

equipped

FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERSHIP



COVENANT LIFE CHURCH

NOTEBOOK

Kenneth Maresco and John Loftness

Instructions on re-publication and/or adaptation of the Equipped notebook:

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, (a) visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>; or, (b) send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the work and to adapt the work under the following conditions: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). You may not use this work for commercial purposes. If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one. For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to the web page listed above. Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from Covenant Life Church, 7501 Muncaster Mill Road, Gaithersburg, MD 20877. www.covlife.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

equipped

FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERSHIP



Covenant Life Church

Session 1:

Introduction to *Equipped*

Session 2:

Leading a Topical Discussion
Leading By Grace

Session 3:

Building a Relational Community

Session 4:

Building a Spiritual Community

Session 5:

Keeping the Gospel Central
“Do We Really Need Each Other?”

Session 6:

The Heart of Change
“The Heart is the Target”

Session 7:

Leading Toward Growth
“Understanding Your Heart Struggle”

Session 8:

Setting Goals/Making Plans

Participant Information

Equipped: For Small Group Leadership

Name _____

Spouse _____

Today's Date _____

Home Phone _____

Work Phone _____

Mobile Phone _____

E-mail _____

Care Group Leader _____

Children with date of birth (m/d/y)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Covenant Life Church

Care Group Leader Job Description

A. Cultivating relationships through building community

1. Your role is to seek to help group members grow in their relationships—both within the confines of the meeting and then beyond to daily life.
2. Your job is not to provide the same level of relationship to each group member but to encourage and foster relationships through your influence as a leader.
3. So you lead in...
 - a. Facilitating personal interaction in meeting contexts
 - b. Organizing care in crisis
 - c. Promoting fun activities
 - d. Celebrating milestones in a member's life
 - e. Organizing service projects for members of the group, within the church, and beyond
 - f. Encouraging each member's participation in our commission to evangelize.

B. Promoting spiritual life

1. Your role is to make sure that each meeting includes spiritual activities that express our dependence on the Holy Spirit and encourage the ministry of the Spirit among the group members.
2. As a small group leader you should:
 - a. Lead the group to pray for individuals in the group and for others known to group members.

- b. Facilitate expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God, which can (but do not have to) include singing together.
- c. Encourage the ministry of the Spirit between group members through words of prophecy and encouragement.
- d. Promote the private practice of the spiritual disciplines.
- e. Outside of meetings, arrange for informing the group of needs that require prayer.

C. Guiding discussions that lead to care and fellowship

1. You will guide discussions (or delegate this responsibility) for each meeting.
2. Your role is to keep the discussion cross-centered, grace-motivated, and within the bounds of biblical wisdom. Your goal is to lead men and women toward hope in the character and promises of the living God as they pursue gospel-motivated, faith-fueled growth.
3. These discussions are of two basic types
 - a. Discussion of materials the group has read or listened to in advance: books, articles, tapes, and sermons).
 - b. Discussion focused on caring for members as they face trials or seek to overcome sin and walk in righteousness.
4. Accomplishing this goal usually requires advance preparation.
 - a. Developing questions or choosing questions from a prepared list.
 - b. Preparing questions that invite group members to share the work of God in their lives and their struggle with a trial or sin.
 - c. Arranging to follow up with a group member from what he or she shared with the group in a previous meeting or shared with you apart from the meeting.

Discussion Leader Assignments

Equipped: For Small Group Leadership

Date	Session	Leadership Assignment	Name
	5	Pursue Fellowship Through Care	
		Pursue Fellowship Through Discussion: “Do We Really Need Each Other”	
	6	Pursue Fellowship Through Care	
		Pursue Fellowship Through Discussion: “The Heart is the Target	
	7	Pursue Fellowship Through Care	
		Pursue Fellowship Through Discussion: “Understanding Your Heart Struggle”	

Instructions for those leading fellowship for the purpose of care:

- Follow your pastor’s example that you observed in Session 3 & 4.
- Draw from the questions and principles that you will find in the outlines for Sessions 5-7.

Instructions for those leading fellowship through discussing a book chapter:

- Review the outline in Session 2—“Leading a Topical Discussion.”
- Make sure you reserve adequate time for getting to application.

Introduction to Equipped

I. Overview of Equipped: for Small Group Leadership

A. What is Equipped?

1. This course grew out of the small group ministry of Covenant Life Church. Covenant Life has identified as its mission: *to build a community of gospel-centered people*. One primary way we are seeking to fulfill this mission is through our small group ministry. Small groups are the place where we can build relationships around the gospel, grow spiritually, and serve others. Virtually every member of Covenant Life is a member of a small group.
2. *Equipped* is an eight-session program designed to train participants with the skills necessary to lead small groups that help us to build our church into a community of gospel-centered people.
3. Our desire as pastors is to fulfill our mandate as expressed in Ephesians 4:11-16, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry”—in this case by preparing people for leadership of a small group.

B. Equipped sessions will include:

1. Discussion of teaching covered in recordings, articles and book chapters studied prior to each session.
2. The practice of small group leadership skills: group members will be afforded opportunity to lead discussions of the materials covered in the course.

3. Equipping group members to provide biblical care and counsel for others in small group contexts, by allowing them to lead in caring for individual group members—followed by evaluation of their leadership.
4. Asking questions. Throughout our times together you will have opportunities to ask questions and interact with your pastor.

C. What is expected of a group participant?

1. Commitment to the group (attendance)
2. Humble willingness to be evaluated (in character and leadership skills) in order to be equipped
3. Preparation for each session through reading assigned chapters and listening to assigned recordings
4. A commitment to ask questions and a desire to be equipped

II. The Three Goals of a Small group

A. Relationships

The Christian Life is not solitary. God calls us to live out our lives with him in the context of relationships—especially those relationships with the members of our local church. We are called to walk out our relationship with Jesus linked arm to arm with brothers and sisters. One of the primary purposes of the small group structure is to provide a context where we can establish real and lasting relationships. The small group provides a context to:

1. Develop friendships.
2. Care for one another with practical help and personal encouragement as we walk through trials.
3. Celebrate joyful occasions, and have fun together.

4. Serve side by side with other group members as we seek to serve our local church.
5. Encourage outreach into our communities with the light of the gospel.

B. Spiritual Life

The small group should be a place of spiritual activity. Our meetings should allow for time to cultivate an awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity. His activity will be facilitated through encouraging each other through Scripture, praying together, and seeking the ministry of the Spirit among us as a group.

C. Fellowship

Gospel-centered believers mature as they walk out their Christian lives with one another. The small group setting is a place where men and women can:

1. Share the details of their lives with each other with a desire to grow in conformity to Jesus Christ.
2. Speak the truth of the gospel to one another.
3. Overcome sin by understanding it from Scripture and exploring its relationship to the thoughts and motives of the heart and inviting others to correct our thinking when it deviates from Scripture.
4. Help each other change through confessing our sins to each other and seeking to repent, with accountability to each other for our change.

III. Role of a Small Group Leader

A. Cultivating relationships through building community

1. A small group provides enormous opportunities for men and women to grow in friendship as the Bible defines it.

2. Your role is to seek to help group members grow in their relationships—both within the confines of the meeting and then beyond to daily life.
3. Your job is not to provide the same level of relationship to each group member but to encourage and foster relationships through your influence as a leader.
4. So you lead in...
 - a. Facilitating personal interaction in meeting contexts
 - b. Organizing care in crisis
 - c. Promoting fun activities
 - d. Celebrating milestones in a member's life
 - e. Organizing service projects for members of the group, within the church, and beyond
 - f. Encouraging each member's participation in our commission to evangelize.

B. Promoting spiritual life

1. Your role is to make sure that each meeting includes spiritual activities that express our dependence on the Holy Spirit and encourage the ministry of the Spirit among the group members.
2. As a small group leader you should:
 - a. Lead the group to pray for individuals in the group and for others known to group members.
 - b. Facilitate expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God, which can (but do not have to) include singing together.

- c. Encourage the ministry of the Spirit between group members through words of prophecy and encouragement.
- d. Promote the private practice of the spiritual disciplines.
- e. Outside of meetings, arrange for informing the group of needs that require prayer.

