



A renew.org resource

STARTING A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP

A LEADER'S GUIDE

FOR USING

REAL LIFE THEOLOGY BOOKS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! There is no greater mission in life than to make disciples of King Jesus. We are so glad you picked up this guide to help you in some of the practical steps of leading a discipleship group.

This is a guide that explains how to set up a discipleship group and thrive as a group. Although the information here can be helpful in numerous contexts, it is specifically designed as a guide in how to use the short books in the Real Life Theology series. There are twelve core books in this series and they have been strategically designed for use in a discipleship group.

This booklet can be useful as a guide for everyone that has been invited into your discipleship group. In the ideal, you will review the first part of this booklet all together as a group at your first meeting. This will allow everyone in the group to see clearly how the group will function as you agree upon the meeting times, places, expectations, etc. This guide will lead you in forming a group agreement, learning each other's spiritual biographies, and asking constructive questions, as well as understanding the nature of the theology books in the series.

The goal of a discipleship group is to establish authentic disciples whose minds are informed, hearts are enflamed, and hands are activated by the gospel of King Jesus.

We want people to become disciples or grow stronger as disciples with rock-solid convictions and Christ-formed character. In each meeting, you will look at what God desires everyday disciples to learn, to trust, and to follow.

**For King Jesus,
Dr. Bobby Harrington**

Point Leader, Renew.org and Discipleship.org

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SEVEN STEPS TO START A GROUP

1. PRAY TO THE LORD ABOUT THE GROUP.

The first step is to ask God to show who would be good to be in the group. We recommend that you fast and pray about the group composition before you start the group.

2. MAKE THE GROUP SMALL AND GENDER-BASED.

Ideally, you will start with two-to-four other people of the same gender in your meeting. Do not go beyond five people. After first explaining to everyone what will be involved, be prepared to ask people to make a commitment. The group covenant (agreement) provided will help make expectations clear.

3. MEET WEEKLY.

We recommend that you meet weekly in a relational place, such as a home or in a coffee shop. We recommend you start by getting to know one another's backgrounds by completing a spiritual biography exercise described below. This will mean that your group will need to devote one week for each person's biography and then start working through the books you select.

4. LIFE-ON-LIFE.

We cannot state strongly enough that the goal is to cover this material in a life-on-life context, as opposed to solely an educational one. The format is designed for open, honest sharing together. Please don't skip over the seven rhythms below. The leaders should set the example of transparency, relationships, and ongoing personal engagement. Pray for each other, text each other, and talk often. We want to follow and be like Jesus, who invited those he was discipling into a relationship with him that encompassed all of life. That is why, as the covenant shows, we strongly encourage you to agree to eat together, rest together, and serve others together.

5. READ THE CHAPTER AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BEFORE EACH MEETING.

The ideal format of the study is for people to read the material before the meetings so that you can discuss your answers to the questions. If you do not read the material before you meet, plan on at least an hour and a half for your meeting time. You will then spend the first fifteen to twenty minutes reading the chapter before answering the questions.

6. PLAN TO MEET FOR ONE YEAR AND THEN TO MULTIPLY.

Discipling relationships should lead participants to multiplication, as we each follow the great commission to make new disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). Ideally, after one year, one half of the people in the group will start a new group and multiply the mission Jesus gave to us.

7. MAKE A GROUP COVENANT UPFRONT.

The best way to have a fruitful group experience is to agree upon a group covenant upfront for everyone who will be in the group. Again, we have provided a group covenant that has been widely and effectively used.

We hope and pray that this booklet will help guide you to create discipleship groups in which you and others grow in your trust in Jesus and your commitment to follow him.

