

DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAYS

STRAIGHTFORWARD DISCIPLESHIP FOR YOUR MINISTRY



NURTURING FAITH

4 Reasons for Christ-Centered Teaching

EVERYDAY EVANGELISM

DECISION-MAKING THROUGH A BIBLICAL LENS

HOW DO WE BUILD DISCIPLE-MAKERS?



Lifeway®

WE DESIGN TO HELP YOU MAKE DISCIPLES.

A Scripture that stays at the forefront of my mind is Judges 2:6-14. This passage should be sobering for every believer, but even more so for ministry leaders.

Moses wasn't the perfect leader, but one thing he modeled for us is the importance of raising up leaders around him. In Exodus 18, Jethro finds Moses overwhelmed and counsels him to appoint trustworthy leaders to assist him in serving the people.

Joshua was one of the greatest benefactors of Moses's commitment to lift up others around him. In Exodus 24, Moses takes his assistant Joshua up the mountain with him to receive instructions from God for the people of Israel. Fast forward to Numbers 27 and we see God telling Moses to appoint Joshua as the leader that would take Israel into the promised land.

Joshua was the obvious choice because of the investment that Moses made in Joshua's leadership as he assisted him. When Joshua does take over, the people already have a sense of respect for him and declare their loyalty to him as their new leader.

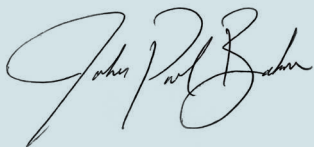
This is great news! When Moses dies, the people of God continue to move forward under Joshua's leadership. The problem comes when Joshua and all of his elders pass away. Judges 2:8-10 tells us a whole generation arose that didn't know the Lord. What happened? Joshua failed to raise leaders in the same way that Moses did. When he died, there was a void in leadership that had a generational impact.

As leaders in the church today, it can be easy to prioritize programs over people in a pursuit of ministry excellence and scalability. But the truth is we often put more polish on the church than is necessary. Life-changing ministry is done side by side in relationship with others.

Our goal at Lifeway is to meet you in these moments of life with your people. We design resources with discipleship in mind and do the work to build experiences that will add fuel to your discipleship efforts. God has given us the privilege of doing this work for over 130 years, in 160 countries, and 60 different languages, and we would be humbled to do it with you as well.

As you work your way through the articles in this magazine, I hope you will find in us an encouraging and helpful ministry partner. Also, if you would like to connect, reach out to me at johnpaul.basham@lifeway.com. I would love the chance to hear about your ministry.

Blessings,



John Paul Basham,
Director, Adult Ministry

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Sign up for **Lifeway's Discipleship eNewsletter** to get helpful articles like these for your ministry.





DISCIPLESHIP FOUNDATIONS

There's no question about Jesus's priority one and action plan for His followers. Matthew 28:19-20 are among the most well-known verses in the New Testament. They contain Jesus's great commission to His disciples as He ascended to heaven. "Go, therefore, make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." In other words, Jesus said to His followers, "make more disciples and teach them to live like I've taught you . . ." (CSB)®.

A disciple is a learner, but more—a learner and follower of a particular person. When we think about Christian disciples, we think first of the twelve men who followed Jesus when He walked the earth, a.k.a. the Apostles. But that first group of disciples was not meant to remain a small, exclusive group. They quickly grew to encompass all the people who responded to the gospel and became followers of Jesus—*disciples*.

But what is *discipleship*? That’s not exactly a Bible word.

True enough. But discipleship is important for disciples. Think of discipleship like this: Are you a friend? Describe your friend-*ship*. Are you a citizen? What does your citizen-*ship* mean to you?

Are you a disciple of Jesus? A follower of Jesus, desiring to learn from Him? Then describe your discipleship. What does your discipleship mean to you?

The term “discipleship” means the condition or situation of being a disciple. When churches speak of the ministry of discipleship, they generally mean the activities of the church that are focused on making disciples; helping people respond in faith to the invitation of the gospel, then learning to live the way Jesus intends for His followers to live.

The Bible is full of the stories of people responding to the gospel and then beginning the journey of discipleship, learning to live new lives, transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit to live by the teaching of Jesus.

Consider just one group of people who came to faith in Christ—the church in Ephesus. We meet the people of Ephesus in Acts 19 when the missionary Paul first traveled there. As the believers in Ephesus received

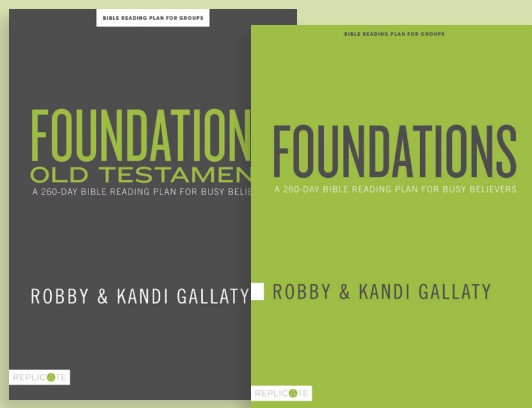
the Holy Spirit and began to learn more about Jesus and His way, they repented from the practices of idol worship and witchcraft that had previously dominated their lives. In fact, their lives were so different because of their discipleship, they became known throughout the city, and caused quite a stir (Acts 19).

We learn more about the Ephesian church when we read the letter Paul wrote to them a few years later. In the letter Paul wrote specifically about how their lives should be different, and how they should imitate God as “dearly loved children” (Ephesians 4:17–5:5, CSB). In other words, as disciples their lives should be clearly different from the people around them who are not following Jesus. That’s discipleship!

That letter to the Ephesians is not the last time we hear about the disciples in Ephesus. In Revelation 2:1-7 we read that the disciples in Ephesus had endured many hardships and become a church that could not tolerate evil people. But the message to the disciples in Ephesus included a word of warning, too. It seems that in their diligence to live righteously they had lost their love—one of the defining characteristics of those who follow Jesus. We learn that discipleship isn’t just about rule-keeping and severe discipline. Disciples who are following Jesus and learning from Him maintain holy lives while they love God and the people around them that God so loves.

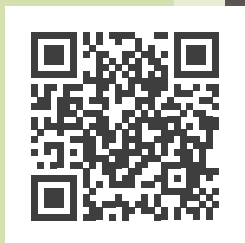
That’s the foundation of discipleship. Following Jesus and learning from Him. Living lives in obedience to His commands. And making more disciples by loving people the way Jesus did.

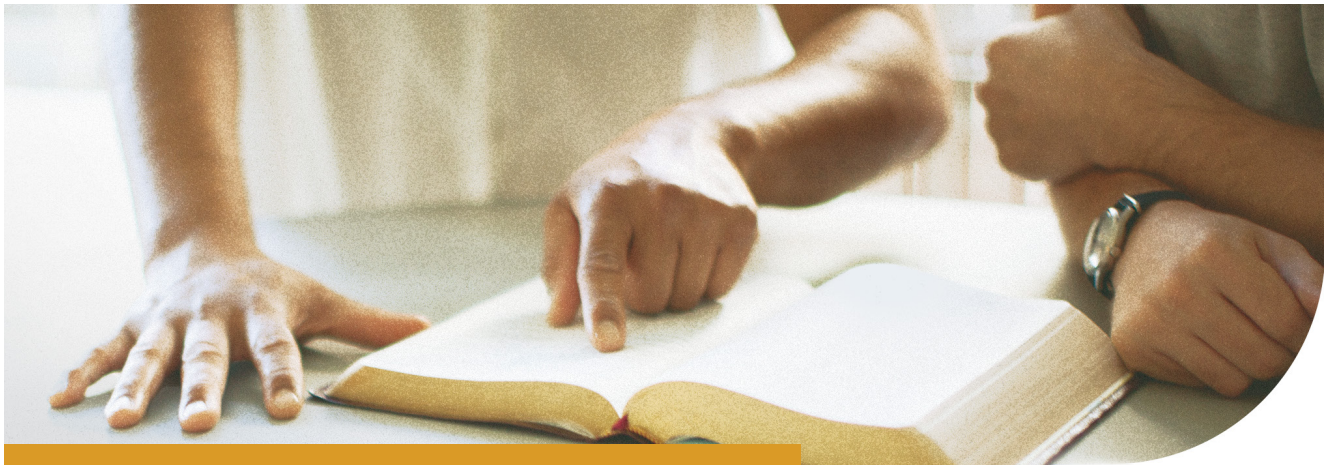
By Bill Craig, Chief of Ministry Experience,
Lifeway Christian Resources, Retired



RELATED RESOURCE

Foundations gives you a one-year Bible reading plan that requires just five days of study per week to fit your busy schedule. It includes daily devotional material. And through the HEAR journaling method, you’ll learn how to Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond to passages, allowing for practical application.





DEVELOPING A DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

In 2018, Lifeway Research found that 65% of protestant pastors were satisfied with the state of discipleship and spiritual formation in their churches. In 2019, 55% of pastors said they regularly evaluated the discipleship progress of their congregation.

Fast forward to today. While nearly 100% of churches have been meeting for in-person worship services since August 2022, attendance at those churches is at 89% of pre-COVID attendance. And 80% of churchgoers think “regular attendance” is twice per month. Group participation has slipped to just 44% of those in worship services, while nearly 25% of pastors report that only 25% of their congregation is involved in a small group.

If you’re facing one or more of these trends and wondering what you can do to plan for and encourage better discipleship, here are some practical ideas to boost the discipleship ministry in your church.

PLANNING FOR DISCIPLESHIP

When we think about discipleship ministry in a church, we generally mean activities that are focused on making disciples; helping people respond in faith to the invitation of the gospel and learn to live the way Jesus intends for His followers to live. Consider some of the following ideas as a starting place for a plan to increase discipleship in your church.

A discipleship plan should:

Have a purpose and a result in mind. Start with a vision for what a maturing disciple looks like in your church. Take a moment to jot down some characteristics and actions you are looking for in growing disciples in your church. You might include items like: attends worship regularly, reads the Bible often, prays daily, gives generously, participates in a group for Bible study, shares their faith, and more.

Take into account various levels of spiritual development. Plan activities and experiences for people who are new to the faith, renewing their commitment to Christ, and for those who are spiritually mature.

Be age-appropriate. Discipleship doesn’t start at adulthood (or even with the teen years) and it doesn’t end at retirement age. A complete discipleship plan includes Kids Ministry through Senior Adult Ministry.

Provide a range of resources that will help fuel discipleship in individuals and improve group Bible studies. Select resources that are doctrinally and theologically trustworthy as well as practical. These tools might be as simple as an online Bible reading plan or studies that include media-rich features and solid Bible commentary.

Engage believers in a variety of experiences that will help them grow as followers of Jesus. Provide opportunities for your church members to participate in a wide range of spiritual development activities. Which of the following are already a part of your church's discipleship plan? Which ones should you consider adding?

- » Worship services
- » Daily time with God, including a Bible reading plan and prayer prompts
- » Prayer ministry, praying for the needs of the congregation and your community
- » Small groups and/or Sunday School for fellowship, Bible study, and congregational care
- » One-on-one discipleship for growth and accountability
- » D-groups—groups of 3 or 4 meeting regularly for Bible study, prayer, and connection
- » Stewardship and generosity training
- » Service opportunities
- » Missions involvement, with praying for missions, giving to missions, and going on mission experiences
- » Gender specific groups
- » Intergenerational interactions
- » Other _____

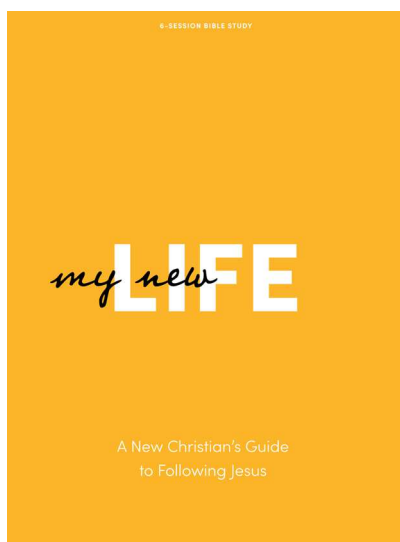
The list of options is long, but that doesn't mean you should offer them all. Choose to emphasize the ones that best fit the culture of your church and community while offering a balance of actions that encourage people to become mature followers of Christ.

