

The background of the entire page is a vibrant orange color. Overlaid on this background are numerous thin, wavy, yellow lines that flow vertically, creating a sense of movement and energy. The lines vary in thickness and curvature, some appearing as straight vertical strokes while others are more fluid and undulating.

G. DWAYNE MCCRARY

reboot

RENEWING OUR MINDS ONE BELIEF AT A TIME

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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INTRODUCTION

The Levels of Biblical Learning® (LOBL) have long been a mainstay of Lifeway's *Bible Studies for Life* resources for preschoolers, kids, and students.¹ The basic idea behind this framework is that biblical concepts need to be communicated in an age-appropriate way. How a person comprehends God is dictated in part by their cognitive development. A middle schooler can understand God in a more complete way than a four-year-old can. The developmental nature of the LOBL framework carries a strong identity and connection for each age group. Ten concept areas serve as the framework for the model:

- God
- Jesus
- Holy Spirit
- Bible
- Creation
- Salvation
- People
- Family
- Church
- Community and World

The framework identifies ways in which kids and students comprehend each category at their life stage. (See the Appendix for the history of LOBL.)

THE ADULT QUESTION

The challenge since the introduction of LOBL has been how it relates to adults. Parents use the LOBLs as a tool to disciple their children, which assumes parents believe and embrace the truths in the framework. Initially, an approach focused on an expanded set of concept areas that were specific to adults. However, because these areas were not addressed by younger age groups, the connections were lost.

A BETTER WAY

The approach presented in this book views the LOBL used in our kids' and students' resources as the foundation for a biblical lens that is refined in adulthood. While a person's ability to comprehend may be fully developed when they enter adulthood, their study, experiences, and relationships cause them to reconsider the lens through which they view life. An adult may cognitively understand a concept statement, but living it out consistently is another story. The same concept areas and statements will be revisited repeatedly as people encounter different challenges in life. Adults are on a life-long journey of aligning what they say they believe and value with God's truth.

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As such, the ten levels of biblical learning concept areas define the lens through which we view life. We face competing voices and cultural pressures that blur our beliefs and values. These competing voices call for us to take an honest look at our world. We can then compare the world's voices to God's Word. LOBL offers a coherent, Scripture-anchored lens that holds across life stages, giving us a means to learn God's way. We can then revisit the same truths as circumstances change, identify misalignments, and practice obedience. At that point, we begin to live out God's way.

Adulthood does not bring a new set of truths, but is a lifetime of refining the same truths until our beliefs and values match God's Word in the way we relate to God, ourselves, and others.

In this book, we define how this refining works in an adult's life and the role Bible study groups play in that refining.



CHAPTER ONE

IN NEED OF A REBOOT

My computer was slower than usual and doing strange things—screen flickers and glitchy graphics. The computer expert's first instruction? Reboot. He recommended a hard reboot—power down fully, then restart.

A reboot flushes out unnecessary data, freeing up memory and giving the system a clean slate. The expert noted that the software is reset to its default state, allowing it to start fresh and potentially avoid glitches in the future. He also explained how rebooting helps resolve conflicts between different devices and re-establishes communication between all the parts. He concluded by sharing that if updates are needed, they are also finalized during a reboot.

By the time he finished explaining, my machine had completed the reboot and was calling for my password. All was well, and I could begin adding words to a fresh, new document—like the words you're reading now! My machine needed to be refreshed with a reboot.

THE NEED

The Bible tells us that humans are complex and wonderfully created. We are the crowning feature of God's creation; the only part of His creation described as carrying His image. Unfortunately, we chose to abandon God and go our own way. A decision was made to value something other than the truth. Adam and Eve valued the promise proposed by the serpent—a new knowledge about good and evil that only God possessed. They valued being more than they were created to be.

And we have been doing the same thing ever since. Competing foundations for living shout for our allegiance; most people follow the loudest cry instead of God's call, and the shouting only gets louder as we age.

The church is not immune to this struggle. Within the church, some fail to recognize areas in which their beliefs and values misalign with God's Word, giving the appearance of hypocrisy. Other adults turn to the Bible for a quick fix without any intention of wholeheartedly following Jesus. Still others view the Bible as a form of self-help to be considered, failing to recognize that God's Word points to our need for a renewed mind—a reboot—which exhibits God's character in practical ways.

On top of that, we confuse knowing facts with a renewed mind, as if the Christian life is only about knowledge. We forget that a person's beliefs and values, the foundation on which we make decisions, must align with God's truth and be visible in our lives with God, ourselves, and others.

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God's truth and be visible in our lives.**

Salvation through faith in Christ makes it possible for us to begin to think (believe and value) as we were created to think. We spend our lives reclaiming, or renewing, our minds, as Paul put it in his letter to the Romans, so we can fulfill our created purposes. This renewing sits at the core of spiritual transformation.

THE REBOOT

Paul wrote to Christians, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). The three elements in this passage help us understand why we need a reboot in our lives.

“Do not be conformed to this age.”

We know the pressure of conforming. We faced it as adolescents at lunch tables and in hallways, and we face it as adults in office politics and family dynamics. We may feel it when we’re invited to lunch with coworkers and we are the only one who chooses to stay in the office. We may feel it from family members who push us to move closer since we are the only branch of the family no longer living near everyone else. We may even sit quietly during a political discussion simply for the sake of avoiding a conflict or risking being overlooked for a promotion.

The word translated “this age” carries a sense of the prevailing thoughts and philosophies of the day—schemes that are often at odds with God’s heart. In their commentary on Romans, Boa and Kruidenier emphasize that, “If Satan is the god of this world (and he is), and if the whole world lies in his power (and it does), then the believer must resist the pressure to conform morally, intellectually, and emotionally—and ultimately behaviorally—to Satan’s schemes for life.”²

In short, Paul was talking about our adoption of the schemes and frameworks of a world that rarely reflect the heart of God. The latest thought leader or influencer sets the standard for today, and

their thoughts or practices become the new norm, regardless of the values or ethics involved.

