

The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a tree branch with several bright orange fruits and green leaves. A semi-transparent orange band is placed horizontally across the middle of the image, serving as a background for the title and subtitle.

# Small Group Guide

**Bearing Fruit**

**First Baptist Peddie Memorial Church**

First Edition

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First Baptist Peddie Memorial Church

First Edition (7/2021)

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# 1. Biblical Foundation

“The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, *to make them little Christs*. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose.”  
– C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (emphasis added).

In the heart of every human being is a thirst for something beyond us. Most of the time, we go on living without being aware of the thirst. But if we pause for a moment from our hyper-connected routines and let our heart be still, we become aware of a still small voice in our heart – a lingering feeling that there must be more to life than an endless rat race.

If you’ve heard such a voice, it might be a stirring of the Holy Spirit. It might be God’s gentle whisper, calling you to a richer life of meaning and purpose. It might be a fresh movement of God’s Spirit that you need to pay attention to.

Indeed, there is much more to life. You are not created for the rat race. You are created for a purpose higher than the unrelenting demands of the society. You are created for a purpose that transcends what you can achieve on your own.

To help us remember, it is good to have a single word that represents what we are created for: a single word that captures *the ultimate purpose* that remains constant regardless of the season of life we are in. The word, from the New Testament Greek, is *telos*. In the vast ocean of choices, the *telos* is the North Star, which stays fixed and always points us to the right direction regardless of where we are.

The *telos* will guide you when you feel disoriented in a stormy sea. It will keep you focused when distracted by many competing voices. It will help you choose the right road when faced with a fork in the road.

## *The Telos (Ultimate Purpose)*

What then is the *telos* of our life? What are we created for? What is the ultimate purpose of our existence? What is our life's North Star?

A popular answer focuses on the single moment of conversion. Once we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are assured a place in heaven. From such a perspective, the *telos* would be entering heaven at the end of our life.

While it is important for us to have the assurance of eternal life, such a *telos* focused on what happens after death is far too limited. We are not created merely for a place in heaven. We are created for an *everlasting relationship* with Jesus Christ. We are created to be loved by God and to love Him.

Our eternal life begins here and now. When we put our trust in the Lord Jesus, we are accepted into His everlasting kingdom now, and we can begin to enjoy our relationship with Him the moment we are born again. We can begin to experience the joy of life with Christ here and now.

The *telos* that will guide us from the beginning of our journey on earth till the end is so glorious, magnificent, and beautiful that it cannot be captured in a single word. The Bible expresses it in a rich variety of ways:

- Union with Christ (John 15:1-11)
- Bearing fruit – fruit that will last (John 15:16)
- Transformation into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- Being holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Note that the *telos* is not merely becoming a “better” person. It is possible to manage our behaviors through secular counseling or self-help techniques, and even to achieve a higher level of ethics through the common grace available to all humanity. While we

could become a socially well-adjusted person through behavior modification, that's not what we're aiming for.

Behavior modification is like hanging plastic apples on a tree that is not bearing fruit. The tree might look better with plastic apples for a little while, but it is dying on the inside.

As Dallas Willard often emphasized in his teaching, “spiritual transformation is not behavior modification.” It is “modifying the source of behavior,” which is the heart (Mark 7:20-23). Transformation begins from the heart. It begins with our inner attitude, the only thing we have control over no matter what circumstance we are in. Once our heart is right with God, the behavior will follow the heart. Gradually but surely, we will be transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ.

At this point, we might feel overwhelmed by such a lofty goal, and dismiss the *telos* as unrealistic, unattainable, and impractical. Indeed, God is commanding us that which we cannot do on our own. None of us is capable of attaining it by our own efforts.

Transformation into Christ-likeness requires complete surrender of our desires to the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Our natural self needs to die to allow the Holy Spirit to do His transforming work in us.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (John 12:24 ESV).

