



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 for middle schoolers

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

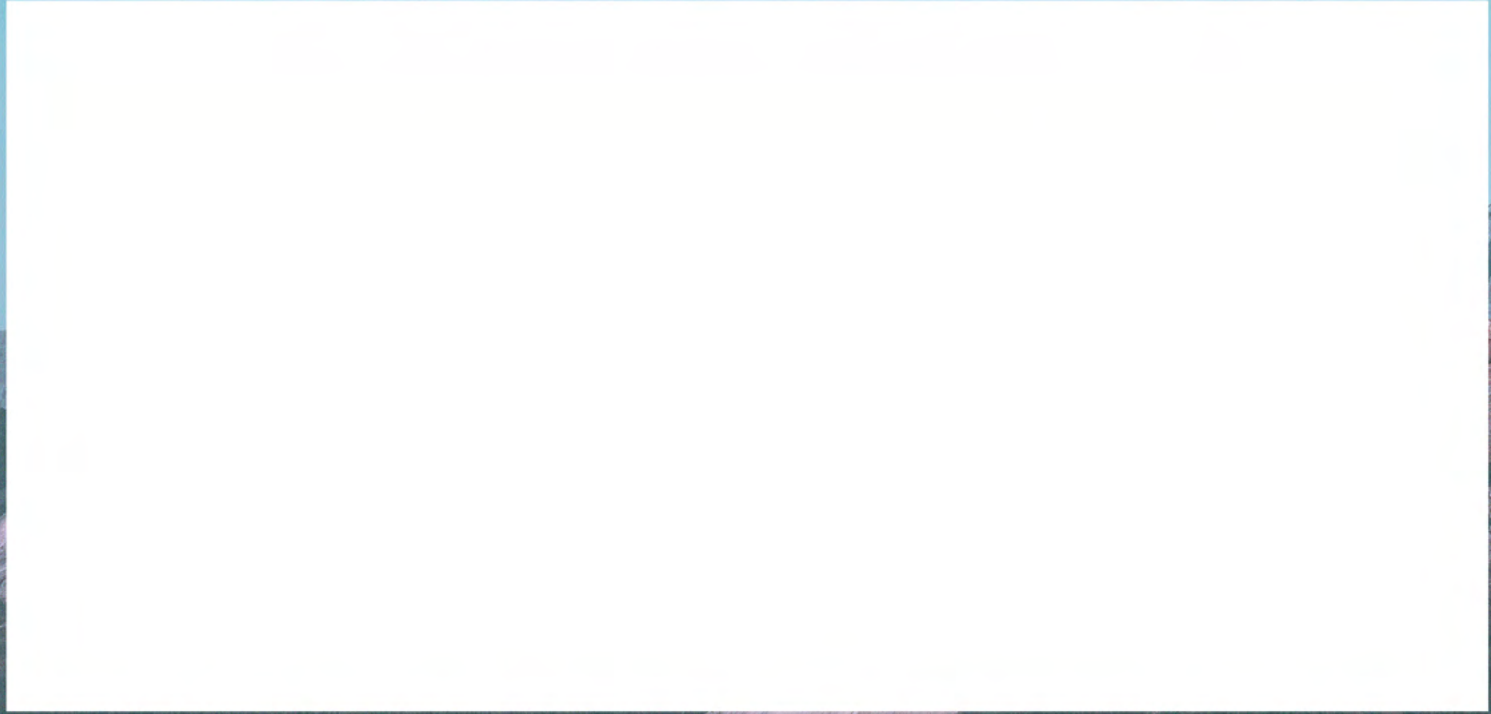
## QUESTIONS

- **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?**
- **Have you ever tried to read the Bible but struggled to focus? What made it so difficult?**
- **When we focus on God's words, how does it help us grow?**
- **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?**



