

# Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus – together

*One of His disciples said to him, "Lord, Teach us to pray..."*

-- Luke 11:1

## Week One, Monday: The Life of Jesus in Micro-Groups



### Micro-Group Reflection Week One:

The life of Jesus as an example  
of participating in Micro-Groups



**Pondering Point:** With micro-groups (MGs) defined chiefly as 2-4 people, an obvious MG in the life of Jesus is the trio of Peter, James and John. He did activities with them that His Small Group (SG) known as the Twelve missed out on. He took only those three for the healing of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37-43). Only they went up the mountain with Jesus during His transfiguration and meeting with Elijah and Moses (Mark 9:2-4). He took them deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane during His heart-wrenching prayer time the night of His arrest (Mark 14:32-34).

*He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ~ Mark 5:37*

But there's more than one MG in the life of Jesus. He enjoyed a close relationship with the family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus as we will see later this week. For now, answer this question (and consider taking notes to share in your MG/SG gathering).

- Who "adopted" you into their lives allowing you to be part of a second family of sorts?



**Prayer for the week:** Father God, open our souls to the possibilities of participating in spiritual micro-groups. Let us see in Jesus the benefits of a micro-group life and see You replicate that in our worlds. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Week One Tuesday: A Micro-Group look at Mark 5:37-43



**Pondering Point:** Micro-Groups come in a variety of packages. Some you're born into, some you marry into or move into; others come about through community activities like music or sports or spiritual pursuits like church life. Within such groups are MG moments that can shape our lives. Let's dive into one of Jesus' micro-group moments with Peter, James, and John. It is recorded for us in Mark 5:37-43:

*While Jesus was still speaking (to a woman just healed), some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"* <sup>36</sup> *Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."*

<sup>37</sup> *He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James.* <sup>38</sup> *When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly.* <sup>39</sup> *He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep."* <sup>40</sup> *But they laughed at him.*

*After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him and went in where the child was.* <sup>41</sup> *He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!").*

<sup>42</sup> *Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.*

<sup>43</sup> *He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this and told them to give her something to eat.*

- Put yourself in the sandals of Peter, James, or John. What catches your attention about the above experience as these followers of Jesus take in this MG moment?

It is interesting to note that Jesus tells them to keep this among themselves. There are conversations and experiences in MGs that ought to remain in the group. This is the first rule of our MG life.

*MG rule #1:  
What is shared  
in the group  
stays in the group.*

Doing so allows for vulnerability and transparency, two aspects that deepen the MG experience. Without these, MGs stay at a surface level – and Jesus did not stay at surface levels in His MGs.



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, draw me into MGs with partners and friends like Peter, James, and John shared – groups where You lead and teach. In Your name Jesus I pray. Amen.

[Not for nothing, take note of the intense MG moment Mark records of Jesus having with the woman who had suffered bleeding for twelve years. It starts in 5:24 and culminates in v. 34 right in the middle of a large group crowd, with a small group of disciples including the micro-group of Peter, James and John.]

## Wednesday, Week One: Biblical Teachings on Groups



**Pondering Point:** As you read the next MG episode from Mark 14:32-34, pay attention to what Jesus is looking for from His MG partners Peter, James, and John. It is these type of times in life that bond us tightly together when it works as hoped.

*They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”*

- In your words, what is Jesus seeking from His MG?

See what happens with Jesus’ MG friends in the following verses.

<sup>7</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.  
“Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? <sup>38</sup> Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

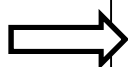
Let’s acknowledge that even our best friends let us down at times. Don’t expect perfection from them or yourself, but rather mutual commitment. That said, we can all take heed of Jesus’ words to His disciples: *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You sought a willing Spirit to do the will of Your Father (our Father). Teach me to seek that same type of willing spirit to overcome the weakness of the flesh and find partners who are after the same type of spiritual life. In Your name Jesus I pray. Amen.

If time permits, check out John 18:10-11 and how it relates to MG rule #4.

Jesus was not asking His friends to rescue Him but to be with Him in a difficult moment. This is one of the greatest blessings of MG life. If you cultivate it among a few peers, it will bear much fruit.



**MG rule #4:**  
*Don’t Fix,  
Don’t Rescue*

## Thursday Week One: Prayerfully Re-Center around God



**Pondering Point:** There is another identifiable MG/SG that Jesus was a part of: His birth family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, known as the Holy Family, are His initial MG (as a human) – which also happened to be God-centered.

As we prepare to ponder Jesus’ family of origin, pause to think about yours for a minute or two. Use the next page to describe in words and/or pictures your family of origin. Include the who, when and where of your family growing up.

*Be prepared to share what you created with a MG or SG of people.*

My family of origin:

**Jesus' family of origin:** What, if anything, do you recall about the early life of Jesus? Where did He live? (Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth) How might you depict His family of origin? What similarities and what differences exist between His family of origin situation and yours?

We noted earlier this week that Micro-Groups come in a variety of packages. Some you're born into, some you marry into or move into. Regardless of how they come together initially, can you envision that God desires to be part of them? Let's review which of our MGs are *or could be* Spirit-led as God desires.



**Review the week:** Which MGs in my life (pockets of 2-4 people) are centered around God? In which ones is God welcome in terms of conversation, influence, or activities? Which ones could include God but have not been given much attention in this way?



**Repent if necessary** of leaving God on the sidelines of certain relationships, of neglecting to acknowledge God's ways or avoiding conversations that revolve around God.



**Return as necessary** by praying for comfortableness to bring God into particular MG relationships, boldness to testify of His place and influence in your life, and openness to approach others about adding a spiritual component to some of your existing MGs. the prayer below is worded to do just that.



**Prayer:** Father God, I desire to be comfortable bringing You into the pockets of micro-relationships within my life. I pray for boldness to testify of Your place and influence in my life -- and that You would be central to all of my life, relationships included. Where the time is right, help me be open to approaching others about adding a spiritual component an existing MG. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## Friday, Week One: Discipleship Point on Groups

Read through this excerpt from Matthew 18:15-20 sound in the context of a MG of Jesus followers?

*“If your brother sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

*“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*



*“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”*

~ Jesus, Matthew 18:15-20



**Pondering Point:** This section of the Bible acknowledges that MGs (any group) can be built around God and yet be unhealthy. Personal offenses or festering issues can pull groups away from a God-centered focus. So can whining, personal agendas, or gossip. Matthew 18 offers a recipe for returning groups to powerful, Christ-centered gatherings. End by praying for God’s insight over the place of MGs in your life.



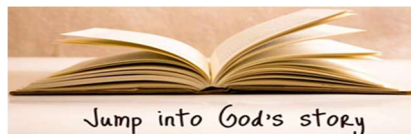
**Discipleship Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You have highlighted a great blessing when even two or three people come together in agreement about something. I want more of this blessing in my life. Help me to cultivate this in several of my current MG relationships -- and even start a few if that is Your desire. In Your name Jesus I pray. Amen.

## Things to appreciate about MG/SG from the life of Jesus:

- Jesus finds value in both Small Groups and Micro Groups and participated in both. So can you.
- Jesus lived more deeply connected with some families and individuals than others. So can you.

### Saturday, Week One: Scripture's Story for the Week

Jesus at the home of  
Mary, Martha, and Lazarus  
John 11:1-53



**Pondering Point:** Jesus enjoyed a close relationship with the family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (see Luke 10 as well as John 11 used today). He could be found at their house on multiple occasions and spent substantial time there. They were like a second family to Him. Lazarus is even described (as is the Apostle John) as Jesus' beloved.

We all have relationships at varying levels of acquaintance. Though many of our contacts in life tend to be casual and superficial, we need and benefit from deep interaction as well (Ecclesiastes 4:10-12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 3:15). In deeper relationships, we have a place to open up and share beyond sports, weather, fashion, or the latest viral media posts. These types of relationships can become a great source of strength and insight regarding our personal lives. Once a sense of trust has been established, and we feel free to share the more private aspects of who we are (strengths and weaknesses, dreams and fears), lots of growth can result. When we become intentional about such possibilities, we create more opportunity for that personal growth, for all parties involved. The greatest of these relationships happens when each person serves as a catalyst for the other's growth, making the benefits mutual. Today we pray for such opportunities to become real.





**Prayer for the day:** Father God, I love the notion of serving as a catalyst for others' growth -- and receiving that blessing as well. Show me where intentionality would open up such opportunities -- and to overcome fears of awkwardness that might arise in seeking a deeper relationship with others spiritually. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Sunday Week One: Called to gather together in groups



**Pondering Point:** Clearly Peter, James and John were open to the spiritual component of connecting with Jesus. Great for them. This was not something everyone wanted -- then or now. But it is something God wants for people. And we are His ambassadors to that end. Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 and 6:1-10. Then work through the following descriptions to get a read on whether particular relationships in your life may be open to God's presence in them. It is okay that some are not at this point. Simply "Shake the dust off of your feet" for now (Matthew 10:14); move on to other opportunities. Maybe that relationship will be open at a later time.

**God-centered:** *"I expect God to be a regular part of conversation with you."* These types of people will pray for you, pray with you -- and want you to pray for them.

**God-friendly:** *"I look forward to conversations about God with you."* These types of people might be uncomfortable praying with you, but often appreciate prayers from you concerning them.

**God-warm:** *"I am open to a conversation about God with you."* These types of people may or may not be comfortable asking for prayer but would not likely turn it down if offered.

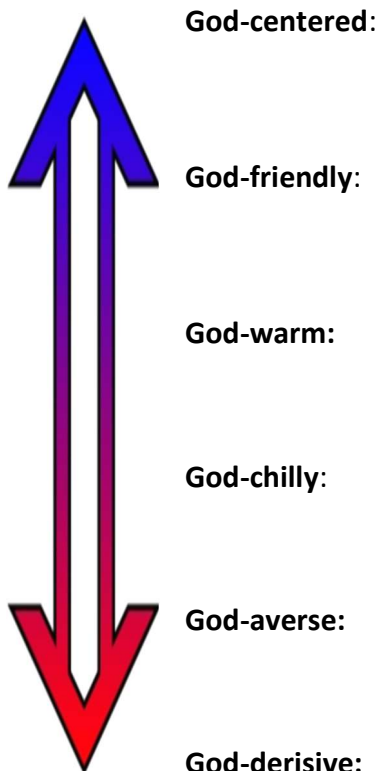
**God-chilly:** *"I welcome you but prefer that we leave God out of the conversation."* These types of people may be uncomfortable with conversation about prayer at all let alone actual prayer.

**God-averse:** *"You are not welcome if you're going to bring God up."* These types of people will actively speak against religion and prefer you not even pray about them let alone bring it up.

**God-derisive:** *"I don't like you because of your views on God!"* These types of people are hateful toward God and may bring up God as an irritant; they often mock and/or verbally abuse your Christian viewpoint.

Note that we did not identify people as believers in any category. Believers and non-believers can be scattered throughout these descriptions.

As you ponder your current set of friends (and acquaintances?) both local and global, place them along the continuum below:



As one might imagine, there will be many micro-relationships in life that are not necessarily spiritual in nature, let alone God-centered. For instance, while you are more than welcome to engage a cashier with kindness and humor, this is not about you trying to create a deep spiritual connection in the grocery line. (Of course, if there is no one else around and you have time, you might just end up in a "John 4 moment" like Jesus did with the woman at the well). But there are people interested in traveling paths similar to yours, many open not only to a spiritual connection with God between you, but specifically open to the way of Jesus. Connected to each other and Jesus is a great combination!

Which micro-relationships in your life might you see as possibilities to either start or deepen a God-centered component between you? Pray for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to the possibilities. you can use the one that follows if you like.



