Planted Before the Rain: Leader's Guide

Welcome

This guide is for whoever leads a group through the twelve-session Bible study in the back of *Planted Before the Rain*. Everything your group discusses is already in the book. This guide adds what a leader needs and the book has no room for: a plan for each meeting, notes on where each session tends to go, and handouts with room to write.

Each person needs a copy of the book and a Bible. Any translation works. The questions describe each passage in plain words and never quote one translation, so the group can read from whatever Bibles they bring.

Every session follows the same shape. The group reads the Bible passages first, then goes back to the story, then turns the questions on their own lives, and ends with one thing to do that week. Each session says how far to read, and the questions never reach past that point in the book.

Planning your group

Pick the length that fits your calendar. Twelve weeks covers every session, and the shorter tracks keep the sessions that build on each other. Every track reads the whole book.

Week	12 weeks	8 weeks	6 weeks
1	Session 1 · Ch 1–6	Session 1 · Ch 1–6	Session 1 · Ch 1–6
2	Session 2 · Ch 7–9	Session 2 · Ch 7–9	Session 2 · Ch 7–9
3	Session 3 · Ch 10	Session 4 · Ch 10–13	Session 4 · Ch 10–13
4	Session 4 · Ch 11–13	Session 7 · Ch 14–17	Session 7 · Ch 14–17
5	Session 5 · Ch 14	Session 9 · Ch 18–19	Session 11 · Ch 18–23
6	Session 6 · Ch 15–16	Session 10 · Ch 20–22	Session 12 · Ch 24–25
7	Session 7 · Ch 17	Session 11 · Ch 23	
8	Session 8 · Ch 18	Session 12 · Ch 24–25	

Week	12 weeks	8 weeks	6 weeks
9	Session 9 · Ch 19		
10	Session 10 · Ch 20–22		
11	Session 11 · Ch 23		
12	Session 12 · Ch 24–25		

The first week asks for six chapters, so hand out books a week before you meet, or hold a short first gathering to give out books and read Chapter 1 aloud together.

A 45-minute session

1. **Check in (5 minutes).** Ask how last week's "Do" went. Nobody has to report.
2. **The Bible (15 minutes).** Read each passage aloud and take the questions under it.
3. **Back to the story (15 minutes).** The "Back to the chapter" questions, then the short summary and the questions after it.
4. **Your own life (5 minutes).** Pick one or two questions. You will not get to all of them.
5. **This week (5 minutes).** Read the "Do" aloud and pray.

If you run long, cut questions, not the Bible reading or the "Do."

What to bring

- The book and a Bible for each person
- Pens and the handout for that session (later in this guide)
- **Session 1:** a sheet of paper and an envelope for each person. They write on the paper, seal it in the envelope, and keep it until Session 12.
- **Optional:** a batch of Mason's cookies (recipe at the end of this guide)

Leading well

Your job is to keep the group in the text and in the story, and to let silence do some of the work. You do not need answers to the questions. Most of them do not have one.

- **Read the session yourself first.** Mark the two or three questions you most want to reach.

- **Bible before story.** Each session opens Scripture first on purpose. The story is the illustration, not the text.
- **Wait after you ask.** Count to ten before you rephrase. The second person to speak usually says the better thing.
- **The people in this book are real.** Mason, Stephen, Peter, and their families are alive and some will hear what groups say. Talk about them the way you would if they were in the room.
- **Keep "Do" small and private.** Ask how it went. Never ask what someone wrote.

Sessions that need extra care

Session	Why	What to do
1. The body you were given	Asks what disqualifies each person, and talks about Mason's Tourette syndrome	Model a simple, honest answer yourself. Nobody shares what they wrote.
2. A wonderful, awful day	Twenty-four children with HIV	Keep them people, not an illustration. Chapter 8 explains why every child there has HIV, in one sentence.
3. The nudge and the words	How God speaks	Watch for two ditches: every impulse is the Holy Spirit, or none ever are.
10. When everything is gone	Four deaths in the mudslide	Do not rescue it. Leave silence. Someone in your group may be grieving.
11. Yet I will rejoice	Praise inside grief	Let people say it is hard. Hope here is not the same as being fine.

If your group is young, read Chapters 8, 9, 21, 22, and 23 yourself first. They deal plainly with illness and death.

Session notes

Each note gives the aim in one line, a little background on the passages, a question to open with, what to watch for, and how to close. The discussion questions themselves are in the book.

1. The body you were given

Read: Chapters 1–6 · **Bible:** Exodus 4:10–17, 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

Aim: God uses people with real limits, and He does not always take the limits away.

