

**Free Downloadable Discussion Guide**

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*The Wesley Study Bible*

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*We are people who have long believed that faith works by love and that love is the expression of faith. I heard a friend comment recently about a fellow Christian: “He went to sleep tired, but it was a sweet tiredness . . . for he slept under the smile of God.” Have you ever wanted your days to end like that, knowing that you had done God’s work all day, were tired from your work, but were satisfied that your life was pleasing to God? I believe every human wants this deep peace. Toward this end I have written “Love Works,” a six-week congregational Bible study on the pattern of service in the Christian life.*

*Blessings,  
Dan Boone*

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***Love Works Week One—What Do You See?***

**Objective:** to see the world through the eyes of Jesus. We will visit biblical texts that show Jesus seeing human need below the surface of casual observation.

***The Wesley Study Bible (WSB) Wesleyan Core Terms***

Image of God, Holiness of Life, Sanctification, Scriptural Holiness

**Opening**

Secure “magic eyes” pictures and distribute them. You can find them by going to a Web search engine (e.g., Yahoo, Google) and typing “magic eyes pictures.” Ask group members to decipher the picture in the picture. Once people *see* it, they can begin to help others who have not *seen* it. *Discussion Question:* Why do we look but not always see what is right in front of us? How is your experience in life like this?

**Lesson**

In the Gospels we see that Jesus is very observant. He saw the world around him with eyes opened to what God might see. He saw what others walked past.

- a fig tree not bearing fruit in season
- a sower throwing seed where it had no chance of growing
- a widow putting a coin in the temple treasury
- a father waiting on the front porch for a wayward boy
- hypocrites praying on the street corners with one eye open to the watching crowd
- children being coldly dismissed by busy adults

*(Invite the group to browse their New Testaments for other things Jesus saw that the common person walked past.)*

Jesus moved in our world with the discerning eyes of God. But he focused on people. He noticed their speech, movement, gestures, posture, status, and body language. And he took a second look to discern their stories. Jesus looked until he saw beneath the surface.

Many theologies across the centuries have defined *holiness* as how we look—the clothes we wear, make-up, jewelry, the car we drive, or hair length. Such a focus tends to keep *me* looking at *me*, concerned about how I appear in the eyes of others. I am the center of my own attention as I attempt to look holy. In this way of thinking, being a faithful witness means that I will place major emphasis on how I look.

But what if this, while important, is not meant to be the primary concern of a holy person? What if holiness is not so much how I *look* as how I *see*? Jesus seems to be almost non-self-conscious. We find little, if any, concern on his part about how others see him. He isn't invested in projecting a certain image. He doesn't look to see if others are looking at him. He just sees the people in front of him and discerns the activity of God in their lives at the given moment. He sees what others fail to notice.

- a short man named Zacchaeus perched up in a sycamore tree
- a shy, bleeding woman whose grazing touch registered even in a crowd
- a thief dying to his right

At moments when we would expect Jesus to be absorbed in what is happening to him, we find him noticing others and engaging them in conversation. He is *others*-conscious. Could it be that the holy life is more about how we *see* than about how we *look*?

**Group Exercise:** Read Matthew 8–9 and observe what Jesus notices about the people in these stories. Underline all the sight words such as *see*, *look*, and *saw*.

- the leper (8:1-4)
- the centurion (8:5-13)
- the fevered care-giver (8:14-17)
- the frightened disciples (8:23-27)
- the demoniac (8:28–9:1)
- the paralytic (9:2-8)
- the tax collector (9:9-13)
- the synagogue leader (9:18-26)
- the bleeding woman (9:18-26)
- the blind man (9:27-31)
- the mute (9:32-34)

People haven't changed much across the centuries. The characters of Matthew 8–9 still walk our streets and live in our neighborhoods. Who are the people of Matthew 8–9 in your town?

### **Devotional Focus**

As you read the assigned text, note the way Jesus sees the people in the text. Will you see anyone today who resembles the people Jesus encountered in the text? Record your reflections in your journal.

