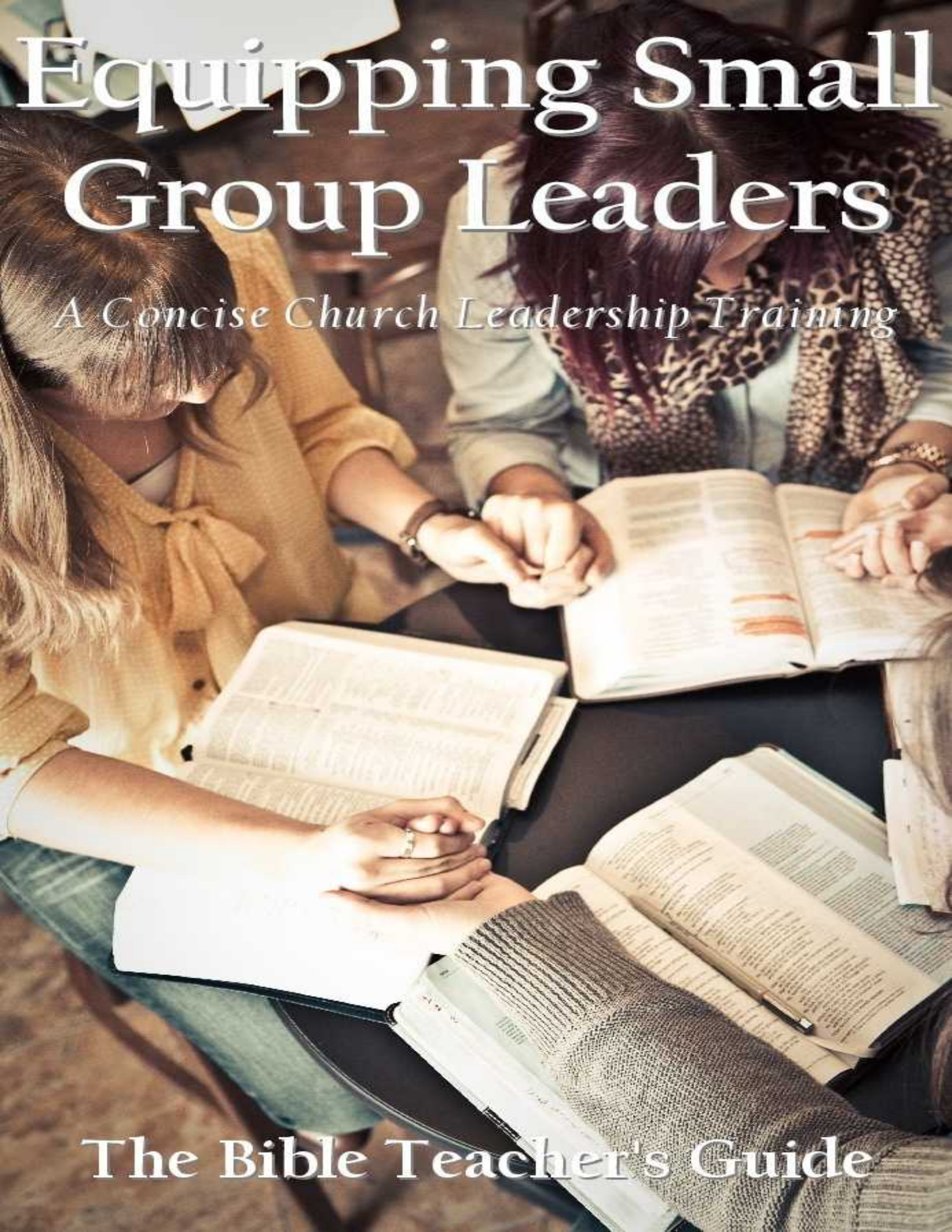

Equipping Small Group Leaders
A Concise Church Leadership Training
The Bible Teacher's Guide

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Gregory Brown



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Author, Gregory Brown

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Preface

> And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.
> 2 Timothy 2:2

Paul's words to Timothy still apply to us today. The church needs teachers who clearly and fearlessly teach the Word of God. With this in mind, The Bible Teacher's Guide (BTG) series was created. This series includes both expositional and topical studies, with resources to help teachers lead small groups, pastors prepare sermons, and individuals increase their knowledge of God's Word.

Equipping Small Group Leaders is written as a church leadership training. Individual small group leaders can use this to train and further equip themselves to lead small groups, or education directors and pastors can use this training to prepare new small group leaders and sharpen experienced ones. There are four major lessons: The Why, the What, the Who, and the How of Small Group Leadership. The How can be divided into several separate lessons which includes working through a sample small group Bible study. Each lesson is sprinkled with discussion questions to cultivate discussion and sharing tips among those being trained. The leader of the training can use the curriculum in one of two ways: (1) It can be used to develop his or her own lessons, or (2) it can be read as a group while pausing at strategic places to add insight or answer discussion questions.

Introduction

God does big things through small groups. He heals, unifies, encourages, and equips. Christ trained his twelve apostles in a small group. It was while participating in a small group of leaders in the Antioch church that Paul and Barnabas heard God speak—calling them to international missions (Acts 13:1-3). Essentially, all believers owe something to those initial small groups. As with Paul, small group ministry has greatly affected a number of us. Some met their best friends in a small group; some met their spouses; others were healed and carried through difficult seasons by the love of their small group members. Some heard their call or reheard their call to ministry in the midst of a group. God does big things through small groups. When two or more are gathered in his name, he is in the midst of them to bless and answer their prayers (Matt 18:19-20).

In this study, we will look at the *WHY* of small group leadership. Why should we participate in and lead them? We will consider the *WHAT* of small group leadership, as we look at types of small groups, their elements, and their focus. We will look at the *WHO* of small group leadership, as we consider qualities of good small group leaders. Christ said it is good enough for a student to be like his teacher (Matt 10:25). In one sense, small group leaders set the spiritual ceiling for the group and individual members. Therefore, small group leaders have a special calling. Finally, we'll look at the *HOW* of small group leadership, as we consider the skills of a leader, the basic order of a small group meeting, and a sample lesson.

Much of the content in this study won't be new, especially to veteran leaders, but it should reaffirm and encourage both new and old leaders in their calling and ministry. In addition, hopefully, small group leaders will pick up a skill or two and be more confident in their frontline ministry of discipling others through small groups. May God bless your study and ministry.

The Why of Small Group Leadership

Why Small Groups?

Why small groups? The need for small groups begins with the very first book in the Bible and is more thoroughly taught throughout the New Testament. In Genesis 2:18, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” This certainly refers to the natural need of most people to be married, but it means so much more.

It means that mankind needs relationships. Small groups are attractive to not only Christians but also to the world, as they are searching for intimate relationships with other people. Small groups provide a medium to not only cultivate the faith of Christians and evangelize the lost, but also to meet the deep-seated need for intimacy in all people.

The Example of Jesus

The greatest evidence and support for small group ministry is seen in the example of Jesus.[1] As part of his plan to redeem the world, he essentially became a small group leader. He chose twelve to disciple, fellowship with, pray with, and prepare for future ministry. He not only invested in a large group of twelve, but at times focused on a smaller group of three—the leaders of the twelve (Peter, James, and John). He took the three on the mountain where he was transfigured, and he also met with them for prayer right before going to the cross (Luke 22:39-45). Very telling is the fact that most of Christ’s three-year ministry was spent in a small group—ministering not to the multitudes but to a select few. In Acts, the twelve and their followers were said to have turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Small group ministry is probably the most effective way to fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20). We participate in and lead small groups to be like Jesus and to carry out his command to make disciples.

The Example of the Early Church

Another support for small groups is the ministry of the early church. In Acts 2:46-47, it says:

> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

They met in the temple for public worship and in their homes for private worship. The small group was the "church in miniature." As they followed this pattern of both public and private worship, the Lord multiplied them. It should be the same in our churches. Every church should be a church of small groups. Christ committed to small group ministry and so did his followers in the early church.

To Fulfill the "One Another" Texts

Finally, small group ministry is also important for fulfilling the "one another" texts in Scripture that are often left unfulfilled in public worship. For example, Hebrews 10:24-25 says,

> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The author said believers should "spur one another" and encourage "one another." Similarly, John 13:34 says people will know we are Christ's disciples by the way we "love one another." In the book, The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group, the authors say there are over thirty "one another" texts in the New Testament.[2] Certainly, "one another" happens in public worship, but it most easily happens in the intimate worship of small groups.

Part of the way believers fulfill these “one another” texts in a small group is by using their spiritual gifts in that setting. While many members’ gifts can’t be used in public worship simply because of limited positions and need, they can be used in private worship. It is in a small group that people often can use and cultivate their gifts of hospitality, helps, mercy, teaching, and even evangelism.

Small group ministry is important and necessary for many reasons: God made humans to be in relationship. Many struggle with depression, fear, sickness, and other maladies simply because they lack a healthy community. In addition, when Christ came to save the world, he didn’t focus his ministry primarily on the crowds but on a small community of twelve, and three within the twelve. To model Christ, the early church practiced this ministry as well, and God multiplied them daily. God does big things through small groups. We should be excited to participate in his ministry.

Discussion Question: What are some other reasons that small group ministry is so important? What other biblical texts support the prominence of this ministry in the local church?

The What of Small Group Leadership

Small Group Elements and Focus

Like a church service, a small group should have various elements: worship and prayer, fellowship, Bible instruction, and serving. However, a small group typically has one of these as its primary focus. Whatever element the small group spends most of its time on, is its primary focus. For example, a Bible study group spends most of the time studying and discussing the Bible, but still allots time for fellowship, prayer, and maybe an occasional opportunity to serve. A prayer group focuses on prayer but also allots time for fellowship, a reading of Scripture, and an opportunity to serve. An evangelism group follows suit. All of the elements are important; the leadership must discern the proper portion of time allotted for each.

Most small groups will focus on the Word of God, just as most church services do. Paul told Timothy, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Scripture trains us in righteousness and equips us for it. It prepares us to be good husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, workers, church members, and servants. It teaches us how to be saved (2 Tim 3:15) and live out our salvation (v. 16-17). It helps us know who God is so we can better worship him. Therefore, we should give attention to it both individually and corporately. God has exalted his Word above his name (Ps 138:2, KJV).

What are some ways to emphasize Scripture in small groups? We’ll consider several ways to do this:

1. Small groups emphasize Scripture by simply reading and surveying books of the Bible. Some groups get together and simply read for thirty or forty minutes out loud in a group setting.

During a semester, a group could run through much of the New Testament. Often those groups will first read an introduction to a specific book, like Matthew, before reading the book out loud. This is quite beneficial. Many people struggle not only with understanding Scripture but simply reading it. The early church would give hours of time to just reading and listening to Scripture, as very few people owned copies of the Bible, and therefore had to hear it at church. They were devoted to the "public reading of Scripture" as Paul commanded (1 Tim 4:13). In a small group setting, emphasis is given to reading the text slowly and clearly. Portions of the text are usually divided between the members of the group—reading five to ten verses each. At the end of public reading, the members may or may not share thoughts, questions, encouragements, etc. Whether groups make this the primary method of studying Scripture or not, public reading should be included, even if it is just a few verses or a chapter.

