

Here are some ideas to get you started.

## LEADERS:

*Need some help? It's okay. We all do.*

A full walk-through of the study guide with notes on how to navigate each session is available at [groupleaders.org/inthetime](http://groupleaders.org/inthetime).

## VIDEOS:

The video sessions that complement this study can be found on the:

- **Anthology Mobile App** (free on the iTunes Store and Google Play)
- **In The Meantime DVD** (available on Amazon)

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### DURING A GROUP MEETING

#### 1. HANG OUT.

*(About 30 minutes)*

Our lives move so fast these days. Take some time to talk about what's going on in the lives of those in your group. Asking about things like job interviews, the health of their kids, and how their weeks are going goes a long way in building community.

#### 2. WATCH THE VIDEO AND DOODLE ALONG.

*(About 20 minutes)*

When we designed this study guide, we had note-taking in mind. So while you're watching the video, take advantage of the extra space and the grid pages for notes and/or drawings, depending on your note-taking style.

#### 3. DISCUSS AND COMPLETE THE ACTIVITIES.

*(About 45 minutes)*

Depending on the session, your group will have Discussion Questions and scenarios to think through, as well as activities to do. Putting pen to paper can give you deeper insight into the content.

#### 4. PRAY.

*(About 5 minutes)*

Keep it simple and real. Use the prayer provided. Ask God to help you apply what you've learned that week.

If you think of group as a Bible study, hanging out may seem like a distraction.

It's not.

Connecting relationally improves the group discussion and helps your group members apply what they've learned.

ANTHOLOGY is a great way to stream video to your TV or mobile device for free!

# PART I:

*The New Normal*

## VIDEO RECAP

### JOHN THE BAPTIZER

*“Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone **greater** than John the Baptist...”*

(Matthew 11:11)

*When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he **withdrew** to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and **lived** in Capernaum...*

(Matthew 4:12-13)

*“Blessed is anyone who does not **stumble** on account of me.”*

(Matthew 11:6)

Don't interpret God's \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_.

### LAZARUS

*“Lord, the one you **love** is sick.” Now Jesus **loved** Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, **he stayed where he was** two more days.*

(John 11:3, 5-6)

Don't confuse God's apparent **absence** for \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Answer Key for Blanks

silence      apathy  
absence

Familiarize yourself with these passages of Scripture before your meeting. You may want to read the full chapters for greater context.

Filling out the VIDEO RECAP as they watch the video will help you and your group remember the content.

Before the meeting, read John 11:1-44 for full context of the story of Lazarus.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

1 During the message, Andy stated that people often interpret God's silence as absence. Why do you think people do that?

2 How have you seen someone demonstrate great faith in God despite difficult circumstances?

3 Read Matthew 4:12-13 and answer the question that follows the verse.

*When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum...*

When have you felt like God was "at the beach" while you were "in the desert"?

4 Which of these statements best describes your relationship with God while you were "in the desert"?

- God was absent from my life.
- God was apathetic to what I was going through.
- God must be angry with me.
- God must have a purpose for me in this trial.

5 Your unanswered prayer doesn't mean that God is uninterested. Is there something you are wrestling with today and wondering when or if God is going to show up? Share with the group.

### QUESTION 1

This is a safe question that allows group members to begin to talk about a challenging subject: God's apparent silence. The question allows group members to talk about others' experiences, but don't be surprised if their answers are more personal.

### QUESTION 2

By talking about how they've seen God work in other people's lives, this will help group members wrestle with the idea that he is often active even when he seems to be doing nothing.

### QUESTION 3

This question is almost a rephrasing of Question 1, except now your group members are challenged to talk about examples from their own lives. Be ready with an example of your own in case group members are hesitant to share.

### QUESTION 4

Listen closely to the answers to this question. It may help you assess the level of trust group members have built in their relationship with God. As your group members respond, resist the urge to correct them or change their minds. Ask follow-up questions like: "Was there a difference between what you believed about God and what you felt about him?" or "Do you think your perspective has changed over time?"