**Prayer:** Spirit of God, open my eyes to the people around me who are interested in a spiritual component to our mutual relationship, whether they are co-workers, neighbors, or even casual acquaintances. Let my Jesus-light shine with an attractive glow that draws those open to the love of Jesus and His gospel message. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

# Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus as sent ones

"As the Father sent Me, I am sending You" –John 20:21

## Week Two, Monday: The Life of Peter in Micro-Groups

MG<sub>s</sub>

### Micro-Group Reflection Week Two: The life of Peter as an example of participating in Micro-Groups

**Pondering Point:** One naturally occurring MG is a birth family. We all get born, but we don't all get born into God-centered families like Jesus did – or even into families at all! This week, through the disciple Simon Peter, we note a second naturally occurring MG/SG scenario, that of marriage (Matthew 8:14). Just as with birth families, some families created through marriage are God-centered and others are not. Of course, not everyone gets married, but for those who do, this naturally occurring relationship is intended to be built around God – both for the couple itself and when a blessing of children comes along with it. Take a moment to answer the following questions based on your marital situation:



**St Peter**

- **If currently (or previously) married:** Consider God's place in your marriage/family. What role (if any) does or did God play in this MG/SG for you? Is He involved? Central? Invited? Acknowledged? Ignored? Included or excluded?

-- OR --

- **If currently not married:** With minimal judgment, describe some MG/SG experiences that you have had in connection to others such as parents, adult children, friends or co-workers?



**Prayer for the week:** Ask God to bless the marital MGs that you are closely connected to -- including your own if you have one. Pray specifically that God is welcome and sought after.

## Week Two Tuesday: A Micro-Group look at Luke 5:1-11



**Pondering Point:** Aside from the spiritual MG Jesus formed with Peter, James, and John -- and Peter's marital MG -- here is an example of a different type of MG in Peter's life. Read Luke 5:1-11 to shed light on it.

*One day as Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.*

*When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."*

*When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.*

*Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.*

When Jesus stepped into Peter's boat, He stepped into a pre-existing MG of Peter, James and John – fishing buddies. The Bible calls them partners, but it is the same “churchy” word in Greek that we use for “fellowship” (*koinonia*).

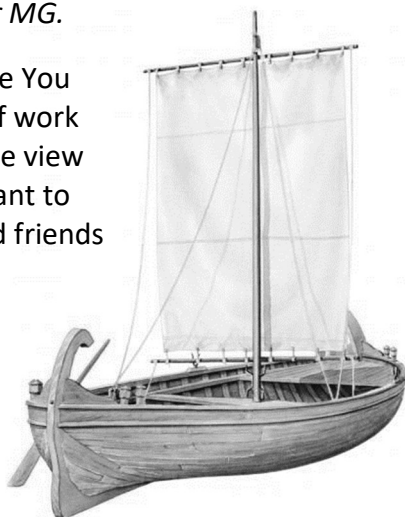


This is a key understanding to the MG life of disciples. While we can be open to starting new relationships, more so we look to welcome Jesus into pre-existing fellowships (when and where the Holy Spirit directs). We may not be able to foster dozens of Small Groups, but we can be intentional about a few of the dozens of MGs that already exist in our current lives. We can, like Jesus, invite others into a deeper spiritual journey as well. These groups meet anywhere from weekly to monthly. To drive this lifestyle home for participants, we designed this group series to highlight the Micro Group examples in multiple New Testament people.

- Are you open to letting Jesus use pre-existing MGs in your life as a platform to teach or connect with others?
- Think about current or past MGs that include teammates or partners of yours. They may be based on work (like Peter) or hobbies like scouting, bowling, music, or book clubs. They could be family-, health- or sports-oriented. *Take time to share when you gather with your MG.*



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I welcome You into my "boat" – my places of work or hobby or relaxation. Let me view You as such a great blessing that I want to have my co-workers, teammates and friends come along with me as I follow You. What joy that would bring You – and me! Let it be so in Your name Jesus. Amen.



## Wednesday, Week Two: Biblical Teachings on Groups

*The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

1 Peter 4:7-8



**Pondering Point:** Having learned forgiveness from Jesus, the Apostle Peter encourages others to do the same.

This was not true simply of Jesus' MG with Peter. It can be true for us. Part of what happens in healthy MGs is a deeper version of emotions and connections – including a deeper love. Peter experienced deep love and forgiveness from Jesus. He also grew deeper in his love for Jesus. Such love can exist in our MGs, rooted in the love God has for us and powerful enough to move beyond sins – even sins against one another.

Such love and forgiveness lend itself to a true expression of the unity that Jesus prayed His disciples would experience (see John 17:22-23). And Jesus knows the power of prayer. Just as Jesus told Peter to be alert and pray, Peter – like a good disciple – told others to be alert and pray. And Peter knew that forgiveness was a beautiful blessing – both from God to us and from us to others. Forgiveness, just like loving and being prayerful, is one more way to follow Jesus – the epitome of being a “disciple” or follower of Jesus.



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I don't know when the end of all things will come, but I know that You called us to be alert and of sober mind, praying through troubling times. As You prayed under distress and called upon your MG to pray with You, so I want to handle all stressful situations with prayer – not alone, but with a few key friends who will be in it with me. Help me get to this place of friendship, discipleship and connectedness with others. Amen.

*Above all  
else love  
each other  
deeply*

## Thursday Week Two: Prayerfully Re-Center around God

When Peter, James and John dragged in TWO BOATLOADS of fish (Luke 5), it wasn't just Peter alone who left his boat. It was plural – *they* left their boats and followed Jesus, with James and John joining Peter to become fishers of men rather than fish. It was probably the first of many MG experiences with Jesus.

In the *IMMERSION Pathway of Discipleship*, we view group connections as essential in the life of discipleship under Jesus. As we read the Bible, a disciple's lifestyle includes participating in groups. Although those groups can come in various sizes and styles, the broad goal we encourage you to aim for is a weekly connection. That may sound like a big commitment but stay plugged in to the idea of MGs. You'll be surprised how readily this adapts into the lives of people. Let's review how Jesus could or may have already come into the MGs of your "partners" with a call to follow him.



**Review the week:** How did Jesus step into your "life" boat? when did it happen? Did He use partners or friends of yours? Has Jesus used your partnerships/friendships to connect with and extend a call to others to follow Him? Who might He want to connect in your current relationships -- ones that are theoretically open?



**Repent if necessary** for not letting Jesus use your boat to reach and teach others; or for not letting Him have access to your friends, teammates, co-workers, or neighbors through your life.



**Return as necessary:** by offering your "life" boat to Jesus again today -- or even for the first time.



**Prayer prompt:** Ask the Holy Spirit to embolden you to live for God rather than for career or family or pleasure. Ask Him to empower you to follow through in making this prayer a reality in your life.



## Friday, Week Two: Discipleship Focus on Groups



**Pondering Point:** Do you find it odd that Jesus would step into someone's boat and give orders to those on board? It helps to imagine that Jesus and Peter were already acquainted. Our next event covers Peter's introduction to Jesus, his future MG leader and friend. The story is found in John 1:35-42.

*The next day John (the Baptist) was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see."*

*So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).*

Who introduces Andrew to Jesus? What is that person's connection to Andrew?

- How might you describe the type of MG this come-to-Jesus moment arose out of?

Who introduces Peter to Jesus? What is the connection to Peter?

- Within which type of MG did this come-to-Jesus moment arise from? (i.e. – marital, birth family, work, hobby, etc.)

Who introduced you to Jesus? (could be more than one person)

- What MG relationship did you have at that time?

Who have you introduced to Jesus?

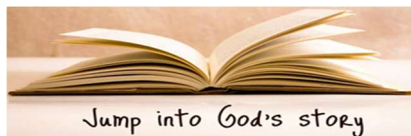
- What MG relationship(s) did you have at that time?



**Disciple's Prayer of Thanks:** Give thanks to God for those instrumental to your introduction and learning about Jesus. In some way, they disciplined you in your journey with Jesus.

## Saturday, Week Two: Scripture's Story for the Week

Jesus at the home of  
Peter and His Mother-in-Law  
Matthew 8:14-17



**Pondering Point:** As tight as Peter and Jesus were, it is likely that their birth families ended up acquainted with each other. It is also likely that Jesus was well acquainted with Peter's marital MG family. Read about the story of Jesus at Peter's house in Matthew 8:14-17.

*When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases."*

- Take a moment to identify the various acts (and actors) of service that occurred in this brief story from the Bible.
- Who benefitted from these actions performed in God's name?



**Prayer for the day:** Lord Jesus, thank You for individuals and families in my life that share a common faith and love regarding You as Lord. May You always be welcome in our conversations, activities and homes. May we also be ready and willing to serve You by serving others in our homes and neighborhoods. So I pray. Amen.

## Sunday Week Two: Called to gather together in groups



### **Pondering Point: Things to appreciate about MG/SG in the life of Apostle Peter:**

- God loves to use a marriage and family that is centered around Him to bring people into a life of discipleship.
- God can use previously existing partnerships/friendships to build spiritually-based MGs that He desires (fellowship).



Most everyone wants to become the best we can be, people of excellent character; and most of us realize that trusted friends and family are a great asset toward that end. Because they know us, they help us better see our inner self, our desires, including how our life is lining up to what God desires for us (or not). Those who know us well can give us different insights about issues, relationships, and challenges unfolding in our lives, and about how we are dealing with all of it!

Without a home of His own, Jesus seemed comfortable in the homes of others like Peter and Lazarus. Peter himself was found in the home of Simon the Tanner. This comfort in others' homes can often be the case in our lives where little pockets of people become well-acquainted with each other through mutual hobbies or activities, friends or careers. But it is even more potent when these groups are centered around God – becoming an extended family of sorts. As in many situations, we grow closer to some and not so much with others.



**Prayer for the day:** Father God, help us to intentionally develop our family to be God-centered, whether it is our birth family, our marriage, or otherwise. Amen.

# Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus as sent ones

"As the Father sent Me, I am sending You" —John 20:21

## Week 3, Monday: The Life of Vigilance in Micro-Groups

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary  
the devil walks about like a roaring lion,  
seeking whom he may devour

1 Peter 5:8

MGs

**Micro-Group Reflection Three:**  
The value of VIGILANCE as a  
participant in Micro-Groups:



**Pondering Point:** *Vigilantes* are known to act outside the law while taking matters into their own hands, and as such are often perceived negatively by the law enforcement community. That said, the character trait of *vigilance* itself (part of the make-up of a *vigilante*) is quite positive and something God desires in His people. As we look into its role in a disciple of Jesus, we will be drawing from John Mark Comer's book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. Here is our first quote:

**The  
Ruthless  
Elimination  
of  
Hurry**

"Life is a series of choices. Every yes is a thousand nos. Every activity we give our time to is a thousand other activities we can't give our time to. Because, duh: we can't be in two places at once. We have to learn to say 'no.' Constantly. As Ann Lamont so humorously pointed out, 'No' is a complete sentence. And it's one we need to work into our vocabulary. In the language of Henry David Thoreau, we have to "live deliberately."

J.M. Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, p. 70

- How good are you at saying “no?”
- How might vigilance play a role in living deliberately?



**Prayer for the week:** Father God, You call us to be vigilant. Help me further develop the character of vigilance in my life and to see the value in applying this character trait to the use of spiritually driven micro-groups in my life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

### Week 3 Tuesday: A Micro-Group look at 1 Peter 5:8

To “keep vigil”  
– or be vigilant –  
is something  
Jesus sought out  
of His disciples.

vigilant

adjective

vig-i-lant

|

\vi-jə-lənt

🔊

Definition of *vigilant*

: alertly watchful especially to avoid danger



**Pondering Point:** Peter reminded His Christian readers (or hearers) to be sober and vigilant in the face of spiritual dangers. This is likely another of those discipleship lessons he learned personally from Jesus – the hard way. When Jesus was entering the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His impending arrest, Mark 14:34 records Him saying,

*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death;  
Stay here and keep watch.*

Of course – Peter, along with the other disciples, fell asleep despite the warning to keep watch. It wasn’t just the physical danger at hand, as Peter would learn. Peter saw his weakened flesh give in to the temptation later that night to deny his Lord three times. And this was despite his insistence that such a thing would never happen. He is not the first – nor last – to over-estimate his spiritual stamina and courage. God help us all.



