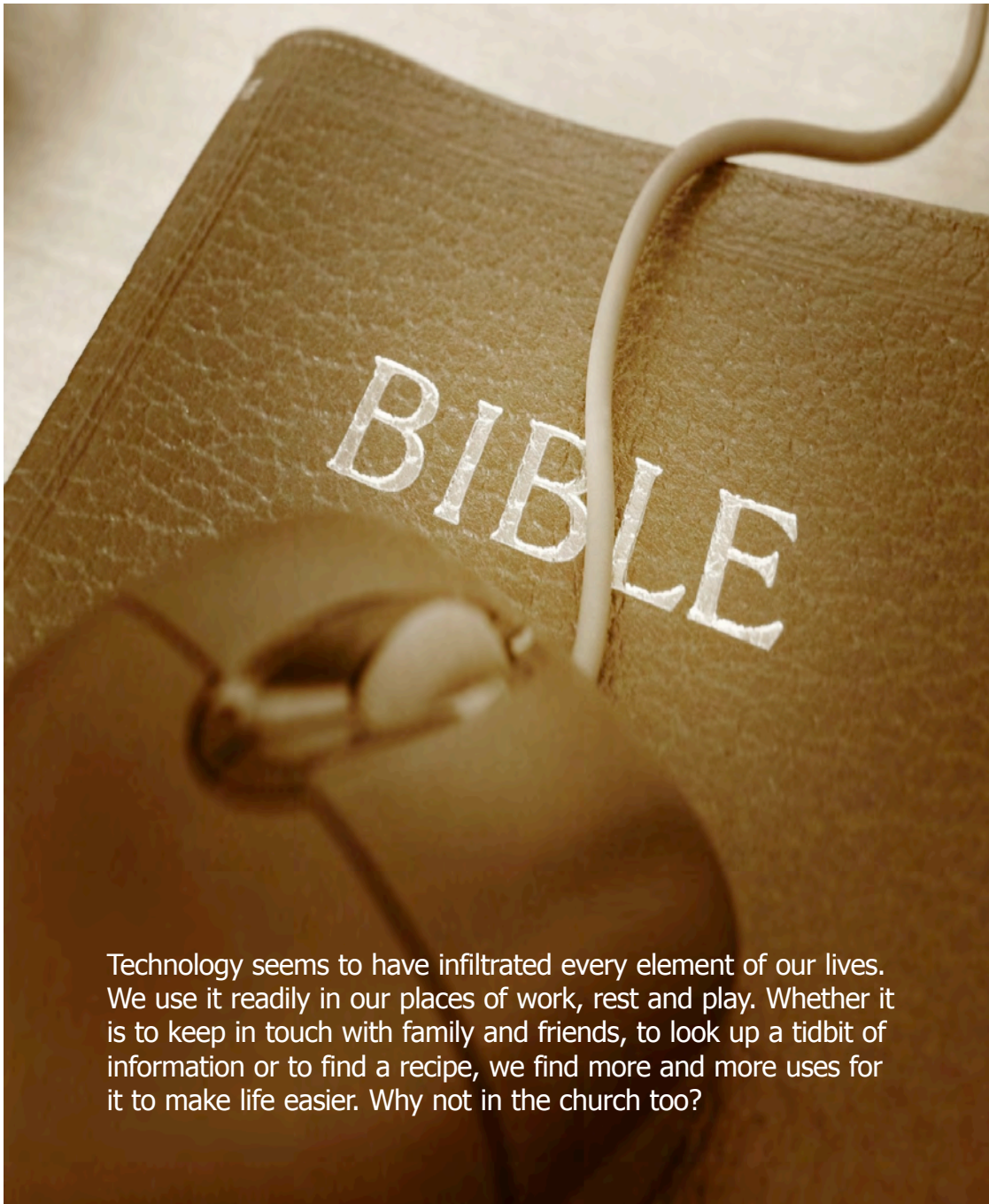


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## Adult Study That Reaches: Discovery Studies

Heather Vais



Technology seems to have infiltrated every element of our lives. We use it readily in our places of work, rest and play. Whether it is to keep in touch with family and friends, to look up a tidbit of information or to find a recipe, we find more and more uses for it to make life easier. Why not in the church too?

