



Go & Share

God Uses Small Acts To Do Great Things

3-WEEK STUDY ON BEING FORMED & SENT

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..."

1 PETER 3:15

Go & Share

God Uses Small Acts To Do Great Things

3-WEEK STUDY ON BEING FORMED & SENT

The Great Commission calls each of us who are Christian to actively look for where God is providing opportunities for us to share the message of the gospel with people who don't know Jesus as savior. When we've experienced what his love has done for us, how can we not share it with the people we know?

The spiritual discipline of studying God's Word and spending time in prayer within a community of believers is an important way that we open ourselves to God's transformative work within us. And as the gospel transforms us, we can reflect on how to graciously and thoughtfully share Christ's love with others. This three-week group study is one way that we at Gospel in Life hope to help you in this endeavour.

This study has been lightly edited and updated as an exclusive sampling taken from a longer series, originally offered to attendees of Redeemer Presbyterian Church during the year-long 2018 Formation Series. You will find here a Leader's Guide for three weeks of group study on what it means to be Formed and Sent.

We hope this group study encourages you to be confident in the idea that God can use the smallest act of faith to change lives.

Go & Share: God Uses Small Acts to Do Great Things, 3-Week Study on being Formed & Sent

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FORMED AND SENT

To Be Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

SERIES OVERVIEW

Spiritual formation is not simply an end in itself; rather, Christians are meant to display God's beauty through their lives, which brings him glory and draws people to him. Within the Christian community, we are meant to encourage and exhort each other to grow in grace, experience forgiveness, join in the mission of Christ, and be transformed in our character by the Holy Spirit. In these ways, followers of Jesus are disciples who attract other disciples, who continue the disciple-making mission (Matthew 28:19-20).

SERIES SCHEDULE

1. To Be Salt and Light	Matthew 5:13-16
2. To Make Disciples	Matthew 28:16-20
3. A Movement of Grace	2 Timothy 2:1-7

The three discussions in this group study focus on this concept of disciple-making followers of Jesus. Through grace, God works in us and through us to complete his mission in the world (Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13).

PURPOSE & WORSHIP

10 MINUTES

Remember why you are meeting as a group: to experience Christ Jesus in our midst ministering to us and through us to one another so that we are spiritually formed as disciples of his.

As you enter into worship, remember that humans were created to be worshipers, and we become like what we worship. If we are to bring light to the world, we must first worship the "Light of the world."

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:13-16 New International Version (NIV)

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

INTRODUCTION

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 to 7) is the Magna Carta of the Kingdom of God. In it Jesus instructs his disciples how they are to live. It begins with the Beatitudes, which describe the core character traits of those who would belong to and follow Jesus. The Beatitudes are followed by the Scripture text presented in this study. Matthew 5:13-16 reminds us that the church doesn't simply exist for its own sake. Instead, it plays an important role in society—of preserving salt and shining light. Christians are to live by a different set of values from those of the surrounding world. Christians are to be notably different, yet strangely attractive, even to those opposed to faith. Thus, this calling is for the sake of others: that they might come to know the God who made them, loves them and desires that they be reconciled to himself.

GOAL FOR TODAY'S DISCUSSION

To grapple with how Christians are to be a counterculture for the common good in the world around them.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

20 MINUTES

1. The call to be “salt” and “light” is essentially a call to let our good deeds bring others to the point where they glorify God (v. 16). What obstacles might Christians face in seeing others come to acknowledge and glorify God?

- ▶ Christians may be too conformed to the patterns of this world, not living distinctively. There may not be much about their lives that is noteworthy or attractive.
- ▶ Christians may carry out these deeds with pride and boastfulness rather than humility. This will undermine the beauty of attempted acts of service and love.
- ▶ Christians might be too busy with their own obligations (and even good things) that inadvertently crowd out a life of service and extravagant love toward others.
- ▶ Christians might be lacking in prayer for others and in confession of their failures.

2. In ancient times every home relied on salt, not only to add flavor to food but also to preserve it. What does the salt metaphor tell Christians about how they should interact with society? What might this look like in our lives?

