

MADE FOR SOMETHING MORE



“Identity” is a buzz word in our world.

The world will tell us our identity is determined by ...

- ▶ ... how we see ourselves.
- ▶ ... how we feel.
- ▶ ... what others expect us to be.

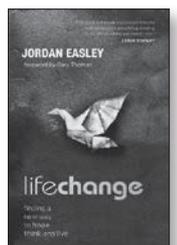
But who are we ... really?

We are who God says we are! And when we come to Christ, our identity is shaped—reshaped—into the image of Christ. He brings us back to what He intended us to be in the first place.

In these six sessions, we will see who we are in Christ, why we’re here, and what our purpose is. Far from how the world wants to define us, we will see that we were made for something more.

JORDAN EASLEY

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GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

GUIDE: In the next six sessions we will identify six descriptions of a person who is abiding in Christ day by day. Invite members to turn to **page 3** in the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review session titles.

LEADER PACK: Display **Item 7: Made for Something More** to introduce the main theme for this study, along with the specific focus for each session.



DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 92** and ask **Question #1: What is something you've made with your own hands?**

GUIDE: Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 93: Every life counts—including mine.**

SESSION 1

I AM WONDERFULLY MADE



The Point

Every life counts—including mine.

The Bible Meets Life

Culture gives lip service to the value of life, but we deem some people more important because of what they contribute to society. Even on a personal level, we may feel more or less valued based on what we do in

our church, workplace, or community. And society sends this skewed message about the unborn, disabled, and elderly. Psalm 139 points us to an all-knowing, all-loving God who values each one of us.

The Passages

Psalm 139:1-6,13-18

The Setting

Three thousand years ago, David ruled as Israel's king. He was a great psalm writer. The heading of Psalm 139 bears David's name, as do many other psalm headings. Many events in David's life—from Samuel's anointing him for kingship in his youth to failed conspiracies against him in later years—showed that his God knew and valued him. We can imagine David and countless others singing Psalm 139 and marveling at God's attentiveness to them.

Psalm 139:1-6

- 1 LORD, you have searched me and known me.
- 2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away.
- 3 You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, LORD.
- 5 You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me.
- 6 This wondrous knowledge is beyond me. It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.

KEY WORDS: Known (v. 1)—The word *known* refers to God’s thorough and intimate understanding of us. It can also refer to our awareness of His wondrous works (v. 14).

Encircled (v. 5)—This word refers to God’s all-encompassing presence so that we are under His full protection and care.

1 ▶ Verse 1. Many people struggle with self-worth. They strive for others to recognize them as valuable human beings. Psalm 139 has a powerful message for all of us: our lives count to God. If He values us, our lives are valuable!

Some people may not agree immediately that God knows and values all of us. It may be easy for them to believe that God knew and deeply valued King David. After all, God chose him to be king. God gave him a great victory in the battle with Goliath. God preserved David from Saul’s spear. Even when rivals rose against him, God kept David on the throne. Obviously, God knew him and valued him.

But does God know and value the rest of us? Yes! The Bible says God “chose us” in Christ for adoption (Eph. 1:3-4). David was chosen. We have been chosen. Jesus taught that God knows us so well that even the hairs of our heads are numbered (Matt. 10:30). God knows you and me intimately.

Further, the high value God places on us is forever confirmed by the cross of Christ. “God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). God loves the world and has given His

STUDY THE BIBLE

Psalm 139:1-6



10 minutes

GUIDE: Refer group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on **PSG page 93** and consider the question, “Who assigns a person’s value?”

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 98.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on this page and page 100 to establish that our lives are valuable to God.

- *Ephesians 1:3-4* states: “He chose us.”
- *Romans 5:8* says: “God proves His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Psalm 139:1-6.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 99 (**PSG, p. 94**) for insight on the word *known*.

GUIDE: Refer group members to these key points on **PSG page 95** to understand the extent to which God knows us:

- *God knows us better than we know ourselves.*
- *God knows what we're going to do before we do it.*
- *God knows what we're going to say before we say it.*

The Bible teaches that God is all-knowing (omniscient). Ask someone to read these verses on **PSG page 95**.

- *"No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account" (Heb. 4:13)*
- *"God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things (1 John 3:20).*

Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish in sin (John 3:16). It stands to reason that if God did not withhold or spare His own Son, but gave Him up for our salvation (Rom. 8:32), He must value us highly. You and I can be certain God does know us. He values us and all people. ◀

2 ▶ God knows us as One who has **searched** us. He studies His creatures closely, like an explorer studies a territory or a researcher examines thoroughly his subject. He has known us in detail, intimately and better than we know ourselves.