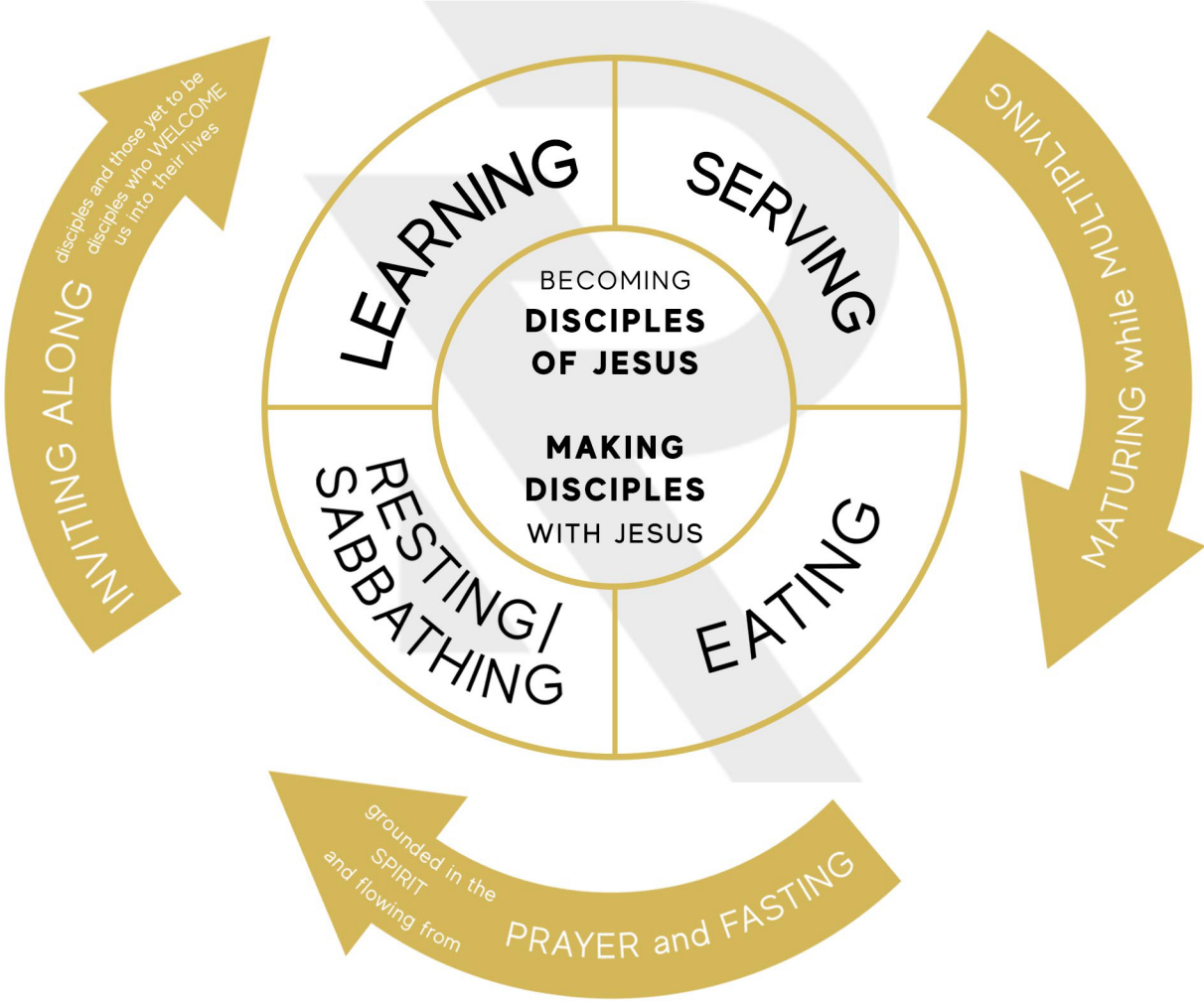
If you have any questions, contact info@renew.org to get help.

SEVEN RHYTHMS FOR THE GROUP

Many forms of disciple making are information-driven and delivered through church programs. We are grateful for the ways these programs can help people, but we think they are often limited in their effectiveness.

When we look at the life of Jesus, his disciple-making rhythms involved all of life. Where possible, we seek to emulate his approach. This means your group will include more than just learning together, it will also include eating together, serving together, sabbathing/resting together, etc...

If we diagrammed it, it would look something like this image:



CREATED BY JASON C. DUKES WITH BOBBY HARRINGTON

Disciple-making relationships endure over the course of these rhythms.

Ideally, these groups will include a diverse group of individuals, from not yet believing to newly believing, to mature believers. The discipleship process is one of inviting along others into the family of believers, not circling the wagons and keeping unbelievers out. When discipleship is mainly an educational experience for believers, the result is stagnancy. True spiritual maturity happens while multiplying. Forming a discipleship group should include pairing up with several other believers and not-yet-believers.

Jason Dukes wrote a very helpful book several years ago called *Inviting Along* ([see the free ebook at discipleship.org](http://discipleship.org)). He showed that making disciples is learning and living the ways of Jesus together as believers in the context of relationship, while inviting along with us those who have yet to believe.

In our discipleship group, we want to shift our disciple-making efforts from “inviting to” toward “inviting along” if we hope to make disciples as Jesus intended us to make them.

As depicted in the graphic above, Jesus modeled seven recurring, relational rhythms in his disciple-making efforts with the twelve men he invited along. Jesus made disciples who make disciples:

1. Grounded in and flowing from **FASTING** and **PRAYING** in relationship with his heavenly Father.
2. Actively loving people and **INVITING ALONG** those who **WELCOMED** him into their lives to love others together.
3. **SERVING** with those he invited along.
4. **EATING** and debriefing with those he invited along.
5. **RESTING/SABBATHING** and retreating and resting with those he invited along.
6. **LEARNING** and living the gospel of his kingdom with those he invited along in all of these relational rhythms.
7. **MATURING** them **WHILE MULTIPLYING** with Jesus to one day send them off to make disciple-makers too.