- ▶ Salt was used as a preservative to prevent all kinds of food from spoiling. Likewise, in this text we see that Christians are called to be agents of God's renewal in a broken world. In the ways in which our culture experiences brokenness—social inequality, poverty, racial discrimination, devaluation of life, distortion of sex, etc.—Christians should be “preserving” agents to right wrongs, restore justice, enable healing, give generously and empower others.
- ▶ Salt was also used to flavor bland and tasteless food. Here, Christ calls his people to act not just as preserving agents but also flavoring agents, bringing the unexpected “taste” of gospel joy to every person.
- ▶ Salt has to be released to be effective; it does no good if it stays in block form or within a saltshaker. In the same way, Christians need to be embedded in and among all of society in order to see the redemptive preserving, flavoring elements of the gospel have effect.
- ▶ Remember: In ancient times salt was used in multiple ways, so there are many ways this metaphor can be applied to the church. The multiple uses, all crucial and important, should keep us from limiting this metaphor, i.e., thinking of “salt” as simply evangelism or strictly doing justice or only shaping culture. If we keep the aspects of the metaphor together, it means ministering in holistic, multi-faceted ways in the world.

3. In calling Christians to be a light in the world around them, Jesus implies that his people are a countercultural community of good that shines into the darkness of the world. What are specific ways that a local church community can be a light that shines into the dark areas of our culture?

- ▶ Light is a metaphor Jesus uses throughout his ministry to explain his role in the world (see John 1:4-5, 9).
- ▶ Christians, as a collective body, are called to shine gospel truth into every area of social and physical life. Light breaks into darkness, exposing what is hidden and dangerous in order to provide visibility and safety. Christians are called to shine into every sphere of life, such that the light of their influence dispels darkness, creates safety and allows flourishing. While they can do this individually, the metaphor communicates that the strength of the light increases exponentially when displayed collectively.
- ▶ What does it look like in practical terms for Christians to let their light shine?
 1. To live consistently and uprightly. If our lives are consistent with our beliefs, we will be attractive witnesses of the gospel and will reflect God's justice and equity.
 2. To live benevolently and lovingly. Most commentators think the term “good deeds” (verse 16) can mean not only upright and ethical living but also deeds of love and service that bring good to others.
 3. To speak truthfully. Throughout the Bible the term “light” is often connected to truth—to the Word of God itself and the illumination it brings. Christians are the “light of the world” not only when they love, forgive and serve, but also when they communicate the gospel, tell the truth and admit their sin.

4. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses the plural form of “you” to address his listeners (verses 11, 13, 14, 16). By doing this, Jesus underscores how Christian witness does not derive just through individuals but rather through entire church communities. One author writes:

The communal, plural address should be noticed first: it is Christian communities that are Jesus' great missionary means.¹

Why do you think Jesus emphasized this communal aspect of the church as a key element of this teaching? How does this challenge your community?

- ▶ There will always be individuals who stand out as remarkable in their faithful witness, but one person's actions might be dismissed as unique, heroic and unrepeatable. However, when an entire community demonstrates radical, other-centered benevolence, it causes people to take notice.
- ▶ One commentator translates the “you” of verses 13, 14 and 16 as “you folks,” to highlight the communal nature of Jesus' teaching: “The initial ‘you folks’ is strongly emphasized in the Greek text. ... The communal, plural address should be noticed first: it is Christian communities that are Jesus' great missionary means.”²
- ▶ The church can be a countercultural community, living out a different set of values and showing how people from different races, cultures, classes and backgrounds can be reconciled and care deeply for one another.
- ▶ Christian communities can demonstrate how the gospel radically addresses everyday life and alters our relationship to money, power and sex. In community, Christians can show how these things can be used in life-giving and God-glorifying ways.

DISCUSSION OF PRACTICES

20 MINUTES

In order to be formed and sent out for God's purposes in the world, Scripture shows us practices we can engage in to create space for God to complete his work. The practices of devotion, worship, accountability, hospitality, and rest are essential to growing as disciples of Christ. Engaging in these practices regularly for the duration of our lives will help us grow not only in our love and knowledge of God, but also in our effectiveness as salt and light for his glory.