**Prayer:** Father God, teach me vigilance not just regarding the evil and temptations I see, but to be prepared for those I cannot see as well. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Wednesday, Week 3: Biblical Teachings on Prayer

- *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Matthew 26:41



**Pondering Point:** Write some thoughts to be shared at a later time with a few trusted friends. This time we start with prayer to set the tone for answering the following questions.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I pray Your Holy Spirit leads me to a fruitful meditation over Your words shared with your original disciples. Let Him convict me where necessary, comfort me where necessary and lead me as necessary. Amen.



- What temptations am I facing now? In the past?
- Where is my flesh weakened right now? In the past?
- What are my spiritual strengths regarding watching and praying as of now? What about in the past?
- Where is my spirit willing right now? In the past?

## Thursday Week 3: Prayerfully Re-Center around God

Vigilance is something Peter stresses when warning us about the attacks of the devil (see 1 Peter 5:8 from earlier in the week).

For Paul, vigilance comes into play this way:

**MAKING THE MOST OF EVERY  
OPPORTUNITY  
BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL**  
EPHESIANS 5:16

*make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.*

Ephesians 5:15

In light of this verse and its call to make the most of every opportunity, let's **Prayerfully Re-Center around God** by reviewing how we are handling opportunities in our lives.

**R** **Review the week:** What are the risks of NOT staying vigilant as a Christian? What opportunities for good and evil, godly and ungodly do you see? Where have you been negligent (rather than vigilant) by letting things come between you and God? What can happen when you:

- allow the devil a foothold in your life (Ephesians 4:27)
- forget that he is an enemy looking to devour (1 Peter 5:8)
- forget that he wants to destroy (see John 10:10)?

**R** **Repent if necessary** of a lack of vigilance regarding your spiritual walk, of not keeping your eyes peeled for opportunities God is providing, or of underestimating the influence of your enemy the devil and of your own ungodly flesh.

**R** **Return as necessary:** Come to Father God in the name of Jesus grateful for the forgiveness that comes in His work on the cross and then re-commit to be vigilant, especially in looking for opportunities to put God front-and-center in our lives, relationships, and choices.



**Prayer:** Father God, I am taking this opportunity to thank You for the kindness (forgiveness, grace, and mercy) that You pour out on me through my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Help me see the other opportunities before me to honor You in my life as a follower of Jesus. In His name I pray. Amen.

## Friday, Week 3: Discipleship Point about Groups

*Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.* Deuteronomy 4:9



**Pondering Point:** Here is an extended context of 1 Peter 5:8 (verses 9 and 10 added)

*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

- What might vigilance – and/or a lack of it – look like in the life of a disciple?

### The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry

Sean Parker, the first president of Facebook now calls himself a “conscientious objector” to social media. In an interview with Axios, he begrudgingly admitted, “God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains. The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them... was all about: *“How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?”* And that means that we need to give you, we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or post or whatever. That's going to get you to contribute more content and that's going to get you... more likes and more comments. It's a social-validation feedback loop, exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology.

J.M. Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, p. 38



Answer these questions now and be prepared to discuss ONE or TWO of them with others regarding J.M. Comer's book quote:

- What consumes huge amounts of time in your life?
- How does hurry impact your life with and under God?
- Have I settled for a mediocre version of faith and relationship with God?
- This notion: That which you give your mind to (what you let be its focus) will shape the trajectory of your character.

There are both *positive* and *negative* actions to remaining vigilant as followers of Jesus. From a *positive* or value-added view, think of being in God's Word, being in worship and prayer, and being in relationship with other people who are also pursuing God. These are three values we speak about in following Jesus. From a *negative* or addition-by-subtraction perspective, think of limiting certain activities that vie for or get in the way of time with God, such as social media engagement, entertainment practices, or time-consuming habits/addictions.



**Discipleship Prayer:** Father God, You are worthy of my time, attentiveness, and heart's devotion. I give it now once again and pray that I remain dedicated throughout the coming days and weeks, indeed all of my days. Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee. Amen.

## Saturday, Week 3: Scripture's Story for the Week

### The High Priest Eli and His Family 1 Samuel 2:12-36



**Pondering Point:** One person's vigilance (or lack of it) can have life-long impact on every MG they are part of: wives and husbands; parents and children; extended family; friends, etc. Check out this stark Bible story about Eli's family in 1 Samuel 2:12-36 and reflect with God on how the impact of neglecting vigilance can have on many people, including those not directly connected to the offenders. The story ends with a newborn son Ichabod being the only survivor of that family. His given name means "the glory of the Lord has departed." WOW! Yet, out of this terrible situation also comes a powerful voice for God known as Samuel the prophet.

[You can see more lessons on vigilance in Samuel's ministry life. He deals with King Saul's lack of vigilance regarding God's Word, causing him to lose the kingship (1 Samuel 13,15). We see it in King David who sought after God vigilantly, and experienced many times where God helped him overcome hardships in life.]



**Concluding prayer prompt:** As befits to your situation, thank God for your church family connections or ask Him to bring you into a church family through being spiritual mentored at SG and/or MG levels.



## Sunday Week 3: Called to gather together in groups



**Pondering Point:** While vigilance – or a lack of it – impacts a person on an individual level, it also has a powerful impact on others, particularly in MG relationships. Small groups and large groups can still manage well when certain individuals suffer through a lack of vigilance, but MGs will be significantly affected by such behavior. We can easily see such impact in the automatically established MGs of marriage and family.

As we saw in yesterday's bible story, one person's lack of vigilance can go so far as to ruin an entire family with life-long consequences... BUT BY THE SAME TOKEN... One person's vigilance can have life-long impact on every MG they are part of: wives and husbands; parents and children; extended family; friends, etc. You can see this significant MG impact addressed between parents and children in Ephesians 6:1-4:

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise – "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."*

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*



**Prayer:** Father God, enable me to be a blessing through a vigilance inspired by Your Holy Spirit. I also pray that, on account of Jesus, You would forgive me where I have failed to be vigilant. By Your grace, mitigate the damages created by any lack of vigilance that has arisen in my life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

# Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus as sent ones

"As the Father sent Me, I am sending You" —John 20:21

## Week 4, Monday: The Life of Paul in Micro-Groups

MG<sup>s</sup>

**Micro-Group Reflection Week Four:**  
The life of Paul as an example  
of participating in Micro-Groups

**Pondering Point:** Have you had any biblical instruction or training about religious fasting? When and where have you been encouraged to fast in your Christian life (with prayer, in Lent, etc.)? Today's description about the Apostle Paul's MG life has a connection to an episode of fasting that occurs in the church. Let's revisit that story in Acts 13.



**St Paul**



*Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul (Paul).*

*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John-Mark was with them as their helper.*

~ Luke, Acts 13:1-5

- Who put together this traveling micro-group? Who were the participants? From what kind of group did they come out of?
- How do you imagine that the Holy Spirit communicated His desire to this group? How might God communicate with you?
- How would you react to being set apart by God to join a group of people called to carry out a ministry task?

Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would remind them of everything He had taught. He also said that His sheep would recognize His voice. We will close this IMMERSION devotion with a prayer about recognizing the teachings of Jesus -- and His voice -- through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.



**Prayer for the week:** Holy Spirit, it is my desire to "hear" -- to recognize the voice of Jesus my shepherd -- the Good Shepherd. Lead me to the truth about Him and my place as His sheep. So I pray. Amen.

## Week 4 Tuesday: A Micro-Group look at Acts 22:6-21



**Pondering Point:** As we look into Paul's life, we see that although he was brought up in the ways of God as a Jew (Acts 22:3), his rejection and persecution of Jesus put him at odds with Jesus and with God the Father. But God would get His man -- using Jesus directly as well as some non-family members to introduce him to a life of grace, faith and service. Here is a testimony of that in Paul's own words:

*About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'*

*"Who are you, Lord?" I asked"*

*'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me."*

*"What shall I do, Lord?" I asked.*

*"Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. Then he said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.' When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me. 'Quick!' he said. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.'"*

*"Lord,' I replied, 'these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "*

Acts 22:6-21

While Paul experienced his call from God individually, he carried out his call in MG/SGs such as the Holy Spirit put together in Acts 13. Having no wife or child, Paul was free to travel readily in his ministry to the Gentiles (and Jews). God's people became family for him – both those he travelled with and those he travelled to.



**Prayer:** Father God, thank You for bringing non-family members into my life who share a love of Jesus. Let these people become partners in Christ as we honor You. Amen.

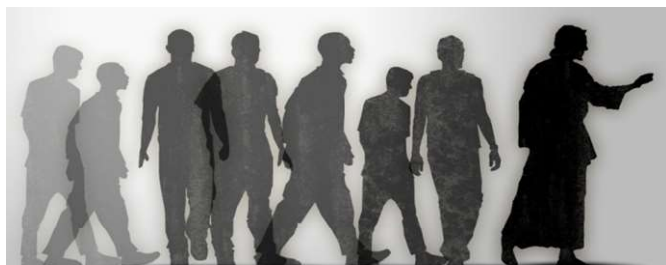
## Wednesday, Week 4: Biblical Teachings on Groups

*Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.* ~ Jesus, Matthew 18:19-20



**Pondering Point:** Group connections that are centered around Jesus supplement an overall goal of connecting people with God through His Word and prayer. This overall goal of connecting with God (through Jesus) is a **daily** life goal both for ourselves and others.

As we practice being in God's Word and under the influence of His Holy Spirit daily, these values are enhanced when we share that Word-and-Spirit influence in groups where Christ is welcomed and honored. Here God uses us to shape one another: our thoughts and experiences, our conversations, our struggles, our joys and celebrations – all through the lens of walking with Jesus.



Follow  
→  
Me

There is great value in having key friendships centered in our Lord. Some groups will have decades-long followers of Jesus, others may have years-long or weeks-long or potential followers. That said, merely desiring but not pursuing such friendships carries little value. Agreeing to pursue discipleship under Christ is key to this type of spiritual growth. That is why we aim for intentional weekly groups, particularly micro-sized ones.



**Prayer:** Holy Spirit of God, build in me a desire to connect with others who are willing to gather in Jesus' name – and to dedicate time to do so during the week. So I pray. Amen.

## Thursday Week 4: Prayerfully Re-Center around God



**Pondering Point:** Continuing a look into Paul's life, we see him speak of deep connections with Timothy and Titus, both of whom he mentors as "sons" of the faith:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.* ~ Paul, 1 Timothy 1:1-2

*To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.*

~ Paul, Titus 1:4



How great for Timothy and Titus to have someone take the time and effort to invest in them spiritually! Let's review our own lives for deep connections of mentors or spiritual parents who invested in us similar to Paul's role with Timothy and Titus.



**Review the week:** Were your parents spiritual mentors to you? Aside from your parents, did anyone else mentor you spiritually, serving as a father or mother in the Christian faith? As an adult, Have you sought out spiritual mentors?



**Repent if necessary:** There is no need to repent of lacking spiritually instructors as a child. It was not something you could control. As adults, we can seek out spiritual mentors on our own. Do you need to repent here?



**Return as necessary:** God likes to put people in families – His family (Psalm 68:6). Embrace God's heart in this way and seek out a "family" with spiritual leaders who will invest in your spiritual growth as a follower of Jesus.



**Prayer:** God the Father, I know that You have a special place for me in Your family. Help me find the connections You desire for me – with spiritual mentors, peers, and those I can be a mentor to as well. In the name of Jesus. Amen.



