



**BROOKSWOOD  
CHURCH**

# **Women's Ministry Table Helper Handbook**

**to make mature disciples  
who truly live  
in the shalom of God**

**How to Use This Handbook:** We recommend reviewing p. 3-15 to plan and prepare before your small group starts meeting each year, to review the core of Women's Ministry, foundations of spiritual growth and group life, and clarity regarding your role. P. 16-33 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. P. 34-47 include an Appendix on Bible study approaches for supplementary information.

More resources are available at [brookwoodbaptist.com/resources](http://brookwoodbaptist.com/resources)

**The Big Picture for Group Life – p. 3**

**Group Life in Context – p. 3**

**5 Stages of Spiritual Growth – p. 4**

**Biblical Shape of Spiritual Community – p. 5**

**Women's Ministry Core Purpose – p. 5**

**How Are Studies Chosen? – p. 6**

**Table Helpers – p. 11**

**Small Group Purpose & Priorities – p. 14**

**Small Group Values – p. 15**

**Leader Skills & Group Dynamics – p. 16**

**Mercy vs. Disgust Part I – p. 16**

**Mercy vs. Disgust Part II – p. 16**

**Mercy vs. Disgust Part III – p. 17**

**Being over Doing – p. 18**

**Strategies for Common Challenges**

**No One Has Done the Homework – p. 19**

**Dominating the Conversation – p. 20**

**People Not Speaking. Ever. – p. 20**

**Difficult Topics – p. 21**

**Keeping on Task – p. 21**

**The Group Connecting with Each Other – p. 21**

**Small Groups 101 – p. 21**

**How to Keep Discussion Going – p. 22**

**Facilitate Group Participation – p. 23**

**Communication & Building Trust – p. 23**

**Healthy Group Discussion – p. 25**

**Staying on Topic – p. 26**

**Leading Different Personalities – p. 26**

**Non-Anxious Listening – p. 27**

**Practice Speaking Well – p. 28**

**Ask Good Questions – p. 28**

**Model Openness & Transparency – p. 29**

**Foster Fellowship & Peace – p. 30**

**Abuse – p. 31**

**Looking Beyond the Group – p. 32**

**Develop & Train Leaders – p. 33**

**Work Cooperatively with Other Leaders – p. 33**

**Appendix: Study the Bible Well – p. 34**

**Inductive Bible Study – p. 34**

**Bible Study & Meditation – p. 42**

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

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

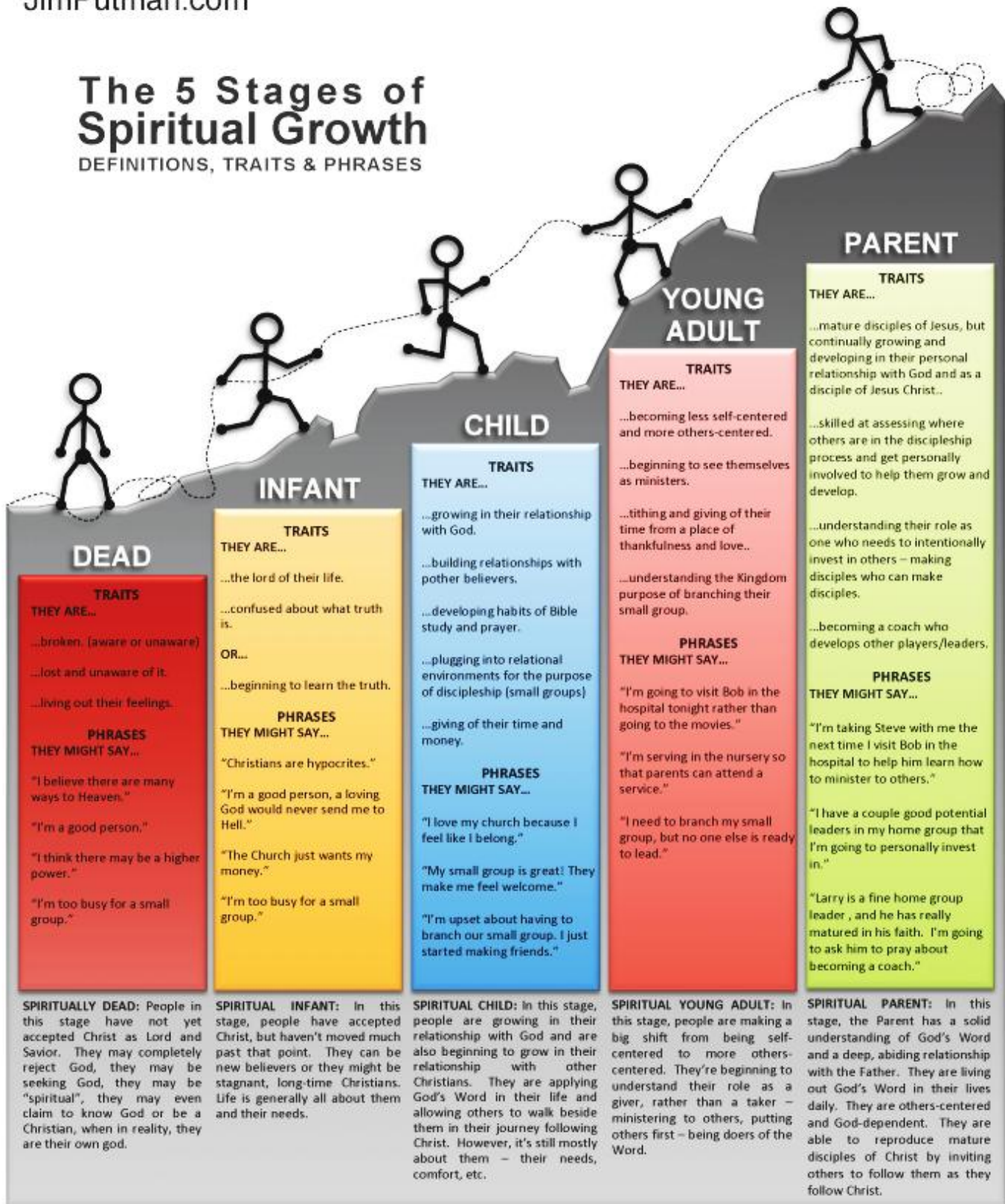
- **Unfamiliar with Christ** – “I am really not that interested”
- **Exploring Christ** – “I believe in God but I am not sure about Christ”
- **Beginning in Christ** – “I believe in Jesus and am working on what it means to get to know Him”
- **Growing in Christ** – “I feel really close to Christ and 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.