Which, if any, of these practices have you found most natural to practice regularly and why? What practices do you find particularly challenging and why?

As each of us are called to help one another grow as disciples of Jesus, how can our group regularly support one another in these vital practices?

¹ F.D. Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2007), 87.

² Ibid.

FELLOWSHIP AND SHARING

15 MINUTES

Catch one another up on your lives so we can celebrate, thank God, and share challenges that need prayer.

PRAYER

15 MINUTES

- ▶ *Pray for three of your friends by name. For what do they need prayer? If any do not know Christ, pray that they would come to know him.*
- ▶ *Ask God to reveal to you if there are any friends you can encourage in their faith. Pray that he would reveal them to you and give you the words, wisdom and compassion to share.*
- ▶ *Pray that God would make you a loving, encouraging and hospitable friend who is quick to listen and extend compassion.*

FORMED AND SENT

To Make Disciples

Matthew 28:16-20

PURPOSE & WORSHIP

10 MINUTES

Remember why you are meeting as a group: to experience Christ Jesus in our midst ministering to us and through us to one another so that our lives are changed.

As you enter into worship, remember that humans were created to be worshipers, and we become like what we worship. If we are to be disciples of Jesus who attract new disciples of Jesus, it is imperative that we spend time enjoying and adoring him.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 28:16-20 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

INTRODUCTION

After his resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples helping them make sense of his resurrection—this miracle that marked the beginning of God's work to make all things new. Now he is about to ascend to the right hand of the Father where he will reign until he returns at the end of the age. In this passage Jesus speaks his last words to his disciples, commissioning them to implement the victory he accomplished in the resurrection. In just a short time after this will come the day of Pentecost, in which the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon his followers, empowering them to accomplish the work to which Jesus has called them.

GOAL FOR TODAY'S DISCUSSION

To wrestle with the Christian's call to make disciples in obedience to Jesus' command.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

20 MINUTES

1. Jesus calls us to make disciples—to help others become his fully devoted followers. What do you understand that to involve?

- ▶ A disciple is fundamentally a learner. A disciple is not just learning content but an entire way of life.
- ▶ A disciple spends time *with* the one from whom he or she is learning, not simply to gain new information but to understand motivations and choices. Making disciples involves encouraging people to be *with* Jesus!
- ▶ In the Christian life one is a disciple of Jesus, not of other Christians. Paul says “follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).
- ▶ To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Jesus. One does not have the option of being a Christian but not being a disciple of Jesus, as if discipleship is just for the truly committed.
- ▶ To make a disciple frequently begins with evangelism—sharing the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ so that others embrace that news.
- ▶ To make a disciple involves baptism. Baptism is the sign of a new identity, signifying that one has been forgiven by God, reconciled to God through Christ, indwelt by the Spirit and made a member of God’s family. This is a disciple’s primary understanding of himself or herself.
- ▶ Disciples are those who are learning to subdue their desires to Jesus’ commands, thus obeying the command to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow” him (Luke 9:23).

2. Scholars agree that the best way to translate this verse is not “Go and make disciples” but “As you go, make disciples.” What does that suggest about the way we conduct our lives and priorities?

- ▶ Making disciples of others is to be a priority in our lives and among the most important things we do.
- ▶ Making disciples is not a program or sequestered to a particular place in our schedules. It is a way of life.
- ▶ It is to be at the forefront of our minds no matter what we are doing. When we are at work, at play, eating, spending time with friends, etc., making disciples is to be part of our ongoing activities and focus. We are always potentially making disciples.
- ▶ Much of what one does to make disciples is done by example. The way we care for our parents or friends, love our families, forgive those who hurt us, and deal with suffering are all means of making disciples of those we encounter throughout the day. By our example, we are making disciples to some degree, whether we are conscious of it or not, and Jesus commands Christians to use their lives to make followers of him.

3. Jesus tells us that all authority has been given to him and that he will always be with us. Why are these two statements so important for those who would take seriously the command to go and make disciples?

