This guide is designed to help you facilitate spiritual growth in one or two other people, as you discuss the ideas, Bible passages, and questions introduced in the Discipleship Toolkit. It may sound presumptuous to think that we actually help to facilitate the spiritual growth of others, but that is exactly what discipleship means. Working with the Holy Spirit, we help others become clear and maturing followers of Jesus.

This is a high and supernatural calling that is given to all believers, not just to pastors and ministers or to some elite group of “good” Christians. Jesus’ last instruction to his apostles also applies to us today: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20) While pastors and teachers provide the solid foundation for our understanding of the Bible, each believer is God’s tool in the discipleship process and plays an important role in strengthening the other members!

“From [Jesus] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:16) In Luke 10, we see Jesus send out 72 disciples two by two to reach out with his message, in addition to the twelve.

Over the past 2,000 years in many different cultures around the world, a grass-roots network of small-group discipleship has laid the foundation for the expansion of God’s kingdom. Consider the Orthodox Church in the early centuries of Christianity, or the brotherhoods and sisterhoods of Catholic revivals, or the Methodists in 18th century England, or the house church movement in
All these movements are rooted in intimate relationships between followers of Jesus, who are focused on seeking God through the study of the Bible and the power of the Holy Spirit. Ever since those first eleven apostles followed Jesus instruction to “Go,” the gospel message has spread from one person to the next, down through the generations, around the world, across cultural bridges, until now it reaches you and me! We offer you this toolkit in an effort to equip you and many others to grow in continuing this approach.

We want to encourage you to approach your discipleship task prayerfully. It’s God who ultimately makes people grow; we play our part, but God gives the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:7-8) Rather than receiving all the weight of discipleship on your shoulders, recognize that the Holy Spirit is ultimately the One who conforms people to the image of Christ. We serve as “spiritual friends.” We consider the Bible together and pray together; we practice spiritual disciplines together and nurture each other’s soul through relationship. We take time to really listen to each other. We often feel encouraged and empowered when we’ve been clearly heard. We also listen to help each other recognize God’s activity and obey His leadings (His “voice”). As we discern God’s emphases, and encourage and pray for each other, God changes us.

Pray for your spiritual friend, your journeying partner, before you meet and at times through the week. You may find it helpful to pray the BLESS Prayer outline for them – mentioned in lesson 4, page 11. Also pray that God will lead your time together each time you meet.

When you meet together, please remember that this booklet is designed to be used in a highly relational setting. Notice the kinds of questions asked are often open ended, so you can share thoughts and feelings and really ponder meanings and ramifications together. Create an atmosphere that allows you both to ask healthy probing questions of each other – questions that spur each other to think and experience God more deeply and practically.

Notice we have divided the Toolkit into different lessons. This is to make it more manageable and applicable to different settings. We’d encourage you to go through one booklet at a time – taking time to evaluate at the end of each booklet and recommitting to do the next one together. Remember, you can do them in whatever order seems best to you.

- First, it’s often good to check in and see how life is going. A need may well be surfaced right away – that is important to deal with and pray about. However, try not to spend all your time on “horizontal” conversation, focused on each other neglecting to relate with God. You are getting together to learn about and apply God’s Kingdom.
- We encourage you to begin your time together in prayer. Acknowledge your desire and need for God to direct and teach you by His Spirit.
- Please do not simply ask the questions of each other and settle for simple/trite answers … dig into real matters of understanding and application.

If theological or practical questions come up that you can’t answer, don’t worry about it – you are not “the Bible answer person.” If the questions seem important, jot them down and either research them yourself, or seek out help from someone with more experience or training. If you are faithful to find some answers for your friend (in between sessions), you will increase their trust in your care and ability to support their growth.

OK – let’s get started looking at the lessons.
LESSON 1 – THE GOSPEL AND JESUS

• Take your time to go over the introduction, it lays a good framework for the overall Toolkit, but it can be helpful to review at the beginning of each booklet.
• Creation: When we recognize God as our Creator – that helps us understand Him as the Source and Sustainer of our lives, and that we are accountable to Him; we are not autonomous free agents.
• The Bad News: Take your time on this section. It is really, really important for us all to understand just how lost we are – apart from Christ’s work. Many times the struggles that people have with their faith are tied to a poor foundation in the Bad News that is true for all mankind.
• The Good News: Again, take your time going through this section, even if your partner is a clear believer. This stuff is powerful, and valuable every day of our lives. We must never let the Good News grow dim or boring in our lives.
• You want to clearly work through the ramifications of Jesus as Savior and Lord, and take your time developing the relational component of faith. We do not follow principles, but walk in a growing relationship with Jesus – that is described by principles and the Word of God.

LESSON 2 – THE WORD OF GOD

• Take your time to go over the introduction, it lays a good framework for the overall Toolkit, but it can be helpful to review at the beginning of each booklet.
• The goal of this chapter is to really highlight the fact that the Bible is THE BOOK – it is the manual for life. It describes God and how we can respond to Him. It describes the Kingdom of God and how it practically works.
• We want everyone to really wrestle with the significance of the Bible and practical its role in our lives.
• If the Bible is inspired by God – it is different than any other book. It needs to be revered, understood and obeyed.
• Take time to consider the Unity of the Bible section – this is truly an unusual book.
• Concretely consider different ways to read, study, memorize and meditate upon Scripture.
• Make sure that your partner has a good and usable Bible translation – that they can write in. How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth is a great book for those who are ready to grow intellectually in their understanding of the different kinds of writing contained in the Bible, and how to read and study each style appropriately.

LESSON 3 – WORSHIP

• Take your time to go over the introduction, it lays a good framework for the overall Toolkit, but it can be helpful to review at the beginning of each booklet.
• Worship is a critical aspect of faith, however, it is often only understood or considered on a surface level. We would like to move beyond the simple forms of singing, reading and listening at church, and really consider what worship means – and how we can be worshipers all the time.
• God is worthy of receiving our expressions of supreme worth; no one and nothing else is worthy of such adoration.
• Take time to consider how great God is – omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, all-caring, compassionate, slow to anger, Creator, Sustainer, Savior, etc. It’s important that we understand whom we are worshiping.
Consider the use of imagination to help us connect with God. We can enter into passages and experience them, not just read them. We can place ourselves in His presence through the use of our imagination.

Worship is about expression; we must learn to express our thoughts and feelings of worship. This involves learning and using words of worship and breaking our inhibitions that hold us back from new and/or emotional expressions.

Romans 12:1 – Old Testament sacrifices were killed, and offered to God. However, Paul wants us to offer our lives as sacrifices to God. We are to die to our own priorities apart from Him, and actually use our living bodies for His purposes – this is meaningful, practical worship.

Real worship is honest about who God is and who we really are; real worship is expressed; real worship involves our whole being (including the emotions); real worship is also expressed with others.

LESSON 4 – PRAYER

Take your time to go over the introduction, it lays a good framework for the overall Toolkit, but it can be helpful to review at the beginning of each booklet.

We want to encourage people to grow in their relationship with the Lord. Relationships involve communication; this is where prayer comes in. Most of our prayers are an intimate conversation – one-to-one – with God. Our prayers are part of our secret and personal relationship with Him.

Sometimes people think of prayer as simply presenting our requests to God, but most biblical prayer is presenting God’s desires and purposes back to Him. It involves learning to recognize His will, and to call it out to Him. For some reason, God has designed His creation is such a way that our prayers – according to His will – make things happen on the earth.

