



# RED LETTER BEING CHALLENGE

- SMALL GROUP GUIDE -

WITH ZACH ZEHNDER  theCross

# WEEK 1

# INTRODUCTION

## Red Letter Being Challenge Small Group Study Guide

As we're about to embark on the 40-Day Being Challenge where we learn five life-changing habits of Jesus, what is a habit you wish you had in your life?

Go over the Group Promise together. Make sure everyone understands the commitment.

## GROUP PROMISE

I commit to these basic Red Letter Being Challenge Group promises. This is my "ALL IN" pledge to live out Jesus' words, both in my own life and in helping my Group do so.

- ➔ **I will be on time and show up with my whole heart.**
- ➔ **I understand that this Group is 100% confidential. Whatever is shared in the Group stays in the Group.**
- ➔ **I will respect other Group members by participating openly and speaking honestly, without dominating the discussions.**
- ➔ **I will not try to fix people, preach a sermon, or give unsolicited advice.**
- ➔ **When I share in the Group I will share primarily about myself and not about others.**
- ➔ **I will trust God to work in all of us as we live out the Red Letters of Jesus together!**

Charles Duhigg says that a keystone habit is, "a habit that people introduce into their lives that can unintentionally carry over into other aspects of their lives." What is a keystone habit in your life and how does it help you in other areas of your life?

*Watch Red Letter Being Challenge Video for Week 1-Introduction.*

Craig Groeschel says, **"Small disciplines done consistently lead to big results over time."**

In his book Atomic Habits James Clear argues relentlessly for the power of small, daily wins. He challenges us to become 1% better each day.

Take the following scenarios and discuss what one small keystone habit you would put in your life if your goal was to:

- ➔ **Run a marathon**
- ➔ **Lose 20 Pounds**
- ➔ **Become debt-free**
- ➔ **Become more like Jesus**

The goal of **Red Letter Being Challenge** is to help you become a greater follower of Jesus Christ by introducing the keystone habits of Jesus Christ into your life.

**Read Matthew 11:28-30 (Message) together:** "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Describe to the group what your relationship (BEING) with God looks like on a weekly basis? What habits, or spiritual disciplines, have you put into your life?

Are there any spiritual disciplines or habits that you have had a hard time with in the past?

Red Letter Being Challenge has identified five keystone habits that Jesus practiced in his life. We want these 5 habits to become the unforced rhythms in your life:

- ➔ **Committing to Community**
- ➔ **Studying Scripture**
- ➔ **Prioritizing Prayer**
- ➔ **Seeking Solitude**
- ➔ **Choosing Church**

Take a look at those five habits that we'll be learning more about over the next five weeks together. Thinking about your life right now, which one of these five will be the easiest for you? Which of the five do you expect to stretch you the most or be most difficult for you?

## CLOSING THOUGHT AND PRAYER

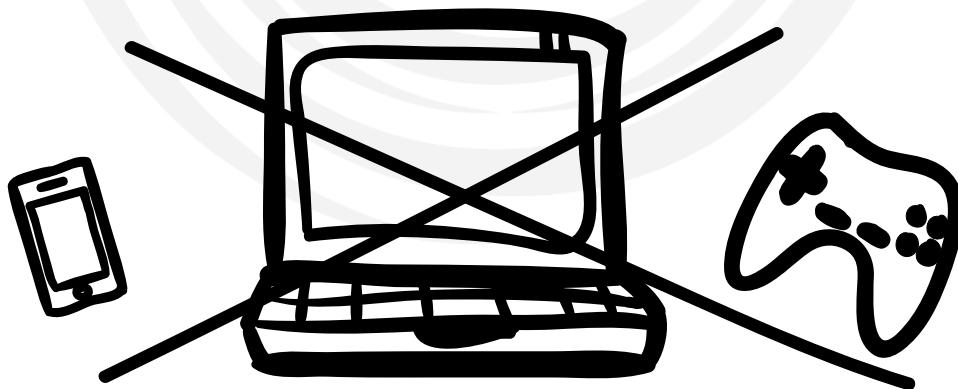
What do you hope happens in the next 40 days in your life through the Red Letter Being Challenge?

