

The Studying Disciple

Deepening Your Faith Through Bible Exploration



Part of a Series of **6** Small Group Studies



MDPC
MEMORIAL DRIVE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH





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1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.

!!!NOTE: If this is your group's first meeting with any of these studies, please work through Sections 2 and 3. If you have done this before, please skip ahead to Section 4.

2 Introduce every group member (15 minutes).

Go around the group and have every member answer the following questions aloud:

- What is your name?
- What is your connection to MDPC or to another Christian fellowship?
- What in the past seven days has been really good news for you?

(Please note each member's time should be brief. If 10 members speak for five minutes, you will have taken 50 minutes to introduce yourselves!)

3 Read aloud about The Equipped Disciple Series, The Studying Disciple Course, and Group Expectations (10 minutes).

The Equipped Disciple is a multi-course small group curriculum developed at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church. Each course lasts six sessions, with each session approximately 60-70 minutes. (To take up to 90 minutes, simply extend the group's participation in one or more areas of the session's lesson plan as desired.)

This course, *The Studying Disciple*, has the sub-title *Deepening Your Faith through Bible Exploration*. Each session will focus on one specific aspect of Christian witness that will enable you, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ through spiritual conversations with your family members, friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

Most sessions will include study and discussion on a biblical passage relevant to being a faithful student of God's Word. Also, each session will include opportunities to grow in your spiritual practices, such as devotional reading and Scripture memory. Directions for those leading a group are found in the session materials themselves, not in a separate leader's guide..

So your group will be a fruitful and joyful experience, each member will strive to embrace the following:

- Commit to attending consistently.
- Contribute to a group climate of mutual trust, respect, honesty, and vulnerability.
- Discuss willingly. This is not a lecture.
- Prepare in advance for the upcoming group session, barring unexpected events. (If such events occur, come to the session anyway.)
- Write in this guide. (But remember, this is not a writing class. Brief notes may suffice.)
- Bring your Bible every time. Ordinarily, biblical passages won't be printed in the guide.
- Anticipate that the Holy Spirit will do something in you during this time of focus.

4 Read, study, and discuss as a group Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2 (30 minutes).

Read Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2 in a Bible translation of your choice, then respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, read Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2 aloud. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss with one another.

What two visual images in Psalm 119:105 communicate the role of Scripture in our lives? Describe how both images make clear to you the Bible's significant purpose.

How does Scripture provide you with "a lamp for my feet" and "a light on my path"? (NIV) Share at least one example from your personal experience.

With what does the first part of Romans 12:2 urge us not to be in conformity? Why is this conformity to be avoided? Please give at least two instances of this conformity today.

What does Romans 12:2 state is the opposite of the conformity mentioned above? What is the eventual result desired by the end of Romans 12:2?

How does the "renewing of your mind" noted in Romans 12:2 take place? How may Scripture play a prominent role in this renewal? What practices or habits with the Scripture can assist you?

Paraphrasing is a great way to work through your own interpretation of Scripture. So write below both Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2 in your own words. Share your paraphrases with the group.

What is God saying to you through the teaching of Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2 about your overall practice as a follower of Jesus Christ? Describe and discuss one way you can act upon the Holy Spirit's direction this week.

5 Read aloud about devotional Bible reading and responding (5 minutes).

We just finished a Bible study. Another encounter with Scripture growing disciples need to practice often is the devotional reading of the Bible. The consistent devotional reading of Scripture is an important way to experience the continuing presence and guidance of Christ.

For our 6-week course, we will read Galatians together as our group's devotional reading. (Note: if you are already a consistent reader of the Bible, well done! For the group's time together, though, please either add Galatians to your present reading or substitute Galatians for this part of your reading plan.)

We will divide this crucial letter from Paul to the Christians in Galatia in this way:

- Before meeting for Session 2, read chapter 1 of Galatians.
- Before meeting for Session 3, read chapter 2 of Galatians.
- Before meeting for Session 4, read chapters 3 and 4 of Galatians.
- Before meeting for Session 5, read chapter 4 of Galatians.
- Before meeting for Session 6, read chapter 5 of Galatians.

Note that sometimes our devotional reading connects with our Bible study passage. Other times, however, there is no connection. That's perfectly fine! We are reading and discussing our readings in the group as a means to get in the habit of meditating on Scripture.

Please do not read mechanically. Reflect upon what you read as you read, and prayerfully discern God's guidance for you. In your study guide's appendix, you will find Reading Response Forms to help you answer two questions of each reading from Galatians:

- "In what I read from Galatians, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?"
- "What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?"

