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# 3 ROLES

— *for guiding groups* —



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# Introduction

## Words Matter

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“Every Word Matters™” is a trademark of B&H Publishing Group. It guides the acquisition and content of every book and Bible they publish. Announcing the initiative, B&H president Selma Wilson said, “Words really do matter. It is a huge responsibility to pay attention to our words as we use them to point toward God’s Word.” “Clarity Changes Everything™” is the trademark of Will Mancini, who leads Auxano as “clarity evangelist.” Mancini and his team apply that principle vigorously when they help a church—or any enterprise—wrestle with the words they will employ to communicate vision, values, and other key organizational concepts. Whenever I (David) speak or write, I can almost hear these two fine leaders asking, “Is your language clear? Precise? Powerful?” Words matter!

### The Words in the Title Matter

We spent a long time deliberating the title of this book. We know churches today use a variety of terms to describe their processes and systems for making disciples. They often care deeply about the words they’ve chosen. We want this book to be helpful to a lot of people in a lot of churches, whatever words they employ to describe what they do. So let’s spend a few paragraphs unpacking the words in our title. We will work backwards.

### Groups

We will use the word “groups” to describe any gathering of people where a primary purpose is to explore, discuss, and apply a portion of the Word of God, the Bible. A *Sunday School class* that meets at the church before or after weekend worship is such a group. A *small group* that meets on a weeknight in a home is such a group. In some churches, members may choose to participate in a *LIFE group* on campus on Sundays or in a home on various weeknights. That is the kind of group we’re talking about, too. *Bible Fellowship groups*, *Community groups*, *Connect groups*, and *Bible study classes* are other popular terms. All of them describe a church’s plan for moving people from worship attendance only to a next step of discipleship: participating in a group where an individual can experience Bible study, fellowship, and ministry at a foundational level. The group is typically open and ongoing. We will sometimes call this a “Step 2 group” because the group represents the second step in a typical discipleship process or assimilation strategy. Helping people take that second step is absolutely essential—whatever

you call the group. (See “What is a Step 2 Group?” in the appendix for a more detailed explanation.) Compelling research has found that:

- *After 5 years, 83% of new members who participated in both worship and a Step 2 group were still active. Only 16% of those who attended only worship were.<sup>1</sup>*
- *Participation in such a group is one of the three most important characteristics shared by people who demonstrated measurable spiritual growth year over year (more on this later).*

If you guide that type of group, this book is for you. You are involved in a significant ministry!

## Guiding

We propose the word *guiding* because it encompasses the terms we use for the 3 roles. In the role of teacher, you *guide* group members to explore the Bible, identify gospel implications, and discover where the Bible meets life. In the role of shepherd, you *guide* the group to connect with one another in fellowship and ministry. In the role of leader, you *guide* the group to be on mission. Maybe *guide* will catch on one day as a popular title!

*What is your position called in your church?*

## Roles

In theatre, film, or television, *role* describes the *part* an actor *plays*. In sociology, it describes how somebody acts in different social environments, based on how the person thinks others *expect* him to act. In organizational life, *role* simply means what an individual does—his or her function. Even if she is *pretending*, a good actress works to get into her role; to *become* the character. While serving as a person who guides an ongoing Bible study group is certainly not pretending, it takes time to fully develop each of the three roles. Like maybe a lifetime! So we chose the word *roles*, partly because it has multiple layers of meaning. It also implies development, practice, and growth.

### 3 Roles for Guiding Groups: Teacher, Shepherd, Leader

Whatever your official *title* is, your challenge will be to grow into 3 *roles* that will help you guide your group: *teacher*, *shepherd* and *leader*. In fact, your title may include one of those terms. Probably either *leader* or *teacher*. Both are used to translate really strong words in the Bible. *Leader* translates a word that means someone who “stands before.” Our mental image of *teacher* is also usually of someone who “stands before.” Although less common as a title than the other two, *shepherd* makes us think more of someone who “sits among.” The shepherd is one who guides a flock. We think *guiding* is a helpful way to think about the job of the person who leads a Step 2 group. And to help us think about *teacher*, *shepherd*, and *leader* less as titles and more as roles.

### Spiritual Gifts and the 3 Roles

Good news! All 3 roles have spiritual gifts associated with them. If God has supernaturally gifted you for a role, it is going to be more like “second nature” to you. Or maybe we should say like “new nature!” If you have the spiritual gift of teaching, then studying, planning, and guiding your group through a study is going to be a joyful process you approach with great energy. If God has entrusted you with the gift of shepherding, you will joyfully care for the members of your flock. Should you also manifest the gift of leadership, you will be intrinsically motivated to influence others toward ministry and mission.

### You Don't Have All Three!

Bad news! It would be very rare to find someone with more than two of the spiritual gifts of teaching, shepherding, and leading. In a sense, that's good news! *First*, it means you will have to recruit other people—preferably gifted ones—to help out with the roles you are not personally gifted to fulfill. *Second*, you need not feel guilty because you are not as motivated to fulfill all 3 roles with equal energy. *Third*, it means you can identify what you are best equipped and motivated to do, and then enlist others to help you where you are weak. *Fourth*, it will encourage you to depend on the Lord—and your team of group members—to accomplish the 3 roles. You are responsible for all 3 roles. But you have helpers—and the Helper. His name is the Holy Spirit. He has provided all the gifts needed for your group to be a great one.

*Which of these three spiritual gifts would your group members say you have? Explain why.*

*Teacher?*

*Shepherd?*

*Leader?*

### Teacher or Shepherd-Teacher?

Others probably affirm that God has entrusted you with *either* the gift of teaching *or* the gift of shepherding. It is unlikely you are the steward of both gifts. The shepherding gift is actually a double-gift already. Some translations of Scripture render the Greek words “shepherd-teacher,” and others affirm it in a footnote. One gift with a hyphen. You can manifest the gift of teaching without being a shepherd. You can’t be a shepherd without teaching. If you are a shepherd, you’re automatically a teaching shepherd! God also may have entrusted you with the gift of leadership. Or maybe not. In fact, in our experience, probably not!

But guess what? You still need to fulfill the *role* of leader! We’ll talk about that in chapter three.

### Gifted or Not, the Roles Are Yours

Teacher. Shepherd. Leader. These terms make up the triple challenge of the person charged with guiding a group. How can one person fulfill 3 roles all by themselves? You can’t! You’ll need help. But the buck stops with you.

### 30 Rs

As an organizing principle, each chapter will include the same 10 subtitles. Each begins with an R. These subtitles will help us understand the 3 Roles.

	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Shepherd</b>	<b>Leader</b>
<i>Requirements</i>			
<i>Responsibilities</i>			
<i>Relationships</i>			
<i>Recruiting</i>			
<i>Resources</i>			
<i>Routines</i>			
<i>Ruts</i>			
<i>Results</i>			
<i>Requests (prayer)</i>			
<i>Rewards</i>			

*Using the table above, identify the sections you especially want to learn more about.*

### Let's Talk About It!

You will get even more out of this book if you read and discuss it with others who are guiding groups—or thinking about guiding groups. You may not agree with everything you read. That's okay! In fact, it would be helpful for you to participate in a short-term group for the purpose of discussing—or even debating—what you read.

#### **Note: Different Roles & Gifts Are Required for Different Groups**

Step 2 groups are not the only kind of group. Different kinds of groups may require different roles and/or gifts. Leaders will be happier and more successful if their gifts match the primary purpose of the group. In fact, the actual purpose of a group is often a reflection of the leader's gifts! That noted, this book is written with leaders of Step 2 groups in mind.



# Introduction Group Discussion Plan

- 10 minutes.* After group members arrive, open in prayer and ask: What are the strengths of our church's Step 2 strategy? (For a large group, ask leaders to answer this question in groups of 2-3). Invite volunteers to call out strengths and write each one on a markerboard or large sheet of paper. Remind your leaders that your church's Step 2 strategy is its way of expressing obedience to The Great Commission.
- 5 minutes.* Direct attention to the "Step 2 and Sunday School" section in the appendix. Remind your group leaders why your church has chosen the particular name for its Step 2 strategy. Reinforce the reasons behind the name used by your church.
- 10 minutes.* Call attention to the 3 Roles discussed in the Introduction. Write all three on a markerboard or large sheet of paper. Ask participants to rank the 3 roles in the order in which they believe they possess the abilities (the most effective one being number 1, the least effective being number 3). Have them write these in order on the inside cover of their copies of the 3 Roles. Invite each participant to share his order with a fellow "guide" and explain why.
- 10 minutes.* Call for a pre-enlisted volunteer to share which of the 3 Roles is his favorite to fulfill and why. Ask the volunteer to explain how the other two roles are accomplished in his group. After the person shares, explain that no matter how well an individual may accomplish one of the roles, he is responsible for all three so that his group is properly taught, led, and cared for.
- 5 minutes.* Ask participants to look at the chart near the end of the Introduction and check the boxes that relate to items they'd like to learn more about. After all participants have checked their boxes, call for several to share which ones they checked and why they chose these.
- 5 minutes.* Close in prayer. If you have a large group, ask participants to form smaller groups of no more than four people and pray for each other to grow and excel in the 3 roles of teacher, shepherd, and leader.