EQUIPPING FOR . . . Christian Education

Technology can be an effective tool for making adult Christian education both interesting and accessible. Here's an idea that could give church members a new reason to love study groups. The newsletter/blog Discovery Study is a unique way to address tough issues of faith, generate conversation and attract people who may not be comfortable with traditional Bible studies. Discovery Studies work as adult Christian education tools in that they promote sharing, relationship building, and making connections between Christian values and daily life. Why not try them out at your church?

A Discovery Study is NOT your traditional Bible study. It is a place to discuss deep and important faith issues that arise in our day-to-day living. Of course, the minister is present to guide discussion and make the appropriate theological clarifications and explanations, but the group is open to explore, ask questions and spiritually reflect on tough faith issues. Sometimes there are no ironclad answers to life's most difficult questions; other times people just want to explore a topic in light of what society, the Bible and the church teach about it. This is the time and place to do this kind of exploring. The following are simple steps to get your group started.

It begins with a newsletter/blog reflection on a topic that is created by the leader(s). If you do not have the resources or time to create a reflection on a topic, you may go online to access the Discovery Study this article references ([www.tpchurch.net](http://www.tpchurch.net)), or you can go to a book like *Beyond Doubt* by Cornelius Plantinga Jr., professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for simple reflections to generate discussion. Discussion topics can be found in the daily devotional book *These Days* or other reflection books. Wherever you get the topic, avoid making the reflection too preachy, which may shut down conversation. Group members would receive a hard copy at the meeting of the study group, but will be given the opportunity to read the blog/newsletter on the Internet prior to the meeting. Members gather together, read the newsletter/blog and the accompanying additional texts and then, after an opening prayer, enter into discussion around the topic of the day. These are some possible topics for discussion: Is heaven real? The what, where and why of hell. Are there really angels? What really happens to us after we die? Are any lies good lies? What about sin? Why do bad

February 26, 2012  
Study 5

Sunday Morning

Discovery Study

SEARCHING, SHARING, AND STUDYING REAL ISSUES OF FAITH TOGETHER WITH THE BIBLE AND DISCUSSION

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... for I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." Romans 7:15, 18-19

For Shame... or not?

**Shame on you!**

We've all heard those three condemning words at some point in our lives. Uttered very likely in the attempt to make us think deeply about and feel badly for something we did, the sting of them sears our conscience. But is shame good? Are guilt and remorse beneficial? Do we need to feel shame or guilt in order to receive forgiveness? Shame and guilt are handy human emotions to have when you are trying to keep a just and ordered society, or when you are trying to get your kids to think about the consequences of their actions, but when does it become too much? When Isaiah cried out "Woe to me... I am a man of unclean lips," was this shame or guilt that made him so introspective? Did his shame make him more worthy of God's call? Shame has been with us since the very beginning. You could say it was one of the first human emotions.

Once Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they immediately saw their nakedness and felt shame. Their sin had been exposed (literally and figuratively) and they knew they had done wrong. It still didn't get them off the hook though. God's punishment was full and final. When Judas realized what he had done to Jesus for a mere 30 pieces of silver, Judas's shame was so great he killed himself. Shame and guilt are not the same. Guilt says "I did something bad", whereas shame says "I am bad". Is one better than the other? Do shame and guilt do more harm than good, or do they help us to set things right? Without a sense of shame or guilt is reconciliation possible? Can forgiveness be truly offered and received if the repentant heart has not felt the sting of shame?  
Heather Vais

**The Counselor**

"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. If I do not go, the Counselor will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment, because men do not believe in me,"<sup>10</sup> in regard to righteousness, "where you can see me no longer,"<sup>11</sup> and in regard to judgment, "of this world now stands condemned." John 16:7-11

Philip Yarnall  
What's so z about Grac

\*The Lord the rooste

things happen? Faith or works? Are shame and guilt necessary for forgiveness? What is the rapture? The leader wraps up the discussion by summarizing the points raised and offering pastoral or biblical advice for further reflection (if necessary), and then closes with prayer.

