



WEEKLY LEADER GUIDE

STORY OF MY LIFE

WEEK 1

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Story of My Life

WEEK 1



WEEK SUMMARY

If we're honest, when we look at our life story, most of us know how we want it to end: "happily ever after." We've all heard or read fairytale stories that ended happily ever after, but this phrase oftentimes seems like an all too distant myth. In fact, while we may want a life that ends happily ever after, most of us would say we want a happy life right now. We all want our life story to be happy. We want our kids to be happy. We want our marriages to be happy. We want to be happy in our job, happy in our friendships, happy in our finances. It drives everything we do. But being happy just isn't that simple, is it? In fact, sometimes it feels the more we chase happiness, the more it remains just out of reach. This week we'll reconsider whether or not happiness should be the ultimate goal—and if not happiness, then what? Jesus showed us that when we let go of happy, He will give us something much better in return. Jesus came not to give us



THINK ABOUT THIS

The first week of small group can be a little intimidating, can't it? What if no one talks? What if everyone wants to talk at the same time? How is this supposed to go? What should happen?

As a leader, your responsibility is to facilitate discussion. And while that's easy enough when it comes to the sports score or local news, it may feel foreign to talk about faith in this way.

This week, focus on breaking the ice and making everyone comfortable enough to participate in the conversation.

Over time, relationships will go deeper and so will your discussion. For now, try to be sensitive to the fact that some members of your group may not be comfortable talking in a group setting, particularly about their faith. So, it's okay for answers to be short and even a little vague. As you continue to welcome them and invite them to participate each week, you just may see more and more of your group engaged in conversations—and that can lead to living a much better story.

TEACHING MATERIALS



VIDEO AND AUDIO FILES AVAILABLE
IN YOUR SERIES FOLDER ONLINE

Story of My Life

WEEK 1



BOTTOM LINE

JESUS CAME TO GIVE US A BETTER STORY, NOT A HAPPY STORY.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

JOHN 10:10

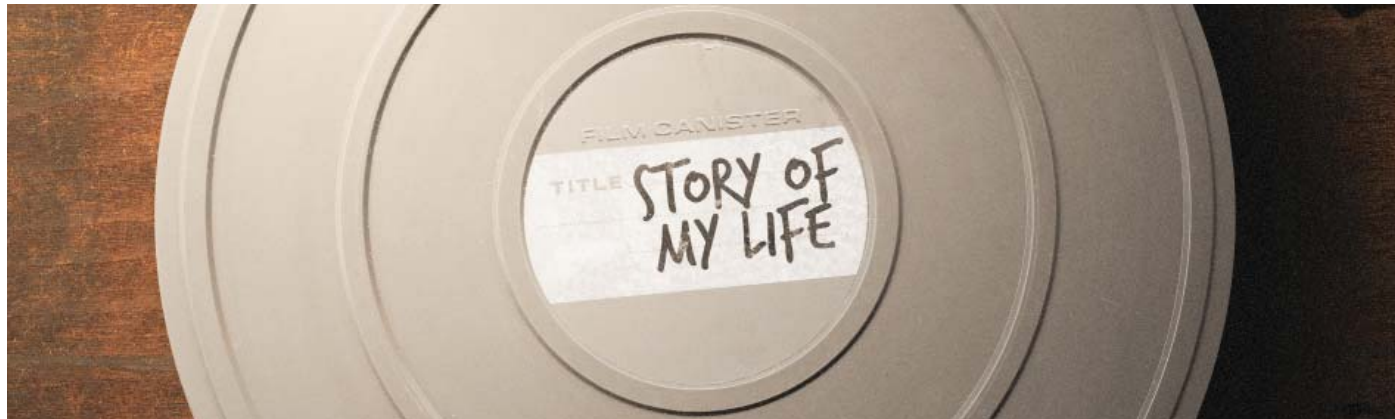
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are a guide to get the conversation started in your group—don't feel like you need to ask everything you see here! As long as you're having a conversation, you're on the right track. Also, feel free to adjust the questions to fit the needs of your specific group.

1. WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE STORY (BOOK, MOVIE, TV SHOW) AS A KID? WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT IT?
2. TODAY WE TALKED ABOUT HOW EVERYONE IS LIVING A STORY. WHAT DO YOU THINK MOST PEOPLE WANT WHEN IT COMES TO THEIR LIFE STORY?
3. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAID, "I'D BE SO HAPPY IF _____ ?" DID YOU GET WHAT YOU WANTED?
4. IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU SEEN PEOPLE CHASE HAPPINESS ONLY TO BECOME LESS HAPPY?
5. JESUS SAID, "I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL." WHAT DO YOU THINK HE MEANT BY THAT?
6. IN YOUR OPINION, COULD FOLLOWING JESUS LEAD TO UNHAPPINESS?
7. IF JESUS OFFERS YOU A BETTER STORY, WHAT CAN YOU DO THIS WEEK TO BEGIN LIVING THAT STORY (AT WORK, WITH YOUR SPOUSE, WITH YOUR FAMILY)?

Communication Plan

WEEK 1



CONTINUING THE EXPERIENCE

Do you ever wish you could strategically communicate with your small group outside of group time? Ever wish you could find a way to share quick snippets of what they're learning or even send a word of encouragement to them?

Well . . . now you can.

The communication plan is designed to help your small group attenders engage with the truths in that week's group time. Below you'll find bite-size content that you can send through

email or post on social media for your group members to see. There are posts for Facebook and Instagram, and images that you can use. And they're all designed to help your attenders connect with the week's topic.

Remember to make these posts yours. Don't feel like you have to use all of the content provided in a given series. Use this plan as a starting point as you leverage technology with your small group.

TEXT MESSAGES

SEND THIS TO EVERYONE IN YOUR GROUP:

Hi! Hope you're having a great week! This week we talked about how Jesus offers all of us a better life story. Just want you to know I'm praying for you as you begin to live out that promise.

SEND THIS TO ANYONE WHO MISSED GROUP THIS WEEK:

(Leader: You can find the audio file in your downloads.

Use a service like Google Drive or Dropbox to share it.)

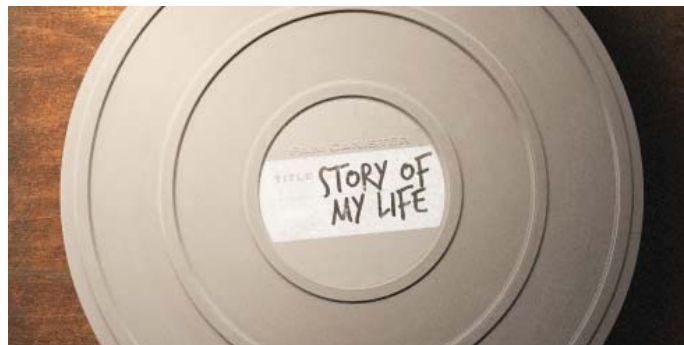
Hey—we missed you at group this week! Here's the link (include full length to audio file) to the audio so you can catch up. Hope all is well and can't wait to see you next week!

SEND THIS TO ONE OR TWO PEOPLE IN YOUR GROUP, JUST BECAUSE:

Hi! Just checking in. Is there anything I can pray about for you this week?

SOCIAL MEDIA

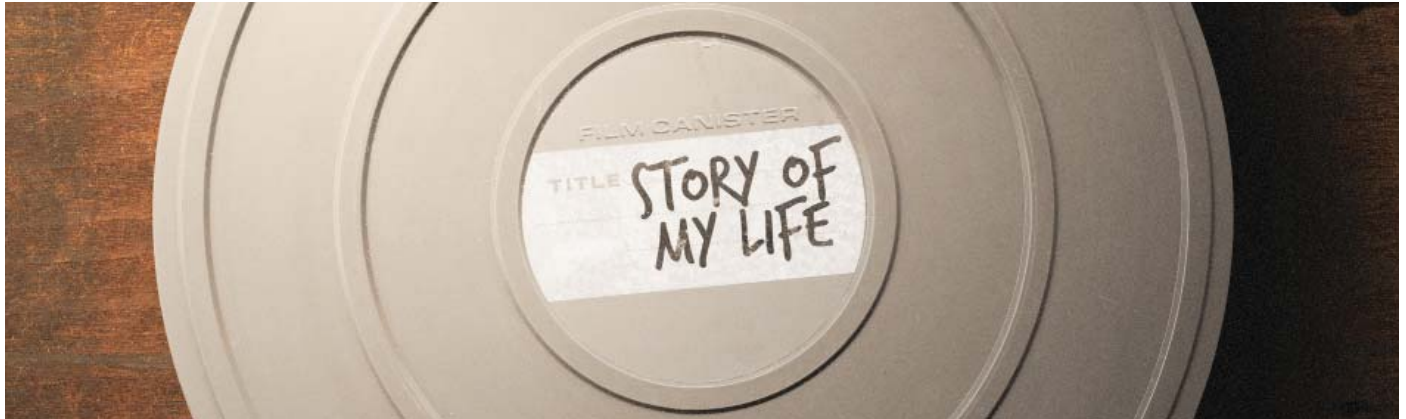
POST THIS TO YOUR FACEBOOK OR INSTAGRAM:



This week, we kicked off our series, *Story of My Life*, by talking about how Jesus wants to make our life story better than we could have imagined. Looking forward to next week as we continue the conversation about exactly what it means to live a better story.

Weekly Email

WEEK 1



FOR THE LEADER

Remember to email your small group every week with a reminder of when small group meets, directions, and any information that would be helpful for them. To make it simple, just **copy and paste the email below** and fill in any

information that you think your group members might need to know. Since every group and leader is different, feel free to change the email text to fit your group.

WEEK 1 EMAIL

Hi everyone!

Hope you all are having a great week! I wanted to send out a quick email to let everyone know what we'll be talking about in small group this week.

The series we're starting is called *Story of My Life*. The bottom line of this week's topic is that Jesus came to give us a better story, not a happy story. And this may come as a surprise to a lot of us! This week in small group, we'll talk about the stories we love and the stories we're all currently living, and we'll also discuss the role Jesus plays in each of our lives. I'm really looking forward to our time together.

As a quick preview, here are a couple of the questions we're going to ask in group this week:

- In what ways have you seen people chase happiness only to become less happy?
- When was the last time you said, "I'd be so happy if ____?" Did you get what you wanted?

Here are the details for our meeting:

Date/time:

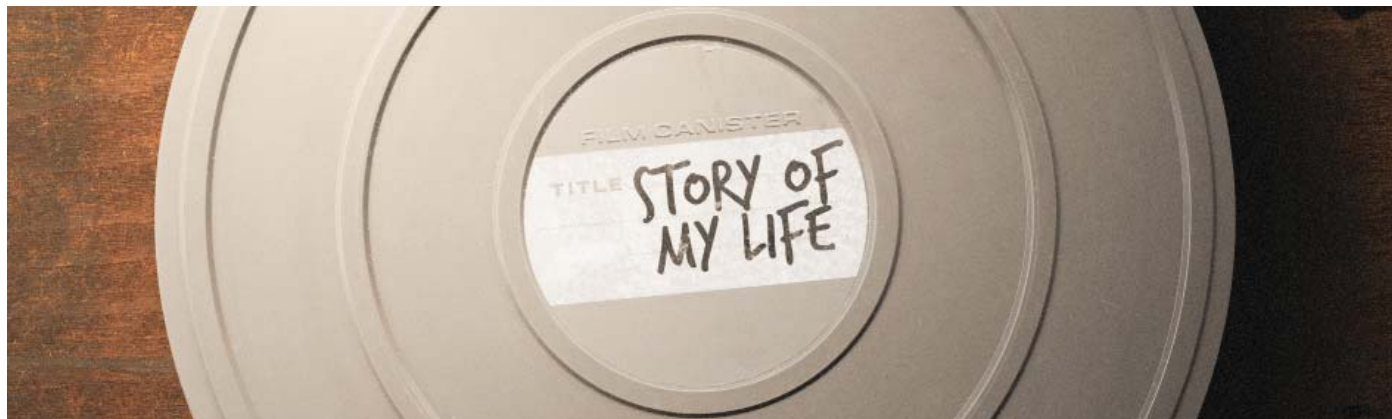
Address or directions:

I'm also attaching a copy of our daily Bible Reading Plan for this week. I hope you have a chance to check it out!

See you soon!

