

A D U L T G R O U P G U I D E

TAKE **THE FLAG**

**FOLLOWING GOD'S SIGNALS
IN THE RACE OF YOUR LIFE**



 **ROB FUQUAY** 

A D U L T G R O U P G U I D E

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IN THE RACE OF YOUR LIFE*

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 UPPER
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NASHVILLE

TAKE THE FLAG: FOLLOWING GOD'S SIGNALS IN THE RACE OF YOUR LIFE

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CONTENTS

Welcome to <i>Take the Flag</i>	5
Overview	5
Leader preparations	5
Adapting for larger groups	6
Group orientation meeting (optional)	6

GROUP SESSIONS

1 The Green Flag: Let the Race Begin	9
2 The Yellow Flag: Heeding the Cautions	14
3 The Blue Flag: Moving to the Outside Lane	19
4 The Red Flag: The Importance of the Delay	23
5 The Black Flag: When It's Time to Leave the Race	28
6 The White Flag: Getting in Position for the Final Stretch	33
7 The Checkered Flag: Experiencing Victory	39
DVD Content	44



WELCOME TO *TAKE THE FLAG*

➤ Overview

Take the Flag: Following God's Signals in the Race of Your Life is a seven-session group-study resource created by Pastor Rob Fuquay. It includes a study book and a companion DVD that features many top drivers and other personalities on the IndyCar and NASCAR circuits.

The study takes the innovative approach of incorporating the flags of auto racing into a discussion of Christian life. Just as the flags send messages to drivers during a race, God sends us messages in our spiritual lives. Though the flag metaphor is the central theme of the study, *Take the Flag* is designed to be enjoyed whether or not you're a fan of auto racing.

➤ Leader preparations

Participants will need to have their own copy of the study book. Each participant will be expected to prepare for group sessions by reading the assigned chapter and responding in writing to the reflection questions. Participants will need to bring their study books and a Bible to each group session.

The study has been designed for flexibility in terms of time and group size. Sessions can last from forty-five minutes to an hour; an asterisk (*) indicates questions and exercises that extend the time to an hour. Additionally, the guide includes optional exercises for even longer sessions.

Recommended times for each discussion and activity are intended as guides. You are encouraged to thoroughly familiarize yourself with the content before each session to tailor the pace to your group's needs.

The study can be used in settings for both small groups (four to twelve) and large groups (thirteen to one hundred). It's easily adapted for Sunday morning classes, weekday Bible or book-study groups, small-group meetings in homes, evening church programming, or any other group opportunity. The instructions will indicate when groups should break into smaller numbers (three to four) or pairs for discussion, regardless of the total group size.

The component parts of each session are these:

- **Drivers Meeting:** gathering and check-in
- **Power Up:** opening prayer and scripture
- **The Driving Experience:** DVD and discussion
- **Pit Stop:** study-book discussion
- **Practice Runs:** spiritual-growth practice
- **Refuel:** closing prayer
- **The Garage:** optional extended-time activities

To prepare for each session, you will need the *Take the Flag* DVD, a television, and a DVD player. Before each session, review the instructions for any special preparation that may be required; sessions 6 and 7, especially, require advance preparation for spiritual-growth practice activities. Read the same homework assignment as your participants. You also may choose to preview the DVD segment.

You have accessed this guide through the booklet included in the DVD case, as a PDF file on the DVD itself, or on the website, www.robfuquay.com. You also can find other helpful resources related to the study on the website.

➤ **Adapting for larger groups**

In general, this guide offers guidance for smaller groups and requires certain adaptations for groups that exceed more than a dozen participants. First, it is recommended that larger groups be seated at tables of six to eight participants each. Table groupings do not need to be stable throughout the study; participants can sit at different tables from session to session.

When participants are called upon to undertake an individual activity—during personal introductions, for example—they should do so only with their tablemates. You also will use your discretion when instructions call for any activity involving the whole group; instead, you may direct each table to complete the assignment separately to ensure that as many people as possible can respond and participate.

You may also find it helpful either to project the discussion questions on a big screen or to print off additional copies of this guide to distribute to each group of six to eight.

➤ **Group orientation meeting (optional)**

The purpose of this optional session is to introduce the study, explain the homework, and set expectations, as well as to give participants initial time to get acquainted. This extra time is especially helpful if participants don't know one another.

If you can, have copies of the book available for participants to purchase, if they haven't already. During this get-together, you will also be making the first assignment.

Because this is a “get-acquainted” session, you may want to have an extended social time or share a meal before or after the orientation.

Welcome, group introduction, and opening prayer

Offer a personal welcome to the group. Ask participants, one by one, to say their names and share two brief pieces of information about themselves.

Next, share why you, as the leader, are hosting this study and what you hope to gain from it. Then ask each person to share what he or she hopes to gain.

Opening prayer

Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for bringing us together. Be with us now as we begin to consider what the next seven sessions might bring to our spiritual lives and our experience as a group. Open our minds and our hearts to new ideas, practices, and friendships. Amen.

Introduction to the study

Read aloud:

Take the Flag: Following God's Signals in the Race of Your Life is a seven-session group-study resource created by Pastor Rob Fuquay. It includes a study book and a companion DVD that features many top drivers and other personalities on the IndyCar and NASCAR circuits.

Discussion

Ask participants to describe their level of experience with IndyCar and NASCAR. Race fans may want to share the name of a favorite driver or race experience.

Read the following:

This book has been inspired by the flags that are used both in NASCAR and IndyCar races. Just as the flags send messages to drivers during the race, God sends us messages in our spiritual lives. This study shows us how we can more closely follow God's signals in our spiritual lives—or, we could say, in “the race of our lives.”

Next, hand out copies of the book and, if need be, collect payment. Or if the books aren't on hand, pass around a sample book and tell group members where it is available. As people are looking at the book, share the following:

To prepare for each session, you will need to read one chapter of the book and answer the reflection questions that you will find at the end of each chapter. For our next session, plan to read the introduction and chapter 1. Be sure to write your responses to the reflection questions at the end of chapter 1. You will want to bring your book and Bible with you to each session.

At each get-together, we'll watch a segment from the *Take the Flag* DVD. The videos were filmed in the heart of racing country: Indianapolis, Charlotte, and Talladega. They feature the author, Pastor Rob Fuquay, interviewing race-car drivers and other racing-world celebrities. Each week the drivers and Rob will introduce us to one of the flags used in racing. We'll start with the green flag and continue through the yellow, blue, red, black, white, and finally, the checkered flag. Drivers on the video will share their personal experiences in racing with these flags. Rob will help us make spiritual applications.

Also, as you know, in car racing, every driver and crew must practice. We need to practice, as well, in our spiritual lives. Often such practices are called "spiritual disciplines." So, in the coming weeks, the study will be introducing some of these. We'll discuss these simple practices during class so we can feel ready to try them out on our own.

I hope you are all excited and ready for a great study together.

Make sure participants understand the first assignment, know when and where to meet next, and remind them to bring their study books and Bibles to each get-together. Also, if applicable, announce childcare arrangements.

Closing prayer

Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for the people in our group and the commitment they are making to prepare for this study and participate in it. Bless us and guide us in the time ahead. Continue to give us lots of signals in our race of life, and help us to recognize and act on them. Amen.



1

THE GREEN FLAG LET THE RACE BEGIN

(45–60 MINUTES)

(NOTE: If you are meeting for 45 minutes, skip the questions and activities with asterisks. These are for groups that meet for extended sessions.)