C. Guiding discussions that lead to care and fellowship

1. You will guide discussions (or delegate this responsibility) for each meeting.
2. Your role is to keep the discussion cross-centered, grace-motivated, and within the bounds of biblical wisdom. Your goal is to lead men and women toward hope in the character and promises of the living God as they pursue gospel-motivated, faith-fueled growth.
3. We will train you to lead two basic types of discussions
 - a. Discussion of materials the group has read or listened to in advance: books, articles, tapes, and sermons).
 - b. Discussion focused on caring for members as they face trials or seek to overcome sin and walk in righteousness.
4. Accomplishing this goal usually requires advance preparation.
 - a. Developing questions or choosing questions from a prepared list.
 - b. Preparing questions that invite group members to share the work of God in their lives and their struggle with a trial or sin.
5. Arranging to follow up with a group member from what he or she shared with the group in a previous meeting or shared with you apart from the meeting.

IV. Our commitment to you:

- A. Your pastor's commitment to you is to keep your group small, making organization and leadership simple, and to give you the necessary tools for being an effective leader.
- B. Your role is *not* to be a pastor to your group members. Your pastor has been trained to provide care and instruction to each of the members of your group as is appropriate to his or her needs. He is ultimately responsible before God for the spiritual care of the members of your group.

Assignment for next session

- Listen to the audio recording of CJ Mahaney's message, "Grace and the Adventure of Leadership." Take notes, write down questions, and come prepared to discuss what you learned.
- Read the outline in Session Two as you listen to the recording and prepare to discuss it.

Leading a Topical Discussion

I. Introduction

As we mentioned in Session 1, a key element for building a small group into a community of gospel-centered people is having effective discussions. One of the easier aspects of discussion leadership is discussing a book or article the group is reading or a sermon the group has heard. You may choose your topic based on a need of the group or based on an assignment your pastor has given for the entire church.

Since the goal of our groups is to build a gospel centered community, the books and articles we read and the sermons or seminars we listen to must lead us back to Scripture—the only infallible source we have for accurate knowledge of God and his will for us. Because of this, ask your pastor about the suitability of the materials you want to give to your group. He needs to approve all materials covered by your group.

Discussion leading involves asking good questions and helping the group grapple with these questions and their answers—as a group. Your role is to keep the discussion cross-centered and grace-filled in order to lead men and women toward hope in the character and promises of the living God. Our goal is gospel-motivated, faith-fueled growth through understanding and applying God’s Word together.

II. The Goal is Application

The goal of discussing a book or sermon is not simply to get new information or have a stimulating conversation about someone’s ideas. We want the discussion to move from gaining a basic grasp of the material to allowing each member of the group to make personal application to his or her life.

When leading discussion of a book or sermon, think of two simple steps: *review* and *apply*.

A. Review

1. Start with the author's purpose. Help the group organize the writer or speaker's thoughts around the big picture of the message. Ask a questions like: "What is the author's purpose in writing?" "What is the speaker's main point?" Try to answer it in a few simple sentences.
2. Then consider how the author accomplishes his purpose. This second step is to determine how the author has organized his thoughts and developed his material.
3. Ask the group why they think the author or speaker is making these points? Why is he so concerned about this subject?
4. Questions like these encourage participants to put the author's points into their own language. They enable the group to begin the process of engaging the material on a deeper level. They also help you to know whether or not group members have read the materials and understood them at a basic level.

B. Apply

1. Application is the place where we put into practice Jesus' words, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:17).
2. Application questions should encourage the group to grapple with how these ideas make a claim on their own lives.
3. This step is the goal of your discussion. Make sure you get your group to application early enough to allow for significant discussion. Much of the *Equipped* course is designed with the goal of training you to help your group skillfully apply God's Word to one another's lives.

4. Before you can get to application, you must listen to what people are saying—how they are processing the teacher’s ideas. Do they understand the main points and their implications?
 - a. If the group gets the sense that you are only looking for a “right” answer—i.e. the answer *you* want—they typically will not explore the topic together but seek to tell you what you want to hear.
 - b. Questions that only require a “yes” or “no” answer are usually ineffective. For most people, they lead the discussion nowhere.
5. To move a discussion forward, you build on the comments of the group:
 - a. Clarification: “Could you restate what you said?”.
 - b. Re-direction: If someone is leading the discussion on a tangent, bring it back, “Thanks for your thoughts on that. I wonder if anyone else...(restate your question).”
 - c. Extension/open ended: “Could you expound on that? What do you think about what Heather said? Has anyone else ever felt conviction in this area? What did you do? How did you respond?”
6. Some sample application questions:
 - What do the truths taught in this article or passage mean to you here and now?
 - As you read this article how were you convicted of sin in your life?
 - How does knowing this truth about God make a difference in your life? How can you apply this truth?
 - What are the implications of this to you and me?
 - How can you change now that you understand this?

- Can you see a command in this passage that we are required to obey?
- Is there an example you can follow here?
- What does repentance look like in this situation? Where have you seen yourself fall short in these areas and how should you cultivate change?
- Now that we have learned these things what can we do to help us walk in obedience?
- How should you change because of what we have learned about God?

Assignment for next session

- Listen to the recording as you read the outline in Session 3, “Building a Relational Community” and prepare to discuss it.
- During each of Sessions 3-7 we will seek to care for one individual or married couple as they bring a life challenge to the group. We will decide who should be the focus of our care at the beginning of the meeting. You can prepare by thinking through the following categories so that if called upon you will have given sufficient thought to reporting the challenge that you face so that we can give meaningful care.
 - Here are some ideas to help you decide what to bring:
 - A source of regular anxiety.
 - A sin that you have not had success overcoming.
 - A relational challenge (if you choose this, please make sure that in your reporting, you do not practice gossip).
 - If you are married, a recent conflict or disagreement and how you sought to resolve it.
 - If you are a parent, a challenge you face with a child or with your children that persists without change.
 - A question regarding the wisdom of a decision, activity, or friendship.

Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Building a Relational Community

I. Introduction

As we saw in Session 1, we have three goals for our small groups: the development of relationships, the cultivation of fellowship, and the practice of spiritual life together. In this session we are going to look at the value of leading our groups to become a community of friends.

A. Relationship is key to all we are trying to accomplish in our groups.

1. In the small group context men and women, transformed by the gospel, can form relationships characterized by trust and integrity allowing them to be known and experience care.
2. Relationships are not the inevitable result of meeting together. The most successful small groups value relationships, live out their lives together, and see their small group as more than a meeting.
3. Genuine relationships require effort, and leaders play an important part in helping a group cultivate and develop friendships by leading and motivating their people in this direction.

B. The gospel makes true relationship possible

1. Our common understanding and experience of the gospel should define our relationships with other believers.

2. Because of the gospel we are able to experience genuine friendships where we can let others know us as we truly are as we pursue spiritual growth together.
3. The gospel frees us from having to impress others and models the sacrificial love that we are to show to one another.

C. Relationship builds the trust necessary for fellowship

1. When people know and experience our practical care and interest in their lives, they are likely to trust us when we are urging them to make progress in the war against sin (which we'll cover in sessions 5-7).
2. Building genuine friendship establishes a foundation that allows us to challenge each other to pursue spiritual growth.

D. Not simply a means to an end: relationships are a gift from God.

1. Although one aim of biblical care is to encourage one another to make progress in living the Christian life, it would be an error to think that building relationships is only a means to that end. Relationships are a gift from God to be enjoyed and treasured!
2. This gift becomes another means to experience God's unfathomable love and grace towards us.
3. As you seek to lead your group toward relationships, think of the following three contexts (which form sections II-IV of this outline:
 - Meetings and activities
 - Serving together
 - Evangelism

II. Leading the Group to Relationship Through Meetings and Activities

A. As the leader of your group, your responsibility is always to seek to provide a model for others to imitate.

1. While you cannot be the source of every relationship in the group, you can set an example by the way you pursue others.
2. Let people know that you do not see serving them as a leader simply as a “ministry opportunity”. Make it clear that you consider it a joy to know them and to build friendships with them.

B. Take a genuine interest in people

1. Draw people out by asking questions about something you know is going on in their life.
2. Opportunities abound for this, and they take no extra time. Before and after a care group meeting, at Sunday meetings, or in other contexts where you happen to meet a member of your care group, you have opportunities to demonstrate you really care about them.

