



SMALL GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE



good
shepherd

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Vital Signs Pre- Series Survey

The following questions were distributed to the congregation in advance of the series, so you may be familiar with the questions. They are included here as a reference.

Consider each definition and your personal response to it based on the following options:

- 1) I feel strong and competent in this area.
- 2) I'm doing ok here but I need to be more consistent.
- 3) I'd really appreciate more coaching and development in this area.
- 4) I don't really understand what this looks like in practice.

Connect means we are involved in a small spiritual community where deep relationships are being developed for the purpose of knowing and being known, loving and being loved, encouragement, challenge and growth.

Serve involves discovering our spiritual gifts and deploying them to serve others. We become part of a ministry team to serve the church and the Kingdom. We learn how to serve and lead within the body of Christ and find where God is calling us to be on mission with him.

Abide means that we admit our need for Christ and the salvation he offers. It requires us to be open to learning and growth, allowing his Word to fill our minds and direct our actions. It requires regular prayer, worship and devotional study of the Word of God to grow into our full, created potential.

Worship means that we desire to praise God in spirit and truth. We participate in regular corporate (church) worship within the body of Christ. Celebration, prayer, confession, word, sacrament, offering together in community. Submission to Jesus' command to "love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength."

Invest is understanding the concept of Biblical stewardship of time, money, possessions, spiritual gifts, and other resources. We recognize that everything we have is a gift from God and we invest generously for God's purposes in the world.

Reach indicates we are seeking out people in our everyday lives who are not in a relationship with Jesus. This requires a willingness to pray for others, to meet people "where they are" without judgment, and to share our faith. It means we ourselves need to grow in our knowledge of our faith and of the world to which we are called.

Impact means being a good citizen of the kingdom of heaven and bringing that perspective to bear on the world in which God has placed you. It involves seeing all of your life - your work, your relationships, your world view - through the lens of being on mission with Christ. We make a deliberate effort to learn more about world needs and problems as well as developing solutions.

Session 1: *Connect* - Developing friendships with other Christians who meet to pray, study Scripture, and serve.

Good News:

God has made us for relationships and life in the beloved community. We are uniquely created at a neuro-biological level for intimacy, trust, conversation, communion, confession, support, encouragement, and service in community with other human beings. We experience spiritual transformation when we live out our lives in close proximity to other uniquely called and gifted people. We need to love and be loved!

Scripture Passage: *Ruth 1-4*

The story of Ruth reminds us that connecting with others and being surrounded by those who can provide comfort, security, and support is very crucial.

What stage are you in?

- **Crawling:** You are interested in a small group, but don't know where to start. Perhaps, you may have some fears or barriers in the way. Fill out a connect card today in service to simply learn more about small groups. Meet one on one with a pastor or staff member to discuss some of your fears and experiences. Pick the group that works best for your schedule, even if you can't make it every week.
- **Walking:** Make small group a priority in your schedule and make a commitment to attend weekly. Be ready to say no to anything else that tries to distract you from coming. Engage in community by sharing your insights and prayer requests.
- **Running:** Help others connect in a small group community by inviting or by stepping up to lead a small group. Pray for the Lord to put someone on your heart to mentor and train as a future small group leader.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you find inspiring about the story Ruth? What good news did Ruth discover about God, relationships, and community?
2. Describe a time when somebody helped you through a difficult time.
3. What made it inconvenient for Ruth to stay with Naomi and what adjustments did she make? In what ways does your current schedule make it difficult for you to connect in Christian community? What adjustments could you make to create more space for connection?

4. What fears and risks did Naomi have to overcome in order to stay with Naomi, to glean in the fields of Boaz? A key way to experience Christian community is through being in a small group that meets regularly to pray, Study Scripture, and serve. What were some barriers or fears that previously kept you from coming to small group? How did you overcome those barriers?

5. Name some of the characters in the story of Ruth and the positive impact they had by being in relationships with others. If you've been in a small group before, what positive impact did it have in your life? How would you encourage someone who is considering small groups?

6. Naomi needed Ruth. Who are two or three people you know that could benefit from being in a small group? Is there anyone in our small group that you think that may be a good small group leader?

Reflect:

Utilize the following questions either in smaller breakout groups or individually.

