



BROOKSWOOD
CHURCH

Life Group Leader Handbook

**Leading People in a
Growing Relationship with
Jesus Christ**

How to Use This Handbook: We recommend reviewing p. 3-25 to plan and prepare before your group starts meeting each year, to review mission, foundations of spiritual growth and group life, and guidance in planning.

P. 26-38 contains short sections on leader skills and group dynamics; we recommend reviewing one of these each week or bi-weekly throughout the year. If your group has immediate needs, navigate by topic.

More resources are available at brookwoodbaptist.com/resources

The Big Picture For Group Life	3
The 5 Stages of Spiritual Growth	4
The Biblical Shape of Spiritual Community	5
What Happens in a Life Group	6
Key Life Group Values	7
Life Groups are About Following Jesus Together	8
The First Meeting...Planning for Success	9
Key Questions When Choosing Curriculum	10
How to Lead a Small-Group Bible Study Effectively	10
Study the Bible Well & Help Others Do the Same	12
Inductive Bible Study	13
Bible Study & Meditation	21
Leader Skills & Group Dynamics	26
1. Prepare for Meetings	26
2. Small Groups 101	26
3. How Do I Keep the Discussion Going?	27
4. Facilitate Group Participation	27
5. Levels of Communication & Building Trust	28
6. Healthy Group Discussion	30
7. Staying on Topic	30
8. Leading Different Personalities	31
9. Actively Listen as a Non-Anxious Presence	32
10. Practice Speaking Well	32
11. Ask Good Questions	33
12. Model Openness and Transparency	33
13. Deal with Difficult People & Situations to Foster Fellowship & Peace	35
14. Involve People in Looking Beyond the Group	35
15. Serving as a Group	36
16. An Open Secret: Ministry and Service	37
17. Develop & Train Leaders	37
18. Work Cooperatively with Other Leaders	38

The Big Picture for Group Life

Groups have the power to change lives. “It happened once, when a simple carpenter shared His life with 12 close friends. For three years they ate together, played together, learned together, travelled together, laughed together, cried together, and even fought together. Their lives were changed, and then they went out and changed the world.... Healthy small groups have the potential to serve as a microcosm of the church in its purest form: a safe place where people can connect with God, and find resources and relationships to nurture their spiritual growth.” – Angie Ward

Group Life in Context

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20):

*Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

The Mission of Brookwood Church: *To honour God by leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ through love and community.*

People become fully devoted followers of Jesus through a process of spiritual formation directed by the Holy Spirit in the context of life-giving relationships in response to the obedience of the follower. John wrote, “Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). Paul described the goal of the spiritual life as “becoming mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). A fully devoted follower of Jesus is one that increasingly looks like Him (Bill Hull):

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| • <i>Transformed Mind</i> – Believes what Jesus believed (core beliefs) | <i>Christ Centered</i> |
| • <i>Transformed Character</i> – Lives the way Jesus lived (character) | <i>Safe Environments</i> |
| • <i>Transformed Habits</i> – Trains as Jesus trained (spirituality) | <i>Dynamic Spirituality</i> |
| • <i>Transformed Relationships</i> – Loves as Jesus loved (relationships) | <i>Accountable Relationships</i> |
| • <i>Transformed Service</i> – Ministers as Jesus ministered (service) | <i>Generosity</i> |
| • <i>Transformed Influence</i> – Leads the way Jesus led (mission/purpose) | <i>Relevance</i> |

There are identifiable steps along the journey toward growth in spiritual maturity and vitality:

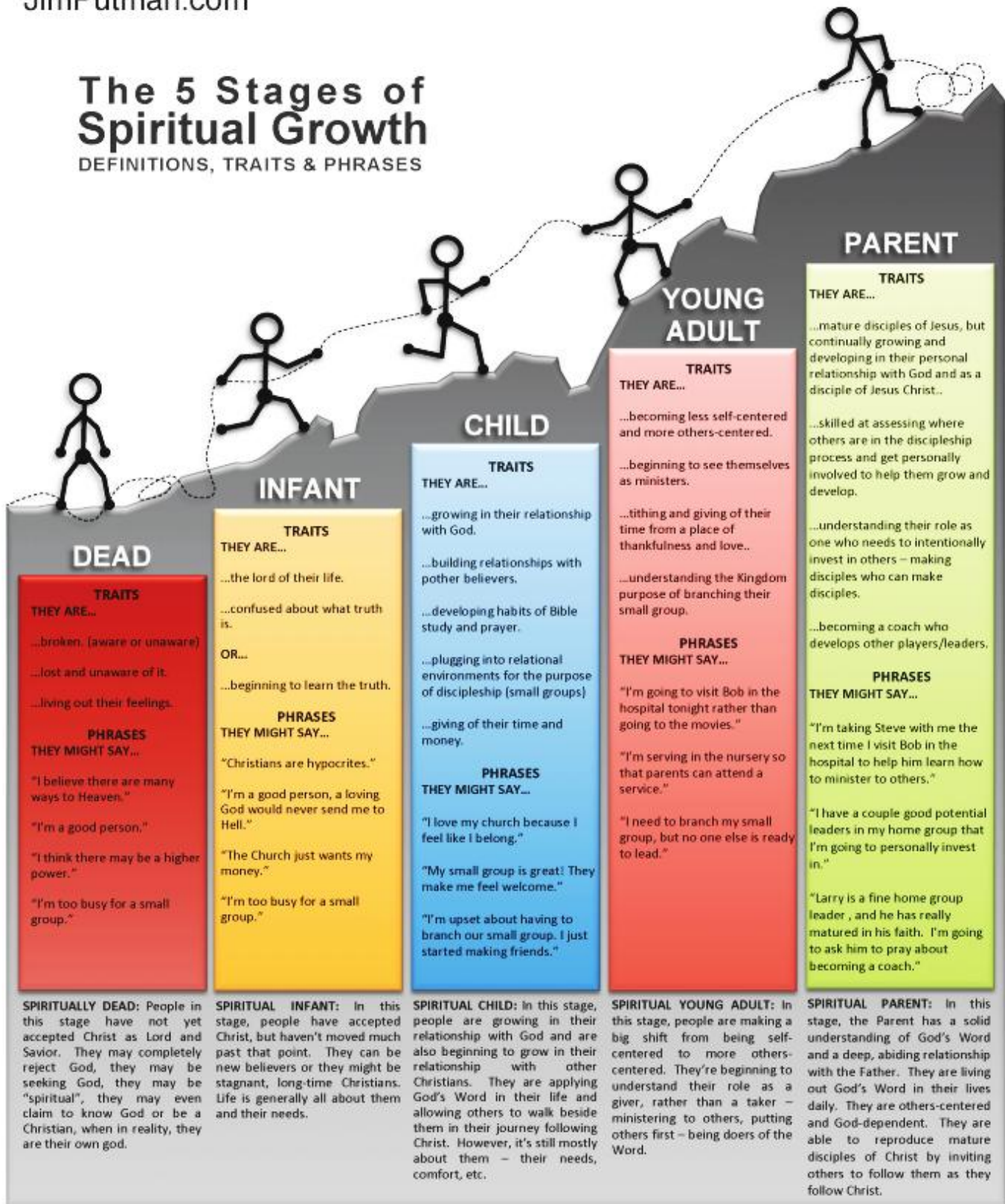
- **Unfamiliar with Christ** – “I am really not that interested”
- **Exploring Christ** – “I believe in God but I am not sure about Christ”
- **Beginning in Christ** – “I believe in Jesus and am working on what it means to get to know Him”
- **Growing in Christ** – “I feel really close to Christ and depend on Him daily for guidance”
- **Centered in Christ** – “God is all I need in my life. He is enough. Everything I do is a reflection of Christ.”

The task of the church is to come alongside and help people **take the next step** in their spiritual journey.

JimPutman.com

The 5 Stages of Spiritual Growth

DEFINITIONS, TRAITS & PHRASES



The Biblical Shape of Spiritual Community

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. – 1 Peter 2:9

“The biblical designation of what it means to be the people of God is always plural. It implies and insists on community. This again reflects the very nature of God, who exists in perfect community as a Trinity. The missional follower of Jesus cannot conceive of their spiritual identity outside of being in accountable and encouraging relationships with other Jesus followers. Church is not a part of life for the missional Jesus follower; it is a way of life with others who are on similar journey.”

– Reggie McNeal

Our task is to craft the right kind of spiritual environment in which discipleship (becoming like Jesus) can flourish and where everyone on the journey of faith learns what it means to become like Jesus and help others become like Him. Our biblical call is to be a disciple-making community, a Christ-centered culture, modeling the reality of spiritual life in Christ and taking it into the world where we live and work and interact with those outside the fellowship.

Why Small Groups?

1. **To fulfill the vision of Christ** – to provide an environment where people can come to know and follow Christ and then make Him known in their spheres of influence outside the faith community.
2. **To fulfill the call to be the Church** (*ekklesia*). Jesus birthed the church at Pentecost to be a community that would model His love to each other and the world. Christian life and ministry is experienced not in isolation but in community. Jesus has not called us to be spectators, but participants in His mission. Small groups provide a place to live out the life of faith together.
3. **To seek and find the “sought”** – a small group is a platform for praying for friends and family far from Christ and provides a place for a first, non-threatening step to faith in Christ and into the life of the faith community.
4. **To nurture the spiritual lives of those newly following Jesus.** The support of other Christ followers in the initial stages of new faith in Christ is essential. Following Christ is often more “caught than taught.”
5. **To obey the call to be and make disciples.** To flourish on the journey of faith toward spiritual maturity, we need other followers of Jesus to encourage us, model the Christ life, and to be mutually accountable in our commitment to Jesus. Together, we’re better.
6. **To be fruitful in ministry.** The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit has been given to the Church and to every follower of Jesus Christ to enable us to be effective in carrying our Christ’s mission. Small groups provide a setting for the gifts of the Spirit to be explored and deployed to the benefit of others both within and beyond the Church.
7. **To fulfill the “one another” commands.** The journey of Christian faith is a life of mutual sharing between fellow followers and a participation in the things of Christ. This common life, common hope, and common calling is expressed in fellowship or *koinonia*. Personal contact and investment is needed to obey these commands.

What Happens in a Life Group?

Group Life is formative – a group is not an end in itself; it is a vehicle for spiritual transformation in the lives of people based on the following dynamics which characterize all groups to varying degrees:

- Belonging – the relational dynamic – people need to connect
- Becoming – the formational dynamic – people need to grow
- Blessing – the missional dynamic – people need a mission/purpose

The Four Basic Components of Group Life:

All groups in the church share these common elements and values to some degree as determined by their focus and reason for being.

