



LEAD YOUR GROUP

A Potential Leader Training Resource

Compiler: Sean P. Keith



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Introduction

Nobody in my class wants to do anything. Every week I ask for volunteers to make contacts, visit a prospect, or plan a ministry project. They just look at each other. Every week!

Maybe you have heard that as well or maybe you were the one sitting there wondering if anyone in the group would finally step up. Unfortunately, many people think service in God's kingdom is optional. Serving God and His kingdom is not an option for believers. When you accepted Christ, the issue of service was settled. For the believer, the question is "what does God want me to do?"

This book was written to help you understand your calling, and to stretch your understanding of how God can and will use you to accomplish His purposes. Whoever provided you this book sees your potential and your willingness to accept it shows your openness to serve God in some ministry role. You are taking a big step by accepting this book.

The person who gave you this book is continuing a long tradition that goes back centuries. Paul directed Timothy to invest in the next generation of leaders. Paul wrote his young protégé, saying: *And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* (2 Tim. 2:2). This verse will serve as a framework throughout this book so be looking for it as you study.

You can be a link in this verse by finding a mentor to walk with you through this book and the information you discover. If you look, you will discover others who share your desire to do more than find a spot and squat, or sit and soak. Invite them to go on this journey. You can encourage one another as you step up and step out to serve in your church.

You don't have to know every thing. Just start with surrendering your life to serve God, His Church, and His Kingdom. God will lead you to do all that He has planned for you. Your church needs you. Thank you for taking this first step!

CHAPTER 1

Lead Your Group

Dwayne Lee

Everything rises and falls on leadership. More importantly, leadership comes in various forms and styles. Not everyone leads the same way, but those who lead exhibit traits that set them apart from the rest of the group.

As a leader in Sunday School, an ongoing Bible study group, or some other small group ministry, it is important to recognize that the class or group will look to the leader for direction, guidance, caring, and understanding. All of these expectations must be shouldered by the person who carries the title of leader.

Let's look at what it means to be a leader using the letters in the word *leadership*.

Leading is What We Do and Are

Without leaders there would be chaos. Someone has to step up to move the group forward. Leaders influence people to cooperate toward the same goal. Ideally, the goal should benefit both. Leaders have two important characteristics; they are going somewhere and are able to influence others to go with them. The fortune cookie had it right: *He who thinks he leads when no one is following is just taking a walk.*¹

Equippers Invest in Others

Paul declared that *the Lord gave...pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints in the work of the ministry* (Eph. 4:11-12). Have you considered your class or group as a training room, a place where you equip men and women for the work of ministry? What a responsibility and blessing all at the same time. The Bible serves as our guide for equipping other leaders.

Apprentice Others

As much as the Apostle Paul invested in the church, he also directly invested in the life of young men, including Timothy. Paul clearly demonstrated the importance of apprenticeship as he called on Timothy to take *the things you have heard from me among many witnesses commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul had invested in Timothy, a faithful man, and he expected Timothy to do the same.

In commenting on the value of investing in others, Daniel Webster stated: *If we work on marble it will perish. If we work on brass, time will efface it. If we rear temples, they will crumble into dust. However, if we work upon the immortal minds and instill into them principles, we are then engraving upon tablets which no time will efface, but will brighten and influence all eternity.*²

Devoted Follower of Christ

Jesus told us to leave everything behind, take up our cross, and follow Him (see Luke 9:23). Certainly being a follower of Jesus Christ should be the number one priority in our lives, regardless of the role we play in a Bible study group. This commitment takes sacrifice. It takes dedication. It takes complete surrender. The very nature of the word *devoted* means to “be zealous” or “passionate” to a cause or person.

Encourager Like Barnabas

As an encourager, we inspire others to act on the basis of their faith in God. We walk alongside others in times of victory and defeat. Perhaps we caution others against actions that might be potentially dangerous or harmful. We may be called upon to motivate others in their Christian life or service. Leaders who encourage tend to lead with practical strategies that motivate followers to action.

Responsible Shepherd

When Sunday School teachers and Bible study leaders are asked if they consider themselves to be shepherds, they usually describe that role as belonging to someone else. They feel they have enough to do as the one who must deliver a lesson every week.

Yet, actively caring for your class or group like a shepherd will greatly impact your effectiveness as a leader. Regardless of your leadership skills, if you energetically love your class like a shepherd loves his sheep, you will find a group willing to follow.

Sacrificial - Broken and Spilled out

Sacrifice is an indispensable quality for any Christian leader, including those who are leading a Sunday School class or Bible study group. Jesus said, *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me* (Luke 9:23). If you model Jesus, you must willingly sacrifice daily. The more you follow the model of Jesus' sacrifice, the better off others will be as they follow your example.

Honest About Limits

When placed in a position of leadership you may think you have everything it takes to get the job done. However, the fact is you cannot do it all, nor does Jesus want you to. Good leaders are honest with themselves. They recognize their limits and surround themselves with others who can help. Utilize the strengths of others around you, humbly asking them to help you succeed. Jesus was the only perfect leader. Acknowledge Him...walk in His ways...lead by His example. This is the model called for by Paul as he stated: *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ* (1 Cor. 11:1).

Integrity

On our own, we are prone to wander and stray from God. The most dangerous leader is the one who thinks he or she has all the answers. However, as we seek His ways and His understanding, God can make us instruments of blessing. The psalmist said: *So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands* (Psalm 78:72).

Prayerful

Prayer is of utmost importance for all followers of Christ. As a leader, bathe everything you do in prayer. Pray for yourself. Pray for every person and family in your class or group. Pray for those that are being invited to your class. Pray for the day your class gets together to study God's Word. Pray...pray again...and pray some more!

Chapter 1 Reflections

Based on what you discovered in chapter 1, would you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not?

What leadership traits best describe you?

How can you build on your strengths as a leader?

What steps are you taking to become a better leader?

¹ John Borek, Danny Lovett, Elmer Towns. *The Good Book on Leadership* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2005) 8.

² Ray Comfort, *The Evidence Bible* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2003) 1484.