In fact, we need Him to show us some of the things He knows about us! I suppose this is why Psalm 139:1 is turned into a request in Psalm 139:23-24. The request there is for God to search and know our hearts and discover "any offensive way" in us. It is not, of course, that God lacks information He needs. Rather, we need to know and are asking Him to show us offensive ways in our hearts and behavior. We need to know what He knows so we can confess and turn from wrongs.

Many Christian husbands and wives have experienced this. At an impasse in a conflict, each has felt justified in holding a position firmly. They have, however, agreed to take a break from the argument and pray about the situation before talking further. As they have prayed individually, God has given insight to each of them. They've seen the narrowness in their hearts. They have humbly thanked God for showing them their own self-centeredness. They have confessed their selfishness to one another and have then been able to move forward together on the matter at hand.

Verses 2-4. God's knowledge extends to our daily actions. He knows when we **sit down** and when we **stand up**. Whether we are sitting down to read the Bible, share Christ with a friend, or eat a meal, God knows what we're doing. If we stand up to serve a spouse, a friend, or a stranger in need, God knows. If we stand to walk away from a task we really should be doing, God knows that also.

He also understands our thoughts wherever we are. If we feel distant from Him, He knows we feel that way. If we're planning something that would take us **far away** from His commandments, He knows the plans we're making.

God is able and faithful to **observe [our] travels** and our times of rest. Many people travel frequently in their work or to serve family members. They may feel lonely in their traveling, as if no one knows them or cares about them. But God sees them and cares! Many people feel vulnerable when

they travel. Violence, theft, and accidents are on people's minds. God always knows exactly where we are in our travels and, as verse 5 will tell us, has His hand upon us.

I know of a missionary who felt overwhelmed and out of his depth as soon as he landed on his first mission field. The sights, smells, and sounds confused him. Everything was different from what he had known in his home country. As he lay down to sleep the first night, he stared up into the darkness confused and doubting whether he should even be there, but he remembered some things of which he was sure. He remembered that God knew him, knew where he was, and was watching him. He rested in these things.

God's knowledge of us is so thorough we will never surprise Him with a **word** we speak. He may be pleased with our words or displeased with them, but He will not be caught off guard by them. He already knows our words before we speak them. Why does He know our words before we speak them? One reason is that He knows the end of things even from the beginning (see Isa. 46:10). Another reason is that God knows our hearts, and "the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart" (Matt. 12:34). Though we will never surprise Him with our words, we can choose to yield our hearts more fully to God's Spirit. As we do so, the words we will speak will not surprise Him but will please Him! ◀

3 ▶ Verse 5. Neither will schemes against us ever surprise God. As a warrior, King David was a target for enemies. Rivals intensely coveted the throne on which he sat. Though he had many loyal friends and servants, he also had people who were out to get him. Ponder how profoundly thankful David must have been to say to God, **You have encircled me.** Hemmed in, protected behind and before, guarded from all angles, David was confident in God's protection.

The prophet Elisha, Elijah's successor, dramatically experienced the encircling David described here. The king of Aram sent a massive army to seize Elisha at the city of Dothan. The army surrounded the city by night. Elisha's servant trembled in fear. Elisha told his servant not to be afraid because "those who are with us outnumber those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). After Elisha prayed for him, the servant's eyes were opened to see the horses and chariots of fire God had sent to encircle them on the mountain around the city! The hosts of heaven were all around to protect Elisha and his servant.

Likewise, you and I don't need to look anxiously about us as if we can find no source of help when we feel we are in danger. God is with us to strengthen us and to help us and to uphold us with His righteous right hand (Isa. 41:10). ◀

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** on page 100 and this page to provide insight on how God intimately knows every detail of our lives.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 99 (**PSG, p. 94**) for insight on the word *encircled*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** to provide further information about the word *encircled*:

- *hemmed in*
- *protected from behind and before*
- *guarded from all angles*

Tell the story of Elisha being encircled by horses and chariots of fire.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Display several sales ads. Ask group members to point out the most expensive items they see in the ads. Highlight how some items are inexpensive and others are very expensive. When we shop, we recognize different items have different values. Note that unlike the items in the sales ads, all people have great value in God's eyes.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to explain the phrase “You have placed your hand on me.”

- Remind group members of how God guided and protected David in battle, in decision making, and in times of trial.
- Tell the story of John Wesley.

SAY: “This wondrous knowledge is far beyond our capacity to understand. This is a lofty thing and we cannot reach it; we can’t get our minds around it.”

DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 96): **What’s your reaction to God’s awareness of every aspect of your life?**

(Alternate: Since God knows everything, why do people try to hide things from Him?)

