

Total Quality Life Small-Group Studies

Total Quality Life



Created by Stan Toler

God Has a Plan for You!

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Total Quality Life Small Group Study Series

Total Quality Life: A Blueprint for Living and Loving Life is a small-group study series based on a popular seminar by Dr. Stan Toler. While the seminar series is designed for pastors, staff, and church leaders, this study will allow those in your congregation to learn how to achieve a Total Quality Life through the principles Dr. Toler teaches.

This is not a verse-by-verse, book-by-book study of the Bible. Rather, it is a survey of God's Word as it relates to living and loving life. Each session is centered around a main theme and central verse. Questions and activities are provided to stimulate discussion and encourage positive change in our lives. Appropriate quotes from the writings of Dr. Toler are provided as a basis for discussion. The format is designed to be informal and fun.

In fact, we recommend that these small-group studies be built around times of fellowship, prayer, and conversation. Use these studies as a time to grow both personally and corporately as a community of faith.

The series is based on Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." God has a plan for our life. It is not a plan filled with pain and disappointment. Rather, it is a plan filled with joy, abundance, and quality relationships. God gives us the opportunity to spend a career in fulfilling vocations, grow with loving families, and experience life with good friends.

Each session focuses on one important component necessary for developing a healthy outlook on life. Over the course of the six sessions, participants will wrestle with what it means to live by God's plan in terms of spiritual growth, family relationships, professional habits, mental growth, and friendships.

While these materials are all you need for a successful series of small-group studies, group leaders are encouraged to read the following resources by Stan Toler.

1. *Practical Guide for Pastoral Ministry*. Published by Wesleyan Publishing House, Indianapolis, IN (2007). ISBN: 9780898273533
2. *Minute Motivators for Dieters*. Published by River Oak Publishing, Tulsa, OK (2002). ISBN: 918158919974X
3. *Minute Motivators for Leaders*. Published by River Oak Publishing, Tulsa, OK (2002). ISBN: 9781589190085
4. *The Buzzards are Circling, But God's Not Finished With Me Yet*. Published by Honor Books, Colorado Springs, CO (2002). ISBN: 10:1589193059

These resources will give you a deeper understanding of the subject matter and provide many ideas and thoughts for your group discussions.

Getting Started

If your church currently has a small-group structure, simply adapt these materials accordingly. Incorporate the questions and discussion elements into your own format and structure.

If you do not have a small-group ministry, consider using these materials for a special series of groups or as a test case for small groups in your church. Or, consider using this study in Sunday School, your midweek Bible study, departmental staff meetings, pastoral staff meetings, or for a weekend retreat.

Again, this study is intended to be informal and easy to adapt. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Limit each session to 90 minutes. Having a designated end time will make it easier for people to commit to your group and will help the host feel more comfortable.
2. Limit each group to no more than 8-12 people. A good rule of thumb is to limit the group size to a number that can comfortably fit into the host's living room or family room.
3. Include a time of fellowship in each session.
4. Include a time of prayer in each session. Review the list of "Ten Things I Have Learned about Prayer" by Steve Weber on page 20. Discuss two or three of the points at each prayer time.

Suggested Schedule

- Fellowship and snacks: 30-45 minutes
- Discussion: 30-40 minutes
- Prayer: 10-15 minutes

The Format

Each session includes the following sections:

Key Verse

This verse is the scriptural basis for each session. Many of the discussion questions will revolve around this verse. Consider encouraging everyone to memorize the verse during the following week.

Focus

This statement provides the purpose or objective for each session. This is the key point for the week.

For Starters

This is a question to use as an ice-breaker for the session. It is intended to get everyone thinking about the subject in a non-threatening, fun way.

For Discussion

These questions are based on the topic of the session and the key verse. Use these questions to dig deeper into the topic of the session.

For Consideration

This is a quote from one of Dr. Toler's books and is related to the topic. Use this quote as a basis for continued discussion. Additionally, discussion questions are provided here.

Prayer

Plan to spend some time each session in prayer. In addition to prayer requests, take a few moments prior to praying to discuss some points from the article on page 20: "Ten Things I Have Learned About Prayer."

For Next Time

This is an activity or assignment for everyone to do in preparation for the next session. Most of these are personal and are not designed to be shared with the entire group, unless individuals decide to do so. This activity will help each group member prepare for next week's topic.

God Has a Plan for You!

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

What plan provides the blueprint for your life? Do you depend on your financial plan? Are you holding onto life goals written down years ago? Are your hopes and dreams tied to job promotions and where you live? Do you have a plan?

God reminds us in Jeremiah 29 that He has a plan for our lives. And it’s not just any plan. God’s plan involves hope. It involves a bright future. God does not desire that we just muddle through this life, only to be rewarded when we get to heaven. He has provided many gifts and blessings to us right here on earth. The question is: How will we respond?

