

What's New with this Series?

When it comes to helping someone become a disciple of Jesus, there's no silver bullet. After Jesus ascended into Heaven, His disciples weren't left with a divinely-laminated tract to guide their efforts. He did, however, fill them with His Holy Spirit and commission His followers (and all of His future followers) with the task of spreading the gospel. The transformation that comes from the gospel sits at the crossroads of urgency and consideration—and it's often difficult to find the balance between each side. For the sake of salvation we may move with haste and hope that their heart actually wrestled enough to convert beyond simply parroting the right answers. Others of us seek to be so thorough that we can inadvertently negate the need for faith by keeping someone out of the waters of baptism until we systematically answer an conceivable doubt. Both urgency and consideration are needed. Surely there must be a middle ground!

What's the most responsible and thorough presentation of truth necessary for someone to surrender lordship to Jesus? What convictions must be established before baptism, and what will be part of someone's ongoing sanctification after baptism? How does simplicity amplify the urgency of the lost? And what lessons should not be skipped before someone says "Jesus is Lord"? Churches and missionaries have considered this delicate balance since Pentecost, and this series is a reflection of our church's best effort to consider those same questions.

Ultimately, the power to transform faith rests in the Word of God and not in our clever plans (Romans 10:17). At the same time we must do our best to "make it plain" (Habakkuk 2:2) and "persuade others" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

This series is an open document. This current iteration reflects our convictions from scripture, reflections on lessons learned, and a Spirit-led response to our current context. At some point in the future, we will re-evaluate this series and make changes – and we look forward to that day. We also know that each seeker has unique life challenges which they must address as they commit to following Jesus. The specific needs of the seeker and the discernment of the one leading them to Jesus will result in something beautiful and unique to each Bible study – and we look forward to that as well. We are not providing a prescription, but instead a framework to help navigate the balance between a firm foundation and an urgent flee into the saving arms of Jesus.

The church has long held a belief that discipleship can be taught from one person to another without the intercession or expertise of an ordained minister. We take pride being part of that long and powerful stream of everyday disciples of Jesus who are convinced that they are called to make more disciples of Jesus. In many ways this series is an artifact—a flag planted in the ground resolving that we will not depart from the conviction to overflow and bring the ministry of reconciliation.

Unfortunately, many artifacts sit behind museum glass or tucked away on the top shelf of a bookcase. In this way we must see this as a tool—an old tool sharpened, regripped, and well-balanced to be wielded. If your insecurity about teaching the Bible has hindered your evangelism, we hope this tool increases your faith and

emboldens you to be a bright light. If you've been consistent in sharing your faith and studying the Bible with lost souls, we hope this tool provides you with renewed excitement and a broader perspective to consider both what is urgent and what is thorough.



This series should feel familiar to anyone who has used First Principles or Making Disciples. Our intent is that there would be very little re-learning required. The primary changes in this series are that we have moved The Call to Discipleship and the Church and Community studies toward the front of the series, and we have fortified the teaching and expectation of repentance within the Repentance and Baptism study (formerly The Way of Salvation).

By moving the principles of discipleship and community to the beginning of the series, we mirror the biblical narrative by beginning with presenting God's ideals – His life-giving Word, those who follow it, and those who help others to follow it. Community is the most frequently cited reason that people are turning back to God, and we believe this good news would be a great encouragement if it's taught earlier. Additionally, the convictions we hold about scripture, discipleship, and community play out throughout each of the remaining studies within this series, so it's important to establish a common language and belief that can be used throughout the Foundations of Discipleship series.

Genesis 1 and 2 illustrate the perfect harmony of these ideals (at least until Genesis 3 when sin enters the picture). After a seeker sees the potential of God's earliest, idyllic vision for mankind, they should be faced with some thought-provoking questions: "Why doesn't the world look that way? Why doesn't my life look that way? Why is the Church a flawed yet still beautiful embodiment of God's plan? And the answer to all of those questions will be the same – sin.

So alongside the ideal, we have now unearthed the problem. Luckily, God has provided a complete solution. These three categories—ideal, problem, and solution—are a framework by which we can make sense of most scripture. Interestingly, those ideals are not just wishes or impossible dreams, they are principles by which God's solution comes to take root. The principles of The Word of God, The Call of Discipleship, and Church and Community are present and pervasive in each of the remaining Bible studies.

In regard to sin:

His Word convicts us of sin (John 16:8); disciples are called to deny themselves of the things of this world (Luke 9:23-27); and sin is confessed to one-another (James 5:16).

In regard to the cross:

The Word became flesh and died on the cross (John 1:1-14); disciples are called to follow Jesus to the cross (Philippians 3:10-11); and we are all reconciled into one body because of the cross (Ephesians 2:13-16).

In regard to repentance and baptism:

We are born again through the enduring Word of God (1 Peter 1:23-25); disciples of Jesus are called to make more disciples and baptize them (Matthew 28:18-20); and when we are baptized, we are baptized into one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), which God adds to daily (Acts 2:47).

By beginning this series with three practical ideals – The Word of God, The Call to Discipleship and Church and Community – we hope to equip each seeker with a common language and lens of practice for the rest of their journey toward baptism, and for an eternity after.

The other change we've made is to be more deliberate about the preparatory work the seeker can do in between their Bible studies. The specific consideration of these scriptures can help the seeker arrive at each Bible study with a primer of understanding, which will hopefully promote a more pointed conversation.

In addition to the refreshed study series, we've worked to create a series called Fortifying Discipleship which consists of follow-up teaching for new disciples, and a series called Restoring Discipleship, which is intended for people who want to return to the faith community after a time of wandering away. We've also bolstered the appendix with resources that can be used to help educate and inspire those who are seeking God and equip those that are leading others to Christ.

Our endeavor is to approach God's Word with humility and awe. He alone claims credit and must receive glory for our transformation. There are many helpful tips for leading a seeker to Christ, but none of these practices should overtake the need for prayer, fasting, reading, and listening to the Spirit. We pray this tool will be helpful in your journey of leading others to Christ.

With love and appreciation,

The Elders, Evangelists and Teachers of the Chicago Church of Christ