



12 WEEK

SMALL GROUP

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

—
by

CHARLIE WETZEL

PREFACE

Welcome to *Home Run* as a small group tool for life change. This material has been created by Charlie Wetzel, who is John Maxwell's writer, the wordsmith behind *Home Run*, an elder on the 12Stone Board of directors, and a dear friend. Furthermore, he is a major league player in small groups. From the training videos provided to the small groups guides, Charlie is a gift to the Body of Christ. I am grateful he voluntarily provided all these materials to help pastors and lay people run life by God's game plan.

– Pastor Kevin Myers

THE BEAUTY AND VALUE OF SMALL GROUPS

Leading a small group is one of the most spiritually impacting tasks you can do as a member of the Body of Christ. Not only does it have the potential to change the lives of the people in your group, it also has the potential to change yours. As you accept responsibility for helping to facilitate the spiritual growth of others, you grow closer to God and learn to depend on Him. Out of your own growth, you will be better able to create an environment where the Holy Spirit can help others to grow.

Small groups are the heart of the local church, and they are as old as the Church itself. Jesus' interaction with the disciples looks a lot like our modern small groups. In Jesus' group, people developed relationships, learned from one another, accepted challenges that helped them to grow, cared for one another, reached out to others, and learned to lead effectively.

When a small group is working at its best, it is a full representation of the church to which it belongs. The best small groups do all the same things their larger counterpart does: carry and communicate the vision, share the Gospel, challenge and instruct believers, provide pastoral care, reach out beyond the church to the community, and fulfill the Great Commission. For that reason, there are few ministries in the local church better at preparing a follower of Christ for leadership.

As you lead your small group, your primary goal should be to build positive relationships and create a positive environment where people can be authentic so the Holy Spirit is free to work. If you are able to do that, you have the potential to be a highly effective leader.

WHAT GOOD SMALL GROUP LEADERS DO EACH WEEK

You can be successful at leading a faith-based small group—no matter whether you are a long-time follower of Christ or a new believer, a person experienced in group dynamics or new to it, a highly gifted natural leader or a novice to leadership. To give yourself the best chance at success, do the following things every week:

- 1. Prepare yourself spiritually.** The most important thing you can do is spend time with God during the week. If you remain close to God, you will be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit when your group meets and remain on God's agenda. In addition, pray for each person and ask God where each needs to grow and how you can help.
- 2. Review or read the material in advance of the next meeting.** Preparation and positive group interaction is more important than the selection of material. Any good material can lead to great results through preparation. In contrast, even great material can be a letdown because of poor preparation. Know what you intend to cover during your group time and seek God's guidance as you prepare.
- 3. Know the goal of the meeting and create a lesson plan made of questions.** The desired result for every meeting must be action! Your task each week is to ask questions in such a way that people open up to each other, sense truth from God, see themselves in light of it, and take action to change based on the Holy Spirit's direction. For *Home Run*, much of this part of the preparation has been done for you if you use one of the three plans provided.
- 4. Meet with a developing leader from the group.** Every leader in the Body of Christ should spend time developing another leader. Select someone with the potential to lead from within the group and spend time weekly investing in his or her spiritual development and leadership ability. Discuss the strategy and goals for each week's session, as well as how you can best serve and lead the members of the group.

5. Make sure the setting is conducive to positive interaction. Prior to each meeting, make sure the environment is positive for meeting. Ask yourself some questions: Will everyone be comfortable? Does the setup promote discussion and interaction? Will the group time be free from unwanted interruptions? Can you make food available before or after the meeting? Is there anything in the environment that will detract from the time? Politely and kindly make any necessary adjustments before people arrive.

6. Facilitate the group time well by creating energy and making it fun as well as rewarding. One of the best things you can do as a group leader is create and direct the energy of your group. People who laugh and have a good time are more likely to talk, and a group where everyone talks is easier to lead. When people enjoy their group, they keep coming back. If you can get every person to contribute and no single person to dominate, you'll be doing well as a leader. Always remember, your goal is to encourage others to self-discover where God wants them to change and commit themselves to actions that will help them grow.

7. Meet with people outside of the group time. As a small group leader, your best hope is to create a positive environment where people develop authentic relationships and are open to the Holy Spirit's movement. And God can do some wonderful things within a small group. However, much of the real action happens outside of the group. People are often more willing to open up more and to seek counsel one-on-one. Spend time outside of the group with your people to deepen your relationships with them, challenge them, and serve them.

PLANS FOR GROUPS BASED ON *HOME RUN*

Home Run was written as a personal guide to God's game plan. Because each chapter of the book closes with questions and assignments, it is designed to be used in small groups as is, or it can be a guide for individual spiritual growth. However, to provide additional assistance to small group leaders, we are providing in-depth guides for groups scheduled to meet for four, eight, or twelve weeks.

In the case of the four-week plan, the assumption is that the group has already been meeting and group members already know one another. Accordingly, the first week is not planned for relationship building. Instead, participants will immediately dive into the material. That will require their doing extensive reading prior to the first meeting, and they may want to be given additional time to complete it.

The eight-week plan takes a more measured pace. It begins with a session where participants will meet and be encouraged to get to know one another. They will also be given their first reading assignment. You may want to have books available for them at that first meeting. In subsequent weeks, participants will read one or two chapters and discuss the material during the meeting.

The twelve-week plan begins similarly to the eight-week: with participants meeting and getting to know one another. After that, they will read one chapter per week and discuss it. In addition, two additional weeks have been scheduled for different purposes. We recommend that you plan a social in week six to give people a bit of a break. In week nine, we recommend that you help participants apply what they have learned so far in a retreat where they connect with God intentionally.

Whatever plan you choose to follow, be sensitive to the needs of your people, flexible in your approach, and open to the Holy Spirit and His promptings so that you help your people grow spiritually.

