



Go for God!



LIFE GROUPS

Building Community, Growing in Faith

DRAFT VERSION

Small Group Leader Handbook



WE WERE CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

You don't have to look any further than Creation itself to see the importance of relationships. The Bible says that after God created Adam he declared "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). God remedied the problem by creating the first woman as a wife for Adam. While a relationship with God was critical for Adam, a relationship with another human being was also important.

That's why Christians need both a personal relationship with Jesus and with His Body, the Church. This is necessary for us to grow and become the people God desires. The CCPH Life Group Ministry is designed to help people connect with Christ and their brothers and sisters in the Lord. This Small Group Leader Handbook will equip, encourage, and guide group leaders as they shepherd others toward Christ-centered community.

The New Testament Model

Acts 2:42-47 gives us a powerful snapshot of the type of ministry and community that marked the early church:

*They devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and to **fellowship**, to **the breaking of bread** and **to prayer**. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, **they gave to anyone as he had need**. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread **in their homes** and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.***

Believers not only met in the temple courts, but also in their personal homes. This is where the close-knit community life of the church was built and where people were cared for, life was discussed, and new believers were integrated into the church family. It was within these informal meetings that the full beauty of the gospel and Christian community was realized.

Chief Goals of the Life Group

- Grow in the knowledge and application of God's Word
- Live out Christ's command for His disciples to love one another
- Build close relationships that provide mutual comfort, discipline and exhortation
- Pray for and serve one another
- Evangelize the lost through outreach ministry

Advantages of the Small Group Format

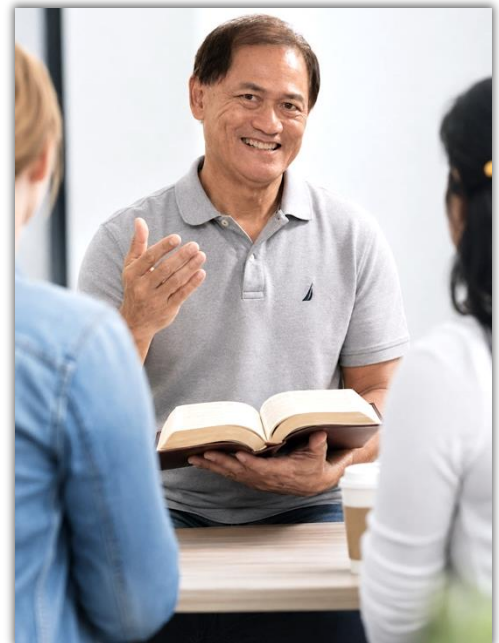
- 1) Meeting in homes facilitates deeper fellowship
- 2) Allows for participation (active engagement) rather than passive learning
- 3) Equips participants and provides them opportunities to use their spiritual gifts
- 4) Prepares members for service in the church
- 5) Provides accountability for spiritual growth and lifestyle choices
- 6) Relationships and support

Good leaders are disciples with shepherds' hearts

Life-changing small groups are led by leaders who invest their time, talents and passion into the lives of their members. There is simply no replacement for highly invested leaders. We are not asking you to be Bible scholars or charismatic speakers who dominate the teaching and have all the answers. We simply want leaders who love the Lord and have the desire and calling to serve the Lord as shepherds; those who guide and feed the sheep in a way that promotes their personal growth.

Responsibilities of the Life Group Leader

What matters most to God isn't what a leader does, but who he is. A leader walks closely with Jesus and becomes more like him over time. It's out of this growing relationship with Jesus that a leader leads. As shepherds, group leaders walk in front of the flock and show others the way to good pasture (truth). The Apostle Paul said, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (*1 Corinthians 11:1*).





Leader Qualifications

- 1) Demonstrate a consistent Christian witness and maintains a teachable spirit
- 2) Faithfully attended CCPH for at least six months and takes part in ministry events beyond Sunday morning services
- 3) They embrace CCPH doctrine and respect the biblical authority of its pastoral staff.
- 4) Recommended by a current group leader, ministry leader or pastor.
- 5) Agrees to participate in scheduled training sessions, and any ministry events linked to small groups.
- 6) Is prepared to lead quality, in-depth Bible studies
- 7) Committed to reflect the qualities of a leader addressed in this manual.