Here's a checklist of questions:

- Do I have a clear vision of how our church is making disciples who make disciples?*
- Do I have a plan or a way to assess the disciples in my church?*
- Have we communicated that vision to the church members, letting them know about both the opportunities for discipleship and the expectations for disciples?*
- Do we offer solutions for every age and level of spiritual development?*
- Do group leaders know where to find trustworthy options for their group to study?*

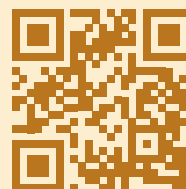
A plan for discipleship does not have to be complicated, but it should be designed to lead people to hear and respond to the gospel, grow in Christ, and in turn, make disciples themselves.

By Bill Craig, Chief of Ministry Experience,
Lifeway Christian Resources, Retired



RELATED RESOURCE

If you're developing a plan for new believers, this resource can help. In short chapters and simple terms, this 6-session Bible study explains key biblical truths like how to understand the Bible, God's character, prayer, the gospel, and much more.





EVALUATING OUR

DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

We want green grass in the areas of our yard that are supposed to be green. We tend to add seed, increase watering, or take other measures before we get a clear picture of why our grass may not be green in the first place. Knowing the kind of grass present and the soil will help us create a better plan for developing greener grass. The same is true when it comes to making disciples in our churches. We need to get to know the people and the context so we can develop a better plan.

EVALUATING OUR PLAN

In our churches, green grass is the level in which we help people follow Jesus, learn from Him, live out His teachings, and love like Him. These four areas serve as overarching categories for a discipleship plan.

The first step is asking how we help others do these four things.

What is in place that helps others understand how to follow Jesus and offers those not following Him an opportunity to do so?

What is in place to help people learn from Him, examining the Bible as individuals and with others?

How are people encouraged to respond and live out the teachings found in the Bible?

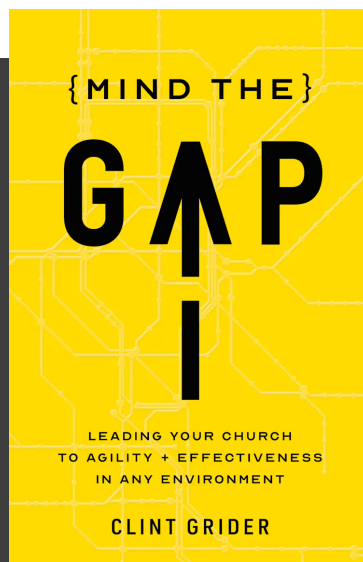
What is in place to help others love like Jesus?

Once we determine what is in place, we can then focus on how effective the plan is. Involving others in determining the effectiveness of what is in place is important. Doing so will help us overcome the gap we tend to create between what is and what we want it to be. We need the perspective of others to get an honest view of what is happening and not happening. We will want to make sure that we are rating the things in place for the actions they are intended to foster. For example, we may evaluate our worship service high when it comes to learning, but if the intent is to help others follow, then we need to evaluate in terms of opportunities given to follow Jesus.

This type of evaluation can then help us look for gaps that need to be addressed and begin to take steps toward strengthening our church plan for helping others to follow, learn, live, and love. Before we take that step, we need to look at ourselves.

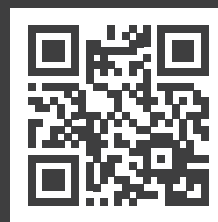
EVALUATING OUR PLACE

As the leader, we set the tone for the discipleship plan carried out in our church. We cannot expect others to follow, learn, live, and love unless we are striving to do so as well. In some cases, the gap between what is and what ought to be reflects our struggles. Doing so requires us to be honest with ourselves and others.



RELATED RESOURCE

Mind the Gap gives leaders an assessment to evaluate and bridge many of the critical gaps that exist in ministry.



We may need to consider to whom we have offered an opportunity to become a follower of Jesus. We may need to look for ways we can place ourselves into a position to better listen to people who are not followers of Jesus. We may need to find a Bible study group to join. We cannot encourage people in our church to do something we are not doing. We may need to secure a mentor or accountability team that helps us live out the truths of Scripture. We may need to get involved in our community so we can help some of the people we find the most challenging to love.

As we take steps to grow as in our following, learning, living, and loving, we then have a better understanding of how to help others do the same.

By Dwayne McCrary,

Manager of Adult Ongoing Bible Studies
Lifeway Christian Resources



AN INVITATION TO DEEP DISCIPLESHIP

Deep discipleship is radically committed to a God-centered—a Christ-centered—vision of all things. One of the greatest mistakes we will make as we seek to grow in our own walk with Christ, and as we seek to help others deepen their faith, is that we will try to give people more than Jesus. True discipleship is not more than Jesus, but more of Jesus. Ministry is only worth doing if Christ is the One who gets all the glory.

The invitation to deep discipleship in the local church is the invitation to enjoy the infinite God—to invite Him to cover His church with the knowledge of His glory, as the waters cover the sea. J. I. Packer asks these important questions of discipleship: What are we made for? What aim should we set ourselves in life? To both he answers: to know God. He is absolutely right, and if we believe that, we also need to ask this question: how can we structure our churches and ministries to help people toward that end?

If God is who He says He is, then nothing is more valuable than deep discipleship. Everyone is a disciple of something, but only the triune God invites us into deep, holistic, never-ending fellowship. Our greatest hope in this program is that our churches will be reminded of who God is. He is

more beautiful than we can ever imagine. Discipleship that is geared toward self-improvement or that caters to spiritual apathy evaporates when we see Him for who He is.

Discipleship should be deep because God is inexhaustible. He invites His church into rich and deep fellowship because His goodness is indeed bottomless, and you can never exhaust the bottomless beauty of God. Along with Paul we proclaim,

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”

ROMANS 11:33

The invitation to deep, holistic discipleship is first and foremost an invitation to see God for who He is—our highest good. And as people find the depths of God and grow in their love for Him and service to Him, they can be commissioned back into the church to take what they’ve learned and disciple others. All disciples are sent, and most are sent back into their local church.

Being sent is not for the spiritually elite; it is for every Christian. One of the most overlooked aspects of sending is intentionally sending disciples back into the local church to serve and lead. I know that it sounds a little counterintuitive to think of the local church as the first place to intentionally send people, but I also think it is deeply biblical. Ephesians 4:12 reminds us that one of the primary purposes of discipleship in the local church is to make more disciples who build up the body of Christ. Every believer is called to ministry and service in the local church. One of the clearest ideas the New Testament gives us is that we are all called to build up the body of Christ through service. When the church becomes a place where people are an audience, rather than participants, we have moved far away from the New Testament’s understanding of discipleship. Ministry is not something the church staff does; it is something the whole church does. The responsibility of the local church is not to put on a show but to call and equip others into service.

Christ has given foundational gifts to the church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers—in order to equip all the saints to do ministry. Too often the church can act as if the foundational gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher are the only gifts because those are the ones that get all the attention. The church is not meant to put the talented on a stage but the gifted into service, and all are gifted. Each believer functions with spiritual gifts that are meant to be put into the service of the church, in order to build up the body of Christ. The role of the church staff is not to do ministry for people but to equip all people to do ministry.

Do you have a plan to take your church deeper—deeper into the story of the Bible, the rich doctrines of the Christian faith, and into time-tested spiritual practice? People are spiritually hungry; they want to go deeper. Typically, we take people deeper by moving them further into different ministries of the church. While those steps could be helpful, they don’t resolve the core longing for more of God.

The *Deep Discipleship* program is a comprehensive discipleship program that empowers participants to grow deeply in their faith—ideally in the context of your local church or in community with other Christians.

Adapted from **J.T. English**, *Deep Discipleship*, (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2020), used with permission.

LEAD YOUR CHURCH INTO A DEEPER LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

With a continuing decline in biblical and theological literacy, many churches are looking for a way to provide in-depth discipleship training right within the local church. That’s why J.T. English, Jen Wilkin, and Kyle Worley created *Deep Discipleship*. Combining personal study, video-based teaching, and group discussion, this two-semester, 24-week program weaves together three key elements of the Christian faith:

- **Story** – increase Bible literacy and learn how everything connects from Genesis to Revelation
- **Belief** – expand theological understanding of key doctrines
- **Formation** – integrate the practice of spiritual disciplines into everyday life



See a free preview and course map at lifeway.com/deepdiscipleship.



BIBLE STUDY APPROACHES

Pros and Cons

An art museum can be toured in many ways. We can move through the exhibits as they are displayed, the order in which pieces were added to the museum, the order in which each piece was originally created, by artist if not arranged that way already, focus on one piece intently, compare selected items, or follow some theme we want to explore. We could visit the same museum with the same art pieces present and have a distinct experience each time we went through the museum. Each approach would be a valid way of enjoying the pieces present and give us a deeper understanding of the art pieces over time. Believing only one way existed for viewing the art pieces would cheat us of a deeper appreciation for the items included.

Your people are
your specialty.

Making Bible
studies is ours.

**LET'S MAKE
DISCIPLES
TOGETHER.**

The same is true when it comes to how we approach Bible study. We can study the Bible book by book, chronologically, thematically, and a host of other ways. We may prefer one approach over another, but that does not negate the value of the other approaches. The goal is the same, to help us live out the truth of God's Word, knowing we can get there from different approaches.

A variety of lists exist of ways to study the Bible. Just to make it simple, most of us will take either a textual approach or a topical approach. The other approaches fit under these two larger categories. Assuming good study practices are followed, each approach has pros and cons. An exegetical examination of a passage is just as critical in a key-passage approach as it is in a thematic-study approach.

TEXTUAL APPROACHES

Verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book. In these approaches, every Bible verse, all 31,102 (if using a KJV, CSB®, or NIV translation) is examined or every chapter, all 1,189, is given attention. The pro is every verse is given attention, which is also the con. If a group studied a chapter a week, they would need nearly 23 years to do so.

Key passages within a Bible book. The group looks at key passages within a Bible book that helps them grasp the main points from that Bible book. The pro is the study is more manageable than a nearly 23-year-long study, but someone must decide what passages are critical to understand that book.

Chronological study. The group looks at the Bible through the lens of events and how these related to each other in history. This type of study usually takes less time to complete but also means less passages about the same event will be examined.

TOPICAL APPROACHES

Theme. The group approaches a passage or set of passages with a theme in mind like names of God, relationship principles, or some other predefined theme. Taking a theme approach gives the group focus to examine a passage, but also means other noteworthy themes within the same passage may be missed.

Character study. Studies are built around an identified biblical personality with the goal of gleaning lessons from his or her life. We gain a deeper understanding of a person with whom we may be able to identify, but also get a limited view since we only have snippets of their life recorded in Scripture.

Theological. A theological category such as God, man, sin, or redemption serves as a topic in this approach. We get a clearer view of the theological category but run the risk of forgetting that the passages examined have historical value either as an actual event or in response to something taking place at that time in history.

No matter what Bible study approach we take, we must be aware of the negatives. We can overcome some of the cons to the approach we select by offering other studies at other times that take a different approach. For example, if the Sunday-morning ongoing Bible study groups are looking at key passages in a Bible book, a character study may be offered at other times. Knowing the approach of each group within the church can help the leader strategically plan all Bible studies to develop a balanced disciple-making ministry.

By Dwayne McCrary, Manager of Adult Ongoing Bible Studies, Lifeway Christian Resources

Making disciples is the most important job for any Sunday School or small group ministry. Lifeway's team of over 50 seminary-trained discipleship experts are by your side to help you provide the best Bible study experience possible.

Find your right study in two minutes or less at rightbiblestudy.com.



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.





NURTURING

FAITH

*4 Reasons for
Christ-Centered
Teaching*

Christ is our all. He is the center of the gospel message and our faith. Every book of the Bible points to Him from Old Testament to New. If we are to nurture faith in those we are ministering to, we need to teach Scripture through a Christ-centered lens. Here are four reasons why.

BECAUSE WE FOLLOW JESUS'S EXAMPLE

In Luke 24, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus met up with two disciples. Not yet recognizing Him, they told Jesus all that had happened in Jerusalem concerning His crucifixion and rumored resurrection. They, however, were still perplexed about what had happened.

Jesus knew they had not understood the message of redemption that God had planned in history. "Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27, CSB). Jesus taught them how Scripture pointed to Him. Jesus knew that He fulfilled Scripture and the promises that God gave His people. As we read and teach the Bible, we should follow Jesus's example in interpreting Scripture through a Christ-centered lens.

BECAUSE IT TELLS THE FULL STORY

The gospel message starts with God's beautiful creation in Genesis, but quickly humanity sinned. And from that point, humanity and the world were broken. But God, because of His love, was going to do everything necessary to rescue His people and to bring them back into relationship with Him. Repeatedly in Scripture, however, we see how God's people were faithless, but God was not. He was and is faithful and constant.

Seeing God raise up prophets, priests, and kings to steer His people back toward Him, and seeing the sacrificial system and rituals put in place to remind His people of their sin as they lived in relationship with a holy God, helps us recognize that it was all insufficient to do what only the Messiah could do.