TWELVE-WEEK PLAN

This twelve-week plan allows you to develop relationships, dig into *Home Run*, and go after key issues. Your goal is to help group members understand God’s pattern for living, recognize how they have been doing life, and make adjustments to conform to God’s design.

As a leader, do not judge the people in your group or try to push them to grow. Instead, be honest about your own need for growth and the lessons you’ve learned, and allow people to respond to the Holy Spirit’s promptings to change.

Overview

Here is an overview of how the twelve weeks are planned:

Week	Focus
1	Meet Together, Get to Know One Another, and Set Expectations for the Group
2	“The Life You Want” & “Hopes, Dreams and Delays” (Chapters 1 & 2)
3	“God’s Game Plan for Winning at Life” (Chapter 3)
4	“Parables, Baseball, and the Home Run Life” (Chapter 4)
5	“Home Plate: How to Win with God” (Chapter 5)
6	Batting Practice at Home Plate
7	“First Base: How to Win Within” – Part 1 (Chapter 6)
8	“First Base: How to Win Within” – Part 2 (Chapter 6)
9	Seventh Inning Stretch – Social
10	“Second Base: How to Win with Others” (Chapter 7)
11	“Third Base: How to Win Results” (Chapter 8)
12	“Scoring: How to Keep Living and Winning God’s Way” (Chapter 9)

WEEK 1

MEET TOGETHER, GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER, AND SET EXPECTATIONS FOR THE GROUP

FOCUS

This first week you will set the tone for the next seven weeks. Your focus should be on the people in your group. You want to put them at ease, create a positive environment, and make them feel welcome. We strongly suggest that you make food a part of the meeting's activity, even if you don't plan to do it the other weeks. There's something about eating together that breaks down barriers.

GOAL

Make every person feel welcome and help them to get to know one another.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

For someone who is new to church or who has never been part of a small group, coming to the first meeting can be very intimidating. For many people, it's a big risk. Make that risk pay off. By the time people leave, make them glad that they came.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. Facilitate Relationship Building: This meeting's focus is primarily social. As the leader, make an effort to greet every person individually as they arrive and chat with them briefly. Be the host and put them at ease. Introduce people to someone else and help them start a conversation, then move on to someone else. Try to facilitate connection among people. Having food out for people to eat often helps to create a pleasant environment.

2. Bring Everyone Together: After people have had an adequate time to interact, call together everyone to meet in a circle for discussion.

3. Open in Prayer: Pray, but keep it brief. Invite God into the group.

4. Welcome: Thank everyone for coming. Introduce yourself, and explain that the group will be meeting for eight weeks to discuss *Home Run*. Let them know that the main purpose of the night is to get to know one another and that you will start discussing the book next week.

5. Icebreaker: Your goal for an icebreaker is to increase the energy of the group, learn things about each person, and make things fun. After you state the question, be the first to answer it, keeping in mind that your answer sets the tone for those who follow you: **“Tell everyone your name, who you knew in the group before today, and one interesting and little-known fact about yourself.”**

6. Scripture: A short passage from the Bible is included in the plan each week because the Word of God is key to helping people grow spiritually. You can read the passage aloud or ask someone in the group to do so. After it has been read, ask, **“Is there a word in the passage that stands out to you? If so, tell why.”** Someone might say devoted because growth requires commitment or fellowship because of the value of relationships or homes because it reminds them of small groups. This exercise is to help set the tone for the discussion and should be brief.

This session’s passage is **Acts 2:42, 46-47**

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

7. Questions: Today there is only one question: “**How did you come to be a part of this group, and what do you hope to get out of it by the time we’re finished?**” This will help you better understand everyone’s mindset coming into the group. Encourage everyone to speak freely, tell stories, make jokes, etc.

8. Assignment: Ask everyone to **read the first two chapters of *Home Run: “The Life You Want” & “Hopes, Dreams and Delays.”*** Prior to this first meeting, you will need to decide how you will handle books, whether you will provide them, buy them and get reimbursed, or expect the people in the group to get their own.

9. Logistics: If you need to settle or communicate any logistics, such as time and place of future meetings, childcare, arrangements for food, etc., do so before the end of the meeting.

10. Closing Prayer: As a leader, you never want to put people on the spot by asking them to pray aloud if you don’t already know they are comfortable doing it. So prior to this first meeting, ask someone you know in the group if he or she would be comfortable praying aloud at the end of the group time. As you close the meeting, communicate that the prayer time is open to anyone who wants to pray, and that the person you’ve previously asked will open the prayer time and you will close it. Then simply give some time to allow anyone who wants to pray to do so before you close. And pay attention to who prays and how they pray because it will give you insight into where they are spiritually.

WEEK 2

“THE LIFE YOU WANT” & “HOPES, DREAMS AND DELAYS”

FOCUS

It may be difficult for people this early in the group process to be open with one another about where their life might not be matching up to their hopes and dreams, so you may not be able to delve too deeply about their present circumstances. However, people are often more willing to talk about their past. That will help everyone get to know one another better and begin opening doors to deeper and more honest conversations.

GOAL

Help people recognize and examine any gap they may be experiencing between God’s invitation to “life to the full” and their current circumstances. Continue building relationships and helping people connect with one another.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

Many people don’t like letting others know about where they are not succeeding. Long-time Christians can be especially reluctant about this. Speak honestly (but appropriately) about where you are trying to improve and change in order to live life to the full, and other people in the group may be more likely to let their guard down and open up.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. Facilitate Relationship Building: We recommend that you continue to have some social component to the meeting. Give people a chance to interact and build friendships. Food is often a great catalyst for positive interaction.

2. Open in Prayer: Get everyone together and pray to signal that it's time to start. Invite God to set the agenda for the meeting.