Take your time to really consider the different biblical characters’ experiences of prayer, and how the godhead is involved in the prayer process. Prayer is a mystery – we get many glimpses of how it works, but we must learn most about prayer be engaging in the practice of prayer.

Spend some time on the Lord’s (or Disciples or “Our Father”) Prayer. Take time to understand it as an outline for prayer that can be used to direct extended and focused prayer sections. You might want to pray through the prayer with your partner.

Also, learn how to use the B.L.E.S.S. prayer. This is a very versatile outline that you can use in almost all settings to pray for individuals or groups.

LESSON 5 – FELLOWSHIP

Take your time to go over the introduction, it lays a good framework for the overall Toolkit, but it can be helpful to review at the beginning of each booklet.

This chapter is very important, yet quite counter-cultural in the United States. Many of us have not spent much time walking through life very closely with others. We tend to have a very individualistic view of life. This leaves many of us feeling lonely – and with many blind spots in our lives. We tend not to be good at seeing life from other people’s perspectives, and we have not learned well how to work through relational difficulties. This chapter is to help us develop a value for corporate, shared living.

Spend time with Acts 2:42-47. What might it have felt like, as the disciples’ new faith was exploding, and they were sharing their spiritual experiences?

This lesson is pretty self-explanatory, yet its importance must not be overlooked. It is the shared experience of faith that most causes most people to grow spiritually. Some of the experiences are immediately perceived as helpful and enjoyable; others may seem very
difficult. Whatever the case, we usually grow most when we are most interactive with others concerning our faith.

LESSON 6 – KINGDOM SERVANTS
- Take your time to go over the introduction, it lays a good framework for the overall Toolkit, but it can be helpful to review at the beginning of each booklet.
- This is a short and focused lesson. It’s designed to produce kingdom-character building. Please take this seriously. Sometimes Christians think they can grow and/or lead without doing this serious heart and soul work.
- One of the character-marks of Christians is a willingness to serve and become as servants wherever they find themselves. This is another counter-cultural value of the Kingdom of God.
- The life and attitude of Jesus is our paradigm for living. He was a servant to all – most clearly to His Father and His Father’s will.
- Take some time to really consider the section of self-righteousness. God uses practical questions from others to help surface the stronghold areas of our lives that need to change. Many times we can only see these areas when others press us to take a look.

LESSON 7 – LIFE PURPOSE
- Take your time to go over the introduction, it lays a good framework for the overall Toolkit, but it can be helpful to review at the beginning of each booklet.
- This lesson is an exploration of the ramifications of God’s Kingdom rule. If He is King, then we are accountable to Him. His will is supreme, and it has concrete application in our lives. His priorities become our priorities – this is the design of life, and the way they we will be most fulfilled and satisfied.
- Please consider and encourage your partner to consider participating in a SHAPE seminar. This can be a very helpful and balanced way to understand how God has uniquely designed and uniquely uses each one of us.
- Help your partner surface any areas of their life that may be hindering them from progressing in life and spirit. We really want to help each other mature in character and spirit.
- Take time to consider spiritual warfare. There really is a devil, and there really are two Kingdoms – there is no demilitarized zone; we must be alert at all times spiritually.
- Recognizing the Kingdom battle in which we all live and participate can be very helpful as we care for and pray for others. Ultimately, we would like to see all our family, friends and co-workers develop meaningful and eternal relationships with Jesus. We’ve found that a Prayer-Care-Share approach to communicating the Gospel is most helpful and effective.
  - Consider challenging yourself and your partner to make a list of a few 3-5 key friends/associates for whom you would like to pray together consistently, asking God to reveal Himself to them. When we pray, he often opens up opportunities to become more involved and to serve those for whom we are praying. This is a very important part of God’s process. God often expresses His care through people, particularly through those who are praying. This kind of care many times opens people spiritually to consider the King and His Kingdom. Do you have a story to share to help them see how God often uses our prayers?
  - When opportunities arise to share about the Kingdom, make sure you focus your dialog on Jesus – not Christianity or the church. The center of all time and creation is Jesus; He is the only Savior; He is the one who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He is our only hope. Do what you can to simply focus your attention and spiritual conversations upon Him.
• As you conclude your booklet, congratulate your partner for this spiritual investment. Read Hebrews 11:6 and declare that you believe God will reward both (or all three) of you – as you have earnestly sought Him together.
• Consider what might be some positive next steps of growth in understanding and service.
• Pray for each other.

Thank you for being willing to grow and to be used to help others grow. This is not a short-term season of your life. God actually wants to use you to build others for the rest of your life. And, as you have worked through this discipleship process this time, God has been developing you for further “exploits” in the future. You have been a delight to Him – and He will be delighted to use you in the future in more people’s lives.

Please let us know if you have any ideas or helpful insights as to how we can make this process and/or material more effective and helpful.

With you,
Pastor Tom
and the Discipleship and Fellowship Ministry Team
INTRODUCTION:
If you are reading this, take comfort in the fact that your seeking to grow in faith is a sign that God has already been reaching out to you and will continue to pursue relationship with you. For, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). Your willingness to work through this booklet is an active investment in your personal spiritual growth. It is great that you are willing to make this effort to grow in your faith. As you look through the guide and answer questions, we encourage you to make it meaningful and practical for yourself. The thoughts and questions aren’t magic, but they can work powerfully in you if you think deeply and answer meaningfully.

This booklet is designed to be read and discussed with one or more friends, so that you may share your ideas and questions with each other. You may use it for personal study, but we hope you will pray for each other and deepen your relationship with your friends. The booklet is one of a few designed to give you an overview of the foundational concepts and Bible passages related to living as a Christian: The Gospel and Jesus, the Word of God, Worship, Prayer, Fellowship, Servanthood, and Life Purpose. While the booklet is intended to be flexible in its use, we hope you will work your way through all seven chapters/booklets, as they are all foundational. You may work through one chapter in one hour, but more likely it will take several hours to go through each chapter, including time for discussion, exploring the Bible, and prayer. Feel free to spend more time on the chapters that seem to most challenge or benefit you. You
may structure your time with your friend(s) at your mutual convenience; perhaps a weekly meeting will fit your schedule.

May God bless you as you study and consider the Bible passages; and may He give you wisdom as you discuss and apply what you are learning.

If we want to learn about God, probably the best place to start is to look at the Bible. Later we will discuss the value and importance of the Bible, but for now we want to jump right in and consider God.

**Creation:**
Genesis (which means “creation” in Greek) is the first book of the Bible. It begins with the sentence, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) This simple statement is hugely important in our understanding of God and spiritual life. First, it indicates that God was there in the beginning. As a matter of fact, the Bible makes it clear that God has always been and that He always will be – God is eternal. (1 Timothy 1:17) Second, this verse indicates that God is the Creator. God is the eternal Creator.

At the end of the first chapter of Genesis we see that God created mankind in His own image. (Genesis 1:26-27) In all creation only mankind bears the image of God. Exactly what is entailed in the image of God isn’t completely clear, but it is important. It means that we in some ways represent God, and that we can have relationship with Him. In the second chapter of Genesis we see God speaking to Adam, and in chapter 3 we can see God interacting with Adam and Eve.

- Why might it matter if we understand that God is eternal and that He created us in His image?

