

SMALL GROUP PLAYBOOK



EMERGING
WORSHIP

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Dear Small Group leader,

I am so thankful that you have decided to lead a Mid City Church small group. We truly believe that this is a key part of peoples' journey towards placing Jesus over everything else in their lives and finding true life and purpose.

As you begin this journey with your small group, we know that it can be scary and intimidating to lead a small group, so we have equipped you with tools and resources to lead your group effectively. In this packet, you have two main resources to help along the way.

Your small group will begin with First Up. This packet is a three-week introduction for your small group. The first week will help you get to know each other and create a group covenant that will help create an environment in which everyone feels comfortable sharing. The second week will look at four practices that the early church exercised as the church began to grow. Our hope in week two is that you will create a plan to execute these four practices together. And finally, week three will focus on the expectations that Mid City Church has of every small group. Our hope is that by the end of First Up, your group will be on the same page as to how to move forward and will understand what is expected of your group.

The second part of this packet is our Maybe God Podcast Discussion. This is an 10-week podcast study (with an optional 11th week) that focuses on different aspect of our faith. You will have discussions about doubt, relationships, race, sex, and death among other topics. Our hope is that through these 10-11 weeks, you can begin to feel comfortable having faith conversations with each other. Each of these weeks will push you to be more and more vulnerable. In this vulnerability, we believe that real relationships begin to build and we begin to move closer to Jesus.

As the group leader, we ask that you lead the charge in creating a safe space for the podcast conversations. If you think the topic is an emotional conversation, maybe move that week's gathering to a more private place. Always remind people that conversations are confidential. And above all, remember that if you are willing to be vulnerable, the rest of your group will join in as well.

By the time you finish with First Up and Maybe God, you will be ready to dive into any curriculum you would like. Every year, we will release a list of resources that we as a church find helpful. You are welcome to use those or any other discussion.

We just ask three things of you:

1). Do not allow your group to turn into a social group. Make a commitment to always have some sort of study or discussion in all of your group meetings. Having a social gathering every once in a while is acceptable. But if the majority of your time is spent socializing, discipleship will not happen.

2). As often as possible, meet in a public location. It is always easier to meet in someone's home and usually more quiet and more comfortable. But when we meet out in our community, we become visible to the community and it is more probable that people will have questions and will want to join. So make every possible effort to meet at a coffee shop, a breakfast place, a restaurant, a park, the library, etc.

3). Continue to use First Up in everything you do. The first three weeks of any small group are the most crucial weeks. Continue to bring up your group covenant as often as you can, keep assessing whether or not you are living into the four practices of the early church and continue to evaluate whether or not you are meeting the small group expectations. We believe that if you follow the tools in First Up, your group will be successful. So as the leader, please keep referring to it and keep assessing your group.

Again, I am beyond thrilled that you have said yes to helping lead others towards Jesus. I have no doubt that we are all searching for something and that that something is Jesus. I have spent so much of my life searching for happiness, purpose, joy, love, peace and so many other things down many different paths. Some of those paths were temporarily helpful but many of them led me down very harmful paths.

The reality was that it wasn't until I started searching for Jesus that I started finding everything that I was searching for. My hope is that through this small group, you and your group will also begin to find everything you are searching for in Jesus. And when you do, you will begin to place Jesus over everything else in your life and for the first time begin to find true life and purpose.

Let us journey together down this path and see what amazing things God can do.

Together on the journey,
Pastor Fernie





FIRST UP

WEEK ONE

“Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It’s about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.” -Brene Brown.

BEFORE WE GATHER

We believe that your small group will only be as effective as you are willing to be authentic and vulnerable with one another. In order for your group to be as authentic and vulnerable as possible we have some pre-launch homework for you and your group.

We want you to encourage your group to take time before your first meeting to listen to Brene Brown’s Ted talk on Vulnerability. You can find a link to that video under the Resources tab on our website (www.midcity.church).

Please share this video with members of your small group (you can text or email the link, or you can even create a group on Facebook or GroupMe) where you can share this and other resources with your group. As usual, we ask that you, the small group leader, be ready to talk about this video and be ready to discuss the following questions at your first small group gathering. This video will be the core of your time together.

We also encourage you to make sure that you get everyone’s contact information by your first gathering and see if the group wants to have each other’s contact information.

INTRODUCTIONS

The most important thing for tonight, is that everyone in your small group feels welcomed and like they belong there. On first nights, it is common for people to present the highlight reel of their life as they introduce people. But we don’t want that to happen today. There will plenty of time in the future to see (and celebrate) each other’s life.

Today is about getting to feel comfortable around each other. So we are going to begin our small group by asking everyone to share three things: (1) tell us your name, (2) when is your birthday, and (3) what is the most embarrassing thing about your life you feel comfortable sharing with the group?

BIRTHDAYS

Let the group know that all you are writing down is their birthday and name so that you can remember to celebrate each other's birthdays as you do life together. We suggest that you do not write down their story.

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THE POWER OF VULNERABILITY

Brown states that “Connection is why we are here. It is what gives meaning and purpose to our lives.” Our hope is that through your time in this small group, you will encounter Jesus and gain a sense of connection so that you too can find meaning and purpose for your life.

So before we dive into this group, what are some examples of groups or communities you have been able to make a connection with in the past? What things stood out about those experiences?

CREATING A TEAM COVENANT

“In order for connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be seen.” At Mid City Church we believe that authentic conversation not only happens when we feel “seen” but also when we allow others to feel “seen.” And the only way to be seen, is by creating a culture in which everyone feels comfortable enough to be vulnerable.

Spend a couple of minutes working on your team covenant as a group that will guide you through all of your small group conversations. These rules should work as a covenant that you promise to keep in order to create a safe space for everyone. Some examples of this are promising to show up on time, holding conversations in confidence, and even promising to be real when things are uncomfortable or the dynamics just aren’t working.

As a group, let us spend 15 minutes coming up with at least 5 group rules that will help create a space where everyone feels comfortable being vulnerable.

CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

Brown mentions that the one thing wholehearted people have in common is that they know and believe that they are worthy of love and belonging. What are some ways that the group can help each other feel worthy of love and belonging?

Spend some time coming up with ways you will help each other feel loved and like they belong.

Ex. We commit to visiting each other when one of us is in the hospital.

GETTING TO (REALLY) KNOW EACH OTHER

Brown defines courage as the ability to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart. She states that those who have a sense of courage have the courage to be imperfect. In order to have connection, you have to let go of who you think you should be and be who you are.

We believe that when we have the courage to be vulnerable and share our story with each other, we can truly become a community that grows together. Brown states that this type of courage leads to four things: (1) we are able to let ourselves be deeply seen, (2) we learn how to love with our whole hearts, (3) we begin to practice gratitude and joy and (4) we start to believe that we are enough.

Knowing that the courage to be vulnerable leads to this type of freedom, let us go around the room and introduce ourselves once again. But this time, share your story.

Share with the group as much as you feel comfortable trusting that our conversations will be held in confidence.

After the whole group has shared their story, we encourage you to thank people for sharing, remind everyone that what was shared was done in confidence, and if anyone in your group is going through something that you think the pastor or staff should know about, please encourage them to talk to one of us.

PRAYER REQUESTS

The last thing we ask you to do today, and every other time you gather, is to ask for prayer requests from the group. Please inform the group that you will be sharing these prayer request with the pastoral team, but beyond that, they will be held in confidence.

Please be mindful that these requests can be joys, concerns or even joy-cerns. **But not gossip.** This means that we don't want people sharing stuff about other people that is not theirs to share. This quote by Pastor Craig Groeschel sums it up perfectly: **"Everything you say should be true, but not everything that's true should be said."**

Write down the prayer concerns and pray together. We ask that you send these prayer requests to prayers@midcity.church. Our pastoral team will check on these daily and pray over them. We also ask that you follow up with people in group.

