
THANK YOU

It is with much appreciation that you have decided to be a small group leader. Small groups can be a vital part to your spiritual growth as well as the growth of the friends that you'll meet with. Scripture says that where two or three are gathered, there God is as well. And, The Scripture can be a place where we meet the triune God. There is excitement for your group to meet the Lord together: to hold space together in the presence of the Divine Trinity glean from the Truth of the Word and from other people.

The hope and desire is for you to not feel alone in this process of facilitating a small group. So, here are a few things to help.

1. **Small Group Leader Handbook:** This information is an attempt to resource you with materials we have found important and helpful.
2. **Training and Connecting:** In addition to this, we hope to continue to connect with you throughout the year
3. **Questions:** Please feel free to contact your DA, DC, or myself if you have questions, comments or suggestions.

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DISCIPLESHIP

“A Christianity without discipleship is a Christianity without Christ.”

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

“Non-discipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring – life lived on its highest plane.”

DALLAS WILLARD

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

In Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Image in the Hebrew is translated to a “representation.” In Old Testament times to display their rule over a specific area they were unable to be, kings would place statues or images of themselves. Often times, images of deities were created as well to represent characteristics of a god. However, “The significance of the image did not lie in the way it described or depicted the god... it lay in the fact that the statue was a place where the deity was present and manifested himself.” (Curtis) God’s intentionality and creative efforts put into humanity was not for its own gain. **GOD SETS**

ASIDE HUMANITY FOR A PURPOSE: TO BE REPRESENTATIVES OF RELATIONSHIP. Just as the images of the kings and gods were to be the “presence” of the king where he was unable to be, so is humanity called to be representative of God to the rest of Creation. Grenz says, “God’s intention and purpose for humanity is to ‘mirror for the sake of creation the nature of the Creator.’”

Now we all understand the next part of the story: where sin entered and our image-bearing capabilities became tainted. While traces of the image of God might be visible, distortions exist. Jesus came to earth as a pure representation and image of God. **HE NOT ONLY REVEALED TO US THE INVISIBLE GOD, BUT**

MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR HUMANITY TO REVEAL THE IMAGE OF GOD. By being in relationship *with* God, we can be restored and redeemed. Only through the Son can our image be transformed and molded further into God's likeness. In Ephesians 4:24, Paul calls the people "to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." In Colossians 3:9-10, he says a very similar statement, "...put off the old self with its practices...put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

Alan Hirsch defines discipleship as, "THE IRREPLACEABLE AND LIFE-LONG TASK OF BECOMING LIKE JESUS BY EMBODYING HIS MESSAGE." We are called as disciples to be made anew, shaped and molded into the image of God, to reflect the nature of God to the world around us. The triune God image is our image. Their message is our message. So, the journey of discipleship is long requiring perseverance, dependence, submission and most importantly, a relationship *with* the Creator God, Son and Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:1 reminds us "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." As the children of God, loved ones, we are called to imitate God.

God gives us direction for how we might be disciples, live like disciples and make disciples. Thielicke says, "The Christian stands, not under the dictatorship of a legalistic 'You ought,' but in the magnetic field of Christian freedom, under the empowering of the 'You may.'" God's direction and commands are seen through the lens of freedom.

Not freedom in the sense of choosing, but A FREEDOM THAT PROPELS US TO ACCEPT THESE INVITATIONS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S GRACE. Two great "invitations," as Wilhoit calls them, are

TO LOVE AND OBEY GOD.

"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it,

'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:37-40)

TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Defining characteristics of disciples of Christ are these two invitations: love and obedience for God and love for one another.

As you embark on this incredible opportunity as a small group leader, I hope you see that this leadership position provides a way for you to GROW AS A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST while you are CREATING SPACE and FACILITATING opportunities for your friends to grow as disciples of Christ. In fact, I cannot think of a better place to work out your faith than in the residence halls. What great opportunity you have to heed the Lord's invitations to love God and one another! God created us as COMMUNAL BEINGS, just as the trinity is the originator of belonging, Creator God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are in community. I echo Paul's words for all of us when he says, "Do you know how I feel right now, and will feel until Christ's life becomes visible in your lives? Like a mother in the pain of childbirth." (Gal. 4:19).

MAY WE ALL ACHE FOR CHRIST'S LIFE TO BE EVIDENT IN US.

MAY WE BE REFINED AND MADE MORE INTO THE IMAGE OF
CHRIST AS A RESULT OF
LIVING IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

MAY WE EMBODY THE TRINITARIAN IMAGE BY BEARING
FRUIT, OFFERING FORGIVENESS, GRACE, REDEMPTION,

RESTORATION AND HOPE AS WE LIVE OUR LIVES WITH OUR
NEIGHBORS IN COMMUNITY.

MAY OTHERS AROUND US EMBODY THE TRINITARIAN
MESSAGE OF COMPASSION THAT SHARPENS US AND LIKENS US MORE
TO THE IMAGE OF BELONGING.

MAY WE ALL PARTICIPATE IN THE GREAT WORK OF
REDEEMING THE WORLD
AND WELCOMING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ON EARTH.

WHY SMALL GROUPS?

As previously mentioned, we are created to be communal beings in relationship with each other and in relationship with God. Small groups can provide a MEANS FOR DISCIPLESHIP especially as we hope to become more like God, love and obey, and love others well. Small groups are not the final product nor are they the only way for us to be disciplined. They are, however, a SPACE intentionally set aside, CRAFTED by you and the Holy Spirit, so that others might be SHAPED into the likeness of Christ and respond to the two great INVITATIONS of being a disciple. SETTING THE TABLE FOR DISCIPLESHIP.

Wilhoit explains four components of spiritual formation or discipleship, and I believe that these can come about within small groups.

RECEIVING.

“highlights our need to focus on Jesus and be open to grace for spiritual formation.”

REMEMBERING.

“describes the process of learning to remember, deep in our heart, who we are and, more important(ly), whose we are.”

RESPONDING.

“reminds us that the enterprise of formational changes of character and action do not exist for our own private ends but to enable us to serve others and the world through love.”

RELATING.

“affirms that spiritual formation takes place best in and through community.”

These four components have been found to exemplify a healthy, spiritual environment that encourages living out discipleship.

So, as you envision your small group this year...

How are you including each of these components?

What practices will you make a part of your small group that help you as a community receive, remember, respond, and relate?

THE NON-NEGOTIABLES OF A SMALL GROUP

The hope would be you are creative in your approach to small groups, there are a few non-negotiables for small groups. Things that are vital to be consistent across the campus as we collectively are being shaped in the image of Christ.

SCRIPTURE

The invitation is for us as disciples is to love and obey God and love others. Scripture provides Truth, reveals the character of God, and is the redemptive and hopeful story for us all. It is through engagement with the Scriptures that we “have meaningful encounters with Jesus Christ and [our] lives are progressively transformed in Him” says Lawson Murray.

PRAYER

Wilhoit suggests that “Intercession for the needs of others is one of the most loving things a Christian can do.” We are invited and called to love others, and prayer is an incredible way to love those in our

community. It provides a healthy way for us to bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2) as we lift those burdens up to the One that restores, redeems and heals. Prayer also includes an invitation to the Holy Spirit to be a part of your small group, so you might seek guidance and direction and participate in the work the trinity is already doing and been doing since the beginning of time.

WELCOMING SPACE FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

It is through genuine Christian friendship that we are able to be sharpened (Proverbs 27:17), understand God in a fuller way, and understand ourselves and the work God is doing in our lives. Ruth Haley Burton says, "Spiritual friendship is a relationship devoted to paying attention to the invitations of God in our lives and supporting one another in making a faithful response." We cannot neglect that in order for Christian community to be fostered, hospitality is vital. Those within your group need to feel safe, welcomed, accepted, and challenged with the grace of God. This will allow for your group to be committed and dedicated to the spiritual formation of each other.

The thoughts expressed above and the pages that follow are intended to demonstrate the impactful role that you as a small group leader can have on your community and the powerful work that can be done in your own life as a result. While being a small group leader is a great responsibility to steward, we must not forget that our lives are lived *with* God. It is only by the Holy Spirit's power and work through us that we can be transformed, redeemed, restored and shaped into God's image.

"God does not demand of us the impossible, He does not demand of us that we imitate Christ in our own strength. He offers to us something infinitely better, He offers to form Christ in us by the power of his Holy Spirit. And when Christ is thus formed in us by the Holy Spirit's power, all we have to do is

to let this indwelling Christ live out his own life in us, and then we shall be like Christ without struggle and effort of our own."

- R.A. TORREY

AN INVITATION TO SMALL GROUPS

Each year Taylor provides small groups on wings and floors around campus – and each year these small groups have sought to provide a space for spiritual growth and relational connection. Many of you have grown through their experience in a small group in years past. We feel the nature and approach to these small groups at Taylor throughout the years have been good our desire this coming school year is to make them better and even more effective in helping cultivate your journey with Christ together with others.

There is a big difference between learning *about* God and the Word and actually engaging in a life *with* God. While learning about God and engaging in prayer, Scripture reading and memorization, discussion and teaching are important, it is not entirely what we're after. **We desire for students to have encounters with God, learning what it means to cultivate spaces for an ever-growing intimacy and interaction with Christ.** We desire to see all students grow to love God with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength and believe more than ever that can happen in significant ways through small groups.

While being involved in a small group has always been encouraged, it is not required. This posture of "opt-in-not require" continues, but we are inviting students to a deeper level of commitment. We have high hopes for what this year can look like, but its success depends upon the hunger and commitment level of those involved. The last thing we want to do is become legalistic or overwhelm you with more responsibilities, but we do know that what you put into something is what you get out of it. With small groups, we are not requiring perfect attendance or

massive amounts of weekly homework. Instead, what we are asking is a commitment of your presence in the lives of those in a small group more than just your attendance at a small group meeting.

THE INVITATION...

Invitations leave room for people to make choices. As a host taking on this posture will allow for people to choose in. If you do not want to join a small group this year, that is okay. In fact, we would rather you say, “No,” than to say, “Yes,” and be partially committed. We are looking for students who want to be present at a small group as a way to participate in spiritual growth on their floor or wing. We’re looking for students with a deep hunger, and desire to grow with others this year. Limiting involvement in activities can allow for you to be fully present in the things you have said, “yes” to for this semester and year. *Maybe the best way you could grow this year is not by being involved in a large amount of activities and events (good as they may be), but by being involved in fewer activities where you are more committed and fully present.* We realize this may mean a small number of people involved in small groups this year – but we’re okay with that because we believe the potential and opportunity is great for you to have a significant, indelible encounter with God and relationships with others.