### QUESTION 5

Listen carefully to group members' answers. Don't offer solutions to their problems. Consider incorporating the needs they express in their answers into prayer time at the end of the group meeting.

## THIS WEEK, THINK ABOUT...

Jesus loved John the Baptizer and Lazarus. Yet he didn't respond in ways we would expect. How do these two stories make you rethink God's silence or apparent absence in your own life?

## PRAYER

"Heavenly Father, help remind me in my *in-the-meantime* moments, that you are not absent or apathetic. Teach me to replace these lies with the truth of how much you really do love me."

**YOUR**  
*unanswered*  
**PRAYER DOES NOT**  
**MEAN THAT GOD IS**  
*uninterested.*

Remind your group members to think through these questions on their own.

You can use this to kick off group prayer or encourage your group members to reflect on it throughout the week.

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Free stuff (maybe)!

# PART 2:

## *A Purpose and a Promise*

### VIDEO RECAP

Therefore, **in order to** keep me from becoming conceited, I was **given a thorn** in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to **torment** me.

(2 Corinthians 12:7)

- Painful
- Humiliating
- Debilitating

Three times I \_\_\_\_\_ with the Lord to take it away from me. But he **said** to me, “My **grace** is sufficient for you, for my **power** is made perfect in weakness.”

(2 Corinthians 12:8-9)

- **Permanent**

Therefore I will \_\_\_\_\_ all the more gladly about my weaknesses, **so that** Christ’s power may rest on me.

(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Embracing your \_\_\_\_\_ is a prerequisite to experiencing Christ’s \_\_\_\_\_.

*That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am **weak**, then I am **strong**.*

(2 Corinthians 12:10)

#### **Answer Key for Blanks**

pleaded	inability
boast	ability

To prepare for the group discussion, spend some time this week reading and reflecting on 2 Corinthians 12.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

- 1 Why do you think people assume that faith in God will remove adversity from their lives? Have you ever made that assumption?
- 2 Why is it difficult to accept that challenging circumstances can come from a loving God?
- 3 Do you feel permission to plead with God to take away your difficult circumstances? How do you believe he responds to that kind of prayer?
- 4 Has there ever been a time that God told you no?

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- 5 Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and complete the activity that follows.

*Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Take a moment to write down what is or has been a "thorn in your flesh." What can you do to begin to view that "thorn" as a gift that comes with a purpose and a promise? If you are comfortable share with the group.

- 6 In the message, Andy said, "You are either in the middle of, have just gone through, or are about to go through an *in-the-meantime* season of life." How does that statement make you feel?

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### QUESTION 1

This is a broad question, designed to encourage the group to brainstorm. Listen to their ideas. Offer your own. Don't try to come up with a "right" answer.

### QUESTION 2

Allow group members to freely discuss how they've experienced this tension. Don't offer a theological answer.

### QUESTION 3

Group members may have a wide variety of responses to this question. Listen closely. Don't teach. It's likely they will learn from and be challenged by one another's responses.

### QUESTION 4

Allow group members time to answer this question before you jump in. But be prepared with a personal example in case you need to get the conversation going. Don't try to reach a resolution. Just talk about the experience of receiving a no from God.

### QUESTION 5

Have pens or pencils ready so your group members can complete the exercise. Give them a few moments to think and write before offering them the opportunity to share. Don't press them to talk about what they wrote down, but be ready to share your own answers. It can encourage others to follow your lead.

### QUESTION 6

This is a broad question that may elicit a wide variety of responses. Listen. Don't offer solutions. Consider including some of what you hear in prayer time at the end of the meeting.

## THIS WEEK, THINK ABOUT...

Andy said, "Embracing your inability is a prerequisite to experiencing Christ's ability." Think of an "inability" or a "thorn" in your life, then use the grief continuum below to evaluate where you are. What can you do this week to move a step closer to acceptance?

Denial	Anger	Depression	Bargaining	Acceptance

## PRAYER

"Heavenly Father, teach me how to live in my weaknesses so I may learn to depend on Jesus. Remind me that it is in my weaknesses that Christ's strength and ability is on display."