WEEK TWO: WHAT IS A SMALL GROUP?

"A great small group is focused on God's mission rather than the group members' agendas." -Michael C. Mack

FOR THE LEADER

Last week, your group set up a covenant and talked about vulnerability. We believe that as long as you follow your group covenant and you have the courage to be vulnerable with each other, this small group can be a very transformative experience. Our hope is that by living up to the expectations you set up last week, you will continue to help each other grow and deepen your faith.

In this session, we will shift our focus away from group expectations and focus more on a biblical understanding of what a small group is. For this session, we ask that you and your group read through Acts 1-2 before arriving to the small group gathering as our conversation will revolve around this text.

INTRO/RECAP

Today is about building on the foundation we created last week. Does anyone remember our conversation from last time? *(Spend some time going over your team covenant and the conversations that we had).*

Today's Goal: Gain a biblical understanding of what an effective small group looks like.

BACKGROUND

The Book of Acts is a book in the New Testament that functions as a connection between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. Traditionally, most scholars identify Luke as the author of this book. (Yes, the same Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke). This whole book focuses on the God's ability to save all humanity from the brokenness of this world.

At the core of this book, the early church is trying to figure out how to be in community without Jesus. This book begins with Jesus' ascension into heaven followed by the story of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends upon the people. This marks the beginning of what we consider today as the church. The interesting thing about it is that the first thing they do as people begin giving their lives to God is that small groups begin to be formed.

Today, we will look at what those small groups looked like and how we can put those practices into practice in our small group today.

Read Acts 2:37-42:

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do? Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Leader:

Jesus is gone, but his message is still spreading. And now there are over 3,000 people who have accepted Jesus as the one who can forgive them of their sins. It is fascinating that a movement that has over 3,000 people chooses to do ministry by doing four simple things. Following Jesus meant being in a community that devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. It is not complicated; it does not have loopholes.

Today we are going to look at each of these and find ways to apply these practices to our life together.

“Devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.”

This practice refers to the reading and teaching of scripture. Remember that at the time when this was written, the whole Bible was not written yet. At the time the only thing they had was what we call today the Old Testament. Unfortunately, the printing press would not be invented for many years later, so if you wanted to learn about the bible you had to go to the synagogue (the local church) to hear someone read from the scrolls and explain the texts.

Devoting themselves to the apostles teaching meant that they were committed to gathering at church every week to learn about scripture and deepen their relationship with God.

At Mid City Church, we believe that there is no such thing as a Christian who does life on their own. This means that learning about God and deepening our relationship with God has to include others around us. Doing this in community, allows us to wrestle with scripture from not just our perspective, but also that of those around us.

Why do you think gathering to hear someone teach them about scripture was so central to the early church movement?

What difference would it make in our lives and the world around us if our small group devoted itself to going to worship every week?

What kind of commitment do we want to make to each other as far as going to worship together? How will we make this happen?

Fellowship

The second central practice of the early church was fellowship, but not the way we understand it to be today. The Greek word used for fellowship is the word *koinonia*. While it does describe fellowship the way we understand it today, it also goes deeper than we understand it. For the early church, fellowship meant joint participation with God.

Yes, the early church got together to spend time together, but usually that time was spent participating in bringing about the kingdom of God alongside God. Fellowship meant that when Christians gathered, everyone understood they had a role to play. No one just showed up to hang out, everyone showed up to participate.

At Mid City Church, we believe that being a part of this Christian movement means that we not only show up, but we are willing to participate, to volunteer, to help and be active. This time of gathering is a great opportunity to practice active participation and our hope is that this practice will begin to pour out into every other aspect of your life.

Knowing that we are all called to active participation, what does *koinonia* (joint participation with God) mean for our small group?

What difference would it make in our lives and the world around us if our small group devoted itself to the practice of *koinonia*?

What kind of commitment do we want to make to each other in order to create a culture of *koinonia*? How will we make this happen?

Breaking of Bread

This aspect is twofold. First, it means that every time the early church got together they shared a meal. Just as it is today, eating was a central part of the early Christian gathering. But breaking bread also meant remembering the last supper.

Part of the fascinating aspect of the early church movement was that they shared meals not just to catch up or distract themselves from their crazy busy lives. At its core, getting together to eat a meal together was an opportunity to catch up on life and to remind each other that no matter what was going on in their life, they were forgiven and beloved children of God.

Because life was difficult (and it still is) eating together was a chance to remember that everyone around the table was a cherished child of God. As a participant, it was a refreshing opportunity to gather with people, share your story, and be reminded that God still loves you. Breaking bread is a perfect opportunity to share God's grace with each other.

At Mid City Church, we believe that when our groups break bread together, we begin to understand God's love and grace for us more and more.

Knowing that we are all called to not only share meals together but also remind people of God's love for them, what does it mean for our small group to break bread together?

What difference would it make in our lives and the world around us if our small group devoted itself to the practice of breaking bread together?

What kind of commitment do we want to make to each other in order to create a culture of koinonia? How will we make this happen?

Prayers

The fourth thing the early church devoted itself to was prayer.

Read Acts 3:1

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Yes, prayer can happen on your own in your special place of reflection. But there is something powerful about Christians gathering to pray together. There is something powerful about people praying together for healing, vision, direction and the movement of God.

The early church movement would gather and pray together. They prayed for the sick around them, they prayed for guidance from God, they prayed for their city and they prayed for each other among many other things.

One of the things we ask of you as a small group is that you spend time in prayer together and as often as possible. If you are eating together, pray before your meal. If you are starting your discussion time, pray over your conversations. If you are closing your time together, lift up prayer requests and pray for each other before you each go your separate ways.

Knowing that we are called gather in intentional prayer, what does it mean for our small group to pray together?

What difference would it make in our lives and the world around us if our small group devoted itself to the practice of praying together?

What kind of commitment do we want to make to each other in order to create a culture of prayer? How will we make this happen?

PRAYER REQUESTS

The last thing we ask you to do today, and every other time you gather, is to ask for prayer requests from the group. Please inform the group that you will be sharing these prayer request with the pastoral team, but beyond that, they will be held in confidence.

WEEKLY REMINDER: Please be mindful that these requests can be joys, concerns or even joy-cerns. But **not gossip**. This means that we don't want people sharing stuff about other people that is not theirs to share. This quote by Pastor Craig Groeschel sums it up perfectly: "Everything you say should be true, but not everything that's true should be said."

Write down the prayer concerns and pray together. We ask that you send these prayer requests to prayers@midcity.church. Our pastoral team will check on these daily and pray over them. We also ask that you follow up with people in group.

SESSION 3: SMALL GROUP EXPECTATIONS

Too many people are thinking of security instead of opportunity. They seem to be more afraid of life than death. -James F. Byrnes

FOR THE LEADER

Today is your last introduction session before you get started with your first study together. By now, you should have accomplished two things. In session one, you should have created a team covenant so that everyone in the group feels comfortable. It is important that you as the team leader remind your group of that covenant. Maybe you can print it out or before conversations you can remind the group of your covenant.

In session two, your group learned of four key practices of the early church (devoting to the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer). As the group leader, it is your responsibility to not only lead your group, but to also set the example of living these four practices out. If your group ever stops living into these four practices, your group will quickly turn into a social group rather than a small group. And while social groups are not a bad thing, your group was not put together to simply make friends. Your group was created to help disciple each other.

So in everything you do from this point forward, you as the leader have been called to lead the charge of creating this movement that will help disciple each other. Stay the course, and we promise you will have an amazing experience. Stay true to your covenant, keep true to the four practices of the early church and we promise that before you realize it, your group will be going deeper in its faith than you ever thought possible.

But we have one more challenge for you before you begin down that road.

Today, your group will look at three expectations that Mid City Church has of all of its small groups: open group mentality, multiplication and service projects. Our hope is that by the end of the session your whole team will understand why we have these expectations and will have a plan to live into these expectations. Let's get started!

