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*This week, we begin our Christmas series, “Baggage”! We all carry things that weigh us down that shape how we walk through life. This series will invite us to face what we’ve been carrying, name what holds us back, and discover the freedom Jesus offers when we release those weights. This season, let’s make room for Jesus by setting down the baggage that keeps us from knowing, trusting, and following Him fully.*

NEED A RESOURCE, HAVE A QUESTION, OR WANT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION?  
Let us know how we can help! Contact your groups director or [discipleship@rockbridge.cc](mailto:discipleship@rockbridge.cc)

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**“If destruction fails to entangle us, distraction will do its best.”**  
[Beth Moore]

**LEADER RESOURCES ||** **Leader Note** *We do our best to equip, empower, and encourage you to shepherd your group well. Access a resource by clicking on the underlined title and share them with your group!*

- **Passage Summary**
  - Despite the loss of her husband, Anna chose to seek God with near continual concentration and perseverance. God showed her His son, Jesus, because she gave God her undivided attention and undivided hope. Her life illustrates the spiritual power and importance of focus.
- **Luke 1-9 Summary Video**
  - This video covers the birth of Christ and His early life. It might be useful for someone who is less familiar with the stories in the Bible or who needs a refresher.

**ENGAGE & CONNECT ||** **Leader Note** *The goal for the icebreaker is to prepare your group for the conversation ahead by connecting with one another’s hearts and building joy together.*

The lady in today’s discussion is “goals”--someone we could all look up to for who we want to be when we’re a hundred years old. What kind of person do you want to be at age 100?

**BEGIN WITH PRAYER ||** **Leader Note** *Begin your time together thanking God for his presence and praying His word back to Him. Ask a few people to pray, taking a posture of humility and dependence!*

“Lord, give us the patience, endurance, stamina, and faith to wait for You and devote ourselves to keep asking for more of You, keep seeking Your face, and keep knocking at Your door.

*“He said to him, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’”*

[Matthew 22:37]

**BIG IDEA ||** **Leader Note** *Read this aloud so your group knows the theme of today’s reading and discussion.*

Anna chose the devotion of concentration, so she consecrated her life to the Lord.

**PASSAGE & DISCUSSION || Leader Note** Have people read aloud the passage as instructed. Your role is to FACILITATE, so keep your group moving along, encourage people to share, and look for opportunities to point out the grace and glory of God! Here are two reminders: 1) Every question does not have to be answered ... go where the Spirit leads! 2) Answers do not have to be read aloud ... they're for guidance!

1. In the sermon we heard, "*Test your attention.*" What do you think about right before sleep? What is your first thought in the morning?

Have someone read aloud Luke 2:36-38. Consider having someone else read it aloud again, possibly in a different translation to gain another perspective (i.e. CEB, the Message, Amplified).

2. How did Anna spend her life? How is your life AS the temple of God different from Anna's life IN the temple of God? *We sometimes think of how God fits into our lives. But Anna wanted to place her life in orbit around where God is, not just invite Him to join in what she was doing. As temples of the Spirit of God, we bring Jesus with us... that includes when we are acting in His Name the way He has taught, and it includes when we act in His Name and desecrate His name with how we walk.*
3. What things pull your concentration and focus away from God? What things eat up your attention and time and make it hard to pray or read scripture? *These things can be sources of idolatry, so it's worth making a plan—not just to set certain things aside while reading scripture or praying, but to deal with them permanently and get them out of the way. This could be through being rid of them, or with something like "work stress" or "kids interrupting," the Spirit may guide the person in other ways to handle the distraction.*
4. Why do those things have so much power over you? *It is important to practice questioning things, rather than letting them continue just because they've been that way for so long. Pause and ask Jesus for His word to be the sharp sword of truth to cut our hearts open and expose the motives behind what is happening on the surface.*
5. Anna was able to devote all her life to one thing. If there was one thing that really mattered that you could devote your life to, what is it? *This question might reveal someone's passion or calling. Something like "loving the lost—I've been really burdened for them," or "homeless ministry" or "loving on little kids and showing them Jesus for the first time" is worth connecting with someone in the church who can help make that a reality.*
6. Have you been asking for something in prayer for a long time? How long have you been waiting for Jesus like Anna did? *People in your group who have been praying for something a long time would benefit from the encouragement of having you join with them in praying for that thing. Whether it's salvation for a loved one or to see breakthrough in something, they've faced discouragement, distraction, and wavering hope. Join them in praying. Perhaps you will get to share in their joy when Jesus does it.*
7. What is something you've given your attention and focus to that has slowly changed you over time? *It might be helpful to offer some categories here. We're often changed so gradually that we miss it. Did focusing on a particular news channel change someone's political views? Focusing on growing as a parent? Focusing on a problem making you more anxious? Focus affects our direction for good or for bad, so this one can go either way.*
8. What about yourself would you like God to transform? What do you need to focus on so you don't miss it? *It would be especially helpful to think of this question in terms of the fruits of the Spirit, as they all come from focusing on Christ: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,*

*faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We don't get them by focusing on the thing itself, but on the Source, that is Jesus.*

9. How can you live a set-apart-for-God life and also do normal things like dishes and grocery shopping? *The book "The Practice of the Presence of God" might be useful to recommend here if this question is a struggle for people in your group, or if people are ready to devote more of their lives to constant prayer and being in God's presence. Another book recommendation is "Liturgy of the Ordinary," and it has prayers to help us rethink everyday moments as opportunities to talk to God or ask for specific blessings.*
10. What gets your energy that needs less of it? *This can be obvious stuff like "your phone" or deeper things like "rumination on that one person who hurt me." Attention is energy, direction, and discipleship. We teach our brain by digging trenches in it—what paths we walk over and over become trenches, ruts, and caverns over time. It's hard to change paths and come home, but that's what repentance is. It's worth it!*

**STEP OF OBEDIENCE || Leader Note** *This is an opportunity for people to put into practice what the Spirit is inviting them to do and live in obedience to God for the sake of love! You can encourage your group to be accountable to one another and use these to follow up with one another throughout the week.*

Anna practiced *alert availability*.

*As you consider your next step, reflect on:* 1) How can you linger on, look at, and listen to Jesus this week? 2) What teaching of Jesus can you meditate on and really dig into over and over again?

*Give your group a few moments to reflect on their answers to the questions above. Then have your group answer the question aloud. Feel free to separate into smaller groups of 2 or 3 for this question, so each person has others praying with them for the needs they're taking before the throne. The possible next steps of faith below are not for discussion, but simply a resource for your group members.*

### **Step of Faith Ideas**

1. Let's work toward being a hundred years old and still living lives of purpose!
2. What lesser things steal worship that belongs to God? Let's get idols away from our faces this week so we can see God more clearly.

**PRAYER FOCUS || Leader Note** *Be intentional about saving at least 5 minutes to pray together. Try the prayer activity below or pray for one another's personal requests!*

### **No Rivals to God**

God deserves our best attention, and that takes intentional focus and slowly building a life devoted to Jesus, His teaching, and prayer.

- Pray for a specific person every time you do an everyday task, like brushing your teeth.
- Add another prayer to another task each day this week, so you slowly build the habit.
- Make one of your "everyday task prayers" be what someone else in the group has been asking for. We can all be praying for each other's requests!
- Close your time by reading this prayer together:
  - *"Lord, burden our hearts for the needs of those around us. Fill us with desire for more of Your presence as we seek You throughout this week. Reveal what needs to go and*

*what needs to begin for us to live set apart for You. We aren't waiting for the new year—we need more of You now."*