

# *The Studying Disciple*

Deepening Your Faith Through Bible Exploration



The **THIRD** in a Series of **6** Small Group Studies



**MDPC**

Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church





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- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.**
- 2 Introduce every group member** (10-15 minutes).

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

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

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

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

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

There are six 6-session courses designed for *The Equipped Disciple*, including this course you are starting now. The courses are, in order of when they'll be available:

- *The Growing Disciple* (February 2020)
- *The Witnessing Disciple* (April 2020)
- *The Studying Disciple* (August 2020)
- *The Giving Disciple* (October 2020)
- *The Praying Disciple* (February 2021)
- *The Serving Disciple* (April 2021)

Another multi-course series of small group curriculum, *The Maturing Disciple*, is scheduled to launch in 2022.

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

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

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

- Commit to attending consistently.
- Contribute to a group climate of mutual trust, respect, honesty, and vulnerability.
- Discuss willingly. This is not a lecture. Your input is vital!
- Prepare in advance for the upcoming group session, barring unexpected events. (If such events occur, come to the session anyway.)
- Write in this guide. (But remember, this is not a writing class. Brief notes may suffice.)

- Bring your Bible every time. Ordinarily, biblical passages won't be printed in the guide.
- Anticipate that the Holy Spirit will do something in you during this time of focus.

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

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

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

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

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

*According to the second part of Romans 12:2, what is the opposite of the conformity noted above? What is the eventual result at the end of Romans 12:2?*

*How does the "renewing of your mind" (NIV) noted in Romans 12:2 take place? How does Scripture play a prominent role?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You have great flexibility in how you schedule the passages from Galatians. For example, you may:

- Read a few verses each day.
- Read the first half of the assignment one day and the second half another day.
- Read the entire assignment at once.

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

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

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

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

*I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You.* (Psalm 119:11, ESV)

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

Our memory verses for this course are Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2. These verses neatly and effectively sum up the importance of Scripture for developing growing disciples. We'll memorize them from the NIV so we can help one another more easily from a shared translation:

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.* (Psalm 119:105, NIV)

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.* (Romans 12:2, NIV)

Some helpful hints for memorizing are:

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

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

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

Review the homework:

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

**8 Close the gathering in prayer.**

- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 minutes).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 1 and discuss (10 minutes).
- 4 Prepare and discuss as a group your notes and responses from three short videos on Biblical story and styles from “The Bible Project” (35 minutes).

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

Please watch three videos in the “[How to Read the Bible](#)” category. The three videos are titled, “How to Read the Bible: Biblical Story,” “How to Read the Bible: Biblical Styles,” and “How to Read the Bible: Jewish Meditation Literature.” Each video is about five minutes in length. You will find each video at The Bible Project’s website, [www.bibleproject.com](http://www.bibleproject.com), as well as information on the project’s goals, founders, and other resources. (On the home page, click the link at the top for “Videos,” then for “How to Read the Bible.” You will find them there. Also, you may find all three videos by searching on YouTube.)

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

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

*How does this overarching story help you understand, for example, the role the four Gospels play in the whole Bible? What are some other writings within the Bible that this overarching story enables you to see better their significance?*

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

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

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

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

*The videos note that often many Biblical books and passages combine two or all of the styles. What do you think is one example of this combination? What does it combine and how?*

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

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

**5 Divide into pairs and practice saying the memory verse without notes** (10 minutes).

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

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

Review the homework:

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

**7 Close the gathering in prayer.**



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 minutes).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 2 and discuss (10 minutes).
- 4 Prepare and discuss as a group the “Observe, Interpret, and Apply” method of study outlined below, using the questions provided (35 minutes).

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

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

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

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

*The classic questions “Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?” are often helpful in clarifying what’s going on in a Biblical passage. But some find them tedious. What reasons come to mind that we should not skip these questions and move on too quickly?*

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

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

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

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

**5 Divide into pairs and practice saying the memory verse without notes** (10 minutes).

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

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

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the “Observe, Interpret, Apply” study on Luke 5:17-26 in “Session 4: Studying the Bible’s Narrative” and be ready to share.
- Read Galatians 3-4 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Work on memorizing Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2 (NIV) and be prepared to practice with a partner at the next session.

