

“Royal Partners” Discussion Guide

This guide is designed for facilitators of a discussion group. It examines excerpts from each chapter of “Royal Partners,” recommends asking for comments or questions relevant to those excerpts and suggests alternate questions to encourage participation. These are not necessarily the most important parts of the text, but are representative.

If you’re leading a discussion group, consider letting participants discuss the parts that interest them, using the material in this guide only if it’s necessary or time permits. This guide provides excerpts you might choose to discuss. Each excerpt is followed by relevant questions, but you may want to use other questions, such as the following:

- How does this change your perspective?
- How is this different from worldly (secular) thinking?
- How might you apply this?
- What changes would this require?
- What difference does this make?
- Why is this important?
- What does this suggest about:
 - our responsibilities in life?
 - our relationship with God?
 - our ability or duty to influence the spiritual realm?
- Does anyone else have a comment or question on this point?
- Does anyone have a different perspective?

This guide recommends nine sessions to cover the book’s seven chapters; two sessions each for Chapters Six and Seven.

Consider having the “Royal Partners Scripture Text” document available during group discussion (available at <https://foxven.com/book-royal-partners/>). It can be invaluable when discussing points made in the book.

Scripture is taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1984 by International Bible Society.

Chapter 1

The Dilemma

Following is an introduction you may want to use as facilitator of the discussion group:

This is a book discussion group and I'm the facilitator, so my role is to make sure the discussion moves along and stays on track, and everyone gets a chance to participate. Here's our general format for these sessions: We'll go through each chapter, one section at a time. I'll ask what you highlighted in that section and I'd like for you to identify either the page number or section heading, the first few words of the paragraph so we can all find the paragraph in our books or on our digital readers, then the part you highlighted. You can express your opinion about the highlighted portion, offer your perspective or ask a question about it, then others can respond. Any questions about the procedure?

Since this book is based on scripture, I want to open each session with a scripture from the section we'll be discussing. Today's verse is about using the abilities God gives us to serve others as stewards of His grace:

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:11)

This first chapter identifies a problem that's very common in our culture – performance orientation – and shows a result that's becoming very widespread, which is burnout. The author's experience shows that ignoring what God says and doing things the world's way will lead to problems. So the chapter provides a context and motivation for learning how to work with God.

Are you ready to begin discussing the chapter?

Possible Discussion Points

Relationship Versus Principles (page 12)

Page 12, paragraph: "It's possible to live ..."

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"It's possible to live according to spiritual laws and principles yet completely miss God's will. Those laws and principles are to help us understand what God is doing, allow us to test what we think He is telling us to do, or help us decide what to do in the absence of specific direction from Him. Laws and principles are not substitutes for relationship."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why will God's laws and principles always be compatible with His will for your specific situation?

How would it be possible to miss God's will for your specific situation by only considering his laws and principles?

Page 13, paragraph: “Two verses ...”

Excerpt:

“The Bible portrays God as the source of life and one aspect of death as a state of separation from God even when biologically alive. I suggest dead works include those done solely by human effort, intellect and motivations. That is, dead works are those in which God is not involved.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 states the nature and quality of our work will be revealed with fire and, though we enter heaven, we will suffer loss (lose our reward) if our work is burned up. Since God will ultimately decide which works are “dead,” how would you counsel Christians who believe God should reward them for whatever good they do?

Page 13, paragraph: “That would have to be”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“That would have to be the absolute worst time to discover you were wrong! These people will think they served God and did His work, but they missed a critical point: their relationship with God was more important than what they did for Him. Jesus made it clear the problem was that He had no relationship with them: ‘I never knew you.’ As a result, their works were dead – performed on their own without God’s involvement. Our works must be expressions or the result of our relationship with God; otherwise we might do all the right things for all the wrong reasons and our works would be considered dead.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why would works we perform on our own without God’s involvement be considered dead?

Performance Orientation (page 15)

Page 15, paragraph: “The result is an attitude”

Excerpt:

“The result is an attitude called performance orientation, which causes us to value ourselves by what we do or how we perform, rather than who we are. As a result, we believe that our achievements give us or demonstrate our personal worth, that we earn approval by succeeding, that we must continue striving for approval.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Think of an incident in which someone withheld their approval because you didn’t perform the way they wanted. How did that affect your perspective of yourself?

Burnout (page 16)

An Example (page 18)

Personal Application (page 21)

Which of the following best describes your approach to work, making decisions or solving problems?

- I focus on doing what needs to be done.
- I wait until I know what God wants me to do.
- I try to do what would please God.
- I apply Bible principles and ask God to help me.
- I try to do things according to Bible principles.

How do you feel about yourself when you make a mistake and how strongly does your reaction indicate you are performance-oriented?

Chapter 2

God's Design

In this chapter the author explains that God created man in his image, a three-part being with nature and abilities similar to his. Man originally had an inherent glory, which he lost due to sin, but which God is gradually restoring in those who belong to him. He gave each person free will and honors our choices, so we experience the consequences of our decisions. These are the general topics covered in Chapter 2, which should help us understand how greatly God values us.

Today's scripture:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom. 8:29)

May God direct our discussion.

Possible Discussion Points

Page 23, paragraph: "This helps us understand"

Excerpt:

"This helps us understand what it means to be the image and likeness of God. The Hebrew text literally means we're patterned after God and have His form and nature. You and I are similar to God in nature and ability."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Mankind is unique in creation account because only man has a spirit. What does this reveal about God's perspective and intent for humanity?

Page 24, paragraph: "Romans 8:29"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"Romans 8:29 also describes Jesus as the 'firstborn among many brothers.' 'Firstborn' is from the Greek word *prototokos*, which is similar to our word 'prototype' and means the same thing. Jesus is the first of a series, the prototype for the rest of us, which means He's the standard for our nature and behavior. This is why Christlikeness is such an important concept for Christians."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does the concept of "prototype" affect your perspective of Jesus and yourself?

Man's Original and Future Glory (page 24)

Page 25, paragraph: "God crowned or surrounded man"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"God crowned or surrounded man with 'glory,' which is the same word used for God's radiant glory. So God 'crowned' man with 'glory,' which supports the idea that visible glory surrounded or enveloped Adam and Eve. In other words, they glowed brilliantly."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

When you visualize God seated on His throne, what does His glory look like?

Before reading this paragraph, when you visualized Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they sinned, how did you see them?

How does this paragraph affect your perspective of Adam and Eve and what they experienced due to their sin?

Page 26, paragraph: “God honored man”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“God honored man by making him an image of Himself, and endowed him with qualities and attributes similar to His own. He treated man as a peer, as much as a created being could be a peer of his Creator. He gave him a domain to rule over – all physical creation – parallel to His own domain. To say that God crowned or surrounded man with glory and honor may be an understatement, but it clearly reveals God’s compassion for mankind, though He knew man would sin and lose that glory and honor.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How do the ways God honored man indicate His compassion for all mankind?

