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SEASON 1 | PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Table of Contents

DISCUSSION GUIDE • PERSONAL STUDY • REFLECTION SCRIPTURE

	OVERVIEW	3
	EPISODE 1 - CALLED MARIANO RIVERA	13
	EPISODE 2 - TRANSFORMATION WILLIE ALFONSO	21
	EPISODE 3 - REDEMPTION KYLE OXFORD	29
	EPISODE 4 - RESTORATION ROBERT AND SHARON IRVING	37
	EPISODE 5 - PURPOSE TOM PATERSON	45
	EPISODE 6 - BROTHERHOOD ACHOS	53
	EPISODE 7 - CHOICES JERRY QUIROZ	61
	EPISODE 8 - PAIN TOMMY GREEN	71
	EPISODE 9 - IDENTITY PROPAGANDA	79
	EPISODE 10 - RELOAD CLINT BRUCE	89

C ● R E

A person wearing a red and tan jacket and a dark hooded sweatshirt stands on a beach, looking out at a large, dark rock formation in the ocean. The person's reflection is visible in the wet sand. The sky is overcast and the ocean has white-capped waves.

**NO ONE
DRIFTS INTO
SPIRITUAL
TRANSFOR-
MATION.**

John Ortberg



OVERVIEW

**WELCOME TO THE CORE
SEASON 1 SMALL GROUP
EXPERIENCE! WE ARE
EXCITED YOU CHOSE TO BE
A PART OF THIS JOURNEY.**

This is the passion behind CORE: to help men feel alive when they see who they truly are and what they were made for in the context of brotherhood. If you haven't already, check out coreunites.com to keep in touch with other resources and events to help you win the battles over your heart, family and city.

It is important for you to know that the whole reason we have produced the CORE Films and Participant Guide is to help create an environment where you can experience breakthrough in some of the most important areas of your life.

In spite of what our culture might tell us, **life was not designed to figure things out on our own.** When Jesus came to earth to start a revolution, he did so by gathering a small band of ordinary men.



OVERVIEW

These men had their own unique backgrounds, diverse occupations and individual personalities. It was alongside one another that Jesus would orchestrate learning environments that would change them into the most powerful transformative community in the history of the world.

Together, these men went from being self-centered individuals, to united powerhouses that forever changed the course of history. Jesus didn't just teach them wonderful truths. He modeled, coached and empowered them on what it took to make those truths become a living reality in the challenging world in which they lived. Jesus is still forming and discipling powerful communities today.

Our prayer is that this 10-session small group experience is the beginning of a journey that transforms your group into this type of community.

Here are the basic elements we have prepared for you:

10 SHORT FILMS

We believe in the power of story. The films are stories of real people, facing real life challenges.

10 PART DISCUSSION GUIDE

We believe in the power of community. This guide will help facilitate small group interaction in a way that creates connection around things that matter.

10-PART PERSONAL STUDY & SCRIPTURE READING

We believe in the power of personal study and reflection. This gives the opportunity, between group meetings, to move the ideas from the film and discussion into deeper understanding and growth.

EPISODE

1

MARIANO RIVERA CALLED

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

90 MINUTES

Opening Prayer

Surrender time and heart to God's leading.

Check In

(15 minutes - 1 to 2 minutes each)

1. Share name.
2. Reasons for being in the group.
3. One thing you would like to get from participating in the group.

Together Read the Guidelines on Page 10. (10 minutes)

These are simple yet designed to enhance your group experience.

1. Does everyone in the group understand them?
2. Are there any clarification questions regarding any of the guidelines?
3. Can we commit to these as a group?

Note: Many of you are seeing this Participant Guide for the first time. There is some foundational information in the Overview and Group Dynamics section in this booklet that would be well worth reading before you meet again.