THE PROCESS FOR FORMING A SMALL GROUP

HOW DO I LEAD A SMALL GROUP?

Leading a small group begins with who you are and centers on three personal commitments:

- Trinity: why are we meeting? Out of the belonging of the trinity, we gather together.

- **Timing:** when are you meeting? When does it begin and when does it conclude? (Have a way for people to join, as well as an exodus process from in the group).
- **Thematic:** Pick a topic that everyone can come around. Scripture passages you will study, topics, people's lives, and//or a theme.

Out of these three areas will allow for an outpouring of an invitation for other people to grow in communal spaces of small groups. Being a small group leader also requires the understanding that, to be in authority you must also be under authority. That means regularly meeting with your DA to provide accountability for your group.

FORMING THE SMALL GROUP:

Forming a small group begins with desire – a desire to grow in one's relationship to the triune God and other people. A small group consists of five to seven people who desire to:

1. Desire to be in the group.
2. Are committed to showing up.
3. Understand the goals for the group.

While these three matters are basic, they are generally the first areas in which tensions arise. If everyone is on board with these three areas then there is a healthy foundation created for growth the take place.

Small groups are not an organization. Rather they are an organism, a living thing. That is why small groups are grown, no built. Think about starting points and endings for your small group. This will allow for people to enter into the groups, as well as exit if they have found that the time frame of their commitment needs to change. This does not mean your small group cannot meet all year, but it does mean that it allows people the opportunity to choose in throughout the rhythm of the academic year.

EXPECTATIONS OF SMALL GROUP MEMBERS:

Setting up expectations at the beginning of your small group meeting together is very important as this allows for each person to know what they are committing to right up front.

Mutual Agreement:

- Time
- Purpose
- Location
- Participation
- Confidentiality (unless someone is at risk to self or another person)

Every member of a small group makes a significant contribution to it. The following article, reproduced from the Australian ministry magazine, "The Briefing" (Issue 206, August 21, 1998), makes a powerful observation concerning how to be a small group member.

How to be a Small Group Member

1. THE POWER OF PRESENCE

This is the simplest and most obvious, but the most powerful element in meeting with people. Being present each week without fail is a powerful encouragement to the other members of the group. In making a solid commitment to group time, to be missed only in times of emergency, you send a very clear message to the other members: "Being with you matters very much to me. Unless something of emergency status comes up, you can count on me. This is a top priority for me."

Conversely, inconsistent attendance sends a somewhat less encouraging message: "I don't mind coming, but it's not that important. If I feel a bit tired or something else crops up, don't expect me. Being with you isn't a very high priority to me."

2. THE POWER OF PREPARATION

Preparing for a small group time is another powerful way to love the members of a group. Of course, having read the passage, or done the homework, greatly increases the benefit you yourself receive from the discussion. More importantly, however, it equips you to encourage others by what you say.

Rather than throwing in whatever occurs to you at the time, you have actually thought about the Bible passage and the issues that it raises.

3. THE POWER OF PRAYER

Paul's friend and fellow worker, Epaphras, would have made an ideal small group member. According to Paul, he was always "wrestling in prayer" for the Colossians, that they might "stand firm in the will of God." Paul was able to vouch that in doing so, Epaphras was "working hard for you" (Colossians 4:12-13).

Praying for others is hard, yet real work. It is one of the most loving things we can do for our fellow group members, not only because through our prayers that God does work in people's lives, but because it is such a quiet, inconspicuous form of care. Bringing a coffee to someone, by comparison, is much more satisfying — you see something very tangible for your efforts, and you have a pleasure of delivering it to the person and receiving their warm expression of thanks.

Prayer has none of those rewards. You do it for one reason only: that you care for the person and you want the best for them in Christ.

4. THE POWER OF LOVE

Whatever you say or do in the group; do it with the awareness of others. Look for how you can support one another. Look for ways to care for the members of your group. Belonging to a small group can be a very rewarding experience, because it is an opportunity to lay down your life for the sake of another person.

Sample Getting to Know Each Other Open-Ended Questions:

1. What is the next place on your travel bucket list, and why?
2. What is your favorite way to spend a free day?
3. Who are the people you grew up with?
4. What are five of your favorite hobbies?
5. What are some of your favorite foods?
6. What are a few words that describe how you think about Christ in this season of your life?
7. What type of music do you listen to? Who are some of your favorite artists?

8. What are a few Scripture passages you often refer back to when you are talking with a friend?
9. What is your favorite...
 - Color?
 - DC meal?
 - Holiday?
 - Part of nature?
 - Season?
 - Movie?
 - Time of day?
 - Destination?
 - Book?
10. What do you first notice when meeting someone?
11. What are three words you'd use to describe yourself?
12. What is your dream job?

SHARING YOUR STORIES OF FAITH

A story of faith at times is referred to as a “testimony.” This is an account of a Biblically and Spirit empowered proclamation of the Gospel. This is also a way to get to know another person.

Here are important things to take note of as you are sharing stories:

DO:

- Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and guidance (James 1:5,6).
- Open with an engaging statement or question.
- Invite people into the story by highlighting personal situations that are important to the story.
- Give enough detail to pique interest, but not so much that it becomes boring or drawn out.
- Make sure you have closure to your story.
- A sample three point outline:
 1. Life before knowing the triune God.
 2. Coming to know the triune God.
 3. Life after coming to know the triune God.
 - a. Changes that have been made.
 - b. What God means to you now.

DO NOT:

- Beat around the bush, “how bad you used to be” or lean on the side of being too wordy.
- Speak in glittering generalities.
- Speak in derogatory ways about denominations.
- Make critical, sarcastic or insulting remarks about other individuals, groups or churches.
- Try to impress other people with your stories, this is a time to bring honor to God.

REMEMBER TO:

- Prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit for help.
- Speak with heartfelt enthusiasm.
- Share in a natural, relaxed tone of voice.
- Rely on the fact that Christians are “born of the Spirit,” not through cleverness.
- Keep from preaching at people.
- Smile!

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

THE MATERIALS IN THE “SCRIPTURE SECTION” HAVE BEEN PROVIDED BY DR. PHIL COLLINS AND TAYLOR UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT & STUDYING THE BIBLE

Scripture engagement is not the same thing as studying the Bible. It is a *complement* to deep study of the Scriptures. In the process of promoting Scripture engagement, the last thing I want to do is to detract from the importance of studying the Scriptures. Let me be very clear here, **studying the Scriptures is absolutely essential to the Christian life.** 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us that we are to come to the Bible as a “worker,” one “who correctly handles the word of truth.” Teachers of the Scriptures are a gift to us from God (1 Corinthians 12:28). Jesus came as The Teacher (John 13:13). The Apostle Paul was a scholar (Acts 22:3). The inductive study of the Bible, the process of observing, interpreting, and applying the Bible, is how we understand what the Bible means. We must know what the Bible means if we are to have an accurate understanding of God as we meet with together.

Though I am deeply committed to Bible study (I teach a class on the Inductive Study of the Bible at the University level), just studying the Bible is not enough. It is possible to study the Bible so that it becomes a mere academic exercise, studying in a way that ends up not impacting spiritual growth. You have probably met people who have head knowledge of a topic without heart or life change, a kind of empty scholasticism.

On the other hand, the goal of Scripture engagement is not to be overly subjective with the Bible, thus moving away from the original meaning of the passage. A basic tenet of Bible study is that the passage can't mean something totally different to the modern reader than it did to the original writer. The sole question can never be, “What does the passage mean to me?” It is possible to engage/reflect on what isn't true, on what the passage doesn't mean. Doing this is irresponsible subjectivism. We have all seen people base their actions on what they think is Biblical, but in fact is not what the Bible is saying.

Scripture engagement calls us to both analyze and apply the Bible, having knowledge of a text and a personal insight about

that text. Scripture engagement encourages us to listen with our minds and with our hearts. It is a process of *Discovery Learning* (see educational psychologist Jerome Brunner for this idea). The ideal process in my mind is to come to the Bible working hard to study what it means, then to reflect, in the power of the Holy Spirit, on the meaning of the passage for your own life and community. Reflection will bring up more questions about the meaning of the text and drive the learner back to study, which will then lead to the need for more reflection. A cycle of study-reflection-study-reflection, which leads to a deepened relationship with God and a changed life, is the most powerful process for developing spiritually.

But does the reflective process in Scripture engagement really need to be taught? Few would disagree with the need to teach people how to study the Bible; learning the principles of Bible interpretation (hermeneutics), understanding the historical and cultural settings of the Bible, and learning the meanings of words in the original Biblical languages are all critical in understanding the meaning of the Bible. But aren't people naturally reflective? Once they understand what the Bible says intellectually, won't they act on that understanding? The reality is, for the majority of us, it just doesn't work that way. Understanding isn't equal to spiritual growth. In some ways, understanding the Bible intellectually is the easier of the two processes. It is the reflection process, the place where we are mostly likely to meet God and be changed by God, that we especially need to learn.

Why is reflecting on the Scriptures often so difficult? One reason is that people have a natural tendency to avoid anything that will cause them to change. Meeting and knowing God is always a life changing process and is always for our good, but it involves a death to ourselves which can be intimidating (Matthew 16:24). Studying the Bible for information can be done in the spirit of trying to master the text so that we are the ones who control the Bible, instead of putting ourselves under the authority of God's Word (think of the Pharisees). Meeting with God will change our lives. Being willing to admit that we need change

(Mark 2:17) is a critical first step in Scripture engagement. Our sinful/prideful natures fight against yielding to God's renewing work in our lives.

Scripture engagement is also difficult because reflecting on Scripture is a "whole person" process. To read the Bible spiritually we are engaging our intellect and our emotions. As we reflect on a passage we should contemplate personal and community life changes. Using our intellect, our emotions/attitudes, and our behaviors/actions together in the presence of the Holy Spirit is a powerful way to grow spiritually. It engages the whole person by exposing all areas of our lives to God's Word. This is much more difficult than just using one corner of our brains to skim the surface of a Bible passage, preventing it from penetrating our lives.

