



# Living Proof: Discipleship

## What Is This Series About?

When *Living Proof: Evangelism* ended, Gerry Sanders had just decided to follow Christ. His wife, Linda, had been watching his process of change but had made no decision herself. And Gerry's friend, Phil "Raz" Rasouske, was also watching closely.

Living Proof: Discipleship answers the question, "What's next for Gerry and his family and friends?"

## How the Series Works

There are twelve sessions in this series, and we recommend you cover them in twelve weeks, but you can spread them over a longer period of time if you prefer.

### **In a Group Setting**

If you are going through *Living Proof* in a small group you can expect each session to last approximately 90 minutes. Here's an outline of a typical session:

- Welcome with prayer
- View an approximately fifteen-minute DVD segment
- Discuss the segment and worksheet questions
- Close in prayer

### **As an Individual**

If you are going through this on your own, we urge you to link-up with another Christian to assist and challenge you after you have viewed each DVD segment and completed the worksheet questions.

Answers for facilitators will appear in dotted boxes below each question.

## Meet the Cast



### **Gerry and Linda Sanders**

Gerry and Linda have been following Christ for about eight years. During that time, they have been wrestling with trusting each other and how to handle Linda's son from her first marriage, Erik. Gerry and Erik have difficulty respecting each other.



### **Bill and Jackie Warner**

Bill has been discipling Gerry and Phil for a few years, and during that time, he and Jackie have started struggling with financial and personal issues. Jackie meets with Linda, Mary Beth, and Alice Chan for lunch once a week.



### **Phil ("Raz") and Mary Beth Rasouske**

Phil has been walking with the Lord for seven years, but his wife, Mary Beth, has not committed herself yet. Jackie and Linda are discipling her in their weekly lunch meetings. Phil has had to deal with many personal habits during this time and weather some difficult storms.



### **Steve Lunsford**

Steve has been a steady friend of all of the characters through the years. In this part of the series, he shares some of the pain he has dealt with in his life.



**Erik Goodson**

Erick is Linda's son from her first marriage. He clashes with Gerry's authority almost weekly.



**Alice Chan**

A single co-worker of Linda's who has been joining her for weekly lunches along with Jackie, and Mary Beth.



**Thomas Jordan**

A friend and co-worked of Phil Rasouske

## Session 1

# Christian Growth in Contemporary Culture

**Big Idea:** Discipleship is:

- Process, not programs
- Principles, not methods
- People, not curriculum

The process takes a long time and requires patience because people today are struggling with many issues.

Over the next twelve sessions, we'll explore what it means to be a disciple and how to help ourselves and others to grow as disciples. The goals of session one are:

- To gain an initial working definition of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in our modern world.
- To become familiar with the main characters in the video and the issues they face as disciples.
- To understand the changing roles of a disciple and discipler in today's culture.
- To consider how the issues we face are like and unlike those of the video characters.



1. What are some of the issues the video characters struggle with in this segment?

*“Before (my) enlightening experiences in Brazil, I had viewed discipleship as a system of information and disciplines that resulted in the mastering of a body of knowledge and a set of skills. So I organized a syllabus and how-to’s, and busied myself with passing it on to the people I was helping. But something wasn’t right. It finally dawned on me that I was forcing my agenda on everyone, and it didn’t truly fit anyone. I need to learn to begin at the other person’s starting point. I described this concept at length in *Living Proof* because this is one of the most basic principles for communicating the message of Christ to another person. The same rule extends into helping a person grow in Christ.”*

*Jim Petersen,  
Lifestyle Discipleship, p. 20*

2. Can you identify with anyone in this segment? If so, who and how?

3. Until the day Gerry failed to show up for breakfast, Bill held some assumptions about discipleship such as:

- Progress in discipleship is measured by having your memory verses and doing the *Operation Timothy* chapter work.
- People who falter in these disciplines do so because they are half-hearted or because they are pursuing ungodly choices.
- Unfaithful disciples free us from further responsibility towards them.

How did his experience with Gerry explode Bill's assumptions?

4. How could Bill have better handled the situation of Gerry not showing up at breakfast?

5. In Luke 4:16-21, Jesus reads a passage from the prophet Isaiah and claims to be its fulfillment. Read Isaiah 61:1-4.

a. What is Jesus mission according to this passage?

b. In what ways is this Bill's mission as he seeks to help Gerry grow in Christ?

- c. Isaiah describes a mature follower of God as an oak of righteousness. What do you think it means to be an oak of righteousness and what kind of a picture does that evoke to you?



6. As you think about Gerry shouting at his stepson, how easy is it to imagine him becoming an oak of righteousness, displaying the Lord's splendor and renewing other people in "ruined cities"?

