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# Introduction

The Church of the Brethren understands that the Bible is the essential book of the church. Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit nurtures our trust in the faithfulness of Christ and guides the church in forming its practices of teaching, worship, witness and disciple making.

As followers of Jesus we are charged to participate in the church's task of discerning what God is saying in our time. The insight and understanding that we bring to the study of Scripture is to be respectfully shared, heard and examined in the faith community.

This study material values the spiritual disciplines of prayer, study of Scripture and reflection. Such disciplines open us to a deeper relationship with God and a closer connection with the people of our church, and are signs of congregational vitality.

Henri Nouwen said that a spiritual discipline is anything that helps us practice "how to become attentive to that small voice and willing to respond when we hear it."<sup>1</sup>

The study can help us connect with God and each other in the following ways:

- Build our relationship with God as we familiarize ourselves with the ways of God.
- Form a stronger identity with Jesus. This is God's work, not our direct effort.
- Develop more respectful and caring relationships with people in our group.
- Share personal hopes and hurts and affirmations, challenges and vision for their church.
- Become open to God's Spirit and others through the reading of Scripture, prayer, conversation and fellowship.

We believe that the process of studying Scripture, sharing and praying together in groups and as a church will engage the congregation in a time of attentive discernment regarding the vitality and mission of your faith community. May your congregation and community experience God's richest blessings!

Peace and Grace.

Congregational Life Ministries  
Church of the Brethren

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Nouwen. Making All Things New. Harper, 1981, p. 66.

# Covenant: Respectful Communication for Study, Share & Prayer Groups

We covenant to:

- Use empathetic listening.
- Be sensitive to differences of communication styles.
- Take responsibility for what we say and feel, using “I” statements.
- Keep comments succinct so others can share with the group.
- Ponder what we hear before speaking.
- Examine our own assumptions and perceptions.
- Trust ambiguity because we are not here to debate who and what is right or wrong.
- Listen with an open, nonjudgmental mind to the words and ideas of the others.
- Respect and care for each other.
- Pray, study Scripture, and be a sign of God’s love, alone and together.
- Uphold these guidelines for the time we have together.
- Maintain confidentiality by not disclosing the conversations and actions shared by Bible study group members, thereby providing a safe space for each person.

# Study, Sharing & Prayer

## Congregational Leadership Guide: Launching Study, Share & Prayer Groups

### Opportunities

1. To initiate a renewed emphasis on deeper conversations and stronger relationships among congregational participants.
2. To covenant to build respectful, mutual relationships.
3. To be intentional in beginning new interpersonal relationships (diverse, not made up of best friends).
4. To renew and strengthen our relationship with God.
5. To anchor the process, inviting and involving the congregation not just a limited few.
6. To open ourselves to God's Spirit and each other through prayer.
7. To begin discerned and inspired ministry initiatives.

### Expectations of the Share & Prayer Triads

1. Participants will experience not just an event but a spiritual relationship-building and discernment exercise.
2. New respectful relationships will develop that will increase the church's ability to have conversation on diverse and controversial subjects.
3. Participants will expand their learning about prayer through the experience.
4. People come to understand that God answers prayer.

# Third Study, Share & Prayer Gathering

**Theme: God's community is to embody blessing and promise.**

Bible Passage: Genesis 12:1-4a

## Bible Study Conversation

Read and affirm as a group the Covenant of Respectful Communication found on page 3. The Bible passage is read aloud during the three (3) readings. After each reading, participants are invited to share their reflections for each question.

### First Reading

- Invite participants to consider the first question appointed for this passage.
- **Question: As the passage is read, what word, phrase, or image stands out for you?**
- Invite someone to read the passage.
- Take a moment of silence to reflect on the question.
- Using Mutual Invitation Sharing (see page 32), start with the leader or designated person to briefly share his or her word, phrase or image. (This should take no more than 5-10 minutes.)

### Second Reading

- Invite participants to consider the second question appointed for this passage.
- **Question: What is God's purpose in God's call to Abraham and Sarah and how is that instructive for the church today?**
- Invite someone to read the passage a second time.
- Take a moment of silence to reflect on the question.
- Using Mutual Invitation Sharing (see page 32), start with the leader or designated person to share his or her reflection. (This should take no more than 20-30 minutes.)

## Third Reading

- Invite participants to consider the following question while listening to the passage again.
- **Question: What does the text invite you to do, be or change through this passage?**
- Invite someone to read the passage a third time.
- Take a moment of silence to reflect on the question.
- Using Mutual Invitation Sharing (see page 32), start with the leader or designated person to share his or her reflection. (This should take no more than 5-10 minutes.)

## Journal

Invite participants to journal in study booklet.

## Prayer

The designated leader invites each person to silently complete the sentences:

- I thank God today . . .
- I ask God today . . . (Prayer may include shared thoughts for questions 2 and 3)
- Using the Closing Prayer process (see page 34), start with the leader or other designated person to share his or her prayer.
- The leader invites the group to pray the Lord's Prayer after the last person has shared their prayer.

## Confirm Calendar

Set date for next Share & Prayer Triad gathering before departing.

## Journal Page

Take 10-15 minutes to journal before the group concludes the study with prayer.

Feel free to journal during the week as you reflect on personal experiences.

Possible questions for reflection:

- What happened during this study and conversation? What stands out to you?
- What am I thinking and feeling?
- What did I learn for future actions for myself? The congregation?
- In what ways do I see God working in my life? The congregation? In the community?

for review