

Study Guide

Unfinished is a challenging book, asking you to reconsider your life and possibly make changes that will enable you to fulfill God's call to build his kingdom. You may be wondering, *What do I do now?* This study guide is designed to help you wrestle with the ideas in *Unfinished* and contemplate its message. It also will help you not only think about the book but also take steps to put its message into action.

You are a character in God's story. In his great plan he has a unique role for you to play. Take the time, in a group or by yourself, to use this study guide to help deepen your commitment to God's call.

Chapter 1: The Meaning of Life and Other Important Things

1. In this chapter Rich writes that each of us is a character that God has written into his big story. Do you believe this? How does it affect your view of your life?
2. Do you have a worldview that you live by? How do you describe it? Consider your worldview in these dimensions: money, family, career, morality, politics. How are your attitudes in these areas influenced by God's truth?

Going Deeper

Consider some of the prevailing views in our society and reflect on their ramifications. Then go into God's Word and look for the countering truths expressed in the Bible. Jot down your ideas and Scripture references.

Truism	Biblical Truth
You should be able to do whatever you want as long as it does not hurt other people.	
The one who dies with the most toys wins.	
Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing.	
We can all find God in our inner self.	
It's a dog-eat-dog world, and only the strong survive.	
All religions are just different roads to the same truth.	
Everyone should have an equal opportunity to pursue his or her dreams.	

Take Action

Contemplate what you believe and how you are putting it into practice in your life.

Pray

Do you struggle to live out the worldview that you espouse on paper? Pray that God would grant you wisdom and courage to build your life on his firm foundation.

Chapter 2: God's Big Story

1. Rich says the Bible is a love story, and he offers a brief history of God's relationship with humanity as described in the Bible. Have you ever thought of it as a love story? In light of that idea, how do you fit into this story of God's love?
2. Have you had a come-to-Jesus moment, one that transformed the way you saw your life? What was that like, and were you able to sustain that passion longer than those first early days? Is such an experience necessary in order to dramatically change your life to follow Jesus?

Going Deeper

Reflect on Rich's suggestion that the Bible is, at its essence, "the story of a Father's love for his children." Study Scripture to make a list of specific stories about fatherly love. Then think about how the love story continues by making another list of the ways God has shown his love for you throughout your life.

Take Action

How much of the Bible have you read? Make a list of all the books of the Bible you have yet to read and make a plan for reading them in the next twelve months.

Pray

As the Word of God the Bible is God's direct revelation. Pray that as you read through Scripture, God would reveal himself to you and you would see in his Word the love story Rich described.

Chapter 3: Why Did Jesus Leave?

1. Have you ever wondered, *Why did Jesus leave?* Why might it be important to consider this? Do you ever ask God why he doesn't just fix all the brokenness in our world?
2. As you reflect on Rich's description of God's big story in Scripture and the mission Jesus left the church to accomplish, how does that change your worldview? How do you see the world differently? How does or should that change the way you live?

Going Deeper

Explore the concept of worldview and how it relates to specific conditions in our world today. First identify your own perspective on these conditions. Then try to step outside yourself to understand the perspective of others in different circumstances.

- Informed by my worldview, here is what I think of . . .
Poverty: _____
Success: _____
Gender: _____
Capitalism: _____
Hunger: _____
- If I lived in China, my worldview on poverty might be:

- If I lived in the West Bank, my worldview about success might be:

- If I lived in Afghanistan, my worldview about gender might be:

- If I lived in Russia, my worldview about capitalism might be:

- If I lived in Ethiopia, my worldview about hunger might be:

- Discuss with a group whether it is possible for people of diverse nationalities to share the same worldview if it is shaped by faith in Christ rather than culture.

Take Action

Are you familiar with Ascension Day? It occurs exactly forty days after Easter in the church calendar, and it honors the day Jesus ascended into heaven. Find out more by researching it, and then consider your own ideas about what his departure means for us today.

Pray

Since “the head thinks where the feet stand,” as Frei Betto stated, take time to pray for those living in poverty and ask God for guidance on how you and your church might make a difference in their lives.

Chapter 4: Magic Kingdom, Tragic Kingdom, and the Kingdom of God

1. Rich writes about the disparities between his home church and the Haitian church he visited in the refugee camp. Anyone who has witnessed the extreme poverty overseas has experienced the moral discomfort of knowing that some people have so little while others have so much. Do you think it is the responsibility of Christians to alter that disparity? Why or why not?

2. If the kingdom of God provides the solution to the disparity between the Magic Kingdom and the Tragic Kingdom, what can the church as a whole do to be a part of the solution? It may seem overwhelming. What can you do to build the kingdom of God wherever you are?