CHAPTER 2

Lead With a Clear Vision

Sean P. Keith

Effective leaders know what they lead and what they are you supposed to accomplish. Let me start by reminding you of Paul's words: *For it is God who is working in you, (enabling you) both to desire and to work out His good purpose* (Phil. 2:13). This task—this work that you have been called to—is a holy work. But, it is God who is working in you to accomplish His purpose. Knowing what it is you are supposed to accomplish for *His good purpose* is vital for the leader.

I am grateful that God has given you eternal life through Jesus Christ, God's Son. At some point, you began to understand that not only has God called you to follow Him, but He has also called you to help others follow Him. Like Paul, you have not only been saved but *appointed* to serve as a herald, apostle, and teacher (see 2 Tim. 1: 9, 11-12). God has given you everything needed to fulfill your role as a leader. He knew this day would come. He placed in your path people and life experiences that prepared you to lead. This is an incredible opportunity and one that must be taken seriously.

What are We Leading?

Maybe a better question is who are we leading? We lead a group of people. No matter what our group is called, God chose us to be a disciple makers (see Matt. 28:19). Small groups of people, meeting regularly, are the church's best strategy for making disciples. This is exactly what Jesus did with the disciples. He poured His life into 12 men. Jesus impacted the lives of thousands of people in His earthly ministry and yet He took 12 men with Him every day. They watched Him. They asked Him questions. They listened. They observed Him perform miracles and deal with difficult people.

In like manner, the people God has given us will watch us and follow us. They not only hear everything we say, but they observe everything we do. They want to see us live out what we believe. They need us to show them how to live the Christian life.

What we lead is a group of people that God has given us the privilege of guiding in their journey toward Christ-likeness. What kind of person do they see? What kind of Christ-follower are you?

We are not perfect and we make mistakes. The people we lead are not perfect and make mistakes as well. And yet, what these people need is to know we are committed to becoming all that God desires us to be. Our commitment brings hope to our church, our community, and beyond. People in our groups need to know and observe someone like them who makes mistakes but is willing to surrender their life to Christ. It is a daily, minute-by-minute commitment to Christ. No one expects us to be perfect. But Christ calls us to consistently seek to become more like Him so that others might see Christ in us (see Col. 1:27).

What are We Supposed to Accomplish?

Answering this question is more difficult because every group is unique. However, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 reminds us of what we have in common. We have a purpose: to make disciples. We have the power (see Matt. 28:18 and Acts 1:8). We have a plan: to share the gospel, develop genuine biblical community, help people to grow spiritually, and equip people to live missionally.

Paul gave Timothy a goal. *And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* (2 Tim. 2:2). We are also to teach others, who will teach others, who will in turn teach others, and so on. In other words, our goal is to make disciples who will in turn make disciples.

It is overwhelming to know that God has chosen us to accomplish so much. Let me remind you, it is GOD who works in us to accomplish His purpose. It's not about us. It is about our willingness to allow God to work in and through us. We don't control what God does or doesn't do. Making disciples is God's responsibility, not ours. He just chooses to work through us.

We do not control the actions, choices, behaviors, and attitudes of others. People will let us down. Over the years we have all known people with great potential that simply chose not to become all that God desired for them to be. Ministry would be great if we didn't have to work with people. BUT, we are in the disciple making business so we can't avoid people. Never give up on anyone. But at the same time, don't take responsibility for their actions, choices, behaviors, and attitudes.

Having said that, we are responsible for our actions, choices, behaviors, and attitudes. We decide the kind of people we will be for the glory of God. We must commit every day to surrender our lives to Christ and to live the life Christ desires for us. We are also responsible for our willingness to accomplish God's purpose in our life. We can't sit idly by waiting for God to show up. We must be intentional in following God's plan for making disciples.

In John 5:5-9, we find Jesus entering Jerusalem on His way to the pool called Bethesda. Every day, multitudes of the sick, lame, and disabled lay around the pool waiting for the water to be stirred. The belief was that when the water was stirred, the first to get in would be healed. Thus, they waited. One of these was a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. Jesus walked up to him and asked the man if he wanted to get well. What a strange question to ask a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. Immediately the lame man began making excuses. Jesus simply told the man to get up, pick up his mat, and walk!

Why would Jesus talk to only one man surrounded by a multitude of people who needed healing? Didn't all of them need healing? Why ask this one man if he wanted to be healed? Maybe many of us are like the man who had been lame for decades.

We have gotten accustomed to sitting around the pool waiting for something to happen. Jesus, the Healer, walks in. He wants to know if we are ready to leave the pool area and get on with the business of doing what He created us to do. Do YOU want to get well? If so, hear Him telling you to get up, get going, and get busy!

He has called us to lead. Don't worry about what you can or can't do. Paul reminds us that the power of God is at work in us (see Eph. 3:20-21). If God has placed a task in front of us, what else do we really need?

In order to be an effective leader, we need to understand what we have been asked to do. We lead people. We lead people to be disciples of Christ who one day will become disciple makers as well.

Lastly, in order to be an effective leader, we need to live a life of surrender to Christ, looking for ways to help others achieve the same in their lives every day. It's not about you or me. It's about Him.

Chapter 2 Reflections

What is your plan to encourage, equip, and challenge members of your group to mature towards Christ-likeness?

How will you lead your group to connect with those outside the church to meet needs and share the gospel?

How will you lead your group to develop a strong biblical community within your group now and for those who will join in the future?

CHAPTER 3

Lead from a Fresh Walk with God

Phil Miller

I love the mental image I get when I read the title of this chapter. *Walk with God* points to a relationship. I see conversation, reflection, teaching, and learning. There is calm, yet progress. A *fresh walk* indicates this relationship is not a one time encounter, but a blessed continuation. But, *Leading from a Fresh Walk with God* says that there has been a change in our walk, in our way of life. We want our life to be like His. People watch what we do and how we walk. In light of that, our steps can no longer be directed by us, but by Him. Our ability to lead others is now based on this continual, relational journey we have with the God of the universe.

We see this visual in a tremendous passage in the life of Christ and his disciples. The story is told in Luke 24:13-35, as two men make their way to Emmaus. We'll examine three steps along the road, applying each step specifically to how God wants us to lead others.

Step 1: Personal Relationship with Christ

Beginning the journey. This is my story of what Christ has done in my life.