# Chapter 1

## —Teacher: Guiding the Group’s Bible Study—

To some, the term *teacher* brings to mind a mental image of a lecturer standing in front of a large *class* of people sitting in *rows* of chairs. The mental picture is of one person who leads the group Bible study by talking, while everyone else mostly listens. Let us be very clear about the term “teacher” in the context of a Step 2 group. *We don’t mean lecturer.* Talking does not equal teaching any more than listening equals learning. In the teaching role, your ongoing goal is to guide group members to discover and apply biblical truth. For that to happen, they probably need to talk at least as much as you do. We wish a word existed for *teaching* that clearly meant “guiding learning” or “facilitating discovery.” Just keep in mind as you read this chapter that when we say “teacher” or “teaching” we mean it in terms of guiding discovery. (Note: There is an appropriate place for the large class lecturing-teacher. Step 2 may not be the best place.)

### Requirements

The primary requirements for fulfilling the role of teacher is a love for the Bible, a desire to understand what God is saying through His Word, and a sense of calling to communicate that to others so that they understand and obey it. The emphasis is on what *God* is saying. A great example of this kind of person is Ezra. He “determined in his heart to study the law of the LORD, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10, HCSB). Here the word *study* means “to tread frequently, as in pursuit” and is a picture of someone who loved God’s Word so much he studied it until he caught the full meaning. The word *teach* in this verse comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to goad.” Ezra studied God’s Word and once he understood it, urged the people to obey it just as he had. Do you have the same kind of passion for God’s Word as Ezra? We hope so!

Perhaps you’ve read James 3:1 and it startled you. When the brother of Jesus and pastor of the Jerusalem church warned, “Not many should become teachers...,” he was exhorting his readers to be careful about sharing their own opinions rather than God’s Word.

*The apostle Paul offered a similar exhortation. Read 1 Timothy 1:3-8 and identify the 3 phrases that tell us what NOT to do as we lead groups to study God's Word.*

## Responsibilities

In the role of teacher, your task is to guide a group Bible study experience that avoids what the HCSB translates “empty speculations” and “fruitless discussion” but rather uses God’s Word “legitimately.” In the role of teacher, you also will be responsible to learn about the characteristics of the “people group” you lead, as well as the basic developmental needs and challenges of the life-stage(s) represented in the group. Doing so makes it possible for you to teach in a way that leads members to apply the truths discovered. You will grow in those areas over time. You won’t likely start off with a complete understanding. In fact, you probably won’t ever have the expertise of a developmental psychologist or an anthropologist! But if you have a desire to learn, you’ll gradually increase your knowledge through reading, training, and just plain old experience.

## Relationships

In the role of teacher, your most important relationship is the one you enjoy with God. We believe the person who leads a group Bible study should be the best listener. That starts with listening to God through prayer and the study of His Word. In the Old Testament, when you read *listen* or *hear*, many times it is the same Hebrew word also translated *obey*. Those words should characterize your relationship with the Lord. That relationship is only possible because of the completed work of Jesus. Abide in Him. He sent the Spirit to empower you to listen to the written Word, to speak a word through you for the specific needs of your group, always pointing to the living Word, the Lord Jesus.

The relationship you enjoy with your group members is also very important. I (Ken) cannot recall everything that my Bible study leaders said to me in class during my childhood and teen years, but I can tell you all about those who took the opportunity to get to know me outside the classroom. How sad it would be for you to know all about God’s Word but fail to know your group members! Effective leaders know God’s Word, and they also know their people. Today I

lead a Bible study group at my church. My wife Tammy and I launched a new group last year and one of our main goals is to get to know everyone who attends our group—both regular attenders and guests. I don't feel that I can teach them effectively unless I really know them. As Bruce Raley has said, "Real teaching requires a relationship."<sup>2</sup> We could have put this paragraph in the Shepherd chapter. Shepherding is about people. But teaching is also about people. It's not either-or. It's both-and. The roles are intertwined, whether you prefer *shepherd-ing-teacher* or *teaching-shepherd!*

## Recruiting

Another key relationship, especially if you guide an adult group, is the one you'll have with your *apprentice*. As you develop the leadership team in your group, this person is your most important recruit. This is the individual who is going to start the next Bible study group you launch. When you were recruited, we hope someone communicated the expectation that your group should anticipate God to bless its growth to the point that you will have enough people to launch another group. The most important evidence of that kind of DNA is your apprentice. That's why this person must be more than an associate or permanent sub. He'll probably start out as a sub! You may have several subs before your apprentice emerges. You'll get feedback about how each sub guided the group. One day, you'll get the impression that the group wouldn't mind if you were gone more often! You may have found your apprentice.

When recruiting an apprentice, arrange a meeting to ask the person to pray about the role—fully aware that when he is ready, you'll let the group know they are going to launch a new group. And the new group needs some missionaries from the existing group. Nobody *has* to go! Just volunteers. You'll get volunteers from three groups: (1) those who want a Great Commission adventure, (2) those who have a relationship issue with someone else in the group and need a graceful exit strategy, and (3) those who prefer your apprentice's style to yours! That is exactly the kind of person you're looking for!

"That's all I need to recruit?" Nope! You'll want a team. But that's a function of the leader role. We'll deal with that in chapter three.

## Resources

The primary textbook for a Step 2 group is the Bible. Many Step 2 groups have their roots in Sunday School, even if they now employ a different name. The Sunday School movement has a rich history that started with a strategy to help boys and girls learn to read and write, using the Bible.<sup>3</sup> Whatever characteristics other expressions of Step 2 groups may have, they almost all agree that fellow-

ship around the Word of God is the non-negotiable core principle. Unfortunately, many small groups have no plan for Bible study. Research indicates that it is not uncommon for group leaders to start looking for new materials just a week or two before the start of a new study. Sometimes they choose from an approved resource list. Often, they simply choose a random study that caught their attention online or at a bookstore.

We think groups should choose a plan and stick with it. That is the idea behind the word *curriculum* – it is from Latin and means a “prescribed course,” like an athlete runs on. It helps me to “stay in my lane” and it gives me boundaries. Curriculum *materials* are the expression of a curriculum *plan*. In your role as teacher, trust a curriculum backed by a wise discipleship plan crafted by experts. Ask yourself: Would you rather trust one of your loved ones to drive a car designed by one engineer or a team of engineers? By a team, thank you very much! The same is true of Bible study materials. Is it wiser to trust one person to create a Bible study, or a team of people who have dedicated their lives to helping group leaders communicate God’s Word? Where we work, teams of men and women labor tirelessly to create trustworthy content that can be used by all kinds of groups in all kinds of environments.

If you have a curriculum prescribed by your church, pastor, or staff, embrace it. Veteran guides of Step 2 groups will testify that there is remarkable comfort found in having a plan. Instead of wrestling with what Scripture passage or topic to study next, they simply lead their group to study the next session in their curriculum plan. Their view is that if it is from the inerrant Word of God, based on a wise plan, and backed up with trustworthy materials to help both members and leaders prepare and participate, they’re good with it. This is true even if—maybe even especially if—the assigned passage is a tough one! They like the challenge of the assignment. And they also like the freedom to get started on the next assignment right away, which is one of their routines.

## Routines

You will develop routines for each of the 3 roles. In the role of teacher, the most important routine is starting your preparation early! Before you begin a new Bible study series, take some time to examine the “flow” so you’ll have a broader view of how each session fits in. The time to start preparation for the next session is the day after completing the current one! Why not right away? Because another one of your routines should be *reflection*. What went well in the group? What could have gone better? Note it. Then move on and begin to prepare for the next session. The next day, read the passage(s) your group will study when you get together again. Read it in multiple translations. *That’s all*. Meditate on it all day.

This simple routine will alert you to illustrations, object lessons, quotes, and maybe even a funny story that you would have missed entirely without that routine. You'll avoid the disappointment of thinking, "What was on that billboard I saw earlier this week? It was a perfect illustration. If only I could remember it clearly." You will develop a rhythm to the rest of your preparation routine.

