

# D E S P E R A T I O N

navigating our way to dependence



DISCUSSION GUIDE



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# INTRODUCTION

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## **DESPERATION AS A VIRTUE TOWARDS DEPENDENCE ON GOD**

We live in a culture where desperation is not welcome. Just hearing the word can instill fear, anxiety, inadequacy, and discomfort. Our culture sees desperation as a lack of comfort, and often we try to ease our worried minds with different forms of security. As a result, we often don't feel desperate until we lack our daily comforts. In reality, we should be most desperate for what is most important in our lives. If God is most important, we should always be in a spirit of desperation.

Desperation clarifies our position before our Holy God. It emphasizes our daily need for Him, and opens the door to an intense season of spiritual growth. Some seasons of life can be hard, and it is through wrestling with God that we receive the blessing of His grace. Rather than resisting or tolerating desperation, we should cultivate it. We should embrace the hard but helpful gift of coming to the end of ourselves. The sooner we learn that we need God's help, the better.

As believers in Christ, spiritual desperation and a conviction of our inadequacy are not only preferable, but critical. They help us abide in God, become more like Him, and experience true contentment. In Christ, we are called to live differently. Part of living "differently" means recognizing our power does not come from us, but from God. Therefore, our answers will not originate from our careful, meticulous planning, but from God—the One who created us, who knows us best, and who provides all that we need.

Desperation is often the bridge between our cries and the answer. It closes the gap and draws us nearer to the God who answers. Our prayers display our view of desperation and often are the place where God meets us in our desperation. We try to do things ourselves, but we really need to be relying on God. Where self-sufficiency resides as our go-to manner, desperation cries foul. Where our hearts swell with the desire for total understanding, desperation answers with a greater find: that of an intimacy with Christ. The goal of desperation is not the cry of a new experience or a greater comfort.

The goal of desperation is, quite simply, more of God.

This study guide is made up of four weekly sections:

## **1. DISCUSSIONS**

Each week has groupings of questions that fit well together. These groupings are called “discussions.” They are designed to help you get into God’s Word, apply the sermon, and guide your group discussion. Use the discussions, or questions, that fit best with your group’s situation or needs. Beyond your Small Group, these questions can also be used in the context of a Bible study or a discipleship relationship.

## **2. FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS**

These questions were created specifically with families in mind and we hope they’ll be useful in facilitating family discussion (maybe around the dinner table, or another family devotional time). These questions are applicable for all ages, including young children. We pray these bless you as you disciple your family.

## **3. APPLICATION**

Each week, we’ve suggested some applications. Whether you use these applications or find other ways to respond, our hope is that you intentionally act on and obey God’s Word.

## **4. PRAYER**

Prayer is our way of communicating our desperation to God. To help strengthen your prayer life, we have included a weekly prayer section for both group and personal prayer.

**DISCUSSION 1**

Dig into the text and discuss how Jacob wrestled with God.

1. Jacob is desperate for God to bless him. Have you ever experienced this type of desperation?
2. Jacob was given a limp, yet he wouldn't let go of God until God blessed him. Why do you think Jacob wanted to be blessed so badly, even after receiving a limp?
3. Read v. 30 again. Why is it important to remember God's character as we wrestle with Him in desperation?

**DISCUSSION 2**

The concept of wrestling with God closely links with the idea of desperation.

1. Do you think that we, as Christians, should wrestle with God like Jacob did?
2. What are some examples of sinful ways that we bring our desires to the Lord?
3. Share a time that you wrestled with God. What was going on in your heart?
4. Why might God allow us to wrestle with Him before we receive the blessing that He gives?

**DISCUSSION 3**

Prayer.

1. Read Matt. 26:36-39. What are some things that we can learn from Jesus's prayer to the Father? How does this example encourage us to live with desperation?
2. Read 2 Cor. 12:6-10. Why did Paul say God didn't answer his request? Why might this be difficult for some of us to hear?
3. Prayer is often seen as merely a way to get what we want from God. What are some of the benefits that come from prayer, even when we don't get what we want?

