
3 ROLES

— *for guiding groups* —



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Introduction

Words Matter

“Every Word Matters™” is a trademark of B&H Publishing Group. It guides the acquisition and content of every book and Bible they publish. Announcing the initiative, B&H president Selma Wilson said, “Words really do matter. It is a huge responsibility to pay attention to our words as we use them to point toward God’s Word.” “Clarity Changes Everything™” is the trademark of Will Mancini, who leads Auxano as “clarity evangelist.” Mancini and his team apply that principle vigorously when they help a church—or any enterprise—wrestle with the words they will employ to communicate vision, values, and other key organizational concepts. Whenever I (David) speak or write, I can almost hear these two fine leaders asking, “Is your language clear? Precise? Powerful?” Words matter!

The Words in the Title Matter

We spent a long time deliberating the title of this book. We know churches today use a variety of terms to describe their processes and systems for making disciples. They often care deeply about the words they’ve chosen. We want this book to be helpful to a lot of people in a lot of churches, whatever words they employ to describe what they do. So let’s spend a few paragraphs unpacking the words in our title. We will work backwards.

Groups

We will use the word “groups” to describe any gathering of people where a primary purpose is to explore, discuss, and apply a portion of the Word of God, the Bible. A *Sunday School class* that meets at the church before or after weekend worship is such a group. A *small group* that meets on a weeknight in a home is such a group. In some churches, members may choose to participate in a *LIFE group* on campus on Sundays or in a home on various weeknights. That is the kind of group we’re talking about, too. *Bible Fellowship groups*, *Community groups*, *Connect groups*, and *Bible study classes* are other popular terms. All of them describe a church’s plan for moving people from worship attendance only to a next step of discipleship: participating in a group where an individual can experience Bible study, fellowship, and ministry at a foundational level. The group is typically open and ongoing. We will sometimes call this a “Step 2 group” because the group represents the second step in a typical discipleship process or assimilation strategy. Helping people take that second step is absolutely essential—whatever

you call the group. (See “What is a Step 2 Group?” in the appendix for a more detailed explanation.) Compelling research has found that:

- *After 5 years, 83% of new members who participated in both worship and a Step 2 group were still active. Only 16% of those who attended only worship were.¹*
- *Participation in such a group is one of the three most important characteristics shared by people who demonstrated measurable spiritual growth year over year (more on this later).*

If you guide that type of group, this book is for you. You are involved in a significant ministry!

Guiding

We propose the word *guiding* because it encompasses the terms we use for the 3 roles. In the role of teacher, you *guide* group members to explore the Bible, identify gospel implications, and discover where the Bible meets life. In the role of shepherd, you *guide* the group to connect with one another in fellowship and ministry. In the role of leader, you *guide* the group to be on mission. Maybe *guide* will catch on one day as a popular title!

What is your position called in your church?

Roles

In theatre, film, or television, *role* describes the *part* an actor *plays*. In sociology, it describes how somebody acts in different social environments, based on how the person thinks others *expect* him to act. In organizational life, *role* simply means what an individual does—his or her function. Even if she is *pretending*, a good actress works to get into her role; to *become* the character. While serving as a person who guides an ongoing Bible study group is certainly not pretending, it takes time to fully develop each of the three roles. Like maybe a lifetime! So we chose the word *roles*, partly because it has multiple layers of meaning. It also implies development, practice, and growth.

3 Roles for Guiding Groups: Teacher, Shepherd, Leader

Whatever your official *title* is, your challenge will be to grow into 3 *roles* that will help you guide your group: *teacher*, *shepherd* and *leader*. In fact, your title may include one of those terms. Probably either *leader* or *teacher*. Both are used to translate really strong words in the Bible. *Leader* translates a word that means someone who “stands before.” Our mental image of *teacher* is also usually of someone who “stands before.” Although less common as a title than the other two, *shepherd* makes us think more of someone who “sits among.” The shepherd is one who guides a flock. We think *guiding* is a helpful way to think about the job of the person who leads a Step 2 group. And to help us think about *teacher*, *shepherd*, and *leader* less as titles and more as roles.

