

KEY CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

book seven in the series:

THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

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- Day One: Be Baptized in Water
 - Day Two: Take Communion
 - Day Three: Join a Bible-Centered Church
 - Day Four: Develop Deep Friendships with Other Believers
 - Day Five: Review and Test

Key Christian Practices: Book seven in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

Forty-eight short books

(Each book includes a five-day Bible study and homework)

By Doug Britton, MFT

Twelve books on “Knowing God”

Twelve books on “Developing a Godly Character”

Twelve books on “Enjoying Healthy Relationships”

Twelve books on “Overcoming Personal Problems”

For

Individuals

Small Groups

Churches

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

Knowing God

- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

Developing a Godly Character

- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
- Book 23: Handling Money Responsibly
- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

Enjoying Healthy Relationships

- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships
- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

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Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Day One: Be Baptized in Water

Once you become a follower of Jesus, there are many steps you can take to get to know God better. Here are six practices that countless Christians have discovered help them:

- Pray daily.
- Read the Bible.
- Be baptized in water.
- Take communion.
- Join a Bible-centered church.
- Develop deep friendships with other believers.

In Books 4, 5, and 6 of *The Owner's Manual to the New You*, you read about the first two practices—praying and reading the Bible. In this book, you will read about four more practices that will help you grow in your relationship with God. Today's lesson is on baptism.



When you were born again, you entered into a new life, a spiritual life with Jesus. The next step is to be baptized, both in obedience to God's commands and as a symbolic act.

What is baptism? Most people think of baptism as being lowered under water and brought back up. Although that describes the physical part of it, there's a lot more to it. Baptism is a physical act that symbolizes and strengthens a spiritual reality, that of dying to yourself and coming alive in Christ.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:3-4)

Being baptized helps us understand and identify with Jesus in a special way. In a sense, we share in his death and resurrection. Plus, baptism provides a powerful image of our sins being "washed away" when we become believers.

And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name. (Acts 22:16)

Discussion questions

1. In your own words, what does it mean to be baptized?
2. Have you been baptized? If so, describe when this happened and what it meant to you.

Why be baptized?

Many people don't understand why it's important to be baptized. Let's look at some of the key reasons.

The Bible commands us to be baptized

Jesus told us to be baptized.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)

Peter said to be baptized.

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

Jesus gave us an example by being baptized.

It's breathtaking to realize that Jesus himself, the Son of God, was baptized. We need to follow his example.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. (Matthew 3:16)

Discussion question

3. Why do you think Jesus was baptized?

Baptism draws you closer to God.

Every step you take in obedience to God's word draws you closer to him. What's exciting is that as you draw near to God, he will draw near to you.

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8)

Baptism solidifies your decision to follow Christ.

Along the same lines, every step you take in obedience to God's word strengthens you in your faith. When you are baptized, you are choosing to be identified as a follower of Christ.

Baptism encourages other believers.

When your brothers and sisters in the Lord see you being baptized, it excites and encourages them, for they see God's love in action.

Baptism is a sign to non-Christians.

If non-believers see you being baptized, it can be an inspiration to them to look a little closer at Christ.

Discussion questions

4. Name two of the above reasons for baptism that speak to your heart. Explain why they have an impact on you.
5. Why would baptism draw someone closer to God?

Common questions people have about baptism

What if I was baptized as a child?

Baptism is your response to Christ's work in your life. If your parents had you baptized as an infant, it may have been a loving gesture, but it wasn't your decision. As Peter said, you need to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38).

What words should the pastor (or whoever is baptizing you) say?

Some think it's important to say you are baptized "in the name of Jesus." Others think the words should be "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (or 'Holy Ghost')." Either phrase is fine. In fact, each is used in the Bible.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

Should I be dunked or sprinkled?

The exact method of baptism is not nearly as important as the attitude of your heart. However, immersion under water has some clear benefits, and it makes sense when you look at the wording in the following three verses:

Jesus "was coming up out of the water." John the Baptist baptized Jesus. It seems apparent that when he did so, he lowered Jesus under water, for Jesus "was coming up out of the water."