Their eyes were kept from recognizing him. (v. 16) Before coming to Christ, we did not recognize Him. We all were introduced to Jesus through a sermon, study, or conversation. To lead effectively in God's Kingdom we must remember our life before recognizing Him so we can understand the position of all unbelievers.

Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days? (v.18) The men mistakenly assume Jesus didn't know what was happening in Jerusalem. The irony was He was the main character on center stage. We make the same mistake when we don't recognize that Jesus is still the main Character on center stage in our Jerusalem.

“What things?” (v. 17) I find humor in the Son of God asking these disciples to explain their thoughts on His death, burial, and resurrection. I also see a teaching principle. Even if you know the answer to a question, give people the opportunity to verbalize it for themselves. We can learn from listening to others express themselves by telling their story. Get people talking, then listen.

Can you feel the tug at this point in the passage? The disciples lean in toward Jesus and begin opening their hearts to Him, still not knowing it is Jesus. As teachers we experience this on a personal level as we put ourselves into every passage we teach. As we look into the eyes of Jesus, we hear His voice encourage us to speak on and to personalize the passage. He invites us to make it come to life for those we teach.

For us to walk with God in a fresh way, we must have the foundational first step. Every teacher must be able to base their calling on a time when they placed their trust in Jesus. This is where it all begins.

Step 2: Current, Up-to-Date, Relationship with the Lord

This is what God is teaching me today.

And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. (v. 31) Even though they had been having a face-to-face conversation with the Risen Lord, suddenly they recognized they were in the presence of Christ. The glorified, Risen Lord interacted with humanity.

Some have said it was at this moment that the disciples first saw His hands. In the days of the Roman killing machine, no one got off the cross alive. Only the burial party saw nail-scarred hands. This was not the painting in our church hallway or the Easter bulletin cover. These were Jesus’ hands—visibly different, eternally changed—which now had changed eternity. No wonder their eyes were opened.

It is not enough, though, to only begin the journey. We must continue on our journey with God through prayer, reading His Word, living life in community with other believers, and sharing our faith with others. When we make mistakes or stumble, getting back up is not only allowed but used to teach us. Just as we teach newborns to walk and expect the accompanying bumps and bruises, we should learn to navigate from the bumps and bruises as our Heavenly Father guides us as on our spiritual walks.

None of these actions are boxes on a check list. It’s spiritual toddling, which leads to steady walking. In time, we graduate to running as if in a race, which eventually leads us home.

Step 3: Calling to Teach Others

This is what God is teaching me that He wants me to communicate to others.

Did not our hearts burn within us – while he talked with us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures. (v.32) Once these disciples had truly met the Savior, they could not help but tell (teach) others what they had learned firsthand. Our Bible teaching must take place at the intersection of living life in community and listening to the Lord. When we let the teaching/learning process intersect with the lives of the people in our groups, we revisit Emmaus all over again.

Every person has a story. We have the opportunity to learn the stories of our group members. Their first steps, toddling, wrong turns, and missteps. My belief is that we know only 20% of the life stories of the people in our groups. Most leaders fail to go beyond discovering their birthdate, hometown, and favorite color. Tremendous conversations with people can happen by simply venturing, “Tell me your story.”

There is still one more verse that must be explored. For me, it is like saving the best for last. Notice the end of Luke 24 which contains the final thoughts of Luke’s account of the life of Christ. The disciples He encountered on the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem, found the eleven, and excitedly told their story. Suddenly Jesus appeared among them. Verse 45 is one of the most empowering and liberating passages for every Christian leader. *Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.* These words leap off the page! The message is the same today as it was for the disciples gathered in awe of Jesus in the flesh. He opens our minds to understand the Scriptures. The only means by which we can truly understand the Scriptures is by relying on Him to open our minds, even today.

When we study God’s Word individually or in a group, our task is never to finish a lesson. We finish a book, finish a meal, or finish a movie. When God opens our minds to understand His Scripture, we are being nourished in our fresh walk with Him. As the leader we are refreshed along the way and so are those we lead.

My conviction is that teaching comes as a call from God in the same way as a pastor is called to serve in local church ministry or a missionary is called to serve. The assignment is different for every person, but the same God directs our steps. The Nominating Committee “asks” us to serve, but it is God who “calls” us to serve. That calling walks alongside us at every turn along the way. It is the Spirit’s calming presence, a still small voice, a word of direction on our way, and a culmination of “well done” when our journey ends.

Chapter 3 Reflections

Reflect on the circumstances that made you consider a relationship with Christ. Take a few moments to record your story of coming to Christ.

What is God teaching you today? What progress are you making on the journey? How can you help someone else on their journey?

What can you do to better engage people so they can tell you their story? How can you make that a part of the class or group you lead or will lead?

Think about why you want to be a leader and the influences that have gotten you to this point. How do you see God's direction through these influences?

CHAPTER 4

Lead Toward Measurable Growth

David Bond

Measurement is a constant part of life. Athletes do not simply work to become more athletic. Progress is measured in terms of an increase in wins, a faster time, or a greater distance. Businesses measure profits and market share. Educational institutions use test scores, writing ability, and grade point averages to indicate achievement. Measurements exist for the church as well. Attendance, faithfulness, and spiritual markers can all be measured to assess the health of a Bible study group.

Basic Measurements of Growth

A visit to the doctor means immediate measurement of height, weight, temperature, and blood pressure. These measurements provide a general baseline for overall health. Similarly, a few basic measurements can provide a reliable starting point for evaluating the health of a Bible study group.

Individual Attendance

Knowing **who** attended the last group meeting is more important than knowing how many. Tracking individual attendance is the only way to accurately gauge ministry to each person within the group. Because many groups are roughly defined by age, life stage, or family structure, tracking individual attendance allows the church to measure activity among people groups.

Unique Attenders Per Quarter

Another way to use individual attendance records is by knowing how many **different** individuals attended the group at least once per quarter (a three month period). This measure provides a clearer picture of the overall ministry reach of the group. The “unique attenders” number will also help leaders understand the real needs for meeting space, plan for fellowship, and the potential for new groups.

Number of Leaders

Multiplying leaders is a critical factor for achieving measurable growth. Increasing the number of capable leaders in each group will spread the leadership load, decrease the dependence level of the group, and provide for future new groups. Leaders of a growing group usually identify at least one additional “associate” leader who can serve as the main teacher/facilitator on a regular basis. The associate may lead once per quarter and then more frequently as he or she gains confidence and experience. You will also want to keep track of the number of people from your group serving in other groups.

