

MEN IN THE BIBLE
SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

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I dedicate this book to the gang at LifeJourney who encouraged and supported me on this journey.

No venture of this magnitude is ever successful alone.

I am deeply grateful to Len and Randy for their support and encouragement when I needed it most. I could not have developed this guide without the shared leadership of Mark and Randy.

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Why I wrote this book

All my adult life I've been in men's groups. I've been in church men's groups as well as non-church men's groups. I've participated in groups that were exciting and impactful, and I've also seen it when they are as boring as reading the dictionary out loud.

Between you and me, I greatly prefer the exciting and impactful kind!

Unfortunately, the exciting and impactful men's groups are hard to find. Too often I found myself in a group of men who didn't want to be there, didn't want to change or grow, and who were content giving "the churchy answer" without looking at their own heart. This kind of group just dragged me down.

Out of a sense of desperation, this study was born. It created a format that I thought would be engaging, real and exciting. My sincere prayer was that this would become the men's group I desperately wanted to be a part of.

From the first week that a group of over 20 men gathered to participate in the inaugural meeting, the study was more than I could have imagined. *It just worked.* The men could not remain passive. They were engaged and impacted and transformed.

I don't want you to take my word on this. I've included the stories of some of the men who participated. They saw and felt what happened. It was big. It was powerful. It left us all changed.

Over the years, I've gone back to this program again and again. Each time it delivers results. It finds a way into men's hearts, even when they are shut down, hard and calloused.

I'm writing this book to share what I've found. It is my hope that you will be inspired and challenged to try it with men around you. I truly hope that my story will inspire you to try something new, and that this book will give you the tools you need to make it happen.

Dennis

Who is this book for?

This book is first and foremost for leaders of men's Bible studies. It's a complete packaged study program that will challenge men and open their hearts. It contains a set of tools that have demonstrated time and again their effectiveness in promoting discipleship.

This book is for your group if...

You want to build a group of men who are open and vulnerable with one another. This study develops an atmosphere of confidence where men can say what's really on their hearts.

You want a study that can change men's lives without becoming overly academic. This study engages the heart and promotes growth without rationalization.

You want a study that feels "manly" without being macho. This study looks at kings, warriors, prophets, apostles and great men while still embracing the softer sides of a man's character.

You want a study that extends a man's toolbox of life skills. This study gives men the tools to find perspective in situations and understand their own reaction to them.

You want to start a men's group but need a little guidance on the steps. This book will give you a plan and all the resources to make it happen.

If you're not a leader yourself, don't worry. You can read this book and then share it with your leaders. If you want to read this, then there's probably a good bet that one of the things above is true about your men's group. Maybe your leaders are simply waiting for an idea like this to come along.

As you read you will find resources to help you run your own group. You'll also find a ready-made, battle-tested plan for preparing and running the study. When you make it to the end, I'll give you everything you need to get going right away!

What do men say about this study?

"[It] puts the Bible into a logical format that causes me to evaluate the Word differently. It illuminates the differences between the text I am reading, my assumptions around it, and how they tie into my feelings of that particular moment in time. This breakdown allows me to more easily discern the Word of God."

Aaron, 31

"[It] taught me that men in the Bible dealt with the same struggles as me. I was taught to "experience" their stories and that it was ok to bring up feelings and judgments about them - good or bad"

Jay, 42

"A very good friend invited me to a "men's Bible study" at a time that I was feeling very disconnected from camaraderie, peers, men. I also knew as a Christian husband, father, Sunday school teacher, man - I was lacking.

"Every Saturday morning, I forced myself out of bed knowing I needed this. Every week I had to drive through the anxiety of "fight or flight". I knew I was broken and this might be my last chance to resolve some issues before the consequences of my actions become permanent.

"Now, after working with this group, my marriage is stronger than ever. My relationship with my children has been repaired."

Wayne, 55

"Bible man has taught me communication techniques that work. I can now analyze what's being said in a heated discussion and, if I make the choice to use these tools, analyze the words and the separate actual data from my judgments (which in most cases feel very much like data). I have also learned to appreciate and own the very feelings that I so desperately tried to hide from others or deny that I was feeling altogether. I have learned, and witnessed first-hand, how God uses the Bible to speak specifically to me. I now know that "The Word" truly is alive.

"In short, Bible man has changed my life and helped me to salvage the most important relationships in my life, the same relationships that I was unwittingly sabotaging prior to this study."

Eric, 51

Introduction

Thanks for buying my book!