These groups can be great places for non-believers to learn about Jesus.

I recently led a group, and here is how we applied the seven rhythms. We live in a white collar community where everyone is very busy. But we worked hard to carve out time for the group because it is so important. We utilized the seven rhythms for our group as agreed upon in our group covenant. Here is a summary of what we agreed to follow.

1. Prayer and Fasting – We started our group when my apprentice joined me in prayer and fasting about whom we should invite into the group. Then, once the group started, we sought to regularly pray and fast about the group.

2. Inviting Along – We intentionally invited people to join our group, including a Muslim who does not yet believe in Jesus. These groups can be great places for non-believers study Jesus, especially if they know in advance what the commitment entails (see the group covenant below).

3. Learning – Three times a month, we made a commitment to study God’s Word together, by studying one of the books.

4. Sabbathing/Resting – Once a quarter (every third month) we made a commitment to just “chill together,” and not do anything that required effort.

5. Eating – Once a quarter (every third month), we ate together and shared our lives over a meal.

6. Serving – Once a quarter (every third month), we served others in need as a group.

7. Multiply while Maturing – My group lasted for a little over one year, and then we multiplied into three groups, which is more new groups at once than I would normally recommend. There are some people we want to journey with over a two-to-three year period, so we will often send out two or three people to start a new group, while the other two or three (including the leader) stay together for another year (or two).

I found these rhythms to be excellent for our group. In the ideal, we will meet relationally even more often than the minimum commitment I have just described. But these rhythms kept us intentional and helped us to provide balanced discipleship, as we looked to Jesus as our model.

As you look through the provided group covenant, you will see that there is flexibility built into the format (e.g., the blanks), but please keep in mind the importance of each of the seven rhythms so that no important element of a discipleship group is shortchanged in the process.

THE DISCIPLESHIP GROUP COVENANT (AGREEMENT)

We want to base the group on our shared commitment.

We will seek to agree on the following:

1. It is my desire to engage this group and seek to grow in my understanding of Jesus and what it means to trust and follow him (even if I am not a Christian and do not plan to become one).

2. To help us in our discipleship group, we will seek to follow rhythms each month/quarter.

- We will share biographies and then learn/process the material together _____ times a month. (we recommend 3 times a month)
- We will eat together _____ times a _____. (month or quarter)
- We will serve those in need _____ times a _____. (month or quarter)
- We will rest (sabbath) together _____ times a _____. (month or quarter)

When we meet to learn/process the material together, we will meet at _____ (location). We will meet from _____ to _____ (time). We commit to start on time and end on time.

3. I commit to attending every meeting/gathering, to be there on time, and where applicable, I will have my preparation work done. No exceptions, unless *provisionally* hindered. I understand and agree that I will have to say “no” to important things in order to meet this commitment, and I am willing to do so.

4. I will stay with the group and “finish the course.” I understand that my leader and the group will make a significant investment in me. We commit to be in the group for _____ months (typically a school year or twelve months).

5. I understand that this process is based upon Scripture and Jesus Christ. I will seek to be open about myself and my relationship with God, for learning and growing in my understanding.

6. I commit to total confidentiality. What is said in the group stays in the group. I will not share with others what is said confidentially in the group without permission (even with my spouse).

7. In the last month of our group commitment (typically the end of the school year or twelve months), I will prayerfully consider multiplying, by helping to launch a new group so that I can actively engage in Jesus’ disciple making commandment (Matthew 28:19-20).

Group Member’s Name

Signature

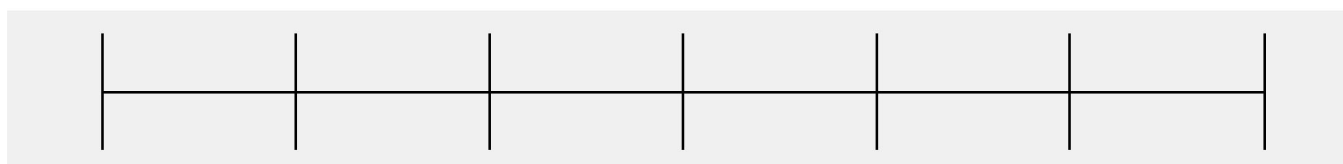
Leader’s Name

Signature

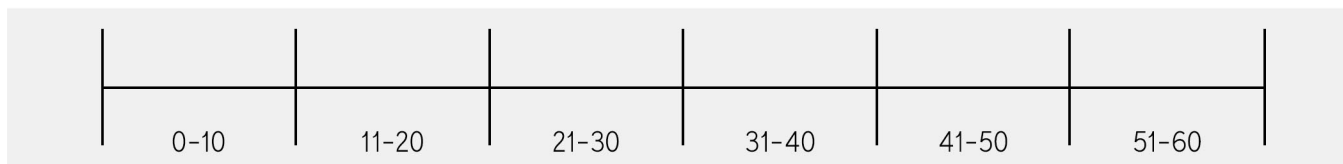
SHARING OUR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL BIOGRAPHIES.¹

