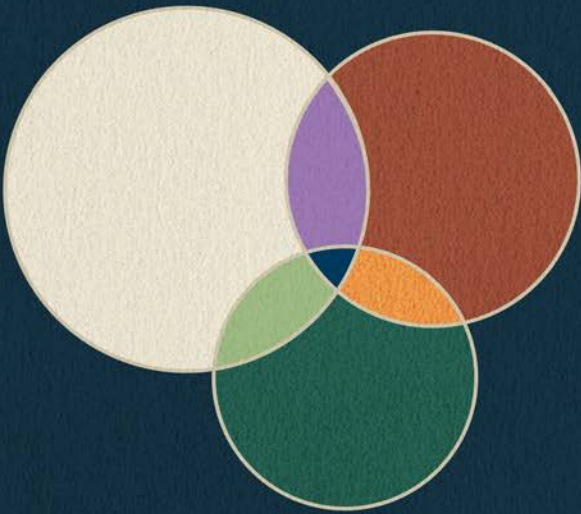
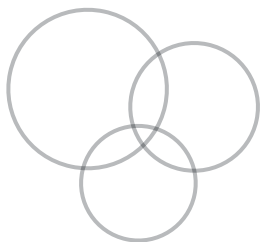


SACRED SPACES

Devoting Time to
God, Others, and Me



KEN BRADDY *and*
JAMIE COOMER



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SACRED SPACES

Devoting Time to
God, Others, and Me

INTRODUCTION

In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, finding time for the things that truly matter can often feel like an insurmountable challenge. Yet, it is precisely in these moments of intentional pause that we discover sacred spaces that fuel our teaching ministries. Burnout is a reality for many of us who are called to serve the Lord as group leaders. We must learn to guard certain parts of our lives so that we finish the race of ministry and hear the words of the Lord: “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

There are three sacred spaces that nourish our souls, strengthen our relationships, and rejuvenate our spirits. *Sacred Spaces: Devoting Time to God, Others, and Me* is a journey into the heart of what it means to live a balanced and fulfilling life that is centered around three pivotal aspects: one-on-one time with God, engagement with group members beyond Bible study, and commitment to personal well-being through mental health and physical wellness.



Time with God

At the core of our spiritual journey lies the intimate and personal relationship we cultivate with God. This one-on-one time is not merely a ritualistic practice but a profound encounter that shapes our faith, guides our decisions, and anchors our lives. In a world that constantly demands our attention, setting aside dedicated moments for prayer, meditation, and reflection becomes an act of sacred defiance against the chaos of life. It is in these quiet moments that we hear the still, small voice of God, offering wisdom, comfort, and direction.

Daily communion with God is essential for spiritual growth and maturity. It is during these times that we delve deeper into the Word of God, allowing it to speak to our hearts and transform our minds. This practice is not about checking off a religious duty but about fostering a genuine connection with the Lord. As we prioritize this sacred time, we begin to see the fruits of our devotion manifest in our lives—peace that surpasses understanding, strength in times of trial, and a sense of purpose that transcends the mundane.

Our one-on-one time with God serves as a foundation for all other aspects of our lives. It is the wellspring from which we draw the courage to face challenges, the compassion to serve others, and the clarity to make wise decisions. By making this time a non-negotiable part of our daily routine, we acknowledge that our relationship with God is the most important relationship we will ever have. It is a relationship that deserves our utmost attention and dedication.



Time with Others

While personal devotion is crucial, our faith journey is not meant to be walked alone. The second pillar of *Sacred Spaces* emphasizes the importance of community and the transformative power of relationships. Engaging with group members outside of your Bible study experience allows you to build deeper connections, foster mutual support, and grow together in faith. It acknowledges that a lot of life happens “between Sundays,” and that our ministries as group leaders are not totally about “nine to noon on Sunday mornings.” While an important part of our leadership as teachers happens as we guide our group members to explore the Bible together, there is more to it than just leading an hour of Bible study.

In the classroom, we often focus on learning and absorbing information. However, it is in the informal, unstructured moments outside of the classroom that true fellowship—and learning—occurs. Whether it’s sharing a meal, participating in a service project, or simply spending time together, these interactions create a sense of belonging and accountability. They remind us that we are part of a larger body, each member contributing uniquely to the whole.

Spending time with group members also provides opportunities for mentorship and discipleship. We learn from one another’s experiences, share our struggles and victories, and encourage each other to stay committed to our spiritual goals. These relationships are a source of strength and inspiration, helping us to navigate the complexities of life with the support of a loving community.

Our interactions with group members outside of the classroom help to break down barriers and build bridges. In a world that often emphasizes individualism and competition, these moments of genuine connection remind us of the beauty of unity and collaboration. They teach us to value diversity, embrace differences, and work together towards common goals. By investing in these relationships, we create a network of support that extends beyond the classroom and into every aspect of our lives.



Time with Me

The third pillar of *Sacred Spaces* addresses the importance of holistic well-being. Our mental health, physical wellness, hobbies, and other interests are not separate from our spiritual lives. Taking time to care for ourselves in these areas is an act of stewardship, honoring the bodies and minds that God has given us.

Mental health is a crucial component of overall well-being. In a fast-paced, high-pressure world, it is easy to neglect our mental and emotional needs. However, prioritizing mental health is essential for maintaining balance and resilience. By taking care of our mental health, we can handle stress, build healthy relationships, and pursue our goals with clarity and focus. It is not selfish—it is essential.

Physical wellness is equally important. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and caring for them is an act of worship. Regular exercise, a balanced diet, adequate sleep, and routine medical check-ups are all ways to honor our physical well-being. Engaging in physical activities that we enjoy, whether it's hiking, dancing, or playing a sport, also brings joy and vitality to our lives. When we feel strong and healthy, we are better able to serve others and fulfill our God-given purposes.

Hobbies and interests are often overlooked in discussions of well-being, but they play a significant role in our overall fulfillment. Engaging in activities that we are passionate about allows us to express our creativity, develop new skills, and find joy in the present moment. Whether it's painting, gardening, honing skills at a sport, reading, or playing an instrument, these pursuits enrich our lives and provide a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Balancing these three aspects—our one-on-one time with God, our time with group members beyond Bible study, and our commitment to personal well-being—requires intentionality and discipline. It involves making conscious choices to prioritize what truly matters and letting go of what does not. It means setting boundaries, managing our time effectively, and being mindful of how we spend our energy.

In *Sacred Spaces: Devoting Time to God, My Group, and Me*, we will explore practical strategies for integrating these three pillars into our daily lives. We will delve into the spiritual practices that deepen our relationship with God, the relational dynamics that strengthen our communities, and the self-care routines that enhance our well-being. Through stories, biblical insights, and practical tips, this book aims to inspire and equip you to create your own sacred spaces where you can encounter God, connect with others, and nurture your soul.

Remember that creating sacred spaces is not about perfection but about progress. It is about making small, consistent choices that align with your values and priorities. It is about being gentle with yourself and recognizing that every step is a step toward a more spiritually, physically, and emotionally balanced and fulfilling life.

May this book be a guide and a companion as you seek to make time for what matters most. May it encourage you to carve out sacred spaces in the midst of the busyness to find joy and peace in the presence of God, the company of others, and the care of your own soul.

This year's booklet was co-written by a dear friend and fellow minister, Jaime Coomer. Jamie serves the people of Lone Oak First Baptist Church in Paducah, Kentucky. Jamie is the church's Minister of Discipleship and Families, and he is well-acquainted with the sacred spaces needed to create health and balance in ministry. I am thrilled that you'll read his insights along with mine. He and his wife Nicole have five children. Jamie wrote chapter two and contributed to the content in the remaining chapters.

Ken Braddy
Director of Sunday School

The background is a dark gray with several overlapping circles of varying shades of gray. A large, semi-transparent circle is on the left, and two thinner, lighter gray circles are on the right, creating a layered, geometric effect.

Chapter 1

THE MOST SACRED SPACE

Making Time for God

TIME — THE GREAT EQUALIZER

It has been noted that everyone has the same amount of time in the day. Others may have an advantage over us in terms of their abilities, influence, or money, but not in the category of time. J. Oswald Chambers said in his classic book, *Spiritual Leadership*, “Time is precious, but we squander it thoughtlessly. . . . A leader will seldom say, “I don’t have the time.” Such an excuse is usually the refuge of a small-minded and inefficient person. . . . Our problem is not too little time but making better use of the time we have.”¹

It might be tempting to say, “I don’t have the daily margin in my schedule to spend time with God—there are so many demands on me.” We all feel it—the tyranny of the urgent. Sociologists have coined the term “time-compressed” to describe our lives, and they are right. Were our parents or grandparents ever this busy? Probably not.

But if we are to lead at this time, and lead well, group leaders like you and I must be intentional about creating time for God daily. It is a sacred space on our calendars that we cannot give up to other demands that are made of us. If we lose this sacred space, we have lost it all.

SOLITUDE IS ESSENTIAL

I doubt that any of us would argue against the necessity of spending alone time with our Heavenly Father. A growing relationship with someone requires proximity to the other person—it is hard to nurture a relationship from a distance. As group leaders, we must be cautious that we do not substitute knowing the Bible with knowing the author of the Bible.