Soon you will be ready to lead your own study. This book will provide you with all the information and the steps to create a men's Bible study group which:

- Fosters openness and vulnerability
- Doesn't lead to knowledge for knowledge's sake
- Appeals to men without resorting to unhealthy stereotypes
- Builds up men's tools for being leaders in their own lives

After eight weeks, it's up to you what you do next. You could loop back and do another session of the study and build on what you've started. I've run groups that were 8 weeks long and groups that were 16 weeks long. Both work great!

You could also move on to something else. If you move on, be prepared for a deeper, more honest and connected experience than you've ever had before. This study changes men and that change shows up everywhere in their lives.

Let's talk about what's going to come in the rest of the book.

In order to have a men's Bible study like what I've been describing; you are going to need some tools. The next section of the book will describe these tools and help you become comfortable using them. The three tools I'll share are:

Check In

- Confidentiality Agreement
- I-Statements

See, you didn't expect those did you? Don't worry; I'll explain exactly what they are in a moment.

With new tools you will also need a process that uses these tools to maximum impact. I have a really simple process that delivers outstanding results in terms of engagement and life change. It will take advantage of the new tools you have and generate results that might surprise you. I know they routinely surprised me.

I call this process the Data-Judgments-Feeling Process (the DJF Process).

Sound simple? It's just that easy.

Once you have the tools and the process, I'll give you a step-by-step plan to put all this together in your men's group. It's the same plan that I've used over and over again. I'm confident it will work for you like it's worked for me.

Along the way, I will show you some resources I have developed that make the study work well. I've provided a link for you to go to my website and download your own copies of these resources FOR FREE. Be sure to do that. It will save you time.

<https://www.dennis-stevenson.com/getting-started-kit/>

Buckle up! This is where the fun really starts.

Your First Tool: Use Check In to set the tone

If we are going to have men's Bible study group that gets deep and produces honesty, we need to start off creating a place where deepness and honesty is encouraged. Just because a group of men get together, even to do something like study the Bible, that doesn't mean that they are prepared to go deep or be honest with one another.

This first tool, called Check In, helps set a tone for your time together that says, "we're going deep."

The basic approach to Check In is to give every man a moment to think about what is happening in his life right that moment and share it with the group. In order to keep things moving quickly and smoothly, we establish a real clear formula for what this will look (and sound) like.

"My name is Dennis, and I'm checking in feeling..."

There are 2 main parts to this formula. First, by naming my name, I am helping everyone in the group get to know me. When everyone says their name, it's sort of like wearing a name tag - without wearing a name tag. Even if everyone is friends, stating my name is a powerful way of owning what I'm about to say.

Secondly, the man shares one or two feelings words about what he's feeling right at that very moment. Talk about breaking down barriers and getting men to open to what's going on in their lives!

There's a problem here. **Most men don't know very much about feelings or emotions.** If you ask them to share what they're feeling, they will look at you with a blank face and say nothing.

I do two things to help overcome this. The first is that I give every man a cheat sheet, so he knows what is appropriate to say. The sheet is really a business card sized handout that gives a very brief overview of the emotions.

My card looks something like this:



It's simple and clear. I make enough copies to hand to every man, and keep extra for men who visit later in the process. This little card gives every man confidence to participate in the Check In process.

A Simple Guide to Emotions

Most men don't have a clue what emotions mean or why they have them. They aren't taught as boys or young men. They have to figure it out on their own. That's why they end up with a very twisted concept of what emotions are and why they exist. It generally goes something like:

- Anger is for bullies and sports
- Sadness and crying is for sissies.
- Fear is a fact of life, but no one should know when it happens to me.
- Happiness is having a good time that makes me laugh
- Shame is supposed to be kept secret.

This is not a good basis for getting authentic and deep sharing. We all need a new emotional framework.

We have emotions on purpose. They are part of the Divine design. God has emotions. In the Bible we read about Him being angry or jealous. Jesus displayed emotions. He cried over Lazarus' death, He felt compassion for the lost crowds; He made a whip and drove out the money changers in a fit of righteous fury. Throughout Paul's letters we are commanded to be joyful (happy) and to not let fear rule our lives.

Emotions are not a mistake or a problem – if we know what to do with them.

Here is the key point men need to understand:

Feelings or emotions provide us with feedback about what's going on around us or inside us. Sometimes it's information that reinforces what we sense or perceive. More often than not, emotions give us feedback that we have no other way of receiving.

Understanding Anger

Anger is an explosive and vigorous emotion. It makes us feel energetic, like we have to do something to blow off steam. *That's because the emotion of Anger says that we are blocked from getting something we want or need.*

The energy of anger is one way of preparing to take on something that is in our way. Emotionally we know that something is blocking us, so automatically the emotion begins to build up energy to do something about it.

