

invitation to consider the one degree difference

Have you ever stopped to consider the direction of your life? In other words, do you know where you're heading? Are you aware of how your decisions today are influencing your tomorrow?

Have you noticed that it only takes one step in the wrong direction (or the right direction) to totally reroute where you thought you were heading?

This is the one degree difference. And it matters in the small things and big things.

purpose

The purpose of this guide is to teach the next generation (10 year olds and up) how to live in such a way that their decisions and actions reflect the Truth found in Scripture. The principles are all biblically based, while the illustrations and suggestions for how to engage the group can be tailored to the audience.

overview

The study is divided into three parts, which can be presented in one sessions, such as a youth group event, or in a sequence of individual lessons.

Part 1

- a. A Small Thing Isn't Really Small
- b. Why the Big Things Start Small

Part 2

- a. A Course is Determined by Degrees
- b. We Can't Stop Temptation
- c. We Can Control Our Emotional Response

Part 3

- a. We Can Decide What We Believe
- b. We Can Make Truth-Based Decisions
- c. We Can Be Accountable Before We Act

audience

This lesson can benefit a number of different audiences in a variety of settings:

Individually

As a personal guide for a short spiritual retreat with the Lord.

One-on-One

This could easily be used as a topical discussion guide in any age/season mentoring or accountability relationships.

In a Group Setting

This topic is great to use as a single or multi-session topical study with tween, teen, or college age students. It can work well as a co-ed youth group discussion or even for a women's Bible study or event.

preparation

Prayer

Take a few minutes to close your eyes and quiet your heart, as you seek the Lord for His will in how to use this material, and to give Him all of your preparation time.

Brainstorming

- Spend a few minutes looking at the One Degree Handout and the One Degree Poster (downloadable from <http://www.moreto.be.com/2012/09/15/download-onedegree/>), to get a big picture of this study.
- Decide on your audience.
- Consider when and where.
- Make a list of the supplies you'll need for the study, such as:
 - ✓ Bible
 - ✓ Journal
 - ✓ Worship Music
 - ✓ Optional items for illustration points or activities

Study Time

If you will be teaching on this topic, devote at least two hours to study of the material.

- With a notebook and your Bible in hand, read through the handout.
- Note any questions that arise and search the Scriptures for the answers.
- Jot down any personal stories you may be able to share in a group setting.
- Look up the Scripture verses and read them in context.
- Pray for God to reveal this lesson's Biblical truths personally.
- Pray also for anyone you might be teaching.

Action Checklist

As you prepare to lead others through this topic, be sure to:

- Pray daily in anticipation of the gathering.

- Confirm with participants through email or phone reminders.
- Have a number of extra Bibles on hand and pens or pencils accessible to the group.
- Provide a stack of index cards for jotting down notes, Scripture verses, or submitting questions.
- Make copies of the One Degree handout and poster.

discussion points, questions, and application

PART 1

A Small Thing Isn't Really Small

Picture yourself sitting on a bench at the mall, waiting for your friend to show up. A woman walks by with a sweet smelling caramel machiatto and your senses are heightened (okay, if you don't like coffee, pick something else that would tempt you...like Cinnabon!). Suddenly, you're wondering, where is that Starbucks? I think I need one right now! So you get up, wander around the corner, and come face-to-face with the opportunity to indulge. Next thing you know, you're ordering a tall coffee, charging a drink you don't have the cash to spend, and putting 180 unnecessary calories into your body. Did you even think about what you were doing? Was it only guided by feelings and temptations?

It is such a small little decision to buy a coffee on a whim. Of course, one drink isn't going to hurt you significantly. It is only 180 calories and a few bucks. But what if you indulge every time your senses are tickled? How will that effect your bank account and calorie count over the course of a week, month, year? It is so easy to take the small things so casually, but should we?