7. Do you think it was right for Bill to be discipling Gerry when Bill's own life-even his marriage-was under so much stress? Why?

**Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 1 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## Session 2

# It's An Inside Job

**Big Idea:** God calls us to grow in Christ while remaining in relationships with the unbelievers in our workplaces, neighborhoods, and families. God wants to use us right where we are.

Last time we saw that discipleship involves struggling people helping other struggling people become like Christ. The characters in our story were certainly a mess: Bill and Jackie were in pain over lowered financial expectations, while Gerry and Linda were in trouble with Linda's son, Erik.



In this session we introduce the concept of the *insider*. This represents a profound shift in the way we understand discipleship. Some of us used to believe that in order to grow in Christ and to help others grow, we needed to draw apart from the world. This is what God told Israel to do in the Old Testament: draw apart and be separate. By contrast, we'll see that discipleship in the New Testament requires us to remain living in a lost world, staying where God has placed us. Your goals in this session should be to:

- Understand what it means to be an insider, and
- Begin thinking about how you are an insider in someone's life.

1. From the video, what would you say it means to be an insider?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-24. How do Paul's instructions relate to the concept of an insider?

3. What would have happened if Gerry had taken the advice that he should stop being such a close friend to Raz?

*"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."*

*John 17:15-19*

*A Disciplemaker focuses on:*

- *People, not programs*
- *Goals, not means.*  
*(Bookstores are full of books on how to do things, but people don't know what they should be doing.)*
- *Individuals, not masses*
- *Intensive ministry, not extensive ministry (A few individuals receive countless hours of counsel, encouragement, exhortation, and help. This disciplemaker is the key influence in their lives for a time.)*
- *Building lives, not getting decisions*
- *The world as well as the neighborhood.*

*David Bok,  
"Who Is a Disciplemaker?"  
Discipleship Journal, Issue 12.*

4. How do you think Gerry grew by reaching out to Raz?

5. What did Raz gain by trying to live in a godly way in front of Thomas?

6. What impact do you think a believer has on an unbeliever when they are willing to risk being vulnerable about their weaknesses?



**Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 2 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## Session 3

# The Path to Maturity

**Big Idea:** Spiritual parents help disciples grow through stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. We all need spiritual parents when we are new in the faith, and we all can be spiritual parents.



Thus far, we've observed two features of our identity as followers of Christ. We are *strugglers* and *insiders*, sent to live among other strugglers in order to help them meet Christ and grow in Him. Another way to say it—we are broken people helping broken people.

1. How do struggling people help other struggling people grow?
2. What are some of the things that helped the characters in the video grow in Christ?
3. Why do babies and children need parents?
4. What do parents do?

5. What impression of spiritual parenting did you get from the video?

*“(B)ut we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”*

*1 Thessalonians 2:7-12*

6. Read 1 Thessalonians. 2:7-12. According to these verses, what does a spiritual parent do?

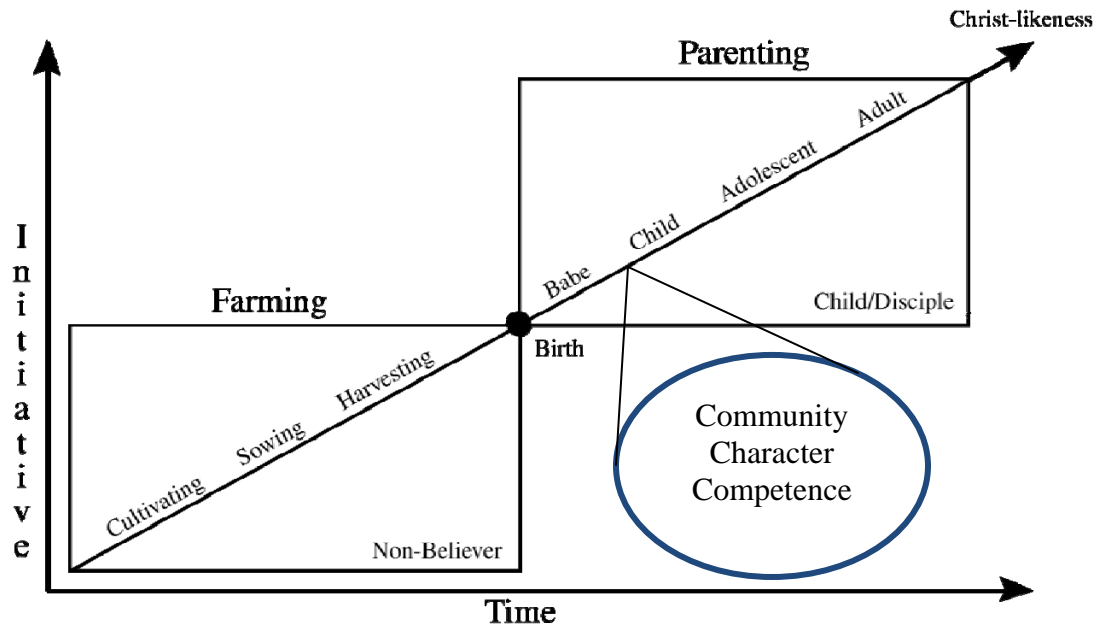
7. What are some of the traits of an effective spiritual parent as distinct from a teacher?