Implementing Basic Measurements

1. Identify the system that you will use in your group for tracking individual attendance.
2. Enlist someone to take on the role of keeping attendance records for your group.
3. Review attendance patterns on a regular basis.
4. Recruit and commit to develop at least one apprentice leader for your group.
5. Commit to communicating to the class the goal of starting a new group. Set the tone early and often!
6. Remind the group of members serving elsewhere, sharing their stories when appropriate.

Measuring Faithfulness

While numerical measures are important, they do not tell the whole story. The Bible never holds believers responsible for the decisions of others to follow Christ. Disciples of Jesus are to preach, teach, share, minister, serve, sow the seeds, and trust God for the growth. Disciples are to be found faithful.

Group leaders can keep faithfulness in front of the group members by measuring specific actions that represent faithfulness.

Gospel Conversations

Encourage group members to engage people during the week in simple conversations about matters of faith. While these may lead to sharing the gospel and someone placing

their trust in Jesus, that may not always be the case. Bringing up matters of faith, offering to pray with someone, and sharing what the Lord is doing in your life are all ways of sowing seeds in the life of another person. Leaders can regularly share examples of this type of activity in our own lives to set the standard.

Personal Action Plans

James reminds us that the purpose of Bible study is not simply to hear the Word but to put it into practice (see Jam. 1:22). As a part of the group study time, plan to lead group members to identify some type of concrete application that can be acted upon during the next week. The response may be an immediate act of obedience or a specific “first step” toward something long-term. At the very least, close each group study time by directing group members to write their response to the following questions:

Is there an attitude to correct?

Is there a relationship to restore?

Is there a habit to address?

Is there an action to remove?

Is there an apology to be made?

Is there a decision to solidify?

Is there a direction to pursue?

On occasion, ask a volunteer to share what they have written and pray together. Begin the next group time by asking volunteers to report on the strides they made toward obedience or the challenges that they faced. Over time, the quality and frequency of responses to the word will demonstrate real growth.

Personal Ministry

One of the leader’s responsibilities is to ensure that a system is in place to care for people within the group (more will be said about this in Chapter 7). Meeting each other’s needs is vital, but what we are measuring here is ministry to people outside the group. The Scripture is clear that meeting needs is an essential evidence that the love of Christ is present in a person’s life. Leaders can encourage individuals to share ways in which they were led by God to meet a need or serve someone in the course of their everyday lives.

Participation in Church Ministry

Group leaders should work to keep the group connected to the ministry of the church. Vacation Bible School, community service projects, evangelistic events, recreational ministries, and seasonal programs are just some examples of activities that provide opportunities for groups to serve together. Promote these opportunities and be sure to allow group members to share their experiences during group meetings.

Implementing Faithfulness Measurements

1. Work with the group to create a system for meeting ministry needs within the group (see Chapter 7).
2. Lead the group to adopt a needs-based ministry in which to serve (foster care, food/clothing, homelessness, etc.)
3. Take time during each group meeting for members to report on ways that they have responded to God's leadership during the week.
4. Plan to close each group Bible study time with an opportunity for group members to record a specific way that they can take a "first step" in responding to God as a result of the Bible study.
5. Use a weekly class email to provide a class "Ministry Report" of all of the ways that the group has been involved in meeting needs during the week. Be sure to include the number of people who participated and how the participation rate increased from year to year.

Measuring Spiritual Growth

The goal of discipleship is transformed lives. While discipleship is a lifelong process, believers should experience consistent growth from year to year. Because every person is different, the areas that God is dealing with in their lives will be unique. While measuring spiritual growth is always a challenge, helping individuals set goals in response to God's leadership can be helpful in evaluating progress.

Basic Spiritual Disciplines

Every believer benefits by participating in basic spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, and service. The single most beneficial practice leaders can encourage in their group is daily Bible reading. Nothing impacts spiritual growth more than regularly

reading the Bible daily. Praying in different ways (sentence prayers in the group, small group praying, praying at different times during the group meeting) will also encourage growth. Service brings the other disciplines into focus.

Personal Growth Plans

A personal growth plan is another way to encourage longer-term spiritual development. Some formal resources are available for this, but leaders may also simply guide members to create some concrete 6-month goals related to what God is leading them to do at home, at work, in the neighborhood, or with finances. These can serve as an evaluation tool and progress can be share at appropriate times.

Formal Survey Tools

Several trustworthy assessment tools have emerged in recent years, such as LifeWay's *Transformational Discipleship Assessment*. This could be given to the group and then taken again after 1-2 years to assess progress. Other surveys based on a biblical discipleship model could be developed to allow users to self-assess their growth.

Implementing Spiritual Growth Measurements

1. Choose some method of leading group members to create measurable goals for their own spiritual growth.
2. Set a date on a calendar for sharing spiritual progress with the group and give reminders along the way. Set the tone by sharing your own progress.
3. Promote a daily Bible reading plan for your group to follow together.

What gets measured is what gets done. Spiritual maturity and measurement are sometimes difficult to reconcile, but the importance of setting goals and charting progress cannot be overstated. Use key numeric indicators as a general way to assess the health of the group and individual growth. Help group members stay focused on the goal of establishing a steady life journey of walking with Christ and becoming increasingly more like Him.

Chapter 5 Reflections

What system do you use or plan to use to track your group?

What critical items do you plan to track? How will each item give you a better view of the spiritual growth of your group?

What does what you track reveal about your priorities as a leader? How do you need to adjust what is tracked to better reflect what you believe to be important for the individuals in your group?

CHAPTER 5

Lead Learning Experiences with Impact

Darryl Wilson

In algebra, tomorrow's lessons are dependent on today's learning. The teacher has to focus on the students' understanding from the past so they can practice in the present. Similarly, leading a Bible study group involves more than teaching a single lesson. It's about leading learning experiences which impact understanding and lives over time.

What are the essential elements that contribute most toward creating an impactful learning experience? Prayerful preparation, leading group members to encounter God in His Word, and holding them accountable for acting on God's truth are essential actions for the leader.