- Monday: John 4:1-42
- Tuesday: John 5:1-18
- Wednesday: John 8:1-11
- Thursday: John 9:1-41
- Friday: John 11:1-44
- Saturday: John 12:1-8

**Suggestions**

- Read Matthew 9:35-37 and John 4:34-35. Our task this week is to see people through the eyes of Jesus. Use a journal to write down what you see. At the end of each day, take a few minutes to record your daily observations in a journal. Written reflection reinforces a new habit.
  - Go to the mall, a coffee shop, or a place where people gather and watch prayerfully. Observe people until you get a sense of compassion for those who are “helpless and harassed.”
  - Drive to a grocery store in a different part of town and watch people coming and going.
  - Park near a school at the opening or closing of the school day and observe families.
  - Go to the Salvation Army, a compassionate ministry center, the welfare office, or the County Courthouse.
  - Set your watch to signal you to stop during your workday and look around.
- Reflect on the following question: How would seeing people as Jesus sees them change my daily routine?

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**Love Works Week Two—What Do You Hear?**

**Objective:** to learn the ways we listen for the voice of God calling us to our work.

**WSB Wesleyan Core Terms**

Social Religion, Faith and Works, Election, Mission, Studying Scripture, Care of Creation, Classes, Bands

**Opening**

Review the past week with group sharing of what people observed and recorded in their attempts to see the world as Jesus sees it. List *sightings* of modern-day biblical characters on a marker board. Did anyone see the woman at the well? the man by the pool at Bethsaida? the grieving sisters of Lazarus?

Prompting questions:

- How did you feel about what you saw?
- Did the texts you studied help you look for certain kinds of people?
- Was your week different because you were looking? How?

If love is to work in Jesus-like compassion, it will begin with *seeing* what we have not seen before. The holy life is not a self-conscious, me-focused concern with how I am seen, but rather a conscious effort to see people as Jesus sees them (*see WSB Wesleyan Core Terms: Social Religion, Faith and Works*).

**Lesson**

One of the reasons we see selectively is that we are protecting ourselves. To see every human need as God sees it would overwhelm the strongest of us. We would blow every fuse in our bodies. The human mind shuts down or numbs out at the point of overload. Even Jesus did not try to meet every need he saw.

Read Mark 1:29-39. Jesus left a line of needy people waiting at Peter’s house because God called him to do something else. We cannot meet every need we see. But we certainly cannot meet the needs we don’t see. How do we know what is God’s work for us to do? How do we discern what God is calling us to notice and tend to? This is the focus of the lesson today.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus seems to be very clear about the work that God has sent him to do. Read the following texts: John 4:34; 5:17; 14:8-14; 17:1-5. Note how Jesus speaks with clarity about the work of the Father that he came to do. What kind of relationship with God is necessary for us to have the same sense of clarity about our work in the world (*see WSB Wesleyan Core Terms: Election, Mission*)?

Our assignment last week was to practice seeing the world as Jesus sees it. In the coming week, we want to focus on hearing the call of the Lord as Jesus hears it. We want to connect what we see with what God is saying to us about it. We believe that God still speaks to us. So how do we hear? How do we listen? There are seven ways the people of God have learned to listen to God.