Many Christians have given their testimonies of becoming a Christian at some time or another. It's often fashioned after Paul's talk to King Agrippa where Paul described his life before Christ, how he came to Christ, and then what his life had been like since. Such a testimony is nice and neat and helpful for some contexts, such as within a presentation. Yet transparent relationships require more. We want to ask you to share your whole story so we can start at a deeper and more transparent place. Such a spiritual biography will include the positives, the negatives. To be honest about the good, the bad, and the ugly, you need a different way to approach telling your story. The following is a helpful guide for sharing your spiritual biographies. The group leader will go first and set the example (especially with true transparency), using this outline:

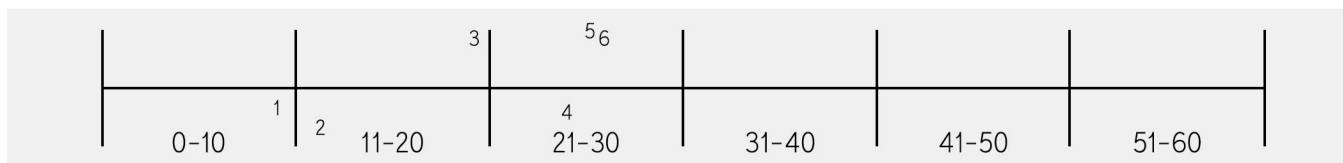
Divide into decades – Draw a line on a piece of paper and divide that line into sections, creating one section for each decade of your life. We'll call it your "lifeline." It might look like this:



Each section represents a decade. Assigning numbers, it goes...



Now, if you are a believer, ask God to remind you of critical events, turning points, moments of truth, disasters, failures, victories. These are the *really important life-shaping events that happened in each of these decades*. If you are not a believer, do the same thing, as best as you can. Put a number on the scale to mark your age when it happened. Put it above the line if it was a positive event for your spiritual growth, and put it below the line if it was a negative one. Your graph and notes might start looking something like this:



Corresponding with the numbers on the chart,
these could be sample notes on our example lifeline:

1. My dad abandoned our family.
2. My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer.
3. I met Mary, my future wife.
4. Mary left me.
5. I made the decision to explore what it meant to trust and follow Jesus.
6. I was baptized.

Now take a few minutes and complete your "highs" and "lows" on your lifeline with a brief note on what happened to make it a significant event. If you end up with more than 12-15 points, strike through any that are not absolutely essential to your faith journey..

¹ This material was developed by Radical Mentoring and is edited and used by Bobby Harrington with Regi Campbell's explicit permission.



THE GOD PART...

Beside each of your notes, jot down where God, as you understand him, was in each of these moments. Be completely honest. On the positive ones, did you see his hand at the time? When did you begin to see God as real or not? How was God guiding you, blessing you, and protecting you in these positive events? If you still have trouble seeing God in one (or more) of them, say so. On the negative ones, those below the line, what did God teach you? How did he redeem the situation for his glory? It may be easier to be honest on the positive events, but make sure to make honest notes about the negative events too; your group will pay more attention to how you got through the down times than they will to your victories. Here's how notes might look for the example above...

EVENT

1. My dad abandoned our family.

2. My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer.

3. I met Mary, my future wife.

4. Mary left me.

5. I surrendered my life to Jesus.

6. I committed to church.

GOD

1. I didn't know God then. I felt alone and abandoned. Unloved.

2. I thought, "If there is a God, how could he be good?" I turned away in anger and unbelief.

3. Mary was a Christian. I loved her instantly so I "paused" my unbelief and started acting like I believed, especially around her.

4. After 12 years of marriage, Mary had enough. She wanted the husband she thought she married in the beginning... the one who wasn't criticizing her all the time. I was shocked and devastated.

5. Mary's leaving forced me to look at myself in the mirror, and I didn't like what I saw. I knew God had been working on me, but I was too stubborn and pigheaded to listen. I was humbled. I dropped to my knees and asked him to forgive me. I asked him to change me. I was baptized, and I started to worship and pray and study his Word. My thoughts slowly became more like his.

6. As I've become more and more aware of his presence in my life, I wanted to go all in with my faith. I attended the church's membership course and made a commitment to a local church. God used that day to warm Mary's heart toward me. We got back together and...

DO YOU GET THE PICTURE? You are telling your group where you were, the role God played (or didn't play) in your life, what happened next, and you are allowing them to see the journey you've been on.

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Our goal as we tell our stories is to share our thoughts and let people know us. Where possible, we also want to bring God the glory, seeing his hand and giving him glory for the "above the line" moments. But maybe even more importantly, we're telling how God showed up in the bad and worked it for good. How he redeemed it.