One of the wonderful truths about God is that “God is love.” (1 John 4:8,16) In Jeremiah 31:3 God is recorded as saying to His people, “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” God loves us and has created us to enjoy a relationship with Him.

**Bad News:**
However, there is a problem; there is some bad news. We can see right after the creation account in Genesis, that people have a natural bent to try to live and understand their lives apart from God. For Adam and Eve it was expressed in directly disobeying the clear command of God. (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:6) This disobedience and selfish or self-reference living, rather than God-centered living is common to all people. The Bible calls this our sin nature.

God expresses it very poignantly through the prophet Jeremiah. He says, “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” (Jeremiah 2:13) We all have a tendency to turn from God to try to find our own way. Yet, we are all marred and unable to live complete, full and perfect lives apart from God’s help. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) This is hard news, but it gets worse. The Bible also teaches: “the wages (or payment) of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).
This would indicate that though God loves us and has created us in His image to have relationship with Him, all people are sinful and bound for death – both physical and spiritual. We physically die when our earthly bodies give out; we spiritually die when we face God’s eternal judgment and are sentenced to eternal punishment and separation from God as a payment for our sin (Revelation 20:12-15).

If we review these concepts we find that:
- God has lovingly created people in His image.
- God desires to have relationship with people.
- All people are sinful.
- The payment (or consequences) for sin is death – physical death and spiritual death, which refers to eternal punishment and separation from God.

This is bad news indeed!

- How would you describe the “bad news” of the Bible?

- How do you respond to these claims? Do you feel guilty? Defensive? Like a failure?

- Do you really believe the “bad news”?

Believe it or not, we are beginning to describe what it means to be a Christian, but we are only part way through the story. So far we have seen God’s created purpose to have relationship with us. We have also discussed the bad news of our sinfulness.

Good News:
The Gospel, however, is the “Good News” pronouncement in response to the bad news that all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory. God has provided a wonderful solution to our sin problem in the person of Jesus Christ. Romans 6:23 in its entirety reads, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Isaiah prophesied concerning the sin payment of Jesus over 500 years before His birth, saying, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). “He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

In the New Testament, we see Peter and Paul explaining the work of Jesus after his death and resurrection: “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Christ not only died for us, taking our sin upon himself, but he credits (or
“Imputes”) his righteousness to us: “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

- Some people refer to this as the “Exchanged Life.” What do you think they mean by this expression?

Jesus was sinless, yet He died in our place as payment for our sin. His death opens the door of eternal life in the family of God to all who will receive His work on the cross. This is wonderful news indeed!

The Bible records that when Jesus came many did not receive Him as the Son of God and the sin payment for their lives. “Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). Being a Christian is about becoming a part of the family of God – to receive Jesus as the One and Only Son of God, who being sinless died not for His own sin, but as a payment for our sin. To be a Christian is not to trust in our own efforts to be good, for we can never be good enough. (It means to trust that Jesus’ death on the cross was an all-sufficient payment for our sin and that his resurrection welcomes us not just to be snatched from the flames, but to become Children of God!

- In what ways do you agree with this definition of a Christian? What questions do you have about what it means to be a Christian?

You may ask yourself or hear others wonder, “So is Christianity just receiving Christ once? Checking the box?” The truth is that being a Christian is less about making a “decision” and more about a relationship with a real person, who is also the God of the universe.

Jesus didn’t just die on the cross. He rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven. He is alive today and seated at the right hand of God the Father (Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3). When we receive Jesus for who He is, when we receive His payment for us and declare that we want to follow His leading, He enters into us by the presence of the Holy Spirit. In Revelation, Jesus is quoted as saying to a church, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). When we respond to Jesus, He comes to live within us and have close relationship with us.

Speaking of the indwelling of Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul wrote, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). **To be a Christian means to receive Jesus’ life and death payment for you. It also means to enter into personal and practical relationship with Him. But it is not dependent on us; it depends wholly on God, who comes to us, in the midst of our sin. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).**
Bob Dylan declared in song, “You’re gonna have to serve somebody.” We are all serving someone or something, whether we realize it or not. Being a Christian means casting off all our old false masters for the master who leads us by serving us and who rules us by dying for us. A relationship with Him recognizes Jesus as Lord and Master. We need to follow and obey Him.

- When you consider this picture of the Christian life, how does it make you feel?

- Does being a Christian sound confining or liberating? Why?

- What does it mean to receive Jesus as Savior?

- What does it mean to receive Jesus as Lord?

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). His intent is to offer you a life that is tailored by God to fit you. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1).

Jesus described the difference between His purposes and those of the devil, whom He referred to as a thief saying, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Being a Christian means having a relationship with the God who wants to release us from captivity. Following Christ is less about following rules and more about living in freedom and experiencing full life. And who do you know who would not want that?

- Having read the above paragraphs, would you like to enhance your definition of what it means to be a Christian in any way?
o Have you personally received Jesus – acknowledged His payment as sufficient for your personal sin and asked Him to come into your life? (If not, why not?) How does this affect your life?

o Have you made a clear decision to follow Jesus as Lord? (If not, why not?) How does this affect your life?

As we begin this discipleship study, we want to focus first on the God who has been revealed to us, as a real man, who came to earth, lived, died, and rose again – all actual events in human history. Rather than starting with abstract concepts about God, we must begin with the person of Jesus. As Christians, we believe that Jesus is not dead, but alive and that we can have a relationship with Him. And so, being a Christian really is all about Jesus. It is a matter of growing in relationship with Him and so being conformed to His image.

God is the One who give us desire for change in our lives, and the power to change is rooted in the cross and resurrection – Jesus died to sin and rose from the dead to life. Hebrews 12:1-3 says, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

o What kind of things do you think might hinder or tangle up your spiritual life?

o What do you think it means to fix your eyes on Jesus?

o Why might we be tempted to grow weary or lose heart?

Disciples are followers of Jesus – they need to make efforts to live intentionally, rather than by default. However, that intentionality is connected to a relationship, rather than the simple pursuit of a goal. We cannot pursue relationship with God simply by trying harder or committing to be better. As we grow in relationship with God, our hearts are changed and God works to grow us up, developing the very characteristics of Jesus Christ.
As branches connected to a vine grow and flourish, so do disciples of Jesus grow and flourish when they are constantly receiving nourishment and life from Him. We seek to grow, but it is the power of God – the vine itself – that causes true growth. Spiritual growth is not automatic; but neither is it simply a matter of deciding. It is hard work, and we must rely fully on God for the strength and motivation to continue. For, it is God who “began a good work in you,” and God who will be faithful to “carry it on to completion” (Philippians 1:6).

Again, growth is part of a relationship with God, which involves two parties. Like your other relationships, relationship with God requires commitment. If you consider a relationship in which you never talk to or spend time with the other person, it will be impossible for that relationship to flourish. The same is true with God; relationships can only grow with commitment.

- Can you think of (and share) anything in your life that was attained through commitment?

To be a disciple/student/follower of Jesus means to be always learning more about God’s will and being conformed to His ways. However, the Christian life should not be lived solely in focus on yourself and your own righteousness. It is also a matter of learning with others. Though it is personal, it isn’t private. Some might say it is a matter of learning to “live out loud” – learning to live and proclaim what you believe.

As you work your way through this booklet and the ones that follow, you will learn some practical ways to grow in your faith. Some of this will involve trying new things and learning some new skills. Our hope is that this will help you to develop some solid, biblical practices in your life that will strengthen and stabilize you spiritually.