Spiritual Gifts and the 3 Roles

Good news! All 3 roles have spiritual gifts associated with them. If God has supernaturally gifted you for a role, it is going to be more like “second nature” to you. Or maybe we should say like “new nature!” If you have the spiritual gift of teaching, then studying, planning, and guiding your group through a study is going to be a joyful process you approach with great energy. If God has entrusted you with the gift of shepherding, you will joyfully care for the members of your flock. Should you also manifest the gift of leadership, you will be intrinsically motivated to influence others toward ministry and mission.

You Don't Have All Three!

Bad news! It would be very rare to find someone with more than two of the spiritual gifts of teaching, shepherding, and leading. In a sense, that's good news! *First*, it means you will have to recruit other people—preferably gifted ones—to help out with the roles you are not personally gifted to fulfill. *Second*, you need not feel guilty because you are not as motivated to fulfill all 3 roles with equal energy. *Third*, it means you can identify what you are best equipped and motivated to do, and then enlist others to help you where you are weak. *Fourth*, it will encourage you to depend on the Lord—and your team of group members—to accomplish the 3 roles. You are responsible for all 3 roles. But you have helpers—and the Helper. His name is the Holy Spirit. He has provided all the gifts needed for your group to be a great one.

Which of these three spiritual gifts would your group members say you have? Explain why.

Teacher?

Shepherd?

Leader?

Teacher or Shepherd-Teacher?

Others probably affirm that God has entrusted you with *either* the gift of teaching *or* the gift of shepherding. It is unlikely you are the steward of both gifts. The shepherding gift is actually a double-gift already. Some translations of Scripture render the Greek words “shepherd-teacher,” and others affirm it in a footnote. One gift with a hyphen. You can manifest the gift of teaching without being a shepherd. You can’t be a shepherd without teaching. If you are a shepherd, you’re automatically a teaching shepherd! God also may have entrusted you with the gift of leadership. Or maybe not. In fact, in our experience, probably not!

But guess what? You still need to fulfill the *role* of leader! We’ll talk about that in chapter three.

Gifted or Not, the Roles Are Yours

Teacher. Shepherd. Leader. These terms make up the triple challenge of the person charged with guiding a group. How can one person fulfill 3 roles all by themselves? You can’t! You’ll need help. But the buck stops with you.

30 Rs

As an organizing principle, each chapter will include the same 10 subtitles. Each begins with an R. These subtitles will help us understand the 3 Roles.

	Teacher	Shepherd	Leader
<i>Requirements</i>			
<i>Responsibilities</i>			
<i>Relationships</i>			
<i>Recruiting</i>			
<i>Resources</i>			
<i>Routines</i>			
<i>Ruts</i>			
<i>Results</i>			
<i>Requests (prayer)</i>			
<i>Rewards</i>			

Using the table above, identify the sections you especially want to learn more about.

Let's Talk About It!

You will get even more out of this book if you read and discuss it with others who are guiding groups—or thinking about guiding groups. You may not agree with everything you read. That's okay! In fact, it would be helpful for you to participate in a short-term group for the purpose of discussing—or even debating—what you read.

Note: Different Roles & Gifts Are Required for Different Groups

Step 2 groups are not the only kind of group. Different kinds of groups may require different roles and/or gifts. Leaders will be happier and more successful if their gifts match the primary purpose of the group. In fact, the actual purpose of a group is often a reflection of the leader's gifts! That noted, this book is written with leaders of Step 2 groups in mind.

Introduction Group Discussion Plan

- 10 minutes.* After group members arrive, open in prayer and ask: What are the strengths of our church's Step 2 strategy? (For a large group, ask leaders to answer this question in groups of 2-3). Invite volunteers to call out strengths and write each one on a markerboard or large sheet of paper. Remind your leaders that your church's Step 2 strategy is its way of expressing obedience to The Great Commission.
- 5 minutes.* Direct attention to the "Step 2 and Sunday School" section in the appendix. Remind your group leaders why your church has chosen the particular name for its Step 2 strategy. Reinforce the reasons behind the name used by your church.
- 10 minutes.* Call attention to the 3 Roles discussed in the Introduction. Write all three on a markerboard or large sheet of paper. Ask participants to rank the 3 roles in the order in which they believe they possess the abilities (the most effective one being number 1, the least effective being number 3). Have them write these in order on the inside cover of their copies of the 3 Roles. Invite each participant to share his order with a fellow "guide" and explain why.
- 10 minutes.* Call for a pre-enlisted volunteer to share which of the 3 Roles is his favorite to fulfill and why. Ask the volunteer to explain how the other two roles are accomplished in his group. After the person shares, explain that no matter how well an individual may accomplish one of the roles, he is responsible for all three so that his group is properly taught, led, and cared for.
- 5 minutes.* Ask participants to look at the chart near the end of the Introduction and check the boxes that relate to items they'd like to learn more about. After all participants have checked their boxes, call for several to share which ones they checked and why they chose these.
- 5 minutes.* Close in prayer. If you have a large group, ask participants to form smaller groups of no more than four people and pray for each other to grow and excel in the 3 roles of teacher, shepherd, and leader.

