

BICF-ZGC
**Small
Groups**

Leader's Guide



Gathering, Growing, Going

The motto of BICF ZGC is 'Gathering, Growing, Going'.

People from many nations **gather** together to worship and serve the Lord Jesus Christ in ZGC. Each Sunday is a preview of the day we from 'every tongue, tribe, people, and nation' will gather before Him. The Lord Himself is the Chief Gatherer. And He enlists us to bring people to enter the joy of His family. Small Groups are one of the best places to bring new friends.

We gather to **grow**. As we gather to sing His praise, hear His Word, and share with His people His Spirit grows us to be more like Jesus. New Testament Christians had both large gatherings: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts" (Acts 2:46), and house meetings: "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2.46). With only small meetings we miss the connectedness to the whole family of faith. With only large meetings we miss the intimacy of personal involvement and accountability. The first church had a healthy balance of both large and small meetings.

Yet we also want to **go** – to reach those in our classrooms, offices, apartment complexes with the Gospel. While we should long for *all* to be saved, as internationals we are uniquely placed to reach the many internationals in this city. Some of whom come from countries so closed that this might be the *only* opportunity they get to hear of Jesus. We trust you will go 'for' and 'with' Jesus. We have gathered with Christ and His people and we are growing to be more like Him. Now we are called to go in His name, as His witnesses, for His glory, to the ends of the earth, until He comes again.

Small Groups: overview

Vision

BICF is committed “To build a vibrant, reproducing community unified in Christ that embraces and transforms people of all nations to impact their cities, their nations, and the world for Christ.”

The ZGC Small Groups are a vital part of fulfilling the BICF Mission Statement as they enable individuals to connect with others in a way that which makes Colossians 3:16 come true:

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Practice

How a Small Group functions will vary from group to group, but typically a group *might*:

- 7:00pm - Meet and have some snacks, welcome new people.
- 7:30pm - Pray for the meeting and sing a couple of songs.
- 7:45pm - Read a portion of Scripture and study it together.
- 8:30pm - Pray in response to the passage & for the needs of each other.
- 9:00pm - Allow those who need to leave to leave.
- Those who want to stay on can stay to chat.

Flexibility

There are lots of areas where Small Groups can vary, here are just a few of them:

- Do we meet in a canteen, dorm room or an apartment?
- When do we meet? Morning? Mid-day? Afternoon? Evening?

- Do we have music and if so how?
- Do we keep the group relatively open, allowing a large number of people to come, or relatively closed to allow deeper friendships to emerge?
- Does the leader also host and prepare the study, or delegate these tasks?
- Do we meet all year, or break during vacation periods?

Fixed

But some things need to be done and it is the leader's responsibility that:

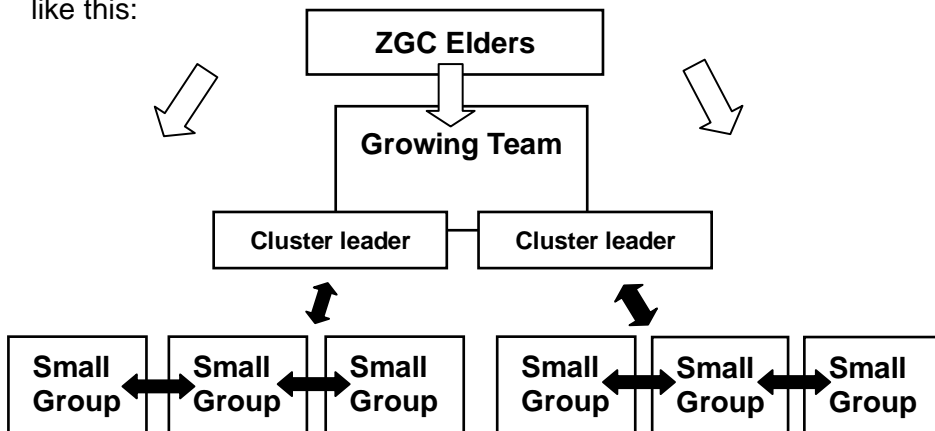
- A suitable venue is found and advertised to the group.
- Potential new members (linked via the church) are invited and followed up on.
- New members are welcomed.
- Each week (wherever possible) a study happens that is faithful to the Bible and time is given to prayer.
- Members are given help to grow in Christ. This may involve:
 - Personal follow up and times of prayer with individuals
 - Encouraging members to serve in a ZGC ministry area
 - Helping members develop habits of personal prayer and Bible study
 - Working out ways of witnessing as a group or as individuals to the outside world

