

ED YOUNG

IN THE ZONE



IN THE ZONE

HOW TO LIVE IN THE
SWEET SPOT OF SUCCESS

SMALL GROUP STUDIES

CONTENTS

Week 1	God Hearted	7
	Devotionals	16
Week 2	Skittles®	27
	Devotionals	42
Week 3	Construction Zone	53
	Devotionals	65
Week 4	Creature from the Cash Lagoon	75
	Devotionals	86
LEADER'S	GUIDE	
Week 1	God Hearted	97
Week 2	Skittles®	105
Week 3	Construction Zone	113
Week 4	Creature from the Cash Lagoon	119

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Small Groups are a vital part of how we do ministry at Fellowship Church just as they are in many churches around the world. There are a number of different theories on how small groups should work and they are all great in different ways. The book you are holding is written with our model in mind. So take a minute to read the following explanation, then feel free to adapt as necessary.

Each of our small groups practices a three part agenda in every meeting. That agenda includes a social time, a discussion time, and a prayer time. Each of these elements share equal importance, but not necessarily equal time. To help you get the most out of this book we have included an explanation of each of the parts.

The first element of every small group meeting should be a time of socializing. This phase of the meeting should about 30% of your time together. Welcome everyone as they arrive at the host home, make visitors feel welcome by introducing yourself and showing genuine interest in them. Enjoy some snacks, or if your group prefers, a meal together. Then move on with second part of the meeting, the lesson.

The lesson itself may take as much as 50% of your group's meeting time, but remember it is not the most important element. You may want to start this phase of your meeting with a short "icebreaker" to get everyone talking. The questions in the "Start it Up" section of each chapter are what we refer to as "level the playing field" questions that everyone should be able to participate in, regardless of their level of spiritual maturity or Bible knowledge. As your group moves through the "Talk it Up" section in each chapter, remember that it is more important to finish on time than to finish each and every question. It is okay to skip some to be sure you allow enough time to take care of the third phase of the small group time: "Lift it Up."

The "Lift it Up" section is a vital part of every small group meeting and should be about 20% of the meeting. During this time you will be able to share with the group what God is doing in your life as well as asking the group to support you in specific prayers. To help focus this time there are one or two questions at the end of each study that will prompt prayers based on the material you have just talked about. There is also a space for you to write down your prayer request(s) so you don't forget them and so you can communicate them clearly when it is your turn. Below that is a place to write down the prayer requests of the people in your group so you can remember and pray for each request throughout the week.

As an additional tool to assist you in your journey of spiritual development there is a "Step it Up" section at the end of each session. This section consists of five devotional thoughts that reinforce the lesson you've just completed and are designed to help you develop a regular quiet time with God. To get the absolute most from this study I challenge you to take five or ten minutes a day to read and apply these devotionals to your life. If your group meets twice a month or bi-weekly, choose five of the intervening days to incorporate these thoughts into your devotional life.

IN THE ZONE

One of the most interesting conversations I can have with someone starts off with a single question. And the responses I hear to this powerful and probing question can be as diverse as the people who give them.

What do you think of when you think of God?

Most people miss the truth of who God really is. But when we don't understand the essence of who God is, we miss the point of our existence. And when we miss the point of our existence, we miss out on the amazing life God has designed for us.

So what is the truth? **What is God really all about?** The answer can be found in one of the most well-known and repeated verses in the Bible:

*For God so loved the world that **he gave his one and only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16

The very core of God's character is generosity. That's who he is. And God wants you to have the best life possible. He wants you to have a life full of excitement, adventure, vitality, and blessing. And he was willing to sacrifice everything for that to happen.

To get the most out of life, we must learn to identify God's character and then imitate him in everything we do. It is my prayer that through this study you embrace God's generosity and learn to apply it directly to your life so you can discover that sweet spot of success. Because as we learn to become more and more like our generous God, we can discover what it really means to live *in the zone*.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Young'. The signature is stylized and cursive.