So when Jesus entered the picture, He fulfilled what human leaders could not. Through His blameless life, ministry, and sacrifice, He became the true Prophet, Priest, and King who would lead His people to salvation through His death on the cross. We need this fuller story when teaching Scripture to help our people understand all that Jesus did and why He needed to do so.

BECAUSE CHRIST TRULY IS THE FOCUS

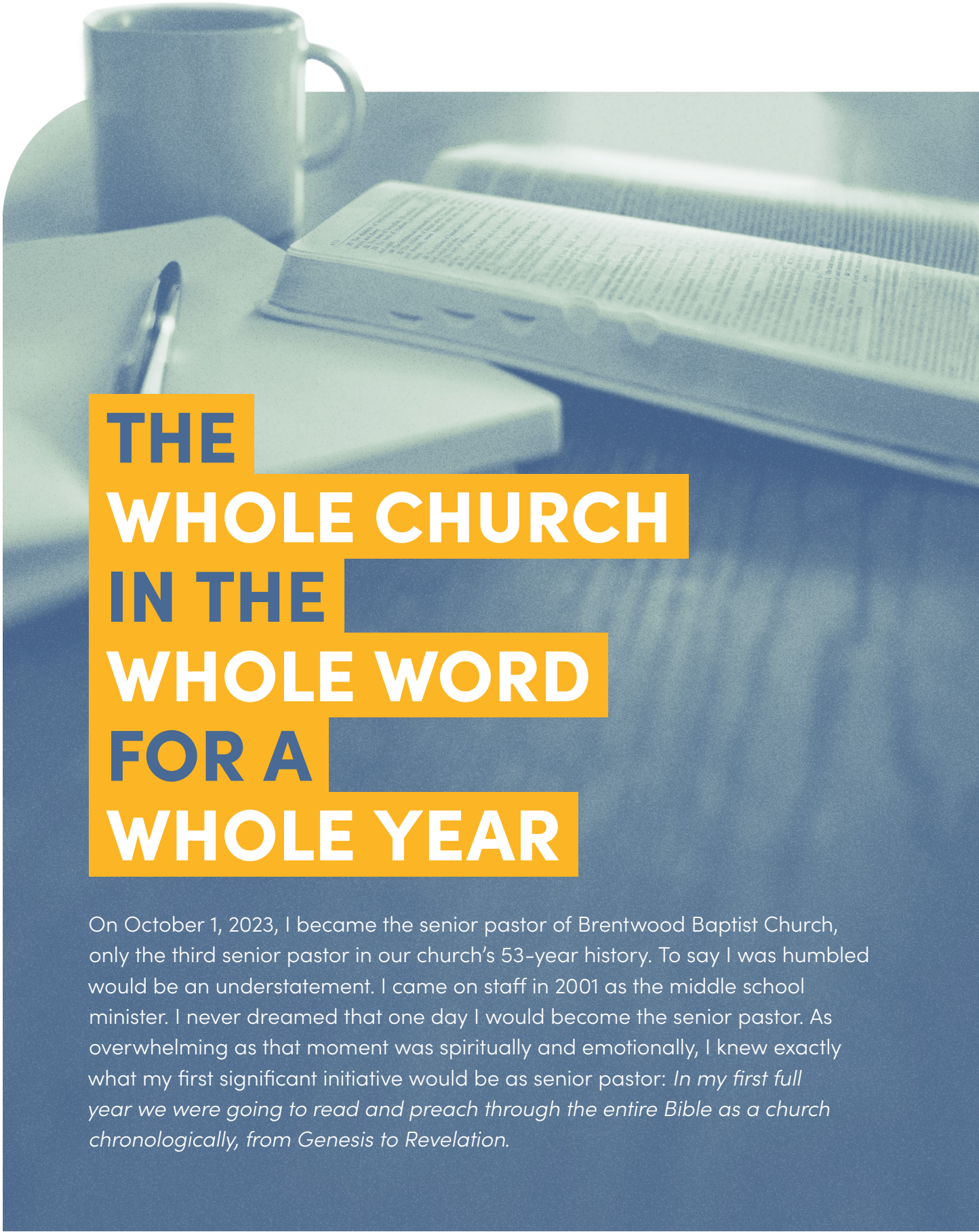
Without Christ, we have nothing except shame, guilt, sin, death, and separation from God. The apostle Paul said it best: "He is . . . the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything" (Colossians 1:18, CSB). Jesus holds all things together and must be "first place in everything." This includes the way we teach Scripture.

BECAUSE IT TRANSFORMS US

Knowledge is important, but a transformed life is even better. When we focus on Christ-centered teaching in our ministry, we know our path will be straight when cultural values so easily creep into our discipleship. But we can tell if our ministry has been Christ-centered when we see lives transformed for God's glory, when we see people telling others about the joy of knowing Jesus and His gospel, when we see broken relationships healed and the kingdom and church growing, both in depth and breadth.

Christ-centered teaching nurtures faith in a transformative way and helps us remember that He is our all and without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). When we center our teaching and our lives on Christ, He transforms us. And what more can we ask for than to be transformed into the likeness of Christ Jesus, our Lord?

By **Y. Bonesteele**, The Gospel Project Team Lead, Lifeway Christian Resources

A photograph of a desk with a white mug, a pen, and an open Bible. The Bible is open to a page with text. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white. The title is overlaid on the image in a yellow and white color scheme.

THE WHOLE CHURCH IN THE WHOLE WORD FOR A WHOLE YEAR

On October 1, 2023, I became the senior pastor of Brentwood Baptist Church, only the third senior pastor in our church's 53-year history. To say I was humbled would be an understatement. I came on staff in 2001 as the middle school minister. I never dreamed that one day I would become the senior pastor. As overwhelming as that moment was spiritually and emotionally, I knew exactly what my first significant initiative would be as senior pastor: *In my first full year we were going to read and preach through the entire Bible as a church chronologically, from Genesis to Revelation.*

Before becoming the senior pastor, I served as the campus and teaching pastor of The Church at Station Hill, the first of what has become a nine-campus family of congregations. In 2020, to encourage spiritual growth, we decided to take our campus through a Bible reading plan. We had no idea that 2020 would include a worldwide pandemic, but it was an unexpected bonus. During that time, approximately six hundred people (about half our congregation) consistently read, asked questions, and led Bible Reading Groups in their homes, in socially distanced gatherings around fire pits, and in study groups seated in lawn chairs on driveways and decks. We used George Guthrie’s chronological reading plan because it had several accompanying resources. As our staff guided our church through an adventure into the whole counsel of Scripture, there were several benefits that repeatedly emerged.

1 A Bible reading plan brings people of all ages into the pages of the Bible every day. Many in our congregation read devotionals, participated in Bible study groups and classes, and heard numerous sermons, but fewer had read the Bible in its entirety. Even older members of our church admitted they had been in church their entire lives and had overlooked, ignored, or neglected much of the Bible.

2 A Bible reading plan creates churchwide synergy around biblical principles and truths. I discovered this by the change in my email inbox. I started receiving good questions from participants grappling with how to apply all Scripture to their lives (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

3 A Bible reading plan introduces people to the “big story” of Scripture. As a pastor, I had consistently preached the “metanarrative” of the Bible to our people for years. By using a chronological reading plan, the readers experienced this journey firsthand.

4 A Bible reading plan gives room for the Word to do its work. I watched our Bible reading plan intersect our people at their exact point of need. People were convicted and repented of sin as we read Romans. Marriages were healed and strengthened by reading Ephesians. People surrendered to God’s call on their lives as we walked with the early church who boldly followed the guidance of the Spirit in the book of Acts.

5 A Bible reading plan shows people are truly hungry for the Bible. We assume people are biblically literate, but most are not. It’s not our job to complain or bemoan that reality; it’s our job as shepherds to do something about it—by challenging people, equipping them with the right Bible study tools, and committing to walk with them. When you challenge people, equip them with the right Bible study tools, and commit to walk with them. I tell our congregation often: I cannot feed you in thirty minutes a week, but I can make you hungrier. A Bible reading plan teaches your people to be self-feeders!

In October 2023, we announced that the whole church was going to study and preach through the whole storyline of Scripture during 2024. We partnered with Lifeway to sell Chronological Reading Bibles. I thought we’d sell a few hundred. We ended up selling close to 6,000 Bibles! We created digital platforms, a weekly podcast (search “Sermon Notes”), and complementary Next Gen content for families. It’s created massive momentum in my first year as senior pastor and it’s fun to watch people show up to church on Sunday mornings eager for you to preach because they’ve already read that section of Scripture the week before. It’s even more fun to get stopped in restaurants and grocery stores with Bible questions. People aren’t asking me about the weather or sports; they want to better understand the Bible!

As I write this, we are two months into the year. It’s much too early to predict the impact a Bible reading plan will have on the Brentwood Baptist Church family not only this year but also in the years to come but, I trust the Word to do the work. Charles Spurgeon once compared the gospel to a lion—all you have to do is let it out of its cage and it will roar, because that’s what it was created to do. We’re letting the lion of Scripture out of the cage—and we’re excited to let it roar!

By Jay Strother,

Senior Pastor,
Brentwood Baptist Church



RELATED RESOURCE

The *CSB Day-by-Day Chronological Bible* features a narrative approach to the Bible, arranging the full text into a clear chronological reading plan with daily readings guided by Dr. George Guthrie.





GOD'S VISION FOR THE CHURCH

Every church attendee carries their own unique history, present circumstances, and future expectations that impact the way they understand the church and their role in it. Identifying those factors makes space for God to address, affirm, and correct them according to His Word.

While our personal histories might at times cloud our view of the local church, God's vision remains crystal clear. Jesus prayed that all believers would be together, as one, in Him. His vision is that our unity would be palpable in every generation and culture, like stars shining brightly in the darkest night sky. The unity experienced in the church is unique. It isn't built on a political ideology, a career path, a favorite football team, or a love of Mexican food or pickle ball! It doesn't depend on our agreement on every matter. No one is excluded because of their background, personality, culture, or race.

And that incredible bond of unity will be the eternal reality for every person who trusts in Jesus Christ. The innumerable multitude of believers "from every nation, tribe, people, and language" will stand together "before the throne and before the Lamb," crying out praises to Him in perfect unity (Revelation 7:9-10). Our human nature conflicts with life in the Spirit. We live in a world filled with loneliness, isolation, unrest, and individualism. Even the most faithful believers struggle to reflect eternal realities in relationships here on earth. That is as true today as it was when Jesus prayed for unity in John 17.

So how can God's vision for His church be carried out by sinful people here on this sin-cursed earth? No perfect church exists. Yet God equipped and empowered the first church, in part, to provide a working model for the rest of us to follow. Their example is God's design for our churches.

THE FIRST CHURCH

The first church to gather after Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension is a picture of God's vision for all local churches in every generation. They weren't perfect—they were flawed people just like us. But when they turned to Jesus in faith and the Spirit began to work in them and among them, everything changed. These flawed people, most of whom had previously abandoned or rejected Jesus altogether, experienced a radical reframing of unity and commitment. When the Holy Spirit indwelt the members of the first church, His next act was to reframe their understanding of unity, family, and commitment. Their experience is our example, preserved in God's Word to reframe our expectations some 2,000 years later.

We live in an easy-bake culture where investments of time and commitment are seen as tying us down and limiting our options. This approach to life has bled into the church. The reality, though, is that commitment to the church is the only way we can experience the full benefits of the church.

We learn in Acts 2 that people couldn't stay away. The devotion among believers to God and each other was so compelling that outsiders came to faith and joined their group each and every day. As they did, those new members joined God's people in living out the beautiful, though imperfect, expression of God's vision for His church.

Local churches all look and feel a little different because people are unique and so are their cultures, but God's design for a healthy church does not change. Acts 2:42 gives us the picture we are to emulate. God's vision for every body of believers involves commitment from its members to engage together in gospel teaching, fellowship, forgiveness, and prayer. And these four components for church health should be seen in all of the diverse congregations scattered across the globe.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

ACTS 2:42

Why were the members of the first church devoted in these four ways? They were obedient to the call to be the church. What about you? Will you be devoted to learning, sharing and caring, forgiving, and praying in the context of a local body of believers? Living within God's design isn't casual, it is living in the way of Jesus.

This was not simply a reality God intended to occur one time and one time only. He means for His church to experience it at every moment. He means for you to experience it now.

This article is an excerpt from the Bible study *Together: Community that Marked the Acts 2 Church*, by **Ben Mandrell**.



