

4-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

footnotes*

*Major Lessons from Minor Bible Characters

BY JULIE LYLES CARR

Praise for Footnotes

“Julie Lyles Carr helps us explore those who showed up faithfully and fulfilled their assignment but never found their way to the spotlight. It’s a celebration of faithfulness. I love how interactive this study is and how beautifully deep it is.”

—**Suzanne Eller**, cohost of *More Than Small Talk* podcast, best-selling author and communicator, founder of Living Free Together

“If you wonder if your ordinary life will have an impact on the world for Jesus, this Bible study will encourage you that no matter what your sphere of influence looks like, you have the potential to shine brightly for God.”

—**Susie Davis**, cofounder of Austin Christian Fellowship, speaker, and author of *Dear Daughters: Love Letters to the Next Generation* and numerous other titles

“Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Peter, Paul, and Mary (not the folk singers)—these major players in the Bible are the topics of many Sunday morning messages, but often they leave us feeling ordinary and insignificant. In *Footnotes*, Julie Lyles Carr draws our attention to several bit players in the biblical narrative and masterfully draws out the significance of their stories. She reminds us that no role is too small, which means our small roles matter in a big way.”

—**Lynn Marie Cherry**, pastor, speaker, and author of *Keep Walking: 40 Days to Hope and Freedom After Betrayal*

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JULIE LYLES CARR

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About the Author

Julie Lyles Carr is an author, speaker, broadcaster, and consultant who serves as the Pastor of LifeWomen Women's Ministry at her home church of LifeAustin in Austin, Texas. With degrees in psychology and English literature, she began her career in radio and television and continues in the broadcast and voice-over arena, including her work as an audiobook narrator. She founded the nonprofit Legacy of Hope, which today, through its 2dance2dream program, is dedicated to serving families with children with special needs. She is the author of *Raising an Original* and speaks regularly in both church and business settings. Her popular podcast, The Modern Motherhood Podcast, has welcomed guests such as Beth Moore, Priscilla Shirer, Bob Goff, and Max Lucado. Julie and her husband, Michael, are the parents of eight children, ranging in age from twelve to twenty-eight. You can find out more about Julie, her work, and her family life at julielylescarr.com.

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Introduction

We hear a lot about the “big” names in the Bible. *Moses. Mary. Paul.* But what about those who are only mentioned in passing, or whose names aren’t even known? What might they have to teach us about the faith journey?

Footnotes is a unique four-week study that introduces us to four individuals who make brief appearances in the Bible, just footnotes in the biblical story. They may be easy to overlook, but what we’ll learn is that the impact of their lives should not be underestimated. Together we will be inspired by the backstories of these biblical figures, who show us that even minor players can teach major lessons.

Getting Started

For this four-week study experience you will need this workbook, which includes personal lessons for each week, plus the corresponding video segments that are available for each lesson. We’ve also included Group Session Guides, which offer a road map you can use as you follow along or facilitate the session (more on that below).

Your Personal Study

Each week consists of three sections or lessons for personal study. You might choose to do one lesson a day—whether three days in a row, every other day, or whenever you can find the time during your week. Or you might prefer to complete all three lessons over a couple of days or even in one sitting, depending on your schedule. Let your calendar and the Holy Spirit lead you to the routine or plan that’s best for you.

Completing the lessons each week will help prepare you for the discussion and activities of the group session, but if you are unable to finish the lessons before the group session, don’t let that keep you from showing up, listening, and

participating. You will still be able to gain rich insights from the video and discussion—and bless the others in your group just by being present and contributing.

Though it is recommended that you complete this study with a group for the benefit of shared insights, support, and encouragement, a self-guided study is also possible.

Meeting with a Group

When studying with a group, you'll gather each week to watch a video, discuss what you're learning, and pray together. The Group Session Guides, which provide options for both a 60-minute and a 90-minute session, include discussion questions, activities, prayer prompts, and a place for taking notes from the video segment. You'll find the outline for each session at the end of the personal lessons for that week.

If you're the facilitator or leader of your group, you'll want to check out the additional Leader Helps at the back of this book. Ideally, group members should complete the first week of lessons before your first group session, so that you may watch and discuss both the video and the workbook content in one session. However, feel free to adapt the study as you wish to meet the needs of your particular group.

Whether or not your group watches the video, the questions and activities will guide you in sharing your thoughts and making personal application as you seek to discover how God is speaking to you and where He is leading each of you on your faith journey.

A Final Word

As we make this journey together, I encourage you to embrace your curiosity and prepare to be surprised by these unsuspecting “Footnotes” in the biblical story. In their own unique ways, each of these characters played a significant role in God's kingdom work, just as each of us does as well. My prayer is that you will come to realize as never before just how special, unique, and needed you are in God's great story.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie". The script is elegant and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping tail on the "e".





Week 1

Tychicus

The Bridge



1

*Let's build a bridge, take us across
Hand in hand, climbin' higher and higher*

"Let's Build a Bridge," by Billy Simon,
Robert B. Farrell, Tommy L. Sims

Bridging Ages and Stages

It happened like clockwork when I was a kid. Every day at five-thirty p.m., dinner was on the table. It appeared magically, piping hot, nutritionally balanced, and budget friendly. We'd circle up at the table, pray over the meal, and dig in. We would eat, chat, and then my brothers and I would head for homework or the television.

Somehow, miraculously, the kitchen soon after returned to a tidy and clean state, the remaining leftovers of the meal left on a plate and covered with a protective sheet of plastic wrap in case pre-bedtime hunger called. Otherwise, the leftovers plate somehow made its way to the fridge. *Tick tock.*

Like I said, this phenonemon happened every day like clockwork—until I went to college. And then, something remarkable happened. While I was living on my own, dinner no longer just showed up. Groceries weren't automatically stocked in my kitchen. The pot with the charred macaroni didn't mysteriously get cleaned up during the night.

What was the difference? My mom.

My mom had been the bridge to those family meals, that organized kitchen, that dinnertime connection. She had gone about it relatively unnoticed and probably somewhat unappreciated, before cooking was "cool" and Pinterest recipes

were all the rage. She faithfully set the stage for daily family contact around the dinner table. It wasn't until I began cooking and shopping and planning on my own, and then for my young family, that I began to realize the magnitude of what she had pulled off for decades.

In its simplicity, I had missed it. In my mom's lack of demand of attention for the service she provided, I failed to appreciate what all went into it. (But don't worry. She's getting the last laugh on this one, since I grew up and became responsible for getting dinners for my family of ten on the table. Which is a whole other study.)

I had a lot more revelations like this as I made my way through college, bought my first car, began work in radio and television, got married, started having babies, and bought our first home. (Air filters? That have to be replaced? Is that a thing?) Getting tax returns completed. Getting the inspection done on the car every year. It wasn't that my parents hadn't prepared me for many of these responsibilities—in fact, my brothers and I had chore charts to fill out each week. My dad was literally a rocket scientist and my mom an accountant. It turned out they were raising a passel of creatives, but they were determined we would be functional. They provided us with a good working knowledge of what we would be responsible for and how to get those things done, but there was so much more to the daily requirements of running a household and getting the bills paid and making the grocery store run and generally being a grown-up than I ever understood—until I was the one on the hook for getting those things done.

When you were a child, what were some things you took for granted that just got done or were provided for you, things that were taken care of until you were the one who was responsible for them? Circle those items below, and add a few others that came as a big surprise when you hit the world of #adulthood.

Laundry

Meal prep

Finances

Taxes

Household chores

Car maintenance (getting gas, changing the oil, etc.)

Making dental, medical appointments, etc.

Others:

Even now, it is still amazing to me that the trash needs to go out every week and that my kids will, without fail, completely destroy the kitchen pantry within forty-eight hours of my attempt to turn it into a Pinterest-worthy scene of serene organization.

Life, and life with people, is so . . . daily. And it all requires maintenance. The kind of maintenance that shows up consistently, gets the job done without wasting time on drama, and then shows up again the next day.

What are some things that you're still struggling to make part of your routine—things that you know need to be done but that still seem to evade you?


When I look back on pictures from my childhood, now from the perspective of a woman who is holding down the fort, making sure the bills are paid on time, and seeing that the kids are in reasonably clean underwear, I'm attuned to the little details in those fading photographs of the past. I'm more aware than ever that, yes, my parents provided some truly photo album-worthy experiences of camping trips and holidays and road trips, but that it was in the faithful carrying out of those everyday, mundane duties, which seem almost invisible, that makes up the context and backdrop of my childhood. Had my parents not been so efficient and consistent in performing those seemingly mundane tasks, the road to some of the more complex elements of my childhood—getting my education, navigating the dangerous waters of girl-world social intrigue, and exploring my faith in our church community—would have been so much harder. That willingness to bridge the daily-ness of life to the bigger things my parents wanted me to be able to explore created that stable span of moving from childhood to adulthood over the choppy waters of my preteen and teen years.

There are those tasks out there, those roles that we sometimes play, that don't seem all that intriguing or historic or wildly within how we define our "purpose," but they are so, so important. I'm all about wanting people to find their passions and chase after those things, but then who is supposed to make sure the trash gets taken out on a regular basis?

Where in your roles as a manager, mom, boss, teacher, or mentor do you find the most resistance? In what ways do you get the most pushback? In what areas do you experience the most frustration?

Would you say that you are a more task-oriented person or a more people-oriented person? How do you find that this influences your approach to the to-do lists in your life?

Not All Superheroes Are Super Famous



We tend to focus a lot on the big names in the Bible—the writers, the heroes, the villains. But have you ever thought about the unsung heroes of the early church? Those who helped house missionaries. Those brave souls who hosted church in their homes, who risked their businesses and their reputations in their communities to follow this Jesus and the movement He began. The money they gave, the time they spent, the risks they took.

We can take for granted that the letters of Paul even exist. We accept it as a matter of course that he wrote to various churches and that his words gave them direction for next steps and spiritual precepts as those young churches formed and thrived. But let's pause for just a minute.

This was the first century. There was no organized mail delivery system that we know of for the regular folk. No e-mail. No social media. You may be thinking, *Well, obviously*. But don't miss the incredible chal-

lenge here of attempting to unite a ragtag band of believers into some kind of force for good. Communication was difficult, writing materials were precious and expensive, and transportation was slow and dangerous. So how was the policy and marketing plan for what would become the early church communicated? How did leadership initiatives and HR handbooks (if you will) make their way into the hands of those early gatherings of believers?

Look up and read the following verses:

Ephesians 6:21

Colossians 4:7

2 Timothy 4:12

Titus 3:12

What name did you find in each of these passages?

Tychicus (pronounced TIH-kih-kuhs!). He was Paul's communication director, the "telephone line" that ran across the various baby churches developing across Asia Minor. His name means "fortuitous," as in *serendipity*, or what we would call a "lucky dog" in our jargon. The first time his name shows up in Scripture is during Paul's third missionary journey, following the account of Paul's quick departure from Ephesus, after he managed to make some locals pretty mad (this seems to be a theme for our sweet Paul). We know from a passage in Acts 20:2-6 that Tychicus was with Paul and several other men as they journeyed from Greece to Macedonia. Tychicus traveled ahead with some of the men to Troas, and Paul joined them a few days later.

Paul had been to Troas before, so this would have been a return trip for him. Troas was a Greek city located on the coast of the Aegean Sea. For a Greek town, it was under considerable Roman influence; the aqueduct constructed for the city is still there today, along with the ruins of the old walls and towers, the gymnasium, and the baths. It was also an important seaport with a robust business of transporting passengers to many places across Europe.

Now, let's head out on a small tangent.

Read Acts 20:7-12. This is the passage of Scripture immediately following the account of Tychicus and others being with Paul in Troas. What is the name of the young man mentioned in these verses?

In verse 9 we're introduced to Eutychus, the young man who somewhat famously falls asleep during the apostle Paul's long sermon and tumbles from the window where he has been sitting to the ground three stories below. Those who scramble to reach him find him dead. But that is not Paul's diagnosis.

Record below what Paul says in verse 10.

Now record what Paul does afterward in verse 11.

And let's gather one more little morsel from this passage. How much longer, according to verse 11, did Paul keep talking?

Here's the thing that has kept Bible scholars chatting for years about this section of Scripture. The names Tychicus and Eutychus are essentially the same because both mean "fortuitous"—or again, "lucky dog," so to speak. So there are several scholars who argue that Tychicus could

be considered a nickname for Eutychus and thus they could be one and the same person, the lucky dog who survived or was revived from a fall—not from grace but from lethal drowsiness.

Others dispute this, but whether it was Tychicus/Eutychus (as one and the same person) who experienced firsthand that three-story fall and woke up in the arms of Paul, or whether it was Tychicus who watched while a dozing Eutychus hit the pavement and Paul comforted those around him as the young man's eyes fluttered back open, Tychicus was there. He experienced, one way or another, Paul's marathon preaching session with a sidebar of midnight miracle.

What do you think being part of that experience would do for Tychicus's loyalty and devotion to Paul?

You may have never noticed the name Tychicus before. And that doesn't make you a haphazard Bible reader. We tend to notice events over names when it comes to more thrilling events or more familiar characters. But taking notice of the name Tychicus and considering some interesting details we find in the Word help us begin to understand more of his story, his motivation, and his impact.

2

*I want to be a bridge that leads to You
So reach through me*

"The Bridge," Mark John Hall, Bernie Herms,
Seth David Mosly, Matthew Joseph West

Connectors Needed

I've been serving on the staff of my home church for many years now as the women's ministry lead. I don't know how other churches handle



that position, but for me it means that I speak a lot, create study content, and provide pastoral counsel. But it also means that I'm an event planner. We have multiple big events every year at our church, events that we hope will draw in members of the community who may be looking for a church or who may be ready to explore faith. We have concerts, musical productions, seminars, conferences, social gatherings, and more.

Now, as a mom of eight kids, I can pull off an event. I mean, even just surviving Christmas morning with a crew this size means that I must, somewhere, have some event planning skills. So I do okay at it. And I've managed to get many events off the ground and to the finish line each year within my ministerial work.

But let me tell you, it doesn't come naturally for me. For years I was a nervous wreck before every event of which I was in charge. I wasn't nervous about what my message would be at an event; that seemed to always flow, and I always was in the center of what I was supposed to be doing on that front. But heavens. What turned my cuticles into a shredded state and my heart rate into jackrabbit status were all the details and what I might forget in terms of water bottles and swag and ticket issues and catering and print materials and hotels for the musical guest and on and on and on.

Eventually, I was blessed to build a team who locked arms with me and came alongside to help with all those millions of details. It enabled me to focus on the bigger picture of what we were wanting to accomplish at these events, while also honoring and making sure the "smaller details" that make an event feel welcoming and organized and peaceful were all covered. But I was still managing a lot of the details and making the assignments to my team of volunteers, being on call right up until I walked onstage. I'm so thankful and amazed by all the things my team has been willing to do and by how they have been so patient with all the places I've dropped the ball and had to scramble. And I still need each and every one of them in order to do all that we are doing.

But now . . . now I have a Tychicus.

Let's call her Jennifer. She gets flustered by the spotlight, even a written one. She would try to tell you that she's no big deal, that what she does is simple. She would do her dead level best to minimize what she does, but don't you fall for it. Jennifer has now come alongside me as the person who has scooped up a big portion of all those crazy details. And she. Just. Handles. It. Completely. Faithfully. She gathers those contracts and remembers which speaker is allergic to mint. She remembers to make sure there is gluten-free catering for that musical artist. She

thinks through what kinds of needs our event attendees will have, and she is on top of it. She'll check in with me on a couple of questions, but otherwise she figures it out and gets it done. And because she does that, because she is such a phenomenal bridge in connecting the big vision of whatever event we are hosting to the actual elements that are critical and crucial to carrying out that vision, she makes those events mean so much more than just throwing a big party. She bridges all those details to creating experiences for people to connect with each other and with Christ. She's someone who lives out the role of Tychicus with such beauty.

Can I tell you something about how we sometimes view the Tychicus tribe, those who are doing the bridge work of connecting the dots? It worries me—it really does—that we have made much of those who do the “stage” work, those who speak and perform music and pitch the big vision and land the enormous account. Even in our faith communities, we can elevate certain giftings and their expression as somehow more “spiritual” or of greater import.

But just a quick perusal of Scripture clearly shows that this was not the vision Jesus had for His church.

*Be devoted to one
another in love.
Honor one another
above yourselves.*

Romans 12:10

Read Romans 12:10 in the margin. What are the two actions this passage tells us to do for one another?

- 1.
- 2.

Let's look at that first action you wrote down: *be devoted*. In the original Greek used in the writing of that passage by Paul, the word *devoted* has such a beautiful meaning. It is the kind of love and tenderness of a parent to a child. It's not just holding someone in esteem or having a general appreciation of a person. It's not just a vague sense of loyalty. It's the kind of connection that speaks of a tenderness, a care that is given regardless of the ability of the other party to reciprocate. To be devoted really does carry in the original language the idea of family. This is why Paul says we are to be devoted *in love*. It's not just devoted out of a sense of obligation. It's not devoted out of trying to climb some kind of church hierarchy—to become head usher or whatever position you covet. It's devoted from a place of cherishing others as your siblings in Jesus. It's being committed to your church family, not just “shopping” for a Sunday experience that meets all your preferences. The original word for

devoted in this passage is *philostragos*, and it's a tenderness, a cherishing in the family sense. We throw around the phrase "church family," but are we living like it? Are we treating one another with that kind of preference and patience and pledge? We often "like" our church friends. We often "enjoy" being around them. But to fulfill the vision Paul carried for the church is something so much more.

That next action you wrote down, *honor*, is also a word we toss around a lot today, often in our concern that we don't show honor well in our culture. Usually by *honor* we mean some general sense of holding someone in esteem for the office they hold or the position they have earned. But *honor* has much more depth than that in the original language. It also means "a valuing by which the price is fixed."² And for us as believers in Jesus, that means each individual we encounter had his or her "price" or "value" set on a revolutionary day on a rocky hill in first-century Jerusalem when Jesus, the Son of God, was executed. Everyone you meet and deal with and love and like and struggle with? Their value before God is that they are worth the life of His Son.

In talking about showing honor, Paul includes the words *above yourselves*, meaning we are to honor each other above ourselves. That's where things get tricky, isn't it? It's a little easier to academically agree to honor people when it doesn't include making it above our own honor of self.

I can say I have love and honor for others but can really get twisted up when that love and honor ask that I lay down something I have a strong opinion about. But when we only practice a form of Christianity that is convenient to our schedule and in perfect keeping with the goals we designed for ourselves in January and is more predicated on our "vision" for ourselves than on the vision for the health and totality of the faith body, we can find it difficult to be a bridge into people's hearts.

When we show a "preference" for others, above our own agendas and preferences, we lead the way to show what honor is supposed to look like. We set the standard for what devotion is supposed to be.

Let's face it, we live in a culture of Christian celebrity. I've met with a lot of women who tell me they desire to "do something for the Lord," but they want whatever that something is to have lots of cool bells and whistles and acclaim and spotlight. They often want me to help develop their platform and "following." Now, listen. The word of God is clear that there are going to be those people who have more public roles in the Kingdom. It's not wrong for people to follow that leading if it comes from the Lord. But when I look at the ministry of Tychicus, I see that he was willing to act as the bridge for Paul to those baby Christians who so

badly needed guidance. And we deeply need people in our faith communities who can do just that. It's just as important, just as critical as some of the roles of which we tend to make such a big deal. Tychicus was able to connect the gap.

In our modern faith communities today, we can feature all kinds of great talent, powerful speakers, amazing musicians. But it takes a person, a real, available person, who cares, who shows personal honor, who is willing to elevate others, to create that deep and lasting connection between the celebrated platform and the pew.

Are there aspirations you've held that are well intended but may be holding you back from acting as a bridge in the lives of those around you? If so, how could you adjust your perspective to chase that dream—writing that book, performing that song, or accomplishing that other goal—while also leaving room, availability, and flexibility to engage as a bridge for someone else?

Take a look at Romans 12:3 in the margin. Paul is pretty direct in this passage. How would you summarize what he says?

By the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Romans 12:3

I want to encourage you to get in the habit of looking at verses from the angle of different translations. You don't need to go buy a whole shelf of Bibles in multiple translations (although, to me it seems like a great thing to add to your book collection! #bibliophile). You can go to any online Bible website and find all kinds of options for viewing Scripture through a variety of translations. As we look at the Romans 12:3 verse, I want you to see it from The Passion Translation (designated as TPT). The Passion Translation, like other translations, is based on the ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic texts, and it seeks to use our modern language to more fully reveal the heart and dynamic of Scripture. This is how The Passion Translation renders Romans 12:3:

God has given me grace to speak a warning about pride. I would ask each of you to be emptied of self-promotion and not create a false image of your importance. Instead, honestly assess your worth by using your God-given faith as the standard of measurement, and then you will see your true value with an appropriate self-esteem.

Wow. Those are some tough words there, Paul. We live in an era in which self-promotion, imaging, branding, and selfies are all the rage. I'm guilty, and you may be too. I've watched Christians—*Christians, people*—practically get into shoving matches trying to get their photo taken with someone they consider a Christian celebrity! What are we doing?

Look up 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. What does Paul have to say about Christians behaving badly in this way?

When we evaluate someone's "worth" in our faith circles based on how "popular" they are or how public their ministry is, we are missing the ability to see, honor, and appreciate those opportunities and people who can be the bridge between a great Christian concert or event and the real-life application of living out its message.

Let's take a heart check: who are some people you've elevated perhaps a bit too much in your faith walk? Is it your pastor? That favorite author or artist you love? That motivational speaker? Hear me well, we should honor those who lead us. It's a gift to find a teacher you resonate with. But if we are not careful, we can end up following a man or a woman over our Messiah. Do you find yourself possibly quoting that person or those persons more than you do Scripture? Do you find that the "truth" they present means more to you than the more challenging teachings of Scripture? Listen, me too. I struggle with the same things. So join me here.

Let's take that heart check and pray it out. Let's confess before God if we have over-elevated others and reset our eyes on Him. Write out your confessional prayer below:

People who motivate and inspire us are great. But we serve a Messiah who is far greater.

3

Although you were once distant and far away from God, now you have been brought delightfully close to him through the sacred blood of Jesus—you have actually been united to Christ!

Ephesians 2:13 TPT

The Power of a Bridge

My husband, Michael, has had some pretty bland office views in his career. And he's had some pretty spectacular ones as well. His current office overlooks one of the most incredible views in the Austin, Texas, skyline. His office is situated on a cliff above Lake Austin. When he looks to the southeast, his line of sight can follow the lake all the way to an incredible view of downtown, nestled amongst the rolling limestone and cedar-fringed hills of the Texas Hill Country.

I like to think it makes up for the years when his view was the inside of a cubicle in an office that seemed to always be in some sort of remodel and electrical system crisis, with ceiling tiles missing and wires hanging down in questionable states of safety.

Now, if you're familiar with Austin or its reputation, then you've probably heard of our traffic. All those rumors would be true and then some. Just last night it took Michael almost two hours to make it the thirteen miles between his office and our home, a complicated recipe of rush hour and rain and multiple fender benders chewing through the commute clock and bringing things to a freeway standstill. So, yes, Michael spends a lot of time staring at the bumper in front of him.

But part of his commute is over a bridge that has become iconic in Austin. The Pennybacker Bridge spans Lake Austin and was opened in 1982. More than 600 million pounds of steel were used in its construction, and it cost ten million dollars to construct. It soars one hundred feet above the water below, and no part of the structure touches the

lake. Its beautiful design has won an award and has become a must-see destination for those taking in the Austin sights and sounds.³ But why Pennybacker? Where did that unusual name come from?

The bridge is not named after the designer or the builder. It's not named after a major financial contributor. It's named in honor of Percy Pennybacker. Percy Pennybacker was born in Palestine, Texas, and received his degree in civil engineering from the University of Texas at Austin. He developed a new technique for the welding of structures; in particular, bridges. A World War I veteran who served in the Army Air Service, he spent time in Kansas and Texas helping construct bridges, and his advancements in techniques for welding earned him accolades and awards. His unique contributions to welding and his advancement of using those innovations as an alternative to rivets have reportedly saved millions of dollars in the construction of bridges in the state. So, this beautiful bridge was named in his honor.

And there's another interesting note to his life. Percy Pennybacker had Type 1 diabetes, also known as juvenile diabetes. His father also had it and died of complications of the disease. When Percy was still early in his career as a civil engineer, his condition landed him in the hospital for almost a year. In an attempt to treat his diabetes, Percy Pennybacker became one of the first patients ever in history to receive insulin as a treatment.⁴ So the next time you visit Austin or see a photograph of the bridge and take a little day hike on the limestone cliffs adjacent to the bridge, you'll know a little bit more about the guy behind the name of this iconic bridge. Percy Pennybacker. A footnote on the Austin, Texas, skyline.

Without that bridge, large sections of our city would not be accessible to one another. Without that bridge, Michael's commute wouldn't just be long; it would be almost impossible unless it also involved a ferryboat and then some kind of crane to lift him from the cliff that abuts the lake. Yet, even as important as that bridge is in our community, even as many cars as it creates a safe passage for each day, I'd lived here many years before I ever bothered to find out why it was called the Pennybacker Bridge.

We don't celebrate enough those who act as the bridge, those who keep their heads down as they keep things running and manage the details and think through what welds it all together. The behind-the-scenes heroes. Those who shy away from accolades but plan all the details to celebrate the giving of said accolades.

In my office is a small leather-bound book. It's my paternal grand-

father's Bible. He was a quiet, reserved man, the perfect match to my paternal grandmother's more emotive personality. He lived a simple life, farming in central Mississippi when the crops were good, and then working in the shipyards on the Mississippi coast when the crops went bad. We would spend a few days each summer with him and my grandmother when we were kids—that part of the world seeming exotic compared to our Southern California high-desert home. He died when I was ten, and so the memories of the time I had with him are few. But I love having his little Bible, the one he carried with him each Sunday.

And catch this: his name was Allen Bridges Lyles. Yep. Bridges. It was his paternal grandmother's maiden name—my great-great-grandmother on that side, Virginia “Jennie” Bridges Lyles. I wish I knew more about her life, about her marriage to my great-great-grandfather James Madison Lyles. There are very few details in the family records on her life. But what I do know is that she was significant enough to her son that he wanted his own son to carry her name, hence my grandfather's moniker of Allen Bridges Lyles.

Who has been a bridge in your life, connecting you to a fuller walk with the Lord?

What kind of divine connections have you experienced in your life—those friendships, situations, or experiences that led to a powerful new chapter in your life?

Has there been a time the Lord has used you in a unique way to connect others to one another or to God? If so, write about it briefly.



I learned that a long walk and calm conversation are an incredible combination if you want to build a bridge.

—Seth Godin⁵

You Span Somebody's Today and Tomorrow

I was in my late twenties with two little girls, a little-bitty mortgage that went with a little-bitty house, and a husband who was working hard and gone a lot. We had started going to a church a bit closer to that little-bitty house, and it was at that church that I met a woman who would become a bridge for me. Her name was Lanna. Her youngest child was about the age of my oldest child, so she had navigated the parenting waters a few years longer than I had. She was fun and outgoing. And she was very passionate about Bible study. She invited me to the Bible study they held weekly at this church, where I met several other women I enjoyed and connected with.

The Bible study itself was beyond anything I had experienced before. I'd been raised in a Christian home, in a church that considered itself very biblically based. I mean, I could have smoked anybody in a Bible trivia round from all that I received in my upbringing. The Christian university I graduated from required hours of credit in Bible, regardless of your degree plan. But this new Bible study, with these new friends, it was so deep. It was an inductive study called Precept, developed by Kay Arthur.⁶ We learned how to dive into the original language. We learned how to better understand context, repeated phrases, connections to other verses in the Bible. We worked through intense homework. After two or three years of attending this study, I decided to become certified in this method of study and attended classes and walked through a certification process.

Now, understand, Lanna didn't write these studies. She didn't check my homework, force me to come to the gathering, or reinforce every lesson with commentary and cajoling. Nope. She was the bridge, the scaffold that connected me to an experience that I can absolutely point back to as foundational in all that would follow, from ending up in vocational ministry to writing, podcasting, and speaking. Because Lanna was willing to be a bridge, it bridged me to the calling and purpose God had for my life. She wasn't trying to tie me to her, to her mission, or to her particular small group. She was simply willing to be a conduit, without agenda, that led me to a fuller understanding of following God and falling more deeply in love with His Word.

God has put people in your life who need you as a bridge. They've come to a ridgeline in their lives. They may not even realize what they are looking for or know what God has on the horizon for them. It's not my job or yours to jump in and receive all revelation for this person and create

some layered accountability for her or him. And most people don't even need that. What they do need is someone who is simply willing to connect them to God. Someone who is willing to invite them to the small group. Someone who is willing to listen to them when you chance to meet in the grocery store aisle. Someone who is willing to share a smile, extend a hand, be present with them. It's a responsibility placed on each of us, whatever our gifts and talents, whatever our calling.

Read John 13:1-17. It's such a familiar passage to many of us, but let's read it with fresh eyes. What stands out to you? Write your thoughts below.

I keep coming back to the last part of verse 1, which suggests that what Jesus does for the disciples in the verses that follow is part of showing them the full extent of His love.

Understanding that we are to serve one another, how do we make sure we are not being sidelined by busywork or activated by a debilitating need within us to people please? How do we make sure we are doing God's work and not just trying to keep the peace?

Write Leviticus 25:17 below.

Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Luke 10:40

Now read Luke 10:40 in the margin. How is Martha described in this verse?

Perhaps an important evaluation tool we need when looking at opportunities to serve is to determine if we're being drawn closer to the Lord or if we're getting distracted by the details. And for leaders, it's critical that we observe if we are allowing those with serving, hospitality, and administration gifts to become overcommitted and overstressed. I love Jesus's clarification for all our programs and details and scurrying: one thing is needed. One. And that is to experience Him.

How do we keep Jesus as our focus when serving? How do we avoid becoming distracted like Martha? How do we avoid taking advantage of others who have servant hearts?

There's a beautiful part of the structure of a song called the musical bridge, a place in the music that builds and connects the stanzas and the choruses for us. The legendary group The Beatles has been well celebrated for its musical bridges in its iconic songs. A great musical bridge makes the power of a song even more heightened, and it creates a connection for the listener between all the elements of the song.

Let us take on the role of being a bridge in the symphony of this life, in this new song of God. It's as simple as being a kind friend, a listening ear, a thoughtful neighbor. In so doing, without needing to have all the right words and strategies, we become a connection for people to a loving God. We become part of this tribe of Tychicus—those willing to connect, support, love, dot the i's and cross the t's. The bridges.

Group Session Guide: Week 1

Tychicus The Bridge

We can become a connection for people to a loving God.

Welcome/Prayer/Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Welcome to Session 1! Over the next four weeks, we're going to look at four minor characters in the Bible who teach us some major lessons. Today we're exploring what Tychicus has to teach us about being a "bridge"—one who connects, supports, serves, and loves others. Open with prayer. Then go around the circle and tell of someone who is a valuable, "behind-the-scenes" kind of person in your life.

Video (about 20 minutes)

If desired, begin by playing the "About Julie" video segment. Next play the "Getting Started: A Devotional Reflection" video (optional), taking a couple of minutes to focus your hearts and minds on God's Word. Then play the video segment for Session 1, filling in the main idea as you watch and making notes about anything that resonates with you or that you want to be sure to remember.

—Video Notes—

Scripture: Colossians 4:7-8

Main Idea: Not all of us have to be in the driver's seat, but all of us can be a

Other Insights:

Group Discussion (20-25 minutes for a 60-minute session; 30-35 minutes for a 90-minute session)

Video Discussion

- How can you be a bridge by helping connect the message of Jesus to those who desperately need to hear it? In what ways has the Lord been leading you to engage with others and walk with them?

Workbook Discussion

- Take turns reading aloud Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:12; and Titus 4:12. What do we know about Tychicus?
- Read aloud Romans 12:3 and 10. What do we learn from these verses about serving with humility?
- Do you think there is a potential danger in the church for those with more public gifts to be “elevated” or celebrated more often? Do you find yourself more drawn to those who are more public in the church experience? Why or why not?
- How do we make sure that the quieter gifts, the more hidden contributions, are also appreciated?
- What kind of divine connections have you experienced in your life—those friendships, situations, or experiences that led to a powerful new chapter in your life? (page 25)
- Read aloud John 13:1-17. What can we learn from Jesus’s example about how to serve others?
- Are you willing to do the small things, the little jobs, the unnoticed chores that seem little but have such reach? Or do you fight the idea of spending your time on that?
- How do we keep Jesus as our focus when serving? How do we avoid becoming distracted like Martha? (page 28)
- Maybe you’ve seen those with more public gifts and callings take advantage of those with servant hearts in supportive, bridge roles. How can we avoid the pitfall of expecting things to just get done regardless of time constraints and other challenges?

One to One (10-15 minutes – 90 minute session only)

Divide into groups of 2-3 and discuss the following:

- Who has been a bridge in your life, connecting you to a fuller walk with the Lord? (page 25)
- How has the Lord used you in a unique way to connect others? (page 25)

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Close the session by sharing personal prayer requests and praying together. In addition to praying out loud for one another, ask God to help you follow Jesus's example to serve others in humility and love, becoming bridges that connect people to our loving God.