Please write your responses in the space allotted. In the remaining group sessions, you'll have the opportunity to share how God has been working through your devotional reading time.

6 Read aloud this introduction to Scripture memorization (5 minutes).

Memorizing anything, especially Bible verses, gets little respect in our day. With the availability of search engines and smart phones, why bother? All you have to do is Google what you want, and there it is! However, Psalm 119:11 insists that storing God's word within our hearts (in other words, memorizing Scripture!) can be an effective means of enabling and strengthening faithful Christian living. It's true Scripture memory will take some effort and determination. But it is well worth it.

Our memory verses for this course are Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2. These verses neatly and effectively sum up the importance of Scripture for developing growing disciples. We'll memorize them from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) below, so we can help one another more easily from a translation we share together:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105 NRSV)

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2, NRSV)

!!!NOTE: *If this is your group's first time with any of these studies, please work through the helpful hints for memorizing below. If you have done this before, please skip ahead to Section 7.*

Some helpful hints for memorizing are:

- Write out the verses in longhand. Something about writing imprints the words on your memory. For some, repeated writing in longhand is quite helpful.
- Write the verses on a 3" x 5" card. Carry the card with you and refer to the verses often.
- Say the verses aloud as you practice. Speaking also imprints the words on your memory.
- Break up the verses into their smaller phrase units. Start with the first phrase and work on it until you are comfortable. Then add the second phrase. Continue to add phrases as you learn the verses phrase by phrase.
- Reflect on the verses' meaning. Connect the verses with their significance for your life.
- Don't forget to include the Scriptural reference and translation at the end, such as "Psalm 119:105, NIV" and "Romans 12:2, NIV."
- Practice often and review regularly. "Overlearning" is often what's needed to break through.

Starting at your next gathering, you will practice your verses with others by dividing the group into pairs. You will want to work on your verses in advance in order to take advantage of this opportunity.

7 Talk about what's needed for next time (5 minutes).

Review the homework:

- Please view the four short videos from The Bible Project found in "Session 2: Biblical Story and Styles." Then respond to the questions given and be ready to share.
- Read Galatians 1 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Start memorizing Psalm 119:105 (NRSV) and Romans 12:2 (NRSV) and be prepared to practice at the next session.

8 Close the gathering in prayer.

- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 min).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 1 and discuss (15 min).
- 4 Prepare and discuss as a group your notes and responses from four short videos on Biblical story and styles from “The Bible Project” (30 min).

The Bible is both a single book and a collection of books. To communicate the Bible’s one central, unified story, these 66 books use a variety of literary styles. A marvelous resource for unpacking both the story and the style is the ministry called “The Bible Project.” The Bible Project focuses on producing helpful videos on nearly every aspect of Biblical study and interpretation.

Please watch the four videos in the “[Intro to the Bible](#)” category. The four videos are titled, “What Is the Bible?” “The Story of the Bible,” “Literary Styles,” and “Ancient Jewish Meditation Literature.” Each video is about five minutes in length. You will find each video at The Bible Project’s website, bibleproject.com, as well as information on the project’s goals; its numerous videos on Biblical books and themes; and its other offerings such as small group studies and daily Bible reading plans. You may also search for these videos on YouTube.

As you view the videos, take notes and respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss with one another.

In your own words, summarize briefly the grand, overarching story of the Bible as presented by the videos.

What are the percentages for Biblical narrative, poetry, and discourse, respectively? What do you think this implies and affirms about Scripture—both what Scripture is and what Scripture isn’t?

What are some of the predominant characteristics of Biblical narrative? What is one Biblical account you think fits this style? Describe why you think so.

What are some of the predominant characteristics of Biblical poetry? What is one Biblical account you think fits this style? Describe why you think so.

What are some of the predominant characteristics of Biblical discourse? What is one Biblical account you think fits this style? Describe why you think so.

Often many Biblical books and passages combine two or all of the styles. What do you think is one example of this combination? What does it combine and how?

Why doesn't the Bible give us the details we often think it should? (For example, the Gospels say nothing about Jesus as a teenager!) What is going on here? Why?

What is Scripture seeking to do in our lives through what the videos describe as its dense and multi-layered writings? How is Psalm 1 reflective of this goal? How should this goal be your goal?

5 Divide into pairs or triads and practice saying the memory verse without notes (10 min).

(NOTE: If you are meeting via Zoom, your host will need to set up the “breakout room” feature.) You probably have made progress on memorizing Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2. If so, wonderful! If you are struggling, remember God is with you as you memorize these verses. Go as far as you’re able. You will have an opportunity next time to continue your work.

