



HOW TO LAUNCH A
DISCOVERY
BIBLE STUDY

A GUIDE

INVITE PEOPLE TO DISCOVER WHO GOD IS THROUGH READING THE BIBLE TOGETHER

Exploring what the Bible says in a small group is a simple next step for people who are curious about God but aren't likely to look to the church down the street for answers. And a Discovery Bible Study (DBS, or sometimes just a "discovery group" for short) is a great way to do that. Discovery groups begin with a person of peace (a spiritual seeker) and include that person's family, friends, or network of social relationships—whoever they can invite to explore with them.

A Discovery Bible Study is an opportunity for people to discover first-hand what the Bible says about God, about people, and what it means to follow Jesus.

A discovery group is a non-threatening way to start discipling someone even before they become a believer.

You don't need to be a Bible or theology expert to launch an effective DBS. A DBS is based on the belief that God's word is powerful (Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16) and that God's Spirit is faithful to lead us into all truth (John 16:13). When you facilitate a DBS, you are essentially co-leading with God's Spirit, who is the major player in guiding seekers toward Jesus.



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STEP ONE

Invite and Gather

One of the biggest roles you, as a believer, have in this process is inviting people in. If a Discovery Bible Study were a baseball game, you would be the coach sending players onto the field. How do you do that?

First, you need to find out who has an interest in “playing the game”; we call these people *persons of peace*. A person of peace will be open to relationship and to talking with you about spiritual things. They will have a *hunger for the things of God, be quick to share what they’re learning with others, and bring you into their network of relationships*. People who are willing to have meaningful conversations about spiritual things and who display these characteristics are the ones you should invite to begin a Discovery Bible Study with you.

Once you’ve identified a potential person of peace you need to actually “make the ask.” Ask if they’d like to read the Bible together. If they say yes, encourage them to bring others along with them. This will make the process much more dynamic.

Imagine a baseball game with only one hitter in the line up. It’s not impossible for one player to hit a homerun, but the chances of making it all the way to home base go way up when you have a whole team alongside of you.

Here are some helpful questions you can use to invite someone into a discovery group:

- What’s your religious background?
- Where are you now in your interest in spiritual things?
- Would you like to know more about this?
- Who else do you know that has spiritual interests similar to yours?
- Would you like to explore this together?
- Where can I meet you?
- Who else can you bring?

Once you have a group willing to discover more about Jesus, it’s time to launch your group.

DISCOVER
WHAT THE BIBLE
SAYS ABOUT...

Recognizing a person of peace

- Read Luke 10:1-11
- Ask, “What does this passage tell me about what a person of peace is like?”

Inviting and Gathering

- Read John 1:40-42
- Ask, “What does this passage tell me about inviting others to meet Jesus?”

. S T E P T W O .

CONNECT

You're really doing this! God has led you to a person of peace; they've gathered a small group around them, figured out the best way to meet, and brought you together at the chosen place. What do you do now?

You might be tempted to jump straight into Bible study, but we're going to stop you right there. While the Bible is our central tool to discover Jesus in a DBS, there are some other crucial elements to making disciples, which is our ultimate goal. Before you get into scripture, take time to connect. To continue using our coaching analogy, you could consider this a pregame warm-up. It's much more than an icebreaker for the group, and we'll explain why.

There are three key questions that make the connect time an intentional part of the discipling process. These questions not only help participants to connect on a personal level, but begin to instill the DNA of Christian fellowship into the group from the very beginning.

The first two questions lay the groundwork of worship (recognizing God's presence and giving thanks). The third one steers participants toward intercession (expressing need) and creates opportunities to meet those needs

(fellowship). Those of us in the Church are familiar with small group dynamics that include open sharing, discussion of deep life topics, and requests for support. But for many outside the church this is a foreign space. The fellowship and connection within

a discovery group are things many people long for and rarely experience. The connect time is a powerful space to open hearts wider to the word of God.

THREE CONNECT QUESTIONS:

How did God show up in your life this week?

What are you thankful for?

