



AGAPĒ

the GREATEST *of* THESE

journal

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I'm so excited that you've made the decision to jump into God's Word these next six weeks as we spend time learning to love more like Jesus. We will study the truths throughout Scripture that focus on the One who is the source of love, how we can experience it in our own lives, and what it looks like to live it out. Our mission at The Bayou Church is all about seeing lives transformed, and that happens when we Know God, Find Community, and Make A Difference. That's what *Agapē: The Greatest of These* is all about! My prayer for you is that through this study you will grow in your faith, experience Christ-centered community, and live out Jesus' greatest command, to love as He loved!



Sean Walker
Lead Pastor

UNDERSTANDING YOUR JOURNAL

1. Weekend Sermon Notes:

Bring this book to church during the *Agapē* series. Use these pages to take notes on the weekly sermons.

2. Small Group Guide:

This section gives small groups direction for each session, prompts for checking in, and discussion questions that can be accessed digitally each week. The idea is to learn and grow together in your faith as you discuss, even if you aren't able to get through all of the questions.

3. Daily Journal:

This section includes Bible verses and Daily Journal prompts.

4. Resources For Small Groups:

Help for Hosts

Small Group Guidelines

FAQ

AGAPĒ
the GREATEST *of* THESE

week 1

MADE FOR LOVE

Sermon Notes

Small Group Guide

This week our focus is on understanding that we were “Made for Love.” Begin your small group time with introductions and by setting realistic expectations for your group (see the Resources for Small Groups section on page 100). Then move into a time of discussion by using the Weekly Check In questions or access this week’s Sermon Based Discussion Questions via the QR code. Your goal isn’t to get through all of the questions, but instead select the questions that will bring about the greatest value for your group.

Weekly Check In:

1. A primary emphasis for this study is spending time in God’s Word five days a week using the Daily Journal. How have you engaged with the Bible in the past and present? Has your interaction with the Bible changed over time and if so, how?
2. What expectations do you have for yourself when it comes to the Bible reading and journaling emphasis of this study?
3. What was your greatest takeaway or what stood out to you the most from this week’s sermon?
4. Share a time in your life when one of the principles or main points from this week’s sermon was difficult for you to follow or live out. Why was it so difficult?

Sermon Based Discussion Questions

Use the QR code to access the sermon based discussion questions that allow your group to dig deeper into this week’s teaching.



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Small Group Notes



DAILY
JOURNAL

How do I log a HEAR journal?

HIGHLIGHT

Highlight - What verse(s) stood out to you in your reading?

The acronym, HEAR, stands for Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond. Each of these four steps helps us HEAR God speak and then live out what He is telling us. Before reading each day's text, pause to sincerely ask God to speak to you. It is absolutely imperative that we seek God's guidance in order to understand His Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

Every time we open our Bibles, we should pray the simple prayer that David prayed: "Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions." (Psalm 119:18) This exercise will remind you to read with a purpose. In the course of your reading, one or two verses will usually stand out and speak to you. After reading the passage of Scripture, you will write out the verse that speaks to you. Writing out the Word of God helps us to process it in a unique and more thoughtful way.

Read the passage of Scripture on the following page and record your highlight verse in the space provided.

Genesis 1:26-28

- ²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”
- ²⁷ So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.
- ²⁸ Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

HIGHLIGHT

How do I log a HEAR journal?

EXPLAIN

Explain - What did that verse mean then?

After you have selected and written out your highlighted passage in your HEAR Journal, you will EXPLAIN what the text meant then in its original context. By asking some simple questions, with the help of God's Spirit, you can understand the original meaning of the verse. Here are a few questions to assist you:

- Who is speaking?
- Who are they speaking to and why?
- Do the verses before or after help you understand the context and purpose?
- Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in this book?
- What is God intending to communicate through this text?

At this point, you are beginning the process of discovering the specific and personal word that God has for you from His Word. It is important that you engage with the text and wrestle with its meaning.

