

Eight sessions

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

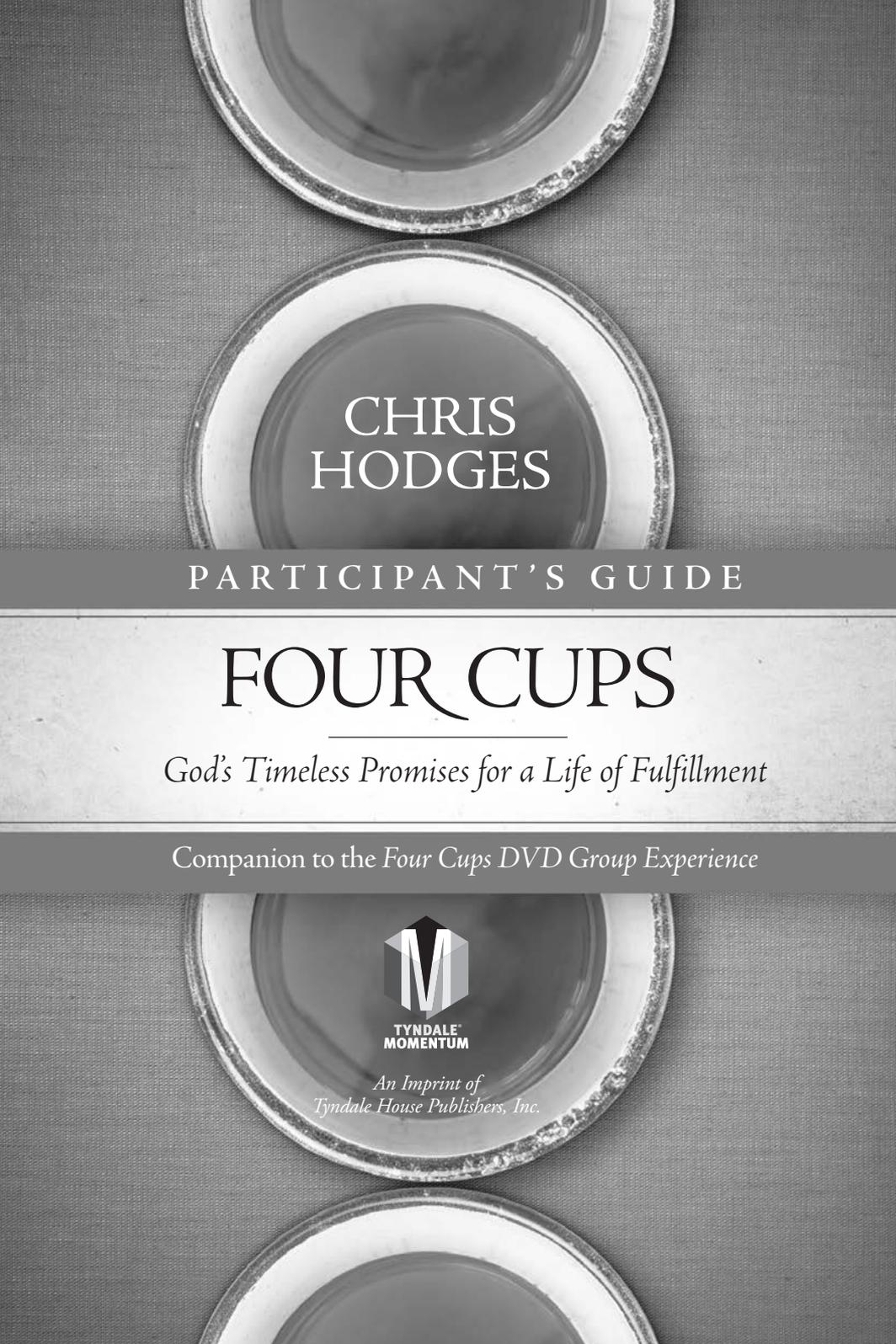
FOUR CUPS

God's Timeless Promises for a Life of Fulfillment

Companion to the *Four Cups* DVD Group Experience

CHRIS
HODGES

FOUR CUPS PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE



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A WORD FROM PASTOR CHRIS HODGES

My journey to understanding the principles of the four cups has changed my life and the way I do ministry. As we share the cups together, I hope it will do the same for you. Four Cups is founded on four foundational promises that God gave us to help us experience life to the fullest: *freedom from sin, deliverance from bondage, purpose for living, and a life of joyful abundance*. Symbolized by the four cups used since ancient times in the Jewish celebration of Passover, these four promises still offer us hope today for our deepest thirsts.

No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you're probably longing for a stronger, deeper faith and a more joyful, purposeful life. The four cups provide the means to fulfill both of those core desires. Each cup reveals God's presence in a distinct and dramatic way. This guide will complement your reading of the book *Four Cups: God's Timeless Promises for a Life of Fulfillment*, enhance your viewing of the *Four Cups DVD Group Experience*,

and guide your discussion of the four cups of promise in a group setting.

As we explore the historical background and biblical significance of the four cups, you will gain more than just information. Faith goes beyond an intellectual grasp of a set of facts. It involves *leaning* and *depending* on God and his promises. It is a firm reliance and devoted trust in a *person*—namely, God—and in his ability to do what he says he will do.

Experiencing the four promises that are symbolized in the four cups will draw you closer to God and to your purpose in his Kingdom. Sharing this journey with others will enrich your understanding and encourage you to practice what you've learned.

Are you ready to join me on this journey to discover more about the reality of God's faithfulness? Let's get started. We'll look at how, when, where, and why God made these four timeless promises to his children and at what each one means for you and your life. It's time to drink the "living water" you'll find in each of God's four cups of promise.

HOW TO USE THIS PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

THE *FOUR CUPS PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE* is a companion to the *Four Cups DVD Group Experience*, an eight-week curriculum designed to deepen your understanding of the four foundational promises of God that are symbolized in the four cups of the Passover celebration. Inspired by the book *Four Cups: God's Timeless Promises for a Life of Fulfillment*, this study was developed to facilitate small-group discussion.

The *Four Cups DVD Group Experience* is based on a transformative sermon series taught by Pastor Chris Hodges at Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama. Though you can do the study at any time during the year, in the videos you'll journey through the Passover/Easter season at the church, seeing the principles of the *Four Cups* message come to life. As you watch each week, consider how what you're learning applies to your own church. What are you discovering that you can put into practice right now, right where you are?



Over the next several weeks, you will gather with your group to study four promises God has made to each one of us. There are eight sessions in this study, each featuring a DVD message from Pastor Chris Hodges. However, the duration of the group experience can be expanded to meet your group's needs. We encourage you to include some fellowship gatherings, where group members can interact beyond the curriculum. For example, here's how you might structure a twelve-week group experience.

Week 1: A “getting to you know you” gathering is a great way to launch a new group. Maybe have a dessert potluck (food is always a good way to make people feel comfortable) and ask some fun icebreaker questions to encourage group members to interact. Review details of the group experience (e.g., what time the group will begin and end, how your group will handle meals or snacks) and encourage group members to think of other friends they can invite to join you. But most important, have fun!

Week 2: Session 1

Week 3: Session 2

Week 4: Session 3

Week 5: Session 4

Week 6: Fellowship Group—This could be a time for group members to have in-depth discussions of ideas and issues raised during the first four weeks, to pray for one another, or simply to socialize and develop group dynamics.

Week 7: Session 5

Week 8: Session 6

Week 9: Session 7

Week 10: Session 8

Week 11: Fellowship Group—Members of the group could share their personal testimonies of what God has done in their lives through this small-group study.

Week 12: Final Meeting—Do something fun with your group to celebrate all that God has done. Some ideas include having a potluck dinner, playing kickball or volleyball, having a game night, or going bowling.

TIPS FOR FINDING NEW MEMBERS FOR YOUR GROUP

Start by praying for God to send people to you whom you haven't yet considered. Think of people who are already in your sphere of influence (coworkers, friends, neighbors). Identify people who are new to the church, who are new believers, or who have shown an interest in getting involved. People often want to get more

involved, but they are waiting for someone to invite them. Look for people you can help to draw out their gifts and potential.

SUGGESTED SCHEDULE FOR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

An hour and fifteen minutes is a good timeframe for group meetings. This allows group members to interact before the meeting begins, while preserving sufficient time for watching the DVD, discussion, and prayer.

1. Fellowship (10 minutes)
2. Just for Fun (5 minutes)
3. Recap and Big Idea (5 minutes)
4. Watch the DVD (20 minutes)
5. Discussion (25 minutes)
6. Prayer (10 minutes)

Remember to start and end on time. Sometimes a vibrant group discussion may cause your meeting to go past your designated ending time. If so, take a quick pause to dismiss the group, so that those who need to leave can do so. Then you can resume the discussion with the group members who want to stay.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Before your first meeting, be sure that each group member has a copy of the following three books:

- *Four Cups: God's Timeless Promises for a Life of Fulfillment* by Chris Hodges;
- *Four Cups Participant's Guide*; and
- a Bible.

Also, your group will need a copy of the *Four Cups DVD Group Experience* (available wherever books are sold).

OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE ELEMENTS

Introduction

Each session begins with a brief introduction, which group members will want to read before they arrive for the small-group meeting.

Just for Fun

These icebreaker questions will help get people talking. It is a chance to “warm up” and get to know each other better. Feel free to use the questions provided or come up with your own.

Recap

A short review of the previous week's message.

Big Idea

A single idea that sums up the main point or key idea of the session.

Remember

Each session includes a memory verse to help group members put Colossians 3:16 into action: “Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives” (NLT). Scripture renews our minds and transforms our lives. Encourage one another to memorize the verse each week. Convenient memory verse cards are located at the end of this participant’s guide.

Watch

We encourage you, as you watch the DVD, to take notes in your participant’s guide, filling in the blanks in the outline and writing down any thoughts or questions that come to mind.

Discuss

After you watch the DVD, this is your opportunity to respond to a series of engaging questions designed to encourage discussion and group interaction. Discussing the content of the teaching will help you to understand

it better and to begin to live out what you have learned. Your group may not have time to cover every question, and that's okay; ask God to guide your discussion each week, and focus on where he wants you to learn and grow.

Pray

Pray together. In each session, you'll find a suggested prayer focus. Some weeks you may pray in groups of two or three; other times you may close in prayer with the whole group.

For Next Time

Recommended reading in *Four Cups: God's Timeless Promises for a Life of Fulfillment* for group members to complete before the next meeting.



SESSION I

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Read

Before your group begins the Four Cups small-group study, read chapter 1, “Promises, Promises,” in *Four Cups: God’s Timeless Promises for a Life of Fulfillment* and answer the following questions:

1. *Pastor Chris talks about Moses and the Promised Land and how God made it clear to his people that he would lead them into a life of freedom. What does “a life of freedom” look like for you today? Do you believe God will lead you there?*

When God makes a promise—that is, an offer with a guaranteed result—he always fulfills it. It may not happen the way you want or expect, or in the timing you’d prefer, but God always follows through. When he gives you his word, he keeps it. “God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?” (Numbers 23:19, NLT).

God wants us to trust him and rely on him. He wants us to live by faith, not by the fulfillment of our own expectations. God wants us to walk with him, trusting him to know what’s best for our lives. “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4, NIV).

The first step in claiming God’s promises is simply to study the Bible. God’s Word is filled with promises, and you can find one for every trial, challenge, or problem you face.

When life doesn’t make sense and you’re tempted to doubt God’s goodness and sovereignty, you must cling to his promises. That’s what it means to trust him and walk by faith, even when you’re afraid or when life doesn’t make sense, and you can’t see where you’re going.

In order to activate the power of God’s promises, you must pursue him with all your heart. God fulfills his promises

in his own way, according to his own all-encompassing wisdom, and in his own time. You may not understand *why* he does what he does or *how* he will accomplish his purposes, but that's why you need to trust him. He wants to teach you, strengthen you, and empower you in ways that only he can. God's promises are foundational to your living by faith and growing in your walk with him.

Just for Fun

What's your favorite beverage? How often have you had it in the past week? Describe the best way to enjoy your favorite drink—with or without ice, glass or go-cup, sugar or no sugar, etc.

Big Idea

More than three thousand years ago, God made some fundamental promises to his people, the Israelites, while they were enslaved in Egypt. These same promises continue to stand today, revealing God's timeless love for all his children. He remains committed to loving, liberating, and leading us in all areas of life—if we'll let him.

Remember

Psalm 138:2 (NLT): "I praise your name for your unfailing love and faithfulness; for your promises are backed by all the honor of your name."

Watch

Watch Session 1, “God Keeps His Promises,” on the *Four Cups DVD Group Experience* with Pastor Chris Hodges, and take notes below.

2 Peter 1:4 (NIV): *[God] has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

- a) Definition of a Promise: An _____ with a _____ result.

Joshua 21:45 (NIV): *Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.*

Hebrews 6:17-19 (MSG): *When God wanted to guarantee his promises, he gave his word, a rock-solid guarantee—God can’t break his word. And because his word cannot change, the promise is likewise unchangeable. We who have run for our very lives to God have every reason to grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go. It’s an unbreakable spiritual lifeline, reaching past all appearances right to the very presence of God.*

b) I need to _____ His promises.

1 Chronicles 17:19 (NLT): *For the sake of your servant, O LORD, and according to your will, you have done all these great things and have made them known.*

c) I need to _____ His promises.

Numbers 23:19 (NLT): *God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?*

2 Corinthians 1:20 (NLT): *For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding "Yes!" And through Christ, our "Amen" (which means "Yes") ascends to God for his glory.*

d) I need to _____ His promises.

Psalms 119:140 (NLT): *Your promises have been thoroughly tested; that is why I love them so much.*

Psalms 119:148 (NIV): *My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.*

NOTES

Discuss

- 1. Pastor Chris mentions several of the many promises in God's Word that address concerns such as our health, our finances, our relationships, and our peace of mind. What is one promise you're still waiting on God to fulfill? What keeps you going while you wait and how can the group pray for you? What has God taught you in the process of fulfilling his promises?*

4. *Pastor Chris calls this group adventure a “spiritual maturity” series. In what areas of your life do you hope to grow in maturity through this series?*

Pray

Trust God to meet you exactly where you are and to remind you of his timeless, changeless promises in areas where you are struggling. Lift up in prayer other members of the group and the needs they have. Ask God to provide everyone in the group with the confidence of his peace.

For Next Time

Before the next group meeting, read chapter 2, “Finally Free,” in *Four Cups: God’s Timeless Promises for a Life of Fulfillment* and answer the following questions:

1. *In this chapter, Pastor Chris describes three “dream killers” that can get in the way of our experiencing God’s promises. What are these dream killers, and which one*

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is the biggest challenge for you personally? When do you typically encounter these dream killers?

2. *What does Pastor Chris recommend as the way to defeat these dream killers?*

3. *What is one promise from God that you can cling to in order to defeat the biggest dream killer in your life? Where is that promise found?*