4. Welcome and Logistics: Go out of your way to make everyone feel welcome. Take care of any logistics at this time.

5. Icebreaker: Remember that the goal for the icebreaker is to increase the energy of the group, help everyone learn more about one another, and make the meeting fun. After you state the question, be the first to answer it, keeping in mind that your answer sets the tone for those who follow you:

“When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up and why?”

6. Scripture: Read **John 10: 9:10**, or ask someone in the group to read it. As you did the previous week, invite people to talk about what stands out to them in the passage.

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

7. Questions: You will note that the discussion is designed using relatively few questions. It's preferred to get people talking openly and to genuinely process ideas than to cover a lot of information. When you ask a question, be comfortable with silence as you wait for someone to speak. If discussion lags, ask, “What does everyone else think?” In the event that you want to supplement the questions provided, you can always add questions from “John's Application Guide” at the end of the chapters.

a. “What was the most interesting thing to you in the reading you did for this week's session?” This question is to get people talking and to remind them of what they read.

b. “Myers says in chapter two that many Christians' lives fall short of their dreams and of God's desires for them. Do you agree or disagree? Why?” This safe opinion question will allow people to express their views without yet having to reveal personal information that might make them feel uncomfortable. At the same

time, you will gain insight into how people think and what they believe.

- c. **“Have you experienced a delay in a dream, as Myers did? If so, how did you react to it?”** This is more personal, but it is focused on the past, which can feel safer to talk about than the present.
- d. **“Maxwell describes an abundance mindset (p. 10), saying that God’s love and resources never run out. How does this abundance mindset about God compare to yours?”** This question is a little more personal.
- e. **“Myers says that God has more for us. (p. 9). What would ‘more’ look like for you personally? Describe life to the full.”** This final question is the most personal, and it asks people to articulate what they really want out of life.

8. Assignment: Ask everyone to read chapters 3 and 4 of *Home Run: “God’s Game Plan for Winning at Life”* & *“Parables, Baseball, and the Home Run Life.”*

9. Closing Prayer: Communicate again that the prayer time is open to anyone who wants to pray. Open and close the prayer time as you did at the end of the previous meeting.

WEEK 3

“GOD’S GAME PLAN FOR WINNING AT LIFE”

FOCUS

For this meeting, people will have read about the four growth gates for living life God’s way: Winning Dependence, Winning Within, Winning with Others, and Winning Results. Depending on their spiritual maturity and life experience, some people may recognize and connect with these ideas. Most mature believers will readily acknowledge that these four areas are important.

GOAL

Your goal for this session is to try to help everyone acknowledge that these four areas are the key to the full life Jesus describes in John 10:10, and to help them understand they must learn dependence on God.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

Some may not recognize that Connection with God, Character, Community, and Competence are the four core areas for success by God’s standard. Other may acknowledge the importance of these areas, but may not be able to assess how well they are doing in each area. That’s okay. In the next session when you talk about the bases, it will make the ideas more accessible and it will help them to self-diagnose some of their issues. Don’t try to force the discussion at this point.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. Facilitate Relationship Building: Continue finding ways to build relationships. If things are starting to get predictable, be creative. Introduce food to the group, if you haven't already done so, ask members of the group to meet someone they don't know well to learn three things about them, or play a game where people must get answers to questions from one another in order to win.

2. Open in Prayer: Get everyone together and pray to signal that it's time to start. Invite God to set the agenda for the meeting.

4. Welcome and Logistics: Welcome everyone and take care of any logistics at this time.

5. Icebreaker: Some leaders are tempted to stop using icebreakers after a few weeks. Don't give in to that temptation. Icebreakers have high value, even for groups that have met together for months or years. (I've led small groups for over twenty-five years. I've never led a session where I did not start with an ice breaker, and I've had group members for whom the ice breaker was their favorite part of group each week.)

"What is a favorite family story about you when you were a baby or small child?"

6. Scripture: Read **Mark 10:13-16**, or ask someone in the group to read it. As you did the previous week, invite people to talk about what stands out to them in the passage.

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

7. Questions: The questions follow the same pattern as in the previous session. Encourage everyone to talk and open up, but don't allow any one person to dominate the discussion.

a. **"Joseph sought recognition. Do you think that is a wrong motive or not?"**

Explain.” This opinion question may start a good discussion.

- b. **“Myers says he relates to Joseph. Which person in the Bible do you relate to most? Why?”** Because people will be talking about biblical figures, this is still a fairly safe question and a way to start the conversation, though it does ask people to tell about themselves in the process. Please be sensitive to any people in your group who have little knowledge of the Bible and can't think of someone they relate to.
- c. **“Myers was worried that he might live a life lacking significance. Have you ever experienced that concern? Explain.”** This question asks people to start being more vulnerable.
- d. **“Have you had a time in your life when you had to wait painfully long for something that you thought would or should happen? How did you handle it?”** This is a very personal question, which may prompt people to share fairly deep hurts. Empathize with people and validate their feelings, but don't allow anyone to try to solve their issues.
- e. **“When you are disappointed or find yourself having to wait for something important, do you tend to work harder, depend on God, or give up? Explain.”** This gives people an opportunity to begin thinking about how they respond to adversity and whether they engage with God.
- f. **“How easy or difficult do you find the idea that dependence is the key to growing in maturity and living life to the full appealing? Explain.”** This asks for people to be vulnerable but does not ask them to give specifics.
- g. **“What do you think it would take for you to become more dependent on God?”** This directs people to identify personal barriers and think about what they are willing to do to change.

8. Assignment: Ask everyone to *read chapter 4 of Home Run: “Parables, Baseball, and the Home Run Life.”*

9. Closing Prayer: Communicate again that the prayer time is open to anyone who wants to pray. Open and close the prayer time as you did at the end of the previous meeting. As you pray, **ask God to help you and everyone else never put a period where God puts a comma.**

WEEK 4

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“PARABLES, BASEBALL, AND THE HOME RUN LIFE”

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FOCUS

This is the pivotal session in the twelve-week series. The key “aha” for most people reading *Home Run* is the idea that most of us tend to run the bases backwards. Try to get people to talk honestly about themselves without judging or trying to “fix” one another.

