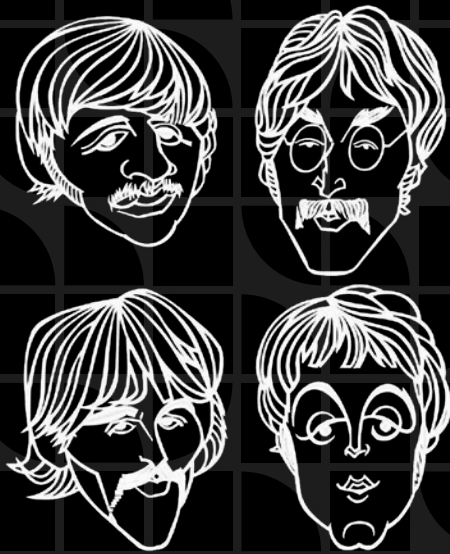


HELP!

GETTING OUT OF WHAT YOU GOT INTO

A Six-Week Study



LEADER INTRO:

Help! I need somebody! That might be the cry of your heart right now as you think about the monumental task of leading a Connect Group this semester. The good news is, you were made for this, and you will be part of the Help! that those in your Connect Group will need. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for stepping out to do something that will make a difference in the lives of people. You are facilitating relationships that will be an answer to prayer for some, and a blessing to all. You're helping people to grow stronger everyday, and live in the freedom God created us for.

That thirst for freedom is common to everyone. We all have things in our lives that have attached themselves to us; things we would love to get out of. **We need Help!** The Bible has given us some direction on how to shed those unwanted attachments that keep us feeling stuck. That's what this series is all about.

Each week we'll load you up with some great questions that should stir up good conversation. **We'll set you up to Help!** people interact with the concepts from the weekend message series. Remember that this might be someone's first experience in a Group. Try to remember to set up your questions thoughtfully, and feel free to adjust the content to serve the people in the room.

At the end of each week's guide, you'll see a section called "An Extra Help!ng". These are additional points in Scripture that can drill down a bit deeper, and allow for a few more angles of conversation to be discovered. If you've got the time and momentum, give it a try. **Thanks again for your Help!**



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HELP! - WEEK 1

Read aloud: 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Pray that God would give us the ability to hear what the Scripture is saying to us, and that we would be able to apply spiritual solutions to our spiritual challenges. Thank Him for the opportunity to grow together.

Let's talk about getting out of stuff. As we go through life, we're always getting into things: new hobbies, a great movie, a fun new gadget for the kitchen. Getting into stuff is kind of fun, but then something turns, and stuff starts to get into us. It becomes a heavy weight that we carry around, and it just doesn't seem like we can get out of it.

• When was the last time you started something new that wound up owning you?

(You can start by sharing a story of your own. That will give the Group a couple minutes to think.)

That passage of Scripture from 2 Corinthians has a key word at the end of it. Strongholds are areas of our lives where we're living by something that's not true. We need Help! to get those strongholds out of our lives, but the Scripture says that it's spiritual weapons that Help! get us out.

• Have you ever experienced a stronghold in your life? In other words, do you remember making decisions and directing your life based on false information?

• What are some spiritual weapons that you have found useful in clearing out some of the strongholds in your life?

• What's in your life right now that just feels like a heavy weight? Maybe it feels like you can't seem to get out of it.

One of the things that can keep us feeling stuck is unfulfilled expectations. When things don't go the way we think they should, sometimes we dig in our heels and become bitter. Other times, it's our inability or unwillingness to meet someone else's expectations. Let's have a little fun with it.

- **When you go out for a nice dinner, what are your expectations?**
- **What recent expectations did you have that were not met, and how did you deal with it?**
- **How have you learned to get out of unfulfilled expectations without becoming bitter?**

There's a Scripture in Proverbs that says, *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick."* God gives us hope, but when that hope goes a long time without being realized, it can become a disappointment.