Perhaps your personal experience has informed you of the need for daily time with God? Mine has. Over the years I have discovered the blessings of communing with God through prayer, meditation, and reading Scripture. The tyranny of the urgent always seems to fight against us having a healthy relationship with our Creator.

Not surprisingly, research has continued to demonstrate the importance of time with God. In the book *The Shape of Faith to Come*, research conducted over two years among 2500 Protestants determined that the

number one indicator of year-over-year spiritual growth was whether a person engaged with God daily. In another independent survey for Lifeway's Transformational Church research project, daily time with God was again found to be a primary factor in people's growth as disciples. From that research, Lifeway discovered eight "signposts of discipleship," which are spiritual habits that God's people do regularly, and "Engage with Scripture" was one of those key indicators of spiritual growth.

How is your time with God these days? Do you find yourself jumping out of bed, hopping into the shower, getting the kids ready for school, and hurrying off to work, only to realize (again) that you allowed time with God to be crowded out of your morning routine? Have you meant to schedule your quiet time with God during your lunch hour, but you seem to end up eating quickly and getting back to your work? Maybe you are a night owl, and you prefer to spend time with God at the end of your day, but you often miss out on that because fatigue sets in, and you drift off to sleep after a long day? Been there, done that.

When I think of a person in the Bible who exemplified the prioritization of time spent with God, of course Jesus is my first thought. He knew the importance of daily communion with God, and He gave us a fitting example to follow.

*We must be cautious that we do not
substitute knowing the Bible with
knowing the author of the Bible.*

Jesus Spent Time with His Father

One of the most profound examples of spending time alone with God comes from Jesus Himself. Throughout the Gospels, we see numerous instances where Jesus withdrew from the crowds and even His disciples to pray and seek the Father's guidance. We read in Mark 1:35, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying." This verse highlights the intentionality and priority Jesus placed on His time with God.

Similarly, it is noted in Luke 5:16, “Yet he often withdrew to deserted places and prayed.” The frequency of these moments underscores their significance in Jesus’s ministry. Despite the demands of His mission and the constant presence of people seeking His help, Jesus made it a point to retreat and spend time with God. This practice not only rejuvenated Him but also provided clarity and strength for His ministry to others.

The significance of prayer and spending time with God is profoundly illustrated in the example of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus retreated to this quiet place to pray, demonstrating the importance of seeking God’s presence during times of intense trial and uncertainty. In Matthew 26:36-39, we see Jesus expressing His deep anguish and sorrow, yet He earnestly prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” This moment of vulnerability and submission demonstrates the power of prayer in aligning our will with God’s, providing strength and clarity in the face of overwhelming challenges.

Jesus’s example teaches us that prayer is not just a ritual. Rather, it is a vital lifeline that connects us to the Father—offering comfort, guidance, and the courage to embrace God’s plan, even when it is difficult. Through His time in Gethsemane, Jesus showed us that in our darkest hours, turning to God in prayer can bring peace and fortitude to persevere.

Sanders noted the primacy of Jesus’s prayer life. He said,

Surely if anyone could have sustained life without prayer it would be the very Son of God Himself. If prayer is silly or unnecessary, Jesus would not have wasted His time at all. But wait! Prayer was the dominant feature of His life and a recurring part of His teaching. Prayer kept His moral vision sharp and clear. Prayer gave Him the courage to endure the perfect but painful will of His Father. Prayer paved the way for transfiguration. To Jesus, prayer was not a hasty add-on, but a joyous necessity.²

Jesus Wasn't the Only One to Seek God in Solitude

Jesus was not the only biblical figure who understood the importance of solitude with God. Moses, for instance, spent time alone with God on Mount Sinai. In Exodus 34:28, we read, “Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat food or drink water. He wrote the Ten Commandments, the words of the covenant, on the tablets.” This extended period of solitude allowed Moses to receive divine revelation and guidance for the Israelites.

Elijah, too, experienced the power of solitude with God. After a dramatic showdown with the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled to the wilderness, where he encountered God in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:11-13). This encounter not only reassured Elijah but also provided him with the direction he needed to continue his prophetic ministry.

Daniel consistently spent time alone with God in prayer. His commitment to prayer is seen in Daniel 6:10, where, despite the decree issued by King Darius forbidding prayer to any god or man except the king for thirty days, Daniel continued his practice of praying three times a day. He went to his upstairs room, where the windows opened toward Jerusalem, and knelt to pray, giving thanks to God just as he had done before. This unwavering dedication to prayer not only demonstrated Daniel's deep faith and reliance on God but also his courage to maintain his spiritual discipline regardless of the consequences. His prayers were not merely routine; they were heartfelt communications with God, seeking guidance, strength, and wisdom. Daniel's consistent prayer life played a crucial role in his ability to interpret dreams, receive divine revelations, and remain steadfast in his faith. His example teaches us the importance of regular, intentional time with God.

But Wait—There's More!

John Wesley, known as the founder of Methodism, made prayer a central part of his daily routine, dedicating two hours every morning to it. He believed ministry could not be effective without it, and his disciplined prayer life laid the foundation for a movement that transformed England and spread across the world.³

Martin Luther, a key figure of the Protestant Reformation, famously said, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” Despite his busy life, Luther recognized that the more he had to accomplish, the more time he needed to spend in communion with God.

Billy Graham believed in the importance of starting and ending the day with prayer. He once said, “In the morning, prayer is the key that opens to us the treasures of God’s mercies and blessings; in the evening, it is the key that shuts us up under His protection and safeguard.”⁴ He emphasized that prayer should be a way of life, not just an emergency measure.

The people mentioned above are well-known from church history, but I imagine that you know people from your life who might be known as “prayer warriors,” who do not have the same kind of notoriety. Perhaps the prayer warrior you think about is your mother or grandmother. Maybe you had a mentor who disciplined you and taught you the importance of daily time with God? The truth is, time with God is not something that is unique to famous believers throughout history. You and I have the same amount of time daily, twenty-four hours of it, to carve out a few moments that place us at the feet of Jesus. History may never know of us or our commitment to prayer, but our heavenly Father does.

WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME?

Spending time with God daily offers numerous benefits that extend beyond our spiritual lives. It provides a sense of peace and grounding that helps us navigate the challenges of life with grace and resilience. Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6-7, “Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” This peace is a direct result of our communion with God.

Daily devotion also fosters spiritual growth and maturity. As we immerse ourselves in God’s Word and seek His presence, we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). This

transformation equips us to live out our faith more authentically and effectively, bearing fruit in every good work (Colossians 1:10).

Perhaps the greatest benefit of daily time with God is the continuation of our leadership roles. “Spiritual leadership flows out of a person’s vibrant, intimate relationship with God. You cannot be a spiritual leader if you are not encountering God in profound, life-changing ways.”⁵

Perhaps the greatest benefit of daily time with God is the continuation of our leadership roles.

Practical Tips for Making Time for God

Creating a consistent routine for spending time with God can be challenging, especially with the demands of life today. However, with intentionality and discipline, it is possible to cultivate this sacred practice and to safeguard this sacred space. Here are some practical tips to help you get started:

1. **Set a Specific Time:** Choose a time of day that works best for you and stick to it. Whether it is early in the morning like Jesus, or during a quiet moment in the evening, consistency is key. My preference is to have my “God and me” time in the morning—around 6 a.m. I have more energy earlier in the day than later. Jesus’s pattern was to rise early and spend time with God before His day began.
2. **Create a Dedicated Space:** Find a quiet and comfortable place where you can focus on your time with God without distractions. This could be a corner of your room, a spot in your garden, or even a cozy chair by the window. Mine (Ken’s) is my big, comfortable recliner. My children are grown and out of the house, so I rise early. I love spending alone time with God while the house is quiet. This place and time of day works well for me. Where is your favorite place to meet with God?

3. **Use a Devotional Guide:** Devotional books, Bible reading plans, and prayer journals can provide structure and inspiration for your time with God. Choose resources that resonate with you and help you stay engaged. My church is currently reading the Bible together this year, and we have about six chapters a day to read. It is nice knowing that hundreds of other believers are reading the same passages daily!
4. **Incorporate Worship:** Singing hymns, listening to worship music, or simply expressing your gratitude to God can enhance your devotional experience. Worship shifts our focus from ourselves to God, fostering a deeper sense of connection.
5. **Be Flexible:** Life can be unpredictable, and there may be days when your routine is disrupted. Be flexible and find alternative ways to spend time with God, even if it is just a few minutes.
6. **Let Go of the Guilt:** If your routine is disrupted, do not become paralyzed because of guilt. Focus on how many days you have been able to spend time with God and simply go forward from that point. Forgive yourself, pick up where you left off, and move on. We have all been there, so remember the mantra: “Progress, not perfection.”
7. **Reward Yourself:** While meeting with God is its own reward, consider giving yourself small incentives for consistently having your daily devotional time. For instance, at the end of your first month of consistently meeting with God, take yourself out for coffee or a special meal. Do something like this and build up to something bigger—like buying yourself a new Bible—that will become a part of your daily devotional time, and a reminder of your commitment (and consistency) in meeting with God.

Overcoming Common Obstacles

Despite our best intentions, there are often obstacles that hinder us from making time for God. Identifying and addressing these challenges can help us stay committed to our spiritual practice. There are numerous obstacles we might encounter in the course of a year. How many of these have sidetracked your efforts to spend time daily with God?