At the end you may want to consider developing a Personal Plan for Spiritual Growth. There is no standard way to do this that works for everyone. You will need to determine what might work best for you, realizing that you will probably need to change and renew your plan from time to time. As you consider practical spiritual growth, you need to continually consider these two simple questions:

1. What commitments are you making/living lately?

2. Based on your understanding of God, are there any decisions or commitments you need to make?

- Are there any practical decisions you think you need to make based upon your reading of the introduction to this booklet?
For further study:
Read the four gospels in the Bible, which describe the life of Jesus from the perspective of four people: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

- Mark, the shortest gospel, describes Jesus from the perspective of the apostle Peter, with a special focus on Jesus as the Son of God, and his miracles.
- John, written by the apostle John, seeks to explain the meaning of Jesus’ life, to help his readers believe in him.
- Luke was written to give an accurate and complete history of the life of Jesus, for a Greek audience.
- Matthew, one of the twelve apostles and a tax collector, wrote the book that bears his name, to demonstrate to Jewish readers that Jesus is the Messiah.

*More than a Carpenter*, Josh McDowell

*Why Jesus*, William H. Willimon
River of Life Church
Discipleship Toolkit

Lesson #2

The Word of God
September 2011

INTRODUCTION:
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may structure your time with your friend(s) at your mutual convenience; perhaps a weekly meeting will fit your schedule.

May God bless you as you study and consider the Bible passages; and may He give you wisdom as you discuss and apply what you are learning.

II. THE WORD OF GOD

It is an incredible reality to face that the living, eternal God, the King of the universe, wants to have a relationship with you personally. He wants to spend time alone with you, talking with you, listening to you, and transforming your life. He cares about the intimate details of your personal life! (See Psalm 139)

1. How have you been aware recently of God speaking with you personally?

2. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. The Bible is the Word of God; it is breathed out by him. How does this happen? Read 2 Peter 1:20-21. What do you think this means?

When you consider the Bible – the Word of God – it is important to realize that this book is different from all others. This book is not only inspired by God or God-breathed -- it is alive! Hebrews 4:12 states, “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” No matter how many times you may have read a passage or a book within the Bible, it can confront you afresh with new understandings and convictions. It will change you from the inside, if you let it.

God can speak to us in any way he wishes. The Bible is not the only way God speaks to us, but it is a very important way. (Other ways are prayer, nature, circumstances, worship, people in authority in your life, and other people -- especially those who walk with God.) Everything God says to you will be consistent with his Word; that is one way we know it’s God speaking. What does 1 John 4:1 say about this?

It’s the Holy Spirit’s job to reveal God’s word to us. Read John 10:27 and John 16:13-15. How clear does God expect us to be about what he is saying to us?
3. What is your experience of reading the Bible? What is it like for you? (Exciting, boring, confusing, helpful, etc.)

4. Do you have any questions about the Bible? (Write them here; you may want to explore them after this exercise.) What passages of scripture do you wish you could avoid?

5. Do you believe that the Bible is true? Why or why not? What does that mean to you?

6. What does the Bible say about itself regarding its reliability and its role in our lives? Describe what the Word does in each of these passages.
   Luke 8:4-15

   Matt. 4:1-11, especially v. 4.

   Psalm 119:98-99, 105

   Isaiah 55:10, 11

   Ephesians 6:14-17
2 Peter 1:3-4

Romans 10:17

7. What is the most valuable or powerful use of the Word of God for you personally?


*The Unity of the Bible points to the supernatural guidance of the Almighty. The Bible was written over a period of about 1,500 years (15 centuries!) by more than 40 different writers from a variety of backgrounds living on three different continents in three different languages (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic), and yet there is a oneness, a unity, within the book....The Bible deals with many controversial subjects yet there is a unity, with one theme: the Bible is about Jesus, the Messiah.*

9. Read John 1:1-5 and v.14. What does it mean that Jesus is the Word of God?

10. What are some different ways I can get into the Bible? What is the benefit of each one?
   a. Daily Bible reading. Options: Plan to read the whole Bible. It will benefit you to read through all 66 books of the Bible over time. You may want to pick a book, read through it, check it off, then pick another book, read through it, check it off, and continue with all the books until you have read the entire Bible. There are many options for reading through the Bible, please see [http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/readingplans/](http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/readingplans/). You may also consider using Bible audio recordings for a long commute, sermon downloads from gifted preachers, or selecting a Bible study that focuses on one book of the Bible. There are lots of resources; find what works for you.

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b. Study what the Bible says about a topic in the Bible. Options: Use study aids (Concordance, Cross-reference, Commentary, learn about the scriptural and historical context), read a book based on scripture about the topic.

c. Memorize a scripture verse or a section of Scripture, or meditate on Scripture that the Lord puts on your heart, especially those that are foundational to faith in Jesus and those that God is speaking to you now. Stay with it. Try to understand what the Lord is saying to you, and how to apply it practically in your life. Read Psalm 119:9-11 and Colossians 3:16. Meditation requires carving out some time and practicing stillness.

11. When you read and study the Bible alone or with others, consider these 3 questions:
   • What does it say?
   • What does it mean to the original readers for whom it was originally written?
   • What does it mean to me today?

12. What is most important to God about the way we regard his Word? Read James 1:22-25. Do you think most Christians have enough knowledge of the Bible or have learned obedient application of what they already know? Why?

Jesus said: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matthew 7:24, 26, 27). How do we put God’s words into practice? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in obedience? See John 6:63.

Resources:
• Get a Bible that you can read and understand! For example, the New Living Translation, or the New International Version (NIV, which we use in church), or a paraphrased version like The Message.
• Get a Bible that you can study! For example, the Zondervan NIV Study Bible, with cross-references, maps, timelines, Book introductions (author, date, theme, outline), abridged concordance, and study notes.
• 30 Days to Understanding the Bible, Max Anders
• How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart
• Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Josh McDowell
• Experiencing God, Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King

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May God bless you as you study and consider the Bible passages; and may He give you wisdom as you discuss and apply what you are learning.
III. WORSHIP

How would you define the word worship?

What role does worship play in the life of the believer? Why is it important?

Worship could be described as attributing supreme worth or value to something or someone. Sometimes we may attribute too much value to some things or people.

Are you aware of any times in your life when you think you have given too much worth to anyone or anything?

“Worship is like an Orange”

There is something wonderful inside every orange. What is it? JUICE! And how do you get the juice out of the orange? You've got to squeeze it, don't you? Within each human being is a wonderful capacity to express love, but it needs to be squeezed out. The word ex-press means, “to press out, as juice from a fruit.”

Worship can be this pressing out of or expressing love to someone or something. How do you express love to others? Do you send greeting cards? Do you dispense hugs?

For whom did you last purchase a greeting card? Why?

These are simple expressions of love. Where did this capacity to love come from? The Bible says that God, our Creator, set eternity in the hearts of all people (Ecclesiastes 3:11). That means God, your Creator, the author of love, deposited a part of Himself into the very core of your being. Whether you believe in Him or not, there is a fundamental part of you that longs to be connected with the One who crafted you. You exist to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!

Do you have any idea how much God actually loves you and wants to be in relationship with you? If it is true that God has deposited an eternal, spiritual awareness within each one of us, then I challenge you to consider establishing a deeply personal relationship with the One who put that awareness within you. This is more than a “religious experience” based upon the expectations of people; this is an encounter with the One True God.

