



BOOK CLUB SERIES FOR LENT



Lenten Life Groups Book Series

Many Christians think of Lent as a season of self-sacrifice and spiritual chores. But this year, what if Lent was different? What if we approached Lent with the spirit of joy?

Because of This I Rejoice is a 6-week study of Philippians that explores what Paul teaches about joyfully practicing spiritual disciplines. The intent of these disciplines is to help us focus less on ourselves and more on God. This Lenten study invites us to engage in the same spiritual practices as a way to grow closer to God and allow joy to flow through our lives.

Key Features

- A reading for Ash Wednesday, one chapter for each week of Lent, and a reading for Good Friday
- Daily scripture readings
- Reflection questions
- Leader's Guide contains a suggested format for small groups

Rejoice in the Lord always—even during Lent.

Pick up your book in the Church Narthex

Cost: \$10 each

Inspiration

Revise our Taking

"Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth" - Prayers of Walter Brueggemann

You, you giver!
 You have given light and life to the world;
 You have given freedom from Pharaoh to your people Israel;
 You have given your only Son for the sake of the world;
 You have given yourself to us;
 You have given and forgiven, and you remember our sin no more.
 And we, in response, are takers:
 We take eagerly what you give us;
 we take from our neighbors near at hand as is acceptable;
 we take from our unseen neighbors greedily and acquisitively;
 we take from our weak neighbors thoughtlessly;
 we take all that we can lay our hands on.
 It dawns on us that our taking does not match your giving.
 In this Lenten season revise our taking,
 that it may be grateful and disciplined,
 even as you give in ways generous and overwhelming.
 Amen



Inspiration & Prayer Prompts

From "Armchair Mystic – Easing Into Contemplative Prayer"
 by Mark E. Thibodeaux, S.J.

Page 2

Friendship Verse & Engaging Hints

What verses in the Bible tell us about Friendship? Spend 10 minutes each day to read and write. Fun hints that may be integrated into the Life Groups Experience.

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Engaging & Fast Facts

Five Times the Fun!

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SMALLGROUPS.COM

Online stories and studies provide key reference tools for leaders of Life Groups to access and find an array of options for their groups to decide on the topic that best fits the majority interests of the group depending on the season and session timeframe.

Inspiration

Contributor - Carrie Leonard

I came across this parable in my reading this week and couldn't help but think about Life Group Ministry! There is something about "connecting" with others that brings richness to our lives and, in that, brings us in to a fuller relationship with the Divine!

"There was once a small country town that had only one little chapel where all went to pray every Sunday. One day the devil, dressed in the form of a wealthy philanthropist, came to town and donated a beautiful bell for the hereto-fore-barren steeple. Now why did he do that?"

It seems the poor townspeople owned no watches or clocks and since there was no church bell, they all gathered early in the morning and waited around for Mass to start. While waiting, the men and women sat under the trees, visiting with one another while their children played in the churchyard. By the time Mass began, the people knew who had died, what new babies were born, whose tractor had broken down and so on. They took all of this with them as they began to pray together at Mass. Later that week, it was not unusual for the farmer with the broken tractor to have visiting neighbors driving onto his fields atop their own tractors, raring to get to work. And in the homes of young mothers with newborns there suddenly appeared older mothers sweeping, cooking and cleaning.

After installing the spiffy new church bell, however, the people didn't get to the churchyard until the bell tolled – no more visiting before and no more lending a hand afterwards. Even the Mass seemed empty, since the believers had only their own joys and sorrows to bring to the altar.

Living Stories & Studies

Contributor - Sandra Bean

Article: by Gordon MacDonald
Our Spiritual Journey

Do you know where you are and where you are going?

Gordon MacDonald is an author, pastor, and chair of World Relief. In these four Bible studies, he will help you define and map out your spiritual journey, while offering practical and biblical advice along the way. No matter where you are on your journey, make a move closer to Jesus and discover the places he wants to take you.

