

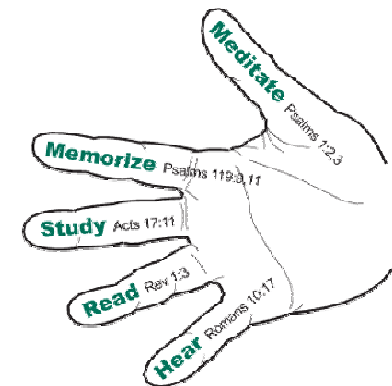
Level Two MEFC Discipleship Studies

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Bible Intake:¹

One of the most important lessons we must learn is that taking in and practicing the Bible is absolutely necessary to grow and to be a strong Christian. All Scripture, which is God’s Word (2 Timothy 3:16), is true (Psalm 12:6; John 10:35; Titus 1:2), the source of wisdom (Prov. 2:6), necessary for salvation (Romans 1:16; James 1:18) and growth (John 17:17), and is the fuel whereby the flames of our faith are fanned (Romans 10:17).

There are five main ways we take in the Bible so we can believe and practice it. One way to remember them is to connect them to the five fingers on our hand.²



Hear

In Romans 10:17 the Apostle Paul writes, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”³ Faith, which is necessary to please God (Hebrews 11:6), comes in response to His Word. Hearing the Bible taught by teachers is important. This is

¹It is recommended that these lessons be used during the six months the disciple is reading through the entire New Testament. You can alternate between these lessons and spending time talking about what is being learned during the Bible reading. So, week one cover Bible Intake, week two cover what has been read in the Bible, week three cover Apprenticeship, week four what has been read in the Bible, and so on and so forth.

² The hand illustration is borrowed from The Navigators.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this study series are taken from The English Standard Version.

so because God has gifted individuals to make the truths of the Bible clear and to help in application, which is of benefit to us (1 Corinthians 12:7). Additionally, such gifted teaching helps equip us for works of ministry (Ephesians 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:17), guards us against false teaching (Ephesians 4:14; Titus 1:9), and is crucial for unity among the Church (Ephesians 4:13). All-in-all, good teaching can correct us when we are tempted to stray (2 Timothy 2:24-26) and it tends to shape positively our understanding of the Bible (implied in 1 Timothy 4:16 and James 3:1).

Good, Bible-rich teaching in sermons plays a key part in our faith. However, it is important for us to be part of other studies as well. Whether this involves Sunday School classes or small groups meeting in homes (or both), we need to build each other up in God's Word and continually grow in our knowledge of God through His Word. (Ephesians 4:15; Hebrews 3:13; 2 Peter 3:18)

To expose ourselves to such teaching is one of the main reasons it is so important for us regularly to gather together with the Church.

Read

Yet, hearing God's Word taught is not enough. We must also read the Bible. Revelation 1:3 states, "Blessed is he who reads...the words of this prophecy" (NASB). Whether we are reading through the entire Bible (see **THE ONE YEAR BIBLE** reading schedule on our church web site resource page) or merely reading through a book or a section of the Bible, reading helps us get the big picture of what the Scriptures are about.

If you are married and/or have children, you should be reading the Bible and praying together in what we call family devotions. The easiest and most effective way to do this is to follow these suggestions: Use **THE ONE YEAR BIBLE FOR CHILDREN**, by Gilbert Beers. This tool is great to read to preschoolers and to read with your children once they can read. It takes you through the main accounts, passages, and storyline of the Bible in one year. With your older elementary school, jr high, and sr. high children

(as well as with your spouse) you can simply share something(s) from your own personal reading. If, for example, you are reading through **THE ONE YEAR BIBLE**, share from one or two of your readings for the day with your family at supper. Then, read with your younger children before bed. You can also alternate between the two: one day read for the younger children and the next for the rest of the family.

Study

The person who is hearing and reading the Bible will have a good foundation built. Yet, to study the Bible means we look with more detail and intensity at what it is saying. In study we may outline a book of the Bible or a particular part of a book we are studying. We determine thought-flow, context, and look carefully at the meaning of words. In study we also can zero in on a particular topic or a particular person in the Bible. Whereas reading gives us breadth, study gives us depth in the Truth.

This is not only important since it will encourage us to learn more about the Bible and about God, it also encourages us to examine the Bible to make sure what our teachers are saying is accurate (Acts 17:11).

If we are studying a book or a part of a book in the Bible, there are four principles we must keep in mind.

Context: We keep before us the previous material in the book and what comes after any passage, sentence, or poetic verse, as well as how that flow-of-thought impacts what we are examining.

Observation: We must pay careful attention to any features which may have bearing upon the meaning. For example, are there certain words repeated? Are there words emphasized in any way? Is there poetry utilized? What about a particular sentence structure or play-on-words? Is there anything which

appears to stand out (even down to a repeated emphasis by the author through the book)?

Meaning: Our goal is to determine what the inspired author of this Bible book we are studying intended to say. Often it is necessary for us to study how a word is used elsewhere by that author or throughout the Bible, as well as to determine if any other passage in the book under consideration (or the rest of the Bible) has bearing.

Application: Once we have determined what the inspired author intended to say, we must then determine how it applies to us: Must we change something in our life? Must we believe something we haven't before now? Should we praise God for something? Should we do something? etc.

Memorize

Hearing, reading, and studying are indispensable to the Christian. Yet, so also is memorizing biblical passages. We do not always have our Bible with us, so unless we memorize Scripture we will not have it at our "fingertips" to aid us in saying, "No" to temptation, in speaking a word of encouragement to a struggling fellow-Christian, or in sharing with an inquiring non-believer. This is why Psalm 119:11 is so appropriate: "I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

When a person decides to memorize, one of the first hurdles encountered is finding an answer to the question, "What verses will I memorize?" One way to answer that is to find verses particularly meaningful to you as you read and study. Keep some note cards near when you read or study and write down these verses.