In the same way we learn more about studying the Bible from good teachers and scholars, most of us have more to learn about reflecting on the Bible for spiritual growth. There are techniques and practices that the church has learned over the years that can benefit each of us. Think what it is like to play soccer (football, for much of the world). The basics of soccer are fairly simple: "kick the ball in the goal." Children can even play the game, but with practice and good coaching, kids can grow up to be brilliant World Cup level athletes, masters of the game. It is the same with engaging Scriptures. You probably already engage the Bible at some level. But perhaps we can admit that with practice and coaching we will grow in the life-changing skills of Scripture engagement. The prayer of those of us at Bible Gateway and the Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement is that we can provide you with meaningful tools to connect you with good "coaches" who train you in Scripture engagement skills, leading you into a deeper life of love and obedience to God.

<http://tucse.taylor.edu/>

NOT THIS WAY

Again, though any listening and reading of Scripture is better than none at all, some ways that people come to the Bible end up restricting their spiritual growth. Many people started listening to or reading the Bible for a weak reason and then over time adjusted their motivation. Below are a few ways NOT to approach the Bible. This list isn't exhaustive, but perhaps it can serve as a catalyst for you to explore your own motivation for coming to the Bible.

Guilt

Many people have come to the conclusion that “good Christians read the Bible.” They want God to like them, so they read the Bible out of trying to please God, out of a kind of guilt. This approach can see God as either punitive (“if I don't read, God will be mad at me”) or almost like a “lucky charm” (“if I read, God will have to reward me”). At its core Scripture engagement is a relational process. We come to a loving God through the Scriptures to know God, to understand what is true, and to be changed into the person we were created us to be. Approaching anybody out of a sense of trying to win them over, from guilt, really limits the depth that relationship can reach. The same is true of approaching God. Guilt is a poor motivator. The results just don't tend to last or give life. I'm not saying there is no guilt in the world; we are sinners that need God's forgiveness. I'm just saying that if we approach the Bible only out of guilt, we will not tend to be prepared to fully engage the God who loves us so much that he sent his Son to die for us. We aren't doing God a favor by spending time in the Bible. God has done us a favor by giving us the Bible as the gracious means of knowing the Divine Trinity and able to know one another.

Devotional Thought

Another way that people approach the Bible is for a “devotional thought.” Scriptures are approached for some quick, small, happy thought that will be an encouragement for the day,

maybe tied to a nice moral story. But the Bible never presents itself as something warm and fuzzy. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “the word of God is alive 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.” Treating God’s Word like a warm and cuddly toy, when it is really a double-edged sword (or a fire and a hammer as in Jeremiah 23:29), is condescending.

Content/Information

The Bible is full of content. It is a window into a number of ancient worlds and a window into the spiritual world. While all of the information in the Bible is fascinating, facts are not relationship. The person who knows the most Bible facts is not necessarily the person who knows God the most. If we elevate facts above meeting God, then we have lost the most important facet of the Bible. If we read primarily to learn content, it can lead to treating the Bible like an object for us to control or as a problem to be solved. Knowing the content of the Bible is critically important because through those concrete real-life realities of God known. But don’t come to the Bible just to be able to pass a Bible trivia exam; come to the Bible ready to meet your Creator. We should read the Bible out of relationship, out of love for God, not just to learn facts.

Selfishness

Have you ever overheard a conversation that you thought was about you but really turned out to be about someone else? When that occurs it can be the source of some deep misunderstandings. It is possible to come to the Bible thinking it is our story and read it just to understand ourselves. Not every word in the Bible is a direct instruction of how to live. In reality, the Bible is God’s story. Yes, we learn a great deal about ourselves in the Bible, but to think that every word is all about us can lead to our misunderstanding the message of the Scriptures. The Bible is a sweeping story about God. It is only as we grow in our understanding of God, his character, and his plan that

we'll really start to understand our place in his story. Perhaps the best question you can ask after reading a passage of Scripture is, "What does this tell me about God?"

Rules

Many people think that the Bible is primarily a book of rules, as if God wanted to control all our actions by giving us a lot of directions about what not to do. The people who think this way tend to avoid the Bible altogether – who would read a book of rules on their own? The truth is that the Bible is about God and his loving actions of redeeming us and making us into his people. To view the Bible as a bunch of rules is similar to viewing marriage vows as a list of rules. Marriage vows are about love and promises made between two people to enhance and protect their love. The Bible is about love also, and to view it as a set of rules is to miss the whole point and to ruin the loving relationship it is designed to protect.

WHAT IS SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT?

1) What is Scripture Engagement?

a) Definitions:

- i) Scripture "engagement is the process whereby people are connected with the Bible such that they have meaningful encounters with Jesus Christ and their lives are progressively transformed in Him." Lawson Murray
- ii) "Lives transformed through God's Word"

b) Theological Assumption

- i) "It is the Holy Spirit who enables the text to speak for itself; when the text speaks it is the voice of God that is heard; and it is Jesus Christ who through the text makes a unique claim upon the readers and hearers"
- ii) God's Word is an extension of God – when we engage with the Word we engage with God
- iii) God acts through His Word by His Spirit

- c) Phrases that may communicate
 - i) Meditating
 - ii) Using scripture to feed your soul (“eating” the scripture)
 - iii) Through interaction with the written word, people encounter the Living Word Jesus Christ.
 - iv) Pondering the meaning of the bible
 - v) It is sought both doctrinal truth and an experience of the presence and power of Jesus in His Word
 - vi) Marinating, ruminating, mulling vii) Formative reading through relations viii) Transformative Engagement
 - vii) Holy attention
- 2) Research
 - a) Reveal – 250,000 surveys, 1,000 churches – one of two major findings
 - i) “The Bible is the most powerful catalyst for spiritual growth. The Bible’s power to advance spiritual growth is unrivalled by anything else we’ve discovered.”
 - b) Souls in Transition – Christian Smith
 - i) In an interview in Christianity Today – Establishing during the teenage years the practice of praying and reading Scripture is a key factor in maintaining a high faith commitment into emerging adulthood
 - c) Arnie Cole – Back to the Bible Center
 - i) There is a significant difference in the moral behavior of someone who consistently engages (reads or listens to) the Bible four or more times a week compared to someone who doesn’t”
 - d) Other research shows
 - i) minimal and declining SE (especially for younger people – not surprising)
 - ii) people find the Bible difficult (though they consider it interesting and true)

iii) people say that they don't read the bible primarily because they're too busy.

3) Compliment

- a) This is not the same as inductive study of the bible – it compliments deep study of scripture
- b) It is possible to study without engaging
 - i) You've probably met some people like this – head knowledge without heart and life change
 - ii) Perhaps we've all experienced this
- c) It is also possible to engage on what isn't true, so we must study to know what is true
 - i) People believe and act on some strange things that just are not really what the Bible is saying
- d) In the same way that we need to be taught how to study the bible – bible interpretation with the rules of hermeneutics – we need to learn how to engage with the scriptures with personal depth and life change – so that we become doers of the Word
- e) We think we know how to do this naturally, but do we?
 - i) People “naturally” know how to run or can quickly play the game of soccer
 - ii) But with solid coaching they can become excellent runners or soccer players – we all tend to have room to learn.

SELECTED PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE

1) Psalm 1

- a) 1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. 4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

2) Josh 1:6-9

- a) 6 Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

3) 2 Timothy 3:14-17

- a) 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

4) Deuteronomy 6:4-9

- a) 4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with

all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

5) James 1:22-25

- a) 22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

6) Luke 8: 15

- a) 15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

7) Matthew 4:4

- a) 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

8) Colossians 3:16-17

- a) 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

9) Hebrews 4:12-13

- a) 12 For 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. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

10) 1 Peter 1:24-25

- a) 24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,
25 but the word of the Lord stands forever."

11) Luke 24:44-47

- a) ⁴⁴He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

12) Psalm 119:137-144 (just a sample of a few of the verses in 119)

- a) 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.
b) 137 Righteous are you, O Lord, and your laws are right.
138 The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy. 139 My zeal wears me out, for my enemies ignore your words.
140 Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them. 141 Though I am lowly and despised, I do not forget your precepts. 142 Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true.
143 Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your commands are my delight.
144 Your statutes are forever right; give me understanding that I may live.

13) Isaiah 55:11

- a) 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

14) Jeremiah 15:16

- a) 16 When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.

- b) Also Ezek. 3:1-3 and Rev. 10:9-11 (eating God's words – turns sour in Rev. 10) 15) Others:
- a) Deuteronomy 17:18-20 – the King of Israel is to make a hand copy of the bible and read it all the days of his life
- b) Jeremiah 36:1-17 – Jeremiah and Baruch
- c) Nehemiah 8 – Ezra Reads the Book of the Law to the Israelites
- d) Luke 24:13-32 – Road to Emmaus
- e) Acts 8:26-40 – Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

IMAGES OF THE BIBLE

- 5) The seed of which we are born again
 - a) 1 Peter 1:23 - For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.
 - b) James 1:21 - Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.
- 6) The light by which we are directed
 - a) Ps 119:105 - Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.
- 7) The food on which we feed
 - a) Heb 5:12-14 - 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.
- 8) The foundation upon which we are built
 - a) Eph 2:20-21 - built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.
- 9) Fire and a hammer

- a) Jeremiah 23:29 - "Is not my word like fire," declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

10) Sword

- a) Eph 6:17 - Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
- b) Heb 4:12-13 - For 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.