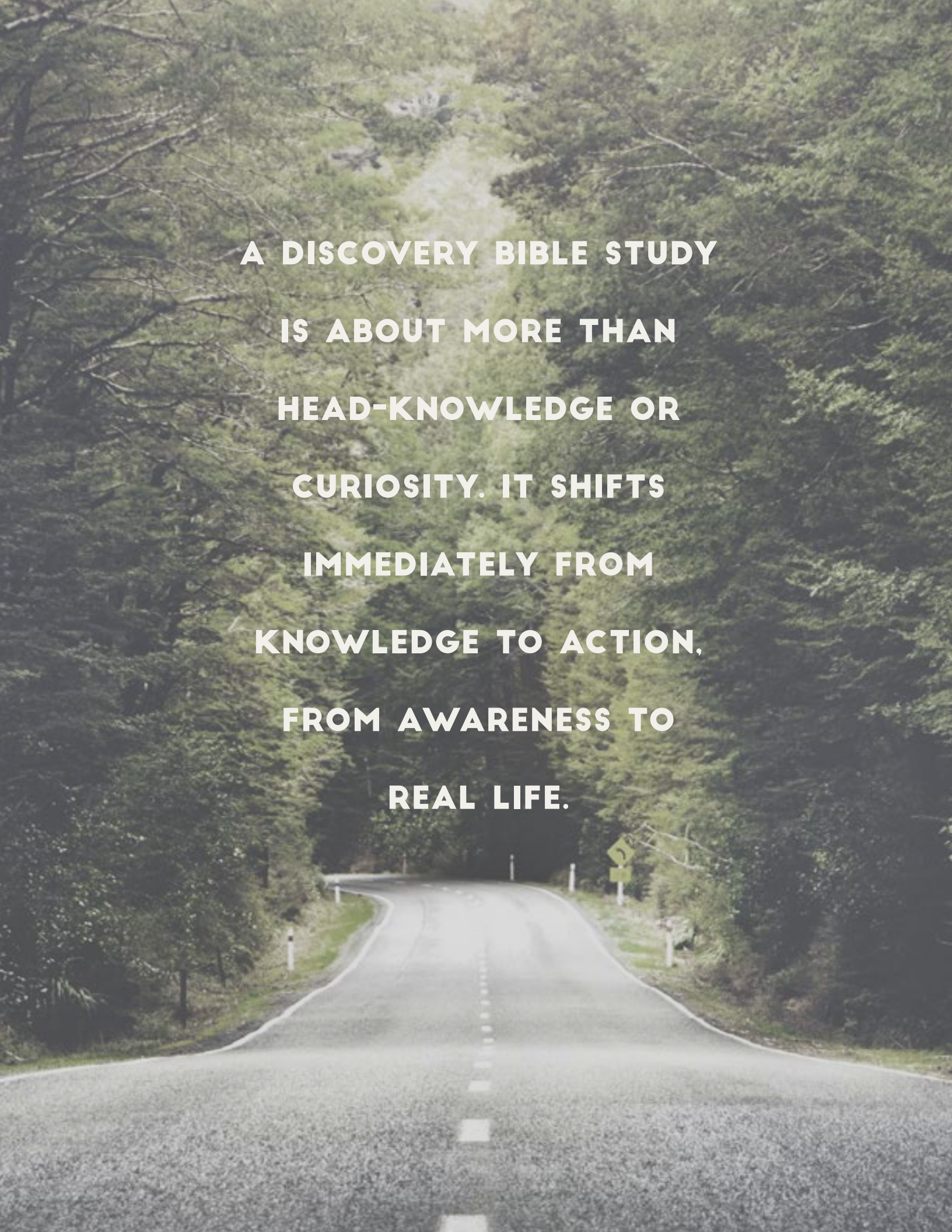
What is causing stress in your life right now?

DISCOVER

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT...

Fellowship

- Read Acts 2:42-47 and Hebrews 10:24-25
- Ask, "What do these passage tell me about the Church and fellowship?"

A paved road with a dashed white center line winds through a dense forest of tall green trees. The road curves gently to the right in the distance. The text is centered over the road.

**A DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY
IS ABOUT MORE THAN
HEAD-KNOWLEDGE OR
CURIOSITY. IT SHIFTS
IMMEDIATELY FROM
KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION,
FROM AWARENESS TO
REAL LIFE.**

STEP THREE

DISCOVER WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT...

The Power of Scripture

Read Hebrews 4:12 &
2 Timothy 3:16

Ask, "What do these passages tell me about the power of scripture in someone's life?"

Acting on Scripture

Read Matthew 7:24-27

Ask, "What does this passage tell me about responding to what I read in scripture?"

Discover

We've made it to the heart of a DBS—discovering God through his word! It's time for you, the coach, to send your players (people of peace) onto the field, where they can explore what the Bible reveals about God and about them. Your main tools in this process are a carefully selected Bible passage and some key questions.

Here are the steps in the discovery process:

- Read the passage.
- Ask, "What does the passage say?" (Select someone from the group to repeat it in their own words.)
- Ask, "What does this passage mean?" (Or specifically, "What does this tell me about God?" and "What does this tell me about people?")
- Ask, "(If this is God speaking...) What will you do about it?" (Another way to ask this with a non-believer is, "If I believed this was true, how would my life be different?") At the end of this step, everyone should have a practical "I will" statement.