- **What hopes have you carried around for a long, long time?**
- **What hopes have become a disappointment for you?**
- **What are some ways you've been able to restore hope in your life?**

I want to challenge us this week to evaluate the expectations we have that are still hanging out there unfulfilled, and bring them to God in prayer. Allow Him to sort out which ones you need to let go, and which ones need to have hope restored. Only He can do it!

AN EXTRA HELPING:

Have someone in your group read aloud: Jeremiah 6:14 NIV.

*They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious.
'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace.*

Who has never been offended? Who has never experienced pain? Pain is a part of life, and it is unavoidable. Whether the pain has been self-inflicted or others-inflicted, unhealed pain is something that we just have to get out of.

- **When you get hurt, do you tend to downplay it, stuff it, or express it? Why?**
- **What kind of pressure do you feel when you've been hurt by someone else?**

One of the Bible's strategies for coping with hurt and pain is to speak the truth in love. It can take a lot of courage to speak up, and address a hurtful situation.

- **Why do you think it is so difficult to talk about it when we've been hurt?**
- **When you've hurt someone, how do you keep the guilt and shame from sticking to you?**

This week, why don't we prink (pray and think) about addressing some of the unresolved pain we've been carrying around. Maybe we need to have a "truth in love" kind of conversation.





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HELP! - WEEK 2

Read aloud 2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV:

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Pray that God would open our eyes to the things that we say we know and believe, but that don't show up in our day-to-day lives. Ask for the Help! we need to make God's truth the driving force of all that we say and do.

This week's session is all about three statements. They are fundamental to understanding who God is, and for living life as a believer and follower of Jesus. They are so basic that sometimes we move on to other things, and lose sight of what's most important. Today, we're going to really reflect on each statement, and discuss our experiences with each one.

The first idea is that God has always loved me. If you grew up in church, this could have been the first worship song you ever learned: Jesus loves me this I know; for the Bible tells me so.

- **When were you first exposed to the truth that God loves you?**

(You might share your story first to give your Group a few minutes to remember)

- **Does this truth, that God loves you, ever cross your mind as you're going through your daily life? Why or why not?**

- **What kind of doubts tend to creep in that compete with the truth that God has always loved you?**

The second fundamental thing we have to know is that God can free me.

God's power is bigger than the power of whatever has attached itself to you.

- **Where in your life have you experienced the power of God to set you free?**

- **In what areas of your life do you struggle to believe and trust God for freedom? Why?**

Truth #3 is that God will restore me. The idea of being restored means that something is put back to its original state. For us, that means that we can be the

way God created us no matter how far we've drifted away.

- **Does anyone have a story of God restoring something that you thought was long gone?**
- **In what areas of your life have you lost confidence in God's ability or willingness to restore?**

We all have doubts that come up especially in areas we've struggled with for a long time; concerns about God's ability or even interest in helping us. It's time for us to oppose the lies of the enemy with the truth that comes from God. This week, let's commit to taking captive every thought that is opposed to one of these three truths, and making it align with what God says: That He's always loved us, that He can free us, and that He will restore us.

AN EXTRA HELPING:

Read aloud Romans 8:1-2 MSG.

With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.

That's good news. We all have a new power, God's power in operation inside of us. If we want to keep that power winning out over our flesh, we have to feed it. What we consume, think about, what has our attention either feeds our spirit or our flesh.

- **What things have your attention right now that feed your spirit?**
- **What things are you consuming that are feeding your flesh?**
- **Where do you need to shift your attention to ensure that the new power of God's Spirit is the only thing shaping and guiding you?**

Let's pray, and ask God to show us some areas in our lives where we're missing out on His power because we're too focused on feeding our flesh.



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HELP! - WEEK 3

Read aloud Genesis 11:27-32

This is the account of Terah's family line.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth...Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

Pray that God would help us to move through the pain and hurt that happens in our lives, and that we don't get stuck in it. Ask for the Help! we need to heal from relational hurt. Thank Him that His love for us follows us through every situation.

That story in Genesis about Terah is a sad one. Terah's youngest son dies, and as the family moves toward God's promised future for them, they wind up settling in a town with a similar name. Harran means a place of passionate anger. They settle there, and Terah dies never having reached God's Promised Land. It leaves us with the sense that he never recovered from the pain that came from losing his child.

