

COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER TRAINING



IRON CITY
CHURCH

OVERVIEW

*The following training exists for the purpose of equipping individuals in our church to be leaders of community groups. Consisting of 4 sessions this scheduled time seeks to accomplish **two main goals**:*

1) Provide leaders with the theological foundations and Iron City's vision for their work.

*We want our leaders to have a clear sense of **why** we gather in community groups and **what** their role is. This is accompanied by clear expectations as well.*

2) Equip leaders with the tools they need to successfully shepherd their community groups

This training is not meant to be exhaustive but to add enough tools in the belts of our leaders that they feel sufficiently equipped to do the task they have been called to.



Along with this training material each leader will be given 2 books to read and partnered with another leader to connect with at a later time of their scheduling to debrief the books. The first book, is a ***Everyday Theology: What You Believe Matter*** by Mary Wiley in an effort to provide a basic theological foundation for our leaders and the second is ***The Emotionally Healthy Leader*** by Peter Scazzero which will help our leaders model vulnerability and transparency with God and with fellow community group members.

SESSION 1

WHY COMMUNITY GROUPS?

WHY COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS?

EXPECTATIONS FOR COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS

This first session seeks to lay the foundation for everything that follows. In order to succeed in our community groups we must define what exactly success in this area entails as well as why it matters at all.

WHY COMMUNITY GROUPS?

WE GATHER IN COMMUNITY GROUPS BECAUSE OF WHO WE ARE AND WHO GOD IS.

“

Man was created in the image of God, in order that he might be fit for the presence of God, and prepared to enjoy fellowship with him and with other holy beings whom he had created.

-Charles Octavius Boothe

”

In speaking of God we are speaking of the God who is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our God exists perfectly and completely in loving communion. In creation our Triune God lovingly creates to share his love with creation generally and humanity particularly. For this reason Genesis records that Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden. Prior to eating the apple they enjoyed loving fellowship, community, and friendship with God as well as with each other. It is only after the fall that this beautiful communion is disrupted. Once this happens, Adam and Eve know their nakedness, are ashamed to stand before God and be exposed to one another. Now, instead of loving fellowship, there is division. God casts them east of Eden with Adam and Eve's relationship in shambles as well. "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). Following this new reality the rest of the Old Testament can be understood as God wooing Israel back to loving fellowship with Him over and over again despite humanity's sinful predicament.

God, however, is not content to let his image-bearers be forever estranged from him. He is inalterably committed to redeeming his people and restoring them to the fellowship they were created for. Thus Jesus was sent not simply to do away with our sin but to do away with our sin *for the purpose*

of bringing us back into the fellowship with the God we were created for. Salvation means our sins are forgiven and we are brought into the loving community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we aren't saved into this community just as individuals but as a *people*—as God's people.

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Therefore we are saved to have fellowship with one another, living as the salt of the earth, showing the world who God is and what it means to be truly human.

This is why we gather as a Church every Sunday and this is why we gather throughout the week in Community Groups. In order to be what God has saved us to be! Community Groups are our means of living into the life Jesus died to give us. It is a stable rhythm where we are able to share ourselves with one another in a deep and vulnerable way as only the gospels empowers us to do.

The church has rhythms and practices, places for God's people to live out the life he has called us to. Sunday are a time of worship and adoration, at time where we receive the word that God has for our church body and where we remember Christ's sacrifice. But, much of what we are called to in the scriptures has to do with a way of living. Community groups are a special place where we practice living in gospel community with one another.



WHY COMMUNITY GROUPS?

IN COMMUNITY GROUPS WE PRACTICE THE "ONE ANOTHER'S" WE'VE BEEN CALLED TO

Various places in the New Testament exhort the local churches to move toward and not away from one another. In Community Groups we make the space to do this. Here are 10 we hope to embody in our groups.