Alongside the word and the Holy Spirit, these questions start to reshape a person's worldview—their beliefs about *God*, *about humanity*, and *about how we should live*. But a Discovery Bible Study is about more than head-knowledge or curiosity. It shifts immediately from knowledge to action, from awareness to real life. If you've been involved in many Bible studies before, this may feel very different or even uncomfortable to you. Many of us have not been expected or challenged to instantly put into practice what we read. This is one of the most powerful elements of a DBS. People's lives actually start to look different as a result.

It's helpful to remember that in the discovery process you are the coach, not the player. Your goal should always be to empower the players on the field to successfully engage the game. Once you get them onto the field and provide the tools they need to participate, it's time to let God connect with them personally.

STEP FOUR

EMPOWER

While the process of leading a discovery group is fairly simple, the process of being a good “coach” or facilitator can be challenging. It sometimes takes a colossal effort, as someone who is really good at the “game” of understanding God’s word, not to take the bat away from the little league players and hit the ball for them.

Remember that DBS’s are all about self-discovery. Resist the temptation to become the expert in the room: teaching, preaching, providing extra-Biblical references, or even referring to other scripture passages beyond what’s in front of you. Nothing shuts down a discussion faster than the feeling that one person has the answers. And besides, what we discover for ourselves usually carries a lot more weight and is far more meaningful and memorable than what another person tells or teaches us.

When you commit to facilitate in this open way, you empower people in the group to personally grapple with the passage and give God’s Spirit more room to speak truth to the heart. Not giving all the answers doesn’t mean you have to be silent in the group. Just be careful not to contribute in ways that go beyond the text. Focus on the word, and let the word speak.

In a discovery process, questions are one of your strongest allies.

If what people are coming up with feels wildly “off-base,” you can ask, “Where do you see that in this passage?” And if participants mention ideas from other parts of scripture, bring them back by asking, “Do you mind if we keep to this particular scripture?”

The discovery approach requires a willingness to give up control and trust God to be at work. Discovery Bible Study has a high view of the power and authority of the Bible to speak. God can work in power through the Bible to accomplish his redemptive purposes. A DBS is built on a conviction that the Spirit of God is at work in such a process, wooing people toward Jesus. That combination—word and Spirit—is irresistible.

If possible, don’t lead the study yourself. Ideally the person of peace (who gathered others together) would facilitate the study within their group. Because this is such a simple process it is easy to learn. Teaching the person of peace to lead not only empowers them in the process, but is also one of the simplest ways to avoid being the expert in the room. This is their discovery process with God, not yours. Give it to God, and give it to your person of peace.

DISCOVER

The Holy Spirit’s role

Read John 16:7-15. Ask, “What does this tell me about the work of the Holy Spirit?”



STEP FIVE

Multiply

A Discovery Bible Study is the cornerstone of a strategy to bring entire networks, cities, and nations to Jesus. This strategy is gaining incredible momentum in many parts of the world, with thousands of new disciples now beginning to follow Jesus. The strategy is called Disciple Making Movements (DMM).

If this sounds a little big in scope for you, consider the plan of God for the world laid out in the Bible. 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Not some, but all! As a follower of Jesus and a member of his Body, you are part of this plan. And once you've started a Discovery Bible Study, you have opened a door to be a part of that big movement of the gospel, where the good news of Jesus can multiply far beyond your own power to share it.

How can you equip your group to multiply? First, you ask questions that challenge them to be others-focused and self-giving.

THE MULTIPLY QUESTIONS:

- **HOW CAN WE HELP ONE ANOTHER IN OUR GROUP?**
- **WHO ELSE (OUTSIDE OF OUR GROUP) CAN WE SHOW KINDNESS TO?**
- **WHO CAN WE TELL AND HOW CAN WE TELL WHAT WE'RE LEARNING?**

These questions weave the DNA of love (for each other and for all people) into the group, and incorporate Jesus's command to his disciples to tell others the good news. We call them multiplication questions because showing the love of Jesus and sharing the truth God reveals to us are two of the most compelling actions we can take to draw people closer to God.

There's one extra tip for helping your group to multiply which is important on many levels. It's simple, but a little counterintuitive. We recommend that you don't keep an open door policy in discovery groups. Don't add new members after the first few weeks, once the group has started to gain momentum. As the group starts having a transformational impact on its members, it's natural for other people to hear about what's going on and "want in." Instead of adding new members, start new groups.

This is where the magic of multiplication (and movement) really starts to kick in. Do you remember the difference between addition and multiplication from your school days? If you only add people to an existing group, you are living in the realm of addition— $3+1=4$. But if you ask the new seeker to pull together a new group, you begin to multiply— $3\times 2=6$. And over time that makes a huge difference in the amount of people given an opportunity to discover Jesus.