How does this affect your perspective of the people you encounter?

Jesus’ Glory as a Man (page 27)

Page 29, paragraph: “This passage in Hebrews”

Excerpt:

“This passage in Hebrews Chapter 2 twice describes Jesus as ‘crowned’ with glory. The word describes a literal crown that encircles a person’s head, but could easily refer to anything that encircles a person, such as an aura of glory.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Descriptions like this in scripture probably are the reason artists painted pictures of Jesus with a halo over His head. Explain why Jesus would not have had a halo during His life on earth.

Our Glory (page 29)

Page 30, paragraph: “As encouraging as that”

Excerpt:

“Many of us have believed we have no real value to God, that we’re just humble servants and have nothing worthwhile to offer, but that’s not God’s perspective! He originally created man in His *eikon*, likeness or image and after salvation is transforming us back into His image. He values us much more than we realize.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Identify some Christian hymns, prayers or sermons that describe us as having nothing worthwhile to offer. What have those led you to conclude about God’s perspective of you?

How has that affected your motivation to do anything for Him?

Page 30, paragraph: “We’re being transformed”

Excerpt:

“We’re being transformed into Jesus’ likeness with ever-increasing glory.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What are some things God uses to transform us with ever-increasing glory?

God Created Us With Free Will (page 31)

Page 31, paragraph: “Free will is our greatest asset”

Excerpt:

“Free will is our greatest asset if we choose to follow God, or it is our downfall if we choose to continue in our old ways. The choice is ours. If we rely on logic or feelings instead of what God says, He will honor our free will and usually will allow us to proceed on our own. ‘On our own,’ as in ‘without His help,’ which is a rather scary thought.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

In what ways might free will be considered our greatest asset?

How might relying on our logic or feelings create problems for us?

Page 31, paragraph: “This gets us into the debate”

Excerpt:

“My understanding is that God has given me free will and His foreknowledge allows Him to know in advance what I will do. God has a plan that would take me where He wants me to be and He asks me to submit to that plan. I’m free to make my own choices and His plan accounts for the choices I make, but I will experience the results of my choices. In God’s system, free will and predestination work together.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If free will and predestination work together as the author stated, how is God likely to respond to a Christian who ignores or doesn’t care about His will?

What if the person wants to know God’s will but simply doesn’t?

Experiencing the Consequences (page 32)

Page 33, paragraph: “The Bible provides many examples”

Excerpt:

“The Bible provides many examples of people experiencing the consequences of their decisions. Such experiences actually are the product of a spiritual law of cause and effect, reciprocity or sowing and reaping. I sometimes call it the law of natural consequence; if I do A, then B will occur.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If a Christian does something very foolish and experiences painful consequences, then

concludes God was punishing him, what does that reveal about his perspective of God?

Personal Application (page 34)

Jesus is the “firstborn among many brothers,” the first of a series, the prototype for the rest of us. What is your reaction to that thought? What does your reaction reveal about your reliance on yourself?

We generally take free will for granted because we’ve always had the ability to choose from available options based on our limited abilities. But now what does this show you about God’s attitude toward you?

Identify some really good things that happened to you as a result of good decisions you made. Now identify some really unpleasant things resulting from poor choices. Consider how your choices produce corresponding results.

Chapter 3

God's Intent

Today we're discussing Chapter 3, "God's Intent," which begins with a discussion of how our relationship with God should progress from that of a servant who needs specific directions for everything, to spiritual maturity which allows God to give us greater discretion and latitude. The author explains the learning curve we'll experience as we develop the abilities God gave us and use them to participate in what He's doing. The chapter emphasizes God's role as our loving Father and how He honors our desires. The chapter then concludes by examining four key principles we must understand and apply if we're to work effectively with God: authority, dominion, initiative and speech.

Today's scripture:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:1-2)

May the Lord give us insight to the topics we're about to discuss.

Possible Discussion Points

Servants of God (page 35)

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

This section addresses two biblical themes that almost seem contradictory: being God's servant and exercising free will. How are you able to reconcile these themes in your mind and how does this affect your relationship with God?

From Servants to Sons (page 38)

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

This section addresses the paradox of being both a servant of God and His child. What does this suggest about the way you can or should approach God?

Page 38, paragraph: "Being a servant of God"

Excerpt:

"Being a servant of God and the Lord Jesus means we have a level of authority appropriate to our spiritual maturity and assigned responsibilities. We can make decisions and initiate actions. A spiritually immature believer may need detailed instructions from God for every decision, whereas a mature believer may be free to exercise much greater personal discretion."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If it seems we need to do something about a matter, but we don't have detailed instructions from God about it, what should we do?

How might God react if we make a bad decision?

Stages of Maturity (page 39)

This section examines three levels of spiritual maturity, using natural maturity as an analogy: a newborn or toddler, a young child, and a mature child or adult.

Here's the paradox. We're to retain the qualities of a young child — accept what God gives us, believe what he tells us, trust him to take care of us, simply do what he says — and yet we're to become mature adults — capable of representing God appropriately in the world and participating in what He's doing. He wants us to retain the admirable qualities of young children, but grow up and be responsible.

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How can we do this?

Adoption (page 42)

Page 44, paragraph: "Now carefully read"

Scripture reference 88: Eph. 1:4-5 (quoted in its entirety)

Excerpt:

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be *huiosthesia* through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does it affect your opinion of yourself to realize it was God's pleasure to grant you all the privileges, responsibilities and authority due a mature member of His family, allow you to conduct His business and even influence His decisions, and be a legal heir to His kingdom?

Progressive Revelation (page 44)

Page 47, paragraph: "At this point"

Excerpt:

"Quite frankly, if we're unwilling to embrace His supremacy and absolute authority over us, we simply can't expect Him to take care of us and provide what we need. If we reject who He declares Himself to be, we're probably on our own."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Explain whether this paragraph overlooks God's grace.

The Learning Curve (page 47)

Page 50, paragraph: “Once we learn

Excerpt:

“Once we learn to interact with God — to know what He’s saying to us personally at that moment and respond to Him — we will cherish that interaction and be satisfied with nothing less.” (A quote from “Royal Partners”) How important is two-way communication to a meaningful relationship? How important do you think it is to God?

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How important is two-way communication to a meaningful relationship?

How important do you think it is to God?

Page 50, paragraph: “If God has been teaching us”

Excerpt:

“If God has been teaching us in a specific area and we’re growing in skill and ability, He may temporarily stop interacting with us to encourage us to take some initiative, to ‘fly solo,’ as pilots call it. It’s time to stretch.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What kinds of reactions might we have when God becomes silent at key points in our learning?