➤ **DRIVERS MEETING: gathering and check-in (5 MINUTES)**

Welcome the group. If you did not have an orientation meeting, begin with the first invitation below (depending on participants' familiarity with one another) and then follow with the second invitation. If you did have an orientation meeting, begin with the third invitation.

1. Ask participants, one by one, to say their names and share two brief pieces of information about themselves.
2. Have each person identify which description best fits him or her:
 - I am totally unfamiliar with NASCAR and/or IndyCar racing.
 - I am somewhat familiar with racing.
 - I am a racing fan.

If any participants are fans, ask them to identify a favorite driver or favorite spectator experience.

3. If necessary, ask each person to reintroduce themselves by name. Then ask each person to respond to the following:

We focus this week on the green flag, which is waved to officially begin the race. With its appearance, drivers can go full speed. Using the green flag as a metaphor, choose which of these describes your faith today:

- I am at the starting line.
- I am accelerating.
- I am going at full throttle.
- I am running out of gas.
- I am interested in a fresh start.

* Read the following and ask a few participants to respond:

In the book, we were asked, “Have you ever wished someone would wave a green flag of faith that takes life from coasting to a full-throttle, earth-shaking experience?” How did you answer that question?

* Ask one or two volunteers to respond to this question:

What do you think the title of the introduction, “You’re in the Driver’s Seat,” means when you think of your life of faith?

➤ **POWER UP: opening prayer and scripture (7-10 MINUTES)**

Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for bringing us all here to this place. Help us to consider our “race of faith.” Open our minds and hearts to the others in the group who will encourage us in our faith, and to you, the one who is giving us signals all the time in our spiritual lives. Give us confidence to start or restart the race of faith and look for your flags. Be with us as we spend this time together. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the theme scripture for this session, Romans 10:5-13. Have others turn to the passage in their Bibles and follow along. While all are opening their Bibles, read aloud:

This passage was written by the apostle Paul to the Romans as part of his effort to explain the Christian faith. It is a lengthy passage with a lot of thought in it! In our study, Rob focused on the idea of what it means to have Jesus as Savior and Lord in our lives. Listen to the scripture with that in mind.

Have the volunteer read Romans 10:5-13 aloud. Then as a group, briefly discuss the following:

After hearing this scripture passage, what do you think the apostle Paul would say is the beginning of a person’s Christian faith, the first green-flag moment?

Invite group members to find a partner, and share with that person their first green-flag moment.

➤ THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE: DVD and discussion (10 MINUTES)

Introduce the video:

Today's video clip introduces us to Rob Fuquay, the author of our study book. He focuses on the green flag this week.

Play the track for week 1 and discuss the following:

1. At the beginning of the video, several racing professionals talk about what goes through their minds when they see the green flag. What do you find new or intriguing about their experiences?
2. In thinking about Michael McDowell's story of his green flag of faith what strikes you most about it?

➤ PIT STOP: study-book discussion (12-15 MINUTES)

Read aloud:

In this chapter, Rob says, "Faith is a trust—a trust in a reality that has yet to be fully realized." He also says, "Faith also is action. . . . Stepping out in trust, . . . moving to the place where we give full control to God's direction."

Ask participants to share, as they are comfortable, their answers to the following questions. Some are similar to the chapter's reflection questions, so participants may wish to refer to the responses in their book.

How willing are you to trust and act, giving full control of your life to God's direction?

What does the statement "accept Jesus Christ as my personal Savior" mean to you?

- * How does knowing God wants a relationship with you and forgives your sin affect how you live today? (You may want to refer to the story of the Rolls-Royce dealer in chapter 1 to begin this discussion.)
- * Why do you think sacrifice has always been associated with forgiveness of sin?

Read the following:

When we call someone our "Lord," we are giving that person power and authority over us. Rob uses two metaphors when describing Jesus as Lord: the orchestra conductor, who seeks to bring out the best in each musician, and the crew chief, who manages the pit crew and helps the driver throughout the race.

Ask the group to discuss in pairs the following:

How does the idea of Jesus as an orchestra conductor or crew chief match your relationship with Jesus at present?

* Ask one or two volunteers to respond to the following:

Understanding that green flags also represent restarts in a race, can you relate to a time in your life—even now—when you've really needed a restart?

➤ PRACTICE RUNS: spiritual-growth practice (5-10 MINUTES)

Read aloud:

As you know, in auto racing, every driver and crew must practice. We also need to practice in our spiritual lives. Often such practices are called spiritual disciplines. A spiritual discipline is an opportunity to make space in your life to practice intentionally keeping company with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

So each session will introduce a spiritual practice to try on our own during the coming week. Today we are going to continue thinking about our divine crew chief and consider ways we can stay more closely connected.

Depending on your faith tradition, you are welcome to focus on your crew chief as God or as Jesus—or perhaps as the triune God (God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit). Now, think about what it might be like to intentionally stop three times each day, pause your thoughts and actions, and check in with your crew chief.

What would a check-in look like? Perhaps you could pause your thoughts and actions, sit down for a few moments, and ask if your crew chief has anything to say right now, and then just be silent for a minute or so.

Ask for suggestions for check-in reminders. (These could include setting a phone alarm or posting a reminder note on the mirror, refrigerator, or computer screen.)

* Find a partner and discuss the following:

How can you practice this idea?

What do you think might happen if you tried this for a week?

What are your thoughts about committing to this practice for a week?

➤ REFUEL: closing prayer (5 MINUTES)

Remind the group to read chapter 2 before the next meeting and to write down answers to the reflection questions.

Invite participants to remember to pray for one another in the coming week, and ask them to name other concerns for the group to lift up in prayer.

Pray this closing prayer or one of your own:

Loving God, we give thanks that you want to speak to us personally in the midst of each day's concerns and busyness. During this coming week, help us to remember that you are reaching into all the situations and concerns close to us, especially [mention those named]. Open our eyes and ears to hear your voice in all the ways you try to speak to us. Amen.

Or have everyone turn to the end of chapter 1 and pray aloud together:

God, I accept again your forgiveness. I need your direction in my life. I don't want to just coast. I need to be revved up. I need a fresh touch of your mercy. I need your healing. I choose all over again to make the one you sent, Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior. Amen.

➤ **THE GARAGE: optional extended-time activities** (15 MINUTES)

1. Write a letter to Jesus or to God expressing what it means to you to have a divine "crew chief." You can also try writing a letter imagining Jesus' or God's response to you.
2. Take a few minutes to think about the people in your life who have been instrumental in getting you started in your race of faith. This week contact one or two of these people, and thank them for helping you respond to the green flag of faith. Today tell them about your faith experience.



2

THE YELLOW FLAG HEEDING THE CAUTIONS

(45 TO 60 MINUTES)

(NOTE: If you are meeting for 45 minutes, skip the questions and activities with asterisks. These are for groups that meet for extended sessions.)

➤ **DRIVERS MEETING: gathering and check-in (5 MINUTES)**

Welcome the group. Ask how participants experienced the spiritual practice of checking in with the “crew chief” three times a day since the last session.

Read aloud:

We focus this week on the yellow flag, also known as the caution flag. It is waved when something potentially dangerous is present, such as debris on the track. Drivers must immediately reduce their speed and follow behind the safety car until the danger has passed. In spiritual terms, the yellow flag means God is signaling for us to heed cautions.

Ask participants to choose one of the following that best describes their response to a spiritual “yellow flag,” the caution flag:

- I am not sure I see or hear the cautions.
- I am well aware of the flags but not so quick to respond.
- I’m pretty good about heeding cautions.

- I could use some improvement on heeding cautions.
- I tend to throw caution to the wind.