The adoption of these schemes and frameworks can be subtle. One example is the idea that religion is a personal matter and should be treated privately. This message gets repeated. What some mean by "private" is that we should never talk about religion in any public forum. Scripture calls believers to a faith that is both personal and public. Our values also influence our public policy decisions. The gospel is meant to be proclaimed, not hidden. We can be sensitive to the rights of others to decide for themselves when it comes to matters of religion, while at the same time being light in a dark world.

“Transformed by the renewing of your mind”

Much has been written about transformation and the connection to the English word *metamorphosis*, so we won't review that here. Instead, we want to focus on the connection between the renewing of our minds and being transformed. Renewing our minds needs to be thought of as a reshaping of our minds. Educators think of learning in terms of facts (knowledge), beliefs (attitudes, values), and skills (action). These three things work in tandem. We gain a fact and begin to understand it on a cognitive level. The fact is raw information that we must personally comprehend. The first time we heard the gospel, we heard facts about being sinners, Jesus dying on the cross for our sin, His being resurrected, and His inviting people to follow Him in faith. We had to comprehend some foundational doctrines about God's nature, humanity, sin, and salvation.

Those facts had to be transitioned into a personal conviction and belief (the heart, or affective domain for those educators reading this booklet). The heart is the emotional and spiritual core where beliefs are formed, values are owned, and wills engage. This is the difference between knowing *about* Jesus and personally following Him in faith.

We know the facts of salvation, but at some point, we decide to stop relying on our efforts to gain God's favor and instead place our trust in Jesus and what He did for us on the cross. But we must take one more step, putting feet to what we know and value. This

involves a tangible behavior that is an application of our knowledge and beliefs and values. Our heads and hearts move us to action. We may share with others what we learned about Jesus, and that we have started following Jesus in faith. We may invite them to a special service where we are baptized as a declaration of that faith.

For the transformation to be complete, the knowledge, beliefs, and actions must be in harmony. We see this in Bible study groups that come together to discuss a Bible passage they have been looking at on their own in the days leading up to the group gathering. The Bible passage is read with a specific focus in mind (knowledge). The group then discusses and reflects on the truth discovered. Participants are challenged to evaluate how that focused truth shapes their beliefs (attitudes, values). The group can then commit to practical steps, such as serving a neighbor or repairing a relationship, making the truth tangible (action).

This comprehensive approach to discipleship prevents a purely intellectual faith (all facts), an emotionally driven but shallow faith (all values), or a legalistic, works-based, behavioral distortion (all action). Instead, it creates a balanced and integrated path for genuine spiritual growth.

“So that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”

The word translated “discern” carries the idea of proving or discerning whether an item or action is worthy. Paul used the same word when explaining to the Corinthians that the quality of a person’s work will be tested by fire on judgment day (1 Cor. 3:13). Peter used the word to describe the results of trials faced by believers, knowing that trials produce a proven faith refined by fire. The word also carries the idea of having tried and proved or put one’s seal of approval on something. What is approved is declared fit or discerned to be appropriate for use.

Until we act on a belief, we really don’t believe it. Dallas Willard echoed this idea in *Renovation of the Heart*. “We don’t believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true.”³

Paul reminded his readers that the renewed mind discovers and puts into action the will of God. Putting into action is proving by demonstration. God's will is good, pleasing, and perfect, and in the doing of His will, the believer shows what it means to be a living sacrifice (see Rom. 12:1).

Our transformation is seen in how we relate to God, ourselves, and others. When approached by a law expert about the greatest commandment, Jesus pointed to Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19. He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands." (Matt. 22:37-40). Both passages point to the object and kind of love a person will exhibit when they have a renewed mind.

Jesus explained to the disciples that they would be known by their love for each other (John 13:35). John reminded his readers that others would know them by their love of each other and for God. He even explained that if a person claimed to love God but harbored hate toward another believer, that person was a liar. (1 John 4:20). A believer's love for God, themselves, and others would be the evidence of a genuinely renewed mind and transformed life.

Remember our computer expert from earlier? He also suggested that my computer be rebooted weekly. He was insistent that rebooting isn't a one-time solution but a regular action that needs to be planned and practiced for the life of the computer. The transforming of the mind is also a continual process that the believer must give attention to throughout their life.

Many Christians assume they have a biblical lens or worldview just because they accepted Christ and attend church regularly. However, Scripture describes an ongoing spiritual battle against entrenched beliefs and mindsets (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Neh. 13:4-9). To engage in this battle, believers must continually take every thought captive in obedience to Christ.

WHO DOES WHAT IN THE RENEWING

God is surely involved in the process of renewing our minds. This transformation begins with conversion, when, by God's grace and through faith in Jesus, a person receives forgiveness of their sin and new life. Spiritual transformation is God's work of changing a believer into the likeness of Jesus by creating a new identity in Christ and empowering a lifelong relationship of love, trust, and obedience to glorify God. The Holy Spirit uses biblical truth, including foundational biblical teaching, to guide individuals toward conversion so spiritual transformation can begin. That same biblical truth then serves as the foundation for aligning a person's heart with God's heart—His perfect and good will. God uses His Word, His church, and other believers to align us with His heart, reshaping our beliefs and values.

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All this work by God does not negate us working with Him in our transformation. Paul called on the Philippians to work out their salvation. He was not talking about earning salvation, since he was addressing people who were already believers. Instead, he was talking about actively living out the implications of our faith by cooperating with God, submitting to His will, and applying Scripture to all areas of life. The lifelong process of becoming more like Christ is referred to as *sanctification*. This journey works in partnership with God, as we seek to walk more closely with Him every step of the journey.

ENGAGE

1. When a person's spiritual life feels glitchy or out of sync, how might a spiritual reboot restore clarity and purpose?
2. How do your beliefs and values align—or misalign—with God's Word, and what might that reveal about your spiritual health?
3. In what ways are people tempted to conform to the patterns of this age, and how can we help them resist those pressures through the renewing of their minds?
4. How do you currently engage with knowledge, beliefs and values, and actions in your walk with Christ? Which area needs more attention?
5. What does it look like for a person to discern and live out the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God in their everyday decisions?