*The image [in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-10] is of a nurse-mother, tenderly fostering her own children. She is not concerned how to correct every mistake. She doesn't load her children with information. Rather, she is busy making them feel secure in her love and acceptance....*

*If we want new believers to assume the habit of going to the Scriptures daily, we need to be doing it ourselves. If we want them to take their needs to God in prayer, they must see us doing it. Whatever it is that we want new believers to do, we must be doing it ourselves. At the newborn/little child stage, our chief means of influencing is modeling.*

*(Jim Petersen, Lifestyle Discipleship, pg. 58)*

8. Read “The Ages and Stages of Growing Up” (see page 12). What stage are you?



9. The characters in the video said parenting others was a key factor in their own growth. Why would helping someone else grow be important to your growth?

*Our goals for our spiritual offspring are to see them:*

- *Understand Christ and the truths about Him in such a way that they are secure in their faith, and are being empowered and transformed in all areas of life.*
- *Develop in faith, hope, and love as an outgrowth of their intimacy with Christ and interdependence in a community.*
- *Assume their share of the responsibility that is intrinsic to the gospel. That is, that they, as ones who receive this message, begin to participate as message-bearers to the rest of the world.*

*(Jim Petersen, Lifestyle Discipleship, pg. 51)*

**Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 3 and 4 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## **The Ages and Stages of Growing Up<sup>1</sup>**

### *Birth/Infancy (“Help Me”)*

Newborn babies are fragile, dependent, innocent, and completely incapable of discerning danger. They would just as readily grab a red-hot poker as a baby rattle. In the same way, indiscriminating infant Christians will often grab for appealing false teaching, not realizing the risk. Believers in this stage cry out, “Help me!” Just surviving is their main focus. And until they begin to walk on their own, more mature Christians must spoon-feed them God’s Word and give them constant attention.

### *Childhood (“Tell Me”)*

In the second stage, childhood, the focus is learning. Believers in this phase are just beginning to feed themselves God’s truths, and their joy of discovery is electric. “Tell me!” is their cry, and their energy and curiosity seem boundless. The danger, however, is that they are very impressionable and their discernment is limited. Easily persuaded, they can be tempted to follow any strong authority figure. This stage eventually ends when they are able to reproduce their faith in others.

### *Adolescence (“Show Me”)*

Believers passing through this phase are capable of reproducing their faith but are sometimes reluctant to do so. Their level of discernment is not always reliable, and they are often critical of others yet unwilling to contribute anything themselves. They focus on challenging others, saying “Show me!” or “Prove it to me!” They don’t settle for pat answers and the way things have always been; instead, they challenge us to rethink our beliefs and prove the integrity of our lives. They are often idealistic, intolerant, and independent. When they eventually shift their focus to the needs of others, they are ready to enter the next level.

### *Adulthood (“Follow Me”)*

This is a period of stability and balance. Adult Christians can easily spot a spiritual fraud because they have developed great discernment (see Hebrews 5:14). With their focus on serving others, their cry is “Follow Me!” as they follow Christ. They don’t grasp at every Christian fad that breezes by. They know maturity is a lengthy process that requires what Friedrich Nietzsche termed a “long obedience in the same directions.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Up in God’s Family* (Anaheim Calif: Insight for Living, 1994), pp. 16-21.

<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, as quoted by Eugene H. Petersen in *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1980), p. 9.

## What Changes Fast, What Changes Slowly

**Big Idea:** Some things change immediately when we trust Christ. Others things change very slowly over years. We need to be patient with ourselves, our spiritual children, and other brothers and sisters. Community is critical for Christian growth. It takes the whole village to raise a child.



Many believers feel disappointed and frustrated that certain aspects of their character are so slow to change. Some of us expected change to be automatic when we started believing in Christ and attending church. Others have labored for years at spiritual disciplines but still see stubborn weaknesses in ourselves. So what should we expect of ourselves and those whom we are helping to grow? What changes immediately at conversion and what changes more slowly? What is God's part of the job of change, and what is ours?

1. What is one challenge you are facing as you try to be an insider?
2. What did you learn about change in this segment?
3. Read Galatians 5:17. This verse describes a war between our flesh and God's Spirit inside us. What signs of this war do you see in Gerry?