Read 1 Timothy 4:7 (NASB) to the group: Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

Say: *"Small disciplines done consistently lead to big results over time."* (Craig Groeschel)

**Challenge for the Week:** Introduce a small, daily habit into your life this week and share it with the group.

Spend time praying for your group as you all embark on the 40-Day Challenge together. Ask God for encouragement, strength, and perseverance to learn and implement the five habits of Jesus into your life.



# WEEK 2

# COMMIT TO COMMUNITY

Take some time to discuss the previous week's readings and/or challenges. Here are some things to discuss:

- ➔ **Celebrate a "win" that you had in the Red Letter Being Challenge over the past week.**
- ➔ **Share a struggle.**
- ➔ **What did God reveal to you during the readings and/or challenges this past week?**

Share with the group the greatest achievement you've ever done alone and the greatest achievement you've ever done with others.

*Watch Red Letter Being Challenge Video 2 – Committing to Community*

In all four of the Gospels it didn't take long for Jesus to choose his disciples (Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 6:12-15, John 2:35-42). He committed to these men and did life with them.

This week we are looking at the importance of the people you surround yourself with. There's an incredible story featuring the importance of your friends.

*Read Mark 2:1-12*

In this story, we see four friends carry their paralyzed friend to meet Jesus. It's a phenomenal story of how friends can help propel you to the place where you need to be.

In what ways did these friends help the paralyzed man?

In the video, Zach referenced Dr. David McClelland, a social psychologist from Harvard, that researched the importance of the community you surround yourself with and his findings were that the people you habitually associate with determine as much as 95% of your success or failure in life. Agree or disagree.

What are your biggest hurdles when it comes to surrounding yourself with the right community? Do you struggle more with individualism or choosing the wrong group of friends?

In what ways have your friends or community hurt you?

In what ways have your friends or community helped you?

One of the great sections of the Bible on the importance of friendship is in Proverbs. Read these verses and ask this question: "How have you seen these verses to be true in your life, good or bad?"

Proverbs 13:20: Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

Proverbs 17:17: A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

Proverbs 18:24: One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 19:20: Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.

Proverbs 27:17: As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

**Rank yourself on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is "very poor" and 10 is "excellent") on how committed you are to the right community around you. If comfortable, share that number with the group.**

## CLOSING THOUGHT AND PRAYER

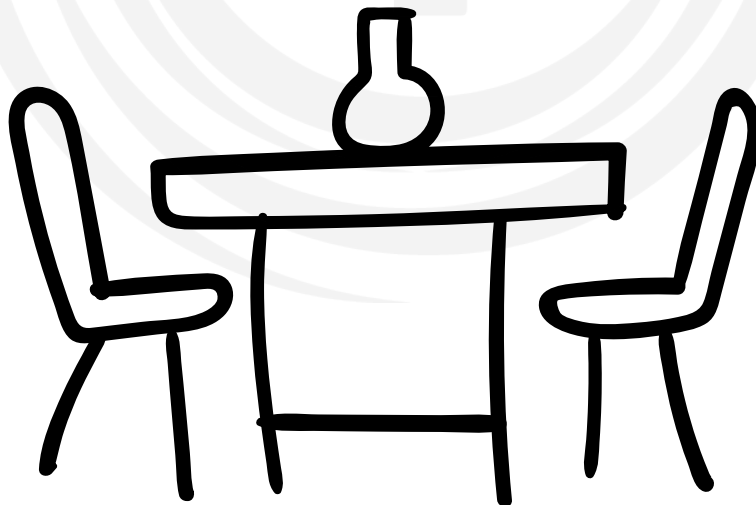
Say: "The next best thing to being wise oneself is to live in a circle of those who are."  
(C.S. Lewis)

**Challenge for the Week:** Use the handout to identify the community you are committed to. Again, as we look to Jesus, we see some things in His life that can translate into ours.