2. Small groups emphasize Scripture by memorizing it. Some groups focus on memorizing and quoting verses within the group. Members are given a few verses to memorize throughout the week. They are encouraged to study them—to understand what they mean and how to apply them. This helps with memory. When gathering, five to ten minutes is given to sharpen the Scripture memory, then individuals share the meaning and application of the verses and quote them. The next week, they repeat the process with new verses but also try to requote the previous verses.

   Bible memory is an important discipline that adults often fail to excel at. David, an elderly man at the time, said, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps 119:11). When Christ conquered the devil's temptations in the wilderness, he did so by quoting Scripture (Matt 4). The more Scripture we have memorized, the more we'll conquer Satan and sin. The less we have memorized, the more we suffer spiritually. Groups benefit greatly from practicing the discipline of memorizing Scripture, as it provides accountability and support. Even if it is not the focus of a group, assigning a weekly memory verse is a healthy discipline.

3. Small groups benefit from studying Scripture expositorily. Exposition really means exposing truths in Scripture. This is done through studying a book of the Bible, like Ephesians, by focusing on bite-sized chunks of perhaps 5-10 verses. There are many popular Bible study guides such as: LifeGuide Bible Studies, MacArthur Bible Studies, etc. Some of them are simply question oriented—leading the group through observation, interpretation, and application questions. Others are teaching oriented, whether in video or written form, with application questions. In addition, small group leaders can develop their own study by creating a road map of questions throughout a passage for discussion and/or using a combination of short bursts of teaching with the questions —an approach that we'll consider in more detail later. Another strategic way to study expositorily is by working through an online expository series of sermons; many pastors have fully manuscripted sermons that can be read in 15-20 minutes out loud and have application questions with them. For example, consider Steve Cole's sermons which are available on Bible.org. Or, work through The Bible Teacher's Guide series, also available on Bible.org or on popular book sites for purchase.

4. Small groups emphasize Scripture by studying it topically. Topical Bible study is essentially trying to understand a major topic in Scripture like the Holy Spirit, Jesus, salvation, prayer, marriage, parenting, or a character study on someone like Abraham. This is done by considering many of the most relevant verses on these topics in a systematic way. Topical Bible study books help groups do this by leading them to Bible verses, asking them the meaning of these verses and what they teach about the specific topic. Other books tackle the topics by fully explaining it in an orderly manner and adding discussion questions at the end of the chapters, or by making a study guide available. Systematic theologies are great for this, like Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology or the smaller versions Bible Doctrine and Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know. Since some chapters are long, small group leader can either assign individual reading outside of

the group and then discuss when gathered and/or read portions of the book in the meeting and strategically add questions for discussion throughout (What did you think about this portion? How should we apply this?). By adding their own questions and/or intermixing those of the author, leaders can make a helpful book fit the format of their small groups. What they don't finish can be given as homework or picked up the next week.

5. Small groups emphasize Scripture by Bible mapping. The concept behind Bible mapping is similar to Bible memory. In Bible memory, one memorizes a verse. In Bible mapping, one memorizes the contents of each chapter in a Bible book. This is done by assigning five to seven chapters a day of reading. For seven days, these same chapters will be completely read each day. While doing this, the member will create an outline of each chapter with the hope of being able to permanently recall the details that happen in each chapter. Then when the members gather for small group, they are given a quiz, where they identify what chapter certain narratives or verses happened in. The leader can make up the quiz or the members will come to each group ready to write out their memorized outline. After they finish, the quiz is self-graded, as members walk through the events of each chapter. They will do this for each chapter of a Bible book (5-7 chapters each week) until it is completely mapped in their mind. By doing this, they train their mind to act like a concordance. Often memory verses within the specific chapters read are assigned weekly with this type of study.

Discussion Question: What will be the focus of your small group and why? Why is emphasizing Scripture so important? How will you emphasize Scripture? How will you incorporate other elements and what amount of time will be given to them?

The Who of Small Group Leadership

Character Qualities of Good Small Group Leaders

What are some character qualities of good small group leaders? There are many, but we will only consider a few:

1. A good small group leader is above reproach in his or her character.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul says, “Imitate me, as I imitate Christ.” It was not that Paul was perfect. The only perfect model is Christ; however, we need to model imperfect people who are striving to be like Christ. They fall and make mistakes, but they get back up, confess their sins, and continue to serve Christ. We need imperfect models like Paul, and that’s what good small group leaders are. They are not perfect, but they are continually striving for it. The righteous fall down seven times and get back up (Prov 24:16). That’s what makes them righteous and a good model. When they fail, which happens commonly, they won’t stay down.

Similarly, good small group leaders are striving to live a life that is above reproach in every area—their entertainment, relationships, devotional life, etc. When Paul gave Timothy qualities of church elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, he said they needed to be “above reproach” in verse 2. Above reproach is the summarizing characteristic for an elder—it covers every other characteristic in the passage. It means there is nothing in these people’s lives to take hold of and accuse them of. By living a life that is above reproach, it keeps others from stumbling because of their lives, and it hinders the enemy’s ability to attack them (cf. Eph 4:26-27, 6:13-17).

When God looks for somebody to use, he finds a person with godly character. They may not be especially gifted, but they have a heart for God and they are aiming to obey him. Second Chronicles 16:9 says, “For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.” He finds those with character—a right heart—and he equips them to serve. This must be true of us. God can’t greatly use somebody with faulty character—meaning they are living with unconfessed sin or areas of compromise. He looks for people with character so he can use them.

Therefore, as small group leaders, we must be quick to confess and turn away from our sins. If we have sinned against others, we should quickly confess our sins both to them and God. Unconfessed sin hinders our relationship with God and others. David said, “if I cherish iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps 66:18). Christ said we either gather people to him or scatter them away from him (Lk 11:23).

Do you have any unconfessed sin in your life? Are there anyways that you are compromising?

Discussion Question: Why is it important for small group leaders to be above reproach in their character? What happens when small group leaders lack godly character?

2. A good small group leader is an abider.

Jesus said in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” All quality ministry comes out of abiding in Christ. From that relationship, there is an overflow, not only into our lives, but the lives of others. Small group leaders must be people of prayer, the Word of God, worship, and service, among other things. Without abiding, we have nothing to give anybody else.

Consider these passages: Psalm 1:1-3 says:

> Blessed is the man … whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

The person who delights in and meditates on God's Word day and night (all the time) will be like a fruitful tree. Trees don't produce fruit for themselves, but so others can eat from them. In the same way, good small group leaders live in the Word, and the fruit of love, patience, wisdom, and encouragement flow from their lives. Like Christ, people start to gather around them so they can eat. This must be true of us as well, as we lead those that God assigns to us.

Similarly, Colossians 3:16 says,

> Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

The word "dwell" in this text means "to be at home with as a resident." When the message of Christ is richly at home in us, instead of like a visitor, we will naturally teach and admonish others with wisdom. We'll lead people in worship to God, and we'll have a thankful disposition.

Small group leaders must be abiders. It is from an abiding relationship with Christ and his Word that all good ministry flows.

Discussion Question: How can small group leaders strike the balance of work, family, and ministering to others with abiding in Christ? What disciplines have you found helpful?

3. A good small group leader is a caring shepherd.

In John 10, Christ contrasts himself with the Pharisees and other false teachers by saying that he was the good shepherd, and all before him were hirelings. When the wolf comes, the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep, while the hireling just runs away.

Small group leaders represent their Lord and Savior as under-shepherds. They help feed the sheep, clean them, give them rest, and protect them. Obviously, none of us can perfectly discharge these duties, but we must aim for them. Daily, we should pray for the people in our small group. When they don't show up, we should contact them and see if they're OK

and ask if they have any prayer requests or needs. Those who are struggling, we should give special attention to.

Even as a pastor, this is something that I'm still growing in. As a young believer, I was mostly at bigger churches and never had any real relationship with my pastor. I didn't attend small group or youth ministry, and therefore, I had nobody to hold me accountable. When I became a pastor, I had to learn without ever clearly seeing a model of somebody shepherding and investing in my life. I did sit under good preaching, but I lacked personal attention. And therefore, shepherding is something I'm still growing in. To be honest, shepherding comes with a lot of pain. These days, I find myself up late at night because I'm worried about a member in my small group who is in a compromised dating relationship. I'm worried about members who are struggling with their faith and potentially turning away from God. There is heart pain with being a shepherd, but we must bear it willingly. It is part of carrying our cross (Lk 14:27). It is part of taking on the yoke of Christ (Matt 11:29).

Discussion Question: In what ways have you experienced the pain of shepherding, as you care for malnourished, sick, and struggling sheep? Do you have any tips that make this easier?

4. A good small group leader is an equipper.

Leading a small group is not a one person show. Each person in a small group has gifts and skills to contribute, and a good leader recognizes that. In fact, Scripture says this is true about good pastors. In Ephesians 4, Paul talks about how God gives gifted leaders for the purpose of equipping the church to do the work of ministry (v. 11-13). In one sense, good pastors are trying to work themselves out of a job. They are equipping people to study the Word, teach it, evangelize, counsel, and serve in general.

This is also true of good small group leaders. If leaders try to do everything, they will eventually burn out. Small group leaders should discern the gifts of their members and put them in positions to excel in the use of those gifts. Is someone great at administration? Ask them to write down everybody's prayer requests and send them out in a weekly email, with announcements. Is somebody gifted at worship? Ask them to lead worship. Is somebody demonstrating the gift of teaching through the

questions they ask and the way they answer questions? Ask them to teach one week. Does somebody have a powerful testimony? Ask them to testify. Good small group leaders equip others to do the work of ministry. They are producing future leaders.

Paul said this to Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2). We should be searching for reliable people, or it can be translated “faithful people,” who can eventually lead and teach others. Therefore, when leading a small group, look for Timothys —those who will one day lead others.

In seeking to equip others, it may be helpful to formalize their ministry. Ask somebody to be “the host.” This doesn’t mean that they host every week necessarily, but that they oversee that ministry. They have people sign up to bring drinks or host the group at their house. Ask somebody to be the small group “administrator” by overseeing administration. As mentioned, administrators send out the weekly emails with prayer requests and important information. They might also set up a monthly fun outing like going to dinner and a movie. Ask somebody passionate about missions to be the “mission coordinator.” Encourage him or her to research various ways that the group can serve once a month or once a semester and to oversee planning it. In many ways, the small group is the “church miniature,” and it should function that way.

Discussion Question: In what ways have you seen or experienced people’s gifts or passions show up in the midst of small groups? How can we encourage those people to use them strategically in small group or other ministries?

Good small group leaders are abiders. They abide in Christ through prayer, the Word, worship, etc., and they minister from that overflow. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing good spiritually. Good small group leaders are shepherds. They care for the sheep by feeding, protecting, and guiding them. Good small group leaders are people whose character is above reproach. By our character, we either push people to or away from Christ. Finally, good small group leaders are equippers. They realize that the people within their small group have various callings and gifts, and they aim to stir their members towards love and good deeds (Heb 10:24).

Discussion Question: What are some other character qualities of good small group leaders? Which one or ones do you feel God is calling you to work on most?

The How of Small Group Leadership

Small Group Leader Skills

Not only must a small group leader possess certain character qualities, but they must also possess specific skills. What are some important skill-sets for small group leaders?