➤ **POWER UP: opening prayer and scripture (7-10 MINUTES)**

Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for bringing us all here to this place. Help us to continue considering our “race of faith.” Today we will specifically think about the ways you caution us in our spiritual life. Help us to listen and to learn from you and from others in our group. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the theme scripture for this session, Matthew 4:1-11. Have others turn to the passage in their Bibles and follow along. While all are opening their Bibles, read aloud:

The Gospel of Matthew records the testing of Jesus that came right after his baptism. He had been in the wilderness praying and fasting and was about to begin his ministry.

After the volunteer reads the passage aloud, ask the group to discuss the following:

What do you think of the idea that God sent Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted? (If need be, ask participants to refer to their answers to chapter 2’s reflection questions.)

* Ask for volunteers to respond to the following:

Share a “wilderness” moment: a time of feeling depleted physically, emotionally, and spiritually. How did that affect your resistance to temptation? When did God feel nearby, and when did God feel distant?

➤ **THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE: DVD and discussion (7-10 MINUTES)**

Play the track for week 2 and discuss the following:

1. At the beginning of the video, several racing professionals talk about what goes through their minds when they see the yellow flag. What do you find new or intriguing about their experiences?
2. Both Chocolate and Caron Myers reflect on the racing life. In considering Chocolate’s story of the “yellow flag when thinking about his faith,” what strikes you most?

➤ **PIT STOP: study-book discussion (12-15 MINUTES)**

Read aloud:

Caution flags are intended to increase driver safety. Heeding the cautions is part of racing well. The same is true in terms of our spiritual life. God is constantly signaling us, warning us to stay away from danger.

Ask participants to share, as they are comfortable, their answer to the following question. It is similar to the chapter's reflection questions, so participants may wish to refer to the responses they wrote in their books.

Have you had your race of life interrupted by a caution flag of some sort? Explain how you sensed the caution and how you responded.

Read aloud:

Cautions can come in life when we are tempted to act in ways that will not help our race. Thankfully, God wants to give us cautions so we can race well. Rob used Jesus' experience in the wilderness to help us understand the temptations that can often come our way. Let's explore how Jesus' temptations can apply to our lives.

With participants in groups of three or four, ask for responses to the following questions:

Jesus hadn't eaten for forty days when he was tempted to turn stones into bread. When have you been tempted to use your power or ability to satisfy yourself, even when you might have hurt or exploited yourself or others in the process? What happened? (You may wish to recall the example of Tiger Woods or the church employee to start the discussion.)

Jesus was tempted to test the Lord by jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple. What are some examples today of the ways people put God to the test and ignore the warning signals? When have you been tempted to put yourself in a potentially dangerous position, believing you would be spared any consequences? What happened?

Jesus was tempted to take a shortcut to bring the whole world under his authority. When have you been tempted to break rules or take a shortcut to achieve success faster, even if it involved breaking the law or hurting yourself and/or others? What happened? (You may want to recall the example of the pastor who used false information to obtain a building loan.)

* In the book, Rob asked us how guilt can signal our closeness to God rather than our distance from God. How do you respond? Give examples.

➤ PRACTICE RUNS: spiritual-growth practice (5-10 MINUTES)

Read aloud:

Like a spotter at the racetrack, God is always on the look out for what can cause us problems. Following God's direction involves learning to recognize and heed the cautions God sends our way. Also, remember that Hebrews 2:18 says, "Because [Jesus] himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." We can develop disciplines that help us focus on Jesus as he guides us through temptation.

Since our last session, we have practiced deliberately contacting our "crew chief" at least three times a day. If possible, continue that discipline throughout the study.

Today, consider building on that discipline by following Rob's suggestion: a simple habit inspired by the painting titled *Divine Counselor* by American illustrator Harry Anderson. It pictures Jesus seated across from a businessman at his desk. The man listens as Jesus talks.

This week, spend a few moments each day in a quiet spot with no interruptions. Imagine Jesus sitting in an empty chair beside you. Ask him the questions that are challenging you. Tell him the temptations you are facing. Share what is on your heart. Be still and listen. You may be surprised by the responses you get.

* With a partner discuss the following:

How can you practice this idea? (It could be one of the three meetings with the "crew chief." Or it could be an activity to try first thing in the morning to start the day.)

What might it be like to hear a response from Jesus during this time?

What do you think might happen to you if you try this for a week?

What are your thoughts about committing to this practice for a week?

➤ REFUEL: closing prayer (5 MINUTES)

Remind the group to read chapter 3 before the next meeting and to write down answers to the reflection questions.

Invite participants to remember to pray for one another in the coming week, and ask them to name other concerns for the group to lift up in prayer.

Pray this closing prayer or one of your own:

Dear God, thank you for Jesus and his willingness to face temptation and remain faithful to you. Thank you for a Lord and Savior who knows what temptation feels like and wants to help us. This week, help us to hear your cautions and to heed them. We thank you for being a God who has our best interests in mind and will care for our needs. Be with each person in our group as we strive to grow closer to you and to follow your signals in the race of our lives. Amen.

➤ **THE GARAGE: optional extended-time activities** (15 MINUTES)

For a group activity, invite participants to practice the following steps to help them avoid temptation. Then suggest they write down the steps for future use when needed.

1. **Acknowledge we are all tempted.** Ask volunteers to read aloud the following scripture passages that refer to temptation: James 1:14; Matthew 26:41; Matthew 6:13. Look up more if time allows.
2. **Have a plan to turn away from the temptation.** Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 10:13. Solicit ideas from participants that they already employ in their lives to avoid temptations. For example, when you're on a diet, you go online and look at the restaurant menu to choose what you plan to order. For accountability, you tell your dinner companion your choice. Or if you know you tend to use regrettable language when you watch a ball game, you choose words before the game and make a commitment to God and those watching with you to hold you to your choices.
3. **Believe God wants to and will help you.** Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. Suggest beginning the daily practice of praying for a specific temptation to be conquered.
4. **Thank God for your successes.** Ask volunteers to read aloud James 1:17; Philippians 4:6; and Psalm 106:1.
5. **If and when you fail, confess your failure to God, repent, and get right back in the race.** Ask volunteers to read aloud 1 John 1:9; Proverbs 28:13; and James 5:16.



3

THE BLUE FLAG MOVING TO THE OUTSIDE LANE

(45 TO 60 MINUTES)

(NOTE: If you are meeting for 45 minutes, skip the questions and activities with asterisks. These are for groups that meet for extended sessions.)

➤ **DRIVERS MEETING: gathering and check-in (4 MINUTES)**

Welcome the group. Ask how participants experienced the spiritual practices of the first two sessions: checking in with their crew chief three times a day and setting a time for a meeting with Jesus to listen and talk with him—especially listening for cautions.

We focus this week on the blue flag, also known as the courtesy flag. It signals slower drivers to move to the outside lane in order to make room for a car that's about to lap them. Moving over isn't mandatory; there is no penalty if drivers choose not to move. Spiritually, blue flags are opportunities for us to help someone else, even when these chances come unexpectedly.

Ask participants to choose one of the following that best describes their response to a spiritual blue flag:

- I am usually so busy I may not notice it.
- I am irritated that responding may cause me an inconvenience.
- I am regretful because I don't think I have time to stop and help.
- I am reminded of someone who helped me and am thankful.
- I am ready and willing to help.

➤ **POWER UP: opening prayer and scripture (7-10 MINUTES)**

Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for our group and our progress in following your signals in our spiritual race. Today as we consider the blue flag, the courtesy flag, impress on each of us how we can become more humble and willingly move to the outside lane so we can be a part of others' victories. Amen.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the theme scripture for this session, Matthew 20:29-34. Have others turn to the passage in their Bibles and follow along. While all are opening their Bibles, read aloud:

This passage recounts an incident that occurs as Jesus and his disciples are heading toward Jerusalem for Jesus' triumphal entry into the holy city.