- ➔ **Jesus' primary relationship was God.**
- ➔ **Jesus had a group of 3: Peter, James, John.**
- ➔ **Jesus had a group of 12: His disciples.**
- ➔ **Jesus had a group of 72: a larger group of disciples that were fully committed made up of men and women.**
- ➔ **Jesus had an even larger group of 500 that got to see him during teaching, etc.**

As the group number increases, the time he spent with each of these groups decreases. Fill out the handout to see what this looks like in your life in regards to who is spending the most time with you. Note if any major/minor changes need to be made.

Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal truth in our lives when it comes to our friends and what, if any, changes ought to be made to commit ourselves to greater community?



# WEEK 3

# STUDYING SCRIPTURE

Take some time to discuss the previous week's readings and/or challenges. Here are some things to discuss:

- ➔ **Celebrate a "win" that you had in the Red Letter Being Challenge over the past week.**
- ➔ **Share a struggle.**
- ➔ **What did God reveal to you during the readings and/or challenges this past week?**

Share with the group something crazy or unique about your family or ancestors (immediate or extended). If married, (and not afraid of the consequences!), share something crazy or unique you learned about your in-law's family.

*Watch Red Letter Being Challenge Video 3 – Studying Scripture*

What's your favorite self-discovery tool that you've used and what did you learn about yourself? See the following for examples on what you could share:

- **Enneagram: what number are you, and what does that mean for yourself?**
- **Strengthsfinder: what are your top strengths?**
- **5 Love Languages: What's your preferred way to receive love?**
- **DISC: Which two letters (D, I, S, or C) describe you?**
- **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator: What 4-letter combination are you?**
- **Random Facebook tests: Which Disney Character are you most compatible with?**

What have you discovered about your family, including previous generations, that have helped or hurt you in your pursuit to become a greater follower of Jesus Christ?

*Read Luke 2:41-52*

In the only documented story we have of Jesus Christ as a grown child, we see Him at the temple talking with and learning from the scholars about the Scriptures. At the end of that story, in Luke 2:52, it tells us that Jesus Christ continued to grow in wisdom.



Are you continuing to grow in wisdom? If so, in what ways are you growing in wisdom and where do you look to grow in wisdom? If not, what habits could you put into your life to intentionally grow in wisdom?

Describe, if any, what your current habits, or rhythms look like when it comes to studying Scripture. What is going well? What could be going better?

Do you have a favorite Bible verse? If so, share with the group why it is your favorite.

Knowing who you are impacts the way that you live. Another way to say it is, "Your biography comes out of your identity." You not only have an earthly family, but as we study Scripture, we find that we are born into a heavenly family with God as our Father! The following verses describe your identity in God:

1 John 3:1a: See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Romans 8:14: For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

Galatians 3:26-27: So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Galatians 4:4-7: But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Matthew 7:9-11: "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

God, our Father, adopts us as His sons and daughters. Through His grace, He makes us an heir. And He gives His children good gifts. As we seek to gain more wisdom in this world, hear these words from a wise man named Solomon who wrote many of the Proverbs contained in the Old Testament: Proverbs 4:6-7 (MSG): Above all and before all, do this: Get Wisdom! Write this at the top of your list: Get Understanding!

Rank yourself on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is "very poor" and 10 is "excellent") on how you feel you are doing at implementing this practice of studying Scripture in your life. If comfortable, share that number with the group.

## CLOSING THOUGHT AND PRAYER

**Challenge for the Week:** Read the Gospel of John in the New Testament and write down three Bible verses that are meaningful to you and memorize one new Bible verse from the Gospel of John. If you need a Bible, please download YouVersion's Bible App on your device.

Read James 1:5: 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.

Spend time in prayer asking God for wisdom from above. Ask God to reveal who you are.



## WEEK 4

# PRIORITIZING PRAYER

Take some time to discuss the previous week's readings and/or challenges. Here are some things to discuss:

- ➔ **Celebrate a "win" that you had in the Red Letter Being Challenge over the past week.**
- ➔ **Share a struggle.**
- ➔ **What did God reveal to you during the readings and/or challenges this past week?**

Share with the group what type(s) of milk they would find in your fridge right now and why this type(s)?