BIBLE AS STORY

- 1. Introduction
 - a. By saying the Bible is Story we are not saying it is make-believe - It is a story because it has plot, characters and authors
- 2. Benefits of Reading the Bible as Story - Why Story?
 - a. Stories Describe our World
 - i. Some say that stories are the best way of talking about the way the world actually is. Stories are the chief way human beings make sense of their experience.
 - ii. The Bible has a different story to tell about the world – a much larger story
 - iii. Every culture has an overriding narrative that shapes its collective consciousness
 - b. Stories are how we know each other
 - i. We tell stories about ourselves to get to know each other
 - ii. The only proper answer to "Tell me about yourself" is to tell a story or a series of stories – stories are relational

- iii. Stories draw us into a relationship
 - iv. The bible is God revealing to us Truth – it isn't just informational – the goal is to encounter a person in the pages of the Bible. The Bible is revelatory of who God is.
 - v. The bible does not simply tell us of the presence of God – it shows us the active presence of God deeply and permanently embedded in all the realities of human life
 - c. Stories invite us to participate
 - i. Good stories leave much to the imagination so we can find ourselves in them
 - ii. God is inviting us to meet and share stories
 - iii. Stories draw us into emotional involvement with them and work on our passions.
 - d. Stories have layers of meaning
 - i. Stories are always embedded in culture – but stories transcend context better than any other literary form
 - ii. As study culture and context, stories take on richer meaning
 - e. There is a subversive nature to storytelling
 - i. Sometimes head on attack will fail, when a story will be very good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews

3. The Big Story

- a. Seeing the bible as one overarching narrative helps to make all of it make sense
 - i. Unified whole – connect each individual part – a proverb, song, poem, prophecy or parable – to the whole As the story advances,

each scene sheds new light on the earlier parts of the story (progressive revelation) ii. Bible begins with God creating the heavens and earth (Gen. 1:1) and ends with the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1)

- b. The Story is what puts the Bible together
- c. Tells the biblical story of redemption as a unified, coherent narrative of God's ongoing work within his kingdom – God's rule in the world
 - i. A unified and progressively unfolding story of God's action in history for the salvation of the whole world
 - ii. Not a jumble of history, poetry, lessons in morality and theology, comforting promises, guiding principles and commands – not a mosaic of little bits
- d. Every part of the Bible must be understood in the context of the one story line
- e. The story of redemption has at its center the Immanuel principle – life with God
 - i. The bible is all about human life “with God”
 - ii. The unity of the Bible is discovered in the development of life with God as a reality on earth, centered in the person of Jesus
 - iii. Every story in the bible, no matter its twists and turns, whether the human characters are trustworthy or untrustworthy, whether the story is sad or happy, is built on the clarion call to relationship, “I am with you – will you be with me?”
- f. Some don't need more information – they need a better way through the information.

4. The Basics of the Drama

- a. Those who think the bible should be read as a story, often also portray it as a drama.
- b. Bible as Drama with 6 acts
 - i. **Act One:** God Creates His Kingdom
 - ii. **Act Two:** Rebellion in God's Kingdom
 - iii. **Act Three:** Promise of Restoration of Kingdom: Israel's Mission
 - iv. **Act Four:** Kingdom Restored: Jesus' Mission
 - v. **Act Five:** Kingdom Tasted and Displayed: Church's Mission
 - 1. *Scene 1: Church Begins Its Mission to the Nations*
 - 2. *Scene 2: Our Place in the Story: Church Continues Its Mission to the Nations*
 - vi. **Act Six:** Consummation of God's Kingdom

EUGENE PETERSON: DISCIPLINE OF SPIRITUAL READING from
Eat This Book | Christianity Today

Years ago I owned a dog that had a fondness for large bones. Fortunately for him we lived in the forested foothills of Montana. In his forest rambles he often came across a carcass of a white-tailed deer that had been brought down by the coyotes. Later he would show up on our stone, lakeside patio carrying or dragging his trophy, usually a shank or a rib; he was a small dog and the bone was often nearly as large as he was.

Anyone who has owned a dog knows the routine: he would prance and gambol playfully before us with his prize, wagging his tail, proud of his find, courting our approval. And of course, we approved: we lavished praise, telling him what a good dog he was. But after a while, sated with our applause, he would drag the bone off twenty yards or so to a more private place, usually the shade of a large moss-covered boulder, and

go to work on the bone. The social aspects of the bone were behind him; now the pleasure became solitary. He gnawed the bone, turned it over and around, licked it, worried it. Sometimes we could hear a low rumble or growl, what in a cat would be a purr. He was obviously enjoying himself and in no hurry. After a leisurely couple of hours he would bury it and return the next day to take it up again. An average bone lasted about a week.

I always took delight in my dog's delight, his playful seriousness, his childlike spontaneities now totally absorbed in "the one thing needful." But imagine my further delight in coming upon a phrase one day while reading Isaiah in which I found the poet-prophet observing something similar to what I enjoyed so much in my dog, except that his animal was a lion instead of a dog: "As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey ... " (Isa. 31:4). "Growls" is the word that caught my attention and brought me that little "pop" of delight. What my dog did over his precious bone, making those low throaty rumbles of pleasure as he gnawed, enjoyed, and savored his prize, Isaiah's lion did to his prey. The nugget of my delight was noticing the Hebrew word here translated as "growl" (*hagah*) but usually translated as "meditate," as in the Psalm 1 phrase describing the blessed man or woman whose "delight is in the law of the LORD," on which "he meditates day and night" (v. 2). Or in Psalm 63: "When I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night" (v. 6). But Isaiah uses this word to refer to a lion growling over his prey the way my dog worried a bone.

Hagah is a word that our Hebrew ancestors used frequently for reading the kind of writing that deals with our souls. But "meditate" is far too tame a word for what is being signified. "Meditate" seems more suited to what I do in a quiet chapel on my knees with a candle burning on the altar. Or to what my wife does while sitting in a rose garden with the Bible open in her lap. But when Isaiah's lion and my dog meditated they chewed and swallowed, using teeth and tongue, stomach and intestines: Isaiah's lion meditating his goat (if that's what it was); my dog meditating his bone.

There is a certain kind of writing that invites this kind of reading, soft purrs and low growls as we taste and savor,

anticipate and take in the sweet and spicy, mouth-watering and soul-energizing morsel words — "O taste and see that the LORD is good!" (Ps. 34:8). Isaiah uses the same word (*hagah*) a few pages later for the cooing of a dove (38:14). One careful reader of this text caught the spirit of the word when he said that *hagah* means that a person "is lost in his religion," which is exactly what my dog was in his bone. Baron Friedrich von Hugel compared this way of reading to "letting a very slowly dissolving lozenge melt imperceptibly in your mouth."

I am interested in cultivating this kind of reading, the only kind of reading that is congruent with what is written in our Holy Scriptures, but also with all writing that is intended to change our lives and not just stuff some information into the cells of our brain. All serious and good writing anticipates precisely this kind of reading—ruminative and leisurely, a dalliance with words in contrast to wolfing down information. But our canonical writers who wrestled God's revelation into Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek sentences—Moses and Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, Mark and Paul, Luke and John, Matthew and David, along with their numerous brothers and sisters, named and unnamed across the centuries — absolutely require it. They make up a school of writers employed by the Holy Spirit to give us our Holy Scriptures and keep us in touch with and responsive to reality, whether visible or invisible: God-reality, God-presence. They are all distinguished by a deep trust in the "power of words" (Coleridge's phrase) to bring us into the presence of God and to change our lives.

By keeping company with the writers of Holy Scripture we are schooled in a practice of reading and writing that is infused with an enormous respect — more than respect, awed reverence — for the revelatory and transformative power of words. The opening page of the Christian text for living, the Bible, tells us that the entire cosmos and every living creature in it are brought into being by words. St. John selects the term "Word" to account, first and last, for what is most characteristic about Jesus, the person at the revealed and revealing center of the Christian story. Language, spoken and written, is the primary means forgetting us in on what is, on what God is and is doing.

But it is language of a certain stripe, not words external to our lives, the sort used in grocery lists, computer manuals, French grammars, and basketball rulebooks. These are words intended, whether confrontationally or obliquely, to get inside us, to deal with our souls, to form a life that is congruent with the world that God has created, the salvation that he has enacted, and the community that he has gathered. Such writing anticipates and counts on a certain kind of reading, a dog-with-a-bone kind of reading.

Writers of other faith traditions and writers who hold to none — atheists, agnostics, secularists — also, of course, have access to this school and benefit enormously from its training in the holiness of words. But, the adjective "spiritual" does serve to identify the way the writers who collectively scribed the Bible used language to form "the mind of Christ" in their readers. The adjective continues to be useful in identifying the post-biblical men and women who continue to write journalism and commentary, studies and reflections, stories and poems for us as we continue to submit our imaginations to the shaping syntax and diction of our biblical masters. But Holy Scripture is the source document, the authoritative font, the work of the Spirit that is definitive in all true spirituality.

What I mean to insist upon is that spiritual writing—*Spirit-sourced* writing — requires spiritual reading, a reading that honors words as holy, words as a basic means of forming an intricate web of relationships between God and the human, between all things visible and invisible.

There is only one way of reading that is congruent with our Holy Scriptures, writing that trusts in the power of words to penetrate our lives and create truth and beauty and goodness, writing that requires a reader who, in the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, "does not always remain bent over his pages; he often leans back and closes his eyes over a line he has been reading again, and its meaning spreads through his blood." This is the kind of reading named by our ancestors as *lectio divina*, often translated "spiritual reading," reading that enters our souls as food enters our stomachs, spreads through our blood, and becomes holiness and love and wisdom.

GETTING STARTED

How you choose to approach someone is often very important to the outcome of your meeting. Your attitude as you go in for a job interview, meet potential in-laws, interact with a teacher, or even talk with a friend, make a difference in the quality of experience you have.

How do you tend to approach the Bible when hearing it or reading it for yourself? Take a minute and consider what your attitude tends to be and what you actually do. When you're done, ask yourself if your attitude and process is helping or hurting your Scripture experience.

Now that you've considered your current method, how do you think we should approach the Bible? The foundational premise of Scripture engagement is that when you engage the Bible, you engage God. Spiritual reading of the Bible is a relational process; we primarily read to meet and know God. We should approach the Bible the same way that we would want to approach God. Let me explain what I mean.

If you had the chance to be in the physical presence of Jesus (of course we are in God's presence all of the time, but play along with me), would you choose to go? It would probably be terrifying (think of all the times in the Bible where the words "fear not" are needed to calm the hearts of people who have a direct experience with God), but let's say you decide to meet Jesus. How would you want to approach him? How would you prepare to meet God? Lots of thoughts run through my mind, but here are a few of them:

First, I think it would be a time of high anticipation and expectation. It would not be "just another meeting!" I can't picture any sense of indifference or boredom in my attitude. I am sure I would feel very unworthy and fearful. Thinking about meeting our Holy and good God brings out a sense of my own

sinfulness. I think my reaction would be to confess my sins and ask for forgiveness before we met. I imagine I would come into God's presence with gratitude and joy at the chance to meet with God and Savior. Surely my focus would be on God alone. I also imagine I would be quick to listen to whatever God would say; I would come open and ready to pay attention to every detail and nuance. I don't picture myself being distracted or dominating the conversation.