None of these tasks are tasks that the leader must personally do, but it is the leader's responsibility to ensure they happen by competent people. Be encouraged that you are part of a church with Elders, Deacons, the Growing Team including your Small Group Cluster Leader(s) as well as other ministry leaders who are ready to encourage and advise you as needed.

Small Groups at BICF ZGC: Structure

¹¹It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³.....speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. *Ephesians 4:11-15*

In any healthy church the bulk of the ministry takes place as individuals speak the truth to each other in love. Yet in God's providence this occurs as those whom God has appointed faithfully exercise their roles as pastors and teachers. In the context of BICF ZGC, a significant part of the ministry of the church occurs in and through the **Small Groups**, but the overall leadership of the church (including the Small Groups) comes through those who are recognized as the pastor-teachers and called to be the church **Elders**. The **Small Groups ministry team - with Cluster Leaders linking to specific groups** - help facilitate the Elders and the Small Group leaders in their respective roles. Structurally this looks a bit like this:



ZGC Elders: taking the lead within the church.

Small Groups: Speaking the truth in love to one another: building each other up; supporting other Small Groups.

Growing Team / Cluster Leaders: Facilitating the Elders and Small Group leaders.

Style

Because BICF ZGC is an *International Church* we have the joy of working with a range of Christians from various different practices and traditions. It is a privilege to have such a diverse congregation, but such a privilege comes with unique challenges as we seek to preserve the unity that we have in the gospel.

To keep our unity we need to focus on what unites us: the gospel of Jesus Christ! In particular we need to emphasize those things which are of “first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3) while avoiding unhelpful and prolonged discussions about “disputable matters” (Romans 14:1) or practices that can alienate others. In our particular context this would mean (among many other things!) being careful about:

1) What we eat. Different cultures may have different ideas about what is right or wrong to eat (e.g. Halal food, alcohol) and different people will have different budgets (avoid ostracizing those with a more limited budget when you choose to go out for socials).

2) What we do on a Sunday. Some church cultures strongly discourage anything that might be considered “work”, while others emphasize freedoms we have. Avoid criticizing other people’s actions, but, if necessary, talk to them to find out if what they are doing is done “to the Lord”. (Romans 14:8)

3) Languages. We think Scripture teaches that members of each group must be able to understand the message of the meeting in order to join their hearts in praise to God. So our practice is that the ‘tongues spoken’ be the language of the group for the sake of building up others. (See 1 Cor 14) *and the below section on language.*

The only way we can keep our focus in the right place is by keeping our focus on Scripture. Therefore in all the ZGC Small Groups we make the teaching and study of God’s Word central to what we do.

Significant issues

Pastoral care

The primary place pastoral care happens at BICF ZGC is in the Small Group setting. Friendships are formed and God's Word is applied to areas in our lives which need to be changed. Leaders play a *key* role in getting to know individuals in their group and keeping a look out for their walk with the Lord "for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." (Hebrews 13:17.)

In most occasions issues which emerge can be dealt with by the group or by individuals within the group. Occasionally bigger issues emerge that you feel unqualified to help with. In these circumstances:

- 1) Pray
- 2) Never promise complete confidentiality. You may be promising something that you can't or shouldn't keep.
- 3) Speak to your Cluster Leaders, a member Growing Team or one of the Deacons or Elders for advice.