**7 Close the gathering in prayer.**



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 minutes).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 3-4 and discuss (10 minutes).
- 4 Prepare and discuss as a group one example of a Biblical narrative, Luke 5:17-26 (20 minutes).

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

*What are some signs that Luke 5:17-26 is a narrative? How does narrative differ from poetry and discourse? How does recognizing this style aid you as you begin your study?*

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

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

*What are other passages that explain and expand upon what Luke 5:17-26 means? How do they do so? Briefly detail two of them below.*

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

*Describe how your application of Luke 5:17-26 is based upon your observation and interpretation of Luke 5:17-26. Why is this connection between observation, interpretation, and application so crucial to Bible study?*

**5 Divide into pairs and practice saying the memory verse without notes** (10 minutes).

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

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

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the “Observe, Interpret, Apply” study on Psalm 51 in “Session 5: Studying the Bible’s Poetry” and be ready to share.
- Read Galatians 5 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Work on memorizing Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2 (NIV) and be prepared to practice with a partner at the next session.

**7 Close the gathering in prayer.**



- 1 **Welcome everyone and open with prayer.**
- 2 **Greet and “check in” with group members** (5 minutes).
- 3 **Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 5 and discuss** (10 minutes).
- 4 **Prepare and discuss as a group one example of a Biblical poem or song, Psalm 51** (35 minutes).

Read Psalm 51 in a Bible translation of your choice, then respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, read aloud Psalm 51. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss your answers with one another.

*What are some indications that Psalm 51 is a poem or song? How do you read and hear poetry differently than either narrative or discourse? How does acknowledging this difference help you as you study?*

*Write down your observations about Psalm 51, based on the “Observe” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. What does this passage say?*

*Unlike most Biblical poems or songs, we know the “back story” on Psalm 51. Please read it in 2 Samuel 11:1–12:25. How does knowing this back story help us in understanding Psalm 51? How does Psalm 51 expand from its particular setting and address universal themes and needs?*

*Write down your interpretation of Psalm 51, based on the “Interpret” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. What does this passage mean and why?*

*Write down your application of Psalm 51, based on the “Apply” section of the essay on p. 9 of this guide. How does God want you to respond?*

*An ongoing problem for Bible study is to run out of energy when it comes to applying a passage and instead to focus solely on observing and interpreting it. Why is application so vital to growth?*

**5 Divide into pairs and practice saying the memory verse without notes** (10 minutes).

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

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

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the “Observe, Interpret, Apply” study on Romans 5:1-11 in “Session 6: Studying the Bible’s Discourse” and be ready to share.
- Read Galatians 6 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Finish memorizing Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:2 (NIV) and be prepared to practice with a partner at the next session.

**7 Close the gathering in prayer.**



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 minutes).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Galatians 6 and discuss (10 minutes).
- 4 Prepare and discuss as a group one example of a Biblical discourse, Romans 5:1-11 (35 minutes).

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

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

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

*Discourse depends upon a logical flow or structure that serves, in one real sense, as its plot. What is Paul's flow or structure in Romans 5:1-11? How does Paul make his case?*

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

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

*Often a major obstacle to applying a Biblical passage is the emotional response to what it advocates. Does Paul’s argument in Romans 5:1-11 convince you of the meaningfulness of suffering? If so, how? If not, why not? How will you seek to apply the difficult teaching about this problematic subject?*

**5 Divide into pairs and practice saying the memory verse without notes** (10 minutes).

(NOTE: If you are meeting via Zoom, your host will need to set up the “breakout room” feature.) If you have not memorized these verses yet, do what you’re able. Continue to work on Psalm 119:105 and Romans 12:1-2 (NIV) in your ongoing practice of Christian spiritual disciplines.

**6 As you close in prayer, share at least one benefit you have experienced from participating in *The Studying Disciple*. Share your prayer praises and requests as you continue your Christian growth. Give thanks to God for His grace and encouragement** (10 minutes).

## Reading Response Forms for Galatians

### **For Session 2** • Chapter 1

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

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

### **For Session 3** • Chapter 2

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

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

### **For Session 4** • Chapters 3 and 4

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

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

### **For Session 5** • Chapter 5

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

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

### **For Session 6** • Chapter 6

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

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





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