Session One

Identify the Road You Are On

A spiritual journey is characterized by observing, seeking, and finding.

Titus 3:3–8

No matter where we are on our spiritual journey, Christ forces us to define our position. Our only choices are to move closer to him or become increasingly resistant.

Session Two

Prepare for the Journey

Knowing Christ demands preparation through repentance.

Luke 3:1–18

The only way a woman or a man can see and respond to Christ is in the atmosphere and climate of repentance. It is only when we begin to break through the hardness that often encrusts our inner being, and see what we really are by nature, that we are able to see Christ.

Session Three

Map Out the Journey

We must not live in the middle ground, because God is in lofty and lowly places.

Isaiah 57:15

Too often we want God to be in the middle ground where we are comfortable. We don't want to have to look for him in the high and low places where he can actually be found.

Session Four

Give Your All to the Journey

When we cultivate the deeper curiosities of life, our faith becomes an extreme faith.

Exodus 33:7–23

You may know a lot of people who profess Christian faith, and yet there are few who seem miles deeper or broader or higher in their quality of faith — those who exhibit "extreme faith." These people are not only on the journey, they are giving it their all.



Friendship

Referral Tips

Life Groups Leadership Team:

We're here to provide referrals and helpful tips! See below to contact us ...

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Ascension Lutheran Church website...

ALCTO.ORG

<https://alcto.org/life-groups/>

Email: LIFEGROUPS@ALCTO.org



Friendship Scripture Writing Plan

Each of the scriptures below takes ten minutes or less to copy out. Commit to spending ten minutes each day listening to God's voice as you simply copy these texts out of your Bible.

Day 1-Colossians 3:12-14	Day 15-1 Peter 4: 8-11
Day 2-1 Corinthians 10:23-24	Day 16-Proverbs 11:4, 12:26
Day 3-Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12	Day 17-Proverbs 13:20, 14:5-6
Day 4-Ephesians 4: 25-28	Day 18-Proverbs 15:22, 16:28
Day 5-Ephesians 4:29-32	Day 19-Proverbs 17:9, 17:17
Day 6-Job 2: 11-13	Day 20-Proverbs 18:24, 19:20
Day 7-Job 16: 19-21	Day 21-Proverbs 20:6, 22:24-25
Day 8-Job 29: 4-6	Day 22-Proverbs 24:5, 27:5-6
Day 9-1 John 4: 7-12	Day 23-Proverbs 27:9, 27:17
Day 10-1 John 4: 13-21	Day 24-Psalms 11-3
Day 11-1 John 13: 34-35	Day 25-Psalms 133: 1-3
Day 12-1 John 15:12-15	Day 26-Romans 12: 3-7
Day 13-Luke 6: 27-31	Day 27-Romans 12: 8-16
Day 14-Luke 6: 32-36	Day 28-Romans 12: 17-21
Day 29-Ruth 1: 16-17	
Day 30-1 Samuel 18: 1-3	
Day 31-1 Thessalonians 5: 4-11	

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Engaging

Hospitality Hints

Contributor - Ron Rudrud

Five Times the FUN ...Here are five ideas for building relationships inside and outside of Life Groups

By Peri Sandifer

Fun is essential to any relationship—or group of relationships. And while activities like praying together as a small group are certainly important, so is laughing together.

The following ideas offer group members an opportunity to laugh and serve together while building lasting relationships that will impact others around them.

Themed Movie Nights

This is as simple as choosing a movie and building a theme around it. Invite the group to come over on a Friday or Saturday evening and have people dress as one of the characters from the movie (or just ask them to reflect one of its themes). You can also encourage people to bring food items centered on the theme of the evening.

For example, have a "Jail House Rocks" night where everyone dresses in black-and-white and brings black-and-white food (Oreos, dirt cake, black bean dip, etc.), then watch *Madea Goes to Jail*. Or you could have a "Green Out" where everyone brings something green to eat (enchiladas verde, olives, green cupcakes) and watches *Shrek*.