Another way to answer that question is to have a program of memorization which will provide verses for you to memorize. The Minden Evangelical Free Church provides such a program known as "Hammer Verses." It is so called since the prophet Jeremiah

compares the Word of God to a hammer shattering a rock in Jeremiah 23:29. God's Word shatters the rock around our hearts so the truth of God can penetrate us. The hammer verse program supplies a different verse each week of the year for 51 weeks, leaving the last week as a time to review. There are five years worth of verses to memorize which will build our faith, increase our knowledge of God, give us strength to say, "No" to temptation, supply us with wisdom, and provide a sword for us to wield in our spiritual warfare. Not only is the weekly verse placed in our bulletin each week, the weekly verse also appears on the home page of the web site.

Once you have a plan for what verses to memorize, the greatest challenge is how to go about memorization in such a way that it is doable and in such a way that we can keep a handle on the verses we memorize as we work through more and more verses and as time passes. Here are some helpful hints:

- Make it your goal to memorize one new verse or short passage a week. To do this means you will memorize over 50 biblical passages a year. That is significant! To do more may make it hard to keep these passages committed to memory over the long run and may, through eventual frustration, lead us to give up verse memorization.
- Begin work on the new verse or passage of the week on Sunday (or Monday if you prefer) by saying the verse/passage by memory ten times. This may require you to say the verse or passage 3-4 times before you can do it from memory. Once you can say it by memory, it is important to repeat it ten times.
- The next day say the new verse/passage again ten times. The remaining five days of the week say it at least once to review.

- The following week add a new verse or passage with the same approach. On the first day, you have said the new passage ten times, then say the passage from the previous week once as review. The rest of the week follow the same review approach with the new passage as you did the previous week. And keep saying the previous week's passage once a day for review.
- Once you have ten passages committed to memory, then you can review that group of ten passages once a week. Continue on with the same format day after day and week after week. Once you have more than 6-7 groups of ten verses/passages you can review each group of ten every two weeks.

One final word about memorization has to do with your family. In order to teach your children to memorize and help them to treasure God's Word in their hearts, you can introduce verse memorization into your family devotion time. Most likely your children will not have to review their verses as much as we do in order to retain them.

Meditate:

The final means of Bible intake we want to discuss is meditation. We first learn about this in Joshua 1:8: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." The word in this verse translated, "meditate" is the Hebrew term, *hagah*. It gives the sense of talking to yourself. So, meditation upon the Scripture is speaking to oneself, asking questions such as, "What does this verse mean?" "How can I do this?" "How does the gospel make a difference with this principle?" "What will be the challenges in this?" This is only a sampling of questions, but the point is clear enough.

One means of meditation I have found helpful is to take a verse (such as the one we just looked at—Joshua 1:8) and work through it one word at a time, asking how each word is significant, what it would mean, and to pray to God in light of what you learn.

So, with Joshua 1:8 we would begin by looking at "This". It is not any other book, but this book (the Bible) which we should keep as part of us and upon which we should focus. Then, we'd focus on "book". We might admit our lack of joy in reading, yet pray to God that He would help us be faithful in reading, and so on and so forth.

Conclusion

When we get into the habit of taking in God's Word through the five main means (reading, hearing, studying, memorizing, and meditating), this will eventually change other habits and will transform us by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2)!

Prayer Journal:

Prayer is communicating with God. One of the best definitions of prayer I have run across comes from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, written all the way back in 1646 in England: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.” We are commanded to pray about all things (Philippians 4:6) as a means of expressing our faith in God (Matthew 7:7-11) and honoring Him (Psalm 50:15).

One of the best tools to help us with prayer is a prayer journal. Here is how we can start and use one.

The purpose of a prayer journal is to give guidance and encouragement to the Christian in prayer by:

- ❑ Keeping track of prayer requests
- ❑ Keeping track of answers to prayer

Some preliminary steps to take before you begin using your journal:

- ❑ Purchase a journal, blank book, or a notebook.
- ❑ Determine when you will regularly pray and where. Keep your journal in that place. To have such a specific plan is necessary to develop the habit of prayer.
- ❑ Be realistic in determining how long you will pray. A small amount on a regular basis is better than large amounts only rarely.
- ❑ Understand that prayer is one of the hardest spiritual disciplines practiced by a Christian. It takes work, resolve, and God’s grace to stay with it regularly.

- ❑ Like almost every Christian there will be days you do not have your normally scheduled time of prayer. That is fine. Pick back up with it as soon as possible.
- ❑ Remember what prayer is. You are invited to communicate with God, to praise Him, thank Him, and bring your and others’ needs to Him through Christ.

What you should do in your journal:

- ❑ Keep a list of all requests you have for self; family; church leadership, church, friends, co-workers, and those requests others give to you. Leave enough space in the margin so you can record answers. As the pages of requests grow, determine how many pages of requests you will cover a day. Each time you pray cover that amount. Add to the requests as your Bible reading prompts you to do so.
- ❑ If you have needs which require daily prayer for a time, write these on a post-it note, place this in your journal and move it through the journal as you make your way through it. Update it as needed.
- ❑ Have a section toward the back where you will at least occasionally list things for which you are thankful.
- ❑ As you write down requests for yourself and others, cover requests under these areas: Glorifying God, worship, faith, love for God; obeying God, application of Bible truth, unsaved for whom you are praying, evangelism fruitfulness, unity in the Church, Church leaders, governmental leaders, and effectiveness of specific ministries with which you are familiar.

For the best tool to equip you in prayer, check out Donald S. Whitney, *Praying The Bible*. It will revolutionize your prayer life.

Apprenticeship:

Webster's Dictionary (online) defines apprentice as “one who is learning by practical experience under skilled workers a trade, art, or calling.”

