

My Story



CONNECT GROUPS

My Story is a tool for you to use as you enter into Connect Groups together . Each week you will find a testimony from theChapel's women in the first section. Then, there are some suggested discussion questions and related scriptures for you to talk about in your group. The heart of this study is to encourage you to evaluate where you are now and dream about where you want to be next year!

We are all in different seasons of life. Ecclesiastes 3'1 says, " There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." Where YOU are, whatever season you find yourself in, we encourage you to read the stories, consider the principle, and pray.

There is also a response piece to this study, We all want to live intentionally, and writing a personal mission statement with a group of other believers is a powerful way to capture the vision God has for you. Once we know where we want to GO, we can then gather a support team, and go for it! The Bible tells us in Matthew 18:20, " Where two or more of you are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of them." This is the bedrock of the Connect Group culture.

The final week, you will be encouraged to write your own Personal Mission Statement. We encourage you to put a date on it, and formalize it by sharing it with your family and friends. Maybe you will inspire them to write a mission statement of their own!

The Journey:

- 1. Beloved: Jesus Loves me, this I know**
- 2. Confident: What does God see when He looks at me?**
- 3. Relationships: Am I investing my life into the right people?**
- 4. Personal Growth: What am I committed to?**
- 5. Priorities: What season am I in?**
- 6. Impact: How am I impacting my realm of influence?**
- 7. Sound Mind: What am I focused on?**
- 8. My dreams, My Legacy: What will my life say about me?**
- 9. My Mission Statement: Spell it out!**

Week 1: Beloved - Jesus loves me, this I know

{Insert Story from the Chapel member}

How do I know Jesus loves me, even when circumstances in life try to make me feel otherwise? For me, the answer required both looking at the facts and choosing faith.

1. The facts show God chose me, even over himself.

a. *For God so loved the world, He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*

i. *God gave His son as a sacrifice, by choice. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He had the opportunity to back out and spare His son, Jesus prayed, Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done. Luke 22:42*

ii. God chose to follow through with the most difficult sacrifice in all of history because He loved us that much.

2. Next comes faith. I chose not to blame God for my circumstances.

a. *The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy. I came so that they could have life, life in its fullest measure. John 10:10*

i. God allowed these things to happen for reasons I may never know... and I can choose trust or choose bitterness. I choose to believe regardless of the circumstances around me. This is the very nature of walking by faith and not by sight. I choose to trust. I trust that He loves me, that He sees a bigger picture than I do, and that ultimately He will work all these things for the good of those who love Him.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Hi, and He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5

Week 2: Confident - How Does God See me?

Growing up, you would think I was very confident. Whether it was the soccer team or the cheerleading squad, I was always going for it, leading the pack! All A's student, athletic and academic scholarship. I knew now to put on a smile and make friends with anyone. Little did I know I was doing this to win other's approval. This is where I was finding my worth. If everyone liked me and I was doing "good", then I felt good. That would make me happy. Later on, I started binding my worth in boyfriends, relationships and it was ending up in heartbreak after heartbreak. Something was wrong inside, something was missing

I was at my first life retreat and toward the end of the retreat I closed my eyes and saw a vivid picture of me as a little girl running into the throne room of God, skidding across the floor on my knees and jumping into the wide open arms of my Father! I had never felt such acceptance and love and joy! It was then that the Holy Spirit starting a mighty work in my life showing me who I am, how accepted and cherished I am, and I can be totally confident in THAT! I can walk into a meeting and know, I've got this. God is with me. I'm His cherished daughter, He comes with me everywhere! The days that I meditate on who He is, all that He's done for me, how much He loves me and accepts me, I am soaring. It is a daily thing. Meditating on the truth. The world has other plans for us and they can look really appealing at times. But God's way is always better.

Fear of man will prove to be a snare but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe Proverbs 29:25

Those who look at him are radiant: their faces are never covered with shame. Psalm 34:5

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Who do you look to for your worth first? Your husband, your children, your best friend or the Father?
- When do you feel your best? After a beach trip, a workout, a night out with your girlfriends or the presence of your Father?

Final Thoughts

This week take some time to think about places that you may be putting your confidence that could possibly be competing with or taking the place of God. Put Him first in all areas and you will feel totally confident in Him and His power, which no man can move!

Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield. Psalm 5:12

Week 3: Relationships - Am I investing my life into the right people?

