

"Kevin Harney shows us that true strength comes in God's presence. A fantastic read for daily meditation."

MARK BATTERSON, author of *The Grave Robber*

SMALL GROUP SESSIONS

EMPOWERED

BY HIS PRESENCE

RECEIVING THE STRENGTH
YOU NEED EACH DAY

KEVIN G. HARNEY

EMPOWERED BY HIS PRESENCE

SMALL RESOURCES

Small Group Discussion Guide

Jesus knew the importance of small groups. He gathered people at meals, around tables, while walking through the open country, in quiet gardens, and in private homes. Jesus loved being with small groups of people for the express purpose of learning, mutual encouragement, and spiritual refreshment. Jesus designed his ministry around a small group—twelve imperfect, passionate, struggling disciples. One of the Savior’s most common tools for helping his followers grow was asking them questions that caused them to reflect, struggle, and take action.

What follows are reflective discussion questions designed to help you think deeply, act wisely, and learn together as a group. Be sure to use the DVD teaching content and stories. The DVD can be purchased on the Baker website (bakerpublishinggroup.com) or on the kevingharney.com website. The DVD teaching, small group questions, and biblical readings work together to create an experience of learning, mutual accountability, and life application. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will show up each time your group gathers and lead you to a place of God-ordained empowerment!

In Joy,

Kevin G. Harney

SMALL GROUP SESSION 1

Experiencing God's Presence in Suffering, Loss, and Pain



Watch “Introduction to *Empowered*” on the *Empowered* DVD

1. How have you seen people (yourself or others) seek to be powerful and self-assured when they should actually be looking to God for empowerment? What are some possible consequences of looking to ourselves to be powerful instead of relying on God?
2. How have you seen people (yourself or others) feeling powerless and out of control? What are some possible consequences when a person believes they are powerless and there is no hope for them to get out of their circumstances?



Watch “Session 1—Experiencing God's Presence in Suffering, Loss, and Pain” on the *Empowered* DVD

3. Tell the story of a Christian you have watched go through a time of hardship, suffering, or loss and describe how God was with them and empowered them along the way.

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*Pain, loss, and struggle can become a conduit
of God's grace and power in our lives.*

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Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–28 and 12:7–10

4. The apostle Paul was being faithful in following Jesus; he was fulfilling God's purpose and mission for his life. But he still faced great hardship, loss, and pain. What was Paul's attitude toward his sufferings and what can we learn from his example?
5. In the DVD, Hasan says, “I know that God was with me through the toughest time in my life.” How have you met God and been empowered by him as you have faced difficult times of pain and loss?

6. In the DVD, Hasan explains that he wants to protect his daughter from the pain of the world. But he also realizes that he does not want to over-protect her because God will empower her and draw near her in the struggles we all face walking through life. What are some of the rich spiritual lessons and experiences of God's presence we can miss if we try to avoid all pain and struggles in life?
7. Share a lesson of empowerment through suffering that you have learned through your reading of section one of the book or the Bible passages provided for your reading. Tell about one of the characters (Job, Paul, Hannah, Joseph, Peter, or Jesus) and how their journey has impacted your life.
8. What are ways your small group members can help show the love and empowering presence of Jesus to each other in times of struggle, pain, and loss?

“We have to go through those times to be refined. God is there in the tough times. . . . He’ll always bring you through.”

—Hasan Houston

9. What is one specific way your group members can support, encourage, and minister the empowering presence of Jesus to another group member in the coming weeks?
10. What specific ways can you pray for each other until the next time you meet?

BONUS QUESTIONS

- Choose one of the Bible characters from this section of the book (Job, Paul, Hannah, Joseph, or Peter) and tell about what you learned from their example of staying connected to God, even in a time of great pain and struggle.
- How do you see the power of God revealed in the life of this person?
- What is one way you can follow the example of this person and stand strong in a time of struggle you are facing in your life?
- Jesus suffered for us so that we would never have to be alone in our times of pain and loss. How have you felt the presence, care, and power of God during a time of struggle and loss?

SMALL GROUP SESSION 2

Encountering God in the Community of His People

1. Tell about some of the different expressions of Christian community you experience in the flow of an average month. How do you meet and encounter God in these various relational connections?