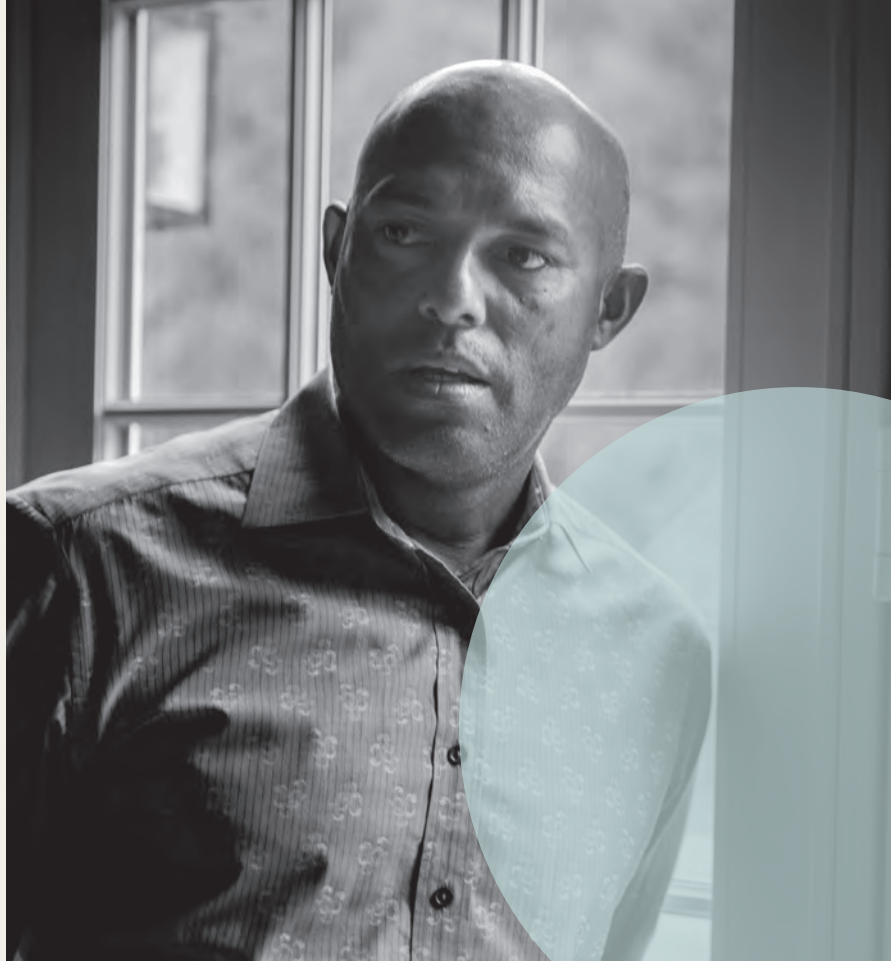
Watch Film (10 minutes)

Mariano Rivera - Called

Discussion (30 minutes)

Be mindful of the need for everyone to have the opportunity to talk. Take 1-2 minutes each time you share.

1. Which part of Mariano's story did you connect with?
2. Mariano said that his pitch's new movement was not something he deserved or was asking for but was a gift that gave him a platform to honor God. Have you ever thought that way about a strength or ability in your life? Explain.

**Action (25 minutes)**

In light of today's discussion, what is one step you can take in your life or in your relationships this week? Something specific. Something measurable. Something the group can pray for during the week.

Read Out Loud This Special Note

The Personal Study and Scripture Reflection section in this guide is included in each of the sessions. Taking time each week to do them is one of the most important things you choose to do over these next 10 weeks. It is the

difference between randomly throwing seed on the ground versus planting it deeply. Setting aside time for personal study and prayerful reflection is a new rhythm for many. Choosing to commit to this, along with showing up every week with your group, will strengthen your ability to drop old thoughts and habits and take on new ways to think and live.

Closing Prayer

Ask for God's guidance and strength for the week ahead.

PERSONAL STUDY

EPISODE 1: MARIANO RIVERA - CALLED

Given Mariano's status as the greatest relief pitcher in the history of baseball, it might at first be hard to relate to how his journey began. It started with him having virtually no awareness of a particular calling or specific purpose. Calling and purpose were probably the furthest things from his mind. Yet, regardless of what Mariano was or was not aware of, it is clear from his story that God had a calling and purpose for his life.

In the same way, God has a specific calling and purpose for you. Look at what He says to you in His word:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. **John 15:16 (NIV)**

God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. **1 Corinthians 1:28-29 (NIV)**

God has a purpose for His people. It's such a wild thought, isn't it? The God of the universe has chosen to collaborate with ordinary – everyday – imperfect people. He doesn't do this because He's been forced to and it's definitely not because He needs to... but solely because He wants to.

God made you in His image. **Genesis 1:27 (ESV)** clearly states our original purpose and calling:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

This means that the all-encompassing aim of your life is to reflect God to others. That looks uniquely different for each one of us. We all have different jobs, different families, live in different homes, have different backgrounds, etc. But, there are some constants for everyone - like reflecting God's love, His goodness, His compassion, His forgiveness, just to name a few. All of us are called to reflect God to others, and we all have specific people, places and times that we get to reflect Him.

When you get a glimpse of the life of Mariano Rivera, you see the uniqueness of God's calling. We're talking about the best closer in major league history. When he stepped on the mound in the ninth inning, he dominated unlike anyone before or after him. But his story is much more than being a great pitcher. It's a love story of God pursuing him, changing him and collaborating with him.

GOD MADE MARIANO IN HIS OWN IMAGE, AND GOD LED HIM TO A PARTICULAR PLACE, WITH A PARTICULAR TALENT, TO SHOW GOD'S CHARACTER TO A PARTICULAR PEOPLE.

Even before Mariano committed his life to Christ, he became aware that God was trying to get his and his wife's attention. God had been using each of Mariano's circumstances to soften his heart and to open his eyes. One day, he heard a pastor give an invitation to become a follower of Jesus. It was then, on

**THE TWO MOST
IMPORTANT DAYS
IN YOUR LIFE
ARE THE DAY YOU
WERE BORN AND
THE DAY YOU
FOUND OUT WHY.**

Mark Twain

EPISODE 1

that day, that he confessed Jesus as his Lord and made Him his Savior.

If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. **Romans 10:9-10 (NLT)**

Mariano said, "That was the moment that I said, 'I surrender. I can't do this thing anymore.' That moment was something special... I said to God, whatever you want us to do, we are here."