Prayerful Preparation

Even with great curriculum, Bible study group experiences do not plan themselves. They are the result of prayerful preparation. What's the best way to prepare?

Meet God

Open God's Word and "meet Him." Listen to Him. Wait to read your Leader Guide or commentary until after you have listened to God first. Consider what God is saying to you. What is the point He wants you to understand and apply to your life?

TIP: Start early. Give God the opportunity for His Word to impact your life. Find a way to read the core passage every day as a part of your routine. Read it at lunch, on the bus as you head to work, prior to going to bed, or listen to it as you exercise or drive. Do this in addition to your daily devotional time. Look for God to intersect your life with situations, remembrances, and conversations that reinforce the truths in that passage.

Examine

As you prepare, examine the passage and the context. Who is the author and the audience? What was going on when the author wrote the passage? What is the point the author was making? What historical and cultural issues are important? Who are the people involved in the passage? What do key words and phrases mean? Write questions before turning to commentaries and other resources. Examining the passage thoroughly helps you to discern the main point, that one, overriding truth.

Apply

Application of biblical truth is directed by the Holy Spirit and influenced by your knowledge of the group. Application is connecting the main point of the passage to the real needs of your group members. Knowing their needs requires time spent together. Focus on ways you can help them recognize relevance and the need for life change.

Focus on two

As you seek to apply the passage truth to your group, think about and pray for two different individuals in your group. Make sure you focus on two different group members each week. This makes application even more personal.

Plan for involvement

Lead the group to feed themselves on God's Word. Ignore the impulse to tell them everything you learned as you studied. Instead, plan activities that get them in the Word. Include discussion, question and answer, posters, pictures, maps, movie and song clips, subdividing into smaller groups, taking field trips, and whatever else helps the group discover for themselves. The point of any method is to teach the truth in the best possible way to your group at that moment in time. Addressing their learning styles leads to greater engagement and opens the door for greater obedience.

Gather supplies

Don't wait until group time to find what you need. Gather supplies early. Keep a bag or backpack to carry, adding the items you need each week. Check the bag on the day before the group study time as a part of your final preparation. Gathering all your supplies prior to the group study time also enables you to invest in relationships as the group arrives.

Refine

Just because you have created a plan for the group study time doesn't mean you can't change it. News events may take place that help bring focus to the lesson. God may show you a different idea as you go through the week. Keep working on the plan until the first group member arrives and then go from there.

Lead Them to Encounter God in His Word

Your prayerful preparation will help you to guide group time while remaining sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Include the following key moments and actions during group time.

Arrive Early

Prayer walk and arrange the learning space. Greet as they arrive. Start on time.

Pray Together

Pray for requests and needs. Pray for the group and this group study time in God's Word. Keep it brief, making sure you dedicate the majority of the time to Bible study.

Create Interest

Help participants begin thinking early about the topic or truth for the day. Ask a key question. Tell a story. Share a headline. Show a movie clip. Get their minds in the room and on God and His Word.

Review / Preview

Review the point from the previous group study time. Invite volunteers to share how they lived out last time's truth. Listen for obedience. Then give a quick preview of where this week's lesson is heading and/or how important it is.

Use the Bible

Instead of teaching from learning materials, hold the Bible and teach from God's Word. This concrete action is powerful and encourages use of the Bible beyond group time. Lead them to open God's Word and meet Him there. Write your plans for leading the group on a sheet of paper and use them to guide the group time. This communicates that you prepared and that the Bible is central.

Set Scripture into Context

Lead the group to understand the truth in its historical setting. Point out the relevance to the original audience. Be careful not to get so caught up in context that you run out of time for application of the truth for today.

Involve Everyone

Get them talking early. Use a variety of teaching methods to address their preferred learning styles. Get them in smaller groups. Ask questions. Help them “own” the learning experience.

Summarize and review

Ask the group to summarize the point of the lesson. This encourages retention and understanding, and prepares for application.

Apply Truth

Help them consider the relevance of the truths discovered. Challenge them to consider what God wants them to change or do as a result of the truths discovered from His Word. Lead them toward a commitment to obey Him.

Preview Next Session

Before closing in prayer, briefly talk about why the next session is so important. Make assignments. This may be reading the Scripture, answering a question, etc.

TIP: Stay flexible. Even though you have a great group plan and did all you could to prepare to lead the Bible study time, things will still happen you did not anticipate. A group member may share a personal story that takes more time than you allotted. Another group member may ask a question you never considered. The first snow storm your city has seen in 10 years could change everything. Trust the Holy Spirit to direct you just as He directed you while you were preparing.

Hold Them Accountable for Action

How can we measure the impact of our learning experiences? Is it whether they enjoyed group time? Or is it more? The ultimate goal is changed lives. Are they more like Jesus? Are they obeying what He commanded? How can we encourage this?

Account for the Other 167 Hours

Recognize that learning should continue beyond group time. Make assignments. Encourage further study. Continue conversation about the passage by email, text, social media, phone call, or in person. Remind them to keep their commitments to God in response to applying the truth. Encourage accountability partners. Do what it takes to reinforce and encourage learning to continue.

Follow up

Have conversation with individuals. Check on questions, needs, and spiritual progress. Extend the care of the group. Walk with group members through stressful and challenging times. Lead the class to invest relationally in each other. When the group cares for each other, group sessions will have greater impact.

Immediate Actions

Pray and prepare early. Plan for involvement. Establish consistent routines: arrive early, pray, create interest, and review/preview. Get them involved in examination and application. Continue learning beyond the group study time. What can you do this week to adjust group time so there is more impact?

Establish a routine that works for you. Add preparation actions to your daily to do list. Anything worth doing well takes some work and some time. The more you invest, the greater the possibility that your group will encounter God's Word in a meaningful way.

Chapter 5 Reflections

Outline the process you use to prepare to teach. Include a target completion time. What needs to be adjusted in light of what you read in this chapter?

Review your teaching approach. What adjustments do you need to make so that everyone can be engaged in a way that fits their preferred learning style?

List actions you can take to encourage the group to act on the biblical truths discovered.