Busyness: One of the most common obstacles is the busyness of life. With work, family, and social commitments, it can be difficult to find time for anything else. However, it is important to remember that our relationship with God is foundational to everything else. By prioritizing our time with God, we can approach our other responsibilities with greater clarity and purpose. I have gone to the extreme of placing my time with God on my daily calendar. I treat it like an appointment each day. Appointments mean that something is important. We place appointments for haircuts, oil changes, and other things, so why not set up calendar time with God?

Distractions: In our digital age, distractions are everywhere. From social media notifications to endless to-do lists, it can be hard to focus on our time with God. To combat this, consider setting boundaries for your devotional time. Turn off your phone (or silence notifications for a time), find a quiet space, and give yourself permission to be fully present with God. If you are a stay-at-home mom, spend time with God while the kids are napping or at a weekday preschool program. The point is, make your schedule work for you and minimize the number of distractions coming at you.

Lack of Motivation: There may be days when you simply do not feel motivated to spend time with God. During these times, it is helpful to remind yourself of the benefits and importance of this practice. Reflect on past experiences where your time with God brought you peace, guidance, or comfort. Sometimes, taking the first step, even when you do not feel like it, can reignite your passion for God's presence.

THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN OUR DEVOTIONAL TIME

The Bible is a vital component of our time with God. It is through God's Word that we hear God's voice, receive His guidance, and grow in our understanding of His character. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul wrote, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Reading and meditating on the Bible allows us to align our hearts and minds with God's truth. It provides a solid foundation for our faith and helps us navigate the complexities of life with wisdom and discernment. As we immerse ourselves in God's Word, we are reminded of His promises, encouraged by His faithfulness, and challenged to live out our faith in practical ways.

Incorporating Prayer into Our Devotional Time

Prayer is another essential aspect of our time with God. It is through prayer that we communicate with God, express our needs and desires, and seek His guidance and intervention. Philippians 4:6 encourages us to "present your requests to God" through prayer and petition. This open line of communication fosters a deeper relationship with God and allows us to experience His presence in our daily lives.

There are various forms of prayer that we can incorporate into our devotional time. These include:

- **Adoration:** Adoration focuses on worshiping and praising God for who He is. Prayers of adoration are expressions of love, reverence, and awe toward God's majesty, holiness, and greatness. They often include declarations of God's attributes, such as His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Adoration helps believers to center their hearts on God and acknowledge His supreme authority and worthiness of all praise.
- **Confession:** Confession involves admitting and repenting of sins before God. This type of prayer is an opportunity for believers to seek forgiveness and cleansing from their wrongdoings. By confessing sins, Christians acknowledge their need for God's mercy and grace, and it helps to restore their fellowship with Him. Confession is a humbling act that brings spiritual renewal and freedom from guilt.
- **Thanksgiving:** Thanksgiving is an expression of gratitude to God for His blessings and provisions. Prayers of thanksgiving focus on acknowledging and appreciating God's goodness, faithfulness, and generosity. By giving thanks, we cultivate a heart of gratitude and recognize that every good gift comes

from God. Thanksgiving prayers can be specific or general, expressing overall thankfulness for God's presence and care.

- **Supplication:** Supplication, also known as petition, involves making requests to God for personal needs or the needs of others. Prayers of supplication can cover a wide range of topics, including health, guidance, provision, protection, and more. Supplication reflects a believer's dependence on God and trust in His ability to provide and intervene in various situations. It is an act of faith, believing that God hears and answers prayers according to His will.
- **Intercession:** Intercession is a form of supplication where believers pray on behalf of others. Intercessory prayer involves standing in the gap for individuals, groups, or nations, asking God to intervene in their lives and circumstances. Intercessory prayers cover a variety of needs, such as healing, salvation, comfort, and deliverance. It reflects a selfless concern for others and a desire to see God's will accomplished in their lives.
- **Meditation:** Meditation involves reflecting on God's Word and His presence. It is about listening to God and contemplating His truths. Meditation often includes reading and pondering Scripture, allowing it to speak to the heart and mind. Meditation helps believers to internalize God's Word, gain deeper insights, and experience a closer communion with Him. It is a time of stillness and focus, fostering spiritual growth and intimacy with God.
- **Consecration:** Consecration is about dedicating oneself to God's service and will. Prayers of consecration involve committing one's life, actions, and decisions to God, seeking His guidance and empowerment. Consecration reflects a desire to live a holy and obedient life, set apart for God's purposes. It is an act of surrender, acknowledging God's lordship and inviting Him to lead and use one's life for His glory.
- **Lament:** Lament expresses sorrow, grief, and anguish before God. Prayers of lament are a way for believers to pour out their hearts in times of distress, pain, or confusion. Lament allows for honest communication with God, acknowledging the

reality of suffering while seeking His comfort and intervention. It is a form of prayer that embraces the full range of human emotions and trusts in God's compassion and faithfulness even in challenging times.

By incorporating these different forms of prayer, we can cultivate a well-rounded and meaningful prayer life that draws us closer to God.

The Power of Reflection and Journaling

Reflection and journaling are important tools that can enhance our time with God. By taking the time to reflect on our experiences, thoughts, and emotions, we gain deeper insights into our spiritual journey. Journaling allows us to document these reflections, creating a record of God's faithfulness and our growth over time.

Recently, I invested in a leather journal that I discovered online. It has become my go-to source for writing down things that I'm learning, especially about God. You may want to invest in something like that, or a simple spiral-bound notebook. I have discovered that journaling helps me remember what God has said to me, and what I have learned during my quiet times with Him. I love looking back and remembering things from over a year ago!

In Psalm 77:11-12, the psalmist writes, "I will remember the LORD's works; yes, I will remember your ancient wonders. I will reflect on all you have done and meditate on your actions." This practice of remembering and reflecting on God's works can strengthen our faith and provide encouragement during challenging times.

AUTO-PILOT OR MANUAL CONTROL?

An autopilot is a system used to control the path of an aircraft without requiring constant manual control by a human operator. Autopilots do not replace human operators but assist them by taking over some of the control tasks, allowing pilots to focus on broader aspects of operations such as monitoring the trajectory, weather, and on-board systems. In writing about our daily devotional time and pursuit of God, one Lifeway leader noted the following that

came from the Transformational Discipleship research study and the issue of seeking God in our daily walk with Him:

One thing we should never do in autopilot is our time with God. Whether it is corporate worship or private Bible reading, we must be focused and intentional to receive anything from it.

In the Transformational Discipleship research study, growing disciples strongly disagreed with the idea that worship can be done by simply “going through the motions.” Instead, maturing disciples approach things like congregational worship, prayer, and time alone with God with focus and intentionality. They actively want to seek God, worship Him, and draw closer to Him. A believer seeking God is evident in three ways:

1. **Christlikeness is their goal.** A person becomes a disciple of Christ because he intends to follow Him and become like Him. The desire to become like Jesus does not end when we cross over the threshold of faith and gain salvation. Growing disciples continuously seek after God because of their love for Him and commitment to become more like Jesus. We should have a continuous hunger for knowing Christ.
2. **Faith is their guiding principle.** Maturing disciples prioritize their faith as the guiding principle for living. The personal commitment to Jesus Christ for salvation remains important throughout their lives.
3. **Honoring God is their desire.** In the research, growing believers gave a strong agreement to the statement, “One of the main reasons I live my life the way I do is to please and honor God.” These believers actively praise God for His previous work in their lives, chase after what He wants next for them, and seek to do it in a way that glorifies Him.⁶

Conclusion

Making time for God is a sacred practice and a sacred space that requires intentionality, discipline, and a deep desire to connect with God. By following the examples of biblical characters like Jesus, Moses, Daniel, and Elijah, we can learn the importance of solitude and daily devotion.

Establishing a daily devotional time with God can be a life-changing experience. You have every possibility of growing closer to the Lord than ever before as you get to know Him through prayer and reading His Word. It is not about keeping an appointment so that you can check a box. Allow yourself to experience the blessings of spending time with your Savior and allow Him to transform your heart so that you reflect the image of Christ to others in your family, neighborhood, and workplace.

As leaders of Bible study groups, we must all practice solitude with the Savior daily. As we lead, we must do so from the spiritual overflow of our lives. Without spending adequate time with Him daily, we will have no extra spiritual depth from which to draw. The people we teach depend on us to walk with God and to guide them well. Spending time with God is a sacred space that is foundational to each of our ministries, and without it, we will not have our ministries for very long.

Reflective Questions

1. How do you currently prioritize your time with God, and what changes might help you protect that sacred space more consistently?
2. In what ways have you experienced the “tyranny of the urgent,” and how has it affected your spiritual life and leadership?
3. Jesus often withdrew to pray despite His demanding ministry. What lessons can you draw from His example for your own spiritual discipline?
4. Do you find yourself going through the motions in your devotional life? What steps can you take to move from autopilot to intentional pursuit of God?

The background is a dark gray gradient. It features three large, overlapping circles. One circle is a light gray outline, another is a medium gray solid, and the third is a darker gray solid. They overlap in a way that creates a complex, layered effect behind the text.

