Life Group Leaders' Guide: Bridge Series — Week 3

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)
Open by inviting the group to pause and quiet their hearts before God.

Pray for Jesus to renew their minds and help them remember His promises. Ask Him to reveal any unbelief, fear, disappointment, or comfort that keeps them from joining His work.
Ask God for humility, courage, and faith to "roll the stone away" and step into what He is doing with authentic aloha.

Close by asking Jesus to unite the group and make them faithful bridges of His love, mercy, and Kingdom work.

Worship Song Suggestions (10 minutes)
"Way Maker" – Leeland / Sinach

"Promises" – Maverick City Music

"Build My Life" – Housefires / Pat Barrett

"Goodness of God" – Bethel Music / Jenn Johnson

Ice Breaker (10 minutes)
Question: What's one promise, encouragement, or lesson from God that you've had to hold onto during a difficult season?

The Big Idea
God is faithful to fulfill his promises, even when they seem dead and buried, and the Holy Spirit renews our minds so we can trust him beyond what our circumstances suggest.

Key Takeaways (5 minutes)
1. God's promises do not expire simply because circumstances appear to contradict them. Jesus promised that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death; He never said Lazarus would not die. The promise was still true even when the situation looked hopeless.

2. The Holy Spirit's renewal of the mind is not a one-time event. It is a daily reorientation of our faith back toward what God has said, especially when our senses or our sense of timing tempt us to give up.
3. Our shared purpose as believers is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Every promise God makes in our lives serves that larger purpose.

4. Jesus moves toward stinking situations, not away from them. His love is not deterred by the mess, the decay, or the shame in our stories.

5. When we bury a promise in unbelief, God may call us to actively undo that burial -- to roll the stone away as an act of repentance and renewed faith, so that he can do what we cannot.

6. Martha's transformation in John 11 pictures what the Holy Spirit does in us: he refocuses a distracted, burdened heart on the one thing that matters: being at the feet of Jesus and trusting in his word.

Discussion Questions

Opening (10–15 Minutes)

1. Think of a time when you received what felt like a clear promise from God through Scripture, prayer, or a strong sense of leading. What was that experience like?

2. The sermon opened with the idea that all believers are on the same path toward becoming more like Jesus, just at different points along it. How does that framing change the way you think about where you are spiritually right now?

Going Deeper

3. Jesus replied to Mary and Martha, promising that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death, and then waited two more days before traveling to Bethany. How do you personally respond when God's timing does not match your expectations? What does that response reveal about your trust in his promises?

4. Pastor John identified Jesus' reaction at the tomb as one of anger and grief directed at the unbelief of the crowd, people who had received his promise but responded as if the story were already over. Have you ever treated a promise from God as though it were finished when it was not? What caused you to close the door on it?

5. Martha's transformation is striking. In Luke 10, she is distracted and resentful. In John 11, she runs to Jesus and declares faith in his power to raise her brother. What do you think changed in her? What does her transformation suggest about how God works in us over time?

6. Pastor John said: "Love moves toward the stink in someone's life. Love doesn't move away from the stink in someone's life." What does it look like practically for your group, your family, or your church to move toward difficult or broken situations rather than away from them?

7. The speaker described how Jesus had those present roll away the stone and unwrap Lazarus themselves, not because he needed their help, but because it was an act of undoing what their unbelief had done. Is there a promise in your life that you have, in effect, wrapped in grave clothes and sealed away? What would it look like to begin rolling that stone back?

Personal Reflection

8. Pastor John mentioned specific promises found throughout Scripture: blessing, protection, provision, restoration, and a future of hope. Which of those promises do you find hardest to stand on right now, and why?

9. Pastor John was honest about his tendency to let a God-given calling drift, concluding that if it hadn't happened yet, maybe it wasn't meant to. Have you ever reasoned yourself out of something God called you to? What would it take to revisit that calling with fresh faith?

10. Romans 8:29 tells us that our purpose is to be conformed to the image of Christ. How does keeping that purpose in view change the way you pray about your current circumstances or unanswered promises?

Practical Applications (10 minutes)

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice this week before your group meets again.

- Spend time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to bring to mind a promise from Scripture or from a clear sense of God's leading that you have set aside. Write it down. Pray over it daily this week and ask God to renew your faith in it.

- Identify one area of your life where unbelief has effectively "rolled the stone in front" of something God spoke to you. Take one concrete step a conversation, a commitment, an act of obedience that represents rolling that stone away.