## Women's Ministry Core Purpose

Our ministry vision and core purpose is **to make mature disciples who truly live in the *shalom* of God.** *Shalom* is often translated as ‘peace’; however, it is an incredibly rich biblical concept. *Shalom* includes ‘a relationship of love and loyalty with God and one another; welfare, prosperity, wholeness, and an absence of hostility; a relationship characterized by friendship, care, loyalty, and love.’ This idea of peace in Scripture is paralleled with: ‘inheriting the land/our spiritual inheritance, long life, quietness and trust, righteousness, strength, tranquility, divine steadfast love; those who have this peace have a future, joy, and a long life.’

We believe this is God's heart for all of us, that it was His original design for His good creation, and it is this *shalom* that He is restoring as His kingdom comes. And thus it is our heart that every woman we minister to be invited, encouraged, and discipled into this *shalom*.

The women of Brookwood are called as followers of Jesus to devote themselves to Scripture, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42):

1. Study of Scripture: Devotion ourselves to Scripture how we seek God and His Way, the Path of Peace. Studies on books of the Bible are essential for Bible literacy and discernment, as well as for developing skills so we all can mature and become more independent in our study, taking an increasingly active role in our own discipleship. This means the women need to both be equipped and feel capable (which comes through practice). This results in less anxiety, and as they grow and test their own skills they realise they are indeed equipped to seek God for their own lovely selves. Topical studies are also essential because we need to be taking in the full witness of Scripture on these topics, so we have complete teaching, so we handle the Word of God well and not only in pieces, and so we deliberately focus on areas where we need to grow in maturity. We do not want surviving disciples, who are starved half to death; but healthy, thriving disciples who know and love their God and can encourage others in

the faith. We pursue the study of Scripture in our regular Bible studies, in workshops, in our Soul-Care retreats, and in our resource recommendations.

2. Fellowship & Ministry of Invitation: Fellowship includes community creation *and* good works; we must become a functioning body sustained by God not only for our good, but also for His glory. 'For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.' (Ephesians 2:10). We pursue fellowship and the ministry of invitation through the Fall Kick Off Fair, Fellowship Events like our Soul Care Retreat and Prayer Bible workshops, and through the Fellowship time on Wednesday mornings 9-10 am. Perhaps most importantly, we regularly have fellowship together around the things of Jesus in our small groups at Bible study.
3. Prayer: Prayer ensures our ongoing seeking of reliance on, and relationship with God. It keeps our hearts oriented to God, keeps us submitted to His will and the work of the Holy Spirit, equipped by Him, sustained by Him, and near to our Lord and filled by His love so that all our seeking, studying, fellowship, preparation, work, relationship, is all done from a place of rest in God and not our own wisdom, preferences, or striving. Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21). We pursue this through regular prayer in the large group time at Bible study, in our small groups, at our retreats, and in all of our meetings.
4. Admin: This is the support that makes study, prayer, fellowship & invitation possible; this is how we are responsible as a ministry and faithful to our purpose, obedient to God's leading. The 'breaking of bread' doesn't just *happen*; it requires prep, facilitation, management, resourcing, etc. We take seriously the training and equipping of our table helpers – which is why you have this handbook :D

## How Are the Women's Bible Studies Chosen?

We have implemented five guidelines for choosing Bible studies in Women's Ministry:

1. **The study must be faithful to and have a high view of Scripture.** The Word of God is authoritative over everything else, and it must be interpreted faithfully, in the larger context of the Church (i.e., the Bible study author needs to have checked their interpretations by consulting qualified others outside of their own thoughts and ideas).
2. **The study must accurately and effectively communicate the Holy Spirit's role vs. our responsibility in discipleship and sanctification wherever possible.** There are two extremes we can err on: the Holy Spirit does everything, and I have no responsibility for obedience or effort; and everything relies on my effort and obedience, my own perfectionism. Neither is biblically faithful or life-giving. Dallas Willard wrote, "Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning." Throughout Scripture, we are called to be obedient and follow Jesus faithfully, to follow His example of obedience and submission to the Father, and frequently there are clear commands in Scripture for us to follow:

*"If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he*

*lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.” – John 14:15-21*

*So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."*

*And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as "temporary residents." For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake.*

*Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory.*

*You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. – 1 Peter 1:13-22*

*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too. We know we love God's children if we love God and obey his commandments. Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. – 1 John 5:1-15*

*"A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from thornbushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.*

*"So why do you keep calling me 'Lord, Lord!' when you don't do what I say? I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it. It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who hears and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house right on the ground, without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins." – Luke 6:43-49*

*We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ. – 2 Corinthians 10:3-5*

*This means that God's holy people must endure persecution patiently, obeying his commands and maintaining their faith in Jesus. – Revelation 14:12*

*Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name. – Romans 1:5*

*I am writing to remind you, dear friends, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning. Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning. – 2 John 5-6*

*Jesus replied, "But even more blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice." – Luke 11:28*

*But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. – James 1:22-25*

*Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.*

*Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*

*Though he was God,*

*he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.*

*Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;*

*he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.*

*When he appeared in human form,*

*he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

*Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor  
and gave him the name above all other names,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

*Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. –  
Philippians 2:1-13*

At the same time, it is only by the power and work of the Holy Spirit within us that we are transformed (as Philippians 2:1-13 above states, along with these passages):

*And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. – Ezekiel 36:26-27*

*And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. – Romans 12:1-2*

*And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. – Philippians 1:6*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God.*

*Renew a loyal spirit within me.*

*Do not banish me from your presence,*

*and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation,*

*and make me willing to obey you. – Psalm 51:10-12*

*Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. But—  
When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our*

*Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. – Titus 3:3-7*

*But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. – 2 Corinthians 3:16-18*

*So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.*

*When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. – Galatians 5:16-25*

These two must be held in biblically-faithful tension: the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and our obedient cooperation with the Spirit.

3. **The study must include genuine instruction for application, teaching not only *what* Jesus has commanded and *what* Scripture says, but also *how* we obey and *how* we live out the truth of the Word of God.** This is essential for three reasons. First, Jesus commands us in Matthew 28:18-20: Jesus came and told His disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.** And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Second, it is profoundly burdensome to tell people what they should do or the wonderful blessings of being in relationship with Jesus, without telling them anything about *how* to obey or *how* to receive those blessings. Not only does this tend to produce a lot of discouragement, frustration, and confusion, it is a form of spiritual abandonment. As we make disciples and love one another, we cannot neglect the ‘how.’ Similarly, the third reason this is essential is because many of us in the Western church are already educated beyond our obedience; we are ‘puffed up’ with knowledge, and not doing a whole lot

of following. In our studies, and thus in our small groups, we want to follow Jesus well by obeying Him out of love and gratitude and trust.

4. **The study must include skill-building, either explicitly or implicitly, for genuine study and application.** Our core purpose is to make *mature* disciples, who can have the skills and confidence using them to *feed themselves and take an active role in their own sanctification*. We cannot have a second-hand relationship with Jesus; relying on the spirituality of another teacher or leader or author is vastly insufficient to meet our needs. We each need to know Jesus for ourselves, each need to be able to handle Scripture well and seek God in it ourselves, need to be able to pray and discern, and to grow into each of these. So we want to take every opportunity to develop these skills, practice them together, support those who are growing, and all be learners together – disciples are always learners.
5. **All studies done under the 'umbrella' of Women's Ministry need to be reviewed first by either the Women's Ministry director or one of our pastors.** This is for discernment and accountability, and so that we who are leaders are being responsible with the teaching that is provided within Brookwood Church. This does not mean we can only use studies that come from Baptist authors or that we cannot discuss or even teach other views – God provides excellent teachers from a stunningly vast array of traditions, and we should learn to hear other views and perspectives *especially* on matters that are secondary and tertiary doctrines. Encountering different interpretations, when presented well and fairly, helps us to think well and develop skills of wrestling with Scripture and relying on its authority to evaluate ideas. However, we are responsible, ultimately, to do our due diligence to check whether studies meet the above criteria, align with the core and primary aspects of the Christian faith, and handle Scripture well. *Please*, bring us study requests and recommendations and let us discern together what is good for our church family as we seek God together.

## Table Helpers

Ministering to others in healthy ways requires clarity regarding our responsibilities, so we can focus on what God has entrusted to us and not be weighed down by burdens God never intended for us. Above all, we want to follow and trust Him.

As table helpers, we are responsible for:

- 1) Doing our homework every week (or ahead of the group).
- 2) Modelling good attitudes and practices in our own time with God in His Word (including but not limited to the homework).
  - If we are having trouble, we model prioritizing what we need and asking for help - blaming and complaining that something doesn't fully suit us does not foster maturity or health. If we are having a hard time, are frustrated, confused, dissatisfied, struggling, we go talk to the Bible study leader so she can actively support us, so we can be empowered and encouraged and overcome whatever is distracting or hampering us, not allowing it suck the joy out of the study for us. We will need to work for the benefits of good Bible study, because we will internalize what we learn better this way; but if the work far outweighs the reward, if we are getting stuck and discouraged, confused, and exhausted, then we need to collaborate on identifying the difficulty and finding a good way forward. This is a function of both fellowship and the equipping of the saints.