1. **Scripture:** God can speak through these ancient words of the Spirit. It seems as if some of the words rise off the page to call attention to what God is saying. At other times, a text stirs something deep within us, begging us to give further attention to what is being communicated. One of the ways to listen for God in Scripture is to ask these questions of a text:
  - a. What is God doing in this text?
  - b. How are humans in trouble in this text?
  - c. What would it look like for humans to open themselves to what God is trying to do?
 Questions like these tend to open a text for our hearing. *Discussion Question:* What are some of the scriptures through which God has spoken to you (*see WSB Wesleyan Core Terms: Studying Scripture*)?
2. **Creation:** Psalm 19 suggests that God speaks through the heavens and earth. Listening to the earth can be a way of listening to God. The groans of our earth and the collapse of entire ecosystems can be heard as a message from God. *Discussion Question:* What does God say to you through creation (*see WSB Wesleyan Core Terms: Care of Creation*)?
3. **One another:** We are called to help one another discern the voice of God that gives us our work. God can speak through those who know us and are faithful to tell us what they hear God saying. Sometimes God speaks through total strangers who become angelic messengers without even knowing it. *Discussion Question:* Has this ever happened to you (*see WSB Wesleyan Core Terms: Classes, Bands*)?
4. **Life circumstances:** God opens and closes doors. Troubled relationships may invite us to attend to something we have not fully owned up to. Tired or diseased bodies may be signaling a slow down or reordering of our priorities. *Discussion Question:* What in your life is asking you to listen?
5. **Dreams:** Biblical characters were guided by dreams. The opening chapters of Matthew have several dreams. Review Matthew 1–2. Our dreams contain the symbols of our inner life. God’s way of speaking to us is often mediated by symbols and images. People of faith have found it worthwhile to listen to their dreams. Write out your recurring dreams and consider where God would be found in them.
6. **Journals:** When we discipline ourselves to put into words what we think, we find ourselves deepening the process of listening to God. We examine our lives on paper.
7. **A check in the spirit:** God can, at times, seem to be standing in our way. The story of Balaam’s mule is appropriate here (*see Numbers 22:22-40*). Some refer to this as a still, small voice. Most believers do not hear God audibly, but as words forming in the mind or deep in the inner being. A conscious message is delivered without words being spoken.

**Group Exercise**

On individual handouts of the seven ways of listening, each group member should place a letter beside each of the seven ways.

- F = a familiar way of listening to God
- U = an unfamiliar way of listening to God
- W = the one you wish to concentrate on in the coming week

**Devotional Focus**

The texts this week revolve around people who heard the call of God. In these texts we see the various ways God speaks:

- Monday: 2 Timothy 3:10-17; God speaks in scripture
- Tuesday: Psalm 19; God speaks in creation
- Wednesday: Acts 13:1-3; God speaks through others
- Thursday: Genesis 45; God speaks through circumstances
- Friday: Matthew 1:18-25; 2:12, 13-15, 19; God speaks through dreams
- Saturday: Revelation 1:9-11; God speaks through journaling

**Suggestions**

- Create space to attend to the voice of God this week
- Drive without turning on the car radio, CD/tape player, or handheld device
- Spend an evening in total silence with God
- Eliminate every possible distracting noise from your life and ask God to fill the space you have emptied with God’s presence

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***Love Works Week Three—Help Wanted***

**Objective:** to explore the kind of work God is doing in the world so that our lives will be connected to something bigger than we are.

**WSB Life Application Topics**

Care for the Poor and Strangers, Care for the Outcast, Justice, Mercy

**WSB Wesleyan Core Terms**

Christian Hospitality

**Opening**

Invite testimonials from the past week’s listening exercises. Begin by sharing your own experience of heightened listening. Did anyone turn off the car radio or spend an evening of silence? How was the week different?

Provide copies of the classified section of the daily newspaper. Ask participants to browse the Help Wanted section to become familiar with the ads. If God were writing the Help Wanted section, what ads would we see? Divide into groups and ask each group to compose as many ads as possible in six minutes. Write these on newsprint and post them around the room for everyone to see.

**Lesson**

Frederick Buechner has said that “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (*Wishful Thinking*, [New York: HarperCollins, 1993], 119). If this is true, we must be able to see need, hear God, and move toward the call of God in practical ways. Some of our biblical friends have done this:

1. **Use positional power to serve those who cannot help themselves.** The book of Esther is an Old Testament account of a young Jewish beauty pageant winner who found herself with access to the king of Persia in a time when the people of God were about to be slaughtered. Read the story and be prepared to summarize what Esther did. She demonstrated courage in risking her position and her life on behalf of others. *Discussion Question:* What kind of Help Wanted ad was Esther responding to? Where are we being called to use our positional power to help those who cannot help themselves (see WSB Life Application Topics: *Care for the Poor and Strangers, Care for the Outcast*)?
2. **Use resources to offer hospitality to those who need it.** The story of Lydia is found in Acts 16:11-15. She is typical of those who open their lives to others. The same can be said of God. In an act of generosity, God provided for us a planet with sufficient air, food, water, and space. God created an environment supportive of life. We are called to be hospitable in the same way. Such acts may be as small as opening our home to others and as large as establishing shelters and protective environments for those threatened by life circumstances. As a group, list all the ways hospitality is being expressed in our community (see WSB Wesleyan Core Terms: *Christian Hospitality*).
3. **Invest in the next generation.** Several Bible stories bear witness to this life investment. Abraham and Sarah leave the comfort of their family farm to journey with God in response to God's promise to bless all the families of the earth through their obedience. The same pattern is true for Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. In Deuteronomy 6:1-9, we hear the call of God on parents to teach the coming generation the ways of God. In the New Testament, we hear the generational influence in the life of Paul's young friend, Timothy. Read 2 Timothy 1:3-7. List the ways we might respond to God's Help Wanted ad to serve the next generation.
4. **Be open for business.** In Luke 10:25-37 we find the well-known story of the Good Samaritan. He is available to be inconvenienced by the need of another as he travels through the day. Given the difference in cultural pace of life then and now and the routine of business then and now, do we have the right to walk on by?
5. **Do justice, right wrongs, reconcile enemies, make peace.** Can you think of biblical texts or stories that give us windows into this work? Here are some examples:
  - Justice: Isaiah 11:1-5
  - Righting wrongs: 1 Kings 3:16-28
  - Reconciling enemies: Philippians 4:2-7
  - Peacemaking: Isaiah 11:6-9
  - Also see WSB Life Application Topics: Justice, Mercy

How are we called to these activities? Take some time to reflect quietly, then each person should write a Help Wanted ad to describe the kind of service to which God is calling him or her. Offer an opportunity for individuals to share their ads if they wish to.

### Devotional Focus

- Monday: Esther
- Tuesday: Philemon
- Wednesday: Exodus 3
- Thursday: Genesis 18:1-15; Hebrews 13:1-2
- Friday: Acts 6
- Saturday: John 13:1-17

### Suggestions

- Begin to think about a service project that you could lead. See the need, listen for God's guidance, and consider what friends you might invite to join you.
- List in your journal the kind of work or service that energizes you.

- Write in your journal about a time in your life when you felt most alive and most useful to God.
- Thank God for what is happening in your life over the past few weeks. Find words to praise God for calling you to something bigger than yourself.

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***Love Works Week Four—Who Do You Know?”***

**Objective:** to design a two-hour service project to be done in the coming week with a group of friends

**WSB Life Application Topics**

Friendship

**WSB Wesleyan Core Terms**

Classes, Bands, Care for Neighbor, Charity, Love of Neighbor, Works of Mercy, Visiting the Sick, Visiting Prisoners

**Opening**

Imagine your entrance into heaven. You have been informed that no one may enter alone but must enter in groups of no fewer than four people. Each group must tell what they have done together in the name of Jesus. Take five minutes and record your response in your journal. Invite group members to share their response with the group.

**Lesson**

We were not created to live in isolation. From the beginning of our biblical story, it has been obvious that God wishes to form a people, not individual persons. Though we come to God one at a time, we come into a family. We are shaped, loved, and put to the work that God has called us to do in this family.

Some have suggested that the demise of the American family has much to do with the transition from an agricultural economy to an industrial/informational economy. In the early 1900s, many families were farmers. They raised food for themselves and the community. They tended animals. They cared for the land. Large families were necessary because children were the day laborers in this economy. It was unthinkable that a child would belong to a family and not share in the work. With the transition to an industrial culture and now to the information age, individuals leave the house and go to work. Extended families no longer live in the same community. Belonging to a family no longer means sharing in common work. While some wise parents assign chores within the family, most do not emphasize that belonging to the family means sharing the necessary work of the family. Many children and teens are little more than consumers of parental goods. A family can even be a single person or a couple without children.

**Discussion**

How has the societal change from agricultural communities of extended families to small, sometimes isolated families that work outside the home changed the church? How has it changed the way we view ourselves as members of the church? In what ways do we act more like consumers of religious goods than members of the family of God, the body of Christ? List these on newsprint. Spend some time describing the consumer-driven bias of the average churchgoer. What are the actions and attitudes of those who think of their faith only from the perspective of the individual (see WSB Life Application Topics: Friendship; Wesleyan Core Terms: Classes, Bands)?

It is impossible to open the pages of Scripture and not be confronted with the community and covenantal nature of the faithful followers of God.

