



# The Prophet Project

## Leader's Guide and Study Questions

This curriculum is designed to be adaptable to the needs of your group, and can be used for an in-person study or completely online. While its outlook and aims are thoroughly Christian, non-Christian participants are welcome, and you do not need to have a thorough knowledge of the Bible or of “Christianese” to follow it. The curriculum can be used at any time in relation to the online performance.

The **videos** are intended to be watched before the discussion, but it is up to you whether you watch them together during your meeting time or watch them individually beforehand.

Because many people may be uncomfortable sharing deeply with group members they don't know very well, the **questions for reflection/journaling** are designed to be used on one's own or with a trusted friend or prayer partner. If there is a high level of trust in your group and people would *like* to discuss the things they discovered with these exercises (and time permits), this is certainly an option, but these questions are more intimate, introspective questions intended to be undertaken in a safe space. You are welcome to distribute these questions to the group via handout and/or e-mail; they are also included with the videos online.

The **questions for group discussion** are designed to be open-ended questions that allow people to choose how personal they get with their answers. These are intended to be the sort of questions that benefit from group discussion, where participants can help each other gain a well-rounded view of the subject by lending their unique perspectives and ideas.

The **assignment** is an important opportunity for participants to take ownership of the material and serve each other. The presentations should be kept short, around 5 minutes, and include time for questions from the group. We suggest that for whichever session follows the online performance, you not schedule any presentations, and instead use that time to debrief about the show.

The **exercises** may be done privately at home, or may be led by the group leader during the meeting time. Some may find this latter option helpful because it allows them to concentrate on doing the exercise without being distracted by keeping an eye on the time, stopping to read instructions, etc.; others may find they can concentrate better alone. If you are doing the exercises during the group meeting time, you may want to schedule fewer presentations for those days in the interest of time. It is up to the comfort level of the group whether or not you would like to discuss these exercises after you do them. *The exercise scheduled for session 4 may be moved to session 5 if you need; it relates to both.*

You may format your time however you wish. If you are unsure how to format your study, we suggest the following simple outline:

- Brief “check-in” (a time for participants to briefly share how they are doing and what is going on in their lives)
- Opening Prayer
- Presentations scheduled for that session (or show debrief)
- Discussion of Group Questions
- Exercises (if conducting them in person)
- Closing prayer

## Part 1 – Relationship: The Key to the Prophets

- **Questions for Reflection/Journaling**

- When and where am I resistant to receiving God's love?
- What excuses do I give for running from (or at least avoiding) God?
- What's underneath those excuses?

- **Questions for Group Discussion**

- Relationship is what we all long for, but we frequently see people running from it, including Gomer (the “humanity” character) in the play. Why does Gomer run?
- Christians are often heard to say “Christianity isn’t a religion; it’s a relationship” – but it isn’t always clear what that looks like in practice. What does it mean to be in relationship with God?
- How does the idea that “God is relationship” (in the Trinity) inform and deepen our understanding of the idea that “God is love”? How does this inform our understanding of who God is and how God interacts with people?

- **Assignment: Prophet Presentation**

At this first session, have each participant select a prophet and a day to present. We recommend keeping Session 6 clear so that when the inevitable mishaps happen, missed presentations can be rescheduled to that day. A printable schedule chart is included, so that you can easily keep track of which day each person is scheduled to present. A list of the prophetic books of the Bible is also there, so that people do not feel awkward if they don’t know the names of any biblical prophets offhand.

Many of your participants will feel nervous about this. Remind them that they are not being graded and don’t need to make it fancy; it’s just an opportunity to help the rest of the group learn. Because we often learn something best when we have to teach it to others, this assignment is an invaluable way for participants to engage with and take ownership of the material.

Presentations should be kept short, 5 minutes or less, and should include a brief time for questions.

## Part 2 – Control, Curses, and Idolatry

- **Questions for Reflection/Journaling**

- Where do I find myself trying to control the people around me, my circumstances, or God?
- What idols do I find myself turning to instead of turning to God? Why does that idol have such power in my life?
- Lord, how do you want to set me free? Are there steps I need to take or people I need to ask for help, in order to partner with you in this?

- **Questions for Group Discussion**

- What does it mean to have idols? How does Ephesians 5:5 inform our understanding of idolatry?
- Look up Ezekiel 20:7-8, and then Hebrews 12:2 and 1 Peter 1:13. What does it mean to “set your eyes” on something? What does it mean to “fix our eyes” or “set our hope” on Jesus?
- How is God’s relentless pursuit of the lost different from our own attempts to control people?

## **Part 3 – Human Value and Human Responsibility**

- **Questions for Reflection/Journaling**

- How has my own corner of this sinful world shaped and influenced my thinking? Are there attitudes of which I need to repent?
- When am I tempted to interpret sacredness in whatever way is convenient for me?
- Lord, where am I operating out of shame or obligation instead of freedom and love? What truth do You want to speak to my heart so I can live in the freedom of Jesus?