RELATED RESOURCE

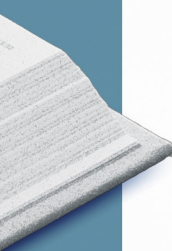
This new Bible study by Lifeway President and CEO Ben Mandrell was created to inspire your groups to get back to basics and go all in with their faith. Relationships can be more authentic, actions more selfless, giving more generous, and lives more transformed.



UNLOCKING

UNDERSTANDING

Why Context Matters to Bible Study



God's Word is our treasure. It reveals to us what God is like and how He is at work in our world. His ways and purposes are made clear as we study each book of the Bible. In the pages of Scripture, we also learn about God's intention for His relationship with His people. Some may consider the Bible to be a guidebook or set of instructions. While it does provide guidance, it contains much more than a list of things to do or actions to avoid. God's Word gives us lifelong truths we can rely on.

As we take steps to grow in our understanding of Scripture, it's important to remember a few Bible study basics. Grasping the context surrounding a verse or group of verses is key to capturing the heart of a passage. Once we glean some general insight, we can then take all we've learned and apply it to our own lives.

Getting the most from our weekly Bible study requires a look at the biblical, cultural, and geographical context of each passage. Begin by asking questions: Who was the original audience of the writing? What was the cultural backdrop of the time? Where did the events of a passage take place? What was the message for the original recipients? These questions lead to a comprehensive study of a passage, understanding its teaching so we can apply it to our lives today. Getting the full context prevents us from picking and choosing verses to support what we believe—the context of a passage allows the text to speak for itself.

As ministry leaders, we want to equip our Bible study leaders with all they need to lead a transformative group time. An effective Bible study begins with context. Approaching each session of study should include a dive into three important areas: biblical context, cultural context, and geographical context.

The original recipients of the Old and New Testaments lived in entirely different cultural and geographical contexts than we do today. Still, God's Word is for us, and it applies to us. A willingness to ask a few questions is needed to glean a valuable understanding of Scripture. With that knowledge in hand, we can effectively teach a Bible study that explores the context of a specific set of verses. Context helps us discover the heart of a passage—the message it has for us today. When we know God's Word, its truth equips us for a lifetime of discipleship.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Understand what comes before and after the focal study passage. What was the immediate historical situation? Take a look at the verses immediately before and following the passage at hand. The surrounding verses can help you construct a biblical timeline of events and how they relate to each other.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Learning more about the culture in which a passage was written gives invaluable insight. Consider the religious practices, family history, and political events taking place in the passage. Find out as much as you can about what key words or phrases meant in the day, time, and language it was originally written.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Get a clear grasp on the setting and location of a passage. Where do the events of the passage unfold? Within what kind of climate and landscape does this passage take place? The geographical context offers key information for a clearer understanding of what's taking place in a passage and why.

By Amber Vaden, Explore the Bible Team Lead, Lifeway Christian Resources



ENCOUNTER THE TRUTH BOOK BY BOOK

Explore the Bible helps the adults, students, and kids in your church understand God's Word in context, build meaningful routines around Scripture, and grow and serve together in spiritual community.

With a focus on biblical literacy and trustworthy interpretation, Explore the Bible invites your ministry to understand the truth of God's Word, one book at a time.

Do you want to

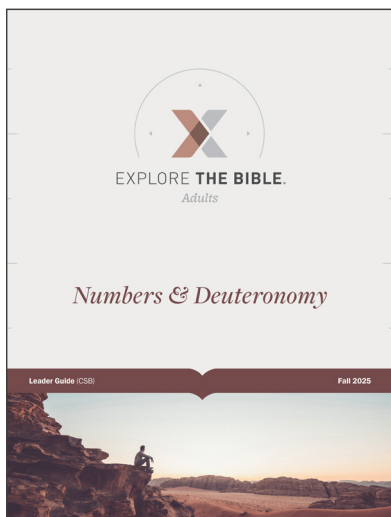
- **champion biblical literacy in your church?** Discover how the Bible functions as a whole, learn to locate foundational passages, and study all 66 books within the correct context.
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Get your free preview and discover how Explore the Bible provides a methodical, proven Bible study curriculum for all age levels.



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FALL 2025 STUDIES



ADULTS

The books of Numbers and Deuteronomy recount how the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness for four decades and how God taught them to be His people as they approached the promised land. As you study these final two books of the Pentateuch, ask God to show you what He longs to accomplish in you and through you. Learn how to avoid a life of spiritual wandering and embrace the best He has to offer. (13 sessions) 🚀



STUDENTS

This fall, students will study the biblical genres of law, gospel, prophecy, and wisdom. We'll examine passages from Genesis, the great book of beginnings; John, which emphasizes Jesus's identity as the Son of God; Zechariah and Malachi, which highlight God's promise of a future King; and Job, which explores suffering and God's sovereignty. (13 sessions) 🚀

🚀 Autoship



KIDS & PRESCHOOLERS

This fall, kids will study the books of Genesis, John, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, and Psalms. Kids will discover God's plan for creation and His constant protection of His people from the very beginning. Throughout history, as recorded in both the Old and New Testaments, God has used miraculous works to provide for His people. (13 sessions) 🚀



EXPLORER BIBLE

+ FOR KIDS +




Additional covers available

Explore More Together





EXPLORE THE BIBLE



EVERYDAY EVANGELISM

Most Christians find it difficult to share their faith. We get nervous and clam up. Or worse, we avoid sharing at all because we're afraid the words will get stuck in our mouths, so we don't try. We envision the awkward or argumentative replies of those we would share with. If we aren't careful, these hesitations keep us from ever sharing the gospel with another person. However, God has called every follower of Jesus to be an evangelist. The problem isn't with our calling but with how we've trained ourselves to think about it.

We have to think about evangelism differently. If we are willing to sincerely engage with our calling, God the Father is more than willing to empower us through the Holy Spirit to give the gospel to anyone we encounter. God can take even the most meager portion given in faith and turn it into something beautiful and useful for His kingdom. He cares more about growing it than we do. If we're willing to be used by God, He will use us. This Bible study (*Everyday Evangelism*) was designed to help Christians embrace that truth and equip themselves with practical tools to be the evangelist God has called you to be.

The term evangelist comes from a Greek word meaning "a bringer or messenger of good news." What Jesus has done for us is good news. We should want everyone to know about it. And what Jesus commands us to do, He will give us the grace to carry out with confidence. The God who brought the good news to us will be with us as we share it. Through the study, we will learn how to share our faith wherever God places us—winning hearts like God has won ours.



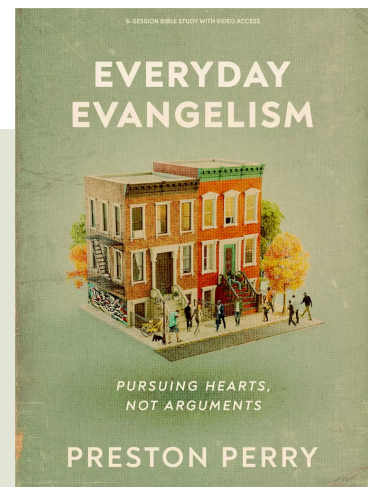
Realizing that God won our hearts allows us to release the weight we place on ourselves. Many of the burdens that keep us from sharing—like the ones mentioned above—are burdens we place on ourselves. We shoulder the load because we mistakenly believe that someone’s salvation depends on having a single conversation with us. Ultimately, salvation belongs to the Lord, and in most cases, God uses several people, planting and watering seeds over time, to open our hearts to Him. Conversion to faith in Jesus happens in an instance, but preparing a heart for that moment often takes time, multiple conversations, and prayer. Giving the gospel to someone is never pointless. In giving it, we are being faithful to the call to be an evangelist and we’re working with the Spirit to prepare their heart and lives to receive the gospel.

The Spirit’s involvement in our work is the greatest blessing and encouragement we can find in our evangelistic efforts. If we’re concerned about having the right words to say when we share the gospel with someone else, we need to remember we’re not alone in our efforts. The Holy Spirit has everything we need for the task. When we obediently give people the gospel, He will empower us. The Great Commission is more dependent on the power of God than our communication skills. As we step out in faith, God will give us the words, the courage, and the wisdom needed to share the good news effectively.

Everyday Evangelism was written to help us realize our calling as evangelists, to take that call seriously, and to equip us to carry that task out with anyone we come into contact with. Faithfulness is not measured in the number of evangelistic conversations we have or the amount of conversions we seek, but in our willingness to be obedient to share with those that God has placed in front of us.

God is going to do powerful things through our obedience! But we must obey. Embrace the calling to become an everyday evangelist.

This article is an excerpt from *Everyday Evangelism*,
by **Preston Perry**.



RELATED RESOURCE

Sharing your faith is not about winning arguments; it’s about winning hearts. Through this 6-session Bible study, you’ll be inspired and equipped with practical, effective ways to boldly share your faith in love with friends, neighbors, coworkers, and others.



FROM CLIQUES TO COMMUNITIES

Leading Groups to be Inclusive, Inviting, and Irresistible

First impressions are not always correct, but they are difficult to change.

- » A non-responsive salesperson allows you to wander throughout the store without approaching you.
- » A server takes a long time before approaching your table.
- » The promise of great service at your local car dealership leaves much to be desired.
- » A guest visits a Bible study group but is ignored while group members carry on conversations with one another.

Great organizations know the power of authentic hospitality, and they work hard to create cultures that make customers and clients feel great about choosing them. Sadly, biblical hospitality is lacking in many Bible study groups. Although groups would rate themselves as “very friendly,” many guests would not.

The lack of hospitality is crippling the attractiveness of groups to outsiders. It has been said that connection and community will win out over content in post-COVID churches. Carey Nieuwhof made that prediction a few years ago, reminding us that people can get great preaching and Bible studies in just a matter of seconds through an internet search. What they cannot get, however, is something every one of us needs: in-person, human connection. The pathway to genuine, biblical community begins and ends with the degree to which Bible study groups break down cliques and establish real community. The church and its groups need a resurgence of biblical hospitality.

How can Bible study groups start fresh in their efforts to be welcoming and open? Is it possible for groups to refocus on making strangers feel like friends? What is the likelihood that functionally closed groups could begin a new era of biblical hospitality? What would they have to change in order to break down cliques and become inclusive, inviting, and perhaps even irresistible? Here are seven ways that groups can welcome people aboard.



1. Group leaders must become “hospitality champions.”

For real change to take place in groups, a catalyst is needed. Group leaders who embrace the idea of providing a higher level of biblical hospitality can become that catalyst when they cast vision for it and model the behavior they want to see. Group leaders can lead group members to understand the needs of guests for relationships, to approach them and engage them in genuine conversation, and to take a genuine interest in them.

2. Adult groups will enlist a Hospitality Leader or a Hospitality Team.

There are members of every adult group who are “people persons.” They have the gift of gab and can connect with people instantly. These group members excel at making people feel comfortable, especially newcomers. These gifted group members enjoy introducing guests to others, sitting with them in the worship service, and inviting them to lunch and other activities.

3. Everyone in a group will take ownership of hospitality.

While it is helpful to have a person (or persons) designated as hospitality leaders, making people feel welcome is really everyone’s job. Guests can quickly sense if they are welcome or not by the way the members of a group engage with them. This is where a catalytic group leader can make a difference in motivating his or her group to own the responsibility of making every guest feel welcome.

4. Kids’ leaders can create welcoming environments through follow-up.

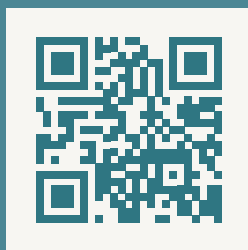
Biblical hospitality doesn’t necessarily start and end in the classroom! Kids’ leaders can extend hospitality into the homes of children by intentionally following up with kids and parents. Notes, postcards, text messages, and other appropriate forms of contact can ensure that families know they are wanted in the church’s ministry to kids.

5. Student Ministry group leaders will immerse themselves in the lives of students.

There’s more to Student Ministry than Sundays and Wednesdays. To create a hospitable, wholistic ministry environment, student leaders must get mixed up in the lives of teenagers. It’s messy, but you can’t disciple, cheer, encourage, discipline, and pray for students from a distance and create a warm, welcoming, and inviting ministry that students want to be a part of.

6. Adult group members will wear name tags. People often don’t fully engage another person in conversation because they either don’t know the person’s name, or they’ve forgotten it. In either case, people don’t like to look forgetful, and they certainly don’t want to be embarrassed because they can’t call the person by name. Stick-on, “Hello, My Name Is _____” name tags are a simple solution to this problem and get groups talking. Groups should wear them every time they come together, which will spark more conversations and connections than ever before.