- We are all called to mature in Christ. One of the most significant obstacles that will hold us back from growing as apprentices of Jesus and keep us from being set free and experiencing the abundant life is handing off our own God-given responsibilities to someone or something else. We will not grow, we will not change, we will not find freedom, we will not mature if we keep an attitude of 'God must bring me my version of the perfect Bible study, experience, circumstances, season, group, church, etc. *before* I can fully lean into the work He wants to do in me.' Similarly, postures of insisting 'I'm just not cut out for Bible study and thus I am excused from clear commands of God and the invitations into deep fellowship with Him', or 'God has to do everything and I will be completely passive, expecting God to change me without any obedience, prayer, submission on my part' will not be life-giving for us, nor will they lead to Christlikeness and maturity in Him. We must each take responsibility according to what God has given each of us, that we each would bear our own load, and take seriously (as God does) that we have been given free will and capacity to obey and follow Jesus. We ask God for what we need and receive from Him. We ask for and receive help and support from our church family. We learn to trust that God knows what He's doing and that any sacrifice given to God is more than worth what God will give us in return.
- 3) Fostering a safe and inclusive space for people to ask questions, share, and study together – see the Small Group Values later in this handbook. We need a 'grown up' in the room.
  - 4) Keeping the small group on track with discussion of the Bible study and providing support and accountability for the homework - this is much easier to do when we ourselves are supported, so take hold of this from training and specific support from the Bible study leader so you can pass it on and encourage one another.
- The discussion focus is particularly important because we want people to be fed by and to love the Word of God. We need to be God-centered, have fellowship around the things of Jesus; our discussion in group time thus needs to reflect this priority. There is time and space for socializing and focusing on our interests outside of our limited Bible study time together. The more consistent we are with this at the start of a study, the easier it is to set the tone for the group and have clear expectations.
  - If this is a struggle within the group, we recommend using a structured discussion time at least for a season:
    - 1) 1) Do not ask how people are doing, the discussion will be more challenging to bring back to the Bible study. Start with: How did you make out with the study this week? Do you have any questions from the homework? (or my personal favourite) What challenged or impacted you from the homework this week?
    - 2) 2) Then go through your predetermined discussion questions. Go around the room and have each person answer one at a time, with no interruptions, comments, or discussion of the person's answer until it is that speaker's turn in the circle (your group may need to be coached on this). You go *last* as much as possible. This makes clear space for everyone to be heard, and encourages an expectation that everyone contributes.

- 3) 3) We have fellowship time beforehand to check in with people. If you can tell someone is having a tough time, please put the study on pause to care for them. We also have prayer time to bring requests (not backstories, discussion, or group problem-solving), *requests* to God together. And if there is need, connect with people after to check in on them.
- 5) Praying together. Again, keep this time to sharing brief requests and spending the majority of the prayer time actually praying to God. Encourage everyone to take turns praying.
- 6) Keeping the Bible study/ministry leader informed regarding any issues or questions that need to be addressed. This helps us support everyone well during the study (rather than only finding out about difficulties when it's too late to address them) and it helps us teach and equip well, according to where there are needs and where the Holy Spirit is working.

Some bonus suggestions for the small group time:

- Ask each in their group to do something like open or close prayer, talk about a particular question, and keep track so everyone has space to contribute/ask questions/get support – this helps group members practice and mature.
- We try to set up our small groups with two table helpers, so if one has to be away there is already someone in place to facilitate. However, if both table helpers happen to be away, please ask someone within your group to step in and handle making sure the homework questions are discussed, that everyone prays together, and to note any remaining questions that they want to revisit next session. Most participants can handle these things just fine.

As table helpers our main role is to *facilitate* discussion. This means we are *not* responsible for:

- 1) Answering every question – it's better to have the group *wrestle* with the question and help each other. And at the end of that, share our answers. But if no one has the answer, research or refer the question to the Bible study or ministry leader, to our pastors, or to other trusted teachers in the church. You do not need to pressure yourself to know everything. It is much better and healthier for everyone to model being a learner (a disciple), encouraging good questions, and searching for God.
- 2) Teaching – the studies are deliberately chosen to be high quality teaching. Table helpers are not expected to do extra prep beyond the homework, *unless this is a spiritual gifting and gives you joy*. Again, small group time is ideally collaborative, an opportunity to share answers and ask questions; but if the whole group gets stuck, pass the question on to the leaders. Also, it's okay to have wrong answers – go back and correct yourselves, mistakes and confusion are part of learning. Our groups should be safe places to be learners.
  - We ought to each lean into our strengths and God-given giftings. If these are knowledge, teaching, wisdom, we can share these in the discussion time. If these are mercy, discernment, encouragement, we *definitely* need to share these in the discussion time. Just as we need intercessory prayer and hospitality, and all the gifts God has given for the body of Christ. We are not responsible for gifts the Spirit has not given us – we are responsible for being who God has created us to be, following Jesus, relying on the Holy Spirit, and not taking on ill-fitting yokes and

identities because we think we ought to be like someone else. Let God bless others through the person He created on purpose: you.

- 3) Getting disengaged people to love studying God's Word/do their homework/attend more often/etc. beyond invitation, encouragement, leading by example, and biblical apprenticeship. People are responsible for their own choices; we cannot and should not bear that responsibility for them. Lysa Terkeurst succinctly notes, 'You cannot work on someone else more than they are willing to work on themselves.' Participants who choose not to engage has much more to do with their own beliefs about what is necessary for healthy spirituality, their own priorities, their own season and circumstances, etc., than it does with you. We are not to take on burdens that do not belong to us, including any condemnation because we could not get someone to do something that is between them and God. We can check in, offer appropriate support, model, invite, encourage, and we pour into those who show up. As Pastor Harv says, 'Go with the go-ers.'