If you use resources from a publisher like LifeWay, where we work, you'll have a variety of choices to help you prepare. You'll want to read the Personal Study Guide provided to the members. Then you'll want to study the commentary material in the Leader Guide and supplemental resources.<sup>4</sup> Consult the suggested group plan in the leader guide to craft a plan that fits your group. What are the few key things you will want to *say*? The gems. The nuggets. The details about a word or setting that make you say "wow!" The tandem—and the hard thing—is next: what *not to say*. Is it a "wow"? If not, eliminate it. Because you need to save time for group interaction. What will I ask? What will the group *do*? How will we *start* in a way that creates interest? How will we *conclude* in a way that encourages application? If you have good curriculum materials, you'll get a huge head start on these routines.

I (David) and my wife Vickie teach a preschool Sunday School class. So I am occasionally asked if I can lead a preschool training conference. I always respond the same way: "I'll do it right now! Secure some trustworthy preschool curriculum materials. As much as you can, given whatever resources are available to you, do exactly what it says. The end." By the way, I usually follow that with advanced training. This is it: "However dumb you think an idea in the leader guide is will be inversely proportional to how much the kids enjoy it." I have dozens of examples. That's why it is important at all life stages to select curriculum materials that are trustworthy—both theologically and developmentally. Your routines will be far more difficult without them.

## Ruts

Each of the 3 roles has ruts to avoid. In the role of teacher, one of the ruts is doing the same thing each time your group gets together. People do like predictability. They expect you to ask discussion questions. They expect—and hopefully anticipate—the nuggets of insight you share in your brief "lecturettes." But they enjoy a little variety, too. So try out a different method occasionally. You'll find some great ideas in Sam O'Neal's excellent book *Field Guide for Small Group Leaders*.<sup>5</sup> O'Neal encourages those who guide group Bible study to remember that people have different learning styles. But most group guides are "word" people. We prefer to learn by reading, listening to, and saying words! Some people are experiential learners, preferring to do, touch, or feel. The group we

tend to ignore most is visual learners. You might think maps and posters require a classroom with a bulletin board. Sam argues that these kinds of visual materials can be tossed on the floor of a living room, too. Watching a video engages more people than just listening to the same person talk. A well-done video to introduce a session connects emotionally with the experiential learner as well as the other.<sup>6</sup> Sam suggests at least providing something for experiential learners to do with their hands during group time—like a ball of play dough! Be open to some different ideas to avoid ruts in your role as teacher.

If you feel a little hesitant to try a different teaching method, just remember that Jesus, the Master Teacher, never got stuck in this rut. He used different kinds of methods to communicate God's Word. Sometimes He lectured: He taught the 5,000. Sometimes He asked a question: "Who do you say I am?" On occasion He used visual aids and objects: a withered fig tree, the temple, or fields white unto harvest...and yes, He even used a coin in a fish's mouth to make His point once! If Jesus Himself used different methods, shouldn't you? The good news is that you can try one of the very same methods He used the next time you guide your group's Bible study!

A final thought. If your group members can predict what will take place the next time your group gathers (a sure sign you're in a rut), it's time to do something different. If your people know your playbook, it's time to throw it out and get a new one! Be creative, be daring, and don't bore people with the Word of God. Get out of that rut!

## Results

Each of the 3 roles can be measured by different results. The main result for the role of teacher is also the most important one overall: *spiritual transformation*. That can be hard to measure sometimes, but there are tools available to do so, like the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA).<sup>7</sup> There are also some observable proxy measurements of spiritual growth. Three of these also happen to be the most predictive indicators of spiritual growth.<sup>8</sup> Those who demonstrate measurable year-over-year growth exhibited these practices:

1. *They regularly read the Bible and other Christian literature.*
2. *They attended church more often.*
3. *They were more likely to be active in a smaller group or class.*

The researchers identified a Transformational Sweet Spot where group members were most likely to grow, at the intersection of these three factors:

- *Truth (the Word)*
- *Leader (healthy, growing)*
- *Posture (group member is open, teachable, even vulnerable because of life circumstances)*

The resources we develop for groups at LifeWay are built on a discipleship model that contends that spiritual transformation is most likely when:

- *Members prepare for the group ahead of time using materials written by an author with insights into the biblical text, the theological issue, and/or the life topic. We attempt to create a personal preparation experience that is as close as you can get in printed form to one-on-one discipleship with the author.*
- *A leader prepares for the group time with even greater intensity and more advanced materials.*
- *When a prepared group comes together, a dynamic is created where believer-priests learn from each other guided by a prepared leader, and the Holy Spirit has a fantastic opportunity to do His work of spiritual transformation. Preparing primes the pump.*

In a sense, then, results can be measured by group attendance and member preparation. Don't fool yourself, however, into thinking that spiritual transformation can only happen if people attend the group. Granted, if people show up for group or class without any expectation of preparation, or no resources are provided for their personal study prior to group time, then group attendance is *the only* measurable result. If you are serious about spiritual transformation, you will provide members with personal study guides and communicate an expectation of preparation. Since most Step 2 groups are open, the enforcement of this expectation is certainly not rigid. One of the huge advantages to providing personal study material is that members can read and interact with the materials even if



they are unable to attend. Such “self feeding” activity is *the* most important single predictor of spiritual growth!

## Requests

What do you pray about in your role as teacher? In your role as shepherd, the focus of your prayers will be people. In your role as leader, the focus will be the work of the class or group. But what about this role? Maybe it is something like this: “Lord: As I study your Word this week, would you give me a fresh word for my group; a word that points them to the incarnate, living Word, King Jesus? Holy Spirit, would you fill and illuminate me as I prepare, give me the right words during our group’s Bible study, and freely do your work among those gathered there?”

*What else might you add to the prayer above as it concerns your role as teacher?*

## Rewards

In the covenant recorded in Genesis 15, the LORD promised Abram a very great reward. An alternate translation is that God Himself *is* the very great reward! The same can be said about studying God’s Word in preparation to guide a group in Bible study. The Word is its own reward. Even the stuff you won’t say. Maybe especially the words you don’t say! Some group guides want to deliver every insight they discovered during preparation. The best teachers pick out just the key insights, and maybe a few extras just in case they are needed. One might think of these insights as seeds. We collect a bag full of them during preparation, but carefully select only the best ones to gently sow—or have in our pocket—during the group time. Your reward is like that of a farmer. Prepare. Plant. Water. Watch people grow. That is the most satisfying reward of all. Rejoice!

# Chapter 1 Group Discussion Plan

- 10 minutes.* After participants arrive, direct them to form small groups. Ask the groups to brainstorm things others have done in the past to engage them in active learning, and activities that bored them. Call for each group to share their responses.
- 10 minutes.* Form new groups and direct participants to draw the “perfect” teacher on a large piece of paper. Allow 5 minutes for this activity, followed by 5 minutes of debriefing. Affirm the many different things required for the role of teacher as pictured in the drawings.
- 5 minutes.* Call attention to the opening paragraph of Chapter 1. Remind participants of the most commonly recognized learning styles: Auditory, Visual, and Hands-on (active learning). Ask: If I were to survey the people in your Bible study group, what would they say describes your style? Remind them of the following: their preferred style of learning tends to become their preferred style for guiding Bible study; a variety of methods will keep everyone in the group engaged over the long haul; Jesus used a variety of methods. Guide them to call out the methods Jesus used as described in Chapter 1.
- 5 minutes.* Call for reaction to the statement: “Relationships with group members are key to delivering effective Bible studies.” Invite volunteers to share ways they have seen the truth of this statement demonstrated.
- 10 minutes.* Instruct participants to scan the Ruts section in Chapter 1 and record methods they’ve used in the past month. Invite participants to call out methods used. Encourage leaders to use a variety of methods, following Jesus’ model.
- 5 minutes.* Remind participants about the rewards of guiding others in Bible study. Direct participants to find a partner and briefly share the name of one person in his or her group who is growing and maturing in Christ. Instruct the pairs to pray for the continued growth of those people and thank the Lord for the privilege of being called to lead people in Bible study.

## Chapter 2

### — Shepherd: Guiding the Group's Care —

Shepherding isn't a job we think about much today, but it is one of the oldest occupations in the Bible. In Genesis 4:2, the word shepherd appeared for the first time. Abel is referred to as "a shepherd of flocks" (HCSB). The shepherding role was important to the Israelites in both Old and New Testament times, and it influenced the language used in the Bible:

- *God is referred to as a shepherd (Ps. 78:52).*
- *Leaders of God's people were called shepherds (1 Kings 22:17).*
- *Jesus referred to Himself as a shepherd (Luke 12:32) and as the Good Shepherd (John 10:10,11,14).*
- *God's people are described as sheep (Ps. 95:7, Mic. 2:12) and as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36).*
- *Psalm 23 uses shepherd imagery.*

If you think your job today is tough you've got it easy compared to the hard life shepherds had. They were often away from home for months at a time caring for their herds. Jacob complained to his father-in-law about the harsh conditions he endured as a shepherd when he said, "the heat consumed me by day and the frost by night, and sleep fled from my eyes" (Gen. 31:40). And guess what? If you are a leader of a group, you're a shepherd!