Chapter 1

—Teacher: Guiding the Group’s Bible Study—

To some, the term *teacher* brings to mind a mental image of a lecturer standing in front of a large *class* of people sitting in *rows* of chairs. The mental picture is of one person who leads the group Bible study by talking, while everyone else mostly listens. Let us be very clear about the term “teacher” in the context of a Step 2 group. *We don’t mean lecturer.* Talking does not equal teaching any more than listening equals learning. In the teaching role, your ongoing goal is to guide group members to discover and apply biblical truth. For that to happen, they probably need to talk at least as much as you do. We wish a word existed for *teaching* that clearly meant “guiding learning” or “facilitating discovery.” Just keep in mind as you read this chapter that when we say “teacher” or “teaching” we mean it in terms of guiding discovery. (Note: There is an appropriate place for the large class lecturing-teacher. Step 2 may not be the best place.)

Requirements

The primary requirements for fulfilling the role of teacher is a love for the Bible, a desire to understand what God is saying through His Word, and a sense of calling to communicate that to others so that they understand and obey it. The emphasis is on what *God* is saying. A great example of this kind of person is Ezra. He “determined in his heart to study the law of the LORD, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10, HCSB). Here the word *study* means “to tread frequently, as in pursuit” and is a picture of someone who loved God’s Word so much he studied it until he caught the full meaning. The word *teach* in this verse comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to goad.” Ezra studied God’s Word and once he understood it, urged the people to obey it just as he had. Do you have the same kind of passion for God’s Word as Ezra? We hope so!

Perhaps you’ve read James 3:1 and it startled you. When the brother of Jesus and pastor of the Jerusalem church warned, “Not many should become teachers...,” he was exhorting his readers to be careful about sharing their own opinions rather than God’s Word.

The apostle Paul offered a similar exhortation. Read 1 Timothy 1:3-8 and identify the 3 phrases that tell us what NOT to do as we lead groups to study God's Word.

Responsibilities

In the role of teacher, your task is to guide a group Bible study experience that avoids what the HCSB translates “empty speculations” and “fruitless discussion” but rather uses God’s Word “legitimately.” In the role of teacher, you also will be responsible to learn about the characteristics of the “people group” you lead, as well as the basic developmental needs and challenges of the life-stage(s) represented in the group. Doing so makes it possible for you to teach in a way that leads members to apply the truths discovered. You will grow in those areas over time. You won’t likely start off with a complete understanding. In fact, you probably won’t ever have the expertise of a developmental psychologist or an anthropologist! But if you have a desire to learn, you’ll gradually increase your knowledge through reading, training, and just plain old experience.

Relationships

In the role of teacher, your most important relationship is the one you enjoy with God. We believe the person who leads a group Bible study should be the best listener. That starts with listening to God through prayer and the study of His Word. In the Old Testament, when you read *listen* or *hear*, many times it is the same Hebrew word also translated *obey*. Those words should characterize your relationship with the Lord. That relationship is only possible because of the completed work of Jesus. Abide in Him. He sent the Spirit to empower you to listen to the written Word, to speak a word through you for the specific needs of your group, always pointing to the living Word, the Lord Jesus.