After the volunteer reads the passage, ask the group to discuss the following:

What do you think it was about these men that moved Jesus "with compassion" to heal them?

* What moves you with compassion to use your abilities to help others?

➤ **THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE: DVD and discussion (7-10 MINUTES)**

Play the track for week 3 and discuss the following:

1. At the beginning of the video, several racing professionals talk about what goes through their minds when they see the blue flag. What do you find new or intriguing about their experiences?
2. In thinking about James Hinchcliffe's story about his blue flag, what strikes you most about it?

➤ **PIT STOP: study-book discussion (12-15 MINUTES)**

Read aloud:

In our book, Rob asks us to consider four questions that relate to blue-flag moments in our lives: Who has moved over for me? What is winning all about? How can I make an impact on people? And how can I help others get into the race? Let's reflect on these questions.

Ask participants to share, as they are comfortable, their answers to the following questions. Some are similar to the chapter's reflection questions, so they may wish to refer to the responses they wrote in their books.

When have you depended on someone to take notice of your situation and offer help? How does that experience have an impact on you now?

Ask for several volunteers to share their thoughts on winning:

What is the difference between thinking of winning as a destination and thinking of winning in terms of what happens along the way?

* With a partner, discuss the following:

What is your definition of winning?

What do you hope people will say about you at your funeral?

How well do these two answers intersect?

What changes in thinking and acting can you make so these answers will intersect even more?

Remind the class that Jesus had the power to heal the blind men, and we also have power to help others. Then in groups of three or four, discuss the following:

What types of power do you have to offer to help others? (You can offer these as examples: time, money, concern, possessions, skills, knowledge, and experience. Make certain each person shares a few.)

Remind the class that, ultimately, heeding God's blue flags can bring others into faith. Then invite discussion around the following question:

What are some examples from your own life or in your church where helping people brought them into the church or at least helped move them toward a life of faith?

➤ **PRACTICE RUNS: spiritual-growth practice (5-10 MINUTES)**

Read aloud:

In our last two sessions, we practiced increasing our contact with our crew chief two different ways. The first was through intentionally pausing three times each day to listen and pray. The second was spending time each day in a quiet spot with no distractions, imagining Jesus sitting beside us and having a conversation. Hopefully, you will continue these practices. This week, consider a spiritual discipline to help you respond to the blue flags that God waves in front of you. Some flags may signal big “move overs,” which could mean a major sacrifice of helping someone, while others may be as simple as an opportunity to open a door for someone with a heavy load.

Either way, here is the discipline to practice this week:

Each morning as you rise and thank God for the day, ask God to wave at least one blue flag in front of you sometime during your day. Then heed the blue flag. Keep track of these experiences in chapter 3's notes section so you can share them next week.

* Discuss the following in pairs:

How can you practice this idea?

What do you think might happen if you try this for a week?

What are your thoughts about committing to this practice for a week?

➤ **REFUEL: closing prayer (5 MINUTES)**

Remind the group to read chapter 4 before the next meeting and to write down answers to the reflection questions.

Invite participants to remember to pray for one another in the coming week, and ask them to name other concerns for the group to lift up in prayer.

Pray this closing prayer or one of your own:

Dear God, we are grateful that you are a God who is never too busy or irritated with us to meet our needs. Thank you for all the people in the world who have helped each one of us. May we never be too proud or too busy to see a blue flag and respond the way you would have us to. Be with each of us this week as we continue to strive to hear, see, and feel your signals while we continue our race of faith. Amen.

➤ **THE GARAGE: optional extended-time activities (15 MINUTES)**

1. Make a plan to complete a group project that requires participants to use their collective power to serve a group of people or a person who needs help. Make sure you leave with a plan to accomplish the task between now and the end of the study.
2. Brainstorm with participants how they can do something special for a stranger at least once during the next week. For example, give a waiter an extravagant tip, pay for the customer in line behind them, return a shopping cart for someone else, give a stranger a coupon for a car wash, buy a meal for a homeless person, give up their seat on the bus. Ask participants to note how they feel when they do it and to report back next week.



4

THE RED FLAG

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DELAY

(45 TO 60 MINUTES)

(NOTE: If you are meeting for 45 minutes, skip the questions and activities with asterisks. These are for groups that meet for extended sessions.)

➤ **DRIVERS MEETING: gathering and check-in (5 MINUTES)**

Welcome the group. Ask how participants experienced the spiritual practice of heeding a blue flag at least once a day since the last session. Remind participants they were to pray each morning asking God to wave a blue flag and then to record their experiences in their study books.

Read aloud:

The focus this week is on the red flag, which is waved when something happens in the race beyond anyone's control. Everyone must leave the track and cease all activity. Not even pit crews can work during the delay. In this session, we'll consider the value of a red flag in our lives, as well as the value of intentional stops.

Ask participants to choose one of the following that best describes their response when they see a spiritual red flag:

- I focus on my frustration and anger.
- I calculate the time I am losing on things that I need to get done.
- I reevaluate the situation and come up with a new plan.
- I'm willing to take a breath, find calm, and wonder how God is working in this situation.

➤ **POWER UP: opening prayer and scripture (7-10 MINUTES)**

Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for our group and our progress in following your signals in our spiritual race. Today as we consider the red flag, the delay flag, impress on each of us how we can learn not only to find value in our delays, but also to begin to choose purposeful delays in our daily life. Amen.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the theme scripture for this session, Luke 5:12-16. Have others turn to the passage in their Bibles and follow along. While all are opening their Bibles, read aloud:

As you listen to the passage, try to imagine the demands placed on Jesus as word of his ministry spread through the towns around the Sea of Galilee. Think about all the people in need of healing. Consider the constant press of people around Jesus.

After the volunteer reads the passage aloud, discuss the following in the group:

How do you relate to what Jesus does at the end of this passage?

* How do you feel when your life is filled with people wanting your time, attention, and abilities?

➤ **THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE: DVD and discussion (7-10 MINUTES)**

Play the track for week 4 and discuss the following:

1. At the beginning of the video, several racing professionals talk about what goes through their minds when they see the red flag. What do you find new or intriguing about their experiences?
2. In thinking about Ann Schrader's story of her red flag, what strikes you most?

➤ **PIT STOP: study-book discussion (12-15 MINUTES)**

Read aloud:

In the book, Rob quotes race-car driver Connor Daly saying, "What drivers love the least is the red flag." It can make drivers lose their focus and get frustrated. We know in life that sooner or later, we all experience circumstances beyond our control that disrupt our life. We too can lose our focus and get frustrated. But let's explore how God signals us to find meaning and purpose in these red-flag moments.

Ask participants to share, as they are comfortable, their responses to the following exercises. Some are similar to the chapter's reflection questions, so participants may wish to refer to their responses in the book.

- * Give examples from your life when you have experienced red flags and found yourself unfocused and frustrated, and even asking why.

Author John Ortberg suggests, “What God does in us while we wait is as important as what it is we are waiting for.” Share red-flag moments in your life when, in retrospect, you could see God at work in you, possibly giving you new insight, hope, comfort, encouragement, or direction.

One of the most important practices the Israelites developed in the wilderness was keeping the sabbath. It is intended to be a day we stop normal productivity so that we can tend to the sacred in our lives. How are you currently practicing sabbath rest?