C. New group, new relationships

1. New people coming into small groups often do not know one another.
2. Wise leaders will seek to help the group get to know one another before jumping into the deeper waters of fellowship.

D. Make meetings relational

1. Try to provide some relational element in each meeting. This means planning for it.

2. For example, sharing a meal together will not necessarily build the group together. If it's needed, lead in seating arrangements or provide everyone with a question that allows each person to relate a story from his life.
3. You can use almost any activity to create opportunities for people to come to know each other better. An addendum of possible activities and possible relational questions is provided with this outline.

E. Ideas for cultivating relationships

1. See Addendum
2. Plan relational events into the regular schedule of your meetings.
3. Appoint someone in your group to be your “fun” director. Give them direction and arrange for the group to have time together to enjoy the gift of laughter by doing special things together on an occasional basis.

F. Be aware of the issues that pertain to season of life

1. Please keep in mind the realities of each unique season of life, and seek to lead in ways that reflect care for your group members. A group comprised of people who do not have children at home typically have more available time and the flexibility to spend time together. A group comprised of parents of young children has less flexibility, and a group with parents of teens less time.
2. Understanding the needs of your group will help you to set realistic goals for relating to one another. Consult with your pastor and experienced small group leaders to sharpen your ideas and set realistic goals.

III. Leading the Group to Relationships Through Serving

- A. We all need help with the basic tasks of life, and sometimes our need is big: at the birth of a baby, a tragic accident and hospitalization, the death of someone close. Your group provides basic “on the ground” support for needs such as these as they arise in the church. Typically, your group is relationally closest to the need. As a leader you lead in coordinating care and in so doing you help foster deeper relationships.
- B. You may need to talk initially with the person in need to determine whether you should mobilize the group or simply ask another individual to help in the situation.
- C. In a crisis, the leader is responsible to insure that care is being provided. This does not mean that the leader is the one primarily providing the care—or even organizing the care. In fact, if you provide all of the organization and care, you deprive the group of practical ways to help them build relationships.
- D. Some examples of practical service:
- Provide family meals following the birth of a child
 - Help a member move
 - Care for the sick or injured with meals, cleaning, errands, child care, or simply a visit.
 - Supply money in a time of genuine need.
 - Provide meals and support for a family during a time of grief
 - Provide child care to a parent who cannot afford it or has no one to help
 - Help an elderly member or single mom with basic chores
 - Lead your group into church serving projects together.
- E. NOTE: With many of these needs it is important that you involve your pastor with an awareness of the need and how you propose to help as a group. He may want to be involved in caring for the person in need and he may have guidance for you as to how best to help.

IV. Leading the Group to Relationships Through Evangelism

- A. One of the great privileges of the Christian life is sharing the gospel. Yet our relationships with unbelievers are often neglected. By bringing our care group into knowing about and, if practical, meeting our unbelieving friends, co-workers and neighbors we can advance the progress of the gospel.
- B. Investing in relationships with unbelievers is a part of being a witness to the gospel. It is in and through these relational investments that we often have the opportunity to share the gospel, or invite someone out to a care group or church activity.
- C. Leaders should be an example of cultivating and speaking about the people they are seeking to invest in.
- D. Leaders who are seeking to build gospel-centered small groups will keep this evangelistic mandate as a non-negotiable element of the group's relational life together.
- E. Groups grow closer as they seek to further the gospel in the world together.
 1. Find ways in which your group can support together the outreach efforts of the church.
 2. Pray for the unbelievers with whom you are developing relationship with a goal of sharing the gospel and inviting them to an appropriate church event.
- F. Your small group can also sponsor its own outreach activities.
 1. For example:
 - Host a barbecue for neighbors.
 - Create a project to serve an elderly or needy neighbor.

2. What is important is that the group is excited about the idea, and you encourage maximum participation.
 3. One easy way to build group excitement is to ask the group for their ideas for outreach and build enthusiasm for those the group agrees are doable.
- G. Take an evangelism training course together as a group and then follow up on the contents when you meet.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION:

- Listen to the recording as you read the outline in Session 4, “Building a Spiritual Community” and prepare to discuss it.
- Come prepared to share with the group some area of need in your life as described in the assignment at the end of Session 2.

Addendum

Seventy-Seven Ideas for Building Your Group Relationally

Getting to Know You Questions

PERSONAL

- What day of your life would you most like to re-live and why?
- In what area of your life would you like greater peace and why?
- What do you find yourself praying about recently?
- What is the most important decision facing you in the near future?

PARENTS AND SIBLINGS

- Where were you born?
- Where were you raised?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- Tell a story from your childhood or adolescence that gives insight into your family.

SPOUSE AND CHILDREN

- How did you meet your spouse?
- How does your spouse “complete” you?
- How many children, if any, do you have and what are their names and ages?
- When your children are grown, what would make you think you were successful in raising them?
- If your spouse and children could write your epitaph, what would you want it to say?
- What creative things have you done to cultivate romance in your marriage?
- What creative ways have you created memories with your children?

- What dreams do you have for your future as a couple or as a family?

VOCATION AND EDUCATION

- Where did you go to school?
- What did you study or what do you now wish you had studied?
- Where do you work, and how do you spend your waking hours?
- If you could do anything but what you do now, what would it be?

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

- What do you enjoy doing with your spare time?
- If rich uncle George died and left you \$50,000 that you had to spend and you had one month off, what would you do with the money and time?
- What have you never done that you wish you could do?

GOD AND CHURCH

- What church, if any, were you raised in?
- What were you taught about God as a child?
- What has been your most significant encounter with God?
- Describe the state of your relationship with God now.
- Tell us how you experienced conversion?
- What has helped you grown in your walk with God?
- Who has been the most significant influence in your relationship with God, and why?
- What would you like your relationship with God to be five years from now?
- When you die and stand before God, what would you like for his first words to you to be?
- How are you serving in the church? Is there another ministry you would like to get involved in?
- What has God been teaching you about? What are you reading?

EVIDENCES OF GRACE QUESTIONS

- What area of growth in your (or your spouse's) character (in the last 3-6 months) would you be most encouraged about?
- What specific evidences of God's grace have you observed in your (children, small group, friends, spouse, roommates) in the last week?

- What would you be most encouraged about in your walk with God?
- What has been the most life giving conviction you have experienced in the last month?
- How have you seen the Lord at work through you or your (friends, spouse) in ways that are not explainable by human effort, in the past several weeks?
- What things are you most thankful for in your (church, spouse, friends, workplace, family)?
- What have you been giving thanks for as you have walked with God this week?

Getting to Know You—Group Ideas

- Start the group off by doing an activity together that will help break the ice. Having dinner together is always an easy way to start. Begin by telling your stories. You don't have to get to everyone the first week. You may want to ask two or three people to share about their lives. As the leader, you can set the tone and an example by sharing first.
- Have group members bring a few photos from their childhood and introduce us to their family members.
- Sit together at church meetings.
- Ride together to special church events like conferences or retreats.
- Room together at events involving hotel stays. Arrange for the group to eat meals together at these events.
- Establish ways the group can be together outside of a meeting, like a “supper (or dessert) club.”
- Couples: Have group members bring photos of their weddings and tell the story of their courtship and engagement.
- Thanksgiving Dinner: Prepare a Thanksgiving dinner and then play a game after dinner.

- Nerd Night: The ladies prepare a nerd setting as everyone comes dressed in their best nerd attire. The guys are given “nerd names” as they are signed in. Play some games. Then serve lunch box dinners and a table full of appetizers. After honoring the men individually, the ladies do a skit imitating their version of one of the men’s meetings.
- Semi-formal Dinner: The guys make an elegant dinner for the ladies. Then they honor each woman individually with each receiving flowers.
- Watch major sporting events together. Assign a responsible person to monitor the advertising and to switch channels when needed.
- Take a retreat together (or just as men or just as women) to seek God together.
- Spend an evening playing board games together.
- Take a one day fun retreat to a park: Spend the day there. Swim, boat, play games. Have a cook out and then have fellowship together around a fire.
- Video Scavenger Hunt: Come up with a list of things that each team has to find, do, act out, or interview. Everything has to be videotaped. The best size for each team is 4 or 5 so that everyone can fit in one car. Allow at least an hour for the teams to hunt. After the hunt, go to someone’s home and watch the videos.
- Small group Cook-Outs: Have cook outs at different homes or parks. Play group games or just hang out and fellowship.
- Christmas Party: Exchange “white elephant” (i.e. silly or old) gifts, play games, sing carols, and worship.
- Go camping together
- Go hiking together followed by gathering at someone’s home or a restaurant near the trail afterwards.
- Take a trip to the tourist destinations in your city.