1. Where are you in regards to Connect? Are you crawling, walking, or running?

2. What do you feel are the greatest barriers/fears in the way of you taking your next step?

3. What are 1-2 action steps you can take to grow in your faith journey? Who can walk alongside you to encourage and support you during this time?

Session 2: **Serve** - *Serving God within the Church and beyond the Church*

Good News:

As part of God's divine plan for his kingdom, he calls us all into mission with him. He gave each of us a unique set of spiritual gifts for building up, serving, and blessing the people of God. We weren't put on Earth just to live for ourselves, we're here to make the world a better place. How we do that will be different for everybody but rest assured, you were created for a purpose. When we serve God, we are doing what we were designed to do. Since we were made to bring glory to God, our acts of service can feel deeply satisfying.

Scripture Passage: **Ephesians 4:1-13**

God has graciously given each of us gifts with which we can serve. While we may serve in different roles, we are all called to help build up the body of Christ and help others know the saving love of Jesus.

What stage are you in?

- **Crawling:** You're not sure what your particular gifts are. If this is you, take a [spiritual gifts assessment](#) to find out. There are many good ones online. Or maybe you know exactly what you're good at but you're not sure how that can be useful to God's kingdom. Reach out to a ministry leader and ask how you can get involved.
- **Walking:** You have in mind a perfect place to use your gifts but you just don't have enough margin in your life for one more thing. There's no shortcut here. You won't "find" the time, you'll have to make the time. But once you get to experience using your gifts to meet a need, it will be so rewarding. Determine a way you can serve and get involved.
- **Running:** Your strengths and gifts are being used and you are living on mission. Well done, good and faithful servant! One action step here is to remember to take breaks (sabbath rest) so you don't burn out. Also, it is important to bring others along with you. Pay attention to the gifts of others and invite people to serve alongside you. Mentor the potential in others and make space for them to serve.

Discussion Questions:

1. How has another person made an impact in your life by serving *you*?
2. In our passage from Ephesians we learn that God has given all of us gifts to serve others and build up his Church. Read the following passages: 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. What kind of gifts are mentioned? What gifts do you think God has given you to serve others?

3. How does that make you feel to know you were created for a purpose, to make the world a better place in a way that only you can? Does it feel exciting and adventurous? Or weighty and serious? Or all of the above?
4. James 2:14 tells us that faith without deeds is dead. That's pretty harsh. But if someone told you they loved you but their actions didn't match, how would you feel about their love?
5. Having a servant's heart is so counter-cultural. It seems like we live in a world that tells us to only be looking out for ourselves. The Bible, though, uses 58 "one another" phrases: "love one another," "care for one another," "pray for one another," "encourage one another," "help one another," "counsel one another," "support one another." How well do you feel like you're "one another-ing?"
6. Do you feel like you are currently using your gifts to their fullest? If you are currently serving in some capacity at Good Shepherd, how has it gone? If you are not currently serving, what ministry needs do you see that you would like to get involved with? Do not sit on this... make your desire known!
7. How do you think being a servant helps you develop spiritual maturity?

Reflect:

Utilize the following questions either in smaller breakout groups or individually.

1. Where are you in your faith journey? Are you crawling, walking, or running?
2. What do you feel are the greatest barriers/fears in the way of you taking your next step?
3. What are 1-2 action steps you can take to grow in your faith journey? Who can walk alongside you to encourage and support you during this time?

Session 3: **Abide** - *A personal, vibrant relationship with Jesus*

Good News:

Abiding in Christ is experiencing an intimate, close relationship with Jesus as our Savior. This is not a superficial acquaintance, it is a life-changing, transformative attachment. Our hearts and minds will be re-oriented toward Christ. To “abide” literally means to remain stable or fixed, to dwell, to remain.

Scripture Passage: [John 15:1-8](#)

Jesus describes this relationship with the metaphor of a vine and branches. We are to abide in Christ as a branch abides in the vine. When we depend on Christ and draw upon his strength, our lives will bear fruit. And as we abide in him, his Spirit abides in us.

What stage are you in?