CHAPTER TWO

RENEWING THE MIND

Jari began her day like most days, drinking coffee and reading her Bible. Her Bible study group was studying a set of lessons that focused on God's work in the world. Each lesson was built on a different element of this statement: *God continues to work in the world, and as we join Him in His work, He uses people to accomplish His eternal purposes.* They studied different people, mostly unnamed and found in John's Gospel, who were used by God to make a difference by sharing what they knew. Jari used her study guide to determine what she would read each day, selecting a section at a time.

On this day, John 10:41 captured her attention. "Many came to him and said, 'John never did a sign, but everything John said about this man was true.'" She noted that the deciding factor about Jesus was John the Baptist's testimony about Him. The people present had access to Jesus, and some had seen His miracles, yet John's testimony carried the day. In Jari's study guide, she wrote about her wonder at the impact of a person's testimony about Jesus and how much her story might impact someone considering becoming

a follower of Jesus. She ended her study by asking God to help her share her story with someone that day.

Jari finished her coffee, got dressed, and headed to work. The first person she met when she got there was a security officer who was obviously having a rough morning. His eyes were filled with worry, and his voice cracked as he greeted her. Jari smiled politely and walked on, thinking, *I should ask if he's okay . . . maybe even pray with him.* But she didn't. She had emails to answer and a meeting in twenty minutes.

On the elevator, Jari encountered a coworker returning to work after her mother's death. The woman's face was pale, her expression distant. Jari offered a soft "I'm so sorry," and the coworker nodded. She thought about sharing how her faith had helped her through grief when her mom passed away and how Jesus had been her comfort, but the elevator dinged, and the moment passed.

Later in the break room, Jari overheard two colleagues talking about the chaos in the world. One said, "I just don't know what to believe anymore." Jari stirred her coffee and considered chiming in, maybe mentioning the peace she found once she began to follow Jesus in faith. But she stayed silent, unsure how it would be received.

At lunch, Jari sat with Aaron, who shared that her teenage daughter was struggling with anxiety. "She's just so lost," Aaron said. Jari nodded, empathizing deeply. She felt the same way before she became a follower of Jesus. But instead of sharing that, she offered a few practical suggestions and changed the subject.

Throughout the day, Jari encountered more moments like this. A colleague confided in her about feeling overwhelmed. Another mentioned struggling with purpose. Each time, Jari felt a tug in her heart—a gentle prompting to speak about the hope she knew in Christ. But each time, she hesitated. *What if it's not the right time? What if I say the wrong thing?*

At the end of the day, Jari sat in her car, the sun dipping low behind the building. She replayed the conversations in her mind, each one a missed opportunity. She believed that the testimony of John the Baptist made a difference for the people in John 10, but she was no John. As she hit the start button on her car, she whispered,

“Lord, help me understand why I saw the moments but failed to act on them.”

LOOKING FOR THE MISALIGNED VALUES

The actions in Romans 12:2 can serve as a path moving forward for Jari. “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”

“Conformed” assumes we are at least aware of what the world is saying or pushing. For each situation Jari faced throughout her day, she needed to examine what got in the way of her sharing her faith.

“Transformed by the renewing of your mind” comes as we compare what this world says with what God says. Jari can help us get a picture of what this may look like. First, she prayed that morning for an opportunity to share her story, and God provided multiple moments throughout the day. Yet, she hesitated each time, questioning whether it was the “right” time.

The security officer provided a clear opportunity to offer comfort and prayer, but Jari doubted the timing. Her hesitancy may show a lack of trust that when God opens a door, it’s intentional. The Bible tells us that God is in charge and at work with purpose. Jari could trust God and His timing.

She also accepted the world’s idea that some things in life are private. Faith is a private matter, and therefore we should avoid any conversations about religion, even if another person raises the subject. Our conforming calls for us to examine our lives for ways in which we continue to adopt this world’s way of life.

Jari’s grieving coworker, who could have been comforted by Jari’s own experience and testimony, reminded her that John the Baptist’s words about Jesus carried weight—even without miracles. Jari may have accepted this truth as fact, but she struggled to apply it. She questioned whether her own story could make a difference, revealing a possible lack of trust in the impact of her personal witness. Jari could gain a deeper understanding of herself by asking why she feared her story would fall short.

Jari felt gentle nudges throughout the day—those heart tugs that believers often recognize as the Spirit’s prompting. The nudge was especially felt when her colleagues expressed confusion about what to believe, and Jari had a chance to speak truth but stayed silent. She second-guessed her ability, unsure if she’d say the right thing or if it would be received well.

Jari didn’t see herself as someone whose words could carry spiritual weight. She could have shared how Jesus helped her through anxiety, but she chose practical advice over spiritual truth. This may reflect a deeper trust issue, not fully embracing her identity as a witness for Christ.

Part of that insecurity could have been associated with her fear of saying the wrong thing or being misunderstood. Jari felt the pressure and weightiness of the conversations. She depended on herself for the results and failed to trust God, knowing He is responsible for the results. She was simply called to be faithful. Her silence was rooted in fear, not faith. In multiple conversations, Jari felt prompted but didn’t act because of a fear of rejection or awkwardness. She may have doubted that God was sufficient and would not reject her.

Jari had work to do if she was going to align her beliefs and values with God’s, making sure her heart was in sync with His. Talking to God and to trusted friends would be a start. Paul called on the Roman believers to discern or prove God’s perfect will, which is another way of challenging them to live it out daily. Jari needed to get her facts, values, and actions aligned with God’s facts, values, and actions.

REFLECTION AVOIDED

We often avoid examining which of our values conflict with God’s and why we fail to live out the truths we claim to believe. While the following list isn’t exhaustive, it outlines some of the more common postures we choose to conform to the patterns of this world rather than pursue renewal and discernment.

Unaware

Much of our educational experience is with fact-based learning. We listen to a lecture or read a selection from an assigned book and then repeat what we heard or read when tested. In the process, we aren't expected to do anything with the information we gained or repeated back. Renewing our minds is more than filling them with additional information. As hard as we try, we can't crowd out the bad with the good. Renewing our minds requires us to identify the faulty things we believe and value so we can replace them with God's truth. We need to treat our minds like a yard with weeds. The weeds must be removed if we want a healthy lawn. Overseeding makes a difference, but overseeding alone will not get rid of the weeds. In the case of renewing our minds, increasing the amount of Scripture we read and memorize makes a difference, but we still need to spend time examining what our actions reveal about what we really believe and value.