INTRO/RECAP

Last week we talked about the early church and how they had four practices: devoting themselves to the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer). Does anyone remember our conversation about these practices from last time? *Spend some time going over your conversation from the previous week and talk about who you can live into those practices as a group.*

Today's Goal: Gain a biblical understanding of Mid City Church's small group expectations.

BACKGROUND

Small groups are an opportunity for us to grow deeper in our faith in a smaller setting. The perfect example of a small group was Jesus and his disciples. Each of the disciples was invited to be in relationship with each other and with Jesus. They were committed to the teaching of Jesus, they played an active role in their shared life, they broke bread together and they prayed together. This small group of friends turned them from a bunch of strangers to a group of committed followers of Jesus willing to defy cultural norms for the sake of spreading the good news of Jesus.

It might sound intimidating, but we want the same thing for you because we know that it is possible. As you begin your journey as a small group, you might not feel deeply qualified to make a difference or have much biblical knowledge. You might love going to church, but you have never quite understood how to apply your faith beyond the walls of the church. But as they committed themselves to their small group, they were able to deepen their faith. If you commit to this, we know that the same will be true in your life as well.

So today, as we begin our journey together, we will look at 3 expectations that Mid City Church has of us that we need to talk through before we begin our study next week.

Read Acts 2:43-47

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Leader:

In this short passage of scripture, we find that the early church (on top of the four practices we talked about last week) had three expectations of each other. Today we will look at all three of these.

1). Open Group Mentality

And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

-Acts 2:47b

This one verse is loaded with information. If we simply read past it, we miss that in this verse there is a hidden question and command.

First, the hidden question: are we willing to let God add people to our numbers or are we going to close ourselves off from God and become a closed group that doesn't invite others in?

When we live into the four practices of the early church, people begin to want to join our movement. There is something fascinating about seeing change in someone that you want to see what is happening and want to join in. That is what the early church realized. As they were faithful to what God had called them to do, their numbers began to grow. But this meant that they were an open group and not a closed group.

You see, a closed group focuses on the needs of those in the group. A closed group cares for each other and provides for the needs of each other. But when a guest shows up, they are such a close-knit group of people, that the guest feels uncomfortable and will probably never show up again.

Now don't get us wrong, it is important to be a close-knit and trust each other. But never forget God wants to bring new people into your midst and not just stay as you are. Welcoming new people into your group, will require you to always be mindful of making sure that every guest feels welcomed and like they can be a part of this group.

Because we believe that God will add to our numbers, what do we have to do to ensure that we are a group that is always inviting new people into our group?

What do we have to do to ensure that we are a group that is always welcoming of new people into our group?

What kind of commitment do we want to make to each other in order to keep an open group mentality? How will we make this happen?

2). Multiplication

We already mentioned that we have to be open to God adding new people to our group. The reality though, is that if we add people, eventually your group will be too big.

You see, a group that is too small, can be intimidating for a guest. But a group with too many people means that people do not really get an opportunity to talk. This means that we want your group to grow while also staying at a manageable size that is inviting and welcoming to all.

How do we do that?

The answer to that is multiplication.

Multiplication means that when our group grows to 12 or more people, we want your group to divide into 2 groups of 6 and multiply into two groups. When those groups reach 12 or more, we want them to multiply into two more groups.

This process of multiplication allows every group to keep the same sense of DNA and purpose (team covenant and early church practices) while also being able to continuously reach new people.

Here is an example of how multiplication works:

Sarah starts a small group with 6 of her college friends. Before she knows it, this group has gone from 6 people meeting each week to 14 people meeting every week. Unfortunately, as the group grows, she begins to notice that their space is no longer big enough for everyone to meet and with more people, those who show up are starting to talk less and less.

As Sarah looks around at the group, she notices that 6 of them really like sports and the other 8 of them are really into Greek life. She decides that in order to fix the space and conversation problem she will encourage the group to divide into two groups.

One group (the one who likes sports) is now led by Zoey and the other group is now led by Kimberly. Both of these groups gain new energy and momentum and before they know it, both of these groups grow and they start this process all over again.

The reality is that all groups eventually become stagnant and enter into different life stages. If a group does not move towards multiplication, every group will eventually fall apart and cease to exist.

By moving towards multiplication, the core of your group (life stage, hobbies, etc.) remains unchanged. But in multiplying you ensure that more people are invited and welcomed into your small group ministry and therefore more people are able to deepen their relationship with Jesus.

How do we feel about this practice of multiplication?

What hesitations do we have about multiplication?

What is more important for us: discipling people or creating a friendship club? If we truly feel called to disciple people, what can we do to ensure that as we grow, we become intentional about preparing each other for that multiplication?

3). Service Projects

“They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

One of the fascinating things about the early church was that they understood that they could not go blind to the needs of the community around them. They had such a heart for this, that the scripture tells us that they sold everything they had and the money was put into one group pile that was dispersed among all who had a need.

How does this example from the early church challenge our group here today?

At Mid City Church, we do not expect you to sell everything and distribute it among everyone who has a need. We know that each of you have expenses and financial needs to take of. But we do know that any group that gathers to deepen their faith has to be intentional about noticing the needs of the community around them.

This is why we would like every group to come up with some sort of service project or opportunity that you can do as a group. There are no set net parameters that you need to follow, we just want you to serve your community. Some examples are volunteering at an animal shelter, going to a feed with FITE (Famine Is The Enemy), participating in a community clean up, or participating in a Habitat For Humanity build. You can serve as often as you would like, but we want you out in your community serving.

Spend the next 15 minutes researching and coming with service opportunities that your group is interested in. Bonus points if by the time your group session is over, you have a date on the calendar to go serve somewhere!

PRAYER REQUESTS

The last thing we ask you to do today, and every other time you gather, is to ask for prayer requests from the group. Please inform the group that you will be sharing these prayer request with the pastoral team, but beyond that, they will be held in confidence.

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Write down the prayer concerns and pray together. We ask that you send these prayer requests to prayers@midcity.church. Our pastoral team will check on these daily and pray over them. We also ask that you follow up with people in your group throughout the week.

The background of the entire image is a photograph of two women sitting at a table. One woman is looking at a smartphone held by the other. The image is overlaid with a large, diagonal, semi-transparent orange shape that contains the text. The text is in a clean, white, sans-serif font. The words 'MAYBE GOD' and 'PODCAST' are stacked vertically in the center. At the bottom left, the text 'WITH ERIC HUFFMAN' is written in a smaller, lighter font. The overall aesthetic is warm and modern.

MAYBE GOD PODCAST

WITH
ERIC HUFFMAN

MAYBE GOD PODCAST LEADER GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Maybe God Podcast is “A podcast for skeptics and believers searching for truth about God and the meaning of our existence.” People from all walks of faith can dive into this Podcast and get something out of it. This is a unique type of curriculum that looks at a podcast to delve into deeper spiritual and personal connection with your small group.

This leader guide helps to equip you to discuss each week’s podcast for 10 weeks (with an optional 11th week). The podcast will be your content for your discussion. This guide contains questions for each week to further your discussion should you need assistance.

Through other Small Groups who have experienced this podcast and curriculum, we found that there are some weeks where your Small Group may have A LOT to say. There are other weeks when your Group may be timid, shy, or did not get as much out of the podcast. The questions provided in this booklet are a guide. You are more than welcome to create your own questions, especially as you get to know your group more.

Basic Rules:

- 1) Every week, please send the website/Spotify/Apple Podcasts link for the Maybe God podcast to those in your small group. Encourage them to share it with friends and family.
- 2) With the link, you may want to send an opening or key question so that your group members can consider the podcast in their own life before you meet that week.
- 3) Encourage your members to invite friends.
- 4) Always pray for your small group. Philippians 4:6 - *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God.”*

WEEK 1: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Why Do People Love to Hate Religion?