## Friday, Week 4: Discipleship Point on Groups



**Pondering Point:** Looking back to yesterday's devotion, the introduction of this father-son dynamic brings a different but very Jesus-like wrinkle to small group (SG) and Micro-group (MG) environments. Jesus was more than a peer to His disciples; He was their teacher and Lord. Paul too is clearly operating as more than a peer, looking to mentor these young men who are leading other people in the Christian faith in Ephesus (Timothy) and Crete (Titus). This could be considered a classic example of one disciple (Paul) making disciples of others (Timothy, Titus) who are in turn making disciples of yet others (Ephesians, Cretans). We view this as one of the keys of life as a disciple who participates in SGs and MGs.

Having touched on who discipled or mentored you yesterday, we flip the script and consider our own mentoring and discipling roles. It is like a bonus review added to yesterday.



**R** Timothy and Titus took their discipleship training gleaned from the Apostle Paul and invested in others. Who have you led spiritually in the past? Who are you teaching or leading spiritually currently? Are you continuing to receive from spiritual mentors to keep you sharp as a discipler of others? Write down a list of those you available to you spiritually for mentoring:

Past

Present

Potential



**Discipleship Prayer:** Father God, bless my life with disciples who inspire and shape me; bless others through my life of discipleship pouring into them. I pray this in the name of my discipler Jesus. Amen.

## Saturday, Week 4: Scripture's Story for the Week

### Newly-Converted Saul Meets the Apostles Acts 9:(1-18)19-31



**Pondering Point:** When Saul, the persecutor of Jesus followers, encounters the real-life Jesus in a vision, his whole world goes dark physically – for a few days. At the same time his spiritual world becomes intensely enlightened – lasting for the rest of his life. He becomes a follower of Jesus. Yay God! But not everyone believed the story was for real, astonished that this man could have such a dramatic turnaround. It took the courage of Barnabas, a future MG partner of Paul, to open the door of introduction to the apostles in Jerusalem. Barnabas (whose name means “Son of Encouragement”) took a chance with Saul (later Paul) and was trusted enough to bring him into the inner work-team of the Christian faith and leadership. That’s a good thing because Paul became one of the most extensive travelers and writers for the gospel message about forgiveness in Jesus. He knew that forgiveness first-hand:

*Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 1 Timothy 1:13*



**Prayer prompt for the day:** Who took a chance on you spiritually? Who believed in you when others doubted? Thank God for them and consider how you might help others in this way.

**NOTE:** A key factor in MG success is when individuals feel seen, heard, and understood. Tomorrow’s ground rules go a long way in creating such an environment. That said, any ONE individual can spoil a healthy environment through judgment, diminishing others, self-absorption or simply violating the basic ground rules. A group should be willing to recognize inappropriate behavior in anyone (leader included) and address it accordingly.

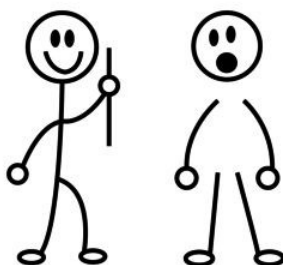
## Sunday Week 4: Called to gather together in groups



### Pondering Point: Things to appreciate about MG/SG from the life of Apostle Paul:

- People who lack a God-centered family life can find such a family in the life of the church.
- People benefit from having others further down the path to help with mentoring in life and faith skills.
- God will call people together into a group to be a blessing in His church.

**DON'T WORRY...  
I'VE GOT YOUR BACK!**



Paul's life story highlights the need to have people in our corner spiritually in the face of life's battles, especially spiritual battles. We need people like Barnabas who will go to bat for us (Acts 9:26-27), people like Peter who will defend us against adversaries (2 Peter 3:15-16), and people like James (brother of Jesus) and the Apostle John who offer the hand of fellowship when others seek to disgrace us (Galatians 2:9). Paul wasn't tight with all of these people. But they were still blessings to each other as brother and sisters in Christ. You won't be able to connect deeply with everyone but anticipate that God does want you to connect deeply with at least a few people.



**Prayer for the day:** Father God, continue to bring people into my life to connect with for whom we can *have each other's back* spiritually and who can stand together in times of trouble, especially a few who can be in a micro-group that You bless. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Establishing ground rules for Micro and Small Group Life

1. **Confidentiality:** What is shared in the group stays in the group. We hold things shared in the group confidential unless given permission to share these things with people outside the group. This must be a safe environment where people can be real, open and honest with their struggles and their victories.
2. **Transparency:** It's easier to love someone as God called us to do when we know them in deep and meaningful ways. We encourage you to share from your heart; let down your walls. Not just your struggles and fears, but also positives – dreams, hopes, answered prayers, etc. We understand that's easier for some and we'll respect your boundaries.
3. **No Convincing:** Differences of opinion are welcome. However, please don't try to convince others to your way of thinking.
4. **Listen:** Value one another during discussions by really listening to what is being shared. Try to hear what's being said without thinking about what you're going to say next or how you're going to respond. Be aware of how much you are talking – we want to give everyone a chance to share in the group.
5. **Pause:** After someone shares, give a pause to allow the group to feel the weight of what was just shared and to fully consider it before the next person shares. This also provides the person sharing with the opportunity to continue with their thought without feeling rushed.
6. **Don't Fix:** Let's try to hear what people are sharing without trying to fix them. If they want your advice, they'll ask for it.
7. **Don't rescue:** When a person shares a deep personal and/or painful moment, some try to make them feel better about themselves or the situation. Often this causes people to stop sharing and results in them not going as deep as they might have gone. Resist temptations to "rescue" people.
8. **No Cross-talk:** Be considerate of others as they are sharing - don't be having side conversations.
9. **Use "I" Statements:** It's easy to talk about the issues of others, we want you to put yourself on the table. Try to use "I" statements rather than "them", "the church", "us", "we", etc.

# Group Connections in the Discipleship Lifestyle

"where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I."

~ Matthew 18:20

## short daily DEVOTIONS

In *IMMERSION's Pathway of Discipleship*, we view group connections as essential in the life of discipleship under Jesus and among people. As we read the Bible, a disciple's lifestyle includes participating in groups<sup>1</sup> as you will see.

Though groups can come in various sizes and styles, the broad goal we encourage you to aim for is a weekly group connection. That may sound like a big commitment but hear me out. You'll be surprised how readily this adapts into the lives of people.

Group life connections supplement the overall goal of connecting people with God through His Word and prayer. This goal – connecting with God – is a **daily** life goal for ourselves and others. As we practice the values of being in God's Word and under the influence of His Holy Spirit, these values are enhanced when we share that Word and Spirit influence in groups where Christ is welcomed and honored. Here God uses us to shape one another: our experiences, our thoughts, our conversations, our struggles, our joys, our celebrations – all viewed through the lens of walking with Jesus our Lord.

We envision three types of group opportunities: **Micro Group**, **Small Group** and **Large Groups**. Each feed into the others. The majority of this explanation focuses on Micro-groups with a cursory look at the others to give a larger context on how they fit.

<sup>1</sup> Eccl 4:10-12; Heb 10:23-25;  
God's *One Another* commands

**1** **Micro-groups** (MGs) revolve around pockets of 2-4 people. While we focus on Christ-centered MGs for discipleship, it helps to know what a MG is in general.

Micro groups are small pockets of people with whom we have a connection. These clusters often co-exist within larger pockets of people. There are dozens of such groups active in our lives, maybe hundreds if you expand these connections to occasional contacts. A few examples are couples, families, friends, drinking or fishing buddies, workout partners, neighbors, etc. It can also include one's co-workers or recurring consumer-provider relationships.

One of Jesus' MGs was the trio of Peter, James, and John – some of His closest friends. He did activities with them that His Small Group (the Twelve) missed out on. Only these three were present for the healing of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37-43). Only they went up the mountain with Jesus during His transfiguration (Mark 9:2-4). They went deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane during His heart-wrenching prayer time (Mark 14:32-34).

***Micro-Relationship:***

A connection you have with one, two or three other people.

***Spiritual Micro-Group:***

A connection with one, two or three others that includes God.

***MGers:***

siblings  
spouse  
parents  
teammates  
classmates  
neighbors  
friends  
church folk  
co-workers

***less often:***

pet-vet  
gym rats  
wait staff  
clientele  
hobbyists

BUT... note that Jesus *did not start* this particular MG. When Jesus stepped into Peter's boat, He walked into a pre-existing MG of Peter, James, and John – fishing buddies. The Bible calls them *partners*, but it is the same church-y word in Greek that we use for “fellowship” (*koinonia*). What Jesus did was invite these pre-existing partners into a deeper spiritual journey as well.

This is a key understanding to the MG life of disciples. While we can be open to starting new relationships, more so we look to welcome Jesus into pre-existing fellowships (when and where the Holy Spirit directs). We may not be able to foster dozens of Small Groups, but we can be intentional about a few of the dozens of MGs that already exist in our current lives. We can, like Jesus, invite others into a deeper spiritual journey as well. These groups meet anywhere from weekly to monthly. To drive this lifestyle home for participants, we designed a group series that highlights the Micro Group examples in multiple New Testament characters.

**2** The second group is what many think of when it comes to Church group connections: **Small Group (SG)**. This includes Bible Studies, confirmation, Sunday School, etc. SGs can meet in church, homes, even parks. At one time this was Hope's primary discipleship target, but we learned that SGs can devolve into stagnancy by losing sight of including others. To combat this, we suggest seasonal windows for SGs with defined starts and stops. Certain SGs stay together, but this gives people a chance to join anew through invitation or gracefully step away if desired.

Within this SG set-up, Hope has established **model SGs** that meet twice a month (Men's, Women's, Couple's, Family). These groups operate year-round and serve as entry points to group life in our discipling church. The goal is to blend social and spiritual elements for participants in a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere. If all is going well, participants experience an encouraging taste of the discipleship life, but sense that there is more. This limited spiritual and relational depth is intentional and meant to foster a desire to go deeper – spiritually and relationally – through **MGs**.

All spiritually oriented Group Life should generate deeper sharing at some level, but certain groups go deeper faster. Groups end up being a great source of strength, support, and insight for our personal lives as followers of Jesus. There is great value in having key friendships centered in the Lord. That said, merely desiring but not pursuing such friendships carries little value. Action is key to this spiritual growth as a disciple. Intentionality matters. That is why we aim for weekly group SG or MG connections.



We encourage you to use the *QUICK START guide to Group Life* to manage the flow of a group. We suggest 90-120 minutes sessions (though some push it into 60).

**3**

The last category, **Large Group (LG)**, is what many people have in mind when they think “church”: Worship services. To that we add bible classes numbering beyond 15 (dynamics of group size change) and other church activities like celebrations, fellowship events and large-scale training events.

As noted with MGs, disciples also happen to be connected to SGs and LGs *outside* of church life. If you revisit the box on page two, you can see that many of us exist in small and large groups based on hobbies, work, family, etc. In light of this, it bears repeating that while we focus on Christ-centered groups for discipleship, it helps to recognize what LGs people are part of in general.

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** My time in ministry, particularly since focusing on discipleship, has brought out this lesson: Christians making the greatest impact on others spiritually (and in doing so fulfilling their God-given purposes) are personally involved in one or more healthy, active MGs. These MGs are more impactful than worship attendance (though they nearly always go), more impactful than SG participation, more impactful than personal Bible study and spiritual commitment (as awesome as this discipline is!). MGers are being discipled **by the Holy Spirit** through groups as well as by God directly in prayer, meditation, study, etc. and through worship and personal study. To live



without fostering such groups in your life is to greatly inhibit your journey with Jesus. Most Christians ***already*** operate with these types of groups present; they simply don't use such language to describe it. That said, many Christians could be more *intentional* at developing them – enabling them to greatly enhance their (and the church's) lives of discipleship. Jump into this four-week series to IMMERSE yourself into what it means to develop a micro group component to your life of discipleship under Jesus.