Unless we surrender our old inclinations, old thought patterns, and old desires, we remain the same. However, if we surrender them into the hand of God, the Holy Spirit takes them, purifies them in the refiner's fire, and transforms them into something new. Ultimately, the fruit we bear is *the Christ-like person we become*.

Your journey of spiritual transformation has begun. Understand that it takes time for your whole being to be transformed. Do not

hurry the process by attempting to tackle all areas simultaneously. Begin with just one area. Please take a moment to reflect on one specific area that you need to change:

- 
1. What is one thing you need to surrender to God? What is one area of your heart that needs to die? Be specific and concrete.
- 
2. What is the fruit that you would like to bear in your life? What kind of person would you like to become? Be specific and concrete.

## ***The Means***

Having a clear vision of the *telos*, we now know how to find the North Star. The question is, how then do we move toward the *telos*? We cannot get to the *telos* in one giant leap. What is the *means* by which we can reach the *telos* step-by-step?

Upon cursory readings of the Gospels, it seems that Jesus had no specific means in mind. He did not organize a massive evangelism campaign, nor did He establish a formal school.

Instead, He called a handful of disciples into a personal relationship with Him so that they might be with Him. This unassuming strategy was the very means through which He transformed the world – one disciple at a time.

In a word, the *means* by which Jesus transformed people into His likeness is *discipleship*. The clearest definition of disciples is given by the Lord Himself in the Gospel of John.

If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples,

and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32 ESV).

The last line, “the truth will set you free,” is often quoted in isolation. It has a nice ring to it, but how does the truth actually set you free? If you accept certain truths about Jesus, will you be free? No, mere intellectual knowledge will not set you free.

Notice the progression in this passage. It starts with a precondition: “if you abide in My Word.” The key to freedom is *abiding* in the Word of Christ. It’s not a brief stop at a Bible study, an emotional high in worship, or a moment of inspiration. To abide means to dwell continually, to remain steadfast, and to live moment by moment in a continuing relationship. It means to hold fast to the Word of Christ in the midst of challenges, oppositions, trials, and tribulations.

Those who abide in the Word of Christ, as our Lord declares, are truly His disciples. *Discipleship is living as an apprentice of Jesus by abiding in His Word moment by moment.* It’s learning from Him how He would live our life if He were in our situation today. It’s doing all things *with Christ* by setting Him before our mind continually. This is the means by which the Holy Spirit transforms us into the likeness of Christ.

There is transforming power in patient, routine, and daily obedience to the Word. By abiding in the Word, we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free from the bondage of bitterness, anger, addiction, guilt, shame, slothfulness, and selfishness. If the Son sets us free, we will be free indeed – free to love God and free to love our neighbors (John 8:36).

## **Why Small Groups?**

One striking aspect of Jesus’ strategy was that He intentionally devoted most of His time to a *small group of disciples*. It is evident that He ministered to the crowd out of genuine compassion for them. However, most of the time He gave His priority to the Twelve. Even among the Twelve, He gave special



attention to the Three – James, Peter, and John.

Why did He concentrate His energy on a handful of disciples? Did He not come to save the world? With the divine power of the Almighty, could He not minister to the multitudes?

It's because the transformation of character rarely happens in a crowd. A crowd is a collection of isolated individuals, each wanting Jesus as their private chaplain, but not wanting any relationships with the real people whom Jesus loves. In a crowd, we can remain anonymous, we have no responsibility, and we are not accountable to anyone. Hiding behind our public persona, we can live in contradiction, and no one would know it.

Only in a community can we learn to love one another. Only in a community can we grow in character as we love our difficult neighbors. Only in a community do we have the possibility of being transformed into the likeness of Christ. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17 NIV).

A large gathering is still appropriate for corporate worship. At the same time, small groups are needed to complement the large gathering of worship in order to nurture personal relationships, mutual accountability, and a sense of belonging.

Here's how the Apostle Paul expresses the power of belonging as each person contributes to the whole:

From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:16 NIV).

It's no wonder that the early church met in small groups in their houses (Acts 2:42-47), and their house churches became the vital instrument of growth in the midst of intense opposition and persecution from the Roman empire.