The newsletter/blog can be posted to a blog site or to your church's website, or it can also be easily posted to Facebook for members to read and comment on. Remember to set the privacy settings for the Facebook account so only members can access it for discussion. Participants who cannot make it to the meetings, or who are distant, are welcome to comment and discuss online. Church members who are ill, confined to the home, or away travelling can plug into this study whenever it is convenient.

The purpose of the group is to engage in relevant discussion about our thoughts, beliefs and traditions regarding a topic and to hear what the Bible and the PCC have to say about it too. Reflecting in a safe place among Christian friends can be very edifying; it strengthens community and links people who are separated by geography or circumstance.

Here are some helpful steps to doing your own newsletter/blog:

1. Get a good publisher program on your computer that can provide you with a template for a newsletter. Microsoft Publisher works great.
2. Set up a simple blog account by going to Google Blogger and following the instructions. There are other free blog sites to choose from on the Internet as well.
3. Set up a Facebook account through the church. Set the privacy settings for friends and encourage your church members to become friends.
4. Choose a topic that is relevant and emergent. Try not to pick topics that are exceedingly controversial until the group gets comfortable with one another.
5. Write a brief reflection on the topic. Try not to be moralistic or opinionated; rather, try to keep your reflection as wide open as possible so people have an opportunity to engage with it (see above for additional resources if writing a reflection is difficult for you).

**Asking Questions that Matter**

Every man is guilty of all the good he didn't do. Voltaire

**Further Reflection**

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.  
<sup>2</sup> For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me.  
<sup>3</sup> Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin.  
<sup>4</sup> My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.  
<sup>5</sup> My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly.  
<sup>6</sup> I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning.  
<sup>7</sup> My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body.  
<sup>8</sup> I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart . . . .  
<sup>15</sup> I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God.  
<sup>16</sup> For I said, "Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my foot slips."  
<sup>17</sup> For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me.  
<sup>18</sup> I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.  
<sup>19</sup> Many are those who are my vigorous enemies; those who hate me without reason are numerous.  
<sup>20</sup> Those who repay my good with evil slander me when I pursue what is good.  
<sup>21</sup> O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God.  
<sup>22</sup> Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Saviour.

**Question for Reflection:**

The Psalmist cries out in shame for his actions and draws close to God. Are shame and guilt necessary for repentance?

**THEY SAW THEIR NAKEDNESS AND HID**

Shame is closely related to guilt, but there is a key qualitative difference. No audience is needed for feelings of guilt, no one else need know, for the guilty person is his own judge. Not so for shame. The humiliation of shame requires disapproval or ridicule by others. If no one ever learns of a misdeed there will be no shame, but there still might be guilt. Of course, there may be both. The distinction between shame and guilt is very important, since these two emotions may tear a person in opposite directions. The wish to relieve guilt may motivate a confession, but the wish to avoid the humiliation of shame may prevent it.

PAUL EKMAN, Telling Lies

6. Find some biblical passages that speak to the topic at hand.
7. Search on the web or in your personal library for other “voices,” contemporary or historical, that may have something to say about the issue. Don’t forget the *Living Faith* or other PCC statements to help out.
8. Print the newsletter for the study group (black and white or colour).
9. Post the document on the web in your blog account, and post a PDF of your newsletter on your church’s website and onto Facebook for online discussion.
10. Have copies ready for participants. Extra newsletters can be made available for people in the church who are interested in reading about a tough faith issue.
11. Begin and close each meeting with prayer.

It is always important that the leader be somewhat prepared for the study by doing some reading beforehand; however, if a tough issue is raised in the study, the leader can always promise to bring the answer back to the group at the next meeting. The good thing about a study like this is it reaches beyond the walls of your church and can engage many people who may not be comfortable with traditional Bible study.



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