Don't miss something we said earlier about those to whom God has given the spiritual gift of shepherding: You can be a teacher without being a shepherd, but you can't be a shepherd without being a teacher! It is a central role for those who guide Step 2 groups.

## Requirements

Although the spiritual gift of shepherd-teacher is not a requirement of guiding a Step 2 group, it sure helps. Paul listed a distinct gift of teaching (see Romans 12:7). Those with the teaching gift generally prefer standing before a large group—the bigger the better—as compared with those with the gift of shepherding, who prefer sitting among a smaller group.

We can think of three requirements of shepherds in the Bible, and those same requirements are still in effect today for those of us who lead Bible study groups:

1. **Love for the sheep.** *Sheep were not typically raised for their meat in Bible times, but for their wool and milk. A flock might be less than twelve sheep, and the shepherd would be with them constantly for the majority of their natural lives. Shepherds usually named their sheep, knew their personalities, and called them by name. As shepherds of people, how much more should we know our people's names, their stories, their needs, and how God is transforming them?*
2. **Constant vigilance.** *David fought off bears and lions in his role as a shepherd (1 Sam. 17:34–37). Predators like wolves, jackals, and hyenas were a constant menace to shepherds, as were robbers. A shepherd had to remain on guard constantly. Likewise, you must remain constantly on guard for the things that harm your group members. Always ready to fight for them. Always on the lookout for the Evil One and his schemes that destroy lives.*
3. **Sense of stewardship.** *Shepherds were not the owners of the sheep, but were stewards for an owner. As such, they were accountable for each of the sheep in their care. Perhaps this is why a shepherd would risk his life to rescue a sheep (or its remains) from the mouth of a wild animal (Amos 3:12). The shepherd was responsible for the life of each of the sheep entrusted to him. As shepherds, we are entrusted with God's precious people, and we should have a strong sense that we are personally responsible to God for them. The members of your group belong to Him. You're the shepherd.*

## Responsibilities

Three key words describe the shepherding role: flock, community, and stories. Your group is more than an assembly that meets for Bible study. It is a flock you care about between group meeting times. If it functions at first like a class, you want to guide it toward community. Community is the result of shared stories. If you've ever heard me (David) speak, you know that I almost always try to say: "No one's story is complete until it has intersected with God's Story, which happens best in a community being enriched by the stories of others." That's your goal. You're going to need helpers. If your gift is teaching, you need a team to compensate on the shepherding front. If your gift is shepherding, you need a staff because your tendency is to try to do everything yourself—and you can't without burning out.

## Recruiting

My (David's) dear departed mentor and friend, Bill Bryan, was known for really creative thematic approaches to leadership development. One year, the art included hearts to illustrate the theme: "CPR: Caring. Praying. Reaching." Bill encouraged all classes to enlist care group leaders, a prayer leader, and an outreach leader. My favorite theme was "The Shepherd's Staff." It had delightful art with a shepherd holding a staff. Bill encouraged all classes to enlist a staff of care group leaders, a prayer leader, and an outreach leader. Plus other positions like a fellowship leader to plan parties! Bill's emphasis was always on care group leaders, the team of folks who took responsibility for 5-7 men, women, boys, or girls. Their job is easy to describe: "Contact every member of your group every week." Not just absentees. Everybody! Then report urgent requests for prayer or ministry to appropriate leaders. Describing the job is easy. You just need to pray for God's guidance about who to ask. Then you have to ask them!

## Relationships

In the role of shepherd, you will of course want to develop relationships with all the members of the group. Sheep don't have great eyesight, but they have great hearing, and they learn to listen for the voice of their shepherd. If several flocks were placed in a pen overnight, all each shepherd had to do in the morning was call for his sheep and they'd follow him out! The relationship with the shepherd was the key. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd because of their close relationship.

If your group is a small one, relating to each member will be easier to do. In a kids class, each worker doubles up as a care group leader, dividing the ministry list equally. For a larger group, you will need a larger team of care group leaders.

For example, in a small coed group with, say, no more than 14 people, you could enlist one male to stay in touch with 7 guys and one female group leader to touch base regularly with 7 gals. (It is always vital for men to contact men and women to contact women.) If you have 20 folks total, with 12 or so attending each time, you may need 4 group leaders with 5 people each. Who is the care group leaders' care group leader? You are! Don't just tell them what to do. Model it, contacting them every week to check in about their own stories, and to get an update on the stories of group members. That builds in some subtle accountability, too. But it's mostly about modeling the role of shepherding. In Eastern culture, sheep were led, not driven, and the people in your group will come to appreciate your role as shepherd as you provide an example for them to follow, gently and patiently leading them to care for one another.

## Resources

Your main high-tech resource for the role of shepherding is probably a smartphone—or whatever tool(s) you use to make phone calls and send messages. A primary low-tech resource may be a notebook—or whatever tool you use to keep records and notes. You'll want a page for each member to record special dates. You may want to keep notes about things you learn about family, interests, background, hobbies, work, spiritual gifts, love languages, etc.

*What other information might you want to include in your shepherding notebook/smartphone/tablet device?*

## Routines

Your main shepherding routine will be contacting your team each week. You will want to check in with them regularly and record any personal prayer requests. Then you'll want to get a report on other members, changes in their stories, and prayer needs. That will inform whatever prayer routine you develop to bring your flock before the Good Shepherd. If you don't have a team, then you're the one responsible for contacting group members and checking on them.

## Ruts

The ruts to avoid in shepherding are on two extremes. On the one hand, you'll want to avoid becoming mechanical in your contact and prayer routines. On the other hand, the more dangerous rut is that of complacency. I (David) have a routine of working out 4-5 times per week. I have been pretty faithful to it, until the last few weeks. Lots of travel. Late hours at the office. A book to write! Frankly, it is an easy rut to stay in. Except I have gained a few pounds, too. The solution is just to start. Or start over!

## Results

One of the ways to measure the results of your shepherding role is what we call "active enrollment." This monthly number is the sum of two parts. For an ongoing year-round group, the first is the number of members who attended your group at least once in the past month. The second part is the members who would have been in attendance except they were working with kids or students. Some churches call these *associate members*, service members, or—my favorite—missionaries to kids!

Other ways to measure the results of your shepherding may be harder to quantify: people feeling valued and appreciated because you and your group have reached out to them, deeper relationships among group members, and fewer people "falling through the cracks." The list could go on. Oh, and don't forget that you can measure the number of answered prayers as you lead your group to pray for one another. That's good shepherding!

*Read Luke 15:3-7 and describe how this parable could be applied to every member of your group regardless of their spiritual condition.*

## Requests

People are the subject of your prayer requests in the shepherding role. You will learn to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide your prayers and to show you how to reflect His work as Comforter and Counselor. Guess what? Effective shepherding will have a positive impact on your teaching role. A couple of old sayings—both true—jump to mind:

- *People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.*
- *We don't teach the Bible. We teach people the Bible.*

Teaching is most effective when it is informed by the needs of the group. Shepherding is the way it gets informed! Imagine how you would approach the other responsibilities of guiding your group if your first thought at the end of a group time was “I can hardly wait to see them again.” How would that change the way you prayed for them through the week? That’s good shepherding!

## Rewards

To somebody, you are the greatest leader in the greatest group in the greatest church in all the world. And it has almost nothing to do with how you perform in the role of teaching! It is rather because you showed up at a sister’s graveside service. Or brought dinner from the group when they returned home after surgery. Or sent a birthday card. Or wrote a note on the anniversary of landing a new job, the birth of a grandchild, the death of a loved one, or some other date you recorded in your shepherding notebook or stored in your smartphone calendar. We have served churches for many years. It is not rare to watch someone who excels in the role of teacher but who neglects the role of shepherd see his or her class or group slowly dwindle away. Curiously, group members almost universally love the teaching of a person who practices the role of shepherding. The “teaching” usually involves a lot of listening to the conversation among the group—provoked by a good discussion question. The teaching-shepherd loves the sound of the flock’s voices engaging in discovering biblical truth. They love her voice when she shares a special insight from her own Bible study. They love that same voice on the other end of a phone call.

John (10:27) recorded these words of Jesus: “My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me.” What a great verse for the 3 roles! Through the role of teacher, the guide’s voice is heard. Out of the role of shepherd, the guide knows the people. As a result, they follow. That sounds like the role of leader. We turn to that role in the next chapter.