Here's Where I Am Today. You will close your spiritual biography by explaining where you are today spiritually. The "Here's where I am today" close happens once you've identified your positive and negative moments. After you've added the God part to them, you'll end with a statement of where you are *right now*. Again, this requires you to tell the truth.

Examples:

"I've gotten involved in this discipleship thing and I'm scared to death. I don't feel worthy. I'm not sure what I have to give, but I'm in and I want God to use me in the best way possible."

or

"I've been a faithful student of the Bible for years. But telling my personal stuff to you guys feels very awkward and uncomfortable. I trust my leader and God that they're leading me right. I'll be praying a bunch as I step into this role of mentor. Please pray for me and let me know how I can be better at it."

or

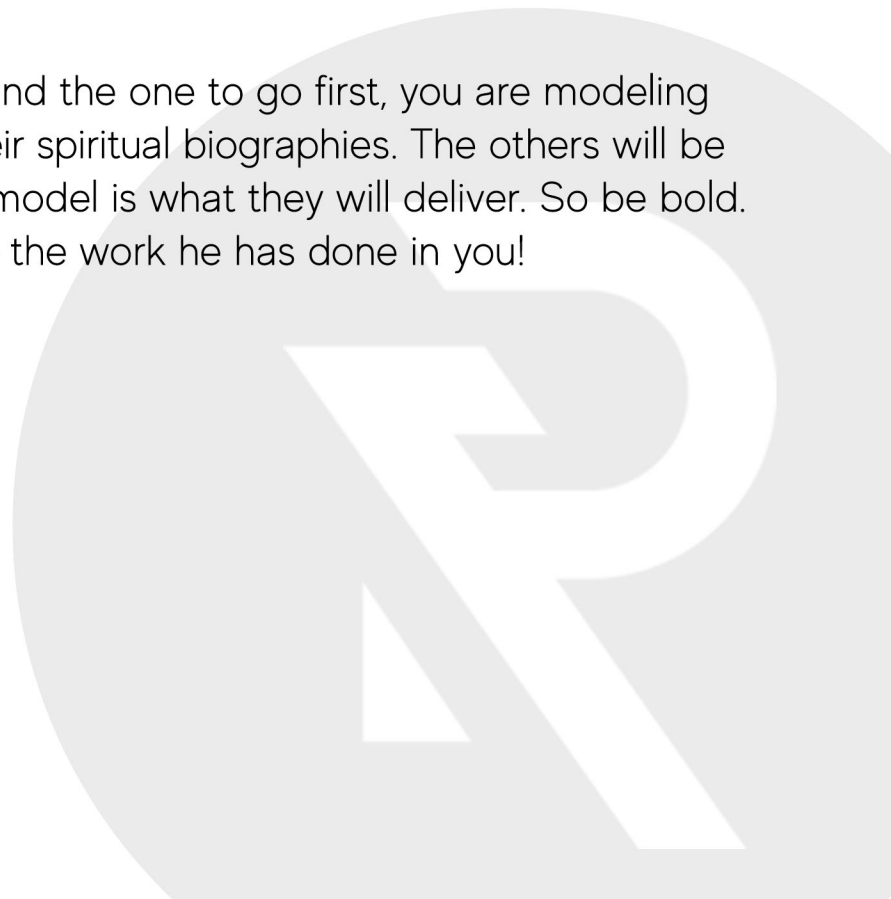
"I've grown in my faith but not as much as I wish I had. It's going to be a challenge to do this much reading, but I love Jesus and I'm willing to be a faithful follower and give it my best shot."

or

"I don't really believe in God or a divine Jesus, but I'm curious to learn more about the Christian faith and in what it might look like to follow Jesus' teachings in some areas of my life."

GET THE PICTURE? It's about being real. Transparent and vulnerable. The worst people in a disciple-making group try to keep up appearances, maintaining squeaky-clean "Sunday school" personas at the expense of being real. In our best moments, we want people who will tell us the truth, and, if you are the leader, *you will set the tone and the trajectory for others of your group by how transparently you tell your story and how much of your life you've surrendered to Him.*

Remember, if you are the leader, and the one to go first, you are modeling for everyone else how to share their spiritual biographies. The others will be telling their stories too. What you model is what they will deliver. So be bold. Be brave. Tell it all so they can see the work he has done in you!



USING THE *REAL LIFE THEOLOGY* BOOKS

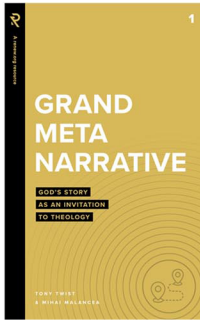
We are so grateful that you are interested in discipling people in solid theology. We have put together the *Real Life Theology* series to be accessible for the everyday Christian or seeker. The point of the Real Life Theology books is to fuel effective and faithful disciple making, and the individual books are ideal for discipling people in important areas of theology, such as the Bible, Christian convictions, the Holy Spirit, and the gospel.