GOAL

Your goal for this session is to encourage people to identify how they have been running life’s bases up to now, and to invite them to commit to working toward living according to God’s pattern.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

This may be the trickiest session you lead while discussing *Home Run*. Some people may resist that connection with God, Character, Community, and Competence are the four core areas for success by God’s standard. Some may push back against the idea of running the bases in the right order. Others may have a difficult time recognizing how they have been living life up to now. Invite them to join you in processing this information, but don’t try to force the issue. There is still time in coming weeks for people to understand how they’ve been living and recognize the changes they need to make.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. Facilitate Relationship Building: Continue finding ways to build relationships and to get to know one another.

2. Open in Prayer: Get everyone together and pray to signal that it's time to start. Invite God to set the agenda for the meeting.

4. Welcome and Logistics: Welcome everyone and take care of any logistics at this time.

5. Icebreaker: "What kind of athlete were you growing up, and what kind of history do you have with sports? Has it been positive or negative?"

6. Scripture: Read **Romans 12:1-2**, or ask someone in the group to read it. As you did the previous week, invite people to talk about what stands out to them in the passage.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

7. Questions: The questions follow the same pattern as in the previous session. Encourage everyone to talk and open up, but don't allow any one person to dominate the discussion.

- a. "Myers mentions the difference between crockpot faith and microwave faith. What differences do you think there are between people who approach life and faith these two different ways?" While people will be giving general observations and are not asked to speak specifically about themselves, their answers to this question will get them thinking about their own faith.
- b. "Do you have a favorite parable in the Bible? If so, what is it and why?" This is another safe question.
- c. "What were the four growth gates Myers mentioned in Home Run and what bases represented each of them?" This question is to get people talking and to remind them of what they read.

- d. **“Do you think any person would be capable of living a home run life (life to the full) while neglecting and failing at one of the four key areas? If so, explain.”** This is designed to get everyone thinking about the credibility of the four growth gates.
- e. **“Which of the four bases have you spent the most time working on in your life?”** This is more personal, but most people are willing to talk about their wins.
- f. **“Which of the four bases have you neglected most?”** Ideally you would encourage every person to answer this question, but don’t embarrass anyone by pressing too much.
- g. **“If you think you may not have been running the bases God’s way, what do you think might change if you started living God’s way and going around the bases the way God wants us to?”** This question invites people to declare that they would like to change. The hope is that it will open the door to a commitment for growth.
- h. **“How willing are you to commit to changing in order to have a better life?”**
Invite people to make a commitment.

8. Assignment: Ask everyone to read chapter 5 of *Home Run: “Home Plate: How to Win with God.”*

9. Closing Prayer: Communicate again that the prayer time is open to anyone who wants to pray. Open and close the prayer time as you did at the end of the previous meeting.

WEEK 5

“HOME PLATE: HOW TO WIN WITH GOD”

FOCUS

This week’s focus is on connecting with God at Home Plate. Because the people in your group may be at many different stages in the spiritual journey, you need to try to engage people who have different needs from one another. And you will be asking them to reveal things about themselves and their walk with God. Some people will resist being transparent about this. They may not want to admit they are not pursuing God’s purpose with His power. (Or they may not be self-aware enough to know whether they are.) And long-time Christians may be very reluctant to admit that they are at the amateur league level when it comes to connecting with God. For this reason, you may need to reveal your own challenges in this area to open the door for discussion.

GOAL

Your goal this week is to get people to set aside time to slow down and engage with God on whatever level they can based on where they are in the spiritual journey.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

When you talk to most believers about connecting with God, they express a genuine desire to do it, and at the same time most feel guilty because they don’t follow through as much as they would like to. Try to encourage people to let go of their guilt and find a way to take a concrete step forward in connecting with God in the coming week. If you have spiritually unresolved people in your group, some of the discussion about connecting with God may not make sense to them. Ask them to be open to what God may have for them, and encourage them to ask God to reveal Himself to them in some way.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. Facilitate Relationship Building: Continue finding ways to build relationships. If things are starting to get predictable, be creative.

2. Open in Prayer: Get everyone together and pray to signal that it's time to start. Invite God to set the agenda for the meeting.

4. Welcome: Welcome everyone.

5. Icebreaker: "What is one of your favorite childhood memories with your dad, mom, or other adult relative? Tell the story and why it's one of your favorites."

6. Scripture: Read **John 15:4-5**, or ask someone in the group to read it. As you did the previous week, invite people to talk about what stands out to them in the passage.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

7. Questions: The questions follow the same pattern as in the previous session. Encourage everyone to talk and open up, but don't allow any one person to dominate the discussion.

- a. "Do you think most people today have a strong sense of purpose which they are striving toward, or are they just trying to get by and do the best they can? Why?" Most people will probably be willing to share an opinion based on their observations.
- b. "Which brother do you identify with more, Jacob who sometimes forced things to get that he wanted, or Esau who was more passive and tended to wait? Explain." This question requires a bit more openness.
- c. "Ernie Johnson had cancer. Jacob feared that his brother would kill him. Do you think a person has to experience a crisis to learn how to depend on

God? Explain.” This question goes back to opinion, but it reveals a person’s point of view and experience.

d. “In the chapter, Myers described four ways to live:

- **Our Purpose with Our Power – The Empty Life,**
- **Our Purpose with God’s Power – The Unfulfilled Life,**
- **God’s Purpose with Our Power – The Frustrated Life, or**
- **God’s Purpose with God’s Power – The Full Life;**

Which best describes how you feel about your *current* situation? Why?” The emphasis in the question is on where people are now. Seasons of life change and how people feel now may be different from how they felt in the past. There’s a risk that people won’t open up, but now that you’re in the fourth week, it’s time to give them a chance to do so.