*“For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”*

*Galatians 5:17*

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul compares his life to that of an athlete. An athlete disciplines his body to overcome its natural tendency to flab. Likewise, Paul disciplines his mind and body to overcome the natural tendencies of the flesh. He describes an aspect of his discipline in Romans 8:5-8 by choosing to set his mind on what the Spirit wants, rather than on what his flesh wants.

4. How did Bill help Gerry set his mind on what the Spirit wants in relation to Erik?

5. What do you think about the way Bill handled Gerry's rage against Erik?

6. How did being Thomas' spiritual parent help Raz grow?



Two key ideas emerge from this session:

- Change occurs at a glacial pace because character matures slowly
- Community brings accountability and encouragement for growth.

**For Further Thought:**

Disciplines like prayer, learning the Scriptures, serving others, asking forgiveness, etc. are as important to spiritual health as regular exercise is to physical health. Such disciplines condition us to set our minds on the Spirit instead of our fleshly desires. We need to make them part of our lives without viewing them as means to earning God's favor or to feeling good about ourselves.

**Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 5 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## Change from the Inside Out

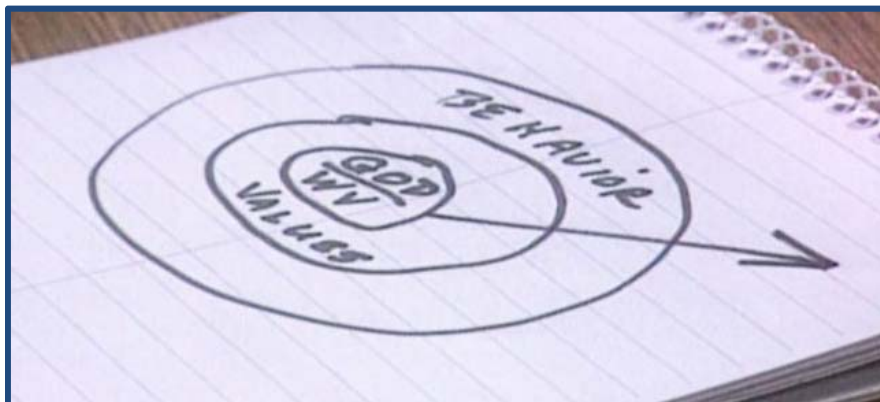
**Big Idea:** God wants to change us from the inside out. Behind everyone's story (external behavior) there's another story (what's happened to him or her in the past, what's happening inside him or her now). Instead of focusing on behavior (ours or that of our spiritual children) we need to focus on changing our worldview and values.

1. Write down four or five of the values that motivate your life. This is, what are the values that motivate what you actually do, not ones that just sound noble or biblical? Here are some possibilities:

- Making money
- Knowing God better
- Gaining respect from others
- Seeing people come to know Christ
- Feeling comfortable
- Feeling safe and secure
- Reaching your fullest potential
- Expressing your creativity
- Raising academically successful kids
- Raising compassionate kids
- Becoming like Christ
- Looking beautiful

### ***For Further Thought:***

*A worldview is a person's answers to the basic questions of life. (Where did the universe come from? Why do I exist? Is there a God or gods? What are he/they like?) Most of us aren't conscious of our worldviews unless we are philosophically inclined, but all of us have world views that lie behind our values and hence our behavior. For instance, if Gerry values having Erik's respect (which Gerry equates with Erik's obedience) more than he values Erik as a person, Gerry gets this value from a worldview belief, such as "A man's worth comes from having others respect him."*



2. Why can't Gerry change the way he treats Erik by willpower?

3. Below are some beliefs and values available to Gerry from the Holy Spirit. What might be some of Gerry's selfish values that cause his rage?

**Beliefs and Values from the Spirit**

*Beliefs:* God loves Erik

God wants Erik to love Him

Erik is a prisoner of sin who needs to be rescued

Gerry's self worth comes from Christ

Therefore...

*Values:* It is important to love Erik as God does

It's important for Gerry to demonstrate Christ's grace & truth to Erik

It's important for Gerry to forgive Erik as Christ does.

It's not essential to Gerry's self-worth that Erik respect him.

**Beliefs and Values of Gerry's Flesh**

*Example:* Erik is a pain in the neck



4. Why must change begin with worldview and values, rather than behavior?

5. What are some things a person can do to develop a Christ-centered view of the world?

6. Read Col. 2:20-23 and Col. 3:1-4.
- a. Instead of focusing on rules, Paul urges us to shift our worldviews and values. How can we practically do what Paul suggests?

b. Why would believing that his life is now hidden with Christ affect the way Gerry treats Erik?

c. How would Gerry go about setting his mind on things above?