CHAPTER 6

Lead to Reach More Disciples

Bob Mayfield

An ancient fable centers on the purchase of a chessboard. A king invites the owner of the board to the royal palace to purchase the game. The humble man initially refused payment, but the king persisted. The man finally agreed to a payment of a grain of rice that would double each day for the next 64 days, which coincided with the number of squares on the chessboard. His payment was so simple and apparently underwhelming that the king immediately agreed.

One week later, the king asked his treasurer if the man had been paid for the board. His treasurer informed him that the amount of rice needed on the 64th day was more rice than they could harvest for the next 1,000 years!

As a new group leader, you may consider yourself to be much like a single grain of rice. By yourself you may not be much. But when you multiply yourself, you become substantial.

Your Church's Strategy

One of the most important things a new leader must understand is the vital role his or her group plays in the church's strategy to connect people to Jesus, the church, and the church's mission. The church's primary organization to accomplish the Great Commission is its small group organization, usually called Sunday School. Your church is on mission to make disciples and lots of them. Your group is the multiplication plan!

Paul emphasized multiplication as he wrote Timothy (see 2 Tim. 2:2). Timothy was one of many people that Paul disciplined. Paul's instructions to Timothy were for him to teach faithful men (notice the plural tense). These faithful men would then teach many others (again, notice the plural tense). Multitudes of disciples sharing the gospel with multitudes of people results in multiplication.

Whether we lead a group of people curious about Christianity or a group of Bible scholars, understanding disciple-making and multiplication is essential to our success.

Ultimately, our goal as the leader of our Sunday School or small group is to lead group members to engage lost people with the gospel and then produce disciples who will then produce more disciples. Evangelism is the essential first step in making new disciples. Unfortunately, many group members are unaware of the importance of evangelism. Referring back to the illustration of the game of chess; if there is no grain of rice in the first square of the chessboard, then there will not be a grain of rice on the last square either. Zero multiplied by anything is still zero!

The Power Behind an Evangelistic Group

Notice where the power comes from in each of the verses.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. (Rom. 1:16)

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is God's power to us who are being saved. (1 Cor. 1:18)

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance. You know what kind of men we were among you for your benefit, (1 Thes. 1:5)

The spiritual power comes from the gospel! If we want our group to experience supernatural power, then our groups must focus on the message of the cross as revealed in the gospel.

Reflect on your experiences in different Bible study groups. Have you noticed that groups that are involved in sharing the gospel are never boring? Spiritual power comes from the gospel, so the more often you lead your group to engage in gospel-driven activities, the more power your group will have. The gospel is never dull!

Lead Your Group to be Gospel-Sowers

In Luke 8:4-8, we find the parable of the sower. The sower scatter the seed and he wasn't all that careful to scatter it only on the good soil. The seed that landed on the good

ground produced a healthy crop. But the seed was still scattered wherever the sower could scatter it. The ground did not determine if he would sow it.

Evangelism is not easy work. But it is necessary work if our groups are going to be faithful to the gospel. Many groups know they need to be evangelistic but they lack an actual plan that engages the group members in personal action. When the call to evangelism is shared, many group members consider evangelism as something the pastor should do. Many group members seem to think that evangelism is an activity for the spiritually elite and do not see themselves as sowers of the gospel. The jump from being an evangelistically unengaged person to a lifestyle witness is something that seems to be out of reach. Consider some of the following options to help your group members become more evangelistically engaged.

Pray

Encourage group members to make a list of lost people that they know personally for whom they can begin to pray. The list does not have to be long or exhaustive, even three or four names will work. Ask them to pray daily for their list of lost friends. God will often open doors for them to share the gospel with their friends.

Learn

Help group members write their personal testimony and then share it with other group members. Teach a gospel presentation to the group. It is difficult to share something that has not been practiced and previously verbalized.

Invite

Plan a special day where members can invite their lost friends to a group meeting. This invitation could be to the usual group Bible study, or it could be to a fellowship, social outing, or even a mission project. A group member that struggles with sharing their faith can still take this simple step of inviting a friend to experience a group meeting. Let group members know that they can invite friends to any meetings of the group.

Share

Encourage group members to share their faith regularly. Allow time at group meetings for members to share any opportunities they had during the week to share their faith. Ask a different group member to share their testimony with the group every month. Lead the way as their teacher, telling them about opportunities you had to share.

Chapter 6 Reflections

Consider how your role as teacher should be impacted by evangelism. How should evangelism be included in your teaching? As a part of your daily life?

Record some ideas to better engage your group members in evangelism. What activity could the group do that would attract their lost friends? What are some verses you can challenge your group to memorize? How can the group hold each other accountable for sharing the gospel with others?

Identify roadblocks people may face when it comes to sharing the gospel. What can you do as a teacher to help them overcome those roadblocks?

CHAPTER 7

Lead to Care for Every Person

Daniel Edmonds

Understanding the purpose behind any action or activity is always a good idea. When we lose the ‘why’ behind care groups and fellowship activities, we cease to do them or do them for the wrong reasons. With that in mind, why should you lead your group to organize to care for every person?

Because of Core Values

One of the core values or purposes of a local church is ministry and fellowship. Both are acts of obedience to the Great Commandment (see Matt. 22:35-40). For a group to thrive, it must help members develop a sense of community as seen in the Acts 2 church. Through ministry, the group cares for one another and bears each other’s burdens. Through fellowship, relationships are formed and strengthened.

Caring is implied when people join a group. When they enroll, you pledge to pray for them, share with them, and care for them. Many times, this pledge is not stated, but is still expected by the new member. No one joins a group to be ignored, especially in a time of need. God said it was not good for man to be alone (see Gen. 2:18). People need a group that lets them know they belong and that they are not alone.

Equips the Saints

Jethro warned Moses, his son-in-law, that he would wear himself out if things did not change. Jethro knew the work was too heavy for one person (see Ex. 18:17-18). Never do ministry on your own. Paul reminds us that one function of a teacher is to equip group members to do the work of ministry and not do it for them (see Eph. 4:11-12). The group will be strengthened in fellowship by participation in ministry.

Encourage One Another

Through the years, care groups have been used to prod group members toward attendance. We need to change that! Enlist care leaders to care for others regardless of attendance patterns. Paul commended the believers at Thessalonica for encouraging and building each other up through ministry (1 Thes. 5:11). Jesus prayed that His followers would be as one, unified like He and the Father (John 17:21). Care for everyone and encourage each other so that community is formed and believers function as one.