## DISCUSSION 4

Community and wrestling.

1. Read Hebrews 3:12-14. Having community with other believers is one way we can fight against the deceitfulness of sin. How would you describe your experience within Christian community?
2. Why might community be essential as you wrestle with God in desperation?
3. Are you in a season where you feel desperate to know more of God? How might your Small Group or community of believers help you cultivate a heart of desperation for the things of God?

## FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

1. How can wrestling with God be a good thing?
2. What are some things that you are wrestling with God about? Share these. As you feel led, pray for one another.
3. How does knowing God's character (His sovereignty, immanence, love, mercy, etc.) comfort us in times of desperation? How does God Himself actually help us in times of desperation? Talk as a family about how you can remember these truths during the next trial you experience.
4. Read Matt. 26:36-39. What can we learn about desperation through the model Jesus gives us in this passage?

## APPLICATION

1. Choose one thing to fast from this week. That can be food, entertainment, social media, etc. Make sure it's something that will be difficult to give up. Then, replace that thing with praying and reading the Word.
2. Outside of your normal Small Group meeting, commit to an intentional time of prayer. Try to spend at least an hour praying as the Lord leads you.

## PRAYER

**Group:** Pray that God reveals some ways that your group can grow together in deeper community.

**Personal:** Pray that God would give you a better biblical understanding of what it means to wrestle with Him, and that He would show you how you can be more dependent on Him than on your circumstances.

## **SELF-SUFFICIENCY: THE BARRIER OF DESPERATION**

James 4:1-10

### **DISCUSSION 1**

James says, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” This is the opposite of what a self-sufficient person does. It is easy to depend on ourselves and selfishly try to meet our own need.

1. How do you think God can use trials, conflict, or suffering to accomplish what He wants in our lives?
2. Take a minute to examine some of the root sources of your desires. How many of them are grounded in God and His Word? How many are born out of your own selfish desires that James 4 speaks of?
3. How do you see the message of self-sufficiency communicated in the news, the media, and the workplace?

### **DISCUSSION 2**

Self-sufficiency is placing our whole dependence and trust in what we bring to the table instead of putting our hope in God.

1. What can you pull out of this week’s passage that motivates you to live with a greater desperation for God? What convinces you that you need to be more desperate?
2. Think of some of the large responsibilities you have or will have in the future, such as a home project, shepherding your children, or navigating a difficult relationship. How much do you depend on your own abilities? How much do you depend on God’s ability?
3. Read 1 Cor. 4:7, James 1:17, John 3:30, Matt. 7:11, and Acts 17:28. How can these passages help us become less self-sufficient?

### **DISCUSSION 3**

The key to exaltation is humility—the way up is actually down.

1. What are some areas in your life where you are actively humbling yourself? What are some areas where you are exalting yourself, focusing on yourself, or preferring yourself?
2. The problem within us is literally ourselves. Our desires get us into trouble all the time. How can you begin to submit your desires to God, so that He would form those desires more into His desires (Read Ps. 37:4-5)?

## DISCUSSION 3 (CONTINUED)

3. Self-sufficiency is putting our understanding, desires, wisdom, and abilities above all. How do these Scriptures address self-sufficiency: Prov. 3:5-6, Isa. 5:21, Prov. 26:12, 2 Cor. 3:5, John 15:5, Job 38 & 39?

## FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

1. How can someone be dependent on God every day? (Read Rom. 11:36)?
2. What is the first thing we should do in times of trouble? What do we sometimes do first instead?
3. Read the following verses and discuss what Jesus did to express His own dependence on His Heavenly Father: Luke 5:16, Mark 1:35, Mark 14:13, Matt. 14:23, Luke 6:12, John 17.
4. Have everyone in the discussion pick one area or person in their life that they are burdened by or afraid about. Spend time praying over each individual family member and his or her burdens. Pray that God would help the individual depend on Him. End by expressing dependence on God through prayer together.