God has called us to serve Him. Deuteronomy 10:12 reads "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Likewise, Romans 12:11 adds: “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.” Since Christians need to be equipped by leaders through God’s Word for the work to which God calls them (Ephesians 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:17), one of the most helpful steps any believer at Minden Evangelical Free Church can take is to enter into a ministry apprenticeship alongside someone else. In every Sunday School class, every level of the AWANA ministry, in MOPS, in the youth ministry, on our worship teams, and in all areas of service (including even the elders) we strive to have apprentices serving and “learning the ropes” alongside others.

Advantages of Apprenticeship

- It helps a person overcome the fear of involvement in a new area of service. For example, instead of being thrust in front of a Sunday School class with no experience or training—to sink or swim, apprenticeships help a person observe and learn from someone with experience; and then gain experience while receiving constructive feedback so they can be worked gradually into the ministry position.
- Because of the opportunity to observe, apprentices can catch some parts of ministry which are hard merely to teach.

- It helps the person gain the necessary conviction (beliefs), character, and competency (skills and procedures) for the ministry before they must be in charge of that area.
- It keeps ministry leaders from having to go out and recruit in a crisis when ministry positions come open.
- It increases the number of leaders and teachers in a church.

How To Get Involved In An Apprenticeship

- If you are not involved in a ministry, have no idea where you should get involved, yet would like to get involved as an apprentice, your first step should be to complete a free online spiritual gifts analysis. You can do this by going to Churchgrowth.org and then clicking on Free Spiritual Gifts Analysis. If you would prefer a hard copy, you can contact the church office at 832-1574 for your own copy.
- Once you complete the inventory and determine your spiritual gifts, then think and pray about how these spiritual gifts can be used in an area about which you are passionate and where you sense God may be leading you to serve.
- If you still have questions, please talk with another Christian to gain feedback from them on what needs there are in the church and what may be a good fit for you.
- Once you have determined where you want to be involved, talk to a leader in that area about how and where you can become an apprentice.
- If you do not know who the leaders are, contact the church office for help.

CPR Evangelism:⁴

- Evangelism is the faithful communication of the good news (the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ), why a person needs that gospel, and how a person can be saved through trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.
- CPR evangelism is a simple biblical approach allowing any Christian to engage in evangelism. It involves three parts...

Cultivate Relationships:

- Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment we have in regard to other people is to love them (Matthew 22:39). This involves meeting needs they have—regardless of what the needs are and regardless of the cost (e.g. Luke 10:29-37; Hebrews 13:16; James 1:27; 1 John 3:16-18). The result is that this honors God (2 Corinthians 9:13).
- We should not be surprised, then, that evangelism is best done in the context of loving relationship (John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 3:1-2). It is often in such friendship or closeness that we have the greatest opportunities to introduce someone to Jesus Christ (John 1:40-42). Whether it is their seeing a difference or a hope in us that will make them inquire about what makes us different (1 Peter 3:15) or whether it places us in the situation in which we can be present when they face a crisis or start asking questions, such close relationships are often the soil in which fruitful evangelism takes place.
- This means that we begin evangelism by the simple means of getting involved with a person(s) who does not know

⁴This evangelism training has been adapted from Evangelism Explosion, the Navigator's 2.7 series, Course 2; and Son Life Ministry's CPR evangelism.

Jesus Christ as Savior and praying for them to trust Jesus Christ as Savior with the result that they become a kingdom laborer.⁵

*Simple Step One:
Get involved with others and
pray for them.*

- Though cultivating relationships is important, it never truly becomes evangelism until we share the gospel. This leads to the second part of CPR evangelism...

Plant The Seed:

- The seed is the Word of God, the gospel (Mt. 13:3, 19). Here is a simple, yet biblical, five point presentation of the gospel which correlates with the five fingers on our hand.
- Share the five truths which have made the greatest impact in you...

*Simple Step Two:
Learn The Gospel And Share It*

1. God created us to and commands us to honor Him.

The thumb is used since it points up and reminds us that the first point is focused upon God and why we want our lives to be "on the way up for God," not down merely for us.

⁵ Though in some occasions people will ask us why we are different as they are in the midst of crisis or searching, often we will need to pray for wisdom how to come to the point of sharing Christ with them. This can be done, for example, by asking if you can share with them how Jesus Christ has made a difference in your life; by doing a Bible study with them; or by simply asking if you can share with them the five most important truths in life.

God did not create us merely to exist, but to live for a great and eternal purpose—putting Him and His greatness on display through how we live (Ps. 8:5; Isaiah 43:7). This is why He commands us to glorify Him in all we do (1 Cor. 10:31). It is also why we spend so much time seeking for significance and making sure our years on this earth count for something.

Illustration: Whenever we hear about someone accomplishing a heroic feat or whenever we read of a doctor saving a life or of someone finding a cure for a dreaded disease, it resonates with us since we have been created for something (someone) great. Yet, we have lost sight of this great purpose for which we were created. This is seen when we focus upon our second truth...⁶

2. We all fail to honor God as we should.



The forefinger is used since it often points in judgment. Here it is pointing at each of us to remind us we all have fallen short of the mark.

Romans 3:23 states this simply: “For all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.” In other words, God’s purpose for us, His target, is to glorify Him. This includes loving and obeying Him. Yet, no man truly does this. We all miss the mark as a misguided arrow misses the target.



Illustration: This means all of us, you and me—there are no exceptions. Many of us think this is not a big deal, yet, when we realize that sin involves thoughts, words, and deeds—and also it involves doing what God says not to do and not doing what He says to do—we see that we could be couch potatoes

⁶ If you can think of a specific example out of the news, share it. Also, if the person is troubled by the fact that God created all things and all people to bring glory and attention to Him, explain how wrong it would be for Jonas Salk (the inventor of the polio vaccine) not to have called attention to himself and his discovery.

and still sin many times a day. In fact, we would think we were pretty amazing, if we sinned only 3 times a day. Yet, over the course of a year that would be over 1,000 sins and over the course of a lifetime it would be 70, 80, or 90 thousand sins. What judge in a court of law, in his right mind, would overlook that many offences? How much more will the perfect God of the universe not overlook our sin!