Going Deeper

Rich points out that the kingdom of God is mentioned more than 125 times in the New Testament, often by Jesus himself. Mine the scripture references below for insights about the kingdom values Jesus imparted and what they mean for you and your church today.

Scripture	What values emerge from this?	What does this mean for my church?	What does this mean for me?
Matthew 13:44: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."			
Mark 10:25: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."			
Luke 9:62: Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."			

Scripture	What values emerge from this?	What does this mean for my church?	What does this mean for me?
Luke 13:29–30: “People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”			
Luke 17:20–21: Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”			

Take Action

Think of a time in which you have experienced the moral discomfort over the disparity of wealth in the world today. How much of your time and money do you sacrifice specifically to address this disparity?

Pray

Pray that your heart will be broken by the things that break the heart of God. Ask that God will grant you eyes to see the world’s pain and give you the compassion to take action.

Chapter 5: The Mission of God

1. Rich says that he has never heard a sermon fully explaining “that the central mission of Christ and the purpose he gave to his church was to proclaim, establish, and build God’s kingdom on earth.” Does your church make the kingdom of God central to its mission and ministry? Describe the hallmarks of God’s kingdom coming on earth.
2. Might you be practicing a faith of decisions rather than one of discipleship? Why does Rich link being a disciple of Christ to the “whole gospel” of taking the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth?

Going Deeper

Rich writes, “When we say yes to Jesus, we say yes to his forgiveness, but we also say yes to his commands and yes to his kingdom. We merge our stories into his story and join the unfolding plan of God to establish and grow his kingdom.”

Look up the verses below and write down their implications for your life.

- Luke 21:2–4 (giving)
- Ezekiel 16:49 (caring for the poor)
- Isaiah 42:3–4 (upholding justice)
- 2 Corinthians 5:20 (being a witness)

Prayerfully explore the changes you can make in your life to more purposefully participate in the mission of God.

Take Action

Brainstorm—on your own or with friends—what you could do to live out the whole gospel. Be specific as you think of practical ways to take action.

Pray

When we say yes, we say yes to God's whole and unfolding plan. Pray without ceasing that "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Chapter 6: The Invitation of God

1. Many Christians never become full citizens of God's kingdom, as doing so can be a bit like enlisting in an army for Christ. But the truth is, either you're all in or you're not. Which side are you on? Consider 2 Timothy 2:3–4 as you contemplate what being a "good soldier of Christ" means to you.
2. Christians often talk about the gospel only in terms of proclamation. But Rich says being ambassadors for the kingdom also involves compassion, justice, and restoration. What do you think about this broader definition, that the gospel is both words *and* deeds?
3. This chapter says that the church is the organizing principle of God's kingdom. What would it take for the church to really be an "outpost of the kingdom" of God? Do you see your church as a community governed by God's values?

Going Deeper

Most Christians know the Sermon on the Mount and can recite some of its famous phrases. But how can Jesus' words cut deeper into our lives and churches as a "blueprint for this new way to live in God's kingdom," as Rich suggests?

Reflect on each of the nine "blessed are" statements (Matt. 5:3–12). Think about and discuss how each was revolutionary in Jesus' time—and how it is revolutionary today. Which cultural truism does each overturn? Also note your own fears or reluctance about being poor in spirit, meek, a

peacemaker, persecuted, and so on. Try to articulate what you risk if you live out these new ways of relating to God and others. And what might you gain?

Take Action

Love requires tangible expression. It needs hands and feet. Read Matthew 22:37–40 several times, listening for God’s direction. Commit on paper several tangible actions you can take to be the hands and feet of Christ in the days ahead.

Pray

We all have withheld a part of ourselves from God’s control. Pray that God would shine a light on those parts of you that may not be enlisted fully in God’s mission. Ask for the boldness to enlist those areas of your life.

Chapters 7 and 8: RSVP and Let’s Make a Deal

1. If Jesus called you to “make you fishers of men,” would you hesitate or step right up as Peter and Andrew did? There is a cost to the invitation. Think about the most valuable things you possess and list them. What kind of sacrifice would it involve to lay them unconditionally at Jesus’ feet?
2. Reflect awhile on what you may have given up already or placed on the altar for God. How did that sacrifice change your life?
3. Stu and Robin Phillips offered to God what they loved most. What would it mean for you to give to God as sacrificially as Stu and Robin did?

Going Deeper

All of us struggle to give up what we most treasure even when God asks us. The sharp edge of sacrifice daunts us, despite God’s assurance that the rewards will be great. Explore the counterintuitive depth and power of

Jesus' words in Luke 9:24: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."