About: “On this episode, host Eric Huffman speaks with Bart Campolo, son of famous pastor Tony Campolo. Bart was a long-time Christian pastor himself until he was injured in a bike crash in 2011 and began questioning the afterlife. Today he’s a leader in the secular humanist world... The Maybe God team expected Eric and Bart to find a lot of common ground - they’re both pastors’ kids who at one point rejected their fathers’ religion. Instead, the conversation quickly heated up as they talked about religion, culture, and morality.”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1. Is it possible to be a truly good person without believing in Christ?
2. Can we live a holistic life without Jesus?
3. To Eric, Bart still “sounds like a Christian.” What does that look like? What does that sound like? How can Bart “sound like a Christian” without believing in Christ as our Savior?
4. Can we live a happy life without Christ?
5. Both Bart and Eric discuss living a life that is longer, better, happier, etc. However, they both see having this life in a different light. How do you see your life being those things? Can that be accomplished without Christ/God?
6. Have you thought of Christianity as a “form of terrorism”? Has that thought crossed your mind?
7. Mid City Church’s vision is about putting God above everything. When we think of our longer, happier, better lives, we may think of more money or weight-loss or less time at work, etc. Those things are possible, especially through Jesus.
 - a. What is something that you would say yes to if Jesus asked you to do it? What would you say no to?
 - b. What is one thing to give up/take on so that Jesus can be more on top of everything in your life?

WEEK 2: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Can an Artist Really Be an Atheist?

About: “Host Eric Huffman sits down with world-renowned street artist Sebastien ‘Mr. D’ Boileau. Ever since his loving grandmother warned him, as a child, never to be alone with certain priests, Sebastien has always struggled with the concepts of religion and God. As an artist, however, he’s constantly drawn to pursue transcendence and beauty. (Sebastien is best known in Houston for his 11,000-square-foot mural featuring Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel God holding a spray paint can.) This tension between spirituality and cynicism is what makes his art so powerful, and it led Eric to wonder, ‘Can an artist like Sebastien really be an atheist?’”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1. Can an Artist really be an Atheist?
2. Eric believes that preaching is about “afflicting the comfortable & comforting the afflicted.” Do you believe you’re the ‘comfortable’ or the ‘afflicted’? Why?
 - a. How can preaching make you either afflicted or comfortable?
How can other Christians? How can you hold yourself to that?
3. Mr. D. (the artist) is not a Christian (maybe agnostic?), but Eric says that that doesn’t define him. What defines him is the fruits that he grows & shows. What fruits do you show & grow? Are you showing that you love God/are a good Christian?
4. This new trend of “Spiritual, not religious” has been growing. Sometimes when a church makes a decision that might make you upset, do you feel that you want to be “spiritual, not religious?”
 - a. Why do you continue to go to church? To be religious?
 - b. Jesus was spiritual, not necessarily religious - not even a Christian.
 - c. How can we still keep church at the center of our lives & others’ lives when “spiritual but not religious” is the trend?
 - d. What does church mean to you?

WEEK 3: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Can Sex Bring Us Closer to God?

About: “The Maybe God team flew to L.A. to speak with Debra Hirsch, author of *Redeeming Sex: Naked Conversations about Sexuality and Spirituality*. Deb addresses the overwhelming need in our society (and churches) to have deeper conversations about sex. She laments the way most cultural conversations about sex are reduced to mere intercourse, and she challenges all people (married, single, LGBTQ+, straight, Christian and non-religious) to think more broadly about the breathtaking, rapturous gift of human sexuality...Also on this episode, Eric opens up about his past porn addiction, and Deb tells the unbelievable story of finding her way to Jesus through her imprisoned drug dealer in Australia.”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1. Parental teaching of sex - not all about boundaries
2. Sometimes we use sex or our sexuality to fill a void in our lives instead of actually enjoying it
3. Do you think that sex is pleasurable as Darwinism or God wanting us to have intimacy with another?
 - a. Is there a human-sized void in us like the one for God?
 - b. What about Jesus and Paul who did not marry or sleep with others (from what we know)?
4. Is it hard for you to talk about sex?
 - a. What is your experience in the church about sex?
5. Is sex a sin?
 - a. Look at the verses below. Thoughts?

BIBLE REFERENCES: Jeremiah 3; Matthew 22: 36-40; Song of Solomon 8:5-7

Optional episode for next week: “Your Sex Questions Answered” Minisode. If your group is having a great discussion about sex, consider adding this episode. If you feel like you’ve already covered the topic of sex with this week’s episode, go on to the next episode instead.

WEEK 4: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

What Lives Matter?

About: “Eric speaks with author, pastor, and humanitarian Rudy Rasmus about baptizing Beyonce, pledging allegiance to the flag, and being Black and Christian in Trump’s America. With a potent blend of grace and brutal honesty, Rudy reminds Eric of his responsibility to speak out about racism and white supremacy - a reminder that we all need to hear... Rudy Rasmus co-pastors the St. John’s Church in Downtown Houston with his wife Juanita and is the author of Love. Period.: When All Else Fails. For more about Rudy, check out his website.”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) Do you have a place that you feel is ‘more church’ than an actual church? How does that feel?
- 2) Pastor Rudy Rasmus feels that his experience at the ‘colored’ water foundation is seeping through our society today. Have you noticed this? Have you seen racist events happening in our world?
- 3) There are two extremes that Pastor Rudy and Eric discuss. There is this complicit side of the spectrum of taking action when something is wrong. There’s also this “aware and awake” side to the spectrum.
 - a) Where are you on this spectrum?
 - b) Do you see something is wrong in our world with not only racism and hate?
 - c) Do you feel aware and awake or complicit?
 - i) Why?

BIBLE REFERENCE: Romans 8:31-39

WEEK 5: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Can God Save a Marriage?

About: "When it comes to marriage, does God make a difference? Are marriages between believers better off than "godless" unions? On this episode, Eric explores these questions with his wife, Geovanna, who shares stories of how God transformed their marriage. Eric's friend, Sara Beth, also shares her story about a shocking revelation and her subsequent divorce. Finally, Eric talks with Emily and Ricardo, a couple nearly torn apart by addiction and depression before finding God together and shifting their priorities."

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) What difference does believing in God make in a marriage? Do you have an experience or understanding of your marriage or a relationship with/without God?
 - a) Should both people believe in God in a marriage?
- 2) When God is not in a certain place in that marriage, what can end up filling that place?
- 3) This podcast shows that marriage is an incredibly sacrificial relationship. Many of the guests explained that it's not about ourselves, but about God and the other person. What a sacrifice! God's relationship with Israel was explained as a marriage. Jesus's relationship with the church (the people of the church) is described as a marriage.
 - a) Have you experienced this sacrifice? What does that look like?
 - b) How can you keep your faith and ~sanity~ by sacrificing?

BIBLE REFERENCES: Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:25-32

WEEK 6: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Did God Save the Catfish?

About: "After years of struggling through a messy divorce, drug addiction, and depression, Casey finally had the life he always wanted: a happy marriage, healthy kids, a growing business, and a deep relationship with God. Then one afternoon, Casey and his wife, Dorian, received some news that changed their lives forever. On this episode, hear this couple's story of amazing love, devastating pain, and the everlasting Light that's carried them through it all."

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) This is such a beautiful story of a relationship, overcoming, and grief. How can you relate to this story?
- 2) Through this experience, were you able to see it as a blessing whether in the moment or after the time?
 - a) Could you feel God in your experience?
- 3) Do we think about God first in our struggles or do we worry/despair/lament?
 - a) What does it look like to put God first? Would that have changed your experience?
- 4) Losing a loved one is incredibly difficult. Maybe you have been in that situation or know someone who has. How were you able to find God during/after losing your loved one? Was it even possible?