e. “In baseball, everyone starts out in Little League, but for some reason when it comes to spiritual leagues of play, people have a hard time believing they should start as an amateur. But there is no shame in starting small. Where are you when it comes to your spiritual level of play:

- **Amateur League – Learning God’s Principles and Obeying,**
- **Minor League – Leaning into God’s Prompts, or**
- **Major League – Leaning Upon God’s Favor?**

Explain why you are where you think you are.” With this question, you’re asking people to assess where they are spiritually and to acknowledge it publically. This may be very difficult for some people. They may be encouraged if you speak first about your experiences. If you are currently a major leaguer, then talk about when you were an amateur and a minor leaguer.

f. “What is the thing in your current ‘league’ that you would most like to win during this season, and is there a way anyone in the group could help you?” This gets people thinking about where they want to grow and hopefully encourages them to ask for help.

8. Assignment: Ask everyone to read chapter 6 of *Home Run: "First Base: How to Win Within."*

9. Planning and Logistics for Next Session: Prior to the current meeting, plan the session for the next time you meet so that people can prepare accordingly. (See week 6.)

10. Closing Prayer: Challenge everyone in the group to pray aloud, even if it's only one sentence. Acknowledge how uncomfortable and scary it is when you're not used to it, but ask everyone to pray as a step of growth. However, challenge and encourage them, but do not force everyone to pray or go in order around the circle. If there are people who don't pray, allow some awkward silence. Then announce that you are about to close out the prayer time and you want to give anyone who hasn't prayed yet another minute to do so. Then close in prayer.

WEEK 6

BATTING PRACTICE AT HOME PLATE

FOCUS

This session is going to be completely different from previous ones. Instead of meeting to build relationships and discuss ways to grow in the spiritual journey, you are going to set aside time to actually practice connecting with God at Home Plate. This week's meeting will be a kind of retreat with an extended prayer time.

GOAL

Your goal this week is to use the meeting time to your help people slow down and engage with God on whatever level they can, based on where they are in the spiritual journey.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

People will experience this event differently depending on their spiritual maturity and openness to growth. Some people may be difficult and challenging. They won't know what to do and the whole thing will feel awkward. Others may experience a breakthrough in the ability to pray and connect with God. People with experience spending time alone with God will probably find it easy to do. Try to challenge people to stretch, but reassure them if they are uncertain, self-conscious, or inexperienced. Lead the way by example and invite people to follow.

SETTING

One of the most important decisions you will make regards the setting. This type of activity is usually best done in a place different from where you ordinarily meet as a group. A change of scenery will help people to make a shift into a different mindset. The ideal setting would be someplace where you could meet together as a group, then

scatter so that each person can spend time alone with God. I usually prefer a setting with access to the outdoors. In the past when I've spent extended times connecting with God, I've gone to the woods, to mountaintops, the lakes, and backyards. Being in nature helps me to think about God and enjoy Him. That may not be true for everyone, so you may want to find a setting where people have options.

FASTING

If you have a spiritually mature group of people, you may want to invite them to fast during the twenty-four hours leading up to the meeting. If you do, remind everyone that the purpose is to be reminded to talk to God every time you feel hungry or have to break your normal routine. If you do decide to fast, you may want to share a meal together at the end of the worship time. That can often be a very enjoyable bonding time for a group.

WORSHIP

If someone in your group has the ability to play an instrument and lead worship, you may want to incorporate that into the time. It's a good way to start the session.

TOOLS

Encourage everyone who comes to bring a Bible, a journal or notebooks, a pen or pencil, and water. In addition, ask people to turn off their phones and other electronic devices while they are on this prayer retreat.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. Welcome and Instructions: Gather everyone together and outline how the time will be spent. Acknowledge that the time may be uncomfortable to some of them, but that you believe they will find it rewarding when you're done.

2. Worship (optional): If you have a worship leader, then engage in worship for two or three songs.

3. Scripture: Read aloud (or ask someone to read aloud) this passage from **Hebrews 10:19-23**.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most

Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

4. Corporate Prayer Time: Start the time by directing people in prayer for the first fifteen to thirty minutes. You can use the following format if desired:

a. Ask people to pray aloud, thanking God for who He is. People can do this in sentences, or you can ask them to give one-word descriptions that describe God.

b. Direct people in a concert of prayer (where everyone prays aloud at the same time) to ask God to make His presence felt, to draw everyone to Him, and to connect with each person. Some people find the concert of prayer distracting, while others love the power of it. Ask people to be open-minded to the practice if it's new or uncomfortable.

c. Ask people to pray for God to bless and protect the leaders of the church.

d. If anyone in the group would like to ask for people to pray for their physical needs, ask them to let the group know. Have everyone in the group pray for that person. You may want to ask individuals if they would be comfortable with having people place their hands on them as they pray. If they are comfortable with that, then have the individual sit or stand in the middle of the group. You can either have an individual pray for the person or ask everyone to pray in a concert of prayer.

e. Pray a prayer of blessing on the group. As the leader, take responsibility for interceding on behalf of your group asking God to bless them.

5. Individual Prayer Time: Ask everyone to find a quiet place where they can be comfortable and undistracted. Predetermine how much time they will have and set a specific time to gather back together. I recommend that the individual prayer time be at least thirty minutes. but no more than an hour. Tell everyone that it's normal to feel like

they don't know what to do when they first start.

Ask them to connect with God in whatever way works best for them: praying, reading the Bible, journaling, etc. Encourage them to talk to God, telling Him what's most on their minds, whether it be praise, anger, uncertainty, etc. Tell them to be sure to save at least fifteen minutes to write in their journals. They can write a prayer to God. They can write prayer requests or impressions of their experience—whatever works best for them.