*“An understanding of the interplay between worldview, values, and behavior helps us know how to minister to others. If we want to see true transformation occur, our efforts should be oriented toward affecting what a person believes and values. That helps us take wrong behavior in stride. We know that in time genuine changes in behavior will appear.*

*It is interesting to note that this sequence of worldview, values, and behavior could serve as the outline for several of the Epistles Paul wrote to the churches, particularly Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. They begin with the big picture. They focus on Christ and His purposes. Then they move to the implications of that picture. Finally, they get very specific on matters of behavior.”*

*Jim Petersen,  
Lifestyle Discipleship, pp. 83-84*

7. Why do we often prefer to focus on changing behavior rather than changing worldview and values?

8. There is almost a “conspiracy of silence” among Christians in which we hurt but don’t talk about our wrong behaviors and feelings behind them. Why don’t we talk about things like Gerry’s rage or Raz’s struggle with pornography?

**Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 6 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## Sin, the Worst Deal in Town

**Big Idea:** We sin because . . .

- it's in our nature to sin.
- we program ourselves with sinful habits.
- we have blind spots in areas where truth would be uncomfortable.

Repentance means deciding to change direction; it's a decision of the will that requires dependence upon the Holy Spirit to carry out. We can help each other in this process by being open about our own weaknesses and providing a safe environment for confession.

Remember the incident with Raz and the swimsuit issue? That wasn't just an isolated event; it's "just the tip of the iceberg," as Raz says in this session. Raz is frustrated that habits like a taste for pornography don't just melt away when we commit ourselves to Christ. Instead, they hang on like leeches, sucking us dry. This session will attempt to answer these questions:

- Why do we keep sinning when it's the worst deal in town?
- What do *confession* and *repentance* really mean?
- If sin is so powerful, how can we not sin?



1. According to the video, what are the three reasons that we sin?

2. What did Raz learn about sin in this segment?



8. What is an area in your life that you have struggled with in the past five years?

*Repentance is not an emotion. It is not feeling sorry for your sins. It is a decision. It is deciding that you have been wrong in supposing that you could manage your own life and be your own god; it is deciding that you were wrong in thinking that you had, or could get, the strength, education and training to make it on your own; it is deciding that you have been told a pack of lies about yourself and your neighbor and your world. And it is deciding that God in Jesus Christ is telling you the truth. Repentance is a realization that what God wants from you and what you want from God are not going to be achieved by doing the same old things, thinking the same old thoughts...*

*Whenever we say no to one way of life that we have long been used to, there is pain. But when the way of life is, in fact, a way of death, a way of war, the quicker we leave it the better.<sup>1</sup>*

**NOTE**

1. Eugene H. Petersen, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, Ill.; InterVarsity Press, 1980.) p. 25.

**Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 7 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## No Left Turn

**Big Idea:** Spiritual transformation occurs as we struggle with our experiences in the light of God’s Word and among community. It’s essential in this process to choose the right turn through humility and dependence on the Holy Spirit rather than the left turn to self-control through willpower.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a nineteenth-century philosopher who was not exactly known for devout faith in God, described the life of faith as “a long obedience in the same direction.” The characters in our story are not finding this long obedience easy. Few of us do. But in this segment they learn the seven critical elements of spiritual transformation and find a few of those elements surprising. Your goal in this session will be to understand these seven elements.

1. According to the video, there are seven elements of spiritual transformation. What are they?

2. How do the characters’ lives illustrate aspects of the change process?

- Change is worked out in the context of life experience.
- The Scriptures enable us to make sense of our experiences and show us how to respond.
- The tension between our inclinations and the truth of Scripture produces struggle.
- God will help us if we humble ourselves, but will not help us if we remain arrogant about our strength.



The Seven Elements of Spiritual Transformation

- The Holy Spirit enables us to do what we cannot do in our own strength.
- An effective community enables us to keep up the day-in day-out struggle necessary for deep change.



3. What is the difference between the left turn and right turn?
4. What left turns have you seen Gerry take in his relationship with Erik? Have you seen him take right turns?
5. Think of an area of your life in which you need to grow. Where are you in the change process?
  - I've just had an experience that points out my need to change.
  - I need to find out what the Scripture says about an experience I've just had or am having.
  - I know what the Bible says about my situation, but I'm failing to do what the Bible says.
  - I am trying to do what is right by my own strength of will.
  - I'm struggling to get myself into a place of humility about this issue.
  - I've admitted my helplessness to God about this, and I'm asking for the Holy Spirit's help.
  - God's Spirit is helping me in this area, but I still have quite a way to go.

If none of these appear to fit your situation, describe it in your own words.

6. The opposite of humility is pride. Pride has several faces. Which of these (if any) are ones you can identify with? Think about which ones you have seen in others.