Connect with New Members

Often a newcomer feels out of place in larger groups. In a smaller group, a newcomer can connect easier as a few people come alongside to provide prayer and care. We should be frustrated if we walk into a room and see a newcomer seated alone. Care group leaders can prevent this awkward situation by giving attention to newcomers.

Mobilize

Every leader needs others who can help mobilize group members for mission and ministry. Without help, teachers will find themselves stretched beyond their physical, mental, and emotional capacity. You need to rely on others so you can focus on leading the group and preparing for the Bible study time.

Begin at the Beginning

Don't wait until your group grows "too large for you to handle" before implementing a care ministry system. Assume that the group will grow and that you will need help to contact everyone. Also, act on the knowledge that you should not do ministry alone. You need someone who can help you minister even if that ministry is to three people.

Balance the Tasks

Generally you will want to enlist a care leader for every five people. This ratio allows the group to become an intimate small group within the larger group. Prayer requests become specific within a smaller group, response can be more focused, and relational bonds become stronger.

Each group should be balanced with faithful attenders, occasional attenders, non-attenders, and people serving in other areas in the church. No one gets left behind and new leaders for the future can be developed. Leaders can utilize their faithful members in planning and conducting activities for the rest of the group. Relationships are formed in small groups, which will contribute to the overall health of the larger group.

Be Consistent

Each member should be contacted every week because life happens weekly. Gather prayer request so they can be quickly shared at the beginning or end of each meeting. As appropriate and needed, plans should be made to follow up when prayer needs are discovered. For example, if a group member is going to be in the hospital, plans should be made to visit the person in the hospital, to care for family members during the stay, and to provide for meals or support after the member is home. Share through literature distribution, sending birthday wishes, giving a small gift, or personal testimony.

Breaking Bread

Some Bible study groups and Sunday School classes have grown to a size where planning fellowship gatherings is nearly impossible. Smaller care groups have the ability to focus on each member in the group. It has the potential to do Acts 2 “house to house” fellowships for the “breaking of bread” and the enjoyment “of all the people.” Typically friends and family find ways to regularly break bread together. Friendships are formed over food. The best way to show you care for a person is to spend time with them.

Be Visible

Whatever a group values is visible, vocal, and verifiable during each session. Some teachers designate the first ten to twenty minute of meeting time to care ministry. Others allow for this time at the the end. This time allows for the small groups to gather for prayer, accountability, ministry planning, and celebration. If care group leaders are not called on or recognized, then the groups will become inactive and members will be neglected.

As teachers lead the group to organize to care for every person, they create an avenue to experience biblical community and to respond positively to the Great Commandment.

Chapter 7 Reflections

What are your plans for helping your group stay connected?

Review the section titles in this chapter, seeking to identify the one that challenged you the most. What can you do to meet that challenge?

Review some of the resources below and develop a plan for establishing care groups in your Bible study group.

Additional Helps

Resources for establishing care groups can be found at *www.LifeWay.com* by using the search tool (suggested search “care groups”); from various state Baptist convention websites (for example, Alabama Baptist provide help at *www.alsbom.org/ss* and click on “resources”); or through several books including *The Six Core Values of Sunday School* by Allan Taylor and *Growing Sunday School Teams* by Lawrence Phipps and Daniel Edmonds.

CHAPTER 8

Lead Your Group to Multiply

Tim S. Smith

God's Word is very clear. Some of the last words of Jesus were instructions for us to make disciples. A leader of a group or class must be busy obeying Jesus. You are going to start a new class or group, and that is great. As you begin this journey, your intent is to make a difference. You don't want to fail and you want to honor God in all that you do. No one takes on this task seeking to be a failure but the truth is that so many never make it to the next level.

If our groups becomes the largest of the church but we fail to reproduce ourselves, we fail. If our groups are known for our presentations and sweet fellowship but we fail to reproduce ourselves, we fail. Even if our class or group wins the class or group of the year award but we fail to reproduce ourselves, we fail. We are called to make disciples not just to get people to attend our group.

Church history provides strong encouragement for multiplying groups. Stephen Paxson set the standard. As a missionary with the American Sunday School Union, he started 1,314 Sunday Schools in frontier America with a total attendance of more than 83,000. This number does not include the numerous other Sunday Schools he impacted through training and encouragement. As a result, Paxson has been called the most important single influence in evangelizing the American frontier. The first Sunday School he attended, he was pressured into teaching. The students read from the Bible and Paxson asked questions out of the Sunday School book. He returned to teach the next week. He thought of himself as a moral man with no need of salvation. After four years of teaching from the Sunday School book, he placed his trust in Jesus.¹ His learning by trial and error became the background used to enlist others to become teachers as well. What if you were the next person God used to make a difference like Stephen Paxson?

Why Start a New Group?

Many reasons exist for starting a new Bible study group. Here are a few to note:

- New groups often produce spiritual growth in both the new leaders and the group members.
- New groups provide additional opportunities for service and blessing which complements the spiritual growth.
- New groups often produce numerical growth because the average size of a group is ten so new groups will result in new people being reached.
- New groups create a sense of excitement and accomplishment for the group and the church.
- New groups enlarge the organizational base and provide choices.
- New groups can help in meeting the felt needs of individuals faster than the entire congregation can be changed to meet needs.
- New groups are more open to new comers because when a group is together after eighteen months it has become established in its social relationships.
- New groups provide an opportunity for absentees and restless members to make a fresh start.

The Goal is to Reproduce or Replicate

If you want to be selfish as a leader, simply fail to reproduce yourself. Paul reproduced himself in Timothy and expected him to do the same. We should be reminded of Paul's words to young Timothy, *And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* (see 2 Tim. 2:2). Every group and every leader should set as their goal reproducing themselves. Start every new group with a leader and an apprentice. Every leader can train an apprentice to lead his or her own group within six to eighteen months. Right now you need to be praying and thinking about who will be your apprentice.

Successfully Enlisting an Apprentice

Follow these steps listed below to invite a person to be your apprentice.

Pray

As Jesus saw the large crowds He instructed His disciples, *The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest* (Matt. 9:37-38). Begin by asking God to provide a person to serve as an apprentice. Ask Him to reveal that person to you. Once God shows you that person, move to the next step.