1. **Accept** one another | *ROMANS 15:7*
2. **Gently, patiently tolerate** one another | *EPHESIANS 4:2*
3. **Be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving** to one another | *EPHESIANS 4:32*
4. **Bear with** and **forgive** one another | *COLOSSIANS 3:13*
5. **Confess sins** to one another | *JAMES 5:16*
6. **Pray for** one another | *JAMES 5:16*
7. **Love** one another | *JOHN 13:34, ROMANS 13:8, 1 PETER 1:22*
8. Regard one another **as more important** than yourselves | *PHILIPPIANS 2:3*
9. **Clothe yourselves in humility** toward one another | *1 PETER 5:5*
10. **Bear one another's burdens** | *GALATIANS 6:2*

Questions for Reflection: Which of these "one anothers" do you believe your community group does well? Which do you think your group could grow to do better?

WHY COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS?

WE HAVE LEADERS TO SHEPHERD COMMUNITY GROUPS TOWARDS THIS ONE ANOTHER WAY OF LIVING, BY MODELING VULNERABILITY, FAITHFULNESS TO THE SCRIPTURES, PRAYERFULNESS AND BY CARING FOR THE SOULS OF OTHERS IN GROUP.

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² *shepherd the flock of God that is among you*, exercising *oversight*, not under compulsion, but *willingly*, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” -1 Peter 5:1-4

Community Group Leaders are called to Shepherd and Soul-tend. They are to see their Community Groups as little flocks to which they are entrusted, little flocks which are an extension of our whole church. To be a community group leader does not mean you have to know everything about the Bible or be the most well-informed person in your group. **Leading is Shepherding**. Your calling is to be an *active loving presence* in your group, to ensure that everyone is *cared for, known, welcomed*, and to guide group discussion to be *edifying*.

WHY COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS?

WE HAVE COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS TO FACILITATE OUR TIME GATHERED TOGETHER.

Just like a vine needs a trellis to grow whole and healthy, so do we as Christ’s disciples. We have leaders to provide the trellis in order for all of us to grow into the love of God together. To facilitate does not mean to do most of the talking in the group but to ensure the right structure is in place so that everyone has ample opportunity to grow and find nourishment. In part 3 we’ll offer helpful tips and expectations on how to best facilitate your group.

EXPECTATIONS FOR COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS

“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” -Titus 1:7-9

THOUGH THESE GUIDELINES ARE FOR ELDERS WE WANT THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SHEPHERD AND LEAD COMMUNITY GROUPS TO BE STRIVING AFTER THESE SAME PRINCIPLES.

Leaders are *not* to be **arrogant or quick-tempered, a drunkard, violent or greedy for gain**.

Leaders are to be **above reproach**.

Leaders are to be **hospitable**.

Leaders are to be **lovers of good**.

Leaders are to be **self-controlled**.

Leaders are to be **upright**.

Leaders are to be **holy**.

Leaders are to be **disciplined**.

Leaders are to **hold firm to the word**.

Leaders are to **give instruction in sound doctrine**.



Questions for Reflection:

Reflection: No one perfectly lives up to these standards but we should strive to live up to them by God’s grace. Which of these descriptions do you feel you need to grow into?

SESSION 2

COMPONENTS OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

PRAYER | SCRIPTURE READING | DISCUSSION & APPLICATION | LIFE-TOGETHERNESS

Our community groups consist primarily of members of Iron City church as well as long time attendees, newcomers to our church who are looking for a church family, and, in some cases, unbelievers who are exploring the Christian faith.

Though the organization of groups can vary, all involve a similar structure. Three elements are foremost.

PRAYER

To be a Christian means we are adopted as children of God and can go boldly before his throne (Hebrews 4:16). One of the primary callings of the church on earth is to be a people who pray. We pray for one another (Eph 6:18; 1 Tim 2:1) asking God to provide for our needs (Phil 4: 6). We pray for government officials and the city we call home (1 Tim 2:2; Jer 29:7). We do all of this as a joyful response to the love of God which has brought us salvation. In Community Groups we desire to have a space where we can fulfill Paul's words that we "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:16-18). In our groups we intentionally carve out time to pray for all that we want to bring to the LORD together. Here we intercede for each other, praying to God to meet us, comfort us, draw near to us, help us, and anything else we want to bring to him. This is a means by which we share life with one another bear each others burdens in a way that helps cultivate and deep authentic community.