When we come to God's inspired Word, in a very literal way we are coming to God. It is an amazing Biblical truth that we have access to God through Jesus (and his sacrifice) by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18, 3:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; Rom. 5:1-2). The more we prepare our hearts and minds for meeting God in his Word, just as if we were coming into the physical presence of Jesus, the more life-changing and powerful our experiences with the Scriptures will be. Coming with expectation, anticipation, confession, worship, and focused attention will directly impact our experience. No matter which Scripture engagement practices we use, how we approach the Bible will determine the impact of our time in God's Word.

I'm not saying every time you engage the Bible it will feel like a miraculous experience (at least that is not my personal experience). The disciples don't appear to have been overwhelmed by Jesus every moment they were with him either. However, I do know that if I come to the Bible without any personal investment or preparation, distracted and just "doing my time," my time with the Bible tends to have almost no impact. On the other hand, when I prepare myself to read the Bible, remembering that to engage Scriptures is to engage God, I often have a significant experience. When you come to the Bible, prepare your mind and heart, and know that God uses his Word, no matter whether it feels miraculous to you or not (Isaiah 55:11).

Here are some simple suggestions for preparing yourself to meet God as you engage with the Scriptures:

- Pick a time: Set aside a specific amount of time in your weekly calendar to engage the Bible. Just like in any relationship, you have to spend time with God. This is probably the biggest downfall for more people than anything else in the whole process of Scripture engagement: we just don't make the time. As the saying goes, "We don't plan to fail, we fail to plan." Check your motivation here. Make time because of the joy that comes when you actually get to come close to God (Psalm 84:2,10). Setting up time to meet with God is not a "should and ought," it is a "I get too!"
- Pick a good time: Make your time with the Bible a "prime time" of your day – not when you are the most exhausted or distracted. God calls us to give our "first fruits," our best, not our leftovers.
- Pick a place: Go wherever you naturally go when you want to focus on something important. For some this will be a quiet place, for others a busy place. Some like to have music playing. Going into a specific room for your reading and praying is a practice that Jesus encouraged (Matthew 6:5-6). You know yourself, do what works.
- Get rid of distractions: Get rid of as many things as you can that usually distract you. Be honest here, what is likely to take your mind away from engaging the Bible? Our world seems to be designed to distract us from focusing on almost anything, but with diligent effort, you will grow in your attention to the Bible.
- Quiet your heart: Take the first minute or two of your time with the Bible and just think about what you're going to do. You are coming to God's Word to meet.
- Pray: Briefly ask God to teach you, to meet you, and to bless your time in his Word. Ask for the Holy Spirit to illuminate (1 Corinthians 2:6-16) the passage for you. Commit to God that, with his strength, you will obey what you read.
- Start: Check out the many different Scripture engagement practices described on this website. Pick one and get going. It is better to start small and continue the practice than to start with huge goals, get

disappointed, and stop. Something is better than nothing!

- Keep moving: If you get distracted or tired, don't worry or criticize yourself. Guilt won't keep you motivated very long. Simply bring your mind back to the passage and start reading again.

* If you are interested in reading more about preparing yourself to hear God's Word, there are two books that I have found particularly helpful: *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. and *The Fire of the Word: Meeting God on Holy Ground*, by Chris Webb.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

THE MATERIALS IN THIS SECTION HAVE BEEN PROVIDED BY DR. PHIL
COLLINS AND TAYLOR UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR SCRIPTURE
ENGAGEMENT

HAND-COPYING SCRIPTURE

Hand-copying Scripture is simply writing out word-for-word passages of Scripture by hand. Why would anybody do this

when most people own many copies of the Bible and can easily access it digitally? The purpose of Hand-copying Scripture is not to have another copy of the Bible. Remember, the goal of Scripture engagement is to meet God in his Word. Writing the Bible out by hand offers us the unique opportunity to participate in an activity that forces us to slow down the process of reading and encourages a more reflective engagement with God's Word. It gives us more time to think about what is written and to dwell on the meaning and implications of a passage. Hand-copying is a focusing activity. Too often we read quickly and forget what we've read within a few minutes. Hand-copying helps combat quick, surface level reading.

Copying is also an aid to memory. Most people would agree that writing information down helps the mind to recall that information later. Hand-copying Scripture can be a great help when memorizing passages of the Bible.

Hand-copying the Bible also helps us to perceive details in a passage that might have been overlooked. As our hands write down words and phrases multiple times (often a sign of emphasis in the Bible) attention will be drawn to those words and phrases as being important, which helps us comprehend the passage.

It might be inspiring to remember that for 1000s of years God's people had scribes whose job it was to pass on God's Word by making written copies (we owe this long line of people a great spiritual debt). In the Old Testament, scribes such as Ezra were revered for their knowledge of Scripture developed through copying the Scripture. Throughout church history, monks have been the people who have transcribed the Bible, devoting their lives to studying and living out God's Word. As we hand copy the Bible we mirror the practices of these scribes and monks and can gain the same spiritual benefits that others have gained.

There is an interesting passage in the Bible that commands the kings of Israel to personally make their own hand copy of the Bible (a king could have easily had someone else make him a copy). In Deuteronomy 17:18-20 God commands that:

¹⁸ When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. ¹⁹ It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees ²⁰ and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.

God knew that the people of Israel would one day demand for themselves a king. Therefore, far in advance, he planned a spiritual discipline that would be required of these kings to keep them devoted to God, his Word, and his people. God mandated that each king was to make his own handwritten copy of the law, to keep it with him at all times, and to read it all of his life. The king was to do this so that he would learn to honor God, follow the words of the Bible, stay humble and follow God's commands. God promised that if the king did these things, he and his descendants would prosper. God's establishment of the practice of Hand-copying Scripture for kings should be a testament to its value and effectiveness, and a challenge for any Christian!

Hand-copying Scripture Practice Tips

- Identify a passage that you would like to interact with or spend time memorizing.
- Commit to writing out a whole book of the Bible instead of isolated sections, especially of narrative style books. This will help you view the book as a whole, understanding its complete message in context.
- Pick a specific notebook which will be dedicated to your Hand-copying.
- Find a quiet place that allows you to focus on what you're writing.

- Quiet your thoughts by praying for the Holy Spirit to reveal his truth to you in the passage and help you focus.
- Begin writing slowly, focusing on each word and what it means in the immediate and broader contexts.
 - Take your time as you write. The goal is not to finish writing out the passage but to spend time in God's Word, to spend time with God. Savor the process as you would an important letter that you just received.

RESOURCES

Journibles

Journibles are journals/notebooks specifically designed for Hand-copying Scriptures. The notebooks have faint lines printed so the words of a specific Bible chapter and verse can be hand copied on the right-hand page of the journible. Journibles are designed to have just the right amount of space for each verse. On the left-hand page of the notebook there is room for personal notes to be added. Though Scriptures can be copied on to any piece of paper, it is especially nice to have a notebook specifically designed for the process, something that can be easily stored and found and will keep well for future use.

The [Journibles website](#) is a good source of information on Hand-copying Scripture for multiple types of ministry: small groups, personal devotions, youth groups, and family devotions. The website is an excellent resource for understanding the value of Hand-copying Scripture and for ideas on how to begin practicing this discipline for both individuals and groups.

Forum Discussing Hand-copying Scripture

A group of people discuss a project in which they copied the Bible on this internet forum. The website is for the purpose of discussing the actual skill of writing (think penmanship and

calligraphy), but the comments are interesting and affirm the personal impact of writing Scripture in your own hand.

A Hand-copying Story

The October 23, 1995 issue of Christianity Today includes a story about Marek Kaminski. When he was 14, Marek, who was raised in communist Poland, lost his father in a car accident. During his grief over his loss, he found a Bible in his home and started reading it because he had heard that it was a fortune-telling book. Marek, realizing the Bible was a very serious book and not a fortune-telling book, read the entire Bible over a three year period. He believed what he read in the Bible, became a Christian, and had a deep desire to learn more about the Bible. Marek began to write out entire books of the Bible as a way to slow down and fully study each word. However, Marek, who was right-handed, realized the only way to really slow himself down was to copy with his left hand! After reproducing the first four books of the Old Testament, Isaiah, Psalms, all four Gospels, and Revelation, he realized that he had memorized God's Word to the level that allowed him to know when people change even one word in a verse that they quoted! The article quotes Marek as saying, "To me, the Word of God is like music. You can listen to the same piece several times and get the melody of it. But to hear the whole sound of it, every instrument, each line, you have to listen several times and pay a lot of attention . . . the word of God is so beautiful, the more time you spend in it, the more you appreciate it." Hand-copying Scripture is a way that we also can engage the Scriptures and understand and appreciate the beauty of God's Word.

LECTIO DIVINA

Nothing New

There is nothing new about Scripture engagement! As I hope you've seen, Scripture engagement is thoroughly taught in the Scriptures. Christians have been developing and practicing various Scripture engagement techniques for hundreds of years. The goal of this website is not to introduce you to some new means of connecting with God. Our hope is to train people in tried and true methods of experiencing God through

the Bible. One Scripture engagement technique that has a long and rich history, and that has been experiencing resurgence in recent years, is *lectio divina*.

What is Lectio Divina?

Lectio divina (pronounced "lec-tsee-oh di-vee-nah"), Latin for "sacred reading," "divine reading," or "holy reading," is a spiritual practice that has been in use for over a thousand years. It was originally practiced by monks who spent a large portion of their days praying and reading Scripture. While reading they noticed that at times individual words, phrases, or verses seemed to leap off of the page with a special personal importance. Have you had the same experience? These special words or verses can give a sense of encouragement, comfort, thankfulness, or conviction that often applies to present situations and can draw us closer to God.

Lectio divina is an intimate way of communicating with the Lord. All too often in prayer and worship, we talk to God but don't give God a chance to communicate back to us. Lectio divina employs God's own words to have a personal conversation with God.

Not Magic

Lectio divina is NOT a magical practice that guarantees you'll hear God's voice. Magic attempts to manipulate God into doing what we want. There is nothing magical about Scripture engagement. Lectio divina involves ruminating on God's Word and listening to what he says so that we become more like Christ. This practice has the ability to open us up to daily communication with God as the Holy Spirit illuminates the Bible so that we are supported and sustained in our day-to-day lives.