## ***Our Mission and the Small Group***

Then how does the small group fit into the mission of our church



based on the Great Commission (for more details, see our website: [www.peddiechurch.org/about-us/mission/](http://www.peddiechurch.org/about-us/mission/))? In what ways does it reinforce the mission of being disciples of Jesus Christ and making disciples?



Small groups reinforce the four aspects of our mission in the following way:

1. **Worship:** Small groups deepen the sense of community in corporate worship because those who belong to small groups are known by their group members.
2. **Word:** Small groups equip us to be better students of the Bible by engaging us in the process of active thinking and learning from one another.
3. **Koinonia (Fellowship):** Small groups nurture an intimate environment where we can share our lives – joys and sorrows, hopes and discouragements, victories and failures – with one another.
4. **Mission:** Small groups serve as welcoming, friendly, and hospitable outposts for reaching out to those who might feel uncomfortable about coming to church. A healthy small group will grow as members reach out to those who do not yet belong to church. As the size of the group increases, it replicates itself just as a healthy cell does.

## 2. Small Group Structure

As for the practical aspects of implementing small groups, there is no one structure that fits all people at all times. Dr. Henry Cloud, in *Making Small Groups Work*, writes,

“One truth that has emerged from this small group movement is that *there is no one right way to do small groups*. Just as there are many mansions in God’s house, so there are many different needs in God’s body, the church.”

The focus of small groups is not on structure, but on transformed lives. This, however, doesn’t mean that the structure can be haphazard or thoughtless. Though it’s good to have impromptu gatherings once in a while, such as a backyard barbecue party, our long term goal for small groups is nothing less than the transformation of our character into Christ-likeness.

To support the *telos*, the structure needs to be flexible and balanced. Just as “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27 NIV), small groups need to be designed for the good of the participants.

First, they need to be **flexible** so that they can be adapted to our changing situations and circumstances. In this pandemic or post-pandemic age, in-person meetings are not always feasible. Also, there are people who live far away from meeting places. The structure needs to be flexible enough to accommodate both virtual and in-person meetings.

Second, it needs to support **balanced** spiritual growth toward the transformation of our character. Specialized small groups, such as those focused on teaching or sharing, have their strengths and serve specific needs. However, in the long run, they can lead to imbalance and deficiency in some areas of spiritual growth. For example, teaching-only groups can be useful for transferring information efficiently from the teacher to the students, but the one-way flow of information does not engage the students in

active learning and living out the Word. Sharing-only groups can be useful for unloading what's on our minds, but without the hard work of studying the Scripture in its original context, we end up perpetuating our collective ignorance.

For long-term spiritual health, we need a balanced diet of teaching, learning, discussing, sharing, and praying.

## ***Basic Structure of Small Groups***

What might such a small group look like at Peddie Church?

The first two components (teaching and learning) are designed to engage the participants in active learning *before* the meeting.

1. **Teaching** based on short video lessons on a Bible passage. The video lessons and the accompanying study guides are provided in advance by pastors and teachers.
2. **Learning** based on our own engagement with the Bible passage. We first read the assigned text, write down the questions and thoughts that arise from our own reading of the text, watch the video lesson on YouTube, and work through inductive questions in the study guide supplied for each lesson. (Refer to Section 5 on Inductive Bible Study.)

The next three components (discussing, sharing, and praying) take place *during* the meeting.

3. **Discussing** what we have discovered from our own study of the Bible passage and how it has changed and transformed our lives. We grow deeper in our knowledge and understanding of the Scripture by learning from one another. (This is the longest section of the meeting.)
4. **Sharing** our joys and sorrows, hopes and discouragements, victories and failures, and prayer requests.
5. **Praying** together in response to what has been shared and

requested.