1. **LOVING** – John 13:34-35 – Love is expressed in a variety of ways in group life. First, we express love to God through prayer and worship – both through our praise and by our practice. We express love to one another as we serve one another and care for each other in our group. John records Jesus as saying, “A new commandment I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so must you love one another.” It is Christian love that makes our groups distinctive.
2. **LEARNING** – Matthew 11:29 – In Matthew, Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Learning about Christ, His mission, and His will for our lives is a key element of group life. All groups are on the learning curve guided by the influence of the Holy Spirit – they learn what the Bible teaches, they learn about one another, and they learn about themselves.
3. **SERVING** – James 2:17 – James writes, “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” Service and good works (expressions of love and mercy) are a part of any vibrant, healthy small group. Every dynamic group needs a focus beyond itself and its members. Your group will need to decide how you will express Christian love to your community at large and to others in the community of faith.
4. **DISCIPLE-MAKING** – Matthew 28:18-20 – Groups cannot forget that “making disciples of all nations” is essentially what they are all about. We influence the world through the compelling dynamic of our love for each other and the world. Groups need to make decisions and behave in ways that ensure the group’s vision and purpose is carried out. That means intentionally looking for ways to serve and reach others for Christ.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. – Hebrews 10:24-25

Key Life Group Values

(Adapted from *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* by B. Donahue)

All groups operate according to certain values and expectations. Often these go unspoken or unwritten. In order to foster open communication and clarity about the purpose and values of the group, **it is important to get your core values in writing and review them together regularly.** Below you will find values that are key for life group relationships. This is only a sample set of values. **You and your group should create your own list with the kinds of values central to your group.** The important thing is that your members are committed to growing in interpersonal relationships and maturity in Christ.

- **Safety and Confidentiality...** Honest, open relationships must be guarded with an agreement of safety – that what is said in the group will remain confidential, that opinions will be respected and differences will be allowed.
- **Openness & Honesty...** Openness in the relationships promotes honesty and an ease of sharing feelings, struggles, joys, and hurts. Reaching the goal of authentic relationships begins with being open with each other and by opening the group to new members. The desire to be honest with each other is critical to authentic relationships.
- **“I” Statements...** It’s easy to talk about the issues of others, but for our purposes, we want everyone to be real about themselves. Encourage and gently correct toward the use of “I” statements rather than “them”, “the church”, “us”, “we”, “you”, etc.
- **Sharing...** Members need to be sensitive about the amount of time they share.
- **Listening...** Let’s value one another during the discussions by really listening to what is being shared. Try to avoid thinking about how you are going to respond, or what you are going to say next. Also, we are not here to ‘fix’ each other; we can speak of our own experience, but are not here to judge or direct someone else’s.
- **Care & Availability...** Group members are to care for each other. Part of care is a consideration of another’s well-being. Another part of care is making one another’s resources available to each other, just like the early church. This means people’s time, attention, insight, as well as material resources, are made available for each other in order to help meet needs and serve one another.
- **Prayer...** Prayer is valued in group life. The group comes together before God to praise, ask, confess, and thank Him for all He has done. Prayer encourages group members to be humble, knowing that all comes from God. In prayer, they also feel valued and come to understand their own worth. As you see God move to answer the prayer concerns of your members, the whole group will be very encouraged.
- **Sensitivity...** A commitment to sensitivity to the needs, feelings, backgrounds, and current situations of other group members will help build relationships in the group.
- **Accountability...** In authentic relationships, accountability is voluntary submission to another group member(s) for support, encouragement, and help in a particular area of your life, giving them some responsibility for assisting you in that area.
- **Evangelism...** As a group, evangelism is being committed to expanding the community of believers through such things as sharing your faith, using the “open chair” to invite people in, or other types of outreach.
- **Multiplication...** Having your group grow and eventually birth a new group enables the group to carry out the vision of seeing more people connected in Christian community, growing in their relationship with Christ.

Life Groups Are About Following Jesus Together

A disciple is someone who follows Jesus, is being changed by Jesus, and engages in the mission of Jesus. There are four steps to the growth of a disciple: Connect, Grow, Serve, Engage. And each of these happens best in a group! Ideally, this looks like:

CONNECT in relationship with Jesus & each other (Matt. 4:18-22, John 15:1-4, Col. 3:12-17, Heb. 10:19-25, Acts 2:41-47)

1. People are building relationships with each other inside and outside of our group time.
2. People notice when someone is missing from our meeting, and they reach out to that person.
3. People participate in discussions with transparency and honesty.
4. We love to invite others to our group, and we create a safe environment that welcomes any person.

GROW as followers of Jesus (Mark 1:35, Phil. 2:1-11, Col. 1:28, Rom. 8:29, 12:1-2, 1 Pet. 2:1-12, 2 Pet. 3:18)

1. We have great discussions that move from information to transformation – how the things we’ve learned cause us to live differently.
2. People are growing into new stages of spiritual maturity (see p. 4)
3. People are following Jesus across every sphere of their lives (family, work, finances, etc.)
4. We encourage each other to develop personal habits of reading Scripture, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines

SERVE with the heart of Jesus (Mark 10:45, John 13:12-17, Rom. 12:3-8, 1 Cor. 12:12-31, Gal. 6:2, Eph. 4:3, Col. 1:12-14).

1. People are discovering their spiritual gifts and using those gifts to serve in the church.
2. We practice the ‘one anothers’ of the New Testament, especially serving and caring for each other.
3. If a conflict or misunderstanding occurs, people respond by seeking understanding and forgiveness.
4. Our group finds opportunities to serve out in the community.

ENGAGE in the mission of Jesus (John 17:15-18, Matt. 28:18-20, 5:13-16).

1. We spend time praying for non-believers and then we invite them to our church.
2. People understand Jesus’ mission of discipleship and they’re finding ways to disciple others.
3. Our group has an intentional leader that keeps our purpose of discipleship clear.
4. We multiply by raising up new leaders and starting new groups.

The First Meeting: Planning for Success

Quality groups don’t just happen. They are developed by leaders who carefully and thoughtfully seek the Lord for guidance. Please review this tip sheet two weeks prior to your first meeting.

Tip 1: Pray for God’s blessing... Leading people is an awesome responsibility and a huge challenge. Pray daily for God to give you insight into His Word. Have a servant’s heart as you lead your group. If the Lord has called you to lead the group, don’t worry, He’ll equip you and teach you to lead it.

Tip 2: Understand the context of your first meeting... People may be a little hesitant about being there. Don't be discouraged if they come and then don't continue. You are feeling each other out and not everyone will find your group to be a fit.

Tip 3: Prepare the meeting with an apprentice... Prayerfully recruit an apprentice who is willing to help lead the group. Partnering with an apprentice spreads the load of leadership. Identifying an apprentice also reinforces the multiplication value as God adds to the numbers. If you can't identify an apprentice prior to your start-up, pray for God to help you identify one.

Tip 4: Prepare the environment... Make sure the meeting area is prepared before the arrival of group members. Leaders need to be at the door welcoming guests. Review this checklist before the meeting and select what is best for your group:

- Remove all outside noise distractions such as cell phones, pagers, TV's and so on
- If possible, no pets in the meeting area. Nothing will distract your meeting quicker than a pet being cute!
- Light refreshments (group members could volunteer to bring refreshments to subsequent meetings)
- Seating, lighting, comfortable temperature.

Tip 5: Warm up the group with an icebreaker... Icebreakers help develop the group's relational component. Early on, they should be light and humorous. As the group deepens, you can move toward deeper sharing icebreakers. Don't rush through this, especially early in your group life. Relationships are what will keep people coming back. Work for everyone to speak early - within the first 5-10 minutes.

Tip 6: Share the nuts and bolts of a small group... What are the ground rules?

- Groups meet two to four times each month
- Leaders may host the group in their home, but it is preferable to have a host home. Don't rotate too much; people may drop out because they don't know where the group is from week to week
- Meetings should last from 1.5 hours to 2 hours – begin and end on time
- Basic group agenda could look like:
 - 30 minutes of conversation, icebreakers, and refreshments
 - 30-40 minutes for group study and discussion.
 - 20 minutes for sharing of prayer requests and group prayer. (People may be hesitant to pray out loud. Help reduce the fear and intimidation by spending a week, sometime in the first couple of months, focusing on the concept and practice of prayer. Don't randomly call on someone to pray – check with him or her beforehand to make sure they're comfortable praying in a group.)
- Homework in the study discussion should be based on what will best serve your particular group and where they are in their spiritual growth. It can be a positive spiritual practice, for daily devotion and spending time in God's Word, for our own personal relationship with God, and for our own maturing in the faith, however it can become a burden if too time-consuming or intense.

Tip 7: Allow time for questions... Clearly state the details of the group. If member sense that you are unclear about the direction of the group, they may back off. Don't be fuzzy about the details. Be as specific as you can when answering questions.

Tip 8: Follow up the first meeting and invite everyone to the next one... Pursue your group members after the first meeting. Often people need personal communication from the leader to realize that they are wanted and valued. Your follow-up phone call is a high-touch relational message. It is vital to the growth and life of your group.

Tip 9: Build a scriptural foundation... At some point in your first meeting you may want to place the role and importance of groups in a biblical framework:

- Exodus 18:19-27 – Jethro gives Moses advice on how to care for the nation of Israel. Notice that the plan is to divide people into groups, each with a leader.
- Acts 2:42-47 – This passage represents a description of the early church and its values. Explore what that first church did and the impact of their life together. How could your group follow this model?
- Acts 5:42 – The early church had two places to meet and gather: temple courts and houses. The church understood the value and role of both as they sought to grow in their faith: supporting each other, learning from each other, simply living life together. Small group community is the relational heart of Christianity.

Tip 10: Aim high... Cast a vision and set goals for the group. Here are a few examples:

- To grow a relationally close group that uses the Bible as a guide for life.
- To discover and deepen friendships applying biblical values to our lives.
- To learn to pray for and with each other.
- To go the extra mile in caring for each other.
- To be the church of Jesus Christ in its smallest form.

Key Questions when Choosing Curriculum

- What is our purpose?
- Where is the group spiritually at this point in time?
- What are our key needs? What are people in the group dealing with?
- What is our current focus? Where are we as a group on the spiritual journey?
- What are our limitations? How long? How much homework? How difficult?

