

**Side by Side by Ed Welch**  
**Study Guide**  
**(Created by Lighthouse Southbay Church)**

**Session 1 – Small Group Study Guide**

**Side By Side Chapter 1**

**Theology of Caring for the Suffering Appendix**

**Overview**

Let's face it—life is hard. Being realistic in what we say and think about life isn't the same thing as sinful grumbling. It's okay to acknowledge that our bodies get sick and age. It's not wrong to recognize that relationships—even good ones—require a lot of work. And since the fall of Adam in the garden of Eden, work and what it purchases can tyrannize us. How are we to cope? How do we avoid getting sucked down into the muck? We begin by simply telling God our reality.

**Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. Read through Romans 8:18–25. Paul is talking about something in the future that brings comfort in the present. Focus on the verbs that Paul utilizes to experience gospel comfort (e.g. *considering, waiting with eager longing, hoping, knowing*). What is Paul thinking about and considering that provides him with hope?

## Session 2 – Small Group Study Guide

### Side By Side Chapters 2 & 3

#### **Overview**

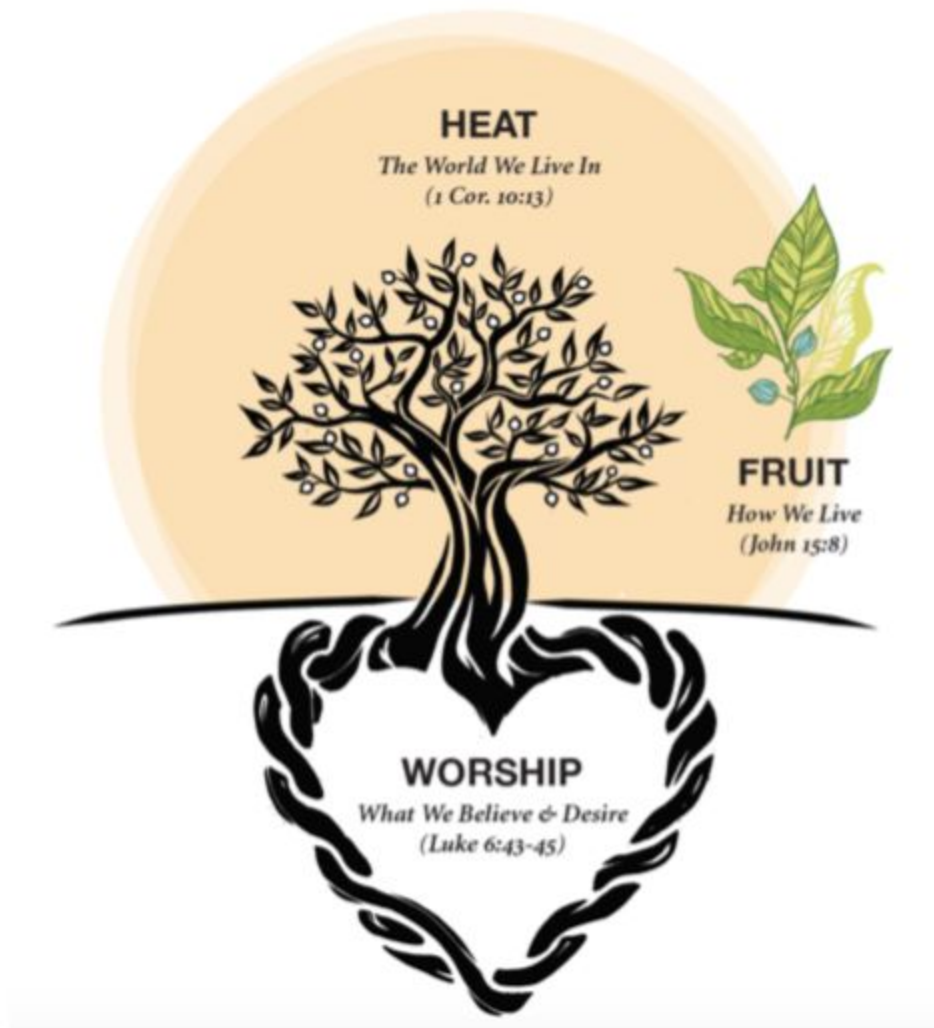
Our hearts hold the essence of who we really are as people because it is the location of all our deepest desires and beliefs (Heb 4:12). Our words, emotions, decisions, and actions all serve as windows into our hearts. Scripture makes it clear that everything good and bad that shows up in our lives ultimately springs from our hearts (Luke 6:45). In sum, our hearts are busy!