Passive

Renewal takes work. Jari had to really dig into why she failed to share her faith in each situation she faced throughout her day. She could have just gone home, gotten in a run, enjoyed some dinner, and curled up with a book. Instead, she did the hard work of asking why, which is one of the more intensive actions we can take. Our initial answer should move us to ask more probing questions about the why behind the initial why.

In a Bible study group that encourages this type of examination, the work is multiplied. For the teacher, putting together a lecture and presenting facts is easier than crafting an experience that includes group and individual reflection. For the learner in such a group, it is easier to sit and listen than to think and contribute. This type of group may also require time to prepare before the group meets, so they can more readily participate and be held accountable afterward to live out what they learned.

Fearful

Our beliefs and values serve as a coping filter. When they change, we must alter how we understand our past experiences. New values require us to give the past a fresh look. Wounds from past experiences may be reopened because of the need to better understand the ways those experiences impact how we relate to God, ourselves, and others.

The whys behind our actions today usually take us to past experiences. We build emotional and relational walls to protect ourselves from the emotions that caused pain. Experts in change management remind us that the past is always present. We see that in our beliefs and values, and we need to risk the pain to move forward with renewing our minds and spiritual transformation.

The possibility of being wrong or incomplete in our understanding stems from placing our beliefs and values under scrutiny, another fear. We risk losing what security we think we have. And our learning approaches can get in the way. Lecture assures doctrinal purity, but it also assures minimal expectations as far as transformation is concerned. The teacher is called on to present content, as opposed to putting it into practice. Lecture insulates the teacher from admitting any areas of struggle or honest change needed in their life, while also insulating the learner from opening up about the struggles they face. Fear wins out over transformation.

Prideful

The Western approach to teaching enables pride by setting up the teacher as the content expert. If they are the expert, then there is no need for further study, and they can't be challenged by a learner who is presumed to be a non-expert. On the flipside, the learner who views himself or herself as having already gained the required knowledge is there to affirm what they already know and feed their arrogance as such.

We are vulnerable when we think we already know it all. Paul reminded the Philippians of the need to keep moving forward in their pursuit of transformation (see Phil. 3). The New Century

Version translates Philippians 3:12 this way: “I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal, but I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that, which is the reason he made me his.”⁴ In the section before this, Paul listed his credentials, including his commitment to keep the law. He called all he accomplished worthless in comparison to knowing Christ. He also reminded his readers that knowing Christ was a lifelong goal that drove his pursuit. If Paul had considered his pursuit finished, he would have had no more need to pursue it. That is the danger of pride.

LIVING IT OUT

Jari shared with her Bible study group what happened during the week and some of the things she considered as she reflected on each situation. The group shared similar experiences and how they overcame those same insecurities and fears. Jari’s experiences became a case study of sorts for the group as they worked through their Bible study that week. The group time ended with an opportunity to record ways the truths studied that day would help them better relate to God, themselves, and others. Jari quickly noted that she could trust God to use her to make a difference in the lives of her coworkers, since she now had a better understanding of her fears and insecurities and how her weaknesses could become strengths if she placed them in God’s hands. She left the group knowing she was not alone in her struggles and with a new resolve to find a way to share with at least one of her coworkers on Monday.

Jari began her Monday with her Bible, her study guide opened to the page on which she wrote notes, and a cup of coffee in her hand. This day felt different from last week. She finished her coffee, got dressed, and headed to work. As she entered the building, there stood the security guard, still carrying that worried look in his eyes. Before Jari knew it, he was telling her about things going on with his family. She listened and eventually offered to pray with him. Today was a different day.

ENGAGE

1. When was the last time you paused to ask “why” about a spiritual hesitation or missed opportunity? How did it lead to growth?
2. What fears keep people from reflecting honestly on their spiritual growth?
3. How might a person begin identifying and replacing misaligned values with God’s truth in their daily life? What practical steps will help them renew their mind?
4. What would it look like for a person to intentionally create space in their life for deeper reflection, even when it’s uncomfortable or inconvenient? What role does a Bible study group play in creating that space?



CHAPTER THREE

GROUPS AND RENEWING THE MIND

Arthur Flake was the first director of Sunday School for what is now known as Lifeway. In notes that eventually gave birth to a book, he stated that everyone ought to study the Bible. He went on to write that people who were not a part of an ongoing Bible study group (like Sunday School) were not involved in personal Bible study. This statement connected Bible study with a group and Bible study as an individual. Both are affirmed and seen as supporting the other. We need both if we are going to renew our minds.

We need time individually to reflect on the truth of God's Word and how it connects with our daily lives. At the same time, we need a group as a sounding board and source of accountability. We work together with those in our Bible study group to compare what the world says with what the Bible says, as we apply God's Word to our everyday lives. Together, we learn from one another and build on each other's knowledge. Group time encourages us to think more intentionally about how the Bible meets life and what needs to be renewed in our minds. As we grow in our understanding of how

we can better relate to God, ourselves, and others, we gain a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

Jari's Bible study group was studying a set of lessons that focused on God's work in this world. As she read her Bible that morning, her interpretation of John 10 was impacted by what her group was studying. She saw the testimony of John as one way God uses people to accomplish His purposes, along with other Bible characters who were included in their studies. Jari's group focused on this truth for several weeks, giving her more opportunities to consider her beliefs and values. She knew she wasn't alone, but that didn't translate into confidence to share with at least one of the people she encountered throughout her day. However, as she processed her experiences with the group after the fact, they helped her think through the whys and encouraged her in the reboot of her mindset.

The kind of group Jari was a part of doesn't just happen. The leader of the group must take some initiative to prepare to teach for the heart, taking the risk of sharing his or her own heart and struggles. The group must be accepting of each other as people, knowing that not all values, including some held individually, are aligned with God's values. People gather in Bible study groups for spiritual transformation, supporting one another along the way. The resources they use encourage them to examine what the world teaches, compare it with biblical truth, and live out those truths as they align their beliefs and values with God's.