TRANSITION: “As amazing as it is that God is all-knowing, the reality is that He has known us from the beginning and was intricately involved in our creation and development.”

4 ▶ Indeed, we can say to God, **You have placed your hand on me.** God’s hand was on David when Samuel first anointed him. God’s hand guided and protected David in battle, in decision making, and in times of trial.

John Wesley lived in the eighteenth century. As a young child, he was rescued from a fire that raged in the parsonage where his family lived. One neighbor stood on another neighbor’s shoulders and reached toward John’s second story bedroom window. John jumped into the neighbor’s arms and to safety. Wesley looked back on that rescue and described himself in the words of Zechariah 3:2 as a brand plucked from the fire. He lived knowing that God’s hand was on him to accomplish a great purpose.

If you and I are believers in Christ, God’s hand has been on us to guide us toward personal faith. God’s hand is on all believers to guide us, protect us, and accomplish His purpose in us.

Verse 6. God’s **wondrous knowledge** is far beyond our capacity to understand. It is expansive. God is all knowing regarding every quarter of His great universe. Likewise, He is all knowing regarding each of us. His knowledge is perfectly broad and perfectly focused.

This is a **lofty** thing and we cannot **reach it.** We can’t get our minds around it. We do not encompass God with our knowledge of Him. He encompasses us with His knowledge of us. His knowledge extends to the depths of our minds and hearts. When we think seriously of God’s knowing us intimately and valuing us deeply, isn’t it right to bow in awe and worship before Him? ◀

Psalm 139:13-16

13 For it was you who created my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

14 I will praise you
because I have been remarkably and wondrously made.
Your works are wondrous,
and I know this very well.

15 My bones were not hidden from you
when I was made in secret,
when I was formed in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw me when I was formless;
all my days were written in your book and planned
before a single one of them began.

KEY WORDS: Knit me together (v. 13)—This phrase pictures God at work like a weaver making cloth. God’s knitting work is, however, on the newly developing human being in the womb.

5 ▶ Verse 13. He **created** us in our **inward parts**. “Inward parts” probably refers to the inner person, at the level of emotion, affection, desire, and conviction. In Job 19:27 the same word in the original Hebrew is translated “heart”: “my heart longs within me.” God created us in our inward parts to feel deeply, to love deeply, to have convictions, and to make value judgments. ◀

He **knit us together** in the **mother’s womb**. He was active in the cells, organs, and fibers of our bodies growing and maturing in the earliest stages of our human existence and development. In verse 12, we read that “the darkness is not dark to you.” In verse 13 we are reading of the dark place of the mother’s womb and hearing that God knows and sees and works out His purposes even there!

God does not wait until after a child’s birth to take interest in and begin His work in that child. God said to Jeremiah, “I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born” (Jer. 1:5). Gabriel said of John the Baptist, “He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15).

6 ▶ Verse 14. **Praise** to God follows very readily from knowing that we are **remarkably and wondrously made**. In our day, doctors and researchers inform us of the magnificent complexity of human beings. Ultrasound technology gives us a window to observe God’s handiwork in the womb. Even in King David’s day people could hold a new born baby and marvel at God’s wonderful work. We also can marvel as we hold a new born baby. Months before, the same baby was so small that we wouldn’t have been able to tell that the child’s mother was pregnant. For a time, she herself probably did not know she was pregnant. God knew. From conception through birth, God presided creatively over that child’s growth and development. Holding the newborn baby in our arms, we are

STUDY THE BIBLE

Psalm 139:13-16



15 minutes

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 139:13-16.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** to explain the phrase *inward parts*.

- *refers to the inner person*
- *at the level of emotion, affection, desire, and conviction*
- *the same Hebrew word is translated “heart”*

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS (PSG, p. 96)** for insight on the phrase *knit me together*.

SAY: “The phrase ‘knit me together in my mother’s womb’ means God was active in the cells, organs and fibers of our bodies growing and maturing in the earliest stages of our existence and development.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** on this page and page 104 for insight on the phrase “remarkably and wondrously made.”

GUIDE: Refer group members to the meaning of the beautiful phrase *remarkably and wondrously made* on **PSG pages 96-97**. Share the following points:

- *remarkably . . . made*—expresses great reverence and awe. God Himself created us in His own image.
- *wondrously made*—God created each person unique and distinct. The intricacies of the human body are amazing.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 7** on this page and page 105 to give insight to these phrases:

- *made in secret*
- *when I was formless*
- *all of my days were written and planned before a single one of them began.*

DISCUSS: Question #3 (PSG, p. 97): How does knowing we are remarkably and wondrously made impact the way you see yourself and others?

gazing upon a little person who will grow day by day into a mature adult. Indeed, God's **works are wondrous!** ◀

7▶ Verses 15-16. We were **not hidden** from God even in the **secret** place of the mother's womb. **I was formed in the depths of the earth** is probably a figurative way of continuing to describe formation in the mother's womb. Light does not shine in the womb or in the depths of the earth.

