



WEEKLY LEADER GUIDE

STORY OF MY LIFE

WEEK 6

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Story of My Life

WEEK 6



WEEK SUMMARY

The last few weeks we've been talking about the idea that each of our lives tells a story. And how, maybe more than anything else, we all want the story of our lives to be a good one. The problem is that the road to a better life story isn't always an easy one. There are setbacks and failures that make it seem as if our life story will never be as good as we want it to be. What's more, it often seems as if we're the only people struggling to live a good life story; we're the only ones who can't get it right. The truth is that we're not alone. Everyone who has ever wanted to make their life better has fallen short at times. Everyone who has tried to do what's right has, at some point, done what's wrong. We know we aren't perfect people, and the good news is this: God knows this too. That's why He doesn't expect us to be perfect—He just asks us not to give up and to continue loving and following Him. God doesn't use perfect people in His story—He uses broken people, because that's the only kind of people He has. So, no matter where you are in your life story, you're in a place where you can be used by God. This week, lay down the perfect picture of what you think it means to be a Christian and invite God into your real picture. He will meet you there.



THINK ABOUT THIS

Small group is a place for everyone to take the next step in their faith, whatever step that may be. Odds are, the people in your group are all at different places in their faith. Take some time to learn what the "next step" is for everyone, and do what you can to facilitate each person's individual step. For some members of your group, reading the Bible regularly may be the next step. For others, the next step may simply be owning a Bible. Some members of your group may be ready to lead a small group of their own. Wherever your group members are on their faith journey, you can help them identify and take the next step.

If you try to make everyone take the same specific step in their spiritual life, you'll end up frustrated because everyone needs to be challenged differently, some more than others. Remember, because everyone's spiritual journey is different, spiritual growth will look different for everyone. It's not your responsibility to get everyone to the same place. However, it is your job to help make sure everyone is growing and moving in the right direction. Before this week begins, write down the names of each member of the group. Pray for them and jot down an idea of what their "next step of faith" may look like. If you get the chance, find a way to encourage some of them to take that step.

TEACHING MATERIALS



VIDEO 06



AUDIO 06

Story of My Life

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BOTTOM LINE

**GOD DOESN'T USE PERFECT PICTURES.
HE USES BROKEN PEOPLE.**

**Who will free me from this life that is dominated
by sin and death? Thank God!
The answer is Jesus Christ our Lord.**

ROMANS 7:24B-25 NLT

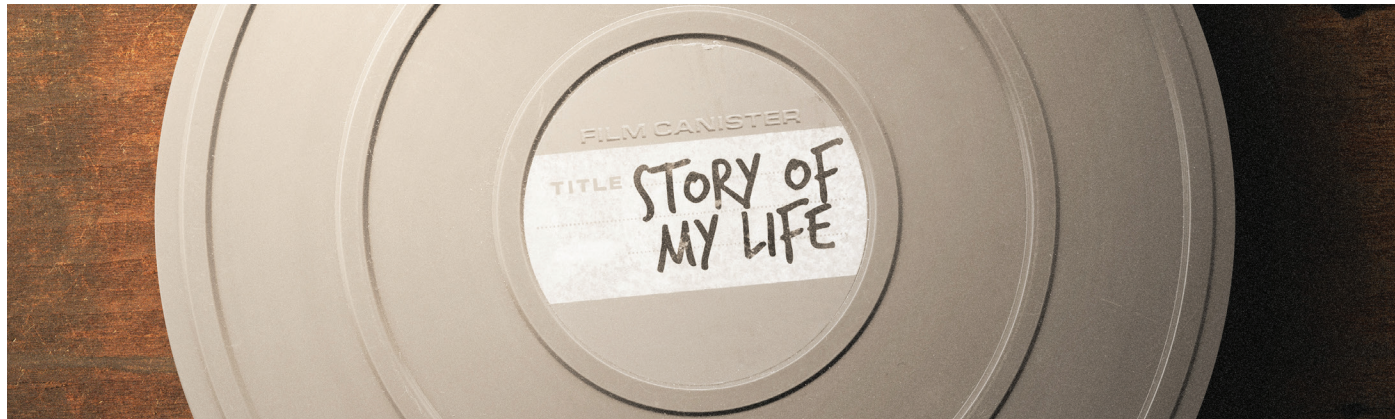
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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'S ONE THING YOU'VE LEARNED FROM THIS SERIES SO FAR? HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE IDEA OF CHANGING YOUR LIFE STORY? ENCOURAGED, OVERWHELMED, CHALLENGED?
2. DESCRIBE YOUR IDEA OF A "PERFECT CHRISTIAN."
3. EVERY ONE OF US STILL SINS AFTER BECOMING A CHRISTIAN. WHAT'S YOUR KNEE-JERK REACTION WHEN YOU MESS UP? WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOD'S REACTION?
4. HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL TO KNOW THAT SCRIPTURE —GOD'S STORY—IS FULL OF MISFITS AND PEOPLE WHO FAILED?
5. WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY IF YOU WERE CERTAIN THAT GOD CAN USE YOU EXACTLY AS YOU ARE?
6. OTHER THAN YOU, WHOSE LIFE STORY COULD BE AFFECTED IF YOU DECIDED TO LET GOD USE YOU, DESPITE YOUR FAILURES?
7. AS A GROUP, HOW CAN WE HELP YOU NOT TO GIVE UP WHEN YOU MESS UP?