Concerning the heart, Welch writes, “It is our spiritual center. The evidence for its activity can be seen every day in the human mash-up of good, bad, fears, frustrations, joys, and sorrows.

Trace these to the heart’s very core and we come face-to-face with the true God and the condition of our relationship to him” (p. 31).

#### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. How would you describe the heart in a few sentences? What picture would you use? To help you visualize your heart, look at the picture below and notice how the heart relates to all of life:



2. The heart of man is like soil and everything we think, say and do grows from it. What we treasure, desire, love, worship defines how we spend our lives. Scripture describes the heart as the spiritual center and describes it as the control center for all of life (cf. Mark 7:21, Matt 15:19). Welch lists some helpful pictures from Scripture to help us describe the nature and activity of our hearts. What do you learn from the following images?:

- Fountainhead (Proverbs 4:23)

- Well (Proverbs 20:5; John 7:38)
- Tree (Jeremiah 17:5-8)
- Treasure Chest (Matthew 6:19-21)

3. As you listen to your emotions, you will begin to hear them speak about personal treasures (*e.g. people, dreams, memories, goals*). Emotions always point out what or who is important to us and therefore they help us understand what our hearts treasure most (*e.g. I get angry because my heart treasures respect from my children, I'm struck with anxiety in traffic because my heart treasures the reputation of being on time.*) What feelings and emotions seem strongest? What do these strong emotions say about how you see God, yourself, and your world? What areas of life do your strong emotions reveal to be dearest to you?

4. An accurate knowledge of God is the most important thing we can ever have and it's something Paul prays for in Ephesians 1:16-17; 3:14-19. What knowledge of God has assisted and guided you through overpowering emotions? What powerful emotions can distort or blind you to this accurate knowledge? (*e.g. guilt can make us distort our God into a human who forgives reluctantly with strings attached, anger toward others can cause us to suppress the truth that God extends love even to his enemies, fear minimizes the presence of God and makes us hyper aware of the presence and opinions of people and situations.*)

5. When hard circumstances collide with our busy hearts, we are even more prone to lose sight of an accurate knowledge of God. Take a moment and meditate on Psalm 131. What promises of God's care come to your mind as you consider this picture of a mother caring for a baby?

6. When you get worried, irritable, wearied, or hopeless how do you try to regain composure? What do you hear your heart saying in the midst of stressful moments?

7. Read Psalm 131:1-3. This psalm doesn't come after the hard times are over. This isn't written by someone in heaven. This Psalm comes in the midst of actions, relationships, and problems. This is because David has a relationship in the midst of his life that teaches him composure. That purposeful quiet is achieved, not spontaneously, but through conscious, alert choices to listen to and watch his Father so he can know

him accurately and fully. “Surely I have composed and quieted my soul.” Relief is only provided in this relationship. In light of this, how can your faith actually change your experience of suffering? How have you seen it happen in the past? (*see page 34*)

8. How did Jesus abound with hope in the midst of his earthly suffering (cf. Psalm 22:3–5, 9–10 and Matthew 4:1–11)?

9. Keep track of the daily deliverances in your life for two consecutive days. When you look back on your days, how did God deliver you from people, circumstances, needs, and even yourself? Write a prayer of thanksgiving for His faithfulness.

10. Share with one person how an accurate knowledge of God from his Word has brightened your hope this week. Write below what you will share and which Scripture has informed your faith with a deeper understanding of who God is.

# Session 3 – Small Group Study Guide

## Side By Side Chapter 4

### The Nature of Sin and Idolatry

#### Overview

The trials and suffering we face threaten to overwhelm us at times. We'd do just about anything to get out from under the pain, and we pray for deliverance. But the truth is, our greatest need isn't deliverance from suffering—it's rescue from sin. So often we fail to understand just how bad sin really is. But when we see the dreadful weight of it, blessings come.

#### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Why is sin our greatest problem and being rescued from it our greatest need? What else in life seems to be a bigger problem and a greater need?
2. According to page 43, how can suffering help expose the sin in our hearts? Describe a time when you experienced this.
3. As we grow as Christians, there is also a growing understanding of our sinfulness and need of grace. The Apostle Paul toward the end of his life calls himself "the foremost of sinners" in 1 Timothy 1:15. In walking with God, our growing wonder of his redeeming love also leads to a growing sensitivity to the presence of our own sinfulness. What blessings have come to you from seeing the weight of your sin? How have you experienced the three benefits identified on pages 44-45?

