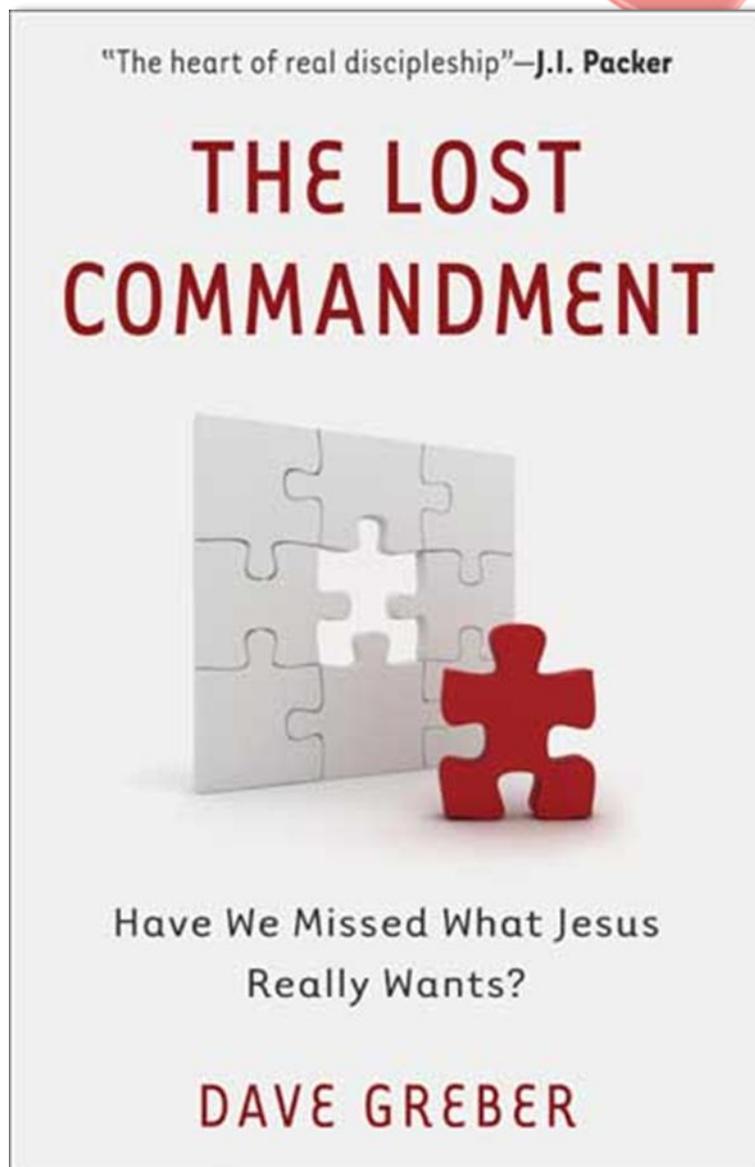


Small Group Guide for Leaders and Participants

by Dave Greber



Welcome to the Small Group Guide for *The Lost Commandment!*

I believe that God will use this study to draw you into a closer relationship with him and others as you learn to love others the way Jesus has loved you. Before you begin your study, I would like to make a few observations and suggestions that I hope will make your time together as a small group more fruitful.

This guide will help equip each member of the group to make the most of your time together. I have created one study guide, rather than a leader's guide and a participant's guide, because I believe that each member of the group should understand the objectives of the group, and each member should accept some responsibility for the accomplishment of those objectives.

Some Keys to a Successful Small Group

In my experience, successful small groups consistently create an experience through which members of the group share their lives, and then lovingly bring the truth of God's Word to bear on those struggles for the purpose of transforming their lives, to the glory of God. The Word is brought to bear on our struggles when we accurately understand it, both intellectually and emotionally, and then apply it to our thinking and behavior for the purpose of allowing the Holy Spirit to change us. Neither understanding nor change is possible without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Here are some principles that help create the kind of small group atmosphere in which each member is blessed, all of which can be summarized by a single word—
commitment:

 **Commitment to Relationships.** Small groups that are like close families build emotional trust that promotes sharing by the group members. Group members should be part of each other's lives, as time and opportunity permit.

 **Commitment to Confidentiality.** Unless members of the group commit to keeping their discussion in the small group confidential, group members will be understandably reluctant to share their confidences with the group.



Commitment to Emotional Safety. When a member of the group shares something personal or potentially embarrassing, they are emotionally vulnerable. Although it's important that the discussion that follows this sharing be based on the truth of God's Word, it is absolutely critical that it be characterized by love. The Lord shares hard truths with us, but he does so out of love for us, in a spirit of compassion, caring, encouragement, and hope. In the same way, we should bear one another's burdens by speaking the truth to each other in the love of Christ.



Commitment to Transparency. Particularly in the early stages of a small group, each of us feels reluctant to tell others about the personal details of our lives. The intention of the group, however, should be to make a deliberate effort to be increasingly transparent. Only by being honest about what is going on in our lives can we bear one another's burdens, and understand the truth and the hope that can only come from God.