He began to see with more and more clarity, that God was weaving His grand story within the particulars of his own human story.

Mariano started noticing God's work in very specific things, including baseball. For example, when Mariano threw the ball – just as he always had – it started moving toward the catcher in ways that he had never experienced before. Batters were rarely able to get a hit off his pitches, and Mariano knew that God had given him this particular ability for a purpose.

Mariano said, "It was something that the Lord gave me to give me a platform to talk about Him. Not because I was asking. Not because I deserved it. But He wanted to use that to glorify his name."

This is indeed a gift - God giving something that was not earned or expected. A gift is not based upon accomplishments, dedication, hard work, talent or effort. A gift is something that the Giver has decided to impart simply because He wants to and loves to.

How many gifts from God go unnoticed or unappreciated for what they are? It is so easy to experience blessings in our relationships and careers without seeing them for what they really are. They are all opportunities to experience the graciousness of God in our lives and to use them to honor Him.

We use the gifts that God has given us in one of two ways: to honor God, or to honor ourselves. Oftentimes we can start believing that we are the ones who are responsible for these gifts in our lives. But Mariano shares with us that it's through the difficult times of life that we are reminded of how powerless we really are - and how powerful God is. It is when things don't turn out the way we want them, when we go through times of failure and unmet expectations, that we are given the gift of facing our own inabilities.

Here is a secret worth discovering: when we come face to face with inabilities and weaknesses and learn how to surrender those to the King of Grace, there exists freedom and joy. It is as simple as praying, "God I can't do this, I can't face this, but I ask you to help me take the first steps to let you do through me what I'm struggling with on my own."

This is what Paul is encouraging the Corinthians with the counterintuitive secret God revealed to him.

But he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

MARIANO RIVERA - CALLED

Are you willing to see hardships that way? Ask yourself this CRUCIAL question:

When I go through the fire of life's challenges, am I willing to become less dependent on myself and more dependent on God?

We must believe that we can face our own weakness because God is always seeking to draw our hearts closer to Him – and few things in the world can draw us nearer to God than difficulties. He is always faithful to grant us the grace and courage necessary to stand firm during these times. When we come out of that fire, we will be stronger and more faithful than when we went into it.

One of the ways we are able to persevere with hope is by the gift of community. Mariano said that Willie Alfonso was a powerful influence during the hardest seasons of his life. Willie was a person who was always there for Mariano. He was one of God's provisions for Mariano to recognize that life is not meant to be figured out on his own.

As you think about those in your CORE group:

- Trust that God has provided them for you to encourage and strengthen your faith.
- Trust that God has provided you for them to encourage and strengthen their faith.

God has gathered each of you together to be a support for one another through the fires.

Think about the challenges you currently face in your life - work, family, children, spouse, and all the other facets of your life. Let this ten-week CORE journey be an opportunity to be as real as possible with one another, to come alongside one another and to experience significant breakthroughs together.



SESSION 1

REFLECTION



PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In what area of my life could I really use a breakthrough?
2. What fears do I have that could create obstacles to seeing God work in and through me?
3. Have I addressed my Action step that I shared with my CORE Group? If not, what is keeping me from stepping out and addressing it? What's my next step?

JOURNALING:

Write down your answers to the three personal study questions above in a notebook. Then, each week, as you watch a new film and the themes contained within it, write down what comes to mind that can be applied to the specific areas in your life where you are committed to taking new ground.

Write down every week what you are learning. This can include: what is happening, what you're experiencing, where you are making progress, where you are stuck, what's working, what's not working, what's wanted and needed, what's next.

A quick encouragement to writing these answers down: It may not seem very important right now, but it will be incredibly beneficial to take the time to

write down your answers to the questions each week. Start your own simple notebook. There are things that come to mind and become clearer when you pause to write. "Thinking" and/or "talking" alone don't produce the same kind of meaningful insight as writing. These are powerful little moments that give you opportunities to go below the surface of typical and familiar thoughts and face blind spots and discover new ways to replace lies with truth.

Note: Your notebook is also a great place to write down the Action steps and prayer requests for you and your group. You can use this as a reminder on what you are wanting to take new ground in and to pray for the guys in your group during the week.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

We encourage you to consider the following scripture passage over the course of this week in a contemplative way. Read the passage four separate times. It works well if you read it on four separate days. But, each time you read it, you read it from a different perspective.

1. With the first reading, be alert for a phrase or word that stands out for you.
2. During the second reading, take a moment to reflect on what touches you—perhaps saying that particular verse out loud or writing it in your notebook.
3. After reading the passage a third time, respond with a prayer to God about what you have experienced and what the scripture might be calling you to.
4. Finally, rest in silence after a fourth reading, trusting that, “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” **Philippians 2:13 (ESV)**

This process helps you to engage not only your mind, but also your heart and soul in worshipful reflection on the scriptures.

This week’s reflection scripture: **EPHESIANS 2:4-10 (NIV)**

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

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CORE Ministries, Inc. PO Box 93007 Austin TX 78709

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