Skilled Host

Often, it's said that in a lecture or sermon, the first five minutes are the most important. In those first five minutes, people typically decide whether they are going to like a lecture or not, and often they spend the rest of the lecture defending their initial assessment.[3] This is probably also true about the first five minutes of a small group when newcomers visit. They often don't know anybody; they don't know where to sit, or what the social norms are. A good small group leader aims to make visitors feel comfortable and enlists other members to help in that endeavor.

In Matthew 25:31-46, Christ teaches the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. Consider what Christ, our King, says to the sheep about strangers:

> "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit

you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’
Matthew 25:31-40

The sheep are invited into the kingdom because of how they treated the least of his brothers and sisters, including strangers of whom are mentioned twice. It is mentioned twice more when Christ rebukes the goats who did not care for the least (v. 41-46). Christ said, what you did to them, you did to me. In the same way, when we serve new people in our small group—the strangers—we are caring for our Lord. Therefore, we should take great pains to make them feel comfortable. But also, as we care for them, we should keep in mind that a large portion of their comfortability happens in the first five minutes. The first five minutes may have more to do with whether they return than the rest of the time in the group. If their first five minutes are bad, they may decide that these people aren’t interested in me or are only interested in one another, and from that point, they spend the rest of the small group defending that position in their mind.

It has often been said that when Ghandi was a young lawyer, he seriously considered becoming a Christian. He decided to visit a Christian church but was barred at the door by a South African elder. When Ghandi told him that he wanted to worship, he was called a racial slur and rejected. From that point, Ghandi decided to adopt the good in Christianity, but never consider being a Christian again if it meant being part of a church.[4] How we care for strangers is not only important in encouraging strangers to return to our small group, but it could have drastic effects on their future faith or lack of it.

The importance of greeting and caring for others is amplified by this common NT command seen in many books, “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (cf. Romans 16:16, 1 Cor 16:20, 2 Cor 13:12, 1 Pet 5:14). Why does God make this a command? And, why is it repeated so much? It’s because our love for one another is very important to God, and it is very important to others. Have you ever had friends get mad at you simply because you failed to greet them when walking by or failed to contact them when you were in town?

Greeting people and making them feel comfortable, in part, has to do with asking genuine questions that demonstrate our desire to know them,

such as: “Where are you from? What do you do for work? How long have you been coming to our church? Do you have family in town?” When there are similarities in the answers, like coming from the same place, connections are formed which often lead to friendships. These friendships become bridges for further ministry.

Good small group leaders are great hosts. Now, because small group leaders often have to care for and mingle with everybody in the group, they should encourage others to participate in this ministry. Certainly, it is probably understood by the group that a visitor is everybody’s responsibility; however, business principles teach us that something that is “everybody’s responsibility” often becomes “nobody’s responsibility.” Each person says to themselves, “Oh, somebody else will make them feel comfortable” or “I’m not the best person to reach out.” It may be prudent to assign somebody who is very social to greet people or make newcomers feel comfortable, or at times, to even introduce a newcomer to a member and ask that member to make the newcomer feel at home. For example, “Hey Jennifer, this is Sharon. She’s new. Please tell her about the group and the church and make her feel comfortable.” In addition, providing refreshments and possibly food goes a long way with making people feel comfortable. Not too many things make a person feel more at home than food. Providing light snacks can be a job that is shared amongst the group.

Discussion Question: Share a time when you were a visitor to a small group or ministry and how you were made to feel welcome or not. How can small group leaders be strategic about making newcomers feel comfortable when they visit?

Skilled Researcher

Good small group leaders are good researchers. Leading a small group is a lot like cooking. I can go to somebody’s refrigerator and cabinets and tell if I’m going to potentially like their cooking or not. If they don’t have meat and spices, there is a good chance I’m not going to enjoy it. It’s the same with teaching. Good small group leaders are great researchers. They gather good resources and work hard in their study so they can be well prepared for teaching and facilitating a small group.

I think we get a good picture of this with Paul right before he is beheaded during his second imprisonment in Rome. In 2 Timothy 4:13, he says to Timothy, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.” What were the scrolls and the parchments? Commentators are divided on this. The parchments were probably copies of the Old Testament. The scrolls were possibly pieces of the Gospels and resources for studying like rabbinical commentaries and paper to write on. Even at his deathbed, Paul wanted his resources to study and write. He was a researcher. This is also true for great small group leaders. Do you have scrolls and parchments?

What are some good resources? Obviously, many books could be named, but we’ll focus on several free and popular resources.

1. Online commentaries, sermons, and Bible studies. Here are some links:

- http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.html (Free commentaries on most books of the Bible by David Guzik)

- https://bible.org/byauthor/98190/steven_cole (Free sermons with discussion questions on many books of the Bible from Steven Cole, author of the Riches from the Word series)

- https://bible.org/byauthor/156476/gregory_brown (Free resources by Gregory Brown including The Bible Teacher’s Guide series which has free studies on bible books and topics like Nehemiah, Philippians, purity, and marriage).

- http://biblehub.com/ (Various Bible versions, free commentaries, original language resources)

- http://www.preceptaustin.org/ (Free sermons, bible studies, books, and commentaries)

- www.e-sword.net (Free Bible software with different Bible versions and commentaries like Matthew Henry’s commentaries, Barnes’ commentaries, and The Treasury of David by Charles Spurgeon)

- www.google.com (Find expository and topical sermons by plugging the passage or topic into Google [i.e. “1 John 1:1-4 sermons” or “sermons on marriage”].)

2. Pre-made studies like Alpha, Christianity Explored, Experiencing God, The Purpose Driven Life, and others—both topical and expository. Good ones are hard to find, even among those that are popular. They are often watered down, filled with pop psychology and secular wisdom, and have minimal biblical content. Therefore, small group leaders must vet them well. Ideally, all curriculums should be affirmed by church leadership.

Discussion Question: What are some other good resources for preparing or offering Bible studies? What qualities made them commendable? What were some less helpful ones and why?

Skilled Teacher

A good small group leader is a competent teacher. There are three primary ways to teach adults:

1. *Lecture*. Often lecture is bashed in pedagogical studies. It is said that people only remember 10% of what they hear. But there are times when teaching is extremely beneficial such as: (1) When dealing with a lot of information or complex information, it might be best to lecture. (2) When there is someone who knows the truth, like an expert, in the room, it is best to lecture.[5] Some groups talk, talk, and talk but never develop an understanding of what a text really means or how to apply it, and that’s not very helpful. If John Piper was in the room, it would probably be most beneficial to hear him talk and then ask questions. The best small groups typically have a mix of teaching and questions. This might have been the primary method used in the New Testament church. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul commands for the women (who, in the context, were probably being disruptive) to ask questions at home, which implies that questions were a normal part of worship (v.

13). That was also common in Jewish synagogues; the rabbi would teach and then people would ask questions. The most effective lectures in the small group setting are probably given in short bursts of maybe five to ten minutes with questions intermixed.

With that said, lecture is not always helpful in a small group setting for various reasons. First, we already have lecture in Sunday services, often without time for questions. Second, lecture is not as conducive for community building which is one of the benefits of the small group setting.[6] Third, it doesn't allow for other members to develop their teaching gifts by answering questions and adding insight.

2. *Creative Education*. Creative education refers to any creative elements used to help teach in a small group such as: playing a game, watching a video, acting out a song, going on a field trip, performing a drama, etc.[7] Often with Old Testament prophets, God had them act out their prophecy. For example, Isaiah went barefoot and naked for three years to symbolize how the King of Assyria would lead Egypt and Cush as slaves, barefoot and naked (Isaiah 20:2-4). Similarly, the prophet Ahijah tore Jereboam's robe into twelve pieces and gave him ten pieces representing the ten tribes of Israel he would rule over, while two tribes stayed with the house of David (1 Kings 11:30-40). Creative education is often used with children and high schoolers. It can be powerful if done wisely. For example, visiting the Dead Sea Scrolls or a Creation museum might really help fortify someone's faith in the inerrancy of Scripture. With that said, it is not the typical method used with adults, and it certainly can be overused.

3. *Question and Answer*. The question and answer method is inductive in nature—meaning that instead of giving the small group members the answer through lecture, they investigate by exploring a series of questions.

All these methods can be great for teaching. Combinations are probably the most effective, such as combining lecture, question and

answer, and a brief creative element. A good rule of thumb for any small group is that the teacher should probably not talk over 50% of the time.[8]

The way a small group leader is gifted will greatly affect how he or she leads the group. A right-brained person will often look for creative ways to change things up in order to spur learning. A person with the gift of teaching will tend towards lecture a little more than others. A person who is a listener and gifted facilitator will tip more towards question and answer. These are all useful methods; we should be open to incorporating methods that are a little outside of our wheel house in order to help those in our group.

Discussion Question: Which method have you found to be the most helpful in a small group setting? In what ways have you seen creative elements used in teaching? Were they successful? Why? Which method are you most inclined towards using, as you consider your gifts and personality?

Skilled Inquisitor

In line with being a competent teacher, small group leaders must be competent inquisitors—skilled at asking questions. Christ was good at asking questions. When approached by the rich man who was seeking eternal life in Mark 10:17-18, Christ asked, “Why do you call me good? Nobody is good but God alone.” Christ asked this probing question to help the rich man realize that Christ was in fact God, and that he could not do anything good to receive eternal life, except follow Christ (cf. Matt 19:17-22). Questions help us critically evaluate the text, ourselves, and the world around us in a deeper manner. Small group leaders must develop the skill of asking good questions.

Bad Questions

Before considering good questions, let’s consider what bad questions are. What are some “do nots” of small group questions?

- Do not ask questions with only a yes or no answer. For example, “Do you want to love your neighbor as yourself?” These don’t

stimulate discussions. Instead, ask open-ended questions.[9] For example, “How can you better love your neighbor as yourself?

- Do not ask wordy questions. Make them short by asking only what is needed.

- Do not ask obvious questions.[10] This often makes the small group participants feel stupid, and therefore, nobody wants to answer. However, some obvious questions can be strategically used to show a hidden truth.

Strategic Questions

When developing an interactive Bible study, one should create a structured conversation—a road map through a text or topic by using various types of strategic questions. These include:

1. *Introductory Questions*. These are great at the beginning of a small group in order to introduce a text or a topic. They are developed by finding a prominent theme in a passage studied. For example, in John 4:21-24, the main theme of the passage is worship or true worship. Christ says to the woman at the well that God desires worshipers who worship in spirit and truth. A good intro question might be: “What are some controversial aspects of worship in churches today?” This might stimulate some discussion about hymns, contemporary worship music, topical sermons, expository sermons, prayer styles, tongues, etc. Then, you would investigate the elements of true worship, regardless of style or culture, by studying John 4:21-24 and comparing Scripture with Scripture.

2. *Life Exposure Questions*. In a Bible study, there will often be people who don’t share for various reasons: fear, lack of Bible knowledge, etc. However, life exposure questions are questions that everybody can answer. These can be used in an introduction or after talking about a point in the text. For example: while discussing Paul mentoring Timothy, as he calls him a true son in

the faith (1 Tim 1:2), a leader can ask, “Who played a prominent role in mentoring you and helping develop your faith and how? If you lacked a mentor, any thoughts on why?” These types of questions lead to disclosure and intimacy in small groups. They are often the only type of questions that get 100% participation.