**Bible study curriculum is available via Right Now Media, which you can access through our church subscription by visiting brookwoodbaptist.com/rightnowmedia/ . On p. 12-25, there are options for Bible study methods you can also use in your group. We are also happy to help with recommendations for Bible studies and small group resources to meet your groups needs; contact discipleship@brookwoodbaptist.com or sean@brookwoodbaptist.com*

How to Lead a Small-Group Bible Study Effectively

by Jack Kuhatschek

The success of any small group starts with the leader. Effective leaders are not teachers or lecturers. They are facilitators and catalysts whose primary job is to get people to interact with each other. Knowing this should be

a relief to many leaders. Not everyone has gifts of teaching, but almost anyone can lead a dynamic discussion by following certain guidelines:

1. **Come to the study prepared.** Ask God to help you understand and apply the passage to your own life. Unless that happens, you will not be ready to lead others.

How much time should you spend in preparation? That depends. If you are using a good study guide, it will probably take you about an hour to read the passage, work through each question in the guide and become familiar with the leader's notes. If you decide to write the study yourself – a practice I don't recommend for most people – your preparation will take much longer. It takes at least four to five hours to write an effective study.

2. **Pray for the members of your group before the study.** If the Bible is to have an impact on their lives, the Holy Spirit must be at work in their hearts before, during, and after the study. That's what makes a Bible study different from any other type of discussion. Jesus said in John 15:5, "You cannot do anything without Me."
3. **Begin the study on time.** If people understand the study begins on schedule, they will work harder to get to the meeting on time. But if you get into the habit of waiting for those who are late, they will assume that the discussion begins whenever they arrive.
4. **At the beginning of your first time together, explain to the group that the studies are meant to be discussions, not lectures.** Encourage everyone to participate, but realize that some may be hesitant to speak during the first few sessions.
5. **Encourage more than one answer to each question.** A good open-ended question should have more than one possible answer, and each person in the group has his or her own unique perspective. So be sure to ask, "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anyone else?" until several people have had a chance to respond. When you sense the people are ready to move on, ask the next question.
6. **Try to affirm people's answers whenever possible.** People are often reluctant to speak up at first, but if they know you appreciate their insights they will warm up much more quickly. Simple words of affirmation such as "That's a great insight," "Good response," "Excellent idea," or "I hadn't thought of that before" are enough to show people that you value their comments.
7. **Don't be afraid of silence.** It usually seems longer to you than to the other members of the group. People may simply need time to think before they respond. Wait at *least* 7 seconds.
8. **If the silence persists, resist the temptation to answer your own question.** Instead, try rephrasing the question until you are confident that the group understands what you are asking. Remember that even an eager group will quickly become passive and silent if they think you will do most of the talking. Of course, after everyone has had a chance to respond, you can share your own insights if you wish. But be careful not to dominate the discussion. Ask what the group thinks, and call on people by name (especially those who have not spoken yet – invite them in, and value their participation).
9. **Never reject an answer, even if you think it is wrong.** When you reject people's answers, it is easy for them to feel rejected as well, and they may decide that it is too risky to give their opinion again. A better response would be to ask them, "Which verse led you to that conclusion?" Or let the group handle the problem by asking them what they think about the question.

- 10. Avoid going off on tangents.** If people wander off course, gently bring them back to the passage and question being considered.
- 11. Be conscious of the pace of the study.** Try to avoid the extremes of being too rushed or spending too much time on any one question. The ideal is to move through the passage and the questions at a comfortable pace so that you finish at the end of the allotted time. Some leaders don't worry about the pace of the study, assuming that they can simply stop in the middle and resume next week. Usually, however, that approach does not work well. Most good studies are designed to be completed within one session so that people can have a sense of completion and closure. Also, certain members of the group may not be able to attend next time, and others may have missed the first half of the study.
- 12. End the study on time.** If the group is committed to spending 45 minutes in Bible study, try to honor that commitment. A healthy small group will do more than study the Bible together, so you must leave enough time for other important activities, such as sharing and prayer. If these other activities are merely tacked on at the end, the healthy of the group will suffer.
- 13. Spend prayer time in prayer.** While sharing prayer requests is important, coach your group to share them briefly so that the time reserved for prayer is spent mainly speaking to God and not only talking about the need and concern with others. This helps everyone rely on God and avoids only one or two dominating the sharing time so prayer is rushed and others are neglected.

Study the Bible Well & Help Others Do The Same

As you learn and practice studying God's Word, bring others along with you. Studying the Bible well requires:

- A high view of Scripture as authoritative, because we believe it is what it claims to be: the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, infallible in its original form and sufficient in its purposes. This also means we do our best to refrain from reading meaning into the text (rather than studying what God intended His Word to communicate), asking questions of the text it was not written to answer (i.e. expecting the Bible to follow modern standards of a history book, or to function like a science textbook, rather than asking what was intended by the text), interpreting Scripture in isolation apart from the community of the church (so I have my individual interpretation and do not check what I believe I am hearing from the Holy Spirit) – all of these tendencies elevate our own ideas and culture over God's Word.
- Humility, so we acknowledge God knows best and we are willing to submit ourselves to His good will and wisdom; this not only includes allowing Scripture to inform our thoughts, prayers, decisions, and lives, but also prompts us to acknowledge our limits and be open to engaging with resources and supports to enable us to handle the Word of God well, which may include the community of the church (both locally and globally), consulting with teachers, scholars, and pastors who have done deep and prayerful study and use their God-given gifts for the equipping of the church (including teaching us!), using Bible study resources such as consulting multiple translations, good commentaries, resources that help us understand historical and cultural context, etc., and engaging with methods and resources that help *me as an individual* study in ways that suit my temperament and engage Scripture well (audio Bibles, journaling, group study and discussion, music, etc.)

- Consistent engagement with Scripture; this can include daily reading and meditating on God's Word, in-depth studies that include slow and detailed reading and contextual study, reading/listening to larger portions of Scripture to see the broader picture of Scripture, memorizing Scripture, etc.
- Studying the Word of God for life-change, to be transformed by God in the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2), in being taught, corrected, and trained in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16), in revealing our own thoughts, intentions, and desires and transforming them (Heb. 4:12, Ps. 37:4, Ps. 139:23-24), to have His Word written on our hearts that they might be transformed from 'a heart of stone' to 'a heart of flesh' (Ezek. 36:26), etc.

Below are two recommended Bible study options, the first a standard inductive Bible study guide and the second a more in-depth option for meditating on Scripture. Use these for your own Bible study and/or with your group. More Bible study and interpretation resources are available at brookwoodbaptist.com/resources/

What is Inductive Bible Study?

from biblestudy.tips/inductive-bible-study/

Before we can talk about the how to of the inductive Bible study method, we must first define what it is. At its simplest, inductive Bible study is a simple and effective step-by-step approach to interpreting and studying the Bible. It is time tested and generally regarded by Bible-believing Christians to be the best way to study Scripture. The goal is to walk you through the steps of reading and interpreting Scripture to applying it to your life.

Deduction vs. Induction

When it comes to learning, we generally approach it from one of two directions. Either we: 1) bring our own assumptions and use the guiding force behind our study, or 2) we begin with our subject and draw any conclusions based on what we learn from our study. The first method is called deduction and the second is called induction. In the realm of the general sciences, neither approach is better or worse than the other. Each has its pros and cons, and can be useful in different scenarios.

In the sciences, deduction is a method we find ourselves using quite often. We come to science with general principles guiding our study and we make specific hypotheses based on those principles. The work then tests those principles and assumptions to make conclusions. The idea is to move from a general understanding to a more precise and specific understanding. We're moving from the broad to the specific. We know generalities about something and our study allows us to know things more precisely.

Induction, on the other hand, moves in the opposite direction. If deduction begins with assumptions, induction starts with the evidence at hand. It looks at the evidence and makes conclusions based on what we can learn from that evidence. For example, in a court of law, jurors are asked to reach a verdict based on the evidence presented to them. They are to leave behind their assumptions and make a ruling based on the facts alone.

Inductive Bible Study

When it comes to the Word of God, inductive Bible study is the best way to study. We want to interpret and understand the Scripture based on the evidence presented to us, instead of our preconceived notions of what we want or assume the text says.

The inductive Bible study method helps us achieve our goal of understanding Scripture and making application for our lives. It does this by treating the Bible as it should. We first observe what the text says before we interpret and apply it. This means we treat it with respect, as the Word of God, and don't move quickly or haphazardly.

The Hermeneutical Triad

A large part of understanding the Bible rightly requires looking at it through the proper lenses. Unlike many books we read today, the Bible is: old, a compilation of many writings, and a religious book. As such, we must keep all those things in mind when we study the Bible. In addition, each facet plays a key role in the right interpretation of Scripture.

First, the Bible is a historical book. It is several thousand years old and was written over centuries. This means we cannot approach it like a book written in the 21st Century. There is a different culture and background we must keep in mind when we study. Not to mention, the Bible's authors wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine (common) Greek. Each language is old and requires translation into modern vernacular. We must keep this in mind when studying.

Second, the Bible contains many different literary genres. We cannot read each book of the Bible the same way. Scripture contains history, prophecy, letters, apocalyptic literature, poetry, and so on. Each passage needs to be read and understood based on its given genre, which, in turn, affects how we interpret it.

Finally, we must understand that it is a theological book. God wrote and teaches us about himself in the Bible. This is another fact we cannot ignore in our interpretation.

This hermeneutical triangle plays a significant role in shaping how we move through each step of the inductive Bible study method. So, with that in mind, let's move into to the how to of inductive Bible study.

How to Do Inductive Bible Study

Given everything above, it sounds like the inductive Bible study method is a complicated way to study. That couldn't be further from the truth. When it comes down to it, the inductive approach contains three primary steps:

1. **Observation:** What does the Bible say?
2. **Interpretation:** What does the Bible mean?
3. **Application:** How do the Bible apply to my life today?

Yes, there are things we must do within each step, but the general approach to the inductive Bible study method is three steps. We must observe the text before we can interpret it. Then, once we've rightly interpreted the text, we can make appropriate application to our lives.

Observation

The first step to inductive Bible study is observing and engaging with the text of Scripture. Here we seek to gain a basic understanding of what the text says. At this point in the study our goal is not making any conclusions. Instead, the objective is looking at the text and asking the right questions to get all the information we need to start interpreting the passage.

There are five steps to observation:

1. Compare Translations
2. Ask Questions
3. Find Key Words
4. Observe Literary Features
5. Analyze the Structure

Let's look at how each step plays a role in helping you observe the passage we're studying.

Step 0: Read the Text

This goes without saying, but the absolute first step we need to take is reading our passage in our primary Bible translation. Before we can take any additional steps, we must familiarize ourselves with the text we're studying. Once we've done that we're free to move to the first step.

