

CONNECT *the* DOTS

LEADER GUIDE: COLLEGE EDITION

We all crave relationships. Both Christians and non-Christians desire to belong to a group—a family of friends they can trust with the truth about who they are. As a leader, you have the opportunity to foster something powerful—biblical community. You strategically invite your group to experience authentic friendships the way God intended. This means doing life together, encouraging one another in Christ, and loving one another through the happy and difficult times. Biblical community is the glue that will bind your group together, and it will absolutely baffle non-believers.

Before young adults change their worldviews, practice spiritual disciplines, or memorize Scripture, they have to belong. As you spend time with your group, pray with them and serve them in unexpected ways. You can give them the security they need to take risks in their faith. When you lay that foundation of trust and belonging, you enable God to transform the lives of your group members. No longer is Bible study just an isolated hour of teacher-student interaction; it goes deeper, building lasting community that influences our lives and the very threads of who we are.

NOTE: Before reading any further, take a few minutes to read the article “What Did I Sign Up For?” in your leader tools section of this enhanced CD. It gives several helpful tips for planning and carrying out your group study sessions. Also, take a moment to check out “Listen to This First,” a challenge from Mike Hurt, small groups expert and author of *Connect the Dots*. Then continue reading through this leader guide.

Disclaimer: The suggestions, ideas, and questions provided in this leader guide serve as just that—a guide. Every group is different, and you will need to adapt this content to the specific needs of your unique group. Always include hangout time during your session. Play music and provide light snacks. No one likes a set pattern, so feel free to mix it up to keep the experience fresh each session. You may discover that a session provides more content than you can cover in one group meeting, especially if the discussion is rich. Consider carrying that topic over to the next time you meet.

BEFORE YOUR FIRST MEETING

- Preview all printed and multi-media features available for this six-session study. Multi-media options are listed and explained on the following page.
- Work through “Toward a Better Understanding,” found in the leader tools section of the enhanced CD, in order to familiarize yourself with the biblical ideas behind the upcoming sessions.
- Display promotional posters (available in the leader tools menu of this enhanced CD) around your church and/or community announcing the start of this study.
- Consider posting information on your church’s Web site or your personal blog or MySpace.
- Distribute member books to study participants and encourage them to read and work through the introduction and first session before your first meeting time.
- Send the audio files “The Journey to Discover God’s Will” and “What am I seeking?” (see multi-media features below) to those in your group. (Or consider sending them to several young adults in your church or community to spark interest and encourage participation in the study.)
- Listen to the music available on the enhanced CD (see Music & Playlist below) and download the remaining songs on the playlist via iTunes at www.threadsmedia.com/studies.

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MULTI-MEDIA FEATURES

MUSIC & PLAYLIST

A playlist of music that complements the topic and themes of the study is available in the leader tools section of this enhanced CD. Seven songs from the playlist come with your leader kit and are located in the music & e-mailable audio files section of this enhanced CD. They are for you, the leader, and are playable on a CD player or a computer. Encourage your group members to visit www.threadsmedia.com/studies and download these songs via iTunes, or you can send your group members the playlist in the leader tools section of this enhanced CD.

Track 1: "Burning Bushes" by Andy Gullahorn

Track 2: "Far From Today" by Arthur Alligood

Track 3: "If I'm Brave" by Alli Rogers

Track 4: "Last Chance" by Jeremy Casella,
Sandra McCracken, & Andrew Osenga

Track 5: "Rejoice" by Addison Road

Track 6: "Into the Mystery" by Jason Gray

Track 7: "The Silence of God" by Andrew Peterson

E-MAILABLE AUDIO FILES

E-mail these audio files (located in the e-mailable audio files section of this enhanced CD) to your group between meeting times to provide a way to connect with the topic of the study. You and your group members can listen to them on a computer and/or download them to an MP3 player. Then, when your group meets, discuss your thoughts about them together.

BONUS: "The Journey to Discover God's Will"

SESSION 1: "What am I seeking?"

SESSION 2: "Has God already spoken?"

SESSION 3: "Am I just waiting for the future?"