- Seeing the weight of our sin drives us to Jesus.
- Seeing the weight of our sin brings humility.
- Seeing the weight of our sin is the beginning of power and confidence.

4. Welch writes, “Throughout biblical history, God has graciously let his people see the realities of their hearts” (page 46). When the Israelites complained in the trials of the wilderness, they couldn’t see that in their hearts they were despising and turning from God (Num 14:11). Name a specific way in which God has allowed you to see the reality of your heart.

5. Once you see the reality of your heart and the sin that is present, how do you take that sin to God and seek forgiveness and grace? How often do you confess sin? What does confession look like in your life?

6. On page 46, Welch lists several things our sin says about God. Sin says, “I want my independence”; “I don’t want to be associated with you”; “I want more than you can offer me”; “I know what is best for me”; and even “I hate you” (James 4:4). But thankfully by the Spirit we can return to God and through confession learn to say what God says about our sin so that we can learn to hate it. Our hearts often deceive us by making our rebellion small, vague, or hard to describe. Think about your most common sins, what does God say about them in Scripture? Write out a list of confessions based in Scripture that help expose the wickedness, foolishness, and danger of sin. Below are some examples of confessions you could write about anger:

- In my impatience, I am carrying out Satan’s agenda for my family (Ephesians 4:26-27)
- In my impatience, I am sinning first and foremost against God (Psalm 51:4).

- In my impatience, I am committing murder against my family in my heart (Matthew 5:21-26).

7. After reading the appendix, you can see how our understanding of idolatry affects how we talk about sin, confess it, and how we fight it by grace. To help our confessions of sin go deeper, answer the following four questions and consider which area of confession you would like to continue to see grow.

- Confessing My Sin - Can I honestly admit my disobedience that revealed my idolatry?
- Confessing My Idol(s) - Can I honestly identify and confess the competing treasures and masters that replace God in my life? (Matt 6:24)
- Confessing My Heart of Worship - Can I describe how my beliefs and desires have been warped by lies and pulled away from God? (Gen 3:1-6)
- Confessing My Thankfulness for Grace - Can I come back to the cross and rest in God's forgiving grace and remember why Christ is better than any idols?

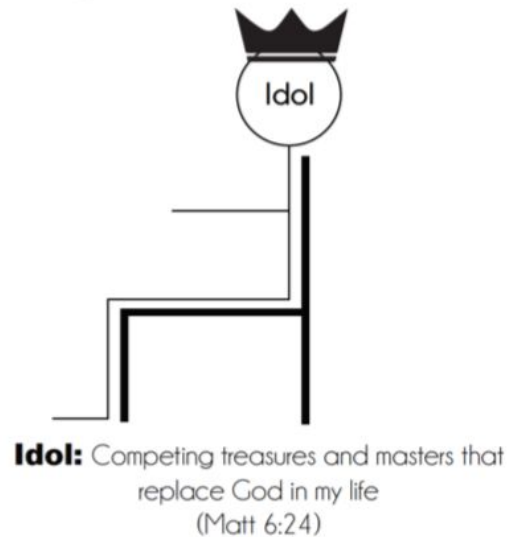
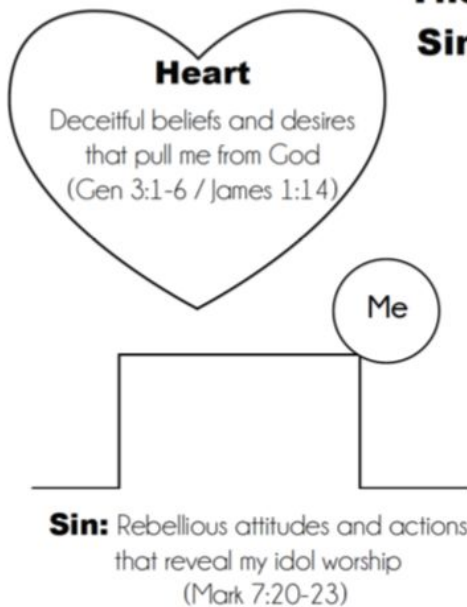
8. Why is our love for God essential to our fight against sin?

9. Choose one day this week and journal at the end of the day, tracking the idols your heart wanted to run toward or what desires tried to rule your heart. After you journal, talk with your accountability partner(s) about the idolatrous desires you see floating beneath the surface for your fears and frustrations.