WEEK 7: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Can Faith & Doubt Coexist? (Part 1)

About: “Nearly everyone doubts the existence or the goodness of God at some point in life, but what happens when you’re a pastor who no longer believes? On this episode, we follow Maybe God host and pastor Eric Huffman as he retraces his steps of the journey from Bible Belt religion to atheism. Eric visits his childhood home and his college campus to speak directly with some of the people who helped shape - and wreck - his faith.”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) Doubts are hard, but also a normal thing. Most people doubt their faith! Surprise! However, we are in the Bible Belt where, like Eric, we grew up without the possible chance to doubt our faith.
 - a) Are there doubts that you related to in Eric’s story?
 - b) How have you addressed them? If you haven’t what can we discuss to help you with your doubts?
- 2) If you personally have not doubted, have you had friends that have doubted?
 - a) Have you helped them through it?
 - b) Do you have questions on how to help them through it?

BIBLE REFERENCES: Acts 1:1-11; John 20:24-29

WEEK 8: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Can Faith & Doubt Coexist? (Part 2)

About: "In part one, Maybe God followed host Eric Huffman's journey from the certainty of Bible Belt religion to the moment in college when he began to reject his Christian beliefs. More than a decade later, he found himself pastoring a church in Kansas City, and questioning everything about God. When Eric took a trip to get away from the life that had him feeling like a fraud, he never imagined coming home a new man."

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) Did anything stand out to you in Eric's story of coming back to belief?
- 2) How did these historic artifacts make you feel? What do you think about them?
- 3) Last week we discussed doubting, but you are all here because of belief. Let's talk about this belief.
 - a) They discussed the idea of being a Christian like a game played on Sundays, but the rest of the weekdays, you may not do anything with your faith. I have experienced that myself. Have you? How would you want to do more during the week?
 - b) Maybe you feel that Christianity is more academic and religious. Eric is adamant about Christianity being about faith and spirituality - less about religion. How does Christianity feel to you? Is it more about study and church or praying and time with God?
 - i) There isn't a right or wrong answer, but having a relationship with God is always #1. You should be focusing on what makes your relationship with God stronger.
 - c) Eric discusses how having faith involves those middle of the week moments - like breaking bread in others' homes, missions, and more - that make your faith stronger and more meaningful. Are there any other ways you make your faith more meaningful in the middle of the week?
- 4) Don't be scared to challenge or question your faith or different aspects of the Bible or even church itself. It may seem daunting and scary, but when you have a community to help you through those doubts and a God that loves you, your faith can only grow stronger.

BIBLE REFERENCES: Acts 1:1-11; John 20:24-29

WEEK 9: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Are Near-Death Experiences For Real? (Part 1)

About: “We all know that death is a fact of life, but is it the end of life? In part one of this series, Maybe God host Eric Huffman talks to pastor and New York Times best-selling author John Burke about his 30-year journey studying over a thousand near-death claims, people from all different countries and religions who say they've “crossed over” and met God. We’ll also introduce you to Jeffrey Olsen and Howard Storm, two men who say they experienced the afterlife, in one case, hell.”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) What were your preconceptions about Heaven before you started this podcast? (send this out with the podcast link for them to think on first)
- 2) What stood out to you in this podcast? Have you ever heard about experiences like these? What shocked/surprised you?
- 3) There seems to be plenty of evidence that near-death experiences actually exist. However, some people still do not believe in God or in Heaven or even in these experiences. Honestly, even I still doubted with these stories.
 - a) How did they make you feel? Could you see Heaven and experience through these stories? Did you doubt about their experiences?
- 4) When we hear these stories of Jesus’s inexplicable love for us, for the people who died, do you understand what that is like?
 - a) How were you able to see the world differently?
 - b) How were you able to see yourself differently?
- 5) Next week, we’ll finish our series with the Part 2 of the Near-Death Experiences. However, let’s go into this week thinking of God’s love for us through these Heavenly experiences. Then, think of how much God loves everyone else with that same love. Try to find Heaven on Earth.

BIBLE REFERENCES: Romans 8; Isaiah 53; Samuel 16:7; Galatians 5:22-23

WEEK 10: MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Are Near-Death Experiences For Real? (Part 2)

About: “What is hell, and why would a loving God send people there forever? In part two of this episode, Maybe God host Eric Huffman continues his conversation with Imagine Heaven author John Burke, who insists that the God of the Bible isn’t who most people believe Him to be. We also reveal the dramatic conclusion to Howard Storm’s harrowing descent into hell, and introduce you to Crystal McVea, a sexual abuse victim who believed God could never love her... until the day she died and met Him, face to face.”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) What are/were your preconceptions/beliefs about hell? (send this question out when you send the podcast link)
- 2) What stood out to you in this week’s podcast? Did beliefs change? Did anything connect to you?
- 3) How do you feel about the idea that was discussed - more people go to Heaven because of their heart over religion and selfishness?
 - a) Does that change how you see your faith?
 - b) Do you think Christians go to hell?
- 4) There was a line said similar to, “There is beauty and peace in the world. If you look for that, you’ll find it everywhere.”
 - a) Do you agree with this statement?
 - b) Where do you find beauty and peace in this world?
- 5) In this podcast, the heart and what ‘fruit’ you produce out of your heart and intentions are discussed. They brought up the idea that that is what God looks at (which we see in 1 Samuel 16:7, etc.)
 - a) How is your heart? What fruit are you bearing?
 - b) How do you feel you could change your heart to bear the fruit of love, peace, hope, self-control, & JOY (!!)
- 6) Let’s read Romans 8. Do you agree with the idea that life is just a “birth canal” to the afterlife? Why?
- 7) Let’s go into this week looking for Heaven around us. We should be looking for God’s love. We should also be looking for those gifts of love, peace, hope, self-control, & JOY all around us. But to add on to this, how can we change our hearts to be more loving of others?

BIBLE REFERENCES: Samuel 16:7; Galatians 5:22-23

THE
COMMON
RULE



**THE COMMON
RULE BOOK**

WEEK 1: THE COMMON RULE

INTRODUCTION: DISCOVERING THE FREEDOM OF LIMITATIONS

About: “Only when your habits are constructed to match your worldview do you become someone who doesn’t just know about God and neighbor, but someone who actually loves God and neighbor.”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) Have you ever experienced the vague feeling of something being wrong that Earley describes? How did it effect you?
- 2) *“While the house of my life was decorated with Christian content, the architecture of my habits was just like everyone else’s. And that life had been working for me - until it collapsed.”*
 - a) Do your internal habits reflect your exterior life?
 - b) What are some of your habits? Go around the room and share your best habit and your worst habit.
- 3) Earley shares that he found it difficult to slow down after experiencing panic attacks. Do you find it easy to be overly busy, or are you content living a slower life?
- 4) Have you ever had an accountability partner? How did this effect the outcome of what you were trying to be held accountable for?
- 5) Share about a season of life when you have experience being overly busy. How did it effect your physical and mental health?
- 6) *“What if true freedom comes from choosing the right limitations, not avoiding all limitations.”*
 - a) Do you agree or disagree?
 - b) Do limits create freedom, or limit it?

WEEK 2: THE COMMON RULE

PART 1: HOW TO PRACTICE THE COMMON RULE

About: What is a rule? How long should you practice a rule before it becomes a habit? What is the Common Rule?