SESSION 4: "Am I listening?"

SESSION 5: "Does God speak through His people?"

SESSION 6: "What if I can't hear anything?"

MORE LEADER TOOLS

"TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING ..."

Need a better understanding of how to help your group "connect the dots"? Use this biblical commentary as a personal study tool in your preparation. It focuses on three parts of Scripture critical to understanding God's will. Find it in the leader tools section of this CD, and study it prior to starting your group.

E-BOOK OF CALL WAITING

This 150-page e-book focuses on helping young adults understand what God has called them to be and do. Filled with accounts of men and women who have followed God's very personal call to serve Him, the book's compelling stories and focused discussion questions will help you provide guidance during—and after—this study.

ONLINE FEATURES

You'll find topical articles, additional leader helps, blogs from Threads staff and authors, and lots more at www.threadsmedia.com. At www.lifeway.com/bible you'll find different Bible translations, commentaries, word studies, and other resources to supplement your preparation.

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

You may use the questions in the member book, those provided in the leader guide, or a combination of the two. There are most likely more questions than you need, so pick and choose what best suits your group. Along with key quotes from the member book, three types of questions are provided for each session:

ENGAGE: Introductory questions that everyone can answer easily. These help to break the ice and get the conversation started.

ENCOUNTER: Focus on God's Word and each other. They ask what the Bible text says or means about a particular topic.

EXPRESS: Ask "So what?" They help identify how truth applies directly to our lives.

Before each group meeting time, set an open and comfortable environment. Have snacks and listen to music from the playlist as people arrive.

THE NATURE OF GOD'S WILL — *Session 1*

ENGAGE

"Rather than looking for equations to explain God's will or a connect-the-dots experience with Him, God's will is best understood in the context of an intimate relationship."

- > If you were making a list of the top five questions college students ask, what questions would you add to the "big three"?
- > When you think of God's will, what comes to mind: a formula, a connect-the-dots picture, or a relationship?
- > If it were God's will for you to never discover the answers to the biggest questions of your life, would you still want God's will?

ENCOUNTER

"God's will is more about us answering His questions rather than Him answering ours. God can, and many times does, give us the answers we are looking for, but don't fool yourself—finding the answers to our big questions is not necessarily the same thing as discovering God's will for our lives. Though God wants us to come to Him for the answers that matter most to us, He wants our full devotion more."

Read Mark 3:35; John 14:21; and John 15:14.

- > What do these verses teach us about the people who are living by God's will?
- > What do these verses teach us about the nature of God's will? How so?
- > What are some of the areas of your life you already know the will of God for, based on simple obedience to Scripture?

Read Exodus 4:1-17; and Genesis 19:1-26.

- > What do Moses and Lot's wife have in common in these two passages?
- > Why do you think each of them resisted in pursuing the will of God, though they knew what His will was?
- > What do these verses teach us about the difference between knowing and doing?

- > What's the difference between seeking to know the will of God and seeking to live in the will of God?
- > Why do you think that even when we know the will of God we question Him or don't follow through exactly as He directed us to?
- > Look more closely at God's response in Exodus 4:14-17. Why do you think God was angry?
- > What are some instances in your life when you have behaved similarly to Moses when you know the will of God?

Read Isaiah 6:1-8.

- > On what basis does Isaiah respond to God's call on his life?
- > How does this response differ from other responses we have studied—such as Lot's wife or Moses at the burning bush?
- > What are some specific areas of your college life where you know the will of God?
- > What is keeping you from responding like Isaiah to what God has revealed to you?
- > What are some practical ways we can remind ourselves to respond like Isaiah as we seek to live in God's will?

EXPRESS

"Don't become your own urban legend by thinking that God's will is like auto-pilot or cruise control. When you discover what God wants you to do, it will take energy and effort on your part to live it out."

- > How do you need to rethink your current pursuit of God's will for your life?
- > What are the key elements you need to incorporate into your life in order to have a relational approach to living in God's will?
- > What are the practical barriers that stand in the way of that relational approach in the life of a college student?
- > Once you know the will of God in certain areas of your life, what role does faith play in living out His will?