## Chapter 2 Group Discussion Plan

- 10 minutes.* Open the meeting in prayer. Review the Scriptures included in the introduction of Chapter 2 that refer to the shepherding role. Ask: How do you respond to the idea that you are a shepherd? Invite participants to share their answers with others sitting nearby. Allow volunteers to disclose their thoughts to the group.
- 10 minutes.* Ask participants to scan the Requirements section for Shepherding. Direct each person to put a star by one of the three requirements he believes is evident in his ministry. Call for volunteers to share his responses. Allow anyone in the group to describe how he sees the quality in one of his fellow guides.
- 5 minutes.* Remind participants how important relationships are between shepherds and sheep. Instruct participants to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10 (1 = poor and 10 = superior) on how well they feel they relate to the members of their groups. Ask them to identify one thing they can do starting this week to improve in relating to the group.
- 5 minutes.* Focus attention on the Resources section and invite participants to share with the group any tool they use to keep track of their group members and information about them. List their suggestions on a markerboard.
- 10 minutes.* Ask participants to quickly scan the Results section in Chapter 2. Invite them to evaluate their work and their groups against the suggested results in that part of the chapter. Call for volunteers to share their evaluation of the results they are seeing in their groups.
- 5 minutes.* Remind leaders that part of their role as shepherds is to regularly pray for their group members by name as specific needs are discovered. Direct participants to pray silently for their group members. Close the prayer time by thanking God for the opportunity to teach and to be a part of the transformation process taking place in the lives of group members.

## Chapter 3

### — Leader: Guiding the Group's Mission —

When you hear the word *leader*, who comes to mind?

*What leaders' names immediately come to mind?*

You probably thought of leaders in sports, politics, science, religion, or business.

*Did you include your name on the list of leaders?  
Why or why not?*

This chapter is going to challenge you more than the other two. Frankly, most people who guide groups are enthused about being a teaching-shepherd. They enjoy preparing for Bible study and guiding a group to explore the Bible, discover the gospel implications, and apply the Bible where it meets real life. But for most, thinking of themselves as a leader is tough. Maybe even uncomfortable. The thought of being a teaching-shepherd-leader may stretch your thinking and understanding. Leaders have influence; that's what makes them leaders. As a shepherd-teacher, you have influence over people; therefore, that makes you a leader. We hope by the end of this chapter, you'll be convinced to give leading—and leading well—your best shot. Your group can be more than a Bible study class. It can be more than a community group. It can be on mission.<sup>9</sup>

### Requirements

We can think of four requirements for those of us who lead Bible study groups. The first requirement is accepting and embracing the role of leader. *Accepting* the role means mentally agreeing that you are the leader of your group. *Embracing* that role, however means that you move beyond simply accepting it to proactive-

ly doing the things necessary to move your group members to action. A second requirement is that you know the mission your group is supposed to accomplish (more on that in the Responsibilities section). A third requirement is a servant mindset. Jesus told His disciples that if they wanted to be great in His kingdom, they would position themselves as servants of the people around them. A fourth requirement is godly character. It is impossible to genuinely lead a group if you are not living the Word.

*Which of the four requirements do you think you best fulfill?*

## Responsibilities

The overall responsibility of the leader role is to organize the group or class to accomplish its mission. You will want to understand what your church expects groups to do. Some groups may exist to study God's Word. Others may have the goal of providing fellowship. Others may seek to involve group members to serve others. Some groups even exist to reach others and share the gospel with them. It is possible for groups to do all of the above as their mission!

I (Ken) led one of the churches I served to transition its Sunday School to the name LIFE Groups many years ago. I had grown up in Sunday School; in fact, I love the term Sunday School, but I wanted to clearly communicate the expectations of groups to both the leaders and the group members. LIFE was used as an acrostic to remind our people that the goal for our groups was to:

- L**earn and apply God's Word
- I**nvite others to become Christ-followers
- F**orm authentic relationships
- E**ngage in service to others

I wanted every group to study and apply God's Word to their context, share Christ, and build relationships between members and guests. Also, I wanted to see people leave adult groups to serve in the preschool, children, and student ministries, and serve the people of our community. The LIFE acrostic was easy to communicate, easy to remember, easy to evaluate, and easy to reinforce my expectations of groups and group leaders.

*What does your church expect groups to accomplish? If you are unsure, write the person's name who could tell you and ask!*

## Recruiting

This conversation is not uncommon when we are conducting training about group organization:

**Conferee:** *I don't have care group leaders.*

**Me:** *Yes you do!*

**Conferee:** *We don't have a fellowship leader.*

**Me:** *Yes you do!*

**Conferee:** *We sure don't have an outreach leader or one of those missions leaders.*

**Me:** *Yes you do!*

**Conferee** (getting flustered): *Why do you keep saying that?!*

**Me:** *Because if you don't have it, you are it. The work has to be done. You either do it all yourself, decide not to do the work, or recruit a team to help you.*

One of the great leadership responsibilities we have as leaders is to recruit others to help us accomplish the goals (the wins) that our churches declare important. Exodus 18 contains the story of Moses and Jethro. I am sure you remember the main events in the story: Moses, serving as judge, heard cases all day; but Moses was just one man and couldn't possibly take care of the people's needs alone without wearing himself out. Jethro saw what was happening and declared that it was not good (Exodus 18:17). Jethro offered some great advice: he encouraged Moses to recruit a team of fellow leaders who could be trusted and trained to help do the work. By dividing the work, others got the opportunity to serve and the people could have their cases heard without Moses wearing himself out. Others got a chance to serve. What a great plan!

*Read Acts 6:1-6 and write the problem faced by the early church plus the solution that was implemented.*

When you recruit leaders to help you accomplish the mission of your group, recruit people to a vision, not just to a job description. If my group needs a person to check the roll each time we get together for Bible study, I could recruit someone to check off names and turn in the form either to me or to someone in the office. That would be recruiting to a job description—asking someone to accomplish those two or three essential tasks the role requires. But what if I recruited the person to a vision for what that role could do for our group? The recruitment conversation would go something like this:

**Leader:** *I'd like you to pray about taking on a role each time we come together for Bible study.*

**Group member:** *What would I do in that role?*

**Leader:** *You would help our group make sure that no one who misses a group Bible study feels left out, forgotten, or uncared for. Your work will help us make sure no one falls through the cracks. We'll use the information you provide to make assignments and contact people each week.*

**Group member:** *Sign me up!*

Did you notice the subtle difference between recruiting to a vision rather than to a job description? It's important to let the person know the tasks you expect of her, but don't stop there. Give her the bigger picture of how her service will help your group accomplish Kingdom work.

## Relationships

When it comes to relationships, you will need to have and improve upon several relationships:

- **God**—*the most important relationship a leader should have is with God. Effective leaders know to make time to read the Bible daily, and to spend time praying and talking with their Heavenly Father.*
- **Family**—*a leader's household should be in order. If we can't manage our own homes, how can we manage the things of God? No one expects a leader's home to be perfect, but it should reflect his or her growing relationship with God.*

- **Group members** – *the most effective leaders know they must spend time with group members. When you do life together, you'll learn a lot about people's needs; and as you learn their stories, the Holy Spirit will help you plan and lead Bible studies that meet them where they are.*
- **The lost** – *Jesus spent a lot of time with sinners. In fact, He was very comfortable just “hanging out” in their world. How about you? Are most of your relationships with people from your church? Don't forget to intentionally spend time with coworkers, neighbors, and others who are not connected to God or His church.*

Three more essential relationships affect a leader's growth. When a group leader has these relationships, he is poised to do great things for God.

- **Mentoring Others.** *A leader should always be mentoring someone in his or her life. Reaching down to a younger, less experienced leader to spend time with him or her is an investment in a future leader. Do you have an apprentice you are mentoring to eventually launch a new group?*
- **Being Mentored.** *A wise leader is one who seeks a mentor. Leaders realize they need to be mentored by someone older and more experienced.*
- **Relating to Peers.** *A leader should also have relationships with peers. These people are at a similar stage in life and have similar spiritual growth. Could it be that God is leading you to establish a relationship with a fellow leader? Maybe even a fellow believer from your workplace or neighborhood?*

## Resources

A leader will assemble a growing library of resources to help accomplish their roles. A veteran leader's bookshelves might include things like Bibles (multiple translations to help understand the text), commentaries, atlases, and Bible dictionaries. A nearby desk might include a set of curriculum and indispensable items like a leader guide. One more thing a leader needs: books on leadership! Find some great Christian writers who have produced resources to help you become a better leader. Finally, you can also read secular books on leadership that will give you principles to follow.