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) Studies show that it takes 2-3 weeks for new practices to turn into habits. Have you ever purposefully implemented a new habit before?
 - a) Some of you may have tried this during a liturgical (church) season like lent or advent. What was that experience like? Did you stick with it after the season ended?
- 2) “Don’t be afraid to start the Common Rule during a difficult season.” Do you feel like you’re in a difficult season right now? Why is it especially scary to try new things when you are in a difficult season?
- 3) The author writes that the Common Rule is freeing. Where do you find freedom? Do you ever feel truly free of burdens in your life?
- 4) The Common Rule is made of 8 habits: 4 daily, 4 weekly:
 - a) Daily habits:
 - i) Kneeling in prayer at morning, midday, bedtime
 - ii) One meal with others
 - iii) One hour with phone off
 - iv) Scripture before phone
 - b) Weekly habits:
 - i) One hour of conversation with a friend
 - ii) Curate media to four hours
 - iii) Fast from something for 24 hours
 - iv) Sabbath
- 5) Which of the habits above (if any) do you already do? Which seem easy to implement? Which are more challenging for you?
- 6) “A neighbor is anyone and everyone who needs our love: family, friends, strangers, and enemies.” Name some of your neighbors.
- 7) Our mission at Mid City Church is “empowering Baton Rouge to discover life and purpose in Jesus.” How do these habits help us to live out the mission?

WEEK 3: THE COMMON RULE

PART 2: THE DAILY AND WEEKLY HABITS

Daily Habit 1: Kneeling in Prayer

About: "The world is made of words. Even small, repeated words have power. Regular, carefully placed prayer is one of the keystone habits of spiritual formation, and is the beginning of building the trellis of habit. By framing our day in the words of prayer, we frame the day in love."

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) How have you experienced the power of words in your life? Through books? Your own writing? Poetry?
- 2) When do you typically pray throughout the day (if at all)?
- 3) What's hard about praying? What's easy about it?
- 4) Do you find that your phone shapes your day first thing in the morning more so than prayer does? Does this start your day with chaos or with peace?
- 5) Does God play a part in your job? What would stopping for midday prayer in the midst of the workday change about your work?
- 6) "What I can't escape is the desire to escape." Have you ever felt that way?
- 7) Are you ready to give this habit a try? How will you approach it? Do you need to set alarms to remind you? Will you pray alone or with someone?

WEEK 4: THE COMMON RULE

PART 2: THE DAILY AND WEEKLY HABITS

Daily Habit 2: One Meal With Others

About: “We were made to eat, so the table must be our center of gravity. The habit of making time for one communal meal each day forces us to reorient our schedules and our space around food and each other. The more the table becomes our center of gravity, the more it draws our neighbors into gospel community.”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) “Our need for food says something profound about us. It says we need God, we need others, and we need the created world.”
 - a) We are so lucky that God created so many delicious things for us to eat! Go around the table and talk about your favorite dish or meal.
- 2) Are you a person who tends to focus on food throughout the day, or do you find yourself forgetting to eat due to busyness?
 - a) Do you get “hangry”?
- 3) What do mealtimes throughout the day typically look like for you? Do you go out or cook? Do you eat alone or with others?
- 4) Have you ever been a part of a supper club, a regular weekly family meal like “Sunday Lunch,” or a similar gathering? What did you like about it?
- 5) Who can you invite to your table? Think of neighbors, coworkers, or friends.
 - a) What stops you from inviting others to your table more often? (Conversation starters – messy house, lack of time, not cooking “fancy” enough, etc.)
 - b) What can you do to feel more comfortable inviting others? (Conversation starters – have a picnic in your backyard to avoid the messy house, get takeout if you’re uncomfortable cooking, etc.)
- 6) How can you implement this practice into your life? Perhaps you can add a family meal or a standing coworker lunch. Discuss your plans.

WEEK 5: THE COMMON RULE

PART 2: THE DAILY AND WEEKLY HABITS

Daily Habit 3: One Hour with Phone Off

About: We were made for presence, but so often our phones are the cause for our absence. To be two places at a time is to be no place at all. Turning off our phone for an hour a day is a way to turn our gaze up to each other, whether that be children, coworkers, friends, or neighbors. Our habits of attention are habits of love. To resist absence is to love neighbor.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) "Attention is our precious commodity. Our life is defined by what we pay attention to." What do you find yourself paying the most attention to?
- 2) At one point in the chapter, the author asks us to practice turning our phone off right now as we are reading the chapter. Did you do that? How did it make you feel to think about doing that? Did you feel alone/lonely as the author suggests?
- 3) What time of the day would it make the most sense for you to turn your phone off for an hour to focus your attention elsewhere?
- 4) Do you often find that your phone interrupts your work day?
- 5) Do you enjoy silence or fear it?
- 6) If you plan to try this habit, what will you use the hour for?
 - a) Spending time with others
 - b) Getting work done
 - c) Hour for silence

WEEK 6: THE COMMON RULE

PART 2: THE DAILY AND WEEKLY HABITS

Daily Habit 4: Scripture Before Phone

About: Refusing to check the phone until after reading a passage of Scripture is a way of replacing the question “What do I need to do today?” with a better one, “Who am I and who am I becoming?” We have no stable identity outside of Jesus. Daily immersion in the Scriptures resists the anxiety of emails, the anger of news, and the envy of social media. Instead it forms us daily in our true identity as children of the King, dearly loved.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) “Who am I?” “Who am I becoming?” Do you feel like you have an answer to these questions? Go around the room and share about who you are and who you’re becoming.
 - a) Where do you find your sense of identity? Work? Sports? Friends?
- 2) What distractions compete for your attention first thing in the morning?
- 3) The author shares that he would often find his father reading his bible in their study first thing in the morning. Did your parents model having a relationship with God? If yes, how so?
- 4) Do you have a favorite bible verse?
- 5) What would help you read scripture every morning? Maybe a reading plan, or doing it with a friend/spouse? What about journaling? You can also read the verse of the day on the Bible app.

WEEK 7: THE COMMON RULE

PART 2: THE DAILY AND WEEKLY HABITS

Weekly Habit 1: One Hour of Conversation with a Friend

About: We were made for each other, and we can't become lovers of God and neighbor without intimate relationships where vulnerability is sustained across time. In habitual, face-to-face conversations with each other, we find a gospel practice; we are laid bare to each other and loved anyway.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) Today we start talking about weekly habits! Does the idea of doing something once a week seem more attainable than doing it every day?
 - a) What are some weekly habits you already have? (Examples: calling your parents, cleaning your house, going to church, going grocery shopping).
- 2) Who do you have the deepest conversations with in your life?
- 3) Have you ever had a moment where you felt like the C.S. Lewis quote: "What! You too? I Thought I was the only one."?
- 4) Share an example of when one of your friendships went through a hard time. What ended up happening in the end? Are you closer to and more open with that friend now?
- 5) Why do we arrange our schedules in a way that makes putting consistent time into friendships so hard?
- 6) Do you find yourself opening to making new friends, or are you closed off due to the friendships you already have?
- 7) How can we help our friends find life and purpose in Jesus?

WEEK 8: THE COMMON RULE

PART 2: THE DAILY AND WEEKLY HABITS

Weekly Habit 2: Curate Media to Four Hours

About: Stories matter so much that we must handle them with the utmost care. Resisting the constant stream of addictive media with an hour limit means that we are forced to curate what we watch. Curating stories means that we seek stories that uphold beauty, that teach us to love justice, and that turn us to community.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) What kinds of media consume most of your time? (TV, social media, video games, etc.)
- 2) How can you curate the media you consume to be more worthwhile? Do you tend to watch a lot of “junk” just to fill time?
- 3) “Stories can become a distraction from loving justice, because we would often rather be numb than soft.” Does this quote resonate with you?
- 4) How many hours would you guess you spend on media per week? Perhaps start by doing a time audit this week and see how much time is spent on media watching. Then, make a goal for next week.
- 5) What’s one great movie, TV show, podcast, etc. that you would recommend to the members of this small group?