Illustration: Some of us might say, “Yes, that might be true, but what if I do more good things than bad?” To answer that, let’s suppose that we fixed a five egg omelet for someone. The first four eggs we put in are fine. However, the fifth we find out is rotten when we crack it. What if we said, “Not to worry, the first four were fine. They’ll make up for the bad one.” Of course we would not do that and we would not serve such an omelet to family or friends. How much more must we see that a lot of good things will not make up for the sin we commit? This is especially true when we understand that God’s requirement for us is not just to be pretty good or to be more good than bad. It is to be perfect (Matthew 5:48).

So, sin truly is a big deal. This is made even clearer when we understand the third truth...

3. God’s judgment is upon mankind because of this sin.



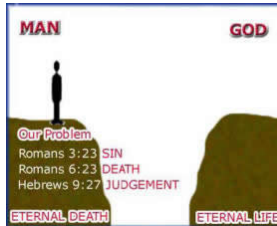
The middle or “great” finger is used since it addresses the nature of our great God.

It is customary to speak of God as love and the Bible does speak of Him in that way (1 John 4:8). Yet, the same Bible which speaks of Him as love also says that He will in no way allow the guilty to go unpunished (Exodus 34:6-7). The Bible says, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Illustration: This is like a coin. If I held out a quarter to you and told you to pick up the heads without the tails, you would not be able to do it. To pick up the one quarter you must have both sides of the coin. So it is with God. He is always

and at the same time, both loving and just. We can't have one without the other.

Sin separates us from God, from His life-transforming power, from His grace, from His saving and eternal blessings. This is true in this life and the life to come. We can draw the reality in this way:



It is a good thing that God judges sin. If He merely looked the other way when people are brutally murdered, raped, and hurt, it would suggest that He did care or value life.

Yet, what is the solution? How can we be saved and truly know God? Our fourth important truth tells us...

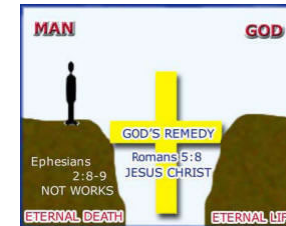
4. God sent His Son to save sinners from God's judgment.



The fourth finger, the marriage ring finger, is used to speak of the Son since He is the groom, the husband, who gave His life for His bride.

Since sin brings the penalty of death (separation from God) and since God's standard is perfection, we must see that the only way of salvation is for the perfect man, the God-man, to live and die in our place. The gap between us and God can be bridged only by Jesus Christ paying the penalty for sin and His perfect life being credited to us (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:8).

This can be drawn in this way...



5. We must repent and trust Jesus Christ as savior to be saved.



The fifth and final finger represents faith since the pinky completes the process of the hand grabbing on to something. Faith and repentance comprise how we grab on to the free gift of salvation.

This saving work of Jesus Christ is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 2:25) which must be received by faith (John 1:12). It is not just a faith of mere head knowledge. After all, even the demons know he died, they know God exists, yet they are not saved (James 2:19). When we come to see we cannot save our self and are grieved we have sinned against God (Acts 2:37-38), we must transfer our trust from what we do to what Christ has done for us.

Illustration: It is similar to when we walk in a room and sit down in a chair. Whenever we do that, we transfer our trust from our legs and feet (for holding up our body) to that chair. We do so because we believe it will hold us up. Yet, the difference between mere head faith and full trusting is sitting down—transferring our trust to the chair. So, it is with Jesus Christ. The difference between mere head faith and saving trust is transferring our “weight” from our own works to His work.

Those who do this are forgiven and have eternal life (John 5:24).

We can draw this truth out like this...



If you would like to trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, please pray with me:

Dear God, I acknowledge You made me to honor and love You, yet all I have wanted to do is live for me. I have ignored You and sinned against You. I understand I deserve eternal judgment and separation from You. I am so sorry for my sin. I believe I can be saved only by trusting in Jesus Christ who lived a perfect life and died in the place of sinners. I trust only in what He has done and receive You as my savior. Thank You for saving me.



Once we have trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior, we will grow in our new faith, our new relationship with God, by reading our Bible (Joshua 1:8; John 17:17), praying (Philippians 4:6-7), and by uniting with a Bible-teaching Church which joyfully follows and loves God and others to His glory (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The third part of CPR evangelism is this, we...

Reap The Harvest:

- Once we have shared Jesus Christ with someone(s), this is only the beginning. If they have not trusted Christ as their Savior, we must pray for them and work with them toward this end. A good place to begin would be to give them an ESV New Testament and do the Thirty day reading plan with them (page xiii). Meet with them weekly during that time to see if they have questions and understand what they are reading. Also, during that time, read with them through “God’s Plan To Save You” (p. 211) to solidify what salvation is. During this time it is also important to help them develop the habit of attending church so they can grow.
- Once you believe they have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and have gone through the Thirty day reading plan and “God’s Plan To Save You,” then ask them to commit to the Six Month Reading Plan (p. 215)
- Continue to meet with them weekly during this six months to make sure they understand what they are reading. Additionally, cover the four key areas we must give attention to if we are to be joyful followers of Jesus Christ who surrender to God’s commandments and commission for His glory:⁷

***Simple Step Three:
We disciple them –
Helping them solidify faith
in Christ And Grow In Him***

⁷To help with this process see the MEFC Discipleship Overview under Discipleship on the Articles And Index page of our web site: www.mindenecf.org.

Worshiping and Glorifying God:

Here are some brief points we should consider regarding worship and glorifying God.

