

take less. do more.

SURPRISING LIFE LESSONS

IN GENEROSITY, GRATITUDE, AND CURIOSITY
FROM AN ULTRALIGHT BACKPACKER

Study Guide for Faith-Based Groups

From the Author: Thanks for your interest in using **take less. do more.** in your small group! My faith journey has been a long one (my "gopher conversion" story is in the book). How you use the book is up to you; in my experience in small groups, the discussions that arise from, but maybe have little to do with the original questions, is where the real learning and bonding come from. I trust that the book sparks discussions that are of value to you and the others in the group and bear fruit in your daily life.

To inquire about bulk orders of signed books, just contact me at glen@glenvanpeski.com. If you want me to participate in a group meeting by Zoom, I can tell you some stories that didn't make it into the book about how God used my dishwashing job to bless others.

—Glen Van Peski, Bend, Oregon, April '25

take.less.

In a backpacking context, *taking less* refers to carrying less weight, allowing us to travel more easily. In an expanded sense, it can mean taking ourselves less seriously, balancing the wonder of our relationship in Christ with our smallness compared to God. It might mean letting go of physical or emotional baggage that keeps us from experiencing God's love and peace. When we focus less on ourselves, we can become aware of the needs of others around us. And when we create margin in our lives by taking less, we can use that to bless others.

LESSON 1

THE WILDERNESS PROVIDES PERSPECTIVE

**THEME: In the vastness of God's creation,
we realize our true place and equality before Him.**

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

—Psalm 19:1 (NIV)

"From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth;
and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands."

—Acts 17:26 (NIV)

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities...have been clearly seen."

—Romans 1:20 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How does being in nature remind you of your place in God's creation?
2. In what ways does the wilderness experience strip away societal distinctions and reveal our common humanity?
3. How can we carry the perspective of equality before God from the wilderness into our daily lives?
4. Share an experience where you felt God's presence more strongly in nature. What made that moment special?

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Plan a short hike or nature walk this week, focusing on observing God's creation and listening for His voice.
2. Set aside 10 minutes each day for quiet reflection and prayer, away from distractions, to reconnect with your place in God's creation.



LESSON 2

TAKE MORE, DO LESS

THEME: Recognizing that carrying too much can hinder our ability to fully experience and enjoy God's creation.

"Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken."

—Psalm 55:22 (NIV)

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

—Matthew 11:28 (NIV)

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...Is not life more than food?"

—Matthew 6:25 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How does carrying too much "stuff" in your life (physical or emotional) prevent you from fully experiencing God's presence?
2. In what ways can simplifying your life help you better serve God and others?
3. How can we balance being prepared with trusting in God's provision?
4. Share a time when you felt overburdened. How did that affect your relationship with God and others?

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Go through your belongings and donate items you haven't used in the past year to those in need.
2. Spend a day in nature with minimal possessions, focusing on God's creation and your connection with Him.



LESSON 3

LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD

THEME: Using our God-given gifts to create a positive impact and serve others.

“...the Lord has... filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts.”

—Exodus 35:31–33 (NIV)

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” —Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” —Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How has God uniquely gifted you, and how might you use those gifts to serve others?
2. In what ways can lightening your load (physically or spiritually) help you better focus on using your gifts?
3. How can we encourage others to recognize and use their God-given talents?
4. Share an experience where using your unique abilities made a positive impact on someone else’s life.

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Make a list of your skills, abilities, and experiences. Pray about how God might want you to use these to serve others.
2. Look for an opportunity this week to use one of your gifts to help someone in need or support your community.



LESSON 4

BE KIND

THEME: Kindness and generosity create connections, enrich both giver and receiver, and allow us to travel lighter through life.

"A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed."

—Proverbs 11:25 (NIV)

"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." —Hebrews 13:2 (NIV)

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." —Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How has an act of kindness from a stranger impacted your life? How did it change your perspective?
2. In what ways can practicing kindness help us "travel lighter" through life?
3. How can we balance personal goals and ambitions with kindness towards others in our daily lives?
4. Share a time when you missed an opportunity to show kindness. What did you learn from that experience?

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Perform an unexpected act of kindness for a stranger this week and reflect on how it affects both you and the recipient.
2. Identify an area in your life where you might be pushing others too hard, and consider how you can approach the situation with more kindness and understanding.



LESSON 5

TAKE LESS, GIVE MORE

THEME: Embracing generosity and sharing what we have, even when we think we have little, can enrich our lives and the lives of others.

“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord.” —Proverbs 19:17 (NIV)

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” —Luke 6:38 (NIV)

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” —2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How has someone else’s generosity impacted your life in a meaningful way?
2. In what areas of your life do you find it easiest to be generous? In what areas do you struggle?
3. How might reducing what you consume or own create more opportunities for generosity?
4. Share a time when giving to others enriched your own life in an unexpected way.

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Identify one item or resource you have in abundance and find a way to share it with someone in need this week.
2. Practice “paying it forward” by performing an act of kindness for a stranger, inspired by kindness you’ve received in the past.



LESSON 6

BALANCE LESS WITH ENOUGH

THEME: Finding contentment by balancing minimalism with having what we truly need.

“Give me neither poverty nor riches, but only my daily bread.” —Proverbs 30:8 (NIV)

“...godliness with contentment is great gain.” —1 Timothy 6:6 (NIV)

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” —Philippians 4:12 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How do you determine what is “enough” in your life? Where do you struggle with wanting more?
2. In what areas of your life could you simplify or reduce, and how might that impact your contentment?
3. How can focusing on God’s provision help us find balance between having too little and too much?
4. Share a time when you felt truly content with what you had. What contributed to that feeling?

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Make an inventory of your possessions in one area of your life (e.g., clothing, kitchen items). Prayerfully consider what you truly need and what you could let go of.
2. Practice gratitude this week by thanking God daily for His provision, focusing on what you have rather than what you lack.



LESSON 7

KNOW YOUR GEAR

THEME: Understanding what we truly need allows us to let go of unnecessary burdens and find simpler solutions.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to keep and a time to throw away”

—Ecclesiastes 3:1,6 (NIV)

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

—Matthew 6:34 (NIV)

“My God will meet all your needs...”

—Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. In what areas of your life do you tend to solve problems by adding more instead of simplifying? How might subtracting lead to better solutions?
2. How does “packing our fears” from past experiences weigh us down in our present and future?
3. How can trusting God help us let go of unnecessary burdens we carry?
4. Share a time when simplifying or removing something actually improved your life or solved a problem. What did you learn from that experience?

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Choose one area of your life (e.g., possessions, commitments, habits) and prayerfully consider what you might remove to simplify and improve it.
2. Reflect on a past difficult experience. Identify any “fears” you’re still carrying from it and ask God to help you release them.



do.more.

In the wilderness, having a lighter pack allows us to *do more*, to travel further, to take side trails and climb some peaks. Projected beyond the trail, doing more is not about getting more stuff done, but about doing more things that really matter, like building relationships with those that God puts in our path, leaning more on God's guidance and wisdom, being more generous with our time and talents to make a positive impact and glorify God. When we know who we are, we can take risks and grow, being open to opportunities that God puts in our life, and saying yes to new relationships. It's about having an increased appreciation and more gratitude in our lives.

LESSON 8

INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS

THEME: Building and nurturing meaningful connections requires intentional effort and time but yields rich rewards in our lives and the lives of others.

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

—Proverbs 17:17 (NIV)

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another..."

—Hebrews 10:24–25 (NIV)

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

—Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How have you experienced the power of investing time and effort in a relationship? What were the results?
2. In what ways can handwritten notes or personal gestures impact others? Share an experience where you've been on the giving or receiving end of such a gesture.
3. How can we be more intentional about caring for the people God has placed in our lives, especially in our fast-paced world?
4. Reflect on a time when someone's investment in your life made a significant difference. How did that shape your view of relationships and caring for others?

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Choose one important relationship in your life and plan a specific way to invest time and effort into it this week, such as a phone call, meeting for coffee, or writing a heartfelt letter.
2. Write a handwritten note of encouragement or appreciation to someone you haven't connected with in a while, expressing how they've impacted your life.



LESSON 9

USE A COMPASS

THEME: Finding direction in life through God's guidance and wisdom.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

—Proverbs 3:5–6 (NIV)

"I am the way, the truth and the life."

—John 14:6 (NIV)

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.
He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he
will tell you what is yet to come."

—John 16:13 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How do you seek God's guidance when making important decisions in your life?
2. In what ways has following your own "compass" led you astray in the past?
3. How can we balance using our God-given wisdom with seeking divine direction?
4. Share an experience where God's guidance helped you navigate a difficult situation.

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Spend time in prayer and Bible study this week, asking God to reveal His direction for an area of your life where you feel lost.
2. Identify a trusted spiritual mentor or friend and ask them to help you discern God's will in a current situation you're facing.



LESSON 10

PRACTICE GENEROSITY

THEME: Being generous with our time, expertise, and talents enriches both the giver and receiver.

"One person gives freely, yet gains even more."

—Proverbs 11:24 (NIV)

"...excel in the grace of giving."

—2 Corinthians 8:7 (NIV)

*"Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds,
and to be generous and willing to share."*

—1 Timothy 6:18 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How can you use your unique skills and talents to benefit others in your community?
2. In what ways might being generous with your time and expertise lead to personal growth?
3. How does practicing generosity align with living a "take less, do more" lifestyle?
4. Share an experience where someone's generosity made a significant impact on your life. How did it inspire you?

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Identify a skill or area of expertise you have and find a way to share it with others this week, either through volunteering or mentoring.
2. Look for an opportunity to give your time to someone in need, whether it's helping a neighbor or serving at a local organization.



LESSON 11

LEARN FROM FAILURE

THEME: Embracing failure as a stepping stone to growth and trusting in God's forgiveness and grace.

"The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities." —Psalm 103:8–10 (NIV)

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."
—Romans 3:23–24 (NIV)

"Brothers and sisters, 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 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How has a past failure or mistake shaped your current approach to challenges?
2. In what ways can viewing failure as a learning opportunity change your perspective on taking risks?
3. How does understanding God's forgiveness impact your ability to move forward from past failures?
4. Share an experience where a failure ultimately led to personal growth or a positive outcome.

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Identify an area in your life where fear of failure may be holding you back, and take a small step towards facing that fear this week.
2. Spend time in prayer, asking God to help you fully embrace His forgiveness for past failures and to give you the courage to move forward.



LESSON 12

REMAIN OPEN

THEME: Being open to God's prompting and alert for opportunities He places in our path.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

—Proverbs 3:5–6 (NIV)

"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."

—James 1:5 (NIV)

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity..."

—Ephesians 5:15–16 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How can we cultivate an attitude of openness to God's guidance in our daily lives?
2. Share an experience where being open to unexpected opportunities led to a blessing or growth in your life.
3. What barriers or fears might prevent us from recognizing or acting on God's prompting?
4. How can we balance planning for the future with remaining open to God's unexpected opportunities?

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Set aside time each day this week to quietly listen for God's guidance, journaling any insights or promptings you receive.
2. Intentionally step out of your comfort zone to engage with a new opportunity that aligns with your understanding of God's will for your life.



LESSON 13

KEEP MAKING FRIENDS

THEME: Cultivating new friendships throughout life enriches our experiences and broadens our perspectives.

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

—Proverbs 17:17 (NIV)

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

—John 13:34 (NIV)

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up,"

—1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How has making new friends in different stages of your life impacted your personal growth?
2. In what ways can stepping out of your comfort zone to meet new people align with the "take less, do more" philosophy?
3. How might your faith guide you in forming and nurturing new friendships?
4. Share an experience where a new friendship unexpectedly enriched your life or broadened your perspective.

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. This week, make an effort to engage in conversation with someone new in your community, workplace, or place of worship.
2. Reflect on your current friendships and identify ways you can deepen these connections or rekindle old ones that may have drifted.



LESSON 14

CULTIVATE A HEART OF GRATITUDE

THEME: Practicing gratitude enriches our lives and helps us appreciate what we have rather than focusing on what we lack.

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever."

—1 Chronicles 16:34 (NIV)

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

—1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

—Colossians 3:17 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How has practicing gratitude changed your perspective on life's challenges?
2. In what ways can gratitude help us "take less" and find contentment with what we have?
3. How might regularly expressing thanks to others strengthen our relationships and community?
4. Share a time when focusing on gratitude helped you through a difficult situation.

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Start a daily gratitude journal, writing down three things you're thankful for each day.
2. Express your appreciation to someone who has positively impacted your life, either in person or through a heartfelt note.



LESSON 15

SAY YES

**THEME: Embracing opportunities and new experiences
with an open mind and heart.**

“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 (NIV)

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

—Romans 12:2 (NIV)

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.”

—Colossians 3:23 (NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How has saying “yes” to unexpected opportunities enriched your life in the past?
2. In what areas of your life might you be too quick to say “no” out of fear or comfort?
3. How can we discern between God-given opportunities and distractions?
4. Share a time when saying “yes” led you to grow in your faith or serve others in a new way.

POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. This week, intentionally say “yes” to an invitation or opportunity you would normally decline.
2. Reflect on your current commitments and pray about where God might be calling you to say “yes” to something new.



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