Each of the core books in the *Real Life Theology* series have questions at the end of each chapter for a discipleship group. These questions were framed by a woman in the Renew.org community skilled in leading life-changing groups.

You will read the description of each book below. Here are four keys to utilizing each book:

1. Make sure each person has a copy of the book. You can purchase them all on Amazon.com or you can have the people in your group get them individually from Amazon.com. Both print and Kindle versions are available for purchase. For a discount on bulk orders, email info@renew.org
2. Ask each person to read the short chapter before the group meeting. The chapter is the size of blog, so it should not take too much time.
3. You can have people fill in their answers to the questions before the group or just answer them live during the group. Some people, especially introverts, tend to want to think through the questions ahead of time and fill in answers before the group. Either way is fine. If you would rather not use the questions at the end of each chapter, please feel free each week to use the standard questions listed in the next section ("**5 Discipleship Group Questions**").
4. If the group decides to read the chapter live, during the meeting (and not read it ahead of time), please add 15 to 20 minutes to the group meeting time. This will give you time to read the chapter aloud at the beginning of the group and then move on to the discussion questions.

Here are descriptions of each of the core *Real Life Theology* books:



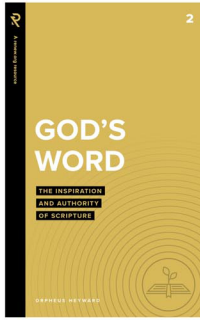
Grand Metanarrative: God's Story as an Invitation to Theology (Real Life Theology #1)

Authors: Tony Twist and Mihai Malancea

Pages: 96

Description: Good theology starts with what God has revealed, and he has revealed himself in a “grand metanarrative.” From this “story of stories,” we learn who God is, where we came from, who we are, and where we are going. Let Tony Twist and Mihai Malancea guide you step-by-step through the grand story God has given us and into which he invites us.

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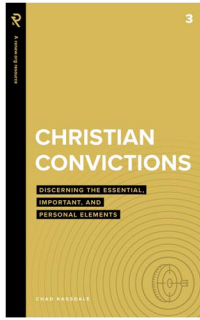
God's Word: The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture (Real Life Theology #2)

Author: Orpheus J. Heyward

Pages: 140

Description: What is the Bible? Why do Christians take it so seriously? What tools can we use to understand this ancient collection of historical writings, letters, poems, and more? God's Word teaches the major sections of the Bible, how we received the Bible, how to interpret it accurately, and why we should view it as our final authority.

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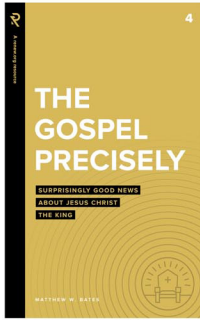
Christian Convictions: Discerning the Essential, Important, and Personal Elements (Real Life Theology #3)

Author: Chad Ragsdale

Pages: 102

Description: If the Bible's teachings were a target, which teachings would be at its bullseye? And what elements of faith are non-essential matters of personal preference? What elements are not essential—but still important to living a life faithful to Jesus? Christian Convictions guides the reader into a discerning faith that majors in the majors.

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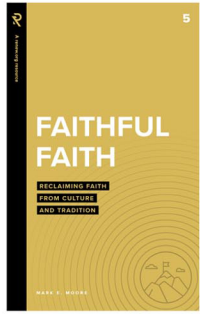
The Gospel Precisely: Surprisingly Good News about Jesus Christ the King (Real Life Theology #4)

Author: Matthew W. Bates

Pages: 124

Description: King Jesus is supplying lifeblood. But our insufficient grasp of the gospel is a dangerous blockage. Award-winning author Matthew Bates shows that the gospel is about King Jesus. It is about the cross and resurrection—yet surprisingly much more. Find yourself empowered for discipleship and prepared to share the gospel effectively.

[AVAILABLE ON AMAZON](#)



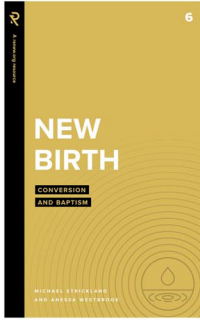
Faithful Faith: Reclaiming Faith from Culture and Tradition (Real Life Theology #5)

Author: Mark E. Moore

Pages: 106

Description: What is faith according to Scripture? Why is faith so fundamental to our salvation? And what is our faith worth when severed from the way we live? In Faithful Faith, Mark E. Moore takes the reader on a tour of biblical faith, demonstrating how—unlike many cultural and incomplete views of faith—the real thing is transformative.