Four Stages

The four traditional stages of lectio divina are lectio (reading), meditatio (meditation), oratio (prayer), and contemplatio (contemplation). The steps were created simply to provide structure and guidance for people who wish to learn how to

perform this practice. Consider how people learn to play a new instrument. A man who is learning piano must go through the steps of reading the notes, putting his hands in the right place, pushing down on the keys, listening to the notes, and then repeating the process. At first, each step seems rigid and awkward, but over time he learns to perform each of these steps as one fluid process leading to the actual art of music.

The four steps of *lectio divina* have also been compared to “feasting on the Word.” Reading is taking a bite of food. Meditation is chewing food. Prayer is savoring food. Contemplation is digesting food and making it a part of your body. Too often we are fast food eaters, rapidly gulping down the Bread of Life (John 6:31). The result is that we are unable to properly absorb our “spiritual meal.” Slow down. Savor your time in God’s Word and find joy in meeting God.

HOW TO ENGAGE IN LECTIO DIVINA

Choosing a Time and Place

One of the most important factors in practicing *lectio divina* is setting aside the right amount of time in a place where you are able to focus intently. Though usually carried out in 15-60 minutes, the amount of time varies between people and spiritual maturity levels.

The setting in which you perform *lectio divina* can vary as well. Some people prefer to have background noise or something to focus on such as a cross or a nature scene. It simply needs to be a place where you will not be interrupted and can feel relaxed, focused, and comfortable. Try out multiple places to find what works best.

What to Read

Another important factor is choosing a passage of Scripture. Some like to meditate on lengthy passages such as a whole chapter or even an entire book. Others choose to reflect on only a few verses. A smaller portion of Scripture obviously gives you a much more in-depth idea of the passage, which is

what lectio divina is all about. But a longer passage can be used for a more general understanding of Scripture as a whole.

What options can you choose from to decide which Scripture to read?

- Use a reading plan that prescribes what to read each day
- Work methodically through a book of the Bible (this is a helpful method because the reader can keep in mind the author's intended audience and purpose throughout the book)
- Focus on a theme of the Bible (e.g., love, patience, or various attributes of God) that you find using a Keyword Search or in the *lectio divina* resources

Lectio divina is best practiced with passages that you have at least some familiarity with. Lectio divina is not intended to introduce you to something new in the Bible; its purpose is to allow you to experience and feed on what you know. There are an infinite number of ways to choose daily Scripture readings. Be creative and use your resources!

Preparation

Before beginning the lectio divina process, it is very important to get your heart in the right place. Do you have an established way of preparing your heart to listen to God's Word?

A great place to start is to simply sit up straight, rest your hands on your lap and relax your body and breathing. Enjoy this moment of silence and choose to temporarily forget about all the work, duties, and anxieties the day may hold so that you can focus on the task at hand. Once you feel peaceful and calm, say a brief prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to come and guide you through your experience. Ask God to make known anything would be helpful to be revealed to you. Plead that the Lord will show you the Truth. Calm your mind and heart in

any way that will help prepare you to meet God in the Scriptures.

Lectio (reading): It is absolutely vital to remember exactly what you are reading. The Bible is a personalized letter written from God to humanity. This letter is one of love, grace, and compassion; as well as warning of impending danger. Read it the same way you would read a letter from someone who loves you.

Reading is the first and foremost part of lectio divina. First, read through the entire passage very slowly. Take the time to note every specific word. Think about the intentionality of the word ordering. Look for repetition, themes, pictures, and dialogue. Try to picture yourself inside the story. Stay alert for a single word, phrase, verse, metaphor, or message that catches your eye, stirs you, moves you or connects with you emotionally.

Then read through the passage again. Stop at whatever it was that really tugged at your heart and reread that significant piece over and over. Repeat it (some people even say the phrase out loud), lingering over the phrase. Pretend that the original author is speaking it to you and try to imagine the tone of voice he might have used. The goal is not only to see the words with your eyes but to feel them with your heart, mind, and soul.

Meditatio (meditation): Much of this stage is about using your imagination. God gave us the ability to think deeply for a reason. Use this tool! Think about what the phrase that stood out to you meant to the original audience, and what the author might have been thinking when he wrote it. Picture yourself in the setting and context of the passage. Play out the scenario in your head. Think about the specific part of the passage that spoke directly to you. Focus intently on why the Holy Spirit might have chosen these words to speak to you today. Reflect on how it might apply to your life. Is it relevant to something that you are going through? Does it bring to mind a struggle that you have been dealing with? Do certain people come to mind that God may want you to reach out to or reconcile a relationship with? Is there a strong sense of a movement or change that needs to happen? When you are thinking about a passage in God's presence, ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate

that passage so that you can grasp the message in terms of your own life.

Why is meditation so important? Meditation helps us keep our memory active. Don't we tend to forget easily? When we enter into the world of the Bible, it starts to influence us and change us. Meditation is a way to guard against splintering our Bible reading into information that is divorced from our lives.

Have you ever thought that Christians are not supposed to meditate? Biblical meditation (e.g., Genesis 24:63, Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2, 48:9, 77:3, 119:15, 143:5) is not the same as Eastern meditation. In Eastern meditation the objective is detachment and an empty mind. In Biblical meditation the objective is attachment to God and sustained focus on his Word. Have you ever noticed your mind center on something? You have a thought, often unhelpful, that repeats over and over? In Biblical meditation, we are retraining our thoughts to mull over whatever "is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable" (Philippians 4:8).

A word of warning is needed here. The purpose of meditation in *lectio divina* is not to make things up about the Bible. Christianity is a faith rooted in history, and we should be on guard against inventing Biblical meanings for ourselves. Meditation allows the passage to penetrate our understanding with depth. If done wrongly, if we pursue some kind of mystical experience that is not connected to the natural meaning of the text, we turn the Bible into a subjective, individualistic experience for which it was never intended.

Oratio (prayer): The next step is to take all the thoughts, feelings, actions, fears, convictions, and questions you have meditated on and offer them to the Lord in prayer. Praise God for who he is. If you feel convicted about a poor relationship, simply apologize, request forgiveness, and ask for guidance on restoring the relationship. If you feel thankful for something that God has done for you, then pour out those feelings of thanksgiving. If you feel a specific anxiety about something in your life, present it to the Lord and pray for the guidance and peace to be able to submit to God's will. People often feel like this is one of the most difficult steps of *lectio*

divina, but there is no reason it needs to be hard. Simply talk to God and share what you are feeling, just like you would with a good friend or family member. It is so important to ask God to help us in the areas in which we need improvement. We are a community of broken people and cannot do any good on our own. The whole reason Jesus came to earth is to succeed for us where we fall short. God wants to help us, and we are yearning for help; it's a perfect match.

Contemplatio (contemplation): This final stage (though frequently overlooked) is one of vital importance. The "task" in this stage is to simply be silent in the presence of God (Psalm 46:10). This is one of the most essential aspects for building a growing relationship with the Lord. Many testify that at the end of a *lectio divina* session one has a feeling of closeness and intimacy with the Lord. One of the most valuable things that we can do with this feeling is to relax and embrace it. Just "be" with God. We don't need to always be talking at God. In this stage we are to simply sit in the presence of God and feel love and embrace. We are to continue to resist worrying about our cell phones, work, friends, illnesses, and whatever else holds us back from God and sit in the love that is shared between us and Jesus.

Part of contemplation (some people make this a separate stage called *Incarnatio* – "living") is to commit yourself, with the help of God, to "do" the truth that he has implanted in your heart. It is our submitting to God's Word, our living it out, that God is calling us to (e.g., James 1:22-25, Matthew 7:15-27, Romans 2:12-16). Living out our faith is a following of Jesus that happens naturally as we know Christ and become imitators of God.

At the end of the contemplation stage of a particular portion of Scripture, you will naturally come to a place where you are done. Your choice then is to repeat the process with another passage or phrase from Scripture or simply close off your *lectio divina* session with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Lectio divina is a process that will take some getting used to. Try not to quit if you aren't fond of it after your first few attempts. Remember that it is much like learning to play the piano. At first each step may seem rigid and awkward, but

after some practice and experience you can learn to have lifegiving communication with God.

Lectio Divina Practice Tips

How to get started doing Lectio Divina:

- Choose a place and time that are quiet and uninterrupted. You will need at least 15 minutes to really get the most out of this practice
- If you don't know what Bible passage to read, choose a Psalm – a great one to start with is Psalm 23
- Particularly the first few times through this process, choose a shorter passage, as it will be easier to focus on and draw a main idea from
- Remind yourself that you are coming to God's Word and that to engage the Bible is to engage God
- Close your eyes before you start reading and pray for the Holy Spirit to quiet your mind and bless your time in Scripture
- If you get distracted or tired, don't worry or criticize yourself. Simply bring your mind back to the Bible passage, re-read it, and be grateful for God's Word.

PRAYER

LEARNING THE WAYS OF PRAYER:

Communally and Individually

Assumptions about prayer and practical ideas for small groups

Dr. Faye Chechowich

Assumptions

1. Prayer was once a natural human activity. It is not natural for us but it will be.

Confession:

Dear Jesus, how desperately I need to learn to pray. And yet when I am honest, I know that I often do not even want to pray. I am distracted! I am stubborn! I am self-centered! In your mercy, Jesus, bring my “water” more in line with my “need-er” so that I can come to want what I need. In your name and for your sake, I pray. Amen.

God’s Word to us:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:3

2. Prayer is an invitation to a conversation.

Good conversation requires authentic self-disclosure.
Good conversation requires the capacity to listen well.

3. Prayer is a gift of grace that puts us in a place where change is possible.

“To pray is to change. This is a great grace. How good of God to provide a path whereby our lives can be taken over by love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control.”