Chapter 2

THE SACRED SPACE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Making Time for Others

Have you ever walked into a room full of people and still felt completely alone? Many people carry that experience into church. They show up, smile politely, sit through a service—and leave without anyone really knowing them. That’s not what God intended. Small groups can change that. They have the power to transform rooms full of strangers into families of faith. We must create that kind of sacred space—where no one has to walk alone.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Bible study groups create sacred spaces where lives are changed, not by programs, but by relationships rooted in Christ. What makes a small group more than just another meeting? It’s the relationships—the sacred spaces where God works through trust, honesty, and love to shape us into His likeness.

Small groups aren’t just a mechanism for teaching—they’re sacred spaces where God shapes lives through community. Relational environments aren’t optional extras in discipleship, but the very soil where faith grows. As a small group leader, you have a vital role in creating that environment. Your goal isn’t just to pass on information—it’s to help people connect deeply with God and one another.

When leaders understand the power of community, they help their group become a place of transformation, not just information. But community isn’t just cultivated during the group’s Bible study time. In fact, a lot of community-building takes place in that sacred space outside of the group time. Being a Bible study leader is more than just delivering a good study. It’s more than donuts and fellowship on a Sunday morning. Some of the best group life happens between Sundays.

Created for Connection

In a lonely world full of surface-level connections, people are starving for something real. Think back to a time when you felt truly known—when someone listened without judgment, encouraged you without an agenda, and walked beside you no matter what. That kind of connection doesn’t happen by accident. It’s built in sacred

spaces—places where trust, vulnerability, and grace allow people to show up authentically and grow together. That’s what makes small groups so powerful. They are more than weekly gatherings; they are environments where spiritual growth happens because real relationships are formed. In a world where so much is shallow and hurried, these Christ-centered spaces allow people to take off the mask and be real. That honesty strengthens faith, deepens friendships, and reminds us we’re not walking this journey alone.

Community That Carries

As followers of Jesus, we are like foreigners in this world—this isn’t our true home (2 Peter 2:11). In light of that truth, biblical relationships become more than friendships; they become lifelines. God uses community as a source of encouragement and perspective, like a lighthouse guiding us through fog. These sacred connections don’t just comfort us—they remind us of our eternal hope and reassure us that we’re not walking the road alone. In these relationships, we find strength, direction, and a renewed sense of purpose.

A strong community also gives you the boost you need when life gets tough. When you share your troubles with a group that cares, those burdens feel lighter. These people can lift your spirits and help you see things in a new way. Over time, their encouragement helps you stand stronger, face life’s challenges with confidence, and grow into the best version of yourself.

More than that, a tight-knit group can show the world how great true community can be. When others see your group’s love, forgiveness, and unity, it’s like a living example of how relationships are supposed to work. It shows them that being connected, in a real and supportive way, can change lives. These kinds of relationships make the world brighter and remind everyone of the good that comes from sticking together.

THE WAY OF JESUS

You can look at Jesus’s life and see how He built strong relationships and formed a community that gave people a sense of belonging. He spent much time with His twelve disciples, walking with them, eating with them, and teaching them. They didn’t just hear His

sermons; they watched Him live out what He taught. Through this close connection, they learned how to trust God and treat others with love. This wasn't about rules—it was about building trust, opening up to each other, and seeing what faith looked like in everyday life.

One great example is when Jesus called Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him. At that time, tax collectors were outcasts—people avoided them because they worked for the Roman government and often cheated others. But Jesus didn't turn away. Instead, He invited Matthew into His circle. Matthew left everything to follow Jesus, and later, he even threw a dinner party where other tax collectors and “sinners” met Jesus too. This shows how a loving relationship and a welcoming community can help someone turn their life around and see themselves in a new light.

Just like Jesus welcomed Matthew, small group leaders today can help people feel seen, valued, and welcomed. Whether it's extending a genuine hello, following up after a tough week, taking time for a meal or a quick cup of coffee before work, or simply making space for someone's story, these everyday moments can open the door to transformation. Who in your group might feel like an outsider? What's one small step you could take this week to draw them in?

Another example is Zacchaeus, a man known for his crooked ways. When Jesus saw him up in a tree trying to catch a glimpse, He stopped and said, “I'm coming to your house today.” Just like that, Zacchaeus was pulled into something bigger than himself. Jesus didn't give him a lecture—He shared a meal with him, talked to him, and changed him from the inside out. That kind of personal connection brought Zacchaeus to repentance and led him to give back all he had stolen. Relationships rooted in care and community gave him hope and a new path forward.

Discipleship Happens in Circles

Beyond these individual moments, Jesus also showed the power of community within His inner circle. The disciples were a group of people from different walks of life—fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot—and they all learned to live and serve together. They argued and misunderstood things at times, but through their connection to Jesus, they grew into a strong, unified group. By living and learning

together, they became the foundation of the early church, carrying forward Jesus' teachings and sharing the gospel around the world.

Jesus also encouraged His disciples to love one another as He loved them. This wasn't a feel-good sentiment but a practical way to live. He washed their feet to show that true leadership involves humility and service. When He said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35), He was pointing to the idea that relationships built on love and service would be a witness to the world. It wasn't about having all the answers; it was about how they treated each other and the community they built.

What we see from Jesus's example is that building relationships and creating a strong community of faith is more than a nice idea—it's central to what it means to follow Jesus. These sacred spaces of trust, forgiveness, and love aren't just for our benefit; they show the world what God's love looks like. Just like with His disciples, Jesus invites us to be part of that kind of community—a place where no one has to walk alone, and everyone can grow and find hope together.

Building relationships and creating a strong community of faith is more than a nice idea—it's central to what it means to follow Jesus.

WHEN COMMUNITY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Community has been such an important part of our lives, both for me (Jamie) and my wife Nicole. Over the years, we've experienced firsthand how a strong network of friends and fellow believers can shape who we are, challenge us to grow, and help us through the highs and lows. There's something special about having people who know you deeply and still love you, who aren't just there for the good times but also step in during the difficult times. Through their encouragement and example, they push us to become the best demonstration of Jesus in all areas of our lives—our marriage, our parenting, and everything else we do.

Nicole and I have been through seasons where community made all the difference. Looking back, we've seen how the care and commitment of others helped us stay grounded in Christ and move forward with courage. If you're leading a group, ask yourself: Who in your circle might need that same kind of support right now? You don't need to have all the answers, just be present. Your willingness to walk with someone through life's ups and downs may be the very thing God uses to bring hope and healing.

How Community Shapes Us

For both of us, being connected to others in a meaningful way has inspired us to serve and grow in our faith. Seeing other couples and families live out their faith authentically—loving each other well and staying grounded in God's Word—motivates us to do the same. Their example challenges us to be more intentional in our own marriage and parenting, to truly be a light to those around us. These relationships remind us that we're part of a much bigger story, one that Christ is weaving together through His power and grace. Each step we take toward reflecting Him is another piece of that bigger puzzle, showing His Kingdom to the world.

In our ministry, too, we've seen how community strengthens our sense of purpose. Nicole's creativity and warmth, combined with the encouragement of those we serve with, gives us both renewed passion and direction. There's something powerful about doing life alongside others who share the same vision and values. We leave those interactions encouraged and reminded that our ultimate goal is to show Jesus in everything we do. It's not about perfection, but about letting His grace work through us so others can see Him clearly. As we said in chapter one, "Progress, not perfection."

The Joy of Shared Life

And then, of course, there's the simple, everyday joy that comes from shared experiences—laughing together, learning together, and walking alongside others. Those moments are reminders that that God never intended for us to go through life alone. Instead, He gave us community to push us toward being the best representation of

Christ we can be, to strengthen and uplift one another, and to help us see how our individual efforts fit into His Kingdom plan. For Nicole and me, that's something we're incredibly grateful for, and it's a truth that shapes how we live, love, and lead every day. Community has become one of the most sacred spaces God has used to shape our lives—and it's a space we believe every group leader can help create.

More Than a Lesson—You're Shepherding Sheep

When Jesus looked at the crowds, He “had compassion on them, because they were weary and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). As a small group leader, you are more than a lesson presenter. You are a shepherd-teacher, called to care for the people God has entrusted to your group. And often that means being with your people outside of the group time.

Think about it—anyone can read a lesson or lead a discussion, but God has called you to know your people. You are not just delivering content. You're walking with people through real life—marriage struggles, job loss, parenting joys, health scares, and faith questions. Your role isn't just to say what's true, but to help them live it out in a way that builds trust in God.

Ask yourself regularly:

- Do I know what's going on in the lives of my group members?
- Do they know I care about more than their attendance?
- Am I praying for them by name?

Being a shepherd-teacher means leaning in with compassion—noticing who's missing, following up, checking in—not out of guilt, but out of love. It's about seeing people the way Jesus does and making space for their stories.

The first thing I look for in a group leader isn't how well they teach or how magnetic their personality is. In fact, some of the hardest small group settings I've seen were led by people who knew how to preach and teach but didn't understand how to shepherd. Guiding a group isn't the same as delivering a sermon—it's about community in a circle, not the commanding of a room.

What I look for first is character. A humble, teachable spirit. Someone willing to learn how to care for people and cultivate community. If that's in place, the rest can be developed. But without it, we're just passing along information instead of changing lives.