- A tough, I-can-do-it, I'm-better-than-this stance.
- False humility, where you claim to "give all the glory to God" but are really satisfied with your own performance.
- Self Contempt: "I'm so pathetic. I'll never get this right. Look, I did it again! What an idiot!" (This attitude implies that you can make yourself change if you just beat yourself up hard enough.)
- Despair: "I give up. I'll never change." (This may not look like pride, but it still refuses to trust God's power and goodness.)

7. What is the difference between humility and pride?

8. What environment do you have as described by Peterson?

*"A Christian must have an environment where he or she **can go and talk openly about how things are going** in this matter of following Christ. It needs to be a place where one can get personalized attention and give it to others.*

*The transformation process we have been describing is characterized by struggle. Nobody can stick it out in an effort of this nature, day after day, year after year, if they attempt to go it alone. Hebrews 3:13 says, 'encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.'*

*This passage implies **an intense, daily, accepting environment**, where the experiences we are dealing with can be an open topic of conversation. It implies commitment to one another, being there when the going gets heavy, when a sister or brother is more inclined to choose wrong over right... Honesty, mutual loving support, and intercession for one another are essential ingredients to repair the damage of our lives."*

*Jim Petersen,  
Lifestyle Discipleship, pp. 118-119*

### Suggested Additional Reading:

Read chapter 8 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## God Doesn't Waste Pain

**Big Idea:** Growth most often occurs in the context of painful experiences. God never abandons us in those times. He is always there to comfort and strengthen us through them.

In this session, the characters think about and discuss the causes of their suffering:

- Other's sinful choices
- Their own bad judgment
- The devil
- The natural order of death and disease

But more important than understanding the cause is understanding what we can expect from God in the midst of suffering.



1. What did each character gain from pain?

Gerry

Bill

Steve

Linda

Oscar

2. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

- a. What does God promise concerning our pain?
- b. How are we to respond to God's promise?

3. Have you ever experienced God comforting you when you were in pain? Describe how He comforted you.

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."*

*2 Corinthians 1:3-5*

4. When people are in pain, do they seek comfort from you? Why do you think that is?

5. Read Romans 5:3-5. Why does Paul say that we should rejoice in our sufferings?

6. What painful circumstances are you struggling with currently and how are you doing with them?

7. How can the group assist you?

*“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”*

*Romans 5:3-5*

“Whatever gets dumped into our lives, whatever the source, whether it is bitter or sweet, God can make artful use of it as He makes us over to look like His son.... We just need to remember one thing: We do not always come out “winners” from these trials. We won’t necessarily end up healthier, wealthier, and more comfortable. We will end up stronger and wiser – when we respond properly. But among the heroes in faith’s “Hall of Fame” in Hebrews 11, we find people who were tortured, jeered at, flogged, chained, and imprisoned. Some were stoned, sawn in two, and killed by the sword. They wandered about destitute and mistreated, living in caves and holes in the ground. These were among the ‘heroes’! Life, for them, did not end with a comfortable retirement.

“God does not promise that He will make our sufferings go away. What He does promise is that He will be right in there with us, inseparable from us, giving us everything we need to win out over the evil, even while we are, by human standards, losing.” Jim Petersen, *Lifestyle Discipleship*, pp. 134-135

### **Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 9 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## When Life is Messy

