Lead a Free Indeed Group

A free sample session from Known: Leader's Guide

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Welcome, Leader

This sample is Session 1 of *Known: Leader's Guide*, Book 1 of the Free Indeed Recovery Series, plus the group agreements card. Each Leader's Guide runs its workbook as a four-session group; all six together make a 24-week Christ-centered recovery program for jails, treatment programs, residential homes and churches.

Bulk, facility and ministry orders: suzanne@hundredfoldbooks.com

Session 1 — Seen

Hagar in the Wilderness · Genesis 16

Workbook: Known: An Opening Word (with the Condemnation word study) · Where I'm Starting: A Check-In · Part 1

> **GRAB-AND-GO**
>
> **Big idea:** Being seen by God is not the same as being exposed. He looks at us to know us and look after us.
>
> **Teach:** 3 God found her · 4 *El Roi* · 5 Seen, not exposed
>
> **Light questions:** L1 What stood out? · L2 What name would you give God right now?
>
> **Small step:** "God sees me. He looks after me."
>
> **Open with:** "Condemnation is a courtroom word…" (1 min)
>
> **Copy:** Group Agreements card · Handout 1 · Before Check-In (only if you've been asked to gather results)
>
> **If you only get 10 minutes:** read the Newcomer version of the agreements and the Story, say the Big Idea in one sentence, read the small step, pray.

Goal: Participants hear that God sees them, not to judge, but to know them and look after them.

Key verse: Romans 8:1 (Stage 1: read and trace) · Genesis 16:13

Prepare

- Read Genesis 16, the Opening Word, Part 1 and "About 'go back'" (teach it every time).
- *Sensitivity note:* Hagar's story is ● WEIGHTY. Survivors of sexual abuse, trafficking or domestic violence, and pregnant participants, may connect with it strongly. Read calmly, don't linger on details, and be ready to lower the intensity. Never use it to steer decisions about pregnancy, parenting or adoption.

Session 1 always runs long. The timing below plans for it: Talk It Over is shorter and stays Light.

60-minute Plan

Welcome & Agreements (8 min) Never skip this. Say it in this order:

> **SAY THIS**
>
> **1. Welcome.** "Welcome. I'm ___. I'm not a counselor. I'm someone who's glad you're here."
>
> **2. A Christian group, by choice.** "This is a Christian group. We'll read the Bible and pray. You're welcome here whatever you believe, or don't believe. You can pray with us or just sit quietly. Both are fine. Coming is your choice. You can stop coming at any time, and it won't be held against you."
>
> **3. Agreements.** "I'll read our agreements. Pass is always okay." Read agreements 1–7 from the card (leave off #7 if no one has a case).
>
> **4. Privacy.** "I'll keep what you share private, with a few exceptions. I'm asking each of you to do the same, but I can't promise what others will do. So share what feels safe to share. If you tell me you're in danger, that you might hurt yourself or someone else, or that a child or a vulnerable adult is being hurt or neglected, I have to get help, and I may have to make a report myself. [Jails: I also have to report anything about drugs, weapons or contraband in this facility, any sexual abuse or harassment, or anything that threatens someone's safety here. So talk about the pull, not about anything you've done in here.] [Programs: In this program, I also have to tell staff if (your program's rule, for example, someone has used or brought something in).] [Church: I'll also let Pastor ___ know if I'm worried about someone's safety, and only that.] And please don't talk about your case here. I'm not your lawyer."
>
> **5. Check-in question (Light).** "What name would you like us to call you here?" *(Jails: "Your first name, and the town you're from.")* "God called Hagar by name. We'll start there too."

Before Check-In (5 min)

Have participants turn to "Where I'm Starting: A Check-In." Read each statement aloud while they circle. "This isn't a test. 'Not yet' is an honest answer."

Open (4 min)

Pray briefly. "Pray along, or just listen. Either is fine."

"God, thank you that we're here. Some of us aren't sure why we came. Meet each person where they are. Amen."

Read Romans 8:1 aloud together from the Stage 1 page and invite them to trace it. Then one minute on the courtroom word:

You might say: "'Condemnation' is a courtroom word. It means the final ruling that says you're guilty. Some of you know what it feels like to wait for one. Romans 8:1 says that for those in Christ Jesus, God's ruling is no longer in effect. It doesn't say the things we did didn't happen. It says Jesus took the verdict. This verse doesn't make a real court case or real consequences go away. It's about a different verdict: God's verdict over who you are."

(Church groups may prefer: "Most of us have a verdict we've passed on ourselves.")

(If someone asks what "in Christ" means, don't skip it: "It means belonging to Jesus by trusting him, not by being good enough or cleaning yourself up first." Offer to talk more after group.)

The Story (8 min)

Read the content note at the top aloud first (people may step out), then the Story, including the boxed "A note about this story" in the middle. Ask, "What stood out to you?"

Teaching Notes (9 min)

1. **Hagar had little say.** As far as the Bible tells us, no one asked her what she wanted. Name it gently: "A lot of us have been in situations where we had no say."
2. **Shame and invisibility go together.** Shame teaches us to hide, shrink and run. Hagar didn't run from God; she ran from cruelty. Sometimes running is how a person survives.
3. **God found her in the wilderness.** He started with her name and a question: *Where have you come from and where are you going?* He didn't blame her for running. He invited her to tell her own story.

You might say: "The first thing God did was say her name. Not her worst moment. Her name."