Following the examples of Jesus and the apostles doesn't require perfection; you aren't expected to be mistake-free and have the answers to every question. Leaders are growing and need God's grace just like everyone else. Godly leaders, however, are committed to their spiritual growth and seek God's leading in all ministry efforts. It's hard to expect group members to take their discipleship seriously, if the leader doesn't. It's hard to expect the group to grow if the leader isn't growing. It's hard to expect members to be committed to the group, if the leader seems only half committed. This is why good leaders must be in fellowship with the Great Shepherd himself in order to reflect our Lord's character.

Leaders lead by example:

- **Prioritize spending time with Jesus.** Be intentional about your discipleship. Spend regular time reading the Bible, praying and worshipping. Exemplify the life of a Jesus follower through love, service and faith (1 Peter 2:11-12, 1 Timothy 4:12)
- **Model vulnerability.** Share first and set the tone for the group. Share openly about what God is teaching you. Be authentic. Be willing to share your failures and struggles (as appropriate) as well as your wins and victories. When the leader is real, it gives permission to others to be real as well and "take off their masks."
- **Be faithful to the church.** Avoid the mentality in yourself and group members that Life Groups are a replacement for Sunday corporate worship. Leaders should be actively engaged in CCPH services and ministries.
- **Pray regularly.** Prayer for your church leadership, your group and your group members.
- **Grow in your gifts.** All believers have spiritual gifts given by God to edify the body. A leader should walk in their own gifts and encourage others to develop and bear fruit in theirs as well.

Characteristics of a leader

In John 13, the Lord Jesus sets the ultimate example of humility. Though He was the eternal Son of God, Creator of the Universe, Lord of Lords and King of Kings, Jesus humbled himself by imitating the work of the lowliest of Roman slaves: washing dirty feet.

John 13:5-9,12-17

Jesus, knowing that the Father had handed all things over to Him, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper and laid His outer garments aside; and He took a towel and tied it around Himself. Then He poured water into the basin and began washing the disciples' feet and wiping them with the towel which He had tied around Himself.

So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, You are washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not realize right now, but you will understand later." Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no place with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!"

*Then, when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you? You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord'; and you are correct, for so I am. So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you.** Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. **If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.**"*

A humble leader considers himself above none; he isn't proud or arrogant and doesn't boast of his position or skills. He realizes it's the Holy Spirit, rather than our own intellect, that empowers Christians to know and accomplish His will. Jesus said in John 15:1-8 that we are to abide in Him, for apart from Him, we can accomplish nothing.

As stated earlier, a godly leader is a caring shepherd in the model of Jesus. Such a leader pursues sheep who have gone astray, tends to the flock's needs, and leads them to green pastures for nourishment. In essence, a good small group leader will take responsibility for group members by following up with those who have been absent, provide appropriate support for those in need, contribute to their spiritual maturing, and nourish them in the Word.



Leaders mimic the humble servant nature of Jesus. Though He was the Creator of all things, he referred to himself as "gentle and lowly in heart," and a place where tired souls could find rest (Matt. 11:29).

LIFE GROUP GUIDELINES

Life Group Formats

Life Groups can take many forms depending on the vision and goals of group leaders. They can be age- or gender-specific, tailored to professions or special interests, based on marital status or family type, or simply open to everyone. Regardless of format, groups must emphasize spiritual growth through Bible study, prayer and fellowship. Bible study is the foundation of group meetings and can take one of three forms:



- **Work Through a Book of the Bible** - Studying through an entire Bible book is a great way to help people make personal Bible reading a habit. Group leaders should use a good study Bible and commentary to ensure good analytical depth. We recommend the *NIV Study Bible* and David Guzik's online *Enduring Word* commentary.
- **Use a Bible-based Study Book** – Christian authors provide a bounty of studies available to small groups. While we would not encourage this to be the ongoing practice (where a group simply goes from book to book), setting aside short seasons (4 to 10 weeks) for a specific study can be highly beneficial. *Coordinate with Pastor Jesse Hall for approval of these materials.*
- **Follow a CCPH Sermon Series** – This is an easy way to build upon what is already fresh in people's minds. The group acquires notes from the pastor and studies the biblical passages that form the core of the pastor's sermon the previous Sunday. This is a great way to maximize sermon retention and glean lessons for life application.