The relationship you enjoy with your group members is also very important. I (Ken) cannot recall everything that my Bible study leaders said to me in class during my childhood and teen years, but I can tell you all about those who took the opportunity to get to know me outside the classroom. How sad it would be for you to know all about God’s Word but fail to know your group members! Effective leaders know God’s Word, and they also know their people. Today I

lead a Bible study group at my church. My wife Tammy and I launched a new group last year and one of our main goals is to get to know everyone who attends our group—both regular attenders and guests. I don't feel that I can teach them effectively unless I really know them. As Bruce Raley has said, "Real teaching requires a relationship."² We could have put this paragraph in the Shepherd chapter. Shepherding is about people. But teaching is also about people. It's not either-or. It's both-and. The roles are intertwined, whether you prefer *shepherd-ing-teacher* or *teaching-shepherd!*

Recruiting

Another key relationship, especially if you guide an adult group, is the one you'll have with your *apprentice*. As you develop the leadership team in your group, this person is your most important recruit. This is the individual who is going to start the next Bible study group you launch. When you were recruited, we hope someone communicated the expectation that your group should anticipate God to bless its growth to the point that you will have enough people to launch another group. The most important evidence of that kind of DNA is your apprentice. That's why this person must be more than an associate or permanent sub. He'll probably start out as a sub! You may have several subs before your apprentice emerges. You'll get feedback about how each sub guided the group. One day, you'll get the impression that the group wouldn't mind if you were gone more often! You may have found your apprentice.

When recruiting an apprentice, arrange a meeting to ask the person to pray about the role—fully aware that when he is ready, you'll let the group know they are going to launch a new group. And the new group needs some missionaries from the existing group. Nobody *has* to go! Just volunteers. You'll get volunteers from three groups: (1) those who want a Great Commission adventure, (2) those who have a relationship issue with someone else in the group and need a graceful exit strategy, and (3) those who prefer your apprentice's style to yours! That is exactly the kind of person you're looking for!

"That's all I need to recruit?" Nope! You'll want a team. But that's a function of the leader role. We'll deal with that in chapter three.

Resources

The primary textbook for a Step 2 group is the Bible. Many Step 2 groups have their roots in Sunday School, even if they now employ a different name. The Sunday School movement has a rich history that started with a strategy to help boys and girls learn to read and write, using the Bible.³ Whatever characteristics other expressions of Step 2 groups may have, they almost all agree that fellow-

ship around the Word of God is the non-negotiable core principle. Unfortunately, many small groups have no plan for Bible study. Research indicates that it is not uncommon for group leaders to start looking for new materials just a week or two before the start of a new study. Sometimes they choose from an approved resource list. Often, they simply choose a random study that caught their attention online or at a bookstore.

We think groups should choose a plan and stick with it. That is the idea behind the word *curriculum* – it is from Latin and means a “prescribed course,” like an athlete runs on. It helps me to “stay in my lane” and it gives me boundaries. Curriculum *materials* are the expression of a curriculum *plan*. In your role as teacher, trust a curriculum backed by a wise discipleship plan crafted by experts. Ask yourself: Would you rather trust one of your loved ones to drive a car designed by one engineer or a team of engineers? By a team, thank you very much! The same is true of Bible study materials. Is it wiser to trust one person to create a Bible study, or a team of people who have dedicated their lives to helping group leaders communicate God’s Word? Where we work, teams of men and women labor tirelessly to create trustworthy content that can be used by all kinds of groups in all kinds of environments.

If you have a curriculum prescribed by your church, pastor, or staff, embrace it. Veteran guides of Step 2 groups will testify that there is remarkable comfort found in having a plan. Instead of wrestling with what Scripture passage or topic to study next, they simply lead their group to study the next session in their curriculum plan. Their view is that if it is from the inerrant Word of God, based on a wise plan, and backed up with trustworthy materials to help both members and leaders prepare and participate, they’re good with it. This is true even if—maybe even especially if—the assigned passage is a tough one! They like the challenge of the assignment. And they also like the freedom to get started on the next assignment right away, which is one of their routines.

Routines

You will develop routines for each of the 3 roles. In the role of teacher, the most important routine is starting your preparation early! Before you begin a new Bible study series, take some time to examine the “flow” so you’ll have a broader view of how each session fits in. The time to start preparation for the next session is the day after completing the current one! Why not right away? Because another one of your routines should be *reflection*. What went well in the group? What could have gone better? Note it. Then move on and begin to prepare for the next session. The next day, read the passage(s) your group will study when you get together again. Read it in multiple translations. *That’s all*. Meditate on it all day.