*What are your favorite resources for studying the Bible?*

*What is one of your favorite books on leadership? What did you learn from it?*

## Routines

**Reading.** You've probably heard the expression, "Leaders are readers, and readers are leaders." It's really true in our experience! You will want to continue to develop for reading books, blogs, articles, and other helpful materials on the subjects of teaching, shepherding, and leading groups. You might even listen to a podcast or two each week as you drive. Set a goal for yourself, and give yourself permission to start small and grow into this: read one book every six months and gradually move up to reading one a quarter. Think in terms of a marathon, not a sprint. As someone once said, "A steady drop wears out the rock."

**Prayer.** Another essential routine is prayer. We hope you have a place where you meet with the Lord daily. You won't be much use to your Bible study group if you aren't a person of prayer. It fuels your relationship with the Master Teacher, the One who has called you to guide others to discover His Word. Christ frequently was pictured as rising early to go to a quiet place where He began His day with prayer. We hope this kind of attitude is a hallmark of your leadership.

**Reproduction.** A final important routine is to lead your group to reproduce. Call it what you will: launching a new group, planting a daughter class, or some other creative term. One of your goals is to lead your group to launch another one. After a group has been together for about 18-24 months it tends to stop experiencing growth. Relationships turn inward and the focus on reaching new people diminishes. Complacency can set in. This is the time to refocus the group members' attention on reaching new people by releasing some of them to start a new group. Many churches today are in decline because they have not regularly started new groups.

## Ruts

A rut has been defined as “a grave with an opening at both ends.” We all get into ruts from time to time, but a leader has a few ruts he must avoid at all costs. First, a leader must keep his group from getting in the rut of being a closed group. An open group expects new people, and really *wants* new people. I (Ken) and my wife spent a painful 9 months searching for a church home when we relocated to the Nashville area. What I’m about to share is no exaggeration. We visited class after class, group after group, and no one welcomed us. Many Sundays no one even spoke to us. Once we were introduced as “fresh meat” to a class! While the groups we visited might be open groups in theory, in practice they were closed. This experience is one of the reasons my wife and I started a new group at our church, and why we are committed to helping people connect with us and our group members. Teachers must lead their people to be open to (and hopefully excited about) the prospect of new people coming into their group. As David said in his book *Great Expectations*, “the natural inertia of any group is to turn inward.”<sup>10</sup>

Second, a leader must avoid the rut of thinking “bigger is better.” Many churches have groups that are just too big. People don’t talk much and new people have a difficult time getting connected. People can hide out. While it may stroke the ego of the person in front, it’s not great for the overall ministry. It’s too easy to get into the rut of simply adding more chairs or moving to a larger room.

Finally, a leader must avoid the rut of thinking only of the active members of the group. Did you know that it is almost a “law” of an established Bible study ministry that about 50 percent of the members actually attend each time you meet? That means you’ve got a lot of people to contact who weren’t with you the last time the group met. The rut of focusing only on active members can be harmful to a group in the long run. Applying Jesus’ parable about the lost sheep, if you are going to be a good shepherd-leader, you occasionally may have to let the 99 sheep fend for themselves while you go after one who has strayed. Be glad and thankful for the regular attenders in your group, but don’t forget to reclaim those lost sheep, too.



## Results

We believe the key results of the leading role can be expressed with—no kidding—three more R words: reach, release, and reproduce.

### REACH

Are you reaching new people? Does your group expect new people every time the group or class meets? Is the group doing the things to ensure that new people feel welcomed? Are you following up effectively and quickly so guests come back? We suggested that the key metric for measuring results for the shepherding role is “active enrollment,” which is a function of “attendance.” Expressed as a percentage, that would be the numerator. The key metric for measuring the success of your reaching efforts is the denominator: enrollment—the number of people signed up for the group or the names on the class roll. Enrollment—whatever term you use—is the driver. By the way, we don’t care much about percentages, especially if you increase it by reducing the denominator! If you have 17 people on your group roll and only 10 ever attend, don’t reduce the list to the 10 that always attend. In a ministry of groups, the denominator rules. Enrollment is the key.

We believe the practice of open enrollment is supreme. That is, a person can be enrolled in the class or group without making a commitment to join the church or even to follow Christ. In fact, we should be clear about that: “Enrolling as a member of our group does not make you a member of the church nor obligate you to become one.” We want people to feel loved and connected—even before they connect with Christ. Open enrollment says we are okay with letting people belong before they believe. Because attendance and enrollment are tied together (approximately 50 percent of the people you enroll will attend any given session), the more you enroll, the more who will ultimately attend. Being placed on your group’s roll (maybe you call it a ministry list) makes you accountable for those people.

### RELEASE

The second key result for those who excel in the leader role is the number of people the group has serving with kids and students. Track it. Celebrate it. Take credit for it. Put posters and photos of the group’s “missionaries to kids” on the wall. Talk it up. Invite them to all the parties. Assign them to the best care group leader. If you only have one care group leader, start there. Treat them like celebrities. Adopt a “catch and release” mindset that some fishermen have. Work hard to catch people to participate in your group, but be willing to release them! Your group should be a clearing house, not a storehouse. The “win” is not how big you can grow your group, but how many people can you send out to serve.

## REPRODUCE

The purpose of having an apprentice is to reproduce your group. At some point, an ongoing group will reach a maximum attendance. New people will still come. Some will leave, move, drop out, or die, and others will take their place. That may feel like growth. It's not. It's what we call "covering your churn." Don't get us wrong. It is not unimportant. In fact, it's hard work! We are not criticizing older groups that stay the same size while reaching enough new people to stay even in attendance. Those groups are important. But for a church to grow, new small groups need to be launched regularly. The law of Kingdom growth is simple: start additional new groups. By the way, that does not mean "split old groups in half." It means preparing an apprentice, announcing a new group, and asking for a few missionary volunteers to help start the new group. New people are more likely to connect with a group that is new and small. Think of this as the Lego Principle. Rectangular Legos™ have six connectors. Relationship experts will tell you that each of us has time and energy to juggle six significant relationships. The problem with constantly sending new people to groups that have been together a long time is that they are already "Lego'd up." Group members are already connected to other people in the group and new individuals can't find a place to connect to them. But in a new group, the people have open connectors—openings for new relationships to begin. When I (Ken) served on church staff, we intentionally assigned guests to the newest groups first, wanting them to get connected as fast as possible. We knew the chances were better with a new group.

## Requests

In the role of leader, much of your prayer time will be devoted to praying for your team—current and potential. I (David) was recently asked what my process was for identifying leaders. I told the inquirer about the closet sized room on the third floor of the education building I used as a study/prayer room. Its furnishings consisted of an old beat-up metal desk and a chair. Among the few things always on the desk were three items: the latest church directory, a computer printout of all members, and my stacks of index cards. I had an index card for every household. My first set was from a couple of cut-up church directories and old newsletters. We took photos of all new members and printed them in the newsletter. (I know that dates me!) I made an index card for each one. The initial purpose was to learn names. You see, I do not have the shepherding gift. I am a teaching-leader, not a teaching-shepherd. So I have to find ways to compensate on the shepherding front. That is one of the reasons I so delight in those people who are teaching-shepherds! Not because I want them to be like me, but rather because they guide groups better than I do. Anyway, the purpose of these tools

expanded. I started asking God to reveal potential leaders to me. He did! He was always right! Even when I had doubts. Did I bat 1.000? No. People are not always obedient! Seriously, I am sure I didn't always discern His will perfectly. But the more time I spent praying, the better we got.

## Rewards

One day we will each give an account to the Lord for our work as group leaders. Which of the following two accounts would you rather give?

**Leader 1:** They tried to make us split our class, but we held firm. Never did. No sir, we stayed together for 30 years. In the same room. Oh, they tried to move us. But we would not be moved. We bought our own chairs. I was the last one except for Fred. Guess it's up to him to hold down the fort now.

**Leader 2:** What a blessing it was to serve as a teaching-shepherd. Thank you for calling me to that. Thank You for your patience and mercy and wisdom. It was so rewarding. As You know, King Jesus, I started with a little group of young adults. Three couples that first Sunday, plus me and Melinda. We worked hard and You blessed, and we grew to 20 that first year. Then six went out to teach kids. We were so proud of them. Put up our first poster! Soon we were back to 20 again. You led us to George and Cindy, who agreed to apprentice until they were ready to start a new group. They did when we were busting the seams with 24 most weeks. How proud we were of our first baby, and the 3 couples that went with them. Although, as You remember, we let them have the room and the rest of us moved. Well, Lord, you know the rest. We kept a scrapbook as a remembrance of all the people who went out to serve. There are hundreds, Lord. Plus their kids! Thank you for helping us see 8 groups start. Thank you for letting us witness the birth of 3 "great grand groups." What a blessing it will be to see them all again. Do you think we might have a reunion?

