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SEASON 1 | PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SAMPLE - EPISODE 2 - TRANSFORMATION

**THIS IS A SAMPLE OF THE SMALL
GROUP OVERVIEW AND SESSION
2 IN THE CORE PARTICIPANT GUIDE.**

**YOU'LL FIND THE FULL
10-SESSION PARTICIPANT GUIDE
TO PURCHASE AT THE CORE
STORE OR AT COREUNITES.COM**

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C ● R E

A person wearing a red and tan jacket and a dark hooded cap stands on a wet beach, looking out at a large, dark, triangular rock formation in the ocean. The person's reflection is visible in the shallow water on the sand. The sky is overcast and grey.

**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.



GROUP DYNAMICS

COMBINED WITH THE FILMS, THE 10-SESSION GROUP DISCUSSION IS DESIGNED TO MAXIMIZE INTERACTION, CONNECTION AND MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS.

We've intentionally made this guide as straightforward as possible. Please know that each of these simple steps are strategically designed to help create maximum impact for you and those in your group. With that in mind, we encourage you to trust the process by following each step, along with their suggested time frames.

CORE Group time consists of:

- 1. Opening Prayer.** Surrendering time and hearts to God's leading.
- 2. Check In.** Discussing past week's issues, progress and challenges.
- 3. Watch Film.** Viewing together a 10-minute real life story.
- 4. Discussion.** Sharing personal impressions and thoughts about the film.
- 5. Action.** Establishing measurable steps that can be taken throughout the next week.
- 6. Closing Prayer.** Asking for God's guidance and strength for the week ahead.

Each meeting together will serve as an opportunity to connect with each other, get real, build trust and consider the important issues in the lives of everyone in your group.

IDEAL GROUP SIZE & TIME FRAME

An ideal small group size is 5-7. If the group is too small and somebody does not come or drops out, you can lose the collective perspective and encouragement a group can bring. If it is too large, you lose the opportunity for everyone to fully participate and build trust. If your group is larger, you can break into smaller groups for the Discussion and Action time.

An ideal time frame for your group is 90 minutes. Of course, if your group decides, you can meet for longer periods of times. You can also meet for shorter periods. We recommend not meeting for less than 60 minutes. The suggested meeting agenda we have provided is based on the 90-minute time frame. If you meet longer or shorter, adjust accordingly.

OVERVIEW

GROUP LEADER

The most effective small groups have one individual who will organize and guide the meetings. They will help with the communication necessary for meeting times and reminders in between gatherings. If you prefer as a group, you can have multiple group members coordinate a session and rotate between them. If one individual is motivated to “owning” the group logistics and reminders for the full 10-weeks, this will go a long way in seeing the group stay consistent and finish strong.

MEETING LOGISTICS

The group dynamic is designed around watching a short film together each time you meet. This will require having access to a proper screen and sound system. Additionally, Wi-Fi access or a DVD player is crucial. In choosing the meeting place, the fewer distractions you have, the greater the chance for open discussion. Some churches host larger gatherings of men that are sitting around individual tables. They all watch the film together and participate in all the discussion time at their tables. If you do this, to build trust, we encourage you to keep the same guys at each table, each week.

1st SESSION ORIENTATION


Please be sure your group goes over the Sharing and Group Guidelines in the first session and has a chance to ask any clarification questions. Have the group agree to commit to these Guidelines. They are simple yet designed to enhance your experience together.

Here is how everything fits together for this CORE Season 1.

Each meeting you will go through the Group Discussion Guide, watch a film and discuss personal relevance and application.

- In between each session, you will go through the Personal Study and Scripture Reflection to process the major theme of that film and think more deeply on supporting scriptures.
- At the next meeting you will have an opportunity to discuss what you discovered, worked through, and what stood out to you during your Personal Study and Scripture Reflection time.

We highly recommend you schedule one or two times between sessions to enjoy a shared activity together as a group (BBQ, movie, sporting event, weekend getaway, etc.). The purpose of this is to help facilitate getting to know each other in a different kind of environment. Be creative and plan something everyone will enjoy.



In your opening
Episode 1 small
group session,
please read out loud
these guidelines for
everyone to agree to.

OVERVIEW

PERSONAL SHARING GUIDELINES

1. **Personalize, Not Sermonize.**

What does the specific consideration being discussed mean for my life, my concerns, my dreams versus giving additional insights to others. Speak more from the “I” and “my” and not “we” and “you.” (Can be difficult for those who are teachers or those who wish to be seen as insightful.)

2. **Be Brief.**

Be thoughtful not to dominate discussion time. Think in terms of 1-2 minutes each time you share. If you have something that needs more time to unpack, make a request to discuss later. (Can be difficult for those who externally process versus those who internalize thoughts before speaking.)

3. **Encourage, Not Fix.**

We honor courageous authenticity. We discourage group counsel or correction. (Can be difficult for those who are counselors or fixers.)

4. **Maintain Confidentiality.**

Keep everything shared confidential. Do not repeat it to ANYONE outside your CORE group, including spouses or close friends. (Can be difficult for those who don't highly value being a trusted confidante.)