- ▶ Jesus is at work to change lives and make all things new. This reality fuels the confidence and endeavors of his followers.
- ▶ Jesus is ultimately the one who calls others to be disciples. While his followers strive to be persuasive, they know that discipleship is ultimately about the power and plan of God: “No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them” (John 6:65).
- ▶ God’s commands are authoritative, not arbitrary or manmade. Even if Jesus’ commands seem out of step with the current culture or others find them antiquated, they are from God. They are intended for our good and for God’s glory.
- ▶ The promise that Jesus is with his followers until the end of the age reminds them that they are not alone or left to their own strength.
- ▶ Jesus’ unending presence is also a reminder that this current age will come to an end. God will complete the work he has begun in people’s lives; resting in this fact, we can persevere and not lose heart.
- ▶ When one fails to acknowledge Jesus’ authority or the promise of his presence, it is easy to get intimidated and shrink back from his call to make disciples.

4. Consider the following quote from NT. Wright:

People get very puzzled by the claim that Jesus is already ruling the world until they see what is in fact being said. The claim is not that the world is already completely as Jesus intends it to be. The claim is that he is working to take it from where it was—under the rule not only of death but of corruption, greed and every kind of wickedness—and to bring it, by slow means and quick, under the rule of his life-giving love. And how is he doing this? Here is the shock: *through us, his followers*.

The project only goes forward insofar as Jesus’ agents, the people he has commissioned, are taking it forward. ... Those who believe in Jesus, who are witnesses to his resurrection, are given the responsibility to go and make real in the world the authority which he already has. This, after all, is part of the answer to the prayer that God’s kingdom will come on earth as in heaven. If we pray that prayer, we shouldn’t be surprised if we are called upon to help bring about God’s answer to it.¹

What captures your attention, challenges you or puzzles you in this quote? If you took it seriously, what might be different about your life?

¹ N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 207.

DISCUSSION OF PRACTICES

20 MINUTES

In light of God's calling on our lives to make disciples, we strive to see a culture in which disciples of Jesus are making disciples of others. We seek to cultivate an environment where each person plays a role in the disciple-making work of the church by helping others grow spiritually.

How can your group become a community that supports one another's spiritual growth? In what ways do you hope your group can grow in Christlikeness together?

What challenges does your community face in helping each other become fully devoted followers of Christ?

FELLOWSHIP AND SHARING

15 MINUTES

Catch one another up on your lives so we can celebrate, thank God, and share challenges that need prayer.

PRAYER

15 MINUTES

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FORMED AND SENT

A Movement of Grace

2 Timothy 2:1-7

PURPOSE & WORSHIP

10 MINUTES

Remember why you are meeting as a group: to experience Christ Jesus in our midst ministering to us and through us to one another so that we are spiritually formed as his disciples.

As you enter into worship, remember that humans were created to be worshipers, and we become like what we worship. If we are to be disciples of Jesus who in turn make disciples of Jesus, it is imperative that we spend time enjoying and adoring him.

SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 2:1-7 New International Version (NIV)

¹ You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

³ Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. ⁵ Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. ⁷ Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's second letter to Timothy is probably the last letter he wrote. Now aged, Paul is writing from prison, but unlike the fairly pleasant imprisonment in which we find him at the end of Acts, he is incarcerated in "a dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air."¹ He is bound in chains (1:16, 2:9), suffering from acute loneliness (4:9-13), and expects to be executed shortly (4:6-8). As difficult as things are for Paul, however, his mind is still preeminently on the spread of the gospel. These factors make this among Paul's most moving and human of letters. It is his own engagement in spiritual practices over the years that have enabled him to become this kind of person.

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Second Timothy* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 1973), 16.

GOAL FOR TODAY'S DISCUSSION

To consider how we can be an effective part of a movement through which the gospel spreads.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

20 MINUTES

1. Paul uses the interesting phrase “Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus.” What do you think he means by that and how might that be demonstrated in a person’s life?