Communication Plan

WEEK 6



CONTINUING THE EXPERIENCE

Did 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 post on your

attenders' social media channels or send through email. There are tweets, 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 and tweets 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 social media with your small group.

TEXT MESSAGES

SEND THIS TO EVERYONE IN YOUR GROUP:

Hi! I'm praying for you this week—that God will release the pressure valve you feel to be a "good Christian." I'm praying that you'll rest in His love and let God's love motivate you to live and love like He does.

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.)

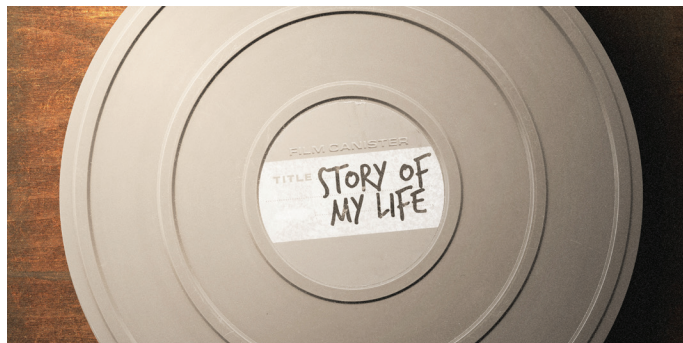
Hey—group wasn't the same without you this week! Here's the link to the audio so you can catch up on the teaching. We missed you!

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

Hi! Just want you to know I'm so glad you've been a part of this group. What did you think about the series? Did any part of it stick out for you?

SOCIAL MEDIA

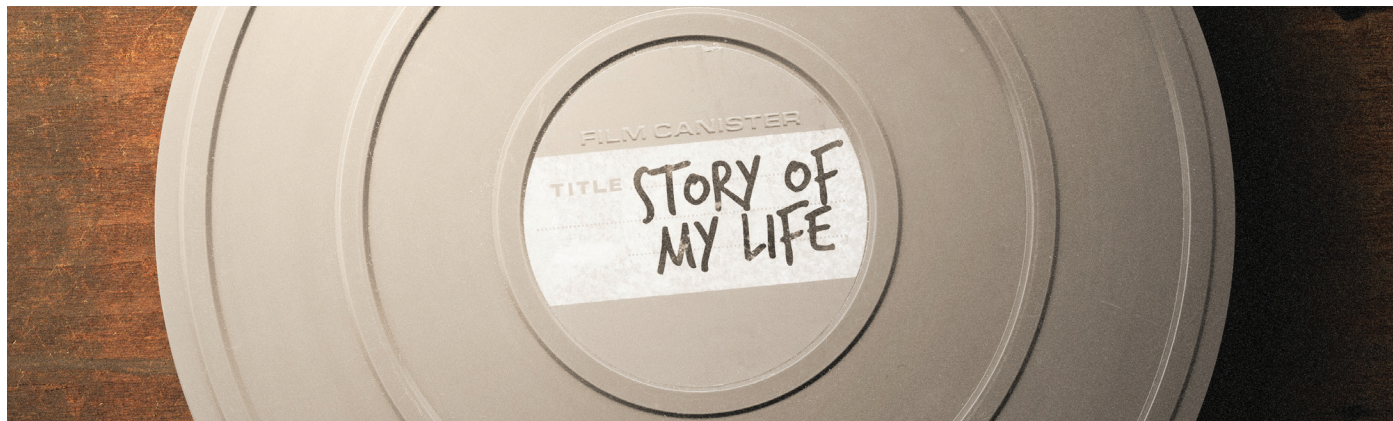
POST THIS TO YOUR FACEBOOK OR INSTAGRAM:



This week, we wrapped up our series, *Story of My Life*, by talking about the awesome reality that God doesn't expect us to be perfect, He just wants us to follow Him. Thanks so much for being a part of group! I really enjoyed learning more about what God wants for us when it comes to living a better story.

Weekly Email

WEEK 6



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 6 EMAIL

Hey everyone!

Hope you all are having a great week! I wanted to send out a quick email to let everyone know what we will be talking about in small group this week—our sixth and final week of *Story of My Life*!

This week's topic is titled "Picture Perfect" and it's about understanding the beautiful reality that God doesn't expect us to be perfect. He just wants us for who we are. In small group, we're going to talk about how we can invite God into our real lives while getting rid of our made-up expectations of perfection. I can't wait to dive in deeper to this freeing truth with you!

Here are the details for our meeting:

Date/time:

Address:

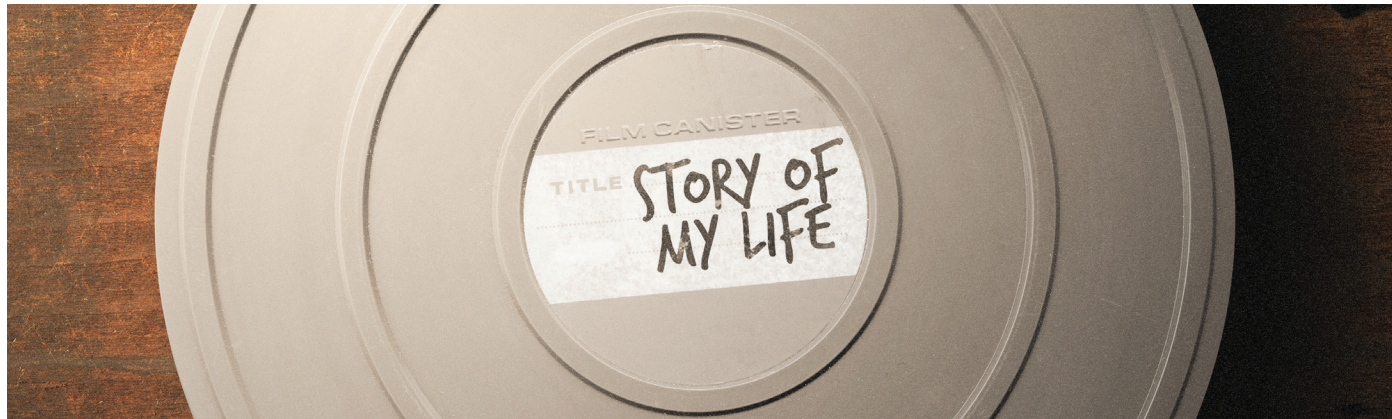
Our weekly Bible Reading Plan and the questions for this week are attached.

(NOTE TO LEADER: Here, add a section that starts with the question: "What happens now?" And then answer that question. Let your group know that this is the last week of this series, and use this part of the email to let your group know what to expect after this week. Will you continue to meet? Is there a new series you could mention? Also, include a short personal note about how you've enjoyed leading them for the last six weeks. Then wrap up the email.)

Thanks so much for being a part of this group!

Bible Reading Plan

WEEK 6



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.