Pit stops are intentional pauses for refueling, tire changes, and tune-ups. In life, we think of spiritual pit stops as taking time to be still and reconnect with God—even as we feel the pressures of other commitments. How do you feel about taking time to pause, be still, and reconnect with God?

- * In the book, Rob suggests, “If we make these practices a habit when life is running smoothly and relatively stress free, then they can become especially powerful in moments of unwanted and unexpected crisis.” How does that insight speak to your life?

➤ PRACTICE RUNS: spiritual-growth practice (5-10 MINUTES)

Read aloud:

In this chapter, we have been thinking about spiritual practices that can help us sustain a healthy life, even when red flags come our way. So far, we have tried some of these practices when we checked in with our “crew chief” three times a day and when we made time to sit down with Jesus. There are many other powerful spiritual disciplines, but this week we are going to focus on keeping the sabbath.

Sabbath is God’s gift of regular, repetitive rest—a day set aside to refresh the spirit and worship God. It is so important to God that it is one of the Ten Commandments. The sabbath is a time to “be” in the midst of a life of “doing”!

Ask volunteers to look up the following Bible verses about sabbath and read them aloud to the group: Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:8; Leviticus 23:3; and Mark 2:27.

Introduce the spiritual discipline for the week, perhaps bringing in the story about the two wagon trains on the Oregon Trail:

This week—and for the next three weeks—dedicate yourself to a more intentional commitment to honoring the sabbath. Besides setting aside time for worship, you may also want to practice restful activities with family or friends. For one day a week, try letting go of the worries of your daily work and your to-do list, and trust that God will provide for your needs.

* With a partner, invite the participants to discuss the following:

What would you need to do to practice sabbath rest one day a week for the remainder of this study?

How might this spiritual practice affect your family and friends?

What do you think the results would be?

What are your thoughts about committing to this practice for the next three weeks?

➤ **REFUEL: closing prayer (5 MINUTES)**

Remind the group to read chapter 5 before the next meeting and to record answers to the reflection questions.

Invite participants to remember to pray for one another in the coming week, and ask them to name other concerns for the group to lift up in prayer.

Pray this closing prayer or one of your own:

Dear God, thank you for red flags. Thank you for doing some of your most powerful work in us when life forces us to stop. Forgive us for the times we just can't see the good in the red flag. As we leave this place today, give us courage to practice disciplines, including the sabbath, that will help us find peace and grace, and ultimately prepare us to be people of grace when future red flags come our way. Amen.

➤ **THE GARAGE: optional extended-time activities (15 MINUTES)**

Ask the group to report on their acts of kindness to strangers during the past week. Then read aloud:

The following are spiritual disciplines we may want to consider practicing. Keep in mind that these are just a sampling. The purpose of these practices is to make room for God in our lives so that we can be transformed into more Christlike people. As I share them with you, consider whether you feel the desire to add any of these to your current practices.

Fasting: There are many ways to fast and many things to fast from. This is a chance to deny yourself of a desire while letting God satisfy your needs instead. People who practice this discipline often choose to fast from some kind of food, TV, shopping, or from any other hunger they experience. If fasting is something you want to try, you may want to search the Internet to read more about it.

Ask the group to share personal experiences of fasting.

Read aloud:

Journaling: This practice is carried out when you strive to be so aware of God that you can reflect in writing about God's presence and activity around you. You may keep a journal daily or whenever you feel the urge to write. It may include a written record of how God is moving in your life, or it serve as a record of prayers, prayer requests, answers to prayers, or simply God-inspired stories or poems.

Ask the group to share personal experiences of journaling.

Read aloud:

Daily devotional reading: This practice involves daily reading of a published guide, such as *The Upper Room* daily devotional, which includes a Bible reading, a spiritual reflection, and a prayer. The goal focuses more on growth in your relationship *with* God than on growth in your knowledge *about* God. Being open to hearing God in the midst of this practice gives God an opportunity to offer you inspiration, direction, suggestions, comfort, correction, love, and grace for your day.

Ask the group to share personal experiences of daily devotional reading.



5

THE BLACK FLAG WHEN IT'S TIME TO LEAVE THE RACE

(45 TO 60 MINUTES)

(NOTE: If you are meeting for 45 minutes, skip the questions and activities with asterisks. These are for groups that meet for extended sessions.)

➤ **DRIVERS MEETING: gathering and check-in (5 MINUTES)**

Welcome the group. Ask participants how they experienced the spiritual practice of keeping the sabbath.

Read aloud:

We focus this week on the black flag, also known as the consultation flag. It's waved at drivers who have mechanical problems or who are breaking a racing rule. Drivers who do not get off the track within five laps of receiving a black flag are disqualified! In spiritual terms, the black flag means something is not right in your life. God is signaling that you may be a danger to yourself or others.

Ask participants to choose one of the following that best describes their response to a spiritual black flag:

- I feel really bad about the situation that is causing me to get a black flag.
- I get really angry and resentful that the flag is waving.
- I respond with denial and possibly blame someone else for the situation.
- I confess my role, repent, and restart.

➤ **POWER UP: opening prayer and scripture (7-10 MINUTES)**

Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for our group and our progress in following your signals in our spiritual race. Today as we consider the flag that takes us out of the race, keep our hearts and minds open to what we need to hear from you. Amen.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the theme scripture for this session, Mark 9:42-48. Have others turn to the passage in their Bibles and follow along. While all are opening their Bibles, read aloud:

In this passage, Jesus makes the point that causing others to sin, or sinning ourselves, brings serious judgment. Jesus uses the literary device of hyperbole, a statement that purposely exaggerates, to communicate a truth.

After the volunteer has read the passage aloud, ask the group to discuss the following:

How do you feel after hearing these words of Jesus?

* Why do you think we have a hard time talking about sin?

* In the study book, Rob notes that theologian Walter Brueggemann calls sin “an aggressive force ready to ambush. . . . Sin is lethal.” How do you see sin as a force that can ambush or be lethal?

➤ **THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE: DVD and discussion (7-10 MINUTES)**

Play the track for week 5 and discuss the following:

1. At the beginning of the video, several racing professionals talk about what goes through their minds when they see the black flag. What do you find new or intriguing about their experiences?
2. In thinking about Cliff Champion’s story of his black flag, what strikes you most?

➤ **PIT STOP: study-book discussion (12-15 MINUTES)**

Read aloud:

Chapter 5 reminds us that Jesus talks about sin not to make us feel bad about ourselves but because God doesn’t want us to wreck our lives! Knowing that we have sinned shouldn’t lead us to despair about our condition but to see hope for our condition—just like a black flag doesn’t permanently disqualify us. We all have an opportunity to “race again” one day, but we must take three important steps. Let’s take a look at them one at a time.

Step one is honest self-appraisal. We must admit our wrongs. The biblical word for this is “confession.” Without confession, we fall into avoidance, denial, a hardened heart, guilt, or

shame. We don't become better people. Confessing our sins to God, as Frederick Buechner said, becomes "the bridge" back to God.

Ask participants to share, as they are comfortable, their answers to the following questions. Some are similar to the chapter's reflection questions, so participants may wish to refer to the responses they wrote in their books.

When have you experienced a black flag in your life?

How have you responded?

* How do you experience confession?

Read aloud:

Step two is changing direction. We can't get by just by saying we are sorry. We must repent. Something must change. We are not allowed back into the race until things are different.

Ask a few volunteers to respond to the following:

Recall a time in your life when you changed your ways or repented.

Read aloud:

Step three is starting over. "Absolution" is what completes the process of responding to the consequences of our sin. God forgives us and releases us from our guilt. We are given an opportunity for a new start. At the end of the chapter, Rob listed Bible heroes all of whom took black flags and yet finished their race well. In an odd way, we can see how a black flag might be just the blessing we need to keep us in the spiritual race of life.