- Look for one person in your life whose situation feels too far gone relationally, spiritually, or practically. Resist the impulse to treat their story as finished. Pray specifically for them this week and consider how you might move toward them rather than away.

- Memorize Jeremiah 1:12 and Romans 8:28-29 this week. Let them serve as anchors when circumstances tempt you to abandon what God has promised.

Closing Prayer Focus (5 minutes)

As you close your group time, invite members to share one promise they are choosing to stand on. Pray together over each one, asking God to renew your collective faith, to help you roll away the stones of doubt and discouragement, and to give you eyes to see that his word is alive and active even when the tomb looks sealed.

Additional Discussion Questions to Choose From

Romans 8:29 describes our purpose as being conformed to the image of Christ. In what practical ways does this shape how you make decisions and set priorities in your daily life?

Jesus sent a promise that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death, yet Lazarus still died before Jesus arrived. How does this challenge or reshape the way you interpret unanswered or seemingly delayed promises from God?

The sermon describes Jesus as being angry at the crowd's unbelief even though he knew what he was about to do. What does this reveal about how God views our tendency to mourn as though his promises have expired?

Martha's transformation from being distracted by serving in Luke 10 to boldly declaring faith in Christ's resurrection power in John 11 is striking. What circumstances or encounters in your own life have produced a similar shift in where you place your focus?

The speaker confesses that he wrapped his calling to plant a church in grave clothes and placed it in a tomb. Are there promises or callings you once held closely that you have quietly buried, and what would it look like to roll that stone away?

Jesus asked the people to roll away the stone and unwrap Lazarus themselves, even though he didn't need their help. What does this suggest about the role our active participation and repentance play in experiencing the fulfillment of God's promises?

The sermon connects God's love to his willingness to move toward stinking, messy situations rather than away from them. How does this understanding of Christ's character change the way you approach people in your life who are in the middle of their own mess?

Romans 12:2 calls believers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, not by personal effort. What habits, practices, or disciplines in your life actively create space for the Holy Spirit to do that renewing work?

The speaker points out that God's timing is not ours, referencing Abraham and Sarah as an example. How do you personally navigate the tension between trusting God's timing and the very human temptation to conclude that a promise has passed you by?

The sermon suggests that standing on God's promises is directly tied to our identity as beloved children of God. How does a deeper understanding of how much God loves you affect your ability to hold onto his promises during seasons of doubt or hardship?

Leader Notes

- This message touches personal themes: faith, disappointment, delayed promises, unbelief, discouragement, unanswered prayer, calling, obedience, and hope. Create a safe space where people can be honest about places where they feel tired, confused, or unsure if God is still moving.

- A helpful direction for discussion: move from “God didn’t do it when I expected” to “God is still faithful”; from focusing only on the circumstance to focusing on Jesus; from buried promises to renewed faith; and from passive waiting to obedient trust.

- The goal is not to shame people for struggling with doubt. The goal is to help them see that Jesus meets us in our disappointment and invites us to believe again. Like Martha, Mary, and the crowd, we may not always understand His timing, but His promises are still trustworthy.

- Keep returning to the central truth: Jesus is the resurrection and the life. What looks dead, delayed, or impossible to us is not beyond His power. He may be inviting us to “roll the stone away” by surrendering unbelief, fear, offense, or resignation.

- Be careful not to let the discussion become pressure to force faith or minimize pain. Some people may be carrying deep grief, illness, family struggles, financial stress, or broken dreams. Lead with compassion and remind the group that faith can be honest and still hopeful.

- Encourage personal reflection: “What promise have I buried?” “Where have I stopped believing?” “What stone might Jesus be asking me to roll away?” “Where is He inviting me to move toward someone else’s pain with love?”

- Encourage gentle next steps: pray over a buried promise, revisit a calling, ask the Holy Spirit to renew your mind, take one step of obedience, or move toward someone’s “stinking story” with compassion. Leave people with hope: God keeps His promises, and the story is not over.

5-Day Devotional: Roll the Stone Away

Day 1: The Promise That Does Not End There

Reading: John 11:1–4; Jeremiah 1:12

Devotional:
When Jesus received word that Lazarus was sick, he responded with a promise rather than panic. He declared that this sickness would not end in death. Notice he did not say Lazarus would not die. He said the story would not end there. God watches over his word to perform it, which means every promise he has spoken over your life is still active, still moving, still being carried toward fulfillment.