SCRIPTURE AND DAILY PROMPTS FOR EACH IMAGE

MONDAY (Day 1) Matthew 11:28

Are you tired of always trying to live up to the perfect expectations of some people's view of Christianity? Rest today in the truth that God doesn't want anything from you. He wants a better story *for* you.

TUESDAY (Day 2) Proverbs 16:3

Talk to God and commit whatever work you're doing today to Him.

WEDNESDAY (Day 3) 1 Timothy 4:10

Is your hope in God or in your own abilities and effort? Ask God

to give you rest, knowing that He is your hope and the hope for everyone.

THURSDAY (Day 4) Ephesians 2:8-9


Rest today that your salvation from your sins was a free gift God gave you—you didn't earn it, and you don't have to fight to keep it.

FRIDAY (Day 5) Isaiah 30:15

How can your salvation be in repentance and rest? Ask God to help you quit working so hard to earn His love and rest in the salvation He has given you.

Bible Reading Plan

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“

“Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

MATTHEW 11:28

DAY 1: Are you tired of always trying to live up to the perfect expectations of some people’s view of Christianity? Rest today in the truth that God doesn’t want anything from you. He wants a better story *for* you.




“

COMMIT TO THE LORD
WHATEVER YOU DO,
AND HE WILL ESTABLISH
YOUR PLANS.

PROVERBS 16:3

DAY 2: Talk to God and commit whatever work you’re doing today to Him.



“

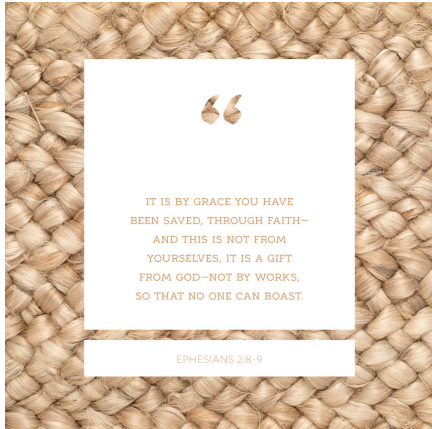
That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

1 TIMOTHY 4:10

DAY 3: Is your hope in God or in your own abilities and effort? Ask God to give you rest, knowing that He is your hope and the hope for everyone.

Bible Reading Plan

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DAY 4: Rest today that your salvation from your sins was a free gift God gave you—you didn't earn it, and you don't have to fight to keep it.



DAY 5: How can your salvation be in repentance and rest? Ask God to help you quit working so hard to earn His love and rest in the salvation He has given you.

Teaching Script



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BOTTOM LINE

**GOD DOESN'T USE PERFECT PICTURES.
HE USES BROKEN PEOPLE.**

INTRODUCTION

"Story of my life." When's the last time you heard someone say that—outside of this series? Maybe it was when they lost their keys only to find them in the freezer. Maybe it was when they opened their car door right into someone else's car door . . . again. Maybe it was when the kids called from school to say they forgot their project. Maybe you've even said something like this today:

"Running late to church again."

"Story of my life."

It's what you say when something bad happens. It's what you say when you're frustrated. It's almost always negative. And yet, for every single one of us, that's the very last thing we want. The last few weeks we've been talking about the idea that each of our lives tells a story. And how, maybe more than anything else, we all want the story of our lives to be a good one. And in this series, we've discovered that living a better story is what Jesus wants for us too. We've discovered that His desire isn't to make our lives miserable or boring or less, but to make them more rich, more satisfying, and more full than we can even imagine.

TENSION

So, living this full, better life story should be a piece of cake at this point, right? I mean, God's on our side. We have five weeks' worth of ideas on exactly how we can change our lives. It should be easy to move toward the full, rich, and satisfying life that Jesus promised, right?

That would be nice. But if we're honest, we know change is difficult and some change takes longer than we'd like. Despite our best efforts, there are behaviors that continue to hurt us, that hurt the people around us, and that stand in the way of our living a better story.