Managing Group Size and Growth

The maximum number of people in any group is based on the group type and its objectives. For the most part, groups should top out at 12 people. This seems to be a common standard for effective fellowship and mentoring. If your group consistently exceeds this number, it's time to consider raising up a leader within your cell who can start a new Life Group. Remember, one significant purpose of this ministry is to equip all to serve and some to lead.

Further, **resist the urge to be "insular,"** to see your Life Group as a closed circle that must be sustained in its current form and size. Such groups tend to stagnate like a pond or lake that has no inlets or outlets to refresh the water. Leaders should encourage outreach that brings in new members, particularly from local communities, and encourage launching members to start new groups.

Meeting format

Again, format is driven by the group type and leader/member objectives. However, a frequently used schedule is one day weekly from 7 to 9 p.m. This provides ample time to accomplish the key components of a meeting while getting people home at a decent hour. If the meetings run long for appropriate reasons (e.g., a deep discussion sustains the group's attention), make sure people who desire to leave are comfortable enough to do so.

Weekend studies are good opportunities to extend the time for additional exhortation, discussion, prayer and encouragement. Here are two recommended weekday schedules:

- 7:00 – Welcome newcomers, opening prayer and worship
- 7:25 – Bible study and discussion
- 8:30 – Closing prayer, refreshments and fellowship
- 9:00 – Meeting close

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- 7:00 – Dinner, fellowship, welcome newcomers
 - 7:40 – Prayer and worship
 - 8:00 – Bible Study
 - 9:00 – Meeting close

Keep in mind, the format of a Bible study is designed to maximize the growth of its members. Schedule and conduct them in a way that maximizes both attendance and participation. Members should feel welcomed, accepted and valued, which will foster the confidence and boldness they need to engage with the Word and each other.



TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Prepare in advance - Use available resources to ensure you can lead an interesting and relevant study; never take a “wing it” approach to Bible study. Be well studied, prayed up and in the Spirit.

Share a meal or snack together – Dining together is one of the four main activities of a thriving Christian community (Acts 2:42-44).

Emphasize prayer and worship – These aren’t simply “add-ons” to a study. Seeking the Lord’s presence is vital to any gathering of believers.

Introduce the study with a related story or questions – Good teachers ignite interest in their topic by sparking curiosity.

GET EVERYONE INVOLVED– Ensure everyone is engaged in the study by asking questions, soliciting input, and encouraging others to lead as part of a mentoring process.

Move people toward application – Every study should give members lessons that will shape their beliefs and practices.

Facilitate joy – The joy of the Lord is our strength. Let meetings be something people look forward to. Have fun and laugh occasionally (or frequently).

Starting and Organizing a Life Group

If you meet the qualifications of a Life Group leader and completed required training, you're ready to launch a new group. The first thing to consider is that you can't do it alone in the long-term; gather people you trust to support the effort. We encourage leaders to partner with the following:

- 1) **A host** who will open their home for weekly meetings and organize meals or snacks. The leader often doubles as the host, but preferably there should be a different host so the leader can focus on prepping and facilitating. The host's location should ideally have decent parking options, ample room for 12 to 15 people, and offer a conducive environment for learning and fellowship.
- 2) **A co-leader** who can fill in when the leader is unavailable and prepare to lead their own group
- 3) **A worship leader.**
- 4) **A child ministry coordinator** if children will be a part of the group.

These positions aren't required to start a group; a leader/host, of course, is the vital piece. As the group matures, other servants will be needed to sustain and grow it. Be patient and allow the Lord to shape your group in His way and His time. **The key to growth** is to invite a few people to start, and then encourage them to invite others. The church will advertise groups online and in-service, but it's important that group members themselves do much of the work by engaging with people inside and outside the church.



Children in Life Groups

While many adults desire to be involved with small groups, a common hindrance is the need for childcare. When possible, it's important to make the effort to accommodate children so families don't feel locked out of this vital ministry. Here are a few recommendations:

- Collect donations from within the group to hire someone who can come to the meeting place. Candidates for hire include members of your church's youth ministry, young adults group, or older members of the youth group.
- Parents or older children take turns watching the little ones in another area of the house.
- Work out a co-op relationship with another group that meets on another night.
- Help families find people for care at their home.



Dealing with Problem Areas

Because small groups, like the church, are comprised of flawed human beings, leaders will likely have to manage potential problem areas, such as gossip, conflict or division. The best approach to most issues is to respond quickly (don't let problems fester), use biblical solutions, and remind people of their call to walk in the fruit of the Spirit as disciples of Jesus.