Support

Your Cluster Leaders are there to offer you regular support for leading the group. This will vary according to the needs of individual leaders and groups, e.g. they might catch up with you on an informal, individual basis or via a meeting of your cluster members together.

If you're personally struggling with things (whether or not they are related to the group) please feel free to speak to your Cluster Leader or anyone from the Growing Team or from the leadership team of BICF ZGC as you feel most comfortable. We are here for you.

Most weeks the Growing Team offer a 'pre-study' before the 11am Sunday service to offer training and support with preparing and leading studies, which are also a good time to catch a Growing Team leader for extra support you might want for your group.

Other regular trainings include: Semester Launches: twice a year sessions on the whys and hows of Small Groups, and JTC Genre trainings: offered before we launch into a new book for recommended study in our small groups.

Study Material

Small Groups are strongly encouraged to follow the study schedule suggested by the ZGC Growing Team. This is because trainings and materials will be offered for group leaders based on this schedule / a balance of Bible books will be offered over a 2 year period. If you have reason to wish to depart from the suggested schedule, we ask that you seek permission from your Cluster Leader to do this, and before using any alternative resources in the group,

Language

At ZGC, we want to call *everyone* in to know of and grow in Jesus. However, there are times where it may be better for those individuals to go to a different meeting, usually due to language issues. This can be an extremely painful decision. However, having to slow down the group significantly for one individual can not only be unhelpful for everyone else, but also for them. Especially if there is another BICF congregation or local group (and there usually is) that ministers in their native tongue. The Growing Team will be glad to try to start new groups to serve languages not currently served.

Local members

Due to Government restrictions BICF ZGC cannot freely welcome those without foreign passports. If local Chinese people want to join your Small Group please talk with your Cluster Leader or one of the other church leaders about what to do.

Non-BICF ZGC members (who hold foreign passports)

If members of other churches wish to join your Small Group, we suggest you consider them on an individual by individual basis, in discussion with your Cluster Leader. If your group does seem the best option for them and the group, having considered the other options, you are free to welcome them. If a group is significantly made up from non-ZGC members, it may be wise to consider no longer listing it as a ZGC group. (This doesn't mean you, as a ZGC member, will no longer have access to the ZGC training resources).

Money

Small Groups may collect free-will offerings or love gifts to cover various expenses related to the Small Group (for instance farewell gifts, baby showers, condolences, snacks, photocopying etc). If money is received then the money should be kept by a trusted group member and regularly reported to the group.

Ministry within the church

It is expected that Small Group leaders will encourage their members to find some way of serving within one or more of the ministry teams of the church. Do pass out copies of our ministries leaflet, let members know about the ministry fair each semester and other appropriate ways to serve as they come up.

Outside speakers

We would appreciate if you could ask your Cluster Leader or one of the Elders or Deacons before having a speaker serve in your Small Group who is from outside the BICF ZGC church family. Also, they should agree with the doctrinal statement of BICF (see appendix).

Small Group fairs

Once a semester BICF ZGC puts on a Small Group fair to encourage the whole church to join a Small Group. This is normally followed by a lunch to help welcome new potential group members.

You need to have someone come to represent your group (more details will be given in the run up to these fairs).

Prayer meetings

The BICF ZGC church prayer meeting is held once a month, currently on the first Wednesday, (soon to be the third Sunday.) We encourage you to come and bring your group with you, or dedicate the Small Group time that week to prayer for the church and group members: *unless God is at work, everything else we do is pointless* (Psalm 127). A prayer bulletin will be provided to help you guide your group in prayer.