Richard Foster in *Prayer*

4. Prayer is a discipline.

“Once we have made generous latitude for individual differences and schedules, we must firmly discipline ourselves to a regular pattern of prayer. We cannot assume that it will

somehow magically appear. We never have time for prayer—we must make time”

Richard Foster in *Prayer*

5. *Prayer is both a communal and an individual privilege*

“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” Ps 63:1 “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us. That your ways may be known on earth your salvation among all nations.” Ps 67:1

Top 10 Practical Ideas for Leading Groups in Prayer

1. Don't assume everyone has prayed out loud before.
2. Keep a prayer request list (on a poster board or in a journal).
3. Switch the order of your group up. Pray first or last or in the middle.
4. Have the group write prayers and then read them out loud.
5. Pray the Lord's Prayer together.
6. Pray scripture*.
7. Pray written prayers*.
8. ACTS model for prayer Focus on one dimension of prayer each week.
Adoration Confession Thanksgiving Supplication
9. Prayer journals to track responses to what you are studying.
10. Collect quotes about prayer to pass along to your group and read one each week before you pray*.

Pray Scripture passage that you personalize (example)

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen _____ with power through his Spirit in his/her inner being, so that Christ may dwell in her/his heart through faith. And I pray that _____, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long

and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that _____ may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3: 14-19

Written Prayers (3 examples)

You who are over us, You
who are one of us.
You who are –
Also within us,
May all see you – in me also,
May I prepare the way for you,
May I thank you for all that shall fall to my lot, May
I also not forget the needs of others.....
Give me a pure heart – that I may see you
A humble heart – that I may hear you, A
heart of love – that I may serve you, A
heart of faith – that I may abide in you.

A prayer of Dag Hammarskjold

Have mercy on me Christ.
I see myself in the mirror of your word and see so much that I
have done that is wrong, and so much I have not done that is
essential. I don't want to just get by with the approval of my
peers, but to become whole by your grace. Amen

A prayer of Eugene Peterson

Grant me, O Lord, to know what is worth knowing,
to love what is worth loving, to praise what delights you
most, to value what is precious in your sight, to hate
what is offensive to you. Do not let me judge by what I
see, nor pass sentence according to what I hear, but to
judge rightly between things that differ and above all
to search out and to do what pleases you, Through Jesus
Christ our Lord.

A prayer of Thomas a Kempis

Example of a Quote about Prayer

“Usually prayer is a question of groaning rather than speaking,
tears rather than words. For He sets our tears in His sight, and

our groaning is not hidden from Him who made all things by His Word and does not ask for words of man.” Augustine of Hippo

Eight Stages of Prayer: *The Hour That Changes the World*, by Dick Eastman.

1. **Confession:** prayerfully admitting your sins to the Lord. *“If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* | John 1:9.

- Examine yourself against the backdrop of Scripture and with the help of the Holy Spirit.
- Prayerfully repent from your transgressions.
- Accept God’s forgiveness in Christ.

2. **Scripture:** prayerfully agree with God’s Word. *“He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination”* Proverbs 28:9.

- What promises can I make my own?
- What commands am I to obey?
- What warnings must I heed?

3. **Evangelism:** prayerfully asking for the salvation of others. *“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men... This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth”* | Timothy 2:1,3-4.

- Pray for people around you who have yet to meet Jesus.
- Pray for people back home to encounter Jesus.
- Pray for unreached people groups.

4. **Intercession:** prayerfully remembering others. *“To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power”* | Thessalonians 1:11.

- Stand in the gap for the wellbeing of other believers.
- Remember your own household, family, friends and church.
- Intercede for the culture around you.

5. **Petition:** prayerfully remember your personal needs. *“You do not have because you do not ask”* James 4:2b.

- Inner struggles.
- Interpersonal relationships.
- Upcoming challenges.
- Areas of needed improvement.

6. **Thanksgiving:** prayerfully express appreciation to the Lord “*..in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus*” I Thessalonians 5:18.

- For what God has done for you.
- For what God has done for others.
- Be specific and tell the Lord why you’re grateful.
- Focus on today.

7. **Song:** prayerfully sing your praises. “*I will praise the name of God with song, and shall magnify Him with thanksgiving*” Psalm 69:30.

- Employ psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.
- Sing a verse for many songs.
- Have each person share a song.

8. **Meditation:** prayerfully reflect on Scripture. “*I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard your ways*” Psalm 77:12; 119:15).

- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you meditate on Scripture.
- Spend time in silence.

THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN from St. Ignatius

<http://www.diocese.cc/upload/images/originals/Examens070510A.pdf>

Finding the movement of the Spirit in our daily lives as we review our day.

Recognize the presence of God

[Be still and know that you are with God.]

Look at your day with gratitude

[Acknowledge God in the big and small things of life.]

Review your day

When or where in the past 24 hours did you feel you were cooperating most fully with God's action in your life? When were you resisting?

Ask yourself

- What habits and life patterns do I notice?
- When did I feel most alive? Most drained of life?
- When did I have the greatest sense of belonging? When did I feel most alone?
- When did I give love? Where did I receive love?
- When did I feel most fully myself? Least myself?
- When did I feel most whole? Most fragmented?

Reconcile and Resolve

Seek forgiveness

Ask for direction

Share a concern

Express gratitude

Resolve to move forward

TEDTALKS ON VULNERABILITY AND SHAME

The Power of Vulnerability

http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html

Listening to Shame

http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame.html

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Questions from The Power of Vulnerability

Brene says, “In order for connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be seen, really seen.” Has this been true of those that you connect with? Your family, friends, etc.?

“People who have a strong sense of love and belonging believe they’re worthy of love and belonging.” What these people all had in common was that they “embraced vulnerability.” They see it as “necessary” and “beautiful.” Who have you seen model vulnerability and you saw it as beautiful?

Brene also talks about the time she went to her therapist, knowing of her struggle with vulnerability, yet only wants strategies for how to deal with it, not vulnerability. Is this true of your life and why or why not?

Brene says that you cannot “selectively numb.” When we numb things like “grief, shame, fear disappointment,” we also numb “joy, gratitude and happiness.” Think of a time when you felt most joyful or thankful. Was vulnerability a part of that experience?

How might you be kinder and gentler to yourself? How might you be kinder and gentler to others?

Questions from Listening to Shame

Vulnerability and weakness as synonymous. Has this been your experience? Do you agree or disagree with this?

“Vulnerability is the most accurate measure of courage.” When have you seen evidence of this in someone else or within yourself?

“Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change. To create is to make something that has never existed before. There’s nothing more vulnerable than that. Adaptability to change is all about vulnerability.” You all are in positions where innovation, creating and change are a part of your roles on your wings and floors. Why do you think Brene says that vulnerability is the birthplace of these things? What has inhibited

your creativity or ability to change? Was a hesitancy to be vulnerable one of those things?

Talk about a time when you've failed. Where was shame a part of this?

(for women) Brene talks about shame as being "organized" differently by gender. She suggests, "Shame, for women, is this web of unobtainable, conflicting, competing expectations about who we're supposed to be. And it's a straight-jacket." Name three of these "unobtainable, conflicting, competing expectations" you experience in your life.

(for women) On the flip side, she mentions that for men, vulnerability is avoided because of the critique of others. How do we as women do this in our relationships with our brothers, guy friends, boyfriends, etc.?

(for men) Brene talks about shame as being "organized" differently by gender. She mentions for men, vulnerability is avoided because of the critique of others. Who are those "others" in your life that critique and therefore keep you from being vulnerable?

(for men) For women she suggests, "Shame, for women, is this web of unobtainable, conflicting, competing expectations about who we're supposed to be. And it's a straight-jacket." Are there expectations that we put on our sisters, friends, girlfriends, etc.? How do our words or actions perpetuate these expectations?

Brene says that shame needs "secrecy, silence and judgment" to grow. And, to contradict that, the antidote to shame is "empathy." Talk about a time when you've experienced either "secrecy, silence and judgment" or "empathy"? How have these things be true of your life?

KEEPING YOUR GROUP MOVING FORWARD

Keeping your group engaged throughout the semester is one of your main responsibilities. Here are some practical ideas to help.

- Send reminder e-mails to each person before you meet.
- Start on time and end on time.
- Take a night off of your normal routine and get off campus.
- Connect with each group member individually.
- Be real with your group. If you're not doing well, share it as appropriate.

Here are additional ideas to keep your group time fresh amidst a routine.

1. Pick a chapel for the group to take notes on and discuss at the following small group time.
2. Similarly, each member takes notes from the Sunday sermon and share with each other.
3. Spend an evening praying for each other.
4. Invite an older adult(s) (e.g. professor, hall director, etc.) to be your guest for an evening. Ask him/her to talk about a passage of Scripture or a story of God's faithfulness from the past.
5. Plan a service project together (e.g. visit the Nursing Home, serve at St. Martin's in Marion, connect with TWO Community Outreach to see the possibilities they have for groups).
6. Memorize Scripture together.
7. Select a people group and pray for them regularly.

REFLECTING ON YOUR LEADERSHIP

While we hope being a small group leader is a good experience for you, we know that neither you nor your group will be perfect. In fact, we're guessing it will take time and likely some mistakes along the way. We hope (and think you will) grow as a result of being a small group leader.

With that said, self-reflection is an important part of growing as a leader. Here are some questions to help you evaluate how you are doing. (List compiled by Dr. Bill Heth)

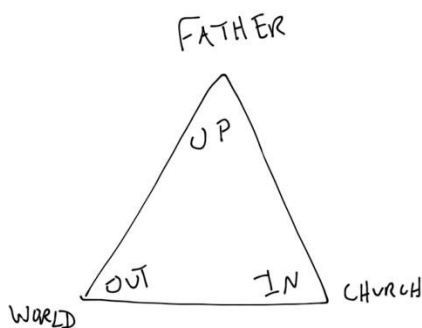
1. Did we begin on time?
2. Did we meet in a good location? (Without distractions?)
3. Was each individual invited to contribute to the discussion?
4. How did we offer space for people who talk excessively as well as those who are quieter to share?
5. Did questions involve more people in the interaction or did I dominate the discussion?
6. Did the discussion go off on too many tangents?
7. Did I show some acceptance of those ideas or theological positions that I do not agree with?
8. Were my questions open-ended, specific, brief, and clear?
9. Did my questions provoke thought or did they only require a rote answer?
10. Did each group member feel free to contribute, ask questions, or (after you get to know one another better) even challenge a thought? Or was there a threatening and/or unnecessary tenseness in the air?
11. How did we engage silence in the discussion or did we feel uneasy about it?
12. Was I open to be corrected by the group?