Why the Big Things Start Small

For some of us, the big things in life are pretty easy to tackle because we've been carefully taught by our parents, church leaders, and teachers the difference between right and wrong, good and bad. But then there are other big things, like making decisions about college and career, deciding on whether to continue in a relationship, choosing moral rights from immoral wrongs that have been culturally skewed, which present another challenge all-together. This becomes an even greater challenge when those in authority over us conflict over right versus wrong, or have stumbled through their own decision making.

Consider how you respond when a friend or family member, whom you deeply love and respect, suddenly ends up committing adultery. You might be wondering if their act is really so wrong, considering the circumstances surrounding their behavior. You might find yourself thinking, "That will never happen to me...because..." while wrestling through the effects of their poor choice on your life. There-in lies the crux of the problem.

**We all have the capability to step
one degree in the wrong direction.**

Do you really think the decision to cheat on a mate happens suddenly? It doesn't. The big things always start small. Maybe "she" foolishly said "hi" to an old friend on Facebook a few months ago, which was followed by an email or text. Maybe "he" met up with "her" for coffee, just to talk. Maybe they couldn't stop thinking about how good it felt to be with that other person. First an emotional affair bloomed, and then something

illustrate it

Divide your group into teams of two or three to act out a scene in which a temptation causes a change in direction. Write out these scenes on a slip of paper and put them in a basket to be drawn by each group. Have props on hand, too.

Here are a few ideas:

1. A person drinking coffee, as in the lesson.
2. Use of an iPhone, iPad, or some other piece of technology.
3. Role playing watching TV and responding to an ad.
4. A "classic" peer pressure scene of drinking, smoking, or drugs.

Discuss the challenges faced in each situation as well as viable solutions.

small became something big. Could it have stopped there? Yes! But a course correction like this requires a radical response. It would have been easier to make the wise decision back when the temptation was small...back when the temptation was spurred on by a hurt or fear or feelings of neglect. Back when a small thing needed big attention.

Application Questions

1. What things do you categorize as small things and why?
2. What things do you categorize as big things and why?
3. Have you ever gone in the wrong direction and experienced the consequence of arriving at an unwelcome destination? What was that like? What did you learn?
4. Do you see the one degree difference playing out in your life, personally?
5. Have you been affected by the one degree difference lived out by others?

draw it or list it

As you work through the application questions, have on hand a white board or poster board and make a list of small things versus big things. Launch from this list into a discussion about what makes these things big or small, and if there really is any difference.

PART 2

A Course Determined By Degrees

Could it be that we have trouble handling the big things of life because we've not disciplined or trained ourselves in handling the little things?

**One decision is like one degree.
It only takes one degree in the wrong
direction to get radically off course.
It also takes only one degree
in the right direction to get back on course.**

While we will all make mistakes and venture off in the wrong direction from time to time, it is possible to decide how we would like to respond to the small and big things ahead of time. Through understanding the cycle of temptation and outcomes, we can train ourselves to be careful in how we live, putting our best effort toward staying on course rather than veering off by even one degree.

The oneDEGREE Course

- ➡Temptations influence feelings.
- ➡Feelings influence beliefs.
- ➡Beliefs influence decisions.
- ➡Decisions influence actions.
- ➡Actions influence outcomes.

We can't stop temptation.

We will always be tempted by things sweet and exciting, exhilarating and off limits, appealing and inviting. Although we can't stop temptation, we can be savvy at recognizing our weakness and running from it. We can put up boundary lines and seek accountability relationships to help us stay the course and not get off by one degree.

Read and Discuss

1 Corinthians 10:13 NLT

¹³ The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

Luke 22:40 NLT

⁴⁰ There he told them, "Pray that you will not give in to temptation."

make it interactive

Using the oneDEGREE illustration handout, walk through the various stages in a oneDEGREE course.

To make it interactive, on white poster-board write out each of the words in the same colors as in the handout. On the back of the poster, write out the questions.

Option 1: Pick six people and give each one a different poster with the word. Tell them to get together and figure out the order. Once they have it, have them line up and begin the dialogue with asking what others think. Is the order correct? How would they line up the stages?

