GARDEN

Relational Evangelism Study

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Week 8 - The Long Game
Becoming a Prepared and Faithful Christian

BIG IDEA

The goal of GARDEN is not to finish an eight-week course. It is to become a Christian who increasingly knows people, knows the faith, engages intentionally, keeps growing, and helps others do the same.

How to Use This Study

Read the material aloud together, switching readers at each section break. When you reach a **DISCUSS** section, pause and discuss the questions as a group. When you reach a **REFLECT** or **MY STAGE THREE PROJECT** section, take a few minutes to write individually before continuing. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture passages should also be read aloud together.

> **No one needs to teach the lesson. Work through it together.**

Scripture First

As you read **2 Timothy 2:1-7**, listen for the movement from **receiving** to **entrusting**. Notice how many generations of people appear in verse 2. Then read **Colossians 4:2-6** again and remember the pattern that has shaped this study: **prayer, opportunity, wisdom, and speech.**

2 Timothy 2:1-7 and Colossians 4:2-6

DISCUSS

1. What is Timothy supposed to do with what he has received?

2. How many generations of discipleship can you identify in 2 Timothy 2:2?

3. Why does Paul use images of a soldier, athlete, and farmer? What do they suggest about long-term Christian growth?

4. Looking again at Colossians 4, which parts of faithful evangelism require dependence on God and which require deliberate action from us?

5. What would it look like for this eight-week study to become the beginning of a pattern rather than the end of a program?

You Were Never Supposed to Finish

Eight weeks ago, the challenge was simple:

> **Choose one person God has already placed in your life.**

Since then, you have done something much larger than collecting apologetics information.

You have practiced a way of engaging people.

You learned to pay attention.

You identified a real issue rather than inventing one.

You located the boundary of your knowledge.

You developed questions.

You researched.

You built a response.

You personalized it.

You practiced a real conversation.

But one topic is not the destination.

The Stage Three Project was designed to prove that you can learn how to become prepared.

If you can do it once, you can do it again.

The next objection may be different. The next person will certainly be different. But the process is now familiar.

Return to the Three Stages

Stage One - No Knowledge and No Comfort

You hear a difficult question and do not know what to say.

"That is a good question. I am not sure how I would answer that right now. Let me think about it and get back to you."

Stage Two - Growing Comfort and Curiosity

You can stay in the conversation. You clarify. You ask for reasons. You notice assumptions. You listen.

"What do you mean by that?"
"How did you come to that conclusion?"
"Why do you think that is true?"

Stage Three - Knowledge and Confidence Together

You can combine good questions with substantive knowledge. You understand the issue, explain the Christian response, handle major follow-ups, and know where to direct someone for more.

And you still know how to say, "I do not know."

Stage Three is not omniscience. It is meaningful preparedness on a particular issue.

MY STAGE THREE PROJECT

Final Readiness Check

Evaluate the topic you have worked on throughout the course. Do not ask whether you know everything. Ask whether you are substantially prepared to have a thoughtful conversation.

UNDERSTAND

Can I state the issue fairly, including the strongest reasonable version of the concern?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

Can I distinguish what my person has actually said from what I have assumed?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

QUESTION

Do I have 3-5 thoughtful questions that can clarify, discover reasons, test assumptions, or open a door?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

Can I ask them naturally rather than turning the conversation into an interrogation?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

EXPLAIN

Can I explain the Christian response accurately in my own ordinary words?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

Can I give a short version first and go deeper if the person wants more?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

RESPOND

Can I address several of the most important follow-up questions or objections?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

Am I still comfortable admitting when the conversation moves beyond what I know?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

RESOURCE

Do I know at least one trustworthy resource that fits this person and issue?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

Do I know why I trust it and when it would be appropriate to share it?

■ Yes ■ Mostly ■ Not yet

> **If most of these are "Yes" or "Mostly," you have made substantial progress toward Stage Three readiness. Where you marked "Not yet," you have identified your next work.**

Demonstrate It

Knowledge feels different when you can actually use it.

In pairs or groups of three, give each participant a few minutes to demonstrate their Stage Three readiness.

The conversation partner should ask:

> **"What is the issue you prepared for, and what do you think the strongest version of the concern is?"**

Then ask one or two natural follow-ups.

The participant should demonstrate, as appropriate:

UNDERSTAND - state the concern fairly.
QUESTION - offer useful questions they might ask.
EXPLAIN - give the short Christian response.
RESPOND - handle a major follow-up or identify the boundary of their knowledge.
RESOURCE - identify a useful resource and why it fits.

This is not a performance.

> **The point is to recognize: I can now do something I could not do eight weeks ago.**

Preparedness Is Bigger Than Apologetics

GARDEN has emphasized objections, worldview questions, evidence, and reasons because those are common places Christians feel unprepared.

But a prepared Christian needs more than apologetics.

Over time, we should grow in our understanding of:

Scripture
the gospel
Christian doctrine
the life and teaching of Jesus
other worldviews and religions
philosophy and ethics
science and faith
church history
the questions actually being asked by the people around us

No eight-week course can provide all of that.

> **The mature Christian is not the person who finished studying. It is the person who has learned to keep studying faithfully.**

Your future topics should increasingly come from real relationships, recurring questions, and areas where your own Christian understanding needs strengthening.

My Preparedness Plan

Choose the next areas in which you want to become more prepared.