*As a small group leader, you are
more than a lesson presenter.*

THE GROUP IS JUST THE BEGINNING

The small group meeting is important, but it's only one hour out of 168 each week. Real community goes beyond the group time. If we want to build a culture of biblical fellowship, we must move from rows to circles—and then out into life.

The early church didn't just meet once a week. Acts 2:46 says, "Day by day . . . they ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts." Their fellowship spilled into everyday life. So what does this look like in your group?

- Text someone during the week just to encourage or pray for them.
- Celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and milestones.
- Show up in hard times—at the hospital, the funeral home, or the kitchen table.
- Grab lunch or coffee with someone just because.

These "outside-the-group" moments often become the most powerful discipleship tools. When people see your love in action, they begin to trust you enough to open their lives and hearts, not just their Bibles.

Relationships Make the Truth Stick

It's easy to think our main job is to "teach the lesson." But Jesus never separated truth from relationships. He didn't just preach sermons; He walked with His disciples. He corrected, encouraged, laughed, and even wept with them. He taught truth in the context of love.

In the same way, the best small group leaders do more than prepare outlines—they prepare their hearts for people. They make truth personal. When you share truth out of relationship:

- You know what burdens your people are carrying.
- You know how to apply Scripture in ways that speak to real struggles.
- Your group sees the gospel at work in you, not just in your notes.

Ask the Lord to help you see your group the way He does—not just as learners, but as beloved sheep, each one needing care, truth, and love. Your calling is holy. Not flashy, but faithful. And it matters—eternally.

SHEPHERDING ISN'T OPTIONAL

Let's be honest: life is full. We've got families, jobs, appointments, and a to-do list that never ends. So why add more people time to the schedule? Isn't teaching the lesson on Sunday enough?

Not if we want to follow Jesus.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me" (John 10:14). A shepherd doesn't clock in and out. He lives among the sheep. He listens for their cries, guides them with patience, and protects them from harm. Most leadership roles today are transactional—but Jesus' model is transformational. If that's Jesus' model of leadership, we can't settle for just delivering lessons. We're called to know and walk with people.

Don't underestimate what a text, a lunch, or a porch conversation can do. Shepherding isn't about being busy—it's about being available in meaningful ways.

YOU CAN'T MICROWAVE DISCIPLESHIP

We live in a fast-paced world. Everything is "on demand"—news, food, even church services. We've become accustomed to instant everything—meals, messages, media. But spiritual formation doesn't follow a shortcut. One thing you can't rush is spiritual growth.

Microwaved faith might be quick—but it’s often cold in the middle. Discipleship isn’t a drive-thru. It’s a slow-cooked meal that takes time, patience, and care.

You might be able to teach a Bible lesson in an hour, but you can’t form a disciple that fast. That’s because real growth happens in the context of relationships over time. Jesus spent three years walking closely with the Twelve—and even they didn’t always get it right.

If our people only hear from us on Sunday mornings, we’re missing the heart of discipleship. But when we walk with them through victories, valleys and everything in between —when they see us living the gospel—that’s when truth starts to take root.

*Discipleship isn’t a drive-thru.
It’s a slow-cooked meal that takes
time, patience, and care.*

Truth Without Relationship Won’t Stick

Think back to someone who truly shaped your faith. It probably wasn’t just their words—it was their life. Because you trusted them, their words carried more weight.

Our people are dealing with deep wounds, distractions, and doubts. If we’re only “Sunday School teachers,” we may never hear what’s really going on beneath the surface. But when we step into their lives—when we build relational bridges—we earn the right to speak into their hearts.

In short: your presence opens the door for your teaching to take root. And that kind of impact is worth making time for.

They’re Not a Project—They’re Your People

It’s easy to fall into the mindset that ministry is a job to complete. Lesson prepped? Check. Room set up? Check. Class taught? Check. But people aren’t projects—they’re souls, created in the image of God, and entrusted to you for a season.

Paul said to the Thessalonians, “We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves” (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Why? “Because you had become very dear to us.”

You don’t walk with your group because it’s efficient, you do it because it’s Christlike. The relationships you build may be messy, slow, and imperfect, but they are sacred space where God works.

If you’re wondering, why does this matter so much? Remember: you’re not just leading a class. You’re investing in eternal souls. And that’s never a waste of time.

As a group leader, you have the opportunity to help people experience the kind of community God intends. Biblical community isn’t just about attending church or gathering for a study—it’s about building meaningful relationships, growing in faith together, and supporting one another. Your role is to guide your group toward a deeper understanding and practice of godly community. No one feels ready for this every week. But faithful shepherds show up anyway—and that’s where God does His best work.

As we’ve seen, real discipleship doesn’t happen in isolation or on a tight one-hour schedule. It happens in the slow, steady, and sometimes messy work of walking with people in love. But this kind of deep, relational community isn’t just a good strategy—it’s God’s design. The longing we feel for connection, the need for encouragement, the power of shared burdens and shared joy, all of it points back to something greater than us. It’s not a ministry trend; it’s part of the blueprint. If we want to lead our groups well, we need to understand that biblical community begins with God’s design, and it reflects His heart from the very beginning.

BIBLICAL COMMUNITY BEGINS WITH GOD’S DESIGN

Being made in the image of a relational God means we were created not just for relationships but from relationship. From the very beginning, God existed in perfect unity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This eternal fellowship within the Trinity reveals that relationship

isn't just something God does—it's who He is. When He made us in His image (Genesis 1:26), He imprinted that same relational nature into us. We cannot separate being made in the image of God from relationships. Every person bears His image. If we want to reflect our relational God most fully, we must choose to live in community. Our longing to be known, loved, and connected isn't a flaw—it's a reflection of the God who designed us that way. We weren't meant to go through life alone.

This is why isolation is so damaging and why authentic community feels so life-giving. Our need for connection isn't merely emotional—it's deeply spiritual. When we build relationships grounded in love, service, and shared faith, we are aligning ourselves with God's original design. True biblical community invites us to bear each other's burdens, speak truth in love, and grow in Christ together. It's not a side feature of the Christian life—it's central. Living in community is how we reflect God's character to the world and how we ourselves grow to become more like Him. As a group leader, you're not just helping people connect—you're helping them live out God's design for community.

Scripture consistently affirms that we were not meant to live in isolation. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him" (Genesis 2:18). From the very beginning, God designed us to live in connection—with Him and with one another. Psalm 133:1 adds, "How delightfully good when brothers live together in harmony!" Unity and togetherness are not only pleasing to God but a source of blessing and peace for us.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 paints another picture of our need for one another: "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts . . . And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken." In other words, we are stronger together. Support, accountability, and encouragement give us the strength to endure life's challenges and stay faithful in the journey. Living in community is how we reflect God's character to the world and how we ourselves grow to become more like Him. Biblical community isn't a luxury—it's a lifeline.

BIBLICAL COMMUNITY IS NURTURED BY THE GROUP LEADER'S ACTIONS

Your Presence Sets the Pace

A thriving biblical community begins with its leader. As a small group leader, you are more than a discussion guide, you are a shepherd, a servant, and a spiritual example. Your presence sets the tone. If you show up with a heart that's available, humble, and Spirit-led, others will be drawn to do the same. But if you treat group time as just another task to complete, your group will follow that lead.

Whether you realize it or not, your attitude and approach create the atmosphere your group will breathe in each week. That's why the way you show up—spiritually, emotionally, and relationally—matters more than any curriculum or checklist. You lead the way, not just by what you say, but by who you are.

The way you model your faith matters. People notice how you respond in tough moments, how you speak about others, how you pray, and how you prioritize Scripture. You don't have to be perfect, just real and growing. Vulnerability doesn't mean sharing every detail of your life, but it does mean being honest enough to show how God is working in you. When group members see you trusting the Lord in your own walk, it gives them permission to open up, ask questions, and pursue Christ more fully themselves.

Leadership in a biblical community also means going first in service. When you make that phone call, show up at the hospital, or help someone move, you're modeling what it looks like to love one another in action. Your group will learn more from your example than from any lesson you prepare. Over time, your consistent faithfulness and care build trust and deepen connection. That's what creates a safe place for spiritual growth—a group where people don't just come to learn, but come to belong, grow, and serve together in the name of Jesus.

Model It Before You Mention It

Being a leader means showing up consistently, both in meetings and in personal interactions with group members. Demonstrating faithfulness fosters trust and reliability within the community. Additionally, prioritizing personal spiritual growth is essential—spending time in Scripture and prayer ensures that you lead from a place of spiritual health. Leaders should also model vulnerability by openly sharing their faith journeys, including both struggles and victories. This openness encourages others to do the same, creating a group culture rooted in authenticity.

Creating an Atmosphere of Trust

Trust is the foundation of any strong community. As a group leader, you should be approachable and relational, taking the time to know your group members personally while investing in their lives. Encouraging honesty and transparency helps create a safe space where individuals feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and struggles without fear of judgment. Leading with humility reinforces that leadership is about serving others rather than holding authority over them. The target is to make your group safe to be real.

Set the Spiritual Temperature

Leaders have the responsibility of setting the spiritual tone for their group. Regularly praying for group members not only strengthens their faith but also demonstrates a deep level of care and commitment. Encouraging service within and outside the group helps members develop a heart for ministry and outreach. Staying engaged in the broader church community is also crucial, as a leader's active participation in church life will inspire their group to do the same.