1. Genesis opens with the story of creation and within three chapters has moved to the man and the woman clinging to each other, bearing children, and navigating sibling rivalry. The work given the first couple was to tend the garden.
2. God's call to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) is about blessing all the families of the earth, not God's family alone. God is raising up a people who will live together and embody loyalty to God.
3. God calls Moses to liberate a large group of people (Exodus 3). The laws given at the foot of Mount Sinai have to do with how people live together faithfully under the rule of God.
4. The camp in the wilderness is established with twelve tribes situated around the tent of meeting where God comes down in a cloud of glory to meet with God's people.
5. The prophets are concerned about public justice and mercy and with how the people of God live together in the land they have been given.
6. The psalms are the prayers of the people.
7. The angelic announcement to the shepherds suggests that a newborn child is good news for all people (Luke 2:8-11).
8. Jesus begins his ministry by calling followers to join him, not by touring as a one-man show (Luke 5:1-11; 5:27-32; 6:12-16). Then he begins to send them out in pairs to do his work (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-12). It is clear that to be a member of Jesus' family is to share in the work of Jesus.
9. The Holy Spirit is given to a group of people on the day of Pentecost. They experience the gift of God's presence—the Spirit of the resurrected Jesus—as a people bound together in waiting anticipation.
10. The apostles go out into the world in teams—Paul and Barnabas and Silas and Timothy and Luke. You rarely see these servants of God alone.
11. The New Testament letters are written to the church, to “the saints of God who are in . . .” God's concern is for the community of faith.
12. In the announcement of the Revelation of Jesus to John, we learn that God's final destination is to be among God's people, not inside individual persons (see Revelation 21:3-4).

**Group Exercise:** Read Mark 2:1-12 where we find a miniature model of the church. While the text is primarily about the authority of Jesus to forgive sin, we see the picture of four men who carry a paralytic to the house where Jesus is teaching. They are inconvenienced by the crowd and end up tearing through the roof to lower the paralytic into the presence of Jesus. Given this picture . . .

- What is the need that you *see*?
- What do you *hear* God calling you to do?
- What does the Help Wanted ad say?
- Who will you ask to go with you to meet the need?

Give time for the group members to work through these questions and create a two-hour service project to do in the next six days. Allow people to share their projects with the group. Others might want to join them (see *WSB Wesleyan Core Terms: Care for Neighbor, Charity, Love of Neighbor, Works of Mercy, Visiting the Sick, Visiting Prisoners*).

### **Devotional Focus**

The following texts give us insight into the community-building and friend-making ministry of Paul. In each text, *you* is plural rather than singular. Read these texts with your service project in mind. The final text from the Gospel of Mark is a clear signal of the way Jesus' followers serve. Enjoy!

- Monday: Romans 16
- Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 12:12–13:13
- Wednesday: Ephesians 2:11-22
- Thursday: Philippians 1:3-11
- Friday: Colossians 3:12-17
- Saturday: Mark 10:32-45

**Suggestions**

- Pray for the members of your service project team
- Remember to focus on the need of the person or persons you are serving and not on how you are perceived by them.

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***Love Works Week Five—A Priest! You Gotta Be Kidding Me!***

**Objective:** to deepen the biblical understanding of priestly ministry as the work of God for all the people of God

**WSB Wesleyan Core Terms**

Mission, Lay Leadership

**Opening**

Invite individuals or groups who have done deeds of service in the name of Jesus during the past week to talk about their experiences. Allow time for this. Encourage sensitivity in naming those who received ministry, taking care not to turn people into *projects*. Capture the joy of serving in Jesus’ name.

**Lesson**

Divide into groups of three or four. Half of the groups should read 1 Corinthians 12:4-31 while the other half reads Ephesians 4:1-16. *Discussion Question:* What do we learn about our ministry in these texts? Each group should discuss this question and report to the larger group. Note the following:

- We are called and gifted to do widely varied work.
- There is no unemployment among the people of God. There is work for everyone to do.
- The work that seems to be least significant is most significant in unexpected ways.
- God is the one arranging the body to do God’s work.
- While our callings are different, our hope and faith and baptism are one and the same.
- The goal of the church is to equip the people of God for the work of ministry so that we can all grow up into the likeness of Jesus (*see WSB Wesleyan Core Terms: Mission, Lay Leadership*).