WEEK 9: THE COMMON RULE

PART 2: THE DAILY AND WEEKLY HABITS

Weekly Habit 3: Fast From Something for 24 Hours

About: We constantly seek to fill our emptiness with food and other comforts. We ignore our soul and our neighbor's need by medicating with food and drink. Regular fasting exposes who we really are, reminds us how broken the world is, and draws our eyes to how Jesus is redeeming all things,

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) Have you ever fasted from something before? What was that experience like? Was it during a season such as lent?
- 2) Food can be a hard topic to talk about. Sometimes people use food to dull their desires, numb their feelings, or make them feel satisfied or happy. How do you feel about your personal relationship with food?
- 3) How does the American relationship with food differ from other cultures?
 - a) For example, in France they eat long meals and savor their food, while Americans tend to eat quickly.
- 4) "When we fast, we become more attuned to the stubborn reality of the world's suffering... So while there is a part of fasting that reveals our own need, there is a part that reveals the world's need too." Do you think it would be hard to put your own needs aside and see the needs of others while fasting?
- 5) In this chapter, the author references Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech "The Other America." How does this apply to our city? Are we really two cities within one?
 - a) At Mid City Church, we value Kingdom Diversity. How can we foster diversity as we gather, grow, and give.
- 6) Will you try fasting this week? What will you fast from?

WEEK 10: THE COMMON RULE

PART 2: THE DAILY AND WEEKLY HABITS

Weekly Habit 4: Sabbath

About: The weekly practice of sabbath teaches us that God sustains the world and that we don't. To make a countercultural embrace of our limitations, we stop our usual work for one day of rest. Sabbath is a gospel practice because it reminds us that the world doesn't hang on what we can accomplish, but rather on what God has accomplished for us.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) What do you think sabbath means? What is your own relationship with rest? Do you practice sabbath regularly?
- 2) What are some of your favorite Sabbath "activities" to do (go for a walk, play with the dog, nap).
- 3) "If you don't choose to rest, then reality will make you rest - often in the form of sickness, injury, or emotional breakdown." How do you know when you haven't had enough rest?
- 4) The author points out that it may be beneficial to do something that's opposite of your vocation during your Sabbath. What might you do?
- 5) What have you learned from this book? Which habits will you keep doing? Which habits did you never try at all? What have you learned about yourself, your habits, and your purpose throughout this study?

Finding God's
LIFE
for My Will

**FINDING
GOD'S LIFE
FOR MY
WILL**



WEEK 1: FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE

Chapters 1 & 2

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1) Chapter 1:

- a) What did you think of Mike's statement: "I was mourning the loss of the choices I'd lose."? (Page 7).
- b) "Choosing her [Mike's wife] was not only something I had to do that day; it's something I've had to commit to doing every day since. I desperately wish more couples understood that love is action. It's a perpetual yes." (Page 11).
 - i) How does this apply to our relationships? What about our walk with God?
- c) What's your response to the scene on the bridge (Page 8)?

2) Chapter 2:

- a) What was your response to Mike's statement on page 13: "I guess you could say I had a gift for distorting reality to fit my desires." Do you do that?
- b) On page 16 Mike says, "Mr. Brunk was the first adult in my life other than my parents who spoke to me as an equal... It was the first time I can recall an academic superior didn't seem hung up on my behavior issues but really wanted to focus on why I felt the need to act so stupidly." Did you experience this growing up? Is this a good analogy for how we should treat people in our everyday lives?
- c) Mike's teacher, Mr. Brunk, uses grace as discipline. Put this concept into your own words.
- d) On page 18-19, Mike says: "I started to believe what Mr. Brunk had been telling me before every one of those times I visited his office the year before: 'Your mistakes do not define you, Michael.'... Though everyone else gave me the label of 'troublemaker' in seventh grade, he gave me a different label to believe in. It was something like 'child of God.'" What's your response to the idea that behavior follows the label, not the other way around. What does this mean?

BIBLE REFERENCE: Matthew 18: 21-35. How does this apply to chapter 2?

WEEK 2: FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE

Chapters 3 & 4

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1) Chapter 3:

- a) Mike almost died in a car accident when he was 17 years old. He said, "Being told I would probably never run again was like being handed a death sentence... to be perfectly honest, I know I should've been astonishingly grateful to be alive at that moment, but I wasn't. I wasn't happy at all. I was angry" (Page 26). Have you ever felt something like this?
- b) The title of this chapter is "When Dreams Die." How did Mike suffer the death of a dream? Have you ever lost a dream?
- c) "The questions bombarded me from every angle. Why weren't my friends hurt? Why was I the only one lying there with my face torn off? If God could save me from death, why couldn't he save me from injury? Was he up in heaven explaining, 'Well there's a difference between mostly dead and all dead'? I absolutely couldn't see even a sliver of hope at the time" (Page 26). Have you ever asked questions like this?
- d) Mike asked for a guitar when he was confined to bed for six weeks and it changed the trajectory of his life. What can God do when dreams die?
- e) What's your response to Mike's statement: "And sometimes the only thing keeping us from God's dreams for our lives is our unwillingness to let go of how we thought our own dreams should go" (Page 29).

2) Chapter 4:

- a) Have you ever heard the phrase "You can do anything you set your mind to"? Did your parents or teachers ever tell you that? What's your perspective on it now?
- b) How do you answer Mike's questions: "What if you got everything you dreamed of? What if you attained every dream and goal you ever had? Would you finally be happy?" (Page 36).
- c) Have you ever seen your plans get messed up?
- d) What's your big dream right now?

BIBLE REFERENCE: Proverbs 30: 8-9. Apply this to Mike's statement about being poor or rich on page 47.

WEEK 3: FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE

Chapters 5 & 6

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1) Chapter 5:

- a) Have you ever experienced something like the “unscripted and spontaneous” worship times that Mike describes on pages 51-52?
- b) What'd you think of Mike's statement on page 54-55? “But what I am saying is that until you learn to worship God with no agenda or ulterior motive, there's a risk you'll end up using God to get something else. I like to call it ‘capitalistic Christianity.’ It's where we come to God with an expectation of return on investment.”
- c) “I didn't realize then that accepting God's grace means he doesn't owe me anything anymore. If all I got from worshiping God was more of him, that was more than enough” (Page 55). Do you feel like this statement is controversial?
- d) On page 59, Mike says, “I don't think you should live big for God until you learn how to live because of God...Don't try to serve Him until you are deeply in awe of how He's served you.” Have you ever examined the reasons why you serve or do ministry? How do we get to a place of awe?
- e) On page 63, Mike talks about “digital cages” creating distance between people. It's seems more efficient to write a quick social media post and get lots of comments, than talk to people face-to-face. How do you feel about that?

2) Chapter 6:

- a) What'd you think about the basketball story (Page 67)?
- b) On page 71, Mike says: “I didn't see what was right in front of me because I wanted to minister on my own timetable. I was ‘ministering’ every night on stage, so I couldn't be bothered when I wasn't in the mindset, could I? Of course, I've come to realize now, I missed what was right in front of me because most ministry opportunities have a way of disguising themselves as inconveniences.” Have you ever felt inconvenienced?
- c) Mike quotes Mother Teresa on page 74: “We can do no great things. Just small things, with great love.” He says “Even the people who used to look like an enormous waste of my time now look like the very face of God.” How do we implement this in our lives?

WEEK 4: FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE

Chapters 7 & 8

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1) Chapter 7:

- a) Do you agree with Mike's assessment that the "resounding ethos of the Western culture I live in carries the mandate 'Don't be a follower. Be a trendsetter. Just do it. Lead. Lead. Lead.'"? Is that what our culture says? (Page 81).
- b) "A name that is dependent on perception is a name that's bound to break under your feet eventually." (Page 82) Have you ever found yourself identifying with a name or title that was based on perception?
- c) On page 84, Mike describes searching the gospels for the word "leader." Jesus never used the word. Have you ever assumed that Jesus talked about being a leader?
- d) What's your response to his discussion of Peter and feeding the sheep on page 85?
- e) "Being a servant isn't as cool or sexy as being a leader." (Page 86) Agree? Disagree?