Think about how the following statements can be true in theory—or are true in practice in your life:

- *When I give away my money, I become rich.*
- *I can fast to become full.*
- *Even if I am uprooted, I am at home.*
- *As a slave to God's law, I am most free.*
- *My pain is a route to joy.*
- *My emptiness allows me to be complete.*

What other statements can you think of that are relative to the sacrifice of being "all in" for Jesus?

Take Action

God may not be asking you to give up anything for him. Still, it can be a good practice *to choose* to give up something for God, as many do for Lent. What symbolic item or habit might you give up for God?

Pray

We all need to hold the things of this world loosely. Pray that God will release your grip on material things and give you a greater love for him and his.

Chapter 9: We Were Made for More

1. Looking objectively at your life, list two or three things you have entered into your "life's GPS" as destinations. How have those things altered your course?
2. How might your life change if you entered "serve Christ and build his kingdom" into your life's GPS?

Going Deeper

Rich suggests a list of new GPS directions for our lives if we allow God's plan to be our destination. Study Scripture to find verses matching each of these:

- Put the needs of others ahead of your own.
- Take detours when someone needs your help.
- Get off the highway to spend time with family and friends, even when it slows you down.
- Pick up hitchhikers.
- Use your money to build up God's kingdom, not yours.
- Don't confuse career success with being a successful person.
- View your work as a means to the end of serving God, not as an end in itself.
- Invest your time, talent, and treasure in being rich toward God rather than becoming rich yourself.
- Stop to help those broken down on the side of the road who need a little help on their journey.
- Pay close attention to your moral compass.
- Keep your relationship with God as your North Star.

Take Action

There is sacred work to do to be the hands and feet of Christ. Consider the list above, also found on page 110. What would you add to the list for your own journey? Could you begin this week?

Pray

We all need a more faithful spiritual life. Pray that God will grant you a greater sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Ask for clarity as the Holy Spirit speaks in your life.

Chapter 10: God's Spiritual GPS

1. Rich says that the Holy Spirit is “the single enabling power that now makes it possible for ordinary human beings to be transformed and live differently.” From the “cluelessness of the first disciples” to secular human history—the Holy Spirit has made the difference. What other manifestations have you observed of the Holy Spirit informing our lives, culture, society, and churches?
2. The Holy Spirit also provides directions, prompting us to reach out to a neighbor, pray for a family member, or spend time with a hurting friend. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit's direction in your life?

Going Deeper

Following the Holy Spirit in our lives requires us to develop ears to hear the promptings of the Spirit. We need to learn to listen to God. When Mother Teresa was asked what she said in her prayers, she responded, “I don't talk. I listen.”

She practiced what is known as *apophatic* prayer, which seeks to quiet the mind in order to draw close to and hear God. Take twelve minutes, quiet and alone, and simply listen for God. Don't come with questions and requests, but seek to enter God's presence through quiet listening. Consider how you might pray by listening more.

Take Action

Reflect on the times when you have felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Did you take action? If not, why not do so right now?

Pray

God is calling you to the front lines of service. Pray that God will pour his Holy Spirit upon you, ignite a holy fire within you, and guide you into his gospel revolution.

Chapter 11: Called for a Purpose

1. What do you think of Rich's prescription for discovering God's calling in your life (commit, pray, prepare, obey, act, trust)? How are those steps incorporated into your own life?
2. This chapter explores the idea of *calling*. Do you have the sense that you were called for a purpose? In God's Great Commission, what might God be calling you to do? Are you doing it right where you are today?
3. As you consider the previous questions, you may realize that you are in a season of preparation. What might God be teaching you as you trust him to reveal his calling for your life?

Going Deeper

Discerning God's call requires the willingness to obey. Reflect on verses such as Matthew 28:20, James 1:22, 1 John 2:3–6, and others. Choose one verse that is most convicting to you. Isolate the words and phrases that spiritually nudge you and spur you on.

In this chapter Rich writes, "Disciples are not expected just to 'talk the talk' . . . they are to 'walk the walk.'" Check yourself: Are you doing nothing more than waiting for a plum kingdom assignment? Consider Rich's list on page 138 about being obedient in the small things: changing bad habits, sharing your money generously, tithing, putting others ahead of yourself, and so on. Keep a checklist of the small, daily acts of obedience you may need to work on. If you think these things are not important, you may lack trust in God for the right outcome—his, not yours.

Take Action

God has likely been prompting you about his call on your life, but perhaps you have been too busy to take note. Dedicate some quiet time now for praying, listening, and planning the journey ahead for him.

Pray

Ask God to strengthen your obedience and to grant you clarity on how you might live an extraordinary life in his service.

