

Laying Foundations

Phase II

Sample

Growing Spiritually

Pocket Principles[®]
and Guided Discussions

For Leaders

Growing Spiritually, Pocket Principles® and Guided Discussions, For Leaders

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NOTE: In an effort to recognize that both men and women are co-heirs of God's grace, we have chosen to use alternating gender pronouns in this document. However, we do recognize and embrace gender-specific roles in Scripture.

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A Welcome from WDA's President

Worldwide Discipleship Association, Inc.

Hello Friend!

Let me congratulate you on your decision to learn more about Jesus Christ and what it means to follow Him. There is nothing more important or more rewarding than the decision to follow Him and then to grow as a Christian.

These studies will help you get started on your journey with Christ or encourage and instruct you if you are already on this exciting journey. We in WDA want to help you grow and become all you can be in Christ Jesus!

Because you have chosen to lead, we want to do all we can to support you. In addition to the materials provided in this workbook, we would like to also offer you a free download of the Teaching Outlines for *Growing Spiritually*.

<http://www.disciplebuilding.org/materials/growing-spiritually-teaching-outlines-free-download>

My prayer and confident belief is that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6) so that He is able "to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy." (Jude 1:24) To Him be glory and praise!

May God richly bless you as you strive to grow in Him.



Bob Dukes
President, Worldwide Discipleship Association
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Growing Spiritually

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Leader's Instructions

For Using Pocket Principles®

What is a Pocket Principle™? Each Pocket Principle™ is a brief essay that focuses on a single topic necessary to the growth and maturity of a believer.

The 10 Pocket Principles®, about *Growing Spiritually*, help the disciple understand how Christian growth occurs, God's role (including the Holy Spirit) and man's role in spiritual growth, dimensions of spiritual growth and God's plan for believers.

Using Pocket Principles® in a Guided Discussion (small group) format:

You will notice that each Pocket Principle™ has a corresponding Guided Discussion. Because the students who are studying *Growing Spiritually* are usually less mature believers, our suggestion is that they **not be required** to read the Pocket Principles® before coming to the Guided Discussion or after the Discussion. At this point in their maturity, it is best that they be given no work to do outside of the group discussion. (For more information about this, go to our website at www.disciplebuilding.org/about/phases-of-christian-growth/2.) Of course, you can mention the purpose of the Pocket Principles® and **invite** students to read them. The content of the Pocket Principles® will reinforce truth learned in the group discussion. Also, if a group member misses a meeting, he can read the corresponding Pocket Principle™ to review the information missed.

Using Bible Readings:

The booklet entitled *Bible Readings for Devotional Use* is for the student to use in her devotional times. (This is the same booklet used in Cornerstone *Knowing God* and *Understanding People*.) The Bible readings (for a year) focus on the books of *John, Colossians, I John, Genesis, Exodus, Philippians, Jonah* and some of the *Psalms*. These books have been chosen because they emphasize many of the topics studied in the Cornerstone series. If the student has already begun using the *Bible Readings*, she should continue.

Using Pocket Principles® in a Life Coaching (one-one) format:

Pocket Principles® can also be used effectively in an interactive one-one relationship. However, in this arrangement we suggest that the Life Coach (discipler) ask the student to read the Pocket Principle™ beforehand so the material can be discussed during the one-one appointment. All the dynamics mentioned above still apply and the Life Coach needs to tailor expectations to the maturity of the student. To facilitate interaction, the material contained in the corresponding Guided Discussion for Leaders will help a Life Coach prepare for the appointment. (For more information about preparing for a Life Coaching appointment, please consult the *Life Coaching Manual* at www.disciplebuilding.org/product-category/life-coaching.)

Leader's Instructions

For Using Guided Discussions

The 10 Guided Discussions, about *Growing Spiritually*, help the disciple understand how Christian growth occurs, the roles of God (including the Holy Spirit) and believers in spiritual growth, the dimensions of spiritual growth and God's plan for believers.

Guided Discussions for small groups play an important role in the growth of a believer with the **major goal being interaction around Scripture**. The goal of disciple building is not just knowledge, but Christlikeness in character and conduct. Therefore, **application is essential**. (Sections "Looking At Real Life" and "Looking at My Life" are application oriented.) At least one-third of the small group discussion time should be spent discussing application of the truth. It is often tempting to get caught up in the content part of the study, but you, as the leader, are responsible to move the group along to application.