***and*** If you have not built daily devotions into your life with God, join our devotional life at [immersed-in-Jesus.org](http://immersed-in-Jesus.org). It serves as the basis for our worship experience every weekend (available on Facebook under Hope Lutheran Church, Orlando, FL).

# Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus – together

*One of His disciples said to him, "Lord, Teach us to pray..."*

-- Luke 11:1

## Week One, Monday: The Life of Jesus in Micro-Groups



### Micro-Group Reflection Week One:

The life of Jesus as an example  
of participating in Micro-Groups



**Pondering Point:** With micro-groups (MGs) defined chiefly as 2-4 people, an obvious MG in the life of Jesus is the trio of Peter, James and John. He did activities with them that His Small Group (SG) known as the Twelve missed out on. He took only those three for the healing of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37-43). Only they went up the mountain with Jesus during His transfiguration and meeting with Elijah and Moses (Mark 9:2-4). He took them deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane during His heart-wrenching prayer time the night of His arrest (Mark 14:32-34).

*He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ~ Mark 5:37*

But there's more than one MG in the life of Jesus. He enjoyed a close relationship with the family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus as we will see later this week. For now, answer this question (and consider taking notes to share in your MG/SG gathering).

- Who "adopted" you into their lives allowing you to be part of a second family of sorts?



**Prayer for the week:** Father God, open our souls to the possibilities of participating in spiritual micro-groups. Let us see in Jesus the benefits of a micro-group life and see You replicate that in our worlds. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Week One Tuesday: A Micro-Group look at Mark 5:37-43



**Pondering Point:** Micro-Groups come in a variety of packages. Some you're born into, some you marry into or move into; others come about through community activities like music or sports or spiritual pursuits like church life. Within such groups are MG moments that can shape our lives. Let's dive into one of Jesus' micro-group moments with Peter, James, and John. It is recorded for us in Mark 5:37-43:

*While Jesus was still speaking (to a woman just healed), some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"* <sup>36</sup> *Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."*

<sup>37</sup> *He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James.* <sup>38</sup> *When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly.* <sup>39</sup> *He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep."* <sup>40</sup> *But they laughed at him.*

*After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him and went in where the child was.* <sup>41</sup> *He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!").*

<sup>42</sup> *Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.*

<sup>43</sup> *He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this and told them to give her something to eat.*

- Put yourself in the sandals of Peter, James, or John. What catches your attention about the above experience as these followers of Jesus take in this MG moment?

It is interesting to note that Jesus tells them to keep this among themselves. There are conversations and experiences in MGs that ought to remain in the group. This is the first rule of our MG life.

*MG rule #1:  
What is shared  
in the group  
stays in the group.*

Doing so allows for vulnerability and transparency, two aspects that deepen the MG experience. Without these, MGs stay at a surface level – and Jesus did not stay at surface levels in His MGs.



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, draw me into MGs with partners and friends like Peter, James, and John shared – groups where You lead and teach. In Your name Jesus I pray. Amen.

[Not for nothing, take note of the intense MG moment Mark records of Jesus having with the woman who had suffered bleeding for twelve years. It starts in 5:24 and culminates in v. 34 right in the middle of a large group crowd, with a small group of disciples including the micro-group of Peter, James and John.]

## Wednesday, Week One: Biblical Teachings on Groups



**Pondering Point:** As you read the next MG episode from Mark 14:32-34, pay attention to what Jesus is looking for from His MG partners Peter, James, and John. It is these type of times in life that bond us tightly together when it works as hoped.

*They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”*

- In your words, what is Jesus seeking from His MG?

See what happens with Jesus’ MG friends in the following verses.

<sup>7</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.  
“Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? <sup>38</sup> Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

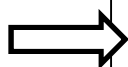
Let’s acknowledge that even our best friends let us down at times. Don’t expect perfection from them or yourself, but rather mutual commitment. That said, we can all take heed of Jesus’ words to His disciples: *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You sought a willing Spirit to do the will of Your Father (our Father). Teach me to seek that same type of willing spirit to overcome the weakness of the flesh and find partners who are after the same type of spiritual life. In Your name Jesus I pray. Amen.

If time permits, check out John 18:10-11 and how it relates to MG rule #4.

Jesus was not asking His friends to rescue Him but to be with Him in a difficult moment. This is one of the greatest blessings of MG life. If you cultivate it among a few peers, it will bear much fruit.



**MG rule #4:**  
*Don’t Fix,  
Don’t Rescue*

## Thursday Week One: Prayerfully Re-Center around God



**Pondering Point:** There is another identifiable MG/SG that Jesus was a part of: His birth family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, known as the Holy Family, are His initial MG (as a human) – which also happened to be God-centered.

As we prepare to ponder Jesus’ family of origin, pause to think about yours for a minute or two. Use the next page to describe in words and/or pictures your family of origin. Include the who, when and where of your family growing up.

*Be prepared to share what you created with a MG or SG of people.*

My family of origin:

**Jesus' family of origin:** What, if anything, do you recall about the early life of Jesus? Where did He live? (Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth) How might you depict His family of origin? What similarities and what differences exist between His family of origin situation and yours?

We noted earlier this week that Micro-Groups come in a variety of packages. Some you're born into, some you marry into or move into. Regardless of how they come together initially, can you envision that God desires to be part of them? Let's review which of our MGs are *or could be* Spirit-led as God desires.



**Review the week:** Which MGs in my life (pockets of 2-4 people) are centered around God? In which ones is God welcome in terms of conversation, influence, or activities? Which ones could include God but have not been given much attention in this way?



**Repent if necessary** of leaving God on the sidelines of certain relationships, of neglecting to acknowledge God's ways or avoiding conversations that revolve around God.



**Return as necessary** by praying for comfortableness to bring God into particular MG relationships, boldness to testify of His place and influence in your life, and openness to approach others about adding a spiritual component to some of your existing MGs. the prayer below is worded to do just that.



**Prayer:** Father God, I desire to be comfortable bringing You into the pockets of micro-relationships within my life. I pray for boldness to testify of Your place and influence in my life -- and that You would be central to all of my life, relationships included. Where the time is right, help me be open to approaching others about adding a spiritual component an existing MG. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## Friday, Week One: Discipleship Point on Groups

Read through this excerpt from Matthew 18:15-20 sound in the context of a MG of Jesus followers?

*“If your brother sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

*“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*



*“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”*

~ Jesus, Matthew 18:15-20



**Pondering Point:** This section of the Bible acknowledges that MGs (any group) can be built around God and yet be unhealthy. Personal offenses or festering issues can pull groups away from a God-centered focus. So can whining, personal agendas, or gossip. Matthew 18 offers a recipe for returning groups to powerful, Christ-centered gatherings. End by praying for God’s insight over the place of MGs in your life.



**Discipleship Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You have highlighted a great blessing when even two or three people come together in agreement about something. I want more of this blessing in my life. Help me to cultivate this in several of my current MG relationships -- and even start a few if that is Your desire. In Your name Jesus I pray. Amen.



## Things to appreciate about MG/SG from the life of Jesus:

- Jesus finds value in both Small Groups and Micro Groups and participated in both. So can you.
- Jesus lived more deeply connected with some families and individuals than others. So can you.

### Saturday, Week One: Scripture's Story for the Week

Jesus at the home of  
Mary, Martha, and Lazarus  
John 11:1-53



**Pondering Point:** Jesus enjoyed a close relationship with the family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (see Luke 10 as well as John 11 used today). He could be found at their house on multiple occasions and spent substantial time there. They were like a second family to Him. Lazarus is even described (as is the Apostle John) as Jesus' beloved.

We all have relationships at varying levels of acquaintance. Though many of our contacts in life tend to be casual and superficial, we need and benefit from deep interaction as well (Ecclesiastes 4:10-12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 3:15). In deeper relationships, we have a place to open up and share beyond sports, weather, fashion, or the latest viral media posts. These types of relationships can become a great source of strength and insight regarding our personal lives. Once a sense of trust has been established, and we feel free to share the more private aspects of who we are (strengths and weaknesses, dreams and fears), lots of growth can result. When we become intentional about such possibilities, we create more opportunity for that personal growth, for all parties involved. The greatest of these relationships happens when each person serves as a catalyst for the other's growth, making the benefits mutual. Today we pray for such opportunities to become real.



**Prayer for the day:** Father God, I love the notion of serving as a catalyst for others' growth -- and receiving that blessing as well. Show me where intentionality would open up such opportunities -- and to overcome fears of awkwardness that might arise in seeking a deeper relationship with others spiritually. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Sunday Week One: Called to gather together in groups



**Pondering Point:** Clearly Peter, James and John were open to the spiritual component of connecting with Jesus. Great for them. This was not something everyone wanted -- then or now. But it is something God wants for people. And we are His ambassadors to that end. Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 and 6:1-10. Then work through the following descriptions to get a read on whether particular relationships in your life may be open to God's presence in them. It is okay that some are not at this point. Simply "Shake the dust off of your feet" for now (Matthew 10:14); move on to other opportunities. Maybe that relationship will be open at a later time.

**God-centered:** *"I expect God to be a regular part of conversation with you."* These types of people will pray for you, pray with you -- and want you to pray for them.

**God-friendly:** *"I look forward to conversations about God with you."* These types of people might be uncomfortable praying with you, but often appreciate prayers from you concerning them.

**God-warm:** *"I am open to a conversation about God with you."* These types of people may or may not be comfortable asking for prayer but would not likely turn it down if offered.

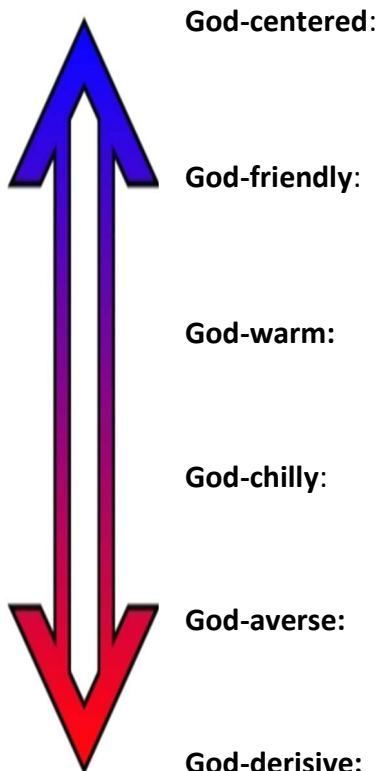
**God-chilly:** *"I welcome you but prefer that we leave God out of the conversation."* These types of people may be uncomfortable with conversation about prayer at all let alone actual prayer.

**God-averse:** *"You are not welcome if you're going to bring God up."* These types of people will actively speak against religion and prefer you not even pray about them let alone bring it up.

**God-derisive:** *"I don't like you because of your views on God!"* These types of people are hateful toward God and may bring up God as an irritant; they often mock and/or verbally abuse your Christian viewpoint.

Note that we did not identify people as believers in any category. Believers and non-believers can be scattered throughout these descriptions.

As you ponder your current set of friends (and acquaintances?) both local and global, place them along the continuum below:



As one might imagine, there will be many micro-relationships in life that are not necessarily spiritual in nature, let alone God-centered. For instance, while you are more than welcome to engage a cashier with kindness and humor, this is not about you trying to create a deep spiritual connection in the grocery line. (Of course, if there is no one else around and you have time, you might just end up in a "John 4 moment" like Jesus did with the woman at the well). But there are people interested in traveling paths similar to yours, many open not only to a spiritual connection with God between you, but specifically open to the way of Jesus. Connected to each other and Jesus is a great combination!

Which micro-relationships in your life might you see as possibilities to either start or deepen a God-centered component between you? Pray for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to the possibilities. you can use the one that follows if you like.