**Group Exercises**

- Secure a priest’s collar. Ask, “Would you be willing to wear this for the next week?” Allow time for individual reaction. The priest’s collar is a symbol that marks people as servant ministers of Jesus. What marks us? How are we recognized as ministers of Jesus Christ, called to the work of God, and sent into the world in Jesus’ name? What symbol is appropriate?
- Secure a bottle of oil and offer to have the group anoint and pray over one another’s ministries. Be careful not to embarrass any persons who do not wish this. Invite members to come forward, state their understanding of their ministries, and then invite others to gather around them for prayer. Make the sign of the cross on each person’s forehead and say, “We

anoint you in the name of Jesus as a minister of God. You are God’s servant. You are God’s gift to a needy world.” Ask someone to lead the group in prayer.

**Devotional Focus**

We read from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians this week. Note how Paul understands that God is at work in his life and through the church to declare the gospel to the Gentiles and outsiders. Remember that Paul did this work as a traveling tent-maker.

- Monday: Ephesians 1
- Tuesday: Ephesians 2
- Wednesday: Ephesians 3
- Thursday: Ephesians 4
- Friday: Ephesians 5
- Saturday: Ephesians 6

**Suggestions**

- Write a prayer about your ministry. Remember that our ministries vary widely: student, homemaker, teacher, nurse, encourager . . .
- Record ministry deeds in your journal. Begin to notice how even mundane, routine work becomes ministry when touched by God.
- Journal question: Is God trying to change the way you view your work?

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***Love Works Week Six—Getting in the Game***

**Objective:** to celebrate the experiences of the past five weeks and to dream together what we might be capable of through the Spirit.

**WSB Life Application Topics**

God’s Redeeming Love, Doing Good, Acts of Kindness

**Opening**

Review the lessons of this series. Ask group members to share the best “take-away” from this group study. What did you learn? What person in the group has influenced you by their example? What practice do you most wish to continue? What will it take to do that?

**Lesson**

Children are naturally self-centered. The words *me* and *mine* seem to be standard fare. One of the challenges of parenting is to help children see a world larger than their own wants and needs. As humans stained by sin, we shrink to the level of living for our little selves. The game of life is only as large as that which directly concerns or affects us.

Our focus today is God’s gift of the Spirit, designed to get us off the bench of our little lives and into the game of God’s world-redeeming work (*see WSB Life Application Topics: God’s Redeeming Love, Doing Good, Acts of Kindness*).

Following the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples were shattered. We find them in hiding, wondering what to do with their lives. Jesus appears and instructs them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift he has promised them, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Read Acts 1:1-8. Quite a challenge for people who have never traveled more than a few miles from home!

On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit is poured out on the gathered group. The reality of multiple languages spoken and understood is God’s way of taking them beyond their comfort zone. They are hearing testimonies of God’s work in languages of other cultures, languages of the business world in far away places. God is evicting them from their small Jerusalem box. The

story that unfolds in Acts shows the disciples doing things they never dreamed of doing: healing crippled beggars, standing face to face with people who are telling them to shut up, creating a feeding program for widows, baptizing Ethiopians, establishing the church of Jesus in towns from Jerusalem to Rome.

**Discussion:** If you could do anything for God, what would it be? What ministry dream has grown in your heart? Allow time for people to talk about this.

**Devotional Focus**

Read the stories of God's work in the lives of Spirit-filled disciples.

- Monday: Acts 2:43-47
- Tuesday: Acts 3-4
- Wednesday: Acts 8:4-25
- Thursday: Acts 10
- Friday: Acts 14:8-20
- Saturday: Acts 16:16-40

**Suggestions**

- As you read each text, imagine yourself in a similar, modern-day situation. How might the Holy Spirit work through you in this setting?
- Keep your ministry dream alive. Continue to pray, seek out others who share your calling, and get some people together to take the next step.
- Pray for your friends who have expressed their ministry dreams. Call some of them this week and talk about their next step toward getting in the game.