7. Groups will multiply and start new ones. A truism of group life is that when a group has been together longer than twenty-four months, it turns inward. At that point, it is very difficult to send guests to that group and expect them to make significant relational connections. Why is this? After being together two years or more, group members have spent a lot of time praying together, studying together, talking together, serving together, and having fun together. Relationships and connections have formed, and they often have no bandwidth for newcomers to connect with them. New groups, however, have people with time, energy, and interest in developing new relationships—it’s one reason they are part of a new group launch. Guests often find a higher level of hospitality in these new groups.

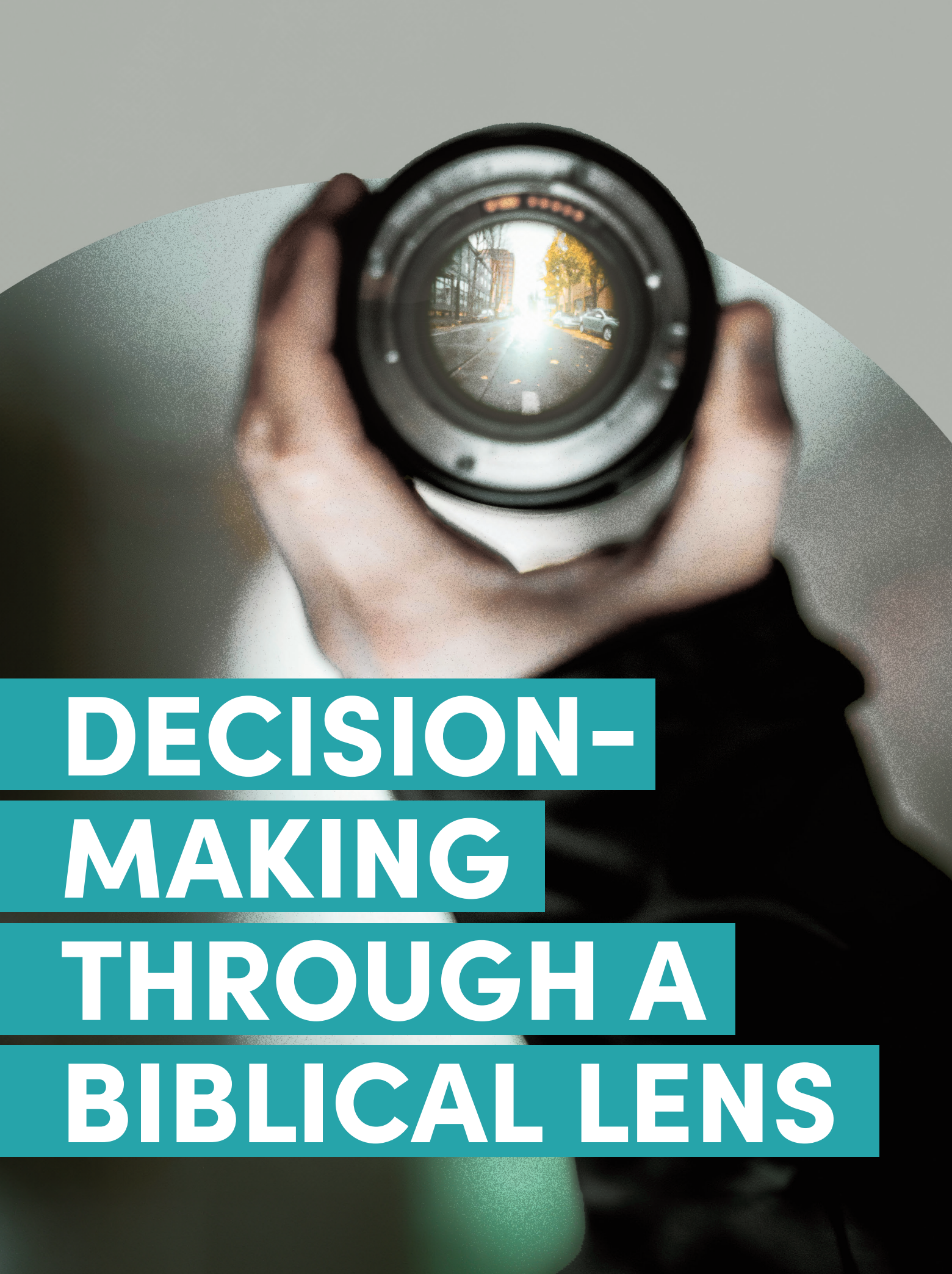


FROM THE AUTHOR

What if visitors to your church experienced the same level of hospitality they might enjoy on a cruise ship? *Welcome Aboard!* addresses how to show biblical hospitality in kids, student, and adult groups. And a downloadable conference plan gives pastors and church leaders an instant way to teach the content during a training time.

lifeway.com/trainingresources





**DECISION-
MAKING
THROUGH A
BIBLICAL LENS**

We make decisions every day. Research indicates we make between 33,000 and 35,000 decisions. Every day. Before you feel overwhelmed or try counting, 95% of those decisions are made on the subconscious level. We also make many decisions that are automatic. For example, I brush my teeth every morning. That's a choice I make without really thinking about it. There still are other decisions we need to think through or wrestle with. How do you decide?

There are no shortage of online tips and advisors on how to make good decisions, and while much of it can be okay, they miss an essential element. You don't just want to make a good decision; you want to make the *right decision*—and that gets to the ultimate question: *What does God want me to do?*

Two practices will help us avoid this and will lead us to the proper use of Scripture in decision-making.

Surrender to the lordship of Christ. I must surrender my will to His will daily. "Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship" (Romans 12:1, CSB). Being a living sacrifice means I die to self so that Christ can reign over my heart, mind, and choices. I need this when it comes to decision-making, because I don't need to be led by my own faulty reasoning or preferences.

As you study, make a habit of asking, "What does God want me to do with this truth or with this passage?" That truth may not apply to the immediate decision you are considering, but it gets you in the mindset of thinking biblically. And of course, as you study and seek application, pray. "Make your ways known to me, Lord; teach me your paths" (Psalm 25:4, CSB).

As you study God's Word with a heart of submission to Christ, there is one more element to assist you in decision-making: do all this in the context of community. Include other believers in your study, understanding, and application of God's Word. I can't overemphasize the value of seeking God in the context of a small group of fellow believers studying God's Word together, praying together, and encouraging one another. When it comes to decision-making, Proverbs 11:14 tells us:

Thankfully, God has not left us alone to determine what's best in making decisions. He has given us the Bible, His Word. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, CSB). There is no decision we can make that cannot be guided by God's Word.

However, there is a right way and a wrong way to gain guidance from Scripture. The wrong way is to make a decision first and then go hunting through Scripture to find a verse that supports that decision. If you try hard enough, you can make the Bible say anything you want. Just ignore the context, the background of the passage, or what the biblical writer meant. People have done this to make the Bible support ideas and practices that the Bible clearly does not endorse! We are never to abuse God's Word in this manner.

Renew the mind. Right after Paul told us to be living sacrifices, he said, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2, CSB). When we renew our minds, we learn to think like Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). But how do we renew our minds?

We renew our way of thinking as we delve into God's Word. Read it. Study it. Take time to learn its background and what the writer intended. Let me be abundantly clear on this. For good decision-making, we need to do more than just read God's Word; we must study it to ensure we are looking at the passage correctly and not misinterpreting and coming to a faulty application.

"Without guidance, a people will fall, but with many counselors there is deliverance" (CSB). A community of believers (whether you call it a Sunday School class, small group, Life Group, or whatever) is not a group getting together to share their ignorance; instead, it is engaging in a study of God's Word together and helping one another apply its truths correctly.

I love my Bible study group. We use a curriculum from Lifeway to give our study direction, but as we study and learn together, we come to the end where the question is raised: "So what does God want you to do with this truth?" I'm often affirmed, and I'm often challenged. Just as the Holy Spirit works by speaking through His Word and speaking to my mind, He also speaks through the body of Christ, His church. I need that.

Praying and studying God's Word in the context of a Bible study group will lead to wise decision-making.

By Lynn H. Pryor, Bible Studies for Life Team Lead, Retired, Lifeway Christian Resources®



**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

**FROM SUNDAY
TO EVERYDAY**

FROM SUNDAY TO EVERYDAY.

Whether you are young or old, if you follow Jesus, you are a disciple. But the quality of your discipleship isn't measured by how well you can answer questions. Discipleship is about being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. And transformation starts in the Word. That's why Bible Studies for Life is carefully crafted to help kids, students, and adults purposefully become more like Jesus every day.

TO BE MORE LIKE JESUS EVERY DAY

That's the goal. And while discipleship takes a lifetime, the day-to-day work is no mystery. Bible Studies for Life is designed to intentionally move babies through senior adults in the direction of Jesus Christ, both in the group setting and every day of the week.

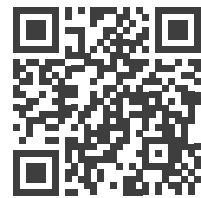
A PLAN FOR EVERY DISCIPLE

With a research-backed, biblical model of discipleship, Bible Studies for Life is designed to provide:

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Download four free sessions of Bible Studies for Life for all ages at biblestudiesforlife.com/preview.



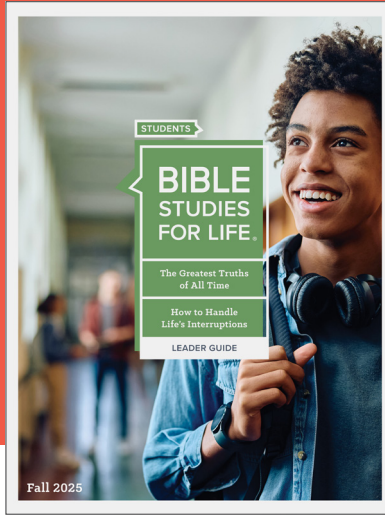
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FALL 2025 STUDIES



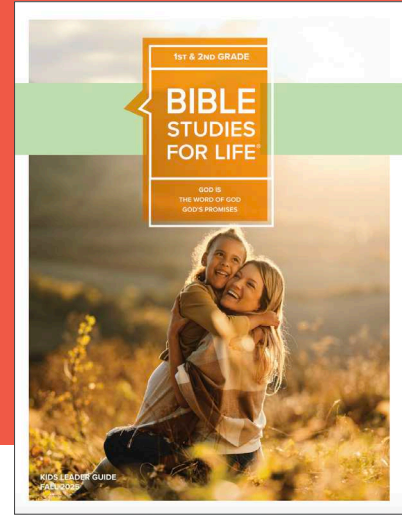
ADULTS

The fall resource looks at six G.O.A.T.s (Greatest of All Time) in the Bible, including God Himself and five other truths. It also considers how to develop a Christ-centered attitude when interruptions come our way. (13 sessions) 🌟



STUDENTS

Join us this fall as we focus on six great truths from Scripture in *The Greatest Truths of All Time*, beginning with God as the truly greatest of all time. Then, in *How to Handle Life's Interruptions*, we'll look at how we can develop a Christ-centered attitude when interruptions come our way. 🌟



KIDS & PRESCHOOLERS

This fall, kids and preschoolers will understand more about God, learning that no one else is like Him. They will learn that the Bible is God's Word and teaches about God and Jesus. They will focus on the promises of God and understand that God always keeps His promises. 🌟



MEN'S MINISTRY

At the beginning of 2008, just two years into my first senior pastor position, I began to feel a need to raise up men in my local church. I was looking for men who were passionate about Jesus, committed to the church, and loved their families. I wanted men of character who knew doctrine and could lead. What I really needed was help! Specifically, I needed the help of godly men.

In the fall of that year, I invited ten men to spend ten weeks with me walking through the book of Titus verse by verse. I chose Titus because it had everything I wanted to invest in men. It clarified the need for godly men, the character of godly men, and the consequences of being ungodly men. It helped men understand the centrality of the local church, the need to love their families, and how to be faithful in the workplace. The more I taught from Titus, the more I realized that those forty-six verses really could be a manual for manhood.

After eight years of doing this study almost every semester, I had personally taken 120 men through *The Titus Ten*, ten at a time. It changed that church, and the fruit is still there today. I believe it was the most important thing I did in my 11-year ministry there.

Over the years, the material changed but the heart stayed the same. Although my heartbeat is verse-by-verse exposition, I felt that this study was better served topically.

So, that's what you'll find in *The Titus Ten* Bible study.