In order to help you see the bigger picture surrounding the daily Scripture, we suggest that you use additional resources. The below *suggested* commentaries and online materials will provide additional insight to help you understand the Bible.

NLT Life Application Study Bible

ESV Study Bible

Believer's Bible Commentary

BibleProject (YouTube/App)

GotQuestions (.org/App)

Read the passage of Scripture on the following page, record your highlight verse, and explain it in the space provided.

Psalm 139:13-18

- ¹³ You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
- ¹⁵ You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
- ¹⁶ You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.
- ¹⁷ How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered!
- ¹⁸ I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

How do I log a HEAR journal?

APPLY

What is God specifically telling me to do today?

After you have highlighted your verse from the passage and explained it, you will then write how you can APPLY it. This application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this step. As you have done before, answer a series of questions to uncover how this verse personally applies to you today, questions like:

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a sin to confess or avoid?
- Is there a promise to keep?
- Is there a knowledge of God I need to reflect on?
- What would the application of this verse look like in my life?
- What is God saying to me right now?

As you complete your HEAR journal, these questions bridge the gap between the ancient world and your world today. They provide a way for God to speak to you and guide you towards what He has for you and wants you to do today. Challenge yourself to write between two and five sentences about how the text applies to your life. The more specific you can be about what God is telling you, the better.

Read the passage of Scripture on the following page, record your highlight verse, explain it, and write how you can apply it to your life in the space provided.

Ephesians 3:14-19

¹⁴When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, ¹⁵the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. ¹⁶I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit. ¹⁷Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in Him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. ¹⁸And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is. ¹⁹May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

How do I log a HEAR journal?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

The last part of the HEAR Journal is to RESPOND. Your response to the passage may take on many forms.

- You may write a call to action.
- You may describe how you will be different because of what God has said to you through His Word.
- You may indicate what you are going to do because of what you have learned.
- You may respond by writing out a prayer to God. For example, you may ask God to help you to be more loving, or to give you a desire to be more generous.
- You may respond with admitting a sin, or confessing a blind spot.
- You may respond by worshiping God or agreeing to do what He has just told you to do.

Keep in mind that this is your response to what you have just read. Notice that all of the words in the HEAR Journal formula are action words: Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond. God does not want us to sit back and wait for Him to drop some truth into our laps. God wants us to actively pursue Him. Jesus said, “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7)

Read the passage of Scripture on the following page. Highlight, explain, apply, and write a response in the provided space.

Psalm 36:5-7

- ⁵ Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.
- ⁶ Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the ocean depths. You care for people and animals alike, O Lord.
- ⁷ How precious is your unfailing love, O God! All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings.

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Romans 8:35-39

³⁵Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁶(As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") ³⁷No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

³⁸And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Daily Journal

Day 5

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

week 2

GOD IS LOVE

Sermon Notes

Small Group Guide

This week we get to soak in the love of our Heavenly Father and realize that “God is Love.” Begin your small group time by using the Weekly Check In questions or access this week’s Sermon Based Discussion Questions via the QR code. Don’t try to rush through all the questions, but instead spend time discussing what matters most to your group.

Weekly Check In:

1. In our culture, we throw around the “L” word for all kinds of things ... “I love king cake!” or “I love crawfish!” and “I love football!” What are some of your greatest “loves” in life?
2. What sermon illustration, story, or example resonated most with you and why?
3. Take time to discuss the HEAR method. Which part comes most naturally to you? Which part seems most intimidating and why?
4. Share HEAR journals from last week. As you share, a great question to ask is, “Which of your HEAR journals stood out the most and what are you doing about it?”

Sermon Based Discussion Questions

Use the QR code to access the sermon based discussion questions that allow your group to dig deeper into this week’s teaching.



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Small Group Notes



DAILY
JOURNAL

Colossians 1:16

for through Him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.
He made the things we can see
and the things we can't see—
such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.
Everything was created through Him and for Him.

Daily Journal

Day 1

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

1 John 4:16

We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in His love.
God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

John 3:16-17

¹⁶For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him.