Commitment to Preparation and Participation. All of us experience circumstances under which we cannot attend a small group meeting, or cannot be as prepared as we intended. But our general level of preparation and participation significantly affects the success of the group, not only from our point of view, but also from the point of view of the other members of the group. We prepare and attend not only for our own benefit, but also for the benefit of the other members of the group.



Commitment to God's Word. The Bible, applied with the help of the Holy Spirit, remains the best source of God's will and wisdom for us, and its words should guide and frame the discussion of the small group. As helpful as I hope *The Lost Commandment* will be to everyone who reads it, the book is only genuinely valuable to the extent that it helps us to understand and apply God's Word to our lives.



Commitment to Change. The power of Jesus' love changes our lives as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to change our thinking and our behavior. Unless we are committed to a continual process of godly change in our lives, we will not experience the transformation and the joy that Jesus intended for us.

The group may find it helpful to put these and other commitments to each other into a written covenant that each member signs.

The Big Picture Purpose of a Small Group Discussion

In general terms, what do we hope will happen in a small group discussion? We hope that through the discussion, members of the group will, with the help of the Holy Spirit:

- Openly share their lives.
- Lovingly support others.
- Look to God and the Bible for wisdom.
- Clearly understand how the Scriptures speak to them. By clearly understand, I mean intellectually, emotionally, and concretely grasp how the Scriptures express God's love, truth, and direction to people.
- Apply the teaching of the Scriptures by changing their thoughts, speech, and actions in light of the Scriptures' teaching.
- Allow themselves to be encouraged and held accountable by other group members for the changes that the Holy Spirit urges.
- Encourage other members, and gently hold them accountable.

These objectives obviously make a small group discussion different from classroom lectures and discussions.

How the Study Materials Are Organized to Help Your Group Fulfill Its Purpose

Each week's materials are organized to help your group get the most out of its discussion. They include:

Theme: A topic that joins a biblical principle from the Key Verse(s) with a Universal Human Dilemma (see "Dilemma" below) that motivates us to follow the principle.

Reading: The chapter(s) from *The Lost Commandment* being discussed.

Purpose: The proposed purpose of the discussion.

Dilemma: Because we are human, we are all faced with dilemmas that can't be addressed well without God's wisdom and power. We can't save ourselves from our sin. We aren't strong enough to face all our challenges alone. We aren't smart enough to solve all our problems. And the list goes on.

But we have real hope because of God's love and grace, Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, working by and through the Word in our hearts. The Scriptures were written to address our Dilemmas. If we clearly understand what Dilemmas the human authors and recipients of the Scriptures faced, and identify with their struggle, then we will better understand the wisdom God is trying to impart to us today through the Scriptures, as we face our own struggles.

The materials for each week identify at least one of the Dilemmas that are addressed by the key verses and the reading from *The Lost Commandment* assigned for the week.

Key Verse(s): Scriptures selected from *The Lost Commandment* reading for the week that will be the subject of that week's discussion. All Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Questions: The discussion questions are intended to help:

- ✦ **Explain:** What do the Scriptures say, and what do they mean?
- ✦ **Illustrate:** What current examples do we see of the Dilemmas addressed in the Scriptures? What struggles do we face that are similar to these Dilemmas? What examples can we see of the application of the principles of the Scriptures being studied?
- ✦ **Apply:** How can we change our thinking or our actions in light of biblical principles?

The questions are grouped under these categories. I recommend you discuss at least one question from each category each week.

Questions That Keep in Mind the Whole-Bible Context of a Bible Passage

Whatever the weekly discussion questions may be, here are some valuable questions that we should keep in mind when we study Scripture:



What does the Scripture say about God? What does it say about his holiness, his love for us, or the ways that he rescues us from the consequences of our fallen human nature?



What does the Scripture say about us? What does it say about our sinfulness, our need for God's love, or our need to be rescued from the consequences of our fallen human nature?



How does the Scripture predict, prepare for, reflect, or result from what Jesus did for us by dying for us on the cross?



What does the Scripture say about how God wants us to express our faith *in him*, and love *for him*, through our love *for others*?

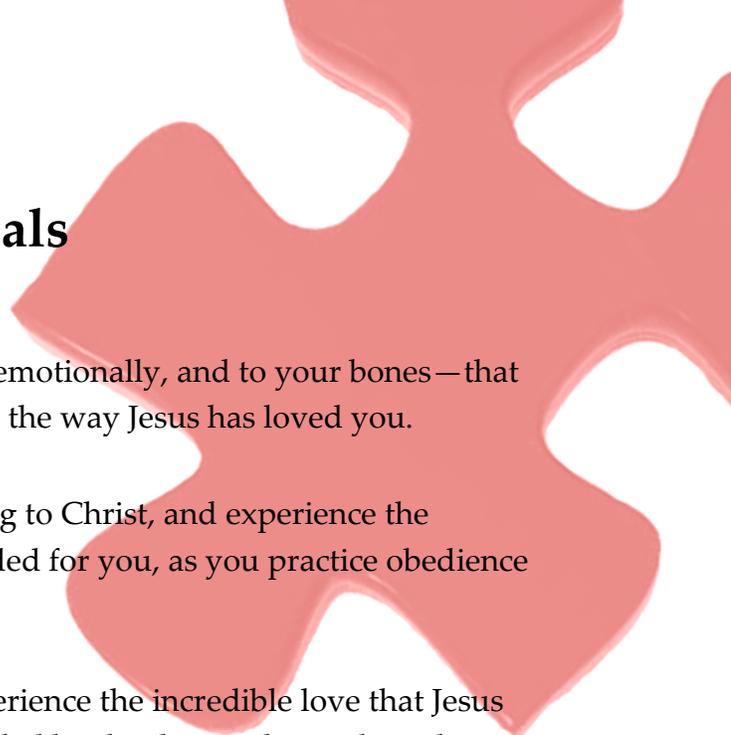
Having these questions in mind helps us understand the most important themes of the Bible.