3. *Observation Questions*. Through observation questions, a leader is simply leading the participants to see what the text says. Studying the Bible is kind of like being a CSI agent. CSI agents notice details: “He has a mark on the right side of his face. There is piece of gum, a piece of hair, etc.” People who are good at studying the Bible are the same way. They are good observers. They observe minute details that may lead them to nothing or something great. And they do this by revisiting the text over and over again (Ps 1:2) and asking the text: who, what, why, where, and how type of questions. Small group leaders lead their members in doing the same. For example, Mark 16:7 says, “But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” This is the text where the women at the grave of Jesus were greeted by an angel who told them Christ had resurrected. He then tells them to go and tell the disciples and Peter. The Observation Question might be: “Who were the women to tell about Jesus’ resurrection?”[11] This seemingly obvious question should lead to a follow up question: “Why the disciples, and Peter? Isn’t Peter a disciple? Why is Peter emphasized?” This could lead to a great a discussion and the principle that God really cares about individuals and maybe specifically those who have fallen or are in trials. As you are aware, Peter had just denied Christ, right before his crucifixion (Mk 14:66-72). After Christ appears, he restores Peter privately—one on one (John 21). When my daughter gets hurt or fails at something, she receives my undivided attention and love in a special way. And no doubt, that’s true with God and the way he deals with us as well. Psalm 34:18 says, “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” God is near us in a special way in our failures and discouragements of life, and we must recognize this, even if only by faith. This observation question along with good

follow up questions, could lead to learning a lot more about our relationship with God.

4. *Interpretation Questions*. What does the text mean? There are many applications to a text but only one meaning. In using the CSI illustration, the agent has found the detail—a mark on the right side of the head—and now he interprets it. The interpretation or conclusion from this detail might be that the attacker is left-handed. We must do the same with the text. Let's consider an example. In Philippians 4:5, Paul says, "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." Several interpretation questions arise from this text: "What does 'gentleness' mean?" "What did Paul mean when he said, make their gentleness evident to 'all'? Who are the 'all'?" "What does 'the Lord is near' mean? Does it mean 'near' in that he is coming soon or near in presence?" These are questions that a teacher is asking and investigating to understand and apply a text. They are also questions a small group leader is asking his or her members to help them figure it out. The way these are investigated is by looking at how other versions interpret this verse, studying the historical context of Philippians, studying the literary context of the surrounding verses and the entire book, cross-referencing with similar Scriptures by using a Study Bible, reading what commentators have said, etc. To help understand the meaning of words, it's good to look up the original Greek or Hebrew (use Biblehub.com or E-Sword), look at an English dictionary, or ask what the opposite of the word is. For instance, asking what the opposite of "gentleness" is will help one understand what it practically means to let your gentleness be evident to all in Philippians 4:5. It is the opposite of being harsh and rude.

   To investigate, even within a small group, it's good to have different translations of the Bible available (use Biblehub.com), Study Bibles, and commentary available (Biblehub.com or E-Sword). This is very easy with the availability of Internet on our phones and laptops these days. For example, after asking what a verse means, a leader might ask, "Could somebody read the verse in a different version?" Or, "Can somebody share the commentary

and cross-references in a Study Bible?" In addition, to further understand the meaning of a text, it may be good to ask a theological interpretation question like, "How does the verse 'let your gentleness be made known to all' apply to the concept of justice in the Bible, especially when others have hurt us? Is it OK to seek justice? Do we always just forgive and forget and therefore never seek restitution?"

5. *Application Questions*. How should we apply this text to our lives? James 1:22 says, "Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves." What are people that simply hear God's Word deceived about? In the context of James, it probably refers to their salvation. In James 2, James says even the demons believe in God and shudder and that faith without works is dead (v. 19, 26). If we don't apply the Word of God, then we're not real Christians. We're like the people who built their house on the sand and it was destroyed by the storm—probably representing both trials and the final judgment (Matt 7:26-27). Only those who hear and do, build on the rock and therefore are truly saved (Matt 7:24-25). For this reason, our ultimate aim in studying Scripture is not just understanding, but to understand in order to apply. Applying Scripture proves that we are true disciples and not just hearers (cf. John 8:31). Small group leaders help their members do this by asking various application questions like: "How are we doing as a church in this specific area? How are you doing in this specific area (prayer, evangelism, showing mercy, etc.)? How will you apply this when you leave small group today?" These types of questions open the door for transparency, public confession, prayer, and healing. James 5:16 says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." Though Scripture teaches that we are all priests and that we can go straight to God with our sins, it never teaches that we don't need priests. We do; we need one another. God often brings his healing as we confess to one another and pray for one another. This should happen often in small group, as Scripture reveals our individual and corporate sin. For example, there is not one husband who has

ever “loved his wife” perfectly “as Christ loved the church” (Eph 5:25). It’s something every married man in a small group can and should confess whenever studying that text. Similarly, no one has ever perfectly loved God with their whole heart, mind, and soul, or their neighbor as themselves (Matt 22:37-39). But in corporate confession and prayer, there is healing. Therefore, small groups are healing agents, and this often comes as we truthfully and transparently apply the texts to our lives. Josh Hunt said this in his book, Good Questions Have Small Groups Talking:

> Small Group is a place where the masks can come off. It is a place where we can come clean. It is a place where we can get real. It is a place where we can confess our sins. It is a place where we can find healing. Not that all this confession will happen in group per se. Much of it will happen outside of group. The group time is only one part of group.[12]

How do we foster healthy environments with open and safe sharing? It must be modeled by the leadership. One of the things I love about Paul is his transparency. He says, “The things I would do, I don’t do. The things I wouldn’t do, I do. Who can save me from this body of death” (Rom 7, paraphrase). He called himself the least of the apostles (1 Cor 15:9), the least of all God’s people (Eph 3:8), and the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15). He’s easy to relate to because we often feel the same about ourselves. Small group leaders say like Paul, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1), and that includes transparency and confession.

What are some other types of useful application questions? There are *Testimony Questions* like: “Share a time when you showed gentleness to somebody who hurt you. How did they respond? How did doing this effect you spiritually, emotionally, etc.?” We can ask *Obstacle Questions* like, “What makes it so hard to be gentle with those who hurt or disrespect us?” There are *General Application Questions* like: “What are five ways that people can show gentleness to all?” Also, we can ask *Commitment Questions*, like “How will you work on being gentle to everybody

when you leave this small group? What small steps will you take to make this part of your character?"

Discussion Question: How have you experienced a small group that felt like a family—safe and transparent? What helped foster this environment? How can it be protected?

Skilled Social Worker

In Jesus' small group, he dealt with various difficult people: He had prideful Peter, doubting Thomas, deceiving Judas, and the Sons of Thunder, James and John. They all fought, failed, and even denied Christ. Leading small groups can be messy. Small group leaders will deal with both difficult people and messy situations. They need social worker skills like peacemaking and conflict resolution.

What are some common difficult people that leaders may encounter in small groups and how should they minister to them?

1. *The Know It All*. These people seem to have an answer for everything, and sometimes this can hinder the contributions of others, especially shy people. This person has a lot of positives. They add insight and enthusiasm to the group, but sometimes, it has to be tempered so everyone can flourish. Don't see them as an irritant to be shut down but a blessing to be guided and nourished. Confirm their enthusiasm and good answers. Use their answers to bounce around the group: "What did everybody else think about what John said? Has anybody considered this angle…?" At times, it may be necessary to reaffirm the need for others to contribute.

2. *The Chatter Box*. These people may not have answers for every question, but when they share, it seems to never stop. They tend to have a problem staying on topic or making their answers clear and succinct. Be patient with them and give them grace. Sometimes, it is prudent to help them get to where they want to go. This might mean finishing their thought, affirming it, and then inviting others to add. Often, these people are aware that they have a tendency to talk too much (which can be a blessing and a curse), and they're

open to coaching. It's good for all of us to hear again James' words, "Be slow to speak and quick to listen" (James 1:19).

3. *The Hyper-Spiritual*. For this person, everything has some deep esoteric significance. Often, they say that God told them this or the Spirit led them this way. Sometimes, they may even have a tendency to get into conspiracy theories with the Illuminati and Satan behind everything. It is important to recognize that God can speak in many different ways and that Satan is real, but reaffirm Scripture as our primary guide and that everything must be tested by it (1 John 4:1). Scripture trains us for all righteousness and equips us for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). The good thing about these people is that they remind us of our need for an intimate and experiential relationship with God and also the reality of spiritual warfare. James says, "Draw near God, and he will draw near us" (James 4:8), and Paul taught that we are in a real war with the enemy (Eph 6:12). Many in our groups need reminders of these realities. As leaders, we must aim to cultivate a healthy doctrinal balance in our groups, as affirmed through Scripture.

4. *The Arguer*. These people tend to like to argue and win arguments, even petty ones. They often enjoy playing devil's advocate in the group. Leaders must affirm the importance of truth, and the need to seek the truth. Often theological conflict is good. It makes us test what we believe to either hold on to it tighter or move to a more sound biblical stance. A healthy "argument" can help lead us there. However, it must be done in a spirit of love. Ephesians 4:15 says that it is by speaking the truth in love that we grow up in maturity. Truth is just as important as love. Otherwise, by using truth (or what we think is truth), we can push people away and hurt them. Part of love is respectfully listening to others and being patient as God slowly changes them and us. Establish the norm of love in the group. Some do this by creating a small group covenant at the beginning of the group: "We will respect one another, listen to one another, not share personal disclosure outside of the group, etc." Throughout the group, whether these

norms have been formalized or not, they need to be reaffirmed constantly. If an argument goes too far in a small group, gently table the discussion and move on. If problems persist with a specific person, meet that person at a later date to affirm and challenge him or her in love.

What are some general principles for ministering to difficult people?

- *Develop a spirit of empathy for them*. Often difficult people are hurting people. They have been hurt in the past by a parent, a sibling, a friend, or an employer. When wounds are touched, people react to protect themselves. The hard exterior of a difficult person is like a scab of a wound that has not fully healed. We must recognize that. This doesn't excuse their sin or the decisions they make. However, it should help us understand them more and even forgive them. When Christ looked at the people hurting him on the cross, he was empathetic. He said, "Lord forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing" (Lk 23:34). Empathy leads us to the path of forgiveness and ministry.

- *Recognize their potential*. God saw a man named Gideon who was hiding from the Midianites and called him a mighty warrior (Judges 6:12). God calls him the opposite of what he was portraying. God called Jacob, which means liar, "Israel", which means one who wrestles with God and prevails. God called Paul—a persecutor of Christians—an "apostle" while he was on his way to imprison Christians. With the same tenacity Paul persecuted believers, he would eventually preach the gospel to the Gentiles. A rock has the potential to become a diamond in the right environment by undergoing the right process, and small group leaders must recognize this, as they minister to difficult people. Often, they can become the greatest and most bold witnesses for Christ to the glory of God. Do you see their potential?

- *Bathe them in prayer*. A difficult person in a small group or someone who is just struggling with sin or inconsistency in general is somebody that God is pointing out to us. He says,

> “Look at him! I want you to lift him up in prayer.” In Matthew 5:44, Christ said that we are to bless our enemies and not curse them. We are called to pray for all people according to 1 Timothy 2:1-2; however, people who hurt us, or who are especially difficult, are supposed to be special objects of our prayer. Give special prayer to these people throughout the week and especially before small group begins. Pray for them to know God, to be transformed by God’s Word, to be healed, delivered from the evil one, and for them to be mightily used by God.