- Go out for breakfast as a group, or as men or as women.
- Start a coffee or dessert club, where couples are assigned to meet together on a rotating basis. Make sure there is clear direction of a few questions to discuss, and someone clearly delegated to make sure that the discussion happens that evening!
- Spontaneously invite people to go out after the Sunday meeting, to go on a picnic with you, to come over for coffee.
- Have a ladies' tea party.
- Play miniature golf together.
- Create times of discussion (topics) that will get people laughing together, such as "tell us your worst vacation, or the dumbest thing you have ever done."
- Plan times to have the group together when their children are able to participate in the activities.
- Scale the climbing wall at a sporting goods store.
- Rotate responsibility for a monthly hospitality night among your members. Be sure to release anyone who is not in a place to extend hospitality.
- Take a group photo and make sure everyone has a copy for their refrigerator.

Find Ways to Celebrate Growth, Transitions and Milestones

- Point out the people who are taking steps of relational growth and tell them how encouraging this is to the group and how it is an example for the rest of us to follow.
- Ask people to share in the group context how they are benefiting from growing relationships. Allow them to share their stories of what's happening and how they are getting to know people better.

- Point out progress in sanctification. Honor people who are growing by identifying them and sharing the specifics of their growth with the group.
- Celebrate conversions of people group members are close to or have witnessed to.
- Recognize significant achievement of life goals and life transitions: promotions, graduations, new job.
- Celebrate family joys: engagements, weddings, births, a child's graduation, baptisms, salvation, and birthdays.
- Take time to celebrate in prayer and thanksgiving together when a loved one comes to Christ.

Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Centrality of the Gospel: Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God's grace and the Gospel?

Fruit of the Spirit: Was the leader patient, humble and gracious in pursuing sufficient details?

Targeting the Heart: Did he ask good questions and seek to understand motive? Did Scripture inform the problem and solution?

Leading to Growth: How well did the leader involve the group? Did he help target specific steps that lead to growth?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Building a Spiritual Community

I. Small Groups: a Context for the Spirit's Work¹

- A. Small groups are more than social gatherings or discussion groups. They are contexts in which men and women who have been made alive by God in Christ may experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit together. As a result of God's initiative in saving us, our meetings become contexts to practice the exercise of the Spirit's gifts to one another. When we gather, we should anticipate the active ministry of the Holy Spirit as we serve one another to the glory of God.
- B. As we meet to study and apply God's word, and to pursue fellowship together, we want to make room for the Spirit's ministry and direction.
- C. Faith-filled, biblically-informed leadership is a significant factor in a small group's experience of the Holy Spirit's ministry. A leader can hinder the work of the Spirit, or he can make room for His work in such a way that people experience profound care and give glory to God.
- D. We can be confident that such ministry will be effective and not lead people into error if we insure that our ministry to one another is grounded in Scripture and overseen by pastors in a local church
- E. Three ways in which we participate in the Spirit's work are through prayer, song, and spiritual gifts.

¹ This course does not develop a theology of the Spirit's work through God's people in the local church. Our practice seeks to apply what is taught in 1 Corinthians 12-14; Colossians 3:12-17 and elsewhere.

II. Pray Together

- A. From its inception, the church has gathered to pray (Acts 2:42).
- B. When our prayers are grounded in the gospel, we remind one another of the access we have to God, which should only inspire great requests (See Rom. 8:32).
- C. When we pray, we help our group express gratefulness to God for His work in our lives. By recounting his grace with gratitude to him, we encourage our own souls.
- D. When we pray as a group for individual needs, we express care for one another.
- E. When we pray we teach each other to petition God with specific, biblically-informed requests.
- F. Here are some suggestions of how you can lead in prayer:
 - 1. Invite the group to state what they are asking of God.
 - 2. Solicit the group for *specific* requests.
 - a. Encourage the group to form requests around God's promises stated in the Bible. (See Heb. 6:12-15; 2 Cor. 1:20-22)
 - b. Many times our requests become opportunities for us to understand our circumstances and our response to them better.
 - c. You may have to encourage or redirect requests if they indicate ungodly or unbiblical desires, reminding the group that God desires us to pray according to his will (see 1 John 5:14-15).
 - d. At times you may want to restrict your prayer to giving thanks for specific help or to praising God for his character and his deeds. It can help to begin a time like this looking at a particular passage of Scripture. Some examples:

- The extent of his love (John 3:16)
 - His remedy of our desperate need (Rom. 5:6; Eph. 2:1-3)
 - His complete provision for our salvation (Rom. 3:21-26)
 - The blessings associated with salvation (Rom. 8:32; Gal. 3:14; 4:6; 5:22).
 - Our access to his throne of grace (Heb. 4:14-16; Eph. 3:11-12)
3. It can be helpful to encourage faith toward God in difficult circumstances. Because of what Jesus has done, we can come boldly with our requests (Heb. 4:14-16).
 4. Encourage your group to participate actively by giving vocal agreement when others are praying. Praying together is not one person praying and others simply listening. Rather it is a group of people joining together in one another's prayers. Encourage your group in the ministry of the "amen" (literally, 'may it be so') as others pray.

III. Sing Together

- A. Singing is one of the ways God has given us to give him glory as we meet together (Col. 3:16).
- B. Singing together can accomplish a number of purposes, including praising God, praying, confessing our need for God, and encouraging one another.
- C. A primary purpose in Scripture for singing is to proclaim God's character, recall his Word and delight in his promises. This is why we sometimes refer to singing together as "worship" (literally, declaring God's worth or value). Although all of life should be an act of worship to God through Jesus Christ, God delights in the praise of his gathered people.
- D. Due to a lack of musicians or musical ability, it is not our expectation or requirement that every small group will worship God together in song.
- E. We should, however, seek to make all aspects of prayer a part of our time of seeking God together.

- F. If you don't sing together, take time to give thanks to God for what he has done, declare aspects of God's greatness, or confess confidence in his promises. Reading Scripture aloud can be very helpful in these times.
- G. If you do decide to worship God in song
 - 1. Make sure that the music you use is sing-able for a small group.
 - 2. Make sure the songs are God-centered with accurate theological content. Your pastor or church music director can help you with this.
 - 3. If you are lead by a musician, make sure he or she has the necessary skills to allow the music to enhance singing and is not a distraction to your worship.
- H. To obtain further training for a musician to lead singing in your group, ask your pastor for a copy of Bob Kauflin's message and outline "Worshiping God in a Small Group," available through Sovereign Grace Ministries.

IV. Serve One Another Through the Exercise of Spiritual Gifts

- A. "...the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good..." as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:7 refers to each of us being used by the Spirit to advance his work in people. First Corinthians 14:1 calls these "spiritual gifts."
 - 1. The list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 is not meant to be comprehensive, and there are other listings of gifts in the New Testament (cf. Romans 12).
 - 2. The point is that the Spirit works in a great variety of ways and each of us should expect him to use us for "the common good."

- B. Some of the gifts are spectacular in nature (e.g. the working of miracles) some unspectacular (e.g. administration). Yet all require the personal activity of the Spirit in order to be useful. We should, as individuals and as a gathered group, ask and expect the Spirit to work among us.
- C. From 1 Corinthians 12, we highlight here two ways that the Spirit works in our groups:
1. Prophecy: Wayne Grudem helpfully defines prophecy as, "...telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind."²
 - a. This gift is not to be equated with that of the prophets in the Old Testament. It is not speaking infallible words from God.
 - b. This gift is not essentially telling the future.
 - c. The person with the gift of prophecy, as described in 1 Corinthians 14:3, "...speaks to people for their upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation."
 - d. How does this operate in a small group? As you wait on the Spirit in your meeting—sometimes when praying for an individual, sometimes not—a person will get a thought, spontaneously brought to mind, that may edify a particular person or the whole group.
 - e. Two cautions you need to be aware of as a leader:
 - These words do not have authority. The person receiving a prophetic word is responsible to test what he hears to see if it truly applies to him.
 - Any word of prophecy must be consistent with the clear teaching of Scripture.
 2. Healing: A gift of the Spirit through which God causes a person to recover from an illness or injury through the prayer of one or more people.

² Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999) p. 408.

- a. This is not inconsistent with seeking medical care. Any healing by any means is a merciful gift from God.
- b. At times this gift operates in a miraculous way—i.e. the person recovers in a way that cannot be explained by the body's normal restorative processes or by medical intervention. At other times, it simply results in recovery but not a spectacular recovery.
- c. It often ministers the comfort and awareness of the presence of the Spirit when we lay our hands on a person as we pray for him.
- d. Two cautions you need to be aware of as a leader:
 - When we ask God to give a gift of healing, we should encourage the sick to put their trust in God and his power. However, a lack of healing is not necessarily an indication of a lack of faith. Those who suggest otherwise misrepresent God in Scripture and can only compound the suffering of a sick person.
 - When we lay our hands on someone, it is not necessary to touch the sick or injured body part for this gift to operate. Typically, it is best to lay hands on a person's shoulder, to hold his or her hand, and not to cross any boundaries of modesty or to do so in such a way that makes the person more aware of our touch than our prayers and God's presence.

- D. Leading your group to expect the Spirit's work and to act on his promptings
 1. Lead your group to pray to experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
 - "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" – Luke 11:9-13

2. Encourage your group to desire an awareness of the Spirit's presence and to anticipate his work.
 - a. "But earnestly desire higher gifts..." (1 Cor. 12:31).
 - b. It is important that we believe that God wants to bless us through the ministry of his Holy Spirit. It is biblical to desire his active presence, so that we may experience his love and know the Savior better.
 - c. We have found that spiritual hunger and desire for the Holy Spirit's ministry is an important element in a group's experience. Where there is no desire, no expectation and no room for the Spirit to work, rarely are spiritual gifts experienced. Bible Scholar Gordon Fee puts it this way:
 - "...After all, 'seek earnestly after the better gifts' for the edification of the body is an imperative, not polite invitation.

"At the individual level, my stock answer is admittedly not always helpful: hunger and thirst with openness. For some this puts too much emphasis on the human rather than with divine side; and I too fear that. But my own experience in the church is that there is a clear correlation between our hunger after God, on the one hand, and our experience of God, on the other. This does not remove the experience of the Spirit of God from God's own sovereignty, nor does it imply that the one hungering and thirsting does not already have the Spirit in full measure. I simply know no other practical solution."³
3. Set aside time in your meetings for the group to wait for the Spirit to lead them to exercise their gifts.
 - a. Praying together as a group is an ideal setting to encourage the practice and employment of spiritual gifts.

³ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996) pp. 190-191.

- b. Lead in prayer by inviting the Spirit to make his presence known and to use the group to bless and minister to one another for the purpose of “building one another up.”
- c. Target your ministry to individuals:
 - Someone who is facing a challenge to his faith.
 - Someone enduring a trial
 - Someone considering a ministry opportunity
 - Someone facing a major life decision
 - Someone celebrating a significant milestone
- d. Here are some helpful ways to do this:
 - Gather around the person, lay hands on him.
 - Invite the Spirit to help you to pray and to bring his blessing to the recipient of your prayers.
 - As you lead, be sensitive to the Spirit by observing the person’s response to your ministry. It can be helpful to stop at points to ask the person what he is experiencing: tears, excitement, consternation can all be indications of how you are to direct your prayers. Avoid cutting off your time if the person appears to be receiving significant help. If this is the case, lead by letting the group know that you are going to continue to wait, and then invite the Spirit to continue to work.
 - If a musician is available, it can be helpful to begin with a song and to have a musician play quietly in the background to help the group to concentrate and to wait with a God-ward focus.
 - While you should allow sufficient time for ministry, you should also be aware of people’s endurance and schedules and close at an appropriate time.

- Our experience of excesses or wrong doctrine being expressed in these times is very infrequent. When someone does say or do something that is unhelpful or incorrect, you should find a wise and gracious way to address what has been said. If you have any question about how you handled the situation, ask your pastor for evaluation.
- It often serves the person being prayed for if another person can take notes during times of ministry to record what is said for future prayer and reference.

V. Conclusion

Active, watchful, and directive leadership is critical to the fruitfulness of any care group or care group meeting. This is especially so if we want to maximize participation and specific application of truth in the lives of our group members. We can grow in leading meetings that expect and experience the Spirit's empowering presence. This requires that we actively seek to discern his direction as we pray—both before and during the meeting. We must be intentional in our planning, preparation and leadership; always watchful for potential opportunities to bring the group and individuals into fresh encounters with the living God.

Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Centrality of the Gospel: Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God's grace and the Gospel?

Fruit of the Spirit: Was the leader patient, humble and gracious in pursuing sufficient details?

Targeting the Heart: Did he ask good questions and seek to understand motive? Did Scripture inform the problem and solution?

Leading to Growth: How well did the leader involve the group? Did he help target specific steps that lead to growth?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Sessions 5-7 Introduction: Building a Community Around Fellowship

Building a Community Around Fellowship

The focal point of our small group is gathering at regular meetings to participate in what the Bible calls “fellowship.” In this group context individuals can involve others in helping them know the Lord and his ways as they experience and respond to the events and relationships which God brings into their lives.

This fellowship should have four qualities if we are to help each other grow in knowing God and living holy lives before him. Over the next three sessions we will explore each of these in depth.

1. We should **keep the gospel central**—for Jesus’ death and resurrection give us forgiveness of our sins and access to God for help and power to change.
2. We should **ask good questions** that allow us to learn the details of the person’s life circumstances and his heart response to them—for God works in us through the circumstances of our day-to-day living and we need help understanding how he is working.
3. We should **get to the heart**—for at root all of our problems and their solutions begin with what motivates us, what we think and believe.
4. We should **lead to growth**—for talking about sin and our Savior is not enough, we must, through the Spirit’s power, change our thoughts, words, and actions. This requires a process of confession and repentance which can be aided by the group providing accountability that encourages persistence in change.

Fellowship, Part 1: Keeping the Gospel Central While Sharing Life Together

Keeping the Gospel Central

I. Gospel-Centered Fellowship

- A. As we share our lives together, we become aware of sin—in our own thoughts and actions and in the thoughts and behavior of the members of our group. Before moving on to helping people change, we must make sure they see their sin in light of the gospel.
- B. Fellowship is possible only because of the gospel. God intends for us to grow in grace in the context of a gospel-saturated, grace-filled community of brothers and sisters.
- C. Therefore fellowship must be gospel-centered. When we are practicing fellowship and seeking to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), we must always remember that the gospel is “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:1-5).
 - 1. It is the gospel’s work that makes us alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5).
 - 2. It is the gospel that enables us to cultivate relationship with one another. Because we have fellowship with God as our Father through his Son Jesus, we have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7).

3. It is the gospel that makes it possible for us to be humble and confess our sins with one another, because our sins need God’s forgiveness and have in fact been forgiven (Colossians 1:21-23).
4. It is the gospel that enables us and motivates us to forgive one another and be patient with one another, even as we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:32).
5. It is the gospel that makes it possible for us to experience the power of the Holy Spirit and gives us hope that even as imperfect sinners, by the grace of God we can grow into the image of Jesus Christ together (Romans 8:28,29).
6. It is the gospel that compels faith for change. “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

II. Leading Gospel-Centered Meetings

- A. Gospel-centered leadership means pointing the group’s attention to the Cross of Christ, in prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and discussion.
- B. A wise leader will always draw his group’s attention to the gospel’s power and current work in his group. He makes it a practice to encourage his group to identify and give thanks for evidences of God’s grace at work.
- C. Small group leaders should encourage their group to recognize these evidences of grace by regularly asking questions that draw attention to God’s gracious activity in their lives—the fruit of our relationship with God established in the gospel.
- D. Some questions that promote an awareness of the gospel and its effects:
 - How does the gospel help you cultivate a conviction of sin?
 - How does an awareness of the gospel help you to maintain hope in this trial?