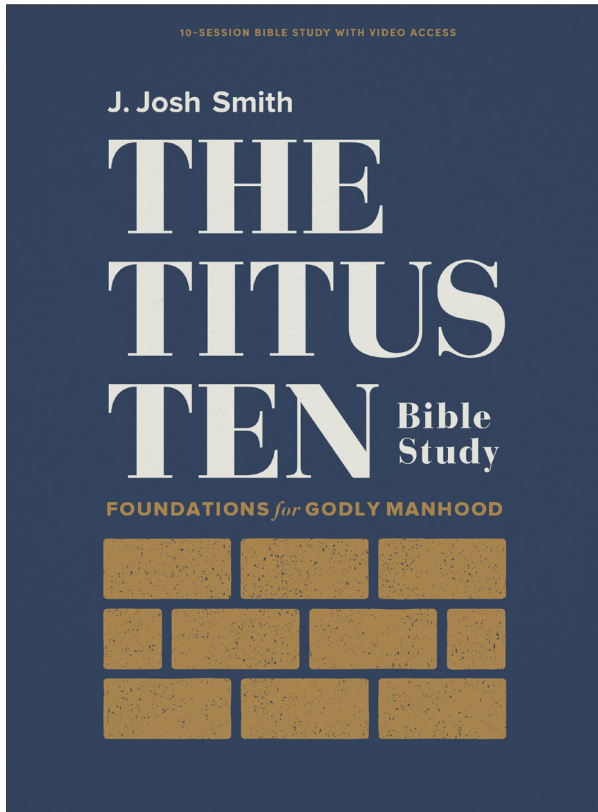
This study was, and still is, my first step in developing godly men—but it is not the last. I see this as an entry point into manhood. If I can get a man to be willing to spend ten weeks with me to talk about manhood, and the content resonates with him and begins to change him, then I have a man I can work with.

So, this study is intended to be a first step of sorts. Not an end. After doing this study, think carefully about what is next for your men. Men need to keep moving, and *The Titus Ten* can help them get started.

Excerpt from *The Titus Ten* by **J. Josh Smith**,
Senior Pastor, Prince Avenue Baptist Church

Resources for Men's Ministry

Equip the men in your church to grow in their faith and become godly leaders using these video-driven Bible studies.



THE TITUS TEN

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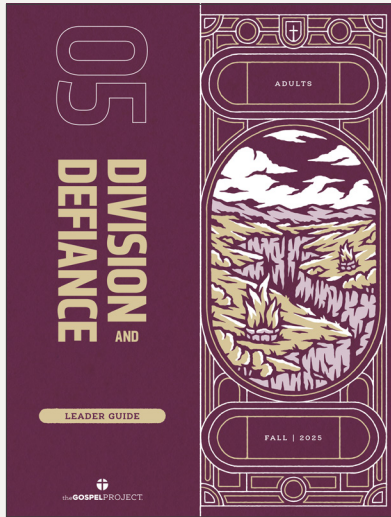
From the youngest in your church to the oldest, from the one who's attended church two times to the one who's attended church 200 times, and from Adam and Eve to Mary and Martha, every single one of us needs the good news that only Jesus brings. That's why The Gospel Project focuses on the gospel in every session.

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Fall 2025 Studies



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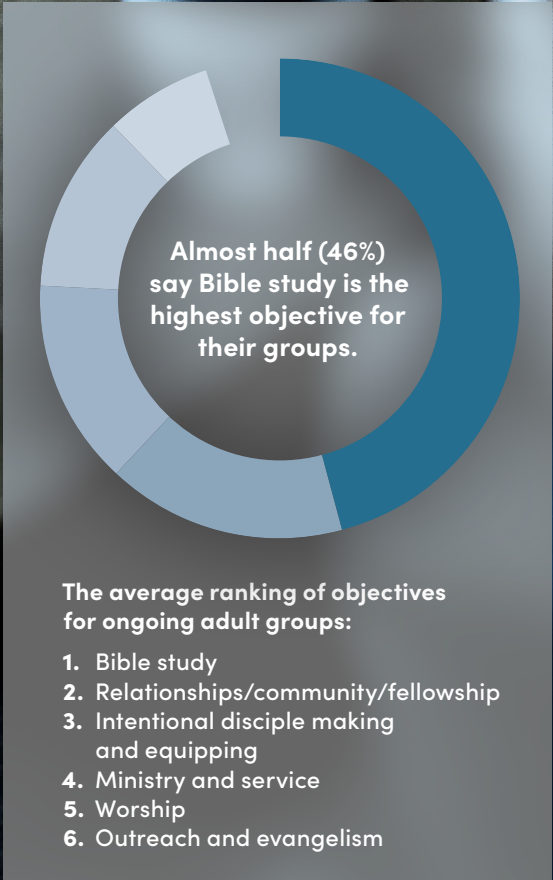


gospelproject.com



THE ROLE OF GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

When ongoing adult Bible study groups gather, leaders are most likely to say they want the primary focus to be on studying Scripture.





On average, churches say Bible study is the top objective for their groups, followed by relationships/community/fellowship and intentional disciple making/equipping. There is a noticeable difference in emphasis between these first three and the last three objectives—ministry/service, worship, and outreach/evangelism.

A church cannot expect their adult groups to do all the work of the church well. Bible study groups focusing on a few objectives allow other ministries in the church to take the lead in other areas. Your adult Bible study groups' objectives are not just something good to have on a document; they provide a vision you must regularly cast to group leaders and your congregation.

Around 2 in 5 worship attendees in the average church (44%) typically participate in small groups. A third of churches (33%) say at most a quarter of their worship service attendance is involved in an ongoing adult Bible study. Another third (34%) say they have more than a quarter but no more than half. The final third (33%) have at least half of their worship attendees involved in their small group ministry, including 14% who say more than 3 in 4 attend both the worship service and a small group.

What does the average church small group look like?



44% of worship service attendees are also involved in a small group.

“Involvement in worship and small groups are not in competition. Studies have shown participation in ongoing Bible studies bolsters worship attendance. The higher a church’s percentage of weekend worship attendees involved in a small group, Sunday School class, or similar group, the greater likelihood of five-year worship attendance growth.”

— Scott McConnell, Executive Director of Lifeway Research

LIFE: 4 THINGS EVERY GROUP NEEDS TO BE SUCCESSFUL

Here are four things that will make any Bible study group successful, all built around the acronym L-I-F-E.

LEARN AND APPLY GOD’S WORD

Learning God’s Word is important, so plan to teach interactively, using two or three of the [eight learning approaches](#) per session. Answer the question, “What now?” at the end of each Bible study so participants have specific ways to apply the Bible passage to life.

INVITE OTHERS TO BECOME CHRIST FOLLOWERS

Groups exist, and the church exists, to make disciples. So, make sure each session is Christ-centered and casts the evangelistic net. Even if no one responds or everyone in the group is already a Christian, connecting the lesson to the gospel message teaches group members how to share the gospel.

FORM AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Groups are about sitting in circles, sharing life, praying for one another, and carrying each other’s burdens. Use group activities in class, plus time set aside at the beginning of the study, to accomplish this. Schedule regular fellowships (date nights, Sunday lunch, day trips, etc.) to give members and guests the opportunity to connect relationally.

ENGAGE IN SERVICE TO OTHERS

Lead group members to engage in service to others inside the group and push them to serve inside the church by leaving the group to teach another class or engage in a ministry that needs leaders. Encourage the group to work together in the community and set aside days to reach out to others by serving their needs in practical ways.

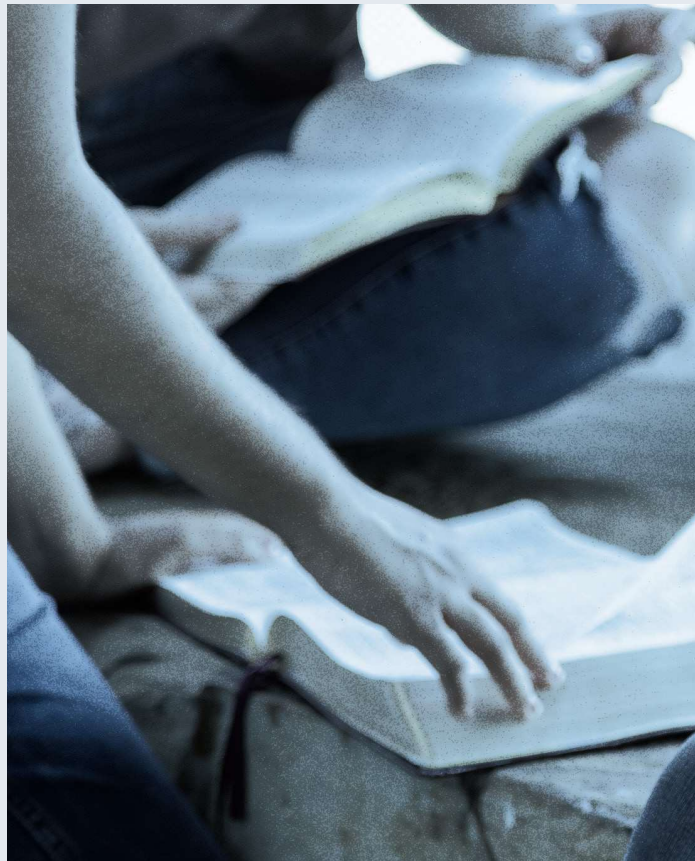
TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR GROUPS MINISTRY

ORGANIZATION

Most churchgoers find a group and stick with it. Half of groups ministry leaders (51%) say most of the people at their church stay in the same group for years, while 43% say the makeup of the group changes slowly over time. Few say most people find a new group each year (2%) or multiple times a year (<1%). Almost 9 in 10 leaders (89%) agree most group participants have been in the same group for at least two years.

The lack of change may be due to the lack of new options. Only around a third (34%) of leaders say they started new ongoing adult Bible study groups in the first half of 2024. Two-thirds (66%) have not.

Group participants may also remain in the same groups because they've found other churchgoers with whom they share similarities. Almost half of leaders (45%) say their groups are organized by an interest in the topic being studied. Around 3 in 10 organize around age (31%), life stage (29%), and gender (28%). Another 22% have an affinity or shared interest, while 10% meet together because of their geographic location. Just 1 in 10 (10%) are organized based on an assignment by the pastor or elders. For some (11%), their church only has one class. Around 1 in 6 (17%) have some other organization method.



9 in 10

leaders say most group members rarely, if ever, change groups—51% say most stay in the same group for years and 43% say the group makeup changes slowly over time.

Most churchgoers stay in the same small group for years.

89%

say most group participants have been in the same group for at least two years.



5 STEPS FOR STARTING NEW GROUPS

1 KNOW YOUR POSSIBILITIES

This first step is all about seeing the possible future of your groups ministry. Do you have a group for every kind of person who wants to study the Bible? In essence, you are determining the target audiences for the new group(s).

2 ENLARGE THE ORGANIZATION

How many new preschool, children, student, and adult groups do you plan to add to reach the new people you identified in step one? Once you've listed all the new groups, determine which ones you can actually start. List those new groups along with the existing groups, and this becomes your new organization.

3 ENLIST AND TRAIN LEADERS

New leaders must know what's expected of them, what curriculum resources the church will provide for them (and how to use them correctly), and when regular training will take place.

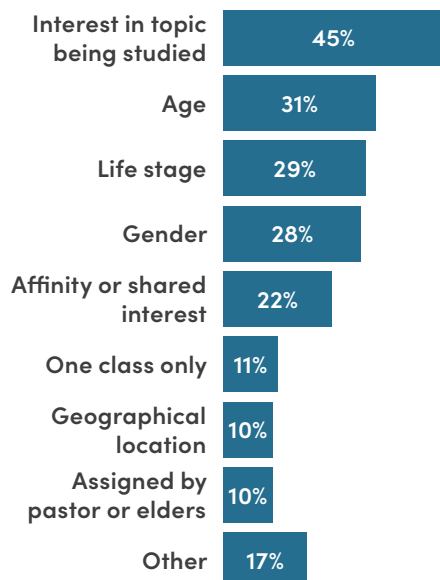
4 PROVIDE THE SPACE

Perhaps you have empty rooms on your church campus. Or you may want to start new groups at an off-campus location. Your church might even need to begin a second hour of Bible study on Sunday morning. No matter what, groups must have places to meet.

5 GO AFTER THE PEOPLE

Make calls, visit potential new group members in their homes, use social media to announce the start of new groups, send out mailers, and encourage your church members to tell their friends and neighbors that your church is starting new groups.

How are your ongoing adult Bible study groups organized?





TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR GROUPS MINISTRY

GROUP SIZE

If a group starts to grow, most leaders aren't going to intervene. Nine in 10 (90%) say they do not limit the size of ongoing adult Bible study groups. Experts, however, suggest groups that grow too large should be split to form new groups for several reasons. In general, Sunday School and small group leaders agree the right size for a group is eight to 16. However, small, medium, and large groups all have advantages and disadvantages.