**EMBRACING**  
*your inability IS*  
**A PREREQUISITE TO**  
*experiencing*  
**CHRIST'S ABILITY.**

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Encourage your group members to follow through on the practical application in this section.

# PART 3:

Yes, You Can

## VIDEO RECAP

While imprisoned in Rome, Paul uses his “*in-the-meantime*” moment to write letters to his fellow Christians in Ephesus, Colossae, and Philippi. The books, known as the Prison Epistles, were extremely influential in shaping the growth of Christianity.

Paul had no idea what hung in the balance of his decision to remain faithful when remaining faithful was difficult.

You have no idea **what** or **who** hangs in the balance of your decision to remain faithful when everything around you says to be faithless.

It’s often in the context of **adversity** that God does his most amazing things in us and through us.

### CONTENTMENT

*I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have \_\_\_\_\_*

*to be \_\_\_\_\_ whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and \_\_\_\_\_, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me [his] strength.*

(Philippians 4:10-13)

Contentment: to be okay on the **inside** when the **outside** is not okay.

The **life**, **strength**, and **endurance** of Jesus is available to us in Christ.

### Answer Key for Blanks

learned    every situation  
content

To prepare to lead this part, spend some time throughout the week reading and thinking about Philippians 4:10-20.



## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

**1** Do you know someone who lives with discontentment? How does it affect the quality of his or her life?

**2** In the message, Andy said, "You have no idea what or who hangs in the balance of your decision to remain faithful when everything around you says 'Be faithless.'" Do you have a personal example of how remaining faithful turned out?

**3** Take a moment to reflect on your own season(s) of adversity. Share one or two sentences about your experience.

**4** In the midst of adversity, we have a choice between being faithful and being faithless—which can be a feeling or in some cases a behavior. What does being faithless tend to look like for you personally?

- Hopelessness
- Fleeing
- Medicating
- Drinking
- Distractions
- Work

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- Spending
- TV, Video Games
- Avoidance
- Resentment
- Denial
- Other

**5** Think back to the adversity example you noted above in Question 3. Was your response faithful? Faithless? A little of both?

**6** What is your primary source of discontentment right now?

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### QUESTION 1

This question may require time to think. Be ready with an example of your own in case you need to get the conversation going.

### QUESTION 2

Listen closely to group members' answers. Even if you disagree theologically with someone's interpretation of events, be patient. Now is not the time to offer correction.

### QUESTION 3

You may want to provide pencils or pens and give group members a few minutes to write down their answers. This will help them come up with clear and concise sentences.

### QUESTION 4

Keep in mind that this is a challenging question. It's always difficult to talk about our shortcomings. If you relate to someone's answer, say so. It builds common ground.

### QUESTION 5

Your discussion of Question 4 will help group members answer this question. But be ready with your own example. Modeling vulnerability can improve the quality of your discussion.

### QUESTION 6

This is a simple, direct question. But your group's answers may be difficult. Listen. Offer empathy by thanking them for sharing and explaining that you hate that they're experiencing discontentment.

## THIS WEEK, THINK ABOUT...

You can't, but Jesus can. You can be confident that he can because he dragged his own cross to a hill and died for your sin. Anyone who can do that on purpose can strengthen you when you're at your weakest. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

## PRAYER

God, I can't, but you can. Teach me the mystery of Christ in me.

**YOU HAVE** *no idea*  
**WHAT HANGS IN THE BALANCE**  
**OF** *your* **RESPONSE TO**  
**YOUR** *IN-THE-MEANTIME*  
*season.*

Encourage your group members to use the **THIS WEEK, THINK ABOUT** section to reflect on the truth that they can find strength in Jesus.

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## PART 4:

(Andy Jones)

*Where's Your Focus?*

When you focus on what's \_\_\_\_\_, you  
lose sight of what God makes \_\_\_\_\_.

## VIDEO RECAP

In the Meantime

I'll never be **happy** again.