AIMING AT THE HEART

Mike Livingstone, an experienced editor at Lifeway, has some great insight about teaching to the heart. He points out that he has never met a Bible study leader who wanted to lead a shallow Bible study. As well, he has never met anyone who attended a weekly Bible study with the hope of being bored by pointless superficialities.

Various opinions exist regarding what constitutes *deep* Bible teaching. For some, going deep means telling people something they didn't already know. Deep may involve that, but deep goes beyond imparting new knowledge.

We can parse Greek verbs all day and never move out of the shallows of a text. We can impress the group with our knowledge of Bible culture and history and still be superficial in our teaching of a passage. Why? Because the depth of teaching is measured not by the amount of biblical knowledge imparted but by how deeply the truth of the biblical text penetrates the heart.

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We can mark the depth of teaching at the point where the truth of God's Word intersects the lives of the group members. If you want to go deeper in your Bible teaching, be intentional about connecting biblical truth to where people are. In other words, aim not at their heads, but at their hearts—the totality of their mind, will, and emotions.

Tim Keller points out in his book, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, "If you want to preach to the heart, you need to preach from the heart. It's got to be clear that your own heart has been reached by the truth of the text."⁵

Keller's point is obvious: Leading a deeper Bible study involves more than preparing the right words to say about a passage; it involves the preparation of the leader. We teach by who we are, not just by what we say. Consequently, a deeper Bible study is, to some degree, the overflow of what God is doing in the depths of the leader's heart. That's a hugely different proposition than merely going through the lesson material and presenting what's in the book.

Livingstone reminds us that a leader guide and other lesson helps enable us to add depth to the content of our teaching. Building relationships with the individuals in our groups will help us connect God's Word to their lives. Our personal study and willingness to renew our minds in a deep pursuit of God—not just in search of lesson material—will take our teaching to another level.

THE ROLE OF A BIBLE STUDY GROUP LEADER

The Bible study leader moves the group through three critical steps. These steps work as an organizing tool for creating a Bible study group time. These three steps can be remembered with three action words: Look, Learn, and Live.

Look at Our World. Within the context of a small group Bible study, the leader functions as a facilitator in the renewing process. He or she begins the process by guiding the group to articulate what the world says about an issue and helping them understand why they need to look at this issue.

Learn God's Way. The second step is to introduce the group to what God's Word says about the subject. The goal is to move toward comparing what the world says with what the Bible says. The leader may use case studies and other activities to help the group make the comparison. Included in this is helping the group identify the beliefs and values expressed by both the world and the Bible. This comparison calls everyone to consider how their actions demonstrate where they aren't aligned with God's values and heart.

Live It Out. With the third step, the leader challenges the group to act on what they have discovered together and individually, living their lives in a way that is consistent with God's way.

The leader and learner are involved in this refining process at the same time, but at levels consistent with what they believe and are willing to adjust. This mutual refining is a dynamic that requires courage when teaching. At times, the leader becomes the learner, yet remains the leader of the group experience.

Teach with a view toward the affective domain.

Educational models focus learning on three levels: cognitive (facts or knowledge), affective (values and beliefs), and psychomotor (skills or action). As such, critical thinking elevates the affective domain within the teaching/learning model. While a person may have all the required information (cognitive domain), it is their beliefs about and evaluation of that information (affective domain) that determine what they will eventually do (psychomotor domain).

This approach is not a call to eliminate knowledge, but a call to go beyond the facts. The affective domain connects knowledge with values and beliefs. Teaching to the affective domain is usually the more challenging and most personal. Also, measuring beliefs and values isn't always clear-cut, while knowledge and skills are easy to weigh objectively.

A word of warning: Beliefs and values must be rooted in facts and seen in real-life action. All three levels are needed.

Design the lesson to be experiential in nature.

Learners must interact with the content and consider the implications of adopting or adjusting their beliefs or values. Case studies, discussion, sharing experiences, and a variety of other teaching approaches are needed to help each other examine and reshape our beliefs and values.

Experiential learning is both directed and open-ended. The goal is to interact with the content as opposed to moving toward a predetermined action response. Instead of approaching the group with a question like, "Don't you think we should follow Paul's directive and provide financial support for the local foster care organization?" we give the group an opportunity to suggest ways they can, as a group and as individuals, actively care for orphans and widows. This second approach is open-ended but also directed, since the focus is on ways to live out a biblical truth.

By using hypotheticals, we can explore possibilities and analyze potential ramifications. Hypotheticals provide a safe place where beliefs and values can be explored. However, it is in the actual world that we all must live out what we believe and value.

Invite a collaborative approach.

The learners and the leader work together. They hold each other accountable for the learning that takes place. Since any one person is limited by their own experiences and perspective, collaborative learning makes it possible for everyone to gain from the experiences of every person involved. The collaborative element also serves as

a doctrinal filter, holding each other accountable for biblical accuracy as you discover and think together.

The leader would also be called on to admit his or her shortcomings and past failures, is a participant in the process, and is also refining their beliefs and values. Humility takes precedent over content mastery. The leader must develop the discipline of asking probing questions that move the group into the affective domain. At the same time, they must be sensitive to the learner, knowing when to probe and when to back off.

One element that limits collaboration is the size of a group. Honest dialogue rarely takes place in a large group. A large number may make it feel safe for some, but it lends itself to transactional learning and minimal sharing that leads to transformation.

Create a healthy class environment.

A challenge facing the leader is developing an environment that encourages loving inquisition about beliefs and values, but does so without personal attack. The leader can guide the group to create a class code—a set of rules or guidelines used by the group. Some items to include may relate to a willingness to try different learning activities, to read the Scripture passage before attending the group meeting, and to question ideas shared but not in a personal way. The leader can periodically remind the group of the code, calling attention to the standards set. While the group may assist, the leader is ultimately responsible for enforcing the code during dialogue and interaction.

Use curriculum as a group study tool.