THE NATURE OF GOD'S WILL — *Session 1*

PRAY

Invite your group to acknowledge that God cares about our “big questions” and our moment-by-moment decisions. Do this by offering a prayer in the form of questions. Ask as many are as comfortable to voice a one-sentence question to God about some area of their lives. After many have done so, close with a statement of confidence.



BEFORE NEXT TIME

Send the audio file “Has God already spoken?” to the group members. Listen to the clip in order to prepare and engage discussion during the next session.

Begin an e-mail discussion with your group members to continue during the week. For your part, send the question, “What is the most interesting method you have used to try and find God’s will?” Encourage all your group members to “Reply to All” so that you can interact with each other’s stories.

Start a *Connect the Dots* Facebook group for your group members in which they can post messages and interact with each other. Encourage them to post notes in that group regarding their pursuit of God’s will.

GOD'S WILL FOR EVERY DAY — *Session 2*

ENGAGE

"God has made His will for every day of our lives clear. You can know what you should do every day. You can know how you should think every day. You can know how you should relate to people every day. You can know what God wants for you every day."

- > Which does God care about more: who you marry or what you do this weekend? Why?
- > What might keep you from believing that you can really find the will of God by studying the Bible?
- > What, in your opinion, separates the Bible from any other historical book?
- > What are some barriers keeping college students from deeply engaging the Bible?

ENCOUNTER

"... if you search for [God's] will without ever consulting His Word, you will never find what you are looking for. You are looking for what only Scripture can provide: a word from the Lord.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

- > Look at the characteristics of the Word of God in 2 Timothy. Define each of those characteristics.
- > Which of those characteristics is most important to you as a college student?
- > In what ways have you seen the Bible prove to be true from each of those perspectives?
- > If we really believed the Bible worked like this passage, how would it change the way we approach reading it?
- > If you were to assign characteristics to the Bible based on how we have the habit of reading it, how would 2 Timothy 3:16-17 read?

Read 2 Peter 1:21.

- > Why is it that we often times first look to the words of men rather than to the Word of God when we're looking to discover God's will for our lives?
- > What are some of the words of men that college students look to instead of the Word of God?
- > What does it mean to say that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?
- > How does realizing these things are true contribute to our pursuit of living out the will of God?

Read Psalm 119:20,24,35,59, and 93.

- > As you read these verses, what strikes you about the psalmist's commitment to God's Word?
- > How does this perspective challenge you?
- > How does your own perspective and commitment measure up to this passage? How do you know?
- > What would have to be different in your perspective on the Bible for you to have a similar passion about God's Word?
- > What does the life of a college student look like when he or she is committed to the Bible?

EXPRESS

"I read so that I know God's Word, I study so that I understand God's Word, and I meditate so that I ingest and apply God's Word. Reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word is the first step in discovering God's will for your life."

- > What practices or habits do you need to develop to consistently read the Word of God?
- > What part of the Bible are you naturally drawn to and which do you avoid?
- > How can consistently reading Scripture teach you God's will for your life?

GOD'S WILL FOR EVERY DAY — *Session 2*

- > What is the difference between reading a passage and studying a passage?
- > What is the difference between studying a passage and meditating on a passage?
- > Why is meditation an essential step in discovering God's will for your life?

PRAY

After this week of emphasis on the absolute need for Scripture, close in prayer by expressing confidence in the Word of God. Do this by reading Psalm 119:57-72 over your group.



BEFORE NEXT TIME

Seek out the one group member who you know least well and make a lunch appointment with him or her this week. Spend the time just getting to know one another.

Send the audio file "Am I just waiting for the future?" to the group members. Listen to the clip in order to prepare and engage discussion during the next session.

GOD'S WILL IN ALL SEASONS — *Session 3*

ENGAGE

"God wants us to know His will each day of our lives. He is at work in every situation and is teaching us what He wants us to do as we walk through life with Him."