6. Gather and Share the Experience: At the agreed upon time, re-gather as a group and talk about the experience. Some of the questions you could ask may include:

- ***Did you find the experience hard or easy?***
- ***What did you like best?***
- ***What made you uncomfortable?***
- ***What did you learn?***
- ***What are you likely to try again on your own?***

7. Close in Prayer: Thank God for the time together.

WEEK 7

“FIRST BASE: HOW TO WIN WITHIN” - PART 1

FOCUS

Character is often the most neglected base for people. In many Christian circles, it is assumed that people work on it. However, many believers neglect character as much as their non-believing counterparts do. The hope is that in this seventh week of the study, you have built strong relationships among group members and developed enough trust so that people will be willing to talk about their character issues.

GOAL

Your goal for this session is to give people a safe environment in which to talk about their character struggles without being judged or rejected, so that they will get help from God and support from other members of the group.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

If the people in your group have not built good relationships or they don't feel safe, they may not talk openly about their struggles. However, if they do, you may be talking about some difficult subjects in this session. Do not be too quick to give advice or to try to solve people's problems on the spot. Character issues require dependence on God, time and coaching. Try to come along side people to help them, but encourage them to take ownership of their own issues.

Note: If you have not previously talked about confidentiality rules for the group, you may need to go over some. We suggest that whatever anyone else says in the group stays in the group, but that the leader reserves the right to consult the pastor on any issue that he or she has questions about.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. **Facilitate Relationship Building:** Continue finding ways to build relationships.
2. **Open in Prayer:** Get everyone together and pray to signal that it's time to start. Invite God to set the agenda for the meeting.
4. **Welcome and Logistics:** Welcome everyone and take care of any logistics at this time.
5. **Icebreaker:** "Who is your favorite hero from movies or fiction? Why?"
6. **Scripture:** Read **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, or ask someone in the group to read it. As you did the previous week, invite people to talk about what stands out to them in the passage.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

7. **Questions:** The questions follow the same pattern as in the earlier sessions. Encourage everyone to talk and open up, but don't allow any one person to dominate the discussion.

a. **"How much of a problem do you think underlying character issues are in our culture? Explain."** This is a safe observation question that will show people's attitude regarding character.

b. **"Do you find it easy to identify with Samson's struggles, or do you have a hard time understanding how someone God picked for a purpose would waste his gifts? Explain."** Though people will be talking about someone else, their empathy for Samson or lack of it will reveal their attitudes toward the character issue.

c. **"Which of the four practices mentioned in the chapter do you find most difficult to do and why:**

- **Pay then Play,**
- **Win Three-Second Windows,**
- **Have No Secret World, or**
- **Put Purity Over Passion?"**

This question invites people to be honest, but it doesn't require them to be too specific if they don't want to be. However, someone may really open up; you need to be ready to appropriately encourage the person or manage the dynamics of the group if the subject area is a difficult one.

- d. "Where in life do you wish you could have a second chance?"** This asks people to be very vulnerable.
- e. "In what area of life do you find yourself having to fight the hardest when it comes to character?"** This is very personal and may be the single most important question you ask during the *Home Run* study. Don't allow others in the group to judge people's issues to try to solve their problems. Do let people know that you are going to have time at the end of the session to pray for these issues.
- f. "How do you want to change?"** This makes a person highly vulnerable and also accountable.
- g. "Is there any way that people in this group can support you?"** Your goal is to encourage, support, and help one another, but you don't want to the group time to become about just one person and his or her struggles. Discourage anyone in the group who may try to "fix" anyone else or become co-dependent with him or her.

8. Closing Prayer: This prayer time is going to be different from previous weeks. You are going to **invite people to make specific prayer requests for themselves related to character struggles**. As people speak their requests, make a note for yourself on a piece of paper with the name of the person making the request along with a word or two to remind you of what they asked people to pray for. Take requests from everyone who desires to make one. You may want to make a request for yourself.

At this point, you have some choices about how to pray:

- a. Invite Others to Pray for Individuals:** Ask, **"Who would like to pray for [person's name] about [person's issue]?"** When someone volunteers, thank them and then ask who will pray for the next person. Do that for the entire list.

If no one offers to pray for any of the prayer requests, you volunteer to pray for that person.

b. Pray for Everyone Yourself: If your group has been reluctant to pray aloud, you can ask people to pray for one or more people in the coming week on their own. Meanwhile, you pray for everyone on the list.

This may lead to a long prayer time, so please make sure you preserve time for it. Don't rush the group and miss the power of praying for one another and inviting God to help people.

WEEK 8

“FIRST BASE: HOW TO WIN WITHIN” - PART 2

FOCUS

This second session on Character is focused on the part of the book that discusses lines. Our culture does not like to be confined by lines, yet God makes it clear in Scripture that we are to be mindful of His guidelines and teaching. This will be another tricky session. If people have connected well and trust one another, then they will probably be willing to discuss their issues.

GOAL

Your goal for this session is to give people a safe environment in which to process what God is asking them to do, and how they need to change.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

People today tend to think of truth as a relative concept, where each person gets to define good and bad for himself. Even Christians fall into this kind of thinking and rationalize their behavior. For example, Scripture is clear that followers of Christ are not to engage in sex outside of marriage, yet many people who profess to be Christians live together. You will have to tread carefully in this discussion. You need to speak truthfully, yet let people be convicted by the Holy Spirit, not you. The more credibility you have developed with the group, the more receptive people will be to what you have to say.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. Facilitate Relationship Building: Continue finding ways to build relationships.

2. Open in Prayer: Get everyone together and pray to signal that it's time to start. Invite God to set the agenda for the meeting.