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. (Mark 1:10)

"Buried" and "raised" imply immersion. Although Paul is using symbolism in the following verse (we aren't literally buried underground when we are baptized), the words "buried" and "raised" suggest being lowered under water.

... having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:12)

"Removal of dirt" implies more than sprinkling. We don't take a bath when we are baptized, and we certainly don't scrub down with soap and water, but Peter's reference to baptism not being "the removal of dirt from the body" makes more sense when you think of dunking than it does when you think of sprinkling.

This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21)

Discussion questions

6. What words do you think should be said when you are baptized? Why?
7. Why do some people think you should be baptized by immersion instead of sprinkling?
8. How important is it to be baptized one way or another? Explain your answer.

If I die before I am baptized, will I go to heaven?

Some people think you will go to hell if you die before you are baptized. That isn't true. Being baptized is very important. After all, Jesus commanded it. But it is our faith in Christ—not something we do, such as being baptized—that brings us into a relationship with God.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Discussion questions

9. If you have not been baptized as a personal choice, are you willing to be baptized? Why or why not?
10. If you have not been baptized, when will you be baptized?

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)

Want to learn more?**Book by Doug Britton**

Getting Started, Getting Connected

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/getting-started

5. If someone was baptized as an infant, should he or she be baptized again by making a personal choice? Why or why not?

6. Why do you think God wants us to be baptized?

7. Do you think someone should be immersed or sprinkled when baptized? Explain your answer:

Day Two: Take Communion

While teaching in Capernaum, Jesus said something that confused many of his disciples and upset some of them (John 6:25-66). In fact, some were so upset that they stopped following him (John 6:66).

What did Jesus say that was so alarming? He started out by telling his listeners not to “work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:27). Then he surprised them by saying that he is the bread of life, and that to have eternal life we must eat his flesh and drink his blood. Here are a few verses from this long passage:

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.” (John 6:51-56)



Jesus obviously was not suggesting his followers become cannibals. Instead, he was helping them understand his true mission on earth. Although he helped meet people’s immediate needs, his true mission was to provide himself as a sacrifice for our sins and offer us eternal life with God. He gave himself—the bread—for the world (John 6:51). He shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins (Matthew 26:28).

Later, shortly before he was crucified, Jesus ate a meal with his disciples (sometimes referred to as the “Lord’s Supper”). At this meal he took this theme one step further, referring to the bread and wine they were about to eat and drink as his body and blood.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:26-28)

When Jesus did this, he was showing us that our relationship with him should be much more than thinking of him as a teacher or religious leader. It should be one of recognizing that he shed his blood for our sins and offers us the amazing privilege of being intimately connected to him—part of his body.

Discussion questions

1. What does the bread represent?
2. What does the wine represent?

3. Why do you think Jesus used the illustration of eating his flesh and drinking his blood to signify our relationship with him?

The New Testament tells about Christians taking communion

We read in the New Testament that Jesus' followers took communion (another word for sharing in the Lord's Supper) when they got together. Believers do the same thing today, sometimes at church, sometimes in their homes. The apostle Paul gives us an overview of this practice in the following passage:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:23-32)

Five reasons we take communion

We remember what Jesus did for us.

It's easy to get so caught up in daily life that we forget about Jesus' sacrifice for us and the life he offers us. When we take communion, we are reminded of him.

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:17-19)

Discussion questions

4. Why do you think Jesus thought it was important to give us something to do to remember him?
5. Is it possible to take communion without thinking about what Jesus did for us? If so, how can we remind ourselves to avoid slipping into this habit?

We examine our hearts and rededicate ourselves to Jesus.

Before taking communion, we examine ourselves for ways we have sinned and ask for God's forgiveness (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). Then when we take communion, we can rejoice in Jesus' love, forgiveness, and abundant life.

Discussion question

6. How can taking communion revitalize us spiritually and emotionally?

We may become healthier.