- How does the gospel provide grace and motivation to forgive others who have sinned against you, so that you don't cultivate a heart of bitterness?
 - What area of growth in your (friend's, small group member's, parent's, fellow believer's or spouse's) character (in the last 3-6 months) would you be most encouraged about?
- E. More questions that promote an awareness of God's ongoing work of grace in our lives:
- What specific evidences of God's grace have you observed in your friends/roommates/children/spouse in the last week?
 - What would you be most encouraged about in your walk with God?
 - How have you seen the Lord at work through you, your friends or your spouse in ways that are not explainable by human effort in the past several weeks?
 - What things are you most thankful for in your church, your small group leader, your small group, your children or your spouse?
 - What specific things have you been giving thanks for as you have walked with God this past week?

Sharing Life Together

I. Fellowship is Sharing in the New Life with Other Believers.

Fellowship is more than sharing the Bible together or praying together. Since God is involved in all of life, we come to know God and conform ourselves to his will and ways as we apply the Bible to all of our life circumstances. Because of the way God has made us, we need the help of other Christians to do this.

- A. The apostle John begins his first letter writing about fellowship with God.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1:1-4).

- B. The most difficult challenges we face have to do with our sinful responses to the circumstances of life. John’s letter continues along this line, as he shows how fellowship with God is not just an individual pursuit, but something to be pursued in community

“[I]f we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

- C. John’s letter goes on to develop how our fellowship involves our moral life (our sins and righteousness), our thought life (our doctrine), and our relationships (love for one another).

1. This is the essence of our life together: Through his work on the cross, Jesus Christ enters into relationship with us in community and thus touches everything about us and the world in which we live.
2. So our life together as a group must be spent exploring how God is working in us and through us in our work, our families, our money and possessions, our recreations— everything under his blessing and kingship!

II. How Can You as a Small Group Leader Bring Self-Disclosing Fellowship to Your Group?

- A. Through your modeling transparent disclosure of your own life. By sharing the details of your circumstances and how you need to know and follow God in them, you demonstrate what fellowship looks like.
- B. As we discuss God’s work in our circumstances:
 1. First we want to make sure we get all the relevant facts of the situation. We don’t want to address ourselves to circumstances that do not exist.
 2. Then we want to explore how a person thinks about those circumstances. Fear, anger, lust, envy all are the products of what we believe. What we believe motivates the response of our heart to our situation. So we must not only learn the external circumstances of a person’s life, but ask good questions that reveal their thoughts, desires, and motives in response to their situation.
- C. The reading for our next session will explore why it is so important to target our hearts as the beginning point of any lasting spiritual change.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION:

- Read chapter 4, “The Heart is the Target” in Paul Tripp’s *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* and prepare to discuss it.
- Listen to the recording, “The Heart of Change” as you read the outline in Session 6 and prepare to discuss it.

Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Centrality of the Gospel: Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God's grace and the Gospel?

Fruit of the Spirit: Was the leader patient, humble and gracious in pursuing sufficient details?

Targeting the Heart: Did he ask good questions and seek to understand motive? Did Scripture inform the problem and solution?

Leading to Growth: How well did the leader involve the group? Did he help target specific steps that lead to growth?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Fellowship, Part 2: The Heart of Change

I. God Wants Our Hearts

- A. God's goal for us is not a superficial confession of sin or outward behavioral change. He wants to change us from the heart, which ultimately affects our words and actions. So your goal for the group is to help members understand their trials and sins in reference to the heart and the need to be transformed by the Spirit in their thinking and desires.
- B. The heart is the inner core of who we are; it is the place of our beliefs and values and feelings and decisions.
- C. It's common for group members to want to move toward practical help or superficial change without addressing the heart's response to their circumstances. Example:
 - 1. Concern: "They've been making some big layoffs at work lately and I'm pretty sure my department is next. I find myself preoccupied with losing my job and wondering how I'm going to pay my mortgage."
 - 2. Superficial response #1: "My company has been hiring lately, and I think they'll have need for people with your background." (This may be helpful at a later time, but it does not address the heart.)
 - 3. Superficial response #2: "Are you reading your Bible before you go to work in the morning? I read through the Bible every year, and I find that making this my daily practice really helps me with the stress of the job." (A wonderful practice, but it does not adequately apply the Word to this specific situation and the response of the heart to it.)

4. Superficial response #3: “The Bible says, ‘My God shall provide all your needs...’ You just have to trust him.” (Again, true and good, but to find this trust, we have to dig deeper into who God is, how we fail to believe him, how we need to discard our false beliefs and then lay hold of his marvelous promises.)
5. Getting to the heart: “What exactly do you fear?...Who is the Lord in this situation?...How does your fear reflect on your functional belief about God?” (This is the best help a group can give in that it gets to the heart, helps root out fear that may grow from pride and a denial of who God is, and cultivates faith in the character and promises of God.)

II. Biblical Correction in a Small Group

- A. Seeing the sinful motives and thoughts of our hearts is not an easy task. It requires humility and hardwork—what Richard Sibbes calls “taking the soul to task” (see Prov. 4:23). Our pride makes us prone to self-deception, and so we deny or ignore Scripture’s clear teaching. This is why we need each other. Our group can be a significant channel of God’s grace and truth to each of us.
- B. The Bible affirms our ability to help each other in seeing our sin and helping each other change.
 1. “I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and *able to instruct one another*” (Romans 15:14).¹
 - a. Most people think of “instruction” as the dispensing of information with no expectation of change. This is not the biblical sense of the word “to instruct” found in Romans 15:14.
 - b. To instruct is to admonish, to warn, to seek to turn someone from wrong thinking to right thinking resulting in a change from wrong behavior to right behavior.

¹ Other verses that encourage receiving correction or instruction from others are Proverbs 13:18; 15:31-32.

2. Since the Bible is our only standard of truth, when we refer to “biblical correction,” we mean speaking to someone in a way that encourages change according to the teaching of Scripture.
 - “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for *correction*, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).
- C. Love Must Motivate Biblical Correction.
1. “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:5-6).
 2. We bring correction to others because we love them and desire them to be free from the deceitfulness of sin. We want them to experience grace. We want to examine our hearts for love when we give correction, and we want to make sure people are aware of the fact that our correction is motivated by love.
- D. Characteristics of Biblical Correction.
1. The content of our correction must be based on Scripture: Biblical language is essential in the diagnosis of the problem and points to the only true solution to any sin.
 2. Before bringing correction, we must make sure a person is confident of his status as a forgiven sinner through Jesus’ death on his behalf.
 - “The only sin that can be mortified [i.e., put to death] is forgiven sin.” — John Piper
 3. We should help people adjust the language they use to describe their problem. The human heart tends to avoid the seriousness of sin by using language that denies responsibility for sin or the seriousness of its offense.

- a. Some examples of neutral euphemisms commonly used for sin.

This euphemism...	...can be the sin of	...can be replaced by
“I’m independent.”	Self-sufficiency	Dependence on God
“I’m frustrated.”	Complaining/grumbling	Thankfulness
“He makes me mad.”	Hatred	Love
“I exaggerated.”	Lying	Truthfulness
“I’m talkative/quiet.”	Selfishness	Servanthood
“I got steamed.”	Anger	Self-control
“He riles me.”	Bitterness	Forgiveness
“I tend to be impulsive.”	Impatience	Patience/Love
“I enjoy nice things.”	Covetousness	Generosity
“I’m not like them.”	Self-righteousness	Humility
“I’m certain what’s best.”	Arrogance	Preferring others
“I’m stressed.”	Anxiety	Trusting God

- b. Bradley Beavers covers this topic with biblical insight and vivid illustrations. See “Watch Your Language” in *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. XII, No. 3, 1994, pp.24-30. This article can be a helpful tool in teaching a group about fellowship.

4. The person bringing correction must be gentle and gracious

“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

- a. If you have a concern, ask for permission to speak to it, and couch your exploration of a person’s sin in respect and gentleness.
- “May I share with you a concern I would have for you in this matter?”
 - “Would you be open to hearing from the group on this?”