Bible Reading Plan

WEEK 1



OVERVIEW

Wouldn't it be awesome if you could help your small group members engage with God's Word all week long, instead of just during your weekly small group time? That's the intention of the Bible Reading Plan that goes along with this series.

Every week of a series comes with five unique verses and five unique prompts to help your small group members think about and engage with Scripture throughout the week. Each Scripture image can be found in the "Graphics" folder of the series download and each prompt can be found below.

HOW TO USE

We've designed these images and prompts to be flexible enough to use in a wide variety of ways. But to help you get started, here are three things you might want to try:

- 1. POST THEM.** These images and prompts work perfectly on social media!
- 2. TEXT THEM.** If you're looking for a more personal way to encourage your group members to read Scripture, try texting

each day's Scripture and prompt to the group. Of course, we're all busy. So to save time, you may want to sign up for an online texting service and schedule those in advance.

- 3. PRINT OR EMAIL THEM.** An easy way to have your group use the Bible Reading Plan is to simply print or email the next page. That way they have each day's reading before the week begins.

DAILY SCRIPTURE

MONDAY (DAY 1) Psalm 37:4

"Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."

TUESDAY (DAY 2) Romans 14:17

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

WEDNESDAY (DAY 3) Romans 15:13

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

THURSDAY (DAY 4) Philemon 1:7

"Your Love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people."

FRIDAY (DAY 5) Psalm 28:7

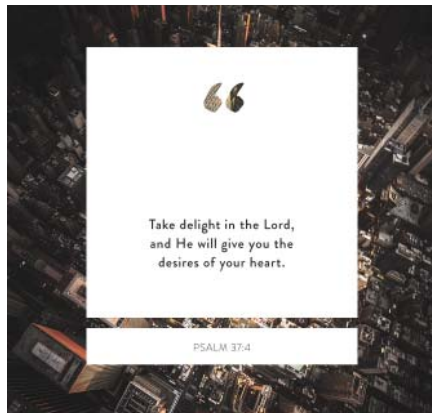
"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him and He helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise Him."

Daily Scripture Images & Devotions



WEEK 1

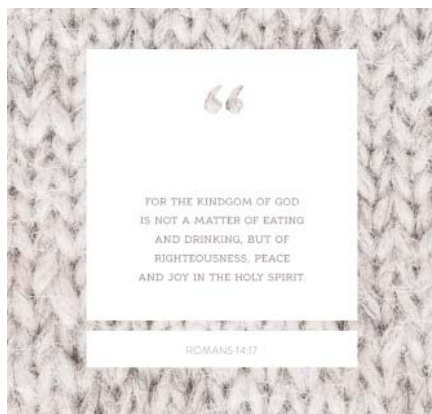
DAY 1:



If you find yourself constantly thinking, “If only _____ would happen, then I’d be happy,” you’re heading down a road paved with discontentment and disappointment. Here’s why: Most of the time, the things we think will make us happy and fulfill the desires of our hearts are one-dimensional and short-sighted. And if we truly got what we wanted at the time, we’d likely find ourselves unhappy with the outcome down the road. The truth is, we can only see so far—it’s God who has the birds-eye view. So instead of focusing on the things you want right now, God encourages us to delight in who He is. And who is He? He’s the Creator of all things, including the hopes, desires, and aspirations we all have

inside of us. He’s the ultimate Provider, willing and able to exceed our expectations. This week, rest in His promises and find comfort in knowing His plan is far greater than any plans we could come up with for ourselves. Take time to thank God for His power and ask Him to shift your focus toward Him.

DAY 2:



The dictionary defines “joy” as “the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires; a source or cause of delight.” In other words, there’s a lot of meaning packed into that little three-letter word. Joy is much more than the temporary happiness we find in things and experiences throughout our day. Joy goes much deeper than that, and ultimately, it’s a Kingdom matter. But how do you tell the difference between true joy and temporary happiness? Take an inventory of the things in your life that delight you and then ask yourself these questions: Are they things God would be excited about? Are they things that give you

energy or deplete your energy? Are they things that hurt you or benefit you in the long run? Do you feel at peace afterwards? Today, ask God to show you what lasting joy looks like, beyond what is temporary.