SCRIPTURE READING

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17) Scripture is God-breathed, living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). Therefore, it is the foundation of everything we do at Iron City Church and our Community Groups. It is one of the primary sites of God's activity in our lives. In it the Holy Spirit builds us up, comforts us, guides us, convicts us, reveals truth to us, and so much more.

For our Community Groups to have Christ center, kingdom unified relationships then the scriptures must be what our groups are centered on. We expect each group to be focused on the word of God weekly in a way that reminds members that more than life stage or age, ethnicity or demographic it is the cross of Christ that brings us together.

DISCUSSION & APPLICATION

Scripture is full of God's people discussing, working things out together. Jesus taught in parables then discussed them with his disciples. And his disciples even learned that he was the messiah through discussion. "He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15-16). Part of the wonderful reality of the church is that God gives us a family on earth to discuss the faith with. In our community groups we do just that.

We want each groups to focus not on teaching new information but wrestling with the call of Christ from the scriptures that week. Seeking as a family to better understand how we live out the way of Jesus. Asking earnest questions of one another and listening deeply.

LIFE-TOGETHERNESS

These three elements are aimed at cultivating life-togetherness in our Community Groups and our whole church. We weren't created to be alone and we weren't saved by Christ to be alone either. God has uniquely wired us to live and walk through life with others. And, in the church, he has given us people to accomplish this. Our prayer is that Life-togetherness is the fruit of the Prayer, Scripture-reading, and Discussion in our Community Groups.

THEREFORE, A HEALTHY COMMUNITY GROUP LOOKS LIKE:

A health Community Group knows and loves one another deeply, they a willing to share the difficult and sweet seasons of life with one another. They have robust and earnest times of prayer for each other and others. They are centered around Christ. He is their common thread and what unites them together.

They are eager to discuss how the word has affected them that week and to hear the same from others. They recognize that the goal of the time is not merely to learn more about Jesus but to practice living more like Jesus and wrestle with the challenges the Scriptures confront them with that week.

A healthy Community Group grows together. They seek each other abiding more in Christ and moving into deeper relationships with

each other. This does not mean things are always easy, often there is heartbreak, loss, suffering, depression and doubt. It is to their Community Group that members are eager to run when life is overwhelming. They weep and rejoice with one another and often have to practice patience. Members of the group get together regularly outside of group for fun and fellowship. They practice vulnerability and rest together. They are quick to welcome others into the group.

This kind of group will only happen when this way of living is boldly modeled by the groups leaders. As a community group leader you share the burden and joy of being the first to practice and pursue this way of living.

SESSION 3

HOW DO YOU FACILITATE A ROBUST COMMUNITY GROUP?

LEADING THROUGH PRAYER

WAYS TO ENCOURAGE PRAYER

Cultivating genuine and transparent prayer can be very challenging in a group setting. Some group may fall completely silent when it is prayer time while others are quick to share too many prayer requests. What is true for every aspect of leading a CG is especially important here, you must lead by example. Ask your self if you are modeling vulnerable, personal, concise and appropriate prayers request. Does your praying reflect an intimacy with God.

Do not let these challenges lead you to despair but rather have them spur you on towards great devotion, rest, and intimacy with the Lord.

A group that doesn't know one another will not pray very well together. If your time of prayer falls flat seek to develop greater connections within the group and with yourself. (We will cover this more in the next section.) Also, leading your group in time of structured prayer can be a helpful practice to stretch and grow your group.

WAYS TO PRAY

Prayer Chain | Go around in a circle, giving everyone an opportunity to offer a prayer request. Prayer for all requests after everyone has shared or pray for each person immediately after sharing.

Pray Scripture | Read a particular passage of the Bible and pray in response to it.

Pray for Current Events | If the group is processing heavy news in our community, country, or world. Intentional pray for this.

Pray for those with significant life changes
Pray as a group for one person, family, or group that is facing significant life changes that warrant prayer.

TOOLS FOR PRAYER

Follow the **ACTS** formula. Start your prayer with **Adoration**, praising God. Move onto **Confession** of sins and failures. Then offer **Thanksgiving** to God for his love and forgiveness, finishing with **Supplication**--praying on behalf of others' needs and requests.