Page 51, paragraph: “It’s never God’s intent”

Excerpt:

“It’s never God’s intent to make us independent of Him; in fact, the more we mature, the more we will depend on Him. Yet it is His goal to make us increasingly proficient at what He created us to do, to improve our skills and expand our abilities.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Normally we’d think the more proficient and effective we are, the less we need to depend on others. So why would God want to improve our skills and abilities, yet make us more dependent on him?

Page 52, paragraph: (top paragraph)

Excerpt:

“We dare not limit ourselves to what we think or understand.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What’s the result of limiting ourselves to what we think or understand?

Family Resemblance (page 52)

Page 53, paragraph: “A question that many Christians struggle with”

Excerpt: (last sentence in that paragraph)

[referring to the fruit of the Spirit] “We might conclude, then, that initially these are God’s

traits which the Holy Spirit makes available to us, but which we're to develop as our own traits."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How successful are you likely to be (or have been) trying to develop God-quality character traits by your own effort; for example, godly love instead of human love?

If the Holy Spirit enables us to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in the beginning because we don't have it, how do we cause those traits to become part of our own character?

God Honors Our Desires (page 53)

Page 54, paragraph: "Jesus frequently said ..."

Excerpts:

"These statements give us a lot of latitude because they reflect Father's heart to honor our desires. God pledges to answer our prayers yet will not violate His own will. This is not a problem because a maturing believer is learning to yield to His will."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If a believer is increasingly conforming his thinking to God's and developing godly character, how will this affect his prayers and God's responses?

Principle of Authority (page 56)

Page 56, paragraph: "All humans"

Excerpt:

"All humans have an inherent authority as a result of being God's image, regardless of their spiritual condition. We have limited autonomy – the authority to decide and act, to direct our circumstances and control our environment."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does this answer the question of why God allows people to do evil things?

Page 56, paragraph: "In addition to"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"In addition to our inherent human authority, Father delegated authority to us on the basis of our relationship with Him. For maturing children of God, that authority is greatly increased in both the physical and spiritual realms. It's a spiritual authority we're to use against spiritual beings and forces that try to interfere with our domains. This is authority we can use to control the forces that influence other people, not the people themselves."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How would spiritual authority used against fallen spiritual beings affect the physical realm?

Why would such authority and its effectiveness increase as a believer matures?

Principle of Dominion (page 57)

Page 58, paragraph: “Many of us pray”

Excerpt (end of the paragraph):

“He will not impose Himself on us or micro-manage our lives. He would dishonor us if He entered our domain uninvited or did things that are our responsibility.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How would God dishonor us by acting in our domains without our approval or invitation?

Page 60, paragraph: “My question is this”

Excerpt:

“Why would God expect or even allow us to do this if we were mere worms, sinners saved by grace and had no value as some Christians believe?”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What are the detrimental results of believing we as Christians have no value to God or anything we do is a worthless work of the flesh?

Page 61, paragraph: “Did He place His image”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“Did He place His image in any other beings and give them their own domains to rule? Is He redeeming any other fallen beings? No, only mankind. He gave us creative or inventive abilities, unique to humans. He gave us the ability to produce eternal spiritual beings through childbirth, also unique to humans. His intent was to create a race of beings similar to Himself with similar qualities and responsibilities, who could relate to Him and have relationship with Him based on common traits and experiences. As an expression of His love, He gave us the authority to reign as He does. He wants us to be like Him, function as He does and enjoy relating to Him as a virtual peer, as much as a created being can be a peer of the Creator. He did this for us, because that is His nature.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does this affect your perspective of Him?

Principle of Initiative (page 62)

Page 63, paragraph: “Some Christians believe”

Excerpt: (end of paragraph)

“How often do we abdicate by waiting or praying for Him to tell us what to do? At some point, we need to stop asking Him about everything, grow up and begin using the resources He gave us.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why might failing to exercise initiative in our domains be considered abdicating?

Principle of Speech (page 65)

Page 66, paragraph: “God gave us authority”

“Authority without speech is impotent, and speech without authority is mere conversation, but speech backed by authority releases power. It’s the combination of who we are and what we do that produces the results.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

When I realize God has given me authority I can use to protect and serve my family, which is part of my domain, how should that affect what I say to my family?

Page 67, paragraph: “We might think”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“We might think our problems are from Satan and his demons, but sometimes the source is more personal because our own words produce results due to our authority. If we consistently speak in an ungodly manner, we conform ourselves to Satan’s kingdom, which authorizes him to affect us and causes our words to produce evil. Our authority causes what we speak to set spiritual laws, forces and beings into motion and the nature of what we speak determines whether those are godly or evil. If we change the way we think, then our speech will change and produce different results.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why would our speech authorize evil spirits to affect us or our domains?

Into Eternity (page 68)

Page 68, paragraph: “This life”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“This life is not about this life. It’s about preparing for our eternal destiny, which is to look and be like God, delight in who He is, share in all He has and participate in all He does. For now, we’re apprentices being prepared for our ultimate duties.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If this life is about preparing ourselves for our eternal destiny, how should that affect what we do in this life?

Personal Application (page 68)

Your heavenly Father wants you to progress from a servant to a spiritually mature adult, capable of assuming responsibilities in His kingdom and participating in what He does. How does that affect your attitude toward Him and your potential in life?

Through Jesus’ victory over sin and death on the cross, Father restored your spiritual authority over your domain, which typically includes yourself, your family, work, life purpose and property. How does this affect your opinion of what Jesus did for you on the cross?

What kinds of responses to problems do you think are appropriate, based on your spiritual authority?

Recognizing the authority of your speech and its ability to produce both benefits and harm, what changes should you make in what you say? In the words you use? In your inclination to “speak your mind”? In your tendency to talk about other people’s problems? In complaining?

How should an understanding of your spiritual authority affect your choices when you have only a general idea of what you should do?

Chapter 4

God's Strategy

In Chapter 4, we see that God works through us, wanting us to be actively involved in everything he does on earth. What may surprise us, however, is that God also wants to be actively involved in everything we do; he gave us free will, delegated authority to us and honors our decisions. It should become evident that as we mature spiritually and learn to fulfill our role as *huioi* in Father's kingdom, we'll see greater and more consistent results.

Today's scripture:

The author describes the following passage as both exciting and scary. (page 79)

"I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." (Matt. 21:21–22)

Holy Spirit, as we discuss this chapter, we invite you to lead us into all truth and reveal Father's strategy to us.

Possible Discussion Points

Page 70, paragraph: "Because of His foreknowledge"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"Because of His foreknowledge, He knew man would sin, be corrupted by sin in every part of his being and lose the dominion He gave him. It's also clear in Scripture that He had a strategy, which we refer to broadly as redemption. Salvation is the initial redemptive step for us. By making us part of His family when we accept Jesus' sacrifice for our sin, Father enrolls us in a plan of growth and development to completely redeem us from all the effects of sin. Because redemption is as comprehensive as the effects of sin, whatever sin has corrupted, He will redeem with our cooperation."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What does God's redemptive strategy reveal about His perspective of all people?