## **Logistics**

- **Frequency:** Twice a month. Each group decides the best day and time for their meeting.
- **Duration:** Approximately one hour.
- **Method of meeting:** Online (Zoom or a similar method), phone, or in-person. Each group decides the best method of holding their meeting.
- **Place of meeting:** Each group decides the best place for their meeting, which can be home, church, online, or any place that is amenable to *koinonia*.
- **Types of group:** Men, women, youth, young adults, singles, couples, regional, etc., depending on the needs of the congregation.
- **Number of people:** Ideally 3–7 per group. Maximum 10. When a small group reaches more than 10 people, replicate by starting another group.

## **Meeting Format**

The following is a skeleton format to be adapted for each group.

1. Welcome (3 min)
2. Opening Prayer (2 min)
3. Scripture Reading (only the key verses, 2 min)
4. Discussion (30 min)
5. Sharing (10 min)
6. Sharing of Prayer Requests (3 min)
7. Prayers (10 min)

### 3. Group Leaders

You don't need to be an expert in the Bible to be a group leader. Small group is not a lecture. Your role is primarily that of a *guide*, pointing participants in the right direction and creating an environment where they can walk together with Christ.

The video lessons and the study guides are designed to help the participants observe what is there in the Bible and discover the meaning for themselves. This inductive process of discovery helps the participants retain what they themselves have discovered than a lecture would.

You are there to facilitate a caring and supportive environment where people are encouraged to open their hearts and share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences.

At the same time, you are more than a guide. You are called by the Lord Jesus to be a *little shepherd* of the little flock whom He has entrusted to you. You are to reach out to them with love, care for them with compassion, bring them before God's throne of grace in prayer, and point them to the Great Shepherd.

#### ***Covenant of Small-Group Leaders***

If you are asked to be a small group leader, your first response might be a feeling of inadequacy. You are not alone in feeling inadequate when called by God. The Apostle Peter's response was, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

None of us can discern God's calling individually on our own. God's calling for you needs to be confirmed by pastors and leaders who know you personally.

All of us, including pastors, are a work in progress. What the Lord requires from us is not perfection but a sincere desire to grow in the likeness of Christ and a daily intention to live out His Word as His disciples.

Consider prayerfully the following covenant promises as a small-

group leader.

I promise to:

- Worship God in ways that honor Him and please Him.
- Submit to the Word of God revealed through the Bible, the only infallible, God-breathed authority for life.
- Love my family, neighbors, and small-group members even when it's difficult to love them.
- Engage regularly in basic spiritual disciplines, such as meditation on the Scripture and prayer.
- Be held accountable to the membership covenant as a member of Peddie Church.
- Be teachable and be receptive to guidance from pastors and leaders.

Sign and date:

\_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Preparation before Each Meeting***

- Remember that you are the first one who needs to be transformed by the Word of God. Never tell others what you yourself have no intention of living out.
- Pray for each participant by name. Do not approach any meeting casually because the transformation of the human heart is the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Watch and pray, being mindful of the spiritual battle waging behind your small group. Expect spiritual resistance from the people. Some might even raise unnecessary oppositions, causing interpersonal conflicts.
- Work through all the questions in the study guide before the meeting. The better you are prepared, the more

beneficial you will be to others when leading the discussion.

- Select a few questions from the study guide, mainly from the Interpretation and Living Out section, to focus on during the meeting. You will not have time to address all the questions. Think of the participants in your group, where they are in their spiritual journey and what situations they are facing, and select the most appropriate ones.
- Communicate in a timely manner to all the participants. Communicating well is an act of love. By courteous, clear, and timely communication, you demonstrate that you consider others to be more important than yourself.
- Assign responsibilities to participants, such as opening prayer, Scripture reading, or song leading, in advance so that they would have time to prepare.
- Use modern Bible translations, such as NIV or ESV, in your group meetings because KJV, though cherished for its literary beauty, is difficult to understand for those who are new to the Christian faith and by those of the younger generation. Always try to put yourself in the shoes of the learners.