- > What role do circumstances play in your decision-making process?
- > Are you most likely to trust your gut, your mind, or your heart?
- > Have you ever sought a sign from God? What was the circumstance?
- > Why are purely circumstantial tests an incomplete means for discovering God's will?
- > Would it be harder or easier to live in God's will if you could rely exclusively on circumstantial tests?
- > Why do you think God doesn't want you to?

ENCOUNTER

"If we are going to find God's will in our daily lives, we must believe a couple of things about Him and the world around us. First of all, we must be convinced that God is still in control of the world in which we live. Secondly, we must believe that we can discern the will of Almighty God by watching His works around us."

Read Acts 17:26 and Romans 8:28-29.

- > To what extent is God involved in our daily lives?
- > How aware are you of God's involvement in your daily life as a college student?
- > How does the reality of God's providence affect the way you see your day-to-day life?
- > What is God's ultimate goal for your life?
- > Is that different than your goal for your life right now? How so?
- > How does your perspective need to change for your goals to be more in line with His?

- > What kinds of things have you seen God use to accomplish His will in your life as a college student?

Read 1 Samuel 24:3-7 and Judges 6:11-24.

- > Have you ever used the "open door" philosophy up to this point in your life to try and find God's will?
- > What are some areas of your life you can use this philosophy in, specifically as you prepare for life after college?
- > How do you know if an "open door" is God's will for your life?
- > What are some of the reasons why "open doors" and "fleecees" might not be the best way to determine God's will?
- > Why do you think Jesus refused when He was asked to give a sign in the New Testament?
- > What things need to be considered if you are using the principles of "Open Doors" and "21st Century Fleecees"?

EXPRESS

"When looking for God's will, don't just look for opportunities to come and go. Look for God's activity and go where He is at work."

Read Romans 12:1-2.

- > How does God's continuing redemption of our minds play into our discovery of His will?
 - > How can you actively embrace the renewing of your mind as a college student?
- Read James 1:2-4; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 1 Peter 3:7; and 1 Peter 4:19.
- > Why does God use both positive and negative experiences to reveal His will?
 - > When has God used a negative experience to reveal His will to you?
 - > What patterns do you need to put in your life to make sure you are pursuing God's will on the good days?
- Read Philippians 4:6-7.
- > Why is it God's will for you not to worry?
 - > How can a disciplined prayer life help you overcome worry?

GOD'S WILL IN ALL SEASONS — *Session 3*

PRAY

Read Philippians 4:6-7 again. Ask each person to complete the following sentence in prayer: "Father, I trust you with . . ." The end of that sentence should be a situation, circumstance, or decision in which the group member would like to experience God's peace.

BEFORE NEXT WEEK



Take special note of the situations that people pray about during the prayer time. Send an encouraging e-mail to a few of those people expressing your confidence in God's ability to move and work in and through their lives.

Send the audio file "Am I listening?" to the group members. Listen to the clip in order to prepare and engage discussion during the next session.

GOD'S WILL THROUGH HIS HOLY SPIRIT — *Session 4*

ENGAGE

"If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in you as well. He is working 24/7 to do all of the things in you that Jesus promised He would do for the disciples. He is working to make you more like Jesus. He is working to show you where God wants you to go. He is working to show you His will so that in every circumstance and in every decision you can know that He is leading you."

- > Do you think the Holy Spirit speaks in different ways to different people? Why or why not?
- > What do you think the Bible means by the command, "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18)?
- > How does that command relate to living out the will of God?

ENCOUNTER

"When you read the Bible, you are reading the words that the Spirit inspired. That very same Spirit is now guiding you to discover truth and be transformed into the likeness of Christ."

Read Matthew 28:20 and Deuteronomy 31:1-8.

- > What do these verses teach about God's commitment to us?
- > How do these verses provide confidence and comfort as you pursue God's will for your life?
- > Given God's commitment to us, what should be the process you use in the next few years to make big decisions?
- > How do you think God wants you to feel after those decisions have been made?

Read John 16:5-16.

- > According to this passage, what are the Spirit's primary activities in our lives?
- > How would you personally define each of those activities?
- > As a college student, which of these are you most thankful for?