13. Did I stifle a thought and discussion by assigning a question to someone before I asked it? (If you call on one person before you throw out a question, everyone else may take a mental vacation!)
14. Did I summarize at appropriate intervals?
15. Did I refrain from expressing an opinion or comment that someone else in the group could express?
16. Am I keeping the group properly motivated in this study?
17. Am I occasionally rotating leadership to help others develop their ministry skills? Can I help them prepare?
18. Did I help the group apply Biblical truths specifically as opposed to generally? (e.g. "Let's get together and pray for Youth Conference three times this week after dinner" vs. "We should pray more.")
19. Did I follow through from previous sessions by asking them later how they have specifically applied the biblical principles we talked about?
20. Am I praying for each member of my group?
21. Is there a growing openness and honesty among group members?
22. Is this group study enriching the lives of its members as well as the group as a whole?
23. Have we done anything fun or social together outside of our normal meeting time?
24. Was I adequately prepared? How can I be better prepared?
25. Have I reached the objective(s) set for this discussion or Bible study? What can I do to improve? As a result of our time, what do I want group members to take away thinking/feeling/doing?
26. Did I encourage group members to share what they have learned with others?
27. Have I, in some tangible way, shown them that I really care about them?

ASSESSING THE HEALTH OF A SMALL GROUP

One of the difficult parts of spirituality and our faith is that it is challenging to measure and assess. This not only remains demanding for us in our personal walks with the Lord, but also in our spiritual, communal practices that form us, such as small groups.

Pastor Mike Breen developed a simple, yet profound way that has helped his congregation assess their small groups so that they might be balanced. After studying the life of Christ, he developed the figure on the next page.



from:<http://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2012/02/04/how-i-chose-movement-over-meg-a-the-story-of-sheffield/>

The three dimensions of this triangle of Jesus' balanced life were:

- UP Jesus had a deep and connected relationship to God and attentiveness to the leading of the Holy Spirit

- IN "Jesus offered constant investment into the relationships with those around Him

OUT Jesus engaged with the brokenness of the world, looking for a response both individually (people coming into relationship with Jesus) and systematically (systems of injustice being transformed)... God's Kingdom advancing the Gospel with compassion and Truth <http://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2012/02/04/how-i-chose-movement-over-mega-the-story-of-sheffield/>

This triangle provides a way for us to determine how balanced our own spiritual lives are, but also can provide a way for us to gauge how balanced our small groups are. So, taking this triangle and thinking of the health of your small group, these are questions you should be asking:

UP *Is the small group providing time devoted to deep connection with the God, allowing Jesus' life to transform us and the Holy Spirit to direct us?*

Are we devoting time to the Scriptures and their transformation on our lives?

Are we in relationship with the God through prayer?

IN *Is the small group providing time devoted to learning and knowing each other better?*

Are we providing accountability, support, encouragement, edification in each other's lives?

Are we helping each other see the work of the Lord in our lives as we learn more about Him and each other?

OUT *Is the small group providing time devoted to advancing the kingdom of God?*

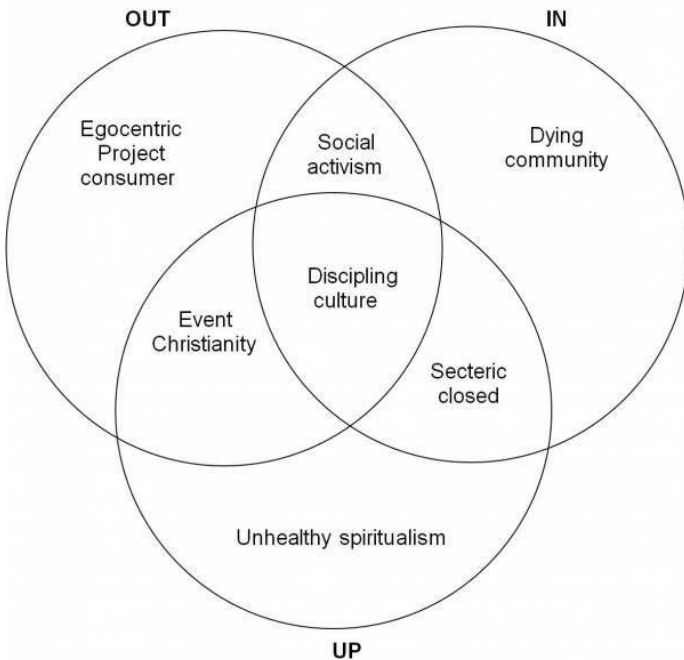
Are those in the group embodying the message of Christ wherever they are found?

Are those in the group being challenged to apply what the group is learning?

How are we being "doers of the Word," not just "hearers of the Word"? (James 1:22) Is what we say in small

group consistent with what is lived out on the wing/floor, in the classroom, on campus, off campus, at home, in the world?

Thomas Willer developed the figure below in response to Breen's triangle development. Here he shows the importance of the balance and the realities of our discipleship culture when there is not balance.



from: <http://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2011/01/21/missional-community-series-post-3/>

As you can see above, there seems to be an artful balance to a culture of discipleship. As you start and continue your small group this year, ask the Lord to help you discern how balanced your group is and seek His insight on how to engage the IN, the UP, and the OUT.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE RETURNING FROM ABROAD

From: Taylor University Lighthouse Program

Family members, churches, student leaders and peers have a strategic role! Re-entry is a crucial part of short-term missions – “even when it’s over, it’s not over”

Biblical model of re-entry care

(from Neal Pirolo, *The Re-Entry Team*)

Acts 14:26-28; 15:35

1. Paul & Barnabas finished their assignment
2. They returned to their sending church (community)
3. They received the community’s hospitality
4. They reported all that God had done in and through them
5. They ministered again in their community

Road blocks that prevent healthy re-entry

Busyness

Difficult circumstances at home

Numbness or not knowing what to do

Disappointment

Illness, exhaustion, jet lag

Returning students may ...

- Have little motivation for classes and/or other activities.
- Experience restlessness – a desire to “get away” or return to the host country.
- Not want the experience to be over, wishing it could continue, and desiring to re-live it.
- Have feelings of sadness/grief or even depression after leaving a part of themselves on the field.
- Go through reverse culture shock – critical attitude toward materialism, self-absorption, lack of gratitude, waste, extravagance, apathy, superficiality, etc. in U.S.

- Be confused about biblical stewardship based on the physical, spiritual, or social needs they encountered, or have a critical attitude toward some aspect of the host culture's shortcomings.
- Question God's sovereignty or other foundational issues for the same reasons.
- Feel that no one else cares about other cultures or the world's needs.
- Feel lonely or isolated – friends/family are busy or preoccupied.
- Think that no one will listen – friends/family may seem uninterested in hearing details.
- Believe that no one understands their experience, even those willing to listen.
- Experience an inability to communicate what they experienced and insights they gained.
- Be confused about what God is doing within them or with their future plans.
- Feel that they have changed, but friends/family treat them the same.
- Seek God's will for their life with new intensity.
- Be excited about finding new ways to reach out and/or use newly discovered abilities.
- Assess their gifts and passions and new ways.
- Have regrets based on unmet expectations, their own conduct/shortcomings, or unresolved conflict.
- Have new excitement for spiritual disciplines – prayer, Bible reading, new worship styles...
- Be seeking a Kingdom perspective on suffering and/or an accurate theology of suffering.
- Be dealing with unresolved hurts and baggage they "discovered" under the stress of the trip.
- Question their friendships and priorities.

Goals for helping

1. Strive for them to feel heard, supported, and cared for.
2. Assist them in dealing with unresolved issues that need to be addressed.

3. Help them begin to integrate the experience into life for the long haul.
4. Allow yourself to be impacted through the experience of helping (by-product of serving the person).
5. Remember that different students will need different types of help.

Top 6 Ways to Help 1.

Pray for them.

2. Listen, really listen! On two levels:
Public: Give them opportunities to share.
Private: Seek them out individually.
3. Provide a safe environment for them to wrestle with issues without a timeframe or expectations.
4. Help them remain alert to the spiritual battle raging at all times (Eph. 6:12). We pray against attacks from the enemy on the field, but it's just as important to pray against them once we come home because Satan would like nothing more than to minimize the impact of the experience.
5. Assist them in maintaining spiritual disciplines, especially journaling/reflection. "An unexamined life is not worth living" (Socrates).
6. Encourage them to make practical application to their lives. This prevents compartmentalization and helps them integrate the experience for long term. Keep it to just one or a few goals that are achievable.

Questions not to Ask

Avoid yes/no, short answer, or very broad questions such as:

How was your trip? (too broad)

What did you do? (too broad)

Did you have fun? (yes/no)

Are you going back? (yes/no)

Did you get along with your team? (yes/no)

Did you like the culture? (yes/no)

Questions to Ask

Ask *specific, open ended questions* that begin with words such as “describe” “in what ways” “explain” or “who/what/how/why”
What was the most meaningful thing about the trip? The hardest thing? The most fun/exciting thing?

1. Describe three highlights of the trip.
2. What are the most significant lessons God taught you? How did you learn them?
3. What did you learn about God’s character? About Yourself? About Missions?
4. How did your expectations match up with what happened? Was this good or bad and why?
5. Explain the types of ministry your team did. How did you spend your free time?
6. What did God enable you to do that you didn’t think you could do?
7. What do you think was your greatest contribution to the project? To the team?
8. Describe three of the people who had an impact on you and why.
9. Explain how the host culture is different from ours.
10. What did you learn from the host culture? What do you admire about the nationals?
11. What is good about the host culture and/or U.S. culture that you can embrace?
12. What is negative about the host culture and/or U.S. culture that you want to avoid?
13. What did you learn from the host missionaries or Christian leaders?
14. How would you describe your relationship with the Lord before and after the trip?
15. If given another chance, would you change the way you conducted yourself on the trip? How?
16. What has been the most difficult thing about returning home? Why?
17. Who has disappointed you since you’ve been back? In what way(s)?

18. What new values or priorities are you bringing home with you?
19. What next steps will you take spiritually? In ministry? In lifestyle choices?
20. In what ways do you sense spiritual attack as you return?
21. What do you remember about the people or culture you left behind?
22. What do you miss most from the trip and why? What are you glad to leave behind and why?
23. How do you see God working around you or in you now that you have returned?
24. Was there a difficult experience on the trip for which you are now thankful?
25. What are you confused or frustrated about?
26. In what ways do you think God wants your life to change?
27. What did you learn about your gifts, strengths, weaknesses and passions?