Discussion Question: What are some other principles necessary to minister to difficult people? Share a time you had a difficult person or difficult people in your small group. How did you handle it?

Order of Life Group

What's a good order for a typical small group? The type of order small group leaders use really depends on their primary focus, as discussed earlier. Is their focus fellowship, worship and prayer, Bible study, or mission? In the below life group order, the primary focus is Bible study. The elements can be switched or enhanced, as the leader decides.

1. *Introduction:*

    a. Start on time. Many people come late because they know the small group doesn't start on time. Leaders reward those who come late by starting late and punish those who come early by waiting. Start on time and others will begin to come earlier.

    b. Open with prayer.

    c. Introduce new comers.

    d. Share the agenda of the small group (i.e. worship, praise and prayer requests, prayer, and then a study on 1 Timothy 1:1-7).

2. *Worship:*

    a. Sing a worship song. Worship is a means of being filled with the Spirit, and it helps prepare our hearts to share and receive God's Word (cf. Eph 5:18-19). In 2 Kings 3:15, Elisha asks for a harpist to play and the Spirit of the Lord falls on him so he can prophecy. King Jehoshaphat had a worship team lead his army and God

routed his enemy (2 Chr 20). Worship is powerful! It's a great way to begin a small group.

b. Consider choosing a worship coordinator. This person can look up a worship song with lyrics on YouTube or, if musically inclined, he can lead worship himself.

3. *Sharing Time:*

a. Have members share how their week has been, how their spiritual life is going, and any praises and prayer requests.

b. Take time to pray for one another and for the Bible Study (cf. Ephesians 6:19).

4. *Bible Study*:

a. Read entire text 1 to 3 times depending on the length: Ask a member or members to read.

b. If possible, give a catchy intro to the study that grabs people's attention and guides them through the study. For example, "In this study of John 4:23-24, we will learn a great deal about True Worship. Are you offering God True Worship? What do we learn about True Worship from this text?"

c. Roadmap of the Study:

(Meditative/Inductive Method)

(i) After reading the entire passage corporately, allow for individual meditation on each verse for 3 to 5 minutes. Ask the members to re-read the passage several times looking for words that jump out, questions they have, connections to other Scriptures, the meaning, and applications. Be prepared with Observation, Interpretation, and Application Questions to make a

road map for the study. Using a Bible study book will help with this.

(ii) After looking at one verse meditatively, ask for people to share.

(iii) Facilitate discussion based on what is shared: Be prepared to ask for further clarification, “Why do you think Paul says that?” “Could you explain further?” “Does anybody have an answer for that question?” “What does everybody else think?” Always prompt people to apply: “How should we apply this to work, family, our studies, etc.?” After a specific question and its discussion has slowed down, offer a prepared question and facilitate discussion. Always reveal things that stood out to you, as the small group leader, strategically to enhance discussion; that strategic place may be after everybody else has shared.

(iv) Go through each verse this way giving attention to individual words, main concepts, theological implications, and applications. Be aware of time; it’s OK not to finish. People can continue to meditate after the study is over.

(v) In closing, it is always good to close with a reminder of applications and to pray through those applications (i.e. What applications did we learn from this lesson today? How can we pray from this Scripture?).

4. *Mission / Fellowship Update and Closing:*

a. Discuss service opportunities and/or opportunities to fellowship (visit an orphanage, take a prayer walk, get a meal, or go to a movie together). Try to have a service opportunity and a play date at least once a semester, if not once a month.

b. Potentially choose a mission/fellowship coordinator to oversee this.

c. Finish with prayer.

Sample Small Group Lesson

The provided sample lesson serves several purposes: (1) The content of Becoming Good Ministers of Christ (1 Tim 4:6-16) is very useful for small group leaders to read and apply to their ministries. (2) It is written in a way that a small group leader might teach a lesson—providing a potential model. (3) It introduces leaders to the type of resources available in The Bible Teacher's Guide series. Becoming Good Ministers of Christ is the combination of a two-part lesson from BTG 1 Timothy. It provides a catching intro and a Big Question that will guide members to seek principles in the text about a good minister. It provides Observation, Interpretation, and Application Questions that leaders can use to facilitate discussion in the group. It can be used by a leader to make his own lesson or it can be read in a small group—stopping after each main point to interact over the content and application questions.

Becoming Good Ministers of Christ

> If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.
> 1 Timothy 4:6-16

How can we become good ministers of Christ?

Paul says this to his son in the faith Timothy, "If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus." The word good can be translated "noble," "admirable," "excellent," or "beautiful." Minister can be translated "servant."[13] A minister of Christ is someone who ministers for Christ and in the way Christ would minister if he were here (cf. 1 Peter 5:2, 4).

Certainly, this applies specifically to pastors and teachers, but it applies generally to all Christians, as we are all called to serve and minister. Paul said this in Galatians 6:10, "Let us do good to all but especially to those in the household of faith." Christians are supposed to serve their neighbor, co-worker, family, other believers, and even their enemies. How can we be good ministers of Christ?

As we consider this text, we can discern qualities of good ministers of Christ.

Big Question: What qualities of good ministers can be discerned from Paul's exhortations to Timothy?

Good Ministers Warn the Flock

> If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus
> 1 Timothy 4:6

Interpretation Question: What is Paul referring to when he says, "If you point these things out…, you will be a good minister of Christ"?

When Paul says if you point "these things" out to the brothers and sisters, he refers to the false teaching and apostasy that will characterize the church in the last days (cf. 1 Tim 4:1-5). "Point these things out" can also be translated "to remind" or "to suggest." It is a present tense participle which indicates that Timothy should be continually pointing out error to his congregation.[14]

Sadly, in our Christian context, it is often considered unloving and intolerant to point out error. However, it is one of the most loving things a minister can do. A shepherd does not just feed the flock; he also protects it. And this is also true of good ministers. In fact, a great deal of Paul's ministry was exposing and correcting false teaching and warning of false teachers. In the book of Galatians, he corrects bad teaching about the law and works-righteousness. In Corinth, he corrects the abuse of spiritual gifts and the false teaching that the resurrection had passed. With the Thessalonians, he corrects bad teaching on eschatology. At times, as seen with Timothy, he even named false teachers—Hymenaeus and Alexander—so that others would not be led astray (1 Tim 1:20).

Obviously, this should not be the primary aspect of Christian teaching. Ministers are called to teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and everything that Christ commanded (Matt 28:20), but there are also negative aspects to this teaching. Warning is an essential part of shepherding, and those who fail to do so open the door for their flock to be led astray and even apostasize (1 Tim 4:1).

Many ministers are out of balance in this area. Some only focus on guarding the sheep by pointing out false teaching and error and therefore the flock grows weak. Others only feed the sheep but leave them open to deception. There is a need for balance.

Certainly, these warnings don't only apply to false teachers and false teaching, they apply to anything that could be harmful to another believer including sin and unwise practices. Proverbs

27:6 says faithful are the wounds of a friend but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy (paraphrase).

Are you a good friend? Are you a good minister—willing to warn and point out error?

Application Question: How can a minister be balanced in his guarding and nourishing of the flock? How have you seen or experienced ministers who were unbalanced in their teaching?

Good Ministers Constantly Nourish Themselves on God's Word

> If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.
> 1 Timothy 4:6

Another quality of good ministers is that they nourish themselves on God's Word. "Nourished" can be translated "constantly nourished" as it is a present participle.[15] It should be the continual discipline of a minister. Sadly, very few ministers truly nourish themselves with the Word of God—a good number are essentially anemic. Many, because they were raised in a Christian family or went to seminary, feel as though they already know it and therefore are not constantly studying God's Word. It has been said that familiarity breeds contempt. Unfortunately, this often happens with God's shepherds. The reality is we can't feed others if we have not first been fed. That is the life of a good minister. They are constantly being nourished by God's Word, and because of that, they nourish others.

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."

The word "dwell" means "to be at home with." It is the opposite of being a visitor. When the Word of God is at home in our hearts richly, we naturally begin to teach and admonish others with all wisdom. For many, the Word of God is more like a visitor. They think, "Maybe, I'll read the Word of God today or maybe I won't." Christians like that won't be effective ministers; they certainly won't be effective teachers.

Are you letting the Word of God be at home in your life? Are you constantly nourishing yourself on its truth? Not just the Psalms when you're depressed, but a balanced diet of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the major doctrines of Scripture? This is necessary to be a good minister of Christ.

Application Question: Why is it so important for ministers to constantly nourish themselves on the Word of God? What happens when they don't? What are your disciplines like when it comes to reading and studying the Word?

Good Ministers Are Obedient to God's Word

> If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.
> 1 Timothy 4:6

However, it must be known that good ministers do not just know the Word of God, they also practice it. Paul said, "the good teaching that you have followed." Timothy not only had been trained since a child in the Scriptures but he was obedient to it (cf. 2 Tim 3:14-15). Ministers who study and teach but don't practice, discredit the truth they proclaim. I heard the story of one pastor whose teaching was so good, no one wanted him to leave the pulpit. However, his life outside the pulpit made them never want him to return.

Sadly, this is all too common with ministers. They teach, "Let no corrupt communication come out of your mouths," yet they are known for harsh comments and crude jokes. They teach to "forgive as Christ forgave you," but they constantly hold grudges. These are not good ministers; they are bad ones.

James 1:22-24 says,

> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

To study and teach the Word and not practice it is as foolish as a person constantly looking in a mirror but never fixing his hair, brushing his teeth, or straightening his clothes. It's idiocy!

Are you both a hearer and doer of the Word? If not, James says you're deceived about the reality of your faith (cf. James 1:22, 2:17). Obedience is not only a characteristic of a good minister but a proof of one's salvation. Matthew 7:21 says, "'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Sadly, the church is full of those who prophesy, cast out demons, and do many mighty works in God's name and yet Christ doesn't know them—they are not saved (v. 22-23). Only those who do the Father's will are saved.

Are you doing the Father's will?

Application Question: Why is being a doer of God's Word so important for a minister? Are there any specific areas that God is challenging you to be obedient in?

Good Ministers Avoid Ungodly Teaching

> Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly
> 1 Timothy 4:7

Another quality of good ministers is that they avoid ungodly teaching. He says have nothing to do with "godless myths and old wives' tales." When he says "godless myths and old wives' tales," he, no doubt, referred to the false teaching that forbade marriage and certain types of foods in the previous passage (4:4-5). However, it didn't refer to those alone. "Old wives' tales" was a common epithet used to describe something that was unbelievable.[16] These teachings and others were void of Scriptural truth and therefore to be rejected. Good ministers must test and reject anything that is void of Scripture or that compromises Scripture.

Sadly, many ministers major on things that have nothing to do with Scripture—whether that be pop-psychology, self-help, eastern practices, or secular business principles. The problem with these ministers is that they have a faulty understanding of Scripture. Paul said this in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Scripture teaches its sufficiency. It is sufficient to train in righteousness and to thoroughly equip the servant of God for every good work. Every minister must ask this question: "Is the Word of God really sufficient for righteousness or is it not?" One's answer to this and application of it will affect whether they are a good minister or not. Good ministers, instead of giving themselves to godless myths (secular teachings void of God and Scripture), use God's tools to minister to others. Second Corinthians 10:4-5 says,

> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Good ministers don't use secular weapons because God's weapons are both commissioned and sufficient. They use spiritual weapons that have divine power—the Word of God, prayer,

worship, fellowship, repentance, etc. No doubt, when Christ returns and his servants must give an account, he will take notice of whether they used his weapons or not. Again, sadly, many neglect them for secular weapons with no spiritual power. Explicitly or implicitly they declare God's weapons as insufficient to train God's people in righteousness.