We can be blocked from obvious physical things, like doing something we want to do. We can also be blocked from something intangible, such as love, or respect or attention. Emotionally it doesn't matter. The emotion is the same.

Understanding Sadness

Sadness has the opposite effect of anger. Instead of being big and explosive, sadness makes us feel small. *That's because the message Sadness communicates is that we've lost something.*

Rather than fighting to get that thing back (that would be anger again), sadness mourns what is gone. This is one reason why the death of a friend or loved one is so sad. They are gone and there is nothing we can do to bring them back. Sadness allows us to mourn what has been lost.

Just as with anger, we can be sad over much more than the loss of our car keys. Imagine losing the respect of your peers, or the reputation of being a particular kind of person, or even the love of your spouse. Intangible things can create the most intense sense of sadness we will ever experience.

Understanding Fear

Fear is more like anger than sadness in that it, too, can give us a burst of energy. But instead of knock-it-down energy, fear brings get-out-of-here energy. *That's because fear is sending the message that we might get hurt.*

Think about "fight or flight". Anger powers the fight side of that equation but fear powers flight.

Fear is not shameful. It just reports what is going on. It's not a guarantee. It doesn't mean that we must run. It's just letting us know what's going on. We get to decide if you want to run away or stick around.

Think about adrenaline junkies, they let their fear power the rush that they are looking for. I'm not saying you must become an adrenaline junkie. But you should be aware of what fear is telling you.

Understanding Happiness

Happiness is different than the other emotions in that it doesn't give or take energy. It is a deep sense of contentment or satisfaction that happens when we are in alignment with the things that are important to us.

You may find happiness as you pursue a hobby that brings you satisfaction. You might find happiness in a career that you believe in very deeply. You might find happiness spending time with people who matter deeply to you.

That's just it. Happiness just says that what you are doing matches what you believe. Don't be surprised if you find happiness in situations where you didn't expect it. That is just saying that you're doing something that matters to you.

Understanding Shame

Shame is what we feel when we want to block ourselves off from feeling authentic emotions. *It is the message that we are broken or no good.* It really isn't an emotion. Sometimes it's called the anti-emotion because it's what we do to hide from emotions.

Feeling broken or no good displaces authentic emotions – perhaps because we don't want to engage with them (some feelings may be very painful). It feels like an emotion, but it's really a way of shielding or protecting ourselves.

Emotion Building Blocks

These five emotions are the basic building blocks of feeling. We can combine them in different ways to come up with all sorts of combinations. Frustration, for example, is generally a mixture of Anger and Fear. If you think about it, you'll find that any emotion can be broken down this way.

In order to keep things simple, the Check-In just deals with the 5 basics. If I felt frustrated, I'd probably say I'm feeling angry – which for me is the closest building block emotion.

We can feel multiple things at the same time. I may be feeling sad about what is happening in one part of my life and happy or glad about what is happening in another part of my life. So I would check in feeling Sad and Happy.

There's no real limit to how many of the five emotions we can feel at one time. I've seen men choose to check in feeling all 5 of the basic building block emotions.

Trust me, when men open up the study or group checking in with their emotions, it sets the stage for a very different kind of interaction. If you pay attention, you will notice how the energy in the room changes before and after the Check In process.

In the beginning, men will be very tied to their emotion card. They will have to look at it to determine what they are feeling. But eventually the process will become almost second nature, and they will be able to go through the check in process without even taking the card out of their Bible or wallet.

Your Second Tool: Make confidentiality work for you

Do you feel comfortable sharing something vulnerable and transparent about yourself in a group of men you don't know well?

I've never been comfortable getting too authentic if I didn't know how the group planned to handle it. I think a lot of men have this same sense and naturally draw back from honest disclosure when confidentiality is ambiguous.

This study is built upon an explicit confidentiality agreement. It's common sense, and it follows the Golden Rule. Men are happy to follow it because it's how they want to be treated themselves.

The confidentiality agreement consists of two simple statements:

- Any man can pass on any step without shame.
- What is shared in the group does not leave the group.

The first agreement says that no man will be forced to do anything he doesn't want to. All participation in the activities of the group is voluntary. It also means the group will accept his decision to not participate as a legitimate and valid action.

The second agreement is what everyone wants to hear. If a man shares something that is true about him, everyone in the group has agreed to hold that revelation in confidence. It doesn't matter what he says, it's confidential.