**Prayer:** Spirit of God, open my eyes to the people around me who are interested in a spiritual component to our mutual relationship, whether they are co-workers, neighbors, or even casual acquaintances. Let my Jesus-light shine with an attractive glow that draws those open to the love of Jesus and His gospel message. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

# Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus as sent ones

"As the Father sent Me, I am sending You" –John 20:21

## Week Two, Monday: The Life of Peter in Micro-Groups

MG<sub>s</sub>

### Micro-Group Reflection Week Two: The life of Peter as an example of participating in Micro-Groups

**Pondering Point:** One naturally occurring MG is a birth family. We all get born, but we don't all get born into God-centered families like Jesus did – or even into families at all! This week, through the disciple Simon Peter, we note a second naturally occurring MG/SG scenario, that of marriage (Matthew 8:14). Just as with birth families, some families created through marriage are God-centered and others are not. Of course, not everyone gets married, but for those who do, this naturally occurring relationship is intended to be built around God – both for the couple itself and when a blessing of children comes along with it. Take a moment to answer the following questions based on your marital situation:



**St Peter**

- **If currently (or previously) married:** Consider God's place in your marriage/family. What role (if any) does or did God play in this MG/SG for you? Is He involved? Central? Invited? Acknowledged? Ignored? Included or excluded?

-- OR --

- **If currently not married:** With minimal judgment, describe some MG/SG experiences that you have had in connection to others such as parents, adult children, friends or co-workers?



**Prayer for the week:** Ask God to bless the marital MGs that you are closely connected to -- including your own if you have one. Pray specifically that God is welcome and sought after.

## Week Two Tuesday: A Micro-Group look at Luke 5:1-11



**Pondering Point:** Aside from the spiritual MG Jesus formed with Peter, James, and John -- and Peter's marital MG -- here is an example of a different type of MG in Peter's life. Read Luke 5:1-11 to shed light on it.

*One day as Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.*

*When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."*

*When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.*

*Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.*

When Jesus stepped into Peter's boat, He stepped into a pre-existing MG of Peter, James and John – fishing buddies. The Bible calls them partners, but it is the same “churchy” word in Greek that we use for “fellowship” (*koinonia*).

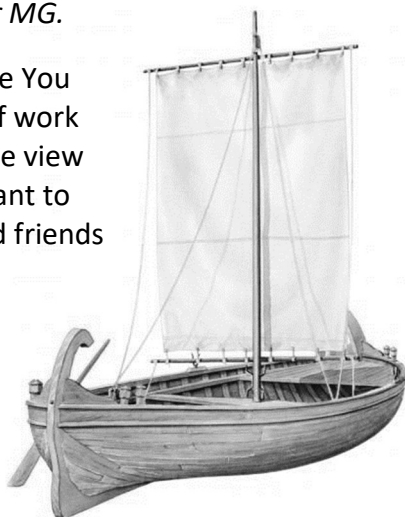


This is a key understanding to the MG life of disciples. While we can be open to starting new relationships, more so we look to welcome Jesus into pre-existing fellowships (when and where the Holy Spirit directs). We may not be able to foster dozens of Small Groups, but we can be intentional about a few of the dozens of MGs that already exist in our current lives. We can, like Jesus, invite others into a deeper spiritual journey as well. These groups meet anywhere from weekly to monthly. To drive this lifestyle home for participants, we designed this group series to highlight the Micro Group examples in multiple New Testament people.

- Are you open to letting Jesus use pre-existing MGs in your life as a platform to teach or connect with others?
- Think about current or past MGs that include teammates or partners of yours. They may be based on work (like Peter) or hobbies like scouting, bowling, music, or book clubs. They could be family-, health- or sports-oriented. *Take time to share when you gather with your MG.*



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I welcome You into my "boat" – my places of work or hobby or relaxation. Let me view You as such a great blessing that I want to have my co-workers, teammates and friends come along with me as I follow You. What joy that would bring You – and me! Let it be so in Your name Jesus. Amen.



## Wednesday, Week Two: Biblical Teachings on Groups

*The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

1 Peter 4:7-8



**Pondering Point:** Having learned forgiveness from Jesus, the Apostle Peter encourages others to do the same.

This was not true simply of Jesus' MG with Peter. It can be true for us. Part of what happens in healthy MGs is a deeper version of emotions and connections – including a deeper love. Peter experienced deep love and forgiveness from Jesus. He also grew deeper in his love for Jesus. Such love can exist in our MGs, rooted in the love God has for us and powerful enough to move beyond sins – even sins against one another.

Such love and forgiveness lend itself to a true expression of the unity that Jesus prayed His disciples would experience (see John 17:22-23). And Jesus knows the power of prayer. Just as Jesus told Peter to be alert and pray, Peter – like a good disciple – told others to be alert and pray. And Peter knew that forgiveness was a beautiful blessing – both from God to us and from us to others. Forgiveness, just like loving and being prayerful, is one more way to follow Jesus – the epitome of being a “disciple” or follower of Jesus.



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I don't know when the end of all things will come, but I know that You called us to be alert and of sober mind, praying through troubling times. As You prayed under distress and called upon your MG to pray with You, so I want to handle all stressful situations with prayer – not alone, but with a few key friends who will be in it with me. Help me get to this place of friendship, discipleship and connectedness with others. Amen.

*Above all  
else love  
each other  
deeply*



## Thursday Week Two: Prayerfully Re-Center around God

When Peter, James and John dragged in TWO BOATLOADS of fish (Luke 5), it wasn't just Peter alone who left his boat. It was plural – *they* left their boats and followed Jesus, with James and John joining Peter to become fishers of men rather than fish. It was probably the first of many MG experiences with Jesus.

In the *IMMERSION Pathway of Discipleship*, we view group connections as essential in the life of discipleship under Jesus. As we read the Bible, a disciple's lifestyle includes participating in groups. Although those groups can come in various sizes and styles, the broad goal we encourage you to aim for is a weekly connection. That may sound like a big commitment but stay plugged in to the idea of MGs. You'll be surprised how readily this adapts into the lives of people. Let's review how Jesus could or may have already come into the MGs of your "partners" with a call to follow him.



**Review the week:** How did Jesus step into your "life" boat? when did it happen? Did He use partners or friends of yours? Has Jesus used your partnerships/friendships to connect with and extend a call to others to follow Him? Who might He want to connect in your current relationships -- ones that are theoretically open?



**Repent if necessary** for not letting Jesus use your boat to reach and teach others; or for not letting Him have access to your friends, teammates, co-workers, or neighbors through your life.



**Return as necessary:** by offering your "life" boat to Jesus again today -- or even for the first time.



**Prayer prompt:** Ask the Holy Spirit to embolden you to live for God rather than for career or family or pleasure. Ask Him to empower you to follow through in making this prayer a reality in your life.

## Friday, Week Two: Discipleship Focus on Groups



**Pondering Point:** Do you find it odd that Jesus would step into someone's boat and give orders to those on board? It helps to imagine that Jesus and Peter were already acquainted. Our next event covers Peter's introduction to Jesus, his future MG leader and friend. The story is found in John 1:35-42.

*The next day John (the Baptist) was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see."*

*So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).*

Who introduces Andrew to Jesus? What is that person's connection to Andrew?

- How might you describe the type of MG this come-to-Jesus moment arose out of?

Who introduces Peter to Jesus? What is the connection to Peter?

- Within which type of MG did this come-to-Jesus moment arise from? (i.e. – marital, birth family, work, hobby, etc.)

Who introduced you to Jesus? (could be more than one person)

- What MG relationship did you have at that time?

Who have you introduced to Jesus?

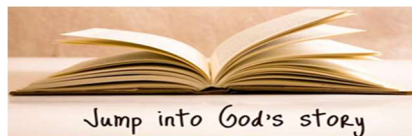
- What MG relationship(s) did you have at that time?



**Disciple's Prayer of Thanks:** Give thanks to God for those instrumental to your introduction and learning about Jesus. In some way, they discipled you in your journey with Jesus.

## Saturday, Week Two: Scripture's Story for the Week

Jesus at the home of  
Peter and His Mother-in-Law  
Matthew 8:14-17



**Pondering Point:** As tight as Peter and Jesus were, it is likely that their birth families ended up acquainted with each other. It is also likely that Jesus was well acquainted with Peter's marital MG family. Read about the story of Jesus at Peter's house in Matthew 8:14-17.

*When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases."*

- Take a moment to identify the various acts (and actors) of service that occurred in this brief story from the Bible.
- Who benefitted from these actions performed in God's name?



**Prayer for the day:** Lord Jesus, thank You for individuals and families in my life that share a common faith and love regarding You as Lord. May You always be welcome in our conversations, activities and homes. May we also be ready and willing to serve You by serving others in our homes and neighborhoods. So I pray. Amen.

## Sunday Week Two: Called to gather together in groups



### **Pondering Point: Things to appreciate about MG/SG in the life of Apostle Peter:**

- God loves to use a marriage and family that is centered around Him to bring people into a life of discipleship.
- God can use previously existing partnerships/friendships to build spiritually-based MGs that He desires (fellowship).



Most everyone wants to become the best we can be, people of excellent character; and most of us realize that trusted friends and family are a great asset toward that end. Because they know us, they help us better see our inner self, our desires, including how our life is lining up to what God desires for us (or not). Those who know us well can give us different insights about issues, relationships, and challenges unfolding in our lives, and about how we are dealing with all of it!

Without a home of His own, Jesus seemed comfortable in the homes of others like Peter and Lazarus. Peter himself was found in the home of Simon the Tanner. This comfort in others' homes can often be the case in our lives where little pockets of people become well-acquainted with each other through mutual hobbies or activities, friends or careers. But it is even more potent when these groups are centered around God – becoming an extended family of sorts. As in many situations, we grow closer to some and not so much with others.



**Prayer for the day:** Father God, help us to intentionally develop our family to be God-centered, whether it is our birth family, our marriage, or otherwise. Amen.

# Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus as sent ones

"As the Father sent Me, I am sending You" —John 20:21

## Week 3, Monday: The Life of Vigilance in Micro-Groups

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary  
the devil walks about like a roaring lion,  
seeking whom he may devour

1 Peter 5:8

MGs

**Micro-Group Reflection Three:**  
The value of VIGILANCE as a  
participant in Micro-Groups:



**Pondering Point:** *Vigilantes* are known to act outside the law while taking matters into their own hands, and as such are often perceived negatively by the law enforcement community. That said, the character trait of *vigilance* itself (part of the make-up of a *vigilante*) is quite positive and something God desires in His people. As we look into its role in a disciple of Jesus, we will be drawing from John Mark Comer's book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. Here is our first quote:

**The  
Ruthless  
Elimination  
of  
Hurry**

"Life is a series of choices. Every yes is a thousand nos. Every activity we give our time to is a thousand other activities we can't give our time to. Because, duh: we can't be in two places at once. We have to learn to say 'no.' Constantly. As Ann Lamont so humorously pointed out, 'No' is a complete sentence. And it's one we need to work into our vocabulary. In the language of Henry David Thoreau, we have to "live deliberately."

J.M. Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, p. 70

- How good are you at saying “no?”
- How might vigilance play a role in living deliberately?



**Prayer for the week:** Father God, You call us to be vigilant. Help me further develop the character of vigilance in my life and to see the value in applying this character trait to the use of spiritually driven micro-groups in my life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

### Week 3 Tuesday: A Micro-Group look at 1 Peter 5:8

To “keep vigil”  
– or be vigilant –  
is something  
Jesus sought out  
of His disciples.

vigilant

adjective

vig-i-lant | \vi-jə-lənt

🔊

Definition of *vigilant*

: alertly watchful especially to avoid danger



**Pondering Point:** Peter reminded His Christian readers (or hearers) to be sober and vigilant in the face of spiritual dangers. This is likely another of those discipleship lessons he learned personally from Jesus – the hard way. When Jesus was entering the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His impending arrest, Mark 14:34 records Him saying,

*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death;  
Stay here and keep watch.*

Of course – Peter, along with the other disciples, fell asleep despite the warning to keep watch. It wasn’t just the physical danger at hand, as Peter would learn. Peter saw his weakened flesh give in to the temptation later that night to deny his Lord three times. And this was despite his insistence that such a thing would never happen. He is not the first – nor last – to over-estimate his spiritual stamina and courage. God help us all.