### ***During the Meeting***

- **Be present at least 10 minutes before the meeting.** Prepare your heart and mind in prayer and expectantly wait on God. Remember you are a servant, and a servant arrives before guests to prepare the table.
- **Make people feel welcome and included.** Be mindful of how *newcomers* might feel. Do not put anyone on the spot or pressure them to share information they might feel uncomfortable with.
- **Be quick to listen and slow to speak** (James 1:19). Do



not listen merely in order to respond. Listen in order to understand. Listen with empathy. Listen so that people know that they have been heard and understood.

- **Be grateful for every answer.** Value each contribution regardless of whether you agree with it or not, and express your appreciation to the person. The diversity of contributions is invaluable to the spiritual growth of the group.
- **Resist the urge to provide a quick solution.** There are very few quick and easy solutions in life. When people share their problems, they are not looking for a pat answer. Most of the time, what they long for is a listening ear. They want to be heard and understood rather than to be bombarded with advice. Unless they are looking specifically for advice, it would be wise to listen with empathy and pray together to the only One who can help them.
- **Share your weaknesses.** “God’s power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses” (2 Corinthians 12:9b). By being vulnerable in the presence of others and sharing your weaknesses, you encourage others to open their hearts, and when appropriate, confess sins to each other (James 5:16a).
- **Ensure that the conversation stays on track.** If it drifts away, gently remind the people what the focus is and lead them back on track.
- **Ensure that no one dominates the conversation.** If some people continue to talk too much, gently interrupt and say, “let’s hear from someone else also,” or “let’s give other people opportunities to speak.”
- **Model grace and truth** (John 1:14b). Exercise the grace of patience, acceptance, and understanding. At the same time, when a person or the group has a tendency to

deviate from the truth, be prepared to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Truth without grace degenerates to suffocating legalism, while grace without truth degenerates to loveless tolerance.

- **Finish the meeting on time.** Keep the promise made to the participants, trusting that the Holy Spirit would continue to work after the meeting. Remember that the Holy Spirit is not bound by your concept of time. Be considerate of everyone's time.

## ***Questions to Encourage Participation***

To encourage more participation at various points in your meeting, you might want to ask the following questions:

- What are some of your responses to the passage we read?
- What makes you think that?
- Would you tell us more about it?
- Does anyone have anything to add?
- What do the rest of you think?

During the Sharing segment, some possible questions to encourage sharing are:

- Can you share any moments when you were aware of Christ's presence in your life?
- Has there been a time when it has been difficult to show Christ's love for another person?
- Have you had any situations or insights that helped you draw closer to Christ?

## ***Followup after the Meeting***

- Reflect on your leadership as a small group leader. Solicit feedback from those whom you respect. If there is any area for improvement, be intentional about it.

- If there are ongoing prayer concerns, continue to pray regularly after the meeting and follow up with those who shared the prayer requests to see how they are doing.
- Take time outside the meeting to get to know new participants.
- If there are *important* questions about the Scripture text that require additional explanations, submit them to the pastor or teacher who prepared the video lesson. The answers to those questions will be disseminated to all groups.
- If there are serious pastoral issues that the pastor needs to be aware of, bring them to the pastor (who will keep them strictly confidential).

## ***Training Potential Leaders***

Small groups are a training ground for potential leaders.

1. If you observe anyone in your group whom you believe the Lord might be calling to lead a small group, pray intentionally and persistently for that person.
2. Consult with the Pastoral Staff and the leaders of the Deacon Board, and pray together for the Lord's guidance.
3. With the confirmation by the leadership and acceptance by the person, he or she will go through training in leading small groups.
4. The secondary leader will begin to co-lead the group with you, just as the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples two by two. During these periods, timely debriefing and feedback are essential.
5. The responsibility gradually shifts from you to the secondary leader until he or she is ready to be the primary group leader either for the same group or for a new group.

## 4. Group Participants

We believe that your desire to be part of our small group is not an accident. Long before we become aware of our desire to grow, God has been calling us to a life-long journey of faith, fraught with unexpected turns and challenges, but also overflowing with unspeakable joy and peace.

