reasons? How easy do you think it is to tell the difference?**
- **How do you think giving something up could help you grow closer to God?**
- **Read Psalm 121:1-8. If you were to fast, how can these verses help you to focus on God?**
- **This week, what's one thing you're going to give up to help you better focus on God?**

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THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on talking to God.

BIBLE

John 4:5-30; Psalm 18:6 & 28; Philippians 4:6

- **What's something you could talk about for hours?**
- **What are some reasons a conversation with someone might get awkward?**
- **What are some reasons people might find prayer awkward or challenging? Can you relate to any of those reasons?**
- **What's something that, if it were possible, would make prayer much easier for you? Why don't you think God chose to make prayer work like that?**
- **Have you ever learned something about yourself or about God while you were praying? If so, what did God show you?**
- **If you decided to talk to God more regularly, how do you think it might change you like it changed the woman at the well?**
- **Right now, what's the biggest obstacle between you and a more focused prayer life?**
- **What kinds of conversations are you most likely to have with God right now? Would you ask for help, say thank you, ask questions, be angry, or something else?**
- **Read Philippians 4:6. Why do you think Paul tells us to be thankful while we're asking God for help?**
- **This week, what's one way you want to focus on talking to God and how can we help?**

ACTIVITY

PRAYER ACTIVITY TO END SMALL GROUP: *Collectively pray this together from Psalm 18:1-3,6*
I love you, Lord, my strength. The lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies. In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. Form his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before Him, into His ears

WEEK 4

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THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on rest.

BIBLE

Mark 6:30-32; Psalm 23:1-6;
Exodus 33:14

QUESTIONS

- If you could spend a whole day however you wanted, what would you do?
- On a scale of 1-10, how stressed do you think you are right now? On a scale of 1-10, how rested do you think you are right now?
- When you're stressed or tired, how does it usually impact you and the people around you? What about your relationship with God?
- If you were more focused on practicing rest, how do you think it could help your relationship with God grow?
- How can we tell the difference between times we really need to rest and times we're resting to avoid something we don't want to do?
- In the last week, what are some things that have made you feel stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed?
- When you're feeling stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed, what helps you feel rested again?
- How do you think you could find the rest you need right now? Do you need to make some changes to your routine, do you need God to intervene, or both?
- Has God ever helped you rest by giving you peace, comfort, or hope when you really needed it? What happened?
- Read Exodus 33:14. This week, what's one way you plan to focus on rest?



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