*Watch Red Letter Being Challenge Video 4 – Prioritizing Prayer*

Looking back at the just the last three days, if God granted every prayer request you made, how would the world be different today?

Has God ever answered one of your prayers? If so, describe for the group.

Is there any prayer request that has not been answered that you'd like to share with the group?

Read the following verses and talk about how Jesus prioritized prayer in each:

Mark 1:35: Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Luke 5:16: But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Luke 6:12: One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

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Mark 6:41: Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people.

Matthew 26:36, 39, 44: 36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

The above verses are just a small sampling of the times in which we see Jesus praying. We see Jesus praying alone, early, often, consistently, in nature, in solitude, overnight, before miracles, to offer thanksgiving, in the midst of difficulty, and even when He doesn't like what's ahead. Prayer was a priority in the life of Jesus at all times in all circumstances.

Describe, if any, what your current habits, or rhythms look like when it comes to prioritizing prayer. What is going well? What could be going better?

Do you believe there is power in prayer? If so, do your current habits reflect this belief?

**Rank yourself on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is "very poor" and 10 is "excellent") on how you feel you are doing at implementing this practice of prioritizing prayer in your life. If comfortable, share that number with the group.**

## CLOSING THOUGHT AND PRAYER

Read James 5:16: "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

**Challenge for the Week:** Make prayer the very first thing you do every day of this week. Whether it's for one minute, five minutes, or one hour, do nothing without talking to God first. You may need to set a reminder. That reminder could be on your phone, or a sticky note on your coffeemaker or shower head. If you want assistance on how to pray, or a tool to help you stay consistent in your prayer, please download the Echo Prayer App.

Spend time as a group praying for the requests that were mentioned earlier and close with saying the Lord's Prayer together:

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN,  
HALLOWED BE THY NAME.  
THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE  
ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD;  
AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES  
AS WE FORGIVE THOSE  
WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US.

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION,  
BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.  
FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM  
AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY  
FOREVER AND EVER.

AMEN.



# WEEK 5

# SEEKING SOLITUDE

Take some time to discuss the previous week's readings and/or challenges. Here are some things to discuss:

- ➔ **Celebrate a "win" that you had in the Red Letter Being Challenge over the past week.**
- ➔ **Share a struggle.**
- ➔ **What did God reveal to you during the readings and/or challenges this past week?**

Okay, time to draw battle lines! Apple or Android. Pick one and explain.

No matter which one you picked, now that we've battled, let's get vulnerable. Both Apple and Android allow their users to check the amount of screen time they have used. Share with the group how many hours/minutes per day you have used on your device for the past day/week and then defend yourself on why that's okay. If you are able, also share how many times you picked up the phone in the past day/week and notifications in the past day/week.

*Watch Red Letter Being Challenge Video 5 -- Seeking Solitude*

Note some of the times and places in Mark's Gospel in which Jesus sought solitude in His life:

- **Mark 1:12-13: In the wilderness**
- **Mark 1:16, 2:13: Walks by the lake**
- **Mark 1:35: Early in the morning in a solitary place**
- **Mark 4:35-41: On the water in the midst of a storm**
- **Mark 6:46-47: On the mountainside**
- **Mark 14:32: In the garden of Gethsemane**

Not only did Jesus seek solitude in many different times and places. He also sought solitude before, during, and after many major life events.

- ➔ **Before He began His 3-year ministry He spent 40 days in the wilderness. (Matthew 4:1-11)**
- ➔ **Before He decided who the 12 disciples would be, He spent time alone overnight with God on a mountainside praying. (Luke 6:12-16)**
- ➔ **He grieved His friend and cousin, John the Baptist, after he was martyred for His faith. (Matthew 14:13)**
- ➔ **In the Garden before enduring His crucifixion, He prayed alone 3 times. (Matthew 26:36-46)**

Describe, if any, what your current habits, or rhythms look like when it comes to seeking solitude. What is going well? What could be going better?

What is keeping you from spending time in solitude with God?

[Read Luke 8:40-56](#)

Many people today will describe their lives as busy. Was Jesus busy? If yes, how do you see that busyness played out in this story?