4. Welcome and Logistics: Welcome everyone and take care of any logistics at this time.

5. Icebreaker: "Who is your favorite hero from movies or fiction? Why?"

6. Scripture: Read **Galatians 5:19-26**, or ask someone in the group to read it. As you did the previous week, invite people to talk about what stands out to them in the passage.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

7. Questions: The questions follow the same pattern as in the previous session.

Encourage everyone to talk and open up, but don't allow any one person to dominate the discussion.

a. "Where do you think most people in our culture currently look for answers to life's questions?" This is an open question that should get the discussion started.

b. "How have you been influence by the culture in the past when it comes to values and answers?" This is more personal, but since it asks about the past, most people should be willing to engage in the discussion.

c. "Myers discussed solid lines versus dotted lines to describe the boundaries God has drawn for his followers. What kind of analogy, if any, have you used in the past to think about or describe what God does not want you to

do?” Some people may have given this a lot of thought, and their comments will help you understand their maturity and theology. People who have not considered this in the past will be prompted to think about where God may be asking them to grow in character.

d. “To use Myers’ language, where has God drawn a dotted line in your life, and how did you come to recognize it?” This question asks people to get personal, but to talk about the past, which feels safer to them than talking about the present.

e. “Is there an area in your life where you know God has drawn a solid line, but you find yourself crossing it?” An honest answer to this question makes a person very vulnerable.

f. “What would it take for you to make the changes required to put yourself on the right side of the line again? Is there any way the group can support you in this?” These two questions are asked together because you don’t want people to be left hanging if they are ready to change. Once again, encourage everyone in the group to be supportive and helpful without being co-dependent. Note, that this discussion may put you in a position as a leader to need help from your pastor or coach. You may end up needing to deal with some difficult or complicated issues. Be willing to help, but don’t make the group about that one person and his or her issues.

8. Assignment: Ask everyone to **read chapter 7 of Home Run: “Second Base: How to Win With Others.”**

9. Closing Prayer: Ask for prayer requests and close in prayer.

WEEK 9

SEVENTH INNING STRETCH

FOCUS

The *Home Run* study can become somewhat heavy, and twelve weeks is a long time in one book. So this session is focused on having fun and giving people a break. Think of it as a seventh inning stretch that prepares you for the last few innings of the game.

GOAL

Your goal for this session is to have fun and connect relationally.

PLAN FOR THE SESSION

You can plan almost anything for this session. You can play board or parlor games. You can have a potluck or moveable feast. You can go see a movie together. You can go to a museum or concert. You can go bowling, play laser tag, or go go-cart racing. You can plan a motorcycle ride or a hike. You can have a pool party. You can go hunting or fishing. You can play golf. Do whatever would be fun for the whole group. Just be sure to pick something everyone can do.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

If you decide to play games or do something competitive, you will learn a lot about group members. You will likely gain insights into their character, interests, and spiritual life.

WEEK 10

“SECOND BASE: HOW TO WIN WITH OTHERS”

FOCUS

Relationships impact every area of our lives. The place we feel the impact most acutely is in family—as children, parents, and spouses. This week’s session looks primarily at family of origin in setting the tone for people relationally and invites people to grow at second base without focusing in on one particular type of relationship.

GOAL

Your goal for this session is to help people identify where they most need to grow relationally and take action to improve in that area.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

We live in a culture of broken relationships. A startling number of people come from broken homes, as Kevin Myers did. To many of them, dysfunction and brokenness seem normal. You can help people by showing them that God desires whole relationships and encouraging them to take responsibility for repairing relationships and loving people.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

- 1. Facilitate Relationship Building:** Continue finding ways to build relationships.
- 2. Open in Prayer:** Get everyone together and pray to signal that it’s time to start. Invite God to set the agenda for the meeting.
- 3. Prayer:** Pray for the meeting and the relationships of the participants.
- 4. Welcome and Logistics:** Welcome everyone and take care of any logistics at this time.
- 5. Icebreaker:** “What is one of your favorite childhood memories? Tell the story.”

This can be a lot of fun and set the tone for the session which will later ask people to open up about relationships.

6. Scripture: Read **1 John 4: 19-21**, or ask someone in the group to read it. As you did the previous week, invite people to talk about what stands out to them in the passage.

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

7. Questions: As always, encourage everyone to talk and open up.

a. "Do you have any healthy role models you know personally when it comes to relationships? If so, describe what you admire about them." Most people can identify someone who models this, and they are usually glad to talk about people they admire.

b. "Is your background more like that of Kevin Myers or John Maxwell? Explain." People's history and perception of themselves in the area of community strongly influences how they interact with other people.

c. "If there was an elephant in the room in your family of origin, are you willing to tell what it was and how you think it impacted you? Does it ever cause you to overreact to others the way Myers described in the story about his injured finger?" This is getting to a very personal question quickly in this session. The hope is that people feel comfortable after ten weeks in the group together.

d. "Myers says that Jacob's family started to get over their dysfunction when Joseph got healthy and started living according to God's guidelines. What would it take for you to become that person for your family?" This question is targeted more toward the people with the greatest difficulties in relationships. It offers hope for change and provides a chance for them to

commit to taking personal responsibility for growth in this area.

e. "Home Run lists four essentials for training in relational health and fitness.

In this current season, which would you most like to focus on improving and why:

- ***Valuing Others More than Yourself,***
- ***Giving More Than You Take,***
- ***Forgiving What You Can't Forget, or***
- ***Letting God Change People?"***

This is personal, but it may feel a little bit less heavy than the character questions asked last week.

f. "What specific action are you willing to commit to doing in the coming week to improve or change in the area you just identified?" The key to change is following through. Encourage people to take action. During the next session, you will ask them about how they did.

8. Assignment: Ask everyone to read chapter 8 of *Home Run*: "Third Base: How to Win Results."

9. Closing Prayer: Open the floor for **prayer requests** as you did in the last session, asking for people to pray for one another. In addition, **offer to pray for people in the group who feel they do not possess a heart for people.** As you close the prayer time, pray for each of those people by name asking God to increase their love for others.