## APPENDIX: The Nature of Sin & Idolatry

### The Nature Of Sin & Idolatry



***Romans 1:21–25 (ESV) — 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.***

At the beginning of Romans, Paul is beginning a long discussion of the gospel that will go through Romans 8, but the first three chapters he dedicates to discussing sin and our need for the gospel. These three chapters are the most complete explanation of sin in Scripture and Paul begins his discussion of sin by focusing on idolatry.

Misplaced worship, according to this passage, is the root and source of every evil thing we think, desire, choose, say, and do. It is the reason for all our personal, relational, and societal dysfunction. I think, I speak, and I do, because I worship. When we put creation where God alone belongs, an endless catalog of bad things happen. This is the core spiritual disease from which none of us can escape.

Paul Tripp describes the great exchange of worship in Romans 1 this way, “No human solution can fix our replacement instincts and our replacement lifestyle. No set of rules will free us. No social or political insights will liberate us. We have met the enemy, and it is us, and because it is, we have no power to defeat it. We will forget God. We will replace him with something else.” Below is a brief summary of the nature of the idol worship war that rages in each of our hearts.

### **Why We Worship Idols**

According to Jeremiah 17:9, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Ecclesiastes 9:3 rephrases this same idea by saying that there is madness in our hearts while we live. Yet Hebrews 4:12 points out that our insanely evil hearts happen to have very specific thoughts and intentions (beliefs and desires) but only the light of God’s word can expose them. Knowing this about our hearts, that they generate deceitful desires and beliefs, helps us understand why we turn from God to worship idols. Your heart will give you as many reasons to trust an idol as the gospel gives you for trusting Christ.

Jesus says in Matt 11:28, “Come unto me all you who are weary and you will find rest for your soul.” Christ promises us “rest for my soul”, but so does money, so does marriage, so does success at work, so does the praise of a parent or a compliment from a peer. Our hearts lead us to defect from God by saying that better promises can be found in the temporary things of this world. As our worship turns toward idols we begin to live under their rule and our idols always demand more.

Because this worship happens in the heart first, it is a subtle shift away from God. As we enjoy the comfort of a TV show, savor the productivity of a hard day’s work, pursue

the diversion of a hobby, browse social media to wind down after a long day, find a great deal on Amazon, or achieve a personal best in sports, a subtle shift happens in our hearts. The promises of all these innocent pleasures and pastimes start to weigh more than the promises of the gospel. And we weigh these promises, not with pounds on a scale but with time. Minutes, hours, nights out, days off, moment by moment, thought by thought we crush the greatness of God by meditating on the greatness of His gifts apart from Him. That is how an idol is created in our hearts.

## **The Idols We Worship**

When we erase the Creator we are blind to God's design for creation. Anything can serve as an idol, particularly the best things in life. Our hearts take good things, and make them *ultimate* things. That's what Paul means in verse 22 when he says, "Claiming to be wise, they became fools." Because when we separate the gift from the giver, we foolishly drain the gift of its significance and meaning.

G.K. Chesterton said it well, "When we cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing. We worship anything." And because we are worshippers, if we don't worship God we will forever inflate stuff and people so that we have something to bow down to.

## **How We Worship Idols**

The clearest sign of a heart that is ruled by someone or something other than Christ is our sin. You can see clearly what a heart worships by seeing what comes out of it according to Mark 7:20-23. Jesus gives an example of how this works in Matthew 6:24-25. In that passage he shows that if someone is anxious about their life, then their worry about what they will eat or drink or wear is a sign of what their heart treasures and serves. It reveals that they are serving another master rather than trusting God who showed his perfect care for us in the gospel (v.24).

# Session 4 – Small Group Study Guide

## Side by Side Chapters 5 & 6

### Overview

Psalm 46:1 tells us that God is “a very present help in trouble,” yet we tend to resist turning to Him until we’ve exhausted all other options. Why? Why do we look elsewhere when all the help we need is found in one place and specifically in one person? Self-sufficiency is the reason, and this craving for autonomy keeps us from crying to the Lord for help. Additionally, sometimes we just don’t know what to say to God. But Scripture guides us here and leads us into ever-increasing fellowship with our Lord.

But not only do we need to seek help from the Lord, but we are called to lean on the body of Christ that he has surrounded us with (1 Cor 12). It sounds counterintuitive, but our neediness actually serves other people. That’s why it’s good to practice the basics of being spiritually needy. Side by Side has us on a trajectory: we’re moving from feeling needy to knowing our deepest needs to asking the Lord for help and asking others for help.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. As we live we all experience the necessity of the word, “help.” Whether we’re asking teachers, parents, co-workers, or friends it a necessary word for life. Yet how often do we usually ask for help from God? In a few sentences, describe when you tend turn to God for help, how you make your way toward him, and what that does that look like?