This isn't just a "Christian" issue. You don't have to come to church or be a Jesus-follower to know some of the choices you make are harmful. You and I already know which choices are harmful. We know because we've felt the consequences of them. Maybe you've seen the look on someone's face when they found out you gossiped about them. Or maybe you've felt the shame that comes as a side effect of addiction to alcohol or drugs or shopping or pornography. Or maybe you've seen the hurt you caused your spouse or kids when you did the same thing you promised not to do again. Or maybe you make yourself miserable worrying if anyone will find out what's really going on in your life.

In any case, we're all old enough to have figured out that there are some actions, choices, and even thought patterns that have the potential to do real damage to us and to our relationships. And, here's what's absolutely maddening: **We do them anyway.** I still sin. You still sin. We all still sin. Even when we know better. And even when we don't want to.

And if that wasn't demoralizing enough, a quick glance at social media can make you feel like everyone else is able to shake these sins. There's nothing like 15 minutes on Facebook to remind you that someone you know just lost a ton of weight, posted a photo of their perfect marriage, recalled an anecdote about their fantastic parenting, or mentioned how "blessed" they are by this new job opportunity. (Insert eye roll—am I right?)

And maybe, if we allowed ourselves to be super-honest, we'd admit we especially feel this way here at church. Right here, maybe more than anywhere else, we're tempted to feel like everyone has it together but us. We look around and everyone else's family looks like a perfect picture. Everyone else has a good marriage. Everyone else has their temptations under control. Everyone else seems to have a better story. Even if logically we know better, it can be tempting to feel like we're



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the only sinners in the crowd, or at least the only ones who still sin *this* much.

We can't help but wonder, "Is it this way for everyone? Or am I the only one who struggles? Is something wrong with me because I can't get a handle on this?"

Well, too often, when we feel like failures, we all have the same tendency: to take a step back. To keep our distance. Maybe it's because we think God is angry. We imagine what He would say to us (or worse, do to us) if we got close. Or maybe we believe He's disappointed. That if we got close to Him, He'd shake His head and remind us to "try harder." Maybe we believe this whole "better story" that Jesus promised just isn't as real or as true as we once thought, or maybe it's not for us.

Either way, when it comes to our sin, you and I feel a pull to distance ourselves from God. To separate ourselves from His people. To tell ourselves that maybe it would be for the best if we just . . .

- Skipped this week at church.
- Cancelled that meet-up with our Christian friend.
- Checked out of small group.
- Opted out of that invitation to serve.
- Took a night off from praying.

In small and subtle ways, we begin to think of ourselves as disqualified or under-qualified to even be close to God. In other words, **our messing up leads to our giving up.**

TRUTH

Since God most certainly doesn't want us taking a step back from Him, what are we supposed to do when we've blown it again and feel disqualified?

Believe it or not, the apostle Paul, one of the most famous Christians of all time, experienced this very same thing. And not just *before* he started to follow Jesus, but *after*. I'm talking about the Paul who wrote 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament. The Paul who started as a Pharisee with a strong religious background. That Paul. In his letter to the church in Rome, he wrote:

I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway (Romans 7:18b-19 NLT).

I don't know about you, but when I read these words I feel a huge sense of relief. If Paul couldn't get it all together, then we're in good company! It turns out Paul was like you and me—wanting to do good, but often finding himself doing the exact opposite of what he intended.

Paul was as good an example as any. But he wasn't the only one. Broken people fill the pages of Scripture.

- The very first humans, Adam and Eve, sinned deeply enough to stain us all.
- Adam and Eve had two sons, one of whom killed the other.
- God saved the world through Noah, and Noah got drunk and naked as a response.
- Moses was a murderer.
- Jacob had a family so dysfunctional that reality TV would have given him his own show.
- David was a great king and man who God said was after His own heart, except David had an affair with a married woman, and when he found out she was pregnant with his child, he had her husband killed.
- Mary and Joseph, trusted with caring for the Son of God, lost Jesus when He was a teenager and didn't find Him for three days.

Strangely, reading the Bible will make you feel better about your life, am I right? Turns out God has been in the business of using misfits for a long time.

So if that's true, that all hope isn't lost on me or you, and that God still uses broken people, how did Paul keep following Jesus even when he felt like he couldn't get it right?