### **Small Group Time Purpose & Priorities**

- 1) Discussing the homework/video (depending on the week). Usually, it works best to do this first so that we communicate valuing the Word above all else. This also ensures everyone is supported in the study and it helps us keep our focus on God first, and then our selves within the context of His love and goodness and the truth of Scripture.
  - During discussion, when people share personal needs and struggles, take the opportunity to encourage them. Point them to Scripture. Pause the discussion to pray for them then. Be mindful, though, of when something is too big of a discussion for our time, or when the group is veering into group therapy – pause this, make arrangements to care for the person properly after the group time (let's talk after, go for coffee, connect as a group tomorrow), and finish the study discussion. This will honor the person and the purpose for which this time has been set aside well. Remember, our purpose is not to provide human wisdom and problem-solving, but to point people to God in Scripture and to pray with them.
  - Always escalate to professional and experienced others when you feel out of your depth, whether that is our pastors, ministry leaders, lead team members, recommended counselors, local support groups, etc. as appropriate.
- 2) Praying together. This is deeply related not only to the care of those in our group, but also to how we relate to God.
  - If the group struggles with long prayer requests, oversharing other people's stories, getting sidetracked into discussion, we recommend shortening the available prayer time so people have to give brief prayer requests. Alternatively, stop taking prayer requests and have everyone pray for what is on their heart – go straight into prayer, coaching everyone that if someone prays for something and they want to pray for that too, go for it.
  - We always want to reserve sufficient prayer time together. It's good to take notes on prayer requests so you can follow up later. Encourage your whole group to do this and to pray for one another as the Holy Spirit brings people to mind throughout the week.

## Small Group Values

All groups operate according to certain values and expectations. Because we want to deliberately and responsibly foster safe and healthy small groups where people can be loved well, be safe to wrestle with their faith, life experiences, Scripture, and God, and have authentic relationship where we can be our genuine selves with one another, we practice the following values together in our small groups. As table helpers, we help remind our groups of these values and encourage each other to practice.

**Safety & Confidentiality:** Honest, open relationships must be guarded with an agreement of safety: that what is said in the group will remain confidential and that opinions will be respected and differences will be allowed.

**'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 & gently correct towards the use of "I" statements rather than "them", "the church", "us", "we", "you", etc.

**Sharing:** We are sensitive about the amount of time we share in group discussion time. We also respect others' personhood by allowing them to be in control of sharing their own story. We share prayer requests about others only with their express permission beforehand and/or with careful protection of their identity.

**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.

**Prayer:** 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.

**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.

**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.

**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. We care for one another out of the overflow of however God has blessed us and according to the Holy Spirit's leading and the love of Christ in us.

**Sensitivity:** A commitment to sensitivity to the needs, feelings, backgrounds, and current situations of other group members will help build relationships in the group. We practice being mindful of one another, being kind with our speech and demeanor, and learning to love one another well. We also refrain from discussing politics and contentious world events in our small group time, as these are complex nuanced topics that are too big to deal with well (and preserve relationship and healthy group dynamics) without distracting from our Bible study time.

## Leader Skills & Group Dynamics

Our orientation to God and others:

### 1) Mercy vs. Disgust Part I

Billy Graham was 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, he said: 'It is the Father's job to judge, it is the Spirit's job to convict, and it is Jesus's job to love. We are called to be like Jesus. And many try to do all three jobs.'

North Point Church provides the following teaching regarding mercy, disgust, and churches influencing culture:

Churches and cultures have beliefs about what is true and right. And when those beliefs differ, we get tension and gaps, which we tend to navigate in 3 ways:

- Separate from the parts of culture we fear
- Surrender to the parts of culture we enjoy
- Engage with the parts of culture we want to influence

The key is: our ability to influence culture is limited by our disgust toward it. William Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*: 'Humans are most likely the only species that experiences disgust, and we seem to be the only one capable of loathing its own species.'

Disgust is a feeling of revulsion aroused by something unpleasant or offensive - an aversion, you want to avoid the thing or remove it. We are programmed to naturally move away from things that disgust us; this can be helpful wisdom. Disgust regulates a boundary between a person and the object of disgust - and biblical boundaries are good, they keep the bad out and let the good in.

Disgust becomes a problem when we project it onto people - this is the objectification of people; we stop defining them as created in the image of God and beloved by God, and instead define them according to whatever we are disgusted by - this is also known as judgement. We can also do this to ourselves, instead of primarily defining ourselves as created in the image of God and beloved by God, we instead can become disgusted by and loathe ourselves, being not only hard on ourselves but self-destructive. This is not good and God is not okay with it.

### 2) Mercy vs. Disgust Part II

To overcome disgust, we must intentionally move toward the messes. This means moving toward the mess of judgement inside of us. Everyone has an internalized standard, that has often been informed by where we grew up, how we were raised, our culture, our community, our faith, our *parents*, our education, etc. We have a tendency to show kindness, love, acceptance, to our kind, to those within our moral circle, who attain this internalized standard of morality.