Some leaders may not be looking to split up larger groups because they aren't sure exactly who is in their church's groups. Around half (53%) say they track attendance in their adult Bible study groups. Only slightly more (56%) say they maintain a roster of who is in each group.

For those who do have a roster or take attendance, most are doing so using the most traditional means. Around 2 in 3 (64%) say their record-keeping involves paper, including 37% who say it is all on paper and 28% who say they use paper and spreadsheets. Three in 10 (30%) say they use some type of group management software, including 20% who have a phone app.

“Churches would be wise to strongly encourage groups to remain small to medium-sized. It's easier to recruit new group leaders, because larger groups are intimidating to lead. Discipleship happens best within a smaller group of people. Jesus had a group of 12 and an inner group of three. And group members often have deeper relationships in smaller groups because they are known. It's hard to hide in plain sight, but people can disappear in larger groups.”

— Ken Braddy, Lifeway's Director of Sunday School

9 in 10

leaders say most group members rarely, if ever, change groups—51% say most stay in the same group for years and 43% say the group makeup changes slowly over time.

“Caring requires intentionality. Tracking adult small group attendance provides an easy prompt to a group that when someone has missed multiple meetings, they should be told they were missed. This data also provides groups ministry leaders a view of how engaged people are in their groups.”

— Scott McConnell, Executive Director of Lifeway Research

10 BEST TIMES TO START NEW GROUPS

1 AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR

Many people come back to church after the busy holiday season. They are ready to get back into the swing of things. Others are making resolutions as they start the new year. New groups started at the beginning of the new year can reach people who are trying to reconnect with the church.

2 WHEN A GROUP HAS BEEN TOGETHER LONGER THAN 24 MONTHS

It's hard for guests to break into classes that have been together for longer than 24 months. Relationships have been formed and life has been shared. When a group approaches its second birthday, it's time to think: "Start a new group."

3 WHEN A GROUP'S SPACE IS FILLED TO OVER 80% OF CAPACITY

When a group exceeds 80% of its seating capacity, the room is visually full to guests. Any group that exceeds 80% of its seating capacity for long will almost always drop to an attendance level less than the 80% it once exceeded.

4 WHEN THE AGE SPAN OF THE PEOPLE IN THE GROUP IS MORE THAN 10 YEARS

Although the idea of a "multi-gen" class sounds like a good idea, in reality, it's hard to pull off with excellence. The age range in any group should not be more than 10 years. If it is, then it's time to start another group (or groups).

5 AS SUMMER ENDS AND FALL BEGINS

There's no doubt your church experiences the "summer slumps" as members take vacations in June and July. But just wait until August—the people return in large numbers, excited about the start of school, football, and autumn. Group ministry often heats up when the weather cools off.

6 WHEN AN APPRENTICE GROUP LEADER IS READY TO START A NEW GROUP

If you have an apprentice group leader ready to launch a new group, don't feel like you have to wait for the "optimal" timing. If the leaders are ready and the need is there, launch the group and trust the Lord's timing.

7 A WEEK OR TWO AFTER EASTER

Among the many people who attend an Easter worship service are people who are not connected to any group. Imagine promoting to your Easter guests the establishment of a post-Easter group that will focus on parenting, marriage, finances, or other felt needs. These short-term groups can morph into ongoing ones as they come to an end.

8 WHEN YOUR CHURCH'S ATTENDANCE SPIKES

Most of our churches see spikes in attendance in January and August or September. Keep good records and track your group ministry attendance. If your church sees a consistent annual spike in other months, consider launching new groups then to give them the maximum opportunity to reach new people.

9 WHEN YOU DISCOVER GAPS IN YOUR GROUPS MINISTRY

You may become aware there are underserved people groups in your community or congregation, such as the need for a new young adult group or the need for a "single on Sunday" group for women whose husbands don't attend. When you become aware of gaps like these, it's a good time to start a new group.

10 WHEN THE SPAN OF CARE EXCEEDS THE GROUP'S ABILITY TO MEET NEEDS

The larger a group grows, the more people it has who need care and ministry. The larger the group, the more people fall through the cracks. The solution will be to start a new group, ask group members to move to it, and give each of the two groups a fighting chance to get organized in order to care for members and guests.



RECRUITING NEW LEADERS BY DEVELOPING APPRENTICES

What do the following people have in common?

- Elvis Presley
- Henry Ford
- Leonardo da Vinci

If you guessed they were all apprentices at one time, you'd be correct. Elvis was an apprentice electrician, and Henry Ford was a machinist apprentice. And, of course, da Vinci was an apprentice painter for a time—he probably cleaned a lot of paintbrushes for his mentor.

The development of apprentices has been a time-honored practice, necessary if societies are to have the professionals they need to produce a wide range of products and services. Without them, the needs of societies go unmet.

Churches need apprentices, too. Without them, new groups won't be started, nor will current group leaders have someone to replace them when they decide to take a sabbatical or transition out of the group. By following six steps, the church can apprentice leaders to carry on the important work of making disciples.

STEP 1 IDENTIFY

This is the first and perhaps most important step. Group leaders must constantly and conscientiously identify people who have potential to be in leadership. What qualities should they look for in potential apprentices? Dependability and consistency would be good for starters. Apprentices are often not flashy, but they are faithful. Humility and consistency are valuable traits in any apprentice.

STEP 2 INVITE

Once identified, the potential apprentice must be invited to become the group's apprentice. This should be done privately, allowing time for questions; the potential apprentice should be given time to pray and consider the request. Any conversation should also focus on the vision for the position, not just the job description. By focusing on the vision, the focus stays where it should be—on the real potential of the position to help fulfill the Great Commission. To focus on the vision for the apprentice position, remind the potential apprentice how the role will help the group multiply and reach new people, and how their example will encourage others to do the same.

STEP 3 INTRODUCE

After your candidate agrees to become the group's apprentice leader, introduce that person to the group. Publicly announcing the person's new role, and your desire to start a new group with them as the leader, will help the group maintain an outward focus. Public affirmation gives credibility to the new leader, and it instills confidence in that person on the part of the group members. But best of all, the entire process fights against the idea of "permanence." Healthy things grow, and growing things change. An apprentice reminds the group that permanence is the enemy of most groups.

Too many groups settle in and settle down, and they expect very little to change over time. An apprentice leader signals that the group will not be together forever, and that there will be a "holy separation" at some point in the future.

STEP 4 INVEST

Over the next six months, the group leader must spend time with the apprentice. Investing time to give feedback, advice, and impromptu training that will be crucial to the development of the apprentice. The investment stage takes place out of view of the group members.

STEP 5 INVOLVE

Throughout the entire preparation period, the apprentice provides varying levels of leadership to the group. Unlike the Invest stage, the Involve stage happens in front of the group members. The apprentice teaches the group and leads in other ways. This is the public side of the apprentice's preparation.

BREAK-

{ Creating a New Scorecard
for Group Ministry Success }

THROUGH

KEN BRADY

FROM THE AUTHOR

Breakthrough gives you a discipleship scorecard to track the progress of your groups and measure their success.

STEP 6 INITIATE

At the end of the process, it is time to remind the group that one goal of developing the apprentice has been to initiate a new group with the apprentice as the leader. Ask group members to pray about supporting a new group by becoming founding members along with the apprentice. When the apprentice and a small core group leave to start the new group, it's time to enlist a new apprentice and begin the process all over again.

The world would be a different place had Elvis, Henry Ford, and Leonardo da Vinci not been apprentices. Your church will be a different place if you commit to developing apprentices, too. They are the future of your church's group ministry.

By Ken Braddy, Director of Group Ministry, Lifeway Christian Resources



LOVE, OBEY & WATCH GOD MOVE

Salvations, calls to ministry, and freedom from addictions are just a few of the ways members of Friendship Baptist Church in Blackfoot, Texas, have seen God moving within their congregation since embarking on a churchwide *Experiencing God* Bible study in 2023.

“I’m watching a whole group become united in a love for Christ, just an adoration and desire to understand and walk with Jesus,” Jerry Horine, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, said. “There is joy and excitement every time we get together. We can’t wait to share what God is doing. We can’t wait to hear and encourage one another and be encouraged.”

Several weeks into the study, Horine said a small group leader named Doyle woke up at three in the morning and began reading his Bible. As he sensed God speaking to him, he started writing notes, which eventually turned into a sermon outline.

“This guy had never preached. He’d never led a Sunday School class. But I knew he had a word for our church, and I felt like it needed to be preached that Sunday.”

More than 250 people attended church that week.

“He was so nervous and vulnerable,” Horine said. “But as he preached, God just united the whole church.”

That evening, Doyle attended the weekly *Experiencing God* meeting. Near the beginning, he confessed that he felt guilty about attending. His granddaughter had asked him to share the gospel with her, but he told her he wouldn’t be home until much later that evening.

“So we all prayed for him, laid hands on him, and sent him out,” Horine recalled.

Horine was still in the parking lot chatting with church members when Doyle returned.

As soon as he parked his car, he opened the door, fell to the ground in tears, and cried out, “My baby girl just got saved!”

Horine congratulated him on his granddaughter’s salvation, but Doyle told him it was actually his 30-year-old daughter who accepted Christ.

“As he was sharing the gospel with his granddaughter, who wasn’t quite ready, his daughter ended up having a conversation with him in the kitchen,” Horine shared. “He just starts laying out the gospel and she responds. And then two weeks later, he baptized his daughter. It was powerful!”

For Horine, what makes *Experiencing God* powerful is its simple message.

“Let’s love God with everything, and if we love him, then let’s obey him, and let’s walk in obedience with him,” Horine said. “And that’s just this message that’s being portrayed over and over again. And we do that by watching Him work. These seven realities that have been so time-tested through the decades are simple. When we walk in them together, it unites us as we watch God work. I think we will continue to watch God move in so many ways through this.”

Adapted from an article from

Blackaby Ministries International.

Used with permission.

RELATED RESOURCES

Over the years, God has used the truths of *Experiencing God* to awaken believers to a radically God-centered way of life. As a result, millions have come to know God intimately, to recognize His voice, and to understand His will for their lives.

lifeway.com/experiencinggod





5 BIBLICAL FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE DISCIPLE-MAKING SYSTEMS

Where should we focus our time and energy to maximize our church's potential?

Most church leaders tend to invest their time in crafting sermons or series, managing events and ministries, and caring for those who happen to come their way. This is only natural, since those are the areas they were trained in and that were usually modeled for them.

But notice how that time investment subtly leads us to whatever quantitative readings we can get from each event in the moment—such as numbers of those who participate—which may or may not correlate to spiritual growth or a multiplying lifestyle. Even if our focus is to care for individuals, we tend to take the pulse of our church from spotlighted stories that we, of course, celebrate (as we should!). But what if those experiences aren't typical or common throughout the whole church?

Either tendency leads us to think we know more than we really do about people's journeys and how they're growing as disciple-making disciples.

To make a difference in the lives of the whole community of people we're called to shepherd, we need a clear and agile system that touches the whole community. We must close the connectivity gaps that exist between our ministries and the personal and practical outcomes God is calling us to nurture in people's lives.

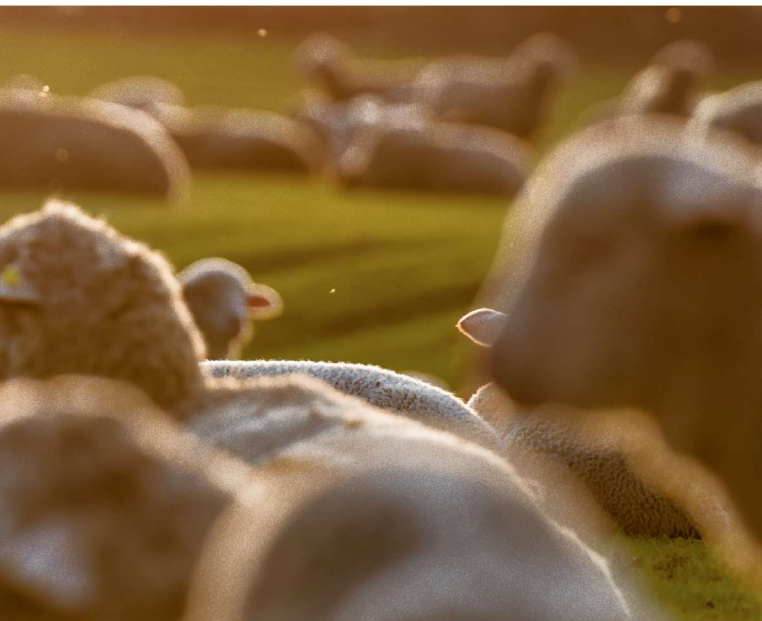
Many think of a system as a set of consistent procedures that churn out consistent results. Some ministry leaders love the clarity that idea can bring while others hate it – thinking it might somehow hinder creativity or sensitivity to the Spirit.