Ask two or three volunteers to respond to the following:

How have you experienced a new start after a black flag?

* What black flag in your life could God possibly use to help others?

➤ PRACTICE RUNS: spiritual-growth practice (5-10 MINUTES)

Read aloud:

Let's consider practicing confession and repentance this week by following these steps:

- Plan a time of quiet and calm when you can pray.
- Begin by asking God: Where in my life am I hurting myself or others—perhaps through my words, my actions, my anger, my neglect, or my expectations? As God brings situations or people to mind, confess your sins and take responsibility for your behavior.
- Ask God to forgive you and to give you the strength to forgive yourself as well.

- Determine what you need to do to change so these hurtful words or actions will not happen again.
- Finally, if appropriate, respond by extending an apology. Perhaps this means a phone call, a letter, or a face-to-face meeting.

* Discuss the following in pairs:

When will you be able to practice the discipline of confession and repentance in some form this week?

What do you think might happen to you if you try this for a week?

Read aloud:

We'll talk about the results of this practice next week, but you won't be asked to share the details of your situation. You will only be asked to comment on the experience.

➤ REFUEL: closing prayer (5 MINUTES)

Remind the group to read chapter 6 before the next meeting and to write down answers to the reflection questions.

Invite participants to remember to pray for one another in the coming week, and ask them to name other concerns for the group to lift up in prayer.

Offer this closing prayer or one of your own:

Dear God, we are thankful that you are a God of forgiveness and new starts. Give us the courage to be open and honest with you, watching for the black flags and consulting you. May we always be willing to offer the prayer of the ancient psalmist: "Examine me, God! Look at my heart! Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts! Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me, then lead me on the eternal path!" (Ps. 139:23-24, CEB). Amen.

➤ THE GARAGE: optional extended-time activities (15 MINUTES)

1. We can use Psalm 51 as a way to bring our sins before the Lord. The psalm is attributed to King David after Nathan the prophet confronted him about his adultery with Bathsheba. Ask the group to turn to Psalm 51 in their Bibles. Then have one person read it aloud. As it is read, invite participants to underline any parts that speak to them personally. Suggest that they remember this psalm to use as a prayer when needing to confess sins to God.
2. Ask the group to memorize and practice the Jesus Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Its scriptural origins reside in the words of Bartimaeus, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Luke 18:38) and the prayer of the tax collector: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Its current form came through the writings of the desert fathers and mothers of the fifth century who lived as Christian hermits and monks in the desert of Egypt. The Jesus Prayer is commonly recited today by Eastern Christians, both Orthodox and Catholic. Lead participants to breathe in as they silently pray, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,” and to breathe out as they silently pray, “have mercy on me, a sinner.” Suggest participants try the prayer a few times on their own during the week.

3. Consider a group study of Bible passages that directly relate to sin and repentance. Ask several volunteers to look up the following references and read them aloud: 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalms 32:5; 41:4; 69:5; and Acts 8:22. Then discuss the following:

How do you feel knowing that people of faith thousands of years ago wrote these verses?

Which of these verses would you find easy to use as a personal prayer? (Ask each participant to choose one.)

Use the verse you chose as the beginning of a prayer of confession and repentance that you write yourself. (Assure participants that these are intended to be kept private. Give the group five minutes to complete the prayers.)

Suggest participants try this prayer method in the future with other Bible verses and topics.



6

THE WHITE FLAG

GETTING IN POSITION FOR THE FINAL STRETCH

(45 TO 60 MINUTES)

(NOTE: If you are meeting for 45 minutes, skip the questions and activities with asterisks. These are for groups that meet for extended sessions.)

ADVANCE PREPARATION: Plan to bring white sheets of letter-size paper, cut into fourths, for each participant. You may want to tape each small piece to a stick or pencil, creating a miniature white flag. Everyone will need a writing implement to complete the exercise.

➤ **DRIVERS MEETING: gathering and check-in (5 MINUTES)**

Welcome the group. Ask how participants experienced the spiritual practice of confession and repentance. Also ask how many are still practicing sabbath rest.

Read aloud:

We focus this week on the white flag, which is waved at the driver in the lead when there's one lap to go. But this flag is also important to all the other drivers because it means they have just one lap to get into their best position to finish the race. Position is crucial in racing because it determines the points-based championship at the end of the season. For us, the white flag invites us to think about how we position ourselves to finish our race well.

Ask each person to choose one of the following that best describes how they consider their current position in terms of completing their race of life:

- I rarely, if ever, think about the end of my race.
- I find myself evaluating my race when someone else's race ends.
- I am consciously trying to develop habits that will help me finish well.
- I think I am on a pretty good path that will leave me well positioned at the end of my race.

➤ **POWER UP: opening prayer and scripture (7-10 MINUTES)**

Pray aloud:

Dear Jesus, we come to you today thinking about how we want to position ourselves so we will end our life on earth well. We know positioning ourselves well involves all aspects of our lives: our relationships with you, others, and your creation. We realize we have a perfect model in studying your life. We also see in your life that you had to take the position of surrender to win your race. Help us to grasp that idea at a deep level today. We desire to finish well, so that we can one day say, like the apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). Amen.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the theme scripture for this session, Luke 22:39-46. Have others turn to the passage in their Bibles and follow along. While all are opening their Bibles, read aloud:

In this passage, Jesus has just finished the Passover meal, or what we refer to as the Last Supper. He is in the garden of Gethsemane praying just before his arrest, which will lead to his trial, scourging, and crucifixion.

After the volunteer reads the passage aloud, discuss the following questions as a group:

Rob suggested that Jesus entered the last lap of his life in a position of surrender. Where do you see this posture in this passage?

* What do you think of the idea that surrender is a position we all need to practice more?

➤ **THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE: DVD and discussion (7-10 MINUTES)**

Play the track for week 6 and discuss the following:

1. At the beginning of the video, several racing professionals talk about what goes through their minds when they see the white flag. What do you find new or intriguing about their experiences?
2. In thinking about Nick Terry's story of the white flag, what strikes you most?

➤ PIT STOP: study-book discussion (12-15 MINUTES)

Read aloud:

We understand that race-car drivers must think about their position in the race when the white flag is waved. We're learning that, in racing, if your goal is to win the championship, you may choose not to try to win every race.

Ask participants to share, as they are comfortable, their answers to the following questions. Some are similar to the chapter's reflection questions, so participants may wish to refer to the responses they wrote in their books.

* How do you understand the idea that we don't need to win every time?

Recall an instance in your life when losing was a good choice. (Ask several volunteers to share.)

How is choosing to lose a practice of surrender?

Read aloud:

In our book, Rob reflects on the life of Jesus and gives us four ideas about "surrender" to consider. The first is, "Surrender doesn't mean giving up." But it may mean "giving up control" of the situation.

Discuss as a group:

What does it mean not to give up on a situation but to surrender control of the situation? (You may want to remind the group of the story of the minister and his rebellious teenage daughter.)

* How do you practice surrender of control in your life?

Read aloud:

Surrender also means showing grace. Even on the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them." Rob gives examples of practicing patience when you are in a hurry, responding with kindness when someone says untrue things about you, and helping others even when you have other priorities.

Discuss as a group:

How well are you able to surrender to a spirit of grace? Share examples of success and failure.

Read aloud:

Surrender also means forfeiting our need to be right. Jesus commanded, "Turn the other [cheek]" (Matt. 5:39). This might be the hardest form of surrender, but as Rob says, being right "may not always offer the best outcome."