Give everyone a chance to say out loud people and situations they want to pray for then the whole group will say together "**Lord hear our prayer**" and repeat until you feel like everyone who wants to share has.

Start or finish time together with written prayer. These can come from books such as *Every Moment Holy* or *The Valley of Vision*.

DO'S AND DON'TS

Don't ever pressure anyone to share or pray if they aren't comfortable.

Don't ever scold someone for their prayer request. If someone is frequently sharing inappropriately explicit request in a co-ed situation connect with them after to discuss this and encourage their vulnerability while directing them to opportunities to share those request with a more intimate genders group. Likewise, if someone is always praying for "Aunt Suzie's Cat" do challenge them publicly but consider discussing it with them afterward in a way that invites them to deeper intimacy with the group.

Do be thankful for anything anyone shares, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem.

LEADING THROUGH DISCUSSION

KEYS TO LEADING WELL

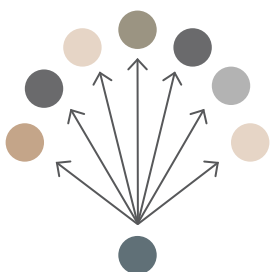
1. You come prepared to lead the group, having a game plan for what to discuss.
2. You go through the questions ahead of time, answering them in your own way and picking out the ones to ask you feel will be best for your group.
3. You do your best to follow the 80/20 rule with your group. As a facilitator you want **80% of the talking to be done by others, not you.**
4. You model opening up your life to your group.

A group that doesn't know one another won't build life together and you are to be the first one to take the initiative in vulnerability.

DYNAMIC DISCUSSION

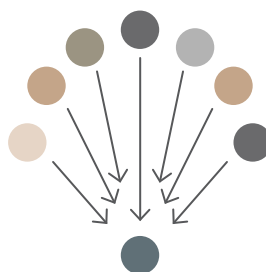
The goal of our time together is group discussion not leader discussion. As a leader you want to draw everyone into the conversation. The following chart illustrates this.

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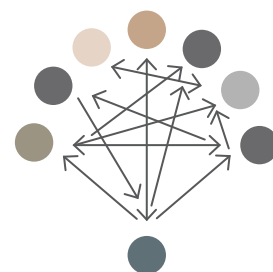
Leader doing all the talking

NOT THIS



Group responding only to the leader

THIS



Group interacting as the leader **guides** discussion



TIPS FOR LEADING DISCUSSIONS

Always **admit when you don't know the answer** to a question. Your job isn't to lead by knowing everything.

Take every question seriously, we're all at different phases of our faith journeys. There is no such thing as a dumb question.

Ask for input or feedback.

Direct questions to you back to the group. *"That's a great question, Jim. Does anyone else have a response?"*

Ask questions to a more reserved person who may be intimidated to speak up.

Ask open-ended questions. Do your best to not ask questions with yes or no answers.

Ask questions to clarify something someone said or to dig deeper. *"That's a great response, are there certain situations where you find that hard? Does anyone else feel the same way or think differently?"*

Allow the group to **"go down the rabbit hole"** but refocus if needed. Sometimes it's great for groups to wander off into different questions or topics but, if you feel it isn't becoming fruitful, bring the group back into the topic originally at hand.

Sit with an **open body posture**. Not crossing arms or legs, this promotes openness to hear what everyone has to say.

Refer to a point someone else made earlier. *"That's just like what Jane said earlier about God's love..."*

Offer **summary statements** to clarify.

Ask questions in a **conversational tone** so no-one is defensive.

SESSION 4

WHAT DOES A FAITHFUL COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER DO?