Watch “Session 2— Encountering God in the Community of His People” on the *Empowered* DVD

2. Tell about a godly Christian person the Lord has placed in your life to help strengthen you and give guidance as you grow on your journey with Jesus.

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“I have felt God taking my hand through my grandmother in pretty much every interaction I have ever had with her since I can remember.”

—Robin Smitherman

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Read Matthew 26:36–39; Luke 8:51–56; and Matthew 17:1–6

3. At critical times in his life and ministry, Jesus gathered three close friends around him. What do you learn from this rhythm in the life of Jesus? How can we follow his example of building community and letting others come close to us?

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God exists in eternal community!

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4. In the DVD story you meet four people who are both a family by blood and by faith in Jesus. Marian Piña is Roy’s mother. Roy Piña is Robin’s father. Robin Smitherman is Crystal’s mother. Four generations seek to walk in community together. Robin talks about longing to pass on to the next generation what she has learned from her parents and grandmother. Why is it critical and essential that we all seek to pass on faith in Jesus to the next generation? What are practical ways we can do this?

Read 1 Timothy 1:1–2

5. What one person has acted as a spiritual parent in your life? How has God used them to help you experience his presence and to empower you?
6. Who is one person you feel God has placed in your life, calling you to invest in them and help them grow in faith? How can God use you to help this person feel his presence and power?
7. Share a lesson of empowerment through community that you have learned through your reading of section 2 of the book or the Bible passages provided for your reading. Tell about one of the relationships that impacted you (the paralytic and his friends; Paul and Timothy; Ruth and Naomi; Lois, Eunice, and Timothy; the woman at the well; Jesus and his friends). How has their journey influenced and inspired you to grow in community?
8. What are ways your small group members can extend deeper community to each other so that each of you can see God more clearly and feel his care more personally?

*One of the greatest sources of power for your life, day by day,
is to stay connected in great and godly relationships.*

BONUS QUESTIONS

- Jesus, God in human flesh, wanted fellowship and friends near him when he was facing great turmoil. How does this make you feel about the hard times when you want people around you?
- Some people try to walk through life alone; they won't let people near to support them. What are some of the dangers we might face when we try to travel through life without the community of others?
- Timothy had a legacy of spiritual support and encouragement that went back two generations. What can you do to infuse greater spiritual heritage and legacy into your own family?

SMALL GROUP SESSION 3

Empowered for the Journey by Receiving God's Rest

1. Tell about a time when your schedule was intensely full, the demands of your life were growing, and you found yourself not getting the rest, refreshment, and time for revitalization you needed. How did the demands of this season of life and the lack of rest impact you in some of the different parts of your life (physically, spiritually, emotionally, or relationally)?



Watch “Session 3— Empowered for the Journey by Receiving God’s Rest” on the *Empowered* DVD

2. What are some of the things that drive us to push ourselves to the point of exhaustion and refuse to find space for rest and refreshment?

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Empowered people have found an amazing balance between working hard and resting well!

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3. In the DVD, Rick tells about a serious wake-up call that forced him to face his own limitations, mortality, and need to dial back and make space for rest and refreshment. Tell about a time when you faced the reality that you are not a machine and that you need to learn to unplug, breathe deep, slow down, and find the refreshment God designed you to need. How did you adjust your lifestyle after this experience?

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“I can be a much more effective father, husband, physician, and friend with adequate rest.”

—Dr. Rick Alexander

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Read Isaiah 30:15–18; Psalm 127:1–2; Exodus 20:8–11; and Matthew 11:28–30

4. Why do you think God is so serious about his children learning to rest and find places of quiet and refreshment?
5. How is your spiritual life and intimacy with God impacted when you are driven, busy, and pushing past your normal limitations? What are some specific ways we can build a rhythm of rest and refreshment into our lives so we can connect with God deeply and consistently?

Read Genesis 2:2–3

6. God is all-powerful, he sustains the universe, and he never gets tired. Why do you think God took a Sabbath day of rest? If God rested as an example for his children, how do you think he feels when we resist taking a day off, slowing down, and enjoying the refreshment he offers?