Are you willing to reject the godless teachings of the world and rely on God and his weapons alone? This is what good ministers do—they reject godless teachings.

Application Question: In what ways are ministers prone to rely on godless teachings instead of God's teaching? What happens when they do this? Should ministers use secular teachings and if so when?

Good Ministers Practice Spiritual Disciplines

> …train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. That is why we labor and strive,
> 1 Timothy 4:7b-10

John MacArthur said, "There is no effective spiritual ministry apart from personal godliness, since ministry is the overflow of a godly life."[17] It is for this reason that good ministers devote themselves to becoming godly. However, godliness doesn't just happen. Paul told Timothy to "train yourself to be godly" (v. 7). The Greek word for "train" is "gumnazo" from which we get the English words "gymnasium" and "gymnastics." It can be translated "exercise" or "discipline." "The word speaks of the rigorous, strenuous, self-sacrificing training an athlete undergoes."[18]

Paul encourages Timothy to exercise himself to godliness because the benefits are eternal. Unlike physical training, it holds promises for both the present life and the life to come.

Application Question: What are some aspects of this discipline or training? How can we train ourselves to be godly?

1. Discipline is an ongoing process.

The word "train" is a present imperative pointing to a continual process.[19] It doesn't happen overnight. Nobody can ever say, "I made it! I am godly, and therefore, I don't have to work anymore!" (cf. Phil 3:12). When we stop disciplining ourselves, sin, compromise, and spiritual lethargy overtake us.

2. Discipline means getting rid of spiritual hindrances.

The Greek word “train” literally means “to exercise naked.”[20] Ancient Greeks used to exercise and compete in the buff because clothing could hinder their performance. In a similar way, believers must get rid of anything hindering them from godliness. Christ said if our eye, hand, or foot causes us to sin, we should cut them off (Matt 5:29-30, 18:8-9). This means if what we are watching or reading with our eyes, if where we are going with our feet, or if what we are doing with our hands causes us to sin, we must get rid of it. Great athletes are ruthless in removing hindrances to their goals such as junk food, relationships, jobs, etc. Sadly, many Christians can’t become godly because they won’t rid themselves of spiritual hindrances—instead, they cling to them.

What is hindering you spiritually? What is God calling you to get rid of so you can look more like him and be a more effective minister?

3. Discipline means keeping our eyes on the goal.

Godliness comes from the old English Word “God-likeness.”[21] It means to have a character and attitude like God. Like an athlete training to win a race, that is our ultimate goal. We must keep our eyes on our Lord Jesus and seek to be like him in every way. Hebrews 12:2 says, “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

What is your ultimate goal? Is it wealth, success, friendships, or family? Or is it being like Christ and hearing him one day say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”?

4. Discipline includes working hard.

In verse 10, Paul says, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. That is why we labor and strive.” No doubt, this describes a good minister’s spiritual training. “Labor” and “strive” were used of wrestlers in an athletic contest. “Labor” means “to work to the point of weariness and exhaustion.” “Strive” can also be translated agonize. It means “to engage in a struggle.”[22]

Spiritual discipline often includes not only fighting our mind but our body. It is a struggle to meditate on God’s Word in the morning and at night. It is a fight to pray when we don’t feel like it. It is a labor, even at times to exhaustion, to serve others when we ourselves are emotionally, physically, and spiritually broken; however, in the midst of this, there is God’s blessing and the fruit of godliness.

Sadly, many know nothing about labor or agony in their spiritual life. Their spiritual life is the easy road. They go to church when it is easy or convenient, but when there is a little agony—a little discipline—they are nowhere to be found. Good ministers discipline themselves to godliness.

5. Discipline includes getting proper rest.

One of the most important aspects of athletics is getting proper rest. Our bodies need rest in order to perform at their peak. But this is also true spiritually. For many Christians, Satan wins the battle before the day even begins because they were undisciplined with their sleep. They went to bed late and therefore could not get up to pray, read their Bible, or even go to church. And those who do faithfully serve and seek the Lord without proper rest, at some point, burn out. Sleep is essential to both physical athletes and spiritual athletes. An essential part of exercise or discipline is not just work but rest.

Are you getting proper rest including a Sabbath so you can effectively serve the Lord and others? God rested on the seventh day, not for himself, but to teach humanity their need for rest.

Application Question: What are some spiritual disciplines that aid in becoming godly? Which ones do you commonly employ and how have they helped you? In what ways is God calling you to grow in your practice of spiritual disciplines?

Good Ministers Continually Hope in the Lord

> This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.
> 1 Timothy 4:9-10

The final characteristic of good ministers is their growing hope in God. Paul said, “we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.” Hope is another word for faith. It is faith in something future. Paul and other ministers labored to exhaustion and strove to help others because they believed in a God who was living—not dead like pagan idols—and who was the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

While good ministers hope in God and heavenly things, unfaithful ministers primarily have earthly hopes. They hope in money, retirement, and secular success. Since their hope is secular, it manifests in their lives, and therefore, they become worldly. But for those whose hopes are eternal, as they hope in God, it manifests in a life of ministering to all and awaiting God’s kingdom.

Interpretation Question: What does Paul mean by saying God is the Savior of all people and especially of those who believe?

There is a lot of controversy over the meaning of this phrase. Most tend to accept one of these three views.

1. God is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe, refers to God being a potential Savior for some and an actual Savior for others.

Christ died for all, and therefore, his death was indeed adequate to save all but only effective for believers. Scripture certainly teaches that not all will be saved, in contrast with universalist teachings (cf. Matt 25:41). However, this interpretation is unlikely since the text deals with God being the Savior of all, not a potential Savior.

2. God is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe, refers to God's common grace for all and his saving grace for some.

In this view, "Savior of all" does not refer to an eternal sense but a temporal sense. God is the Savior of all people in that he withholds his judgment on sin for all. He does not destroy us immediately, as we deserve, but is patient with us, hoping that we will repent. God provides rain, food, and clothing for us. He gives us life, breath, and everything else. In a temporal sense, God is the Savior of all, but in an eternal sense, he is the Savior of the church—those who believe in Jesus.

3. God is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe, refers only to believers.

Some believe this passage has nothing to do with nonbelievers at all. John Stott's comments are helpful in understanding this view:

> Several scholars have drawn attention to some research by T. C. Skeat in 1979, in which he claims that the word especially (malista) should rather be translated 'to be precise' or 'in other words'. In this case, Paul 'is not saying that God saves believers more than he saves others; he is simply modifying his general statement that God is the Saviour of all men by adding the limitation that you cannot be saved unless you believe'.[23]

Either way, good minsters have a growing hope in God who is the Savior of all, especially of those who believe. A good picture of this is seen in 2 Timothy 2:24. Paul says,

> And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,

Why does the Lord's servant not quarrel? It's because he hopes in God who grants repentance. It is God who saves souls; not us. It is God who changes hearts. Good ministers understand this, whereas, bad ones are prone to trust in themselves, their arguments, or the wisdom of this world.

Without this growing hope in God, many ministers quit and give up on ministry all together. Only hope in God who is a Savior will enable us to faithfully persevere, especially in difficult times.

What are you hoping in? Are you hoping in God who is a Savior? This is a motivating quality of good ministers. They hope in the living God, and this hope enables them to be faithful regardless of difficult people or circumstances.

Application Question: In what ways is God calling you to hope in him more and his characteristic of being a Savior? How can we grow in this hope? As ministers, what are the consequences of losing our hope in God?

Good Ministers Teach with Authority

> Command and teach these things.
> 1 Timothy 4:11

Interpretation Question: What does command and teach "these things" refer to?

In 1 Timothy 4:11, the word "command" can be translated "to order." It is a "call to obedience by one in authority."[24] It is a military word that reflects the fact that the church is God's army and that spiritual leaders are called to pass down instructions with authority and conviction because they come from God.[25] When Paul says command and teach "these things," he refers to the instructions given to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:1-10: He should warn the flock of false teaching and avoid it himself. He should discipline himself to godliness and train others to do so. However, these instructions weren't just for Timothy; they were also for the Ephesians. In this we see another quality of good ministers; they preach and teach with authority.

This was clearly seen in Christ's ministry. The Jews marveled at Christ's teaching because he spoke with authority. Rabbis simply quoted other rabbis, but Christ spoke for God (Lk 4:33). Before Christ's ascension, he declared that all authority had been given to him and therefore we should make disciples of all men (Matt 28:18-20). Believers are meant to minister in his authority. First Peter 4:11 says that we should speak as the very "oracles of God" (ESV).

John MacArthur said this about the sad state of most preaching and teaching:

> Paul's command to Timothy contrasts sharply with much contemporary preaching. Preaching in our day is often intriguing, but seldom commanding; often entertaining, but seldom convicting; often popular, but seldom powerful; often interesting, but less often transforming. Paul does not ask Timothy to share or make suggestions to his congregation. Rather, he is to prescribe the truth to them.[26]

Application Question: How can ministers preach and teach with authority?

Preaching and teaching, whether in our private or public ministry, is not something conjured up from inside of us; it comes from understanding and applying these principles:

1. Ministers must believe that God's Word is inspired and without error (2 Tim 3:16-17, Matt 4:4, Psalm 19:7-9). If we believe there is error in Scripture, it robs the Scripture and our teaching of authority. Billy Graham once struggled with whether the Bible was fully inerrant. One of his fellow ministers leaned towards liberal doctrine and that was affecting him. He even wondered if he would have to give up preaching. One day, he went into the forest and put down his Bible on a tree stump. He cried out to God, "Father, I am going to accept this as thy Word by faith!" Franklin Graham, his son, attributes that declaration as the beginning of a great move of God in Billy's ministry. Shortly after, droves of people began to respond to Billy Graham's ministry in a way that had never happened before.[27]

2. Ministers must properly interpret Scripture. If we are unsure of what a text means, again, we will lack authority in sharing it with others. Proper interpretation comes from diligent study and comparing Scripture with Scripture (2 Tim 2:15).

3. Ministers must recognize that they are called to please God and not men in their preaching. In Galatians 1:10, Paul said, "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ." Sadly, the church is full of men pleasers and very few God pleasers. God's approval should be our motivation in everything we do, but especially in our preaching and teaching. When we seek to please God instead of others, there will be authority in our ministry.

4. Ministers must serve others out of an abiding relationship with Christ. Christ said, "If you abide in me and I in you, you will produce much fruit" (John 15:5 paraphrase). No doubt, this fruit includes God's authority and power on our ministry to heal, to encourage, to strengthen, to build up, and even to tear down. If we neglect abiding in God, we will lack authority and power in our ministry.

Good ministers preach and teach with authority which comes from God. Christ has sent us forth with authority from heaven to make disciples, and when we are faithful, we operate in that authority (cf. Matt 28:18-20, Eph 2:6).

Application Question: Why is belief in the inerrancy of God's Word so important to preaching and teaching with authority? How would you teach the inerrancy of God's Word to somebody who doubts (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17, Matt 4:4, Psalm 19:7-9, Titus 1:2)?