When leaders prioritize their relationship with Christ over simply gaining knowledge, they become a living example of faith that others are drawn to. When leaders emphasize the importance of “who you need to be with” by cultivating strong biblical relationships in their own lives, they set the tone for the group. This approach naturally inspires deeper connections and fosters spiritual growth within the community.

JESUS MODELED COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Jesus didn't make followers by lecture—He made them through relationship. From the very beginning of His public life, He intentionally surrounded Himself with people. He called the twelve disciples not just to follow His teachings but to walk closely with Him in everyday life. Mark 3:14 says, “He appointed twelve . . . that they might be with Him.” Together, they traveled, ate, prayed, and faced storms—both literal and spiritual. They shared in moments of joy, confusion, grief, and growth. Jesus invited them into His life, not as distant students but as friends. He corrected them, served them, and even washed their feet. He didn't teach truth from a distance—He lived it out in front of them. His up-close, relational model of ministry wasn't accidental—it was how He trained the early church to live out the gospel.

Jesus's commitment to community went far beyond the Twelve. He spent time with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—friends who brought comfort and support. He welcomed outsiders and outcasts, sharing meals and meaningful moments to those the world ignored. Whether it was sitting in someone's home, sharing stories on the road, or stopping to meet someone on the margins, He made space for people. Jesus's ministry flowed not from platforms but from relationships. If the Son of God chose not to walk alone, neither should we. Deep, Christ-centered relationships aren't just helpful in ministry—they are essential to it.

*Jesus's ministry flowed not from
platforms but from relationships.*

THE EARLY CHURCH MODELED COMMUNITY-BUILDING THROUGH GROUPS

The early believers in Acts provide a powerful and compelling picture of biblical community. Acts 2:42-47 tells us,

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer . . . Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in

the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This passage isn't just a record of church history—it's a glimpse into the kind of vibrant, Christ-centered community that God desires for His people.

Their example shows us that real spiritual growth doesn't happen in isolation but in community. They gathered regularly for the purposes of sharing meals, worshiping together, and learning under the apostles' teaching. These rhythms of meeting in both large and small settings allowed their faith to take root and flourish. Community wasn't a side dish in their spiritual life; it was a main ingredient. Their togetherness created an atmosphere where truth could be heard, applied, and lived out.

When we prioritize Christ-centered relationships, we don't just build better groups—we help build the Kingdom.

Perhaps the most striking part of their community was how they cared for one another. They didn't just meet—they ministered to each other. They met needs, shared resources, prayed as one body, and carried each other's burdens. Their lives pointed to a Savior who loved sacrificially, and their unity became a witness to the world. As a result, God added to their number daily. Their story reminds us that when we prioritize Christ-centered relationships, we don't just build better groups—we help build the Kingdom.

Community-Building Is Everyone's Responsibility

It's easy to think that creating a strong group culture falls solely on the leader, but Scripture paints a different picture. The church is described as a body, and every part plays a unique and essential role. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, Paul wrote, “For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are

one body—so also is Christ . . . Instead, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted.” God didn’t design His church to run on the gifts of a few, but on the faithfulness of many.

No one is meant to be just a spectator. When group members see themselves as contributors rather than consumers, the entire community grows stronger. That means everyone—from the long-time believer to the brand-new Christian—has something to bring to the table. Whether it’s offering prayer, sharing a story, bringing a meal, or reaching out during the week, each act of love and service helps build the kind of Christ-centered community we all long for.

As a leader, you have the opportunity to encourage and empower others to step into their gifts. Help your group members discover what they’re good at and what brings them joy—whether it’s hospitality, encouragement, teaching, or acts of service—and then give them space to use those gifts. A healthy group doesn’t depend on one person doing everything, but on many people working together in love. When everyone plays a part, your group becomes more than a meeting, it becomes a spiritual family.

Living Out Biblical Community

Living out biblical community means more than sitting in the same room or attending the same group. It’s about showing up for one another in real, meaningful ways. Community thrives when we move from mere attendance to action—when we stop merely being together and start supporting each other. Galatians 6:2 says, “Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” That’s not just a nice suggestion, it’s a calling. Whether someone is walking through grief, parenting struggles, illness, or doubt, true community means standing by them, lifting them up, and helping shoulder the weight.

But biblical community isn’t just for the hard moments—it’s also where spiritual growth is stirred. Hebrews 10:24-25 urges us to “consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together . . . but encouraging each other.” We need each other in order to stay sharp, to stay faithful, and to keep moving forward. When group members lovingly challenge one

another, celebrate steps of obedience, and pray with persistence, the result is not just friendship—it's transformation.

This kind of community doesn't happen by accident. It requires intentionality. Encourage your group to check in on each other during the week, to pray specifically and consistently for one another, and to build relationships outside of the scheduled meeting times. Simple actions—a text, a meal, or a moment to listen—go a long way in creating the kind of group where people are known, loved, and challenged to grow. That's what living out biblical community looks like—and it's worth the effort.

Build Community, But Not Just on Sundays

As a group leader, you play a vital role in helping people feel seen, known, and valued—not just during class time, but all week long. What you do between Sundays matters just as much as what you do in the room. Touchpoints outside of group time create space for deeper conversations and stronger bonds.

Inside the class, your role is more than guiding discussion. You help set the relational tone of the group. By being present, welcoming, and attentive, you create an environment where people feel safe to open up. When others see you making the effort to connect both in and out of class, they're more likely to follow your lead. That's how a group moves from being a weekly gathering to becoming a real, growing community.

Reflective Questions

1. When have you experienced the kind of deep, Christ-centered community described in this chapter? What made it feel sacred and transformative?
2. How are you currently helping your group members feel seen, known, and valued—both during and outside of group time?
3. How do you balance teaching biblical truth with building relational trust? Which area might need more attention in your leadership right now?
4. In what ways are you modeling vulnerability, humility, and service to your group? How might your example be shaping the group's culture?



Chapter 3

THE SACRED SPACE OF WELLNESS

Making Time for Me

Bible study group leaders play an essential role in guiding others toward spiritual maturity. They encourage, teach, listen, and support—often with little thought of their own well-being. But leadership, especially in ministry, is demanding—even among volunteers. Without intentional self-care, volunteer leaders risk burnout, exhaustion, and spiritual dryness. The best way to serve others effectively? Take care of yourself first.

Whenever I (Ken) am on a flight, I hear the same announcement from a crew member before we take off: “In the event of a loss in cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop down from an overhead compartment. Place the mask on your face first, then help others around you.” In other words, you are no good to anyone if you are passed out during a crisis! These days, ministry leaders should follow that crew member’s advice—prioritize yourself so you can help others.

Bible study leadership is a privilege, but it also comes with great responsibility. Prioritizing oneself is not selfish, it’s wise stewardship. Leaders who take care of themselves are far more equipped to serve others with endurance, wisdom, and joy.

When leaders prioritize their mental, physical, and spiritual health, they set a strong example for those they lead. They lead from overflow rather than depletion, offering wisdom, patience, and joy instead of frustration and fatigue. There are three vital areas of self-care every Bible study leader must consider.

1. MENTAL RENEWAL: BATTLING BURNOUT

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. It can manifest in several ways, including feelings of helplessness, detachment, and a lack of motivation. For Bible study leaders, burnout can result from the constant pressure to meet the needs of others while neglecting their own.

Leading a Bible study group isn’t just about studying Scripture together—it’s about shepherding hearts, answering questions, and navigating discussions. That responsibility can be mentally draining, especially if leaders begin to feel like they must have all the answers or carry the burdens of their group members.

Self-care is not a luxury; it's a necessity. For Bible study leaders, the demands of ministry can be overwhelming, leading to burnout if not managed properly. Mental health is a critical component of overall well-being, and self-care practices play a significant role in maintaining it.

The truth is, God never intended for leaders to do it all alone. Even Moses needed help when the demands of leadership became overwhelming (Exodus 18:17-18). The key to mental renewal? Healthy boundaries and regular rest. Bible study leaders need to schedule time to step back—whether for prayer, relaxation, a sabbatical, or simply engaging in a hobby that refreshes them. Taking breaks allows leaders to recharge, process emotions, and return to their group with clarity and energy.

Another helpful practice is delegating tasks. If leading feels overwhelming, it may be time to invite others to share responsibilities, whether that means rotating the responsibility for teaching the group to an apprentice, forming a prayer team, or asking for assistance with logistical details. Leadership is a shared journey, not a solo race.

*God never intended for leaders
to do it all alone.*

Establish Alone Time

One of the most effective ways to practice self-care is by establishing alone time. This dedicated time allows you to connect with God, reflect on your thoughts and feelings, and recharge your energy. If you are going to have alone time, you will need to practice saying one significant word: NO.

I struggle with this because I want to serve others well, and I have been guilty of over-committing myself to help others accomplish their goals. When I do not say no to opportunities that come along, even good ones, I end up sacrificing my alone time. Some of you reading this booklet are just like me—you can't say no (or at least when you do, it creates a great uneasiness within you!).

Create a Routine

Establishing a routine for alone time can help ensure that it becomes a regular part of your life. Choose a specific time each day that works best for you, whether it's early in the morning, during lunch, or in the evening. Consistency is key to making this practice a habit.