We can get more done in six days of labor and a good day of rest than in seven days of work!

Read Mark 1:35

7. Jesus made space to pull away from the demands of life and meet quietly with the Father. How is this a model and example for us? What do you do, in the rhythm of your day and week, to make space to be quiet with God and receive his rest and empowerment?
8. Share a lesson of empowerment through rest and refreshment you have learned through your reading of section 3 of the book or the Bible passages provided for your reading. Tell about one of the biblical stories that impacted you (God's day off, Moses's teaching on Sabbath, Israel's struggle, Psalm 23, Elijah's nap, and Jesus's early mornings). How does this passage challenge you to develop disciplines?
9. What is one practical step you can take to build a rhythm of rest and Sabbath into your life? How can your group members pray for you and keep you accountable to live this out?

BONUS QUESTIONS

- Some attitudes and behavior patterns in our culture that are seen as normal or even praiseworthy actually push us too hard and keep us from resting. What are some of these and how can we identify and avoid them?
- The Twenty-Third Psalm is often seen as a psalm for those who have passed away (or are drawing near death). If you read this as a psalm focused on giving wisdom for the living, what do you learn?
- If you could snap your fingers and change one thing in your life that would allow you to slow down and find a restful pace of life, what would it be? What can you do to work toward making this change a reality?

SMALL GROUP SESSION 4

Propelled Onward by the Call and Mission of God

1. Tell about a time you sensed God's call or leading in your life. How did this clarify your awareness of God's vision for your life?



Watch “Session 4—Propelled Onward by the Call and Mission of God” on the *Empowered* DVD

2. In the DVD story you learned about how Sherry finished an advanced theology class and said to herself, “I am glad I will never have to take another class like that.” Years later, God called her to undertake a master's degree in theology. Tell about a time when God called you to do something that surprised, stretched, or even scared you. How did your faith deepen as you followed God on this journey?
3. What are some of the ways God speaks to us and directs us toward his mission for our life? How can we get ourselves in a posture and place where we can hear from God and grow in confidence that we are following his call for our life?

In my heart I heard God say this very clearly, “Do you want to be in my will?” And I answered, “Yes, Lord, I want to be in your will.”

—Sherry Harney

Read Isaiah 6:1–8

4. What prepared Isaiah to hear and follow God's call? How did Isaiah respond to the leading and mission of God?

Read Genesis 12:1–5

5. What do you learn as you watch Abraham following God with limited instructions and details? What helps you follow God, even when you don't have the whole trip mapped out in advance?

God wants to give you a mission. He wants to call you as you read his Word, as you listen to his Holy Spirit, and as you walk in community with his people.

6. How has following the mission and call of God on your life brought greater joy, deeper meaning, or a more profound connection with Jesus?
7. Share a lesson of empowerment through God's clarifying call to a life mission you learned you have as you read section 3 of the book or the Bible passages provided for your reading. Tell about one of the biblical stories of being called to a mission that impacted you (Paul, Isaiah, Abraham, Esther, Mary, or Jesus). How did this story inspire you to listen for God's call and follow his mission for your life?
8. Tell your small group about some call or mission of God you have felt called to follow but have not yet acted on. How can they pray for you, encourage you, and keep you accountable to take a next step of obedience toward this mission?

When God gives you a mission, everything changes. You are empowered and you wake up each morning with a consuming vision of fulfilling God's call on your life.

BONUS QUESTIONS

- Esther took a risk when she approached the king without being invited. It could have cost her dearly. What is one risk you feel God wants you to take as you seek to follow his call and mission for your life?
- Paul heard a heavenly voice, was blinded, and was knocked off his donkey. It is unlikely that you experienced a call that dramatic. But God does still speak, call, and move us in very interesting ways. Tell about some way God has called and directed you to follow his will for your life. Describe how you have tried to follow God's leading.
- Jesus's personal mission statement was to seek and save the lost. As his follower, your mission should include seeking and saving those who are lost and still wandering far from Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Who is one person you know who is still far from the Savior? How can your group members pray for you as you reach out to this person?