When someone asks to join the group, you can say something like this: "Our group has already started and we aren't adding people. Sorry. But if you want to do something like this, I/we (person of peace) will help you lead a group for yourself and the people you know. Let's start a new one."

DISCOVER *WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT...*

Multiplication and Expansion

- Read Mark 5:1-20, Acts 11:19-21 and 2 Timothy 2:2
- Ask, "What do these passages teach me about multiplication and sharing the gospel?"



GOD CAN WORK

IN POWER THROUGH

THE BIBLE

TO ACCOMPLISH

HIS REDEMPITIVE PURPOSES.

STEP SIX

Keep Accountable

DISCOVER WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT...

Obedience

Read Matthew 28:18-20

Ask, "What does this passage tell me about obedience?"

It's the final inning of the game. The bases are loaded, the score is tied, and everyone is holding their breath as the batter steps up. The whole team is counting on the next hitter to bring them home. This player is accountable to the rest of the group; they're depending on him. Accountability is a powerful dynamic.

We mentioned earlier how a DBS is not just for learning about God, but for taking action. It's in the response of obedience to Jesus that life transformation starts to take place. Accountability is one of the best tools you have to support one another in making that transformation a reality.

So we'd like you to add this accountability question to your connect time, from the second meeting onward. That means that before you dive into the week's discovery time in the word, everyone will be asked to give an account of what they said they would do.

The accountability question:

- Were there any lessons you applied or shared? Did you follow through on your "I will" and "I will tell" statements?

This question will give you a space to celebrate victories and encourage each other to obey Jesus. It's not about making someone feel guilty, but giving them more opportunities to grow. If someone didn't take the action they said they would, you can gently ask, "How can we help you to obey what God is telling you?"

Discovery groups are a place where community forms around the process of discipleship (following and becoming like Jesus). They have potential to eventually merge with other small "cell" groups to form a new expression of the Church, poised to reach the world with the good news of Jesus. That developmental step goes beyond the scope of this guide. But there are resources available to help you guide the process when it's time. You can contact us if you are at this point with your groups.

PUTTING IT

- ALL TOGETHER -

In this guide we've outlined six major steps to effectively launch a Discovery Bible Study:

INVITE AND GATHER
CONNECT
DISCOVER
EMPOWER
MULTIPLY
KEEP ACCOUNTABLE

These six steps will guide you all the way through finding and inviting people into your study to catalyzing a gospel movement, where the good news of Jesus expands far beyond the reach of your original group.

We've covered a lot of ground, so we want to summarize the main components of a DBS one more time. There are 11 key questions that shape a powerful time of discovery. We've looked at these questions in groupings to better understand their purpose, but it's helpful to see how they all flow together. Here's what the full discovery process looks like:

Connect:

- How did God show up in your life this week?
- What are you thankful for?
- What is causing stress in your life right now?
- Were there any lessons you applied or shared? Did you follow through on your "I will" and "I will tell" statements?

Discover:

- What does the passage say? (Repeat it in your own words.)
- What does the passage mean? (What does it tell us about God? About people?)
- Where did you see that in this passage? (Used if discussion strays from the passage.)
- (If this is God speaking...) What will you do about it?

Multiply:

- How can we help one another in our group?
- Who else (outside of our group) can we show kindness to?
- Who can we tell and how can we tell what we're learning?



NOW IT'S UP TO YOU

As you've learned how a DBS works, have people come to mind who could benefit from being in this kind of a group? Do you know people who might be ready to discover God? Take a minute or two right now to pray over those people and make a plan. Tell someone you trust that you want to do this. Maybe they'll be inspired to join you and start a group of their own!

We call this a beginning guide because there are many other factors that will support you in successfully launching a Discovery Bible Study. These factors include how to meet and connect with non-believers in the first place, how to start genuine spiritual conversations with people that aren't religious conversations, what actions to take if no one accepts your invitation to study the word, and how to join with other believers to strengthen and multiply your effectiveness.

You can learn more about many of these topics on the CRM blog, which is continually being updated with new resources and stories of these groups in action. We also recommend the booklet *Activating Gospel Movements: An Eight Step Guide* from CRM's Accelerate Team as a follow-up to this beginning guide. It goes into greater detail about many of the topics listed above and will help you navigate common challenges people face when launching their groups. We are committed to helping followers of Jesus implement DMM strategies and are available to mentor and coach you in the process. Contact us at info@crmlleaders.org to let us know how it goes or to connect with a team member for more help.

CRM EMPOWERING LEADERS