My next Stage Three topic:

Why this topic matters to someone I know or to my own ability to represent Christ:

Two additional topics I want to develop over the next year:

1. _____

2. _____

One area of Scripture or theology I need to understand more deeply:

Trusted voices or resources I plan to use:

A realistic rhythm for continued study:

Do not try to master everything at once. Become prepared one meaningful issue at a time.

Your People Plan

The course began with people, and it should end with people.

Return to the names you listed in Week 1.

Some relationships may have changed. Some conversations may have opened. Some people may still seem completely closed. Some names may now matter more than they did eight weeks ago.

The question is not: "Which people can I complete?"
The question is: "Whom has God placed in my life, and what might faithfulness look like now?"

Choose several people you want to continue engaging intentionally.

MY PEOPLE PLAN

Person 1: _____ Next faithful step:

Person 2: _____ Next faithful step:

Person 3: _____ Next faithful step:

Person 4: _____ Next faithful step:

Person 5: _____ Next faithful step:

How will I remember to pray for these people?

How will I record significant conversations, questions, resources, and possible follow-ups?

Love pays attention. The purpose of a plan is not to turn people into projects. It is to help us remember, pray, follow up, and remain faithful over time.

The GARDEN Framework - One More Time

G - Grow Relationships

Love the person. Be present. Build genuine relationships.

A - Ask Thoughtful Questions

Understand what they mean, why they believe it, and where their reasoning leads.

R - Reflect & Research

Use the space between conversations to think and become prepared.

D - Direct to Helpful Resources

Connect people with useful material or people beyond yourself when appropriate.

E - Engage Over Time

Return. Follow up. Keep planting and watering.

N - Nurture Through Prayer

Pray throughout and trust God for the growth.

GARDEN is not six steps you complete.

> **It is a pattern you can return to for years.**

Playing the Long Game

Some people come to faith quickly.

Others wrestle for years.

One conversation may matter enormously. Another may appear to accomplish almost nothing.

You usually will not know where your conversation fits in the story God is writing.

Your task is not to manufacture the ending.

> **Plant. Water. Trust God for the growth.**

That means we can be patient without becoming passive.

We can prepare without becoming anxious.

We can speak boldly without becoming forceful.

We can ask hard questions without treating people harshly.

We can admit ignorance without remaining ignorant.

We can care about evidence without forgetting the person.

We can share the gospel without believing conversion depends on our eloquence.

> **Faithfulness is active. Dependence is peaceful. GARDEN needs both.**

From Participant to Leader

There is one final step.

Second Timothy 2:2 describes truth moving from Paul to Timothy to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.

GARDEN was designed with that same kind of multiplication in mind.

You do not need to become a professional apologist.

You do not need to lecture for eight weeks.

You do not need to know how to answer every question the next group might raise.

> **You have already experienced the study. The Participant Guide carries the curriculum. The Leader's Guide helps you facilitate it.**

A GARDEN leader primarily needs to:

prepare beforehand
let the group read and work through the material together
draw quieter people into discussion
keep stronger personalities from dominating
ask useful follow-up questions
protect important theological and relational guardrails
model "I don't know" when necessary
pray

That means someone who has completed this course can reasonably begin asking:

> **"Who could I invite to work through GARDEN with me next?"**

REFLECT - Could I Lead GARDEN?

What part of facilitating another group would make me most nervous?

What have I learned during these eight weeks that would help me guide someone who feels unprepared?

Who are 2-5 Christians I could imagine inviting to work through GARDEN?

What would I need in order to feel ready to facilitate?

Is there a realistic time in the next year when I could lead or co-lead a group?

Discussion

1. How has your definition of successful evangelism changed during this study?

2. What did the Stage Three Project teach you about the difference between "knowing apologetics" and becoming prepared for an actual person?

3. Which part of GARDEN has changed the way you think about evangelism most?

4. Where are you still most likely to fall into passivity? Where are you most likely to create pressure?

5. What should reasonably be expected of a mature Christian after years of following Christ when it comes to knowing and explaining the faith?

6. How can we continue increasing our knowledge without turning evangelism into an intellectual hobby?

7. What would make GARDEN become a lasting rhythm rather than something we forget after the course?

8. What could happen in a church if people who completed this study began taking small groups of other Christians through the same process?

This Week - and Beyond - in the GARDEN

There is no final homework assignment that completes GARDEN.

Instead, carry these practices forward.

KEEP PRAYING

Keep the names of real people before God.

KEEP PAYING ATTENTION

Notice questions, experiences, assumptions, and openings.

KEEP ASKING

Become increasingly comfortable with thoughtful questions.

KEEP STUDYING

Choose the next issue. Repeat the Stage Three process.

KEEP RETURNING

Do not let worthwhile conversations disappear simply because time passed.

KEEP SPEAKING OF CHRIST

Remember that the goal is not merely better worldview conversations. We are ambassadors for Christ.

HELP SOMEONE ELSE BEGIN

Consider taking another Christian or another small group through GARDEN.

> **Grow. Ask. Reflect. Direct. Engage. Nurture. Then do it again.**

Final Prayer

Pray for the people whose names have been carried through these eight weeks.

Pray for one another as ambassadors for Christ.

Ask God for **open doors, wisdom, gracious speech, courage, humility, growing knowledge, genuine love, perseverance over years, and dependence on the Holy Spirit.**

Pray that God would use conversations you may never see the outcome of.

Pray that he would raise up other Christians through you who become more faithful, thoughtful, prepared, and prayerful witnesses.

> **We plant. We water. God gives the growth.**

Go tend the GARDEN.