A word needs to be said about the relationship between Pocket Principles[®] and Guided Discussions. The content of both is generally the same, although not identical. These 2 formats provide different ways of presenting the same content, or both can be used to reinforce the content. (Another type of WDA material is Teaching Outlines. These are designed to be used by a teacher who wants to present the content in a lecture format to a larger group. Free Teaching Outlines can be downloaded from www.disciplebuilding.org/materials/growing-spiritually-teaching-outlines-free-download.)

There are two (2) versions of each study: the Leader's version with answers and special notes, and the Student version with questions, but no answers. *Answers and notes to leaders are in gray, italicized text.*

Much of the preparation has been done for you as a leader: topics have been chosen, Scriptures chosen, questions written. However, it is important that you become comfortable with the material so that you will be able to be flexible and focus on the needs of your group. In the *Small Groups Manual* (WDA), you will find information about the practical aspects of group leadership. Please refer to the section titled "Practical Dynamics of Small Group Leadership." This is available from the WDA store at www.disciplebuilding.org/store/leadership-manuals/small-groups-manual.

God's Plan For The Believer

Some years back, after Henry Norris Russell, the Princeton astronomer, had concluded a lecture on the Milky Way, a woman came to him and asked, "If our world is so little, and the universe is so great, can we believe God really pays any attention to us?" Dr. Russell replied, "That depends, madam, entirely on how big a God you believe in."

ONE OF OUR GREATEST NEEDS IS TO HAVE A PURPOSE IN LIFE.

God has built into each one of us a desire to do something meaningful with our lives—to make a contribution. The American naturalist and author Henry David Thoreau wrote toward the end of a life in which he could find no ultimate meaning that "most of us live lives of quiet desperation." While his statement is perhaps overly pessimistic, it is generally agreed that most people seem to be seeking for something more out of life than they are able to find. The good news is that not only does God instill that desire within us, but He also has a plan for each of us to satisfy that desire and to find great meaning and significance in our lives. Along with the astronomer Russell, we worship a God big enough to create the universe and gracious enough to design a special place for us in it.

GOD HAS A PLAN FOR EACH BELIEVER.

God grants both the need for meaning and the opportunity to find it. This has been part of His master plan from the beginning. As Paul wrote to the believers at Ephesus, "We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things He planned for us long ago." (Ephesians 2:10, *New Living Translation*) In the original language of Scripture, the word "masterpiece" literally means "poem." Think of your life as a poem written by God, with each day a new opportunity to do the things that He has planned for you to do. As living poems, we find meaning and significance in fulfilling the desire of the Author of the universe.

God's design involves both privilege and responsibility. Philippians chapter two, verses 12 and 13 say, "Dearest friends, you were always so careful to follow my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away you must be even more careful to put into action God's saving work in your lives, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him." (*New Living Translation*) Note that the verbs are active on both sides of the equation. The believer's role is by no means passive. As Paul

...we worship a God big enough to create the universe and gracious enough to design a special place for us in it.

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reminds the Christians in Philippi, we have a responsibility to do the things that please God. However, he also reminds them that it is God who gives the ability to fulfill the responsibility.

GOD PROGRESSIVELY REVEALS HIS PLAN FOR EACH BELIEVER.

Once we understand that God has things for us to do, we must think through how we come to understand what it is that He expects us to do. The believer is not given a playbook at the time of salvation or upon being baptized or joining a church. In reality, the rest of the believer's life is a process of discovering and doing the will of God. In His infinite wisdom, God reveals His plan more fully as we grow in spiritual maturity and understanding. This is similar to the work of an artist who starts first with the background and covers the canvas with broad strokes. Then he paints in the major points of interest. Finally, he fills in the details.

God's plan for the believer has both an internal component (spiritual growth) and an external component (ministry). The internal is "being" and the external is "doing." The internal component has priority. We must *be* what God wants us to be before we can *do* what God wants us to do. Ministry (the external component) is an overflow of the inner life. However, ministry is also a means of future growth. So we see a circle where spiritual growth leads to ministry, and ministry leads to more spiritual growth.

The general expectations that God has of all who follow Him are woven throughout Scripture, in both the Old Testament and the New. These expectations generally focus on the believer's inner life and include such things as maintaining an attitude of prayer and dependence on God, keeping ourselves pure, giving thanks in all situations, being kind and considerate to others, and so on.