THE ZONE

START IT UP

What do Rev. Al Sharpton, George W. Bush, and Paris Hilton have in common? All three have a name that produces an emotion or associated thought. Isn't it strange what our mind associates with certain noises, objects and people? The accuracy of the association game depends upon our knowledge of the subject. The more we know, the more accurate we'll be.

1. As a group, read each name one at a time and explain the first association that comes to your mind with each person.

- John Wayne
- Bill Gates
- Julia Roberts
- Marilyn Manson
- Madonna
- Richard Nixon
- Martha Stewart
- Hillary Clinton

TALK IT UP

How did your associations compare with others in the room? It is surprising how many different concepts can be associated with just one person. Now shift your attention to God. When you say the word, "God," there are many thoughts and emotions that usually surface.

2. As a group, take a minute and brainstorm a list of words or concepts that come to mind when you think about God.

There are many characteristics we associate with God. From the outset of this study, we must understand that living in the zone is first and foremost about seeing God as he really is, and then mimicking his character in our lives. One characteristic that is commonly overlooked is God's generosity.

OUR GENEROUS GOD

God's generosity is evident throughout the Bible. For our purposes in this study, he is the Blessor. In other words, all good things come from God. Generosity is such an integral part of God's essence that generosity is expressed in each person of the Trinity. God the Father illustrated his generosity with the ultimate act of giving. This fact is expressed in one of the most well known verses in the Bible.

*For God so loved the world that he **gave** his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*

God's consuming love was expressed through the generous gift of his Son for the forgiveness of mankind.

God the Son also demonstrated the generous nature of God.

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to **give** his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45*

Jesus did not come to take from this world, but to give. Jesus gave generously of his time, his knowledge, his healing, and ultimately, he gave his life.

God in the form of the Holy Spirit also expresses generosity.

All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. John 16:15

Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit was given by God to continue giving to us from God's abundance. In other words, the Holy Spirit continually gives us an insight into God's essential character quality—generosity.

3. What are some biblical and personal examples of God's generosity?

For some reason, God's generosity gets overlooked in the midst of all his other character traits. But if we overlook God's generous nature, we will never truly understand who he is. So we look to the Bible for some powerful one-on-one examples of God's generosity.

But God's generosity is not limited to the characters of the Bible. His generosity continues to play an active role in our relationships with him today. Think about this. God never gives the bare minimum. In a restaurant, he'd be known as "the big tipper." That is just his character. God always goes beyond the minimum when he expresses his generous nature. Consider how God's generosity is described in Romans.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Romans 8:31-32

God didn't give us the bare minimum. And for that, we should be thankful. God gave that which was most precious to him; sacrificing his only son, Jesus. And he promises to continue giving us what we need—and more. God goes beyond the minimum because he loves to be generous. Generosity and love are intertwined.

4. How has God showed his abundant generosity by giving you more than you need?

5. What do you think Paul meant when he wrote in Romans that God will “graciously give us all things”?

“BLESS YOU”

God is for you and desires to bless you. The term “bless” is found throughout the Bible. To be blessed by God is to be on the receiving end of the tangible and intangible favor of God. The intangible favor of God refers to things such as peace, joy, and healthy relationships. The tangible favor of God deals with financial, material, and other blessings that can be touched.

6. Do you think Christ followers focus more on the tangible or intangible favor of God? Explain why you think that is the case.

7. In your life, are you more aware of God's tangible or intangible favor?

8. If you could only have God's tangible or intangible favor, which would you choose? Explain why.

WELCOME TO THE ZONE

God is for you and wants to bless you, but you must choose to accept God's blessing—you must choose to step into the Zone. In the most common sense of the word, the Zone is an area that is distinguished from the surrounding areas. In reference to God, the Zone is living where God's blessings flow to and through you.