Paul wrote that if we eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, we are sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). He added, "That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Although Jesus instituted communion primarily for spiritual reasons, we can see there's another benefit to it. When we examine ourselves and take care of sin, we may end up becoming healthier. Sometimes illness is the result of our sin—although it's often for other reasons (such as accidents or viruses). For example, drinking too much can destroy your body. Committing sexual sins can result in sexually transmitted diseases that can ruin your health. When we examine ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-29) and turn from sin, we end up living healthier lives.

Discussion question

7. How can taking communion result in us living healthier lives?

We celebrate being part of the body of Christ.

Taking communion is an individual act of reflection and worship, but it is also a reminder that we are part of Christ's body, for all of Jesus' believers together form his body.

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

Discussion question

8. Why is it good to remember you are part of the body of Christ when you take communion?

We proclaim the Lord's death.

When we take communion, we are doing more than participating in a ritual. We are proclaiming that we believe in and are rejoicing in Jesus' sacrifice, and that he took our sins upon himself.

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Discussion question

9. What does it mean to "proclaim" the Lord's death when taking communion?

Digging deeper

Read John 6:25-66. Ask God to help you deeply understand this passage.

Memory verse

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Notes

Homework – Day Two

1. What did Jesus mean by saying we must eat his flesh and drink his blood?
2. What does it mean to “proclaim” the Lord’s death (1 Corinthians 11:26) when taking communion?
3. Some of Jesus’ disciples stopped following him when he said they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. What would be a more mature or trusting thing to do when you are confused by something Jesus says?
4. Why did Jesus refer to himself as bread?

Day Three: Join a Bible-Centered Church

In the first two days you read about baptism and communion. These practices are often called “ordinances,” which means activities initiated by Jesus, taught by the apostles, and practiced by the early Christians.

Today’s lesson looks at a different type of practice—that of being involved in a local church—that is to say, a local body of believers. Before we get into this study, let’s take a look at what the word “church” means, and what it doesn’t mean.



What is a “church”?

What do you think of when you hear the word “church”? Many people immediately think of a church building. However, in the New Testament, the word “church” refers to people—not buildings.

Sometimes it refers to all the believers throughout the world. That’s the meaning Paul had in mind when he wrote:

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Other times the word “church” is used in the New Testament to refer to all believers in a specific city. You can see this in Paul’s letters to the churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, and other cities. These groups typically met in people’s homes, although in Acts 2:46 we read that the early Christians in Jerusalem met in the temple courts.

For today’s lesson, let’s use the word “church” to refer to a local group of believers who get together to worship God in a specific place.

Discussion questions

1. What are the two ways the word “church” is used in the New Testament?
2. What are some reasons it’s good to meet with other believers in a local church?

In tomorrow’s lesson, you will read about the importance of meeting with small groups of believers. For some people, their small group is their church.

Other people also attend a larger church, one which offers them more opportunities to grow and serve. (By “larger” I simply mean larger than a small group.)

Benefits of being involved in a Bible-centered church

There are many advantages to being part of a larger, Bible-centered church. Here are a few:

Personal growth

Everyone should be growing—growing in knowledge of God, in love, and in maturity. In a larger church you are more likely to have the opportunity to interact with and learn from a variety of other believers whom God has called specifically to help his people grow.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Discussion questions

3. What are some ways your church provides opportunities for personal growth?
4. Name one person in your church experience who was instrumental in your growth as a Christian. What did he or she do that was helpful to you?

Balanced doctrines

Believers who live isolated lives or just have a few Christian friends sometimes get caught up in weird or extreme ideas. In a larger church, the greater number of believers often acts as a check-and-balance against odd beliefs and impostors. (Of course, it's possible for a large group to get caught up in foolish ideas.)

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

Discussion questions

5. Have you ever observed people in an isolated group who adopted some strange practices or ideas that might have been prevented if they had been part of a larger group? If so, what happened?
6. What lessons could be learned from their experience?

Group worship

There's something exhilarating when a large group of believers worship together. That can be especially inspiring when you have gifted, anointed worship leaders.

