



# Discipleship Groups

## STARTER GUIDE

### SUMMARY

At the heart of the Christian faith is “discipleship” or, in other words, being a learner of Jesus (Mt 28:18-20). Growing as a disciple of Jesus doesn’t happen on accident, intentionality is required. Therefore, we have created Discipleship Groups (DGs) which are small (2-5 people), gender-specific, biblical, and missional groups that regularly meet together for life-on-life intentional discipleship. The purpose of these groups is to cultivate trust in Jesus, growth in holiness and missional living.

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

**FOCUS.** Trusting Jesus. Growing in holiness. Living on mission.

**FORMAT.** Text > Theology > Life.

**DEPTH.** We encourage conversation to go beyond mere behavior to the heart.

**SIZE.** 2-5 people, w/ 2-3 being recommended. If the group grows, we recommend multiplying.

**GENDER.** Men and women participate in gender-specific groups.

**CONTENT.** Bible. We recommend agreeing on a designated section of scripture to focus on each week.

**PEER-TO-PEER.** While a leader will likely emerge, DGs are intended to promote peer-to-peer discipleship.

**COMMITTED.** It is important for those involved to be committed to promote maximum depth and growth.

**ORGANIC.** Most successful DGs will be formed with those you are naturally drawn to.

**FREQUENCY.** We recommend meeting weekly or bi-weekly.

**PRIORITY OF COMMUNITY.** DGs are intended to be a supplement to, not a replacement of, community.

**COVERING OF COMMUNITY.** Every DG should be covered by a community for nurture and accountability.

### FOCUS: TRUSTING JESUS. GROWING IN HOLINESS. LIVING ON MISSION.

#### TRUSTING JESUS.

The entire Bible can be summed up in two words: trust Him. Jesus is the good life. We were created by Him, for Him, therefore life-that-is-truly-life is only found in Him. Yet, the world, the flesh (i.e. that part of us that is not yet fully submitted to God) and the Devil do everything they can to dislodge, distort and distance our trust and enjoyment of Him. The greatest weapon we have against these opponents is a Spirit-empowered faith in the promises of God (i.e. who He is, what He has done, what He will do). What does that look like? This means we follow our Spirit-led promptings to believe in the promises of God rather than the promises of the flesh. Not the promise of pride to feel important, self-pity to medicate our poor self-image, sexual lust for satisfaction, or anger to get justice. The Spirit wants to empower us to believe better, true and lasting promises. So instead of trusting fleeting, fleshly promises, put your faith in the promises of God. Ask the Spirit to strengthen your faith to believe God over the flesh.

#### GROWING IN HOLINESS.

To grow in holiness is to grow in Christlikeness. To grow in Christlikeness is to grow in your human-ness. But, we don’t drift into holiness. Holiness is a harvest (Gal 6:7). We have two strategies here. First, to grow, we must

become well acquainted with the areas in our lives where the flesh gets the best of us, where we are prone to sin. When and where do you find the flesh awakened? In order to beat the flesh we have to know how, when and where it hits. Ask the Spirit to convict you of those sins that need to be fought and to help you better know your sin. Second, it is important to know why we are gravitating towards certain sins. Ask yourself why you are inclined to these sins. What do you believe they will do for you? Provide acceptance, satisfaction, self-worth, significance? Know the lie you believe when you give into the flesh. The proof of your faith is that it fights. Holiness is the result of a habitual weakening of the flesh through constant contending in the Spirit for life-giving victory over sin. God desires for us to kill our sinful behaviors, emotions and patterns of life so that we might fully experience the life He intends for us.

### **LIVING ON MISSION.**

To live on mission is to build relationships with others for the sake of the gospel, as friends not projects. Jesus' great command is to love God and love others. Jesus' great commission is to make disciples. Our discipleship is incomplete apart from seeking to make disciples. This may not mean you head off for the jungles of southeast Asia, but it may mean heading over to your neighbors. Followers of Jesus are to declare the good news of Jesus and display what a life looks like that has been gripped by that news. We recommend each person have 3-5 unbelievers who they are regularly, lovingly pursuing and praying for. A weekly "missional" check-in is helpful to keep this at the forefront of our thinking.