How can we express our love to God and establish a personal relationship with Him? Have faith; He loves you more than you know. His pursuit of you has brought you to this point. Don't stop now … He sees your heart … He knows your heart … He wants your heart. Express your love to Him today. Write to Him, sing songs, dance, draw, create, and let Him know you are thinking of Him.
Christian worship is relational at its core. We are not worshipping a force, or some distant God; we are worshipping the “God who is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). It has been said, “It’s not enough to worship the God you know, you must know the God you worship.” We don’t want to simply know about God, we need to be continually growing in relationship with Him. Worship is one great way to keep it all fresh. Recount who He is, what He’s done and what He means to you.

Worship is expressing your heart, thoughts and devotion “OUT LOUD.”

It may involve words of adoration, song, dance, art, poetry, writing, sculpture, etc. Even if it doesn’t involve words or sounds, it can be helpful to think of your worship as an OUT LOUD expression of your inner being to God.

- What is the practical difference between thinking about how much you love someone and actually telling him/her (or expressing it in a tangible way)?

But God is invisible . . .

Christian worship is relational at its core, but relating to God has its challenges. God is so much bigger, more wonderful, more complex than anything we can begin to imagine. The fullness of God is well beyond our understanding. Each of us truly understands only parts of all that God really is, and for each of us our understanding is mixed with misunderstanding. Yet God still calls us to Himself and wants a personal relationship with us. This relationship is further challenged by the fact that God is invisible, so relating to him is not the same as relating to your spouse or best friend.

Relating to God requires us to use our imaginations. Not the part of our imagination that makes things up, but the part that allows us to more thoroughly process reality. For example, to understand a tree, it would be helpful to imagine the roots of the tree going deep into the ground, how the tree would look as it goes through the four seasons, and how sap flows through its bark. But you could also imagine, if you chose, the tree walking around at night and communicating with other trees by waving its branches or perhaps talking with a mouth that appears when no one is looking. The first kind of imagining is based in reality, while the second kind is pure fancy.

How does the reality that God is so “big” affect your ability to personally relate to Him?

How do you use your imagination in relating to God?

Discuss how these concepts show our need to be both grounded in Scripture and related to each other.
The Greatest Command
Jesus said the greatest command of God is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). He wants us to be totally engaged in our relationship with the Father, learning all we can of God and His ways, experiencing Him deeply in our most inner life and motivations and involving our unique personalities in our expressions.

- Which area of your life do you think you can most easily incorporate in your worship and relationship with God? Why?
  - Heart
  - Soul
  - Mind
  - Strength

- Which area do you think might be most difficult for you personally?

Let your body tell part of the story.
Different postures can be helpful. Kneeling expresses humility; raising your hands may express thanks; opening your hands and holding them palms up expresses a willingness and readiness to receive; standing can express declaration; laying face down on the ground expresses total surrender; jumping or dancing expresses great gratitude; etc.

Please don’t just read about these different postures and expressions, try some of them – even now.
- What do you want to express to God? Use your body to help; you will notice the power of this expression (once you get past the nervousness).

When we involve our bodies, it is easier to remain engaged and focused. We are – in a sense – involving more of our selves in worship.

The rubber meets the road.
Learning to express our worship privately is very important and very fun. But, there is an even more concrete expression of worship. It is to obey God.
In the Old Testament the prophet Samuel addressed Saul, the King of Israel, at a time when Saul was trying to live life and worship God according to his own ideas. Samuel said, "To obey is better than sacrifice." (1 Samuel 15:22)

- What do you think that Samuel meant by this?

- How might it apply in our lives today?
The apostle Paul wrote, “… I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1)

- At the end of chapter 11, we see the awesomeness of God and His great mercy to us (Read verses 33-36). Our appropriate response to Him is to worship Him. What does it mean to offer our bodies as living sacrifices?

  - What might it look like for us practically to offer our bodies (and our lives) to God in a way that is holy (set apart for God) and pleasing to Him?

  - Is there any way you can presently, practically offer yourself to God like this? (Is there anything He is asking of you?)

Jesus said, “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

  - What do you think it means to worship in spirit?

    - What does it mean to worship with your own spirit?

    - What does it mean to worship in the Holy Spirit?

  - What do you think it means to worship in truth?

    - What truth/s of God might be relevant in your worship?

    - How might personal honesty (or the lack thereof) impact worship?

**Worshiping Together**

When we come together to worship God with others (at church or in a small group), our worship takes on a new dimension. Corporate worship includes declaration and proclamation and affirmation of God’s truth together. This often serves to dramatically increase our faith in God. When we realize that others also believe, it encourages us. When we declare our faith together we are often energized, and we can sense a great bond of unity with others.

1 Peter 2:4-5 says that when we come together in worship, we are spiritually built together into a spiritual house to offer praises to God. Peter goes on to describe our purpose in corporate worship, saying, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that
you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

- What would you say are some of the differences between private and corporate worship?

- Which do you think you enjoy more? Why?

- Which do you think is more important? Why?

**Sum it up**
Can you list three significant truths about worship that have emerged from this simple study?

1. 
2. 
3. 

Are there any decisions or action steps that you sense God would like you to make with regard to growing as a worshiper?

**For further study:**

Make Love, Make War: NOW Is the Time to Worship, by Brian Doerksen

Facedown, by Matt Redmon (and other books by this author)

Let the Nations Be Glad, by John Piper

The Worship Maze, by Paul Basden
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IV. PRAYER

Prayer is simply talking with God. It's a two-way conversation. Prayer involves openly and honestly coming to God with our concerns and hopes, desires and fears. As in any conversation, we also want to take time to hear from God – to understand what He wants and is doing in and around us. Because of who God is, the direction of prayer is God's kingdom advance, his rule, in my own life and in the lives of those around me.

1. Do you find it difficult or easy to hear from God? How do you do it? What do you think it would take to have a closer relationship with God?

God is very serious about wanting to talk with you personally. He gave his only Son to live like us and die in our place, so that you can have access to a relationship with him. What does Hebrews 10:19-23 say about this?

The door to heaven is always open to you, if you walk in with Jesus.

Following are some accounts of individuals' relationships with God from the Bible. Please note how honest each person is with God.

Moses: “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' ” .... Moses said to the LORD, “O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” The LORD said to him, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” But Moses said, “O Lord, please send someone else to do it.” Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. (Exodus 3:10-14, 4:10-15)

What do we learn about Moses from this account? What do we learn about God?
Jacob: So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." (Genesis 32:24-30)

What do we learn about Jacob from this account? What do we learn about God?

Psalm writer:
You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths.
Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. Selah
You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them.
I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief.
I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you.
Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Selah
Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?
Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?
But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you.
Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?
From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair.
Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me.
All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me.
You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend. (Psalm 88:6-18)

What do we learn about the psalmist from this account? What do we learn about God?

Martha: As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

What do we learn about Martha from this account? What do we learn about God?
Jesus: Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" (Mark 1:35-37)

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." (Luke 22:39-46)

What do we learn about Jesus from these accounts? What do we learn about God?

2. What jumps out at you about these interactions?

The difference between prayer with God and our other relationships is that, when we give our life to Jesus, we actually become a part of his body along with the rest of his people throughout history and around the world. We are mystically one with him, like husband and wife are intended to be in a marriage. Read John 17:20-23, 1 Peter 2:9-10, John 15:5-8. What do these passages say about our relationship with God?