GROUP GUIDELINES

1. Take responsibility for your own actions, results and experience.
2. Real, honest and transparent discussion is highly encouraged.
3. As mentioned in the Personal Sharing Guidelines, maintain confidentiality.
4. If you are going to be late or absent, call someone in your group to inform them.
5. No cellphone use during the meeting, unless permission is asked at the beginning of the meeting.
6. Don't leave the group permanently without speaking to your group about it.



There are 10-film episodes in CORE Season 1. So, you have 10 small group meetings and personal reflection opportunities revolving around each episode.

OVERVIEW

ADDITIONAL GROUP BEST PRACTICES

In these groups, we put a premium on being real. No posing required. “Being real” can mean different things to different people. So, be respectful of each other and embrace what “being real” means for them.

- Interrupt any tendency you feel to judge another.
- Avoid being a “professional advice giver.” If someone in the group wants input or feedback, let them ask for it. If you have input you want to offer, ask permission to give it. Feel free to not grant permission to someone to give input if you are not ready to hear it. Be committed to creating an honoring and respectful environment in your group.
- Do not shut down someone who is using strong language or expressing raw emotion in describing their perspective and experience, i.e., swearing, raising voice, etc.
- Be respectful and aware of the time frames included in the group meeting agenda for each week. A common problem for groups is the tendency of one guy to dominate the group time. If someone is going over on time, after the meeting, respectfully remind them of the time so they can limit their sharing time. If they persist, gently remind them during the group time.
- There will be some very good and open conversations in the Check In and Discussion time. The temptation will be to let that take so much of the group time that you sacrifice the Action round. The current spiritual culture is high on talking but slow on doing. When you purposefully give time to ask, “what specific step am I going to take this week?”, it can move your group into new levels of discovery and breakthrough. This also gives everyone something specific to pray for one another during the week.
- When you discuss how your previous week’s Action step went, this is a “no shame zone” if someone is still struggling. Growth takes time. Empathy, encouragement, and patience will go a long way to building the kind of environment that will surface root issues and facilitate breakthrough.
- The focus of discussion in these CORE group meetings is authentic sharing, encouraging, and connecting. The focus for the Discussion time is not instructing, teaching, or pontificating. Of course, you can offer suggestions, just be aware that this is an opportunity for your group to open up with what they are processing and discovering.
- A great CORE group meeting, which takes time to evolve, has an ease and a flow to it. It is not a rigidly enforced agenda, but it is important to follow the established guidelines that allow enough time for each of the group elements.

LET’S GO!

EPISODE

2

WILLIE ALFONSO TRANSFORMATION

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

90 MINUTES

Opening Prayer

Surrender time and heart to God's leading.

Check In (25 minutes)

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

1. How has your week gone? Family? Work?
2. What kind of progress or challenges did you have with your Action step?
3. How was your Personal Study and Scripture Reflection time this week? What is resonating? What is not working?

Check In time is high on encouragement and low on "judgment".

Watch Film (10 minutes)

Willie Alfonso - Transformation

Discussion (30 minutes)

1. Which part of Willie's story did you connect with?
2. Briefly share what was positive and negative about the relationship with your father/step-father. How do you think that relationship impacted your life and decisions?

Action (25 minutes)

Be mindful of the need for everyone to have an opportunity to talk. Take 2-3 minutes each. Take notes and pray for each other's Action steps during the week. As always, keep everything confidential.

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.

Closing Prayer

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

**WHAT LIES
BEHIND US AND
WHAT LIES
BEFORE US ARE
TINY MATTERS
COMPARED
TO WHAT
LIES WITHIN US.**

Ralph Waldo Emerson

PERSONAL STUDY

EPISODE 2: WILLIE ALFONSO - TRANSFORMATION

One of the great themes of last week's Mariano Rivera story is that God calls you and gives gifts to you in order to fulfill that calling. He has made you in His image. He chose you. He loves you. And you did absolutely nothing to earn it. That is the good news of God's grace! No pressure to earn it, perform for it, or try to achieve it. God freely offers it. He paid the price in full. It is a free gift (Romans 5:15; 6:23).

Consider the status of Mariano's life when God called him. It was well before Mariano had accomplished any level of success in his life. God did not choose him because he was successful - because at that time he wasn't. God chose him because God loved him, and it was for God's purposes. God is on the move and He's chosen to use ordinary people to partner with Him and His purposes. Like He invited Mariano to collaborate with Him, He is inviting us to do the same.

Willie Alfonso is the mutual friend that has stood by Mariano for many, many years. They've committed to meet regularly, to be real with each other, and to pursue their love for God together. Their friendship reflects what is at the core of life as brothers. In the same way, this is what's possible for you and those in your group.

Just as Mariano has his unique story, Willie's own story shows the power of God's redemptive grace. To see what Willie's upbringing was like, it's nothing short of the power of God that he is who he is now - and where he is now. Today, Willie serves as the chaplain of the New York Yankees and is involved in serving God and others in a myriad of ways. But that's not how his story began.