6 Talk about what’s needed for next time (5 min).

Review the homework:

- Please read the short essay “Observe, Interpret, Apply” in “Session 3: A Method of Study,” respond to the questions given, and be ready to share.
- Read Galatians 2 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Continue your work on memorizing Psalm 119:105 (NRSV) and Romans 12:2 (NRSV), and be prepared to practice at the next session.

7 Close the gathering in prayer.



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 min).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 2 and discuss (15 min).
- 4 Prepare and discuss as a group the “Observe, Interpret, and Apply” method of study outlined below, using the questions provided (30 min).

A popular Bible study method bearing fruit for any devoted student of the Bible is the “Observe, Interpret, and Apply” approach. These three steps can guide any study:

- **Observe: What Does It Say?** You pray for God’s direction. Then you ask a lot of questions. You figure out “Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?” You note repeated words or terms because repetition may indicate importance. You look up definitions. You notice the literary style of the passage. You see the flow of events or thoughts and how they’re structured. You look for key transitional words like “if... then” and “therefore.” You check for cause-and-effect, questions-and-answers, and other clues. You notice what seems clear or unclear.
- **Interpret: What Does It Mean?** You pray for God’s guidance. You start answering your questions. You put phrases, sentences, events, and ideas in sequence and relationship. You look at the style and the context. You examine what the author’s original intent, goal, or desire may have been in writing. You “let Scripture interpret Scripture” through examining other passages connected with this passage. You think about how the passage fits in the overarching Scriptural story. You investigate the passage’s cultural and historical aspects. You paraphrase the passage. You read how others have interpreted the passage via commentaries.
- **Apply: How Does God Want Me to Respond?** You pray for God’s empowerment. You have been exploring Scripture; now Scripture explores you. You consider what you have learned through your study about God; the gospel; Christian doctrine and practice; relationships with others; and your inner life. Then you ask, “Now that I know this, how do I respond? What is the undeniable result?” You ponder the implications of the passage for your daily life. You note that not all passages lead you to act, for some passages lead you to think or to feel, and reflect upon what God has in mind for you.

Respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss with one another.

Why do you think “Observe, Interpret, Apply” is listed in this order? What is significant about it?

The classic questions “Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?” are often helpful. But some find them tedious. What reasons come to mind not to skip these questions and move on too quickly?

Why should you pay attention to what is repeated several times in a passage? What does this repetition often indicate? Can you think of a passage that does this? (Hint: Jesus in Matthew 5.)

The 19th and 20th century temperance movement often used Colossians 2:21, “Taste not; taste not; handle not” (KJV), as its theme message during its campaigns. Read Colossians 2:16-25 in a translation of your choice. What do you notice that differs from the temperance movement’s interpretation? What does this example teach about the importance of context?

How do you find related passages to the passage you’re studying, often called “cross references”? Why and how do these cross references assist you in interpreting your passage?

How are commentaries sometimes helpful? How can they be misused? What good commentaries are you aware of?

It can be easy to fall into a rhythm of surface-level application of Scripture, geared toward behavior or habits you need to change. How do you move into deeper layers of life with application?

5 Divide into pairs or triads and practice saying the memory verse without notes (10 min).

(NOTE: If you are meeting via Zoom, your host will need to set up the “breakout room” feature.) You probably have made progress on memorizing Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2. If so, wonderful! If you are struggling, remember God is with you as you memorize these verses. Go as far as you’re able. You will have an opportunity next time to continue your work.

6 Talk about what’s needed for next time (5 min).

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the study on Luke 5:17-26 in “Session 4: Studying the Bible’s Narrative” and be ready to share.
- Read Galatians 3-4 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Continue your work on memorizing Psalm 119:105 (NRSV) and Romans 12:2 (NRSV) and be prepared to practice at the next session.

7 Close the gathering in prayer.



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 min).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 3-4 and discuss (15 min).
- 4 Prepare and discuss as a group one example of a Biblical narrative, Luke 5:17-26 (30 min).

Read Luke 5:17-26 in a Bible translation of your choice, then respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, read aloud Luke 5:17-26. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss your answers with one another.

What are some signs that Luke 5:17-26 is a narrative? How does narrative differ from poetry and discourse?

Write down some of your observations about Luke 5:17-26, based on the “Observe” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. What does this passage say?

Write down your interpretation of Luke 5:17-26, based on the “Interpret” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. What does this passage mean and why?

What other passages affirm and expand upon what Luke 5:17-26 means? How do they do so? Briefly mention and discuss two of them below.

Write down your application of Luke 5:17-26, based on the “Apply” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. How does God want you to respond?