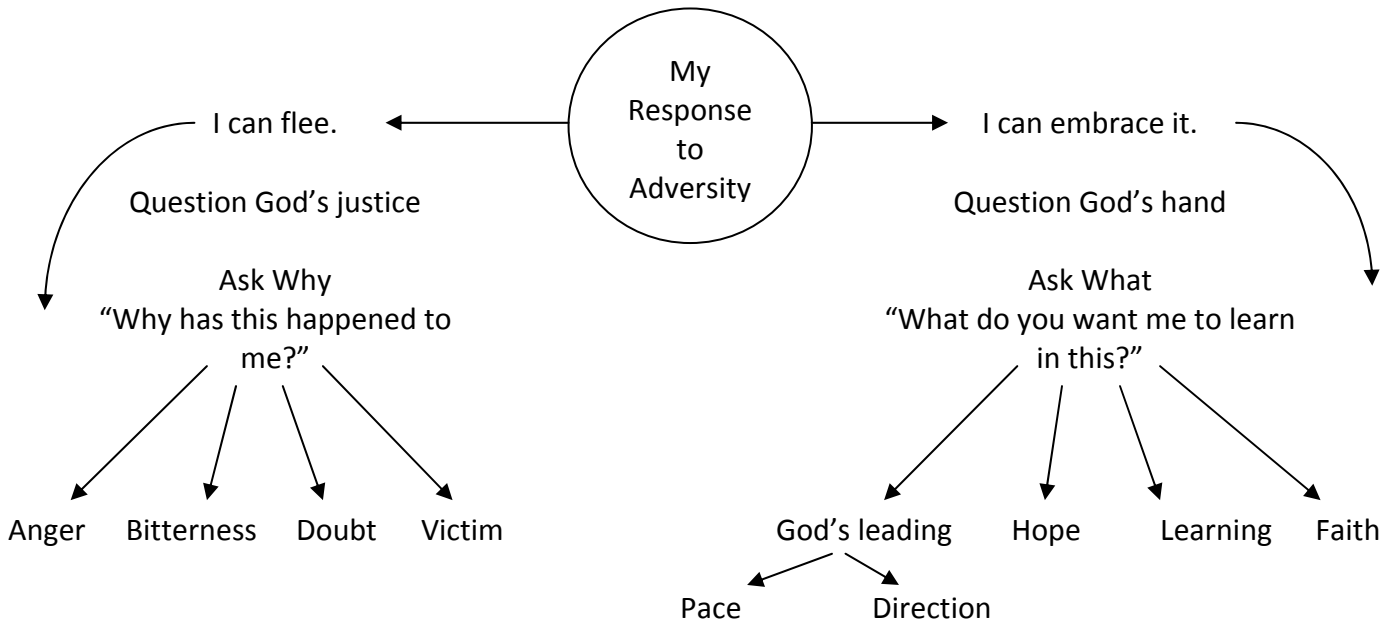
**Big Idea:** A constructive response to our own suffering involves humbly depending on God for strength to endure, and humbly receiving comfort from other people. A constructive response to another person's suffering involves standing with them, not giving advice.

Two sessions have been devoted to the topic of suffering, because too often it stalls a believer's growth instead of enhancing it. Suffering is supposed to lead to endurance, character, and hope, but frequently it brings merely discouragement, bitterness, and despair. It produces this opposite result when we misjudge God's role in it and choose to respond poorly. In Session 8, we looked at God's role in suffering; in this session we'll consider our response.



1. What are two ways you can respond to adversity?

- You can flee from it
- You can embrace it



### Ministering When Others Experience Suffering and Adversity

2. If you flee from adversity, what might your attitude be towards God?

3. What might your emotional response be to asking why something has happened?

4. If you embrace adversity, what might your attitude be towards God?

5. What might your spiritual response be to asking "What do you want me to learn?"

6. How did each of these characters handle their own pain or uncertainty?

1. *Demonstrate love and commitment by taking the time to communicate your awareness of their situation and their needs.*
2. *Refrain from giving your advice. Rather, mourn with those who mourn. Words are often not necessary; silent service is always safe. Otherwise you could become like one of Job's friends.*
3. *Avoid over-spiritualizing and help others avoid it. Refrain from saying, "God told me to tell you..." even if it seems God did. By making that statement, you elevate the authority of your words to where they are beyond dispute.*
4. *Help people recognize that adversity can come from many sources. Help them focus on how to respond rather than on attaching blame or criticizing external circumstances.*
5. *When we suffer, it is an opportunity to be transparent with our sisters and brothers. When they suffer, it's an opportunity to practice community.*
6. *Trials are dangerous. They can discourage and dishearten. This opens the way for Satan to cause permanent damage, such as bitterness. We must pray for people in trials and encourage them.*

*Jim Petersen,  
Lifestyle Discipleship, pp. 149-150*

7. How did the group handle the others pain?



8. How have you handled hard times in the past?

9. What is one stress you are currently facing?

**Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 10 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*



4. What do you think a spiritual parent's role is in helping someone grow in character?



5. Read 2 Cor. 3:4-6. What do you these verses mean to you?

*Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*  
*2 Corinthians 3:4-6*

**Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 11 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## Running on Empty

**Big Idea:** Both spiritual parenting and personal growth requires time. We will never be effective as insiders and spiritual parents unless we solve our problem with chronic busyness, over commitment and consequent exhaustion.

Growth, like love is often spelled T-I-M-E. And time is a precious commodity these days. If we're going to function effectively as insiders, then we need to consider carefully how to prioritize our time. This session is for every overloaded participant in this series who has been asking, "That's great, but when do I have time for this?"

1. Think of yourself as a car that runs on physical, emotional, and spiritual fuel. On a scale of 1 to 10, how full right now are your tanks?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Physical

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Emotional

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Spiritual

2. Why is Bill so overloaded? What are his root problems?



3. Do you ever feel you're too busy to be an effective Insider who brings God's grace and truth to the people around you? If so, explain what you're feeling and why.