No one can go on such a journey alone. None of us is strong enough to finish it as a lone ranger. That's why we need to belong to Christ's body, i.e., a community of disciples, and walk together with them. Your group members are there to encourage you, bless you, rejoice with you, weep with you, carry the burden together with you, and pray with you. You are not alone in your journey of faith.

Most importantly, the Lord Jesus Christ is present in the midst of the two or three gathered in His Name (Matthew 18:20). He is the Center of all our relationships. Our meetings are all about Christ and not about us. There is no room for our egos, titles, or status. We seek to honor Him in all that we do and say.

### *Small-Group Covenant*

As members of a small group, we make promises to each other and to God. In the Bible, such promise making is called a *covenant*.

Why is it important to make promises and keep them? It's because the most meaningful and formative relationships in life are based on promises. For example, think of marriage and of our relationship with God. What makes these relationships durable and intimate is the promises that bind them.

In our small groups, we agree to keep the following covenant promises:

- **The Covenant of Love:** I promise to love the members of my group, treating them with respect, patience,

kindness, humility, and gentleness.

- **The Covenant of Forgiveness:** I promise to seek forgiveness from anyone whom I have offended and to forgive those who have offended me.
- **The Covenant of Availability:** I promise to be available at an agreed-on meeting time.
- **The Covenant of Truthfulness:** I promise to be open to sharing my joys and sorrows and to speak the truth in love even when we have disagreements.
- **The Covenant of Confidentiality:** I promise to keep whatever is shared strictly within the confines of the group.
- **The Covenant of Prayer:** I promise to pray regularly for the prayer requests shared in the group to the best of my abilities.

Sign and date:

date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Responsibilities***

You will gain much more from your group meetings when you are committed to the process. While it is still possible to benefit from your meetings regardless of the amount of time you put in, the Word of God will be more deeply rooted in your soul when you take time to think it through and wrestle with it.

We encourage all participants to devote some time *before* the meeting to reading, studying, and reflecting on the assigned Bible passages using the YouTube lesson and the study guide.

## 5. Inductive Bible Study (OIL)

Inductive Bible study is the most effective way of studying the Bible regardless of how far you are in your spiritual journey. Whether you are a beginner or a seasoned scholar, the inductive method has proven to be the most beneficial one for understanding what the Scripture actually says and applying the Word of God to daily life.

It is simple, and anyone who has the desire to study the Bible is able to learn it. It does require practice and repetition, but once you get the hang of it, you will be equipped for life.

One of the goals of our small groups is to equip you so that you may be able to feed yourself with the Word of God day after day.

“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day.  
Teach a man how to fish, and you feed him for a  
lifetime.”  
– Maimonides

The word “inductive” is from the Latin “*leading to*,” and it means that you allow the Bible itself to *lead you to* spiritual insights. It’s the opposite of starting with preconceived ideas and imposing them on the text. Instead, you start by surrendering your agendas, ideologies, and preferences, and allow the text to speak for itself.

In a nutshell, the inductive method is **OIL: Observe, Interpret, and Live out**. We will unpack what OIL means, but before we delve into the details, we need to mention a few preliminary steps.

### **Preliminaries**

While Bible apps on electronic devices are convenient and available for free, printed Bibles are still indispensable for in-depth study of the text *in its context*. If you don’t have one already, you might want to consider getting a printed Bible, preferably with wide margins.

With a printed Bible, you are able to see the *context* more clearly because you have two full pages open before you. Also, seeing the text, in relation to its context as well as by its position on a page, develops deeper memories of the text in the long run.

In addition, you can write on the margins and see all your notes along with the biblical text. Your notes, especially the insights that you yourself have gained from your study, will turn out to be invaluable to your life-long study of the Scripture, and you will treasure them.

As always, before you engage in the study of the Scripture, begin with a prayer, surrendering your agendas to God and asking the Holy Spirit to be your Teacher.

Concentrate on a small portion of the Scripture, usually a chapter or less. This allows you to read the text closely and dig deeper.