Daily Scripture Images & Devotions



WEEK 1

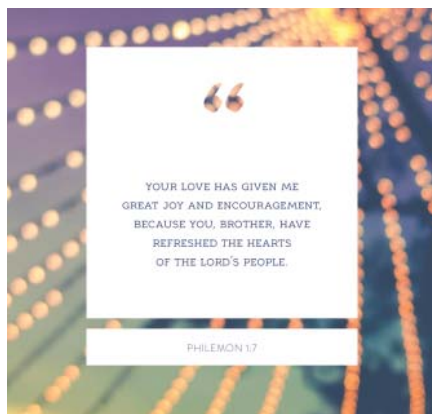
DAY 3:



When we choose to put our trust in God, we're assuming a posture of vulnerability, and that feeling oftentimes makes us uncomfortable. The world tells us we can control almost anything in our lives if we try hard enough, which makes trusting God go against our very nature as humans. But there's a reason why God calls us to *"be still and know"* that He is God (*Psalm 46:10 NIV*). He's reminding us that, in reality, we can't actually control all of the variables in our lives—but He can. Be careful not to fall into the trap of supposed self-sufficiency. Instead, choose to give God control—even in the small things. One way to build your trust muscle is to recall the times God has come through

for you—the times He's helped you, protected you, or answered your prayers. As we learn to put our trust in Him, we'll be more likely to notice God at work in our lives. And when we see God at work, our faith will increase—and so will our joy.

DAY 4:



If you're a Christian, you're called to be a light in the world. But what does that even mean in today's context? Well, it's actually not as complicated as you might think. You see, spreading joy is actually part of being a light. Which means, every time we choose to extend positivity rather than negativity, every time we give of ourselves selflessly, and every time we choose to see the best in someone, we're spreading joy. It's easy to see—through the news and through social media—that the world around us is in desperate need of joy. By spreading joy, you're being a light in the world and pointing others to the refreshing, lasting joy that only God can provide. But you can't pour from an empty cup. Just as you're called to pour into other people

by spreading God's love, you should also surround yourself with people who can fill you back up. Today, ask yourself these two questions: Whose life can you bring light and joy to? Who in your life brings you joy and refreshment? Write down the names that came to mind as you answered those questions, and make it a priority to reach out to those people today.

Daily Scripture Images & Devotions



WEEK 1

DAY 5:



“
The Lord is my strength and
my shield; my heart trusts
in Him, and He helps me.
My heart leaps for joy, and
with my song I praise Him.

PSALM 28:7

Have you ever met someone who was constantly positive and happy all of the time? Your initial thought about them was probably something like, “No one can be that happy all the time. Something must be wrong with them!” For some reason, we’ve been conditioned to think that super happy people must be fake—putting up a facade to hide what’s really going on in their lives. Surely no one can be joyful ALL the time, right? Believe it or not, this is flawed thinking. The truth is, when you trust in God and find your strength and delight in Him, you can’t help but become one of those types of people—people who are filled with genuine joy and gratitude for everything God has done

and is doing. Wouldn’t you like to know what that kind of contentment feels like? It’s possible! Today, pray that God would fill you up with this kind of genuine joy by reminding you to approach every situation with a spirit of gratitude.

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BOTTOM LINE

JESUS CAME TO GIVE US A BETTER STORY, NOT A HAPPY STORY.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone loves a good story. It's what drives us to stay up longer at night than we intended—binge watching, binge reading. All of a sudden we look up, and several TV episodes or book chapters have flown by. The hours have escaped. We can't seem to get enough because there's something about the plotlines of the characters in movies, on TV, or in books that captivate us. Their struggles. Their battles to do what's right. Their complicated relationships.

There's something about a story—a good story—that we can't resist. Good stories tug on something deep inside of us.

Maybe the reason they stir something in us is that in all of the drama—from the spies to the love stories to the people lost in a plane crash on an island—we find a bit of camaraderie. Sure, we may not fully relate to a character's situation, but the emotions of it, the frustration of it, the comedy of it—the journey of it—we catch a glimpse of a truth we know about our own lives. Because the truth is this:

We're all living out a story.