Find a Quiet Space

A quiet, comfortable space is essential for effective alone time. This could be a corner of your home, a spot in your garden, or even a nearby park. The goal is to find a place where you can be free from distractions and focus on your thoughts and prayers.

Become an L3 Leader

Years ago, I heard the term L3 applied to those of us who lead in ministry. L3 stands for "Life-long Learner," and it is the posture of successful leaders who pursue personal and professional development.

While alone time is needed for you and me to mentally recharge, making sure we stay mentally engaged and in a posture of learning is also a key to mental health. The church is an important part of our lives, and so is the leading a Bible study group. Most of us have the spiritual gifts of teaching and knowledge, and we can spend much of our free time preparing to teach the Bible to our group members.

While this is important, and a blessing from God, we should also focus on other mental pursuits besides Bible study preparation. Doing so will help us stay mentally sharp, and we'll discover new knowledge about topics in which we are interested, even in topics that are not necessarily biblically centered.

Read About Topics That Interest You

Continuing to learn and grow is an important aspect of self-care. Reading about current interests or pursuing new knowledge can stimulate your mind, broaden your horizons, and provide a sense of fulfillment. You'll also pick up some new illustrations to share with your Bible study group members as you teach and lead them.

Start by identifying areas of interest that you would like to explore further. This could be related to your ministry, such as theology or biblical studies, or it could be a completely new topic,

such as history, science, or literature. The key is to choose subjects that genuinely interest you and spark your curiosity.

Find Resources

There are countless resources available for learning and personal growth. Books, articles, podcasts, and online courses are just a few examples. Take advantage of these resources to deepen your knowledge and expand your understanding of the world around you. Are you into golf? There's a book or a magazine for that! Are you an angler? There's a podcast for that. If you like to cook, there are numerous television shows that can stimulate your thinking about the next dish you want to prepare.

Set Learning Goals

Setting specific learning goals can help you stay motivated and focused. Whether it's reading a certain number of books each month or completing an online course, having clear goals can provide a sense of direction and accomplishment.

The Benefits of Life-long Learning

Life-long learning offers numerous benefits for mental and emotional well-being. It keeps your mind active and engaged, reducing the risk of cognitive decline. Learning new things can also boost your confidence and provide a sense of achievement. Additionally, pursuing new knowledge can open new opportunities and experiences, enriching your life in unexpected ways.

The Bible encourages us to seek wisdom and understanding. Proverbs 4:7 states, "Wisdom is supreme—so get wisdom. And whatever else you get, get understanding." By pursuing knowledge and learning, we honor God's call to grow in wisdom and use our minds to their fullest potential.

2. PHYSICAL CARE: STRENGTHENING THE VESSEL

A spiritually strong leader is still a physical being, and neglecting physical health can impact ministry. Fatigue, poor nutrition, and lack of movement can lead to sluggishness, brain fog, and even a short temper—none of which make for effective leadership. Jesus took care of His body. He rested when necessary (Mark 6:31), ate well (Luke 24:41-43), and walked long distances. His ministry demanded physical endurance, and so does yours.

Leaders should make intentional choices to strengthen their bodies—without guilt. Getting enough sleep, eating nourishing foods, and engaging in regular movement are not indulgences; they are tools for effective service. A leader who is physically well has the stamina to engage with their group, the focus to study Scripture, and the endurance to lead consistently. Even small efforts, such as taking walks, drinking enough water, and stretching between meetings, can contribute to long-term well-being.

Physical Care is Self-Care

The Bible provides numerous examples of the importance of self-care. Jesus Himself often withdrew from the crowds to rest and pray. In Mark 6:31, Jesus said to His disciples, “Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest for a while.” This invitation to rest highlights the necessity of taking time to recharge and renew our strength.

I (Ken) have come face-to-face with my need for greater physical care. Until just recently, I avoided going to the doctor for decades (yes, you read that right), neglecting annual checkups. But after a recent health scare, I found a new doctor and began a battery of tests to determine why I wasn’t feeling well. I have discovered that I have AFIB, high blood pressure, and diabetes. I am pleased to say that all these conditions are improving, but still, I didn’t take care of myself and the results could have been much worse. For too long, I neglected the temple of the Holy Spirit and could have cut short my life and my ministry.

If you're like me and you haven't given enough time and attention to your physical well-being, I'd like to encourage you to get started—today. And as you go forward, take better care of yourself by finding or growing a hobby.

Explore Your Interests

The first step in finding a hobby is to explore your interests. Think about activities that you have always wanted to try or those that you enjoyed in the past. Whether it's painting, gardening, cooking, or playing a musical instrument, there are countless hobbies to choose from.

Hobbies are an excellent way to practice self-care and bring joy and fulfillment into your life. Engaging in activities that you enjoy can help reduce stress, improve your mood, and provide a sense of accomplishment.

Once you have identified a hobby that interests you, make time for it in your schedule. Set aside specific times each week to engage in your chosen activity. Treat this time as a priority, just as you would with any other important commitment.

Hobbies offer many benefits for mental and emotional well-being. They provide a creative outlet, allowing you to express yourself and explore new skills. Engaging in hobbies can also be a form of relaxation, helping to reduce stress and promote a sense of calm. Additionally, hobbies can provide opportunities for social interaction, whether through joining a club or sharing your interests with friends and family.

3. SPIRITUAL RENEWAL: LEADING FROM OVERFLOW

Bible study leaders spend so much time guiding others in faith that their own relationship with God may unintentionally take a backseat. But a dry well cannot refresh anyone. Leaders must continually refill their own spirits, spending time in personal prayer, Scripture study, and worship—not out of obligation, but because it nourishes their souls.

Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:5). Without staying connected to Christ, leaders risk leading from exhaustion instead of abundance.

Making space for quiet moments with God—whether through a morning devotional, journaling, or simply sitting in His presence—ensures that leaders serve with joy and wisdom rather than weariness.

But while making time for God is important, there is something else that is also important for group leaders to do. Group leaders are always “on,” pouring out their lives to others through ministry. When do you as a group leader ever have someone else pour into you?

PARTICIPATE IN, BUT DON'T LEAD, ANOTHER GROUP

Church leaders like you carry the weight of ministry on their shoulders, tirelessly serving their groups and congregations through their ministries. Yet, as they lead others, they can find themselves struggling with isolation, loneliness, and spiritual dryness. The very people called to shepherd others sometimes lack a community for themselves. Who is shepherding the shepherds?

One powerful way to combat spiritual burnout takes place when group leaders engage in a Bible study group—not just as a teacher or leader, but as a participant. These leaders spend so much time pouring out to the congregation, they need a place where they can be poured into. We all need a place where we can soak up God’s Word, be taught, cared for, and encouraged by fellow believers, without the pressures of leading the group.

Connection to others is of extreme importance. Consider the example of the sequoia tree. It grows to heights of over three hundred feet. It can be as large as 40 to 50 feet in diameter. Yet the root systems of these gigantic trees are only 5 to 6 feet deep! That’s because God designed these trees to grow close to one another, not alone. Their root systems aren’t deep, but they can spread hundreds of feet in all directions, intertwining with the root systems of their fellow sequoia trees. Sequoias require proximity to survive, and we need that, too. Genesis 2:18 reminds us that, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

Being involved in a Bible study beyond the one you lead can be transformative and life-giving. There are multiple reasons why everyone benefits when the church's leaders are committed to being in proximity to others in Bible study groups where they receive ministry:

Involvement Combats Loneliness and Reduces Burnout

Ministry can be draining. Pouring into others without refueling spiritually leads to burnout. A Bible study group offers a consistent opportunity for spiritual renewal and growth. It's a place where church leaders can receive as much as they give, strengthening their own walk with Christ.

Discipleship Insights Are Gained

Regularly attending a secondary Bible study provides group leaders with valuable insights into how their church's discipleship program is functioning. They can observe the needs and challenges of the congregation, allowing them to refine their leadership and teaching approaches in the groups they lead.

Faithfulness is Modeled

Bible study leaders who participate in other Bible study groups are better able to model faithfulness and commitment to the church's discipleship programs. Their attendance and active engagement can inspire others to follow suit.

Involvement in a Group Encourages Authentic Relationships and Community

Church leaders can sometimes feel like they live in a fishbowl, where everything is scrutinized, and personal struggles must be hidden. A Bible study group provides a space where pastors, staff, and group leaders can form deep, trusting relationships with fellow believers—where they can be vulnerable and receive encouragement without judgment.

A Small Group Provides Accountability and Support

Having a group of believers who pray together and keep each other spiritually accountable is crucial. Church leaders need friends who will check in on them, speak life into them, and challenge them in their faith journeys. A Bible study group becomes an anchor, ensuring they stay rooted in Scripture and grounded in a healthy spiritual routine.

Bible study leaders must be intentional in seeking out or creating Bible study groups where they can participate as members, not just leaders. Whether it is joining an existing group or starting one with fellow group leaders, the goal is to build a network of support, encouragement, and faith-driven connection. Loneliness doesn't have to be part of ministry. Through the power of community and the Word of God, church leaders can find restoration, strength, and deeper relationships that sustain them in their calling.

OTHER WAYS TO BOOST SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

It is important for group leaders to be in a Bible study group in which they receive ministry. But this is just one of a number of ways that group leaders can make sure they are positioning themselves to experience spiritual renewal.