The Role of the Discussion Facilitator

The role of the small group discussion facilitator is primarily to pose questions, promote broad participation, gauge the emotional and intellectual reaction of the members of the group to what is being said, and gently guide the group through the questions in the materials. Both to promote relationships and go with the flow of the Holy Spirit, it is more important to have a significant discussion that meets the group members at the point of their needs than it is to cover every discussion question.

The facilitator should not lecture or feel compelled to provide answers to every question. A little guidance here and there goes a long way. The facilitator should also draw out the quieter members of the group by asking them open-ended questions, like, "What's your reaction to that, George?" or "Karen, you seemed to have a reaction to that last statement. Would you share your thoughts with us?" It's a good idea to rotate the responsibility for facilitating the discussion.

Study Goals



- Goal # 1** To be persuaded—mentally, emotionally, and to your bones—that God wants you to love others the way Jesus has loved you.
- Goal #2** To sense the joy that you bring to Christ, and experience the complete joy that Jesus intended for you, as you practice obedience to the Lost Commandment.
- Goal #3** To learn more about and experience the incredible love that Jesus has for you, and to be compelled by that love to love others the same way.
- Goal #4** To understand in practical terms how to love others the way Jesus has loved you, in reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit, the grace of God, and the loving example of Jesus.
- Goal #5** To have a hunger to hear God’s loving voice in the words of the Bible and in prayer, and to allow his Word to fill your heart with hope and joy.
- Goal #6** To be a group of believers who express their love for God by loving each other as Jesus loves us.

General Suggestions



Group Members. My assumption is that most members of the group will be Christian. Non-Christians should also be welcomed and encouraged to participate in a way that is comfortable for them. Giving all potential group members a copy of this guide will help them know what to expect.



Group Size. Studies show that once a group gets larger than about eight members, it becomes difficult to keep a true discussion format. However, the reality of our lives is that not everybody can make every session, so I think it makes sense to have a group of 10 or so. If everyone shows up, the discussion can still work just fine.



Meeting Place and Time. Although discussions can be held at church in a Sunday school setting, it's also great to meet in someone's home. I recommend that you meet every week, rather than every other week, primarily because meeting every week enables the members of the group to stay more involved in each other's lives. I would assume between fifty minutes and an hour for the study itself, including a brief opening prayer. If additional time is available, then I recommend spending fifteen or twenty minutes in group prayer, during which members of the group pray out loud for each other's needs. If still more time is available, then time might be set aside for members of the group to visit with each other, and catch up on what's going on in each other's lives.

My small group recently decided to meet every Sunday night for dinner. We talk about what's gone on during the week during dinner, but then conclude dinner with a very brief communion devotional and communion. We then gather in the living room to sing a few praise songs (two members of the group are guitar players). Then we have our study, followed by prayer. Our meetings last about three hours from start to finish and we all look forward to them. We feel like family.



Food. There's something about food that helps bond a group. It doesn't have to be fancy or caloric. I would suggest that you have some kind of snacks at your meetings.



Shared Responsibility. In order to share the effort and expense of having the group, and to build a sense of belonging and ownership in each group member, the responsibilities for the group should be shared. The group can rotate who is

responsible for facilitating discussion, hosting the meeting, and bringing food.



Length of the Study. These materials include questions for each chapter and an 8-week study that combines chapter questions. If your church is doing the 8-week sermon series on these materials (sermon outlines will be available at davegreber.com), *and* your group members can commit to reading about thirty pages per week, then the 8-week study should be fine. If thirty pages per week is a little steep for your members, and everyone (including your church's leadership) doesn't mind your taking your time through the materials, then I recommend you use the chapter questions and proceed at your own pace. My small group took a year to go through these materials, meeting every other week (and skipping certain holidays). We had a very fruitful, engaging study. As long as a small group study brings the Word of God alive in the lives of its members, it really doesn't matter what you're studying or for how long.



Prayer. Serious prayer is critical to the success of any Bible study. The Holy Spirit is our ultimate teacher and discussion facilitator. At the beginning of each small group study, we should ask him to give us wisdom and guide our discussions.

God bless you and your group as you gather in Jesus' name!