- **Background.** Moses raises his objection at the burning bush, after God has already told him what to do. Paul never says what his thorn was. The group does not need to solve it.
- **Open with:** "What were you told, growing up, that you would never be good at?"
- **Watch for:** a turn into a debate about healing. Keep Tourette syndrome a plain fact about Mason, not a problem the group tries to fix.
- **Close:** hand out paper and envelopes for the "Do." Each person seals what they wrote and keeps it until Session 12.

2. A wonderful, awful day

Read: Chapters 7–9 · **Bible:** Matthew 9:35–38, Luke 5:12–16

Aim: Compassion starts with looking at what is in front of you.

- **Background.** Under the law of Moses, touching a person with leprosy made you unclean (Leviticus 13). In Matthew 10, the next chapter, Jesus sends out the same twelve who were told to pray for workers.
- **Open with:** "When did you last see something you could not stop thinking about?"
- **Watch for:** pity. The book's own note says these children were not sad, and they were not being brave about it either. Keep them people.
- **Close:** the "Do" asks people to notice one need and bring it back. Start Session 3 by asking about it.

3. The nudge and the words

Read: Chapter 10 · **Bible:** 1 Kings 19:11–13, 1 Samuel 3:1–10

Aim: God speaks in more than one way, and we often need someone else to help us hear.

- **Background.** Elijah is on the mountain because he has run for his life and asked to die (1 Kings 19:1–4). Eli is the old priest whose sons have disgraced the priesthood (1 Samuel 2), which is why the questions say he is not having a good year.
- **Open with:** "How did you make the biggest decision you have ever made?"
- **Watch for:** two ditches. One group decides every impulse is the Holy Spirit; another decides none ever are. If you have time, read Acts 16:6–10, where Paul's plans are blocked and Luke writes only that they concluded God had called them.
- **Close:** the "Do" asks each person to take one nudge to someone they trust. That was Amy's part in December.

4. Small things, multiplied

Read: Chapters 11–13 · **Bible:** John 6:5–13, Mark 12:41–44

Aim: God starts with something too small, and He seems to prefer it that way.

- **Background.** John is the only gospel that mentions the boy who brought the lunch. Mark says the widow's two small coins were all she had to live on.
- **Open with:** "What is the smallest gift that ever meant a lot to you?"
- **Watch for:** a fundraising pep talk. The point of both passages is that Jesus does not measure by the amount.
- **Close:** this is the one "Do" for the whole group. Before people leave, agree on one small repeatable thing and who will start it. The cookie recipe is at the end of this guide.

5. What it costs

Read: Chapter 14 · **Bible:** 2 Samuel 24:18–25, Luke 9:57–62

Aim: A gift that costs the giver something is a different kind of gift.

- **Background.** The threshing floor David bought from Araunah later became the site of Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 3:1). In Luke 9, each man who wants to follow has something he wants to do first.
- **Open with:** "What gift do you remember because of what it cost the person who gave it?"
- **Watch for:** comparing amounts. The question is not who gave more. It is what the gift cost the one who gave it.
- **Close:** the "Do" is private. Don't ask what anyone gave.

6. Taking it off the table

Read: Chapters 15–16 · **Bible:** Isaiah 6:1–8, Numbers 13:30–14:10

Aim: Some yeses are best settled before anyone asks.

- **Background.** Isaiah's vision comes in the year King Uzziah died. In Numbers, twelve men scout the land; ten say it cannot be done, and only Caleb and Joshua say it can.
- **Open with:** "What have you decided once, so you never have to decide it again?"
- **Watch for:** a group that hears this as "say yes to everything." Chad's promise was one specific yes, made ahead of time because he knew himself.
- **Close:** each person writes down one thing they are deciding in advance, with the date, and keeps it to themselves.

7. Planting before the rain

Read: Chapter 17 · **Bible:** Hebrews 11:1–3, Genesis 26:1–12

Aim: Faith gets to work before the answer comes.

- **Background.** Hebrews 11 opens the long list of people who acted on what they had not yet seen. In Genesis 26, God tells Isaac to stay put during a famine and not go down to Egypt.
- **Open with:** "Have you ever gotten ready for something before you knew it would happen?"
- **Watch for:** turning Peter's story into a promise that faith always gets the cow. The session asks what Peter would have lost if no cow had come. Let the group sit with that.
- **Close:** each person names one thing they are praying about and one piece of work toward it this week. Ask about it at Session 8.

8. Behind the window

Read: Chapter 18 · **Bible:** Matthew 6:1–4, Philippians 2:3–4, Romans 12:10–13

Aim: Most of the work that holds things up is done where nobody is watching.

- **Background.** Matthew 6:1–4 opens a section of the Sermon on the Mount on three practices done in secret: giving, prayer, and fasting.
- **Open with:** "Who did a lot of unseen work in the house you grew up in?"