- > Which are you not thankful for?
- > How do these activities of the Spirit clarify God's will?

Read Romans 14:1-23.

- > Does God care about the "grey areas"? Why or why not?
- > What, as a student, do you consider to be those "grey areas"?
- > What are some principles, based on this passage, that can help you navigate through those grey areas?
- > How does the Holy Spirit turn issues of conscience into issues of conviction?

Read Galatians 5:16-23; Romans 12:6; and 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.

- > How does God use the Holy Spirit to accomplish His will in us?
- > What would your life look like if you were fully living according to the Spirit?
- > Do you think your life would involve less risk, or more risk? Why?

EXPRESS

"To discover God's will, make it your goal to submit to the Spirit's activity in your life. By doing so, God will fill you with spiritual wisdom and understanding of His will for your life."

Read Galatians 5:22-26 and Colossians 1:9-10.

- > How can we be sure that we are submitting to the Spirit's activity in our lives?
- > Is there an area in your life where you are confident that you are in step?
- > Is there part of your life where you need to get back in step?
- > How would you tell another college student to practically keep in step with the Spirit?
- > How can we pray for each other to submit our lives so that we can each discover God's will through His Spirit's activity?

GOD'S WILL THROUGH HIS HOLY SPIRIT — *Session 4*

PRAY

Encourage your group that prayer is a two-way conversation. With that in mind, ask each group member who feels comfortable to pray verbally, but ask the group to wait until they feel prompted by the Spirit to pray specifically about something. Explain that this exercise is meant to develop our spiritual ears so that eventually prayer is as much about listening as it currently is about talking.

BEFORE NEXT WEEK



Send the audio file “Does God speak through His people?” to the group members. Listen to the clip in order to prepare and engage discussion during the next session.

Since God’s will for your life is absolutely clear in some areas, plan to participate in something God is clearly behind, such as serving others. Inform your group that you are planning a service project for the group to participate in after the study concludes. Contact some local organizations: a homeless shelter, soup kitchen, Habitat for Humanity, or other service organization (ask your group members for suggestions as well) and plan an upcoming opportunity to serve.

GOD'S WILL THROUGH COMMUNITY — *Session 5*

ENGAGE

"Relationships are one of the greatest avenues that God has given us to discovering and applying God's will to our lives. Relationships—particularly those with other Christ-followers—set the environment in which we can discover God's will for our lives."

- > Why do you think we consider more independent people to be more "spiritual"?
- > Why does God want us to live in community with others?
- > What obligation do you have to others' spiritual progress?
- > Do you think genuine community is easier or harder to find in the college environment?

ENCOUNTER

"Relationships also provide the context for you to live out the will of God in your life. It is impossible to live the will of God outside of relationships."

Read Matthew 22:36-40 and John 13:35.

- > Why do you think Jesus chose love as proof of His authenticity?
- > What are the characteristics of the kind of love Jesus was talking about?
- > What does this teach us about the quality of relationships we should strive for as we discover and live out God's will?

Read the following "one another" commands:

- "Love one another" (John 13:34-35).
- "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Romans 12:10).
- "Instruct one another" (Romans 15:14).
- "Be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).
- "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19).
- "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).
- "Encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- "Spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:25).

- "Encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:25).
- "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other" (James 5:16).

- > Which of these commands stands out to you as the most needed in a college environment?
- > What are some practical ways your group of students can live out some of these commands?

Read 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 1 Samuel 20:1-4; and Acts 4:32-35.

- > What do we learn about committed relationships from David and Jonathan?
- > What would the church look like today if we lived in committed relationships like the ones we just read about?
- > Is there a difference between a committed relationship and an intentional relationship?
- > What are the essential elements that make these relationships intentional?
- > How do you practice the forming of intentional relationships in your college ministry?
- > Is there a difference between a committed relationship and an intentional relationship?
- > What can you do to up the "on purpose" factor in your relationships, at church, or in this group?
- > What are the essential elements that make these relationships intentional?