Specific expectations, or details of the plan, often revolve around the good works (ministry) that God has planned for us to do. One of the primary ways that we fulfill our purpose is by using our spiritual gifts. Scripture makes it clear that God's Holy Spirit has endowed each believer with one or more spiritual gifts in keeping with His master plan. As we develop and use these gifts to His glory, we are fulfilling our role in His plan. Other dynamics are at work that help define God's will in our lives (personality, interests, passions, etc.), but these will be discussed in other publications.

When it comes to discovering God's will for their lives, many Christians seem most concerned with major decisions such as who to marry, what career to pursue, where to live, and so on. We don't find this preoccupation in Scripture.

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Rather, the emphasis there is on godliness and ministry. These twin pursuits provide a context in which to make the other decisions.

At each point along this path, God presents us with ministry opportunities that are appropriate for our level of spiritual maturity. Consider the example of a father who wants to teach his son carpentry. The father, himself a master craftsman, can see from the beginning the potential of his apprentice and the beautiful objects he will someday create. However, he starts with very simple tasks. In the early years, the son's primary responsibility is to watch his father and to help when asked. The father starts by teaching his son how to use simple tools. He gives him scrap pieces of wood to practice on. As the son gains physical strength and maturity, the father increases the level of responsibility. At some point, he allows the son to begin using power tools. Once the son gains proficiency, the father gives him the opportunity to work on real projects, but always under the father's close instruction and watchful eye. After many years of instruction and development, the son is ready to use any tool to tackle any project.

So it is with our heavenly Father as He develops His workmanship into workers. Just as a wise and considerate father would never give a young boy a dangerous power tool and leave him alone to complete a complex project, so our Father does not require of us anything beyond our capability. We see this pattern in the life of Christ as He worked with His disciples. From a relational perspective, Jesus asked His followers first only to trust in Him as the Messiah they had been looking for, then as their provider and protector, and finally as One who desired and was able to work through them. From a ministry perspective, Jesus first took His disciples with Him so they could observe. Gradually, He began to give them more responsibility and involve them in the ministry. Finally, He sent them out on their own.

We must be what God wants us to be before we can do what God wants us to do.

Over a period of many months together, the conversations between Jesus and His disciples went from "Come and see" to "Follow me" to "Work with me" to the point where He could finally tell His disciples on the night before His crucifixion, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." And also, "You shall do greater works than you have seen me do." It would have been absurd for Jesus to utter the last statements as soon as His disciples began to follow Him, but from the beginning His design was to prepare them to hear and respond to these words.

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GOD WORKS OUT HIS PLAN IN THE MIDST OF THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE.

If God's only desire were to bring us safely home to glory, He could easily choose to arrange things so that Christians would be protected and immune from all the bad things of life. But because He desires for us to grow into His likeness, to be His agents for change in this world and to help accomplish His purposes, He allows us to face life as it comes and teaches us in and through these circumstances.

Challenges are a daily fact of life for the child of God. These difficulties come from any number of sources including our own sin nature, the fallen world, the sins of others, spiritual warfare, human limitations, emotional issues, and sometimes even from God Himself. Because of these challenges, the working out of God's plan is not a smooth process. It is often not predictable, easy, or comfortable. In fact, the path we are called to follow is often difficult, sometimes painful, confusing, and dangerous, and may even appear to be a dead end at times.

There is much written in Scripture about the role trials and troubles play in the Christian's life. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote that we are to joyfully welcome difficulties as friends because of the good that they accomplish in our lives. Granted, this can be a difficult thing to do in the midst of the trial. But we should focus on the outcome, knowing that challenges, when responded to properly, produce perseverance, endurance, strength of character, and spiritual maturity. In short, they help conform us to the image of Christ. An important point to remember is that there is nothing that comes into our lives that cannot be redeemed by God for our good and for His glory.

To further understand the role of difficulties, let's return to the earlier illustration of a painting. The artist starts first with the background and covers the canvas in broad strokes. Then he begins to add the details. A frequently used technique to add definition and focus to a painting is to use darker colors for contrast, adding outline, shadow, and depth. So it is with the difficult challenges—the darker colors—that God uses to bring greater clarity to His plans for us. Challenges are part of the plan. Difficulties give definition to the picture, and make it come more clearly into focus.

GOD LINKS HIS PLAN FOR EACH BELIEVER WITH HIS GREATER PLAN FOR ALL CREATION.