Read the text out *aloud* at a slow pace, engaging your sight, body, and hearing. Read it multiple times. You will be surprised how much more you notice when you read the text out aloud very slowly.

As you dig deeper, you might need other resources to help you unpack the text. For recommended Bible translations, apps, dictionaries, commentaries, and maps, please visit our website: [www.peddiechurch.org/resources-for-bible-study/](http://www.peddiechurch.org/resources-for-bible-study/) .

## **(a) Observe**

**Observe what the text is saying.** The first step is always to observe what is there in the text. Allow the text to speak for itself, pay attention to unexpected twists and turns, and listen to the questions that emerge from the text.

Be mindful of the tendency to impose your own biases on the text. Do not try to fit the text into your preconceived ideas.

Instead, let the text confront your thinking. Kneel before the text, acknowledge its authority over you, and with a spirit of humility listen to what the text is actually saying.



Write down the thoughts that come to your mind as you are guided by the following questions:

- What does the text actually say?
- What words or phrases stand out?
- What is its immediate context?
- What questions is the text raising?
- What tensions do you notice in the text?
- What makes you uncomfortable?

### **(b) Interpret**

**Interpret what the text means.** Interpretation is the process of discovering the meaning of the text. Begin with the *plain* meaning, the one that makes plain sense. That is a safe starting point, though it needs to be developed further.

Be mindful of your tendency to impose a meaning that is foreign to the text. Do not seek an extravagant, hidden meaning that no one else can see.

The plain meaning of the text needs to be developed further by studying the text in its context – first in its immediate context, then in the context of the whole Bible. *Let Scripture interpret Scripture.*

If possible, try to place yourself in the shoes of the original audience during biblical times. Try to see the text through their eyes. Don't be discouraged if you don't understand the original context. The Bible is an ancient Book, written 3500 to 2000 years ago, and it takes time and persistence to understand the history and culture of an ancient people. This is where the video lessons can help by supplying the relevant background.

- What is the plain meaning of the text?
- How does the context shape the meaning of the text?
- How do historical and cultural backgrounds shape the

meaning of the text?

- Who is the God revealed in the text?
- What does the text say about who we are?
- How does it change my preconceived ideas?
- What is its significance for today?

At this point – only after you have devoted some time observing the text closely – you may consult Bible commentaries or study notes in your study Bibles. Good commentaries and study notes are the work of both humans and the Holy Spirit whom the scholars relied on. Their authority is secondary and is derived from the Bible. As such, they are to be tested and accepted only after careful examination.

### **(c) Live out**

**Live out the truth in your life.** This step is the most crucial. It is much more than coming up with applications. Merely thinking about how to apply the Word does not lead you to action. Often the missing link is an *intention* to please God and obey His commandments. If you have heard the Word of God through your study, you must *intend* to take the first step in obedience. Without such an intention, Bible study remains totally ineffective and might even harden your heart.

Of course, life is complicated, and it might not be clear how to live out God's commandment to the fullest. Despite the daunting challenge, you can always take the first step toward the path of righteousness. As you obey the Word one step at a time, you will understand more. And as you understand more, you will delight more in the joy of walking with Christ.

- What is the one thing I can work on?
- What kind of person am I becoming through this Bible study?
- What is hindering me from doing what the Lord

commands me?

- What idols do I need to surrender to God?
- How does the Word rearrange my priorities?
- What do I need to pray for based on the insights gained from this study?

As you engage in the three-fold pattern of OIL regularly, you will gain more confidence in applying this pattern to your daily reading of the Scripture, and you will be equipped for life.

In all that you do, remember that you need to do it *with the Lord*. Your intention alone is insufficient. You need to set Christ before your mind and rely on His power and strength as the Psalmist confesses:

I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken (Psalm 16:8 ESV).

May the LORD strengthen you for the journey ahead. As you fix your eyes on Christ and contemplate His glory, may He transform you from glory to glory into the likeness of Christ, and may He enable you to bear fruit – fruit that will last (John 15:16).

# **First Baptist Peddie Memorial Church**

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