Discuss as a group:

How well are you able to forfeit your need to be right? (You may want to remind participants of the story of the minister and the little league all-star game.)

Read aloud:

Finally, surrender means putting yourself in God's hands. Rob maintains that "the most important action Jesus took in his last lap was to put himself, at all costs, in God's hands." In the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed, "Not my will, but yours be done." But the next day on the cross, Jesus' faith wavered when he prayed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Then right before his death, Jesus prayed, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Together, these three prayers express that Jesus still trusted his Father even in the midst of feeling abandoned.

Discuss as a group:

How well are you able to put your trust totally in God's hands? Share examples of situations where you have been able to trust God completely.

* How is your ability to trust God affected when you feel doubt or even abandonment by God? Share examples.

Read aloud:

In the closing paragraphs of this chapter, Rob reminds us that Jesus' prayer of "not my will, but yours" is one that life requires us to pray again and again. Just as accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior isn't something you can do just once, surrender isn't a one-time deal. It's a lap-by-lap effort, and every lap gives us the opportunity to position ourselves for that final sprint to the finish line.

➤ PRACTICE RUNS: spiritual-growth practice (5-10 MINUTES)

Hand out the small pieces of paper you prepared before class and read aloud:

No matter where you are in your race of life, surrender is perhaps the most significant act for positioning yourself for victory. Since surrender is such a big idea, let's each choose one area of surrender to focus on for a spiritual practice. As I read these four areas aloud, choose the one you are willing to work on until our final session:

- Surrender my control of a specific situation or person.
- Surrender by showing grace in a difficult situation.
- Surrender my need to be right with a specific person or in a specific situation.
- Surrender in a situation where I feel doubt or even abandonment by God.

* Discuss the following in pairs:

Which of the four choices will you work on? (Remind participants that it is not necessary to share the details of the situation.)

Read aloud:

Take your white flag of surrender, and write a prayer to God surrendering what you are working on. No one else will read these. This is for your own spiritual practice. I will give you a few minutes to write. (Pause until most are finished.)

Ask participants to assume a posture of surrender, perhaps by bowing their heads, closing their eyes, and resting their hands with palms up in their laps. Then pray aloud:

Dear God, I desire to finish well. I understand that I will actually do better in my race if I can surrender. But I am struggling with surrendering what I have written on this white flag. As I silently read these words on my paper to you, hear my prayer. [Pause for a few moments.] I realize I may need to pray this prayer many times before it finally sinks in and becomes a reality for me, but I thank you for hearing and receiving it now and honoring this desire in my heart. Help me to be able to pray and live these words: “All to Jesus I surrender; all to him I freely give; I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live. I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.” Amen.

Instruct participants to put their flag in a place where they can read it over and over again during the week. Ask them to arrive at the final session ready to report on their progress in their specific area of surrender.

➤ **REFUEL: closing prayer (5 MINUTES)**

Remind the group to read chapter 7 before the next meeting and to write down answers to the reflection questions.

Invite participants to remember to pray for one another in the coming week, and ask them to name other concerns for the group to lift up in prayer.

Offer this closing prayer or one of your own:

Lord, thank you for designing life in a way that you let your children grow and change positions in the race. Surrendering seems so opposite of our natural behavior, and yet we understand how it is truly the way to position our lives for final victory. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

➤ THE GARAGE: optional extended-time activities (15 MINUTES)

1. Teach the group a visualization prayer of surrender. Have everyone assume the posture of surrender (described above) in the prayer. Then ask them to visualize themselves holding an empty shopping bag and standing at the bottom of an escalator. Ask them to visualize Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit at the top. Then ask them to visualize putting a situation in the shopping bag that they want to surrender. When they are ready, ask them to imagine placing the bag on the escalator and watching it rise to be received by Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit. Caution participants that they may be tempted to imagine climbing on the escalator to take it back. If so, they just need to try the exercise again until the situation is finally surrendered.

This visualization prayer can be practiced anywhere and at any time. In addition, some people benefit from visualizing Jesus or God sending them the shopping bag back on the “down” escalator. This time, the bag is filled with the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Read Galatians 5:22-23.)

2. Teach the group how to “pray the scripture,” a spiritual practice that allows God to shape the participant through the words of scripture. Instruct them that the focus is on a Bible passage of their choosing that reflects the feeling or desire they are experiencing. Since surrender is the focus of today’s session, ask participants to locate passages about surrender, letting go, and trusting God. Give this task a few minutes, as time allows, then ask for volunteers to read aloud the passages that they located. Or if time is an issue, ask for volunteers to read the following passages: Job 11:13-15, Luke 9:23-24, John 3:30, Proverbs 3:5, Philippians 4:6-7.

Read aloud:

At home, once you have chosen a passage to pray, you can personalize it. Here is an example.

This is Job 11:13-15 (CEV):

Surrender your heart to God, turn to him in prayer,
and give up your sins—even those you do in secret.
Then you won’t be ashamed;
you will be confident and fearless.

Here is one way you can personalize it for prayer:

I surrender my heart and [here, add a specific situation] to God,
I turn to you in prayer, and I give up my sin [here, identify what you are holding on to]—
even when I do it in secret.
Then I won’t be ashamed;
I will be confident and fearless.

To close, pray aloud the personalized version again, pausing at the bracketed words, giving participants time to silently fill them in with their own words.



7

THE CHECKERED FLAG EXPERIENCING VICTORY

(45 TO 60 MINUTES)

(NOTE: *If you are meeting for 45 minutes, skip the questions and activities with asterisks. These are for groups that meet for extended sessions.*)

ADVANCE PREPARATION: *Plan to give each participant a reminder of some sort to help them with the spiritual practice for this lesson. If possible, locate yarn or embroidery thread in both black and white—enough for each person to make a bracelet with each color. Pre-cut the yarn or thread to a bracelet length, or bring scissors to class.*

➤ **DRIVERS MEETING: gathering and check-in (5 MINUTES)**

Welcome the group. Ask how participants experienced the spiritual practice of surrender, using their white-flag prayers. Also ask if anyone is still practicing sabbath rest or any of the other spiritual practices introduced.

Read aloud:

We focus this week on the checkered flag, the most famous flag in car racing. This symbol of victory is waved when the first driver crosses the finish line. But for us, the checkered flag serves as an invitation to think about how we can live victoriously.

Before participants take up discussion of the checkered flag, ask each person to choose the flag from the previous chapters that has made the most impact on them spiritually:

- The green flag (the start or restart flag)
- The yellow flag (the caution flag)
- The blue flag (the courtesy, or “serve others” flag)
- The red flag (the delay or “pause” flag)
- The black flag (the consultation flag)
- The white flag (the one-lap-to-go flag)

➤ **POWER UP: opening prayer and scripture (7-10 MINUTES)**

Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you that we will all one day have a final checkered flag and be with you in eternity. But today, help us understand how we can live a victorious Christian life now. Open our hearts and minds to your spirit as we share with one another. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the theme scripture for this session, Luke 24:1-12. Have others turn to the passage in their Bibles and follow along. While all are opening their Bibles, say aloud:

This passage takes place early on Sunday morning after Jesus’ crucifixion on Friday.

After the volunteer has read the passage aloud, discuss the following:

How do you think it would have felt to be one of the women going to the tomb fully expecting to find the body of Jesus and have angels ask you, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5)

- * If you were among those who heard the story from the women, would you most likely think it was an idle tale or run to the tomb to see for yourself?
- * How willing are you to believe in resurrection, in new life, in God’s power over death?