- **Questions for Group Discussion**

- When and why do we feel uncomfortable with the idea of God's wrath? How do we understand it in light of Scripture? In light of the Cross?
- What are some of the sinful situations we’ve inherited? How might God be calling us to “tear down the high places”?
- How do we “tear down the high places,” without letting our anger tear down the value of our fellow sinful human beings?

## **Part 4 – The Difficult Call**

- **Questions for Reflection/Journaling**

- Lord, You have called each of us both generally (to Jesus) and specifically (to work for which we’re uniquely gifted). Will You tell me more about Your call on my life?
- Where or when do I struggle with the difficulty of God’s call? Is there any bitterness of which I need to repent? Bring your questions, doubts, and struggles before the Lord.
- How are You calling me to identify with the people around me? How are You asking me to identify with Your heart?

- **Questions for Group Discussion**

- How does clarifying our responsibility – to speak the truth, not to make people believe the truth – help us in our interactions with people?
- Part of the prophet’s role – seen perfectly in the life of Jesus – is to identify with the sinful people he or she addresses. How does this prepare us as we interact with nonbelievers? How does it prepare our hearts to confront sinning brothers and sisters in Christ?

- What do we do with it when obeying God seems to bring nothing but trouble, or when our faithfulness doesn't seem to be rewarded?
- **Exercise: in what ways has Jesus taken my place personally?**  
This exercise may be done as a journaling exercise privately at home; other groups may find it helpful to provide structure by taking time together for journaling or meditation, with the group leader guiding the activity by reading the instructions, and keeping an eye on the time.  
\* If you run out of time during Session 4, you may move this to Session 5; it is applicable to both.

## **Part 5 – Sovereignty and Trust**

- **Questions for Reflection/Journaling**
  - How is God's sovereignty good news for me personally?
  - What is my biggest barrier to trust? Lord, what one step of trust are You asking me to take towards You?
  - Lord, what is my true agenda? Will You please increase my trust, love, and joy in You so that my agenda may more closely match Yours?
- **Questions for Group Discussion**
  - What one thing about Jesus most wins your trust?
  - How do we balance our belief in God's sovereignty with the prophets' insistence on our responsibility?
  - Can you recall a time when you have placed your hope in something other than God? What insights come to you as you look back on it?

## **Part 6 – The Spirit and the Bride**

- **Questions for Reflection/Journaling**
  - Lord, what one way are You asking me to practice the belief that I am beloved by You?
  - What things about the Church or about my own life cause the most doubt and discouragement for me? Lord, how do You see these situations? What truth do You want to speak to me about this?
  - Lord, I want more of Your Spirit. How are You already at work in my life? Will You help me to be open to what Your Spirit wants to do, and help me trust that You will empower me for it?
- **Questions for Group Discussion**
  - What do you think about the idea that "God chose the path of gardening on purpose"? What does observing how God works teach us about who God is?

- What might it look like in practice to “abide” in Jesus? What practical steps can we take or habits can we form to do this?
- How can we practice hope for our brothers and sisters in Christ? How can this hope be part of our testimony to the world about God’s goodness, kindness, and mercy?

● **Exercise: Look**

This exercise can be done on one’s own, but it will likely be helpful to do it as a group, because with quiet, meditative exercises like this it can be helpful to have a leader keeping an eye on the time and providing a little bit of verbal guidance, so that participants can concentrate fully.

This exercise may be uncomfortable for some. Very concrete, proactive people can feel silly doing something like this, some worry that any sort of “visualization” is automatically New Age, and many simply worry that they won’t be able to see or hear anything. You may want to simply point out at the beginning that the Lord is the inventor of our imaginations, and that – just like our reason – our imaginations, although fallen like the rest of us, are also a gift that can be used to draw closer to God. You may also want to remind people that it is not their job to make anything “happen.” The exercise might come easily or it might not; profound feelings might come or they might not, and none of that has any effect on whether or not God is present and at work. Encourage them to trust that God will receive their attention as a gift, and that He is competent to do what He wants with this time.

Open with prayer. You may want to pray for the Lord to protect and inspire people’s minds; you may also want to thank God for His promise that those who seek Him, find (Jeremiah 29:13, Luke 11:9-13).

Give people 5-10 minutes to spend looking at Jesus. They may remain where they are or go find a more secluded spot in the room, if you’re meeting physically. You may want to have some artwork available for those who are more visual. (Artwork is not provided here in order to avoid any unintended copyright infringement, and to give you options because there is so much good art out there! If you’re worried about copyright, there are quite a few ancient depictions that are in the public domain.)

Give people about 2 minutes to close their eyes in Jesus’ presence. Encourage them to find a position that is comfortable for them – lying on the floor is especially helpful for slow breathing, but some may prefer to sit – and to breathe slowly. If you are comfortable with it, you may coach them into slowing their breathing down by counting slowly out loud “In, 2, 3. Out, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.” You can also encourage them to breathe in the Holy Spirit, and breathe out any fears or distractions. Once they are settled into a nice slow rhythm, coach them to allow Jesus to look at them, without trying to hide or to make anything happen, and to observe what expression is in His eyes.