Step 1: Compare Translations

While [there is no one right Bible translation](#) and we often have one we prefer over others, multiple Bible translations can prove helpful in our studies. One of the best ways to begin making observations in our passage is by reading it in a few translations.

Remember, the Bible is an old book and was originally written in ancient languages. Any Bible we use is a translation from those original languages. With that in mind, each translation team comes with their own translation philosophies and thoughts on how the Bible should read. Therefore, using multiple translations allows us to observe these differences implemented by translators, and might also point out where there are difficulties in relaying what the original text says.

Another benefit of using multiple translations is that one translation may make it easier for us to understand the main point of the passage. This is one reason why I start with an essentially literal translation like the ESV, but also read something like the NLT, which is more on the end of being a dynamic thought-for-thought translation.

The overall goal in this step is noting differences between translations and using them to help you understand what's being said in the text.

Step 2: Ask Questions

The key to engaging the text in a thoughtful manner is asking the right questions. It's like sitting in a classroom lecture. As you listen to the teacher, your mind engages the information presented to you, which allows you to then ask the teacher relevant questions that further enhance your understanding of the material. This is what we're doing in this step; we're "listening" to the text as we observe it and asking the questions that will lead us to a right interpretation.

As Fuhr and Köstenberger write in *Inductive Bible Study*, there are four kinds of interpretive questions we should ask when observing the text.

1. **Questions of Content:** These questions seek to understand the substance of the text and the significance of its content. Who, what, where, and when are the types of questions you generally ask at this point.
2. **Questions of Relationship:** These questions probe the relations of words, phrases, and concepts within and between literary units. With these questions your goal is figuring out how the text relates to other areas of Scripture, both near and far. How does it relate to what precedes and comes after?
3. **Questions of Intention:** These questions probe authorial intention. There is always a reason why an author said what he said or didn't say and how he said it. Our questions here will help us ponder they *why* questions.
4. **Questions of Implication:** These questions explore the implications and ramifications of interpretations. What inferences can be made based on what is happening in the text? How will a given interpretation impact the rest of Scripture?^[1]

But how do you ask the right questions? Again, Fuhr and Köstenberger provide suggestions for asking the right questions in the following list:

1. Observations should be a springboard for interpretive questions
2. When asking interpretive questions, don't limit yourself to general questions of content
3. Seek questions deeper than just "Who?" "Why?" "Where?" "What?" and "How?" More elaborate questions are preferable
4. Ask both broad (questions of intent and purpose) and narrow (questions pertaining to word meanings, etc.) questions
5. Speculate regarding possible answers to your interpretive questions
6. Allow your knowledge of biblical and theological issues to influence your questions
7. The question-asking process begins with observation but may continue throughout the process of interpretation and into application
8. Some questions relate more to application than to interpretation
9. Do not ask questions simply for the sake of asking questions! Quality is better than quantity
10. Do not feel compelled to answer interpretive questions prematurely^[2]

Step 3: Find Key Words

As we read the text and ask questions, words and phrases should begin to stand out. These are things we want to note because they will help us in our interpretation later. While there will be obvious words that stand out, we also want to look for words with significance.

What kind of words are we looking for? We're looking for anything that conveys meaning that will help us interpret the text.

- Are there words that are significant within the context?
- Do we find words that are repeated or are synonyms?
- Are there words that may have theological significance?
- Does the text mention places or things we need to look up to understand better?
- Are there figures or speech or symbols that need to be understood?

The goal here is to make note of these words so we can investigate them in the step of interpretation.

Step 4: Observe Literary Features

The fourth step in observation requires us to look for literary features as we attentively read the text. Here we look for things like repetition, comparison and contrast, conjunctions, illustrations, and the like. Are figures of speech being used? Is the author using a certain tone in his writing?

Highlight and underline such phrases. Make connections between points and visualize how the passage fits together. Mark repeated words, phrases, or ideas. Be attentive and look for any associations and observations you can make of the text.

Step 5: Analyze the Structure

The final step in observation is examining the structure of the passage. It may not seem obvious, but the way an author presents the text can help us make better interpretations.

We begin by first recognizing the genre used in the passage. Before we can examine the structure, we must first know what type of literature we are dealing with. From there, we look for any key segments and ways to break up the text.

- What are the boundaries where a larger portion of Scripture begins and ends?
- Is there cohesion between the units?
- Is the text structured to convey a certain message?

Why is this step important? Well, when we understand the structure and genre of the text we're dealing with, it makes it easier to understand the language and other components used by the author, which ultimately informs how we interpret the text.

Interpretation

With our observation complete, we can move to the second step, which is interpretation. In this step we are investigating the text based on the questions we asked and what we uncovered in our step of observation. We are not jumping to any conclusions about a text's meaning at this point. Instead, we are still letting the text reveal itself. Like observation, interpretation includes five steps:

1. Consider the Context

2. Compare Scripture with Scripture
3. Word Studies
4. Topical Studies
5. Consult Other Resources

Let's take a look at each step in order.

Step 1: Consider the Context

The first step to interpretation is considering the context. In this step we look at the book or passage we're studying and place it within its proper boundaries. Within this step we also keep in mind the hermeneutical triad of history, literature, and theology.

Using the hermeneutical triad, let's see how we would view each context to help our interpretation.

History

- What is the geopolitical context? Is there anything significant going on in the world at this time as it relates to this text?
- Are there aspects of culture we must keep in mind?
- What are the setting, situation, and occasion for this writing?

Literature

- Where does this fall in Scripture? Is it Old or New Testament?
- What section of the New or Old Testament is it contained in?
- What is the genre and/or sub-genre? Are there multiple genres?
- How does the passage relate to what precedes and follows?
- What is the surrounding context?
- What is the main idea of the passage?

Theology

- What are the key themes presented in the text?
- What covenants are in place at the time when the passage is written? How does this impact the text?
- How does the passage relate to the overarching meta narrative of the gospel?

When we ask such questions we get to the heart of the circumstances surrounding the passage we're studying and where it fits in the Bible and history in general. With this key information in hand we are equipped to move to the next step.

Step 2: Compare Scripture with Scripture

As we've stated in a previous Bible study tip, [the best way to interpret Scripture](#) is to allow it to interpret itself. The second step of interpretation is doing just that. Since I covered this at length in a previous tip, I will refer you to that Bible study tip for an in-depth look at how to approach this step.

Step 3: Word Studies

The third step of interpretation involves looking at all those interesting words we found during the observation phase of our study. At this point we want to call on the aide of both context and our theological lexicons to help us discover the meaning of words and phrases. This step is important because we must understand the meaning of words if we are going to interpret any passage correctly.

Therefore, this step finds us [conducting word studies](#) on all the words and phrases we need help with. Again, this is something we covered extensively in a previous Bible study tip, so I will refer you there for the full methodology.

The goal of this step is figuring out what a word *could* mean so you can then place it back in its context to find out what it *does* mean.

Step 4: Topical Studies

The fourth step of interpretation looks at the whole of Scripture to understand what it teaches about a given theme or topic. In many respects this is similar to the step of comparing Scripture with Scripture, but with a thematic correlation in mind. Comparing Scripture with Scripture helps us interpret the text, whereas [thematic studies](#) seek to more broadly synthesize Scripture.

Like with the two previous steps, we have covered the details of how to do this in a previous tip, and [will refer you there](#).

Step 5: Consult Other Resources

Up to this point we have consulted very few outside resources. At most, we've consulted resources that give us general background on Scripture and lexicons that define words. We have not touched resources like commentaries and study Bibles. It is now, at the fifth and final step of interpretation, that we consult these resources.

The purpose for referencing these resources is to enhance our study of Scripture. It also has the added benefit of double checking our findings. While Bible study is highly personal, we do not study in isolation from the rest of church history and the Body of Christ. We should and must lean on our brothers and sisters in the faith to help us understand God's Word. This is why we should, as a last step of interpretation, consult the works of others.

Bible study tools you might want to consider referencing in this step include:

- Commentaries
- Bible dictionaries
- Study Bibles

- Bible handbooks and surveys
- Bible atlases
- Concordances
- Journals and articles

I recommend checking out Bible Study Tips' [recommended resources page](#) for titles we use in our own studies. Also check out this tip for steps on how to [build your Bible study library](#).

Application

The final step of the inductive Bible study method is application. God spoke to his people when the Bible was written. And God continues to speak to his people today through those same words. Therefore, it is important for us to know how we should apply what the Bible says and teaches to our lives. This step will do just that.

Like with observation and interpretation, application has a couple steps, which include:

1. Establish the Relevance
2. Appropriate the Meaning

Let's have a look at each step.

Step 1: Establish the Relevance

When we study a passage of Scripture, one thing we quickly learn is that finding application can prove quite difficult. Sometimes this is because the immediate context of a passage is not relevant for this day and age. Therefore, we must determine a text's relevance before seeking application.

The first step in the process is evaluating the text. We make our evaluation by asking questions like:

- What is the author's intent in writing?
- What is the application for the original audience?
- Is the text helping us know something or is it telling us to do something?
- What is the underlying principle of the text?
- Based on that principle, how does it relate to today?
- How can I apply this text?

Asking questions like this will help us make appropriate application.

Step 2: Appropriate the Meaning

Knowing what the Bible says means nothing if we don't apply it to our lives. The second step of application moves us beyond simply knowing what the principle or application is to making it a part of our lives. In this step, we are wholly relying on the Holy Spirit to guide us, because we can do nothing in the Christian life without his help.

There are no guidelines on how this should take place. But, it does require some thought on the part of the Bible student. This involves some introspection and asking how the passage and application impacts us. How is the Holy Spirit moving us to respond to the passage? From there, we must meditate on the Scripture and then put that application into action.

That is the end result of the inductive Bible study method. We move from reading & observing the text, to interpreting it, so we can then live it out.

Bible Study & Meditation

Jen Wilkin, Anne Graham Lotz, Priscilla Shirer

(from Jen Wilkin): “The Bible study you are about to begin will aid you in the worthy task of God-discovery. The Bible is not a book about self-discovery; it is a book about God-discovery. The Bible is God’s declared intent to make Himself known to us. In learning about the character of God in Scripture, we *will* experience self-discovery, but it must not be the first object of our study. The first object must be God Himself.