**Prayer:** Father God, teach me vigilance not just regarding the evil and temptations I see, but to be prepared for those I cannot see as well. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Wednesday, Week 3: Biblical Teachings on Prayer

- *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Matthew 26:41



**Pondering Point:** Write some thoughts to be shared at a later time with a few trusted friends. This time we start with prayer to set the tone for answering the following questions.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I pray Your Holy Spirit leads me to a fruitful meditation over Your words shared with your original disciples. Let Him convict me where necessary, comfort me where necessary and lead me as necessary. Amen.



- What temptations am I facing now? In the past?
- Where is my flesh weakened right now? In the past?
- What are my spiritual strengths regarding watching and praying as of now? What about in the past?
- Where is my spirit willing right now? In the past?

## Thursday Week 3: Prayerfully Re-Center around God

Vigilance is something Peter stresses when warning us about the attacks of the devil (see 1 Peter 5:8 from earlier in the week).

For Paul, vigilance comes into play this way:

**MAKING THE MOST OF EVERY  
OPPORTUNITY  
BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL**  
EPHESIANS 5:16

*make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.*

Ephesians 5:15

In light of this verse and its call to make the most of every opportunity, let's **Prayerfully Re-Center around God** by reviewing how we are handling opportunities in our lives.

**R** **Review the week:** What are the risks of NOT staying vigilant as a Christian? What opportunities for good and evil, godly and ungodly do you see? Where have you been negligent (rather than vigilant) by letting things come between you and God? What can happen when you:

- allow the devil a foothold in your life (Ephesians 4:27)
- forget that he is an enemy looking to devour (1 Peter 5:8)
- forget that he wants to destroy (see John 10:10)?

**R** **Repent if necessary** of a lack of vigilance regarding your spiritual walk, of not keeping your eyes peeled for opportunities God is providing, or of underestimating the influence of your enemy the devil and of your own ungodly flesh.

**R** **Return as necessary:** Come to Father God in the name of Jesus grateful for the forgiveness that comes in His work on the cross and then re-commit to be vigilant, especially in looking for opportunities to put God front-and-center in our lives, relationships, and choices.



**Prayer:** Father God, I am taking this opportunity to thank You for the kindness (forgiveness, grace, and mercy) that You pour out on me through my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Help me see the other opportunities before me to honor You in my life as a follower of Jesus. In His name I pray. Amen.



## Friday, Week 3: Discipleship Point about Groups

*Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.* Deuteronomy 4:9



**Pondering Point:** Here is an extended context of 1 Peter 5:8 (verses 9 and 10 added)

*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

- What might vigilance – and/or a lack of it – look like in the life of a disciple?

### The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry

Sean Parker, the first president of Facebook now calls himself a “conscientious objector” to social media. In an interview with Axios, he begrudgingly admitted, “God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains. The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them... was all about: *“How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?”* And that means that we need to give you, we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or post or whatever. That's going to get you to contribute more content and that's going to get you... more likes and more comments. It's a social-validation feedback loop, exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology.

J.M. Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, p. 38

Answer these questions now and be prepared to discuss ONE or TWO of them with others regarding J.M. Comer's book quote:

- What consumes huge amounts of time in your life?
- How does hurry impact your life with and under God?
- Have I settled for a mediocre version of faith and relationship with God?
- This notion: That which you give your mind to (what you let be its focus) will shape the trajectory of your character.

There are both *positive* and *negative* actions to remaining vigilant as followers of Jesus. From a *positive* or value-added view, think of being in God's Word, being in worship and prayer, and being in relationship with other people who are also pursuing God. These are three values we speak about in following Jesus. From a *negative* or addition-by-subtraction perspective, think of limiting certain activities that vie for or get in the way of time with God, such as social media engagement, entertainment practices, or time-consuming habits/addictions.



**Discipleship Prayer:** Father God, You are worthy of my time, attentiveness, and heart's devotion. I give it now once again and pray that I remain dedicated throughout the coming days and weeks, indeed all of my days. Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee. Amen.

## Saturday, Week 3: Scripture's Story for the Week

### The High Priest Eli and His Family 1 Samuel 2:12-36



**Pondering Point:** One person's vigilance (or lack of it) can have life-long impact on every MG they are part of: wives and husbands; parents and children; extended family; friends, etc. Check out this stark Bible story about Eli's family in 1 Samuel 2:12-36 and reflect with God on how the impact of neglecting vigilance can have on many people, including those not directly connected to the offenders. The story ends with a newborn son Ichabod being the only survivor of that family. His given name means "the glory of the Lord has departed." WOW! Yet, out of this terrible situation also comes a powerful voice for God known as Samuel the prophet.

[You can see more lessons on vigilance in Samuel's ministry life. He deals with King Saul's lack of vigilance regarding God's Word, causing him to lose the kingship (1 Samuel 13,15). We see it in King David who sought after God vigilantly, and experienced many times where God helped him overcome hardships in life.]



**Concluding prayer prompt:** As befits to your situation, thank God for your church family connections or ask Him to bring you into a church family through being spiritual mentored at SG and/or MG levels.



## Sunday Week 3: Called to gather together in groups



**Pondering Point:** While vigilance – or a lack of it – impacts a person on an individual level, it also has a powerful impact on others, particularly in MG relationships. Small groups and large groups can still manage well when certain individuals suffer through a lack of vigilance, but MGs will be significantly affected by such behavior. We can easily see such impact in the automatically established MGs of marriage and family.

As we saw in yesterday's bible story, one person's lack of vigilance can go so far as to ruin an entire family with life-long consequences... BUT BY THE SAME TOKEN... One person's vigilance can have life-long impact on every MG they are part of: wives and husbands; parents and children; extended family; friends, etc. You can see this significant MG impact addressed between parents and children in Ephesians 6:1-4:

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise – "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."*

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*



**Prayer:** Father God, enable me to be a blessing through a vigilance inspired by Your Holy Spirit. I also pray that, on account of Jesus, You would forgive me where I have failed to be vigilant. By Your grace, mitigate the damages created by any lack of vigilance that has arisen in my life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

# Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus as sent ones

"As the Father sent Me, I am sending You" —John 20:21

## Week 4, Monday: The Life of Paul in Micro-Groups

MG<sup>s</sup>

**Micro-Group Reflection Week Four:**  
The life of Paul as an example  
of participating in Micro-Groups

**Pondering Point:** Have you had any biblical instruction or training about religious fasting? When and where have you been encouraged to fast in your Christian life (with prayer, in Lent, etc.)? Today's description about the Apostle Paul's MG life has a connection to an episode of fasting that occurs in the church. Let's revisit that story in Acts 13.



**St Paul**



*Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul (Paul).*

*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John-Mark was with them as their helper.*

~ Luke, Acts 13:1-5

- Who put together this traveling micro-group? Who were the participants? From what kind of group did they come out of?
- How do you imagine that the Holy Spirit communicated His desire to this group? How might God communicate with you?
- How would you react to being set apart by God to join a group of people called to carry out a ministry task?

Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would remind them of everything He had taught. He also said that His sheep would recognize His voice. We will close this IMMERSION devotion with a prayer about recognizing the teachings of Jesus -- and His voice -- through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.



**Prayer for the week:** Holy Spirit, it is my desire to "hear" -- to recognize the voice of Jesus my shepherd -- the Good Shepherd. Lead me to the truth about Him and my place as His sheep. So I pray. Amen.

## Week 4 Tuesday: A Micro-Group look at Acts 22:6-21



**Pondering Point:** As we look into Paul's life, we see that although he was brought up in the ways of God as a Jew (Acts 22:3), his rejection and persecution of Jesus put him at odds with Jesus and with God the Father. But God would get His man -- using Jesus directly as well as some non-family members to introduce him to a life of grace, faith and service. Here is a testimony of that in Paul's own words:

*About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'*

*"Who are you, Lord?" I asked"*

*'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me."*

*"What shall I do, Lord?" I asked.*

*"Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. Then he said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.' When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me. 'Quick!' he said. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.'"*

*"Lord,' I replied, 'these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "*

Acts 22:6-21

While Paul experienced his call from God individually, he carried out his call in MG/SGs such as the Holy Spirit put together in Acts 13. Having no wife or child, Paul was free to travel readily in his ministry to the Gentiles (and Jews). God's people became family for him – both those he travelled with and those he travelled to.



**Prayer:** Father God, thank You for bringing non-family members into my life who share a love of Jesus. Let these people become partners in Christ as we honor You. Amen.

## Wednesday, Week 4: Biblical Teachings on Groups

*Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.* ~ Jesus, Matthew 18:19-20



**Pondering Point:** Group connections that are centered around Jesus supplement an overall goal of connecting people with God through His Word and prayer. This overall goal of connecting with God (through Jesus) is a **daily** life goal both for ourselves and others.

As we practice being in God's Word and under the influence of His Holy Spirit daily, these values are enhanced when we share that Word-and-Spirit influence in groups where Christ is welcomed and honored. Here God uses us to shape one another: our thoughts and experiences, our conversations, our struggles, our joys and celebrations – all through the lens of walking with Jesus.



Follow  
→  
Me

There is great value in having key friendships centered in our Lord. Some groups will have decades-long followers of Jesus, others may have years-long or weeks-long or potential followers. That said, merely desiring but not pursuing such friendships carries little value. Agreeing to pursue discipleship under Christ is key to this type of spiritual growth. That is why we aim for intentional weekly groups, particularly micro-sized ones.



**Prayer:** Holy Spirit of God, build in me a desire to connect with others who are willing to gather in Jesus' name – and to dedicate time to do so during the week. So I pray. Amen.



## Thursday Week 4: Prayerfully Re-Center around God



**Pondering Point:** Continuing a look into Paul's life, we see him speak of deep connections with Timothy and Titus, both of whom he mentors as "sons" of the faith:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.* ~ Paul, 1 Timothy 1:1-2

*To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.*

~ Paul, Titus 1:4



How great for Timothy and Titus to have someone take the time and effort to invest in them spiritually! Let's review our own lives for deep connections of mentors or spiritual parents who invested in us similar to Paul's role with Timothy and Titus.



**Review the week:** Were your parents spiritual mentors to you? Aside from your parents, did anyone else mentor you spiritually, serving as a father or mother in the Christian faith? As an adult, Have you sought out spiritual mentors?



**Repent if necessary:** There is no need to repent of lacking spiritually instructors as a child. It was not something you could control. As adults, we can seek out spiritual mentors on our own. Do you need to repent here?



**Return as necessary:** God likes to put people in families – His family (Psalm 68:6). Embrace God's heart in this way and seek out a "family" with spiritual leaders who will invest in your spiritual growth as a follower of Jesus.



**Prayer:** God the Father, I know that You have a special place for me in Your family. Help me find the connections You desire for me – with spiritual mentors, peers, and those I can be a mentor to as well. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

## Friday, Week 4: Discipleship Point on Groups



**Pondering Point:** Looking back to yesterday's devotion, the introduction of this father-son dynamic brings a different but very Jesus-like wrinkle to small group (SG) and Micro-group (MG) environments. Jesus was more than a peer to His disciples; He was their teacher and Lord. Paul too is clearly operating as more than a peer, looking to mentor these young men who are leading other people in the Christian faith in Ephesus (Timothy) and Crete (Titus). This could be considered a classic example of one disciple (Paul) making disciples of others (Timothy, Titus) who are in turn making disciples of yet others (Ephesians, Cretans). We view this as one of the keys of life as a disciple who participates in SGs and MGs.