That should be an easy choice! What is your story going to be? If it's been less like the second than you'd have hoped, start now. Ask God for a fresh vision. The reward is great for the one who guides a group well as a teaching-shepherd-leader. Thank you for serving.

## Chapter 3 Group Discussion Plan

- 10 minutes.* Open the meeting in prayer. Invite participants to identify people they feel are leaders, writing their responses on a markerboard. Focus attention on why they may not view themselves as leaders. Remind them that the third role for which we are responsible is that of leader.
- 5 minutes.* Discuss the way the leaders answered the question in the Requirements section in Chapter 3.
- 10 minutes.* Under the Responsibilities, highlight the section that mentions leaders must know what is expected of their group. Lead participants to evaluate how well they know the win (your expectations) for them as leaders and what you desire their groups to accomplish. Call attention to the LIFE acrostic in this section as an example of how one church clarified the win. Lead participants to determine if such an acrostic would be helpful to your church's leaders and group members. Discuss the possibility and potential value.
- 10 minutes.* Highlight the three kinds of mentoring relationships identified in the Relationships section of Chapter 3. Help participants define what makes each type of mentor relationship distinct. Guide participants to identify the names of three individuals whom they are or could be mentoring or mentored by. Call for responses and point out that some of the participants are already engaged in this kind of crucial activity.
- 10 minutes.* Direct participants to share with partners their biggest takeaways from Chapter 3. After a few minutes of sharing, instruct the pairs to pray for one another. Thank them for being a part of the *3 Roles for Guiding Groups* training as they depart.

# Conclusion

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## Groups Matter

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Do you believe that groups matter? How about your group? Does it matter? Yes, it does! Consider these points from Eric Geiger—the first based on Scripture; the second on research for *Transformational Groups*.<sup>11</sup>

- *God has supernaturally designed community to mature His people. (Hebrews 3:13)*
- *People in a group/class read the Bible more, pray more, confess sin and repent more actively, share the gospel more, give more generously, and serve more regularly than those not in a group.*

Groups matter! Churches *must* have a group strategy. Because groups matter so much to the health of a church, your church must (1) develop your leaders, (2) launch new groups, and (3) feed the people well in your groups.

Your group matters! People are fed because of your group. Leaders can be developed because of your group. Your group can choose to launch a new group.

### 100,000 Guides for 100,000 Groups

We are praying for a revival of groups. What would happen if 100,000 new groups could be launched? Over 1,000,000 more people could be involved in regular Bible study, experiencing community and engaging in mission through a group. It will require 100,000 new people to guide those groups.

Healthy groups are led by healthy leaders. We must develop leaders. Leaders reproduce who they are. The Bible calls us to embrace the holy cause of equipping leaders (Eph. 4:11-13). Can you imagine 100,000 new groups, each guided by a person who practices the roles of teacher, shepherd, and leader?

We must launch all kinds of new groups. On campus weekend groups. Week-day home groups. Groups for kids in apartment complexes. Groups for teens before school. Groups for nurses in hospitals. Groups for businesspeople in downtown offices. Groups for collegiates on or near campuses. Groups for moms. Groups for dads. Groups for singles. Groups for all kinds of people groups. Like my favorite all time self-described people group: a lady in San Angelo, Texas, said her class was for widows over the age of 90! She was a missionary, using the obituaries as her tool to identify those her group reaches out to!

What people group is underserved in your community? Your church? Special needs kids? Their parents? The deaf? Immigrants? Young adults? Young adults without kids? Young adults with kids? Parents of youth? Empty-nesters? Widow? Widowers? The homeless? Divorced? Single parents? Others?

Will you pray that God will help you enlist and equip at least one other person to guide a new group? Maybe you could use this book as a guide!

## Feed the People

It is not enough to start groups. Healthy groups embrace a wise plan for Bible study that ensures groups are built on a solid foundation. It would be irresponsible to expect 100,000 new group leaders to figure out their own comprehensive plan for Bible study. Recent research findings reveal that 75% of experienced group leaders say they want some direction in the choice of Bible study materials. All the more reason to equip new group leaders using resources that will help them guide Bible study successfully—right away!

## Need Help?

Maybe your church already has a solid plan for training new leaders. If so, enthusiastically enroll in it! If not, check out Ministry Grid. You'll find information at [www.ministrygrid.com](http://www.ministrygrid.com). Be alert for other leadership training opportunities.

If your church has processes and plans for systematic Bible study, embrace it! If not, a good place to start thinking through the process of developing a wise plan that fits your church is The Tour. To take the tour, visit [www.lifeway.com/tour](http://www.lifeway.com/tour).

# Appendix

## What's a Step 2 Group?

Simply stated, it is whatever kind of group represents Step 2 in a church's discipleship process or assimilation system. Step 2 groups are a church's way of expressing obedience to The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) as they seek to make disciples. In *Simple Church*, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger reported research findings concluding that churches experiencing sustained growth were more likely to have a clearly communicated process that encouraged people to move progressively through a series of steps. Each step is aligned with one primary program. The steps help people identify where they are in the process—and what they need to do next on the discipleship path the church has adopted.<sup>12</sup> Every church needs a plan to disciple people. Churches usually have different labels for each step to help people remember them. We'll leave those to each church and simply identify the type of group typically associated with each step. Some churches have three steps. Others have four. We will suggest five steps and the kind of group typically aligned with each.

### Steps 1 and 2

Almost every church has some form of the first two steps, and most do a pretty good job of making that clear. Step 1 is almost always participation in the primary worship service—usually on the weekend. Whatever kind of group people are encouraged to participate in *next* is a Step 2 group. Step 2 groups usually help people connect through Bible study, fellowship, and ministry—at least at a foundational level. These groups are typically open; that is, they expect new people every time the group meets and encourage a culture of invitation. Most small group ministries are a Step 2 program. These groups may meet on a weekday and away from the church facility in homes or other gathering places. Churches without sufficient space for groups on campus usually choose this approach. Others choose it for philosophical reasons. Many churches do have adequate space on campus to schedule Step 2 groups right before and/or right after weekend worship services. Some churches have Step 2 groups for kids at the church and weekday groups for adults. The key advantage of weekday groups is an extended meeting time—often 90-120 minutes. The main benefit to weekend groups is the ability to help busy families accomplish the first two steps of the discipleship process in one trip to the church campus. A growing trend is to offer an option: adults choose *either* to participate in a weekday off-campus group OR a weekend on-campus group. This is usually driven by a desire to do whatever

it takes to launch new groups as often as possible to connect more and more people as soon as possible.

## Next Steps

Step 3 groups in most churches have the purpose of encouraging people to serve intentionally through a ministry team. Ministry teams (like ushers, greeters, music groups, and many others) help people connect around a common passion. A fourth kind of group are those that exist to help people grow to deeper levels of maturity, commitment and biblical understanding. These might be called “D-groups” (Discipleship groups) to signal that they will take a deeper dive into a doctrine, topic, or skill. These Step 4 D-groups are usually short-term and closed—that is, the group does not accept new members after the first meeting. They also typically have a higher level of accountability for preparation and participation than Step 2 groups. Finally, many churches encourage people to do missions externally. That might be through a Step 5 group. Community ministry teams, disaster relief teams, and mission trip teams are examples. This step values reaching people beyond the church.

## Step 2 and Sunday School

The default Step 2 ministry for many years in thousands of churches has been “Sunday School.” More and more, the name *Sunday School* is being changed to something different. Some of the more popular alternative names include:

- *Community Groups*
- *LIFE Groups (with different meanings for the acronym)*
- *Bible Fellowship Groups (BFG)*
- *[Adult] Bible Fellowships (ABF)*
- *Bible Study*
- *Bible Classes*



- *Connect Groups*
- *Small Groups*

By various names, Sunday School remains the predominant expression of Step 2 groups for Southern Baptists. Whatever the name, these programs usually share these characteristics:

- *Typically aligned with Step 2 of the church's discipleship process. (Some will remind me that historically, Sunday School functioned as Step 1 and worship was Step 2. That was true in the first half of the 20th century, and yet true some places today. But not many. Among Southern Baptists, about 6 million people attend worship each weekend, with 4 million attending Sunday School or a similar program. It is now "step two.")*
- *A foundational multi-purpose ministry. That is, it provides—on a foundational level—opportunities for people to experience foundational discipleship, connect in Christian community, and be on mission—again, at an entry-level. One purpose is usually primary.*
- *The majority of the time during the group meeting is devoted to studying the Bible, which is the primary textbook. The basic organizational unit is usually called a group or class.*
- *They operate as open groups. That is, new people are expected and welcomed every time the group meets. A culture of hospitality and invitation is encouraged and cultivated.*
- *The program is ongoing. That is, the group/class meets regularly—usually weekly. The use of ongoing Bible study curriculum materials is typical. Because of their relatively low price, materials can be provided to guests the first time they attend and used as an invitation tool, as well as helping members prepare for and participate in the group session.*

- *Groups/classes are provided for all stages of life, simultaneously when possible.*
- *The most popular occasion and location is on the church campus just before or just after the primary weekend worship experience. Since the worship experience is typically Step 1 in a church's discipleship process, a church can accomplish the first two steps of its discipleship process with every member of the family on one trip to the church. This dynamic requires the availability of sufficient facilities—and leaders.*

### “Small Groups” Instead of Sunday School

If the Step 2 program in your church differs a lot from the list above, it is probably around the last two bullets. Some churches offer off-campus weekday small groups instead of an on-campus ministry like Sunday School. This could be because of a lack of facilities, philosophical approach, or both. These groups may still operate with some of the same strategic characteristics, or have different ones.