God's Zone is nothing new. It started in the beginning with Adam and Eve. God designed a Zone of blessing known as the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were given the choice to live in this Zone or to go their own way. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve chose to live outside the sweet spot of God's success. The good news is that God did not discontinue his offer with Adam and Eve.

The offer of the Zone continued after Adam and Eve's rejection. Before Abraham was a well known biblical figure, he was known as Abram. And God gave Abraham the option to choose the Zone as described in the following verses.

The LORD had said to Abraham, “Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

*"I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.*

*I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:1-3*

In this passage you can see God's offer to bless Abraham. God told Abraham to "go to the land I will show you." That land was a distinguished area, the Zone. The land to which God called Abraham would later become known as a land of blessing for the entire nation of Israel. We know this special place as the Promised Land.

God's promise to Abraham included tangible (children) and intangible (protection, leadership) blessings. Another essential part of God's promise to Abraham was that Abraham would become a blessing to others. When you live in the Zone, the blessings do not stop with you. It is an opportunity to bless those around you. God promised Abraham that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

9. Knowing that Jesus came from Abraham's lineage, what is one way God fulfilled his promise to Abraham?

God's offer of the Zone to Abraham did not stop in the Old Testament. It continued throughout the New Testament and even into today, when God offers this promise to all those who accept Jesus.

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ...If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:26, 29

10. In general, what does it mean to be an heir?

11. Keeping Genesis 12:1-3 in mind, what do you think it means to be an heir to the promise God gave Abraham?

RECEIVE AND REFLECT

A major part of God's promise to Abraham was that he would be a blessing to others. When God blessed Abraham financially, relationally, spiritually and in every other area of his life, Abraham turned around and reflected the generous nature of God to others. God blessed him so that he could be a blessing to others.

We've established that generosity is a major component of God's essence. We must also remember that we are made in the image of God and are called to mimic him. That means that everything we do should reflect the generous nature of God to others—emotionally, relationally, occupationally, spiritually, and yes, even financially.

We must take those blessings from God and then reflect the character of the Blessor by blessing others. When we do that, we become a blessing. We are called to reflect our Blessor. Remember, God does not give the bare minimum. His generosity exceeds all limits. God delights in giving more than the basic level. Because of that, we should go above and beyond the norm to reflect God's

generous nature. If giving someone an old coat would do, why not give them a new one? If a person needs \$75 to pay a heating bill, why not give them \$100? That type of abundant generosity truly reflects the heart of God.

12. How have you experienced God's character reflected through an abundantly generous person?

13. How can you reflect God's generosity to someone else this week?

THE ZONE PLAYBOOK

Because of faith in Jesus Christ, you have the opportunity to experience the Zone much like Abraham. All the key ingredients of the Zone offered to Abraham are still offered to us.



BLESSOR

God is the Blessor. He is the one who offers you the opportunity to live in the Zone and experience his incredible favor.

BLESSED

You can be one of the blessed if you choose to live in the Zone. God is for you and wants you to be on the receiving end of his tangible and intangible favor.

BLESSING

When you live in the Zone, you can be a blessing to others. Remember, the Zone is where God's blessings flow not only to you, but also through you.

LIFT IT UP

God has invited you to live in the Zone. Over the next several meetings, you will take a look at what that means and how you can accept God's offer of blessing. Keep this in the frontal lobe of your brain as we move on: God is for you and desires to bless you. Are you ready to embrace this truth?

Prayer Requests:

Notes:

DAY 2

Matthew 7:9-10

When was the last time someone called you evil? Evil is reserved for murderers, those who take advantage of the helpless, and those who scar the world in lasting ways. Evil is not an adjective that is carelessly thrown. It was not common in Jesus' day either.

Jesus was talking to a group of people who had been following him. And Jesus does something very surprising. Instead of trying to woo the crowd, Jesus called the entire crowd "evil." Calling out an entire group of people with this hateful description does not seem like a way to keep the crowds coming back. "I'd like to thank all of you evil people who came to the mountain to hear me. Thanks again, and remember; I'll be here all week."