- Glorifying God is showing forth the full weight and greatness of God, which is the chief purpose of man. 1 Corinthians 10:31
- An important aspect of glorifying God is worshiping God. The remaining points explain worship.
- Worship is recounting back to God in word, behavior, and thought His glory, His *worship*. Pss. 29:1-2; 71:8; 96:3; 1 Chron. 16:23; Rom. 12:1-2
- Worship must be done in “spirit and truth”. John 4:24
 - This demands that the gospel is at the center (Isaiah 6; 12; Rom. 12:1-2 [in light of Romans 1-11]; Eph. 1:13; Gal. 2:14). A worship service should, in many ways have a flow which supports and communicates the gospel.
 - This demands passion, affection, and a sense of newness in expressing our praise and adoration to God. Pss. 33:3; 34:8; 37:4; 96:1
- Worship involves clear, well-done communication and leading so that understanding is enhanced (even among those who are not regularly part of the church). 1 Cor. 14:1-12 (esp. 11-12), 16, 23
- Worship involves methods which balance preserving the truth of the gospel with sensitivity to the context in which a church exists. 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5; 9:19-23

- It seems God demonstrates that knowledge and worship of Him is strengthened by engaging all our senses. The amount of color, smells, fabrics, and the like used in the tabernacle (cf. Exodus 25-30), as well as use of taste, touch, and sight used in Communion (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:17ff.)—all suggest that the more we can engage the different senses in worship, the better it is.
- Whether or not we worship God in life, behavior, thought, corporately, and from the heart is a very important aspect of our growth and walk with Christ. This is why it is so important that every Christian interact with what worship is.

If you own the Reformation Study Bible and want to see more on God’s glory and glorifying Him see “The Glory Of God” at Ezekiel 1:28. For more on worship see “God’s Pattern For Worship” at 1 Chronicles 16:29.

Spiritual Gifts And SHAPE:

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 the Apostle Paul writes:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; [5] and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; [6] and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. [7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [8] To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, [10] to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. [11] All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

In this passage we learn that there is a variety of different ways people are empowered by God's grace to serve—yet they all come from the same God. One is not more important than the other (see also 1 Corinthians 12:12-30). Additionally, we learn that every Christian has some gift given by the Spirit's sovereign choice (7, 11) and for the benefit of others (7). Though the Scriptures never exhort us to discover what our Spiritual gifts are, the implication is that Christians will discover where they are best gifted to serve and then minister in that area(s).

How do we determine what our spiritual gifts are and where we may best serve?

- First, since God gives us grace empowerments or gifts for service (1 Corinthians 12:6, 7, 11), we should ask Him to guide us in what He wants us to do. Part of the way this will be fulfilled, most likely, is through our passions and desires (e.g. 1 Timothy 3:1 [overseers desire to be overseers]).

- Second, we seek feedback from others. Implied in the qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9) is that Christian leaders are examining others to help determine where they will serve and whether or not they are in the right ministries (see especially 1 Timothy 3:10: “let them also be tested first”). What this means, in practice, is that we are asking others for feedback. If we believe God may have gifted us and called us to be an elder, deacon, a worship leader, a teacher, or something else, we should ask for input from those who know us, know the Scriptures, and have seen us in that capacity. Additionally, spiritual gifts inventories are also a helpful tool. There are hard copies of spiritual gift inventories available in the church office or you can simply go to Churchgrowth.org, click on the free spiritual gifts assessment link, and gain helpful feedback that way.
- Another way in which you will gain direction is by looking at where your talents and experience lie. Certainly talents with which you are born are not necessarily the same as spiritual gifts, but often there will at least be overlap. For example, if you have always enjoyed planning and organizing events, this will at least give you some guidance in where you will effectively serve.
- As you look at different ministries in which you have been involved and seek feedback from people, one of the questions you want to ask is, “Where does God seem to bear fruit through me?” In other words, where are you most effective? If you can't “carry a tune in a bucket,” most likely participation on a worship team is not for you. If you get so scared when you stand in front of people to speak it makes you hate it and you can't get a word out, then public teaching and preaching are probably not your calling.

Spend some time discussing your spiritual gifts with a friend or mentor. Ask them to pray with you and to give you feedback about your gifts and some possible areas of service. If you have taken a spiritual gifts inventory, share with them the results.

If you have never been involved in a ministry where you desire participation, the first step for you to take is to become an apprentice.

The identification of your spiritual gifts is only the beginning of finding your niche in the body of Christ. There are also four other areas you will want to examine—areas that along with Spiritual Gifts form the acrostic SHAPE:

Spiritual Gifts

Heat for particular areas, needs, or ministries.

Abilities

Personality

Experience

For help in determining your SHAPE, see the two SHAPE documents under DISCIPLESHIP at www.mindenefree.com.

Family And Marriage

1. The Family⁸

The family is the oldest and most basic of human institutions. In both the Israelite culture of the Old Testament and the [Roman] culture of the New Testament, the household might consist of parents and children, relatives from several generations, servants, and even friends, depending on the economic resources of the head of the family. The Bible stresses its importance as a spiritual unit and a training ground for mature adult character. The Bible pictures a clear authority structure within the family, whereby the husband is to lead the wife and the parents are to lead the children. But just as all leadership should be a form of ministry rather than tyranny, so these domestic leadership roles must be fulfilled in love (Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

The family is to be a community of teaching and learning about God and godliness. Children must be instructed (Genesis 18:18, 19; Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:6-8; 11:18-21; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4) and encouraged to use that instruction as a basis for their lives (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20). Discipline should be used as a means of corrective training to lead children beyond childish folly to self-controlled wisdom (Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15, 17). Just as there is purposeful, loving discipline in God's family (Proverbs 3:11, 12; Hebrews 12:5-11), so there must be in the human family.

Building strong family life is always a priority in serving God.

2. Marriage⁹

⁸This discussion on the family is taken from "The Christian Family," in The Reformation Study Bible, 1714.

⁹ This discussion on marriage is taken from "Marriage And Divorce," in The Reformation Study Bible, 1347.

Marriage is an exclusive relationship in which a man and a woman commit themselves to each other in covenant for life, and on the basis of this solemn vow become “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; Malachi 2:14; Matthew 19:4-6)....