A better question for us to ask is “how does a community group leader live?” What does the life of an ideal community group leader look like? We said in section one that community group leaders are shepherds first and foremost. So much of Jesus’s ministry was done through modeling. Jesus didn’t do shepherding. He was a shepherd. It was the way he lived. A community leader embodies the attributes mentioned in the first three sections. They are people of prayer and the scriptures, practicing a robust spiritual life. Community group leaders are seeking to ever grow in their identity as God’s beloved children receiving more fully his unconditional love and acceptance of them in Jesus. This cultivates a radical ability to give themselves to others vulnerably and without the expectation of this always being reciprocated. Put another way, community group leaders are confident in Christ’s love and acceptance of them so they are able to love and accept others boldly, to share their own pains, insecurities, and struggles, and cultivate a culture of the same in their group. This doesn’t happen because of ideal leadership strategies but because Christ is embodied in the leaders of the group.

Community group leaders see their members as friends not merely responsibilities or commitments. They are connected with members of their group outside of meetings and invite others into this. Though they have friends, maybe even deep friendships outside of the community group, they are seeking to develop robust and lasting relationships in their group. With so many at Iron City moving to Birmingham recently it is crucial that our groups provide an atmosphere where folks can form lasting and deep gospel centered friendships

COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS ARE THE FIRST LINE OF SHEPHERDING.

We expect all community leaders to be invested in the lives of their members shepherding and providing pastoral care. This **DOES NOT** mean you must intimately and deeply know everyone in your group. It does mean that you and your fellow leaders need to develop a plan that assures everyone in your group **IS** deeply and intimately known or being pursued to that end. This works best when you as leaders invest in a few key folks that are able to do the same with others.

You can’t shepherd people if you don’t know they are in your group so work hard with your fellow leaders to keep an accurate and up to date list of your group membership and if someone leaves help them transition to another group well. Don’t be afraid to have a DTR with folks that come very inconsistently. Invite and challenge them to get more involved.

Our desire is for you as leaders to be the first folks your group members contact from the church when the deep joys and the great sorrows of life come because of the role of spiritual leadership you have cultivated with them. But this doesn’t mean you are alone. Each group has an elder that helps oversee your group and is a ready resource when shepherding issues arise that may need to be taken to the pastors. Know that you have been asked to lead because our church sees your pastoral ability and we want you to use them and grow in them, but you need to know when you are over your head in a situation and be willing to reach out for help. Please don’t hesitate to contact Dustin or the elder that is overseeing your group.

WHAT IS SHEPHERDING?

As a shepherd you are seeking to help cultivate the spiritual health of your members by providing biblical counsel, challenging them in areas of sin, encouraging them in sorrow or despair, reminding them of the hope of Jesus and inviting them into these same areas of your own life. Shepherds do not separate themselves from their sheep but live with them. Shepherds serve, and model humility and vulnerability. A shepherd is approachable, kind, gracious and bold. A shepherd weeps over their sheep and is quick to pray for them. When members disappear or begin to live in sin pursue them and bring others with you. Often you will know when a member of your group is struggling before a pastor will. Be intentional to pursue them while encouraging them to bring others into the situation.

As a shepherd of your community group you should feel some responsibility not just for what happens at the group but for the members of your group and their spiritual growth and striving while they are under your care. This is a weighty and serious call that should draw you into a deeper dependence on God.

FINAL THOUGHTS & TIPS FOR LEADERS

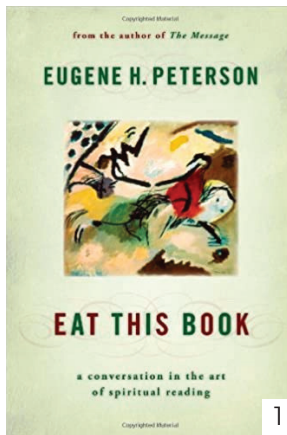
Don't go at this alone. Communicate with your fellow leaders often and have a CG mentor that you can go to with questions and for advice. If you are a new leader you are walking through this material with someone. They would be a great place to start.

When do you bring Pastors or Elders in? When there is a grievous and public sin, when someone is steadily unrepentant of sin, when illegal activity has taken place, when there are allegations of abuse, when there is a serious threat of suicide or self harm, or anytime you feel this is necessary. Make sure you know and have regular correspondence with the elder that oversees your group.