Training / Raising up new leaders

The transitory nature of our congregation means that we are constantly looking for new leaders – for our own groups or others.. We ask, therefore, that leaders have 2-3 people in mind as potential future leaders. Leaders are encouraged to introduce these potential leaders to their Cluster Leader, inviting them to trainings/pre-studies etc. organised for them. These will help them prepare as a leader, particularly in the Bible-teaching element.. When a potential leader has been identified (Group leaders should be members of ZGC), the process for appointing them as a new leader is:

- ▶ Discuss with Cluster Leader
- ▶ Approach individual / give space for them to consider
- ▶ Give a copy of this leaders guide and an application form
- ▶ Interview with Cluster Leader
- ▶ Add to Wechat group if mutually decide this seems right

Communication

Please keep the leaders of the church informed about how your group is going so that we can pray for you and help you. Your Cluster Leader will endeavour to keep closely connected to your group to offer support. Help and support can also come through any member of the Growing Team or by speaking to one of the Elders or Deacons.

Dealing with sin

As Small Group leaders we will encounter sinful people (on earth, what other type of people are there?) When you consider how to help a fellow sinner in their struggles, keep these two Scripture passages in mind...

The Goal – Restoration

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:1,2

Our goal is to see our brother or sister restored. This word means ‘return to its former condition’ – like setting a broken or dislocated bone. And we must realize that we are no better than they are – we too may be tempted! So we must examine ourselves before we exhort others. Perhaps there is a log in our own eye, and just a speck in theirs! (Matthew 7:3). And our manner must be gentle, like our Saviour who is ever gentle and gracious with us.

The Guidelines – Respect

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Matthew 18:15-17

Jesus outlines three simple steps we must follow as we seek to restore others...

1) Talk to the individual first and try to win him over.

2) Take one or two others with you and try to win him over.

3) Take the matter to one of the church leaders.

Out of respect for our struggling friend, we maintain loving confidentiality. Your aim is always to win them over (to see them stop sinning) without seeing the sin, or the knowledge of the sin spread to others. This passage encourages us to keep the issue on a 'need to know' basis. When you hear X complain about the sin in Y, ask X whether they have spoken to Y about this sin.

One of the best protections for the holiness of your group is your resolve to live a holy life.

Qualities of a Small Group leader

Character – Competence – Chemistry (people skills)

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” 1 Peter 5:2-3

Expectations of a Small Group leader

- Is a growing, born-again, baptized believer in Jesus Christ
- Understands the value of local church membership, and is a committed member of ZGC English church.*
- Understands and agrees with the BICF’s doctrinal statement, mission statement, vision and core values (please see appendix).
- Works to support the Small Group Ministry at BICF ZGC, seeking God’s blessing on all our groups.
- Demonstrates a teachable spirit and willingness to be coached to be well equipped for the task.
- Strives to ensure that your meetings promote “true worship in spirit and truth” - faithful to Scripture, and loving to all seekers.
- Respects those whom God has placed in authority over you, according to Hebrews 13:17:

(Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.)

*ZGC Small Group Leaders are also encouraged to seek ZGC Membership – classes for this are offered each semester.

**Good leaders are teachable
Good leaders are reachable**

Self-assessment questions for Small Group leaders

Not all these things are appropriate for each and every context, but you may find that some are useful things to think through:

- 1) Am I available for consultation or telephone/Wechat follow-up with my Cluster Leader / the Growing Team?
- 2) Do I personally follow up with new enquiries about my Small Group within a couple days?
- 3) Do I share out tasks to members and potential leaders so as to get others involved and trained to serve? (Or do I just share out tasks because I don't want to do them....?)
- 4) Do I commit to include new members into the group and release mature members to start new groups over time?
- 5) Am I actively recruiting my replacement(s) and training that person to lead?
- 6) Do I encourage members to participate in BICF ZGC ministry as a group?
- 7) Am I seeking to build genuine relationships and follow-up with each group member (care, encourage, pray, protect)? Am I giving opportunities for more mature members to help serve younger believers?
- 8) Do I seek to support other Small Group leaders in the work they are doing?
- 9) Am I encouraging our group to work together in witnessing for Christ among non-Christians?