When the exercise is over, let people return quietly and comfortably back to the group. It is up to you, time constraints, and the comfort level of the group whether to open it up to people sharing at this point. No one should feel that he or she must share. It can be helpful to phrase the invitation as optional, such as “does anyone have anything they want to share from doing that exercise” rather than in a way that implies a response is expected, such as, “who would like to share first?”

Thanks for leading, and may God bless you!

The following pages explain the assignment and exercises for participants. You may want to print or forward these pages to them.

## Assignment: Prophet Presentation

There are a lot of prophets in the Bible, and each one of them is worth studying. Unfortunately, most of us don't have time to study them all! This assignment is an opportunity for you to help the other people in your study by introducing them to one of the biblical prophets.

**(1) Select a prophet** from the Bible and a day to present. Your study leader has a signup sheet to claim a prophet and a presentation slot, and also has a list of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. (Prophets such as Huldah, Deborah, Miriam, Elijah, Nathan, and Philip's daughters don't have their own books, but if you're feeling ambitious you can choose them!)

**(2) Study your prophet.** What was his or her main message? When and where was he or she preaching? What else was going on at the time? What do you find particularly interesting or affecting about this prophet?

\* For many of these prophets, the Bible doesn't tell us a lot directly about their context. Read about them in the Bible, but also try to do some "external" research about them.

A.J. Heschel's *The Prophets* is a good resource, and The Bible Project at [www.thebibleproject.com](http://www.thebibleproject.com) is another good place to start. Interlibrary loan is also a wonder!

\*\* Resources are written from a variety of perspectives. Some of them will differ on certain points like when a book of the Bible was written. Don't dismiss resources from people who disagree with you on matters of faith, but try to be aware of the potential biases of the authors you're reading.

**(3) Prepare a short (5 minutes or less) presentation**, to be presented at the beginning of one of the next sessions, on your prophet's historical context, message, and one or two verses that really jump out at you. **Be ready to answer a few questions as well!**

Feel free to get creative with how you present! You are not required to use visual aids or get "fancy" with it, and you're not expected to be an expert. You're just helping introduce the group to your prophet.

**\*\* Remember you are not being graded! This is just an opportunity to help your fellow participants learn more about the prophet you chose. \*\***

**Date**  
Week 2

**Name**

**Presenting On**

Week 3

Week 4

Week 5

Week 6

## Exercise: In What Ways Has Jesus Taken My Place Personally?

Jesus took our place on the Cross, but sometimes we underestimate the extent to which He has identified with us. In His life and especially in His death, there are countless details in which we may see our own stories reflected.

Reflect and/or journal about this question: how has Jesus taken my place and identified with me personally? You may want to write it out as a list.

Consider the following as a starting point:

- He never got to marry or have kids
- He watched those He loved as His own kids making terrible decisions (e.g. Matthew 23:37)
- He spent the vast majority of His life in obscurity; He didn't achieve anything that anyone noticed until he was in his 30s (and only lived about 3 years after that)
- He was misunderstood frequently, even by those closest to Him
- He experienced racial injustice (living in an occupied country and eventually being executed by the occupying power)
- He was unfairly accused of racial prejudice (e.g. by the woman at the well in John 4)
- He was a refugee and immigrant (living in Egypt as a child, Matthew 2:13-15)
- He experienced homelessness (Matthew 8:20)
- He experienced hunger (e.g. during His temptation in the wilderness, Matthew 4/Luke 4)
- He experienced family conflict (e.g. in Mark 3 when His mothers and brothers believe Him to be crazy)
- He had limited options but also deep concern for His mother's care in her elder years (John 19:26-27)
- He spent long hours meeting other people's needs, but was dismissed when He expressed His own needs (e.g. the disciples falling asleep when He asked them to pray and be with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane)
- He experienced physical, emotional, verbal, spiritual, and sexual abuse (the latter through public exposure) on the Cross
- He was judged for not being religious enough (e.g. by the Pharisees, such as in Matthew 15)
- He was judged for being too religious (e.g. by the woman at the well in John 4 or the healed man in John 5:15 who turned Him in to the authorities when Jesus mentioned his sin)
- He had no one on earth who could really understand what He was going through (since no one else has ever been fully God and fully man)
- He experienced feelings of being judged by and distant from God (crying out from the Cross "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")
- *What other specifics do you notice from His life that reflect your own experience?*

## **Exercise: Look**

We are deeply affected by what we allow to occupy our minds, and the author of Hebrews tells us to “fix our eyes on Jesus.”

Spend some time “looking at” Jesus. You may want to read portions of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John), visualize Him on the Cross, spend some time imagining the sensory details of one of the stories in the Gospels, or spend some time with a piece of artwork about Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to Jesus and to help you trust that He will meet you in this time.

Now close your eyes and allow Him to look at you. Make sure you’re sitting or lying comfortably, and settle yourself by breathing deeply and slowly. It may help to consciously “breathe in” the Holy Spirit, and “breathe out” fears and distractions as they come. Once you’ve quieted yourself, focus on allowing Jesus to look at you, without hiding, working at it, or rushing away. You don’t need to do anything or make anything happen; just sit, breathe, and allow Jesus to look at you. What expression is in His eyes?