Having touched on who discipled or mentored you yesterday, we flip the script and consider our own mentoring and discipling roles. It is like a bonus review added to yesterday.



**R** Timothy and Titus took their discipleship training gleaned from the Apostle Paul and invested in others. Who have you led spiritually in the past? Who are you teaching or leading spiritually currently? Are you continuing to receive from spiritual mentors to keep you sharp as a discipler of others? Write down a list of those you available to you spiritually for mentoring:

Past

Present

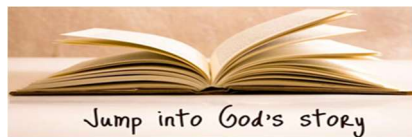
Potential



**Discipleship Prayer:** Father God, bless my life with disciples who inspire and shape me; bless others through my life of discipleship pouring into them. I pray this in the name of my discipler Jesus. Amen.

## Saturday, Week 4: Scripture's Story for the Week

### Newly-Converted Saul Meets the Apostles Acts 9:(1-18)19-31



**Pondering Point:** When Saul, the persecutor of Jesus followers, encounters the real-life Jesus in a vision, his who world goes dark physically – for a few days. At the same time his spiritual world become intensely enlightened – lasting for the rest of his life. He becomes a follower of Jesus. Yay God! But not everyone believed the story was for real, astonished that this man could have such a dramatic turnaround. It took the courage of Barnabas, a future MG partner of Paul, to open the door of introduction to the apostles in Jerusalem. Barnabas (whose name means “Son of Encouragement”) took a chance with Saul (later Paul) and was trusted enough to bring him into the inner work-team of the Christian faith and leadership. That’s a good thing because Paul became one of the most extensive travelers and writers for the gospel message about forgiveness in Jesus. He knew that forgiveness first-hand:

*Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 1 Timothy 1:13*



**Prayer prompt for the day:** Who took a chance on you spiritually? Who believed in you when others doubted? Thank God for them and consider how you might help others in this way.

NOTE: A key factor in MG success is when individuals feel seen, heard, and understood. Tomorrow’s ground rules go a long way in creating such an environment. That said, any ONE individual can spoil a healthy environment through judgment, diminishing others, self-absorption or simply violating the basic ground rules. A group should be willing to recognize inappropriate behavior in anyone (leader included) and address it accordingly.

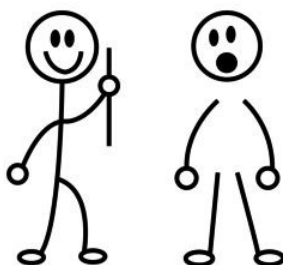
## Sunday Week 4: Called to gather together in groups



### Pondering Point: Things to appreciate about MG/SG from the life of Apostle Paul:

- People who lack a God-centered family life can find such a family in the life of the church.
- People benefit from having others further down the path to help with mentoring in life and faith skills.
- God will call people together into a group to be a blessing in His church.

**DON'T WORRY...  
I'VE GOT YOUR BACK!**



Paul's life story highlights the need to have people in our corner spiritually in the face of life's battles, especially spiritual battles. We need people like Barnabas who will go to bat for us (Acts 9:26-27), people like Peter who will defend us against adversaries (2 Peter 3:15-16), and people like James (brother of Jesus) and the Apostle John who offer the hand of fellowship when others seek to disgrace us (Galatians 2:9). Paul wasn't tight with all of these people. But they were still blessings to each other as brother and sisters in Christ. You won't be able to connect deeply with everyone but anticipate that God does want you to connect deeply with at least a few people.



**Prayer for the day:** Father God, continue to bring people into my life to connect with for whom we can *have each other's back* spiritually and who can stand together in times of trouble, especially a few who can be in a micro-group that You bless. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Establishing ground rules for Micro and Small Group Life

1. **Confidentiality:** What is shared in the group stays in the group. We hold things shared in the group confidential unless given permission to share these things with people outside the group. This must be a safe environment where people can be real, open and honest with their struggles and their victories.
2. **Transparency:** It's easier to love someone as God called us to do when we know them in deep and meaningful ways. We encourage you to share from your heart; let down your walls. Not just your struggles and fears, but also positives – dreams, hopes, answered prayers, etc. We understand that's easier for some and we'll respect your boundaries.
3. **No Convincing:** Differences of opinion are welcome. However, please don't try to convince others to your way of thinking.
4. **Listen:** Value one another during discussions by really listening to what is being shared. Try to hear what's being said without thinking about what you're going to say next or how you're going to respond. Be aware of how much you are talking – we want to give everyone a chance to share in the group.
5. **Pause:** After someone shares, give a pause to allow the group to feel the weight of what was just shared and to fully consider it before the next person shares. This also provides the person sharing with the opportunity to continue with their thought without feeling rushed.
6. **Don't Fix:** Let's try to hear what people are sharing without trying to fix them. If they want your advice, they'll ask for it.
7. **Don't rescue:** When a person shares a deep personal and/or painful moment, some try to make them feel better about themselves or the situation. Often this causes people to stop sharing and results in them not going as deep as they might have gone. Resist temptations to "rescue" people.
8. **No Cross-talk:** Be considerate of others as they are sharing - don't be having side conversations.
9. **Use "I" Statements:** It's easy to talk about the issues of others, we want you to put yourself on the table. Try to use "I" statements rather than "them", "the church", "us", "we", etc.

# Group Connections in the Discipleship Lifestyle

"where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I."

~ Matthew 18:20

## short daily DEVOTIONS

In *IMMERSION's Pathway of Discipleship*, we view group connections as essential in the life of discipleship under Jesus and among people. As we read the Bible, a disciple's lifestyle includes participating in groups<sup>1</sup> as you will see.

Though groups can come in various sizes and styles, the broad goal we encourage you to aim for is a weekly group connection. That may sound like a big commitment but hear me out. You'll be surprised how readily this adapts into the lives of people.

Group life connections supplement the overall goal of connecting people with God through His Word and prayer. This goal – connecting with God – is a **daily** life goal for ourselves and others. As we practice the values of being in God's Word and under the influence of His Holy Spirit, these values are enhanced when we share that Word and Spirit influence in groups where Christ is welcomed and honored. Here God uses us to shape one another: our experiences, our thoughts, our conversations, our struggles, our joys, our celebrations – all viewed through the lens of walking with Jesus our Lord.

We envision three types of group opportunities: **Micro Group**, **Small Group** and **Large Groups**. Each feed into the others. The majority of this explanation focuses on Micro-groups with a cursory look at the others to give a larger context on how they fit.

<sup>1</sup> Eccl 4:10-12; Heb 10:23-25;  
God's *One Another* commands

**1** **Micro-groups** (MGs) revolve around pockets of 2-4 people. While we focus on Christ-centered MGs for discipleship, it helps to know what a MG is in general.

Micro groups are small pockets of people with whom we have a connection. These clusters often co-exist within larger pockets of people. There are dozens of such groups active in our lives, maybe hundreds if you expand these connections to occasional contacts. A few examples are couples, families, friends, drinking or fishing buddies, workout partners, neighbors, etc. It can also include one's co-workers or recurring consumer-provider relationships.

One of Jesus' MGs was the trio of Peter, James, and John – some of His closest friends. He did activities with them that His Small Group (the Twelve) missed out on. Only these three were present for the healing of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37-43). Only they went up the mountain with Jesus during His transfiguration (Mark 9:2-4). They went deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane during His heart-wrenching prayer time (Mark 14:32-34).

**Micro-Relationship:**

A connection you have with one, two or three other people.

**Spiritual Micro-Group:**

A connection with one, two or three others that includes God.

**MGers:**

siblings  
spouse  
parents  
teammates  
classmates  
neighbors  
friends  
church folk  
co-workers

*less often:*

pet-vet  
gym rats  
wait staff  
clientele  
hobbyists

BUT... note that Jesus *did not start* this particular MG. When Jesus stepped into Peter's boat, He walked into a pre-existing MG of Peter, James, and John – fishing buddies. The Bible calls them *partners*, but it is the same church-y word in Greek that we use for “fellowship” (*koinonia*). What Jesus did was invite these pre-existing partners into a deeper spiritual journey as well.

This is a key understanding to the MG life of disciples. While we can be open to starting new relationships, more so we look to welcome Jesus into pre-existing fellowships (when and where the Holy Spirit directs). We may not be able to foster dozens of Small Groups, but we can be intentional about a few of the dozens of MGs that already exist in our current lives. We can, like Jesus, invite others into a deeper spiritual journey as well. These groups meet anywhere from weekly to monthly. To drive this lifestyle home for participants, we designed a group series that highlights the Micro Group examples in multiple New Testament characters.

**2** The second group is what many think of when it comes to Church group connections: **Small Group (SG)**. This includes Bible Studies, confirmation, Sunday School, etc. SGs can meet in church, homes, even parks. At one time this was Hope's primary discipleship target, but we learned that SGs can devolve into stagnancy by losing sight of including others. To combat this, we suggest seasonal windows for SGs with defined starts and stops. Certain SGs stay together, but this gives people a chance to join anew through invitation or gracefully step away if desired.

Within this SG set-up, Hope has established **model SGs** that meet twice a month (Men's, Women's, Couple's, Family). These groups operate year-round and serve as entry points to group life in our discipling church. The goal is to blend social and spiritual elements for participants in a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere. If all is going well, participants experience an encouraging taste of the discipleship life, but sense that there is more. This limited spiritual and relational depth is intentional and meant to foster a desire to go deeper – spiritually and relationally – through **MGs**.



All spiritually oriented Group Life should generate deeper sharing at some level, but certain groups go deeper faster. Groups end up being a great source of strength, support, and insight for our personal lives as followers of Jesus. There is great value in having key friendships centered in the Lord. That said, merely desiring but not pursuing such friendships carries little value. Action is key to this spiritual growth as a disciple. Intentionality matters. That is why we aim for weekly group SG or MG connections.



We encourage you to use the *QUICK START guide to Group Life* to manage the flow of a group. We suggest 90-120 minutes sessions (though some push it into 60).

**3**

The last category, **Large Group (LG)**, is what many people have in mind when they think “church”: Worship services. To that we add bible classes numbering beyond 15 (dynamics of group size change) and other church activities like celebrations, fellowship events and large-scale training events.

As noted with MGs, disciples also happen to be connected to SGs and LGs *outside* of church life. If you revisit the box on page two, you can see that many of us exist in small and large groups based on hobbies, work, family, etc. In light of this, it bears repeating that while we focus on Christ-centered groups for discipleship, it helps to recognize what LGs people are part of in general.

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** My time in ministry, particularly since focusing on discipleship, has brought out this lesson: Christians making the greatest impact on others spiritually (and in doing so fulfilling their God-given purposes) are personally involved in one or more healthy, active MGs. These MGs are more impactful than worship attendance (though they nearly always go), more impactful than SG participation, more impactful than personal Bible study and spiritual commitment (as awesome as this discipline is!). MGers are being discipled **by the Holy Spirit** through groups as well as by God directly in prayer, meditation, study, etc. and through worship and personal study. To live

without fostering such groups in your life is to greatly inhibit your journey with Jesus. Most Christians ***already*** operate with these types of groups present; they simply don't use such language to describe it. That said, many Christians could be more *intentional* at developing them – enabling them to greatly enhance their (and the church's) lives of discipleship. Jump into this four-week series to IMMERSE yourself into what it means to develop a micro group component to your life of discipleship under Jesus.

***and*** If you have not built daily devotions into your life with God, join our devotional life at [immersed-in-Jesus.org](http://immersed-in-Jesus.org). It serves as the basis for our worship experience every weekend (available on Facebook under Hope Lutheran Church, Orlando, FL).