WEEK 11

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“THIRD BASE: HOW TO WIN RESULTS”

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FOCUS

There is a disconnect in our culture. On the one hand, teams give out trophies to kids just for showing up. On the other hand, many people in the work world believe results are everything. Neither aligns with God’s perspective. Results matter, and third base is important to God, but He wants us to win results after dependence, character, and relationships.

GOAL

Your goal for this session is to help people identify where their perspective about work and career may be off base. Some people aren’t giving their best; others are sacrificing too much. Encourage people to commit to changing so they can live God’s way.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

You may have a broad spectrum of attitudes toward work in your group, from classic workaholic executives, to get-ahead workers with multiple jobs, to slackers who simply show up for a check, to stay at home moms or dads. It may be difficult to include every type of person with every question, but do your best to engage everyone and encourage each person to make appropriate adjustments to run the bases God’s way.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. Facilitate Relationship Building: Continue finding ways to build relationships.

2. Open in Prayer: Get everyone together and pray to signal that it’s time to start. Invite

God to set the agenda for the meeting.

4. Welcome and Logistics: Welcome everyone and take care of any logistics at this time.

5. Icebreaker: “What was your first job? Describe it and tell how you did at it.” This can lead to a lot of great stories and be a lot of fun for the group.

6. Scripture: Read **Matthew 6:31-33**, or ask someone in the group to read it. As you did the previous week, invite people to talk about what stands out to them in the passage.

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

7. Questions: As always, encourage everyone to talk and open up.

a. “How would you describe how you have handled the pace of progress in your career up to now?” Most people will be honest about this, whether positive or negative.

b. “In general would you say that you tend to give too much time and attention to your work or too little? Explain.” This is a pretty personal question, but most people are usually willing to talk about this subject pretty openly.

c. Which of the four lessons from John Maxwell do you have the most difficult time practicing:

- **Bring Your Talent to the Table,**
- **Don’t Let Your Failure Be Final,**
- **Earn Your Keep Every Day, or**
- **Have a Funeral and Get a New Dream?**

The four choices will probably include people who are envious of others’ jobs, are discouraged in their career, are not motivated to work hard, and need to change course. It may not include people who work too much. Try to include those people in the next question.

- d. ***“How would you need to change in order to put third base in its appropriate place in your life—after winning with God at home plate, winning within at first base, and winning with others at second base?”*** This may be tough for people to answer because they may still have a hard time defining the “appropriate place” for work. For some it may mean giving less time to work. For others it may mean being willing to learn the ropes. And for others it may mean trading a sling for a sword.
- e. ***“What specific action are you willing to commit to doing in the coming week to improve to put the bases in the right order?”*** The key to change is following through. Encourage people to take action. During the next session, you will ask them about how they did.

8. Assignment: Ask everyone to read chapter 9 of *Home Run: Scoring: How to Keep Living and Winning God’s Way.*

9. Closing Prayer: Open the floor for **prayer requests** as you did in the last session, asking for people to pray for one another.

WEEK 12

“SCORING: HOW TO KEEP LIVING AND WINNING GOD’S WAY”

FOCUS

This week’s session is likely to create more questions than it answers for most people in the group. The question of purpose for one’s life is no small thing, and it takes time to discover and unfold. Try to help people to think about whether the life they are living is rooted in eternity and is serving God or themselves.

GOAL

Your goal for this session is to help people to start thinking about aligning their purpose with God’s purpose for them if they haven’t already started on it. Try to get a commitment from every person to seek God’s direction in this.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

Once again, you may have quite a cross section of perspectives and experiences in your group. Encourage the people to talk who’ve given this a lot of thought and who have made adjustments in their life to live for God. Encourage others to explore, not out of guilt, but out of the desire for a greater calling and a stronger sense of fulfillment.

PLAN FOR THE MEETING

1. Open in Prayer: Get everyone together and pray to signal that it’s time to start. Invite God to set the agenda for the meeting.

2. Acknowledge the Relational Bonds that Have Been Built: Acknowledge and celebrate the relationships that have been built in the group over the twelve weeks.

3. Logistics: If you plan to continue the group or stay in touch in the future, talk about those things at this time.

4. Icebreaker: “Who is the person you admire most in the world and why?”

5. Scripture: There are two passages this week: Read them or ask someone in the group to do so. Then invite people to talk about what stands out to them from the passages.

Mark 12:29-31

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

1 Corinthians 10:31

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

6. Questions: As always, encourage everyone to talk and open up.

a. **“Do you think it would be possible for people to run the bases the right way and still get stuck at third base and miss the greater purpose for their life? Explain.”** Though this asks people to describe others, it still may help someone who is not living for God to recognize that fact.

b. **“Why do you think it’s such a struggle for most people to focus on storing up treasure in heaven instead of trying to possess treasures on earth?”** This question asks for people’s observations, but will likely get them thinking about their own actions.

c. **“Of the four things Myers says we must do for God’s glory in order to lead to a home run in life, which do you think God is currently asking you to focus on:**

- Do what you were created to do,
- Give yourself away,
- Invite others into the faith journey, or
- Help others discover what they were created to do?

Most people will probably not have figured out what they were created to do for God's glory. Try to help them do that.

d. "How do you figure out how to use your gifts and experience in the service of God?" Let this question generate a good long discussion. If there are people in the group who have wrestled through this issue, ask them to share their experiences. Encourage others to ask questions. People may not settle this issue quickly, but if you can help them get started in figuring it out, you will help them greatly.

e. "What specifically do you think you must change for you to live a home run life according to God's standard and His definition of success? What step are you willing to take today in that direction?" Encourage people to commit to whatever changes God asks of them.

7. Assignment: Ask everyone to **spend some time with God seeking His will for their lives and asking that He reveal their purpose.**

8. Closing Prayer: Open the floor for **prayer requests** as you did in the last session, asking for people to pray for one another. When you close in prayer, **ask God to help everyone find and fulfill their purpose.**