Such events help people get to know one another in a comfortable environment rather than at a restaurant (where people are often excluded in a large group simply due to seating

arrangements). This type of evening is suitable not only for members of the small group, but also to those from the outside. It gives members a chance to invite others to a fun and lively event.

Game Night

Game Night brings out the teenager in all of us! I have had the privilege of watching grownups become teenagers while playing a round of spoons.

If you have never played spoons, you gather people into a circle on the floor. You have one less spoon than there are people in the middle of the circle. Then take a deck of cards (if you have a large group, you may need two decks) and pass out four cards to each person. The dealer begins the round by choosing a card—if it is something he needs, he places it in his hand and discards another card. If it is not something he needs, he passes the card. You can only have four cards in your hand. The first person to have four of a kind (as in four aces) grabs a spoon, and then everyone tries to grab a spoon as quickly as they can. The person without a spoon is out.

Other games such as Cranium, Apples to Apples, and Clue offer fun evenings full of laughter. Again, this activity provides an opportunity for group members to invite another person who may be un-churched or simply in need of encouragement from other godly men and women.

Far, Far Away

As a small group, you can choose to impact your community and laugh with one another in the process. One way to do so is through reading and dressing the part of a favorite children's work.

Most libraries offer a reading program for kids after school or during the summer. Contact your local library ask them what books are most popular for all ages. Then, as a small group, dress as the characters in the book and head to the library for a fun day of reading. Some great books to act out are *Oh, the Things You Can Think* by Dr. Seuss and *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Numeroff. Books such as these allow for multiple people to be a part of the action and are easy to perform.

Of course, you could implement this same idea at elementary schools or children's hospitals in your area.

Winner Takes All

Playing cards is a failsafe for almost any crowd, but here is a twist to the usual poker night. The jackpot does consist of money, but not for the winner. The money goes toward a serving opportunity in your community.

Choose a game of Hearts, Slap Jack, or Poker. Have people put money in the middle. If you have a large group, you can have people play in teams. You can play three to five rounds of the chosen card game and whoever wins the overall game chooses to whom or where the money will go. You can even have the last round be the deciding round for the serving opportunity.

Again, this type of activity encourages laughter and fun while impacting the community at the same time.

A Night Out

Everyone loves a progressive dinner. But what about a meal that offers adventure and fun not only for your group, but also for complete strangers?

To try this, meet at a person's home and have everyone pile into one or two vehicles. Begin at your favorite restaurant or dining establishment for an appetizer, but don't simply order food for your table. Buy an appetizer for the table behind, beside, or in front of you as well.

Once you have completed your appetizer, head to your favorite fast food place. Each of you get a meal, and then collectively or individually choose a person to buy for or purchase a gift card to leave at the counter for unsuspecting consumers. You can each pitch in a dollar or two for the gift card and tell the cashier to use the card to pay for people's meals until the card has no money left.

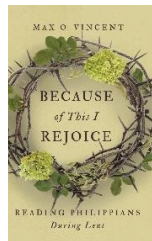
After you have completed your tantalizing meal, drive to your favorite place for dessert. Again, you can collectively or individually choose to buy for the person behind you, or

choose to purchase a gift card to leave at the register.

At their core, small groups are designed to build spiritual growth and lasting relationships for people within the group, but also outside of the group. By offering fun events where guests can enjoy an amusing evening to serving together in fun ways to impact a community, small groups have the potential to shine the love of Christ in new and creative ways.

Name Your Life Group Affinity...

Email: LIFEGROUPS@alcto.org



Life Groups during Lent

The Leader Connection NEWSLETTER

Ascension Lutheran Church
1600 E. Hillcrest Dr.

Thousand Oaks, CA 91362

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

FUN IDEAS:



FAST FACTS

79%

Churchgoers who belong to a group are more likely to go to church at least four times a month.

LifeWay Research