Paul uses Christ’s relationship to His church to explain what Christian marriage is, so as to highlight the husband’s special responsibility as the wife’s leader and protector, and the wife’s calling to accept her husband in that role (Ephesians 5:21-33). The distinction of roles does not imply that the wife is an inferior person. As God’s image-bearers, both man and wife have equal dignity and value, and they must fulfill their roles with a mutual respect grounded in recognition of this fact.

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), yet He provided a procedure for it that would protect the divorced wife (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). This provision was made ‘because of your hardness of heart’ (Matthew 19:8). The most natural understanding of Jesus’ teaching (Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:8, 9) is that adultery, the sin of marital unfaithfulness, destroys the marriage covenant and warrants divorce (though reconciliation would be preferable), and that he who divorces his wife for any lesser reason becomes guilty of adultery when he remarries, and drives the woman into adultery if she remarries....

Paul says that a Christian who is deserted by an unbelieving partner is not ‘enslaved’ (1 Corinthians 7:15). This evidently means that the Christian may regard the relationship as finished.

Tithes and Offerings (Systematic Giving):

All things in the world ultimately belong to God (Psalm 24:1). Because of this and because God is self-sufficient, He does not need our gifts (Psalm 50:10-13; Romans 11:35). God entrusts gifts to us (James 1:17) and desires us to use them wisely for His glory (Matthew 25:14-30).

Giving back a portion of that which God has entrusted to us has been something from early on in the biblical record man has done to express his worship toward God (Genesis 14:20; Proverbs 3:9-10). These same two Old Testament passages also establish that a good place to start in our giving to God is by regularly giving back to Him a tenth or a tithe which is taken at the top—from the very first of our income and before we spend our money on anything else (see also Deuteronomy 26:12-13; Malachi 3:10; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

Jesus seems to teach that even with His coming and the New Covenant, a tithe (regularly giving a tenth of our income) is still a good place to start (Matthew 23:23).

In addition to regular systematic giving (a tithe being our baseline) which is an act of worship, giving back to God a portion of what He has entrusted to us, the Bible also sets forth some other important principles to consider in our giving:

- Our tithes help fund the ministry of the Church. Malachi 3:10; 2 Corinthians 9
- We should give tithes and offerings (that which is beyond the tenth) willingly and cheerfully. 2 Corinthians 9:7
- We should give in faith, believing God will take care of us and provide for us without those monies. 2 Corinthians 9:8-10

- We should give that we might glorify God as the funds are used to carry out things which benefit others and carry out that which is dear to God. 2 Corinthians 9:13
- We should give to help those in need. 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; Ephesians 4:28
- It appears that an example of God-honoring giving Paul holds up in 2 Corinthians 8 (the churches in Macedonia) does not necessarily stop at regular systematic giving of a tithe, but gives offerings for those in need and for ministry needs above and beyond that as God blesses and leads.

Conflict Resolution:

Conflict is a regular part of human relationships. This is confirmed by the fact that Jesus taught what we should do if we hurt someone else (Matthew 5:23-24) or if someone does something against us (Matthew 18:15). It is also confirmed by the fact that Paul and Barnabas even parted ways, disagreeing over what to do with John Mark on Paul's second missionary trip (Acts 15:36-41). Too often disagreements lead to people dividing from and hurting each other even further. The Bible, however, offers very clear and effective teaching on how to approach conflict with others. There are four key principles, four steps we must take in conflict:¹⁰

First, we must realize conflict is an opportunity to

Glorify God. Glorifying God (putting His greatness on display) is the ultimate purpose of mankind. (Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 10:31) When God changes our lives through His grace, results such as righteousness, good works toward others, forgiveness, love, and peace bring glory to God. (Matthew 5:16; John 13:34-35; 15:1-12; 2 Corinthians 9:13; Philippians 1:9-11; 2:14-15) All of this means that when conflict arises, it is an opportunity to put God's life-changing grace on display. Most people do not work out their differences well. When, by God's grace, we face conflict head-on, it puts on display what God can do through us. When we remember this, it transforms how we face these hard times in relationships, helping us to face them rather than run from them. It also reminds us to pray for God's help. (Matthew 7:7-11; John 15:7)

With this mind frame we are ready to take the next step...

¹⁰ These are taken from the book by Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*. See also his web site hispeace.org. We regularly offer classes on the peacemaking process.

Get the log out of your own eye. This phrase comes from Matthew 7:1-5: "Judge not, that you be not judged.... Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?...You hypocrite, *first take the log out of your own eye*, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (emphasis added) Before we go and communicate to someone how we believe they have hurt or offended us, this passage urges us to: (1) Ask how I might have contributed to the problem? (2) Communicate to the person how I have contributed to the problem and, if applicable, ask for forgiveness. Doing these two things not only may decrease in our mind the part the other person played while increasing our part; it also may lead them to be more receptive to what we have to say. Sometimes you might even conclude you do not have to go to the person except to apologize. Surely, it will enable us to be more gracious, humble, and understanding.

Gently Restore. Once we have wrestled with what our part in the conflict has been, if there is still a need to communicate to the other person their part in the situation, do so with grace and gentleness (Proverbs 18:13; Ephesians 4:29, 32; 2 Timothy 2:24-26) with the purpose of restoring your relationship and, if needed, restoring the person in their walk with Christ (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1). As you do this, speak the truth in and motivated by love (Ephesians 4:15; 1 John 4:8). We must remember that as the family of Jesus Christ, we are to treat each other as brothers and sisters—thus caring enough not to look the other way when a fellow Christian is self-destructing and/or dishonoring God (2 Thessalonians 3:15) Here are the seven A's to remember when you gently restore:

- Address everyone involved.
- Avoid "if," "but," and "maybe".
- Admit specifically.

- Apologize.
- Accept the consequences.
- Alter your behavior.
- Ask for forgiveness.