4. ***El Roi*** **(el ROY) — the God who sees me.** Hagar is the only person in the Bible recorded giving God a name of her own. The Hebrew word for "see," *ra'ah*, can carry the sense of looking after someone (see the El Roi word study). *(If someone asks about Abraham: in Genesis 22:14, he named a place "The LORD will provide." Hagar spoke a name straight to God.)*

You might say: "Hagar wasn't only saying, 'God saw where I was.' She was saying, 'God is looking after me.'"

5. **Seen is not the same as exposed.** Exposure is being looked at to be judged. Being seen is being looked at to be known.

You might say: "Being exposed is when someone looks at you to catch you. Being seen is when someone looks at you to know you. God wasn't catching Hagar. He was finding her."

About "go back" (teach this every time, about 1 minute): Genesis 16:9 says, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." The workbook names it in the boxed note in the middle of the story. Don't skip it or explain it away.

- **One woman, one moment.** It was God's word to Hagar, with a promise, not a rule for anyone. Elsewhere, God's law told Israel *not* to hand an escaped slave back to a master (Deuteronomy 23:15–16).

- **God kept seeing her.** When she was later sent away for good, God met her in the wilderness again (Genesis 21:17–19).
- **Never** use this passage to tell anyone to return to, stay with or "submit to" a person (or a program) that is hurting them. Leaving is not running from God. Don't use Hagar's danger in the desert to suggest going back is ever the "safer" choice today.
- **If someone is angry,** let them be: "That's an honest reaction. Hagar didn't have an easy road. And God didn't stop seeing her."

You might say: "God sent Hagar back with a promise, in one moment, to one woman. It's not a rule for anyone. If someone is hurting you, leaving is not running from God, and the Bible elsewhere says don't send a runaway back."

If someone asks why things turned so bad at home: Genesis 16:4 says that once Hagar was pregnant, she looked down on Sarai. Nothing she felt or did made her deserve to be mistreated. The Bible tells the truth about people, and God meets people who are wronged and people who do wrong. Don't raise it with the group unless someone asks (the workbook story leaves it out), and never use it to suggest that Hagar deserved what happened to her.

Talk It Over (12 min — Light only this week, unless the group is clearly settled)

○ **L1** What stood out to you in Hagar's story?

○ **L2** Hagar named God "the God who sees me." What name would you give God right now, based on your experience? (Any honest answer is okay, even a hard one.)

○ **L3** In the story, how can you tell God was *seeing* Hagar, not *exposing* her?

● **W1** Where have you tried to hide, or what have you run from? Some running keeps us safe. What did yours protect you from?

● **W2** God asked Hagar, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" How would you answer that today?

Leader tip: If someone says God feels absent or hasn't seen them, don't correct them. Hagar felt alone too, right up until the spring. "Thank you for being honest. Hagar might have said the same thing that morning."

Leading men: "Hagar was used by people with more power and had little say. Most men in this room know exactly what that's like." (See "Leading Men's Groups.")

Extra time, or meeting one-on-one? The workbook has its own "Talk It Over" page at the end of Part 1: four more questions with the same privacy reminders. Use one or two. They also work well for a sponsor or mentor between sessions.

Quiet Pages (9 min)

Journaling, the Quiet Page, drawing or rereading. "Feelings, not case details. A word, a drawing or just thinking it counts." Stay seated and color or journal yourself; don't read over shoulders. Give a 2-minute warning.

Close (5 min)

Read the small step aloud: *"Each time you catch yourself hiding or shrinking, quietly say, 'God sees me. He looks after me.' That's all. You don't have to feel it yet."*

Pray the Part 1 prayer aloud for the group. Read its first line too: "If you're not sure anyone is listening, you can read this as a question instead of a prayer." Silence is always fine. Hand out Handout 1. Thank them for coming.

45-minute Version

Welcome, agreements and privacy statement (7, never skip) · Before Check-In (4) · Romans 8:1 trace + courtroom word (2) · Story (7) · Teaching points 3, 4, 5 + "go back" (7) · Two Light questions (10) · Quiet Pages (3) · Small step and prayer (5). *Total: 45.*

30-minute Version

Welcome, agreements and privacy statement (5, never skip) · Romans 8:1 trace + courtroom word (2) · Story (7) · Teaching points 3, 4, 5 + "go back" (5) · Two Light questions (8) · Small step and prayer (3). *Total: 30.* Do the Before Check-In at the start of Session 2.

LEADER'S REFLECTION (before or after)

When have you felt unseen? When did someone see you in a way that changed things? Let that memory shape how you look at each person. *(If a reflection stirs up more than you expected, talk with your own sponsor, counselor or supervisor before you lead.)*

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Group Agreements Card

Our Group Agreements

1. We keep what's shared here private. (We can't promise everyone will, so share only what you're okay with others knowing.)
2. Pass is a complete answer.
3. One person talks at a time.
4. Share your own story, not someone else's.
5. No fixing, preaching or advice unless someone asks.
6. We come as we are.
7. Talk about you, not your case. *(Jails, courts and probation: no charges, open cases, co-defendants or court dates.) [Leader: optional; leave off if no one has a case.]*

This is a Christian group. Coming is your choice. You can pray with us or just sit quietly.

Some things I can't keep private. If someone is in danger, or a child or vulnerable adult is being hurt, I have to get help, and I may have to report it myself. I will tell: _____ (for example: Pastor ___, the program director, the chaplain)

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The 24-week Program

Run the six themes in order (Known, Where It Stops, Released, Set It Down, Already New, Not Alone) for a 24-week program, or use any one theme as a four-week group. Each participant needs their own workbook; the leader needs that theme's Leader's Guide. Email suzanne@hundredfoldbooks.com for facility pricing and Program Kits.

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