I've discovered a practice that really works well to solidify the confidentiality agreements for the group. After explaining them, I say "I agree to keep confidentiality." Then I turn to the man to my left and ask him. "Do you agree?" Invariably, he says yes. Then I only need to look at the man to his left and the pattern is set. All around the circle, men will respond to the confidentiality agreements one at a time.

Not only do the men hear themselves say it, but this one-by-one method means that every man there hears every other man say it. This strengthens the overall confidence of the group.

These agreements will do wonders in terms of setting the stage for men to go deep and be honest. But you have to use this tool effectively, or it won't create that kind of benefit we're discussing. Here are two absolute musts of confidentiality that you need to be aware of to make it ironclad.

The agreement has to be repeated again and again.

This reminds men of what everyone has agreed to. If we get to a place in the process and I think that it's likely that someone will share something really honest, I remind the men that we have the confidentiality agreement, and they can trust that the group will hold what they share.

Each time I repeat the agreement, it gives the men confidence that this wasn't just a thing I said once and then forgot. It strengthens the confidentiality of the group. As a result, men are more likely to share freely.

The leader has to follow the agreement precisely.

The leader of the group models the behaviors that everyone else in the group will follow. If the leader is good about the agreement, then the others in the group will be more likely to follow the agreements as well. This will mostly be seen in two places.

There will come a time when a man chooses to pass on an activity. How you respond will set the tone more certainly than anything else you do.

If a man says, "I don't want to do that" or "I pass" and you say "Are you sure you really want to pass?" be prepared for every man in the group to immediately shut down. You've just demonstrated that you aren't really committed to the first agreement. You are questioning his ability to make decisions for himself.

When a man passes in a group I'm leading, I immediately say "Thank you, you have the right to pass without shame." And I immediately move on to the next thing without a second thought or hesitation.

Confidentiality and Check In work together beautifully to prepare men to go to a different level. They set a tone for the group that is deep and honest and authentic. It's the perfect foundation for what comes next.

Your Third Tool: I-Statements keep it real

We're building a men's Bible study group that is designed to go deep and result in honest sharing. The final tool that will get us there relates to the kind of language we use.

Consider the following two statements:

"When you go to the football game you have to hit the tailgate party first. It's where all the energy starts and you begin to get in the spirit of the game."

versus

"When I go to a football game, I have to hit a tailgate party first. It's where all the energy starts and where I begin to get in the spirit of the game."

Can you tell the difference between them? They are identical except for 3 words. Did you notice? Which one communicates the most honestly to you?

Ok. They're just statements about a football game, not grand confessions. But they do communicate different things.

The first statement communicates *what the speaker wants to be true for the listener* by generally implying that it is true for all people – including the speaker. The second statement communicates what is true *for the speaker* without placing any assumptions on the listener. This huge swing in meaning is delivered by three little words.

In our men's Bible study, we want men to be honest and genuine. Only one of the statements in the selection meets those criteria. It's the second statement, which uses I-Statements.

The way we communicate sets the tone for the degree of openness we share. Changing the words we use is the first step for increasing the honesty of what we share with one another. It's a small thing with a big impact.

It's not hard to show what an I-Statement is. You can do it in about 2 minutes. It is, however, difficult to change the way men communicate. We are culturally trained to speak in You-Statements which are neither personal nor revealing about ourselves.

As you introduce I-Statements into your group as the third tool, you will need to reinforce the message over and over. Slowly it will take root, and men will change how they speak.

I-Statements very clearly establish ownership for what is being said. It means I am describing what is true about me rather than trying to make it all about you the listener. As we move onward and look at the DJF Process (in the next section), having tools for taking ownership of what is going on in my life will be a very powerful base for being able to share deeply and honestly with the group.

It's a good idea to get consensus for this language change. Once it's been introduced to the group, ask each man if he will agree to use I-Statements while in the group. Generally, men will agree. This sets the stage for what happens next.

As men begin sharing in the group pay attention to the words they use. Whenever a man uses You-Statements, stop him and ask, "Who does?" That's the clue for him to switch it around and find a way to make it into an I-Statement.

In the beginning this can be very repetitive. You may need to do it ten or more times in an hour-long meeting. That's fine. This will help men see how they are falling into such passive communication patterns.

As always, be respectful as you call attention to You-Statements and encourage I-Statements. Point out the speech pattern and let the man correct his own statement. The goal here is not to shame the man, but to help the entire group transition into an attitude of taking ownership for what they say and do and feel.

If you interact with these same men outside of the group setting, watch and see what happens. I'll bet that the influence of I-Statements will start to change the way they communicate in real life (outside of group). Think about how transformative it would be to have more I-Statements in marriages, or in your church, or even in the workplace. This tool keeps paying dividends when you least expect it.