Engaged in His Kingdom (page 71)

Page 71, paragraph: "God Almighty chose"

Excerpt:

"God Almighty chose to do His work through imperfect people – us – as well as through angels. Why? Because He wants us to participate in what He does, to have experiences in common with Him as Adam did, to get to know Him by working with Him, and to learn how His kingdom and spiritual laws work. Passivity and inactivity are not acceptable in His kingdom."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If passivity is not responding to what someone has done or not participating in an activity, why is passivity unacceptable in God's kingdom?

Why is it unacceptable for us to be inactive, to not be doing anything related to God's kingdom?

Page 71, paragraph: "The apostle Paul"

Excerpt:

"God not only chooses to work through humans, who are clearly inferior to Him, He deliberately chooses to work through those whom other humans would consider inferior. That way, there's no question in anyone's mind that God Himself is actually producing the results and no one can boast about what they did for Him."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What hope does this offer a Christian who feels inadequate or unqualified to be involved in what God is doing?

Page 72, paragraph: "Although we cannot"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"Although we cannot produce the needed results, we do have control over our willingness to serve. As imperfect as we are, Father chooses to work through us."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

The previous two paragraphs describe an incident in which God worked through the author because he was willing to serve despite his really bad attitude. What does this suggest about God's ability to work through us regardless of our limitations?

Page 73, paragraph: "A lot of teaching"

Excerpt:

"A lot of teaching today emphasizes that God does everything for us as an expression of His grace but also because only He can do things of eternal value, that whatever we do is an act of the flesh and has no value."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What do you think might be the basis for this belief and what effect do you think it's had?

Page 74, paragraph: "So if we're doing"

Excerpt:

"It's possible He'll do something for us without our involvement if we're spiritually immature, or we need to discover the greatness of His love, or He simply wants to bless us with a gift. Normally, however, we can expect Him to have us do our part for the benefits it produces for us."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How might our attitude change when we begin to realize God involves us in what He's doing because it benefits us?

Prepared for Life's Work (page 74)

Alternate questions:

This section deals in part with the alleged distinction between secular and spiritual. How does this relate to our “politically correct” culture and what should our attitude toward such a culture be?

Page 75, paragraph: “For us”

Excerpt (entire paragraph):

“For us, there’s no distinction between spiritual and secular. We are spirit beings with psyches or souls, temporarily living in physical bodies. We’re not just physical beings having occasional spiritual experiences. We’re spiritual beings all of the time. We’re God’s children all of the time. We have the Holy Spirit within us to help us all of the time. Wherever we are, whatever we do, we belong to God and not ourselves because He bought us with the sacrifice of His own Son. To limit our relationship with Father to one or two hours a week is a gross abuse of what He’s done for us.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does this affect our ability to participate in what God is doing, or for Him to be involved in what we’re doing?

God Engaged in Our Work (page 76)

Page 76, paragraph: “Our faith”

Excerpt:

“Our faith must be based on Father’s nature and not on ourselves or what’s happened in our past. Our results will be proportional to our faith, not because our faith actually produces the results, but because greater faith gives Him more room to work. Our decisions to act outside our comfort zones, or to reach for “impossible” goals, or position ourselves for extraordinary results opens the door wider for Him to do His supernatural work, which is typical of the way He does things.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Father gave us free will, delegated authority to us, gives us latitude, allows us to exercise personal initiative and responds to our faith. How should we respond to that?

Page 77, paragraph: “The Gospels”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record a familiar statement Jesus made: ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.’ The grammatical tense of the verb ‘ask’ indicates a continuing process, so we’re to ask and keep on asking, then at some point, what we ask for will be given to us. If we examine the context of this statement, we discover the only condition is our persistence and there are no limits to what we can ask. The same is true of the verbs ‘seek’ and ‘knock.’”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What does this reveal about God's desire or intent to be involved in what we're doing?

Page 80, paragraph: "As we've said"

Excerpt:

"As we've said, if we have faith and do not doubt, we can take the initiative and Father will produce the results. It's not our faith that produces the results; rather, it's God supporting us with His power that makes things happen."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What does this reveal about the extent of our authority on earth and the extent of Father's commitment to us?

Personal Application (page 81)

To what degree are you emotionally committed to and engaged in Father's kingdom, not merely fulfilling your obligation to Him?

Do you think Father has given you specific instructions about something He wants you to do? What's your attitude about that? Do you feel He's imposed on you or are you happy He asked you? Are you looking for opportunities to do it or ways to ignore it?

Each of us has spiritual gifts, abilities, skills and motivations. In what new ways can you use yours to serve people as an expression of God's love for them?

Chapter 5

A Cooperative, Interdependent Relationship

Chapter 5 deals with the core premise of the entire book: We have a cooperative, interdependent relationship with God, in which He depends on us to do our part and we depend on Him to do His. Because He gave you authority over your own domain, for example, there are things only you can do and He will not do.

Today's scripture:

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17)

May Father show us the nature of this unique relationship we have with Him.

Possible Discussion Points

Page 83, paragraph: "Cooperation describes"

Excerpt: (last sentence)

"Our goal is to have a cooperative relationship with God, in which He and we have a common purpose and work together toward a desired end."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Explain why it's actually counterproductive to have a different purpose or goal than God does.

Paragraph: (page 83) "Interdependence is a state"

Excerpt: (last two sentences)

"That is, in an interdependent relationship, each partner in the activity is dependent upon the other doing his part. Typically, each partner has defined responsibilities or a job description that complements that of the other without overlap."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Any questions about what a cooperative, interdependent relationship is or how it works?

Among the Trinity (page 84)

Page 85, paragraph: "We see examples"

Excerpt:

"We see examples of interdependence among the Trinity throughout Scripture."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does interdependence among the Trinity affect your perspective of God?

Cooperating With God (page 86)

Page 87, paragraph: “Then, if we think”

Excerpt: (Entire paragraph)

“Then, if we think something needs to be done and He hasn’t given us specific instructions, we know what kinds of things He wants done and how He operates. We know the boundaries and guidelines, what’s appropriate and acceptable. We also know our purpose in life, what we’re supposed to do. Within those parameters, we have authority to do what we think is appropriate. It’s been said it’s easier to steer a moving vehicle than a parked one, so Father might not give specific directions or details until we begin moving.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

When we’re cooperating with God, who clearly has greater experience, skill and ability, using our own initiative may seem inappropriate. What key point in this paragraph resolves that conflict?

We’re Dependent Upon God (page 88)

Page 90, paragraph: “When something happens”

Excerpt:

“Our part often is preparing the way for Him to do the work and only we can do that in our domains. This is why people wanting physical healing are sometimes asked to do something their physical problem prevented them from doing; they initiate in their domain and God responds with the desired results.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does this fit the definition of a cooperative, interdependent relationship?