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Romans 5:6-9

⁶When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God's condemnation.

Daily Journal

Day 4

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Psalm 19:1-6

¹The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display His craftsmanship.

²Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make Him known.

³They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.

⁴Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.

God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.

⁵It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding.
It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.

⁶The sun rises at one end of the heavens
and follows its course to the other end.
Nothing can hide from its heat.

Daily Journal

Day 5

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND



week 3

LOVING GOD

Sermon Notes

Small Group Guide

This week we're digging into what it looks like to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Begin your small group time by using the Weekly Check In questions or access this week's Sermon Based Discussion Questions via the QR code. Remember, your small group time isn't about getting through all the questions, but instead about facilitating discussions that matter. Don't forget to have some fun!

Weekly Check In:

1. Share your favorite love song. What feelings does the song bring about?
2. What was your greatest takeaway or what stood out to you the most from this week's sermon?
3. Share a time in your life when one of the principles or main points from this week's sermon was difficult for you to follow or live out. Why was it so difficult?
4. Share HEAR journals from last week. As you share, a great question to ask is, "Which of your HEAR journals stood out the most and what are you doing about it?"

Sermon Based Discussion Questions

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Small Group Notes



DAILY
JOURNAL

Matthew 22:34-38

³⁴But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees with His reply, they met together to question Him again. ³⁵One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap Him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?”

³⁷Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment.”

Daily Journal

Day 1

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Matthew 16:24-26

²⁴Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow Me. ²⁵If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake, you will save it. ²⁶And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?”

Daily Journal

Day 2

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

1 John 5:1-3

¹Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves His children, too. ²We know we love God's children if we love God and obey His commandments. ³Loving God means keeping His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.

Daily Journal

Day 3

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Hosea 6:6

I want you to show love,
not offer sacrifices.
I want you to know Me
more than I want burnt offerings.

Daily Journal

Day 4

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Matthew 6:31-34

³¹“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ ³²These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.

³⁴“So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Daily Journal

Day 5

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

The background is a deep blue with lighter, glowing blue wavy lines that create a sense of movement and depth, resembling water or light waves. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

week 4

LOVING OTHERS

Sermon Notes

Small Group Guide

Loving others matters to God and is one of our greatest responsibilities and opportunities as believers. Begin your small group time by using the Weekly Check In questions or access this week's Sermon Based Discussion Questions via the QR code. Listen intentionally as you share experiences, opportunities, and stories about loving others.

Weekly Check In:

1. Reflect on a time when you felt fully loved and cared for. What was it that made you feel so loved?
2. What sermon illustration, story, or example resonated most with you and why?
3. Share a time when you saw one of the principles or main points from this week's sermon apply to your life. What made it significant or meaningful to you or others?
4. Share HEAR journals from last week. As you share, a great question to ask is, "Which of your HEAR journals stood out the most and what are you doing about it?"

Sermon Based Discussion Questions

Use the QR code to access the sermon based discussion questions that allow your group to dig deeper into this week's teaching.



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Small Group Notes

The image features a vibrant blue background with a complex, abstract pattern of flowing, overlapping lines in various shades of blue and cyan. These lines create a sense of movement and depth, resembling a digital or organic structure. In the center, the word "DAILY" is written in a large, bold, white serif font, with "JOURNAL" in a smaller, white sans-serif font directly below it.

DAILY
JOURNAL

Matthew 22:37-40

³⁷Jesus replied, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Daily Journal

Day 1

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

1 John 3:16-18

¹⁶We know what real love is because Jesus gave up His life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? ¹⁸Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

1 John 4:18-21

¹⁸Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love. ¹⁹We love each other because He loved us first.

²⁰If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? ²¹And He has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Romans 13:8-10

⁸Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law. ⁹For the commandments say, “You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet.” These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law.

Daily Journal

Day 4

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 13

⁴Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance ...

