THE STORY
SESSION 21 – LEADER GUIDE

Before the Meeting

- Don’t forget to RSVP for an Influencer Event if you haven’t yet! Here is the link: www.newhopechurch.tv/VIP
- Contact group members and tell them how excited you are about their commitment to CARE Group.
- Encourage group members to read pages 291-304 from The Story Bible.
- Remind group members to bring their Participant Guide, and their Bibles!
- Walk through the material on your own prior to the meeting.

Leading the Discussion - Session 21

Introduction:

- Ask for a volunteer to read the introductory paragraphs about working side-by-side with God.

Talk About It:

- Read the question and encourage a response from several members in the group. Or, if you have a lot of people, have members turn to their neighbor to discuss the question.
- Also, make sure you are reading the Scripture passages from the Bible; we want to encourage group members to read their Bible.

DVD Teaching Notes:

- Provide pens so group members can take notes as needed.
- Play Session 21 from the DVD (time = 10:45)

DVD Discussion:

- It’s hard to believe we are 21 weeks into the Story! It’s been a great and exciting series. This session God unleashes his plan to take his people from “SLAVERY-to-FREEDOM!” In the Lower Story it seems as though all is lost, and God’s people will always be in captivity, but in the Upper Story God is working to use the Persian king to free his people!

1. Ezra had devoted himself to studying God’s word and following what it teaches (Ezra 7:1-10; The Story, pp.291-292). How did Ezra’s commitment to God’s word shape his life and ministry?
   - Hebrews 4:12 (NIV) teaches us the Bible is God’s word. It says, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”
Some common answers might be: 1. “It helped him to know the difference between what God did, and did not want.” 2. “It helped him to obedient.” Or 3. “God blessed him for it, and he had favor with the King.”

Ezra’s life was transformed by his commitment to studying God’s word. This may be a good time to ask members about their commitment to studying God’s word- maybe share a story of how God has changed you because of your commitment to studying the Bible.

Why is it so important that we do more than just know the content of the Bible but actually obey what the Bible teaches?

- Obedience is proof our faith. When we do what the Bible says, “It shows how much we love God.”

2. Randy noted that throughout The Story God calls his people to (1) refocus on God; (2) recenter on his plan for our lives; (3) remember who God is; and (4) rebuild our relationship with him. Tell about what you have learned in the past 20 weeks about one of these four themes.

- This is a very important question! It will help members of your group to see how God’s word is changing them. Please encourage everyone to share his or her thoughts!
- You may need to kick it off, but don’t be afraid of silence; it just means people are thinking about what they are going to say.

3. God worked through king Artaxerxes to send the exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and reestablish worship (Ezra 7:11-28; The Story, pp. 293-294). How have you seen God use surprising people and circumstances to accomplish his will in the world?

- Encourage someone to read Romans 8:28 “We know God works ALL things out for the good…” Remind your group God can use anyone, or circumstance for the good of his people.
- Even in Ezra’s time the Jewish people we’re sent with “gifts, money, and the blessing of the Persian king Artaxerxes!” That’s incredible! God took the very empire, which had imprisoned them, to bless them and gave them freedom- encourage your group God can do the same in their lives! He can take their bad situation (troubled marriage, health problems, financial crisis, etc.) and make it into something amazing if we would just trust, and be obedient to his word!

4. Nehemiah was a man of prayer (Nehemiah 1, 4, 6; The Story, pp. 294-299). What situations led Nehemiah to pray, and what do we learn from his example?

- 1. When he discovered the walls of Jerusalem were broken and the gate burned to the ground, 2. When the people faced opposition to rebuilding the walls, 3. When they were half-way completed with the wall, and 4. When false reports of a potential Jewish revolt spread among the nations and Nehemiah was getting tired.
• From Nehemiah we observe God answers prayers; our first response should be to consult with God, and then get wise counsel.

5. Nehemiah not only prayed hard, but he worked hard. How do you see this balance in Nehemiah’s life? What is the danger of praying hard, but not working hard? What are some possible consequences of working hard, but forgetting to pray?
• You may have to take the lead on this question, but it should sound something like this. “Nehemiah understood faith to be both, hearing and doing.” Romans 10:17 (NIV) says, “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”
• If we pray hard, but never do anything we pray in vain; prayer moves the heart of God, and God clears the way for us to accomplish his will. Proverbs 3:5-6 teaches by praying and trusting, “God directs our steps.”
• Remember, “You need not only pray- you need to move!”
• This may be a great opportunity to tell your group an example from you own life how you acted before praying, and how it turned out.

6. As the people we’re seeking to rebuild their relationship with God they got very serious about reading the Bible. They even had a team of people to help everyone understand the meaning of God’s Word. In what ways can we help the next generation to learn to know, love, and follow the teachings of the Bible (in our homes and churches)?
• You may have answers like: 1. Reading the Bible to our family each day. 2. Devoting ourselves to praying for the next generation. 3. Model godly behavior in our workplace. 4. Continuing to attend church or CARE Group.
• Whatever your group comes up with challenge them to actually put into practice! Tell them we will all follow up with each other to see how it’s going!

7. Malachi was the last prophet of the Old Testament and this movement of The Story. He challenged the people to give God their first, and their best, not their last and left overs (Malachi 1:6-10; 3:6-12; The Story, pp. 302-304). What are some ways we give God our leftovers rather than our first and best?
• This is one of the most important questions of this study! You may need to start this, but encourage everyone to share.
• You may hear answers like: “Our time- we often neglect God for the ball game” “Our finances-we often give God what’s left over instead of our 1st fruits” “Our families- we often skip church for our children’s activities.”
8. When the people of God heard the Word of God read, and had it explained to them, they moved into action. In this case, they reestablished the feast of tabernacles. Tell of a time you read the Bible and we’re quickly moved to action because of what God taught you?

- The Feast of tabernacles was a time of celebration, and remembering the 40 years the Hebrew people lived in the dessert in tents. During this time God provided shelter, food, and safety for them.
- Really challenge your group to talk about this (maybe sub-group into gender friendly groups).
- You can also ask this question a different way: *What do you believe God has told you to do in His Word that you are not doing? What is holding you back?*

9. Read movement 1-5 of The Story (pp. 10-11 of the participants guide). How do these 5 movements all connect to reveal God’s love for us?

- Everyone may have different answers, but it should sound something like this, “God never gave up on his people. No matter how far off course they went God created a plan to bring them home; God’s love for his people is unstoppable.”

**Closing Prayer:**

- Review the 3 points of the closing prayer and ask group members to choose 1 from the list. Ask, “*Looking at the list, how can I pray for you?*”
- Once everyone has shared, say a closing prayer.

**Between Sessions:**

- Encourage group members to reflect on what they heard this week, and challenge them to take an action. Tell them to “take 15 minutes each day to read your Bible, and 5 minutes a day to pray.” Watch how God will change, and grow you!
- Remind group members to review the exercises before the next meeting.
- Go over where and when the next group gathering will take place.
- Clean up and go home.