Nothing **good** can come from this.

There's no **point** in continuing.

*As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, \_\_\_\_\_, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "\_\_\_\_\_ this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be **displayed** in him."*

(John 9:1-3)

### **Answer Key for Blanks**

who sinned	wrong
Neither	right

To prepare for  
this discussion, read  
John 9:1–12.  
Spend some time  
reflecting on the passage.  
Try to imagine  
what it was like  
to be the man born blind.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

- 1 Why is it tempting for people in the midst of difficult circumstances to compare their lives to the lives of others?
- 2 Read John 9:1-3 in the Part 4 Video Recap. The disciples were looking to attribute blame for the man's blindness. Why do we look to assign blame as a response to difficult circumstances?
- 3 During the message, Andy Jones said, "When you focus on what's wrong, you lose sight of what God makes right." Using the table on page 27, take two minutes and list what's not going well right now. Then, turn your focus to what God is making right.
- 4 As you consider your current circumstances, what is one thing you can do to begin to focus less on what's going wrong and more on what God is making right?

	THINGS NOT GOING WELL	THINGS TO BE GRATEFUL FOR
Family		
Work		
Health		
Other		

### QUESTION 1

This may be a challenging conversation for some people. It cuts to the heart of what they believe or want to believe about God. This question lets them ease into the discussion by talking in general terms about how people respond to circumstances.

### QUESTION 2

If this question generates interesting conversation, you may want to ask follow-ups like, "What does assigning blame do for us emotionally?" or "Is it true that someone is always to blame for a given circumstance?"

### QUESTION 3

Give group members time to fill out the chart on page 27. When they're finished, invite them to share if they want. Be ready to share some of your own answers in order to encourage them to do the same.

### QUESTION 4

When it comes to this practical action, challenge your group members to be specific. Model how to do that by sharing what you will do to focus on what God is making right. Make sure your "one thing" is specific and achievable.

## THIS WEEK, THINK ABOUT...

As long as you're focused on what went wrong, you'll lose sight of what God is making right. This week, as you find your attention drifting in the direction of what is currently wrong, press reset—and remember that God is on display in your circumstances.

## PRAYER

God, help me to see how you are on display in my circumstances. Help me focus on what you have made right instead of what's wrong.

**WHEN YOU FOCUS ON**  
*what's wrong,*  
**YOU LOSE SIGHT OF WHAT**  
*God MAKES right.*

Read this paragraph aloud to your group. Then finish this study by praying together.

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# PART 5:

*Believe It or Not*

## VIDEO RECAP

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...**Consider** it pure **joy**, my brothers and sisters, whenever you **face** trials of many kinds, because you know that the **testing** of your **faith**...

(James 1:1-3)

\_\_\_\_\_ test our \_\_\_\_\_  
in God.

You know that the **testing** of your **faith** produces **perseverance**.

(James 1:3)

Trials produce \_\_\_\_\_ **faith**.

**Let** perseverance **finish** its work so that you may be **mature** and **complete**, not **lacking** anything.

(James 1:4)

Let perseverance \_\_\_\_\_ its work so you will be **complete**.

Spiritual maturity is measured in terms of **persevering faith**, not **perfect behavior**.

*If any of you lacks **wisdom**, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be **given** to you.*

(James 1:5)

Wisdom: the ability to see **current** circumstances within a **broader** context.

To prepare for this discussion, read James 1:2-17.

### Answer Key for Blanks

Trials	persevering
confidence	complete

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

- 1 Is there a situation or circumstance you wish you would have persevered through instead of hitting the eject button? Take a moment to reflect.
  
- 2 During the message, Andy said, "Faith that gets a yes from God is nothing compared to faith that gets no answer or no for an answer but endures anyway." How do you feel when you see people persevering through trials? Are you okay with the "no" or with no answer?
  
- 3 Read James 1:2-4 in the Part 5 Video Recap. How realistic is it to be able to consider your trials "pure joy"? Be honest.
  