Go and be reconciled. Once you have worked things out with the other person, forgive them (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). This is a mark of those who are true believers (Matthew 6:14-15). If you cannot reconcile with the person and/or they are unwilling to talk to you, then get others involved to help (Matthew 18:16-20). There are four promises you can make which are helpful in forgiving another person:

- I will not think about this incident any more.
- I will not bring this incident up and use it against you.
- I will not talk to others about this incident.
- I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

Reading:

In the Church God gives to some Christians the gift of teaching (Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11) so that they can explain the truths of God in such a way that believers can more completely understand and apply them. This gift not only comes through in oral communication, but also in written. Even the Apostle Paul, himself, desired Timothy to bring to him “books and...parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13). We should not be surprised, then, that throughout the history of the Church saints have benefited greatly from books written by those who explain Scripture and topics covered in the Scripture.

In addition to taking in the Bible, one of the beneficial disciplines in which any Christian should be engaged is regularly reading good materials which help him or her grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Donald Whitney, in his helpful book, Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life, wrote, “I’ve always found it to be true that growing Christians are reading Christians.” Whitney is right on! Good books help us build a foundation for grasping the Bible and knowing God. They also help us think creatively and see things from a perspective beyond our own limited experience. As the Roman Cicero (106-43 B.C.) asserted, “read to lead.” Or, it could be said, “leaders are reader.” Why? Because reading is one of the avenues which make our creative juices flow and help us think of new and fresh ways of carrying out the ministry to which God calls us.

Reading is not only beneficial because it opens up the Bible and makes creative juices flow. There are at least two other benefits. First, the very act of reading itself helps develop and keep strong our thinking abilities so we can follow arguments, advanced concepts, and are therefore strengthened in our ability to think about our God and His ways. Second, reading some books (such as biographies and novels) can provide great examples for us of what living for Christ and overcoming struggles with the world look like.

In addition to well-written novels and biographies (which are simply too numerous to mention), here are some key books it would be beneficial to read. These would also be good books to go through together with someone whom you are discipling or who is discipling you.

Alcorn, Randy. Heaven. Tyndale.

This is a very readable and enjoyable book dealing with what the Bible teaches about heaven.

Arthur, Kay. How To Study Your Bible. Harvest House.

The title is self-explanatory. This book is the most readable good book which outlines how to read and study the Bible.

Barnes, Tom. Atonement Matters. Evangelical Press.

Though a substantive book to read, the challenge is well worth it. It opens up what Christ accomplished on the cross, how it impacts us, and why it is important to teach a solid, biblical approach to this subject.

Barnes, Tom. Every Word Counts. Evangelical Press.

This readable work explains why we should value the Scriptures. It covers Inspiration, Inerrancy, the formation of the Bible, and the reality that the Bible is our ultimate source of authority.

Barnes, Tom. Living In The Hope Of Future Glory. Evangelical Press.

Though a substantive book to read, the challenge is well worth it. As the first book written on the glorification of the Christian since 1963, it explains what the Bible means by our future glory and how this should shape all we are and all we do.

Barnes, Tom. The Parents’ Game Plan. Unpublished (Available at mindenefc.org, resource page)

In this on-line book you will not only learn what the Bible teaches about discipling your children, you will also find some practical guidance and resources for doing that very thing.

Bridges, Jerry. The Discipline Of Grace. NavPress.

When it comes to our growth as a Christian, how much do we do as our responsibility and what does God do? How do these fit together? No

book does a better job of helping a Christian bring together these all-important aspects of our growth (or sanctification).

Bridges, Jerry. The Joy Of Fearing God. Water Brook

Jerry Bridges is a very readable biblically rich writer. This book takes readers through what the fear of God is and why it is such an important part of our walk with Christ. This is a book which will enlarge your view of God.

Dever, Mark. What Is A Healthy Church? Crossway.

This is a short, biblically-rich work on what the Bible says about what the Church is to be.

Dobson, The New Dare To Discipline. Tyndale.

You will not find a better book to guide you through what the Bible teaches about disciplining your children and how to do it than this. This is a must for every young parent.

Grudem, Wayne A., Elliot. Christian Beliefs. Zondervan.

This is one of the most readable books available on the basic teachings or doctrines of the Bible of which every Christian should be aware. If you have been afraid of the words “theology” or “doctrine” in the past, this book will change that.

Mack, Wayne A., Carol. Sweethearts For A Lifetime. P & R.

There are many good books on marriage available today. This may be the best all-around, biblically-rich, and readable treatment you will find. It is good to read with a disciple, or even to read with your spouse.

Packer, J. I. Evangelism And The Sovereignty Of God. IVP.

This classic book deals with how God’s sovereignty impacts election. You will be surprised. Packer argues rightly from Scripture that rather than discouraging evangelism, the reality of God’s sovereignty encourages us to share the gospel with others.

Packer, J. I. Knowing God. IVP.

This classic work will enlarge your view of God as Packer offers a biblically-rich, yet readable study on what God is like.

Piper, John. Future Grace. Multnomah.

This book, along with The Discipline Of Grace, by Bridges, form the two best books available on how God’s grace impacts our growth and how we pursue God’s holiness in the grace of Christ. Anything Piper writes is a gem!

Piper, John. The Dangerous Duty Of Delight. Multnomah.

This short, biblically-rich book shows how the Bible teaches us we should seek our joy and pleasure in God. This book will enlarge your view of God and cause your soul to soar like few others will!

Piper, John. Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came To Die. Crossway.

This book contains 50 very short readings—each one explaining why Jesus Christ came to die and what impact the cross has upon us. It was originally written as an outreach tool, so is readable, in addition to being biblically-rich. It is a great study on the cross.

Ryle, J. C. The Duties Of Parents. Grace And Truth.

This very short simple book sets forth the basics on what the Bible teaches about parenting. Since older works (this was written in the late 19th century) often did not offer scriptural references for all their points, please contact the church office for an addendum to the book which offers those references for each of the points.

Sanders, J. Oswald. Spiritual Leadership. Moody.

This is the classic book on Christian leadership which will not only give very biblical and practice guidance on how to lead as a Christian, it will also feed your soul as you read it.

Strobel, Lee. The Case For series.