“Knowledge of God leads to true knowledge of self, which leads to repentance and transformation. So are confirmed Paul’s words in Romans 12:2 that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Most of us are good at loving God with our hearts. But the God who commands us to love with the totality of our hearts, souls, and strength also commands us to love Him with all of our minds. Because He only commands what He also enables His children to do, it must be possible for us to love Him well with our minds or He would not command it. I know you will bring your emotions to your study of God’s Word, and that is good and right. But it is your mind I am jealous for. God intends for you to be a good student, renewing your mind and thus transforming your heart. Being a good student entails following good study habits, that may not always yield immediate application, comfort, or peace, but one that builds over time a cumulative understanding of the message of Scripture (or, to fill our spiritual storerooms with truth, so that in our hour of need we can bring forth both the old and the new as a source of rich provision).

“Imagine yourself receiving a letter in the mail. The envelope is handwritten, but you don’t glance at the return address. Instead you tear open the envelope, flip to the second page, read two paragraphs near the bottom, and set the letter aside. Knowing that if someone bothered to send it to you, you should act on its contents in some way, you spend a few minutes trying to figure out how to respond to what the section you just read had to say. No one would read a letter this way. But this is precisely the way many of us read our Bibles. We skip past reading the “envelope” and then try to determine the purpose of its contents from a portion of the whole. What if we took time to read the envelope? What if, after determining the context for its writing, we started at the beginning and read to the end? Wouldn’t that make infinitely more sense?”

(from Will K. Chung): “The Word of God was written at a particular time in a particular place for a particular people. And the Word of God can never mean what it never meant. The problem is sometimes when we read the Scriptures through a 21st century Western mindset, we’re going to read into the story things that were never meant to be there. There’s something called *eisegesis* (literally, reading *in*) which is where every passage is about me. I heard someone recently say today’s generation is narcigesis, everything is narcissistic – I am David, I am Joseph, I am Mary, I am Martha. But *exegesis* and hermeneutics is reading the Word for what it meant *then*, and *then* you can bridge the application for today’s context.”

We believe that the Word of God never changes, which means all interpretation of the text must match the original meaning. We must remember that while the Bible was written *for* us, it wasn’t written *to* us – it has a particular historical and cultural context that God effectively spoke into, which means that context influenced the

communication (otherwise, the original readers would not have been able to understand what God said). For us modern readers who are far from that original context, it's going to take some work and study to faithfully understand what God has said in His Word so we can know the true God, love Him, and be transformed by Him. Don't worry! God has provided tons of help to His Church for this. (the following is from Anne Graham-Lotz & Jen Wilkin)

1. **Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand, receive, and obey His Word.** We cannot do this alone. While we have our own responsibilities in this process, we still need *help*, especially when it comes to our own hearts. Ask God to help you every time you study His Word.
2. **Read the Address.** Answer these questions to orient yourself in the historical and cultural context; this is essential to understand what God is intending to communicate. You can refer back to these answers and add to them as you study the book:
 1. Who wrote this book?
 2. To whom was it written?
 3. Where was it written?
 4. When was it written?
 5. Why was it written?
 6. What genre/style was it written in? (narrative, poetry, discourse, etc.)
 - Study Bibles that include introductions to each book of the Bible are one of the easiest ways to find these answers, and one of the best resources regarding genres of writing in the Bible are the Bible Project videos available on YouTube.

Work through the book of the Bible, studying 1-6 verses at a time – we are studying for the long-term, and depth requires time. This helps us read in context rather than slipping into proof-texting, bending Scripture's intended meaning, or simply missing a ton of what God wants to say to us. Plus, we internalize God's Word way better when we meditate deeply on bite-sized passages, in the order they were intended to be read. Savour Scripture.

3. **Read the Passage (comprehension).** Slowly, at least twice, out loud if possible (the Bible was written to be read out loud, and it often helps us to hear it).

Jonah 2:1-2: From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said: 'In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me. From the depths of the grave. I called for help, and You listened to my cry.

4. **Observe What God's Word Says (comprehension).** Make a verse-by-verse list of the facts that you see in the passage, rewriting the verses phrase by phrase and sticking to the original wording (you can paraphrase later when we get to interpretation).

v. 1: From inside the fish, Jonah prayed.
v. 1: Jonah prayed to his God
v. 2: In distress I called to the Lord
v. 2: And He answered
v. 2: From the depths of the grave I called for help
v. 2: And You listened to my cry

Look for these things as you observe to find important elements and forms that the biblical authors deliberately included: (*from Grasping God's Word by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays*):

- Repetition of words – look for words and phrases that repeat
- Contrasts – look for ideas, individuals, and/or items that are contrasted with each other. Look for differences.
- Comparisons – look for ideas, individuals, and/or items that are compared with each other. Look also for similarities.
- Lists – anytime the text mentions more than two items, identify them as a list.
- Cause and effect – look for cause-and-effect relationships.
- Figures of speech – identify expressions that convey an image, using words in a sense other than the normal literal sense.
- Conjunctions – notice terms that join units, like ‘and,’ ‘but,’ ‘for.’ Note what they are connecting.
- Verbs – note whether a verb is past, present, or future; active or passive; and the like.
- Pronouns – identify the antecedent for each pronoun
- Questions and answers – note if the text is built on a question-and-answer format.
- Dialogue – note if the text includes dialogue. Identify who is speaking and to whom.
- Means – note if a sentence indicates that something was done *by means of* someone/something (answers ‘how?’). Usually you can insert the phrase ‘by means of’ into the sentence.
- Purpose/result statements – these are a more specific type of ‘means,’ often telling why. Purpose and result are similar and sometimes indistinguishable. In a purpose statement, you usually can insert the phrase ‘in order that.’ In a result clause, you usually can insert the phrase ‘so that.’
- General to specific and specific to general – find the general statements that are followed by specific examples or applications of the general. Also find specific statements that are summarized by a general one.
- Conditional clauses – a clause can present the condition by which some action or consequence will result. Often such statements use an ‘if... then’ framework (although in English the ‘then’ is often left out).
- Actions/roles of God – identify actions or roles that the text ascribes to God.
- Actions/roles of people – identify actions or roles that the text describes or encourages people to do/be.
- Emotional terms – does the passage use terms that have emotional energy, like kinship words (‘father,’ ‘son’) or words like ‘pleading’?
- Tone of the passage – what is the overall tone of the passage: happy, sad, encouraging, and so on?
- Connections to other paragraphs and episodes – how does the passage connect to the one that precedes it and the one that follows it?
- Shifts in story/pivots – is the passage being used as a key to understanding a dramatic shift in the story?
- Interchange – does the passage shift back and forth between two scenes or characters?
- Chiasm – does the passage have any chiastic arrangements, such as a-b-c-d-c’-b’-a’? (remember, chiastic refers to the Greek letter X to represent the form of the passage, where the beginning and end parallel each other, then the next in from the beginning and ending parallel each other, and on and on, until reaching the center-point of the passage)
- Inclusio – does the passage open and close with similar statements or events?

Then answer the following questions (not all of these may be relevant for every passage):

1. Are there words/phrases in this passage that seem important or that I don’t understand? (look these up in a Bible dictionary or other study aid)
2. What in this passage is strange, unfamiliar, or confusing to me? (historical events or cultural elements; use Bible Study Resources to find out about these)
3. Is this passage descriptive (communicating what people did) or prescriptive (communicating what readers *should* do)?

4. Does this passage include any commands? Based on the context, is this a command that might be for everyone (including me) or is it intended only for the original audience/someone in this passage? (it's okay if sometimes you're unsure)
 5. Does this passage include any promises? Based on the context, is this a promise that might be for everyone (including me) or is it intended only for the original audience/someone in this passage? (again, it's okay if sometimes you're unsure)
 6. Does this passage include any warnings?
 7. Does this passage include any good examples that one could follow?
 8. What does this passage reveal about God?
5. **Study What God's Word Means (interpretation).** Our goal is to listen to what God is saying in His Word, on His terms, to determine the intended meaning of the passage as best we can. The following questions will help. Remember that if at any point your interpretation (or later, application) contradicts what Scripture says, correct it to line up with Scripture. God's Word is infallible, perfect and completely true and reliable; our interpretation is not, *and that's okay*. Our faith rests upon Jesus Christ and God's truth, not our own interpretations; we have freedom in Christ to let go of interpretations that don't align with Scripture.

1. What does this passage mean in the context of this book of the Bible? (fit it into what you've already studied – the flow of events in narrative, the continuation of an argument or conclusion in discourse, etc.)
2. How might the genre of this passage affect the interpretation?
3. Are there any passages I could cross-reference to put this into the context of the whole Bible? (most Bibles include cross-references; if yours doesn't, look up the passage on BibleGateway.com)
4. What can I learn from what is taking place or what is being said in this passage? Are there any principles or spiritual lessons?
5. What is one resource I can use to better understand this passage and check my interpretation? (see Bible Study Resources Quick Guide)

v. 1: We can pray anywhere

v. 1: We need to establish a relationship with God before a crisis so we can pray with confidence in a crisis.

v. 2: God responds to our distress calls even when it's our fault that we are in that crisis in the first place

v. 2: There is no place so low that God doesn't hear our call and cries for help

6. **Meditate on God's Word (Listen for His Voice, application).** This step cannot be done effectively without completing the previous steps – we want exegesis, not eisegesis. Go through your observations from the previous two steps, and rephrase them (where appropriate) into questions you could ask yourself, your spouse, your child, your friend, etc. As you write the questions, listen for God to speak to you through His Word. Then journal answers to your questions; you can write to yourself or in dialogue with God. Don't rush this process of reflection and prayer; knowing God, deepening relationship, and transformation take *time*.

v. 1: We can pray anywhere

- *In what place do I think prayer is off limits?*

v. 1: We need to establish a relationship with God before a crisis so we can pray with confidence in a crisis.

- *How confident am I in my relationship with God that He will answer me in any situation?*

v. 2: God responds to our distress calls even when it's our fault that we are in that crisis in the first place

- *Why do I sometimes think that God will not respond to my distress call?*
v. 2: There is no place so low that God doesn't hear our call and cries for help
- *If God heard Jonah from the belly of a fish, why don't I think He will hear my call from the depths of depression, addiction, humiliation, or grief?*

7. **Respond to God's Word (application).** God may not speak to us personally through every verse, but He will speak. Consider how to apply what you have studied and meditated on: respond in prayer, with confession, with praise, with action and obedience, with seeking accountability, etc. "God does not speak merely to be heard; God speaks to be obeyed." (Priscilla Shirer, *Discerning the Voice of God*)

Regardless of where I am or what I am going through, I know that God will hear me when I call out to Him. Therefore, I will go to God with confidence, knowing that He will hear and answer me.