God’s Dependent Upon Us (page 90)

Page 91, top of the page

Excerpt:

“He created the physical realm as man’s domain, then Jesus restored our authority over that realm, as we saw in previous chapters. You and I have domains here and we’re to reign in life, not just wait to reign in heaven. This is the system Father created and He won’t trample on our authority or impose on our turf. Therefore, He responds when we invite Him to do something here and even then He works cooperatively with us.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does it affect your perspective of your relationship with Father to think that He honors the authority He gave you so much that He normally won’t enter your realm uninvited?

Page 91, paragraph: “Consider Jesus’ statement”

Excerpt:

“He told them – and us, by extension – to make disciples of all nations, baptize them and

teach them to obey everything He commanded them to do. Obviously, God could have performed all these tasks through angels, but that would have been an intrusion into our domain. This is our planet, so He delegated the tasks to us. Think about it: We have responsibility for bringing people into God's kingdom and making them disciples, disciplined followers of Jesus."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does this compare with most churches' emphasis on salvation?

Page 92, paragraph: "We'll be saved"

Excerpt: (Notice how many times the word "if" appears in this paragraph.)

We'll be saved *if* we confess Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts God raised Him from the dead. We're saved *if* we hold firmly to the gospel. We're holy in God's sight, without blemish and free from accusation *if* we continue in our faith. We are God's house, *if* we hold on to our courage and hope. We have come to share in Christ *if* we hold firmly to the confidence we had at the beginning. *If* we endure, we'll also reign with Him, but *if* we disown Him, He'll also disown us. *If* we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for our sins is left.

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How is salvation a cooperative, interdependent experience for both God and us?

Page 92, paragraph: "I believe"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"I believe we are eternally secure in our salvation, as long as we choose to be faithful to the end. No one else can remove us from our Father's grace, but we can turn away from it. The main point here is that we have a vital role in maintaining the salvation we receive through God's grace. He does His part, then it's up to us to do ours. If we fail to do our part, either through indifference or by choice, we forfeit what He freely gave us. This same principle applies in other areas as well, such as receiving blessings from God."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does this show that God honors the authority He gave us?

We're Interdependent With God (page 93)

Page 93, paragraph: "The's no question"

Excerpt:

"It may seem bizarre that God Almighty, the Creator, the only true God would choose to depend on us, but He does in fact rely on us to do what only we should do in our domains. He will not intervene on earth without an invitation from us."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What's one way we invite God to intervene on earth and why is that necessary?

Page 93, paragraph: “What He has given us to do”

Excerpt:

“Father’s purpose for our lives is always beyond our ability because it’s based on interdependence between Him and us.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Will God never ask us to do something we can do on our own?

Then how can His purpose for our lives exceed our ability?

Page 95, top of page, middle of the paragraph

Excerpt:

“And now, through the process of redemption from sin, God is not just restoring us to Adam’s original state – total dominion over his own realm – but elevating us to dominion in His realm.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does using our authority in our own realm prepare us to reign with God in His?

We Limit God (page 96)

Page 96, paragraph: “Our spiritual maturity”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“Our spiritual maturity affects what God can do through us and only He can produce worthwhile results, worthwhile by His standards, that is. Therefore, we need to focus on personal transformation and faithfulness, rather than achievement, and leave the results to Him.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How would we likely react if we remain spiritually immature but God does extraordinary things through us?

Why would God avoid that scenario?

Page 96, paragraph: “Sinful man’s fallen nature”

Excerpt:

“As believers, we no longer have a fallen or sinful nature because we’re spiritually born again, yet what we thought as sinners still prevents us from accepting or understanding what Father says if we haven’t adequately transformed our minds.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How effectively can we work cooperatively with God if we don’t transform our minds? Explain.

Page 97, paragraph: “He chose to make”

Excerpt:

“He chose to make Himself dependent upon us, to enter a partner relationship with us. For us to work effectively together, however, our thinking needs to be compatible with His –

our values, standards, perspective, motivations and such.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why is it counterproductive to think differently than God does?

Page 98, paragraph: “If what we do”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“If what we do violates spiritual laws and principles, it creates disturbance and interferes with the process and ultimately is unproductive. We must learn to work within the system He created because incompatible efforts are actually counterproductive.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does our knowledge of scripture help prevent us from being either unproductive or counterproductive?

Page 98, paragraph: “The fundamental issue”

Excerpt:

“The fundamental issue is compatibility, not origin. He wants us to produce compatible thoughts, for example, not just wait for His thoughts.... But as co-laborers, total partners, He wants us fully engaged in the creation, contemplation, evaluation and implementation of thoughts.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why would God want us to feel free to exchange ideas with Him?

It's Time to Stretch (page 99)

Page 100, paragraph: “Unfortunately”

Excerpt:

“Unfortunately, many of us consider Christianity almost a spectator event and are very passive in our relationship with Him. We might think He's everything and we're nothing. Or that only He can make things happen and our efforts are worthless works of the flesh.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why does our partnership with God become ineffective if we are passive or uninvolved?

Page 100, paragraph: “We see the same forcefulness”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“We see the same forcefulness in Paul's writings. He wrote that he worked harder than all the other apostles as God's grace enabled him. As God's energy worked powerfully in him, he labored and struggled to present everyone perfect in Christ. Yet he described himself as a jar of clay to show that this “all-surpassing power” is from God, not himself, and even boasted of his weakness for the same reason. He repeatedly wrote about God's power enabling us to do whatever is necessary. He encouraged Timothy to do his best to present himself to God as a workman who correctly handles the word of truth. No passivity there.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does today's church culture compare with the intensity described in this paragraph and what changes should we make, if any?

Working With God (page 101)

Page 102, paragraph: "We see a clear example"

Note:

This paragraph examines Nehemiah's response to enemies threatening people who were rebuilding the city walls. He had the people pray for God's protection, he posted guards and had half of the people ready to fight.

Excerpt:

"At first, we might think that praying to Father is sufficient if we have faith and we should completely trust Him to protect us. In some cases that might be the best approach, especially if faith is the issue or He tells us to do so. As we're discovering, however, it's generally better to do our part and trust Him to supplement our efforts and do what we cannot. Doing our part and trusting God aren't mutually exclusive; it's best to do both."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

In Chapter 3, we examined the principles of authority and personal initiative. If we're faced with dangerous threats as Nehemiah was, we might exercise our authority and initiative to protect our domains while trusting God to do what we cannot. Might that be an appropriate example of doing our part and trusting God to do his?

Page 102, paragraph: "Faith makes things"

Excerpt: (first and last sentences in paragraph)

"Faith makes things possible, but our perseverance and His intervention at the proper time make things happen.... Without Him, we *can* do nothing; but without us, He *will* do nothing."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How do these statements reflect our cooperative, interdependent relationship with God?