When someone doesn't align with our internalized standard, we either try to impose that morality on them (which is controlling and objectifying - 'you have to become like me or like the way I think you should be or I will distance myself from you, I will be unkind toward you,' whether verbally or nonverbally) or we become disgusted and avoid them.

But, God's standard is there is no one righteous *and* Jesus came to show mercy and grace to *everyone*. There is no standard higher than God's - and Jesus did not distance Himself from sinners, although He had more cause than anyone to be disgusted by sin - instead, He invited people in and ate with them. This approach is not control, nor earning, where you change to come to Jesus and be near Jesus; rather, Jesus draws near to you and will be with you until His presence draws you to Him and makes you whole, because you are the beloved of God.

Jesus taught that our neighbour is the one in need, this is who we are to show kindness to. It actually has *nothing* to do with how well they align with my internalized moral standard, just as my justification by Christ and identity as God's beloved has nothing to do with how well I attained any moral standard.

We then need to expand our moral circle, so we treat people in the culture, people who are different from us, like family - because either they already are in God's family or the Father *longs* for them to be in the family, and objectifying them and distancing myself from them is the opposite of inviting. It is shaming and alienating, and it is not the way of Jesus. I am called to show grace, generosity, and love toward others, to have a heart that is inclined toward them as the Father's heart is inclined toward them.

### 3) Mercy vs. Disgust Part III

Richard Beck, *Unclean*: 'The Pharisees, seeking purity, pull away from the sinners. Jesus, seeking fellowship, moves toward the sinners.' Jesus' ministry prompts us to define spirituality less in terms of religion and knowledge and more in terms of service and engagement. Theology and knowledge are important but they aren't the solution to every problem we face.

Service and engagement are much more important, and most important is how we love. Andy Stanley encourages us to ask ourselves, 'What does Love require of me?' In Matthew 9:9-13, we read:

*As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him. Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."*

Understanding the difference between sacrifice and mercy will help us love better. Sacrifice is intentionally moving toward purity - getting rid of something that doesn't belong - and this is *good* within appropriate boundaries, I should sacrifice that which is unclean or causes me to sin within my own life, my own area of responsibility. But you know what? I am not responsible for the sin in your life. Or my neighbor's life. Or anyone else's life. So it immediately becomes problematic when I'm trying to remove someone else's sin – this is God's job. And I am not God.

Mercy is embracing and intentionally moving toward what is different. This means moving toward people. If being opposed to what someone is doing keeps you from moving toward them, then you have a higher standard than Jesus. What right do I have to claim a standard higher than God Himself?

This is the same issue we run into when we can't forgive ourselves for something, when we feel crushing shame - we are holding ourselves to a higher standard than God's and refusing to submit ourselves to His standard of loving-kindness. Which is wild that pride can twist up our hearts like this, but seriously. Let it go. You do not outrank God. And also, this other system of crushing standards that cut us off from perfect love? Awful. Ew. Return to sender. This is why Proverbs says 'There is a way that seems right to man but in the end it leads to death.' This is a system designed to convict and crush, not save.

No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good,  
and this is what he requires of you:  
to do what is right, to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:8

God has to shape our loving and our boundaries for us to love well. This requires humility where I let go of my standard, my effort, my self-righteousness *and* my shame, and I embrace the goodness and mercy of God. Nothing else will allow me to be healed, free, and whole. Nothing else will allow me to love God well. And nothing else will allow me to love others well.

#### **4) Being over Doing, from *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* by Peter Scazzero**

A slowed down spirituality is one in which our doing for Jesus flows out of our being with Jesus, so that we operate from a place of emotional and spiritual fullness, deeply aware of ourselves, others, and God. This helps us be present, to move into maturity and bear the fruit of the Spirit. It prevents us from getting burnt out. It enables us to serve and love others from the overflow of God's love poured into our own cup.

Mary and Martha: Martha is consumed with doing for Jesus, while Mary has chosen what is better - being with Jesus, sitting and learning from Him, simply being in His presence. It doesn't mean we never do, we never work in the kitchen or do practical service - but rather, we don't do so much that it makes us anxious or takes us away from the presence of Jesus.

Doing over Being looks like:

- Pressure of having too much to do in too little time
- Ignoring the stress, anxiety, and tightness in my body
- Concerned with what others think/orient myself to what I think people want/need *all the time*
- Fearful about the future
- Always rushing
- Defensive and easily offended
- Preoccupied and distracted
- Fire off quick opinions and judgments
- Feel unenthusiastic about or threatened by the success of others
- Spend more time talking than listening

We need to slow down to be with God. You cannot give what you do not possess: the Fruit of the Spirit. Mercy. Wisdom. All this comes from God and time in His presence. What you do is important, but who you are is even more important. The state you are in is the state you give to others.

How do we do this?

- Integrate silence and solitude; be alone with God, and enjoy His presence - especially listening prayer where you can be attentive to His Voice.
- Study Scripture for yourself, not just for others; in fact, we ought to always lay hold of whatever we study for ourselves first. Then it can overflow to others according to God's perfect plan and timing.
- Feel your feelings and learn to process them with God - spiritual maturity goes hand in hand with emotional maturity.
- Commune with Jesus throughout the day. This can look like practicing the rhythms of the Daily Office, or other practices that help you pause, pray, and tune into God's presence, as well as having time and space to receive from Him whatever you need.
- Sabbath: 24 hours, once a week, where you stop all work, rest, worship, and delight in God.
- Craft a Rule of Life, a trellis of spiritual practices or rhythms of being with God that support your life with Him and your spiritual health.