We should acknowledge that "the depths of the earth" may also refer to death in Scripture (Ps. 63:9). If that is the case here, then the meaning is that even in death God knows the person. Since, however, in this case "the depths of the earth" is the place where "I was formed," it seems unlikely to refer to death. It seems best to take "depths of the earth" here as a poetic reference to the womb.

God's **eyes saw me when I was formless**. When our bodies were as yet unformed, when we were embryos still undeveloped, before ultrasound technology could have detected our image, God saw us and knew us!

More than this, **all my days were written in your book and planned**. Did God know in advance both the joys and trials that would come to the people whose lives unfold on the pages of Scripture? Psalm 139 testifies that God knew what their days held **before a single one of them began**. Was He working out His purposes in their lives through both triumph and tragedy? Indeed, He was. The Bible assures us that God works in all things for the good of His people who love Him (Rom. 8:28). KJV does not refer to "days" but "members" here; adapt appropriately.

God knew of Joseph's slavery, success, imprisonment, and ascent in Egypt before they occurred. God was at work for His glory and Joseph's good in all of these things! God knew of Moses' wilderness sojourns and great victories before they happened historically. God knew of Esther's intervention to save her people before Haman hatched the plot against the Jews. He knew of these things before Esther was born!

God knew of Job's suffering even before Job was born. God also knew that Job's suffering would forever provide emotional relief and ease of conscience to bewildered people who erroneously think they are suffering because God has turned against them and rejected them. God's purposes in human suffering are often beyond human understanding. The plights of war refugees, famine stricken people, and friends in chronic pain may remain mysteries to us. We do know, however, that when we suffer we are not merely victims of

fate. We have a great God who has loved us by giving His Son freely for us. This great God has promised to work for our eternal good and has planned our temporal days accordingly. ◀

Psalm 139:17-18

17 God, how precious your thoughts are to me;
how vast their sum is!

18 If I counted them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand;
when I wake up, I am still with you.

8 ▶ **Verses 17-18.** It's a good thing God's favor toward us does not depend on our capacity to grasp fully His mind. His **thoughts** are so **vast** that they are far beyond our ability to comprehend. They are many and far reaching. If we **counted** God's thoughts of us one by one, the effort would be as hard as trying to number the **grains of sand** on a beach. Could you count one by one the grains of sand that fill a large jar? Could you count one by one all the grains of sand on a coastal beach or in a vast desert? Likewise, God's thoughts of us and plans for us are simply too many to count.

If you did set out to count God's thoughts, sleep would overtake you too soon and too often for you to finish. Maybe that is why Psalm 139 refers at this point to **when I wake up**. And what do we realize when we do wake up? We realize that God has been with us even while we've slept. His thoughts have been toward us and of us. And each of us can say to Him, **I am still with you**.

Our experience of the presence of God is like our love for God. We love God because He first loved us and because He loves us now. We are with Him because He is with us.

David prayed in Psalm 23:4, "I fear no danger, for you are with me." Years ago a Christian family was in a terrible car accident. The father and two children died. The mother survived. When friends arrived to comfort the bereaved woman, they were amazed by her somber strength. The first thing that she said was, "The Lord is with me and He is the strength of my life." Through her long, painful journey of grief she lived with that confidence: God is with me.

Yes, He knows us. He works out His plans for us. He is with us. ◀

DISCUSS: Question #4
(PSG, p. 98): **Where in our culture do we see life being devalued or disrespected?**

(Alternate: What actions can we take that reflect our belief in the value of all human life?)

TRANSITION: "Next we will discover another marvelous truth: God's thoughts for us."

STUDY THE BIBLE

Psalm 139:17-18



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Psalm 139:17-18.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 8** to give further explanation to God's thoughts toward us.

DISCUSS: Question #5
(PSG, p. 100): **What is your response to God's thoughts toward you and His presence with you?**

(Alternate: How does this passage support the idea that our lives count?)

DO: Invite group members to respond privately to the activity "**How About You?**" on **PSG page 100**.