2) Chapter 8:

- a) "I hear a lot these days about finding oneself. Find your calling. Find your center. ... The search for self-knowledge can quickly and subtly become a quest to adore ourselves." (Page 99-100) Thoughts?
- b) "You don't even need to try to think of yourself less; you only need to think about God's love more" (Page 103). How do we practically apply this concept?
- c) On page 104, Mike says: "Jesus never asked us to change the world. He said to love one another." Does this change your perspective?
- d) How do you feel about Mike's statement on page 106: "What if sin is nothing more than an attempt to build an identity on something other than God and his love?" What do you think sin is?
- e) What's your response to Mike's conversion story on page 107-8?

WEEK 5: FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE

Chapters 9 & 10

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1) Chapter 9:

- a) This chapter is titled "God doesn't need you." Reactions?
- b) On page 118, Mike references his friendship with Cory, who had impaired speech and motor skills. "Sometimes, doing less means loving more. Accomplishing less with our time can often mean loving the people around us more meaningfully." Have you ever experienced a time when you tried to slow down and love those around you well? Even when it wasn't easy or "productive."
- c) On page 118-119, Mike says: "Surprisingly, learning to recognize Cory's value freed me from my own anxieties. I began to realize that God didn't need my production as much as he wanted my presence." What has the church (or our culture) taught you about production and presence?
- d) How do you answer Mike's question on page 120: "Just because God wants to use us, does that mean he needs to use us?"

2) Chapter 10:

- a) On page 124, Mike talks about the "prayer behind my prayer." He prayed for God to use their music, but Mike realized that he wanted God to use them more than the other bands. Have you ever realized that there was a prayer behind your prayer?
- b) "I find that the more I celebrate others, the more joyful I become. Let me say it this way: celebration keeps me from comparison and jealousy" (Page 125). Thoughts?
- c) On page 129, Mike says: "God doesn't need us to acquire fame or notoriety or leverage our influence for maximum impact. He may even need us to stop trying to expand our territory, so he can expand his kingdom in the territory of our hearts." Whoa, what did Mike just say?
- d) "This is why God isn't selfish when he asks us to glorify him. He is actually asking to do what he's already been doing for eternity" (Page 130). Had you considered this before?
- e) How do you feel about Mike's statement on page 141? "Competition has lost its power over us. Nobody is a threat. Instead, they are a reflection of the trinity. They are relationship. They are shared space."

WEEK 6: FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE

Chapters 11 & 12

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1) Chapter 11:

- a) On pages 133-135, Mike talks about how he learned to pray (go outside, pray out loud, keep moving). What prayer attitude works best for you? How did you feel about the concept of fighting to rest? (Page 139).
- b) How do you respond to Mike's statement on page 147? "You're not too needy for God. He isn't disappointed by your need for him; He welcomes it. And if you struggle to pray, to keep quiet and tame your thoughts before God, know you're not alone. Know that it pleases our father's heart when we pray unsuccessfully."

2) Chapter 12:

- a) Mike shares the story of his wife's miscarriage in this chapter. On page 155, he says, "We didn't get the answers we wanted, but we did receive the peace that we needed...I believe we should never stop praying for and expecting miracles, but we should also keep believing God is good, even if we don't see a miracle." Have you experienced something like this? Praying for a miracle but not getting one? Have you ever wanted answers but not gotten them?
- b) What did you think of this statement? "Often we're so concerned with changing the outcome of what we're going through, or having our pain relieved, we tend to miss the supernatural healing God is offering us" (Page 158).
- c) On page 159, Mike says, "Good Friday wasn't the day a bad thing happened to a good person; it was the day the worst thing happened to the best person." He goes on to say, "In this life or the next, we'll be able to look back on certain 'worst Fridays' of our own and see God was up to something beautiful, even then. Maybe one day all our worst Fridays will be good Fridays because we'll see them against the backdrop of God's kingdom come." Have you experienced this?

BIBLE REFERENCE: Matthew 11:28-30. Does "easy and light" describe your prayer life?

WEEK 7: FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE

Chapters 13 & 14

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1) Chapter 13:

- a) On page 169, Mike talks about someone asking him to promote their artist. He said that was the wrong question to ask. "Who is your artist trying to serve? Identify that first. It seems there's no shortage of opportunity when you're trying to serve people." Reactions?
- b) What did you think about Mike's statement on page 171? "Not to be overly simplistic, but since that moment, I've come to believe almost all my problems begin with the equally powerful word no. Whether it's 'No, I won't move forward until you give me all the facts' or 'No, I will not follow you into forgiving that person.'"
- c) What was your response to this on page 174? "It's beautiful to know that living a perpetual yes doesn't mean I can't have questions. It doesn't mean I can't have doubt. Rather, it means I need to keep bringing my doubt boldly before the throne of God." Have you had doubts?
- d) In the section Jonah versus Job (page 174), Mike says: "When everything falls apart, is it because we are like Jonah running from the Lord's command, or because we're like Job enduring a difficult trial? Is this a sovereignly appointed valley I'm being led through, or am I just an idiot?" Have you experienced anything like this?

2) Chapter 14

- a) In the first few pages of this chapter, Mike discusses first-century weddings and the symbolism of Jesus offering the cup during the last supper. He was asking, "will you marry me?" What is your response to this concept?
- b) "Christ uses the most intimate relationship to describe what he longs for from us" (Page 184). How does this change our relationship with God? How does it change daily life?
- c) On page 185, Mike says, "Of course, it will be a lifelong fight for us to rest in His love, because it is not in our human nature to love without reason." What are your obstacles to resting in God's love?

WEEK 8: FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE

Chapters 15 & 16

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1) Chapter 15:

- a) On page 189, Mike says, “The place where we have failed is exactly the place where we get to be loved.” Have you ever experienced this, either on the giving end or the receiving end?
- b) On page 196, Mike talks about the Japanese art form called kintsugi, where they repair broken pottery with gold-dusted lacquer. “No busted-up pot is beyond repair, and neither are we. The grace we give one another in moments of great weakness is like the gold poured into the cracks of the kintsugi pots.” How have you given grace to someone recently? How have you received it?

2) Chapter 16:

- a) On page 207, Mike says: “Anyone can feel great about themselves when everything is on a perfect trajectory. But that doesn't help us when things come unglued.” Can you relate to this? What about in light of recent events?
- b) “The greatest opportunities often come on the backs of terrible mistakes” (Page 208). Have you ever experienced this?
- c) On page 212 Mike says: “I remembered what life looks like when we let Christ be our life. It looks like playing bad golf well and joyfully stumbling through bad set lists. We can let go of how things were meant to go, and we can embrace what is.” What do you think of that?
- d) How do you respond to Mike's question on the bottom of page 212? “How would things change for you if fear of failure were no longer a factor.”

BIBLE REFERENCE: James 5:16. Letting yourself be fully known is a hard thing to do. How has this played out in your life?

WEEK 9: FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE

Chapter 17

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) On page 217, Mike says, "Truth is, I still don't know what I'm doing, and maybe, as Shane [another musician] implied, I'm not supposed to." Do you feel like you know what you are doing, or not?
- 2) On page 220, "Find out what makes you come alive, and go do that thing, but not for yourself alone." Have you found what makes you come alive?
- 3) On page 223, Mike says, "God isn't hiding his will for me on some cosmic treasure map. He isn't chuckling to himself, wondering whether or not I'm going to navigate the booby traps, stay on course, or end up another flattened Chester Copperpot. God's not a pirate; he's your treasure." Is this a new concept for you?
- 4) How do you respond to Mike's question on page 224, "Are you worried Jesus will come back too soon?"

BIBLE REFERENCE: Psalm 23. Discuss this quote from page 217: "I've read that the green pastures mentioned in Psalm 23 were actually little tufts of grass...God isn't offering us luxurious provision; He's offering us abundant life...sustenance."

BIBLE REFERENCE: John 15:5. Is intimacy with Jesus the answer to all of our problems?