- “I have not come to a conclusion on this, but I have some concerns about what you have shared. Would you be open to hearing my perspective on this situation?”
 - “We would be very interested in hearing your thoughts in response to our concerns.”
- b. People are aware of our attitude toward them and often respond accordingly.
5. Look for patterns of behavior rather than focusing on one incident of what appears to be sin.
 6. When discussing the motives of the heart, raise questions and share concerns without drawing conclusions.
 - a. “I could be wrong here, but your voice seemed to become tense and grew louder when you said to your wife, ‘I don’t want you doing that,’ it sounded like you were angry. How would you evaluate your feelings toward her at that point?”
 - b. “What concerns me is that you don’t seem to be changing in this area, and that leads me to wonder: Are you concerned about the seriousness of this sin and its potential consequences in your life?”
 - c. “I am not sure about this, but it doesn’t seem like you are hearing what I am saying. Can you summarize what you think I am saying?”
 7. Allow the person to explain his words or actions in a way that is different from what you perceived.
 8. Allow people time to consider the perspectives of others. Don’t expect immediate agreement.
 - a. Only the Holy Spirit can bring conviction of sin.
 - b. Don’t insist (even in your heart) that people will respond completely, sufficiently, or immediately to your input.

- c. A patient trust in the Spirit to work frees you to share observations faithfully and peacefully without feeling the pressure to make people respond as you bring correction.
 - d. The fact that a person even listens to our concerns is a sign of God's grace at work.
- 9. Bring serious concerns to your pastor (preferably by inviting the one confessing to do this first).
- 10. Avoid assuming the role of "group counselor" based on your leadership position. Encourage the group to participate in the process of helping a member to understand his sin.
- 11. Our goal is not a group counseling session in which we spend an entire meeting seeking to tie up every aspect of a person's sin.
 - a. Our goal is to help as many members of the group as possible move forward in overcoming sin.
 - b. This may mean that one person gets more time than others in a particular meeting, but our goal overall is that all of us have ample opportunity to bring the concerns of our lives and hearts to the group.
- 12. If a group member brings correction in a harsh manner or gives counsel that is clearly unbiblical, your responsibility as a leader is to...
 - a. ...redirect the discussion to others who will bring a right attitude with their input: "What do the rest of you have to offer our brother?"
 - b. ...redirect the discussion to group members who will have a biblical viewpoint: "Steve, how would you think about this situation?"
 - c. ...gently correct the counsel given: "I'm not sure that advice is in keeping with Scripture. For example, look at this verse..."

- d. Remind the group that if a person is trapped (or “caught”) in a sin, Scripture commands us to correct gently. We should always make the person and the group aware of the grace of God to forgive and to change. And we should always have in mind that we are all fellow sinners in need of change.

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load” (Gal. 6:1-5)

III. Conclusion

Many Christians suffer from discouragement over patterns of sin in their lives that they are unable to overcome. The gospel is our source of hope for change. In our next session we will look at how a small group can be an important context for helping one another to pursue on the pathway of continued growth.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION:

- Listen to the recording while you read the outline in Session 7, “Lead Toward Growth” and prepare to discuss it.
- Read Chapter 5 in *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, “Understanding Your Heart Struggle” and prepare to discuss it.

Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Centrality of the Gospel: Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God's grace and the Gospel?

Fruit of the Spirit: Was the leader patient, humble and gracious in pursuing sufficient details?

Targeting the Heart: Did he ask good questions and seek to understand motive? Did Scripture inform the problem and solution?

Leading to Growth: How well did the leader involve the group? Did he help target specific steps that lead to growth?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Fellowship, Part 3: Lead Toward Growth

I. Confession → Repentance → Accountability

- A. Our goal in any one small group meeting is not to provide one or more group members with a thorough “counseling” experience. What we want to do is help as many members as a meeting allows take steps that produce growth in godliness. Therefore, our goal should not be to get to all the issues, nor should we think that we can tie up a person’s problems in a neat package. The goal is *progress* in sanctification.
- B. **Confession.** Seeing sin is not enough. We must take responsibility for it and see it as offensive—an act of rebellion toward God that is often offensive to those around us as well.
1. While all our sin has been covered by the death of Jesus on our behalf, the Lord still expects us to acknowledge our sins to him (1 John 1:7-9, Ps. 32:5). This is a part of our Father-son relationship with him.
 2. Scripture also obligates us to be reconciled to those we’ve sinned against, which would include confessing our sins to those people we’ve offended (Matt. 5:23-25).
 3. Beyond this God can use our small group to help us see our sin clearly allowing us to grow in our relationship with God and with others through making humble, accurate confession.
- C. **Repentance.** Beyond confession the pathway of growth involves taking steps to change. The Bible calls this change “repentance.”

Fellowship, Part 3: Lead Toward Growth

I. Confession → Repentance → Accountability

- A. Our goal in any one small group meeting is not to provide one or more group members with a thorough “counseling” experience. What we want to do is help as many members as a meeting allows take steps that produce growth in godliness. Therefore, our goal should not be to get to all the issues, nor should we think that we can tie up a person’s problems in a neat package. The goal is *progress* in sanctification.
- B. **Confession.** Seeing sin is not enough. We must take responsibility for it and see it as offensive—an act of rebellion toward God that is often offensive to those around us as well.
1. While all our sin has been covered by the death of Jesus on our behalf, the Lord still expects us to acknowledge our sins to him (1 John 1:7-9, Ps. 32:5). This is a part of our Father-son relationship with him.
 2. Scripture also obligates us to be reconciled to those we’ve sinned against, which would include confessing our sins to those people we’ve offended (Matt. 5:23-25).
 3. Beyond this God can use our small group to help us see our sin clearly allowing us to grow in our relationship with God and with others through making humble, accurate confession.
- C. **Repentance.** Beyond confession the pathway of growth involves taking steps to change. The Bible calls this change “repentance.”

- D. **Accountability.** Repentance takes place over time. As a group we can help one another toward growth by encouraging each other to fulfill the commitments we have made to God for personal change.

II. Confessing Sins in Our Small Group

- A. Many of our sins cannot be known without our confessing them to others. If we are going to pursue godliness with others, we must make sure they know what is really going on in our souls.
- B. The Bible supports the wisdom of this:
1. “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)
 2. “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13)
- C. Confession humbles us and humility brings grace (James 4:6).
1. We confess because we need others to help us to see ourselves clearly. How many times has a sin that you have helped someone else overcome ensnared you? This is a clear illustration of the deceitfulness of sin.
 2. This principle of needing one another is fundamental to the humble and grace-filled practice of fellowship.
- D. A good leader will take time to discuss the confession of sin with his group to make sure that everyone understands and sees the value of this practice. One good resource for helping us overcome sin from the inside out is Chris Lundgaard’s book *The Enemy Within*.
- E. A wise leader asks if everyone is open to input and correction before encouraging confession in his group. You must make sure that a member sees the benefit of this practice and participates willingly, otherwise he may feel coerced into a practice for which he lacks faith.

- F. Deferring discussion: Good discussion can lead to confession that, because of limited time or the nature of what the participant shares, should not be discussed in the group.
 - 1. Some issues are not appropriate for group discussion. If that is the case, thank the participant for sharing and ask if he or she could follow up in another more appropriate context.
 - 2. If you must do this, follow up privately after the meeting.
 - 3. It may be appropriate to ask the person if they would like to discuss the issue privately with you or someone else in the group who is qualified to help him.
 - 4. If the implications of the confession are serious or especially difficult, encourage the group member to speak with a pastor.
 - 5. Be faithful to follow up personally with members of your group when they bring up significant life issues that require significant change.

III. Repentance – Where the Change Happens

- A. Once a Christian has sharpened his understanding of his sin through correction and confessed it appropriately, he is ready to begin walking a path of repentance.
- B. What is repentance?
 - 1. Repentance is turning away from sin *because* you are turning to God. It begins with a change of mind and ends with ceasing from sin in order to pursue righteousness.
 - 2. Repentance is always joined with faith. Repentance is not about self-help but about change that begins with a full confidence that all our sins are forgiven through Jesus' death on the cross. Repentance is compelled by confidence that by the Spirit we have the power to change through Jesus' resurrection from the dead.
 - 3. Repentance is often misunderstood

- a. Confession to God and others, by itself, is not repentance.
 - b. Identifying a sin by name is not repentance.
 - c. Simply purposing not to sin in a particular way is not sufficient for repentance.
- C. Repentance includes grief (or sorrow) over the effects of sin on God. We must distinguish this grief from a worldly grief over the consequences of sin in our lives.
- “Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).
- D. Repentance requires a biblical view of sin: it is an offense toward God for which God’s holiness demands payment and change.
- E. Repentance must be particular. It must find expression in specific change in how we think and act. We can get at the particulars of repentance by asking the question, “What does repentance *look like*?”
1. Putting to death particular thoughts and actions that open you to temptation and lead to sin.
 2. Bringing to life particular thoughts and actions that lead to righteous thoughts and behavior that replace your sin.
 3. This pattern of putting to death and bringing to life is taught and illustrated in Colossians 3:4-17 (see especially verse 5, “Put to death...” and verse 12, “Put on then...”) and in Ephesians 4:17-32 (see especially verse 22, “to put off your old self...” and verse 24, “to put on the new self...”)
- F. How can a leader promote repentance through a small group discussion?
1. Help the person define his sin biblically. Ask him: “How do you think the Bible defines your sin?” Invite the group to share their knowledge of Scripture on this point.

