

When Is It Appropriate to Pause or Deviate from the Series Plan?

This Foundations of Discipleship Series is not a prescription. Perfect adherence will not guarantee a person's salvation, nor does deviation undermine God's ability to transform their heart. The purpose of this series is to provide clarity, sequence, and shared language about the most foundational aspects of faith. This series (or any other) is not intended to replace the Spirit's guidance or a leader's discernment, but to provide a framework from which to begin. God alone transforms hearts (Romans 10:17), but He calls us to "make it plain" (Habakkuk 2:2) and to do our best to "persuade others" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

When presented with a framework, many leaders can be tempted to err toward the extremes of rigidity or improvisation. Some may treat the series like a sacred formula, while others may discard it entirely. The structure isn't meant to control the process of transformation. Instead, it serves as an assessment and tool to develop biblical conviction across the core foundations we believe are necessary for all followers of Christ.

Spiritual discernment isn't chance guesswork. It's a honed and God-given ability to choose what's best in a situation where there are multiple good options (Philippians 1:9-10). Each seeker's heart, background, and obstacles present a unique canvas. A wise leader must shepherd accordingly, and sometimes they may deviate from the suggested path. However, an understanding and proficiency of the typical form is what makes each variation intentional and masterful. While the unique composition of each seeker may require specific conversations, we do believe there are universal needs and foundations for every disciple of Jesus, and these are reflected in the series framework.

The series follows a deliberate flow: The Word of God, The Cost of Discipleship, Church and Community, Sin, The Cross, Repentance and Baptism, and Counting the Cost. This sequence largely mirrors the biblical story. It also highlights the tension we often see during transformation: "I have hope, but I feel so lost. What should I do?" We see a version of this inner conflict at Pentecost when the people were cut to the heart and humbly sought help (Acts 2:37). We ask you to consider this series as it was developed to address the balance between urgency and readiness. However, the gospel has the power to meet and transform each soul at their own time and place.

When a Change in Course May Be Wise

If you decide to use this series (or any series), there will be times when it's appropriate to deviate from a plan. Pray for discernment and a heart to shepherd each seeker in a direct, yet compassionate manner. The following are a few of the most common reasons it may be good to pause or redirect a Bible study.

1. When the Heart Hasn't Engaged

Some seekers grasp the concepts being presented but fail to internalize them as conviction. Nodding in agreement isn't the same as being "cut to the heart." Emotional blocks like fear or shame can prevent deep humility and surrender (Luke 18:18-23) If you notice that the seeker prefers a checklist mentality, that's a great opportunity to pivot

and ask reflective questions like this: "I notice you've been diligent about some of these practices, but you have expressed it in terms of duty or responsibility but not joy. Am I sensing that correctly?" A leader should help surface these barriers and not be satisfied by joyless compliance. Reading, praying, fasting, confession, and testimonies can be great tools to help unlock a heart that feels stuck.

2. When There's a Disconnect with Sin

The cost of our forgiveness was incredibly personal to God – He offered His own Son in the hope that we might respond and turn to Him (John 3:16, Romans 5:6-8). We should never feel entitled to that sacrifice by having a cavalier attitude toward sin. Therefore, true repentance begins with taking responsibility (Psalm 51:3-4, Jonah 2:8-9). If a seeker deflects the weight of sin on family, culture, circumstances, trauma, or even through a comparison to others, you should pause. All of these can be contributing factors, but each individual must own their wayward choices (Luke 7:36-48, Romans 3:23). God can redeem pain, but a posture that is defensive or excusing of sin is one that rejects the power of the cross. Forgiveness of others is another marker of transformation. Many times a seeker desires to forgive but needs shepherding through complex hurts. In these situations, lead with great patience and compassion. If, however, they refuse to forgive, that's an indicator they are incapable of understanding their own forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15). In such situations, Jesus states their own forgiveness will be withheld (Matthew 18:21-35).

3. When a Foundational Truth Is Misunderstood

A misunderstanding of core concepts such as God's sovereignty, the divinity of Jesus, grace, faith, repentance, and baptism (and other topics) warrants review. Leaders should ask questions that require answers other than "yes" or "no" in hopes of drawing out a seeker's heart (Proverbs 20:5). Repetition is a helpful tool for reinforcing truth (2 Peter 1:12). It's better to revisit a study than rush toward emotional resolution without conviction.

4. When Learning Differences or Context Require Adaptation

Every seeker processes differently. Some need time, repetition, or contextual translation. Many biblical terms can feel technical and intimidating to someone who's unfamiliar with them. These insecurities can grow if something is read outside of their primary language or if they have diagnosed learning differences. Adjusting pace for clarity is love, not compromise (Colossians 4:6). You can consult the section in the appendix on Learning Differences for more specific considerations.