Whatever our pain comes from, we're meant to move through it toward the promises of God, but sometimes we get stuck.

• What's one place your family has lived that you're glad you've moved on from?

(You might share your story first to give your Group a few minutes to think)

• What's one painful experience that you're grateful you've been able to move on from?

• Is there an experience you've been through that you're still a little bit stuck in?

Relational pain is particularly difficult to navigate because it sticks to us, and tries to define us. It sometimes shapes our behaviors, our decision-making and even damages our other relationships.

• What are some poor decisions that you made because something or someone hurt you?

• **Which of your relationships look different than they could because of pain from another relationship?**

• When we get hurt in a relationship, it can change our disposition toward others. Our attitudes, words and motives can all start to take on a different shape. Sometimes we even become defensive.

• **Who in your life seems to be quickly defensive? Do you think it has anything to do with past hurt?**

• **What are your defensive "triggers"? When can people expect you to react in a defensive way?**

This week, let's take steps to get out of the relational pain that is shaping our responses, our decisions and our other relationships. Give those things to God, and ask for Him to Help!

AN EXTRA HELPING:

Have someone read aloud Matthew 18:21-22 NIV

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Releasing people from the hurt that we feel because of what they said or did is key to the freedom God wants for us all.

• **Why do you feel like it's so difficult to let someone off the hook?**

• **What have you learned about forgiveness that has helped you overcome relational pain?**

• **Who is still on the hook for you right now? What are you willing to do to release them?**

Whoever it is that has you stuck, let's take a step this week, and release them. It doesn't mean we won't use boundaries, or create some separation, but let's let them off the hook, so we ourselves can be free.



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HELP! - WEEK 4

Read aloud Psalm 32:1-5 NLT:

Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

Pray over your Connect Group. Pray that God would begin to reveal His character. Ask Him for the Help! to get out of the guilt that has hung heavy over us for so long, and to realize how gracious and kind He really is.

Let's just start with a really honest, transparent statement. We've all messed up. Can we agree on that? And many of us, after we messed up, continued to mess up by carrying around the guilt that comes after the mistake.

God wants to set us free from the heavy burden of guilt and shame that we carry sometimes.

• **What parts of your life bring about the most feelings of regret and guilt?**

(Share your thoughts first to give your Group a few minutes to process)

The Psalm we read together is written by David. He was a warrior, a king, a musician and a man after God's own heart. He writes this Psalm following a personal failure. He had an affair with another man's wife, and then had the man killed to cover it up. I hope we can start by all agreeing, "That's pretty bad."

• **What do you think about David knowing that he had made such horrible decisions?**

• **Why do you think he continued to attract God's favor in his life?**

David didn't immediately come clean. His behavior was called out by a prophet of God. I think we can agree that being found out seems to make it worse, right?

- **When you make a mistake, are you quick to come clean, or are you more likely to be found out?**
- **What have you learned in your life about what to do after you've messed up?**

The Scripture we read also talks about "complete honesty."

- **Why do you think we omit or edit the details of a story?**
- **What do you think it means to be completely honest?**

There's an impulse on the inside of us to hide at some level when we know we've done the wrong thing. What if we focused this week on intentionally not hiding; bringing the details of our behavior into the light, and presenting them before a loving God?

AN EXTRA HELPING:

Read aloud Genesis 3:6-8 NLT

...So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too... they suddenly felt shame...When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees.

The first story of people in the Bible involves sin, guilt and shame. It seems to be the framing story of God in relationship to people.

- **What are the patterns of sin, guilt and shame that have impacted your life?**
- **How do you imagine God when you feel guilty? Is He disappointed? Is He angry?**
- **When you know that God's desire is to be close to us, and that Jesus' life and death guarantees that it can happen, how does that change your perspective on guilt and shame?**

What are you willing to do to get out of a pattern of guilt? Think about what would have to change. Perhaps it is our point of view about God? Maybe increased attention to God's forgiveness and mercy? Whatever it is, let's take a step this week to shake off the guilt that weighs us down.