*A collection of strategies to address our most common challenges (in no particular order):*

### **5) When no one has done the homework:**

- *From Bethany:* I used to think the best approach was to be extremely accommodating, avoid them having any uncomfortable feelings, and reassure them 'it's totally fine you haven't done the homework, the main thing is that you just come.' There are some seasons for some people where all they can do is attend, and this is fine. We want to be gracious and encouraging. However, for most of us, we need accountability and good discipleship. I have inadvertently given the impression that homework was 'optional bonus content' that ultimately didn't really matter and people would get the same out of the study whether they did the homework or not. This is not only untrue, it had the unfortunate effect of communicating that our time with Jesus did not matter as long as there was a video to watch once a week or someone stood on the stage and taught from their own relationship with Jesus – second-hand spirituality is vastly insufficient to meet our needs for a personal relationship with Christ. It also communicated that if people had the right excuses, level of busyness, or anxieties/lack of experience, they could simply not spend time studying the Bible and God was cool with it. This does not do good things to our souls.
- The homework is essential to the studies we choose – this is deliberate for fostering our individual relationships with God. Not everything can and should be done in a group. We have a responsibility to invite and encourage each woman to connect with God in His Word. And this helps everyone participate more fully in the large group times and connect with that content on a meaningful level. This affects our

fellowship. The homework is designed to help us learn to study Scripture for ourselves, to process what we're reading in Scripture in ways that help us connect with it deeply and *personally*, and while it takes work and practice, it is very much a worthwhile investment. We desire God's best for our ladies: that they would know God for themselves, hear His Voice firsthand, and love Him with their whole hearts as they experience His love directly.

- If we don't do our homework at *best* we just skim the surface. This can be a way of avoiding engaging with God on a personal level – we shouldn't be okay with enabling this. This does not at all mean that when life interrupts we do not have grace, that we must always have the homework done perfectly every week, nothing so burdensome and divorced from reality; but the chronic refusal to engage with God's Word personally is harmful to our souls. We will not mature nearly to the extent we would by pressing into God and seeking Him in His Word for ourselves. This is why we build groups so that those who haven't been as engaged are surrounded by our homework-doers so that they get encouraged and lifted up, and see everything the others are getting out of the study (preaching and testimony!), and it makes them desire it for themselves - because if you have one person doing homework and the rest of the group isn't, that one will get discouraged and dragged down. It's too heavy a burden for one person's relationship with God to carry everyone's spiritual health. So darlings, don't do it.
- So, we strongly recommend starting with the aforementioned questions to focus people on the homework, *to indicate the priority, include accountability that homework discussion (not visiting) is our focus at Bible study, and it lets the table helper gauge where everyone is at.* We want to prioritise everyone understanding and being looked after.
- If no one has done the homework, the best way to encourage, support, and hold people accountable is to simply do it together. We start where people are, with no shame, and we get as far as we can together. We take turns reading the Scripture together, we share answers, we pause to think and share on the personal questions. This allows us to come alongside those in the group who may be struggling, give them a really good start to the week, and help them not feel alone or overwhelmed.

#### **6) One person is dominating the conversation:**

- Ask someone else what they think within the discussion.
- Sit so they are beside you and can't make direct eye contact with you all the time - it's subconscious, and it *works*.
- Talk to the person if this is a consistent issue. Maturity includes dealing with conflicts directly, and table helpers are the 'grown up in the room' for the loving care of everyone.
- Recruit that person to get someone else more engaged, and redirect that energy to building relationship and community.

#### **7) People not speaking. Ever.**

- Practice the pause. Give people 7-10 seconds to think, then reword the question. Do *not* answer the question first, or people will over-rely on you for this. We want discussion, not just answers. Pause until it is uncomfortable.

- Make sure they have done the homework in the first place (because this requires a different approach); but if homework is done then:
  - Call on people by name
  - Go around the table for personal questions, so everyone answers by reading at least part of what they wrote (and if they wrote nothing, pause for them to think or circle back to them)
  - If people are *still* refusing to discuss, move to prayer. Stop the homework, move to prayer, end early. Connect with the Bible study leader to discuss and figure out what is going on. Perhaps something has happened that makes people feel uncomfortable discussing - that will require individual connection to find out. Perhaps the group just doesn't want to discuss, so we don't force it. If this happens two sessions in a row, then we have an honest conversation with the group: it doesn't seem like anyone is wanting to discuss the homework, is that correct? Can you tell me why? I'm very sorry to hear that, I will respect your decision then, after the video for this study we will just meet to pray. And if anyone has questions about the homework I will stay to answer them after. *Be encouraged that this is extremely rare, but we do not want you to bang your head against a wall. If they will not accept the invitation to discuss, release them.*

#### 8) Difficult topics:

- We have a policy in place that we do not discuss politics or divisive world events during our Bible studies or workshops, as these are complex topics that we cannot handle responsibly in the limited time we have without losing the time set aside for Bible study. There is time outside of our gatherings to discuss these things. We want to protect our Bible study time and keep our focus on God and on what He is doing in our lives and our local communities, because that is where we live. If an issue is distracting in the group, pause to pray about it, surrender it to God, and then firmly redirect the group back to the study.