People who dominate the discussion

There are some folks who simply can't help but make their thoughts known, even if it means other people are locked out of the conversation. These people will either chime in too frequently or talk at great length. If you allow the problem to persist, others will grow passive and lose interest. The leader must politely address the issue. For example, gently interrupt the person by thanking them for their input and then ask a question to others in the group. If delicate strategies don't work, be more direct with the person in private.

The leader who does everything

When leaders believe everything depends on them, they deny others the ability to contribute and eventually lead. This can result in burnout for the leader and reduced growth and decreased engagement among members. Good leaders strive to engage others as fully as possible through delegation and soliciting input. Assign members certain tasks to help manage the group (i.e., sending out reminder notices or prayer requests or coordinating social events) and try letting other capable people lead the study occasionally.

Inconsistent attendance

Some people may not be able to attend weekly, but encourage consistency, because regular absences inhibit growth and weaken the bond between members.

Unruly or disruptive people

People who persistently disrupt the group must be warned in private, and if the problem continues, asked to leave the group. While we try to exercise mercy and patience, we cannot allow individuals to distract others from learning. In some cases, it may be appropriate to refer such people to the pastoral staff for counseling. If you have questions or need guidance, confer with the pastoral staff. Addressing conflicts directly, lovingly, and privately whenever possible and follow the guidelines of Matthew 18:15-17 when needed.

Loss of Focus and Passion

Don't let the group stagnate by insisting on keeping the same members for years on end; be open to sending people out to help form new groups and doing outreach that brings new faces into your home. Also, discuss a vision with group members to keep them focused and moving toward Spirit-led goals.

Internal Conflict

People are people, and some personalities just seem to naturally conflict. The role of a leader is to build and sustain peace within the body. Mediate between parties in a conflict by seeking root causes, helping them overcome those causes, and exhorting them to walk in obedience to Christ's command that we walk in love.

Avoid inappropriate advice-giving

When dealing with problematic individuals never assume the role of a crisis counselor or pastoral advisor; refer people to pastoral care or professional services when appropriate. The Life Group leader can pray with folks and provide exhortation and encouragement, but must not go beyond that with people suffering significant emotional or mental health concerns. Leaders should avoid offering inappropriate professional legal, financial, medical, or mental-health advice.

Helpful video links

Address Group Killers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRWSr6WMJ1Q>

Challenging Personalities

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw8_iu1P3V4

Confronting Members of Your Group

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3D-pLLqhT8>

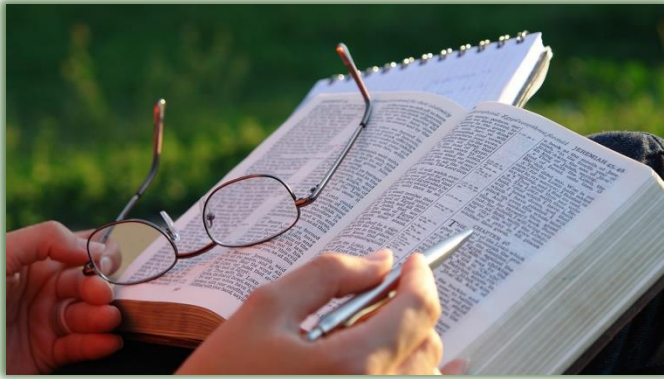
Acknowledgements: Jesse Hall, associate pastor with Calvary Chapel Pearl Harbor, served as editor, designer and contributor. This manual contains material from the *Small Group Ministry Training Manual*, Immanuel Lutheran Church of Crystal Lake, IL; the *Small Group Leader Handbook*, Cornerstone Christian Community Church of Markham, ON; and a previous version of the CCPH small group manual.