4. How would you answer the question, “What are you giving your life to?”

- Getting to know God and make Him known.
- Living with my wife in an understanding way; learning to love her as Christ loves the church.
- Investing in my daughter and son-in-law, expecting them to come to know Christ and be fruitful.
- Spending time with people to make them disciples.
- Using my gifts in the CBMC ministry.



5. In order to spend time with Erik, Thomas had to take some time from something else. He might spend less time building his career or less time with other friends or less time exercising or sleeping. How does that kind of trade-off feel to you?

6. As you think about simplifying your schedule in order to have room for people (and yourself), what seem to be the main obstacles?

Solitude is being with God and God alone. Is there any space for that in your life?

Why is it so important that you are with God and God alone on the mountain top? It's important because it's the place in which you can listen to the voice of the One who call you the beloved. To pray is to listen to "my beloved son," "my beloved child."

...When you are not claiming that voice, you cannot walk freely in this world....There are many other voices speaking – loudly: "Prove that you are the beloved. Prove you're worth something."

It will take work – deliberate, conscious effort – and it will take time to regain margin and find the space to be available in your calling as an insider. You will become a non-conformist....

Get away from home and your familiar surroundings, from telephones and people who know you. Spend the first day in the Scriptures, in prayer, and in personal assessment. Decide the second day to working through and examining the commitments that make up your life. Ask yourself how they contribute to or work against the things you want your life to be about....

[A]sk yourself some questions and write down the answers. Let me suggest a few:

- "What are the key Scripture passages that God has used in my life in the past?" Go back and review them....
- "Do I know Christ more intimately now that I did a year ago?..."
- "What motives, positive and negative, drive my life?..."
- "What anxieties do I experience?..."

Jim Petersen, *Lifestyle Discipleship*, pp. 187, 189

### **Suggested Additional Reading:**

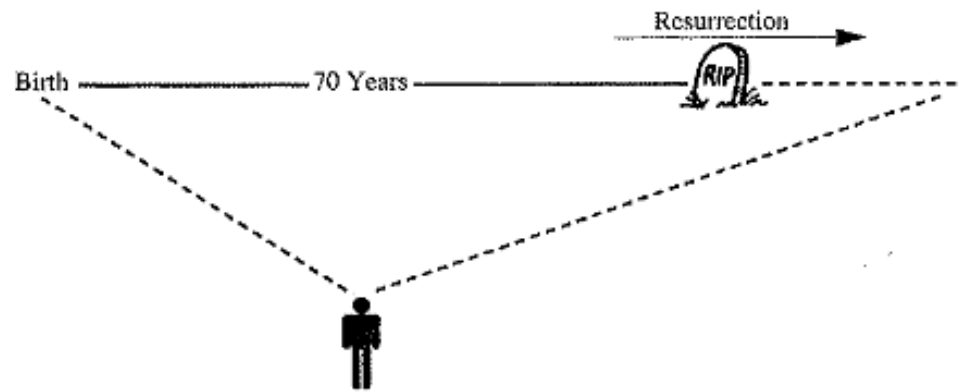
Read chapter 13 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*

## The Eternal Purpose

**Big Idea:** Either we live life on the seventy-year plan, as though this life is all there is, or we can devote ourselves to something that has value for eternity.

It's easy to exhaust ourselves just surviving, longing for the day when we can retire and relax. Isn't there more to life than that? There is. We can be partners with God in an eternal purpose right now.

1. What do you think about Bill's decision to stay with his job rather than taking a staff position at his church?
2. How would having an eternal perspective instead of living by the seventy-year plan affect your priorities?
3. What are the costs of building your life around an eternal perspective and committing to give your life to others?
4. What are the rewards?
5. What have you learned or gained from this series?



6. What obstacles do you see?

7. What help do you need?

Our walk with Christ is meant to be an adventure. But surrounding as we are by the pressures of modern society, it's not easy to keep the adventure alive. In the course of this book we have explored the elements that need to be present if the adventure is to endure. They can be summarized in the few statements that follow:

- Each of us is called to a living bond with Christ. This relationship is to be a two-way street between Him and us. As we need His Word and engage Him in our daily affairs, He engages us as well in His.
- We are also called into a living bond with one another. This implies that we are a safe place for each other to come to, where God empowers us to walk in truth and to overcome the things that have us in bondage.
- We can participate in the eternal purposes of God, whatever our situation. We are called to glorify God among the people who make up our networks for relationships. We should be looking to God to make us fruitful in the various contexts where we live out our lives.
- The Great Commission is really God's invitation to us to co-labor with Him in accomplishing His purposes among the nations. All of us, in some way, at some level, need to respond to this call.

Jim Petersen, *Lifestyle Discipleship*, pp. 190-191

**Suggested Additional Reading:**

Read chapter 12 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*