Some of the most readable, yet well-done, books which answer the hard questions about our faith and the Bible are Strobel’s books in this series: The Case For Faith (answers some of the hard questions about believing in God); The Case For Christ (answers some of the hard questions about the Gospels and Christ); The Case For Creation (answers some of the hard questions about the origin of the world); and The Case For the Real Jesus (answers some of the hard questions about the historicity of Christ and Christianity).

Tripp, Paul David. Age Of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide To Parenting Teens. P & R.

The title is self-explanatory. No Christian parent of teens (or future parent of teens) should be without this book. It is superb!

Tripp, Tedd. Shepherding A Child's Heart. Shepherd Press.

This is a helpful parenting tool for how to move beyond merely modifying our children's behavior to the point of seeing heart change by the Spirit of God working through us and the gospel in our sons and daughters.

Whitney, Donald S. Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life.

NavPress.

Whitney offers the most biblical and practical book on spiritual disciplines (things like Bible reading, prayer, giving, fasting, etc.) on the market today. This is a fantastic discipleship tool!

Iron Man Teams

Here at Minden Evangelical Free Church we encourage the creation of what we call Iron Man Teams. These are often teams of two or three people who meet together for mutual encouragement and growth, but can also be larger groups (a Sunday School class, home Bible study, or even a group of AWANA clubbers). We call them Iron Man teams since they seek to carry out the truth of Proverbs 27:17: "Iron sharpens iron; and a man sharpens the face of his friend."¹¹ This proverb teaches us that in relationships between people who love and fear God, as well as seek to live wisely, they sharpen each other just like an implement is sharpened to carry out its task effectively. Our task is to glorify, follow, love and serve our God (Deuteronomy 10:12-13; 1 Corinthians 10:31). So, men, women, boys, and girls who are in Iron man (or woman) teams, help each other grow and effectively carry out our calling.

These are also called Iron Man teams since they have three main areas of focus as we run the race of life (1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:7)—just like an Iron Man triathlete has three main events:

- (1) We seek to swim in the same waters with others. Proverbs 27:17 (see above). In other words, we realize God has not called us to be an island-to-ourselves or a Lone-ranger. We must seek to love and impact others—helping them know and grow in Christ (Matthew 22:39; Colossians 1:28). Usually, such relationships are beneficial to each person involved (Romans 1:12).
- (2) We help others ride into the kingdom of God. As we get involved in the lives of others, if they do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior, we seek to win them to Christ. This is the first part of the Great Commission Jesus gave to the Church: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). If a Christian is

¹¹ Author's own translation.

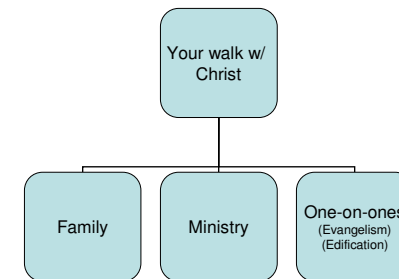
seeking to follow Christ faithfully, he/she will realize we are to be fishers of men (Mark 1:17) and will be praying for and regularly seeking to reach at least 1-2 people. (See CPR Evangelism above)

(3) We will help others run the marathon of growth. In the long race of life as a Christian, we are called to grow continually, to become more and more like Christ, to pursue holiness, to grow in His grace and knowledge (John 15:1-8; 17:17; Romans 13:14; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:22-24; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Peter 3:18). God has created us in such a way that this is best done with the help of others in a small enough group (1-2 other people is best) in which you can talk about how to apply the truth of God in your own situation. This is why the Church is called to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20; Colossians 1:28; 2 Timothy 2:2) and following the example of Jesus in the Gospels, the most effective way to do this is with small groups of people. This means that each of us need someone who can help sharpen us and we need to sharpen someone(s) else also. As we meet regularly with another Christian(s), one of the ways we can sharpen each other is to help each other be accountable to the Lord. Here is a good set of questions taken from Ephesians 6:10-18 you can use:

1. Have you sought to glorify God in all you do?
2. Have you sought to be strong in Christ and in the strength coming from His might—"preaching the gospel" to yourself daily and growing in your faith?
3. Have you been open and honest about where you are at in your walk with Christ? Have you examined your heart and life before God?
4. Have you sought to live a life in keeping with God's character and will? Have you exposed yourself to any sexually explicit material or allowed your mind to dwell upon sinful thoughts? Have you struggled with any other "habitual sins"?

5. Have you sought to do the gospel work of making disciples with anyone? Your family? A disciple? Are you engaging with anyone who is not a Christian? Are you being encouraged by anyone(s) else in a Bible Fellowship? How regularly do you sit under the preaching and teaching of God's Word?
6. Have you spent adequate time in the Scriptures? Have you sought to memorize Scripture?
7. Have you been praying regularly? Have you prayed regularly for your family? Your church? Other Christians? Your elders/pastors?

So, to sum up what our Christian life looks like in its simplest form, it is this:



We should nurture our own relationship with Christ by regular times of taking in God's Word, prayer, and worshipping Him. This walk is also best nurtured by regularly assembling together with the Church for teaching and encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25). Flowing out of this growth and relationship with Christ, we should live as iron men and women in relation to our family, 1-2 people with whom we are meeting to sharpen each other, and as we utilize our spiritual gifts in some ministry for God's glory and the benefit of the Church, as well as the public square (including work).

CONCLUSION

Now that you have completed Level Two of discipleship, the next step is to determine if you desire to continue meeting together. A good next step is to print out THE ONE YEAR BIBLE reading plan on the Resource Page of our web site and to read through the entire Bible. Meet together either weekly or twice a month to talk about your reading and how you are doing as Iron men and women in your family, in your area of service, and with others to God's Glory. You may also want to go through the *Evangelical Catechism* together. This is a great tool for learning basic Bible doctrine. You can find it under CATECHISM on the Articles page of our web site.

Once you complete reading through the Bible, you might want to choose a book or books to study together. You can choose something from the list under the Reading discussion above.