#### 9) Keeping on task:

- 'We've gotten off track and our time short, let's discuss...'
- 'I really want to hear more about this, but can we share about this after?'
- 99% of the time, do not start with prayer requests
- Get into a rhythm of asking 'how did the homework go' or 'what questions did you have' etc., rather than 'how is everyone' – it shifts the focus to the study and Scripture rather than ourselves

#### 10) The group connecting with each other:

- Focus on homework, relationship will develop organically.
- Expect this to take time.
- Share honestly and vulnerably. This helps signal to the others that the group is a safe space.
- Foster a healthy environment for people to be loved well.

#### 11) 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.

## 12) 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?

### 13) 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.

### 14) Levels of Communication & Building Trust

Priscilla Shirer writes, "The beauty of Bible study group is authenticity, sisters who lift each other up and encourage each other." This is our desire for authentic, loving community, where we can be sisters in Christ who bless one another. Leslie Vernick shares this teaching on the Levels of Communication as insights into relational safety and how we can build safety with others, fostering healthy, close relationship. We include this as a tool to understand how people become comfortable enough to open up to others, and so we can all be mindful of how to encourage others to share and honor them when they do.

- **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.

## 15) 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.

## 16) 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*.

## 17) 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.

### **18) 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.

### 19) 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.

### 20) 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.

## 21) 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 coveting 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 breath 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.

## **22) 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](http://groupleaders.org/training-home) [groupleaders.org/common-challenges](http://groupleaders.org/common-challenges) [groupleaders.org/resources](http://groupleaders.org/resources)

**23) Abuse (adapted from the Gospel Coalition & Leslie Vernick):**

The first recommendation is believe them, especially in cases of emotional, physical, and spiritual abuse. Abuse is the least falsely reported crime. The odds are very good that this person, who has finally worked up the courage to call abuse what it is, has wrestled with this a long time, and no one has doubted or argued with them more than they have with themselves. We need to honor them and be obedient to God by not enabling sin to continue and by providing safety for the abused, because women especially get so maligned and judged for having the courage to do the right thing, the very hard right thing, and we should support and encourage and listen.

Active listening; do not interrupt them, and ask gentle questions to encourage them, but not probing questions to push, or they may feel unsafe and shut down. Remember that abuse victims often have a hard time identifying all the abuse they've suffered until they are well into the healing process; odds are, it's worse than what they've shared with you.

Also remember that abusers, regardless of the type of abuse, groom their witnesses as much as they groom their victims. Abusers are master manipulators and deceivers. You'll probably be surprised: "they always seemed like such a godly person, such a good Christian, I thought it was the *other* person who had the anger issues, etc." They do seem that way. But you didn't live with them or have that very close relationship with them. We see what people allow us to see. And even people who are not deliberately abusing to cause harm but are just extremely immature and unhealthy, they are the proverbial fool, even they tend to present a very carefully cultivated image especially in front of *Christians*.

Humble discernment requires that I not assume my experience with that person defines them entirely. Even if someone is causing harm not out of evil intent but out of sheer foolishness, ignorance, immaturity, the effect on the abused is still the same. They are deeply hurt and this is unacceptable. They need care, safety, and support, and we do not enable anyone to continue sinning.

Validate. Even if you aren't sure, to say that sounds incredibly difficult, thank you so much for telling me. I am here for you. Pray with them. And then ask, what do you want to do? It is extremely important that their agency be protected.

Respond well. There are binders with resources and information available at the church. Resources are also available on the church website.

If someone is in danger, hotlines or the non emergency line for police and child services should be called - you can call to get good counsel on what needs to be done and how. But if someone is in immediate danger, call the police using 9-1-1. We do not need to go to the pastor or the elders first, if someone is breaking the law and endangering another person that is illegal, and the right thing to do is get the authorities involved.

If they are not immediate danger, do not push. You support, you pray, you respect them. Help connect them to good resources. Make sure they are loved, cared for, believed, protected, supported, surrounded by loving fellowship, kept connected, given safe places. If you are out of your depth, bring in another ministry leader, pastor, or lead team member. They all can confidentially help you navigate and provide resources.

The top priority is always the person's safety - this means not confronting the spouse, not pressuring the survivor but respecting their choices and being an emotionally safe person for them to share with.

Please remember that the strategies that work well in relatively healthy relationships can often make things worse in abusive relationships. Because good things, like honesty, kindness, generosity, even love, get used against the person to make them more vulnerable, more confused, more reliant on their abuser, and so what might be the wisest answer in a difficult relationship that is essentially healthy could be a very destructive recommendation for a destructive relationship.

#### **24) 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](http://Buildingchurch.net/g2s-i.htm)
  - [Gregwiens.com/gifts](http://Gregwiens.com/gifts)
  - [lifeway.com/en/articles/women-leadership-spiritual-gifts-growth-service](http://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.

### **25) 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.

### **26) Work Cooperatively with Other Leaders**

We are not meant to do this alone; while our culture has discipled 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.

## Appendix: 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/](http://brookwoodbaptist.com/resources/)***

### What is Inductive Bible Study?

*from [biblestudy.tips/inductive-bible-study/](http://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 21<sup>st</sup> 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<sup>[2]</sup>

### 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.