Incorporate Prayer and Meditation

Prayer and meditation are powerful tools for connecting with God and finding peace. During your alone time, spend a few moments in prayer, expressing your gratitude, seeking guidance, and laying your burdens before God. Meditation, on the other hand, involves quieting your mind and focusing on God's presence. This practice can help reduce stress and promote a sense of calm.

Reflect on Scripture

Reading and reflecting on Scripture is another valuable aspect of alone time. Choose a passage or verse that resonates with you and spend time focusing on its meaning and application in your life. This practice can deepen your understanding of God's Word and provide spiritual nourishment.

Set Boundaries

Setting boundaries is crucial for maintaining a healthy balance between ministry and self-care. This involves being clear about your limits and communicating them to others. For example, you might set specific times for responding to emails or phone calls, ensuring that you have uninterrupted time for self-care and personal activities.

Delegate Responsibilities

Delegating responsibilities can help lighten your load and prevent burnout. Identify tasks that can be shared with others and empower them to take on these responsibilities. This not only reduces your workload but also fosters a sense of ownership and collaboration within your ministry.

Prioritize Self-Care

Make self-care a priority by scheduling it into your calendar just as you would with any other important commitment. Whether it is alone time, hobbies, or learning, treat these activities as non-negotiable parts of your routine. By prioritizing self-care, you ensure that you have the energy and resilience to serve others effectively.

Seek Support

Do not be afraid to seek support from others when needed. This could be in the form of mentorship, counseling, or simply talking to your pastor or a trusted friend or family member. Having a support system can provide encouragement, guidance, and a sense of community.

Solomon Says . . .

The Bible emphasizes the importance of balance in our lives. Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us, “There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven.” By finding a healthy balance between ministry and self-care, we honor God’s design for our lives and ensure that we can serve Him and others with joy and effectiveness.

A SHIP'S PLIMSOLL LINE

I recently heard the term “Plimsoll Line.” I am an admitted nautical novice, and the concept of the Plimsoll Line was intriguing.

Samuel Plimsoll (1824-1898) was an English politician and social reformer who is best remembered for developing what is known today as the Plimsoll Line.⁷ It is a mark on ships that helps determine how much weight the ship can safely carry.

The draught (the distance between the water line and the ship's keel) is determined, which is different on various kinds of ships. This distance between the waterline and the bottom of the ship informs the crew as to how much weight can be loaded and safely carried. Water temperature is a factor (warm water is less dense than icy water), which decreases buoyancy. The same is true of salt or fresh water—fresh water provides less buoyancy, too.

The Plimsoll Line keeps a ship from becoming so overloaded that it cannot stay afloat. This sounds like something each of us need in our lives – an indicator to help us know when we have overloaded ourselves and taken on too much.

Loading Past the Plimsoll

It is dangerous to avoid using a ship's Plimsoll Line. Overloading a ship can produce disastrous results for the captain and crew, and the owner of the ship. There is a reason the Plimsoll Line was developed in the first place. Ships were sometimes overloaded with cargo, and some sank because of it.

As leaders, there is a point beyond which we overload ourselves. Stress, anxiety, reduced performance, anger, depression, and apathy are just a few results of continually overloading our calendars with personal and professional obligations. That is not to say we should not be loaded and busy—to a point—but beyond that safe point, dangers abound.

Group leaders tend to be among the busiest people in churches today. Group leaders are under pressure each week to prepare their group's Bible study, care for the members of the group, keep an eye on absentee group members, follow up with guests, spend time in prayer, read devotionally, and much more. Those things are in

addition to tasks that come with the added responsibilities of being employees or employers, moms and dads, coaches, neighbors, and friends. No wonder so many of us have overloaded ourselves well beyond what our “personal Plimsoll Line” says is safe.

Finding Buoyancy Again

If you are someone who has taken on too much and overloaded yourself, ignoring common sense when it comes to managing your life’s activities, here are a few tips that might help you find buoyancy.

- 1. Do not try to earn God’s approval by constantly being busy.** God loves people who move slowly, too! I am sure you remember the story of Mary and Martha. One sister was busy preparing the house and the meal for an evening with Jesus, while the other sister sat at His feet and spent time with Him. We must not fall into the trap today of believing that full calendars mean we are important, important to others, and more important to God.
- 2. Give yourself permission to say no.** I have recently declined opportunities to do some projects for other people who made requests of me. Honestly, I do not like saying no, and I don’t like disappointing people. But I must realistically assess my available time, and I could say yes so often that I have zero time for me, my family, and my relationship with God. Saying no to some things helps me say yes to those things that are most important in my life, and those things that are most important in the grand scheme of eternity.
- 3. Involve others.** One of the joys of being a group leader is the opportunity to help people use their God-given gifts. Like pastors, whose role it is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12), you and I can call out the called and invite them to help us with essential tasks related to group leadership. You do not have to do it all for your group members. Doing so creates an unhealthy co-dependency in which you receive validation and accolades for your heroic efforts. Group members may unfortunately feed that ego by sitting back and letting you try to become Superman to them. Don’t do it! Avoid that trap by asking people

to help you teach, reach absentees, minister to their fellow group members, plan fellowships and service project days, and other important things.

4. **Seek professional help.** If you have overloaded yourself well past your personal Plimsoll Line, talk with your pastor. You might also consider seeking a professional counselor. God has granted wisdom and experience to people who can help us when life gets heavy.

Remember the words of Jesus, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Jesus summed up the Old Testament in two commands—love God, and love others. He kept things simple, while we tend to overcomplicate them. If you have overloaded your life and you’ve ignored your personal Plimsoll Line, return to your first love—Jesus—and take rest and refuge in Him. Stop trying to earn His approval—you already have that as His child! Learn to say no and not feel guilty. Share your essential tasks with others and let them help lighten your load. Talk with your pastor—he’ll understand and will be able to give you guidance. And finally, remember the words of the old hymn:

*“O soul are you weary and troubled
No light in the darkness you see
There’s light for a look at the Savior
And life more abundant and free
Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace.”⁸*

Conclusion

Self-care is an essential practice for Bible study leaders, enabling you to maintain mental health, establish alone time, find hobbies, and pursue new knowledge. By prioritizing self-care, you can ensure that you remain effective, energized, and fulfilled in your role. Remember that self-care is not a selfish act but a necessary one, allowing you to serve others from a place of strength and well-being. As you incorporate these practices into your life, may you find renewed joy, peace, and fulfillment in your ministry and personal journey.

Reflective Questions

1. Are you leading from spiritual overflow or depletion? What practices could help you reconnect with God more deeply and consistently?
2. Have you ever felt like you've crossed your personal "Plimsoll Line"? What changes could help you regain balance and buoyancy in life and ministry?
3. In what ways are you modeling self-care and life-long learning for those you lead? How might your example influence their own wellness?
4. Are you part of a Bible study group where you receive ministry, not just give it? If not, what's one step you can take to find or create that space?

The background of the entire page features three large, thin, light-gray circles that overlap each other. One circle is positioned in the upper left, another in the upper right, and the third in the lower left, creating a Venn diagram-like pattern.

Epilogue

LIVING OUT SACRED SPACES

As you close the pages of this book, remember that the journey toward sacred spaces is not a one-time event but a lifelong pursuit. The call to devote intentional time to God, to others, and to yourself is both a privilege and a responsibility—one that shapes not only your ministry but your entire life. In a world that constantly pulls us in countless directions, it is easy to lose sight of what matters most. Yet, by carving out these sacred spaces, you are choosing to live with purpose, balance, and deep spiritual health.

Let the lessons learned here serve as gentle reminders. Your time with God is the wellspring from which all other aspects of your life flow. Your investment in relationships transforms groups into communities of grace and support. And your commitment to personal well-being ensures that you can serve others from a place of strength, not exhaustion.

You will not always get it right. There will be seasons of imbalance, moments of fatigue, and days when sacred spaces feel out of reach. But progress, not perfection, is the goal. Each small step—each prayer, each conversation, each act of self-care—moves you closer to the life God intends for you.

As you lead, teach, and serve, may you do so from the overflow of a soul that is nourished and renewed. May your sacred spaces become places where God's presence is felt, where community is built, and where your own heart finds rest. And may you inspire others to seek and create their own sacred spaces, so that together, we reflect the beauty and balance of a life devoted to God, others, and ourselves.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Ken Braddy is Lifeway's Director of Sunday School and has trained and equipped group leaders since 1992. He is a group leader at his church, and he is a blogger, author, and podcast host. Ken frequently travels and trains pastors and group leaders around the country.

Jamie Coomer serves the people of Lone Oak First Baptist Church in Paducah, Kentucky. Jamie is the church's Minister of Discipleship and Families, and he is well-acquainted with the sacred spaces needed to create health and balance in ministry. He and his wife Nicole are the parents of five children. Jamie wrote Chapter 2, and contributed to the content in the remaining chapters.

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Lead with balance.

Rediscover the power of intentional pauses—moments set aside for spiritual renewal, meaningful relationships, and personal well-being. Through practical strategies, biblical insights, and real-life stories, this guide offers encouragement and actionable steps to help you create sacred spaces that sustain your soul, strengthen your community, and inspire lasting joy. Choose to live with purpose, balance, and deep spiritual health.

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