Delegating Roles

While small group leaders are responsible for what happens in their group, they are certainly not required to *do* everything for the group. In fact, a key way you can help members to serve is by giving them specific responsibilities. Some of these can be small and one-off (e.g. praying to open/ close the meeting, time-keeper etc...) The following are more regular. These are only suggested roles, based on what best fits your group. We do recommend groups have an evangelism coordinator if at all possible.

Study Leader = Receives notes and training for the passage. Prepares questions and leads the Bible study.

Evangelism Co-ordinator = Plans any welcome/ outreach activities and connects with ZGC Going ministries (e.g. International Student Ministry, ACM...) about evangelism training and other events

Prayer co-ordinator = Someone who collects prayer requests and may write them down for other group members to remember

Food/ drinks co-ordinator = Someone in charge of bringing or organising a rota for bringing food/ drinks

Music Leader = Someone who prepares songs to either sing/ play music during the meeting

Secretary = Passes on information to the group and help members know the venue/ upcoming events. Possibly also checks attendance. (Group leader may fulfil this role, otherwise.)

Small Groups and BICF ZGC

Being connected to a church body is an important part of the Christian life and the life of a BICF ZGC Small Group springs from the life of the church as it gathers week by week. Here are a few ways the Small Group stays connected with the wider church body:

ZGC Church Membership

We expect that a leader in ZGC understands active, committed membership of a local church is an important expression of following Jesus, the Head of the Church.

BICF ZGC also practises formal Membership – via a signed fellowship agreement – which we realise is a concept new for many of those who attend ZGC. But just as a “marriage document” is an important proof of a lover’s pledge to their beloved, we believe formal Membership is a visible expression of our pledge of love and loyalty to our God and Saviour.

Many of you may already be Members of local churches in your homelands. This is great! And we trust that when you return home you will continue to serve there. But we ask our ZGC leaders to take the additional step of being a Member of BICF ZGC too. This does not mean we ask you to end your relationship with your home church. Rather, we ask for you to join ZGC too and thus have a “dual Membership” – with us while you are here, with your home church while you are there.

ZGC Membership classes are offered at least once a semester and last about 1 hour.

Notices

As a Small Group leader do carefully note what is going on in the life of the church and consider what things are relevant for your group, and make sure any notices are given during the Small Group meeting and/or shared electronically .

BICF Mission Statement

To build a vibrant, reproducing community unified in Christ that embraces and transforms people of all nations to impact their cities, their nations, and the world for Christ.

BICF Doctrinal Statement

God

We believe there is one God, existing eternally in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and possessing the same attributes and perfections (Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; John 10:30; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is God (John 10:33). We believe in: His virgin birth (Isaiah 7:17; Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:34-35); His sinless life (Hebrews 4:15, 7:26); His miracles (John 2:11); His vicarious and atoning death (1 Corinthians 15:3; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 2:9); His resurrection (John 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:4); His ascension to the right hand of the Father (Mark 16:19); His personal return to earth in power and glory (Acts 1:11; Revelation 19:11-16).

The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, dwells in every true believer (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16-17). We believe that the Holy Spirit seals and dwells in every believer, spiritually uniting them with one another (Ephesians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 8:9; Galatians 3:26-28). We believe the Holy Spirit enables the trusting, obedient believer to live a godly life (Romans 8:13-14; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20; Ephesians 4:30, 5:18) and continues to endow believers with gifts for the purpose of building up the body, for the common good, just as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

The Scriptures

We believe the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God, without error and infallible in the original manuscripts. We believe the Bible is the final authority in faith and life (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:20; Psalm 19:7-9).

The Condition of Man

We believe that man was created in the image and likeness of God, in innocence and without sin. In Adam's sin humanity fell, inherited a sinful nature, became spiritually dead and alienated from God. We believe that, within himself, man is incapable of redeeming himself from his lost and depraved condition (Genesis 1:26, 3:1-24; Romans 3:10-18, 5:12; Ephesians 2:1-3).