Curriculum functions as a tool to help the group consider what God's Word says about a matter, presents biblical truth on the matter, and moves them toward aligning their beliefs and values with God's truth. This alignment is seen in features that challenge the group to consider how the truth impacts the way they relate to God, themselves, and others (based on Jesus's response to the question about the greatest commandment). The curriculum also includes comments about the Bible passage being studied, enables

the learner to examine the parts, introduces the why, sets the stage for collaborative learning, and provides activities that introduce possible implications. The curriculum used by the group focuses on gaining an understanding of the truths and providing opportunities for personal reflection.

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Resources for the leader give focus to their preparation so they can introduce what the world says, present the biblical truth clearly, and foster reflection from the group. The leader guide gives them ideas for getting into the study by framing the issue and how the world may call for us to conform, interacting with the core Bible passage, and leading the group to live out the truth discovered. The leader guide works with the curriculum used by the group members, reinforcing the value of individual and group study and reflection.

ENGAGE

1. How has being part of a Bible study group helped you reflect more deeply on your beliefs and values? What impact has group discussion had on your spiritual growth?
2. How does your Bible study group encourage participants to move beyond learning facts and toward personal transformation? What could make that process more effective?
3. What are some implications for Bible study group leaders if they desire to aim more at beliefs and values than just facts and knowledge? How might that impact how the group engages with Scripture?
4. What role should a Bible study leader play in helping the group compare what the world says with what the Bible says? How can you support or grow in that role?
5. How can you contribute to creating a group environment that fosters honest dialogue, spiritual accountability, and mutual encouragement?



CHAPTER FOUR

A FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATION

In the introduction to this book, we highlighted the Levels of Biblical Learning. The framework began as a tool specific to kids' ministry, serving as a guide for communicating foundational truths to children. The ten concept areas were established then. Over time, the framework expanded to include statements relative to students. Because of the developmental nature of the statements, the expansion stopped at high schoolers.

As we have already established, our spiritual development and transformation continue throughout our lives. Jari helped us understand some of that, showing us the difference between carrying knowledge and valuing knowledge to the point of acting on it, letting our hearts in on what our heads know so our feet can take action.

The connection to the LOBL for adults isn't in knowing more statements, although some statements have been added for adults (more on that later). The adult connection is about deeper alignment—letting our hearts own what our heads confess until our feet act consistently.

In Every Age, Every Stage: Teaching God's Truth at Home and Church, Landry Holmes defines discipleship as the process of becoming and being a disciple, someone who trusts Jesus as their

Savior and Lord and follows His teachings.⁶ No timeline is provided for how spiritual transformation takes place, and we would be missing the point if we tried to define that here. The LOBL does not pretend to be a spiritual development model, and we should leave it like that. What it does offer is a way to gauge how we communicate foundational Christian truths developmentally and provides a framework on which we can build as adults.

**The Levels of Biblical Learning offer
a way to gauge how we communicate foundational
Christian truths developmentally and provide a
framework on which we can build as adults.**

People who grow up with the LOBL framework may have an advantage over those who grow up with little or no Christian framework for their beliefs. They may have less work to do intellectually, but we all have much to do when it comes to renewing our minds, regardless of our upbringing.

The LOBL framework is an acknowledgment of foundational beliefs and not a path for securing them. The framework helps us understand how to communicate those foundational beliefs in an age-appropriate way, with the fundamental belief being the same regardless of age. The fact that we are all sinners is true no matter what our age. The way we communicate that may be different, but the truth is universal.

These concept areas are foundational in that all people have some type of belief relative to each category. People with no Christian background still carry beliefs about God, the origin of this world, purpose, future and afterlife, and how they relate to their families, others, and institutions, including government and religious organizations. The goal is to examine biblical truth so we can determine if our values align with what we find in the Bible.

As such, the Bible becomes the lens through which we live and relate to God, ourselves, and others. The truths of Scripture, seen in the concept statements in each category of the LOBL, define how

we think about the world. This biblical lens becomes the means for evaluating our thoughts, values, and attitudes.

The ten areas—God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Bible, creation, salvation, people, family, church, and community and world—can also be stated as the response to a core question. We spend our lives refining our response to these ten core questions, seeking to align our hearts—our life lens—more fully. As we align more closely with God’s Word, we become more capable of relating appropriately to God, ourselves, and others.

The chart on the next page illustrates how the concept areas, core questions, and key relationships intersect to help us view life more clearly through a biblical lens.

Levels of Biblical Learning Concept Areas	Core Question	Relationship
God	Who is God?	God
Jesus	Who is Jesus?	
Holy Spirit	Who is the Holy Spirit?	
Bible	What does God want me to know?	
Creation	How did I get here?	Ourselves
Salvation	Where am I going?	
People	Who am I?	
Family	What is my role in my family?	Others
Church	What is my role in the church and God's kingdom?	
Community and World	What is my role in and my responsibility to the world around me?	

Each concept area is made up of a set of statements. These statements represent a mature understanding of the answers to the core questions identified on the chart. Many of the adult statements are also included in the high school document. However, some statements were added with the realization that adulthood is different from high school.

Each statement demands a careful and thorough examination, accompanied by reflection. That kind of work will take more than a week or a month in most cases, which brings us back to Jari and her Bible study group. Jari's group was studying a set of lessons that focused on God's work in this world. Each lesson in the set looked at a different element of the selected statement: *God continues to work in the world, and as we join Him in His work, He uses people to accomplish His eternal purposes*. This statement is included in the adult statements under the Community and World concept area (see the Appendix). While truths from other concept areas may be interwoven into this set of lessons, the primary focus is on community and world. Spending several weeks on this category gives the group time to fully process not only how they understand this statement, but also how they can practically live it out (transformation).

Jari's class gives us a glimpse of the future of *Bible Studies for Life Adults*. Over the course of three years, each category will be touched on at least twice. A group of lessons will be crafted based on at least two different statements from each concept area, each quarter. The ultimate goal is to develop a set of studies (units) built on every statement in every category. The current document, which is included in the Appendix, includes sixty-eight (68) statements. Some of these statements may deserve more attention, so they may appear twice, lengthening the overall time required to address all sixty-eight statements.