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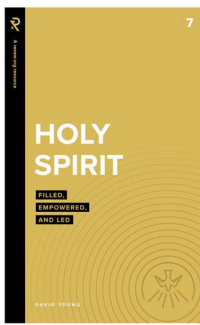
New Birth: Conversion and Baptism (Real Life Theology #6)

Authors: Michael Strickland and Anessa Westbrook

Pages: 120

Description: Why do we need a spiritual “new birth”? How is it even possible? In New Birth, Strickland and Westbrook walk through our need for a new birth and the way to be born again, according to Jesus. What is the point of baptism? Why do we need to repent? This book guides readers to know what the Bible teaches about the why and how of being born again.

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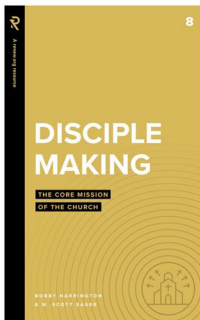
Holy Spirit: Filled, Empowered, and Led (Real Life Theology #7)

Author: David Young

Pages: 124

Description: Many would rather study about the Holy Spirit than experience him. In Holy Spirit, David Young encourages the reader to choose the adventure over the classroom. He walks through key questions such as “What is a spirit?” and “What does it mean for the Holy Spirit to live within us?” Yet the end goal of this exploration goes beyond mere insights to being an invitation to a transformative way of life.

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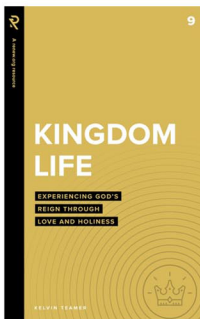
Disciple Making: The Core Mission of the Church (Real Life Theology #8)

Authors: Bobby Harrington and Scott Sager

Pages: 132

Description: Many churches today are producing church attenders, but Jesus called us to produce—and reproduce—disciple makers. In Disciple Making, Harrington and Sager make the scriptural case for disciple making as the church’s core mission. They define what it means to be a disciple and articulate the results among churches who shift toward cultivating a disciple making culture.

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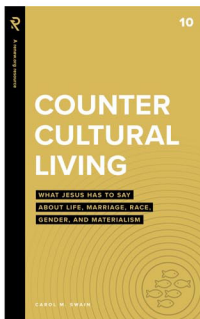
Kingdom Life: Experiencing God's Reign through Love and Holiness (Real Life Theology #9)

Author: Kelvin Teamer

Pages: 110

Description: Not everyone was excited about Jesus’ good news of the kingdom. Yet for people who hunger and thirst for righteousness, a kingdom defined by love and holiness easily outshines kingdoms characterized by selfishness and moral decay. In Kingdom Life, Kelvin Teamer describes life under King Jesus and invites you to embrace Jesus’ reign as the true satisfaction of your longings.

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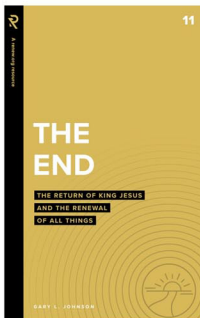
Countercultural Living: What Jesus Has to Say About Life, Marriage, Race, Gender, and Materialism (Real Life Theology #10)

Author: Carol M. Swain

Pages: 134

Description: When it comes to core worldview topics such as human life, marriage, and race, should it be Christ or culture that decides our convictions? Can we really find intelligent answers to contemporary quandaries in the ancient teachings of Jesus? In Countercultural Living, Carol M. Swain confronts cultural consensus with the countercultural and surprisingly compelling teachings of Jesus.

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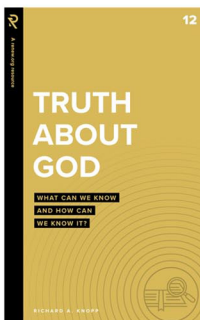
The End: The Return of King Jesus and the Renewal of All Things (Real Life Theology #11)

Author: Gary L. Johnson

Pages: 110

Description: When it comes to “the end,” God did does not abandon us to abstract speculations or anxious suspense. His Word included clarity and urgency regarding what happens after an individual’s death, as well as after the end of history itself. In The End, Gary Johnson explores what the Bible teaches about Jesus’ second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, eternal punishment, and the new heaven and new earth.

[AVAILABLE ON AMAZON](#)



Truth about God: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It? (Real Life Theology #12)

Author: Richard A. Knopp

Pages: 164

Description: Whether you’re a believer in God or a skeptic of his existence, you want your beliefs to rest on a solid foundation of truth. Truth About God shows surprisingly strong evidence that God exists and explains what he is like. What can we know about God? Can we have confidence about our beliefs even when we do not have 100 percent certainty about them? As Truth About God explains, we are not left in the dark about God.

[AVAILABLE ON AMAZON](#)

5 DISCIPLESHIP GROUP QUESTIONS ²

1. HOPE - Where have you seen God at work in the last week?

2. HEAD - What does this book chapter or section of Scripture teach us about God or people?

What did you like about what you read?