Good Ministers Are Models of Godliness

> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.
> 1 Timothy 4:12

Application Question: Why is godliness in the life of a minister so important for ministry?

Next, Paul calls Timothy to not let anyone look down on his youth. Most likely, Timothy was around 30 to 35 years old.[28] In that context, a great respect was given to age and wisdom, and therefore a youth was anybody from birth to forty years old.[29] No doubt, some of the people in the Ephesian church struggled with Timothy's young age. Maybe, they thought, "What can he teach me? He is so young!" However, Timothy was called to calm their fears by being a godly example.

John MacArthur said, "The single greatest tool of leadership is the power of an exemplary life."[30] Puritan Thomas Brooks said, "Example is the most powerful rhetoric."[31] By being a godly example, Timothy would quiet the mouths of those who questioned his ministry.

Observation Question: In what areas was Timothy called to demonstrate godliness, and how can good ministers be examples in these areas?

> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.
> 1 Timothy 4:12

1. Good ministers model godliness in their speech.

Proverbs 10:19 in the ESV says, "When words are many transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent." Young ministers are often prone to excessive talking instead of listening. James 1:19 says, "be quick to listen and slow to speak." Excessive talking often leads to sin. Good ministers must be good listeners—listening to what people say, what they are not saying, and listening to God. Only after deeply listening should ministers speak, and when they do, it should be in a loving manner (Eph 4:15). Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a

harsh word stirs up anger." Our manner of speaking is just as important as our words. Good ministers understand that.

Are you modeling godliness in your daily speech, especially when others fail or hurt you?

2. Good ministers model godliness in their conduct.

Conduct refers to our behavior and lifestyle. In how we handle our money, our family, our friendships, our personal appearance, our work, our entertainment, and anything else, ministers must seek to glorify God. First Corinthians 10:31 says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Are you modeling godliness in your daily conduct—your eating, drinking, and everything else?

3. Good ministers model godliness in their love.

Good ministers model biblical love. This love is not simply comprised of emotions, as is often considered by the world, but includes self-sacrificing service regardless of how one feels. In John 13:34, Jesus said, "'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Christ loved us by giving his life for us, and therefore, we must demonstrate this love to others. Good ministers sacrifice their time, money, and even goals to love God and people. As others watch, they are inspired to love more deeply as well.

Are you modeling godliness through your sacrificial love for God and others?

4. Good ministers model godliness in their faith.

This probably refers both to faith in God and faithfulness. Sadly, though Christians are saved through faith, most aren't living by faith. They have no expectations of God. They don't approach God in faith for him to move powerfully and change lives through Sunday worship. When they encounter difficulties, instead of trusting God, they fret, worry, and often quit. Even though Christians are believers, they often do not actually believe. Jesus said he couldn't perform very many miracles in his hometown because of their lack of belief (cf. Matt 13:58). Sadly, this is true for most. They believe in a supernatural God but their worldview and faith are largely natural.

In addition, as mentioned, faith also applies to faithfulness. Our yes must mean yes and our no must mean no. If we say, we are going to do something, we must follow through. These are qualities of good ministers. They are models of faith in God and faithfulness in their daily lives.

Are you modeling godliness through your faith?

5. Good ministers model godliness in their purity.

This would have been especially important for Timothy, as he pastored in Ephesus. Ephesus was the location of the temple of Diana—the love goddess. She had thousands of temple prostitutes, and immoral sex was one of the ways people pleased her and sought prosperity. Sex and sexuality was exalted throughout the city and the Greco-Roman world for that matter.

Timothy needed to model purity both in his conduct with young women (1 Tim 5:2) and his thought life. Purity is not just an outward issue but a heart issue. Christ taught that a man committed adultery simply by lusting after a woman that was not his wife (Matt 5:28). To demonstrate purity in heart, Timothy needed to constantly take his thoughts captive and confess them to Christ (2 Cor 10:5). He needed to battle to keep his mind and heart pure by avoiding ungodly entertainment, practices, and relationships that characterized the Greco-Roman world.

Are you modeling godliness through your purity—your conduct with the opposite sex and in your heart? Good ministers model godliness in every area of their life—provoking others to godliness.

Application Question: If you had to pick one, which area of godliness—speech, conduct, love, faith and purity—do you struggle with most and how are you going to strive for godliness in that area?

Good Ministers Are Bible-Centered

> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.
> 1 Timothy 4:13

Interpretation Question: What does Paul mean by public reading and preaching and teaching?

Paul told Timothy to be devoted to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching. Public reading of Scripture was very important in that culture, as many were illiterate and very few owned manuscripts. Books in general were very expensive. After reading, Timothy was to preach or exhort, which refers to challenging people to apply God's Word. Teaching refers to the passing along of biblical doctrine.

This method of disseminating God's Word was originally practiced in Judaism. In synagogues, Jews would stand to hear God's Word read and then somebody would explain and apply the text. In Nehemiah 8, Ezra and the Levites read the OT for six hours and explained it to Israel, as they stood listening. Nehemiah 8:8 says, "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read." Similarly, Christ and Paul read and explained Scripture in the synagogues (cf. Lk 4:16, Acts 13:15).

Expositional Preaching

It seems clear from Scripture that the Jewish method of presenting the Word carried over to the apostolic Christian church. This is often called expository preaching, as people teach verse by verse through Scripture after a public reading. It "exposes" truths in the text to the hearers by explaining the text in the ancient context and applying it to the contemporary setting.

John Stott said this about exposition: "It was taken for granted from the beginning that Christian preaching would be expository preaching, that is, that all Christian instruction and exhortation would be drawn out of the passage which had been read."[32] Kent Hughes concluded, "Therefore, any preaching that does not guide the listener through the Scriptures is an aberration from the apostolic practice."[33]

Sadly, exposition is often not practiced in churches today. A pastor approaches the pulpit to read a text and then everybody waits anxiously to hear it explained. Then the pastor launches into a series of stories and jokes with a moral, political, or social conclusion and hardly even references the text or other Scriptures.

As a result, the church is malnourished, and most don't even know what biblical preaching is. They come away from sermons saying, "That was so encouraging!" However, they don't understand their Bibles any better. All they know is a bunch of stories, illustrations, and devotional thoughts.

Expositional Hearers

It is important not only for pastors to expositionally preach God's Word but also for the church to be expositional listeners. This means congregants listen to preaching to both understand the text in its original context and apply it to their contemporary life and situation. We have a lack of exposition in the pulpit, in part, because most congregants don't really desire to understand and apply God's Word. They just want to be encouraged or entertained. Paul said this in 2 Timothy 4:2-4:

> Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage —with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Again, exposition is often neglected simply because people don't want to hear it. Those who preach the Bible are mocked and criticized—called intolerant, irrelevant, and sometimes even

boring. This doesn't remove the responsibility of the preacher to preach God's Word, but it does put responsibility on the hearers to demand God's Word, instead of messages that simply itch ears and make people feel good.

Expositional Disciplers

In addition, good ministers are expositional not only in their public teaching but also in their private teaching. When a person is depressed, angry, or lost, ministers open their Bibles to present Scripture, explain its meaning, and apply it to that person's life. They do this because they believe Scripture is useful for thoroughly equipping men and women for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Are you an expositional teacher? Do you share Scripture with people and apply it to their life or situation to help them grow? Are you an expositional listener? Do you come to worship to understand Scripture in its original context and applied to the contemporary setting? Good ministers are Bible-centered—they have a wholly biblical ministry.

Application Question: What is your experience with expository preaching—verse by verse teaching of Scripture? How has the church often strayed from its Jewish and apostolic roots in this area? Why is being expositional in preaching and hearing so important?

Good Ministers Faithfully Exercise Their Gifts

> Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.
> 1 Timothy 4:14

As Paul instructs Timothy, he also commands him to not neglect his gift. We don't know what spiritual gift Timothy had. If the context is considered, most likely his gift was preaching and teaching (cf. v. 13). Since "Do not neglect" is a command in the original, it implies that Timothy was being tempted to not use it and maybe abandon ministry all together.[34] Timothy had a timid disposition (2 Tim 1:7). People looked down on him because of his youth. False teachers in the church twisted the Word, and persecution came from outside the church. One of Satan's tactics has always been to intimidate the church into silence. He is a "roaring lion" seeking whomever he can devour, and fear is one of his tactics (1 Peter 5:8).

The tendency towards not using spiritual gifts is not unique to Timothy; it's common for all believers. In the Parable of the Talents, the person who received one talent said to the Lord, "I was

afraid so I hid my talent in the ground" (Matt 25:25, paraphrase). Fear of failure, fear of what others think, fear of persecution, etc., all hinder believers from faithfully using their gifts.

God gives each person a gift at salvation, if not many gifts (1 Cor 12:7). However, at times, God gives gifts later in life to meet a need in the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:31, 14:1). This is probably what happened with Timothy. Second Timothy 1:6 says, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands." When Timothy was called into ministry, Paul prayed for Timothy and some gift was imparted into his life. Timothy had the responsibility not only to use it, but to develop and fan it into flame.

Our spiritual gifts must be developed and cultivated. They must become skills, as we use them and refine them for God's kingdom. If we instead choose to neglect them, God may remove them. In Matthew 25, the master took the neglected gift away from the servant and gave it to another (v. 28). Afterwards the master responded, "For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them" (v. 29). Therefore, we all bear the responsibility to use and cultivate our gifts, lest God removes them.

Application Question: How can we discern our spiritual gifts?

There are several ways:

1. First, God gives gifts to serve the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7), and therefore, we must serve in order to identify them. As we serve, we will find areas that we're gifted in and areas we're not so gifted.

2. Another way we discern our gifts is by whether we are edified by using them. Typically, while using our gifts, we will feel built up and encouraged (cf. 1 Cor 14:4). Serving outside our gift-set will be less edifying and even burdensome at times.

3. Not only will we be edified by using our gifts, so will others. This provides further affirmation in discerning our gifts (cf. 1 Cor 14:4). If one's gift is teaching, others will be edified by his teaching. If ones' gift is helps, others will be built up and motivated by his serving. As others are built up, God will affirm one's spiritual gifts through them. When Paul mentions the body of elders laying hands on Timothy, this probably referred to his ordination to ministry.[35] At some point, the elders publically recognized his gifts and affirmed his call to ministry. Something similar happened to Paul when he was called to missions in Acts 13:1-3.

Are you faithfully using and cultivating your spiritual gifts? Good ministers are faithful stewards of God's gifts. They don't hide them in the ground, they use them to build up others and expand God's kingdom. In addition, they affirm the gifts in others and encourage their use of them (Heb 10:24).

Application Question: What spiritual gifts do you have? How has God called you to use and cultivate them as you serve the church? What specific people do you feel God is calling you to encourage and affirm their spiritual gifts?

Good Ministers Are Progressing Spiritually

> Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.
> 1 Timothy 4:15

Next, Paul tells Timothy to, "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress." Often, there is a misconception in the church that pastors are perfect. Sometimes pastors reinforce this by never sharing their weaknesses or struggles (cf. Paul in Romans 7:14-25). However, they are not and are far from it. They must be "blameless" (1 Tim 3:2)—nothing in their lives should disqualify them from ministry—but they are not perfect. Pastors and ministers must continually be growing and progressing spiritually, and it is important for the congregation to watch their growth. As the members watch, they are inspired to grow, as well.