The Work of Christ

We believe that God's eternal Son, Jesus Christ, became man, without ceasing to be God, in order to reveal God and redeem sinful man. We believe Christ voluntarily offered Himself as our sacrificial substitute on the cross, satisfying God's righteous judgment against sin. We believe God's only provision for our sin is Christ's death on our behalf, through which God reconciles us to Himself (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Salvation

We believe that salvation from the penalty of sin is a gift of God's grace, cannot be gained by any work, and is provided on the single ground of trust in God's work on the cross. All who trust Christ in this way are forgiven of their sins and born into God's family by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:16-19; Romans 3:23, 5:1-9; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

The Church

We believe that the church, called in Scripture the "Body of Christ", is a spiritual organism and that every true believer is a member of His Body. We also believe that Scripture affirms the establishment and continuation of local churches, groups of Christian believers called together for worship, instruction, fellowship and service (Ephesians 1:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:42, 13:1).

Eternal State

We believe that at the moment of death, the souls of all who trust in Christ for salvation immediately enter Christ's presence, awaiting the resurrection of life. We believe that at death, the souls of all who do not trust Christ for salvation immediately enter into a conscious separation from God, awaiting the resurrection of condemnation, the eternal consequence of unbelief (Luke 16:19-26; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Revelation 20:11-15).

Core Values

- We are God-Centered - God is our source of passion and strength. We worship Him vibrantly and depend on him with prayer and fasting. We are rooted in the Word, full of the Spirit and our lives are characterized by holiness and sanctification.
- We are Relationship Oriented - we model loving relationships and encourage intimacy and transparency. We promote strong Christ - centered individuals and families, aim to meet people at their point of need and are growing in community.
- We are in Unity - we are focused on Jesus Christ and are forgiving and accepting, enjoying strength in diversity. We honor one another, seek common ground and learn from each other.
- We are Mission Focused - we boldly proclaim the gospel and are intentionally gathering the world to reach the world. We are systematically transforming people into reproducing disciples and give generously to reach others.
- We are Reproducing - we are a growing and learning organism, not a static organization, equipping and empowering each other to use our gifts for impact. We promote multiplication of disciples, small group ministries and churches.
- We are Catalytic - in building God's kingdom we are exercising stewardship of our established networks, sharing our experience, people and resources. We are developing cooperative efforts and "synergy," expanding our reach and effectiveness, and learning from others.

Covenant of Fellowship

BICF Members affirm commitment to the following, to be expressed through affiliation with the BICF:

- To Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord;
- To seeking Him through a life of faith, and to obedience to the teaching of Scripture;
- To the Doctrinal Statement of the BICF;
- To attending the congregational meeting as diligently as possible;
- To seeking a knowledge of their spiritual gift(s) and expressing them through one of the ministries of the BICF;
- To participation in a Small Group, as family and other priorities permit;
- To relating graciously and lovingly to other members, preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; and
- To supporting the BICF in prayer, and through systematic, proportionate giving as God supplies and directs.
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Character Guidelines:

- I am willing to be held accountable to what God has called me to be as a Christian, representing Jesus, the King of Kings, with my life.
- I am open to being discipled and mentored so that my life and heart will constantly be renewed to God's Word.
- I will give respect to those whom God has placed in authority over me, according to Hebrews 13:17.
- I have read and agree to the Vision and Core Values of the Ministry of BICF, and I will represent our fellowship in ways that will please God.
- I am open to and welcome biblical evaluation. I will submit to pastoral correction to insure my growth in Christ.
- I will keep myself sexually pure according to God's Word for the sake of the Kingdom of God and the Ministry, and I will be wise in all my relationships, steering away from even the appearance of evil.
- I understand the "deeds of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21, and choose God's ways rather than the world's ways. I will not be known for any of the following: immorality, outbursts of anger, sexual impurity, disputes, sensuality, dissensions, idolatry, factions, sorcery, envy, enmity, drunkenness, strife, carousing, jealousy, and things like these. Instead by God's help I will cultivate the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control.