Four years ago my husband and I had a FULL cup. We moved from our unsold townhome into a real live fixer-upper. We had three kids ages five, almost four, and four months. And my husband would not let us do any improvements to the house until our townhome sold. Our bedroom had bright green carpet, another had pink, and the rest of the house had different shades of beige carpet. What were we thinking?! And then we were informed we had a MOLD problem! Sigh. I was stressed!

Somehow, we afforded the sense to attend a couple's Connect group up the street. I now know it was God's gracious provision. He knew that what I would need more than hardwood floors or matching carpet with solid, Godly friends.

I really do think of that first Connect Group often. I laugh about what it must have looked like from God's perspective. He saw the potential. He knew the fruit of life-giving friendships. He knew the protection and security these foundations would bring. But all we knew was a room full of nervous strangers. We went around the large circle and the husbands introduced the couple. We left that night completely unaware that we had been making eye contact with our very own pot of gold.

It took weeks and months of playdates and casual lunches after church, but in time I knew I was a part of something much bigger than myself. Unity of believer is SO powerful! Discussing problems with children or money or what to cook for dinner became moments when the Holy Spirit used us to speak through one another. I have found that when I gather with my like minded moms and God fearing friends, I come away refreshed and renewed. We spur one another on in love and good deeds.

Over the course of four years, our townhome sold, we got the hardwoods and fresh carpet in places. I really think fondly of my waiting time. I grew stronger. God met my most desperate needs. Our core group has grown to several couples. We don't always do the same Connect Groups but are all actively leading or participating in groups.

We stay connected and pray for one another. We have a healthy foundation of loving friends who “have our back”.

I have learned that healthy relationships play a vital role in doing life well. I’ve found that most relationships fall into one of two categories: Inner Circle and Outer Circle. Inner Circle being the group I mentioned above, those who feed you. Outer Circle being those you seek to influence. In a way, Jesus molded this too, with His close friendship of the disciples and then His intense life in ministry.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

1. Who would you identify as your inner circle?
2. What are some adjectives you would use to describe this group?
3. Who is your Outer Circle? Who do you feel called to influence?
4. What are some adjectives you think people in your Outer Circle would use to describe you?
5. Do you feel that you have an inner circle that encourages your growth and love for Jesus?

Week 4: Personal Growth- What am I committed to?

Born into a typical middle class family, I was the middle child, with an older brother and younger sister. Church attendance was rare but I do have a few memories of sitting in a circle at Sunday school and learning stories of the Bible. My parents divorced when I was 11 years old and it was the first recollection of real fear coming into my heart. At the age of 12 that fear was coupled with shame, guilt, and depression as a family friend who lived with us began sexually abusing me. By the time I graduated from high school I was using alcohol and drugs on a daily basis in an attempt to cover up the pain. By the age of 25 I was in a full fledged drug addiction.

At age 29 I met the Lord for the first time and gave Him my whole heart. It didn't take much to convince me that I needed a Savior; I went all in and have never looked back!

Giving our life to Christ is the first step to receive the incredible life He has for us. It doesn't just fall into place automatically; we have a part to play. Looking back, there were 3 things I committed to that enabled God's love and power to flow into my life.

1. I committed my life to Him. I went all in with the Lord; I held nothing back from him. The first time I heard a message in Jeremiah 29:11- "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." I gave my life to Him. It was obvious to me that I had made a huge mess of my life and I was so grateful that someone cared enough about me to have a plan for me. We cannot have one foot in the world and one foot in our relationship with Christ and have the life we truly want. We have to choose. Choose a relationship with Jesus over the world, you will not be disappointed.

2. I committed to my healing. I had a lot of pain, hurt, disappointment and anger, but then again, a lot of us do. If we want a healthy life and desire a healthy mate, we have to be healthy people. Unhealthy people do not attract healthy people. Jeremiah 17:14 says, "Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise." The Bible is not only referring to our physical body, but our mind and emotions as well. I

spent a lot of time in counseling and it was good. But I truly believe I received most of my healing sitting at the feet of Jesus and asking him to heal me.

3. I committed to growing in Christ. I was not satisfied staying the same every month and every year. I wanted to look back each year and know I was closer to the Lord. For me, that meant increasing the time I spent with Him each morning, increasing my giving every year, continually increasing the number of people I served. In Exodus 3:5 when Moses approached the burning bush, the Lord God said, "Do not come any close, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." I wanted my life to be a holy ground so I increased the things in my life that mattered most. What would it be like if we were so close to the Lord that every decision we made we felt like we were in His presence? One song that I would listen to that would make my heart cry is My Heart Your Home by Christy Nockels. Download it and sit before the Lord and invite Him to make your Heart His Home.