1 Joel Comisky, SmallGroups.com, "5 Ways to Motivate People to Join Small Groups: Plus, two tactics that do not work to get people to join and stay involved," 2017, <https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2017/5-ways-to-motivate-people-to-join-small-groups.html>

2 Ibid.



Training for Small Group Leaders



Principles of Context and Interpretation

Context: *The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.*

To correctly interpret and understand the Bible, context is vitally important. We need to know the background of certain verses, particularly those that are difficult

to understand or seem contradictory. Understanding factors, such as the writer, audience, time written, language, literature type, and author's intent, ensures we receive the message as God intended. Good context requires that we consider several important tasks and facts when studying the Bible:

1. Ask vital questions

- a) Who wrote the text and why was it written? (*BibleHub – STU to Book*)
- b) When was it written and to whom was it written?
- c) Where was it written?
- d) What genre is it written in? Is it poetry, history, prophecy, parable or a mix of genres?
- e) What literary tools are used? Hyperbole (exaggeration), allegory, contrast and compare, repetition, figurative, etc.?
- f) Does the message apply only to the original audience or beyond them?

2. Interpret all Scripture in light of God's character:

- a) He is the very essence of love, justice, truth and patience
- b) He never contradicts himself nor acts arbitrarily without purpose

Interpret the Bible with the Bible...keep verses and passages aligned with the "whole Bible" message; don't isolate passages from other parts of Scripture.

All Christian theology and practices should have precedence in Scripture. There are no new revelations today or any day since the completion of Revelation.

c) All of his acts – no matter how mysterious or confusing – are accomplished according to His perfect will; even His harshest judgments are righteous and ultimately just and loving.

d) You can answer any difficult question by defaulting to God's essential character.

3. Proverbs are often general principles rather than unwavering truth claims

a) In other words, don't look to ALL Proverbs for "hard theology," but rather evaluate each based on logic, experience and especially other Bible passages. Here are examples:

b) "Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow (Prov) 13:11." *There are many cases throughout history where people become quite wealthy with dishonest money...what is the general principle here? The honest and patient means to prosperity is the godly way. In many cases, people who are dishonest and unwise will waste their resources.*

c) "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty" *Not always...many people have worked hard, but barely scrape by in life economically...what is the general principle here? Those who don't do an honest day's work are more likely to end up financially challenged. Those who work hard are more likely to at least provide the basic needs for their families.*

d) "The wages of the righteous is life, but the earnings of the wicked are sin and death." *This is true in all cases*

4. Not all actions recorded in the Bible are approved by God – good or bad, they are included because they are historical and relevant...demonstrates credibility of the Bible

a) Noah getting drunk; or Judah sleeping with his daughter-in-law; thinking she was a prostitute; Samson marrying a Philistine; kings having hundreds of wives, and concubines

5. Differentiate between Old Testament laws that are universal and timeless, and those that were temporary and Israel-focused.

a. Marriage, sex and worship commands are eternal; but dietary, clothing and ritual laws changed or were eliminated with Christ's life, death and resurrection

5. Prophecy can be *echoic*: it finds partial or complete fulfillment soon after the foretelling, at different times in history and/or in the last days

a. Advent of the antichrist – Antiochus, Nero, Hitler, Mao Tse Tung, the final antichrist.

6. **The Law is patterned after ancient Near East covenantal language...** many of the promises of the Old Testament are limited to ancient Israel (wealth and health in exchange for obeying the Law, for example)
7. **All seeming contradictions are not contradictory when understood in context...** if the Bible seems to contradict itself, you can deconflict it by doing contextual and analytical studies.
 - a) Acts 9:7 (KJV) states, “The men which journeyed with him (Paul) stood speechless, *hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*”
 - b) Acts 22:9 (KJV) reads, “And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but *they heard not the voice* of him that spoke to me.”
 - 1) Which is it? Did they hear or not hear the voice?
 - c) The Greek word for *hear* is **akouō**, which can mean the physical hearing (our ear picks up sound waves) or the hearing with the mind (our brains translate sound waves into meaningful language).
 - d) An American who can’t speak French can physically hear a Frenchman talking, but cannot translate the sound into something meaningful
 - e) The American hears, but doesn’t *hear (comprehend)* the Frenchman.
 - f) In the Acts passages, the sense of what is being said is that the men with Paul heard the voice, but did not comprehend it. In essence, they heard, but did not really hear (with understanding). To them, it was likely a thunderous sound with no tangible words.
8. **The Bible often uses metaphors or hyperbolic language...** be careful not to take literally what is meant as a figure of speech
 - a) Much of the harsh and “loud” language of the Old Testament is designed to get the attention of a hard-headed people through visual/emotional word pictures
 - b) Such language was necessary in an ancient era dominated by heavily pagan and self-glorifying clans, kingdoms and empires
 - c) Examples: (1) *Is the Lord’s arm too short?* (Num 11:23) (2) *Ishmael will be a wild donkey of a man* (Gen) 16:12.; (3) *God will sharpen his sword and he will string his bow* (Psalm 7:11-13).
9. **Carefully consider era, culture and God’s intent.**
 - a) A lot of Old Testament laws were designed to keep the Jews healthy in an era before food and water could be managed for safety