This simple routine will alert you to illustrations, object lessons, quotes, and maybe even a funny story that you would have missed entirely without that routine. You'll avoid the disappointment of thinking, "What was on that billboard I saw earlier this week? It was a perfect illustration. If only I could remember it clearly." You will develop a rhythm to the rest of your preparation routine.

If you use resources from a publisher like LifeWay, where we work, you'll have a variety of choices to help you prepare. You'll want to read the Personal Study Guide provided to the members. Then you'll want to study the commentary material in the Leader Guide and supplemental resources.⁴ Consult the suggested group plan in the leader guide to craft a plan that fits your group. What are the few key things you will want to *say*? The gems. The nuggets. The details about a word or setting that make you say "wow!" The tandem—and the hard thing—is next: what *not to say*. Is it a "wow"? If not, eliminate it. Because you need to save time for group interaction. What will I ask? What will the group *do*? How will we *start* in a way that creates interest? How will we *conclude* in a way that encourages application? If you have good curriculum materials, you'll get a huge head start on these routines.

I (David) and my wife Vickie teach a preschool Sunday School class. So I am occasionally asked if I can lead a preschool training conference. I always respond the same way: "I'll do it right now! Secure some trustworthy preschool curriculum materials. As much as you can, given whatever resources are available to you, do exactly what it says. The end." By the way, I usually follow that with advanced training. This is it: "However dumb you think an idea in the leader guide is will be inversely proportional to how much the kids enjoy it." I have dozens of examples. That's why it is important at all life stages to select curriculum materials that are trustworthy—both theologically and developmentally. Your routines will be far more difficult without them.

Ruts

Each of the 3 roles has ruts to avoid. In the role of teacher, one of the ruts is doing the same thing each time your group gets together. People do like predictability. They expect you to ask discussion questions. They expect—and hopefully anticipate—the nuggets of insight you share in your brief "lecturettes." But they enjoy a little variety, too. So try out a different method occasionally. You'll find some great ideas in Sam O'Neal's excellent book *Field Guide for Small Group Leaders*.⁵ O'Neal encourages those who guide group Bible study to remember that people have different learning styles. But most group guides are "word" people. We prefer to learn by reading, listening to, and saying words! Some people are experiential learners, preferring to do, touch, or feel. The group we

tend to ignore most is visual learners. You might think maps and posters require a classroom with a bulletin board. Sam argues that these kinds of visual materials can be tossed on the floor of a living room, too. Watching a video engages more people than just listening to the same person talk. A well-done video to introduce a session connects emotionally with the experiential learner as well as the other.⁶ Sam suggests at least providing something for experiential learners to do with their hands during group time—like a ball of play dough! Be open to some different ideas to avoid ruts in your role as teacher.

If you feel a little hesitant to try a different teaching method, just remember that Jesus, the Master Teacher, never got stuck in this rut. He used different kinds of methods to communicate God's Word. Sometimes He lectured: He taught the 5,000. Sometimes He asked a question: "Who do you say I am?" On occasion He used visual aids and objects: a withered fig tree, the temple, or fields white unto harvest...and yes, He even used a coin in a fish's mouth to make His point once! If Jesus Himself used different methods, shouldn't you? The good news is that you can try one of the very same methods He used the next time you guide your group's Bible study!

A final thought. If your group members can predict what will take place the next time your group gathers (a sure sign you're in a rut), it's time to do something different. If your people know your playbook, it's time to throw it out and get a new one! Be creative, be daring, and don't bore people with the Word of God. Get out of that rut!

Results

Each of the 3 roles can be measured by different results. The main result for the role of teacher is also the most important one overall: *spiritual transformation*. That can be hard to measure sometimes, but there are tools available to do so, like the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA).⁷ There are also some observable proxy measurements of spiritual growth. Three of these also happen to be the most predictive indicators of spiritual growth.⁸ Those who demonstrate measurable year-over-year growth exhibited these practices:

1. *They regularly read the Bible and other Christian literature.*
2. *They attended church more often.*
3. *They were more likely to be active in a smaller group or class.*

The researchers identified a Transformational Sweet Spot where group members were most likely to grow, at the intersection of these three factors:

- *Truth (the Word)*
- *Leader (healthy, growing)*
- *Posture (group member is open, teachable, even vulnerable because of life circumstances)*

The resources we develop for groups at LifeWay are built on a discipleship model that contends that spiritual transformation is most likely when:

- *Members prepare for the group ahead of time using materials written by an author with insights into the biblical text, the theological issue, and/or the life topic. We attempt to create a personal preparation experience that is as close as you can get in printed form to one-on-one discipleship with the author.*
- *A leader prepares for the group time with even greater intensity and more advanced materials.*
- *When a prepared group comes together, a dynamic is created where believer-priests learn from each other guided by a prepared leader, and the Holy Spirit has a fantastic opportunity to do His work of spiritual transformation. Preparing primes the pump.*

In a sense, then, results can be measured by group attendance and member preparation. Don't fool yourself, however, into thinking that spiritual transformation can only happen if people attend the group. Granted, if people show up for group or class without any expectation of preparation, or no resources are provided for their personal study prior to group time, then group attendance is *the only* measurable result. If you are serious about spiritual transformation, you will provide members with personal study guides and communicate an expectation of preparation. Since most Step 2 groups are open, the enforcement of this expectation is certainly not rigid. One of the huge advantages to providing personal study material is that members can read and interact with the materials even if

they are unable to attend. Such “self feeding” activity is *the* most important single predictor of spiritual growth!

Requests

What do you pray about in your role as teacher? In your role as shepherd, the focus of your prayers will be people. In your role as leader, the focus will be the work of the class or group. But what about this role? Maybe it is something like this: “Lord: As I study your Word this week, would you give me a fresh word for my group; a word that points them to the incarnate, living Word, King Jesus? Holy Spirit, would you fill and illuminate me as I prepare, give me the right words during our group’s Bible study, and freely do your work among those gathered there?”

What else might you add to the prayer above as it concerns your role as teacher?

Rewards

In the covenant recorded in Genesis 15, the LORD promised Abram a very great reward. An alternate translation is that God Himself *is* the very great reward! The same can be said about studying God’s Word in preparation to guide a group in Bible study. The Word is its own reward. Even the stuff you won’t say. Maybe especially the words you don’t say! Some group guides want to deliver every insight they discovered during preparation. The best teachers pick out just the key insights, and maybe a few extras just in case they are needed. One might think of these insights as seeds. We collect a bag full of them during preparation, but carefully select only the best ones to gently sow—or have in our pocket—during the group time. Your reward is like that of a farmer. Prepare. Plant. Water. Watch people grow. That is the most satisfying reward of all. Rejoice!

Chapter 1 Group Discussion Plan

- 10 minutes.* After participants arrive, direct them to form small groups. Ask the groups to brainstorm things others have done in the past to engage them in active learning, and activities that bored them. Call for each group to share their responses.
- 10 minutes.* Form new groups and direct participants to draw the “perfect” teacher on a large piece of paper. Allow 5 minutes for this activity, followed by 5 minutes of debriefing. Affirm the many different things required for the role of teacher as pictured in the drawings.
- 5 minutes.* Call attention to the opening paragraph of Chapter 1. Remind participants of the most commonly recognized learning styles: Auditory, Visual, and Hands-on (active learning). Ask: If I were to survey the people in your Bible study group, what would they say describes your style? Remind them of the following: their preferred style of learning tends to become their preferred style for guiding Bible study; a variety of methods will keep everyone in the group engaged over the long haul; Jesus used a variety of methods. Guide them to call out the methods Jesus used as described in Chapter 1.
- 5 minutes.* Call for reaction to the statement: “Relationships with group members are key to delivering effective Bible studies.” Invite volunteers to share ways they have seen the truth of this statement demonstrated.
- 10 minutes.* Instruct participants to scan the Ruts section in Chapter 1 and record methods they’ve used in the past month. Invite participants to call out methods used. Encourage leaders to use a variety of methods, following Jesus’ model.
- 5 minutes.* Remind participants about the rewards of guiding others in Bible study. Direct participants to find a partner and briefly share the name of one person in his or her group who is growing and maturing in Christ. Instruct the pairs to pray for the continued growth of those people and thank the Lord for the privilege of being called to lead people in Bible study.