- **Watch for:** the two traps the book names. This is not a session about mothers or wives, and selfless is not the same as tireless. Keep Mary, Attah, and Kim as people with their own parts in the story.
- **Close:** each person thanks one specific person for one specific thing this week.

9. So, so good

Read: Chapter 19 · **Bible:** 2 Corinthians 8:1–5, 1 Kings 17:8–16, James 1:27

Aim: Learning to receive from people who have less than you.

- **Background.** In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul is describing the churches of Macedonia. The widow Elijah meets lives in Zarephath, outside Israel, during the drought he announced.
- **Open with:** "Is it easier for you to give a gift or to receive one?"
- **Watch for:** sentimentality about poverty. The book's note says Mary, Stephen, and Peter are the competent ones in this story. Keep the talk on what they did: sold, taught, planted, fed, hosted.
- **Close:** each person receives something this week without evening it up.

10. When everything is gone

Read: Chapters 20–22 · **Bible:** Job 1:13–22, Lamentations 3:19–24

Aim: Lament. This session is meant to hurt.

- **Before you meet.** Read Chapters 21 and 22 yourself. Think about who in your group has a recent loss, and tell the group the week before that this one is heavy.
- **Background.** Job never learns why any of it happened. Lamentations mourns the fall of Jerusalem.
- **Open with:** no warm-up. Read Job 1:13–22 aloud, slowly.
- **Watch for:** your own urge to close on hope. Session 11 is for hope, and it only works if this one is allowed to hurt. If someone says they don't understand, don't correct them.
- **Close:** there is no "Do" this week, on purpose. End with a short prayer or a minute of silence.

11. Yet I will rejoice

Read: Chapter 23 · **Bible:** Habakkuk 3:17–19, Romans 8:35–39, Psalm 13, Job 38:31–33

Aim: Praise that keeps the losses in view.

- **Before you meet.** On the six-week track, the group skipped Session 10. The third question has the group read Job 1:13–22 first. Read it aloud, slowly.
- **Background.** Habakkuk's book is an argument with God that ends in a song. Psalm 13 is a lament that complains first and sings last. In Job 38, God finally answers Job and never tells him why.
- **Open with:** "What stayed with you from last week?" (On the six-week track: "What stayed with you from Chapters 21 and 22?")
- **Watch for:** a quick jump to "it all worked out." Stephen still grieves. Worship and missing them live side by side.
- **Close:** each person writes their own list and their own "yet." Nobody reads it but them.

12. Two cows

Read: Chapters 24–25 · **Bible:** Galatians 6:7–10, Joel 2:21–26, Job 42:10–17, Matthew 25:14–23, Joshua 4:1–9

Aim: Faithfulness over years, and stones to remember it by.

- **Before you meet.** Remind everyone to bring the envelope from Session 1. Think ahead about one thing your group could commit to together.
- **Background.** Joel speaks after a locust plague stripped the land. In Job 42, God doubles Job's herds but gives him ten children, the same number he lost. Joshua 4 comes as Israel crosses the Jordan into the land.
- **Open with:** the envelopes. Let people open them and read silently.
- **Watch for:** time. This session has the most to finish. Save ten minutes for the "Do."
- **Close:** choose one thing as a group, put a date six months out on the calendar, and have each person name one stone. Put that date on your own calendar too, and call the group together when it comes.

Handouts

Print one per person for each session. Each handout carries the session's personal questions and its "Do," with room to write. The rest of the questions are in the book.

Session 1 · The body you were given

Exodus 4:10–17 · 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

1. God didn't fix Moses' speech or Paul's thorn. Why not?
2. What is the difference between an excuse and a real limitation? Is Mason's Tourette's one, the other, or both?
3. What do you think disqualifies you? Who told you that?

Do: Write down the thing you believe rules you out. Seal it in the envelope and keep it. You'll open it at Session 12.

Your notes

Session 2 · A wonderful, awful day

Matthew 9:35–38 · Luke 5:12–16

1. Have you ever seen a need you could not stop thinking about? What did you do with it?
2. Can a person feel joy and grief in the same afternoon? Which one do you trust?
3. Mason didn't say much on the bus going up the hill. What do you think was going on in him?

Do: This week, notice one need near you that you would usually walk past. Don't fix it yet. Write it down, pray about it, and bring it back next time.

Your notes

Session 3 · The nudge and the words

1 Kings 19:11–13 · 1 Samuel 3:1–10

1. Which of the four nudges in the story would you have trusted at the time? Which would you have explained away?
2. Who confirms things for you, and what do you do when nobody will?
3. How do you tell a nudge from indigestion, or from the thing you already wanted to do?
4. When have you been the adult in the room who almost said no?