For the next six weeks, you are invited to review the blueprint of your life in light of the plans God has for you. These six sessions will examine the spiritual, mental, and physical aspects of life as well as family, professional, and community relationships. Each component is critical to developing a healthy life and living the kind of life that God has intended.

This study is intended for a small-group setting. This setting provides each participant with other, like-minded friends who can serve as partners on this journey. You will receive from this study exactly what you are willing to invest in it. Remember, God has a plan for your life. Now go and discover that plan!

*Session One***God Has a Purpose for Your Life (Spiritual)**

Key Verse: “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,” (Philippians 3:13).

Focus: The total quality life begins with understanding that God has a purpose and a plan for your life.

For Starters

Name five things you would like to do before you die.

For Discussion

1. Read Philippians 3:13.
2. What is your purpose in life?
3. What aspects of the past is Paul asking us to forget? Why is this important?

For Consideration

“There is a reason for every season of life. As we’ve seen, God has a master plan for our lives, a plan that is absolutely beneficial to us, and we can trust that He is leading us on the right course. We only see the ‘rough’ side of the answer, like viewing a tapestry from its underside.” (Stan Toler, *The Buzzards are Circling, But God’s Not Finished With Me Yet*, 2002.)

1. How have you seen God working His master plan in your life?
2. Do you believe God has a plan for you? Explain?
3. Describe a time when God’s plan for a particular situation was revealed.

Prayer Focus

1. Discuss the first two points from “Ten Things I Learned About Prayer” on page 20.
 - a. God is completely unchangeable, yet moved in infinite love by all things.
 - b. No one can effectively pray until they have been broken.

2. Pray for the needs of the group.

3. Pray for your church, your pastor, and church leaders.

For Next Time

Continued learning is an important part of developing a total quality life. How do you learn best? Reading? Surfing the internet? Exploring new places? Make a point to learn something new this week. Read a magazine article or watch a documentary about a subject with which you have little or no familiarity. Set some personal goals for learning new things.

*Session Two***Lean and Learn (Mental)**

Key Verse: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight,” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Focus: The total quality life is one of continued growth through learning.

For Starters

What is the last good book you read? What did you like about it?

For Discussion

1. How do you learn new things? (Reading, television, personal conversations, Internet?)
2. What makes a smart person?
3. At what point in life do we stop learning?
4. Read Proverbs 3:5-6.
5. Why is it so tempting to “lean on our own understanding”?

For Consideration

“Jesus learned in the Temple by listening to the Jewish teachers, and in the carpenter shop by watching His skilled foster father, Joseph. The most effective mix is a combination of formal training and informal learning experiences.” (Stan Toler, *Practical Guide for Practical Ministry*, 2007.)

1. Who has been a mentor in your life?

2. Give one example of something you learned by observing the actions of other people?

3. What is something you would like to learn? (For instance, another language, a skill, or a new hobby.)

Prayer Focus

1. Discuss two more points (number 3 and 4) from “Ten Things I Learned About Prayer” on page 20.
 - a. No one who is not a person of prayer can do a great and enduring work for God, and no one can be a person of prayer without giving much time to prayer.
 - b. Patience in prayer and patience in action.

2. Pray for the needs of the group.

3. Pray for your church, your pastor, and church leaders.

For Next Time

What habits would you like to change regarding how you take care of yourself? Make a list of short-term goals for changing these habits.

*Session Three***Temple Maintenance (Physical)**

Key Verse: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (I Corinthians 6:19).

Focus: The total quality life involves caring for our bodies.

For Starters

If scientists discovered a new process for making any kind of food completely free of calories and other unhealthy by-products, which food would you choose?

For Discussion

1. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19.
2. When Paul says that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, what does he mean?
3. If we truly see our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, how does that change our habits?

For Consideration

“Self-control begins in the mind. You make some mental choices. Option A or Option B. Which has long-term spiritual, physical, social, or financial benefits? Then, you put up some “fences” for your own safety. You keep certain foods or certain behaviors out of your life – for your own protection.” (Stan Toler, *Minute Motivators for Dieters*, 2002.)

1. What does Dr. Toler mean when he says, “Self-control begins in the mind”?

2. What kind of “fences” do we need to construct to practice self-control?
3. What “fences” have you constructed in your life to practice self-control?
4. What physical goals do you need to set for yourself? (Activity, exercise, sports, etc.)

Prayer Focus

1. Discuss two more points (number 7 and 8) from “Ten Things I Learned About Prayer” on page 20.
 - a. “Peace,” is the rest that flows from unceasing prayer.
 - b. Emotional intensity in prayer is in itself no proof of spiritual depth.
2. Pray for the needs of the group.
3. Pray for your church, your pastor, and church leaders.

For Next Time

Make note of how much time you spend with your family this week. What are the best moments? How can you have more of these moments?