Growing up, Willie endured tremendous suffering and rejection:

- He was abused by his violent father.
- He was abandoned by his father and mother.
- He was homeless, sleeping and eating on the streets of New York at 11-years old.
- He experienced deep rejection.
- He was a drug addict.
- He felt deep anger and bitterness towards his father.

And, yet, God rescued him from all of that.

Perhaps your background is not as dramatic as Willie's. Perhaps it's even worse. Regardless, we all experience loss, betrayal, and failure in some form or another. A harmful tendency we have in response to these hardships is to excuse, minimize or dismiss them as not relevant or not a big deal. But they have influenced us just the same.

Willie recounted the persistence of a co-worker that shared an alternative to the self-destructive path he was on. This man told Willie that there was forgiveness found in Jesus. Willie received the gift of God's grace and began learning how to live as an empowered follower of Jesus.

Oftentimes we hear about a person's radical life-change, and it sounds almost too good to be true. We might even become envious of such a powerful story, because we have a hard time seeing our own lives being changed that way. It is easy to assume that a person's outward transformation is more glamorous and immediate than it really is.



EPISODE 2

How does a life like Willie's change so radically? How did Willie get his life turned around?

Though there were many contributing factors, Willie says that it was the daily influence of God's Word that shaped this profound life-change. The Scriptures showed him a new way of addressing the challenges of his life and softened his heart so that he could see those challenges differently.

Here's what Willie says about this:

"I love the Word of God. I think there's an eighteen-inch difference between what you believe here (in your head), and what you transfer here, to your heart. I read the Word of God just about every day."

"You know Psalms 119 says, thy word I have hidden in your heart so that I might not sin against God. I can't tell you how many times I read my Bible in the morning, went outside and that day I ran into a struggle and that verse I read bailed me out."

"I had a guy cut me off not too long ago. I chased this dude down to the red light. I can't tell you what I was thinking. I wasn't chasing him to get him saved! And when I caught up to him I told him, 'Roll your window down, my man.' Then I love how the truth of God comes. The Bible says at the moment of temptation God will always give you the way of escape. You know what God said? 'Yo stupid! What are you doing man? You're about to bang this thing up.'"

"I make it my business to stay in the Word of God, and I also make it my business to hear God speak to me and respond right then."

"My father may have never told me he loved me, but my Heavenly Father tells me every single day. 'Willie, you're special. I love you. I have something special for you to do that only you can do.'"

Willie shared one of the most important keys in experiencing a breakthrough in how you are living. He doesn't see reading scripture as something he is supposed to do as a "good" Christian. He sees it in the same way a soldier would view his weapon. It gives him what he needs to face the challenges ahead.

A starting point is reading, reflecting and declaring the truth of what God says is true about who we are. We are sons of the Creator of the Universe. This understanding is the starting point of replacing old self-destructive habits with new ways of thinking and living.

Willie admits that this process is not finished and that he is continually being changed. But it's important that we have a clear view of how he is changing. It wasn't like he just prayed a prayer or snapped his fingers, and then became a changed man. Instead, just as Willie shared, it was how God's Word not only enabled him to see the ways he needed to change but gave him the strength and wisdom to carry out his divine purpose to make a difference in others.

- He embraced God's truth in scripture and studied it.
- He reflected upon it.
- He applied it in his life.
- He allowed it to instruct, challenge and encourage him.

WILLIE ALFONSO - TRANSFORMATION

- He applied discipline to this process. He became a disciple—a disciplined one.
- He embraced the possibility of being transformed by the renewing of his mind.
- He made his Action step to hear and obey.

Learning, examining and applying the truth of God from His Word is inwardly life-giving, and outwardly life-changing.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)**

Willie poured himself into studying and reflecting on scripture. In doing so, he was replacing the lies of the corrupt culture that brought him up, with the life-giving truth of God.

In obeying the Word of God:

- Willie replaced bitterness and rejection with forgiveness and acceptance.

- He replaced isolation with connected brotherhood.
- He replaced abandonment with community.
- He replaced using drugs with being freed by God and being used for His perfect purposes.
- He replaced self-centered survival with other-centered service.

All of us have a past that has shaped us. For better or worse – we all have people and circumstances that have shaped how we see God, how we see ourselves and how we see others. Our history, personality and experiences have a way of convincing us of what is true – even when it's not. Graciously, God has given us His Word so that we can confidently know how to think, how to see and how to live.

EPISODE 2

REFLECTION



PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How did your relationship with your father influence how you are living out your life today?
2. Where do you need to exercise forgiveness for others in order to more fully experience freedom and God's forgiveness for you?
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 your answers in your notebook. Also, journal about what comes to mind that can be applied to the specific areas in your life you are committed to taking new ground, as referenced in your vision you

created in Session 1. What are you learning? What is happening? Where are you making progress? Where are you stuck? What's working? What's not working? What's wanted and needed? What's next?

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

We encourage you to consider this 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. Each time you read it, 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 your heart and soul in worshipful reflection on the scriptures. This can also give you fresh courage and trust to take new ground to where God is calling you forward.

Here is this week’s reflection scripture: **PSALM 119:9-16 (ESV)**

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

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