5. When Prayer, Fasting, or Fellowship Are Needed

We often forget that divine transformation is met with cosmic opposition. Satan's most pressing mission is to attack the faith of those who are seeking God. Moments of resistance or confusion may call for prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29). Still, these times of prayer can often supplement – instead of replace – the rhythm of the Bible studies. Consider meeting throughout the week in between Bible studies for prayer times.

6. When Fatigue, Anxiety, or Hurt Appear

If seekers consistently appear tired, overwhelmed, or shut-down, it's good to evaluate the tone of the Bible studies. The gospel is unapologetically demanding – Jesus expects our whole life. But this call should be more hopeful than heavy-handed (Matthew 11:28-30). A heavy-handed or unbalanced presentation can make freedom

feel like duty, and it may be good to invite an outside perspective to observe the dynamic. It's also helpful to consider the setting of each gathering. Evening Bible studies after a long day of work may be convenient times for our social schedule but less fruitful than a weekend when everyone is rested. Dim lighting can create a subdued tone. And meeting in public cafes could be an intimidating place for someone to be vulnerable. Sometimes, the gospel exposes wounds. These wounds are often the site of the most striking examples of the power of the gospel – people responding with deliverance and transformation as if they were characters on the pages of the New Testament (Hebrews 4:12). But even though the deliverance is powerful, it may stir feelings and memories that require pastoral care. Seek wisdom and discernment as you shepherd people through these times (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Sometimes, you may need a longer pause. In other situations, you can still move toward baptism while creating a parallel track for follow-up and care.

7. When the Spirit Redirects

Sometimes, the Spirit opens a new door through an unexpected question, a personal experience, or a world event (Acts 8:29–35). Sometimes, a timely sermon stirs a topic they are eager to talk about that you hadn't planned on discussing quite yet. Follow the Spirit's lead, but test the motive. Some redirections are Spirit-led, while others can be distractions. If the new topic seems peripheral, offer a brief but considerate answer, then re-center the study. It's always good to have an environment where someone seeking God can ask questions. Help the seeker to understand that all of these questions are part of being a life-long disciple of Jesus, and that there are foundational principles that can help equip them for future questions.



When Deviation Becomes Dangerous

There are also situations and topics where even a well-meaning leader can cause confusion in the heart of someone seeking God. Here are a few examples of instances where it would be better to simply stay the course,

1. Passion Projects

Spiritual leaders should have a rich devotional life with Christ, and one of the best ways to teach humility is by being a learner yourself. However, a leader's current fascinations are rarely a seeker's greatest needs. The podcasts, books, and musings of a long-standing disciple are often inaccessible to those seeking God for the first time. The depths and treasure troves of Scripture should be celebrated (Matthew 13:52), but they

shouldn't impede upon the matters of first importance (1 Corinthians 15:3). Mature leadership requires distinguishing between personal enrichment and evangelistic essentials, and we all have a lifetime of learning ahead.

2. Avoiding Hard Topics

Like the Rich Man in Luke 18, there will be some seekers who turn away from God when they are confronted with a difficult truth. As a leader studies the Bible with a seeker, they grow in their affection for the individual, as does our desire to protect those we love from disappointment. For many who aren't versed in conflict, there can be a temptation to avoid the more challenging conversations in lieu of agreement and retention of a friendship. But dodging topics like sin, repentance, sentimentality, romance, or contribution in order to preserve comfort undermines transformation (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

3. Teaching Doctrine without Scripture

When it comes to matters of doctrine, there are times when we become overly dependent upon analogies and anecdotes to communicate points. We don't believe things because they're primarily logical, but because they were spoken by God. Rationalism can often be a powerful tool, but it can also become an idol where our understanding replaces our submission and trust. The clarity of God's Word saves: "Hold firmly to the trustworthy message" (Titus 1:9).

4. Forced Timelines

As a seeker confronts their sin and sees a call to salvation and Lordship, they are filled with eagerness. In an effort to accommodate family and friends, they may begin to plan their baptism before they've even counted the cost. Scheduled baptism dates can cause leaders to rush through the process of helping the seeker to count the cost, which often manifests as shallow discipline in their discipleship. It's crucial that neither our thoroughness or urgency are made to fit a self-inflicted schedule.

Art (and the Spirit), not Science

Order reflects love because it communicates intention. Order was how God created the world and how God reveals the truth that shapes His people. "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:40). The sequence of this series intends to tell the same story that Scripture tells: God's Word calls, His people respond, His community gathers, sin is confronted, grace redeems, and new life begins. Yet every conversion story unfolds differently. The Foundation Series can be understood like a trellis – a structure that supports growth without dictating its shape. Leaders must use discretion as they teach the fullness of God, ensuring that every decision serves the seeker's clarity, not the teacher's impulse. Transformation is God's miracle, not our method. Our task is to steward truth boldly and faithfully, trust the Spirit completely, and remember that "the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit" (James 3:17).