2. Welch writes that humility before our Father and freedom to speak what is on our hearts to Jesus are spiritual fundamentals (page 50). Why is this humble honesty vital to our relationship with God?

3. When we ask for help it must not only come from a place of neediness, but also from a place of gratitude and humility. What are some wrong ways to ask for help?

4. What is the link between gratitude and humility? How do these qualities factor into our relationships?

5. How does depending on your relationship with God prepare you to depend on your relationships with others?

6. Why can it be harder to ask people for help than to ask God for help? What fears do you sometimes experience in being vulnerable or needy in your relationships? What do those fears reveal about what you value?

7. What are some regular ways you seek to love and help those in your life? In what ways would you like to see your relationships grow in helping one another this season? Who at Lighthouse is an example of loving help to others that you are seeking to imitate?

### **For Further Study**

8. After almost every prayer for help, there is a period of waiting on God. What should be our expectations after we pray and how can that help us wait with patience and hope?

9. What are some blessings of transparency? What potential dangers (if any) do you see in confessing your need for God and others?

# Session 5 – Small Group Study Guide

## Side By Side Chapter 7 and

## Our Hope in Helping Others Appendix

### **Overview**

Up till now we've focused on our own neediness. We started there because recognizing our need for help breeds the humility we need to receive it. Once that happens, we can offer others the very help we've received. God delights to use the humble, because humble people rely on the Holy Spirit rather than on their own strength when it comes to helping others. Welch writes, "Are you feeling ordinary or a little less so? Do you have the Spirit? If so, you are just the person God has been looking for." (page 71)

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. At the beginning of chapter 7, Welch recounts a personal experience in which he was greatly helped by friends (pages 67-68). What did his friends do that proved so helpful? Think of those who have helped you during times of trouble. What were their qualifications and what did your helpers do that was most helpful?
2. Welch writes, "followers of Jesus have all the competencies needed to encourage and instruct each other." How, according to Jeremiah 31:33-34, is this true?
3. Do you ever feel unqualified to help someone? Why?
4. Based on 1 Cor 1:26-29, Welch writes, "God has determined that run-of-the-mill people do most of his work." How does this truth aid you in both offering and asking for help?
5. After reading the chapter and the appendix for this week, how would you explain the Spirit's work in empowering believers? How does that give you hope as you help others? Describe one way you would like to depend more on the Spirit as you love the people in your life.

6. What is unique about the wisdom imparted by the Holy Spirit? What specific wisdom would you like to have for your relationships?

### **For Further Study**

7. What does your prayer life reveal about your dependence on the Holy Spirit for helping others?

8. Looking at the list on page 67, how would you like to grow as a helpful friend?

## **APPENDIX: The Holy Spirit – Our Hope in Helping Others**

Our great hope in walking together is that someone greater than us walks with us and works in and through our relationships. The Holy Spirit is vital to any relationship that seeks to offer help to another, thus it is important to see how He works inside our hearts and relationships so that we hope in Him as we walk alongside others. To encourage our hope in the Spirit's work, here are a few ways Scripture teaches us about how He works.

### **1. The Spirit Convicts**



### **He convicts unbelievers of sin and their need for salvation (John 16:8-11).**

In love, God the Father sent his Spirit into the world to convict unbelievers of their sin because they need to believe in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and salvation (John 16:9). Each member of the human race needs the Spirit for this work because no one can experience such conviction on their own. All sinners are hardened in unbelief and disobedience and never feel the weight of their sin without the work of the Spirit (Rom 3:10-12).

By God's grace, we have the privilege of being used by the Spirit to place the truth of the gospel before those who do not know Christ and thus aid in allowing the opportunity of conviction to occur. While we do not hope in our skill or ability to change someone's heart toward Christ, we do rejoice in the opportunity we have to be used by the Spirit to love unbelievers knowing that He is our only hope that they can come to saving faith.

### **He convicts believers of sin and their need for regular repentance (2 Cor 7:9-10).**

In this passage, Paul rejoices that the believers experienced godly grief. This work of the Spirit through revealing truth leads Christians to see both the reality of their sin and the forgiveness provided for it on the cross. As the passage indicates, those who experience this godly grief move back toward God through repentance.