What Jesus said is shocking, and recorded in Scripture. And when we look at from God's perspective, we are all sinners who have rebelled against a holy God. We are all evil apart from Jesus. And yet, even though we are sinful people, we still know how to give generous gifts. Jesus capitalizes on this fact to illustrate the greatness of God's generosity. If we know how to give generously despite our evil, how much greater is God's generosity?

Reflect on some of the great gifts God has given you. Think about your health, family, ability, possessions or anything else that comes to mind. Consider what your generous God has given you, and take time to thank him.

Notes:

Prayer Requests:



CREATIVE NOTES

ICEBREAKERS

Famous Associations

Search the internet or magazines for pictures of famous people. Bring those pictures to your group and ask them to tell you the first thought that comes to mind when you show the pictures. Choose well known personalities with polarizing characteristics such as the examples in the lesson.

BRIDGE – Our mind associates characteristics with well known people. As you probably noticed from the answers in your group, the associated characteristics vary from person to person. We associate characteristics with God, but we do not always share the same characteristics. In some cases, we associate the wrong characteristics or neglect key characteristics.

Who Am I?

Prepare name tags with the names of famous people. Place a name tag on the back of each participant without them knowing the name on the tag. Each person is then responsible for discovering the name on their tag by asking other people “yes or no” questions about the name of their tag.

BRIDGE – Our mind associates characteristics with well known people. As you probably noticed from trying to find out the name on your tag, the associated characteristics can vary from person to person. What other people associated with the name on your tag might not be what you associate. We associate characteristics with God, but we do not always

share the same characteristics. In some cases, we associate the wrong characteristics or neglect key characteristics.

Describe Yourself

Have each member of the group try to describe themselves with only three words. Or, if each person in the group has somebody that knows them well, ask somebody else to describe each person with only three words.

BRIDGE – With a limited vocabulary, it is difficult to fully describe who you are. In fact, you probably had to leave out key characteristics. If we are not careful, we can leave out key characteristics when we think of God.

Associations

It is amazing how our mind can associate a specific memory with a song or smell. The smell of a certain meal may raise memories of a family member's house. An older song may bring memories of a past crush back to life. Try to think of songs or smells that have specific associations in your mind. Then, describe what you associate with each song or smell as well as why you have that association.

BRIDGE – God wants you to associate the right characteristics with him. When you think of God there should be certain automatic associations that come to mind. This series will help you understand one of the fundamental characteristics of God.

HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES

List it Out

As a group, make a list of all the tangible blessings you have received. Then, make another list of all the intangible blessings. Based on the lists, discuss which list was easier to create. Find out if your group is more aware of tangible or intangible blessings.

BRIDGE – God blesses. There are tangible and intangible blessings. If we are not careful, we can neglect the intangible blessings of God. We need to be just as aware of God's tangible blessings as his intangible blessings.

Hitting the Zone

Use a dart board or set up the game "Pin the tail on the donkey." In each activity, blindfold the participants and have them try to make it into the zone without being able to focus on the target.

BRIDGE – There is a zone God desires us to live in. If we forget to focus on God the

Blessor, we will struggle to live in the zone. We must keep our eyes focused on God if we want to live in the zone.

Sell It

Divide the group into two teams. Assign one team the task of selling tangible blessings and give the other the task of selling intangible blessings. Have the group brainstorm the advantages of each and present an argument why their type of blessing is the best.

BRIDGE – One blessing is not necessarily better than the other. The right blessing is the one God chooses to give. Remember the benefits of both blessings and more importantly, remember God is the Blessor of both intangible and tangible blessings.

VISUAL REINFORCEMENTS

Zone Diagram

On a piece of poster board, draw a diagram of the Zone. Include: The Blessor, the Blessed, Blessing and the land of Ing.

BRIDGE – Use the diagram of the Zone for the coming weeks as a reminder of where God wants us to live.