Dallas Willard writes in *The Divine Conspiracy*, "It is always true that meaning is found, when it is found, in some larger context." A further element of significance for believers is that we play a role in the larger scheme of things. It is

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God's design to involve us in His unfolding drama of redemption. Ours are not simply unrelated bit parts to fill time between scenes. Rather we are players on the stage of human history with significant roles to play.

Throughout history, God has chosen to use humans to accomplish His purposes. We see this consistently throughout Scripture. Then it was an Abraham, a Moses, a Ruth, a David, or a Mary. Today it may be a Fred or a Tiffany or a Charles. Reading through the written record, we can plainly see how God had determined for people to be involved in His plan. It is often not as easy to see or even to believe that we also are part of His plan. But this is the startling truth.

Throughout history, God has chosen to use humans to accomplish His purposes.

When John the Baptizer came to prepare the way for the Messiah, he proclaimed, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." As Jesus walked and ministered among the people, he taught, "The kingdom of heaven is among you." And so the kingdom of God has already been established in the hearts and lives of those who have chosen to follow Jesus. And it continues to grow today as His Word goes out and more are brought to faith in Christ. As we fulfill His plan for our lives, we are doing kingdom work. And Scripture tells us that someday we will rule with Christ when He establishes His eternal reign. Significant work indeed!

SUMMARY

The things that we have considered should bring great joy to the heart of every believer. Each of us can have full confidence that our lives have purpose and meaning because of the following truths:

1. God has a plan for every believer, which He progressively reveals to us.
2. God works out His plan through and in the difficult challenges of life.
3. We are part of God's larger plan for the whole world.

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God's Plan For The Believer

IMPORTANT to Leader: Answers and notes to leaders are in gray, italicized text.

GOAL:

For a disciple to understand that God has a plan for each believer that is a part of His overall plan for His kingdom.

GETTING STARTED:

Picture this:

You work on the assembly line for a carmaker. Your assembly line installs the brake system. Your specific task is to attach the brake pedal to the master cylinder (i.e. the brake system). What would happen if everyone on the line did his job, except you?

Transition: Just as it is important that each person on an assembly line fulfills his task, it is also important for each believer to carry out the task/role he has been given by God, which is part of His overall plan for His kingdom.

STUDYING TOGETHER:

Read Ephesians 1:9-10.

1. According to Ephesians 1:9, what privilege has God given New Testament believers?

He has revealed the mystery to us.

2. According to Ephesians 1:10, what is God's plan (the "mystery") for the world?

To bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one Head, Christ.

When will this plan culminate?

When the times have reached their fulfillment (when Christ returns).

Read Ephesians 2:10.

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Guided Discussion 1

3. According to Ephesians 2:10, what is our involvement in God's plan?

To take part in that plan by doing good works that God has prepared for each of us.

What two things does God do, and what is the relationship between the two?

- 1) *He has prepared in advance the good works we are to do and He builds us ("we are His workmanship").*
- 2) *God builds us up so that we can carry out the good works He has prepared.*

4. Ephesians 1:9-10 is about God's overall plan, and Ephesians 2:10 is about God's plan for the individual believer. What is the relationship between the two?

The plan for the individual is a part of the plan for the whole world.

Read James 1:2-5.

5. How does God use challenges and difficulties in this process of individual growth?

He uses difficulties to develop faith and perseverance which culminates in spiritual maturity.

6. To this point in your Christian life, how has God revealed Himself and His will to you: slowly and progressively or quickly and completely? Explain.

God usually uses both in our lives, but in neither case does He show the believer all of His will at one time.

Jesus' ministry to the Twelve is the best example of progressive revelation of His will. For example, regarding trusting Him: Jesus first asked them to trust that He was the Messiah (John 1:35-42). Later He wanted them to trust Him for provision and protection (John 6:1-12) and eventually to work through them (Luke 9:1-2).

LOOKING AT REAL LIFE:

7. What is the main reason that some Christians believe that God will not work through them?

Past failure, a feeling of insecurity, lack of faith in God, etc.

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8. Why do you think God doesn't give us the details of His overall plan right now?

LOOKING AT MY LIFE:

Describe an event in your life that didn't make sense at the time, but today, makes sense as it pertains to God's overall plan.

What is happening in your life right now that doesn't make any sense to you regarding how it fits into God's overall plan? Pray for one another in groups of 3 or 4, asking God to give you the strength, wisdom, and faith needed to keep trusting God.