- **Crawling:** You have a vague feeling of wanting to follow Jesus but you have questions, concerns or doubts. If this is you, seek answers! Know that it’s okay to wrestle with your faith. In fact, it is encouraged. Action step: talk to a pastor, read some books, do the research. Dig deep in your Bible. You will find Jesus there. Start with the Gospel of John. Pray and ask God to transform you.
- **Walking:** Your faith is developing and you’re ready to accept Christ as your Savior. If this is you, pray “Jesus, I need you. I want to know you better so that I can feel comfortable trusting you and surrendering my life to you. Help me go beyond mere ‘religion’ to have a relationship with you.” Action step: be baptized or recommit to your baptismal covenant. Join a small group to find other like-minded people to grow with.
- **Running:** You’re all in and your life reflects it. You’ve wrestled with your faith and you’ve sought answers to your questions. Your faith informs the way you view the world and you are a totally different person than you were before you committed to following Christ. Action step: If you’re not already, commit yourself to a daily devotional time (prayer, scripture reading, reflection) and weekly worship. Help others grow in their relationship with Jesus as a friend, mentor, or small group leader.

Discussion Questions:

1. “Abide” is a word we don’t use much anymore. Some Bible translations use “remain” instead. What synonyms can you come up with? Which word do you think better captures the essence of this idea? Which best resonates with you?

2. As you read through Jesus' words about abiding (in John 15), what are the benefits and the blessings that God offers?
3. Jesus tells us that if we abide in him, we will bear much fruit. Read Galatians 5:22-23. What kind of fruit is produced when we have the Spirit in our lives? What fruit can you see in your life and what would you like to see develop?
4. How did you come to trust in Jesus as your Savior? If you have not made that decision yet, what is holding you back?
5. How do you regularly seek God's direction in your life and allow the Spirit to guide your thoughts and inform your actions?
6. What do you find easier to do: read Scripture or pray? Why? What have you found to help you grow in these daily faith practices?
7. What is one way you'd like to grow in your relationship with Jesus? What step can you take?

Reflect:

Utilize the following questions either in smaller breakout groups or individually.

1. Where are you in your faith journey? Are you crawling, walking, or running?
2. What do you feel are the greatest barriers/fears in the way of you taking your next step?
3. What are 1-2 action steps you can take to grow in your faith journey? Who can walk alongside you to encourage and support you during this time?

Session 4: **Worship** - *Coming together as the body of Christ to worship God*

Good News:

God seeks those who will worship him in spirit, in community. He has created his body, the church, the community of faith and has gifted his church with music, liturgy, prayer, confessions, creeds, word and sacrament for the building up of his body and the display of his Glory. It is a privilege to worship with brothers and sisters in Christ.

Scripture Passage: [Hebrews 10:19-25](#)

This passage reminds us that all are welcome into the presence of God in worship. Worshipping should be active and not passive to fully experience the community of Christ. It calls for a clean/prepared heart to eliminate barriers to a passionate worship. Worshipping with fellow believers is important as we lift one another up.

What stage are you in?

- **Crawling:** Regular corporate (church) worship is not a part of your weekly life, but you are starting to wonder what that could look like. Schedule worship into your calendar app or planner.
- **Walking:** You are attending worship 1-2 times per month and really enjoy a few of the worship elements each week. Commit to worshipping every week unless you are physically unable to do so. Sign up to serve with communion or the welcome team or in the cafe to enhance the experience for all.
- **Running:** You schedule life around your worship time and you protect its place and importance to you. You begin each worship experience with time to focus and ask God to prepare your heart. Engage in worship throughout the week by taking time daily to worship God through scripture, music, and prayer. Rather than having a consumer mindset, you bring your whole body, mind and soul to fully engage in worship - including your praises, doubts and laments.

Discussion Questions:

1. For many of us, our families' approach to worship during childhood strongly impacts our mindset now, how has your upbringing impacted your worship life?
2. Current culture can make prioritizing worship difficult, how have you experienced this and how have you found ways to maintain your priority?

3. Hebrews 10:22 says, “ Let us approach (the sanctuary) with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” What do you think that means for you? How would you go about doing this in practice?
4. Worship includes key elements - celebration, prayer, confession, word, sacrament, and offering together in community. Which of these elements come most naturally to you? Which elements do not come naturally? What is helpful about this tension?
5. Have you ever just “gone through the motions” of worship? Why do you think this happens? How can we authentically engage in each of the elements of worship?
6. How do you experience God and worship outside of the corporate church?
7. Hebrews 10 stresses the importance of meeting together. While we can worship anywhere, why is it important to worship in community?