Make an Appointment with the Potential Apprentice

Don't corner them by the water fountain or in the parking lot after church. Call them to let them know you've been praying and want to discuss with them something that God had been speaking to you about. Go to their home, place of business, or meet for coffee.

Provide a Written List of Duties and Expectations

The potential apprentice needs to know what you are asking him or her to do. Also inform him of how long you are asking him to serve in this role. If he is not ready to lead a group after eighteen months then more than likely, he will never lead a group by himself. Another important thing to do in the meeting is to provide essential materials such as a copy of curriculum resources. It is also important to explain to him the support systems in place to help him be successful such as leadership meetings and training opportunities. Finally, allow time for questions and provide your contact information in case a question comes up later.

Encourage Him or Her to Pray

Before accepting an answer, encourage them to pray and promise them that you will be doing the same. Set a time for a decision, usually about one week from the initial enlistment visit.

Get an Answer

Contact the potential apprentice after the agreed upon time period. If he or she agrees, begin the process of mentoring immediately. Respect his or her decision if they decline. Help him or her find a way to contribute in a greater way to the life of the group.

Mentoring Your Apprentice

The apprentice should be seen by the group as a co-leader not just a substitute teacher. Every week the leader and the apprentice should be praying for the group members by name, contacting group members based on discovered needs and ministry opportunities, planning fellowship and social gatherings, and preparing the group time and Bible study.

Baby Steps

Every week the teacher/leader and apprentice should be meeting to plan the Bible study. The teacher prepares the Bible study and the apprentice participates in the group time. Following the session the teacher and apprentice meet to discuss how the teacher prepared and to debrief what happened during the session.

The teacher and apprentice meet together and develop the Bible study sessions plan together but the teacher is the primary leader and the apprentice helps with the group time. After each group Bible study time, the teacher and apprentice discuss and debrief the session. This action helps both you and the apprentice.

Co-leaders

As a second step, the two begin to function as co-leaders to the group. They share the same amount of time leading the group Bible study time and they prepare the group time together. Continue to debrief following the sessions.

Coach

In this step the apprentice takes the lead in the preparation with the assistance of the group leader. The apprentice takes most of the time during the group Bible study time. After the session, continue to debrief.

Leader

This stage is a release point. The teacher doesn't assist with preparation but still attends the Bible study group time that the apprentice leads. Following the group time, continue to meet and debrief.

Launch

Finally the apprentice is now the leader of a group and should be repeating the same process with another apprentice. Each step should take five to thirteen weeks.

In most cases, the easiest way to help a new leader get a good start is for them to take over the class you have been teaching. You can then help start a new group, taking a few of the members of your old class. You may want to take one of the care groups, with those five to seven people making up the core for a new class.

Begin With the End in Mind

As you begin this journey make sure you are constantly and consistently communicating to the group that the goal is to birth another group. If you build multiplication into the DNA of your group, it will be less of a shock when the time comes to start the new group. Your prayer should be to lead a healthy group that is growing spiritually and numerically with the end goal of producing new groups.

Chapter 8 Reflections

Review the story of Stephen Paxson. How has your church and/or your class benefited from others seeking to multiply groups or churches?

Who has invested in you? How have they passed on to you what they know? To whom and how can you pass on what you know?

Pray for God to give you a person to mentor and coach as a Bible study leader. Record your prayer below. Share your prayer with the one God gives you as a source of encouragement to them.

¹ Belle Paxson Drury, *A Fruitful Life: A Narrative of the Adventures and Missionary Labors of Stephen Paxson* (public domain)

Conclusion

New leaders are essential to the health, growth, and vitality of a church. We can become stale and too comfortable. When that happens, our classes or groups cease to be effective. Therefore, our church ceases to be effective.

Our churches desperately need an infusion of fresh faces, passions, dreams, godly desires, and warriors who are ready to take up the mantle of leadership to spread the gospel and make disciples. Are you one of those people? If so, don't just learn how to be a leader, do it. Regardless of position or opportunity, start being the one who shows up, who ministers in times of need, and who takes action while others sit idly by

God desires and deserves your best. The best leaders are often not the best known leaders. The best leaders are the ones that give unselfishly of their time, resources, energy, and commitment to fulfill the Great Commission. Don't expect a crown in this life. That has been reserved for you when we get to heaven.

Be a leader!

Next Steps

Pray!

You can make a difference. God created you with the potential to accomplish His purpose. Allow the Spirit of God to lead you to become and do all that He asks of you. Success is dependent on obedience, not results. Ask God not only for direction but for the courage to lead.

Decide!

Life's not fair. I get it. We say things like, "if only...". Why should we be the one who is asked to be a leader when there are others who could do a better job? Life is filled with too many regrets. Take a risk. Step out in faith. Many people fail because either they never decide or because they failed to act once they did decide.

Caution: Many people have succeeded in accomplishing their mission but their actions caused the wrong conclusions. Even if you succeed, make sure your actions are to accomplish the right outcomes.

Your service and ministry for God is not dependent on your abilities, your faith, or your gifts. But it does require your willingness to be used of God to fulfill His purpose. We must decide.

Act!

Life is peculiar in that nothing seems to happen the way you expect it to happen. Too many people wait until the perfect moment to commit to serving the Lord. The problem is there is no such thing as a perfect moment. You will never know the Bible well enough. Your leadership skills will never be good enough. Your ministry skills will never be good enough. Life happens. To enjoy life, you still have to live it. And that takes action.

Give it your all!

Always give it your best effort. I have walked into Sunday School classes, pulpits, and conference rooms feeling as prepared as possible and yet nothing seemed to go right. I have also been unprepared and everything seemed to go great. Ultimately the results depend on God. We are responsible for doing the best we can with what we have, leaving the results in God's hands.

Stick With It!

Be faithful, dependable, honest, thoughtful, kind, trusting, optimistic, hopeful, and humble. Sometimes it's the little things we do that have the greatest impact. Being a Christ follower impacts our actions. Give God every opportunity to use you for His purpose. Sometimes a smile, a hug, or a kind word can do more for the Kingdom of God than the best sermon ever delivered. Trust God and stick with it.