But what if the big problem with leading a church is a misunderstanding of biblical perspectives on systems?

It is crucial to remember that the Bible frequently and repeatedly compares the work of church leaders to common occupations of its time, all of which were seriously concerned about systems but without our industrial presuppositions.

An important example is shepherding, from which we get our Latin-to-English term 'pastor'. In addition to calling Himself the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), it was no accident that Jesus ordered Peter to feed His lambs (John 21:15) and that Peter used the same analogy to exhort elders of the church (1 Peter 5:1–4).

A shepherd's knowledge and skill had to be wide-ranging and his judgment sound to an extraordinary degree to apply to a variety of changing circumstances. He had to know where to go in different seasons for food and water sources, when to drive them and when to rest, what their personalities were, signs of disease to cure them, how to breed, slaughter, and shear them nimbly, grasp economic conditions, hire, fire, and train other shepherds, and survive the wilderness and death matches against wolves, lions, and thieves.



Similar attributes also apply to the common profession of farming. Jesus compared himself and all who proclaim God’s message with farmers planting seed (Matthew 13:3–23). Paul compared himself and Apollos to hired or tenant farmers working God’s field, the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:5–9). Like shepherds, farmers must be highly capable, vastly knowledgeable, and intensely attentive to respond to a wide variety of conditions.

Paul also compared church leaders to builders, asserting that every leader should “be careful how he builds” because “each one’s work will become obvious” (1 Corinthians 3:10–15, CSB®). It should go without saying that builders, architects, and engineers don’t operate unsystematically.

When you start wrapping your mind around what was required of ancient shepherding, farming, building, or other occupations (fishing, for example—Mark 1:17), does any of it sound like something anyone could do well without a well-established, connected system?

Consider the features these occupations have in common:

1 They involve patterned activity. There are certain functions and practices that are performed over and over again.

2 They require keen observation of everything. Extraordinary attention to detail is required. Refusing to read the clouds, taste the soil, smell the wind, recognize the blemish, or measure the gradient of the land even once invites failure or even disaster.

3 They require adaptation to circumstances. The world is both predictable in its biological, chemical, and physical laws and unpredictable in what will happen when. Workers must be continuously responsive to changing conditions to execute an approach with the best chance of success.

4 They hand down a body of practical knowledge. No one learns these trades on their own. Instead, one is initiated into an accumulation of thousands of years of empirical wisdom born of innumerable experiments over generations, and it takes a lifetime to master it.

5 They embody a system, not systems. Unlike mechanistic constructions that involve the interplay of multiple systems, in these occupations *everything workers do is the system*. All that they do works together to form one interdependent, synergistic whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This kind of connectivity is very different from running a variety of separate programs.

The Bible teaches that church disciple-making is supposed to be like this. It isn’t building a factory that runs by itself. It also isn’t speaking the right ideas and then sitting back waiting for God to do the rest. Instead, biblical church leadership is an experimental, intensely attentive, continually improving effort. Doing this well requires gaining deep ongoing knowledge of the people you lead.

If we don’t bring to our calling the rigorous, multidirectional investigation and adaptation of a shepherd on the edge of the desert, a farmer on the edge of planting season, or a builder on the edge of a river two thousand years ago, we’re missing something.

By Clint Grider, Chief Integration Officer and Senior Lead Navigator, Auxano

HOW DO WE BUILD DISCIPLE-MAKERS?

There's no doubt that Jesus's Great Commission means that the church's primary activity needs to be about reaching and teaching. In fact, churches should always operate with the goal to make disciples who make disciples, doing this until the return of Jesus.

But what does this mean for church leaders? Here are a few important questions church leaders should ask when seeking to build disciple-makers:

Are people engaged in large groups? Too often, worship becomes a "spectator sport," an activity that may not always encourage people to fully participate in worship. Ideally, worship should be engaging, passionate, even compelling. This means that preaching, while biblical, ought to speak to the mind, heart, and soul of the individual. As a common front door to the church, it is vitally important that worship is engaging, Bible-centered, and participatory, because the large group of worship often sets the tone for the other ministries of the church.

Are people engaged in small groups? Small groups in all contexts can and should be exciting. Groups are places for fellowship, support, encouragement, relationship, and yes, discipleship. Be sure to offer trusted curriculum along with training for leaders and potential leaders. Also, encourage groups to take on a ministry or missions project regularly. Taking groups beyond the study will help members look forward to each session.

Are people engaged in groups of a few? Within each church is a potential for micro groups, where groups of two or three connect during the week to provide deep friendship, support, encouragement, and accountability. Even more, micro groups help individuals go deeper in their own spiritual development, with the goal that each person start another micro group to encourage spiritual growth in others. Done consistently, these types of groups can be extremely valuable to disciple-making.

Are people engaged personally? There is no substitute for daily Bible engagement. It's clear that when people read, study, and meditate on God's Word, their Bible literacy will increase, leading them to grow in their faith. One practical way to grow individuals is to encourage a church or group to undertake a Bible reading plan. Another idea is to emphasize different spiritual disciplines regularly. As these practices are encouraged, it's likely that some will take on these new habits and grow in their faith.

Are you engaged? You as a leader must be engaged, not only to be an example, but to grow as well. When you belong to a small group and a micro group, and are enjoying daily Bible engagement, others are encouraged. After all, leaders need a quiet time to be refreshed and more effective for the work of ministry.

Every church can make disciples who make disciples. By looking at the church from the large, small, micro, and individual levels, a leader can help other leaders grow, in turn affecting others as they build up one another in the love and truth of Christ. By doing this, the Great Commission is obeyed, the gospel is advanced, and the work of reaching and teaching continues until Jesus returns.

"Micro groups help individuals go deeper in their own spiritual development, with the goal that each person start another micro group to encourage spiritual growth in others."

By Dr. Fran Trascritti,
Lead Pastor, Beacon Church

4 FACTORS THAT PREDICT CHURCH GROWTH

Small, normative-sized churches can be healthy congregations serving Jesus and the community in which He has placed them. For many churches, however, there is an opportunity for numerical growth. Many people may be physically near the church building but spiritually far from God.

Analysis of a Lifeway Research study on church health found four predictive factors of church growth—evangelism, assimilation, small group discipleship, and church size. You can evaluate your own church by asking each of the questions associated with each factor.

1. EVANGELISM

In the past 12 months, how many people have indicated a new commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior through your church?

This should be obvious, but the more effectively evangelistic a church is, the more likely they are to have grown numerically. If you want more people at your church, you need to reach more people.

The average U.S. Protestant church saw 15 new commitments to Jesus in the past year.

But most churches saw far fewer than that. Around two in three congregations had fewer than 10 people make a new commitment to Christ as Savior in the past 12 months, including 17% who saw no new commitments through their church.

**The average
U.S. Protestant church
saw 15 new commitments
to Jesus in the past year.**

Churches wanting to grow can start by increasing their evangelism. If non-Christians live within driving distance of your church, you have an opportunity to grow.

2. ASSIMILATION

Among the new commitments, what percentage have become active in the life of your church?

If you want to grow, help new converts transition into active participants. Weave them into the fabric of your congregation.

On average, 79% of new commitments become active in the life of the church. A slight majority of churches (56%) say they retained all their converts in the past year. Churches are more likely now than at any point in the past 15 years to say they retained all the new commitments.

This is an area where smaller churches, or those reaching fewer people, have an advantage. Small churches that can reach new people for Christ and make them feel a welcomed part of the congregation can keep those they reach with the gospel.

3. SMALL GROUP DISCIPLESHIP

What percentage of your current weekend worship attendees are involved in some small group, Sunday School class, or similar group?

If you've reached new people and they feel at home in your church, an important step is to get them involved in small groups. A higher percentage of worship attendees involved in groups means a church is more likely to be growing its worship service.

The average percentage of worship service attendees involved in some type of small group discipleship has fallen from 50% in 2008 to 44% today. Currently, a quarter of churches (24%) say less than a quarter of their churchgoers are part of a small group. Fewer than one in five (19%) say at least 75% of their attendees are also small group participants.

Right now, this is a weakness among small congregations. Those with fewer than 50 worship service attendees are the most likely to say less than 25% of those attendees are involved in a small group (39%).

If you want a growing church and a healthy church, strive to increase the percentage of churchgoers involved in a small group.

4. CHURCH SIZE

What is your current worship attendance?

Churches that evangelize, assimilate new converts, and get them involved in small groups are likely to grow. Because of that, growth is a self-repeating cycle. Church size predicts church growth because those churches are often already doing what it takes to grow.

This does not mean, however, that small churches cannot grow. This only indicates that larger churches are more likely to have grown in the past 15 years. Leaders of normative-sized churches should focus on the first three factors—reaching new people, getting them involved, and plugging them into a small group.

Regardless of a church's size today, if a congregation is committed and successful at those three factors, they're much more likely to be a healthy and growing congregation in the future.

By Aaron Earls, Communications and Media Relations,
Lifeway Christian Resources

Step into God's beautiful story.

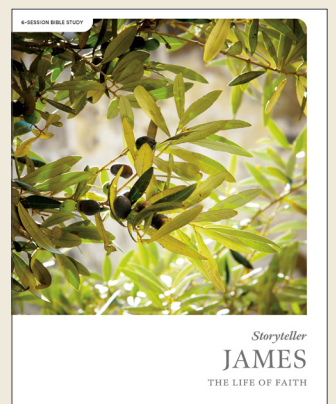
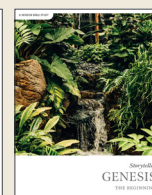
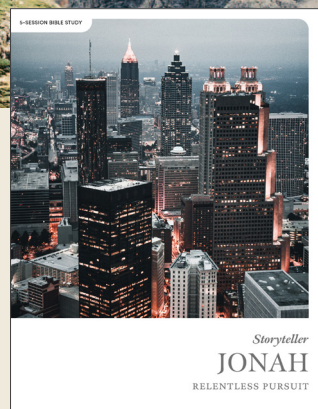
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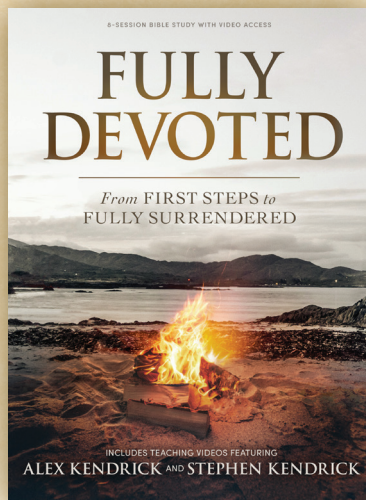


GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES.

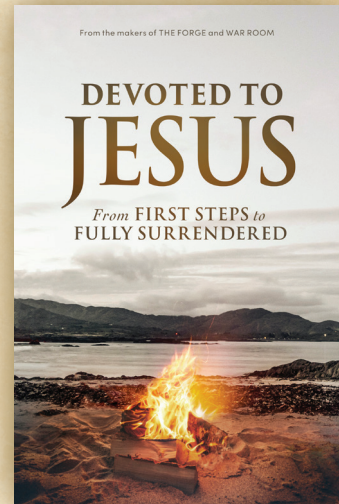
Across the world. Across the country. Across the county line.
Across the street. Across the dinner table.
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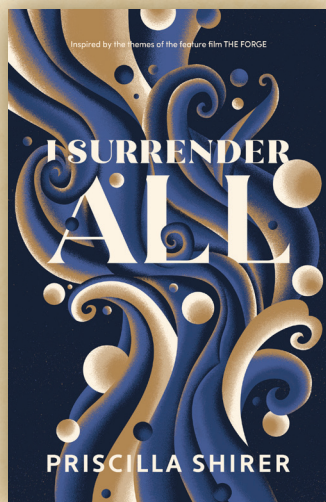
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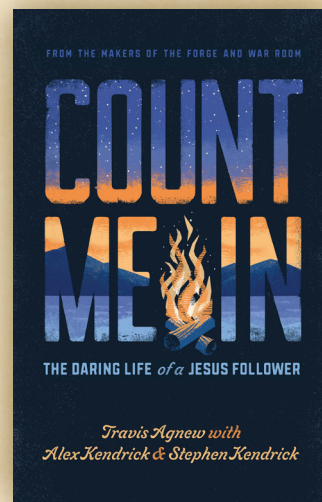
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