- 4 James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." God responds to our requests for wisdom in different ways. Waiting only for "a sign" or an audible voice from God may mean missing out on the cues God is giving you.  
  
Listed below are a few different ways God can respond to our requests for wisdom. Check the situations that are most relevant in your story. Add any others that might be missing and share with the group.

### Finding Wisdom In:

- Private Disciplines: quiet time, reading the Bible, prayer  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Providential Relationships: certain people in your life that are uniquely qualified to offer wise counsel  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Practical Teaching: messages, books, podcasts  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Personal Ministry: volunteering on Sunday, serving with a local nonprofit, mission trips  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 5 What came to mind when Andy said, "Spiritual maturity is measured in terms of persevering faith, not perfect behavior"?

### QUESTION 1

This is a challenging question—especially at the beginning of the discussion. But it can set the tone for the rest of the conversation. Be ready to provide a personal example in order to encourage group members to do the same.

### QUESTION 2

Give people space to answer this question honestly. If they're not okay with a no or no answer, make sure they feel free to say so. Don't correct or challenge. Instead, allow the answers to influence the direction of the rest of the conversation.

### QUESTION 3

Again, it's more important that group members are honest than that they give the "right" answer. Don't correct or challenge.

### QUESTION 4

Give group members about five minutes to complete this exercise. Be prepared to share from your own answers.

### QUESTION 5

Keep in mind that Andy's statement may be challenging for people, depending on the religious environments they've experienced. Be ready to talk about what it means to you that your connection to God is based on faith, not your behavior. Be honest if you struggle with a desire to earn God's approval.

## THIS WEEK, THINK ABOUT...

Challenge the way you've thought about your trials. When you're living *in-the-meantime*, believe that God is at work in you to mature you and that we are perfected through perseverance.

## PRAYER

"Heavenly Father: help me to consider my trials as a 'pure joy' and to trust you in my *in-the-meantime* moments. Open my eyes this week to the wisdom you have for me."

**WE ARE**  
*perfected*  
**THROUGH**  
*perseverance.*

End the discussion by reading this paragraph aloud to your group. Then take prayer requests and pray together.

Encourage your group members to reflect on this sentence throughout the week. It's easy to understand, but challenging to live by.

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# PART 6:

## Comfort Zone

### VIDEO RECAP

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the **Father of compassion** and the God of all **comfort**, who **comforts** us in **all** our troubles, **so that** we **can** comfort those in **any** trouble **with** the comfort we ourselves receive **from** God.

(2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

God comforts \_\_\_\_\_ to comfort \_\_\_\_\_.

God comforts **us** through **others** to comfort **others**.

For just as we share **abundantly** in the sufferings of Christ, **so also** our comfort **abounds** through Christ.

(2 Corinthians 1:5)

Our \_\_\_\_\_ to comfort is determined by the \_\_\_\_\_ to which we've suffered.

If we are **distressed**, it is for **your** comfort and salvation; if **we** are comforted, it is for **your** comfort, which produces in you **patient endurance** of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our **sufferings**, so also you share in our **comfort**.

(2 Corinthians 1:6-7)