3. What else does Jesus say about prayer? Summarize each teaching in your own words.
Matthew 6:5-15
Matthew 7:7-11
Luke 11:5-13

Have you ever communicated deeply and powerfully with God, beyond words? What did you hear and what was the result?

5. Do you find it more difficult to believe that God exists, or that He cares for you? Read Hebrews 11:6; what does this mean?

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God said to the people of Israel, "You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). God doesn't expect more faith from you than you have, but He does expect you to come honestly to Him with all that you do have.

6. If we love God, we will take our communication with him seriously, just as in any relationship. Jesus modeled and taught both daily, intentional prayer and continuous prayer in the moment. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Prayer is ultimately a matter of regularly coming to God with your thoughts and desires. It's learning to share all of your life with God. If you feel you've disappointed him in your communication, confess your sin to him, and he will forgive you! How do you think God wants you to grow your prayer life?

Do you have a regular time and place to talk with God that works for you? Why do you think it's difficult for us to keep these appointments with God?
7. Allow prayer to change your personal priorities. Read Matthew 6:25-34. Jesus teaches how instead of worrying we should learn to pray. Jesus assures us that if we prioritize the things of God, He will take care of all of our practical needs. He said, “But seek first His [God’s] kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”
   - What kinds of things are you most prone to worry about at this point in your life?

   - What do you think it means to seek God’s Kingdom first?

   - What are some practical ways you can apply this verse (Matt. 6:33) in your life?

8. Conviction of the Holy Spirit. Read John 16:7-11. Sometimes, when we are praying, God will convict us of sin or wrongdoing or wrong motives. At first this may feel like bad news, but it is actually good news. God is showing us what is blocking our relationship with Him or interfering with our Christian walk of freedom. When you experience God’s conviction, agree with him, don’t take it lightly, don’t defend yourself and don’t blame others.

   Read 1 John 1:5-10. Instead, confess your sin to God and repent. Confession simply means to agree with God. Repentance means to turn around, to make an “about face.” To repent is to change your mind and go in the opposite direction. Confession is the beginning of the process; repentance refers to the desire and action needed for change. Both confession and repentance require agreement with and reliance upon God rather than self. God is the one who leads us to and through the changes we need in our lives. In fact, conviction, confession, repentance, and the refilling of the Holy Spirit are ongoing, foundational practices of a Christian. We never “move beyond” these processes!
   - What does walking in the darkness and walking in the light mean?

   - What does verse 9 teach us?

   - Why would God forgive you of your sin?

   - What temptation do verses 8 and 10 highlight?
9. Ultimately to forgive someone is to close the evidence in your mind that contains his or her offense, to lock the drawer and throw away the key. When you forgive someone it means that you will not reuse the evidence of his or her offense in the future. You are letting go of the right to use that information to build a case against him or her in the future. When you pronounce the words, “I forgive you,” you are letting the offense go. Are you aware of any people that you may need to consider meaningfully and clearly forgiving?

10. You can use the “Lord’s Prayer,” as an outline for prayer; Jesus gave it to His disciples as a means of instruction of how to pray. Review Matthew 6:5-15. Each line opens a different door to an entire kind of prayer to explore; think of your own prayers in each area below.
   o Our Father in heaven:
     o Hallowed be Your name:
     o Your Kingdom come:
     o Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven:
     o Give us today our daily bread:
     o Forgive us our debts/trespasses/sins:
     o As we forgive others:
     o Lead us not into temptation:
     o Deliver us from the evil one:
     o Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever:

11. At River of Life Church we have an outline that we often use when we are praying for other people; we call it the BLESS prayer. This is a tool that helps us pray fairly comprehensively and positively for others. It involves praying for their:
   B – Bodies: Their physical health and related issues
   L – Labor: Their work, or school and related issues
   E – Emotions: Their emotional health
   S – Social Life: Their relationships
   S – Spiritual Life: Their relationship with God, spiritual development and growth
Praying through this outline consistently for 3-5 people who don’t yet know Jesus can be used by God to begin opening them up to spiritual things and toward developing a relationship with Christ. This is part of a personal outreach strategy that we call Prayer-Care-Share. Once you are consistently praying that God will BLESS someone, you can look for opportunities to express practical and possibly supernatural Care for that person. Eventually God will give you opportunities to Share the Gospel – the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. List 3-5 people you care about who don’t yet know Jesus, for whom you want to begin to pray the BLESS prayer. You may want to make a little card that has the BLESS outline on it and their names – and place it in your Bible or some other good place to remind you to pray.
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V. FELLOWSHIP:

- Why do you think people struggle with loneliness and isolation in our culture?

- How many times over the last two weeks have you eaten a meal with others?

- How many times over this period have you eaten with others outside your family?

For a variety of reasons, some people in our culture do not spend much time with others. This kind of widespread isolation makes the Christian concept of fellowship more radical and important than ever. However, fellowship is often misunderstood. Sometimes people are tempted to think of it simply in terms of social fun, or activities with others – usually involving some kind of food and drink. Spending time with others is very important, but it is not necessarily fellowship.

Real fellowship (the Greek word is koinonia) includes a spiritual focus and partnership. It could be defined as **sharing life together, in commitment to the Lordship and direction of Jesus Christ**. This is not a new idea, as God is relational at the most fundamental level; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit exist in perfect unity and fellowship in the Trinity. Fellowship among Christians grows out of and uses as its model the fellowship of God within the Trinity. For a description of the Trinity in the Bible, see John 16.12-15 and John 17.20-23.

How does Jesus describe his relationship with the Father? With the Holy Spirit?

How does Jesus describe our relationship with God?

Fellowship was also a foundational tenet of Old Testament Judaism. God called his people to gather together at least 7 times a year, sometimes traveling great distances to do so (Leviticus 23). These feast celebrations were mandated in order to remember the “mighty acts of God”. David says in the Psalms, “One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts… They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom” (Psalm 145:4; 11-12). Reviewing what God had done served to build faith together amongst God’s people.
Similarly, when we are in times of trial and suffering, seeing what God has done in the past, and what He is doing in the present with others gives us hope and faith for what He will do for us. In the same way, after we have gone through trials and suffering, we can comfort others in similar situations, and help build their faith. Paul describes this kind of encouragement in his letter to the Corinthians: “The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort... comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Corinthians 1.3-4). You may want to read the entire chapter in 2 Corinthians at this point.

- When have you been suffering, and received comfort from another person who had been through a similar situation?
  - Is there someone in your life right now who is going through trials similar to what you have experienced, and who is in need of comfort from you?

One of the most descriptive passages of fellowship in the Bible is found in Acts 2:42-47. At the beginning of the chapter, the Holy Spirit filled and empowered some 120 people who were meeting together. They experienced signs of God’s presence – the sound of wind and the appearance of fire over each other’s heads. And they were given abilities to speak in tongues – languages that they didn’t “know.” They communicated the glories of God in the native languages of many foreign by-standers. This miraculous empowerment led to the conversions of over three thousand men. All of these new believers in Jesus began to meet and learn together. Consider this context as you read Acts 2:42-47.

The entire passage could be entitled, “Fellowship – sharing life together, committed to the Lordship and direction of Jesus Christ.” What activities listed in this passage could help make our definition of fellowship more practical?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
o How is the kind of relationship described in this passage different from just spending time or eating with friends, even Christian friends?

o Which of the above activities do you think would be better accomplished in a church service, and which ones would more likely be best accomplished in homes?