- ▶ Grace is God’s unconditional love that works on our behalf apart from our merit, effort or contribution. It is his intention to work in us and for our good despite our sin, impotence and brokenness. Being strong in grace means taking this aspect of God’s goodness to heart so that our minds are renewed and our practices transformed.
- ▶ Being strong in grace means meditating on and believing that “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).
- ▶ When we are strong in grace we will:
 - Be people of prayer, which is the chief mark of dependence on God and his goodness.
 - Be people who take risks in sharing the gospel and giving ourselves away in service.
 - Be people who are at peace and free from deep anxiety.

2. In verse 2 we read, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” Why is this dynamic so important? What has been your experience as both one who has had others build into you and as one who has passed things on to others?

- ▶ The gospel in all its beauty and wholeness simply cannot spread unless people are being prepared to share it well. “How can they believe unless they hear and how can they hear unless someone tells them. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news” (Romans 10:14-15).
- ▶ As the leader, encourage the group to share both the small and significant ways in which others have equipped them and how they have equipped others. Be prepared to share from your own experience.

3. Paul uses three metaphors (vv. 3-6) to help us reflect on what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus. How do you see these metaphors connecting with the Christian life? If you're a Christian, how are they a challenge to your current approach to living faithfully before God?

Soldier

- ▶ A soldier's chief goal is to please his or her commanding officer. Anything that interferes with this goal is dealt with ruthlessly.
- ▶ A soldier's life is marked by discipline and readiness.
- ▶ A soldier maintains constant vigilance, always aware that he is engaged in war.
- ▶ Note: As the leader, avoid a sacred-secular dichotomy with this metaphor, as if some things matter to God and other things do not. Everything we do is to be done in a way that honors God. All activities can be done in a way that pleases God.

Athlete

- ▶ An athlete subjects his or her skills to the rules of the game and brings everything under strict discipline for the goal of winning. To skirt the rules would be to disqualify herself.
- ▶ An athlete doesn't give up or engage half-heartedly. He keeps striving until the end of the race or game with the goal in mind.
- ▶ An athlete is willing to endure pain.
- ▶ An athlete doesn't settle for mediocre results but pursues excellence with a goal in mind.

Farmer

- ▶ A farmer works hard; expecting that things won't be easy and knowing that much effort will be required in order to reap a successful harvest.
- ▶ A farmer is not much concerned with the mundane, unglamorous rigor of the work.
- ▶ A farmer doesn't waste time complaining about soil quality or weather issues but works with what is given. He lives with the hope that a harvest will come.
- ▶ All of a farmer's tasks involve discipline, hard work and struggle. Followers of Jesus should expect nothing less than this as they strive to live the Christian life.

4. We see in this passage that Paul is concerned with spiritual generations. He instructs Timothy to take what he has learned of the gospel and pass it on to others, who will also pass on what they have learned.

Consider this quote from author and pastor Jack Miller about who is called to participate and where the power comes from for this movement of grace:

The church is indwelt by a commissioning Spirit, which means that the power for doing the missionary task is Christ dwelling within the people of God. Theirs are the feet that go, the minds that think, the hearers that pray, and the mouths that proclaim. But the sole power for accomplishing the task is not anything human, institutional, or organizational. It is in Christ. ... His promise to be with us till the end of the age is no mere pat on the back to say that He will be with us at a distance, with the energizing power supplied by ourselves. No, never! He is saying that in all our work He will be secretly working by His own inward presence in our lives, taking away our fears, giving us love for the lost, enabling us to forgive our enemies and friends, and giving us a fervent trust in the power of the gospel to bring men to faith and eternal life.²

What captures your attention or challenges you about this quote? If you took this seriously, how might you live your life differently?

DISCUSSION OF PRACTICES

20 MINUTES

What are practical ways you can play a role in this movement of grace in the lives of others? Who are people in your life that you can encourage spiritually and how will you do this? What is one step that would help you take ownership of your own spiritual growth? Can you begin this week?

FELLOWSHIP AND SHARING

15 MINUTES

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PRAYER

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- ▶ *Pray that God would make you a loving, encouraging and hospitable friend who is quick to listen and extend compassion.*

² C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1986), 56.