

Philosophy, audience, goals.

Welcome to *Living in Light!* The six sessions making up this course will introduce you to foundational themes of Christianity, and invite you to live in light of the great and true story of what God has done in the past, what he is doing today in renewing the world, and what he will do in the future. There are various aspects to this story, some of which we will study in depth; all of them center on Jesus. We may call this the *gospel* story, the story of good news for everyone. It is a story that must increasingly define and transform our lives.

This study will unpack many implications and applications of this gospel story. In fact, as we will see, each new day provides us with fresh and different opportunities for living out this story and re-orienting ourselves toward Jesus.

This study is specifically targeted toward new believers—those new to the Christian faith—and provides a thorough explanation of various concepts. Nevertheless, the foundational themes contained here are essential throughout our Christian lives. So this study is equally applicable to those who have been Christians for many years. How can a study appeal to both audiences? For this reason: the New Testament reminds us that we are to continue in the Christian life in the same way we began it. The good news that we first believed in is the same good news we must continue to trust in and live by. Moreover, it is easy after many years as a Christian to forget the bedrock on which we are to live. Therefore, these sessions are relevant and applicable to everyone; they cover the basic or core values we all need to live in light of every day.

It is important to note that this study is not intended just to impart information. Thus, the teaching content is never divorced from practical application. The questions are designed to draw out much more than simple facts. You will find that the questions relate specifically to life struggles, desires, hopes, and fears. The goal is to encourage you to center your life on God and what he is doing in this world, and to help you grow in a love that is rooted in a vital faith in Jesus. We hope you will enjoy working through *Living in Light*. May Jesus greatly encourage you!



How this study is organized

▶ *Living in Light* contains this introduction, six sessions, and a leader's section.

Session 1 • Living in light of: The Father's love.

This session introduces us to the lasting, beautiful, and undeserved love God has for us, in the face of our unloveliness. We will look at what God is like and how he views us—even though we often search for life, meaning, and love in the wrong places.

Session 2 • Living in light of: The cross.

Here we look at the cross as a picture of the gospel, and discuss how important it is to live always in light of who God is, what Jesus has done, and what has happened to us as a result. To discover how we do this in practice, we will cover topics such as faith, repentance, our hearts, our desires, and the power of the Spirit.

Session 3 • Living in light of: The King's forgiveness.

Many questions arise regarding the topic of forgiveness: What does it mean to forgive? How can we forgive those who harm and abuse us? What gives us the power and motivation to forgive? We will see in this session that we can forgive only when we see ourselves as forgiven by God, “big time.”

Session 4 • Living in light of: A new reputation.

This section unpacks what it means to live in light of the new and perfect image, identity, and reputation given to us by Jesus. Often we don't live as though we have been given this new identity, and so we seek to get or keep a certain reputation by the things we think, say, or do.

Session 5 • Living in light of: Heaven.

God is in the business of renewal—from individuals, to communities, to cultures, to the entire universe. How can we take risks and become a part of God’s restoration of this world, when we are faced with suffering, hardship, pain, death, and sadness? The answer presented in this session is for us to live in light of something far greater and better than this present world.

Session 6 • Living in light of: The kingdom.

The coming of the kingdom of God is bringing about the renewal, restoration, and reconciliation of all things, and God has made us a part of this great story of salvation. This session answers questions like: What are some essential characteristics of the kingdom of God? How can we be a part of this kingdom that God is building? What sorts of things hinder this kingdom and its expansion?

- ▶ Each session has a number of sections, outlined as follows:
 - ▶ **A review** of the previous week’s homework. A warm up question is included to help start the discussion.
 - ▶ **A comic strip** that illustrates one of the topics of the session.
 - ▶ **Introduction.** This introduces the theme, and contains important material to aid in understanding and completing the session.
 - ▶ **Setting the scene.** This bulleted text includes small nuggets of information relating to the Scripture text for that particular session. It explains words, ideas, or ancient culture that may be unfamiliar.
 - ▶ **Scripture passage(s).** The Scripture text for each session is printed out in full, using the *New Living Translation*.
 - ▶ **For further thought.** This section follows the Bible passage, and includes further explanation of the text and thoughts for reflection.
 - ▶ **Main body of the session.** This section contains the questions, teaching content, and diagrams. The teaching content and diagrams will aid in answering the subsequent questions.

- ▶ **Homework assignment.** The homework section contains a few questions to consider outside the group discussion, after the group has worked through the entire session. This material is reviewed at the beginning of the next session.



How to use this study

Living in Light is designed for small group study, although it is possible to work through the study independently or in a large group. The most effective approach, however, is a small group setting, with a leader who has already worked through the material and applied it to his or her own life. We also suggest that the participants work through the study questions on their own before coming together as a group. The more time, thought, prayer, and reflection each group member puts into this part of the study, the more each will gain from it.



Here is a possible format for a group study:

- 1 Have a group leader. The leader should consult the “Leader’s section” at the end of the book before beginning the study.
- 2 Meet once a week. Depending on time available, you may want to divide the six sessions into a twelve week course. There is enough material to do so, and this will provide an opportunity to spend more time on each question, discussion, and interaction.
- 3 Before each meeting with your group, work through the relevant session and answer all the questions, except for the homework. Using the Scripture text (printed in full) and the teaching content in each session will help you in answering the questions.
- 4 Meet with your group to: discuss the session, interact with each person’s answers and thoughts, have any questions answered, learn from each other, and pray together.
- 5 Before starting the next session, complete on your own the homework assignment. Homework will be discussed at the beginning of the next meeting.



What to expect

► **Expect to be challenged...**

and expect that the answers will not come quickly. As you work through the questions, expect that it will take some time and thought to complete each session. Expect to be challenged in a number of different areas.

► **Expect the Holy Spirit...**

to be the one ultimately responsible for the growth of your group, and for the change in each person's life—including your own. Relax and trust him.

► **Expect your group's agenda to include...**

an open, give-and-take discussion of the session, the questions, and the homework. Also expect times of prayer at each meeting.

► **Expect struggle...**

and don't be surprised to find that your group is a mixture of enthusiasm, hope, and honesty, along with indifference, anxiety, skepticism, guilt, and covering up. We are all people who really need Jesus every day. So expect your group to be made up of people who wrestle with sin and have problems—people just like yourself!

► **Expect a group leader...**

who desires to serve you, but who also needs Jesus as much as you do. No leader should be put on a pedestal, so expect that your group leader will have the freedom to share openly about his or her own weaknesses, struggles, and sins. Pray for your group leader regularly, and give your support and cooperation.

► **Expect confidentiality...**

and be prepared to make a commitment that anything personal mentioned in your group must be kept in confidence and not shared with others. Gossip will quickly destroy a group. ■