## APPLICATION

1. Spend some time this week surveying your life and prayerfully determining if you are more self-dependent or God-dependent. Repent and turn toward the Lord in the self-sufficient areas He reveals.
2. Thank God for all the ways His sufficiency has rescued you from danger, self-destruction, sin, and pain. As you do, acknowledge that His sufficiency is given not out of obligation, but out of loving grace.

## PRAYER

**Group:** As a group, spend some time praying truths from the Scripture over situations that may have come up during discussion. Pray that each individual would grow from self-likeness and into christlikeness.

**Personal:** Pick one area of your life where you know you are fixed on trusting in your own abilities and strength. Use that as a mainstay in your life to go to God consistently; pray that He would have His way in your life so that you would taste the satisfaction of being a desperate child of God.



**DISCUSSION 1**

Pride and Humility: Pride is one of the main roots of sin.

1. How does pride hurt our relationship with God?
2. What are some ways that you can detect pride in your life?
3. How does humility during suffering reflect your view of mankind and your view of God?
4. How can desperation actually be a sign of humility?

**DISCUSSION 2**

We will experience suffering in this life, but with God, we can persevere to the end.

1. How does God's promise to exalt you motivate you to endure suffering?
2. Why does God tell us to humble ourselves under His mighty hand (read 1 Pet. 5:6, 11 and James 4:10)?
3. How could a better understanding of God help us in our walk with God (Heb. 13:5; Deut. 31:6)?
4. What does Peter mean that God will exalt us (read Heb. 11:6 and 1 Pet. 5:11)?

**DISCUSSION 3**

Our anxieties often reveal that our desperation is not for God. When we are desperate for God and rely on Him, God removes our anxieties.

1. How are you exercising humility when you cast your anxieties on God?
2. When we are desperate because of our circumstances, we often become anxious. What are some ways you can view desperation as a way to trust God?
3. Why does Peter say we should cast our anxieties on God? How does this reason help us to trust God (v. 7)?

## FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

1. What are some differences between us and God? How might these differences change the way you think about God, or how you treat Him?
2. What does it mean to be humbly desperate for God?
3. What are some ways that we can humble ourselves to be more desperate for God in our daily lives? Brainstorm as a family.
4. How does our humility before God help us fight the devil and stay strong in our faith?

## APPLICATION

1. Next time you are wronged or hurt, let your first reaction be to go to God rather than taking your frustration out on others.
2. Consider humbly pursuing God in community by joining a Small Group. If you are already in a Small Group, consider leading a group or inviting others you know to join or to lead a group. Visit [yourchurch.com/smallgroups](http://yourchurch.com/smallgroups) to learn more.

## PRAYER

**Group:** Discuss ways that each individual feels they could better display a spirit of desperation before God. Spend time praying for each individual.

**Personal:** Pray that God would grant you humility to be desperate for Him in the good times and bad.

**DISCUSSION 1**

A summary of desperation.

1. As we conclude this sermon series, how would you define desperation? Is that different from how you would have defined it four weeks ago? Explain.
2. What should be your posture when you think of desperation? Is it situational? Does desperation change?
3. Should desperation be the mark of a Christian's life? Explain.
4. Beyond being in desperate situations, how do you think we can cultivate desperation as an awareness of our need for Christ in everything?

**DISCUSSION 2**

Desperation and prayer.

1. How would you describe your prayer life? Be as specific as you can.
2. How would you describe your ideal prayer life? What prevents you from reaching greater fellowship with the Lord through prayer?
3. Have you ever been around someone who has a vibrant prayer life? How would you describe their prayers?
4. How does the above person's prayer display desperation? Is it based on a situation or based on their awareness of their need for God's presence, grace, and power in every aspect of life?

**DISCUSSION 3**

Desperation and prayer in the context of Luke 18.

1. Read Luke 18:1-8 together. What sticks out to you from this passage?
2. Have you ever prayed with as much persistence as the widow in Luke 18? If so, what was your prayer request? How long did you persevere in prayer? How did your desperation for God grow in this time?
3. What are some specific ways you can apply this parable to your own life?