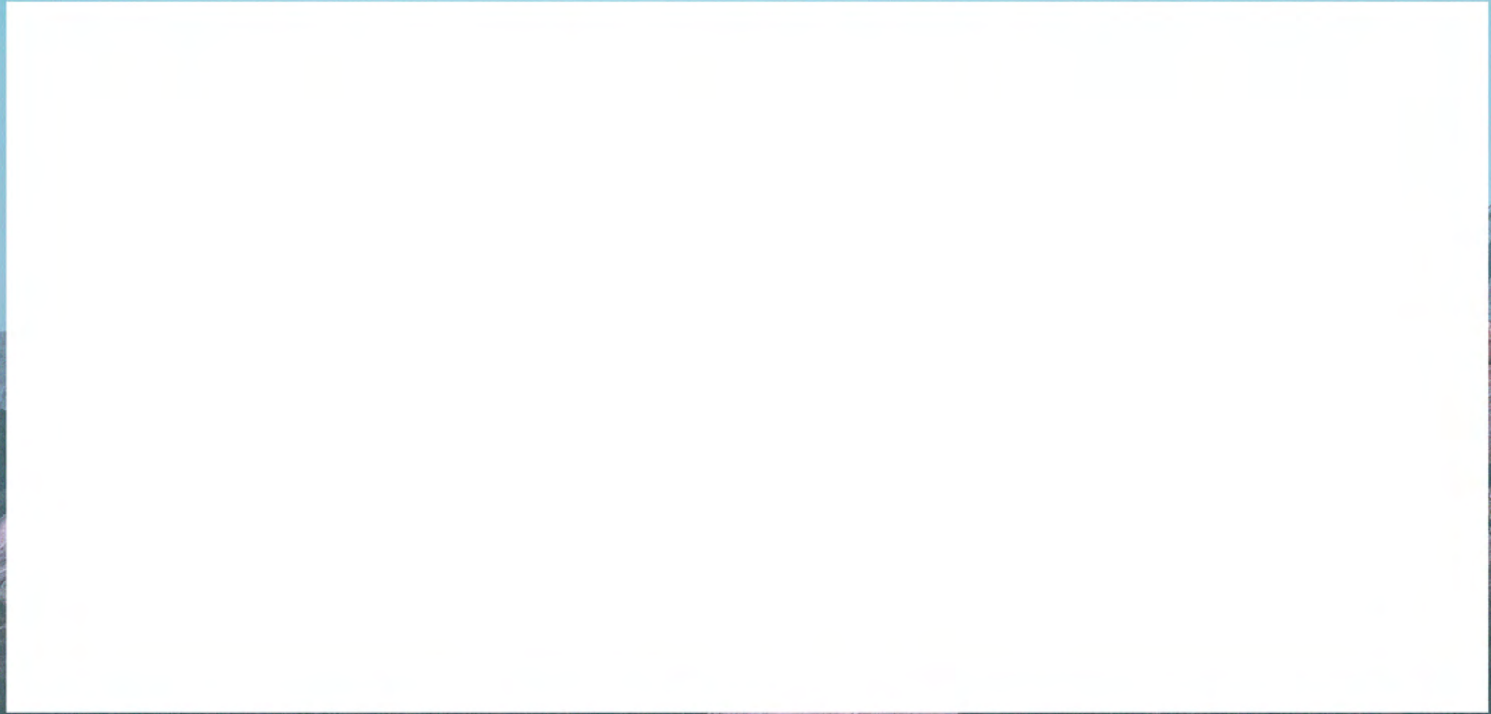
Share your habit stacks with each other! See if anyone has identified a habit stack that would be helpful to someone else in the group.

Focus on what God has said.



focus

Focus on what God has said.



focus

## WEEK 2

### DISCUSSION GUIDE For Middle Schoolers

## focus

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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?**
- **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 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?**



## WEEK 3

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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?**
- **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?**
- **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. From 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?**
- **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?**
- **Read Exodus 33:14. This week, what's one way you plan to focus on rest?**



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.