Page 103, paragraph: "Because He uses"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"Because He uses our work to develop us and teach us how to work with Him, and because our personal transformation is much more important than what we accomplish, our effort on projects has little value if it doesn't help us grow. The overall goal of everything He does with us is development of His nature in us, not just completion of a task. Growth is something we do, the result of intentional effort, not just something we happen to experience."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why is our personal transformation much more important than what we accomplish?

Personal Application (page 103)

What would it look like for you to cooperate with Father and reign in life – making decisions, exercising authority and making things happen with Him? In what ways could you reign more effectively in your current phase of life?

When you encounter a problem, how quickly do you turn to Father for help? What does this reveal about your level of dependence on Him?

Jesus was the exact representation of the Father and we're being transformed into the Lord's likeness, so we're to accurately represent the Father to the world, too. What are three specific areas in which you need to develop or mature so you can represent Him more effectively?

Jesus said the greatest commandment is for us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength. What would you be like if you did that? What problems might that create? What benefits would that produce? What are you willing to do to make that happen?

Chapter 6

Restful Work Habits

Part 1

Chapter 6 discusses some restful work habits we can develop that can radically change how we work and even how we think about it. We might add some of these practices to what we already do, but others may replace our current ones.

Today's scripture:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30)

May the Lord give us insight to the material we're about to discuss.

Possible Discussion Points

Page 107, paragraph: “Once we realize”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“Once we realize God wants to work cooperatively with us and bring all of His supernatural resources to bear on our comparatively mundane human problems, we should feel as if a huge weight lifted from our shoulders. We no longer have to have all the answers, provide all the resources or come up with all the bright ideas. In a sense, the pressure is off.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How should this perspective affect our responses to life's crises?

Praying Continually (page 108)

Page 108, paragraph: “We often think”

Excerpt:

“We often think of prayer as one-way communication, from us to God. In reality, prayer is to be a dialogue, not a monologue.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why must our prayer be a dialogue with God, based on the principles described in this book?

Page 109, paragraph: “We're to fix our eyes”

Excerpt:

“The greatest privilege any created being can have is to interact with the Creator, and to do that we must intentionally train ourselves to be preoccupied with Him. We can do that, but it requires an extended and intentional effort to radically change the way we think.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why is extended, intentional effort necessary for us to become preoccupied with God?

Page 109, paragraph: “We can be conscious”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“We can be conscious of the importance of courtesy and gratitude toward others while completely neglecting the uncountable ways God has blessed us. For example, if you were looking at a beautiful landscape, wouldn’t you think to yourself or tell the people with you how beautiful you think it is? ‘That’s absolutely beautiful. I love it! I could stay here and look at this forever.’ But would you think about saying that to the one Who created it? Would you thank Him for creating a planet that was beautiful even in its fallen state? Would you complement Him on His workmanship, His creative ability, His standard of excellence and the awesomeness of His power?”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How might expressing appreciation to God for everyday enjoyable experiences affect us?

Page 111, paragraph: “Those who processed”

Excerpt:

“Meditating on God, His kingdom, what He does, what He says to us and how much He loves us makes Him very real in our thinking and helps us focus on Him, making Him a top priority.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why is it important that we do this?

Listening to Him (page 112)

Page 113, paragraph: “In reality”

Excerpt:

“In reality, God speaks to us in a variety of ways and we might not initially recognize them as from Him: through the Bible, other believers, impressions, insight and many other ways.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If we accept the possibility that God speaks to us through other believers, impressions or insight, how should we respond to such things?

Page 113, paragraph: “The point is this”

Excerpt:

“God speaks with us and, if we want to work cooperatively with Him, we need to listen. Quieting ourselves before Father is important, waiting patiently while acknowledging His presence and attention. This improves our receptivity and awareness of what He’s doing and helps us learn to work with Him more effectively.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why does quieting ourselves before Father improve our receptivity and awareness of

what He's doing?

Conforming Our Thinking to His (page 113)

Page 113, paragraph: "If we're to be"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"If we're to be compatible with Father so we can work effectively with Him, we need to think the way He does. In general, we can't afford to think differently than He does, but especially as we learn to work with Him."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why is it important to think the way Father does?

Page 114, paragraph: "It's essential"

Excerpt: (last two sentences in paragraph)

"He will only work with us and through us to the extent our minds conform to His. So, it's critically important for us to renew our minds."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How effectively can you work with someone when you disagree on what can or should be done? Why is it important to think the same way?

Page 115, paragraph: "Humility is a godly character trait"

Excerpt:

"Humility is a godly character trait that causes us to consider ourselves less important than others; not unimportant or having no value, but less important than others. As we become increasingly humble, we'll become less concerned about our own feelings, getting what we want or receiving credit for any results we produce."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

List several reasons humility is critical to our cooperative, interdependent relationship with God.

Page 116, paragraph: "Our Lord is"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"Our Lord is a Servant-King and He's the firstborn or prototype for an entire race of servant-kings. We're to be like Him. We're to reign in life, using our spiritual authority to serve others. That'll be our role and purpose throughout eternity and it begins now in this life."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What are some specific ways we can use our spiritual authority to serve others?

Our Work (page 119)

Page 119, paragraph: "In one of his epistles"

Excerpt:

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Even when we’re working for men, why is it important to work as if we’re doing it for the Lord?

Page 119, paragraph: “If we reported”

Excerpt: (last sentence)

“In reality, God has established every authority that exists, including employers and supervisors, so whether we submit to or rebel against an authority, we do it to Him.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How might this perspective affect our attitude toward our supervisor or boss?

A Lighter Load (page 120)

Page 120, paragraph: “Come to me”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph, quotes Matt. 11:28-30)

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What does this imply about our cooperative, interdependent relationship with God?

Page 121, paragraph: “When we approach”

Excerpt:

“The goal is to develop a restful attitude and absolutely reject anxiety in any form.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What does anxiety indicate about our perspective and who we’re trusting?

How must we change our thinking to reject every form of anxiety?

Chapter 6

Restful Work Habits

Part 2

Today's scripture:

I can do all things in him who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:13)

Possible Discussion Points

Taking a Break (page 121)

Page 124, paragraph: "This more enlightened approach"

Excerpt:

"The psyche-oriented method totally shuts out inputs from our spirits, which are always active and have lots to offer, including inputs from Father. But we put our psyches in hyper-drive and never consider whether we're overlooking the obvious – that the best solution cannot be found by working our psyches harder. Taking a mental break and quieting ourselves allows us to become more aware of what Father and our spirits have to offer, which may include the solution we're looking for."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does taking a mental break allow us to become more aware of what's coming from our spirits or from Father?

Page 123, paragraph: "The hard part"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"The hard part is radically reprogramming our minds. Our former sinful natures were totally self-centered, so it was natural to trust our own judgment, to reject what others tell us because we want to do things our own way, to produce results ourselves so we can be proud of our accomplishment. That's completely natural, which is why so much effort is required to trust God."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does this relate to setting aside one restful and refreshing day a week, which is the topic of this section?

