

FINDING LIFE

group leader's guide

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This guide is to be used in conjunction with *Finding Life: From Eden to Gethsemane—the Garden Restored* by Jane Rubietta (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2014).

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INTRODUCTION

Finding Life: From Eden to Gethsemane—the Garden Restored contains several application tools at the end of each day’s reading. Sometimes, though, it helps to have additional questions and journey-deepening suggestions, both to enrich personal study and application, and to make leading or facilitating a small group, book club, or study easier.

The daily readings have been combined by chapters to form a seven-week study guide. There will be ample material to use during your meeting time. The questions below work well in combination with the application elements at the close of each chapter, which can be implemented with the suggestions in the Small Group Guide in the book itself.

To get started, each group member should have a personal copy of *Finding Life*. It is helpful if they read the weekly chapters in advance of the meeting.

Individual group sessions are divided into two parts: Turning the Soil and Digging Deeper. Turning the Soil contains icebreaker questions, non-threatening openings that invite people into relationship, story, and memories. Digging Deeper takes a more in-depth look at elements in the book’s chapters, related Scriptures, and application.

(Depending on when your first session begins, it’s possible that week 7 actually occurs for your group after Easter, which makes this lesson all the more perfect.)

For more group ideas and resources, please visit [www. JaneRubietta.com](http://www.JaneRubietta.com). If your group is interested in a video conference call with me, during or toward the end of your study together, contact me at Jane@JaneRubietta.com.

GENERAL QUESTIONS TO ASK EACH SESSION

1. What stood out for you in these readings?
2. What Scriptures spoke to you? In what ways?
3. Where did you sense God tugging, or an ah-ha moment?
4. What emotional responses did you experience?
5. What will be different today? Tomorrow?

Note: at the beginning of each session, you might want to remind people that silence is uncomfortable but good, and allows people time to process. Also, to honor confidentiality and to create a safe environment, adapt the motto, “What we say here, stays here.”

CREATION IN THE GARDEN AND ONENESS IN THE GARDEN

Genesis 1:1–5

TURNING THE SOIL

1. What conceptions have you had about the season prior to Easter? What’s been your tradition with Lent? What, if any, sort of spiritual practice have you used? (Giving up something for Lent being a common one. If so, what?)

2. What sort of garden stories can you tell? Favorite memories, or absurd?

3. In what ways have you experienced God’s presence in creation?

4. Thinking about rest: What strikes you about God *creating* rest? It seems superfluous. Won’t our bodies just do this for us? But what is your experience with rest? Do you see it as a necessity, punishment, or luxury? Why?

5. Thinking about light: What effect does it have on you? The absence of light? My dad walked around switching on lamps when he would catch us reading with insufficient light. “You’ll ruin your eyes,” he said. What parallels do you see between light and sight, and spiritual sight? Between light and growth in plants, and in our souls?

6. The Scriptures don’t actually say, “God created beauty.” So why do we believe this to be true, and why do *you* think God created beauty?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. The Scriptures tell us “God rested” (Gen. 2:2–3). The word in Hebrew is *sabat*, from which we get the word Sabbath: cessation of work, creation, and labor. How do you receive the idea of resting from work, and how does this compete with your work ethic? Where does trust begin and labor cease for you?

2. Consider the consequences of Adam and Eve’s lack of trust. How did this impact the rest God demonstrated both in creation (so much of nature rests and restores at night) and in our lives? Where is your restlessness most apparent? To what end? What do you do with Christ’s words, “Come to me, all you who are weary”? (See Matt. 11:28–30.)

3. “Noah walked with God.” If the name Noah means rest, what is the correlation between rest and walking with God? (See Gen. 6:9.)

4. Jewish tradition portrays Adam and Eve, though naked, being so filled with light that their physical nakedness wasn’t visible. When they turned away from God, the light left them, and then they were truly

naked, vulnerable. When have you felt filled with light? Empty of it? And what do those experiences do to your sense of nakedness or safety? What if you experiment with saying, “And God said, ‘Let there be light’” in those dimly lit and vulnerable times?