The Christian faith needs expression in large groups, small groups and in one-on-one settings. We see these different levels of fellowship both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. God’s people met all together at certain times, like the feasts, but they were also divided into 12 tribes (Genesis 49), and subdivided further into household groups for specific functions, which could be 50 people or more.

Jesus taught widely during his ministry, and amassed a large group of followers. However, he had a select group of twelve disciples, whom he taught and ate with regularly, apart from the crowds (sounds like a Lifegroup!) Indeed, most fellowship of the kind we are talking about, seems to be best worked out in small group, relational settings. Meeting together and discussing spiritual truth and application is often what God uses to stoke the fire of our faith.

From God’s command to provide for the priests (who had no provision on their own) as well as “the aliens, the fatherless and the widows” (Deuteronomy 14:29), to considering how to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24), fellowship can connect the sometimes-lonely island of our personal faith to the stabilizing continent of the “Community of Faith.”

This kind of “koinonia” fellowship really starts with our relationship with God. The apostle John wrote, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). It’s rooted in our experience of God and it overflows into a shared experience with and commitment to other believers. In Romans 12:10 Paul says, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love,” and there are many similar imperatives in the New Testament that relate to our relationships and activities with “one another” (we are called to love, honor, bear with, accept, instruct, serve, agree with, submit to, forgive, admonish, encourage one another, etc.). Most of them are best accomplished in small group and relational settings.

o Can you think of some positive experiences of fellowship that you have shared with other believers?

o How were expressions of devotion and commitment to Christ and each other expressed?
We must remember that fellowship is not just about feeling good together. It is about strengthening each other to walk more heartily after God. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

- Practically, how do you think this “spurring” is accomplished? How would you like to be encouraged? Can you think of ways to encourage those close to you to grow in faith and service?

We must be careful, however, to walk the line between legalism (judging others by their ability to follow the rules) and enabling (willfully ignoring or neglecting to address others who are struggling). We should take seriously Paul’s warning to the “foolish Galatians” that “now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law” (Galatians 3:25), as well as the ideas that “as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17) and “a cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Fellowship should pursue real faith in which everyone is able to be honest with God, honest with themselves, and honest with others.

Additionally, we must be careful not to allow gathering in small groups to become an end in itself. Sometimes people focus so much on meeting together that they forget about all those around them that don’t yet know Jesus. Their “Koinonia” becomes “Koinonitis,” swollen and out of balance.

- Have you ever been in a small group that was kind of “in-grown”?

- What might be some signs that a group has become swollen or out of balance?

- Are you aware of other kinds of sicknesses that can afflict small groups?

Although we will encounter struggles together, fellowship is the main way that Christians grow together as parts of one body (1 Corinthians 12). It is not something that we must do on our own, but instead a gift from Christ, which we receive by faith. Having risen from the dead, Jesus’ last words to his disciples are: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18).
Having considered this idea of fellowship, please answer the following questions:

- In your own words, how would you define fellowship?

- How does fellowship strengthen our faith?

- Is there anything you have freshly learned or considered in new ways lately in this area of fellowship?

- How are you presently involved in positive fellowship settings? How can these be strengthened?

- Do you know what steps you could take to strengthen or build fellowship in your life? If not, who could you talk to, who could help you pursue fellowship?
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This booklet is designed to be read and discussed with one or more friends, so that you may share your ideas and questions with each other. You may use it for personal study, but we hope you will pray for each other and deepen your relationship with your friends. The booklet is one of a few designed to give you an overview of the foundational concepts and Bible passages related to living as a Christian: The Gospel and Jesus, the Word of God, Worship, Prayer, Fellowship, Servanthood, and Life Purpose. While the booklet is intended to be flexible in its use, we hope you will work your way through all seven chapters/booklets, as they are all foundational. You may work through one chapter in one hour, but more likely it will take several hours to go through each chapter, including time for discussion, exploring the Bible, and prayer. Feel free to spend more time on the chapters that seem to most challenge or benefit you. You may structure your time with your friend(s) at your mutual convenience; perhaps a weekly meeting will fit your schedule.
May God bless you as you study and consider the Bible passages; and may He give you wisdom as you discuss and apply what you are learning.

VI. Kingdom Servants

When we ask children about their future, we generally expect them to declare the kind of work they hope to do, or some accomplishments they would like to achieve. We want to hear about their dreams.

• Do you remember your hopes, dreams or vocational aspirations when you were younger? What were they?

• When you were in junior high, high school or college, what did you want to be when you grew up?

• Can you remember what was motivating you to consider those particular aspirations?

When you consider your life now and what you want to become, does developing as a better servant ever cross your mind? It’s not often on the top of our culture’s priorities, yet it is foundational for developing and growing in the Kingdom of God.

• Why do you think servanthood might be an important Kingdom characteristic?

When Jesus was building (and correcting) His disciples, He said, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28). Jesus came to “be” a servant.

Describe the specific actions and attitude with which Jesus served others and taught us to serve others, in each of the following passages of scripture:
Mark 5.21-43

Mark 6.30-44

Mark 9.33-41, 10.13-16
A servant can be defined as, “a person devoted to another or to a cause.” When Jesus lived in human flesh, He was devoted to the person and will of His heavenly Father. His primary goal in life seemed to be to serve His Father, and that led Him to serve others – because service is a foundational principle and operative in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom advances through humility and service, not through pride and entitlement.

Jesus, though God, lived as a servant. This was not a temporary kind of lifestyle for Jesus; it is a picture of what God is like. When Jesus was encouraging His followers to persevere in faith and watchfulness, He told a story relating to the end of time. In it the Master comes to serve the servants who are reclining at the table (Luke 12:35-40). The picture portrays God serving His people. Can you imagine God coming and serving you a meal? (That might be worth taking some time and pondering for a while.)

Jesus’ servant character is described very clearly in Philippians 2.5-11:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Describe his attitude in your own words:
We are instructed to have the same mindset in our relationships with each other!

Describe a time when you had to serve others in a way that was humbling for you. How did you respond?

A humble, serving attitude must undergird our life of worshipful obedience to God; inner humility needs to also characterize our service to others. It is amazing, however, how easily pride and self-serving attitudes can creep into almost every area of our lives – even our efforts to serve others.

Richard Foster, in his book, *The Celebration of Discipline*, outlines some powerful contrasts between self-serving/self-righteous service and Kingdom service that is empowered by God. As you consider this list, you may find it helpful to identify any of the contrasts that are particularly troublesome for you personally. This can be a good opportunity for you to repent of your present patterns and ask for God’s help to walk in real Kingdom service. You may also find it helpful to share these struggles with others, so they can pray for you. (This act of humble sharing can do wonders to break the power of self-absorption in your life.)

- Self-righteous service comes through human effort – true service comes from a relationship with God.
- Self-righteous service is impressed with the “big deal” – true service is unable to distinguish the small from the large service.
- Self-righteous service requires external rewards – true service rests contented in hiddenness.
- Self-righteous service is highly concerned about results – true service is free of the need to calculate results.
- Self-righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve – true service is indiscriminant in ministry.
- Self-righteous service is affected by moods and whims – true service ministers simply and faithfully because there is a need.
- Self-righteous service is temporary – true service is a lifestyle.
- Self-righteous service is without sensitivity – true service listens with tenderness and patience before acting.
- Self-righteous service fractures community – true service builds community. It quietly and unpretentiously goes about caring for the needs of others. It puts no one under obligation to return service. It draws, binds, heals, builds. The result is unity in the community. 