Focusing on What God's Called Us To Do (page 125)

Page 125, paragraph: "Our life purpose ..."

Excerpt:

"Our life purpose must dominate our perspective of life. Nothing else should matter to us, comparatively speaking."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How can we set realistic priorities for our discretionary time based on our life purpose and responsibilities in life?

Page 125, paragraph: “A key element”

Excerpt:

“As we’ve seen, Father considers our becoming like Jesus a top priority, so it’s possible for us to ‘obey’ Him yet fail because we refuse to mature spiritually. Serving others in humility and *agape* will always be essential to what Father gives us to do.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What’s the relationship between maturing spiritually and serving others in humility and *agape*, and how will this affect our obedience to Father?

Relying on Our Partner (page 126)

Page 126, paragraph: “So how can we ...”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“So how can we rely on Him? The counterintuitive part of this is that it does not require a lot of effort. In fact, the key is resting, which has nothing to do with the amount of effort we expend. Rest is primarily a state of mind, so we can work very hard and still rest in God.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How difficult is this and why?

Spending Time With Him (page 127)

Page 128, paragraph: “I work best ...”

Excerpt:

“I work best with a task list and I include ‘worship break’ as a recurrent task for every workday. This is a daily reminder of my priorities.

“These breaks are very helpful, since our goal is to make Him an active partner in everything we do and that requires we remain aware of His presence. It’s also a great way to refocus and refresh ourselves.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What impact would you expect a daily 10-minute worship break to have on your work performance?

Reducing Stress (page 128)

Page 129, paragraph: “Because stress preoccupies ...”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“Because stress preoccupies our psyches, it’s harder for us to sense what’s coming from our spirits, which hinders our ability to sense anything from God. Since our focus in this study has been working with Father, it’s essential that we address the stress in our lives so we can interact more effectively with Him as our Partner.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What are some ways stressful entertainment hinders our interaction with Father?

Working Hard (page 129)

Page 129, paragraph: “This brings us ...”

Excerpt:

“... the difference between working hard and assuming full responsibility for the results.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Who’s responsible for the results when we work hard the natural or worldly way?

How must we change our perspective so we can work hard yet trust God to produce the needed results?

Persevering (page 131)

Page 131, paragraph: “The Greek word”

Excerpt:

“The Greek word translated ‘sin’ literally refers to missing the mark, failing to hit a target or objective. Our objective is to work cooperatively with Father by doing our part and relying on Him to produce the needed results.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How can failing to persevere cause us to miss our objective of working cooperatively with Father?

What worldly or ungodly attitudes can cause us not to persevere?

Page 132, paragraph: “Why would it be ...”

Excerpt:

“Why would it be necessary for us to persevere if we rely on God for the results?”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What two reasons does the author give?

What additional reasons can you suggest?

Page 133, paragraph: “Perseverance’s greatest benefit ...”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“Perseverance’s greatest benefit is the change it produces in us, not the amount of work it completes. This is the exact opposite of worldly thinking. It’s important to realize Father’s primary goal is to develop us into the image of Jesus. The work we do and the things we experience in life provide the context for that to happen.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How *must* this affect our attitude toward our work and life experiences?

Personal Application (page 134)

List three of Father’s qualities that you especially appreciate, only three. Now list three things He’s done that you really admire, again, only three. Review these items several times

each day for the next five days and tell your Father how much you appreciate Him and admire what He's done. At the end of five days, consider how this has affected your thinking and made you more aware of Him.

Think of someone you encountered recently but don't know very well; maybe it is a work associate, store clerk or acquaintance. Consider how an attitude of humility and agape-love would affect what you think of that person. How would this attitude affect your level of respect for them? How might your interactions with them change? In what ways might you serve them? How inclined would you be to pray for them during your prayer time? When you have an opportunity, what kind things could you say to them?

When you take a work break during the day, how beneficial would it be to use that time to think about Father, express appreciation for His help and tell Him how important He is to you? What are some ways you could get away from the crowd and commotion to spend a few minutes with Him?

What forms of entertainment do you engage in that involve violence, shock, overstimulation or other stress-inducing experiences? How much easier could it be to sense Father's presence and interact with Him if you reduced or eliminated these? Would it be worth it? After an initial withdrawal, do you think you could enjoy less stressful forms of entertainment?

Chapter 7

Extraordinary Results

Part 1

Today's scripture:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this *all-surpassing power* is from God and not from us. (2 Cor. 4:7, emphasis added)

Possible Discussion Points

Beyond the Norm (page 136)

Page 136, paragraph: "God's plans"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"God's plans for us are extraordinary, too. He's restored our authority and dominion on earth, honors our choices and supports our initiative. He develops us from servants to *huios*/sons. His love for us motivates Him to commit to a cooperative, interdependent relationship with us and He intends to participate in everything we do, if we allow Him."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

List a few ways in which these plans are extraordinary, exceptional and remarkable.

Page 136, paragraph: "Our task ..."

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"Our task now is to realize that His nature, ability and intent haven't changed, and that He will continue being Himself as He works with us. When He gets involved, extraordinary things happen."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How can we let God "be himself" as we work with him?

Why can we expect extraordinary things to happen when God gets involved?

Beyond Our Ability (page 137)

Page 137, paragraph: "The destinies"

Excerpt (entire paragraph):

"The destinies God specified for us are 'impossible' – totally beyond our capacity – and absolutely require us to work with Him, using the abilities He gave us. He works with us at our level but constantly nudges us toward His."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why would God specify destinies for us that are totally beyond our capacity?

What does the fact that He works with us at our level reveal about His nature?

Page 137, paragraph: “When God leads ...”

Excerpt:

“When God leads us to do something significant, we can be sure it will fail without His direction and active involvement.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Assuming this is true, how does that affect your perspective of working with God?

Excellence (page 139)

Page 140, paragraph: “As Christians ...”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“As Christians, we need to declare war on the status quo, which is defined by the fallen world we live in, where the “norm” typically is the product of sinful humanity. Are you content with normal human results? Are you content with your current spiritual condition? Are you content with the current performance of the church community? If we’re content, we’re never motivated to grow or develop. On the other hand, if we see more in Scripture than we’ve experienced in life and become discontented, then we become willing to do whatever it takes to improve.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why should we be discontented with our current spiritual condition?

What should spiritual discontentment motivate us to do?

Page 140, paragraph: “As children of God ...”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“As children of God, created in His image and becoming increasingly like Him, we’re failing if we’re not producing results that reflect His excellence. Excellence is a description of His work and characteristic of everything He does.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

While working in partnership with God, how do we avoid being critical of ourselves if our results are less than excellent?