Discussion questions

7. What do you experience when you are in a worship service?
8. How does this affect your Christian walk?

Opportunities to get to know a variety of types of people

If you only interact with a small group of believers who are similar to yourself, you may miss out on a wide variety of potential friendships with people who don't look like you or who have different personalities and interests.

Opportunities to serve

Every believer has been called to play a role in God's family. When you are in a larger church, there may be opportunities to serve in a wide variety of ministries. God wants us to be praying and

looking for ways we can get involved. These can range from helping teach children's Sunday school to working in the church garden to volunteering in the office to helping widows and single parents.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Discussion questions

9. What are some ways you have served in church or Christian ministry?
10. What are some ways you would like to serve in church or Christian ministry?

Be aware of potential dangers in churches

Pride

It's good to appreciate and honor your church. However, don't take that attitude too far and think you are better than other believers. Remember that all Christians together make up the church.

What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:12-13)

Gossip, hypocrisy, and other church problems

All churches have problems since people make up churches and people have problems. Part of growing as a believer is learning how to respond to problems.

If your church has a major problem, such as a pastor who has an affair, don't give up on church and don't give up on Jesus. If necessary, move to a new church.

Discussion question

11. If you discover something very concerning about the church you attend, should you refuse to go to any church? Why or why not?

Memory verse

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. (Acts 2:46)

Want to learn more?

Free online Bible study

How to Deal with Church Problems

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/church-problems

Notes

5. What are some ways church can protect you from believing false doctrines?

6. Name two people you have admired in church and describe why you admire them:

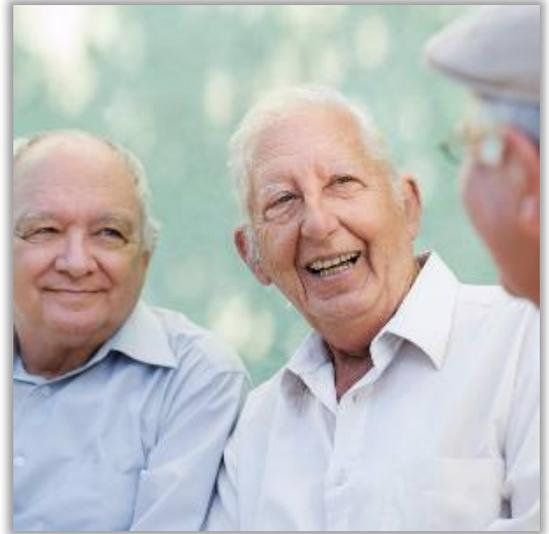
7. What are some ways you have helped serve in church?

8. What are some ministries you would like to help with in your church?

Day Four: Develop Deep Friendships with Other Believers

We all need friendships with other believers—something more than saying “hi” in the church parking lot. We need friends for playing, praying, and sharing the real issues of our lives. We need those who will be there when we are sick and who will believe in us when no one else does.

It’s good to have non-Christian friends. However, your primary relationships should be with other believers, people who are serious about growing in the Lord. Christian beliefs and values are often ridiculed by the world. Other believers can encourage us in our faith. It is nice to know we are not alone.



We are part of one body.

The Bible describes all Christians collectively as the body of Christ. Each of us has something that others in the body need. One inspires faith, another comforts, another offers good counsel.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12:4-5)

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? (1 Corinthians 12:14-17)

Early Christians met together often.

The Book of Acts tells us the early Christians met together frequently, eating in their homes “with glad and sincere hearts, praising God” (Acts 2:46-47). They understood the need to spend time together and did so enthusiastically.

Discussion questions

1. How often do you get together with other believers? When do you get together?
2. Does it seem you are too busy to get together with others? Explain your answer.
3. How could you make time for friendships?

The Bible encourages us to meet together.

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

Benefits of deep friendships

There are many reasons to develop close friendships with other believers. Some are:

Enjoying an extended family

All Christians are brothers and sisters in the Lord. What a gigantic family! Even if your own flesh and blood relatives are far away, you can enjoy being with family. As Jesus said, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35).

