

## What's New: Small Group Curriculum Reviews by Mark Howell



[Counter Culture](#), the newest study from David Platt. [A](#)

[Compassionate Call to Counter Culture](#) is designed to expose participants to the truths of the gospel that should “compel us to a contrite, compassionate, and courageous personal response to social issues in the culture.” Based on Platt’s 2015 [book by the same title](#), the study looks at many of the most pressing social issues of the day:

- slavery
- abortion
- sexual immorality
- the degradation of marriage
- the neglect of orphans and widows
- racism
- persecution

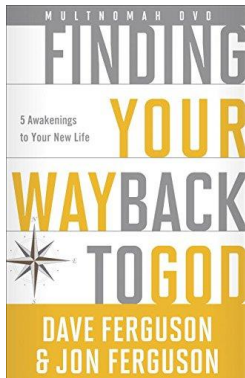
Dr. David Platt is probably best known for challenging books like [Radical](#) and [Follow Me](#) (and the small group studies that were developed from these books). He is “President of the [International Mission Board](#), is deeply devoted to Christ and His Word. David’s first love in ministry is making disciples, sharing, showing, and teaching God’s Word in everyday life. He has traveled extensively to serve alongside church leaders throughout the United States and around the world (from his bio).”

Counter Culture is a 6 session DVD-driven study. The video segments average just over 30 minutes in length and are both very engaging and extremely challenging. Platt is a dynamic and passionate communicator and has no trouble holding the attention of participants.

The member book includes the now standard video viewing guide and group discussion questions. It also includes a well-written set of daily lessons (5 per week) that build on the group teaching.

This is a simple study to use. Although there isn’t a leader’s guide included, it shouldn’t be difficult for even an inexperienced leader to facilitate. At the same time, the content is deeply challenging. Like everything David Platt does, [Counter Culture](#) will reveal a pathway for Christ-followers that leads above and beyond the humdrum salt-free and light-free 21st century Christianity. If you’re looking for a study

that will expose your group members to a life that is beyond ordinary, add Counter Culture to your recommended list.



I am even more excited about [the 5 session DVD-driven study](#) that accompanies the book. I believe this might be the most powerful outreach study I've ever reviewed.

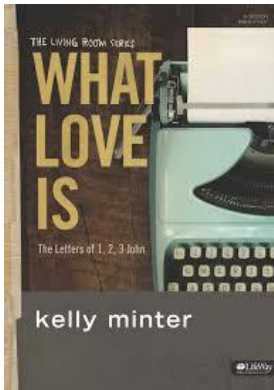
[The DVD](#) segments are very compelling and exactly the right length to grab and hold attention. Both Dave and Jon Ferguson come across as real people who genuinely care about this message. Each session also includes the compelling testimony of some who have found their way back to God. An aspect of the video segments that stands in stark contrast to some is that these people have a very familiar presence and feel like they could be your neighbors.

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[The participant guide](#) is well-written and very easy to use. Although some participants will be anxious about joining a discussion on this topic, most will be quickly made at ease by the tone set in the opening questions. Each session of the study includes an opening icebreaker and questions that will consistently welcome everyone to the conversation. The Bible study portion of the study does a very good job of exploring the Parable of the Prodigal Son. A life application section will help participants make the story personal. Each session also includes optional segments for personal decisions and expanded discussion of additional scripture.

[The participant guide](#) also includes an extensive leader guide that will enable even the most inexperienced leader to feel better equipped to lead.

[Finding Your Way Back to God](#) is a very powerful study. Whether you are simply looking for a small group study that will connect with friends and neighbors who are far from God or a compelling study for a church-wide campaign, I hope you'll take a look at Finding Your Way Back to God. I love this study and I think you will too.



Finally had an opportunity this week to spend some time with a new study from Kelly Minter. [What Love Is: The Letters of 1, 2, 3 John](#) is “a theologically rich study—that also includes recipes for deeper fellowship.” This line from the cover caught my eye as I began my review: “John anchors us with truth in a culture that has lost its way. He separates light from darkness, offers community for loneliness and rest for our striving.”

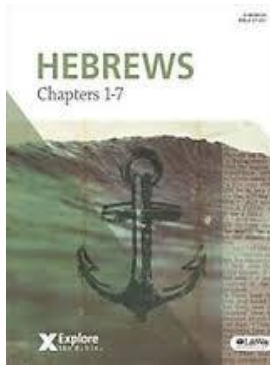
[What Love Is](#) is a 7 session study DVD-driven study. Featuring [Kelly Minter](#), “an acclaimed author, speaker, songwriter, and worship leader,” there is a fresh feel to her speaking style that draws you in as though you are in the room. With an average length of 30 to 34 minutes, she does a good job of holding attention by weaving personal stories into a rich study of the letters of John.