Explain how your application of Luke 5:17-26 is based upon your observation and interpretation of Luke 5:17-26. Elaborate on why this connection between observation, interpretation, and application is so crucial to Bible study.

5 Divide into pairs or triads and practice saying the memory verse without notes (10 min).

(NOTE: If you are meeting via Zoom, your host will need to set up the “breakout room” feature.) If you have not memorized these verses yet, don’t worry! Say what you can. Continue to work on Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV). You will have an opportunity next time to show how far you have come.

6 Talk about what’s needed for next time (5 min).

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the study on Psalm 8 in “Session 5: Studying the Bible’s Poetry” and be ready to share.
- Read Galatians 5 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Continue your work on memorizing Psalm 119:105 (NRSV) and Romans 12:2 (NRSV) and be prepared to practice at the next session.

7 Close the gathering in prayer.



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 min).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 5 and discuss (15 min).
- 4 Prepare and discuss as a group one example of a Biblical poem or song, Psalm 8 (30 min).

Read Psalm 8 in a Bible translation of your choice, then respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, read aloud Psalm 8. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss your answers with one another.

What are some indications that Psalm 8 is a poem or song? How do you read and hear poetry differently than either narrative or discourse?

Write down your observations about Psalm 8, based on the “Observe” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. What does this passage say?

Pick out the verse that stand out to you from Psalm 8. Why does it grab your attention? What makes it so memorable? Provide some reasoning for your choice.

Write down your interpretation of Psalm 8, based on the “Interpret” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. What does this passage mean and why?

How does Psalm 8 describe humanity? What does this description communicate about human dignity? Give an example of another passage in the Bible that supports or expands upon this description.

Write down your application of Psalm 8, based on the “Apply” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. How does God want you to respond?

An ongoing problem for Bible study is running out of time and energy when it comes to applying a passage and instead focusing solely on observing and interpreting it. What ulterior motives might we have in letting application slide as we study? How can we guard against this tendency?

5 Divide into pairs or triads and practice saying the memory verse without notes (10 min).

(NOTE: If you are meeting via Zoom, your host will need to set up the “breakout room” feature.) If you have not memorized these verses yet, do what you’re able. Continue to work on Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV). You will have a final opportunity next time to show how far you have come.

6 Talk about what’s needed for next time (5 min).

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the study on Romans 5:1-11 in “Session 6: Studying the Bible’s Discourse” and be ready to share.
- Read Galatians 6 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Continue your work memorizing Psalm 119:105 (NRSV) and Romans 12:2 (NRSV) and be prepared to practice at the next session.

7 Close the gathering in prayer.



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 min).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 6 and discuss (15 min).
- 4 Prepare and discuss as a group one example of a Biblical discourse, Romans 5:1-11 (30 min).

Read Romans 5:1-11 in a Bible translation of your choice, then respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, read aloud Romans 5:1-11. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss your answers with one another.

Why can you state without hesitation that Romans 5:1-11 is part of a Biblical discourse? How does discourse differ from the types of literature we've already studied? Why is this distinction helpful?

Write down your observations about Romans 5:1-11, based on the “Observe” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. What does this passage say?

Discourse depends upon a logical flow or structure that serves, in a sense, as its plot. What is Paul's “plot” in Romans 5:1-11? What are his main points and how do they fit together?

Write down your interpretation of Romans 5:1-11, based on the “Interpret” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. What does this passage mean and why?

Write down your application of Romans 5:1-11, based on the “Apply” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. How does God want you to respond?

Often a major obstacle to applying a Biblical passage is our emotional response to what it advocates. Does Paul’s argument in Romans 5:1-11 convince you of the reality and meaningfulness of suffering for the Christian? If so, how? If not, why not? How may we address the application of Biblical teaching we struggle with?

5 Say the memory verses in unison as a group to celebrate what God is doing through this work (5 min).

If you have not memorized these verses yet, do what you’re able. Continue to work on Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV) in your ongoing practice of Christian spiritual disciplines.

6 As you close in prayer, share at least one benefit you have experienced from participating in *The Studying Disciple*. Share your prayer praises and requests as you continue your Christian growth. Give thanks to God for His grace and encouragement (15 min).

Reading Response Forms for Galatians

For Session 2 • Galatians 1

In what I read from Galatians, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?

For Session 3 • Galatians 2

In what I read from Galatians, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?

For Session 4 • Galatians 3 and 4

In what I read from Galatians, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?

For Session 5 • Galatians 5

In what I read from Galatians, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?

For Session 6 • Galatians 6

In what I read from Galatians, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?



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