Reflect:

Utilize the following questions either in smaller breakout groups or individually.

1. Where are you in your faith journey? Are you crawling, walking, or running?
2. What do you feel are the greatest barriers/fears in the way of you taking your next step?
3. What are 1-2 action steps you can take to grow in your faith journey? Who can walk alongside you to encourage and support you during this time?

Session 5: Invest - Cheerfully and faithfully investing the best of our God-given resources for the glory and purposes of God

Good News:

God is the source of all good gifts and asks us to join him in his generous outpouring of tangible grace. “Generosity is a way of life” our values say, and we believe this is an all-encompassing mindset. We are to be generous with our prayers, our forgiveness, our mercy, our encouragement, our love and our tangible resources. These include material wealth, assets, income, investments and savings. God indeed loves a cheerful giver!

Scripture Passage: 2 Corinthians 9:6-14

This passage describes the extravagant generosity of God as well as the motivation for our giving. We discover God’s promise and the R.O.I. (Return on Investment).

What stage are you in?

- **Crawling:** You have considered giving money, but you have struggles or don’t know where to begin. Talk with a pastor or take a “Financial Peace University” course. Start investing at some level.
- **Walking:** You move from giving sporadically to giving strategically. You prayerfully consider when, what, and how you will invest your resources for the glory and purposes of God.
- **Running:** You move from giving comfortably to giving sacrificially. You trust God with more and more of your resources and experience the miracles of God’s provision and power working through you. You share with others how the Lord has tested, blessed, and strengthened your relationship with him through the process of sacrificial giving. Be a resource to others who are unsure where to begin.

Discussion Questions:

1. How did your family handle money growing up? Was investing in the church by tithing talked about or made a priority? How has that influenced you?
2. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-14, God calls us to be cheerful givers. What can make it hard to be cheerful about giving? What reasons do we have to be cheerful about giving?
3. Read Mark 12:41-44. How was the widow’s giving different from others?

4. Imagine that you are the widow in Mark 12:41-44. What would have been challenging about your investment? What would have motivated you to give like that?

5. Now think of your own life. What have been some challenges and motivations for investing resources toward the glory and purposes of God?

6. The Bible contrasts different approaches to investment: giving sacrificially or out of convenience, giving God our first/best or giving our leftovers. How would you describe the way you invest?

7. 2 Corinthians 9:13 says others will praise God due to our obedience in living generously. How have you experienced the impact and blessings of giving?

Reflect:

Utilize the following questions either in smaller breakout groups or individually.

1. Where are you in your faith journey? Are you crawling, walking, or running?

2. What do you feel are the greatest barriers/fears in the way of you taking your next step?

3. What are 1-2 action steps you can take to grow in your faith journey? Who can walk alongside you to encourage and support you during this time?

Session 6: Reach - Actively reaching the “spiritually distracted” by loving, inviting, and sharing our faith

Good News:

Jesus Christ is on a mission and he has called us to join him and given us authority and power to bring the gospel to every corner of the world. God desires that all people everywhere come to know him, love him and serve him. The church does not have a mission...the mission has a church!! To baptize and disciple people from every tongue, tribe, people group and nation. This mission of “teaching everyone to obey” what Jesus has taught us is the essence of Kingdom work. The promise of Jesus to be with us to the end of the age is a great comfort and encouragement to face the challenges and sacrifices of this holy calling.

Scripture Passage: Jonah 1-4 (specifically Jonah 4:1-11)

The story of Jonah masterfully illustrates God’s heart for all people and the importance of obeying God’s call to reach. We see in this story how God can use ordinary, flawed individuals to reach others for his glory.

What stage are you in?

- **Crawling:** Identify names of people who don’t follow Christ and pray for their salvation.
- **Walking:** Prepare a two-minute testimony that you could use when an opportunity arises to share your faith. Invite someone who doesn’t follow Christ to a small group, church, or service opportunity with you.
- **Running:** Intentionally build relationships with people who do not have a relationship with Christ and share your faith with them. Here are some examples of what you could do: host a backyard BBQ for your neighbors or co-workers; lead a common-interest group in your workplace or neighborhood utilizing an evangelism study; go on a long or short term mission trip; Ask your friends and acquaintances how you can be praying for them; schedule a prayer walk through your neighborhood, where you can walk the block praying for each neighbor.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Matthew 28:16-20. What does Jesus say about sharing our faith with others? What is exciting and challenging about this call?
2. What kind of people do you tend to associate with (Christian or non-Christian) and why?