The [member book](#) includes a small section for jotting down notes from the video and a set of discussion questions designed to help members reflect on their daily studies from the prior week. The five daily studies each week will take some commitment. With 4 to 5 pages per day, your members should expect to spend about an hour a day in their daily study.

The member book also includes a simple leader’s guide with additional questions that “supplement the discussion starter questions on the viewer guide pages...intended to assist you and stimulate discussion.”

If you’re looking for a timely study, [What Love Is](#) is a study that will likely strike a chord with many of your members. “In an age when opinions fly at us unbridled, John gives us the immutable gift of truth. When science and philosophy and your social circles say you can’t really know God, John says, yes you can. And perhaps most importantly, at a time when the word love means just about anything under the sun, and therefore almost nothing, John tells us ‘this is what love is...(from the introduction).’”

Kelly Minter will be a fresh voice for many groups and the study’s content will provide rich and timely takeaways. I like [What Love Is](#) and I think your groups will too.



Spent some time this week with a new study from LifeWay's Explore the Bible series. [Hebrews](#) is a 13 week study, divided into two study guides: Chapters 1-7 "introduces the Book of Hebrews and gives encouragement and hope to believers." Chapters 8-13 "helps believers understand how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of a New Covenant."

**The Explore the Bible series** provides "deep, book-by-book study. Each study focuses on one book of the Bible (or section of a book) and features questions designed to encourage group discussion. These studies encourage transformational encounters with Scripture that help participants know the Word in a personal and meaningful way. And because the Word equips us "for every good work," as Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3, these studies help adults understand how to live it out in their own life context (from the website)."

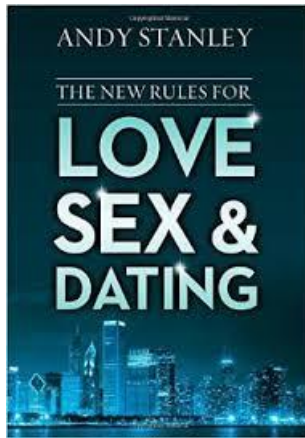
**Why study the book of Hebrews?** (from the website):

- It was written to a persecuted people.
- It was written for a church struggling to remain passionate about the gospel.
- It elevates the superiority of Christ.
- It reminds struggling believers that they have an advocate and brother in Jesus.
- It urges believers to endure in the faith until Christ returns because He is returning.

A good **leader's guide** is included in the member book. Each session features a creative activity designed to generate good discussion, along with questions that will help your members understand the context, explore the text and obey the text.

The Hebrews study is being featured as a special emphasis this fall by LifeWay. The emphasis includes free additional resources that will enable your church to use Hebrews as a church-wide study. You can find out more about the emphasis [right here](#).

I like the Hebrews study because the issues of the 1st Century world correspond so directly with those of the 21st Century. If you're looking for a study that will help your members find hope in the middle of the 21st Century, be sure and take a look at Hebrews.



Spent some time with a new DVD-driven study from Andy Stanley this week. [The New Rules for Love, Sex & Dating](#) is a four session study that you're going to want to know about. In this study Stanley explores "the challenges, assumptions and land mines associated with dating in the twenty-first century. Best of all, he offers the most practical and uncensored advice you will ever hear on this topic (from the cover)."

Who is the study designed for? While the primary audience is single adults, married adults will have no trouble relating and learning. Keep in mind that the video segments were taken from a weekend message series at North Point. What about teens and young adults? This study ought to be required.

While the session titles provide a preview of where these sessions are going, like every Andy Stanley study Love, Sex & Dating is very creatively and memorably arranged.

- The Right Person Myth
- Gentlemen's Club
- Designer Sex
- If I Were You

DVD-driven, [Love, Sex & Dating](#) features teaching by Andy Stanley, one of the most compelling communicators in America. At an average length of 20 minutes, the video segments easily hold the attention of participants.

The small group discussion guide is built in to a book by the same title that accompanies the DVD. Easy to use, the discussion guide includes a short introduction, a simple video viewing notes section, and a very good set of discussion questions. The discussion guide also features a simple between sessions assignment that includes a verse to memorize and a section of the book to read.

The book is very well written and packed with great insights. No holds barred, Andy Stanley addresses the topic of love, sex and dating in an eye opening way that grabs attention.

[The New Rules of Love, Sex & Dating](#) is a great study! I'm already thinking about how to use this content and get it in the hands of the most people. I loved it and I know you will too.