Paul asked the very same question: *Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Then he gave his answer: Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:24b-25 NLT).*

When Paul felt helpless against his own sin, he reminded himself of what is true. And the truth for him and for us is this: Our ability to follow God well isn't what determines whether or not we're "right" with God or if He's happy with us or if we're failures at this whole Christianity thing. Jesus died and rose to life to take our sin-stained life and give us His perfect life because God knew that we'd never be able to live rightly on our own.

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In other words, **we aren't perfect people. God knew we'd never be. But we are forgiven people.**

When we blow it, and feel disqualified, we must remember, like Paul did—we're forgiven. We're broken, but we're not disqualified. Remembering what Jesus did and who we are because of it will set us free when our best efforts at following Jesus are falling short.

Paul gave us another hint on how God views our failures—and how He wants us to view them too. In a different letter to a different church, Paul wrote this:

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves (2 Corinthians 4:7 NLT).

In other words, Paul was saying that our fragility actually allows Jesus to get the credit for the good things in our lives. It's the cracks in our lives that show the good light of God pouring through. When we mess up, it's obvious that we're not the perfect ones—God is. Our mess-ups are where God gets to show off His goodness. So, the pressure to be perfect? It's off.

The good news about faith is this: **God doesn't use perfect pictures. He uses broken people.**

And God uses broken people because those are the only people He has. That's because God's story is a story of grace and redemption. God's story is the story of a God who loves you despite your failures but who isn't content to leave you in them. And when you surrender your brokenness to God again and again, it gives the people near you a front-row seat to see God's goodness at work.

Now that's a better story that will last a lifetime.

APPLICATION

So, what's the failure that keeps you feeling like you need to step back from God and His people?

Today, I want to invite you, maybe even challenge you, to change the way you think about that area. I'm not talking about simply trying harder or making a promise to do better (although, those are good attitudes to have). I want you to change the way you think when you mess up. I want you to **decide that you won't let messing up lead to giving up.** Because Jesus isn't disqualifying you. He knew you'd never be perfect and He doesn't expect you to be. He loves you anyway.

Should you work on changing your behavior? Absolutely.
Are you still going to mess up? Absolutely. Probably, this week.

That's why this is so important. I don't want you to let sin or a hang up cause you to push God away. I don't want you to miss out on living a better story because you feel like you're not qualified to. So when you give in to temptation, don't talk yourself into giving up on God's story for you. Instead, this week, I want you to decide to **lay down the perfect picture of what you think it means to be a Christian and invite God into your real picture.** Even when that picture includes sins you can't seem to quit. Even when that picture includes actions you're not proud of. Even when that picture looks as far as you can imagine from what you think it should—invite God into it anyway. He can handle it. He loves you more than you know.

Now I have to warn you, when you invite Jesus into your real picture . . . there's a good chance your picture isn't going to stay the same. There's a good chance He's going to challenge you to do some things differently, to think differently, to live differently. And that's okay. You can trust Him. He is an expert at repairing and fixing our brokenness. In fact, the ancients had a word for it—they called it sanctification. Sanctification is the process of being made holy. And it's a life-long journey.

Fortunately for us, God doesn't use perfect pictures. He uses broken people. And that makes for an incredible story that everyone on planet earth is invited into.

So today, decide you're not going to quit and forfeit your role in God's story. Persevere. In fact, here's a prayer you can pray. "Jesus, I'm both sorry for the times I continue to fail You and for the many ways in which I fail You. I am amazed by Your forgiveness and love. Thank You for using broken people like me. Today, I commit to continuing to follow You no matter what. Lead me toward Your love, toward Your grace, and toward Your hope. May my life reflect the better story You're writing in me."

LANDING

As we finish this series, I want you to know that there's more at stake here than just your life and your story. When you let messing up lead to giving up, it can have a tremendous effect on those around you. At the same time, when you surrender your brokenness to God again and again, when you trust Him to change you, you give your spouse, your children, your coworkers, and your neighbors a living picture of what a better story looks like. When you continue to return to God, despite your failures, it may just give them the courage to do the same. And when you trust Jesus to change the story of your life, you just might find Him using you to change the lives of those around you. And that's one of the most beautiful results of living a better story.