The Desired Results (page 141)

Page 141, paragraph: “One of the main points ...”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“One of the main points in this study is that we have a critical role in our partnership with God, but only He can produce the results He intends. Sometimes, only He knows what all the desired results are. We know what He shows us and what may be obvious to us, but He seldom tells us everything. Faith and trust are essential ingredients in our relationship with Him.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What are some reasons God seldom tells us everything about what He’s having us do?

Why might these reasons be important from His perspective?

Page 143, paragraph: “It’s far more important ...”

Excerpt:

“It’s far more important to be transformed than to do good work, but as we cooperate with Him, we’ll do both. This is a life-long process that produces ever-increasing results.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why will our work quality improve if we focus on transformation and developing godly character?

How will this affect our job performance?

Page 144, paragraph: “Even a casual reading ...”

Excerpt:

“Rather, we change and mature when we apply godly spiritual principles to overcome the enemy’s opposition, the normal difficulties caused by the world we live in, and our own self-centeredness wanting to maintain or regain control. We grow through effort and when we do our part, He produces the desired results.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What is our part in this process and what are the results God produces?

Godly Imagination (page 147)

Page 149, paragraph: “Faith and imagination”

Excerpt:

“Faith and imagination are interrelated. Imagination is the ability to see what doesn’t yet exist and faith is being certain of the existence of something we don’t yet see with our eyes. Imagination is a key to faith because it allows us to see beyond our circumstances.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why is it important to use our imagination to visualize God solving our problem instead of focusing on the problem itself?

Page 150, paragraph: “It’s essential ...”

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

“It’s essential that we use our imagination while working with God. If we can’t visualize ourselves working with Him and producing extraordinary results, we likely will never get beyond mediocrity — the world’s level. We must exercise faith to produce excellence and imagination is a key to faith.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How can we use our imagination effectively in a work situation?

Why is imagination a key to faith?

Page 151, paragraph: “In the Genesis account”

Excerpt:

“Notice that God didn’t destroy or hinder their imagination, their ability to dream up such a project. Rather, He destroyed their unity so they couldn’t work together. The problem wasn’t their imagination, but what they were trying to do with it.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What does this reveal about how much God values our imagination?

How should this affect our perspective of it?

Chapter 7

Extraordinary Results

Part 2

Today's scripture:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.... You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion. (2 Cor. 9:8, 11)

These statements were written to believers being asked to give generously to meet a need; they don't apply to every believer in every situation. However, what do these statements reveal about God's likely response when we choose to work with him?

Possible Discussion Points

Elastic Thinking (page 152)

Page 153, paragraph: "The term 'elastic thinking'"

Excerpt:

"The term 'elastic thinking' represents our need to stretch our thinking, but it also implies a limit to our stretching ability. Nothing in our human experience can stretch indefinitely, yet God will work with us to keep stretching our thinking incrementally, a little more each time, and we'll be amazed at how far He'll stretch us."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine," then what would be the result if we refuse to stretch our thinking?

Page 154, paragraph: "Until now ..."

Excerpt:

"Until now, we've judged what's reasonable by what happens in our human culture and by our personal experience. That makes it very difficult to comprehend what God intends to do, not to mention that He wants us to participate in it.... We must practice elastic thinking because His ways are extraordinary and we have no previous experiences to help us understand them."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If we don't use our godly imagination to stretch our thinking, how much do we limit God?

D3 (page 155)

Page 156, paragraph: "Before I provide details"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"Before I provide details about the D3, let me remind you that our ideas are important to

God. Not because He needs our ideas, but because He loves us so much that what we think is important to Him. While He's already aware of our thoughts and desires, He honors us by providing time for us to express ourselves. Also, this is our domain, so it's totally appropriate for Him to consider what we say about what should happen here. Remember: our cooperative, interdependent relationship with God is bidirectional. We each present who we are, what we think and what we're able to do and then rely on the other to do the same."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How is this different from your original perspective or belief about your relationship with God?

How does this insight affect your perspective of God?

Page 158, paragraph: "This doesn't mean ..."

Excerpt:

"I've learned it's not as important to know who had a thought first — either Father or me — as it is to know whether my thoughts are compatible with His. Compatibility is much more important than origin."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why does the issue of compatibility free us to present our own ideas to Father?

True Success (page 159)

Page 160, paragraph: "From what we see"

Excerpt:

"Our primary goal must be personal transformation rather than achievement, because our spiritual condition affects what God can do through us. Becoming like Christ and fulfilling our destiny are inseparable."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

In what ways does our spiritual immaturity affect what God can do through us?

Why can we only fulfill our destiny if we become like Christ?

Page 161, paragraph: "We thrive when"

Excerpt: (entire paragraph)

"We thrive when we serve God with undivided affection and commitment, because He then supplies everything we need. If that's our perspective and we apply what we learned about working with Him, then we have absolutely nothing to worry about, regardless of what seems to happen."

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

If we're faithful to do our part and trust God to produce the desired results, what can our attitude be when things don't happen the way we expect?

The Importance of Failure (page 162)

Page 163, paragraph: “Most people consider”

Excerpt:

“Most people consider success and failure as opposites, but they are actually both products of the same process. Negative results might mean that our current approach is not working and we need to try another one. We learn by trial and error, not by trial and rightness. If we did things correctly every time, we’d never have to change direction. And we’d never grow.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

What are some ways mistakes and failure help us develop godly character?

Page 164, paragraph: “Success and failure”

Excerpt:

“Success is good, but failure and mistakes are invaluable if we learn from them. For one thing, they benefit us by reducing our self-confidence and increasing our reliance upon God.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How must this affect our definition of success and our response to alleged failure?

The Big Picture (page 164)

Page 165, paragraph: “Father wants us”

Excerpt:

“Father wants us to look and be like Him so we can delight in Who He is, share in all He has and participate in all He does. He wants us to have experiences similar to His so we can relate to Him, see things from His perspective, participate in what He does and experience the satisfaction and fulfillment of doing so.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

Why must we be like Father to delight in Who He is?

Why must we be like Him to share in all He has?

To participate in all He does?

Page 166, paragraph: “We’re to live”

Excerpt:

“We’re not doing things *for* Him; we’re working *with* Him.”

Any comments or questions?

Alternate questions:

How does this change your perspective?

Personal Application (page 166)

Use your imagination to form a mental image of yourself talking with someone who has a major problem. Now visualize God’s power flowing from heaven through your words and

actions into that person and totally resolving their problem. In what ways do you think this image accurately represents God's intent?

How did God stretch the way you thought in the past and what's your opinion of the results? What are you experiencing in this phase of your life that's challenging your thinking even more? Can you see potential benefits?

Think of something you did in the past that seemed like an absolute failure. What did you learn from the experience? How did your perspective, values or priorities change as a result? In what positive ways did it affect your relationship with God? Can you identify ways it helped you grow stronger or more mature? Can you now see that experience as a partial success, rather than a total failure?