5. Compare God’s unbroken presence in Eden with the death knells throughout Scripture and your own life. When do you long for “unbroken,” and when are you most aware of “broken”?

6. Describe a time of unbroken community or communion or relationship with another, or with God. How about a time of broken? What did that look like? What broke the connection? How do you reestablish relationship?

DARKNESS IN THE GARDEN

Romans 8:26–27

TURNING THE SOIL

1. What makes you squeamish in the dark? How did you feel about the dark when you were a child? How did your family handle any nighttime fear?

2. Our mission trip to the south side of Chicago was filled with all four subjects: temptation, treason, violence, and night. But it also proved formative for my husband and me as we clarified God’s calling of us, away from our comfortable and wonderful church in a rural/semi-suburban area, and into a high-crime, low-income, high-unemployment section of Metro Chicago. In what ways have those four areas been formative for you—life-changing in terms of your approach or calling or mind-set?

3. Where would you say is your biggest area of temptation? Food? Social media? Laziness? Overwork? Appearance? Possessions? What underlies that temptation, and when are you most susceptible to it?

4. Thinking about violence: When have you witnessed violence and not addressed it? While in seminary, I worked in a restaurant, and two women I knew came to the restaurant—one with a very obvious black eye. I didn’t ask her about it. I had to later ask myself why not. Fear? Politeness? Not wanting to be nosy? Embarrassed for her sake? Or mine? I was a coward, and if there was abuse in her home, I should’ve addressed it.

5. Some confuse passivism with passivity. Opting for peaceful, nonviolent solutions is quite different than refusing to get involved. Consider Jesus and the clearing of the temple, Jesus’ response to Pilate, or how He handled the beatings and the cross.

6. When have you substituted passivity for passivism? Where have you leaned toward violence, confusing it with movement and the opposite of passivity?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Consider temptation as described in Hebrews 4:15. Where does this impact you? Look at Jesus’ temptations in Luke 22:42 and Luke 23:8. We are most familiar with Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer, “Lord, take this cup away from me.” But what about the temptation to polish His image? Would you have succumbed to that temptation? Where are you tempted like that now?

2. Treason means to turn against someone, to trade sides, to shift alliances and allegiance. Selling out secrets would count as treason, wouldn’t it? Where have you done this, personally? To what end, in terms of relationships? And where has someone been treasonous toward you? How did you handle that?

3. Where do you see your own treason when it comes to your relationship with Christ? How have you experienced Christ responding to you?

4. We all groan and grumble at times. What common refrains do you have? What are typical subjects over which you groan? What about groaning to God for yourself or for others? When have you sensed the Holy Spirit groaning through you to God, even when you had no words?

5. It seems that darkness and night indeed rule the world right now. How do you align the present state with what is yet to come? How do you fight against darkness, whether your own darkness or the darkness in society?

6. Reread Romans 8:26–27. What challenges, convicts, and comforts you? Close this time by singing or reading the words aloud in unison of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

SHAME IN THE GARDEN AND SACRIFICE IN THE GARDEN

Romans 8

TURNING THE SOIL

1. What's one of your most embarrassing moments? What things do you remember from childhood that embarrassed you?

2. What's the difference between embarrassment and shame for you?

3. When we think about Lent, we often think of sacrifice. But most of our giving up at Lent doesn't cost us very much. As you rethink relinquishment and sacrifice, what might you give up or sacrifice or offer? It's not too late to start.

4. One of the words for shame is used 122 times in the Old Testament. Remarkable, isn't it, in our day and age, to read the report of Adam and Eve? "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Gen. 2:25). Shame means disgraced, humiliated, shown up, embarrassed, or dishonored; as a verb, it means to make somebody or something seem inferior or of inferior quality by comparison. When have you done that to someone else? When have you experienced it yourself?

5. What about transferring shame to yourself, when someone else makes a mistake? Do you feel ashamed, for instance, for your friend? Do you feel embarrassed to be associated with that person and thus ashamed as well? Talk about this in relationship to boundaries, and drawing a line between our own reputation and self and someone else's.

6. In what ways have you used the system of sacrifice and hurt others? For instance, what of sacrificing family on the altar of work? What do you think you could do differently?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Compare the relationship between shame, sacrifice, and salvation in Romans 9:33 and Romans 10:8–13.

2. Read 1 Peter 2:6. Contrast these words with the shaming words you have heard in your past (or your present). Whose voice will you believe? How?

3. Regarding the sacrificial system begun in Eden, continued between the gardens, and fulfilled in Gethsemane, the Scriptures tell us, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). The covering of fur saved Adam and Eve from death by exposure to the elements; the covering of blood on the lintels of the doors saved the Israelites from death before the exodus from Egypt (Ex. 12:1–13). See also

Hebrews 9:11 and 2:13. It's a rather grisly picture—all of that blood. Where have you tried to atone for your own sin and been unable to eradicate the shame?

4. In the original languages, the word for “offering” means to draw near. Since we were incapable of doing this, yet again God took the step that would reestablish relationship: Christ offered himself. He “drew near” so that we would be *able* to draw near once again. James 4:8 tells us to draw near to God and God will draw near to us. How do you draw near? When is that an offering? When is it a sacrifice?

5. Talk about the sacrifices of God for today: a broken and contrite heart, praise, obedience, thanksgiving. How do these fit into your life and lifestyle? Look at Hebrews 10:19–25 for ways of “drawing near,” offering ourselves to God and to one another.

6. Close with Charles Wesley’s hymn “And Can It Be.” If the melody is too challenging, read the words aloud in your group in unison. Then pray through the verses in the group or in pairs.

THORNS IN THE GARDEN AND FAILURE IN THE GARDEN

Isaiah 55

TURNING THE SOIL

1. I grew up in Southern Indiana, where builders landscaped with thorn-laden locust trees, because the trees grew so fast. I learned quickly to either wear shoes or be really sorry I didn't. What's your experience with thorns and thistles in your yard (or foot!)? Sometimes those barbs stick around for so long, but nothing can remove that thorn.

2. Talk about sweat for a minute. Your sweat or another's. Locker rooms? How much boys sweat when they hit puberty (something like a gallon a day!)? What sweat does to your eyes when it runs down your forehead? (It burns like acid, is what.)

3. Where does work feel like part of the curse, rather than the sweat of the brow that comes from the work? Maybe your work doesn't produce sweat. Could sweat be an internal reaction, as well as a physical product of moisture?

4. What does daily bread mean to you? Do you tend to trust God for tomorrow's ration, or do you hoard and store up for tomorrow? Take this literally, as food or money for retirement, etc. How do you find equilibrium?

5. What catchy slogans do you know or use about failure? How about failure as part of the plan? Where do you see that thinking in the corporate world? The church? Your own life? Spiritually?

6. When you think of failure, what one event or moment stands out most for you? And is it your failure or someone else's? When have you considered failure to be fatal?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. The curse of the ground in Genesis 3:17–19 describes painful toil, thorns and thistles, and sweat. One of the ways toil becomes painful is that it slips into the spot intended to be filled with God. We begin to rely on our work rather than on our God, who provides for us daily. When do you see this in your life? When do you toil for the wrong reasons? What are some of those?

2. Consider Colossians 3:17: doing all things to the glory of God. How do you do this, so that all your effort becomes "priestly ministration" as A. W. Tozer put it in *Pursuit of God*? How is this related to Matthew 11:28–30?

3. How might you work for the food that "endures to eternal life" rather than the food that perishes (see John 6:27)?

4. Regarding failure, what do you consider to be the biggest failures in our society? In our economic policy? In our church? Now line up that failure with personal failures. Compare your attitude toward failure that is external of you with failure that is caused by you or is integral to you. Finally, consider what we know about God and all the “does not fail” truths of Scripture. (Ps. 89:28; Lam. 3:22; Zeph. 3:5; as well as those mentioned in *Finding Life*.)

5. Imagine that you are in that courtyard with Peter, having just denied Christ three times and fulfilling the first half of His prophecy about you. Christ turns and meets your eyes. What does He say with His eyes to you?

6. How has failure sifted you? Sifted out what? Settled what? When has failure been a conversion moment for you or through you for others? As Jesus said, “When you have turned, strengthen the others” (Luke 22:31–32).

EXILE FROM THE GARDEN

Luke 15:1–24

TURNING THE SOIL

1. When did you think about running away from home? How recently have you considered it? (For example, as an adult, have you ever wanted to just chuck everything and take off?) Did you run away? Why or why not? What happened?
2. If you could run away from one thing, whether a person or situation, without repercussions, what would it be?
3. Running away is self-imposed exile, as we see in the parable of the lost son. What other types of exile are you familiar with (consider emotional, relationship, physical, spiritual, etc.)?
4. In what ways have you experienced exile? When?
5. What high-profile exiles do you remember? Think POWs, political prisoners, etc. What happened, for instance, when Dostoyevsky was a political prisoner, and what happened when he received political asylum to America?
6. How do you impose exile on others? On yourself?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. One means of exile is sin. The Israelites were sent into exile because they abandoned their relationship with God and began worshiping idols, giving themselves over to all sorts of depravity. When have you experienced this type of exile, whether by another or in your own life? For instance, we exile ourselves from God and others when we sin. How long does it take you to return? What costs have you paid?
2. King David lived for years on the lam in exile, running from his enemies. He lived in caves and fortresses and once pretended to be insane. Achish, king of Gath, said of David, “Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me?” (See 1 Sam. 21:10–22:5.) What benefits do you see to exile for King David? (It sure didn’t help his reputation much!)
3. Prophets weren’t very popular in general, and many hid from kings and other detractors. For more, read about Elijah in 1 King 5:1–6, and how God provided for him in exile. John wrote the book of Revelation from prison, while exiled by Rome to the Isle of Patmos.
4. In Jeremiah 29:4–7, God told the exiled Israelites to settle into the land in Babylon, pray for the prosperity of the city, build homes, marry, and have children. What do you make of this, given your own

experience of exile? (Read Jer. 29, for a letter to the exiles in Babylon, and the often-quoted encouraging words in vv. 11–14.)

5. How have you seen God’s provision in your times of exile? What challenges your faith and growth curve in those times?

6. Talk about ways you exile the “unclean.” Who are the unclean? Why do you feel uncomfortable? What does exile mean, and what would it look like to welcome them, as Jesus welcomed the lepers?

SUFFERING IN THE GARDEN

1 Peter 1:2–7

TURNING THE SOIL

1. We have all sorts of remedies for pain relief. What are some holistic ways you've discovered to relieve pain? (For example, hydrate if you have a headache.) What are some funny ways people have tried to relieve pain or illness?
2. What are some forms of pain you'd love to have relieved, but haven't found a remedy?
3. A college professor I had said, "'Misery loves company' isn't true. What is true is, 'Misery loves miserable company.'" Who or what do you seek out when you are miserable?
4. When are you tempted to compare your lot with another's pain or suffering?
5. Studies show that when people compare their sufferings, they usually decide to stick with their own rather than trade. What have you found to be true there? (As if you actually could exchange your troubles for your neighbor's.)
6. One praise song speaks of trading our sorrows for joy. How do you lay down those sorrows and sufferings? How do you find God's joy?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. The Scriptures talk about suffering shame, disgrace, loss, mockery, punishment, and thirst, among other things. When has life linked suffering to those forms for you?
2. In the movie *Patch Adams*, the patient Gareth forgot about his chronic pain when viewing beauty. What replaces pain for you or allows you a measure of pain relief?
3. See Lamentations 3:47–48 for Jeremiah's response to others' suffering. Read 2 Corinthians 1:2–7. Why does Paul preface verses 3–7 with "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"? How is that critical to the subject that follows?
4. What is the point of suffering, according to this passage? (See also 1 Pet. 1:3–9; James 1:12; and Rom. 5:1–11.)
5. How have you been able to comfort others in their troubles with the comfort you've received in your own trouble? How *do* you receive comfort in times of suffering?
6. Close with singing or reading the words of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

LIFE IN THE GARDEN

John 21:5

TURNING THE SOIL

1. Sometimes we consider someone or something to be “life-giving.” Who or what do you describe that way? Tell about a favorite life-giving experience.
2. What about the opposite, “death-giving”? Would people describe you in either of those terms? Why? What do you need to reevaluate and what can you change if there are death-giving elements in your life or in your behaviors?
3. Imagine being in Adam’s shoes. You get to name your spouse, who just instigated the fall of every human being to ever come, looping you into the catastrophe. What name would you choose?
4. What takes your breath away? When are you breathless or out of breath? Compare to what the Scriptures say about breath—breath of God, of the Holy Spirit, of Christ.
5. Look again at the interaction between the Marys and the angel, in Matthew 28:1–10. The earthquake was so violent and the angel’s appearance so striking that the guards at the tomb “were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.” The angel told the women, “Do not be afraid.” Note that he did not so reassure the half-dead guards! What does this tell you about being on God’s journey and working toward God’s purposes, and the place of fear in our lives?
6. Where do you need to apply the angel’s words (and Jesus’ words), “Do not be afraid”?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Adam and Eve’s third child was named Seth (see Gen. 4:24–26). It means restitution: to give back, pay back, restore. In what ways did God demonstrate restitution through him? How do you see that restitution, tracing the journey from Eden to Gethsemane and all the way through resurrection?
2. The Jews expected a king who would actually sit upon a throne and rule. Earthly kings married and had sons who inherited their thrones after them. Imagine the shock and disappointment of the Jewish followers when Jesus *died*. “What? Not only is our king dead, but what about His family line? What about that prophecy regarding King David? (See 2 Sam. 7:12–16.) “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (v. 16).
3. Consider the amazing fulfillment of that prophecy, the purpose of Christ’s suffering. Talk about this, in the context of God, sending Christ the only begotten Son: “In bringing many sons and daughters to glory,

it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered” (Heb. 2:10). What does this tell you about the Trinity? How do you respond to this?

4. “Many sons and daughters to glory”: This is from the Greek word *doxa*, from which we draw our word *doxology*. It means splendor or brilliance with its base in the “awesome light that radiates from God’s presence, and is associated with God’s acts of power, honor, praise, speaking of words of excellence and assigning highest status to God’s glory” (*The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance*). How does this translate to your life, what you think and say, how you live?

5. The proverb on my coffee cup reads, “Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a butterfly.” In the original language, the word for change or transform is rooted in the word *morph*, like the caterpillar changing, morphing, into a butterfly. When have you thought the world was over, and then . . . *voila!*? Where do you see this morphing happening for you? Where don’t you see it happening?

6. What transformation can you pray for now with your group? Frame one sentence. Then share that sentence with the group or with the person beside you. Pray for one another, whether silently or aloud. As you close this Lenten season and celebrate the resurrection of Christ, what one primary thing will change for you? Close with Robert Lowry’s hymn, “Up from the Grave He Arose.”

If your group benefited from studying *Finding Life* together, watch for the release of Jane Rubietta’s next book, *Finding the Messiah: From Darkness to Light—the Birth of Our Savior*, a twenty-eight-day devotional for the season of Advent, available October 2014.