The word "progress" is a military term. It means a "'pioneer advance.' It describes the soldiers who go ahead of the troops, clear away the obstacles, and make it possible for others to follow."[36] As spiritual leaders grow in speech, conduct, love, and faith, they inspire the church to follow along the same path. No minister can lead others where he has not gone. Therefore, this is a quality of every good minister—they are constantly growing.

Observation Question: How was Timothy supposed to continue his spiritual progress and not plateau? How should all ministers continue their spiritual progression?

How was Timothy called to continue this growth? By being "diligent" in these matters and giving himself "wholly to them." "Give yourself wholly to them" can literally be translated "'be in these things so as to be absorbed in them.'"[37] Timothy was called to be absorbed in the endeavor of seeking godliness, knowing God's Word, and sharing it with others.

If this is how one keeps from plateauing spiritually, then it is easy to tell why many are not progressing. It's simply because they are not giving their whole self to God's calling. They give everything to work, school, family, and friends, but their spiritual life is continually neglected. Our spiritual life must come first, and from that, grace spills over into every other endeavor. Only those who are diligent, those who are "all in" will continue to grow in their prayer life, their knowledge of the Word, their teaching of it, and ultimately their ministry to others.

Are you all in or only partly in?

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” God’s grace was on his life to be an apostle; however, that didn’t mean he could be spiritually lethargic. He worked to complete the work God began in his life, and therefore, the grace of God was not without effect. Sadly, for many Christians, God’s grace is without effect. God gives much grace that is often neglected. He gives every believer power, love, and self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7) and everything needed for godliness (2 Peter 1:3); however, many come up with excuses. They say things like: “I’m not a morning person,” “I don’t speak well,” or “That’s not my gift!” It is easy to toss God’s grace to the side by focusing on ourselves or others instead of our resources in him.

God’s grace is available. Are you using it? Are you working hard to fulfill God’s call? Paul said, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in us to will and do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13, paraphrase). Good ministers are progressing spiritually, as they wholly give themselves to their work.

Application Question: Have you had seasons where you were more “all in”—fully absorbed into your spiritual life and ministry? What did those seasons look like? How can you better or more consistently give yourself fully to your calling?

Good Ministers Are Balanced

> Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.
> 1 Timothy 4:16

Interpretation Question: What does life and doctrine refer to?

Finally, Paul calls Timothy to watch his life and doctrine closely, and if he did so, he would save both himself and those who listened to him. This is probably a summary statement of 1 Timothy 4:6-15—encompassing all the qualities of a good minister. “Life” obviously encompasses everything—his speech, his faith, his love, etc.—and “doctrine” includes both what he believed and taught. Paul told Timothy to stay away from godless myths and old wives’ tales (4:7) and also to give himself to public reading, preaching, and teaching (v. 13). His life, beliefs, and teaching needed to be guarded.

Paul probably mentions this because ministers are often prone to a dichotomy—a separation between their true life and their beliefs/teaching. In one scenario, the minister preaches and teaches but allows weeds to grow in his own life. He neglects his devotions and his family and children. He allows pride, anger, and bitterness to sprout in his heart. When he does this, he pushes

people away from God—leading some to never accept Christ and others to fall away from him. This neglect may also precipitate his own stumbling away from the faith.

For others, they selfishly focus on themselves and neglect teaching. Because of this, many congregations are malnourished. This opens the congregation to a plethora of attacks from the enemy—leading some to fall away from the faith all together.

But again, this doesn't just apply to pastors but to every minister. Parents must cultivate their spiritual lives and their teaching so they can raise godly children. When they don't, they endanger their children's spiritual lives and ultimately their eternal destiny.

When Christians cultivate their life and doctrine, those who watch them daily are inspired either to be saved or to grow in their faith. When they fail at cultivation, others are pushed away, and they also endanger themselves.

Are you cultivating both your life and doctrine? Good ministers are balanced. Their faith and the faith of others depend on it.

Application Question: How can ministers stay balanced by cultivating both their life and doctrine? What makes this difficult at times?

Conclusion

What are qualities of good ministers?

1. Good Ministers Warn the Flock
2. Good Ministers Constantly Nourish Themselves on God's Word
3. Good Ministers Are Obedient to God's Word
4. Good Ministers Avoid Ungodly Teaching
5. Good Ministers Practice Spiritual Disciplines
6. Good Ministers Continually Hope in the Lord
7. Good Ministers Teach with Authority
8. Good Ministers Are Models of Godliness
9. Good Ministers Are Bible-Centered
10. Good Ministers Faithfully Exercise Their Gifts
11. Good Ministers Are Progressing Spiritually
12. Good Ministers Are Balanced

Appendix 1

Walking the Romans Road

How can a person be saved? From what is he saved? How can someone have eternal life? Scripture teaches that after death each person will spend eternity either in heaven or hell. How can a person go to heaven?

Paul said this to Timothy:

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
>
> 2 Timothy 3:14-15

One of the reasons God gave us Scripture is to make us wise for salvation. This means that without it nobody can know how to be saved.

Well then, how can a people be saved and what are they being saved from? A common method of sharing the good news of salvation is through the Romans Road. One of the great themes, not only of the Bible, but specifically of the book of Romans, is salvation. In Romans, the author, Paul, clearly details the steps we must take in order to be saved.

How can we be saved? What steps must we take?

Step One: We Must Accept that We Are Sinners

Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” What does it mean to sin? The word sin means “to miss the mark.” The mark we missed is looking like God. When God created mankind in the Genesis narrative, he created man in the “image of God” (1:27). The “image of God” means many things, but probably, most importantly it means we were made to be holy just as he is

holy. Man was made moral. We were meant to reflect God's holiness in every way: the way we think, the way we talk, and the way we act. And any time we miss the mark in these areas; we commit sin.

Furthermore, we do not only sin when we commit a sinful act such as: lying, stealing, or cheating. Again, we sin anytime we have a wrong heart motive. The greatest commandments in Scripture are to "Love God with all our heart, mind, and soul and to love others as ourselves" (Matt 22:36-40, paraphrase). Whenever we don't love God supremely and love others as ourselves, we sin and fall short of the glory of God. For this reason, man is always in a state of sinning. Sadly, even if our actions are good, our heart is bad. I have never loved God with my whole heart, mind, and soul and neither has anybody else. Therefore, we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). We have all missed the mark of God's holiness and we must accept this.

What's the next step?

Step Two: We Must Understand We Are under the Judgment of God

Why are we under the judgment of God? It is because of our sins. Scripture teaches God is not only a loving God, but he is a just God. And his justice requires judgment for each of our sins. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death."

A wage is something we earn. Every time we sin, we earn the wage of death. What is death? Death really means separation. In physical death, the body is separated from the spirit, but in spiritual death, man is separated from God. Man currently lives in a state of spiritual death (cf. Eph 2:1-3). We do not love God, obey him, or know him as we should. Therefore, man is in a state of death.

Moreover, one day at our physical death, if we have not been saved, we will spend eternity separated from God in a very real hell. In hell, we will pay the wage for each of our sins. Therefore, in hell people will experience various degrees of punishment (cf. Lk 12:47-48). This places man in a very dangerous predicament—unholy and therefore under the judgment of God.

How should we respond to this? This leads us to our third step.

Step Three: We Must Recognize God Has Invited All to Accept His Free Gift of Salvation

Romans 6:23 does not stop at the wages of sin being death. It says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Because God loved everybody on the earth, he offered the free gift of eternal life, which anyone can receive through Jesus Christ.

Because it is a gift, it cannot be earned. We cannot work for it. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Going to church, being baptized, giving to the poor, or doing any other righteous work does not save. Salvation is a gift that must be received from God. It is a gift that has been prepared by his effort alone.

How do we receive this free gift?

Step Four: We Must Believe Jesus Christ Died for Our Sins and Rose from the Dead

If we are going to receive this free gift, we must believe in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Because God loved us, cared for us, and didn’t want us to be separated from him eternally, he sent his Son to die for our sins. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Similarly, John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life.” God so loved us that he gave his only Son for our sins.

Jesus Christ was a real, historical person who lived 2,000 years ago. He was born of a virgin. He lived a perfect life. He was put to death by the Romans and the Jews. And he rose again on the third day. In his death, he took our sins and God’s wrath for them and gave us his perfect righteousness so we could be accepted by God. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” God did all this so we could be saved from his wrath.

Christ’s death satisfied the just anger of God over our sins. When God saw Jesus on the cross, he saw us and our sins and therefore judged Jesus. And now, when God sees those who are saved, he sees his righteous Son and accepts us. In salvation, we have become the righteousness of God.

If we are going to be saved, if we are going to receive this free gift of salvation, we must believe in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection for our sins (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5, Rom 10:9-10). Do you believe?

Step Five: We Must Confess Christ as Lord of Our Lives

Romans 10:9-10 says,

> That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe

> and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Not only must we believe, but we must confess Christ as Lord of our lives. It is one thing to believe in Christ but another thing to follow Christ. Simple belief does not save. Christ must be our Lord. James said this: “Even the demons believe and shudder” (James 2:19) but the demons are not saved—Christ is not their Lord.

Another aspect of making Christ Lord is repentance. Repentance really means a change of mind that leads to a change of direction. Before we met Christ, we were living our own life and following our own sinful desires. But when we get saved, our mind and direction change. We start to follow Christ as Lord.

How do we make this commitment to the lordship of Christ so we can be saved? Paul said we must confess with our mouth “Jesus is Lord” as we believe in him. Romans 10:13 says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

If you admit that you are a sinner and understand you are under God’s wrath because of them; if you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he died on the cross for your sins, and rose from the death for your salvation; if you are ready to turn from your sin and cling to Christ as Lord, you can be saved.

If this is your heart, then you can pray this prayer and commit to following Christ as your Lord.

> Dear heavenly Father, I confess I am a sinner and have fallen short of your glory, what you made me for. I believe Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins and rose from the dead so I can have eternal life. I am turning away from my sin and accepting you as my Lord and Savior. Come into my life and change me. Thank you for your gift of salvation.

Scripture teaches that if you truly accepted Christ as your Lord, then you are a new creation. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” God has forgiven your sins (1 John 1:9), he has given you his Holy Spirit (Rom 8:15), and he is going to disciple you and make you into the image of his Son (cf. Rom 8:29). He will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb 13:5), and he will complete the work he has begun in your life (Phil 1:6). In heaven, angels and saints are rejoicing because of your commitment to Christ (Lk 15:7).

Praise God for his great salvation! May God keep you in his hand, empower you through the Holy Spirit, train you through mature believers, and use you to build his kingdom! “The one who calls you is faithful, he will do it” (1 Thess 5:24). God bless you!

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Greg Brown earned his MA in religion and MA in teaching from Trinity International University, an MRE from Liberty University, and a PhD in theology from Louisiana Baptist University. He has served over ten years in pastoral ministry and currently serves as chaplain and visiting professor at Handong Global University, pastor at Handong International Congregation, and as a Navy Reserve chaplain.

Greg married his lovely wife Tara Jayne in 2006, and they have one daughter, Saiyah Grace. He enjoys going on dates with his wife, playing with his daughter, reading, writing, studying in coffee shops, working out, and following the NBA and UFC. His pursuit in life, simply stated, is “to know God and to be found faithful by Him.”

To connect with Greg, please follow at http://www.pgregbrown.com.

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