Chapter 12: Spiritual Dominoes

1. These stories of “spiritual dominoes”—Rahab, Robert Wilder, Steve Reynolds—are inspiring. Can you think of people you have known or read about, people who, through small acts of faithfulness, have had significant repercussions?
2. How does it change your perspective to realize that God can—and does—turn small acts of faithfulness into extraordinary works?
3. Rich notes how God changed the world through ordinary means: Moses’ staff, David’s sling, Peter’s net, and Paul’s pen. What is the staff or pen that you can offer for God to use through you?

Going Deeper

Rich describes spiritual dominoes and biblical change agents, such as Moses, David, Peter, and Paul, to show how ordinary people are powerfully used by God. Study some of these examples and take note of the qualities these people brought to the table. How would you rank their qualities against high-profile successful figures in today’s society?

Not . . .	But . . .
Ready-made heroes	
In it for themselves	
Craving the glory and the credit	
Needing to know the end from the beginning	
Making it on their own	

Maybe you are ready right now to start a chain reaction. Think about the people in your life whom you can bless and influence. God has put you together for a reason.

Take Action

Resolve now to encourage one or more of the people you have just identified by telling them about how God uses small things to do great deeds.

Pray

Mother Teresa said, “Don’t look for big things, just do small things with great love. . . . The smaller the thing, the greater must be our love.”¹ Pray that God would make you faithful and full of love as you do those small things.

Chapter 13: Outposts of the Kingdom

1. Do you believe the church is the organizational unit of the kingdom of God—God’s means for changing the world? Do you think it is important to be connected to a local church?
2. The church may be the instrument God uses, but that does

not mean he needs all the bells and whistles we often have at church—the building, programs, worship teams, and so on. Are there things in your church that may not be contributing to God’s kingdom work?

3. What does a church need in order to execute the five dimensions (worship, model, disciple, mobilize, and go) that Rich suggests should define communities of believers?

Going Deeper

Rich suggests churches use his five-point checkup to evaluate their potential for changing the world for Christ. Read each point carefully, and then rate your church honestly. Study the Word to discover passages and verses to anchor you in your efforts to turn *church* into a verb.

Checkup Points	Grade	Convicting Scripture
Belief above behavior		
Explanation replacing exhortation		
Inward instead of outward		
Apathy replacing outrage		
Institution instead of revolution		

Take Action

It is never enough to simply critique. If you feel that your church has failed Rich’s five-point checkup, what concrete steps can you take to help achieve the desired outcomes?

Pray

Ask God to inspire you to be a worker in his “harvest field,” a catalyst in your local church to jump-start its transformation into a “kingdom church.”

Chapter 14: The Gates of Hell

1. What do you think about Rich’s decision to include a chapter on Satan in this book? As Rich states, talk about the devil can seem so medieval. Do we need to think about spiritual opposition as we pursue God’s call for our lives? Why or why not?
2. Rich says, “Every act of kindness, each moment spent in prayer, and every expression of love in the name of Christ pierces the heart of the enemy.” This brings the battle between good and evil into our everyday attitudes and actions. Do you see it as spiritual warfare when dealing with coworkers, neighbors, and others with whom you may not be inclined to always act with kindness? Explore your thoughts about this.

Going Deeper

Just before Rich accepted his position as president of World Vision, he received an unusually compelling offer from another company for a position that would have been rewarding financially. But it is not unusual for obstacles or distractions to be placed in the path of doing God’s will. Consider Job 1.

How might the enemy place obstacles or temptations in your path to prevent you from doing what God is asking of you? Can you list a few? Honestly consider which ones might hinder you from following God’s call.

Take Action

How can you practice greater acts of kindness in the name of Christ? Choose two or three that you can practice every day.

Pray

We do spiritual battle. Pray for insight regarding spiritual opposition to God's work in your life, and pray for spiritual strength in the battle.

Chapter 15: God's Great Adventure for Your Life

1. Rich tells a number of stories of people making decisions to more radically follow Christ's call. Which one comes closest to your experience? Is yours a bloom-where-you-are-planted story or one that is more drastic, like Joey Lankford's?
2. Rich says, "The key battles . . . hinge on the decisions of the little people." After reading *Unfinished*, what decisions do you need to make?

Going Deeper

Read the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11. What would it look like for you to act in faith like Enoch, Noah, and Abraham? Take some time to create a list of things you hope may someday be included in your obituary. If you died today, which of the things you have listed could not be said truthfully about you? How might that change your priorities and choices going forward?

Take Action

God has invited you to join him in changing the world. What is the role you are to play in his story? Write down steps you can start taking today that will bring you closer to fulfilling God's call on your life.

Pray

You already have taken several steps in the direction of God's plan for your life. Pray for endurance as you consider how to join Jesus' mission to change the world. Pray for the perseverance needed to complete the journey and the courage to continue when obstacles or distractions appear in your way.