➤ **THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE: DVD and discussion (7-10 MINUTES)**

Play the track for week 7 and discuss the following:

1. At the beginning of the video, several racing professionals talk about what goes through their minds when they see the checkered flag. What do you find new or intriguing about their experiences?
2. In thinking about Sam Hornish Jr.’s story of his checkered flag, what strikes you most?

➤ PIT STOP: study-book discussion (12–15 MINUTES)

Read aloud:

For the winner of the race, the checkered flag is exhilarating. We, too, have been promised that our final victory will be exhilarating! But in the meantime, we can focus on experiencing victory in everyday life. In this chapter, Rob explains that Easter is a present experience. It signals the way to live with hope amid pain, suffering, and despair. Easter means new life can be ours through faith. How does that happen? What can the resurrection of Jesus teach us about experiencing victory? Rob gives us four ideas to consider. The first idea is that “living with victory is more than blind optimism.”

In our study book, we read about the Stockdale Paradox. Admiral James Stockdale was a prisoner of war (POW) during the Vietnam War who watched as the optimists in the camp died of a broken heart. But the survivors understood the following lesson that Stockdale learned, “You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be.”

Ask participants to share, as they are comfortable, their answers to the following questions. Some are similar to the chapter’s reflection questions, so participants may wish to refer to the responses they wrote in their books.

What does the Stockdale Paradox say to you? What examples can you share from your own life that show how you have practiced the Stockdale Paradox?

- * In considering examples that you have just shared, how was living with the Stockdale Paradox similar—and yet different from—someone who chooses blind optimism?
- * What do you think about the idea that God works in our current reality, even when bleak, and brings new life? What examples from your own life can you share that illustrate this truth?

Read aloud:

The second thought for us to consider is that “God works even when we’re not looking.” We must not lose hope even when we don’t see God at work. Sometimes we just have to keep committing to our spiritual disciplines even when we feel God has let us down. That’s what the women did when they brought spices to the tomb. Our book also tells a remarkable story about a man named Bucky who never imagined all that God was doing in his life.

Discuss as a group:

Share examples in your life when you refused to give up on God, stayed faithful, and now, looking back, can see God’s work in the situation.

Read aloud:

The third idea for us to consider is that “hope is meant to be passed on.” The women spread hope when they ran to tell the disciples about the empty tomb. When Rob’s church helped a single mother recover from a house fire, hope was passed on.

Discuss as a group:

How do you and your church pass hope on to others?

Read aloud:

The final thought for us to consider is that “our victory isn’t dependent on the outcome.” Even though we read amazing stories about people who have experienced victorious outcomes to their tragedies, we know not all stories turn out with endings we would want. We know that sometimes the miracle we pray for never comes.

Discuss as a group:

What good is faith if it doesn’t guarantee a happy ending?

Read aloud:

Rob writes his thoughts on that question at the end of the chapter. You may want to turn to the last page in your book and underline this paragraph as I read it. He says, “What good is faith? It holds the power to bolster our spirit. It offers us a sense we’re not enduring our struggles alone. It provides us with strength and courage that is not our own. It gives us an active role in God’s greater purpose. And it promises us a hope for the future, whatever the future holds.” Let’s talk about the question again thinking about this paragraph.

Discuss as a group:

What good is faith if it doesn’t seem to change the outcome of your struggle?

➤ **PRACTICE RUNS: spiritual-growth practice (5-10 MINUTES)**

Read aloud:

Every day that we live with hope, we are seizing victorious living. Let’s practice hopeful living this week. This will require both holding on to hope when feeling doubt or despair and passing on hope in seemingly hopeless situations. Remember, we are not talking about blind optimism but about giving hope while acknowledging the reality of the situation.

Distribute the yarn or thread to each participant and then offer these instructions:

Twist these pieces of black and white yarn together and then tie them around your wrist to wear this week as a constant reminder of your commitment to victorious living.

Ask participants to use the bracelet as a reminder to practice these four spiritual disciplines:

- Begin each day with prayer asking God to let you be the one who finds hope in any situation you find yourself in today.
- Visualize yourself waving a checkered flag. Thank God for the opportunities for victorious living you will be given today.
- When you find yourself with an opportunity to bring hope to a situation, whether it's your own or another's, do it. This may be through words or actions.
- Keep a daily journal describing your experiences.

➤ **REFUEL: closing prayer (5 MINUTES)**

Offer this closing prayer or one of your own:

Victorious God, we have spent these past weeks together trying to learn how to follow your signals in our race of life. You have been faithful as a crew chief to teach us about starts and restarts, temptation, service to others, delays, times we need to face our failings, and surrender. Today we understand how to live victoriously with the hope only you can give. For all of this, we are extremely thankful. It is overwhelming but exhilarating to understand that you, the creator of all, choose to be an individual crew chief to each of us. In the name of Jesus we praise you and thank you. Amen.

➤ **THE GARAGE: optional extended-time activities (15 MINUTES)**

Memorizing scripture can be a powerful experience that allows us to access it anytime and anywhere. This week encourage participants to try the following memorization strategy:

- Choose a passage of scripture that speaks to you.
- Write it down on several index cards.
- Put the cards in places you will see several times a day.
- Read it when you see the card. Then close your eyes and say as much as you can by memory.
- Continue this habit until the scripture is easy for you to recite without the card.

Ask the class to consider one of the following scriptures about hope. If time allows, read each one and encourage participants to choose one to memorize, following the steps above:

Joshua 10:25

Psalm 39:7; Psalm 147:11

Jeremiah 29:11

Lamentations 3:20-24

Romans 5:1-5; Romans 15:13

Revelation 21:4



DVD CONTENT

The DVD includes

- Segments using auto racing flags to illustrate spiritual themes in our Christian life
- Teaching and commentary by Rob Fuquay
- Downloadable PDF group guides for leaders of children, youth, and adults

Quick flag stories by

- Ed Carpenter (IndyCar) <https://twitter.com/ecrindy>
- Jerry Cook was inducted into the NASCAR Hall of Fame, Class of 2016 http://www.nascar.com/en_us/news-media/articles/hall-of-fame/nascar-hall-of-fame-jerry-cook.html
- Conor Daly (IndyCar) <https://twitter.com/conordaly22>
- Austin Dillon (NASCAR) <https://twitter.com/austindillon3>
- Scott Dixon (IndyCar) <https://twitter.com/scottdixon9>
- Larry McReynolds is a former NASCAR crew chief and current sports analyst on Fox NASCAR <https://twitter.com/larrymac28>
- Danica Patrick (NASCAR, former IndyCar) <https://twitter.com/DanicaPatrick>
- Ricky Stenhouse Jr. (NASCAR) <https://twitter.com/stenhousejr>

Personal stories (in order of appearance)

- Michael McDowell (NASCAR) https://twitter.com/Mc_Driver
- Chocolate Myers is the former fuel man for the GM Goodwrench #3 driven by Dale Earnhardt Sr., curator of the Richard Childress Racing Museum and host of Sirius XM NASCAR Radio show *Tradin' Paint* on channel 90 <https://twitter.com/chocolatemyers3>
- James Hinchcliffe (IndyCar) <https://twitter.com/Hinchtown>

- Ann Schrader is married to Ken Schrader <https://twitter.com/KenSchrader>
- Cliff Champion is a former NASCAR crew chief <https://www.facebook.com/cliff.champion.1?fref=nf>
- Nick Terry is a NASCAR Chaplain with Motor Racing Outreach <https://twitter.com/nickterryMRO>
- Sam Hornish Jr. (NASCAR, former IndyCar) <https://twitter.com/samhornish>

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