¹³Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

week 5

**LOVING WHEN
IT'S HARD**

Sermon Notes

Small Group Guide

This week we're digging into what it looks like to love even when it's hard. Begin your small group time by using the Weekly Check In questions or access this week's Sermon Based Discussion Questions via the QR code. Remember, your small group time isn't about getting through all the questions, but instead about facilitating discussions that matter.

Weekly Check In:

1. What fictional character in a movie, play, or book is hard for you to love? What characteristics make that person hard to love?
2. What was your greatest takeaway or what stood out to you the most from this week's sermon?
3. Share a time in your life when one of the principles or main points from this week's sermon was difficult for you to follow or live out. Why was it so difficult?
4. Share HEAR journals from last week. As you share, a great question to ask is, "Which of your HEAR journals stood out the most and what are you doing about it?"

Sermon Based Discussion Questions

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Small Group Notes



DAILY
JOURNAL

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For He gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Daily Journal

Day 1

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Matthew 18:21-35

- ²¹ Then Peter came to Him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?”
- ²² “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”
- ²³ “Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. ²⁴ In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. ²⁵ He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.
- ²⁶ “But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ ²⁷ Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.
- ²⁸ “But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.
- ²⁹ “His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. ³⁰ But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.
- ³¹ “When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. ³² Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.
- ³⁵ “That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

Daily Journal

Day 2

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Romans 12:17-19

¹⁷Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

¹⁹Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,
“I will take revenge;
I will pay them back,”
says the LORD.

Daily Journal

Day 3

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Romans 12:20-21

²⁰Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them.
If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap
burning coals of shame on their heads.”

²¹Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Daily Journal

Day 4

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Colossians 3:12-13

¹²Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Daily Journal

Day 5

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

The background is an abstract, fluid composition of wavy, undulating lines in various shades of blue and purple. The colors transition from deep, dark blues and purples in the shadows to lighter, more vibrant blues and purples where the waves catch the light, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is reminiscent of liquid or smoke in motion.

week 6

**LOVING WITH
YOUR WORDS**

Sermon Notes

Small Group Guide

Your words matter, and they can be incredibly life giving or incredibly hurtful. This week's focus is on loving with your words. Begin your small group time by using the Weekly Check In questions or access this week's Sermon Based Discussion Questions via the QR code.

Weekly Check In:

1. Words of affirmation are important. Share a time when you received life-giving words of affirmation that made a difference.
2. What sermon illustration, story, or example resonated most with you and why?
3. Share HEAR journals from last week. As you share, a great question to ask is, "Which of your HEAR journals stood out the most and what are you doing about it?"
4. Reflect on these past six weeks and share a major take away or something impactful that you're excited to apply to your life.

Sermon Based Discussion Questions

Use the QR code to access the sermon based discussion questions that allow your group to dig deeper into this week's teaching.



TheBayouChurch.org/Agape

Small Group Notes



DAILY
JOURNAL

Proverbs 15:23

Everyone enjoys a fitting reply;
it is wonderful to say the right thing at the right time!

Proverbs 15:28

The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking;
the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words.

Proverbs 18:21

The tongue can bring death or life;
those who love to talk will reap the consequences.

Proverbs 15:2

The tongue of the wise makes knowledge appealing,
but the mouth of a fool belches out foolishness.

Daily Journal

Day 1

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Ephesians 4:26-32

²⁶And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

²⁸If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. ²⁹Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

³⁰And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, He has identified you as His own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. ³²Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. ²⁵And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near.

Daily Journal

Day 3

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

James 3:3-12

³We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. ⁴And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. ⁵In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. ⁶And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

⁷People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. ¹⁰And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! ¹¹Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? ¹²Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

Daily Journal

Day 4

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

James 1:19-21

¹⁹ Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. ²⁰ Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. ²¹ So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.

Daily Journal

Day 5

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

The background features a dynamic, abstract composition of flowing, wavy lines in shades of blue, purple, and pink. The lines create a sense of movement and depth, with some areas appearing more saturated and others more ethereal. The overall effect is reminiscent of liquid light or a digital landscape.

SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

TOP 10 TIPS FOR NEW HOSTS

Congratulations! As the host of your small group, you have responded to the call to help people Know God, Find Community, and Make a Difference. As you prepare to facilitate your group, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind.