Specifically, I will pray about _____, ask God for help with my fears and doubts, and take these steps to practice this: _____

Remember, it's crucially important to confirm whatever we think God is speaking to us; we are influenced by our upbringing, relationships, experiences, culture, desires, fears, the enemy, how much sleep we got, etc., which means not all of our thoughts are going to be the Voice of God. Always check and confirm what we think God is saying (the following is also from Priscilla Shirer):

1. **LOOK FOR THE MESSAGE OF THE SPIRIT.** Intentionally listen. Be still and consciously turn your attention inward to see if what you're sensing carries the weight of God or is simply the fleeting, unsteady voice of your own emotions. Don't just casually ask God for guidance. Discernment like this takes time. And patience. And practice.
2. **LIVE IN THE MODE OF PRAYER.** Don't talk to others about anything more than you talk to God about it. Submit anything you think you're hearing from Him back to Him in prayer. When the issue comes into your mind throughout the day, don't waste time worrying. Instead, spend your time handing the issue over to God.
3. **SEARCH OUT THE MODEL OF SCRIPTURE.** Carefully consider what the Bible says. Dig into the Word and find out. Does what you think you're hearing contradict the character of God or His Word in any way? If it does, guess what – you're not hearing God correctly.
4. **SUBMIT TO THE MINISTRY OF ELI.** Just as this priest of Israel provided young Samuel with insight as to how to recognize the voice of God (1 Sam. 3), seek the counsel of a wise, more mature believer who is practiced in discerning God's voice in his or her own life.
5. **EXPECT THE MERCY OF CONFIRMATION.** Ask the Lord to confirm His internal Word with external evidence. He desires for you to know His will. He's not hiding it from you. He will graciously verify His message through His Word, through circumstances, or even through another person.

Leader Skills & Group Dynamics

1. Prepare for Meetings

Work ahead in studies, take notes on the sermon, rewrite provided questions whenever needed to help your group engage, prepare a hospitable space (and partner with others to do so), etc. Take time to consider what would serve your group well (and help things run more smoothly for you) - you do not have to do *everything*, only what is going to genuinely serve your group well.

Above all *pray*, asking God for everything you need, for the Holy Spirit to be at work in all of you, for discernment regarding His plans and purposes, etc. – other preparation helps, however reliance on the Holy Spirit is non-negotiable, for your sake and theirs. Spend time in solitude both listening for God’s direction and simply resting in His presence; this will not only provide much-needed wisdom, but will also keep you filled up to pour into others and enable you to bear the fruit of the Spirit in your group. The more you are working with people and in public ministry, the more silence and solitude with God you will need to lead out of His grace, wisdom, and the power of the Holy Spirit rather than your own human (and limited) ability, wisdom, and strength.

2. Small Groups 101 (adapted from Youth Leader Manual)

What should I avoid doing as a small group leader?

- **Being too talkative.** Let others speak. You might know the answer but we need to allow people to process and share.
- **Being insecure.** It’s not all about you. If you are so concerned about how you look to your peers, you won’t be able to notice what is actually happening around you.
- **Being unprepared.** Come to the group knowing what we are talking about, and come on time with everything you need.
- **Being inflexible.** If the conversation goes off topic, that CAN be okay as long as the conversation is healthy and it isn’t so far off topic that it is more distraction. We do small groups to allow people to process their thoughts and to build relationships. If people have questions related to but not in the study, let them ask and discuss; if there is not time for this or if it is too far off topic, thank them for the question and tell them you will talk with them after, follow up with them, or prepare space to discuss this in particular next time.
- **Getting walked on.** Even when you are leading adults, you are the adult in the room. You set the agenda and keep the group on track. You also are the one responsible for stepping in should there be conflict, dishonoring speech, tone, or action, or anything that is preventing the group from functioning well.
- **Gossiping.** We do not enable or foster a place for gossip to occur. If prayer for others is being requested, encourage your group to share those requests in a way that will protect the person’s anonymity (unless they have the person’s express permission). If there are concerns about someone being raised in the group, encourage them to go directly to the person or, should this be a leadership issue, go to the pastor or lead team to deal with the issue properly and in a manner worthy of the gospel. If they need support, discuss and pray with them one on one.

3. How do I keep the discussion going?

- **Encourage** everyone to verbalize their views and feelings, however unorthodox they may be.
- **Be grateful** for every answer. It might take a lot for someone to share even something really simple. Value that.
- **Don't be satisfied** with the first response to your question.
- **Keep the discussion moving.** Don't allow it to stagnate for too long on one topic.
- **Be alert** to the individuals in the group. If you notice that people are uncomfortable or suddenly get really tense, acknowledge it.
- **Don't be afraid of silence.** It takes time to process and to build courage.
- **Turn difficult questions back to the group.** E.g., "so what does the group think about that?"
- **Let the group self-correct its tangents.** E.g. "what do the rest of you think?"
- **Stay flexible** to the group's needs. Address certain issues when they arise.
- **Be prepared to learn** from your group.
- **Help create a safe space.** Don't talk about the things spoken of in small groups anywhere else. Sharing things spoken of in confidence is the fastest way to kill relationships and shut down conversation.
- **Know the law** (physical, sexual, emotional abuse). If you have concerns that someone is being abused, the safest thing to do is report it – bring it to our pastors or a lead team member immediately if you are unsure. You can also contact VictimLink at 1-800-563-0808 for questions and sound guidance for what to do, available 24-7.
- **Avoid yes or no questions.** Open-ended questions foster much better discussion. Likewise, don't ask questions that assume the answer.
- **Do exegesis (the meaning comes from Scripture) not eisegesis (we read meaning into Scripture with our own thoughts, opinions, and feelings).**
 - Observation: What does the passage say?
 - Interpretation: What does the passage mean?
 - Application: What does this passage mean to me/us?

4. Facilitate Group Participation & Understand the Dynamics of Group Life

(from *Rooted* training). Your primary role as a group leader is not a teacher, but a shepherd to guide and care for your group. Remember, we are trusting the Holy Spirit to teach and lead people, we want others to discover the truth for themselves so it has the deepest impact on them, which means our speaking needs to be limited; practice the 80-20 rule: aim for speaking a max of 20% of the time, and giving space to the rest of the group to discuss at least 80% of the time. You will need speak loud enough for your group to hear and sit where the majority of your group can see you and you can make eye contact with them, so that you are the person in authority to facilitate and guide the group.

Create a safe space for people to share deeply, protecting the confidentiality of the group to encourage trust and deeper sharing. Setting a standard of confidentiality that what is discussed within the group will stay within the group, and reminding your group of this often, helps foster trust and deeper, more honest sharing.

5. Levels of Communication & Building Trust

It also helps to be aware of the different levels of communication and how people build trust with individuals and the group at each level (from Leslie Vernick):

- **Level 5: Superficial Chit Chat**
 - This is just polite chitchat, no real meaning, communication, or sharing
- **Level 4: Facts/News**
 - It's raining; today is Thursday, talking about the news or sports, with no personal commentary; it's like a handshake; you don't tell everybody the facts about everything, you're communicating a little more deeply, but it's still impersonal
- **Level 3: Thoughts/Ideas**
 - This is a personal level of communication; if someone shares their idea or opinion in the group and it is not received well, whether it is mocked, criticized, the person is shunned, avoided, met with any form of rejection or contempt whether verbal or otherwise, people tend to respond (depending on their personality and level of confidence) either by getting louder or shutting down and not feeling safe to share in that way again (let alone sharing in any of the deeper levels). We do not have to agree with someone to be respectful in our disagreement, to still love the person and not reject them or hold them at a distance because they think differently than we do. This is conditional love, that requires others be like us in order to be near to us, and it will affect relationships in the group. Instead, we need to practice responding not out of our personal preferences and emotions but out of love for others and with curiosity ('I didn't think about it that way, what makes you think that?'), have a real conversation to understand, and ask with a tone of that is open and kind, not laced with disgust, judgement, or impatience, frustration, and anxiety.
- **Level 2: Feelings/Needs**
 - If our thoughts and ideas are safe, though, we may be more vulnerable with our feelings and needs. We can share what we love, what resonated with us, where we got confused or bothered, or even upset by the study; this is a level of trust where people can tackle points of friction in relationship: 'I feel hurt when you do X,' or make requests of one another: 'I would really appreciate it if you would do X.' However, if those feelings and needs are met with indifference, no response, no care, no comfort, no meeting of that underlying need, or those feelings and needs are mocked, criticised, invalidated ('you're just emotional,' 'you're being dramatic,' 'you're so sensitive,' 'you shouldn't feel that way,' 'that's just because you're a woman/man/young/single/from a particular culture,' 'that's just your personality,' 'what's wrong with you, are you crazy?,') then of course you don't feel safe.
 - Human beings are hardwired to be sensitive to rejection, and even if we aren't experiencing rejection with someone's words, their facial expressions and body language, and even our own disappointed expectations for care and acceptance will also make us feel rejected. All of us have flaws, but to have

that critiqued or to be treated as wrong/meaningless, to have our flaws be used as a reason to reject us then we feel shame and we instinctively pull away. We have to protect ourselves and we can't be open or genuine, it isn't safe to be ourselves. This is not what the Church, what mature believers being conformed to the image of Christ, are called to be like; Jesus ate with sinners, with the outcasts of society, some of whom were His closest disciples and friends, and people were *attracted* to Jesus because He accepted them and loved them completely. He did not affirm their sin (He encouraged them to go and sin no more and His preaching regularly convicted people of how they had fallen short of God's righteousness), but Jesus knew how to give grace and love to people who needed it. We must learn to do the same (more below).