## **DISCUSSION 4**

Self-sufficiency and prayer.

1. In week two, we talked about self-sufficiency as the barrier to desperation. How would you define self-sufficiency?
2. Would you describe yourself as a spiritually desperate person? Why or why not? Do you need to repent of being self-sufficient and striving to control your own life vs. walking in desperate dependence on God each day?
3. Do you ever feel so overwhelmed by a situation that you don't know what to do? Prayer is a great place to start. Spend time praying as a group.

## **FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS**

1. Read Luke 18:1-8 with your children and ask them to give you observations from the story. Model for your children some things you see in the story and talk about how you do or do not relate to the persistent widow. Give your children some examples of prayers you pray in desperation.
2. Talk with your children about the difference between self-sufficiency and desperation for God. Take some time to pray with them, modeling how to confess sin, ask for forgiveness, and petition the Lord for specific changes in your life. Make time this week to talk with your children about desperation and pray with them on several occasions.
3. As a parent, seek opportunities to help your children consider how to walk in desperation each day. What does desperation look like as a young child, as an adolescent, and as a young adult? What prayers are most important and express desperation for God Himself, and not just what He gives us? Ask God to show you and your children areas where you need to trust Him, and ways that you can grow a heart of desperation.
4. Put a date on your calendar each month to circle back with your children to continue the conversation on desperation, and talk with them about what they are learning and seeing God do.

## **APPLICATION**

1. Search the Psalms and find a song/prayer that expresses the cry of your heart. Memorize that Psalm, or a portion of it, and meditate on it daily.

2. Make a short list of prayers that you want to pray persistently. Make sure your prayers align with God's heart for your life, and not simply with your desires for your life. The following are some prayers that are modeled for us in Scripture: Phil. 1:9-11, Col.1:9-12, Eph. 1:15-23, 3:14-21.

## **PRAYER**

**Group:** Spend time as a group discussing how you would like to grow in prayer and desperation. Then, spend time asking God to grow you in those specific ways.

**Personal:** Take 5-10 minutes a day to be alone with God, and simply talk to Him. Communicate to Him, out loud, your desperate need for His presence, and ask Him to help you walk in deeper dependence each day.

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## **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

You can find these books in the Resource Area, located by the Next Steps Area:

*The Power of Desperation* by Michael Catt

*Weakness is the Way* by J.I. Packer

*Waiting on God* by Andrew Murray

*Brokenness* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

*Storm Clouds of Blessing* by Janice M. Cappucci

## **MARKS OF A DESPERATE CHILD OF GOD**

**A desperate child sees his sin as bigger than others' sins.**

Matt. 7:1-5, Luke 18:9-14, 1 John 1:8

**A desperate child seeks to make others' needs more important.**

Phil. 2:3-4

**A desperate child understands there is a cost to being a child.**

Luke 9:23-24

**A desperate child sees the benefit of the hardship as greater than the hardship.**

James 1:2-4, Heb. 12:11, Rom. 8:28-29

**A desperate child seeks the Lord and is satisfied in the Lord even when trouble lurks.**

Psalms 63, Matt. 26:36-41, Gen. 50:20

**A desperate child worships no matter what.**

Hab. 3:17-19, Job 1:21-22, Job 2:10

**A desperate child lets the Lord lead his ambitions.**

John 15:1-5, Ps. 127:1, Ps. 37:4-5, Prov. 3:5-6

**A desperate child has a life in prayer.**

Phil. 4:6-7, Eph. 6:18, 1 Thess. 5:16

**A desperate child is desperate in His pursuit of God.**

Ps. 81:10, Matt. 6:33, Ps. 77:2-4

**A desperate child is quick to repent and have godly sorrow.**

2 Cor. 7:8-11, Acts 3:19, James 5:16, Ps. 51

**A desperate child wants God more than they want stuff.**

Ps. 27, Ps. 63, Phil. 3:8, Psalm 84:10



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