ENGAGE

1. How do you see the Bible as a lens through which you relate to God, yourself, and others? What adjustments might be needed to sharpen that lens?
2. How comfortable are you in helping your group explore truths in each of the ten LOBL concept areas and apply these truths in their daily lives? Explain.
3. In what ways are you guiding your group to move beyond biblical knowledge to aligning their beliefs and values with biblical truths?
4. How can the LOBL concept areas and core questions be used to shape learning experiences that help adults reflect on their worldview and spiritual maturity?
5. What strategies are you using to create space for personal reflection and group accountability while studying biblical truths together?
6. How can you better support lifelong spiritual transformation in your group, recognizing that renewing the mind is an ongoing process for every adult?



CONCLUSION

A LIFE OF REBOOTS

Just as a computer needs a regular reboot to function at its best, so do we. The spiritual reboot described in Romans 12:2 isn't a one-time event—it's a lifelong process of transformation. It begins with recognizing the need: Our beliefs and values often drift from God's truth, influenced by the noise of the world and the habits and hurts of our past. By renewing our minds, we are invited into a deeper alignment with God's will—what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

This renewal involves more than gaining knowledge. It requires our beliefs and values to move the knowledge we have in our heads to our feet, so we can live our lives through a biblical lens. As our life lens becomes more aligned with a biblical lens, transformation becomes visible—not just in what we know, but in how we love, serve, and relate to God, ourselves, and others.

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Jari's story reminds us that missed opportunities aren't the end. They are invitations to reflect, realign, and respond differently next time. Her journey—and ours—is marked by grace, growth, and the gentle prompting of the Spirit. We are not alone in this process. God works in us and through us, using His Word, His people, and His Spirit to shape us into the likeness of Christ.

As we engage in Bible study—individually and in groups—we aren't just learning facts. We're being formed. We're discerning what it means to live as disciples in a world that desperately needs light. And we're discovering that the reboot God offers isn't just a reset—it's a renewal that leads to a life of purpose, love, and transformation.

The lifelong journey continues as we seek to live with aligned hearts, ready feet, and renewed minds set on the things of God.

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APPENDIX

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING: ADULTS

Lifeway's Levels of Biblical Learning is a dynamic framework for teaching biblical concepts, incorporating suitable language for all age groups. LOBL is based on how God created us to learn throughout our lives. Work on what is now known as LOBL began in the mid-1990s when Christian educators from seminaries, denominational entities, and local churches gathered to determine the marks of a biblical worldview. A few years later, Lifeway leaders and editors, along with other denominational leaders, picked up this work again, honed it specifically for babies through preteens, and named the resulting document Levels of Biblical Learning. Eventually, after consulting with student ministry experts, the LOBL was expanded to include teenagers. The most recent edition includes adults. Individuals speaking into this revision included seminary professors, denominational leaders, and local church practitioners.

The following are the concept statements developed for adults. See the full set of statements for each age group at lifeway.com/agesandstages.

ADULT CONCEPT STATEMENTS

View of God

GOD (Who is God?)

- Because God is holy, He is a distinct transcendent Being altogether separate from and infinitely above people who are sinful, and yet He chooses to be in relationship with people and deserves our reverence and obedience.
- God is Creator. All creation is a result of His work. He created people in His image and as His crowning achievement to enjoy a relationship with Him and reflect His glory.
- God is omnipresent (all places at all times), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipotent (all-powerful). He exercises sovereignty over all creation.
- God communicates to us through His Word. He hears and answers when we pray. Our spiritual maturity depends on spiritual disciplines, including prayer and fasting, Bible study, service, worship, meditation, and solitude.
- God relates to His people according to His covenant promises. Even though we are not always faithful to Him, God keeps His promises. He always has been and always will be faithful to us.
- God is loving and righteous, grieves the impact of sin on the world, and will one day restore His creation to its original state.
- God alone is worthy of our worship. To misplace our attention or affections to people or things rightly owed to God is idolatry.
- God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is eternal, and although He is not bound by time, He chooses to operate in it to relate to us.
- The one eternal God chooses to reveal Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity has distinct personal attributes, with the Father begetting the Son, the Son begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeding from the Father through the Son.

JESUS (Who is Jesus?)

- Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. He did not inherit the sinful nature passed down from Adam, which made Him fit to be our Savior.
- From the beginning, God planned that Jesus would save people from their sins, and it was necessary that He would be crucified and raised.
- Jesus is fully God and fully man. Despite being tempted while on earth, He remained altogether free from sin.
- Jesus lived for the glory of the Father and taught that we should do the same through lives of worship, service, and sacrifice.
- Because no sin can enter God's presence, and because Jesus is holy, He is the only way people can connect with God.
- Jesus, being fully God, performed miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. He did so as a sign of His divine nature and to help people overcome their lack of faith.
- Jesus sits at God's right hand and continually intercedes for believers as our Advocate, Mediator, and High Priest.
- Jesus will one day return to exercise His reign over creation, and He will make all things new.

HOLY SPIRIT (Who is the Holy Spirit?)

- Each person who comes to faith in Christ receives the Holy Spirit and is endowed with a spiritual gift to be used to serve the church.
- Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has come to convict, teach, comfort, lead, strengthen, and seal us, as well as to produce fruit within and through us.
- The Holy Spirit intercedes before the Father on our behalf when we do not know how or what to pray.

- The Holy Spirit inspired and guided people to write the Bible and used the personalities and voices of men to communicate the very words of God.
- The Holy Spirit enables humanity to understand truth, opening their spiritual eyes, enabling believers to stand against Satan and evil, and empowering the church to fulfill her purposes.

BIBLE (What does God want me to know?)

- The Bible is God's truth. It is internally consistent, without error, totally trustworthy, and eternal. The Bible is the standard by which all conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.
- The Bible is the story of God's work to redeem fallen creation through the saving work of Jesus, who will one day make all things new.
- The Bible consists of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments and is the only inspired written Word of God.
- Through the Bible, we know God Himself, and we know how He expects us to live as followers of Christ and to experience His blessing.