- **Level 1: Emotional Vulnerability/Intimacy/Deep Knowing**

- God has hardwired us to need relationships that get to all these levels, even this deepest one. We need to get to a place where we can connect with God at this deepest level (modeled by David in the Psalms, by Jesus throughout His life and ministry, especially His prayer life, and by Paul as he shared of his own personal journey with God), and we are hardwired to need and desire a connection this deep with human beings too. This can take a great deal of time to develop with people, especially if one is still healing from wounds from unsafe relationships where one was let down, rejected, criticized, emotionally abused, betrayed, or abandoned, one's family never went to those deeper levels and so it's never been modeled or experienced – this means many of us need more time observing within a group how a leader handles connection, communication, sensitivity, and entrusting them with little bits of ourselves to see if they know how to handle and can be trusted with those parts of our heart and life that are fragile and hurting.
- We can only handle so much hurt in our hearts before we must accept reality, recognizing a person or situation is not safe for us, not good for us, and we must take care of ourselves. If we truly want our group, our church, to be a safe place for hurting people, we must foster this; no one owes me their trust with their deeper self, and I as a leader must earn their trust by being consistent and present, showing up well for them and others in the group even when it is messy, difficult, and uncomfortable, working on fostering safety, taking responsibility for any failures in this and taking seriously the work of reconciliation and peacemaking when I have hurt someone or let them down. If I push, I am more likely to trigger their anxiety, make them feel unsafe, and cause them to shut down and pull back rather than draw them out with gentleness and love into a place of safety where they can be their most honest selves. Stirring fear in people will break relationship, not develop it; we can only invite people into these deeper levels and conduct ourselves responsibly and faithfully, asking the Holy Spirit to transform us into people who love others well.
- We invite others into those deeper places of communication and relationship the same way our heavenly Father handles us: with care, gentleness, patience, and unconditional love. We must not underestimate the value and how precious it is to be entrusted with any sharing and connection at these other levels, but to take the process of building trust seriously, no matter how long it takes for there to be enough trust for that person to go deeper. We invite people into deeper relationship by handling what is entrusted to us faithfully, recognizing this is God's son or daughter created in His

image, of immeasurable value and beloved of God, and it is our privilege to minister to them in whatever capacity entrusted to us.

6. Healthy Group Discussion

(from *Rooted* training) Ensure you have balanced dialogue, drawing out others' thoughts and responses by setting a regular expectation of going around the room and everyone taking an uninterrupted turn to respond, calling on people by name to ask for their thoughts, and especially by asking open-ended questions that invite deeper discussion and help your group think through not only the content of your study and discussion but their own interpretation and experiences. If you sense a conversation is getting off biblical principles, redirect the talk to what the Bible says; if someone is off-track in their interpretation of a topic, suggest the group look for the answer in Scripture and ask where they see it in the Bible.

Be considerate of different viewpoints, respectful and open-minded to other ways of thinking, remembering that your demeanor will often dictate how the rest of the group responds. If people know they won't be judged or ridiculed by presenting conflicting opinions, or an answer they are unsure about, they will be more willing to open up.

If you notice one person is sharing more than is appropriate, you can interrupt and say, "I can tell this is a topic that interests you, so let's continue the conversation later, but right now we need to move on," or "I love how passionate you are about this topic; does anyone else have anything to add? Otherwise, let's move on for now." Follow up with that person later to let them know that you redirected the conversation to allow for everyone to be able to share, but that you are interested in their input, and hopefully they will become more aware in the future.

7. Staying On Topic

Avoid tangents, gently bringing your group back to the discussion on hand to value everyone's time and the priorities for which they have studied and gathered. Don't feel as though you must lead everyone into agreement, but rather be okay with messy conversations, affirming each person for sharing, asking for others' thoughts, and trust the Holy Spirit to work and reveal the truth. Be patient. Let people struggle. This will encourage them to look further, to study more, and to find the truth they are seeking. You can support them by redirecting them to the Bible and following up with more in-depth topics that cannot be addressed in the group time but encourage them to seek the answer themselves and trust God to guide them.

There is a fine line between your group supporting an individual going through a difficult time and turning it into a support group; as the facilitator, balance the time for all group members, being sensitive to their needs. Pray for those struggling in the group, follow up with them after, but do not displace the core purpose for your group gathering. Support one another in love, bearing one another's burdens, lifting up concerns in prayer, making yourselves available to one another outside of the group, sharing resources and encouragement. However, we also must practice biblical boundaries and avoid taking on responsibilities that God has given to the other person to allow them to grow and mature; we do not want to undercut this, no matter how good our intentions. We recommend *Boundaries* by Henry Cloud & Charles Townsend and *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter

Scazzero as excellent resources on how to love and disciple others well. If any situation is out of your depth, escalate to others who can help through their experience, training, and giftings – this includes our elders and pastors, there is a list of recommended Christian counsellors available on the church website, and *please always reach out for support in discerning what the appropriate course of action is in any difficult situation.*

8. Leading Different Personalities

(from *Rooted* training) Although people are different, most fall into one of four personality styles: Analytical, Driver, Amiable, and Expressive. Below are basic characteristics of each of these personality styles as well as tips on engaging each person, to give insight into how you might best guide conversation, affirm group members when they share, and redirect your group when tangents arise. They are in no means a hard and fast guideline for discussion or dealing with your group personally. They are given only to heighten awareness that what you say can be interpreted, ignored, or misunderstood based on not only your words, but on their personalities as well.

Analytical people are known for being systematic, well-organized and deliberate. These individuals appreciate facts and information presented in a logical manner as documentation of truth. They enjoy organization and completion of detailed tasks. Others may see them at times as being overly cautious and structured people who do things too much “by the book.” This personality is strongly independent. Don’t rush things. Plan to give the person plenty of breathing space and thinking time. They may be the people who listen, gather information, and comment late in the group time, or they may think about it during the week and share the next time you are together.

Drivers thrive on the thrill of the challenge, and the internal motivation to succeed. They are practical folks who focus on getting results. They can do a lot in a very short time. They usually talk quickly, directly, and to the point. They are often viewed as decisive and pragmatic. Be to the point with Drivers. Speak specifically and understand that their responses will seem more matter-of-fact, less like opinions.

Amiable people are dependable, loyal, and easygoing. They like things that are nonthreatening and friendly. They dislike impersonal details and cold hard facts. They are usually quick to reach a decision but tend to be wishy-washy on the follow-through. They are often described as warm people who are sensitive to the feelings of others. They are guided by feelings more than facts and will tend to be compassionate to others in the group. Nurture the relationship, and work hard to gain their trust. Amiables love security and safety and will thrive in that type of environment.

Expressive people are very outgoing and enthusiastic, with a high energy level. They enjoy helping others and are particularly fond of socializing. They are usually slow to reach a decision. They are often thought of as talkers, overly dramatic, impulsive, and manipulative. They are oftentimes “idea” people. They like recognition and compliments. They may come across as sarcastic at times. Expressives like to be liked and appreciated. They need people around them and are anxious to develop and maintain relationships. They may dominate the conversation, so be prepared to steer and guide the discussion.

9. Actively Listen as a Non-Anxious Presence

Much of being an effective group leader is treating people as people, what Peter Scazzero refers to as the I-Thou relationship. Nothing can undercut our ability to love and be with people well like fear and anxiety, so we must learn to sit with discomfort, surrender our anxieties to God, and be with people incarnationally. Some key tenets of this way of relating to people as Jesus did include:

- Recognizing each person as unrepeatable, an inestimable treasure, an image-bearer of the living God; treating them as sacred, as one created from the very breath of God... we welcome their otherness, acknowledging how different they are from us.
- Conversations and in-study discussions are not about getting something from the other person or treating them as an extension of ourselves (an I-It relationship), but rather connecting as a whole person to a whole person and having fellowship around the things of Jesus
- Practice being fully present instead of distracted; this includes listening to what the person is saying and pausing after they finish to consider your response, rather than trying to think of what to say next while they are speaking (practicing the pause and letting them see you think will communicate care and value far better anyways)
- Practice being loving instead of judging; focus on understanding the other person, requesting clarification and reflecting back what you've heard, not arguing your own views (or allowing frustration or discomfort to drive one's responses) or feeling responsible to correct their 'faulty' views of God or anything else (instead, we can ask good questions and trust the Holy Spirit to guide people – see below); and refuse to turn our differences into virtues of moral superiority that diminishes others' humanity. Billy Graham was once heavily criticized for sitting at the same table as President Clinton and his wife Hillary at a public function, at their request. And when he was asked about it in an interview, Graham said, 'It is the Father's job to judge, it is the Spirit's job to convict, and it is Jesus' job to love. We are called to be like Jesus. And many try to do all three jobs.'
- Practice being open to being changed, in a posture of humility not only to other people but to God and how He wants you to grow in every interaction; foster discussion by asking open-ended questions and exploring each others' experiences, history, thoughts, cares, and questions together, and asking good questions about how Scripture relates to these things, making space for people to work this out with the Holy Spirit over time, and trusting the Holy Spirit can and *will* lead them – just as He can and does lead and transform you.

10. Practice Speaking Well

(from *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*) Speaking uses the God-given power of words to bring healing, growth, and the love of Jesus to people. It is indispensable to spiritual maturity and healthy community. There are four components to speaking well:

- **Respectfully:** give thought to your words and don't simply blurt them out. Take the other person's feelings into consideration. Instead of, "How could you like that movie? It was terrible," you say, "That is fascinating. Tell me what you liked about that movie."
- **Honestly:** Say what you truly think and feel rather than soft-pedaling or distorting the truth. Instead of, "I can't volunteer because I have other plans," you say, "I prefer not to volunteer because I want to have some time alone at home."
- **Clearly:** communicate directly. Rather than being vague or dropping hints, be clear. Instead of, "Are you busy Tuesday night?" you ask clearly, "Would you be willing to attend the class I'm teaching on Tuesday night and give me feedback on how I can improve?"
- **In a timely fashion:** Consider the moment. You understand that some moments are better than others for certain conversations. You notice when the other person is tired, irritated, or short on time, and you choose to wait until they are more relaxed before talking about your concerns.

11. Ask Good Questions

Relationship and safety are fostered with open-ended questions that asked with curiosity and respect. Avoid aggressive questioning as this undermines relational safety (asking questions to make a point, to make someone uncomfortable, to interrogate someone, rapid-fire questions without allowing the person time to think and respond, and especially asking questions to communicate judgement, disdain, or disapproval of someone or something), as well as narrow questions that don't allow for open discussion and the sharing/processing of thoughts and experiences together. 'Questions foster greater transformation because the truth discovered is more transformative than the truth taught. Questions express interest and empathy while pushing people to look inwardly and identify the real issue' (from Replicate.org). Also, trust that the Holy Spirit is working and teaching people, and will lead them to the truth; you do not need to provide the answers, but rather can care for others well by shepherding and nudging them in the right direction while allowing them to keep seeking and learning for themselves; this will have a deeper impact.