Every single one of us has a life story. And whether you're older or younger, married or single, whether things are going well or whether things aren't so great right now, we all have one thing in common: **Our story is still in progress.**

None of us are at the beginning. And none of our stories are over. We're all here, in the middle, trying to figure out how to make our life story a good one. Because that's what we all want, right? We want a good life. We want a good story. We want our family, our kids, our grandkids to be proud of us. No one wakes up thinking, "Man, I can't wait to screw this up." Or, "I sure hope I regret what I do today." Of course not!

We all want to live a good—maybe even a great—life story. And that's why, for the next few weeks, we're going to be talking about what Jesus said about life—not about His, but about ours. And even if you aren't a Christian, or you aren't sure about the whole church thing, or you aren't sold on the whole idea of religion, I think this series could be really helpful for you. Because, when it comes to your life and your story, you want to have a good one. And so do I.

TENSION

And, if I'm being honest, I think when most of us talk about life, when we talk about our story, we really want it to come down to one word.

Happy.

We all want our life story to be happy. We want our kids to be happy. We want our marriages to be happy. We want to be happy in our job, happy in our friendships, happy in our finances. It drives everything we do. And consciously or not, we're all looking for ways to experience more happiness, more often—we're wired that way.

Not only do we all want happiness, we think that if we were happier then we'd be better people and our lives would tell a better story. We think: If I were happier with my finances, then I wouldn't fight with my spouse. If I were happier in my job, then I'd be a better parent at home. If I were just happier in my dating life, then I'd feel better about myself.

For all of us, there's something we think would make us happier. And ultimately, we think getting that thing and therefore having more happiness is tied to having a better life story.

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But there's a problem, isn't there?

Think about the last thing you really wanted, the last time you said "I'd be so happy if _____." Did you get it? If so, chances are you were happy for a little while, but that feeling faded. Maybe you got the promotion, the raise, the date, the marriage, the MVP kid, the car of your dreams—and it was great. But there's probably something else on your list now that stands just between you and happiness. Sure, that moment made you happy, but I'm betting it didn't keep you happy, at least not for long. One day, like me, you woke up and realized you were unhappy (or at least you could be happy-er) . . . again.

As adults, we all know this: Happiness is slippery.

And because happiness doesn't stay for long, we continue to live believing happiness is just out of reach or just around the corner—we just have to get there. Happiness becomes like a feather we chase in the wind, but we're never quite able to catch. It's always one step beyond where we currently are. And if we aren't careful, we can find ourselves hoping for a great life while spending every day of our lives chasing something we can't quite reach.

TRUTH

Now before we dive deeper, I want you to know this isn't a series about how happiness is a bad thing or how, to live a life that pleases God, you have to commit to being completely miserable. Happiness isn't the enemy at all. That's why the verse we're talking about today is so fascinating. I think as we take a look at something Jesus said, we may discover that God wants more for our life and more for our story than we ever realized—maybe even more than we do. This verse is found in the book of John, one of the four accounts of Jesus' life in the New Testament. John, one of Jesus' closest friends, recounts what Jesus said as He was trying to help a crowd of people understand who He is and why He had come.

He explained His mission this way:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

In this one verse we learn two things. The first is that there's a thief, a robber. And this thief is trying to steal, kill, and destroy. To find out what this thief is trying to destroy, let's look at what Jesus says next. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." In this verse, Jesus states His intentions. Unlike the thief, Jesus has come to give us

life—not a miserable life or boring life, but also not a happy life. Jesus says His goal for us is something else—a *full* life. Some other translations of the Bible read that Jesus says He has come to give us *abundant life*. In reality, there were several words that Jesus could have chosen when He was talking about life. Each had its own unique meaning, but the word Jesus chose to use is the form of life that is often paired with the word "eternal." This is a life that cannot be taken away. This kind of life isn't slippery. It doesn't fade. It isn't difficult to catch or keep. It's the opposite—steady and full. When you think about having anything in abundance, you probably picture having more than you could ever need or use. You picture never lacking or desiring more of it. That's the picture Jesus is painting here. He came to offer that abundant, more-than-enough, overflowing, never-lacking, life.