The situation you are looking at may appear finished, but God is not confused. He knew the full picture when he made the promise. What has God spoken over your life that you have quietly assumed is expired? Today, resist that assumption. The promise has not changed simply because the circumstances look dark. God's word does not lose its power while it waits for the right moment to break through.

Reflection:
Write down one promise from Scripture or a word God has placed in your spirit that you have begun to doubt. Sit with it today and ask the Holy Spirit to renew your confidence in it.

Day 2: The Transformation of a Distracted Heart

Reading: Luke 10:38–42; Romans 12:2

Devotional:
Martha was once the woman too busy serving to sit at Jesus' feet. But when her world collapsed and her brother lay dead, something shifted. She ran toward Jesus, not away from him. She declared that even now, she believed God would do whatever Jesus asked. That is a transformed heart. The same woman who was distracted by dinner is now standing in the middle of grief and speaking words of resurrection faith.

This is what the renewing of the mind looks like in real life. It does not always happen in a quiet moment of prayer. Sometimes it happens in the middle of loss, when the Holy Spirit redirects your gaze from the crowd of obligations back to the one thing worth being concerned about. God is not finished shaping you. The very circumstance pressing against you right now may be the moment your own transformation takes root.

Reflection: Where in your life has distraction pulled your focus away from Jesus? Ask God today to redirect your attention back to his presence and his promises, even in the middle of difficulty.

Day 3: When Jesus Moves Toward the Stink

Reading: John 11:32–38; Romans 8:28–29

Devotional:
Jesus did not stay at a comfortable distance from the grief, the doubt, or the smell of death. He moved toward it. He has always moved toward the stinking stories. He washed feet, spoke to the woman at the well, stood between a condemned woman and her accusers, and interrupted a persecutor on the road to Damascus.

He does not wait for your life to be presentable before he draws near. Romans 8:28–29 reminds us that all things work together for good for those called according to his purpose, and that purpose is conformity to the image of Christ. That means even your most broken seasons are not outside his redemptive reach. He is not repelled by your mess. He is moving toward it with intention, because love does not retreat from the stink. It enters it and transforms it.

Reflection:
Think of an area of your life that feels too broken or too far gone for God to address. Invite Jesus into that specific place today, trusting that he moves toward what others would walk away from.

Day 4: Rolling Away the Stone of Unbelief

Reading: John 11:38–44; Matthew 17:–20

Devotional: Jesus could have rolled the stone away himself. He could have walked Lazarus out already unwrapped. But he asked the people to do what they had done in reverse. They had shut the story down in unbelief, so he called them to undo that act in repentance and renewed faith. Rolling the stone away was not about physical strength. It was about choosing to believe again.

Many believers have quietly buried promises. A calling set aside because years passed. A prayer abandoned because the answer seemed too delayed. A dream wrapped in grave clothes and sealed behind a stone of disappointment. God is asking today not for perfect faith, but for a willingness to roll the stone back. To say, Lord, I still believe what you said, even now.

The Kingdom does not need more platforms. It needs more people who say, without condition or negotiation, “Here I am. Send me.” Let your encounter with God be the source of your yes.

Reflection:
Identify a promise, calling, or prayer you have sealed away in unbelief. Take one concrete step today to reopen it, whether through prayer, journaling, or a conversation with a trusted believer who can stand with you in faith.

Day 5: Standing on the Promises That Are Still Alive

Reading: Romans 8:28–29; Deuteronomy 28:1–6; Jeremiah 29:11

Devotional:
The sermon closed with a cascade of promises: blessed in the city and the field, no weapon formed against you will prosper, the head and not the tail, a lender and not a borrower, plans to prosper and not to harm. These are not motivational phrases. They are the declared intentions of a God who watches over his word and makes it happen.

The purpose behind it all, as Romans 8:29 makes clear, is that you would be conformed to the image of his Son. Every promise God has made ultimately serves that goal. He is not simply trying to improve your circumstances. He is shaping you into someone who looks more and more like Jesus. Stand on his promises today not merely because you want a better outcome, but because you trust the character of the one who made them. He has never abandoned a promise. He will not start with yours.

Reflection:
Read each of the promises referenced in today's reading aloud. Speak them as declarations over your life. Then spend a few minutes in quiet, asking the Holy Spirit to renew your mind and deepen your confidence in who God says he is and who he says you are.