Remember you are not alone. God knows everything about you and He knew you would be asked to facilitate your group. You may not feel ready; this is common for all good hosts. God promises, “I will never abandon you.” (Hebrews 13:5 NLT) Whether you’re facilitating for one evening, several weeks, or a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.

- 1.** Don’t try to do it alone. Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy team. If you can enlist a co-host to help, that can sometimes make for a greater experience. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is ask people to help you. You’ll be surprised at the response.
- 2.** Be friendly and be yourself. God wants to use your unique gifts and temperament. Be sure to greet people at the door with a big smile—this can set the mood for the whole gathering. Remember, they are taking as big of a step showing up for this study as you are hosting a small group! Don’t try to do things exactly like another host; do them in a way that fits you. Admit when you don’t have an answer and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it!
- 3.** Prepare for your meeting ahead of time. Review the session and write down your responses to each question. Being familiar with the material will ease your mind and help facilitate a smoother session.
- 4.** Before your group arrives, take a few moments and pray for each member by name. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of each person in your group. Expect God to lead you to whomever He wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead.
- 5.** When you ask a question, be patient. Someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the questions. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple “thanks” or “great answer.” Then ask, “How about somebody else?” or “Would someone who hasn’t shared like to add anything?” Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren’t ready to say, pray, or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time.
- 6.** Provide transitions between questions. Ask if anyone would like to read the paragraph or Bible passage. Don’t call on anyone, but ask for a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

HELP FOR HOSTS

- 7.** Break into smaller groups occasionally. With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning and ultimately get more out of their small group experience. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocally dominant member.
- 8.** Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud will feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back in with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests from their subgroups. The other great aspect of subgrouping is that it fosters leadership development. As you ask people in the group to facilitate discussion or to lead a prayer circle, it gives them a small leadership step that can build their confidence.
- 9.** Rotate facilitators occasionally. You may be perfectly capable of hosting each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to host the group.
- 10.** One final challenge (for new or first-time hosts). Before your first opportunity to lead, look up each of the six passages listed. Read each one as a devotional exercise to help prepare you with a shepherd's heart. Trust us on this one. If you do this, you will be more than ready for your first meeting.

SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

HELP FOR HOSTS

³⁶“When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.’”

Matthew 9:36-38 (NIV)

¹⁴“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.” **John 10:14-15 (NIV)**

²“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

1 Peter 5:2-4 (NIV)

¹“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” **Philippians 2:1-5 (NIV)**

²³“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” **Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)**

⁷Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well...¹¹For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹²encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8,11-12 (ESV)

SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

SMALL GROUP GUIDELINES

It's a good idea for every group to put words to their shared values, expectations, and commitments. Such guidelines will help you to design an alliance that will set you up for success. We recommend you discuss your guidelines during your first small group meeting in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience. Feel free to modify and make these guidelines your own!

CLEAR PURPOSE

To grow healthy, spiritual lives by building healthy small group community.

GROUP ATTENDANCE

To give priority to the group meeting time (call if I am absent or late).

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

To create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved so we will be careful with being judgmental, giving quick answers, and offering our simple fixes to complex situations.

BE CONFIDENTIAL

To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group (unless someone states they are going to hurt someone else or themselves).

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

To avoid gossip and to immediately resolve any concerns by following the principles of Matthew 18:15-17, which begins with going directly to the person with whom we have an issue.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH

To challenge and encourage one another to live a healthy and balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God.

WELCOME NEWCOMERS

To invite our friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

To get to know one another outside of the group time and pray for each other regularly.

MOTIVATED SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

To work with each other and develop group ownership as each one of us helps with group responsibilities (rotate homes, study facilitators, snacks, drinks, collect prayer requests, etc.).

Other _____

If you haven't already done so, take a few minutes to fill out the small group calendar on page 105.

SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

SMALL GROUP CALENDAR

Healthy groups share responsibilities and group ownership. It might take some time for this to develop. Shared ownership ensures that responsibility for the group doesn't fall to one person. Use the calendar to keep track of social events, mission projects, birthdays, or days off. Complete this calendar at your first or second meeting. Planning ahead will increase attendance and share ownership.

DATE	SESSION	LOCATION	FACILITATOR	SNACK OR MEAL
	ONE			
	TWO			
	THREE			
	FOUR			
	FIVE			
	SIX			

SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long will this group meet?

This study includes six sessions. We encourage your group to add an extra session for a celebration. In your final session, each group member may decide if he or she desires to continue on for another study. At that time, you may also want to do some informal evaluation, discuss your group guidelines, and decide which study you want to do next.

Who is the host?

The host is the person who coordinates and facilitates your group meetings. In addition to a host, we encourage you to select one or more group members to facilitate your group discussions. Several other responsibilities can be rotated, including refreshments, prayer requests, or keeping up with those who miss a meeting. Shared ownership in the group helps everybody grow.

Where do we find new group members?

- Start with people who are already in your sphere of influence (co-workers, friends, and neighbors).
- Find people around you who are new to church, are new believers, or have shown interest in getting involved.
- Look for people you think you can help realize their potential.
- As an “open group,” your group will be listed online as an option for people wanting to join a group.
- Ask God to send the right people to your group.

How do we handle the childcare needs in our group?

Childcare needs must be handled very carefully. This is a sensitive issue. We suggest you seek creative solutions as a group. One common solution is to have the adults meet in the living room and share the cost of a babysitter (or two) who can be with the kids in another part of the house.

Another popular option is to have one supervised home for the kids and a second home (close by) for the adults. If desired, the adults could rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson for the kids.

Where can I hold my Small Group?

We encourage Small Groups to meet outside the church building in the places where you like to spend your time. Some of the most common meeting places are homes, restaurants, parks, coffee shops, and office buildings.

How do I measure if group members are growing?

Make it part of your discussion whether in a group setting or individually. Here are some great questions to guide your conversation:

- What are you most looking forward to in the group?
- What do you feel like God has been doing in your life lately?
- What areas of your faith are you hoping to grow in the coming months?

- What are you focused on in your life right now?
- Have you been through First Steps? Do you remember what your personality type is or what your spiritual gifts are?
- Have you ever served at The Bayou?
- How can I pray for you?
- Invite them to consider being baptized. Invite your Small Group to be there to celebrate anyone getting baptized.
- Share how you find time regularly to pray, worship, and read God's Word and encourage them to make their own plan for time with God.
- If they are ready to receive Christ, offer to pray with them.

Everyone in your group will be at different places spiritually. The process of helping them grow is not to get them to do everything at once, it's to help identify where they currently are spiritually and offer a practical next step.

Here are some examples of next steps you can share depending where a group member is spiritually:

- Invite them to attend a Sunday service with you.
- Share your personal story and what God has been teaching you.
- Share how First Steps can help them discover their purpose and invite them to attend.

What should I do if someone asks a question I can't answer?

It's okay to not have all the answers. Thankfully, we can find guidance through prayer, God's Word, and the Holy Spirit. Encourage them to spend time reading the Bible and praying. Also, let them know that you will do your best to get some information and get back with them at your next Small Group meeting. Always feel free to reach out to a staff member for help.

What should I do if someone in my group shares something with me (or the group) that requires attention beyond what I (or we) can provide?

If you encounter a difficult situation within your Small Group, please know that you are not alone. If a member is going through a crisis, you can rally the group around them to provide prayer, encouragement, and support. Use wisdom and be sensitive to the situation. If you are unsure of what to do, don't hesitate to ask a Bayou staff member.

AGAPÈ

the GREATEST *of* THESE

Acknowledgments/Translations

The HEAR journal method is taken from Robby Gallaty's book, *Replicate*.
All Scriptures are in New Living Translation (NLT) unless otherwise noted.



 THE BAYOU
C H U R C H