In other words, **Jesus came to give you a better story, not a happy story.**

Think about it this way. For those of you who have children, I bet you understand this concept. When you prepared for the arrival of your child, you didn't quite know how you would feel or what to expect. You didn't have words to adequately describe how you'd feel until you held your child, got to know your child, and built a relationship. Now, I bet you can't imagine life without them—unless they're throwing a fit in Target. It's not about happiness with your kids because you have good days and bad days. Some days are harder than others. And some days you want to quit. You realize that it goes beyond that. It's better than happy. In the same way, Jesus is saying He came so that we can have a life-story that is full and abundant and beyond happy. It's not lacking. It's not unhappy. **It's better than happy.**

If we're honest, for many of us this is the opposite of what we think about God. We might not say so out loud—especially not in church—but it's tempting to think that God's goal for us is to have life minus all the good stuff, all the things that can make our lives fun or exciting. For some of us, it's the very reason we've kept our distance from God or from church. Because it just seems like what God wants for our life-story is to make it less satisfying and more difficult. In other words, **we think of God as the thief.** And Jesus is telling this crowd of followers and us that we couldn't be farther from the truth. He's basically saying, **"I didn't come to make the story of your life worse. I came to make it better than you have ever imagined."**

This is great news. Because that means we can stop the chase. We can stay exactly where we are, with everything we already have, all the relationships we're already in, all the possessions we already possess—or don't—and still be

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satisfied. Because our life-story isn't centered around the moving-target of happiness. Our life story is centered on the always-there, always-enough, always-abundant, rich life that Jesus is inviting us to live in right now. And as we follow Jesus, He will show us how to give up on chasing happiness and go deeper—to begin to enjoy the better, satisfying, full life He promises.

Here's the bottom line: **Jesus wants you to live a better story.** Not a happy story. Not an easy story. But a more satisfying and more meaningful story. And here's what's crazy about that. Here's what some of the older, wiser people in our lives would tell us if we asked: **When we find our satisfaction in the abundant life Jesus offers, we will often find ourselves happier than we've ever been.**

APPLICATION

So if that's true, what does it mean for me and you? Maybe you've been living in the rut of waiting for the next thing for as long as you can remember. Maybe you've been waking each day hoping that something or someone will make you happy and when that expectation isn't met, you're left feeling empty. And maybe it's time you decided to **stop chasing happy.**

Just think about it for a moment: How well has the chase worked out for you? How happy—consistently happy—has it really made you? Or has the myth of happiness actually stolen and robbed you of life? Has it kept you dissatisfied with the life you have?

When we agree with what Jesus wants for us, and build our lives on the fullness that He offers, we discover a deeper and more satisfying happiness. That's just like Jesus—we want happiness, and He gives us happiness—but He also gives us more.

The life Jesus brings is indeed a better, more meaningful life. And at the center of it is a cross—a cross that triumphed over the deepest darkness imaginable. It's not the life we were maybe expecting, but it's the life we desperately need. And

we're going to explore what it means to live a better life story together over the next few weeks.

But for now, let's start by posing this question: **Are you willing to pause the chase for happiness?** If so, spend some time this week thinking about what your happiness is tethered to. What determines if you have a good day or a bad one? What are you chasing in hopes it will make your life story better? What word fills in the blank when you say, "I'd be so happy if ____." Even if it's just for the next few weeks, **are you willing to trust that Jesus has something better in mind for you?** If you are, a better story in Jesus is right around the corner.

LANDING

Imagine for a second if we all did this. What if, just for this week, your kids weren't so focused on the next new thing that might make them happy? What would happen if your neighbors, the people who live around you, gave up on the idea that the chase for a better career, a bigger paycheck, a nicer house, or a better spouse would eventually make them happy? How would it change our marriages? Our families? Our communities? How would it change our church if just the people in this room decided to trust Jesus for a full, satisfying life instead of chasing what we think would make us happy?

Jesus is extending this offer to all of us—to follow Him, to live a better story and a more meaningful life. And if you're willing to trust Him—to press pause on chasing happiness—then you may one day look back and say, "The story of my life isn't necessarily easier, but it's better than I ever imagined."

Maybe, like me, you're wondering: *What does a better story look like? How does that work exactly? And what am I supposed to do?* Well, you're about to begin that conversation with your small group. But I also want to invite you back next week as we begin to explore specifically how Jesus' promise impacts the story of your life and mine.

Have a great week.