Option 2: Have each person holding a sign share aloud the questions on the back of the sign. Then ask them to answer one of those questions. You can open up the discussion to let the others answer the remaining questions.

Mark 14:38 NLT

³⁸ Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

We can control our emotional response.

We've been designed by God to experience all sorts of feelings -- joy, contentment, frustration, jealousy, anger, sorrow, disappointment -- our emotional response is not meant to dictate our actions. We are expected to exert self-control, so that we do not give into temptations that will lead us astray. This takes time, practice, repentance, and accountability, as the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in us!

Read and Discuss

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 NLT

⁶ So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. ⁷ Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. ⁸ But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

1 Peter 1:13 NLT

¹³ So think clearly and exercise self-control. Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 5:8 NLT

⁸ Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

speak it out loud

Take the time to read these Scriptures as a group. Assign each one, have it read aloud, and pause long enough for a response.

Ask:

1. What do these verses promise or teach:
...about God?
...about ourselves?
...about how to live?
2. To what situations could you apply these Scriptures?
3. How do these verses encourage you?

demonstrate it

Have a pitcher of dark drink on hand, such as soda or grape juice, and a pitcher of water. Have at least one glass and fill it with water. Then add to the glass a little bit of the dark drink. As you do, talk about what it looks like to add a bit of sin to your life, a little bit at a time. Go slow and wait for their reactions. Discuss what it means.

Then, show them how God forgives our sin in Christ Jesus and this process is like the pouring out of the darkened drink, which you can pour into a bowl. While we are forgiven, the effects of sin still exist. But as we draw close to the Lord and live in the Truth according to the Word, God continues to pour into us -- pour more water into the glass at this point. Emphasize that over time, we will be restored, and how this is a constant and on-going process.

Application Questions

1. Do you agree or disagree with the one degree course?
2. How do you handle situations that require self-control?
3. What are you tempted by and what doesn't tempt you?
4. How do you face your struggle with temptation?
5. What should you do when someone else is tempted by something but you are not? For additional discussion, dig into Romans 14:24.

the need for Jesus

This is a great opportunity to share with the group about how Jesus meets us in our time of temptation. In a conversational way, share these main points:

- Sin is disobeying God.
- We all sin (Romans 3:23), but God made a way to forgive us for our sin (Colossians 2:13-15) through Jesus's death on the cross. His death paid the price for our sin.
- When we put our faith in Jesus as Lord, and acknowledge our sin and need for a Savior, we receive the gift of salvation and the promise of eternity with God (Romans 10:9-10).
- Through salvation - putting our faith in Jesus - we receive the Holy Spirit to guide and lead us (John 14:-15-17, 26).
- However, we still struggle in the flesh to obey God. We still sin, which is like a wall between us and God, making it hard to sense the Spirit's leading and causing us to make unwise choices.
- That wall of sin removed through confession (telling God what we did) and repentance (making a u-turn from that behavior), which is marked by godly sorrow (Romans 4:7-8).
- God forgives us and removes that wall, growing us in our faith and maturity, with a greater desire to do the right thing (Philippians 2:13).

Pray

Pause for a quiet time of silent prayer, inviting a time of accepting Jesus as Lord.

Offer

Let your group know you are available to speak with them privately at the end.

PART 3

We can decide what we believe.

In the face of temptations and emotions gone wild, beliefs have to kick into high gear to stay the course. But how do we know what to believe? And how do we know what is true?

Romans 12:2 NLT

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NLT

We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.