Do: Write down a nudge you are sitting on right now. Take it to one person you trust and ask them honestly whether they see anything in it.

Your notes

Session 4 · Small things, multiplied

John 6:5–13 · Mark 12:41–44

1. Why does God seem to prefer starting with something inadequate?
2. Mason couldn't finish it alone. Does that make it less his?
3. What is the smallest useful thing you are capable of this week?

Do: Work out what your group could raise in one month doing one small repeatable thing. Don't just calculate it. Start it.

Your notes

Session 5 · What it costs

2 Samuel 24:18–25 · Luke 9:57–62

1. Giving away money you have and giving away how you earn money are different things. How?
2. What have you given that actually cost you something?
3. Is a gift that costs you nothing still a gift?

Do: Give something this week that you would rather keep. Nobody has to say what it was.

Your notes

Session 6 · Taking it off the table

Isaiah 6:1–8 · Numbers 13:30–14:10

1. What have you already decided, before the situation comes up? What are you still deciding case by case?
2. Name an invitation you have let pass while you waited for a better time.
3. Is deciding in advance an act of faith or an act of self-knowledge? Can it be both?

Do: Decide one thing this week before it is asked of you, and write it down with the date. Tell nobody what it is until it comes up.

Your notes

Session 7 · Planting before the rain

Hebrews 11:1–3 · Genesis 26:1–12

1. What is the difference between faith and wishful thinking? Where exactly is the line?
2. Has anyone ever done something for you before you knew you needed it?
3. What would change about the way you serve if you assumed God had been working on the situation for months before you turned up?

Do: Name one thing you are praying about. This week, do one concrete piece of work toward it, your version of planting a field. Report back next time.

Your notes

Session 8 · Behind the window

Matthew 6:1–4 · Philippians 2:3–4 · Romans 12:10–13

1. Who in your life is doing the work that makes someone else's thing possible? Do they know you have noticed?
2. What makes a friendship, when one side has more to give than the other?
3. Is there something good you do that you would stop doing if nobody ever found out?

Do: Find one person whose work is holding up something you get the credit for. Tell them, specifically, what you saw them do.

Your notes

Session 9 · So, so good

2 Corinthians 8:1–5 · 1 Kings 17:8–16 · James 1:27

1. Have you ever been given something by somebody who could not afford it? What did you do with it?
2. Why is receiving harder than giving? What does receiving cost you that giving does not?
3. If your own Bible were hard to get at, how long before you noticed?

Do: Receive something this week without paying it back or evening it up. Say thank you, and stop there.

Your notes

Session 10 · When everything is gone

Job 1:13–22 · Lamentations 3:19–24

1. Does this change how you read the earlier chapters?

2. Job's friends sat with him in silence for seven days, and that was the best thing they did. What does that suggest about helping someone who is grieving?
3. Is there a good answer to why? Does there have to be?

Do: Nothing this week. Sit with it.

Your notes

Session 11 · Yet I will rejoice

Habakkuk 3:17–19 · Romans 8:35–39 · Psalm 13 · Job 38:31–33

1. Habakkuk lists everything that is gone before he says "yet." Why does the order matter?
2. Is praising God in grief the same as being all right? How would you tell the difference?
3. Does complaint belong in worship?

Do: Write your own Habakkuk 3:17 (your list of what is gone or missing), and then write your own "yet." Nobody reads it but you.

What is gone or missing

Yet

Session 12 · Two cows

Galatians 6:7–10 · Joel 2:21–26 · Job 42:10–17 · Matthew 25:14–23 · Joshua 4:1–9

1. What makes something a character trait instead of a one-off good deed?
2. What are you willing to still be doing in ten years?
3. Open your envelope from Session 1. Does it read differently now?

Do: Pick one thing as a group and commit to it past the end of this study. Put a date on the calendar six months out. Before you leave, name one stone.

What we committed to	Date we meet again

My stone

Mason's cookies

The chocolate chip cookie Mason sold at chai, fifty shillings each. It comes from *Rift Valley Recipes*, the RVA community cookbook (p. 245), with Amy's changes in brackets.

Ingredient	Amount
Blue Band margarine, melted	1⅓ cups [Amy: ½ Kimbo]
White sugar	1 cup
Brown sugar	1 cup
Eggs	2
Vanilla	2 tsp.
Flour	4½ cups [Amy: 3]
Baking soda	1 tsp.
Salt	1 tsp.

Ingredient	Amount
Chocolate chips	2 cups [Amy: a bag]

Mix the margarine, sugars, eggs, and vanilla well. Add the flour, soda, and salt. Stir in the chocolate chips. Bake at 350°F (180°C) for 10 to 12 minutes.

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The book and updates on Stephen's family and the cows are at chadwallacebooks.com.