View of Self

CREATION (How did I get here?)

- God is Creator. All creation is a result of His work and exists to glorify Him.
- Creation testifies to the existence of God. Because His power and nature are understood through what He has made, people are without excuse for their disbelief and disobedience.
- God's creation functions in an orderly way, and even though sin distorts that order, creation serves His purposes as He exercises sovereign rule over it all.

- People are God's most loved creation and have been given the responsibility for overseeing His creation. As we steward it for His purposes, we reflect God's character and authority.
- God's creation was perfect and flawless in every way; however, that perfect creation became tainted by sin when humanity willfully chose to disobey God.
- God will one day restore His creation, making all things new, with Satan, his demons, evil, and people who reject Jesus being banished for eternity to hell.

SALVATION (Where am I going?)

- Before the beginning of time, God's plan for salvation centered on Jesus's death and resurrection, which made salvation possible.
- No amount of good works can save a person. Jesus's paying the penalty for our sin is the only way to be reconciled to God.
- Because of rebellion against God, all people are cut off from a relationship with Him and deserve eternal death and hell, which is the punishment for sin.
- God's salvation is eternal. Once we are adopted into God's family, nothing can separate us from Him.
- Salvation includes regeneration (becoming new beings), justification (acquittal of our offenses against God), sanctification (the process of moral and spiritual maturity), and glorification (the culmination of salvation seen in eternity).
- Salvation includes the forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus, releasing the individual from the guilt and penalty of sin, and enabling them to extend genuine forgiveness to others.
- We can be confident in our salvation when we, as a matter of desire, live in obedience to God and in ways that reflect Jesus.
- Salvation does not exempt a believer from temptation, nor does it give them a license to sin.

PEOPLE (Who am I?)

- All people are created in God's image as male and female. We are infinitely valuable, and our lives are gifts from God.
- People are created as moral beings and are responsible for our choices and the consequences of our choices, including the way we treat others.
- People inherit a nature inclined toward sin. Once we reach moral awareness, we inevitably commit wrongdoing and fall under judgment.
- People grow in Christlikeness as we act intentionally to pursue Christ and as God works in our lives.
- God has a purpose for every person. We can know His plans by understanding and applying the truth of Scripture.
- God loves all people, regardless of ethnicity or status. He desires that we turn to Him for salvation, and He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to bear the penalty for our sin on the cross.
- Because of Jesus, people can live with joy regardless of circumstances, as joy is rooted in an eternal perspective and not in earthly circumstances.
- Our response to God's love is to remain pure (strive toward holiness) in all aspects of life—with our bodies, thoughts, attitudes, actions, and speech. God empowers us to obey His commands as we live by the Spirit.
- All people have sinned and have been separated from God, but we can be restored to a relationship with Him when we trust in Jesus and turn from our sin.

View of Others

FAMILY (What is my role in my family?)

- Families are a part of God's plan to fill the earth with His image-bearers and are responsible for providing for the spiritual, physical, mental, social, and emotional needs of family members.
- God's plan for the family involves one man and one woman, who have different but complementary roles, committing to one another in a lifelong covenant relationship as a reflection of God's love for His people.
- Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from God.
- God calls children to honor their parents throughout their lives as a reflection of honor and love for Him. Further, we are to demonstrate love toward all members of our families, including siblings, extended family, and those God brings into our families through fostering, adoption, or remarriage.
- When families experience brokenness, such as conflict, abuse, or divorce, God desires to bring healing and repentance and to use the broader family of God to minister to hurting people during difficult times.

CHURCH (What is my role in the church and God's kingdom?)

- The church is a community of believers called to meet regularly to study Scripture, pray, worship, serve, encourage one another, and proclaim the gospel to the world.
- The church is not a place or a building but is made up of the people who belong to the family of God. Under the Old Covenant, God dwelt in the temple or the tabernacle; today God dwells in His people and works through them to advance His kingdom.

- The church is called to train and equip its members for works of ministry, including giving their time, resources, and talents to serve those within the church and reach those outside the church.
- The ordinances of the church are the Lord's Supper, which represents the body and blood of Jesus as the payment for our sin, and baptism, which represents our sharing in Jesus's burial and resurrection.
- Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another to carry out missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries.
- Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people.
- Each congregation operates under the lordship of Christ, following the leadership provided by the pastor and service of the deacons, holding each other accountable, with the Spirit's leading, through a democratic process.

COMMUNITY AND WORLD (What is my role in and responsibility to the world around me?)

- God values all people—born and unborn, young and old, male and female, all ethnicities, those of opposing faiths. He calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost across the street and around the world through prayer, giving resources, acting with love, and sharing the gospel.
- God continues to work in the world, and as we join Him in His work, He uses people to accomplish His eternal purposes.
- We demonstrate honor for God when we respect the earthly authorities He has placed in our lives, such as parents, pastors, teachers, coaches, police, and government.

- Christians ought to pray and work so that God's kingdom will come and God's will will be done on earth. The full consummation of the kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.
- Christians should seek to be at peace with all men on principles of righteousness, forgiving those who may wrong them in the process. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ, they should do all in their power to put an end to war.
- Every Christian should seek to bring all industry, government, and society under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, justice, and brotherly love. We should work to improve our society, providing for the orphaned, needy, abused, aged, helpless, and sick in ways that honor God.
- Christians should be ready to work with all people of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

ENDNOTES

1. For more on the Levels of Biblical Learning, see “What Are the Levels of Biblical Learning?” by Landry Holmes at www.lifeway.com/en/articles/what-are-the-levels-of-biblical-learning.
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5. Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 166.
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reboot

Adults don't need a new set of truths—they need a renewed mind. *Reboot: Renewing Our Minds One Belief at a Time* encourages church and Bible study leaders to challenge adults to revisit and refine their worldview through the Levels of Biblical Learning model. Long trusted in kids and student ministry, this model is a trustworthy lens for adult discipleship. *Reboot* challenges individuals and Bible study groups to move beyond knowing biblical facts to aligning their beliefs and values with God's truth so they can live out their faith in everyday life.

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