Puzzle Pieces

Have the edge pieces of a smaller puzzle (approximately a 50-100 piece puzzle) assembled on a table by the entry. As each person enters, have them take one piece. Later, ask them to try to find the people who hold the puzzle pieces that fit their piece then assemble it on a table in the middle of where you have your meeting.

BRIDGE – The edge pieces represent God's zone. We must make decisions to live in the Zone. Once we realize the parameters of the Zone, we must be in the Zone to grow as God wants.

Stagnant

Bring two pictures (from a magazine or the internet) of water. Have one picture show a stagnant body of water and the other show a body that has fresh, flowing water flowing. Compare the stagnant water to people who only accept blessings, but never let the blessings flow through them.

BRIDGE – God is the Blessor and he desires for blessings to flow to you and through you. If you only let the blessings flow to you, you will become a stench to others like a stagnant body of water.

Colander vs. Bowl

Put a colander and a bowl in the middle for all to see. Discuss how a bowl can only contain a certain amount of water before it becomes too full. A colander can constantly receive new water because it lets water flow not only to it, but also through it.

BRIDGE – God desires to flow blessings into your life, but you must not just store them up. God wants blessings to flow through you to others. When you allow blessings to flow through you, you open yourself up for more blessings from God.

POSSIBLE MEDIA REINFORCEMENTS

“The Song Remembers When” by Trisha Yearwood

The lyrics describe how a song reminded her of a certain time in her life.

BRIDGE – Our mind can be triggered by songs and other things to bring up associated memories. God wants us to have the right associations with him.

“Blessed” by Rachel Lampa

The lyrics describe how there are different types of blessings and that being blessed does not mean that we get each and every kind of blessing.

BRIDGE – There is not one kind of blessing. God can give you a blessed life with both tangible and intangible blessings.

Your Own Commercial

Make your own “Priceless” commercial like MasterCard®. Show various items and their approximate prices such as: car - \$35,000; season tickets - \$5,000; suit - \$750. Then, have the final part of the video showing a family having fun together and have the video say, “priceless.”

BRIDGE – Sometimes the most valuable blessings in life are the intangible. God is the giver of both the tangible and intangible blessings.

TAKE HOME OBJECT (Reminders of the lesson)

Targets

Find small targets for everyone to take home as a reminder to aim for God’s Zone.

Sports Erasers

Hand out small basketball-shaped pencil erasers as a reminder to play in the Zone. Or hand out football-shaped pencil erasers as a reminder to aim for the end Zone.

Zone® Bar

Pass out Zone® bars as a reminder to live in the zone.

OTHER

Group Generosity

As a group, reflect God’s generosity by choosing an item to bring each week to give away for the rest of the series. For example, collect canned food items one week, diapers another week, etc...

Individual Generosity

At the end of the discussion, have each member think of generous acts they could do for someone else before the next meeting. Be generous then report the effects of being generous at the next meeting.

Thank You Note

Think of specific blessing God has given you that you have overlooked. Take time to write God a thank you note for giving you that blessing.

Uncertainty

Discuss the uncertainty of moving to a new city or job. Relate that uncertainty to the uncertainty to moving into the Zone.

LEADER’S NOTES

1. As a group, read each name one a time and explain the first association that comes to your mind with each person.

Tip: Try to bring out the different thoughts for each person in your group. If you consistently get a positive reaction to a person, ask for any negative thoughts. Help them see the associations has are not always the same.

2. As a group take a minute and brainstorm a list of words or concepts that come to your mind when you think about God.

Tip: Encourage everyday words to describe God. Instead of saying, “God is omnipotent” say God is extremely powerful. This will encourage those who are still

learning about God to answer since they will not feel the need to use technical terms. Encourage them to speak from their experience. Also, if you get a unique answer, ask the person to explain where that idea came from.