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HELP! - WEEK 5

Read aloud Matthew 6:14-15 ESV:

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Pray that God would show us all the importance of forgiveness. Ask Him to show us any anger or bitterness that is shaping and guiding us, and give us the Help! we need to get out of it.

Learning to forgive others is often the hardest thing about following Jesus. The only thing harder, is carrying around the heavy weight of unforgiveness. We think sometimes that forgiving someone takes the pressure off of them, and absolves them of the wrong thing they did.

- **Why do you think it's so important to us that others feel the consequences of their actions?**
- **Why do we believe sometimes that forgiveness removes the consequences?**

The impulse to "get even" is hard to overcome. There's something on the inside of us that longs to settle the score. We want revenge.

- **Why do you think revenge tends to escalate?**

We know that revenge can take a lot of different forms: Exclusion, snide comments, treating people poorly or ignoring them completely.

- **What brand of revenge is your go to?**

(This is a good spot to share yours first. It may disarm folks a little bit, and Help! them to open up)

There are behaviors as a society that we all consider offensive: Violence toward children, unwanted sexual pressure, etc. But we also have a personal "code of conduct"; things that are really offensive specifically to us. Maybe it's returning things that you borrowed better than you found them, or cleaning up after yourself. We hold ourselves and others to this code, and we take offense when people cross our line.

• **What are some things in your personal code of conduct that make it hard to forgive someone when they cross your line?**

• **What would it look like for you to release someone from your code of conduct?**

The goal of forgiveness is to get out of the cycle of behavior that is determined by something other than God's Spirit. We release offense because it sets us free. Which offense will you release?

AN EXTRA HELPING:

Read aloud Romans 12:17-19 NIV

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Let's drill in a little bit on revenge. According to this Scripture, revenge and wrath belong to God. So when we take revenge, we're taking something that belongs to God.

• **Why does God reserve revenge for Himself?**

• **What other examples can you think of in Scripture where people take something that God has reserved for Himself?**

• **Why do you think people take things that God didn't intend for them to have?**

From Genesis on, man has been tempted to take what belongs only to God. He has given us so much, but withheld a few things. He has given us the gift of forgiveness, but withheld revenge. The challenge this week for all of us is to look at all the incredible things that God has given us, and resist the temptation to pick up what He has not.



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HELP! - WEEK 6

Read aloud Psalm 51:1-2, 17 NIV:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

Lead your Connect Group in prayer. Pray that God would open us up to see His truth today. Thank Him for cleansing us of our sin, and ask Him to show us more and more of who He is.

As we wrap up our study, let's really lean into the kind of heart and attitude that can Help! us to stay free, and not pick up more baggage. That heart is humility.

- **What do you think of when you hear the word humility?**
- **What are some great examples of humility that you've witnessed?**
- **What have you found in your life that helps you to pursue humility?**

Our Scripture points to the reason for our humility. It's about Him; not us. With our eyes focused on the love and compassion of God, our response will be to trust Him.

- **What gets in the way of seeing the love and compassion of God?**

The Bible story of Adam and Eve tells us that they hid from the presence of God because of their feelings of guilt after disobeying God.

- **In what ways do you find yourself hiding from the love and compassion of God?**
- **If you have felt the presence of God before, what did it feel like to you?**
- **What does humility have to do with being in the presence of God?**

The challenge in front of us is that we would be completely exposed to the presence of God; welcoming Him to bring power, mercy, love and compassion to us and through us.

AN EXTRA HELPING:

Read aloud Matthew 9:13 ESV

Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Sometimes we mistakenly think God needs something from us. We say things like, "We're the hands and feet of Jesus," or "We advance the Kingdom of God." Those statements are true, but they leave us with the idea that what God wants from us is our effort and strength.

What happens to us when we start to think that God needs us?

- **What is in your life that reminds you of how much you need God?**
- **Are there any areas of your life right now that depend on you instead of God?**

We experience Godly humility in our lives when we depend on Him. Humility is also the key to staying out of what we tend to get ourselves into. Less of me; more of Him. We need His Help! to get free and to stay free!