But it is important to see that God used Paul, to present the truth to the Corinthian church and the Spirit used that truth to change their hearts. Thus, while God doesn't need us, He still uses our human relationships in the body of Christ to be part of the Spirit's work in pointing individual hearts back to Him.

## **2. The Spirit Indwells (John 14:16-17)**

Here Jesus is stating that for believers the ministry of the Holy Spirit is present internally. The Spirit comes and resides in believers and displays the presence of Christ within them. God's indwelling presence means that he dwells within believers in a special way that leads them to call out to God in faith as Father (Gal 4:6).

This indwelling presence is vital to our relationships with one another within the church. By pointing each other to God's presence within us it helps our brothers and sisters hope in the intimate presence of God dwelling inside them at work in their hearts in the midst of every trouble they experience. Much like the comforting presence of a parent to a child who has a bad dream, the indwelling presence of God allows us to run to Him and continually find Him present to love and care for us.

### **3. The Spirit Teaches (2 Pet 1:20-21 / Luke 24:27)**

The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of all Scripture in order for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the story of our redemption, to be known and studied to expand our understanding and worship of Christ. But not only did the Spirit inspire the Holy Scripture to testify about Christ, He also illuminates truth as we study and meditate on God's word so that we are changed. In our practice of meditating on the living word of God, we should expect the Spirit to continually search our hearts, show us our need for grace, and display the glory of Christ so that we are transformed into His image (2Cor 3:18).

### **4. The Spirit Empowers (John 14:15-16, 21, 23 / Gal 5:22-23)**

If the indwelling Spirit only opened our eyes and showed us Christ, but did not provide the power for us to become like Christ we would still live just like the world. It's one thing to know what God desires for us to do, but quite another thing to possess the power to accomplish it. This is why the words of Christ in John 14 are comforting to us — **15** "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."

This is because for Christians obedience is not optional, rather becoming like Christ in our hearts and lives is the inevitable result of knowing Him. That is why he calls obedience the evidence of our love for him. True obedience points to a genuine relationship with Him empowered by the Spirit. So what should we expect to see in our lives? According to Gal 5:22-23 we should anticipate a constant catalogue of good fruit in our lives as a sign of the Spirit's empowering work — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As we bear this fruit, Christ stands forth in our lives and relationships and we

are able to help one another because Christ dwells in us and works through us to love those He places in our lives.

# Session 6 – Small Group Study Guide

## Side By Side Chapters 8 & 9

### Overview

God always takes the initiative to care for us even when we sin. That's what grace looks like. And because we're loved like that, we can take the initiative to love others – not just our friends, but also those we don't know well. Reaching out to people we don't know can be awkward and difficult. But through our union with Christ, it's a calling we can delight in carrying out.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Describe a meaningful conversation you've had recently. What made it meaningful?
2. As you reflect upon all the ways Scripture describes God's love for us, what are one or two of the most powerful pictures God pursuing us in His love? How can we reflect God in the way we move toward people?
3. What makes it hard to pursue people? From your personal experience, what has been most difficult in this regard?
4. Welch writes, "A reasonable application of Scripture is to greet one person we don't know or don't know well every time we gather with others in the body of Christ" (page 76). What has hindered you from living out this application? How are the greetings we offer a way to imitate our Lord?
5. How do we move from generic conversation to more personal interaction?

6. What does Welch mean when he says, “listen for signs of life”? (page 82) What questions could you ask to move from hearing the important things going on in someone’s life to what is going on in their heart?

7. How do you plan to act on the call to move toward others this week (perhaps towards those who are more distant and marginalized)? Who comes to mind that you could get to know better this week? How will you do it?

### **For Further Study**

8. How does Welch prioritize whom to greet in church (page 76)? Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?

9. What are some helpful questions you can ask people you are meeting for the first time on a Sunday morning? What are some not-so-helpful questions that could be asked to someone you’re meeting for the first time?