“Relaxation is a good remedy for taking life too seriously.”

—Stan Toler

(Minute Motivators for Leaders, 2002)

*Session Four***All in the Family (Family Relationships)**

Key Verse: “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith,” (Hebrews 11:7).

Focus: The total quality life involves making our family a priority.

For Discussion

1. What are the characteristics of a healthy family?
2. Which characteristic is hardest to achieve in your family?
3. Which is more important to the family – spending a lot of time with the family or spending quality time with the family? Why?
4. What is quality time?

For Consideration

“Leaders understand that the happiness of their homes directly influences the happiness of their work. So they make the time and effort to contribute to that happiness.” (Stan Toler, *Minute Motivators for Leaders*, 2002.)

1. How does your home life affect other aspects of your life?
2. How can we change priorities to put more focus on our families?
3. What kinds of things do you do to build your relationship with your spouse, children, or other family members?

Prayer Focus

1. Discuss two points (number 9 and 10) from “Ten Things I Have Learned About Prayer” on page 20.
 - a. Prayer requires discipline.
 - b. To pray effectively, one must have a strong sense of the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

2. Pray for the needs of the group.

3. Pray for your church, your pastor, and church leaders.

For Next Time

Do a personal job evaluation on yourself. What areas would you like to improve? How could you improve in these areas?

“Leaders make sure that of all the people who compete for their attention, their families get first priority.

—Stan Toler

(Minute Motivators for Leaders, 2002)

*Session Five***Job One (Professional)**

Key Verse: “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat,’” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Focus: The total quality life values hard work.

For Starters

What is the worst job you ever held? The strangest? The best?

Optional question: What was your first job?

For Discussion

1. How did you end up in your current career?
2. If you were given the choice, would you choose another career? Why or why not?
3. Is it possible to enjoy your job?
4. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10.
5. What do you think about the rule mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 3:10?
6. How does working contribute to a quality life?

For Consideration

“Actions take precedence over accolades. Goals are more important than gold. Ribbons are incidental to right behavior.” (Stan Toler, *Practical Guide for Pastoral Ministry*. 2007.)

1. Can you think of someone who exhibits this kind of attitude toward their job?
2. If you were to adapt the attitude described by Dr. Toler, how would this change your job performance?
3. What is one thing you could learn that would improve your job performance?

Prayer Focus

1. Discuss the final two points from “Ten Things I Learned About Prayer” on page 20.
 - a. We must learn how to listen as well as talk when we pray.
 - b. Pray as if it all depends on God and live as if it all depends on you.
2. Pray for the needs of the group.
3. Pray for your church, your pastor, and church leaders.

For Next Time

Note how much time you spend with friends this week. What can you do to foster better relationships with others?

*Session Six***Building Community (Friends and Relationships)**

Key Verse: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin,” (1 John 1:7).

Focus: The total quality life is filled with valuable friendships.

For Starters

Who was your best friend as a kid? What made that friendship special or unique?

For Discussion

1. What is a friend? What are the qualities or characteristics of a friend?
2. Are the majority of your relationships long- or short-term?
3. Read 1 John 1:7.
4. Why is fellowship with each other important to God’s plan for our lives?
5. Do you have friends you haven’t spoken to in a while because of a misunderstanding or disagreement? What would happen if you contacted them this week?

For Consideration

“Remember the advice we received as children: ‘If you want to have friends, you need to be friendly. Relationships take work. They aren’t given out like political flyers. Relationships grow as a result of our efforts. And, most often, what we put into them is exactly what we get out of them. They take time, talent, tears, and treasure. But the payoff is worth the effort. When those relationships work, they can be a great source of encouragement and strength.’”
(Stan Toler, *The Buzzards are Circling, But God’s Not Finished With Me Yet*, 2002.)

1. How does being friendly result in more friends?
2. What is the key ingredient to building a good friendship?
3. How can you invest in your friendships and relationships this week?

Prayer Focus

1. Review the list of “Ten Things I Learned About Prayer” on page 20. Ask members to share what they have learned about prayer in the past few weeks.
2. Pray for the needs of the group.
3. Pray for your church, your pastor, and church leaders.

God gives us relatives – thank God we can choose our friends.

— Addison Mizner

Ten Things I Have Learned About Prayer

1. God is completely unchangeable, yet moved in infinite love by all things.
2. No one can effectively pray until they have been broken.
3. No one who is not a person of prayer can do a great and enduring work for God, and no one can be a person of prayer without giving much time to prayer.
4. Patience in prayer and patience in action.
5. “Peace,” is the rest that flows from unceasing prayer.
6. Emotional intensity in prayer is in itself no proof of spiritual depth.
7. Prayer requires discipline.
8. To pray effectively, one must have a strong sense of the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.
9. We must learn how to listen as well as talk when we pray.
10. Pray as if it all depends on God and live as if it all depends on you.

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