What did you find difficult about what you read?

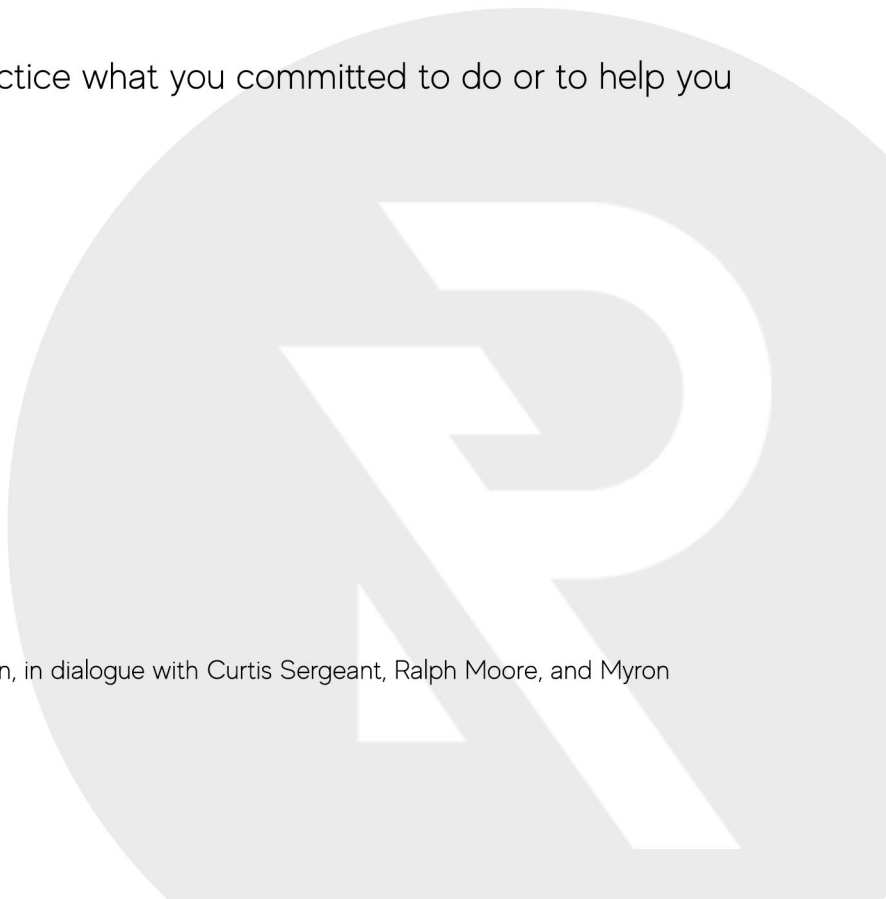
Summarize what you learned in two words

3. HEART - What are you intuitively sensing in your heart that God wants you to do as you think about what you read?

4. HANDS - How will you obey God's prompting and/or share the hope of Jesus this week?

5. HELP - How can we help you to practice what you committed to do or to help you in another way this week?

² These questions were developed by Bobby Harrington, in dialogue with Curtis Sergeant, Ralph Moore, and Myron Pierce.



THE DISCIPLESHIP GROUP COVENANT (AGREEMENT)

We want to base the group on our shared commitment.

We will seek to agree on the following:

1. It is my desire to engage this group and seek to grow in my understanding of Jesus and what it means to trust and follow him (even if I am not a Christian and do not plan to become one).

2. To help us in our discipleship group, we will seek to follow rhythms each month/quarter.

- We will share biographies and then learn/process the material together _____ times a month. (we recommend 3 times a month)
- We will eat together _____ times a _____. (month or quarter)
- We will serve those in need _____ times a _____. (month or quarter)
- We will rest (sabbath) together _____ times a _____. (month or quarter)

When we meet to learn/process the material together, we will meet at _____ (location). We will meet from _____ to _____ (time). We commit to start on time and end on time.

3. I commit to attending every meeting/gathering, to be there on time, and where applicable, I will have my preparation work done. No exceptions, unless *provisionally* hindered. I understand and agree that I will have to say “no” to important things in order to meet this commitment, and I am willing to do so.

4. I will stay with the group and “finish the course.” I understand that my leader and the group will make a significant investment in me. We commit to be in the group for _____ months (typically a school year or twelve months).

5. I understand that this process is based upon Scripture and Jesus Christ. I will seek to be open about myself and my relationship with God, for learning and growing in my understanding.

6. I commit to total confidentiality. What is said in the group stays in the group. I will not share with others what is said confidentially in the group without permission (even with my spouse).

7. In the last month of our group commitment (typically the end of the school year or twelve months), I will prayerfully consider multiplying, by helping to launch a new group so that I can actively engage in Jesus’ disciple making commandment (Matthew 28:19-20).

Group Member’s Name

Signature

Leader’s Name

Signature



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