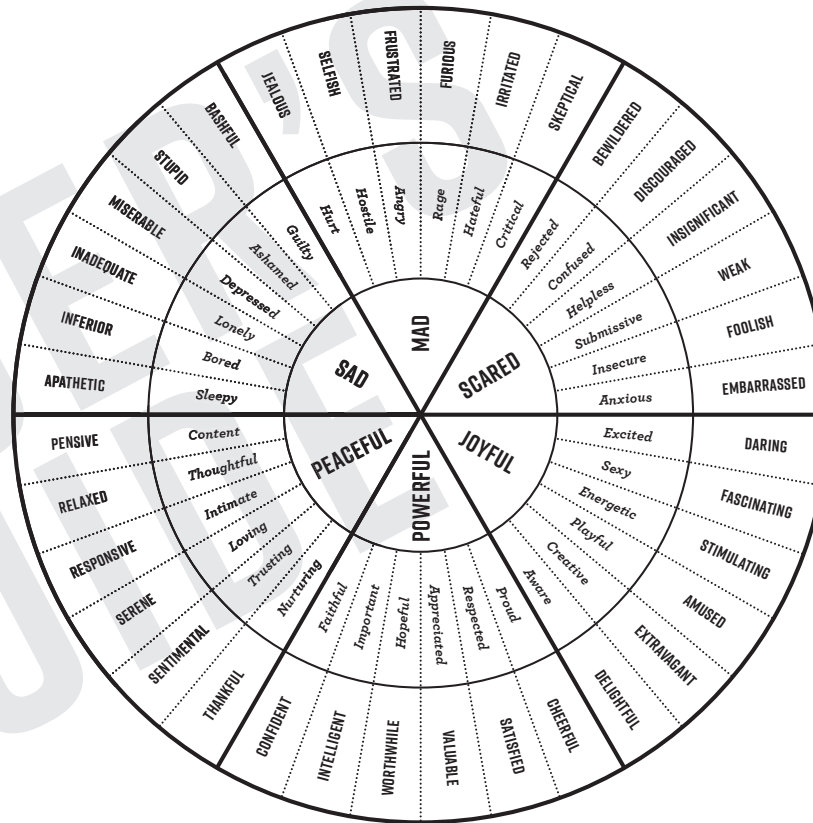
To prepare for this discussion, read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11. Reflect on the troubles Paul and Timothy faced and how God delivered them. How might that give you a new perspective on your troubles?

#### Answer Key for Blanks

us	capacity
others	degree

# LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

- 1 When was a time when someone who had experienced circumstances similar to yours attempted to comfort you? Was it helpful?
- 2 Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 in the Part 6 Video Recap. In the midst of his own suffering, Paul is able to praise God for his compassion and comfort. Does this seem possible?
- 3 Have you ever had the opportunity to comfort someone because you've experienced a similar trial?
- 4 Giving and receiving comfort can be intensely emotional. Considering your answers for Question 1 and 3, use the wheel of emotions listed on page 39 to identify one word to describe how you felt in those situations. Share with the group.
- 5 During the message, Andy said, "Our capacity to comfort is determined by the degree to which we've suffered." Respond to that statement. In what ways is it hopeful? In what ways is it scary?
- 6 Does your *in-the-meantime* moment have to be fully resolved before you can comfort others?



## QUESTION 1

Shared experience isn't an automatic recipe for comfort. How people approach comforting someone else matters. Listen empathetically. Thank your group members for sharing.

## QUESTION 2

It's more valuable to the discussion if group members are honest than if they provide a theologically sound or correct answer. Listen. Don't offer correction. Let the answers, no matter what they are, influence the direction of the rest of the conversation.

## QUESTION 3

This question challenges group members to contrast their efforts at offering comfort with someone else's efforts to comfort them. A good follow-up question may be: "If you could go back and do it again, would you do anything differently?"

## QUESTION 4

Give group members a few minutes to complete this exercise. Challenge them to select feelings from the outer or middle circles of the wheel.

## QUESTION 5

A good follow-up question may be: "When have you seen God use your past suffering to help someone else?"

## QUESTION 6

Spend time before the meeting reflecting on this question. Know how you would answer and why. Use a personal example if you can.

## THIS WEEK, THINK ABOUT...

Make the most of your *in-the-meantime* moments. Comfort those who need comforting with the comfort you have received from God. Don't bury your sorrows. Leverage them for the sake of other people that you are uniquely qualified to comfort because you've been there, you understand, and you know there's life on the other side.

## PRAYER

"Father, help me make the most of my *in the meantime* moments. Help me to see the opportunities to leverage my story for someone else's benefit."

*In the Meantime:*

*YOU can* BE HAPPY AGAIN.

SOMETHING GOOD *can*  
COME FROM THIS.

THERE *is* A REASON TO  
CONTINUE LIVING.

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Read this paragraph aloud to your group. Then finish this study by praying together.