Body: What can I commit to, in reference to my body, that would bring health in that area?

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself. 1 Corinthians 6:19

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119: 9-16

Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then, you will be able to test and approve what God's will is- his good, pleasing, and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

Mind: What can I commit to, in reference to my mind, that would bring health in that area?

*You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast,
because he trusts in You. Isaiah 26:3*

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and
godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his
own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very
great and precious promises, so that through them you may
participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the
world caused by evil desires.*

2 Peter 1:3-4

Spirit: What can I commit to , in reference to my spirit, that would bring health in that area?

*The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and loving toward all He
has made. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call
on him in truth. Psalm 145:17-18*

Questions to ask yourself:

1. How am I living foolishly?
2. How am I living wisely?
3. What things do I need to commit to?

Final Thoughts

Ladies, this is a great week to go deeper! The Holy Spirit will take you at the perfect pace. You never have to worry. But He doesn't want us to stay where we are. He wants to heal us, make us whole and use us to shine the love of Jesus everywhere we go! This week, in what area does God want you to focus ? Is it somewhere in your body, mind, or your spirit? The Holy Spirit is very practical and will help pinpoint any area that He wants you to grow in this season so you're the most effective, radiant daughter of the Most High! Psalm 139: 1-2

Week 5: Priorities- What season am I in?

When I was a young pastor's wife in my early twenties, I wanted just one thing really. I wanted influence. I wanted people to want to hear from me. I wanted what I had to say to matter. What the Lord said back to me was this, "What would you say?" Of course, He was right. I was still so young. There was still so much He wanted to do in me, so much I needed to learn. That thing I wanted, or thought I wanted, would have to wait. It was not the right season.

When we are young, the tendency is to wish for the next stage or the next season. If we are single, we long for marriage. If we are married, we pine for children. If we have young children, we long for the days when they will grow up and be more self-sufficient because we are Oh so tired. When they are older, we look forward to welcoming young spouses into the family. . and then grandchildren! No matter what stage of life we find ourselves in, I think the challenge for us as Christ-following women is to be fulfilled in that season and to prepare well for the season to come.

I will never forget, about the same time I was longing for influence and working as a young nurse, I would openly wish for my shift to end. I'd sometimes stare at the clock- willing its hands to move faster. One day Jean, an older nurse, saw me doing this and said, "Honey, don't wish you life away!" I have never forgotten that advice. I have to remind myself of it often. While there are plenty of things I long for, I have to remain mindful of the fact that I have things to do now. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that *we are God's handiwork, created in Christ to do good things...* These things, God prepared in advance for us to do right now.

We need to get busy! The tasks He has for us today will prepare us for the tasks He has for us in the next season of our lives.

And that influence I asked the Lord to give me all those years ago? At forty- seven, I have it now. But also have the life experience and humility that is needed to go along with that. It blesses me to have the privilege of speaking into someone's life but I am also well aware of the great responsibility it carries. Everything in its proper season.

There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens... Ecclesiastes 3:1

One thing is for certain. the next season of our lives rarely ends up looking like we thought it would. But if we draw close to our heavenly Father during our present season, we will be well prepared for both the joys and trials of the one to come. One of the best ways I can think of to prepare well for the next season is to draw close to a godly woman who is already there. Lean in, and let her show you the way. We weren't made to walk this life alone.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What is my favorite part of my current season of life? What is God teaching me now?
- How am I preparing well for the next season? Where do I see God leading me in my Faith, ministry, or relationships?

Final Thoughts

Take some time this week to evaluate. It's worth the time! Are you "wishing your life away" or are you enjoying the current season? Do you have a mentor in your life, an older godly woman that is in a season further down the road who can help you? It is something to pray for and intentionally seek.

Also, let's begin to embrace this current season with all of its Beauty and be "noticers of His goodness." It is all around you — right now!

Week 6: Impact - How am I impacting my realm of influence?

In 2011, the Lord spoke clearly to me that I was going to be a Foster Mama. I was about to turn 40, I had a very busy social life, I was single with family living out of town, I lived on a school teacher's salary - and I had 0 desire to be a Foster Mama. Zero, zilch nada.