What is an example of self-righteous service, from your own life or the life of others?

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What is an example of true service, from your own life or the life of others?

Foster further helps to illuminate what a Kingdom heart of service looks like. This list can be quite inspiring. See if God may use any of these service disciplines to inspire your growth in Christ.

- The service of hiddenness - secret service done to help others anonymously, which nobody will thank you for;
- The service of active helpfulness - assisting when there is a need, including but not limited to helping in small ways;
- The service of guarding the reputation of others - refusing to slander and speak ill of others;
- The service of being served - allowing others to serve us without feeling we must repay them;
- The service of common courtesy - being polite and taking the trouble to thank people, answer invitations, and so on;
- The service of hospitality - opening our homes to one another;
- The service of listening - showing compassion and patience;
- The service of bearing each other’s burdens - bearing one another’s hurts and sufferings; and
- The service of sharing the Word of life.

Growing a servant’s heart can begin with the golden rule, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:30). Yet, Kingdom growth goes beyond our own perspective and invites God’s into the picture. It leads to doing to/for others as God would. Everything focuses on the will of the Father. Our acts of service are done for God, and they are expressed as we believe God would express them. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24).

At the beginning of this chapter, we looked at Jesus’ challenge to the disciples to become a servant. Do you believe Jesus is saying that it’s not good to be great? Why or why not?

After looking at Jesus’ teaching and practice on servanthood, how is his view of servant leadership different from our culture’s view?

What further questions do you have about service and servanthood?
Who do you want to ask about them?

Are there any decisions or action steps that you sense God would like you to take with regard to growing as a servant? If so, what are they?
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may structure your time with your friend(s) at your mutual convenience; perhaps a weekly meeting will fit your schedule.

May God bless you as you study and consider the Bible passages; and may He give you wisdom as you discuss and apply what you are learning.

VII. HIS KINGDOM COME, MY LIFE PURPOSE

When Jesus first met his disciples, he said to them, “Come, follow me!” What does it mean to follow Jesus?

The night before he died, he said to them:
I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other. (John 15:15-17)

In what ways are these statements true of us today?

What is the fruit he appoints us to bear?

This chapter begins to explore what God is doing in our lives, in our community, in our generation. We hope you will continue to seek God and his purposes all your life, wherever you go!

1. Read the Lord’s Prayer again (we read it earlier in the chapter on prayer), Matt. 6:9-13.
   • What do you think Jesus means when he says, “Your kingdom come?”

   • In what ways is God a King?
• What do you think God’s kingdom is like?

• In what ways is God reigning as King here and now?

• In what ways is he not reigning?

2. What do the scriptures teach us about God’s kingdom? Read the following passages; what do we learn about God’s kingdom?

How does the kingdom advance? How does it stall or decline?

What indication do you see of the advance of the kingdom of God?

What do these parables teach us about God’s kingdom?

d. How are our current political structures (global, national, regional, local) related to the authority of the Kingdom of God? Read Romans 13:1, Ephesians 1:19b - 22, Matthew 28:18, Revelation 11:15, Philippians 2.10-11.

e. Read Revelation 21.3-7. What is God’s goal in the advance of his kingdom?
f. What does the Bible say about the end of the universe? About judgment? Read 2 Peter 3:3-13 and Heb. 4:13. What will happen to you when you face God at judgment?

3. After considering these principles of God’s kingdom, what do you believe are top priorities on God’s heart and mind in this generation, for the world, or for our community, or for your life?

God wants us to be very clear on our identity as his children and on our life’s purpose in advancing his kingdom. Now we’ll explore how God’s kingdom affects the direction of our lives.


5. If God is the gardener and Jesus is the vine, the fruit on our branches should just develop naturally, as long as we remain in the vine. Is there anything we can do to tend the garden of our lives, to be the “good soil” Jesus describes in Matt. 13? Read Philippians 2:12-13. God is at work in you to want to do what he wants, and to help you do it! Notice that it says “work out” - not “work on” - your salvation. There is nothing you can add to what Christ did for your salvation. Paul is talking about spiritual growth in this passage to people who are already saved. The important thing to note is that God has a part in our growth but so do we. We must make an intentional effort to grow.

a. God has made you especially for his purposes in your life: your individual gifts and abilities, your family values, your personality. You are like no one else in the world, throughout history! He is shaping you uniquely to be used for His kingdom purposes in this generation! What are your unique strengths, and how might He use them to accomplish His purposes? Write a few preliminary thoughts about yourself in each of the following categories, after talking it over with your friend:

• Spiritual Gifts (See 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:3-8)
• **Heart Passions** (What values or visions are you consistently passionate about over time?)

• **Abilities** (see [www.strengthsfinder.com](http://www.strengthsfinder.com))

• **Personality** (see [www.myersbriggs.org](http://www.myersbriggs.org) and [http://www.similar minds.com/test.html](http://www.similar minds.com/test.html))

• **Experiences** (formative life experiences, for better or for worse!)

For further study, River of Life Church periodically offers a two-session class on these five strength areas above, called SHAPE, to help you understand how God has designed you uniquely for His purposes. If you haven’t yet completed SHAPE, consider doing it together next.

b. Has God highlighted a weakness or challenge that may interfere with his kingdom advancing in your life?

c. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. God’s will is for you to be mature and complete in Jesus! What is the role of other believers in that process? Why do you think it’s so important for us to stay in close relationship with other Christians? (You may want to review the chapter above on fellowship, and the idea that we are all members of one body (I Corinthians 12), in light of God’s kingdom and purposes in your life.)
Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.” God intends for us to grow up in a family.

   a. How does each of the following scriptures describe God’s enemy and what he does?
      1 Peter 5:8-9

      Rev. 12:10

      John 10.10

      Gen. 3:1-4


   c. What does Ephesians 6.12 say about people as our enemies?

7. Consider the relational roles you already have in your life: son/daughter, sister/brother, friend, employee, supervisor, mother/father, husband/wife, etc. How might God be at work in these relationships?

8. Read John 15:26-27, 16:7-16, and 1 Cor. 2:9-12. Who is the Holy Spirit?

   What is his role in your life?

9. Read 2 Cor. 5:14-21, 1 Tim. 2:3-6, 1 Peter 3:15-16, Acts 1:8. Consider the people you love and those you regularly interact with. How well do you think they understand the good news about Jesus? How do you see God at work in their lives? Take a few moments and pray for them now.
10. Remember the BLESS prayer from Chapter 4? When you pray through this outline consistently for 3-5 people who don’t yet know Jesus, God often begins to soften their hearts toward spiritual things and toward developing a relationship with Christ. This is part of an outreach approach that we call **Prayer-Care-Share**. Once you are consistently praying that God will **BLESS** someone, you can additionally ask God to open opportunities for you to express practical and possibly supernatural **Care** for that person. In the progression of things, you can also ask God to open opportunities to **Share** the Gospel – the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

11. Finally, please consider question 3 above one more time. Read Matt. 5:13-16. What do you think are God’s top priorities in your life right now? What is He speaking to you or asking of you?

Congratulations of finishing this booklet! Please be assured, God is completely committed to shaping you as his disciple! Philippians 1.6 says, “I am confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” And he is also delighted to work through you to reach others with his love. Consider together what will most benefit your growth next as a disciple of Jesus.