12. Model Openness and Transparency

In *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*, Peter Scazzero identifies several ways mature disciples lead from weakness and vulnerability (and so model openness and transparency) following the examples set by Jesus, Paul, and David in Scripture:

- I allow myself to be sorrowful and troubled in front of others (rather than coving my feelings of sorrow and confusion in front of my team)
- I admit to my team when I am feeling overwhelmed (rather than refusing to fall apart, always modeling strong faith and vision)

- I easily ask for the help and prayers of others (I rarely appear needy in front of others. While I will be there for others, I don't look for others to be there for me)
- I pray in utter dependence to surrender my will to God's will (I pray how to strategically turn a bad situation around and expand the ministry)
- I have no problem falling face down on the ground in front of others when I struggle to submit myself to the unfathomable will of the Father (I try to stand tall, being decisive and unwavering in a crisis, so others can lean on me for faith and strength)

God came to earth, not in a flashy show of signs and wonders, but as an infant born into poverty and obscurity. After living as a refugee in Egypt, He returned to grow up in Nazareth, a backwoods town a long way from the big city. He waited thirty years to begin any public ministry, and even then, refused to do miracles on demand or overwhelm people with His brilliant intellect. His ministry was small and almost invisible by the world's standards. Throughout His ministry, Jesus exercised His power carefully so as not to manipulate or force people into following Him. He revealed just enough of Himself to make faith possible, but hid just enough of Himself to make faith necessary. For His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He rode not on a magnificent war horse like Alexander the Great, but a humble donkey. And He allowed Himself to be arrested and treated as if He were a common criminal. Then, as He hung on the cross in the worst moment of His earthly life, His final prayer was a question He quoted from the Psalms: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:1). Jesus did not approach His death as a superhero, but with raw humanity and weakness displayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He said "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" and He repeatedly prayed to God to take the cup of His wrath from Him. Jesus' leadership was from weakness and vulnerability, complete dependence on God, not the proud and defensive leadership our culture tends to promote.

When Paul argues for the authenticity of his leadership, Paul appeals not to his visions and revelations from God, not to his successes and gifts, but instead to his weaknesses. He writes about how God had allowed a 'thorn in his flesh' to humble him, which he referred to as a gift. Paul considered his great weakness to be his badge of apostleship and authority from God – so much so that he boasted in it, arguing that this was how and why the power of Jesus flowed through him.

The phrase most often used to describe David is that he was "a man after God's own heart." We observe that heart, of course, in the many psalms he wrote as well as the many victories he achieved. But one of the most vivid pictures we have of David's heart is revealed not in a triumph but in a colossal moral failure – when he commits adultery with Bathsheba and then murders her husband, Uriah. When he is confronted by the prophet Nathan, David does not deny what he's done, cover it up, or try to erase all memory of it from Israel's history. Instead, he repents. And he makes sure his failure is recorded in vivid detail as a lesson for future generations (2 Samuel 12). He even writes a song about it to be sung in worship services and published in Israel's worship manual (Psalm 51)! How many of us today would do something like that after such a colossal failure? David understood something significant about who God is and how He works. He wrote: *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart You, God, will not despise.* (Psalm 51:16-17). David knew that acknowledging imperfections was critical, not only for his own spiritual health, but also for the health of those he led. His life embodied God's message that Israel's existence as

a people was based on the love and mercy of God alone and not their own performance. And if God can use a person like David, forgiving him of such a massive breach of integrity, God can use anyone – even you and me.

On a practical note: by modeling weakness and vulnerability, being open and transparent with your group, you not only give them the blessings of an example to follow in the ways of God and of being able to pray for you, encourage you, support you as brothers and sisters in Christ, but you also communicate by example that they are safe in those deeper levels of communication noted above. This will help them feel safer to at least try sharing with the group in honest, genuine relationship; and as you allow yourself to receive God's grace in your own weaknesses vulnerabilities, you will have grace to in turn pour into others in your group, and beyond, as they need it. God is glorified in this far, far more than us keeping up a guise of confidence, mastery, pride, and infallibility, and it keeps us from setting ourselves up as the source of anyone's faith, peace, and hope, so they too must seek and rely on God.

13. Deal with Difficult People & Situations to Foster Fellowship & Peace

Conflicts need to be dealt with directly, slowing down to have good conversations (probably face-to-face) to work out the problem without pushing away the person – conflict that is swept under the rug will only lead to deeper offences and division. As the leader, take the initiative to have follow-up conversations to ask good questions with openness and curiosity, hear concerns, and work toward reconciliation as far as it depends on you. (See *Peacemaker* by Ken Sande, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* by Peter Scazzero) Just as God moved toward us in grace and love not because we deserved it but because we needed it and He valued relationship with us, so we get to show the same grace and love to others by moving toward them.

NorthPoint also provides excellent leader training and resources to help navigate group dynamics and difficult relationships; we encourage you to visit these links to see what is available, so as situations arise you have resources to help guide you in handling these relationships with biblical wisdom:

groupleaders.org/training-home groupleaders.org/common-challenges groupleaders.org/resources

14. Involve People in Looking Beyond the Group

One of our priorities in our groups is that we would become people who serve with the heart of Jesus (Mark 10:45, John 13:12-17, Rom. 12:3-18, 1 Cor. 12:12-31, Gal. 6:2, Eph. 4:3, Col. 1:12-14). (from *Rooted* training): Serving is less about fulfilling an obligation, or even about helping other people. Serving is more about who God is shaping you to be. The Bible defines poverty in terms of Shalom shattered. There is brokenness between us, each other, Creation and God. God's mission, or the Gospel, is the restoration of Shalom on the planet. In other words, we are not saved to stand around with other saved people talking about our saved experience, but instead we were restored to be restorers. In our groups, this includes:

- People discovering their spiritual gifts and using those gifts to serve in the church. (from *Rooted* training): As we progress in our spiritual journeys and want to do the work we are called to do, we sometimes get stalled by not being sure where or how to fulfill our God-given purpose. It's important we understand how

the Holy Spirit equips us with not only His power, but also with gifts specific to each of us. Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to help accomplish God's work in this world and His Church. Our talents, abilities, and personality traits are natural human resources everyone has. These are not the same as spiritual gifts, which are given by sovereign choice, by the Holy Spirit, at the time we become Christ-followers. These gifts are supernatural, enabling us to serve God more effectively in the world and in the Church. They come with the power of the Holy Spirit and are therefore 'supercharged' when used for the benefit of the Kingdom of God.

- No one except Jesus has all the gifts. All Christians are called to the work of the ministry as there are no distinctions made in the New Testament between "clergy" (professionals) and "laity" (volunteers). The primary sections of the New Testament that teach about spiritual gifts are Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:11-16, and most extensively, 1 Corinthians 12-14. We have been given these gifts with a desired purpose in mind, and it is our responsibility to use them as intended.
- We recommend these three spiritual gift assessments to help discern what one's giftings may be:
 - Buildingchurch.net/g2s-i.htm
 - Gregwiens.com/gifts
 - lifeway.com/en/articles/women-leadership-spiritual-gifts-growth-service
- Each assessment you take will possibly weigh gifts differently, and therefore, while there may be overlaps, you may also see differences in results. Secondly, these assessments are not intended to pigeonhole you into a specific place in ministry; they are only to identify some of the gifts the Holy Spirit has given you to work toward His purpose for you. An alternative way to discover how God has uniquely gifted you follows these three steps: Examine your tendencies and passions; Experiment with serving in these areas; Evaluate whether serving in these ways has born the fruit of glorifying God and edifying His people. Also look for outside confirmation of your giftings as others affirm where you have been gifted.

15. Serving as a Group

The group finding opportunities to serve out in the community, to be restorers of Shalom as part of maturing into who God created us to be and living out the Gospel.

To help facilitate this, we have prepared three suggested ways to serve in our community together, in addition to the churchwide rhythm of community outreach and service opportunities. We encourage you to prayerfully discuss these options with your group and arrange at least one time each year where your group focuses on ministering to others. Secondly, we encourage you to regularly pray as a group for opportunities to engage with and invite non-believers into the group, to church, or for one-on-one conversations to build relationship with them. Lastly, we also encourage you to take on burdens of prayer for the church and our community with us, and especially to ask together with us that God would make us a house of prayer.

16. An Open Secret: Ministry and Service

It's not enough to gather. It's not enough to study. It's not enough to worship. It's not enough to meditate. The spiritual pilgrimage asks you to be more than what you've become. It requires putting action to thought and legs to ministry. It's not an issue of people not wanting to serve, rather, the effort to be missional amounts to the proverbial 'one straw too many' in the lives most of us lead. We are called to be salt and light – to go. **The healthiest small groups have a vision beyond themselves. Biblical community is about being 'on mission' together.**

When Jesus stood before the world to announce His mission as it is documented in Luke 4, He read from Isaiah 61:1-2. The missional invitation to all of us resides in these words, too:

The Spirit of the Lord God is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of our God's vengeance; to comfort all who mourn.

The missional aspect of Small Group Life may well be one of the most exciting for the following reasons:

1. Groups that turn inward seldom live long lives and very, very few ever multiply. Groups that are missional see beyond themselves. They seek to have an impact with those who are not yet followers of Christ, and it organically instills a mission mindset.
2. Groups involved in mission endeavors bond in much deeper ways than those who simply have ongoing meetings, parties, and involve themselves in recreational activities.
3. You will see life transformation as selfish people become giving people, discontent individuals become more satisfied with their own lives, and broken people begin to be put back together. It's impossible to serve others and allow your heart to remain spiritually stagnant.

17. Develop & Train Leaders

Pass on whatever God has given you. If you identify any potential future leaders within your group, arrange for them to deepen their participation by taking on responsibilities (such as leading prayer, guiding discussion, helping contact and connect with people between gatherings, helping create welcoming environments for your group, etc.) and consider strategically splitting into two groups to reach and care for more people when your group has grown beyond 8-10 people. Involve these people in your planning, preparation, and prayer; whenever possible, do nothing alone but use those opportunities to show growing leaders how to do these things, serve together, and let them take the reins while you can be on hand to encourage until they have the experience and confidence they need to continue with more independence and be fully released into leadership. Encourage those you see growing into maturity to use their giftings for the sake of the body of Christ, and invite them into opportunities to do so as often as possible. Pass on your observations regarding the giftings and passions of those in your group to other leaders in the church, including our pastors, our nominating committee, and our ministry leaders, so we know who we can invite into these opportunities – as much as possible, we want to join with the work God is doing in our church and community, and this includes noting how God has gifted those He has placed in our church family.

18. Work Cooperatively with Other Leaders

We are not meant to do this alone; while our culture has disciplined us to believe being hyper-independent is normal and everyone feels this way, we often do not realize how much we need and are blessed by having co-laborers in the work we've been called to do. Connect with the other life group/church leaders whenever possible to support and encourage one another. You never need to do this alone. If you have any needs, please ask often so we know and can work on supporting you well. Lastly, we encourage and implore you to take advantage of opportunities for fellowship with other leaders so that *you can be poured into, encouraged, and strengthened too*. Healthy discipleship requires both serving others and receiving from the body of Christ; leadership can be isolating, which means it is all the more important that we lean into the fellowship we are called to by God in our local church family and beyond.