Rewind back to 2009. As I was spending time in prayer one evening, Goa said to me "you will preach to thousands." Uhm, excuse me? I immediately pictured Beth Moore on a stage with thousands of people in the audience. I assumed "preach to thousands" meant that I was going to be Beth Moore, Jr. literally preaching on a stage with thousands of women in the audience. I had no desire to be Beth Moore, Mr. Zero, zilch, nada.

Fast forward to 2014. So Far, I have had the honor of being Mama Steph to two beautiful daughters and one handsome son. Once I put aside my fear, my selfishness, my anxiety - and stepped into obedience and said YES to God - He began to write the most beautiful story. When I started my Foster Mama journey, I decided to "live out loud" and share my heart and my hurt and my struggles publicly, mainly through a blog and Facebook. Recently ,my foster son unexpectedly went back to his birth mama. It was then that the Lord showed me what He meant by "preach to thousands" . I received countless messages and texts, telling me how my story and my faith have touched them - how my story clearly points to Jesus. He didn't need me to be Beth Moore, Jr. He just needed me to be Mama Steph, a woman after God's own heart, living out loud for the "thousands" to behold.

Ladies, we live in a very dark world - a world that is desperate for the light of Jesus. The Bible is clear that we are to live out loud, to shine the light of Jesus wherever we are.

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16

Wherever the Lord has you, That is your sphere of influence. Go shine!

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Where is your sphere of influence? Is it at your job? Your child's play group? Your home?
- What are some practical ways that you can "let your light shine Before others" in your sphere of influence?
- What does the phrase "live out loud" mean to you?

Final Thoughts

This week is about going and doing. And the Bible clearly says faith without works is dead (James 2:20)! Is there anywhere in your realm of influence you could be more prayerfully intentional to shine? The acts of kindness cards are the perfect way to get you started! You have more influence than you realize and your life makes a big difference. Plus, it will bring so much joy to YOU in return to love and serve! Let our life be like a stone dropped in the pond whose ripples reach out far and wide!

Week 7: Sound Mind - What am I focused on?

Just a few weeks ago, I had taken one wrong turn onto the interstate and am very embarrassed to say that I ended up twenty minutes south of Montgomery on interstate 65 rather than twenty minutes north of 165 which was the direction I should have been heading. I had been talking on the phone so intently with a friend of mine that I literally was on autopilot, not noticing I was reading to Mobile instead of Birmingham. I felt really silly of course and ended up wasting much of an already busy afternoon.

I can get distracted in life as well and not pay attention to the direction my mind is taking me. My thoughts can easily be swept in the direction of my emotion and until I notice the signs around me and make a U-turn, I will just keep heading in the wrong direction.

2 Corinthians 10:5 says *we must take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*. It takes maturity in the Lord to recognize negative and unhealthy thought patterns and then quickly pause long enough to adjust your thoughts in a better direction. This also takes a lot of practice especially if you haven't spent a lot of time disciplining your mind to come under the leadership of the Lord Jesus.

This process is what Romans 12:2 calls the "renewing of your mind." For every season in our walk with God, there will be a new time of renewal in the way we think. Our earthy patterns are so backwards from the way God operates that we can be on the wrong interstate and not even realize it. We must allow the Holy Spirit to show us in God's Word now we are to think and behave. Our thoughts determine to a great extent the direction our life goes, so we must focus on having thoughts that honor Jesus and bring Him glory.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Where do you struggle in your thought life?
 - How often do you pause when you are in the middle of a destructive thought pattern?
- Why is God so concerned with our thought life?

Final Thoughts

This is a crucial week! If we can start to get an awareness of our thoughts and what we're thinking, our whole lives will change! Many Christians are either dying or thriving, all based on what is between their ears! Take this week to think about what you're thinking about. Is it life or death? When you start to dwell on, meditate on life-giving thoughts, see if your day isn't that much brighter! You will literally be inviting streams of living water to flow in you and through you with redeemed thinking!

Week 8: My dreams, My Legacy - What will my life say about me?

For most of my life I have stressed myself to the point of exhaustion trying to force circumstances to make my dreams into reality. Get a degree, get a job, get a husband, get some children and then work, work, work to buy the right house in the right neighborhood. Join the right organization boards and work, work, work until you are asked to be the leader. Serve at Church and work, work, work so people will deem you worthy and acceptable. And then God spoke into my weary, heavy heart.

Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Matthew 11:28-29 MSG

He encourages me to invite some friends to come on a retreat and see what He has in store for all of us. So, we stole away from our families and our jobs and our activities and we spent time with our Master and Savior. It was amazing!

During that time away God reinforced lessons He had already taught me.

1. Cultivate an intimate relationship with me. Psalm 16:8-9
2. Let me be God so you don't have to. Leviticus 26:13
3. You only need the sound of my applause. Revelations 4:11
4. Give your life away so I can use you. Luke 6:38

Life is about giving for the sake of someone else. That is how we should be remembered. That is our legacy.

Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back- given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. Luke 6:38 MSG

Recently, a sweet friend went to be with the Lord. At her home going service we all commented that we would remember the laughter, her smile and now she gave of herself to all of us. That is a legacy worth leaving.

I am still a work in progress, but every day I get a little better by spending time with Jesus in prayer and in the Word, and with those he allows me to do this life with.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What is God asking you to give today?
- What is in your hands to share? It may only be time, but that is enough.
- How might your “giving” impact those around you?

Final Thoughts

It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35

Week 9: Writing your Personal Mission Statement

Congratulations on completing this study! Now it's time to apply the principles you have read about, and create your very own mission statement. A mission statement can help us focus, and live life with intention and conviction.

This will require a little introspect, which is always good when done prayerfully. Ask God to help you have fresh vision for your life! This is your opportunity to **THINK BIG** about your future! I believe we get caught up in the day-to-day, and lose sight of why we do what we do. So, let's begin.

Consider your realm of influence. Let's make a list of your roles. Here are a few examples:

Wife, Mother, Daughter, Sister, Friend, Business Owner, Runner, Artist, Christian, Teacher, Connect Group Leader, Employee, Athlete, Writer, Doctor, Nurse, Other...

Now, prioritize those roles according to what is important to you. Don't order them according to the places of your greatest responsibility or reward, but rather based on what is most vital and important to you; where you want to succeed the **MOST**.

Next, we are going to simplify. Which roles are absolute? Which ones **MUST** you do? See if you can choose just five.

This is where it can get hard. We don't want to exclude anything, but we must. Our mission statement should not include everything we want to do. It's kind of like a map. If we stop in every single town along the way, we'll never reach our destination.

Your mission statement needs to be focused, so that when you're feeling scattered, you can rely on it to get you back on track.

What are your top five roles?

Your core?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now, for each role above, pray and dream a little about the potential there. This is fun! Use descriptive words. Brainstorm together as a group, and find inspiration.

Use what you come up with to create action statements and faith images that give a face to your dreams. Every mission statement will be unique!

Here are a few examples, to help you:

“To know God and His Word, and to trust Him in everything, that His love for me may overflow into every aspect of my life. To shine God’s light to my family, friends and neighbors, using my gifts and talents and interactions to always point back to Christ.”

“To nurture my marriage and let it serve as a living example of respect and partnership. To embrace this season of my life as a blessing, while my children are young and I am still their whole world. To nurture their development into self-confident, capable, compassionate adults, and nurture myself in order to maintain my energy and enthusiasm.”

“I want to be a life-giver everywhere I go, a light in the darkness and a voice of hope to one discouraged. I want to use my gift as an artist to inspire, comfort, and encourage. I want to continually view my creativity as an awesome gift from God.”

“I will manage my time better, I will create a haven of peace in my home for my family, and I will begin the discipline of a daily quiet time. This is where I will invest my time and energy in this season. Every other habit in my life will take a back seat to this!”

“With the help of God and His people, I have overcome chronic illness. So I am passionate to share my story with all who will listen, and I am especially motivated to help my family live in total physical and emotional health. ”

“I choose to live my life as a daughter of the Most High God, commissioned to bring His light to my surroundings. I will walk with a pure heart before my God, and serve Him first in all I do! I choose to invest my time and talents into people in this season of my life, the people that God sends across my path. I will live each day aware of God’s supernaturally orchestrated encounters. and I will walk in the fruit of the spirit as it flows freely through me.”

The final step is to believe in your statementlive it and reinforce it often. Write it down where you will see it often, like in your Bible or journal. In time, you may find that your statement needs updating. It is a good idea to revisit your statement often and make changes or refinements as needed.

Ultimately, a personal mission statement will help inspire you to live a more fulfilling, conscious life. As the celebrated motivational speaker Zig Ziglar once said, “Outstanding people have one thing in common. An absolute sense of mission.”