2. Ask the person how he feels about his sin and why he feels as he does. Invite the group's observations. Encourage him to see his sin first and foremost as against God.
3. Ask how the gospel speaks to his sin. Is he assured of God's forgiveness through Jesus' death? Does he have hope for change because of the resurrection? Invite the group to encourage him in this area.
4. Help him brainstorm (and include the group) as to what particular things he can do to avoid future temptation and sin. Make sure that Scripture, prayer and fellowship are foundational to his plan.
5. Help him brainstorm (and include the group) as to what particular things he can do to replace his sinful thinking and behavior with righteous thoughts and behaviors. Make sure that Scripture, prayer and fellowship are foundational to his plan.
6. Pray for him according to his need as you've explored it in #'s 1-5.

IV. Accountability

- A. Every human being is accountable to God.
 1. "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).
 2. "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" (Hebrews 4:13).
- B. Accountability to other believers.
 1. If we desire fellowship with God through fellowship with other believers, we will want them to inform them about our practice of repentance (see 1 John 1:5-10). If we want to give a good account before God on the last day, we'll invite our brothers and sisters to help us give a good account today.

2. Accountability cannot be imposed; it must be desired and invited. Moreover, it is ineffective if a person does not desire it.
3. Accountability should always direct people to God. The goal is pleasing God, not impressing the group.
4. Accountability is simply asking someone else to follow up with me about my progress in change I believe God wants in me.
5. As a small group leader, you can encourage accountability by asking a group member who is pursuing repentance questions like these:
 - a. “How can we help you accomplish what you desire to accomplish in pleasing God?”
 - b. “What questions would you want us to ask you to make sure you are taking this seriously before God?”
6. Some other ways a small group leader can foster accountability:
 - a. Follow up on previous meetings and conversations in which a group member has expressed a desire to repent. It can be helpful to keep a running list of commitments to follow up to see how a person is continuing in his repentance.
 - b. Encourage the involvement of others between meetings (e.g. encourage the establishment of partners for the purpose of follow up, encouragement, and prayer).
7. Always keep in mind—accountability is not the goal: repentance which leads to joyful obedience is our aim. Repeatedly confessing the same patterns of sin without growth can be counter-productive and dull a person’s conviction of sin. If this happens we must help the person evaluate whether his repentance is sincere.

8. As with correction, confession, and repentance, accountability must always be practiced with the gospel in view.

V. Final Considerations: Confidentiality and Pastoral Involvement

A. Confidentiality

1. Each member of the group must be assured that what he shares with the group will not become the subject of gossip.
2. Confidentiality does not mean that we tell no one outside the group what we hear, but that we have a compelling and biblically supportable reason to speak to others.
 - a. Informing others outside the group must be in the best interest of the person who has shared a confidence, or it must be in the best interest of someone affected by another's sin. In most cases this should be done after informing the group member that you are talking to someone else. If you are not sure how to handle a confidence that may need to be shared with others, discuss it with your pastor.
 - b. Married couples must use discretion: Marital unity means that we keep no secrets from one another. But this does not mean that we *must* share the details of another's sin with our spouse. There must be a compelling reason for giving your spouse such details (e.g. Your spouse may be helping the spouse of the one confessing sin). So you are not "keeping a secret" but acknowledging between each other that some things are not necessary for the other to know.
 - c. We must be aware of the sinful tendency to desire information for selfish reasons and restrain ourselves out of a desire to please God and care for his people.

B. Pastoral Involvement

1. Small groups exist in the context of the local church and pastoral care.
2. The church is a place where God-given spiritual authority is exercised with the intention of protecting the church from theological error and moral compromise.
3. Small group leaders are extensions of pastoral care. They represent and are appointed by the pastors to serve in extending care and help to others who desire to grow.
4. Pastors and confidentiality
 - a. Because pastors are accountable to God for the care and oversight of the members of your group, the leader should share anything that he hears that he believes will help the pastor achieve this end or that helps him provide his group wiser leadership. The group should be aware that the leader has these conversations with his pastor.
 - b. A small group leader may invite a person to take issues directly to a pastor before the leader speaks to the pastor, but the leader should also be free to discuss anything that comes to him in his role as a small group leader in God's church.

Assignment for Session 8

Turn in your notebook to the notes for session 8. Prior to our next meeting, you will set goals for the first three months your group will have together. Even if you are taking leadership of an existing group, you will want to set goals. Notice that the goals are for the three areas of group life this course has covered: relationships, spiritual life and fellowship. Once you have set these goals, write out your plans in detail for your first three meetings. When we next meet, we will evaluate together what you create.

Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Setting Goals/ Making Plans

Introduction

Now that you have been equipped to lead a small group, it is your turn to put into practice what you have learned. Where will you lead your group? What goals will you set to help you get there? The following pages will lead you in a process of goal setting and planning your first three meetings.

As you plan, always think in three categories:

1. How can we pursue relationships?
2. How can we pursue spiritual life together?
3. How can we pursue fellowship?

Before you begin, take some time to pray for yourself as a leader and for each member of your group. Then begin the task of goal setting and planning.

Pursuing Relationships Together

Read over the outline and addendum for Session 3, then on this page write down as many ideas as you think could work to help your group grow relationally. Include in your thoughts how you can delegate responsibilities for the group to other members. Once the page is full, circle the ideas you think are best for your first three months as a group.

Pursuing Spiritual Life Together

Read over the outline for Session 4, then on this page write down as many ideas as you think could work to help in your group's pursuit of spiritual life as a group. Once the page is full, circle the ideas you think are best for your first three months as a group.

Pursuing Fellowship Together

Read over the outlines for Sessions 5-7, then on this page write down as many ideas as you think could work to help in your group's pursuit of fellowship as a group. Once the page is full, circle the ideas you think are best for your first three months as a group.

Plans for Meeting #1

Day of week, date and time of meeting _____

Location of meeting _____

Plan for a two hour meeting with time for connecting informally at the beginning. Make sure that you include elements of relationship, spiritual life and fellowship together.

Plans for Meeting #2

Day of week, date and time of meeting _____

Location of meeting _____

Plan for a two hour meeting with time for connecting informally at the beginning. Make sure that you include elements of relationship, spiritual life and fellowship together.

Plans for Meeting #3

Day of week, date and time of meeting _____

Location of meeting _____

Plan for a two hour meeting with time for connecting informally at the beginning. Make sure that you include elements of relationship, spiritual life and fellowship together.

Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Centrality of the Gospel: Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God's grace and the Gospel?

Fruit of the Spirit: Was the leader patient, humble and gracious in pursuing sufficient details?

Targeting the Heart: Did he ask good questions and seek to understand motive? Did Scripture inform the problem and solution?

Leading to Growth: How well did the leader involve the group? Did he help target specific steps that lead to growth?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Centrality of the Gospel: Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God's grace and the Gospel?

Fruit of the Spirit: Was the leader patient, humble and gracious in pursuing sufficient details?

Targeting the Heart: Did he ask good questions and seek to understand motive? Did Scripture inform the problem and solution?

Leading to Growth: How well did the leader involve the group? Did he help target specific steps that lead to growth?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Centrality of the Gospel: Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God's grace and the Gospel?

Fruit of the Spirit: Was the leader patient, humble and gracious in pursuing sufficient details?

Targeting the Heart: Did he ask good questions and seek to understand motive? Did Scripture inform the problem and solution?

Leading to Growth: How well did the leader involve the group? Did he help target specific steps that lead to growth?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader _____

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