# Session 7 – Small Group Study Guide

## Side By Side Chapters 10 & 11

### Overview

“God has determined that help takes place in the context of love and respect,” says Welch (page 87), and for that to happen, we can’t let the bad we see overshadow the good. Every believer you meet is a sufferer, a sinner, and a saint. Cultivating a helping heart includes keeping our eyes open for good things in others. If we focus only on the hard or sinful aspects of people in our lives, we’ll find ourselves prone to criticize rather than help. This doesn’t mean we turn a blind eye to the realities of sin; rather, we simply remember that every human being has been created to reflect the Creator in unique ways. It’s a perspective that enables us not only to help others but also to enjoy them. Additionally, the more we get to know someone and hear their stories we begin to build a relationship that goes beneath the surface of everyday life. Along the way, we discover the rich blessings that come from the mutual sharing of joys and sorrows.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Describe someone you appreciate and some of the things you enjoy most about them.
2. We read on page 88, “Everything good is a reflection of the God who is good.” How does this truth impact our view of people and our relationships? What does it mean to see the good in someone who is sinful? (See Psalm 16:1, Rom 3:10-12, Gal 5:22-23)
3. Why was the apostle Paul thankful for the Corinthian believers? How did his outlook open doors for the helpful instruction he wanted to give them? (1 Cor 1:4-9)
4. Where in our own lives can we act more like Paul did toward the Corinthians? How often do you tell the people you appreciate why you are thankful for them?

5. Welch warns, “Don’t let the unattractive features of someone’s life blind you to the good” (page 89). How can we keep the good in mind when the bad knocks us down?

6. On page 98 we read, “Love naturally moves to what is important in someone’s story and follows up.” How can you apply this to a conversation you’ve had over the past week?

7. Which of the following areas of hearing and sharing life with others would you like to grow in more? Specifically share what you can do to grow in the area(s) you mention:

- Sharing everyday life. How can you grow in asking and talking about the everyday details of life? (e.g. A baseball game, a restaurant you like, a funny thing your kid said)
- Self-disclosing. How can you be vulnerable with others? While not everyone needs to know your most personal struggles, do you know how to speak about your struggles and how Christ is working in your life?
- Emotional Sensitivity. Do you have a demeanor that says: “I’m here and nowhere else,” “I’m affected by the things you share (weeping/rejoicing), and I want to walk with you”? Do you have empathy for apparent suffering (parent/sibling is sick, recent loss of loved one)?
- Regularly following up. Can you keep track of a person’s story whenever you see them? Do you check in on prayer requests and look for more personal ways to pray?

### **For Further Study**

8. Name one person you can write a note, letter, or an email to this week to express thankfulness for the grace of God that you have witnessed and that has blessed you.

9. Reflect on the questions you’ve asked this week. Do your questions communicate a desire to

build a relationship of understanding that is loyal to the work God is doing in that person's heart?



# Session 8 – Small Group Study Guide

## Side By Side Chapters 12 & 13

### **Overview**

The steps we take to help others are actually simple reminders about how to be a friend. That is what Jesus did – he became a friend of sinners. A vital component of friendship is compassion. We rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15). Showing compassion includes knowing what to say, what not to say, and most importantly how to pray.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. Review the “ordinary steps” of how to be a friend (page 101). Based on that list, are you a good friend? What area(s) need work?
2. How does following the ordinary steps of friendship lead to the primary struggles of suffering and sin?
3. Welch writes, “Suffering is the trouble that comes at us. Sin is the trouble that comes out of us” (page 102). How do you see this truth revealed throughout Scripture?
4. Welch points out that we all tend to talk about our hardships more easily than we talk about our sin. Why do you think this is the case?
5. What are some practical ways to show compassion to the suffering? How does a biblical understanding of suffering enable our compassion? (For further study, look back at the “Theology of Caring for the Suffering Appendix” from Session 1)

6. Have you felt the sting of unloving or unthoughtful comments in the midst of your suffering? As you think back on it, why was it so unhelpful? How has that experience helped shape how you speak to suffering people?

7. Welch writes, "Sickness is always a spiritual matter in that it raises questions about God's care and goodness, and it is an opportunity to grow in trust and obedience" (pages 115-116). How does this truth impact our prayers for others as well as the words of comfort we offer?

8. Welch says, "We honor God when we know his comfort" (page 116), and we see how this is true in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Where have you seen that played out in your helping of others? How is God's comfort beneficial for both sufferer and helper?

### **For Further Study**

9. Compassion for the hurting requires proximity. Jesus healed and cared for people when he walked among them, touched them, and talked with them. Proximity also communicates to someone who is hurting that your time is theirs. You're not in a hurry. What are some specific ways to move toward someone who is hurting?

10. Can you tell a Christ-centered story of finding God's comfort in the midst of your own suffering? Share it with someone in your small group this week. Remember the effort in sharing your story is not to try to match someone else's story but to show that you share the same God of comfort.