### “Small Groups” Together with Sunday School

In some churches, off-campus weekday groups are an option to on-campus weekend groups. That is, members choose one or the other of these Step 2 options. For example, the church has one Step 2 program called LIFE Groups. Members choose *either* a LIFE group that meets before or after weekend worship on/near the church campus *or* a LIFE group that meets in a home or other location during the week. This is a growing trend.

## “Small Groups” Alongside Sunday School

Other expressions of small groups include those that operate as:

- *an **extension of** weekend classes. That is, smaller sub-groups meet another time and place—weekly, bi-weekly, monthly—for extended discussion, application, and/or fellowship.*
- *a **part of** groups—whatever the occasion and location. This is especially true of a large class that uses a master-teacher approach. Envision a room where small groups of people sit around tables or in semi-circles (horseshoes with the open ends facing the teacher). These serve as discussion groups. A group leader alternates with the teacher, who typically lectures a bit, then invites group discussion, lectures again, and so forth, with the groups closing as prayer groups.*
- *an **addition to** weekend classes—or weekday groups. That is, the groups are designed as a more advanced step in the church’s discipleship process (usually Step 4). Some churches designate these groups, which are typically short-term closed groups, as “D-groups” to highlight their focus on taking a deeper discipleship dive guided by weightier short-term curriculum material. In churches where Step 2 groups are mostly weekend on-campus groups, the off-campus approach to D-groups provides a refreshing change of environment. In a reversal of sorts, watch the trend among churches where Step 2 groups are mostly weekday off-campus groups; while short-term Step 4 adult D-groups meet in on-campus classrooms, usually in conjunction with a program for kids and students. The occasion, curiously, might even be Sunday morning in a limited number of adult classrooms. That is savvy: capturing a traditional Step 2 occasion and location for a more limited, intense Step 4 program.*

**Do any of these scenarios apply to the way your church approaches discipleship and small group Bible study? What questions do you have about how these affect the way you approach your assignment?**

# New and Small

Some people like to debate the merits of “small groups” versus those of “Sunday School classes”—whatever they are called—as if they were hopelessly distinct polar opposites. We think there is a better way. We have decided to be students of any fruitful approach to Step 2 groups. We would encourage you to do the same. The Sunday School movement can learn from those who excel at small groups. We think the small groups movement might benefit from some of the strategies employed by those who practice Sunday School well. One of the curious things both movements generally agree on is this: both tend to be more effective at discipling people if the classes or groups are actually small! Both movements also agree that groups are more effective at reaching new people if they are new. **New and small.** We think we can all rally around those words. 100,000 new small groups. Guided by 100,000 new teaching-shepherd-leaders. That’s an achievable vision. Are you in?

## New Step 4 Groups, Too!

This book was written for leaders of Step 2 groups. The optimal spiritual gift is probably teaching-shepherd, although people with different gifts often compensate beautifully by enlisting helpers and adjusting to the three roles.

Churches also need to feed their people more deeply. Short-term, higher accountability groups with more challenging discipleship content being taught is a way of meeting this need. Too many churches are neglecting these kinds of groups. Some are rediscovering their importance.

Who should lead those types of groups? People with gifts of teaching and exhortation! Teachers are excellent leaders of content-intensive seminar-type discipleship classes. Exhorters are the best with high-accountability small discipleship groups. Not surprisingly, these folks may be frustrated leading a Step 2 group.

Someone else can write a book about that! We just want to make sure we acknowledge and encourage those kinds of groups. And exhort you to match leaders to the primary purpose of your groups!<sup>13</sup>

## *A Sample 5-Step Discipleship Process*

<b>Step #</b>	<b>Label</b>	<b>Type of group</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Resources</b>
1		Worship service		Music  Sermon helps
2		Small group  Sunday School class  LIFE group	Open  Ongoing  _____ times per year  Preparation & attendance encouraged but not required	Ongoing Bible study curriculum
3		Ministry team	Serve/minister within the church	Training system
4		Discipleship group	Closed  Short-term  Higher accountability  Preparation & attendance expected	Deeper short-term study materials
5		Mission team  Community ministry team  Evangelism team	Ministers primarily to those not in the church	Training system

## Attention: Those Who Enlist, Equip, and Encourage Group Guides

A plan is included at the end of each chapter for leading a 45-minute training session based on each of the chapters in this book. The suggested plan follows each chapter. How might you use this book to encourage and equip your leaders? Here are a few ways we can think of:

- *Ask your leaders to read one chapter each month and conduct training at the end of the month (four months).*
- *Read the book and conduct a multi-hour one-time training event (Saturday morning?).*
- *Read one chapter each quarter and have quarterly training events, using it to equip your leaders throughout the year.*
- *Use the post-chapter suggestions to guide a one-on-one conversation with a leader (perhaps over coffee or a lunch meeting). You might even invite 2-3 leaders to have lunch regularly for the purpose of going through this book.*

Downloadable conference plans for taking group leaders through the contents of this book are also available. The plan outlines a two-hour approach for providing a special conference. Some churches will plan a Saturday morning or a Sunday afternoon event. Others may accomplish the same thing on a Friday night or another mid-week time, depending on the church's schedule.

You may download the conference plan and handouts at [www.lifeway.com/davidfrancis](http://www.lifeway.com/davidfrancis).

# Endnotes

- 1 See *High Expectations* by Thom Rainer (pp. 44–45); available at [www.LifeWay.com](http://www.LifeWay.com), LifeWay Christian Stores, or other retailers.
- 2 See *Extreme Sunday School Challenge* by Bruce Raley and David Francis, page 13; free download at [www.LifeWay.com/DavidFrancis](http://www.LifeWay.com/DavidFrancis).
- 3 For a brief summary of the history of Sunday School, see chapter one of *Missionary Sunday School* by David Francis; free download at [www.LifeWay.com/DavidFrancis](http://www.LifeWay.com/DavidFrancis).
- 4 Ongoing resources produced by LifeWay are supported by additional study helps including commentaries written for that quarter of studies and *Biblical Illustrator* magazine (illustrated articles on issues such as biblical customs Bible lands, and archaeological discoveries).
- 5 See *Field Guide for Small Group Leaders* by Sam O’Neal; available at [www.LifeWay.com](http://www.LifeWay.com), LifeWay Christian Stores, or other retailers.
- 6 While many categories of learning styles exist, the three most common categories were identified in the interest of brevity.
- 7 TDA (Transformational Discipleship Assessment) is an online assessment tool that helps individuals and churches assess spiritual strengths and weaknesses; for more information or to purchase, go to [www.tda.LifeWay.com](http://www.tda.LifeWay.com).
- 8 See *Shape of Faith to Come* by Brad Waggoner and *Transformational Discipleship* by Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly, and Philip Nation; both are available at [www.LifeWay.com](http://www.LifeWay.com), LifeWay Christian Stores, or other retailers.
- 9 See chapter 3 of *Connect3* by David Francis; available as a free download at [www.LifeWay.com/DavidFrancis](http://www.LifeWay.com/DavidFrancis).
- 10 See *Great Expectations* by David Francis, page 15; free download at [www.LifeWay.com/DavidFrancis](http://www.LifeWay.com/DavidFrancis).
- 11 See *Transformational Groups* by Eric Geiger and Ed Stetzer; available at [www.LifeWay.com](http://www.LifeWay.com), LifeWay Christian Stores, and other retailers.
- 12 See *Simple Church* by Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger; available at [www.LifeWay.com](http://www.LifeWay.com), LifeWay Christian Stores, or other retailers.
- 13 For a more complete treatment of matching spiritual gifts and ministries, see *Spiritual Gifts* by David Francis; available at [www.LifeWay.com](http://www.LifeWay.com) or LifeWay Christian Stores.