Support and encouragement

When you spend time with sincere Christians, you have opportunities both to encourage and be encouraged in your faith.

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:13)

Prayer

The early Christians often prayed together. In Acts 1:14 we read, "They all joined together constantly in prayer." In Acts 12:12, we read that a prayer meeting was held in the home of Mary, the mother of John (also called Mark).

Inspiration

When the early Christians got together, they inspired one another to engage in Christian ministries. "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24).

Accountability

Close friends or members of a small group can ask how you are doing in your daily Bible study or overcoming a sin you have been praying about. You, likewise, can show a loving concern for others.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (Proverbs 27:6)

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

Joy

When you are with fellow believers, you can have a good time as you worship together, laugh together, and play together. As we read in Acts 2:46, the early Christians enjoyed "glad hearts" when they got together.

Discussion questions

4. Which of these benefits of having close friends have been meaningful to you in the past?
5. Which of these benefits are missing from your life now? Why are they missing?
6. What could you do to make your friendships more meaningful?

Take steps to make friends.

We are connected and need each other. Others need your love, and you need theirs. It's hard to love people when you don't spend time with them. If you have trouble meeting other Christians:

- Pray for friends.
- Join a Bible-believing church.
- Take the initiative. Introduce yourself to lots of other people.
- Spend time visiting with others after church. Introduce yourself to an usher, the pastor, or others around you.
- Attend church activities, picnics, and workdays.
- Join a small group in your church such as a Bible-study class, home group, coed softball team, or exercise class.
- Join the choir, usher team, or another ministry.
- Invite someone to be your prayer partner.
- Invite others to your home.
- Overcome embarrassment over your home. Don't worry if you have a small apartment or old furniture.

Discussion questions

7. Which of the above ideas will help you get to know more people?
8. How could you go about putting them into practice?

Make deep friendships.

One goal of getting together with other believers is to get to know each other on a deep level and to encourage one another in the Lord. The following ideas will help you form close friendships.

- Pray ahead of time. Ask God to help you enjoy a growing friendship.
- Talk about each other's Christian experiences—your experiences with the Lord, your struggles, and your dreams. A good way to get started is to ask how the other person became a Christian.
- End your time by praying together.

Discussion questions

9. When you get together with other believers, what do you usually talk about?
10. If you are married, how can the two of you encourage meaningful conversations with friends? How can you initiate praying with them?

Memory verse

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

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Homework – Day Four

1. Is it possible to go to church yet not have deep friendships with other believers? Explain your answer:
2. What are some reasons it is important to spend time with other believers?
3. If someone does not have close friends, what are steps he or she could take to make friends?
4. Write out a Bible passage that lets us know we are part of the same body:

5. Do you ever pray with other people?

If you wrote “yes,” describe what that is like for you. If you wrote “no,” what steps will you take to pray with someone?

6. Once you get together with someone, how can you move from superficial conversation to more meaningful conversation without seeming pushy?

7. Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

What does that mean?

What can you do to make it easier for someone else to “sharpen” you?

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- T 1. Baptism is commanded by God.
- F 2. Baptism is necessary to be saved.
- F 3. Taking communion refers to talking with a friend about a problem.
- T 4. It's important to examine yourself before taking communion.
- F 5. One benefit of attending a large church is that you don't need to read the Bible.
- F 6. It's a bad idea to go to a small group and a large church.
- F 7. Since Jesus is our best friend, Christians don't need other friends.
- T 8. All Christians are brothers and sisters in the Lord.
- T 9. When we take communion, we proclaim the Lord's death.
- T 10. It's important for believers to encourage one another.

Memory verses

- 1. Matthew 28:19

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

- 2. Hebrews 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

Doug and his wife Skeeter live in Northern California.



Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

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Read and download Doug's free online studies on marriage, parenting, anger, self-concept, anxiety, depression, temptation, fear of death, biblical counseling, mentoring, small group leadership, and other topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources.

Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

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In addition to “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” Doug Britton has written many more cross-cultural, Bible-based books on leadership, discipleship, and key areas of daily living.

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