If we identify ourselves as a Christian, our baseline for truth is found in the person of Jesus Christ and the revelation of the Word of God. The Scriptures tell us in John 14:6 that Jesus Christ is the way, the Truth, and the life. Jesus, the Savior and Redeemer of this world, died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, opening for us the gates of heaven and also enabling us to enter into a personal relationship with God. Through faith in Christ, our life course is radically transformed, but all too often our thinking doesn't reflect the transformation. We think like the old person instead of the new one we've become. As Christians, our source of truth is the Word, yet we are easily swayed by the opinions of others, and even the culture at large. Sometimes it is hard to know what to believe. The Bible promises us that the Scriptures are useful for teaching and training (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). We can use the Word as a guide for how we should love, serve, give, receive, grow, mature, and live wisely. *2 Corinthians 10:4-5, Romans 12:2, Colossians 1:15-23*

We can make truth-based decisions.

Every decision we make needs to come up against the truth, which is found in the Scriptures. But how do we practically do this? The Bible doesn't have google search feature. We can't type in, "God, should I ... ?" So how do we know what God wants for us? How can we determine what is right or true when it seems there are no clear answers for our personal situation?

fill in the blanks

Take a few minutes to role play a few different scenarios using the questions to consider when facing a challenging situation.

Possible Situations:

- going to a friend's house when there are no parents at home and you don't tell your own parents this factor
- choosing to not date, but a new opportunity presents him/herself
- a friend offers a copy of the test with the answers for you to use to study
- you are left home alone and are tempted to watch TV the whole time

Ask:

- Is this _____ consistent with the character of God?
- Is this _____ something that brings honor to God?
- Is this _____ reflective of what the Bible says is true?
- Is this _____ something that will lead me, or someone else, to sin?

Psalm 139:23-24 NLT

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

The answers we are looking for can be found through seeking God, reading the Bible, and listening to Christians in authority over us. As we spend time in the Word, it becomes stored up in our minds, and rather than a google search, the Holy Spirit works inside of us, drawing out the truth we learned at another time that is relevant for our situation today.

When we face challenging situations, we can ask:

- Is this _____ consistent with the character of God?
- Is this _____ something that brings honor to God?
- Is this _____ reflective of what the Bible says is true?
- Is this _____ something that will lead me to sin?

When we don't know what to do, we can always approach God, the Word, and other Christians thoughtfully and humbly, in search of the truth. *Psalm 139:23-24, 2 Timothy 3:16*

We can be accountable before we act.

Sometimes, we simply won't know what God wants for us. That is why we need to come under the counsel of mature Christians, asking not only for their wisdom but also for them to teach us how to read the Scriptures. We also need to have accountability relationships with other Christians who also want to honor God and live according to the Word. These relationships ought to be pursued for the purpose of sharing honestly about what is going on in life. Confession is key to staying on course. *Colossians 3:9-10, James 5:16*

Colossians 3:9-10 NLT

Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.

Application Questions

1. What is the primary influence on your beliefs?
2. If it is not the Word, would you be willing to start reading at least a chapter of Scripture daily to explain this influence in your life?
3. What is your understanding of confession and repentance? Does it make sense? Do you do it? If not, why? If so, how would you explain it to a friend?
4. To whom are you accountable? Is that relationship helpful to you?
5. Do you need to find an accountability partner? If so, do you know who to look for and what to expect?

take the one degree challenge

We are not meant to journey through life alone. We need to be thoughtful and intentional in how we live, which is why reading the Bible and getting in accountability relationships is so important. So, will you take the oneDEGREE challenge to encourage you to get on course and stay there? Commit for the next 31 days:

1. Pray for God to bring you an accountability partner.
2. Read one chapter of Proverbs per day and journal/pray about how your daily decisions are lining up with God's word. Consider using the Immersed Challenge Resources (<http://www.moretobe.com/immersed/>) as an easy way to start this new habit.

how to find an accountability partner

By considering and applying these suggestions, you should be on your way toward finding a healthy accountability partner:

- **A Professing Christian:** an accountability partner should identify themselves as a follower of Christ
- **Spiritual Fruit:** an accountability partner should live in a way that is consistent with the Scriptures so that you can see spiritual fruit
- **Availability:** an accountability partner should have time to meet with you at least once a week in person or by phone
- **Interest:** an accountability partner should be someone who has already showed an interest in your life