# Session 9 – Small Group Study Guide

## Side By Side Chapters 14 & 15

### Overview

Satan is a defeated foe, but we still need to be aware of his tricks. His goal with believers is to wreck their faith, and during times of hardship, he moves in to tempt, accuse, and confuse. How do we recognize Satan's tactics and counteract them?

One way we stay alert to the forces of darkness is to talk about sin. Do you find it easier to talk with friends about your suffering more than about your sin? If so, you're not alone. Most of us find it difficult to bring our sin into the light. Yet it's even more challenging when the sin that needs discussion is not our own but our friend's. We're not sure what to say without coming across as judgmental, so we debate whether to say anything at all. But walking side by side with others can't exclude discussions about sin. What we need is wisdom in how to go about it.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What were Satan's devices for temptation in the Garden of Eden? (Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-5) How specifically did Jesus refute the lies of Satan? (Matt 4:1-11)
2. On page 126 we read, "Since we have the Spirit, the Word, and prayer, we can be hopeful and stand firm against Satan as we go through our daily wildernesses." How can we live this out practically? How does Ephesians 6:10-18 encourage and equip us to counter Satan's attacks?
3. Talking about sin is typically perceived as impolite, why is this the case?
4. Why is humility a prerequisite to helping others deal with sin?
5. We read on page 136, "Patience is more interested in direction and less interested in how fast people are changing." Based on that insight, how are you doing with patience?

6. Building up another before addressing his or her sin is sometimes the best and most loving approach. In what relationship should you apply this lesson?

7. Have you ever been confronted in a helpful way? What made the confrontation helpful? Have you ever been confronted about sin in an unhelpful way, describe what made the confrontation hurtful?

8. Are you personally hesitating to talk to a friend about sin? If so, is your hesitation rooted in love or in fear?

### **For Further Study**

9. On page 134, Welch writes, "suffering and sin are the sum of human struggles. This means that we need one another in our struggle with suffering and in our struggle with sin and temptation." Who is involved in how you process your sin and suffering? Who helps you see your heart clearly?

10. How do you know if your heart has the patience and humility necessary to address someone else's sin?

11. Why is patience an essential feature of love? Give biblical backing in your answer. When is patience not the best course?

12. How do circumstances factor into helping others deal with their sin?

13. Sometimes it is better to remain silent about the sin we see in someone. How can we discern when to speak up and when to be silent?

# Session 10 – Small Group Study Guide

## Side By Side Chapter 16 & 17

### Overview

We have already established that our sin is more problematic than our suffering. And although talking about sin is difficult, God calls us to help one another deal with it. Only then will we flourish in the ways God intends. Being alert to temptation and what triggers it – both in ourselves and in those with whom we walk – is an important part of growing up in our faith and helping others do likewise. We also need wisdom for handling failure, for times when we've succumbed to temptation. And most of all, we need to help one another see that where sin abounds, God's grace abounds more (Rom 5:20).

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. On page 143, Welch gives examples of three questions we can ask one another about our various temptations. Do you feel able both to ask and to answer those questions? Why or why not?
2. At times we must decide whether or not the sin we witness someone committing needs to be called out or covered. How do we decide? When thinking through our approach, what factors should *not* be determinative?
3. When talking with someone about their sin, how do we help them see their sin the way God sees it?
4. If someone comes to you grieving over sin and asking for help in fighting it, how would you respond differently than if you were pointing out someone's sin?
5. While we all are sinners we can often move too quickly to commiserating when someone is confessing their sin. Though it is important to affirm that we all share in spiritual weakness, it can shift the conversation away from what is most important, the all-out battle against sin. What

questions can you ask to explore the struggle in another believer's heart? How specifically do you pray for someone struggling with sin?

6. How do you talk about someone's sin and yet keep Jesus Christ in view? (see page 149)

7. How does a wrong view of our sinfulness marginalize Jesus from daily life? How does Ephesians 1:7-9 provide a corrective?

8. While hope in God is not automatic or natural for our hearts, Welch writes, "Hope is essential to human life" (page 158). How does keeping *the* story in view allow us to live with abundant hope?

### **For Further Study**

9. Meditate on Ephesians 1:3-14. In your own words, describe how Paul tells the gospel story in this passage.

10. On page 156, Welch writes, "Paul always had this larger story in view. His mind was not an assortment of pithy sayings and pieces of advice. It was organized around Jesus Christ and the cosmic changes brought about by his life, crucifixion, and resurrection." How has the great story of the gospel brought hope to you recently?

11. Looking back on this study, how has the story of the gospel changed how you live inside your relationships?