- b) Laws were designed to make the Jews stand out from the pagans of their day.
- c) Some Christian guidelines are based on a similar purpose – to ensure Christians stood out as salt and light; for example:
 - 1) Women shouldn't wear make-up and jewelry, avoid showy dress, and keep their hair long to distinguish themselves from temple prostitutes of the Roman era
 - a) This doesn't apply today because these things don't carry the same cultural stigma

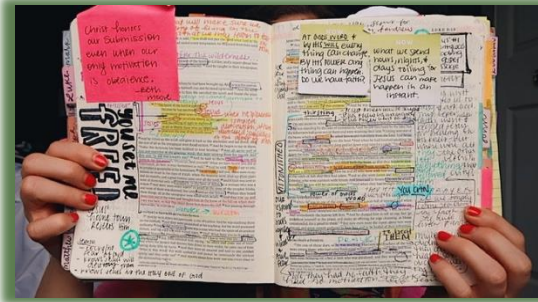
IMPORTANT! The best context for a passage is provided by nearby verses, its chapter, book, testament and the Bible as a whole. **Don't isolate passages**; ensure you interpret based on surrounding texts and the grand narrative of the Bible: (1) God is creator of all things; (2) man is fallen and destined for darkness; (3) man is made right with God by faith in God's mercy and provision; (4) God promised a Savior to renew man; (5) Jesus, the Son of God, is that Savior; (6) Jesus died for our sins, but rose on the third day; (7) all who believe Jesus is Savior and obey his commands receive eternal life; (8) Jesus will return and rule the earth.

Test your knowledge

- 1) You can answer any difficult question by referring to God's _____.
- 2) Proverbs are often _____ rather than absolute truths.
- 3) All actions recorded in the Bible are approved by God. T or F
- 4) Any command you read in the Old Testament applies to Christians today. T or F
- 5) The Bible uses figures of speech, such as _____, to paint word pictures.
- 6) What attributes of God's character help us interpret mysterious or confusing acts in the Bible _____.
- 7) Prophecy is often described as _____, fulfilled in stages over _____.
- 8) List two vital factors to consider for context: _____
- 9) Explain how Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9 are NOT contradictory.

The process of building a Bible study

- ☐ Prayerfully select a book of the Bible and ask God's anointing upon your study
- ☐ Explore the book's background/context
- ☐ Start reading verse-by-verse
- ☐ Take personal notes
- ☐ Meditate prayerfully and thoughtfully on what you read and pray over difficult verses until you understand them
- ☐ Write down impressions of verse groups
- ☐ Use the Bible Hub tools for deep analysis
- ☐ Take additional, detailed notes
- ☐ Write passages in your own words
- ☐ Summarize the chapter



- ☐ Write lessons learned, particularly as they apply today
- ☐ Organize your notes into a teaching outline
- ☐ Organize notes for teaching verse-by-verse
- ☐ **Explore associated topics**



Bible Hub provides several valuable Bible Study tools in its app and online. First, enter a passage into the reference window, then click on any of the three-letter links in the white bar. I recommend the following, especially those in red:

- PAR – Translation comparison
- STU – Analysis, word study, dictionary, teaching points, study questions, sermons (scroll through this function to access the associated tools)
- COM – Commentaries
- LEX – Lexicon – Greek language dictionary
- OUT – Chapter outline
- QUE – Additional discussion questions

Other good tools: Enduringword.com;
BibleRef.com, BibleProject.com.

APPLICATION

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Application

Read 1 Corinthians 1:6-9: *“Just as the testimony concerning Christ was **confirmed** in you, ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will also **confirm** you to the end, **blameless** on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, through whom you were called into **fellowship with His Son**, Jesus Christ our Lord. “*

Using the BibleHub Lexicon or other study tool, to do a word study on the terms that are bold and red. Write the Greek word and its range of meanings. Then rewrite the passage using your own words to reflect your better understanding of the passage.

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