EXPRESS

"Connection does not happen by accident for most of us. It takes discipline. Discipline is required to stay connected to the vital relationship environments that God uses to communicate His will through other believers. The early church's pattern of worship in the temple and meeting from house to house provides a solid pattern for us if we are to live a connected life."

Read Acts 2:42-48.

- > What do we learn about the discipline of connection from Acts 2?

GOD'S WILL THROUGH COMMUNITY — *Session 5*

- > How can we build biblical community as they did?
- > What commitments do you need to make to see this happen in your life?
- > Do you see your church community involvement as a critical path for discovering God's will in your life?
- > What qualities do you look for in someone before you seek their counsel?
- > Who are some people you know that you would benefit from connecting with?

PRAY

During your prayer time this week, try to emphasize the “corporate-ness” of prayer. Do this by asking the group to hold hands. Lead in prayer, but do so using only “we” terms.

BEFORE NEXT TIME



Send the audio file “What if I can’t hear anything?” to the group members. Listen to the clip in order to prepare and engage discussion during the next session.

Settle on a date, time, and schedule for your service project. E-mail group members to make sure they know the details of the service opportunity.

Get together as a group for dinner or a fun outing apart from your Bible study time. Ask for ideas from the group—or enlist a couple of group members to plan the time.

THE SILENCE OF GOD — *Session 6*

ENGAGE

“There has been (or will be) a time in our lives when it seems like things between God and us have gone dark: no more comfort, no more communication, nothing.”

- > Why do you think these times have historically been called wilderness or desert times?
- > Have you experienced this level of disconnect from God? If so, what were the circumstances?
- > What were you thinking and feeling as you went through it?
- > How would you describe your college experience? As a valley or a mountaintop? Somewhere in between?

ENCOUNTER

“It is clear that wilderness experiences are a key ingredient in God’s plan to shape your life. God sent Moses to the desert for 40 years to prepare him to lead Israel out of captivity. Jacob wrestled with God in the wilderness. Even Jesus spent time in the ‘desert’ as a part of His preparation for ministry. Each of these men spent time in the wilderness and as a result, they knew God more intimately and clearly discovered His will for their lives.”

Read Matthew 4:1-11 and Matthew 26:36-46.

- > What lessons do you learn from each of Jesus’ desert experiences?
- > Why were these experiences essential for Jesus to live God’s will in His life?
- > Why do you think God brings us into and through desert experiences?
- > Do you think it’s hard or easy to learn during these desert times? Why?
- > What sorts of circumstances might lead to a desert time in the life of a college student?

Read Genesis 32:22-32.

- > What do we learn about wrestling with God from the story of Jacob at Peniel?
- > Have you ever felt like you were wrestling with God? When? What does it feel like?
- > Is there any benefit to wrestling with God?

- > What is so difficult about it?

- > How was Jacob changed? What is significant about his name change? How about his limp?

- > In what ways have you been marked from wrestling with God?

- > Do you think God wants us to wrestle with Him? Why?

EXPRESS

“The lessons that we learn in the desert can be summed up in three words: die to self. It is in the desert experiences of our life that we discover first hand what it means to put our hopes, dreams, concerns, and fears into God’s hands.”

- > If we know it’s not God’s intention for us to live in the wilderness but to go through these experiences in His time, how can we embrace God’s working in us through these experiences?

- > How do you think college students typically respond to desert times?

- > What practical habits or disciplines can you put in place to consistently check to make sure you are seeking the will of God during the wilderness times?

- > How can these disciplines help us live a life in which we consistently die to self and embrace God’s activity even when we are in the middle of a wilderness experience?

- > What resolutions have you made during your study that will help you live out God’s will as a college student?

PRAY

Recognizing that sometimes prayer is an exercise in silence, read Romans 8:26-27. Emphasize the belief that the Spirit is praying and interceding for us even now. Close in prayer without speaking; encourage group members to focus on the quiet during the one minute of silent prayer.

AFTER THE LAST SESSION

Send an e-mail thanking the group for their participation, honesty, and input during your time together. Encourage them to continue to be involved in Bible study groups in the coming months. List further opportunities if they are available—and complete your group service project together.