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** **Every life counts—including mine.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 101)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

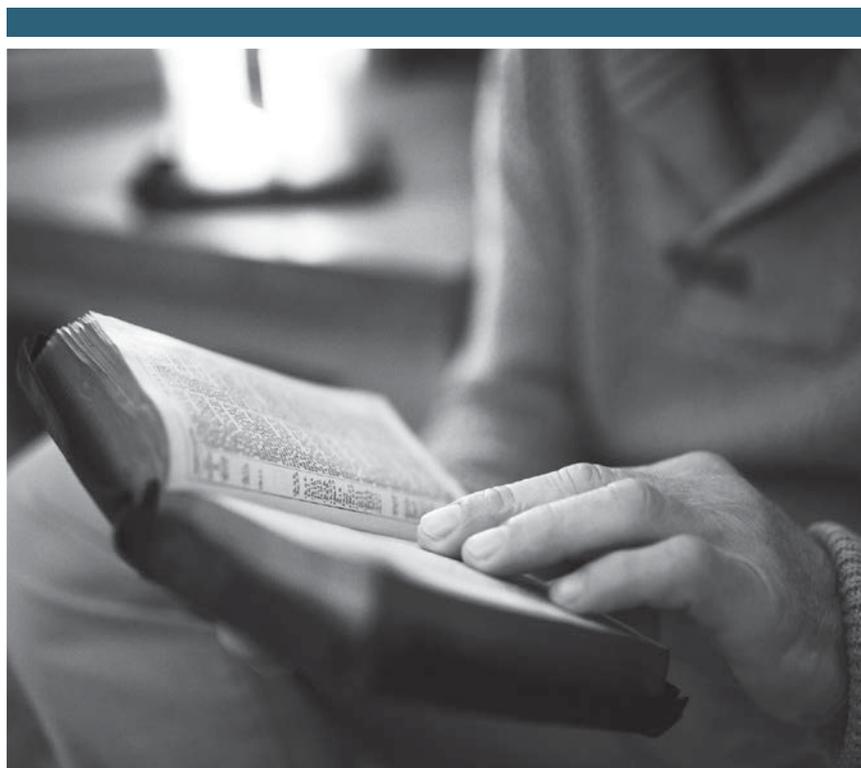
GUIDE: Take a moment to remind group members that God knows each of us intimately and always has. Rejoice in these truths as the psalmist did, celebrating your value in God's eyes.

PRAY: "Father, thank you for knowing us intimately and for loving us so much. Help us to live like we are highly valued by You, because we are."

LIVE IT OUT

Your life matters. Let that truth make a difference in your life this week.

- ▶ **Pray.** Pray that the eyes of our lawmakers, judges, and political leaders will be opened to the fact that every life was created by God and counts.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Commit Psalm 139:13-14 to memory. Let these verses take hold in your mind and heart, so that it not only impacts how you see yourself but how you see those around you.
- ▶ **Volunteer.** Commit an hour a week to serve at a local Christian pregnancy center, retirement home, or ministry to those with special needs. Help others see the truth in Psalm 139 that every life—including theirs—matters.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



The recipes on this tablet cover barrenness, pregnancy tests, and treatment for gynecological conditions. Dated about 600–400 BC; likely from Babylon.

After a while, Elkanah could have divorced Hannah for barrenness. However, a marriage agreement between Hannah's and Elkanah's fathers may have required Hannah to find someone to bear children for her husband. Could Hannah have "acquired" her fellow wife? Anyway, following law and custom accepted across the land, Penninah arrived. She gave Elkanah both sons and daughters (1 Sam. 1:4).

The family traveled annually to worship in Shiloh. Hannah could have stayed home and joined Canaanites as they observed

pagan rituals. Though near despair, Hannah never stooped to idolatry. She was neither sick nor sinful, yet "the Lord had closed her womb" (1 Sam. 1:5). Once, after their sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah abruptly left and hastened to Yahweh's sanctuary. There, she urgently begged God for a son (vv. 9-11). "It is completely in accordance with Eastern custom that Hannah asks not for a child, or children, but for a son."

At the sanctuary of the God of Israel, Hannah cried so bitterly and prayed so fervently that to Eli the priest she seemed like a drunken cult debauchee (vv. 11-14). "Do not take your servant for a wicked woman," Hannah protested, "I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief" (vv. 15-16). "Go in peace," Eli answered, "and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him" (v. 17). With joy, Hannah returned home, conceived, and gave birth to a son.

The excerpt above is from the article "Barrenness in the Ancient Near East" (Spring 2009), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

God created each of us in His own image, with a soul that can only be filled by Him. We truly realize how wonderfully we were made when we repent of sin and trust in Jesus as Lord.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

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Free additional ideas for your group are available at
BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra