**Becoming GreatER**

**A Biblical Study of the movie Greater**

**By**

**Michael Covey**

This study is my gift to the Burlsworth family and Foundation.

May God continue to bless your ministry.

…with a special dedication to my wife, Nicole, and son, Mason for tolerating a 50 year old who doesn’t know what he wants to be when he grows up.

…to my son, Kinman – a deserving recipient of the Burlsworth

Award for High School players.

…and, to the SOS Sunday School class.

You created this monster.

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**How to Use these Lessons**

**Requirements for successful sessions**

* All participants need to have seen the entire movie before the study
* Facilitator – someone to lead the discussion in the session
* DVD player or computer DVD and television or projector for the sessions
* Play the video clips as indicated in each lesson (except session 12)
* Discussion is important – this is not designed to be a lecture series
* Each session should last 45 minutes to an hour

**Format**

* Make copies of the **GreatER Personal Reflection** sheets (the last page of each lesson) for participants to take home – hand out at the beginning of the session
* *Facilitator* will lead the sessions by reading where indicated in the lesson, as well as ask the discussion questions
* For many questions there are no right or wrong answers – encourage discussion and participation
* For questions that do have suggested answers, try to guide the discussion to those answers
* Run the video selecting the clips indicated in the lesson, then discuss
* Read the Bible verses related to the video, then discuss
* Close in prayer

**Session 1: What’s in a name?**

**Opening discussion**

*Facilitator state:* In our culture, everyone has a legal name. This name is documented on the birth certificate and is considered permanent. However, in the course of a lifetime a person’s **name** **can change** – in a way. This change can occur in the form of a nickname, which is given to an individual based on what people observe in their personality, appearance or habits. Also, names can be changed with the addition of a title – indicating a status or an accomplishment. It could be said that **nicknames and titles reflect other’s perception of a person’s nature and character.**

What are some positive or negative nicknames and titles you have heard given to people? *(Allow answers to vary. Negative titles could include: liar, alcoholic, the accused, inmate, etc. Positive titles: Mr./Mrs., Doctor, coach, etc.)*

What traits or choices would warrant them receiving these names or titles?

How might a person’s nickname or title influence others’ interaction with them? Why?

*Facilitator:* In the movie “Greater”, Brandon Burlsworth was no stranger to name changes. As we watch this clip of various scenes in the movie, make note of the nicknames and titles given to Brandon.

**Run the DVD, selecting clips: a”-b”, c”-d”, e”-f”, etc. (scenes of “cheesecake, turd, walk on, starter, All-American, professional”)**

What were some of the nicknames and titles given to Brandon? How would these names have made him feel?

How did the nicknames/titles influence how others treated Brandon?

What changes in Brandon caused him to receive ‘name changes’?

*Facilitator:* Name changes are common in scripture, too. In the Bible, a person’s real name had meaning - like a nickname. It was given to them because of something unique about their character. (For example: Jacob means “deceiver”) So, as a person gave their name it told others what they could expect as they interacted with them. Often, God would change their names as their character and purpose changed. (Jacob was changed to Israel – “contender with God”) With that in mind, let’s look at a Biblical figure that had a unique name.

**Read 1 Chronicles 4:9-10.**

*Facilitator:* All we know about Jabez is what is written in these verses. What stands out most is God answering his prayer to increase his territory. But, the answered prayer is really secondary to a change we see in how others perceive his character. Focus on his name and why it says he was named Jabez.

Based on verse 9, what can we conclude “Jabez” means? *(Jabez means sorrow bearer or pain.) (Note: no one knows why his birth brought sorrow or pain.)*

Remember, Biblical names were an indicator of **what a person was like**. How would a name that means sorrow, or pain, have affected his self-esteem? *(Feelings of inferiority; insecurity; unloved; allow answers to vary.)*

How might Jabez’s name have affected his relationship with others? *(Allow speculation.)*

*Facilitator:* With a name that means sorrow, it could be said that Jabez started his life at the bottom of the barrel. But, notice in verse 9, it says he was **more honorable** than his brothers. Somehow, he rose from a lowly state in everyone’s eyes to one of respectability. This was God’s work and it is clear from the context of his prayer Jabez had a relationship with Him.

The lesson that the story of Jabez – and Brandon – teaches us is this: **our nickname today – the way others perceive us – does not have to define who we will be tomorrow.** We do not have to accept our circumstances as permanent, because our God is in the business of changing names and character. **He wants to make us** **GreatER.**

In the next sessions, we will examine the character, honor and integrity that Brandon Burlsworth possessed. We will also look at his faith and how God helped him achieve success.

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflection**

**Session 1: What’s in a name?**

**Reread 1 Chronicles 4:9-10.** Because of his name, Jabez was reminded every day that his birth was associated with sorrow for his mother. Sadly, many people can recall a time in their life where great pain or sorrow was involved. Maybe this pain was a result of something they caused, or maybe it happened to them. Whatever the case, the memory can be so vivid it seems like it was yesterday that it occurred.

What pain have you experienced in your life that you still think about today?

Do these events effect your decisions today? In what ways has this pain influenced others’ perception of you when you make decisions?

How might this sorrow prevent you from becoming **GreatER**?

Jabez chose to not be trapped by his past and rose above his circumstances to the status of being honorable. Honorable means respectable. What are traits that people consider honorable? What traits in a person does God consider honorable? How are the traits similar or different in each list? Why?

As Jabez asked for his blessing and increase in territory, he specifically asked for God’s hand to be on him. God was clearly central to Jabez’s life and was responsible for his change in status. Do you believe God is willing to change your name? Are you willing to let Him? *(If you are a believer, He has already changed your name from sinner to Christian.)*

**Read Genesis 32:24-30.** Jacob was a part of God’s plan. But, before God could use him he needed a name change – a character overhaul. Remember, Jacob means “deceiver” (some say “one who supplants”) and he was selfish to the core. Verse 30 reveals Jacob is wrestling with God. But, notice in verse 27 God asks, “What is your name?” This is an opportunity for Jacob to confess his true nature – God knows his name. He then blesses Jacob with a name change to Israel.

Do you think this story is literal or symbolic? Why? Have you ever sensed that you wanted something in life that was outside of God’s will for you? How did you respond? Was there a ‘struggle’ between you and God?

If God asked you to state your name – or reveal your true nature – what would your answer be? Are you willing to ask for His blessing for you to become **GreatER?**

**Suggested memory verse: Jeremiah 29:11**

**Session 2: Trust is a Must**

**Opening discussion**

*Facilitator state:* The words believe and trust, are synonyms. Having similar meanings, they can each be used to define the other. But, do they really convey the same mental image when being used? For example:

Is it possible to believe in the existence of something and **not trust** in it? Give examples.

Is it possible to trust in something and **not believe** it exists? Why?

*Facilitator:* To further illustrate, let’s look at a scene in the movie “Greater” that shows Marty Burlsworth receiving a lesson on the nuances of trust (that his baby brother, Brandon knew all along). The scene is at the end of the movie, but the epiphany he receives is necessary for us to grasp now as we begin our study of becoming **GreatER.**

**Run DVD, selecting clips: a”-b”. (Show Marty in despair until he sees “we trust” spelled on the field. Show the hope he feels after trusting.)**

Marty has tragically and unexpectedly lost his brother in a car crash. In what ways might he question the love of God at this time? *(Allow speculation. Try to avoid in depth discussion of Marty’s encounter with ‘the farmer’ – that will be in another lesson.)*

How in this scene was Marty showing a lack of trust in God?

How might the loss of his brother cause him to lose his belief in God altogether? *(Allow speculation.)*

Marty was on the field while the young men were arranging the flowers and could not see they were spelling words. However, when he reaches the top of the stadium he can read their message. What does this symbolic act teach us about gaining trust? *(A change in perspective can help us to trust.)*

Describe Marty’s facial expression after he reads the words “we trust”. How had his emotions changed at that point?

*Facilitator:* Marty’s situation alerts us to the fact there may be an important relationship between **believing** and **trusting** that we need to explore. There is an instance in the Bible that helps clarify that concept.

**Read Mark 9:14-29.** *Facilitator:* Jesus returns with Peter, James and John from the mountaintop to join the other disciples. The scene they walk into is one of turmoil. There is an argument concerning the deliverance of a demon-possessed boy. From this event we can learn more about believing **and** trusting.

In what ways does every character in these verses show they believe in who Jesus is on some level?

**Disciples:** *(they are his daily followers)*

**Crowd:** *(they are believing He might produce a miracle)*

**Demon:** *(knows He is the Son of God and obeys)*

**Scribes:** *(believe He is a threat to their beliefs; they would not be there if they did not believe that)*

In spite of their apparent belief in Him, Jesus expresses dissatisfaction in that belief in verse 19. How is their lack of belief evident in their overall behavior? *(Arguing, blame, chaos, fear, anger, self-pity, etc.)*

*Facilitator:* Then, it is the father of the demon-possessed boy that brings the point of believing and trusting into focus.

Bringing his son to Jesus implies he thinks Jesus can help. But, what clues in verses 21-24 show us the truth in his heart? *(“If you can”, “I do believe, help my unbelief”, feels doubt)*

The statement, “I believe, help my unbelief”, makes more sense if we substitute ‘my unbelief’ with ‘me to trust’. Restate that portion of the verse with the supplanted phrase: **“I do believe, help me to trust.”**

From this exercise, how would you best explain the relationship between believing and trusting in Jesus? *(Believing in Jesus is a start. Then, we must release our control and trust Him with total abandon in all situations.)*

If the father had trusted Jesus unwaveringly first, how might this entire scene have been different?

*Facilitator:* From the movie, “GreatER”, we learn that Brandon Burlsworth had learned to trust his Savior completely at a young age. If we asked him how we could become **GreatER,** he would tell us to **first believe in Jesus** as our Savior, too. And, then relinquish control of our life to Him **and trust Him in our daily walk**.

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 2: Trust is a Must**

**Read John 3:16.** **(Suggested memory verse)**

Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior? If you have not done so, you can do it now by deciding to **believe in Him.** Then follow up with a pastor or trusted Christian friend for guidance on what to do after that decision.

Simply believing is the beginning of our salvation. But trusting in Him daily means we are relying on Him for our needs. Our spiritual growth depends on that trust. And, the trust we have will be evident in our life as a testimony to our Savior.

**Reread Mark 9:14-29** and pay close attention to the attitudes and emotions found in all the people in this scriptural scene.

Which people are showing fear? Doubt? Anger? Self-pride? Self-pity? Despair? Do you see any other strong attitudes in these verses? In what ways do these actions prove a lack of trust?

The scriptures are silent as to the reaction or fate of the father and his son in this text. How do you think they felt after Jesus delivered the boy? What kind of impact do you think it had on their lives beyond that day?

Have you ever experienced a situation where a solution to your problem seemed completely out of reach? How did you feel? How did you react?

Assuming the problem you had got resolved, how did your emotions change when it was resolved?

Do you believe Jesus can help you in solving your life’s problems? Do you believe He can bring about peace, hope and joy as He delivers you?

How would your emotions have been different in the problem mentioned above if you would have trusted Jesus entirely in the first place?

For anyone to earn your trust, they have to consistently follow through on their promises to you. God understands this and is willing to prove Himself to you. Learn His promises found in scripture. Pray that He will increase your faith by helping you to trust. Then see for yourself how He keeps His promises to help you become **GreatER.**

**Session 3: Training and Preparation**

**Opening discussion**

*Facilitator state:* A coach once taught that the only way to win a game is to control yourself, control the ball and control the game. Obviously, controlling the game is dependent on the player’s control over themself and the ball.

But, what determines how well the player controls their self and the ball? *(Learning fundamentals, practicing skills, conditioning, knowing rules, etc.)*

Why is the mastery of fundamentals in sports important?

Beyond game skills, what are ways a player needs to control their self in order to better control the game? *(Good attitude, positive, good sport, etc.)*

Some players - in any level of competition – despise practicing. Why? *(Boring, not as fun as the game, monotonous, painful, etc.)*

*Facilitator:* Brandon Burlsworth was not one to despise practice. In fact, he seemed to relish the time he had to prepare for the game. Why was he different? As we watch these clips, focus on his persistence, attitude and belief in what he was doing.

**Run DVD, selecting clips: a”-b”, c-d”, etc. (“Be first one here, last to leave”, drills, running, etc.)**

Brandon’s high school coach taught him football fundamentals. But, he also offered good life lessons? What were they and how did they affect his attitude about the game?

Why was Brandon so receptive to the coach’s advice? *(Allow speculation.)*

How would honing his skills and conditioning himself change his confidence?

*(Allow answers to vary.)*

College level football required advanced skill training. How would his prior dedication to practice help him at this new level? *(While it might require greater effort, the self-discipline needed to meet the challenge was the same.)*

In what ways in the movie do you remember him showing the same work ethic in other areas of his life?

*Facilitator:* As Disciples, we are expected to be disciplined students of Christ. That means we are supposed to know the fundamentals of our faith and practice them daily. Using an analogy to athletics, the Apostle Paul explains.

**Read 1 Corinthians 9:23-27.** *Facilitator:* Paul says everything he does is for the sake of the gospel. He then compares his methods to reach his goal to that of an athlete in training.

**Run in such a way to win:** *(be spiritually fit, be positive, try, etc.)*

**Self-control:** *(do not be swayed by the world or the flesh)*

**Not beating the air:** *(be deliberate, purposeful, on target)*

**\*Discipline:** *(train,* ***learn fundamentals****, uphold the rules)*

**Not be disqualified:** *(do not sin, practice what we preach, etc.)*

Paul’s emphasis on being \*disciplined means he spent time training/learning fundamentals. What are the fundamentals of our faith we are expected to learn? *(Study of scripture, prayer, worship, serving others, etc.)* How are they interrelated?

After learning our fundamentals, how and when do we practice them? *(Life is our practice. All of our experiences are opportunities for us to practice our skills: pray, apply scripture, love others, etc.)*

*Facilitator:* Not everyone likes to practice. But, considering our **life** **experiences are practice,** we should make sure we embrace them with the proper frame of mind.

**Read James 1:2-4.**

Trials are moments in life when we use our faith fundamentals. What does James say the result of enduring a trial is? *(Becoming complete, mature, accomplished, proven, etc.)* What does this mean to you?

Notice it says “when” we face trials – not “if”. Tough times are expected in a fallen world. In what ways does overcoming one trial help us in the next?

Showing joy during a trial seems counterintuitive. But, the joy described here is referring to our attitude. What should that attitude look like when we are being tested? *(Engaged, positive, spirit of learning, etc.)*

*Facilitator:* Observing his life, it would be safe to say Brandon Burlsworth knew James 1:2-4. He would tell us that **mundane tasks**, **set backs or obstacles** are just practice for life. As we maintain our fundamentals in these moments, we are **preparing for our next tests** – becoming **GreatER** every time.

**Close in prayer**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 3: Training and Preparation**

**Read Acts 7:20-36** and make note of Moses’ drastic changes in circumstances throughout his life.

These verses give a brief account of the life of Moses. (His full story is found in Exodus through Deuteronomy.) Recapping these verses, he was: born a slave, adopted into Egyptian royalty, fled Egypt as a criminal, was a foreigner without privilege and then became the leader of the Hebrew exodus.

At the time of Moses’ birth, Pharaoh had determined that all male Hebrew babies be killed in order to control the population. By God’s hand, Moses was spared and raised by Pharaoh’s daughter. How would this have made Moses feel, knowing God had spared his life?

Egypt was a powerful empire with the best military, government and educational opportunities in the world at that time. Verse 22 indicates Moses was accomplished in the application of all his studies. How would this have affected Moses’ self esteem? What might his personality have been like?

Moses fled Egypt and became an alien in a foreign land. He then became a shepherd (Exodus 3:1) – an occupation considered demeaning to an Egyptian royal. In what ways would this turn of events be considered a setback for him? How could it have affected the way he viewed himself?

But, how would all of these situations work together to shape Moses as a person? How did each experience equip him for the next life event? How much do you think God was involved in these events of his life?

**Read Romans 8:28. (Suggested memory verse)**

What jobs have you had that you considered demeaning? What was your attitude while performing the tasks? Are there lessons or skills from that job you still use today?

Has life ever handed you a disappointment or setback? How did it affect you? What did you learn?

Do you love the Lord? In what ways has God worked all things (good and bad) together for your benefit? How have those events prepared you for other situations?

How willing are you to embrace the notion that God is training and preparing you now for **GreatER** things in

**Session 4: Facing Discouragement like a Champion**

**Opening discussion**

When it comes to reaching our goals, how can discouragement from others prevent us from reaching success? *(Causes doubt, robs our motivation, etc.)*

What forms can discouragement come in? *(Rude comments, jokes, name calling, direct discouraging statements, etc.)*

How hard is it to continue towards our goal when facing discouragement from others? Why?

*Facilitator state:* Brandon Burlsworth faced a great deal of discouragement his whole life, especially when it came to meeting his goals in football. Let’s look at a few of those examples in these clips from “Greater”.

**Run DVD, selecting clips: a”-b”, c”-d”, etc. (discouraging remarks, “never play defense”, “never play at Arkansas”, etc.)**

*Facilitator:* While many people would allow this discouragement to stifle their enthusiasm and prevent them from reaching their objective, Brandon did not. The tools he used to handle discouragement were discussed in Sessions 2 and 3. We will use an example in scripture to illustrate how those tools are used.

**Read 1 Samuel 17:12-50.** Make note of how many times David is offered discouragement and by whom.

* **Brother Eliab** (vs. 28): he insulted David
* **King Saul** (vs. 33): discouraged with well meaning advice
* **Goliath** (vs. 42-44): insulted and taunted David

How could these examples of discouragement stop David from facing Goliath? *(Cause doubt, fear, etc.)*

What causes people to try to discourage others? *(Feelings of inferiority in themselves, envy, control, honestly trying to help, etc.)*

*Facilitator:* But, David was undeterred by the discouragement because of his faith. Specifically, he was trusting in the combination of two things. They are found in verses 34-37.

What are the two elements David is trusting in? *(God and Preparation; these were discussed in Sessions 2 and 3.)*

David gave God credit for delivering him from the lion and the bear. But, what about the first time he faced a wild animal? How did David know to trust that God would help him then? *(David was known to have a deep relationship with God. Like Brandon, he learned to trust God early in life.)*

As a shepherd boy learning to use a slingshot, do you think he had any idea he would one day use it against a giant? Remembering Session 3, what does this teach us? *(All of our experiences are preparing us for the next life event.)*

King Saul offers David conventional weapons to face Goliath, but he refuses because he had not tested them. What can we learn from his choice? *(It is best to use the tools we are most comfortable with at the moment. The popular choice is not always God’s choice. Be yourself when facing trials, not someone else. Allow answers to vary.)*

Just for fun: if David was so confident, why did he pick up 5 stones to kill 1 giant? *(Maybe experience taught him it took multiple stones to subdue his quarry; maybe he always carried 5 stones; maybe he had 1 for each of Goliath’s brothers should they choose to retaliate -1 Chronicles 20:5.)*

Look again at verse 37. How did David’s faith influence his perspective of the giant? *(It minimized the giant in his mind, making it no different than the lion or bear.)* What does this teach us about how we should mentally approach our next adversities?

*Facilitator:* In Session 2, we discussed the importance of trusting Jesus completely. In Session 3, we emphasized embracing faith fundamentals and trials as preparation for our next life event. David facing Goliath illustrates clearly how those two concepts work together. He teaches us to **trust our preparation to enter the battle and God’s hand to exit the battle.** This faith enabled him **to overcome discouragement and confidently run to the battle line** (vs. 48)**.**

Brandon is a modern day David. He did everything right. His tireless training and unwavering trust in the Lord helped him overcome discouragement. Following his example every day can help us to become **GreatER.**

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 4: Facing Discouragement like a Champion**

**Reread 1 Samuel 17:12-50.**

The armies of Israel and Philistia gather in battle array in the Valley of Elah. But, instead of engaging in corporate battle, the Philistines sent their champion to challenge one warrior from Israel. The idea was the winner of the two soldiers’ contest would determine the victor of the entire battle.

The scriptures make it clear that King Saul and his whole army were terrified of Goliath. Why were they scared? Do you think their fear was justified? Why? In what ways did the soldiers perpetuate the fear amongst themselves?

Fear is not always a bad thing to feel: it is an emotion designed to alert you to danger. But, it either motivates us or discourages entirely. Have you ever known fear? How did you respond – did you run or make a stand against the fear? Have you ever felt a fear that immobilized you?

Some fear we experience is created in our own mind. By speculating negatively about the outcome of a situation, we begin to believe our imagination to be true which causes fear to develop. Have you ever dreaded something so badly you became fearful? Did your fear actually come true? Had you made choices in response to your dread? Did you regret those choices or did they help your situation? How do you need to pray to control your speculations that cause fear?

We may never have to face a giant in a duel to the death. But, we all face giant sized problems of some kind: financial worries, relationship issues, addictions, etc. What are your giants? Do they cause you to fear? Does the fear of those giants motivate you or discourage you? Do you believe God can help you face your giant the way He did David? How willing are you to trust Him to do so?

Discouragement can occur when we doubt our ability to handle the moment or feel we have no hope. How has the study of David and Brandon’s dedication to training and their trust in the Lord helped you face discouragement? How do you need to pray that God will help you become **GreatER** by overcoming discouragement?

**Suggested memory verse: Philippians 4:12-13**

**Session 5: Strong Father Figures**

**Opening Discussion**

*Facilitator state:* Education in our nation requires all students to study all academic courses: math, science, history, language, writing, etc. Furthermore, athletes are required to take a music class - musicians are required to take a P.E. class. The reason for this is so the student will have a complete education and become a well-rounded adult. Parenting is intended to work the same way. A mother and a father work together using their different strengths to ensure the child will be emotionally whole.

What are the different strengths a mother and a father offer a child?

In a lot of single parent homes, the parent is often the mother. What are some adverse effects for a child – especially a boy - growing up without a father?

In some homes, the father may still live in the house, but he can be detached emotionally from his children. Or, he may be absent a lot because of work or other interests. In what ways would this have the same result as a child whose only parent is the mother?

*Facilitator:* Brandon Burlsworth grew up without his father. However, he was fortunate to find a strong male influence in his brother, pastor and high school coach. It is important for the fatherless child to attach to a **strong father figure**, and Brandon continued to find that mentoring in his college coach.

**Run DVD, selecting clips: a”-b”, c-d”, etc. (offensive line coach noticing no father on form, working with Brandon, leading Bible studies, etc.)**

What do you think the coach was feeling when he noticed Brandon did not name a father on the personal information form?

In what ways did the coach invest himself as a father figure in Brandon’s life?

What effect did this have on Brandon as a player? How did it affect him emotionally and spiritually?

How do you think Brandon would have fared in college football if he had not had a coach be a father figure to him? Why?

How would it have affected Brandon if he had a coach with a strong personality, but was not a Christian? Why?

*Facilitator:* No matter your age or circumstances, it is always beneficial to have a strong father figure in your life. And, if you are spiritually mature, it is good to be a mentor to someone else. Whichever end of that spectrum you are on, these verses offer insight into what a father figure does.

**Read Psalm 16:7-11.** *Facilitator:* David was a decorated warrior and successful king – a man’s man, so to speak. But, even he relied on strong father figures. He had a good Dad as well as strong prophets to guide him to that point. However, these verses suggest his ultimate father figure was God **the** Father. And, notice verse 11 says that God – as his father - will show him the path of life**.** We can conclude from God’s example that **the main role of a strong father figure is to show the path of life to the next generations.**

Where do you think the path mentioned in verse 11 leads? *(It leads to God.)*

On the path of life, what are some attractions along the way that can distract us from the ultimate goal of reaching God? *(Money, career, fame, social life, allow speculation)*

What else do these verses say a father figure does to keep their charges focused on the path to God? *(Counsels, instructs, offers availability, shares strength/confidence/encouragement, brings positivity or joy)*

*Facilitator:* Amazingly, David’s choice to follow God’s path had an effect on other generations that followed him.

**Read 2 Kings 22:1-2.** *Facilitator:* Notice verse 2 says Josiah walked in the ways of his father David. But, David was a distant ancestor to Josiah – not his father. This is significant because Josiah’s actual father was a perversely evil king.But, Josiah was the last Godly and successful king of Judah. The implication in scripture is that walking in the “ways of David” – on the path to God – fostered that success.

This begs the question, how did Josiah learn about this path? *(Guidance by father figures, possibly priests, after they found the lost scriptures –vs. 8.)*

Knowing distant generations may follow **our** path, what does this teach us about choosing the correct path now? Why?

*Facilitator:* Brandon and Josiah had weak examples to follow from their own fathers. But, with the guidance of strong father figures they were shown the path of life**.** Following this path made them **GreatER**.Their challenge to us is to **follow our father figures down the same ancient path and to mentor others to do the same**.

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 5: Strong Father Figures**

**Reread Psalm 16:7-11** to refresh your memory on what a father figure does. Write them down if necessary.

Now read these verses of fathers, or father figures, interacting with their charges. Determine how these interactions compare with your list.

**Joshua 1:1-9 1 Samuel 3:7-10**

**1 Kings 2:1-3 2 Kings 2:5-14**

**Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3 Matthew 3:16-17**

In what ways did the father figures offer affirmation, instruction and encouragement to their ‘child’?

How would you feel if your father figure spoke to you in the same manner as the ones in the above verses?

Have you benefited from receiving the love and guidance from a strong father figure? What do you need to pray for to insure you can receive that mentoring? (Keep in mind being mentored is beneficial at any age.)

The above verses show that father figures can be Dad, a friend and God. How could you benefit from having several father figures? How willing are you to accept God as your primary father figure?

As you grow spiritually, how willing are you to reach out to the fatherless and mentor them? What do you need to pray for in order to be a successful encourager of others?

The prevalence of fatherlessness in recent decades has not gone unnoticed by Christian leaders. There are volumes of books written on the subject by many qualified pastors, teachers and counselors. Unfortunately, one lesson does not scratch the surface on all the information available. If you are someone who is in need of healing from a fatherless childhood – or if you are someone in a position to help the fatherless – it would be wise to invest time reading on this subject. Recommended authors: John Eldridge, Gordon Dalbey, David Murrow, Paul Coughlin, James Dobson, Robert Lewis and Stephen Mansfield.

**Suggested memory verse: Psalm 16:11**

**Session 6: Satan, Temptation and Sin**

**Opening discussion**

What are some common names for the devil? *(Satan, Lucifer, old Nick, etc.)*

How do most movies portray the devil? What dramatic effects do these portrayals have on the audience?

**Read 2 Corinthians 11:14.**

How does this verse change your knowledge of what Satan might look like?

*Facilitator state:* In this session, we will shift our focus from Brandon to his brother Marty. As he is struggling emotionally with the loss of his brother, Marty finds himself being drawn into debate with an unnamed man. As you watch these scenes in “Greater”, try to determine whom this man represents.

**Run DVD, selecting clips: a”-b”, c”-d”, etc. (scenes of Marty and the farmer)**

What is the man’s demeanor towards Marty when they first begin to talk? How does that demeanor change in the course of their conversation?

What is the symbolic significance of the man whittling the wood into the likeness of Marty?

The young man trying to get Marty to go to the service does not seem to notice a man is there talking to Marty. What does this suggest?

Who do you think the man *(“the farmer” in the credits)* represents in these scenes? Why?

After Marty throws the carved image away, the man picks it up. What is the spiritual implication of this?

*Facilitator:* Satan has been craftily tempting people to sin since the beginning of time. But, fortunately his methods have not changed much for thousands of years. With a quick review of his first encounter with mankind, we can get a clearer picture of what those tactics are like.

**Read Genesis 3:1-6.** *(Note: these verses do not say the serpent is Satan. It is in Revelation 12:9 that we learn ‘the serpent of old’ is called the devil.)*

What is the difference between sin and temptation? *(Sin is violating God’s law and will. Temptation is the* ***luring*** *to commit a wrongful act or sin.)*

Identify the tactics Satan used to tempt Eve. *(1. Plant doubt 2. Twist the God’s word 3. Promise a reward)*

Why are these methods effective in leading people to sin?

Why does Satan want to tempt us to sin? *(Satan can only hurt God indirectly by causing us to sin and disrupt our relationship with God.)*

*Facilitator:* Knowing the devil’s tactics leaves us with the question, “What do we do when we are feeling tempted?” The simplest answer to that is found in James.

**Read James 4:7.**

The most important part in dealing with Satan is to first submit to God. What does it mean to submit to God? *(Spend time regularly in prayer and in His word, then obey Him.)*

Why is submission to God necessary to resist the devil?

How do we ‘resist’ Satan? *(Simply saying “no” and not giving in to temptation is resistance enough. We ultimately make the choice to sin or not. The devil does not* ***make*** *us sin.)*

**Conclusion:** **Satan is our adversary**. He will do all he can to stifle our spiritual growth, tempt us to sin and disrupt our relationship with God. He wants to prevent us from becoming **GreatER** so we will not bring glory to God with our lives. It is important we **be aware of his tactics, submit to God and resist him**.

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 6: Satan, Temptation and Sin**

**Read Matthew 4:1-11.** This is the account of Jesus’ temptation by Satan. **Reread Genesis 3:1-6** then compare and contrast Eve’s temptation to Jesus’.

Notice first the devil sought moments of weakness to tempt them: Eve was inexperienced and Jesus was alone and hungry. What are moments that you are at your weakest? Why is it important to know this about yourself when it comes to dealing with Satan’s tactics?

Satan appeals to basic human desires when he is tempting Eve and Jesus: aesthetic senses, the need for food, pride, control and power. Eve began to doubt that God would meet those needs for her and she gave in to temptation. What basic desires do you struggle with most when it comes to dealing with temptation? How well do you trust God to meet your needs?

Immediate gratification is the underlying theme in both temptations. Rather than growing spiritually, Eve is tempted to have godlike knowledge now. Satan is telling Jesus He can rule all kingdoms now and bypass God’s plan. In what ways can shortcuts to meeting your goals lead you to sin? How vulnerable are you to this type of temptation?

Notice also how Satan misrepresents God’s word in tempting them. Eve allowed the seed of doubt to influence her decision. However, Jesus knew the scriptures well enough to rebut him. Do you know God’s word better than Satan does? How easy would it be for His word to be twisted in your mind?

How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus was tempted? How do you feel knowing He was tempted and did not sin? How does this knowledge help you in your walk?

How would giving into the temptations of Satan prevent you from becoming **GreatER?** What do you need to pray about to ensure you do not succumb to temptation?

**Suggested memory verse: James 4:7**

**Session 7: America’s Idols**

**Alcoholism and Drug Addiction**

**Opening discussion**

As slaves, Israelites were exposed to the worship of Egyptian idols for 400 years. As freedmen entering the Promised Land, they would witness the idolatry of Canaanite gods. But, God made it clear to the Israelites through His law that idolatry was a sin.

What is an idol? *(A manmade object believed to have god-like qualities.)*

What is idolatry? *(The worship of idols.)*

Why was it necessary for God to specify that idolatry was a sin? *(The other nations could have influenced the Israelites to worship their gods.)*

What cultures come to mind when you think of people worshipping idols? Have you seen this type of idol worship in our country?

*Facilitator:* While we may not see organized ceremonies in our culture, idolatry still occurs. Most Christian authors today define **an idol as, anything we deem more important than our relationship with the one true God**. This means an idol can be anything that has control in our life. In the next two sessions, we will look at a few of those idols as they are revealed in the movie “Greater”.

**Run DVD, selecting the clip: a”-b” (scene of Brandon’s father getting drunk while Brandon is spending the night).**

*Facilitator:* Brandon’s father was an alcoholic. Divorce was a result of his addiction and Brandon grew up without a father. In an attempt at reconciliation, Brandon is invited to spend the night with his father.

As they spend time getting acquainted, what are things they find they have in common? How is their level of trust between each other growing?

But, Brandon’s father fails on his promise to not drink while his son is with him. What does this imply was most important to Brandon’s father? What was least important? How was alcohol controlling him?

Throughout his life, what had he gained by using alcohol compared to what he had lost?

What was Brandon’s emotional reaction to his father’s drunkenness? How did you feel when you saw the father drunk? In what ways does alcoholism affect many people, not just the alcoholic?

**Read Matthew 22:34-40.**

*Facilitator:* In these verses, Jesus condenses the Ten Commandments into two sentences. The most important command according to Him is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. What does this mean to you?

We opened with a brief discussion of idolatry. How does idol worship violate the Greatest Commandment? *(Its importance replaces our love for God.)*

Recalling the contemporary definition of an idle, how might alcoholism - or any drug addiction - be considered an idol?

How is our nation influenced to accept the use of alcohol or drugs as a beneficial activity? *(Advertisements, glorified in movies, peer-pressure, etc.)*

Because of this desensitization and easy accessibility, alcohol and tobacco are considered to be gateways to the use of other drugs. Why would the use of one drug make it more likely the person will use a different drug later?

It is obvious how alcohol or drugs can affect behavior when being used. But, when sober, an addict is continually thinking about how and when they will get to use again. What does this reveal about the absolute control the substance has on the addict?

*Facilitator:* The sin of an addiction is the control it has on the person. And, it is the control that makes addiction an idol. The only way to correct this problem is to change what controls the person. Paul explains.

**Read Ephesians 5:15-20.**

What are the similarities in meaning of being “drunk” with wine and being “filled” with the Holy Spirit? *(Being drunk is the same as being filled with alcohol. They both suggest there is a control over the person.)*

What do these verses say the result of being controlled by wine is? What is the result of being controlled by the Spirit?

What determines what controls the person? *(The person chooses.)*

*Facilitator:* Brandon chose to be controlled by the Holy Spirit instead of the ‘spirits’ of his father. At some point in our life, we will have to choose what we will allow to control us. Our becoming **GreatER** is dependent on that choice. Will you choose as a wise person, or unwise?

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 7: America’s Idols**

**Alcoholism and Drug Addiction**

**Read Isaiah 44:9-20.** These verses offer a generalization of how an idol – a false god – is made. Notice how a man uses manmade tools to gather wood to create fire for warmth and cooking. But, he selects one piece of the same kind of material to make a graven image. He plans, sketches and carefully measures every detail to make the idol. Then, upon completion, he props the image up and declares it is his god.

What is backward about worshipping something you have made? How can a manmade structure offer guidance or meet needs? Why would anyone think they could benefit spiritually from a relationship with a piece of wood?

On the other hand, how reasonable is it to worship the God who created you?

In what ways can the Creator of the universe protect you or meet your needs? Knowing that God can actually love you back, how much easier is it to have a relationship with Him? Why?

In Session 7, it was mentioned that an idol is anything that consumes our thoughts and controls our decisions. In this case, an idol is not ceremonially worshipped - it is served.

What are things in your life that you devote more attention to than God? How does the time and money you spend on those things help you spiritually? How do you need to pray to ensure your priorities are aligned with God’s desire for your life?

In the session, we discussed that alcohol is an idol. How does alcohol fit within the description of the creation of an idol mentioned above? What benefits do people expect from the use of alcohol? Do the results of using alcohol have positive or negative effects on their spirituality? What are those effects?

Drugs and alcohol are addictive. This means that our mind and body can crave those substances, leading to habitual use. These habits will consume a lot of time and money because the cravings are never satisfied. However, if they are never used there is no possibility of addiction. In your quest to become **GreatER,** pray that God will help you develop healthy habits that help you meet your goals – not ones that hinder.

**Suggested memory verse: Matthew 22:37-39**

**Session 8: America’s Idols**

**Food and Eating Disorders**

**Opening discussion**

*Facilitator state:* In the previous session, we discussed that idolatry is a sin in God’s eyes. It was necessary for Him to declare this to His people because all the nations around them worshipped idols and He did not want the Israelites to be influenced by them.

While we may not see this type of idolatry in our culture, many Christian authors suggest that idols are still prominent today. What is the contemporary definition of an idol? *(Anything we deem more important than God. Or, anything that controls our life other than God.)*

In the previous session, we concluded that alcoholism is an idol. What are some other things that we could make more important than God? *(Allow answers to vary. Examples: career, money, hobbies, family, etc.)*

*Facilitator:* Some things that can become idols are actually necessities in life. For example: we need **money** to function in our culture, but money can become **more** **important to us than God**. Another example is **food**: it is necessary to eat to live, but **addiction** to food can lead to obesity and other health problems. In the movie “Greater”, Brandon’s issues with diet and weight give us an opportunity to explore the possibility of food becoming an idol.

**Run DVD, selecting scene: a”-b” (Brandon having a conversation with his mother about him being overweight.)**

Brandon was the baby of the family and his mother was raising him without a father. Why might this have prompted his mother to coddle him?

How might his diet of cheesecake and potato chips have been a means of pampering Brandon by his mother?

When Brandon was disappointed after receiving a scholarship offer from a smaller university, he grabbed a bag of chips from his nephew and went to his room. What does this reveal about how he viewed this type of food?

Do you think comfort food could have been an idol for Brandon? Why?

*Facilitator:* With the prevalence of eating disorders in our culture today, it is clear that food can have a controlling influence in our life.

What are some examples of eating disorders? *(Binge eating, obesity, anorexia, obsessive dieting, etc.)*

What are some factors that could cause people to develop eating disorders?

*(Emotional problems, insecurity, pressure to look a certain way, viewing food or treats as a way to celebrate, lack of dietary knowledge, etc.)*

Eating disorders are viewed as a medical condition. But, in what ways could they be considered a spiritual problem? *(Example: binge eaters are attempting to control emotional pain instead of relying on God for comfort. Allow speculation.)*

*Facilitator:* Food is a necessity, but to keep it from controlling our life it is important to view it in the proper perspective. An event in the life of Elijah helps clarify.

**Read 1 Kings 19:5-8.** *Facilitator:* Normally a spiritually tough individual, Elijah has come to a point in his life where he is emotionally and physically exhausted. He is ready to quit. However, God sees Elijah’s needs and ministers to him. By giving him rest and nourishment, God helps him recover completely.

What is unique about the food God gave to Elijah? *(He traveled 40 days on it.)*

*Facilitator:* The scriptures do not tell us what was in the food that gave him that strength. But, there is a rule hidden in these verses that offers a fresh perspective on diet: **we should focus on eating only what is necessary for the next leg of our journey.** This serves to remind us that food is nothing more than a source of fuel. It gives us energy and enables our body to function properly.

Following this rule, how different should the meals be before a day of physical activity verses a day of watching T.V? Why?

Some people with eating disorders use food as a means of escape or to mask an emotional pain. Others deny themselves needed nutrition in order to maintain a physical appearance. How would following the rule above help in those situations?

How difficult would it be to follow this rule? Why?

*Facilitator:* Fortunately for Brandon, his college coaches offered guidance on proper nutrition. That knowledge enabled him to reverse the control that food had on him. In our quest to become **GreatER,** it is important to maintain a proper perspective on the necessities of life and not allow them to become more important to us than God.

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 8: America’s Idols**

**Food and Eating Disorders**

**Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-13 and 19-20.**

In the session we discussed that food can be an idol. Restate verse 12 but substitute “all foods” for “all things”. How does the amended verse fit within the theme of the session?

From this exercise, what foods come to mind that you eat that would be considered unprofitable? What foods would be profitable?

What does it mean to you to be mastered by food or a diet? What do you think Paul would do to insure he was not ‘mastered’ by food?

Verses 13 and 19-20 make it clear that our bodies belong to God. What does this mean to you? Knowing that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, how does this change what you would allow yourself to consume?

Our culture places a lot of importance on physical appearance. Do you think God places more importance on your figure/physique, or on your health? Why? Do you think God loves you any differently because of your body shape? Why?

In what ways will this study help you to become **GreatER** as you master your diet and not let food control you?

Before leaving the study on idols, it would be beneficial to look at another life necessity that has the potential to control us.

**Read 1 Timothy 6:9-10.** Earning and having money is necessary to function in our world. It is not sinful to have money. In fact, God can sometimes bless us monetarily. But, the love of money makes it an idol and leads to evil.

How has the desire for money or possessions ever caused you to sin?

As you become **GreatER,** how does money fit into your plans?

Brandon Burlsworth stood a chance to make more money than he ever thought possible in the NFL. But, nowhere in the movie “Greater” did it indicate that his goal was to be rich. What does his example teach you about how to view money in a spiritually healthy way?

**Suggested memory verse: 1 Corinthians 6:12, 20**

**Session 9: The Bible and Bullies**

**Opening discussion**

*Facilitator state:* Bullying among students has received national attention. In fact, most state educational associations have written policies that address its management. A general definition of bullying is: any unwanted, aggressive behavior involving a power imbalance. (Power includes: physical strength, knowledge about another individual or popularity.) **Actually, bullying occurs throughout our culture, not just in schools.** This is a topic worthy of our concern.

What are some examples of bullying?

Why is bullying wrong?

What causes people to intentionally bully others?

*Facilitator:* If you have experienced bullying, you are not alone - Brandon Burlsworth did too. As we look at an example of that bullying, focus on his confident response to his dorm mates’ aggression towards him.

**Run DVD, selecting clip: a”-b” (scene of dorm room bullying)**

How were Brandon’s teammates bullying him? How did it make him feel?

How did Brandon respond to the bullying? *(Told them to stop; confidently replaced his items; removed himself from the room)*

*Facilitator:* What he did **not do** was allow himself to be drawn into a physical altercation. A fight would have solved nothing and may have created other problems. Instead, Brandon does the best thing possible to stop the bullying.

**Run DVD, selecting clip: c”-d” (scene of the gauntlet where he is facing Ward)**

In this scene, Brandon not only wins the competitive drill, he **earns Ward’s respect.** Why would respect stop the bullying?

Remembering the theme of Session 1, how has Brandon’s “name” changed in the scene? *(Ward said, “That’s no walk-on.”)*

*Facilitator:* The point is**, proving your-self in a common arena and earning respect from aggressors can stop the bullying.** It takes time, but earning that respect will usually turn a bully into a friend.

*Facilitator:* However, as representatives of Christ, it is more important that **we are** **not being the bully**. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains how to best interact with all people, in any situation.

**Read Matthew 7:12**

*Facilitator:* The Golden Rule is the code all Christians should live by. But, as simple as it is to say it, it can be difficult to apply every day. Here are some skills we can develop to help us master the Golden Rule.

**1. Empathy**

What is empathy? *(An awareness of another’s situation or feelings.)*

How would empathy help us live the Golden Rule? *(Allow speculation. Seeing someone’s side may prompt us to show kindness, meet a need, not judge or even to not feel provoked by something they did to us.)*

**2. Self-awareness.** *Facilitator:* Posture, facial expressions, tone of voice as well as our choice of words are all a part of communication. They not only transfer ideas, they affect others’ emotions. **We are responsible for our choices**, so it is important to be aware of how we communicate.

How would not being aware of how we present ourselves prevent us from living out the Golden Rule? *(Any action that belittles or threatens others gives the perception of unkindness. Examples: angry expression, condescending tone, crossed arms, etc.)*

**3. Self-discipline.** *Facilitator:* The Golden Rule is not a governmental law – we will not be arrested for not following it. It is, however, **a standard that we must hold ourselves to**. Self-discipline is required to make our selves accountable to this standard.

What are some instances where self-discipline would be necessary to live out the Golden Rule? *(Examples: power struggles, moments of anonymity, disagreements, desire for vengeance, etc.)*

*Facilitator:* Brandon used these skills and as a result lived out the Golden Rule – even when some would think retaliation was justified. His life gives us encouragement to do likewise. **If everyone lived by the Golden Rule, there would** **be no bullying**. It is up to Christians to make the world **GreatER** by leading this movement.

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 9: The Bible and Bullies**

Bullying has existed since sin was introduced to mankind. The first recording of it in the Bible was when Cain killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4). However, with the advent of almost instantaneous information through media, it seems like it has just recently become an epidemic. We receive reports of violence and suicides related to bullying in our student population almost weekly. As a result, most state education associations have addressed it in statewide policies for schools. These policies can be found on the web sites of the respective associations.

How knowledgeable are you about the specifics of bullying? How willing are you to research information on this subject? After gaining this knowledge, how willing are you to be involved in stopping it?

**Read Ephesians 6:12.**

The education associations’ definition of bullying indicates the unwanted aggression involves power of one person over another. In what way is this use of power a spiritual issue? What specifically do you need to pray for to curb bullying in your area of influence?

In the class session, we learned that if everyone lived by the Golden Rule, there would be no bullying. How effective are you at exhibiting this example?

**Reread Matthew 7:12. (Suggested memory verse)** Truthfully, the Golden Rule is taught by almost every culture around the world. However, everyone knows that followers of Christ know the Rule and are expected to follow it. This makes it important that Christians be the experts in living out the mantra that even non-believers know. Therefore, it is important that we understand why we might have trouble doing it.

**Read James 4:1-3.** According to James, the desires of our flesh can cause us to bully others so we can get what we want. Note in these verses how we grope for power over someone in order to satisfy our flesh.

In what ways has your desires caused you to be unkind to someone else? How might your actions be considered bullying?

Notice in verse 3 the relationship between asking (God) for what we want and our motives behind it. In what ways do your motives affect your relationship with God and others?

How do you need to pray that God will make you **GreatER** through the management of your desires?

**Session 10: Death, Loss and Grief**

**Opening discussion**

Describe death from a medical standpoint. *(Allow answers to vary. Examples: stop breathing, heart stops beating, etc.)*

What might an atheist believe happens to someone after death? *(Allow speculation.)*

What do Christians believe happens after death? *(Allow answers to vary. Examples: soul goes to heaven or hell, be with Jesus, resurrection, etc.)*

If a loved one dies, how is the **response** to that death alike or different for the atheist as compared to the Christian? *(Allow speculation.)*

*Facilitator state:* Whether it is unexpected or the result of a lengthy illness, losing a loved one is never easy. Before discussing how a person deals with loss, let’s look at the scene in the movie “Greater” where the family learns of Brandon’s death.

**Run DVD, selecting scene: a”-b” (Marty receiving news of Brandon’s death)**

*Facilitator:* Death is an unavoidable consequence of living in a fallen world. And, for the friends and family of the deceased, grief cannot be escaped either. On the Focus on the Family website, there is an excellent series written by Patricia Johnson that details the grief process. Quoting Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Johnson explains there are 5 common responses in that process:

1. **Denial:** doubting or unbelief of the situation
2. **Anger:** hostility, blame
3. **Bargaining:** thinking action on our part can reverse the situation
4. **Depression:** profound sadness
5. **Acceptance:** the end result of the process, at peace with the situation

Which of these responses were manifested in the scene of Marty and his mother as they were informed of Brandon’s accident?

What may have been other emotions or feelings the family experienced with this tragedy? *(Anxiety, pain, hopelessness, confusion, loneliness, etc.)*

What is the exact reason for these emotions? *(The pain is from the realization that a valuable part of their life is missing.)*

According to Johnson’s article, it is possible that someone gets hung up in one of the stages of grief. What would it be like for the person who gets stuck in the depression or anger stage?

How long do you think it takes for someone to go through the grieving process? *(According to Johnson, there is no standard time frame or formula. The process is a little different for every person.)*

Although it is very painful, in what ways can allowing grief to run its course be beneficial for the one grieving?

*Facilitator:* As mentioned earlier, grief touches everyone who walks this earth. In point of fact, even Jesus grieved when he lost his friend, Lazarus.

**Read John 11:14, 17-44.**

In verse 35, it says that Jesus wept. What does this imply about Jesus? How does it make you feel knowing Jesus experienced the same emotions we do?

Recall the grief process mentioned earlier. Which of those responses do you see in any of the people in these verses?

Jesus knew what God had planned for Lazarus, so He seemed to move to the acceptance part of the grief process quickly. How can Jesus’ example and the trust we have in God help us when we have to work through the grief process our self?

Verse 19 indicates there were people consoling Mary and Martha after the death of their brother. How comfortable are you consoling anyone who has lost a loved one? Why?

*Facilitator:* In Johnson’s article, she emphasizes there is not a lot that can be truthfully said to someone grieving. Her suggestion is to say simply, “I am sorry for your loss.” Then it would be best to quietly listen if they want to talk or just be present for them. Also, it is best to offer a specific service you could do for them while they are grieving rather than asking if there is anything you can do.

How will understanding the grief process help you to become **Greater?** *(Allow speculation.)*

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 10: Death, Loss and Grief**

**Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.** King Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes late in his life. In the book, he is reflecting on the meaning of life based on his experiences.

How complete is this list in describing events in life? Are there any events you would add to the list? Why do you think this is included in the Bible?

Reread each event and think about what a person is expected to do in each one. How many of these have you experienced? How did you respond in those events?

**Recall the 5 common responses to grief mentioned in the session: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance.**

How many of the responses to grief do you see in the verses in Ecclesiastes? How do you feel knowing God has clearly allotted a time for some of those responses in his word?

While the magnitude cannot be equated to losing a loved one, any loss (job, home, relationship, etc.) can cause pain. In what ways do you think the grieving process in those situations is the same? Why?

Considering there is an allowance from God to grieve, do you think it is best to resist the responses to grief or let them happen? Why? How does this help you understand how you can help others grieve? How does it help you personally?

Acceptance is the goal of the grieving process. How do the verses in Ecclesiastes describe what acceptance might look like in the person overcoming grief? How would contact with friends or family help in achieving this peace? How might adequate rest and taking care of physical needs help?

**Read Colossians 3:1-2. (Suggested memory verse)**

How might getting stuck in one of the processes of grief affect a person’s relationship with others? How would it affect their relationship with God?

Have you ever grieved a loss? Are you to the point of acceptance or are you stuck in one of the stages? How do you need to pray to change your focus from things of the earth to the things of Christ? How might focusing on things above help you become **GreatER?**

**Session 11: Character, Honor and Integrity**

**Opening discussion**

Name some of your favorite comic book super heroes **and** villains. *(Examples: Superman, Lex Luther, Spiderman, Venom, etc.)*

Name some of the super powers the heroes **and** villains have.

If the heroes and villains both have super powers, what determines if they are the good-guy or the bad-guy? *(Allow answers to vary, but lead them to the idea that* ***who they are on the inside*** *dictates if they are the good or bad-guy.)*

*Facilitator state:* While Brandon Burlsworth may not have had superhuman powers, he certainly was a super human being. And it was not his athletic prowess that made him great – it was his **character, honor,** and **integrity.** It is not possible to discuss all the traits that fit under the umbrella of those virtues, but we will discuss a few of them within the framework of the movie “Greater”.

**Character**

**Run DVD selecting scenes: a”-b”(Brandon saying someone’s always watching)**

His coach said, “Character is who you are when no one is looking”. What does that mean to you?

What are ways that someone may act differently in front of others than when they are alone? *(Allow speculation.)* Why would they do this? *(Pride, shame, selfishness, insecurity, manipulation, etc.)*

What does it mean to you when Brandon said, “Someone’s always watching”?

**Read Matthew 7:15-20.**

Jesus is speaking specifically of false prophets, but his teaching easily applies to all people. What are examples of the “fruit” in someone’s life? *(Results of their choices, if they help, do they love others, etc.)*

What is the relationship between character and fruit in a person’s life? *(They are directly related – fruit is dependent on character.)*

How would you define character? *(Definition of ‘you’, who you are, how you are remembered, etc.)*

**Honor**

Some describe honor as having a good name. What does it mean to you to have a good name?

**Read Proverbs 22:1**

Why would a good name be more beneficial than wealth?

What are traits in a person that one would consider respectable or worthy of a good name? *(Dependability, responsibility, trustworthy, diligent etc.)*

**Integrity**

*Facilitator:* Integrity literally means honesty. But, according to the Psalmist, scriptural integrity goes a lot deeper than just stating an honest opinion.

**Read Psalm 15:1-2.** *Facilitator:* Speaking truth in the heart suggests there should be a consistency between what we believe and what we say and do. It makes us think of something solid, whole and stable.

With this explanation in mind, what has more integrity – an egg or a rock? Why?

Why is it important that there be a consistency between what we believe and the way we live?

**Living with Character, Honor and Integrity**

What are instances in life where character, honor and integrity are most evident in a person?

Even though each of these virtues has a distinct definition, is it possible for a person to posses one without the other two? Why?

**Run DVD, selecting scene: a”-b” (the discussion over the trip and fumble)**

How are Brandon and Clint each showing strong character, honor and integrity in this scene? How common is this behavior in our culture? Why?

How will following their examples help you to become **GreatER?**

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 11: Character, Honor and Integrity**

**Read 2 Corinthians 13:5. (Suggested memory verse)**

We live in a narcissistic society where many people seem obsessed with their appearance, status or accomplishments. How is Paul’s suggestion to examine ourselves different from being overly consumed with ‘self’? What about our self is Paul wanting us to examine? Why do you think it may be important to test or examine our self? How often should we perform this test?

If you examined yourself, what would you find in regard to character, honor and integrity? By what standard do you measure those virtues?

Recall Session1 where we discussed that our nicknames are a reflection of how others perceive our character. Based on your nickname or how others interact with you, how do you think others perceive your character, honor and integrity?

How does this compare with your list of how you see yourself? How consistent are you in your choices when you are alone as compared to when you are with others? How does this make you feel? How do you need to pray to insure you are the same in all circumstances?

Paul indicates that as we examine our self, we should see Jesus. What does this mean to you? Why would ‘failing’ the self-test mean we would not see Jesus? Do you see Jesus when you test yourself? Do others see Jesus in you?

**Read Galatians 5:16-25.** The Holy Spirit lives in our heart after we are saved. However, Paul makes it clear we must be deliberate in choosing to obey the Holy Spirit instead of the desires of the flesh. What does this mean to you?

When you examine yourself, how many of the deeds of the flesh (verses 19-21) do you see in yourself? Do they occur occasionally or do you ‘practice’ them? How would being aware of this help you develop your character, honor and integrity?

The opposite of the deeds of the flesh is found in verses 22-23. Notice there is only one fruit (result) of walking in the Spirit. But, nine words are used to describe what it is like. What does this mean to you? How does the fruit of the Spirit influence character, honor and integrity in a person?

How do you need to pray to insure you are becoming **GreatER** by walking in the Spirit? How often are you willing to pray that prayer?

**Session 12: …but He is greater**

**Opening discussion (there will be no video in this session)**

When watching a football game on television, it is common to see theatrical celebrations by the player making a touchdown. Describe some of these antics. *(Just for fun, encourage re-enactment.)*

In some levels of the game, excessive celebration can bring a penalty. What is the purpose of instilling a rule against celebrating?

By his actions, the player seems to be taking credit for the touchdown. But, realistically it takes the whole team to make that happen. How do you think his stealing the glory makes the rest of his team feel?

Beyond being happy about scoring, what seems to be the motivation behind his antics? *(Allow answers to vary, but direct them toward the idea that the player is* ***drawing attention to himself****.)*

In these instances, is the player’s promotion of self an indication of a healthy self-esteem? Why or why not? *(Allow discussion.)*

*Facilitator state:* Confidence and a good self-esteem are essential to thriving in the world. But, a preoccupation with one’s self can indicate a deep spiritual problem.

**Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5.**

As you read this description of depravity, what traits stand out to you?

What does it mean to you when it says in verse 2 these people will be lovers of self?

How difficult would it be to have a friendship with people that act in this manner? Why? *(Allow speculation.)*

In what ways do you see the traits in these verses lived out today?

What factors in a person’s life would contribute to this type of behavior? *(Lack of God, lack of parental guidance, sense of entitlement, etc.)*

How might success in a person’s life cause them to act this way? *(Pride, exaggerated sense of self worth, feelings of superiority, etc.)*

*Facilitator:* In his life, Brandon Burlsworth, sacrificed a great deal to reach the pinnacle of his chosen profession. If anyone had a reason to be prideful about success it was he. However, nowhere in the movie “Greater” do we see him boasting or living with a sense of entitlement because of his accolades. As we finish our study of his life, Brandon has one more lesson to teach us about what it really means to be **GreatER.**

**Read John 3:27-30. (Verse 30 is the suggested memory verse)**

*Facilitator:* John the Baptist was a cousin to Jesus. From birth, John was anointed to preach, baptize and prepare the way for the arrival of Jesus’ ministry. He had proven to be very successful in fulfilling his call. But, in these verses he makes it clear that this success was not for his own indulgence.

We have spent 11 sessions learning how to become **GreatER** by following Brandon’s example. But, John the Baptist makes a point about the source of any success. Reread verse 27. What does this mean to you?

What is our role in becoming **GreatER** if God is the one who ultimately determines if we are successful? *(Allow answers to vary. By studying greatness we are showing faith, by applying our studies we are showing obedience. God blesses us accordingly.)*

Reread verse 29. The bridegroom in this verse is Jesus. The bride is the people following Jesus. John is the friend who helps the bridegroom. John said his joy has been fulfilled because his duty to Jesus has been a success. Is there anything spiritually wrong with enjoying or being pleased with success? Why or why not?

There is certainly nothing wrong with enjoying a job well done. And, as we become **GreatER** we may even be rewarded or compensated in some way. But, who should receive the glory if it is God permitting the success? *(God.)*

Reread verse 30. How does this verse teach us to give God glory for the fruit He bears in our life? *(Allow speculation. Ultimately we should allow the spotlight to be on the Lord.)*

According to Brandon’s example and John the Baptist’s statement, what would you say the purpose is of becoming **GreatER?** *(Allow answers to vary. We glorify God when we excel in any arena of life. The fruit our life bears points others to Christ. Etc.)*

**Close in prayer.**

**GreatER Personal Reflections**

**Session 12: …but He is greater**

Brandon Burlsworth made a commitment to himself and God to become **GreatER.** This choice was evident in the way he lived his whole life – not just in football. His legacy is a challenge to each of us is to do the same. Keep this list of the suggested memory verses from each lesson. Feel free to make notes next to the verses about what it means to you. Choose a verse daily, memorize it, pray and commit to applying it in your life that day. Repeat the cycle every 12 days and see how God helps you to become **GreatER.**

1. **Jeremiah 29:11**
2. **John 3:16**
3. **Romans 8:28**
4. **Philippians 4:12-13**
5. **Psalm 16:11**
6. **James 4:7**
7. **Matthew 22:37-39**
8. **1 Corinthians 6:12, 20**
9. **Matthew 7:12**
10. **Colossians 3:1-2**
11. **2 Corinthians 13:5**
12. **John 3:3**