3. In the story of Jonah, God was concerned about the people of Nineveh not following him. Name someone in your life who is not a follower of Jesus.

4. What barriers or fears kept Jonah from responding obediently to God's call? What are some barriers or fears that keep you from regularly sharing your faith with others?

5. Whether we are new to our journey with Jesus or a seasoned follower, sharing our faith with un-church friends can be difficult. Have you ever done this? Were you successful or unsuccessful? What did you learn? In what ways would you like to be equipped to more effectively reach non-believers?

6. Jonah had a hard time extending God's mercy to the Ninevites. Is there any person or people group that you have a hard time extending God's grace and mercy towards? How does this story challenge you to think or act differently towards them?

7. If you were giving Jonah a performance review, what might you say about his strengths and weaknesses? God uses Jonah's life and witness to bring many people to God. How does this story give you confidence to reach others?

Reflect:

Utilize the following questions either in smaller breakout groups or individually.

1. Where are you in your faith journey? Are you crawling, walking, or running?

2. What do you feel are the greatest barriers/fears in the way of you taking your next step?

3. What are 1-2 action steps you can take to grow in your faith journey? Who can walk alongside you to encourage and support you during this time?

Session 7: **Impact** - *Living all of life with a Kingdom perspective*

Good News:

God has created a “very good” world that is fallen into sin, evil, darkness and depravity BUT...he has called us to be “salt and Light” in this world and to redeem every corner of our lives with the power of his gospel. We have been given the grace and gifts of God to serve in the world through our calling, convictions, vocation and virtues. Every sphere of life should be viewed through the lens of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. What does it mean to be a Christian *and* a business person, an investor, an Uber driver, a teacher, a student, a healthcare worker, an athlete, a retiree or an artist?

Scripture Passage: Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus calls us to be salt and light in the world. Salt preserves. Salt changes the flavor. We too are to preserve the good values and purposes of God in the world and bring a different flavor to the environments we live in. Light illuminates the darkness so all can see. Our faith should be shining and on display, we should not be hiding or avoiding it. It should illuminate every decision and action we take.

What stage are you in?

- **Crawling:** A kingdom perspective is new to you. Consider how following Jesus can impact the various areas of your life - relationships, entertainment, recreation, work, education, politics, world issues, etc. Read what the Bible has to say about these different areas.
- **Walking:** Consider how you can be salt and light in the places you live and spend your time - home, neighborhood, work, school, etc. Pick one thing you can do to change the flavor of your environment and shine the light of God’s truth and grace.
- **Running:** Consider how God is calling you to affect change and make a positive impact in the world. Identify an issue God is calling you to address. Join with other partners in working for mercy and justice. Dare to dream God-sized dreams for the world that would only be possible with God’s help.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is there an area of our life that faith should not touch? Why or why not?
2. Where in the world do you see a need for the “salt” and “light” of Jesus?

3. What are some ways Christians can lose their “saltiness” or hide their “light”?

4. If Jesus came to earth and spent the day with you, how might it change the way you spend your time, spoke, and acted throughout your day? Would it change any of the dynamics at home, work/school, with friends, etc.? Explain.

5. Consider the following dimensions of life: family, marriage, parenting, careers, retirement, time off, struggles, life goals, etc. Pick one or two and share how following Jesus has had an impact on this area of your life.

6. What world issues do you think matter most to God? Why? What could we do about them?

7. While most advise to keep politics out of church, there are many political issues with strong connections to our faith. How does your faith impact how you think and talk about politics? How can our political conversations model both the truth and grace of Jesus (John 1:17)?

Reflect:

Utilize the following questions either in smaller breakout groups or individually.

1. Where are you in your faith journey? Are you crawling, walking, or running?

2. What do you feel are the greatest barriers/fears in the way of you taking your next step?

3. What are 1-2 action steps you can take to grow in your faith journey? Who can walk alongside you to encourage and support you during this time?