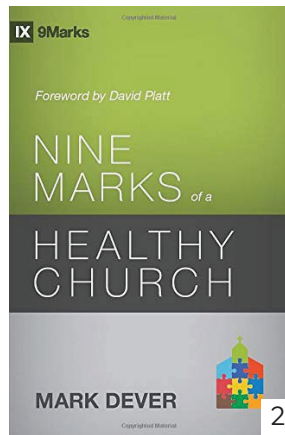
Always be looking for possible future leaders. Our prayer is that this curriculum will create a system that makes multiplying leaders and groups sustainable and accessible. If there is someone in your group that might make a good leader begin to give them the opportunity to use those gifts and consider inviting them to walk through this material with you!

If you ever enter into a season where you are unable to fulfill these responsibilities because of a lack of margin, burnout or spiritual health please let your elder or Dustin know. There is no shame in this but a sign of maturity. Our prayer is that you are pursued by leadership enough that this will not be a surprised or forced conversation.

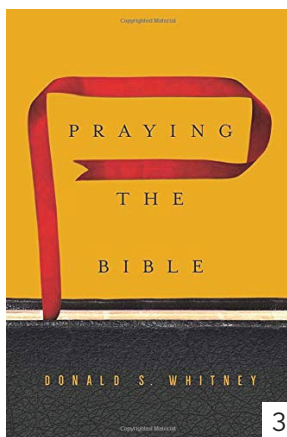
RESOURCES



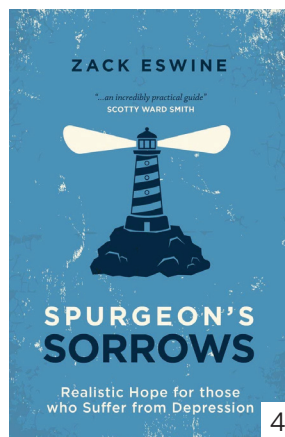
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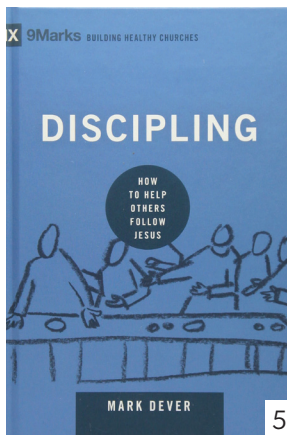
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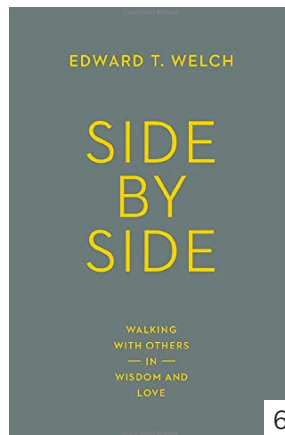
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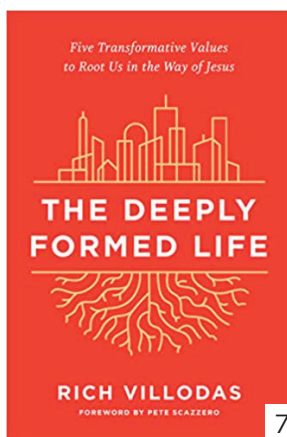
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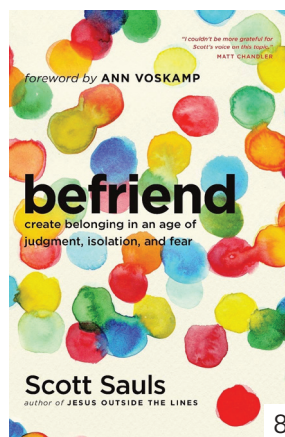
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BOOKS

1. *Eat This Book, A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*, by Eugene H. Peterson
2. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, by Mark Dever
3. *Praying the Bible* by Donald S. Whitney
4. *Spurgeon's Sorrows* by Zack Eswine
5. *Discipling* by Mark Dever
6. *Side by Side* by Edward T. Welch
7. *The Deeply Formed Life* by Rich Villodas
8. *Befriend* by Scott Sauls

SETS

1. *Lexham Press Christian Essentials (3 Volumes)*



2. *Short studies in Biblical Theology (12 Volumes)*



RESOURCES

PODCASTS