Is there a difference between being busy and hurried? Was Jesus hurried?

Are you busy or hurried?

Jesus had an extremely busy life. He was a very wanted man, crowds continually followed Him, pressed in on Him, and made requests of Him, etc. And yet, in the midst of all of the busyness, Jesus was never too hurried that He missed out on the one person that needed Him in that moment. Solitude with God allowed Jesus to stay focused on the mission God called Him to. God has also called you to live on mission for Him.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3: Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Zach said last week that prayer allows us to connect to God in a confusing world, while solitude allows us to disconnect from a loud and distracting world. Agree or Disagree.

What could the practice of solitude look like in your life in the upcoming week?

**Rank yourself on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is "very poor" and 10 is "excellent") on how you feel you are doing at implementing this practice of seeking solitude in your life. If comfortable, share that number with the group.**

## CLOSING THOUGHT AND PRAYER

**Challenge for the Week:** Go unplugged for an entire day in the upcoming week. In that day, spend some alone time with God.

Close by spending five minutes together in silence. In that silent time, each person can pray that God would reveal more clearly the race He's called you to run, that He would give you focus to run the race, and that He would also reveal any distractions that may hinder you from running well.





# WEEK 6

# CHOOSING CHURCH

Take some time to discuss the previous week's readings and/or challenges. Here are some things to discuss:

- ➔ **Celebrate a "win" that you had in the Red Letter Being Challenge over the past week.**
- ➔ **Share a struggle.**
- ➔ **What did God reveal to you during the readings and/or challenges this past week?**

Discuss with the group your favorite fast-food burger you've had. Not fancy. Not even fast-casual. What made it the best?

*Watch Red Letter Being Challenge Video 6 – Choosing Church*

Can you have a solid, growing relationship with God without the church?

In the time when Jesus lived, the people assembled in either a temple or a synagogue. In all four Gospel accounts, on several different occasions, it is mentioned that Jesus was found at the temple or synagogues on a daily basis (Matthew 26:55, Luke 19:47, Luke 21:37, Luke 22:53, John 18:20).

**Read Matthew 16:15-18:** Not only did Jesus regularly assemble as the "church" but He instituted the church in Matthew 16. Why would Jesus put this habit into His life?

Describe your church experience in the past. In what ways has the church helped, or hurt you, in your pursuit of following after Jesus?

Zach said that while churches may look different from one another, the one thing the Church, when it assembles together, should always get right is the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Agree or disagree.

Has the good news of Jesus Christ changed or made a difference in your life? Explain.

Consider the following statistics and trends regarding choosing church in America:

- **Gallup shows that in 2019 only half (50%) of American adults are church members, down from 70% in 1999.**
- **George Barna in his book *Revolution*, from 2005, claims that there were 20 million born-again Christians in the USA for whom the primary means of spiritual experience and expression is not the local church, and that by 2025 there will be 70 million such persons.**
- **Ed Stetzer in his book *Lost and Found* discovered that 90% of 20-29-year-olds and 88% of 30+ year-olds believe they can have a good relationship with God without being involved in a church.**

Can you give an example of someone that you know that has stopped attending church and has grown in their relationship with Jesus?

Carey Nieuwhof says, "Christians who attend church casually usually have a more casual commitment to their faith. Infrequent attendance is often a sign of diluted devotion. Church attendance does not equal engagement, but engagement almost always involves church attendance." Agree or Disagree.

Describe, if any, what your current habits, or rhythms look like when it comes to choosing church. What is going well? What could be going better?

**Rank yourself on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is "very poor" and 10 is "excellent") on how you feel you are doing at implementing this practice of choosing church in your life. If comfortable, share that number with the group.**

## CLOSING THOUGHT AND PRAYER

Read Hebrews 10:24-25: 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Say: "Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man." (D.L. Moody)

**Challenge for the Week:** Attend church each of the next four Sundays and invite someone who needs to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ to come with you.

Spend time praying that more people would hear and receive the Good News of Jesus Christ and be forever changed. If you are connected to a local church, please pray for your church and its leaders.