3. What are some biblical and personal examples of God's generosity?

- Genesis 2:16-17 – Adam was given access to every tree in the garden, but one
- Genesis 12:1-3 – God promised to bless Abraham and in multiple ways
- Numbers 13:1-2 – God gave the Israelites the promised land
- 1 Kings 3:10-14 – God gave Solomon wisdom, wealth and more
- John 3:16 – God gave his Son for the salvation of humanity
- James 1:5 – God generously gives wisdom to all who ask

4. How has God showed his abundant generosity by giving you more than you need?

Most of us have experienced God's abundant generosity. Examples are pantries full of food, closets full of clothes, and money to pay for heat and air conditioning. All of these are abundant gifts from God that many people in the world don't yet experience. God's abundance of generosity is not limited to physical possessions. There are blessings in relationships, family, careers and more. It could even be the blessing of peace in difficult situations, encouragement through a confusing time, or moments to celebrate. All of these are ways God generously gives in abundance.

5. What do you think Paul meant when he wrote in Romans that God will "graciously give us all things"?

There is nothing we will need that God will not provide for us in his own time. There are intangible gifts God wants to give us to equip us to live as he desires. God promised to give us those things in 2 Peter 1:3. There is also the tangible side of this promise. Jesus described it in Matthew 6:25-34. Jesus taught that there was no need to worry about clothing, food or life in general because God knows what each person needs and will provide for those who seek him.

6. Do you think Christ followers focus more on the tangible or intangible favor of God? Explain why you think that is the case.

There is a division between believers about tangible and intangible blessings. One group focuses on tangible blessings—claiming your obedience will always result in tangible blessings. There is another group that neglects God as the giver of tangible blessings. They see God as someone who desires all to be poor in material possessions, but rich in intangibles such as love, hope, joy, etc. They believe it is more spiritual to focus on intangible blessings. But God is generous in both areas. One area is not more spiritual than the other because God is into both expressions of his goodness.

7. In your life, are you more aware of God's tangible or intangible favor?

Tip: If your group is struggling with this question, ask them to list out blessings God

has given them in the past month. This will help them realize God's blessing as well as help them identify the area they tend to focus on.

8. If you could only have God's tangible or intangible favor, which would you choose? Explain why.

Tip: Encourage your group to look at the pros and cons of both sides. It might be nice to be rich, but if you are incapable of loving anything besides your money, it could lead to a lifetime of loneliness. It would also be great to be filled with peace. But, if you cannot eat, your peace will be short-lived.

9. Knowing that Jesus came from Abraham's lineage, what is one way God fulfilled His promise to Abraham?

God promised "all people on earth will be blessed through you." He fulfilled this promise as Jesus, the Son of God, came from Abraham's lineage. Abraham's ancestor, Jesus, provided salvation for all humanity.

10. In general, what does it mean to be an heir?

- 1: one who inherits or is entitled to inherit property
- 2: one who inherits or is entitled to succeed to a hereditary rank, title, or office
- 3: one who receives or is entitled to receive some endowment or quality from a parent or predecessor ¹

11. Keeping Genesis 12:1-3 in mind, what do you think it means to be an heir to the promise God gave Abraham?

God promised to bless Abraham and be for him. And God will bless those who follow him today. This does not mean life will be without difficulty, but God will bless in the midst of life's difficulties. Also, God can bless others through us. When we reflect God to others we become a blessing to them.

12. How have you experienced God's character reflected through an abundantly generous person?

Tip: Have them share some of the most generous things others have done for them. After these answers, help your group realize that ultimately, "Every good and perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). That means God is the ultimate Blessor, regardless of who the blessing comes through.

13. How can you reflect God's generosity to someone else this week?

God's generosity can be reflected in numerous ways. You can show God's generosity by offering someone else a relationship with God. By keeping your eyes open to the needs of those around you and meeting those needs, you can be a blessing to other people. It could be offering free babysitting to a friend, offering a ride to a co-worker, or taking someone out for a free meal.

¹ <http://www.webster.com/dictionary/heir>