### **FORMAT: TEXT > THEOLOGY > LIFE<sup>1</sup>**

#### **TEXT.**

Your group should read the same biblical text during the week. If the Bible isn't central, you'll end up relying on yourselves, your experiences and your feelings. While other books can be helpful, nothing can replace the Bible. If the Bible is central you'll be more likely to rely on Jesus. Your group gets to decide what section of the Bible to read on any given week. We suggest reading at least one chapter per week and asking the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what he wants to do in you. You may be prompted to repent of a sin, rejoice in a promise, meditate on an insight, or praise God for an attribute. Each week make the text your initial focus by sharing how the Spirit moved through the Word to change you.

#### **THEOLOGY.**

Move from the text to theology by understanding the intent of the author. From there, try to understand the central theological message of the chapter. Ask yourself: "Where is Jesus and his work (i.e. the gospel) reflected in this text?" Strive to be Christ-centered, not application-centered. The goal is not to "apply" but to be awe-struck with Jesus, not to "do" but to delight in him. Then, from our delight in Christ and belief in his promises, we can apply the text to every day temptations and trials. Make Jesus central!

#### **LIFE.**

As you move from theology to life, bring your life into the conversation. Allow plenty of time for this. Ask one another questions. Graciously and lovingly press one another to discern ungodly motivations and get to gospel motivations. This is not a Bible Study. Share your lives, not your insights. Confess sin and repent. Remember, Christ alone is sufficient for your failures and strong for your successes. Take it all to the Lord Jesus in faith-filled prayer for one another, on the spot, and not just afterwards. Finally, be sure to share the names of people you are trying to bless with the gospel. Pray as a group asking God to help you trust his promises, as well as asking him to give unbelievers in your life the very same gift of faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from "Fight Clubs" by Jonathan Dodson

## **WHAT DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS ARE NOT:**

- NOT a place for endless introspection and navel-gazing.
- NOT a legalistic or religious way to impress God and others.
- NOT a venue to display your vast biblical knowledge.
- NOT a group to help others while withholding from them.
- NOT merely a Bible study where you share your insights.
- NOT a time to just chat and catch up.

## **EXAMPLES OF HEART-LEVEL QUESTIONS:**

- What are you desiring more than anything else?
- What do you find yourself day dreaming about?
- What lies are you subtly believing that undermine the truth of the gospel?
- Are you astonished with the gospel?
- Where have you made much of yourself and little of God?
- Is technology stealing attention from your family?
- Is work replacing your spouse's place in your heart?
- Where do your thoughts drift to when you enter a social setting?
- What fears are paralyzing your heart from enjoying God?
- What consumes your thoughts when you have alone time?

## **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:**

Fight Clubs, Jonathan Dodson  
You Can Change, Tim Chester  
The Cross Centered Life, CJ Mahaney  
A Praying Life, Paul Miller

## **ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:**

Gospel Centered Life, Bob Thune & Will Walker  
The Enemy Within, Kris Lugaard  
Battling Unbelief, John Piper  
When People are Big and God is Small, Ed Welch  
How People Change, Tim Lane & Paul Tripp  
Instruments in the Hands of the Redeemer, Paul Tripp  
Finally Free, Heath Lambert

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.**

### **“Does peer-to-peer mean that our DG doesn't need a leader?”**

Yes and no. DGs are intended to promote peer-to-peer discipleship, though a leader will likely emerge. Inevitably someone will need to set the pace and tone of your DG. If not, over time, the group will drift or stop altogether. At the same time, this isn't an official leadership position where one person instructs the others. That would defeat the purpose of the group. Everyone is in it together. Using the term “peer-to-peer” is intended to remove the leadership mystique from the group, though not eliminating the need for some measure of direction, accountability, and intentionality by one or all members.

**“Can we read/study books outside of the Bible?”**

We encourage every DG to keep the Scriptures central to your studies and discussion. Though you are welcome to supplement the Scriptures with extra-biblical reading, DGs are not created to be mere Bible studies or book clubs. We want our times, and lives, rooted in and shaped by the Word.

**“Should I join an existing DG before starting a new one?”**

Maybe. Temporarily joining an existing DG will help you understand their purpose and practice. However, we do recommend only visiting for 3-4 weeks before starting your own. Another thing that has worked well for some is having a leader from another DG help start a new one for 3-4 weeks before pulling out.

**“Where should we meet?”**

Your group is free to meet wherever you like. While meeting in a local cafe or bar can be helpful for missional purposes, meeting in a home or apartment can be more conducive to prayer and sensitive topics. Feel free to experiment to discover what works best for your group.

**“How do I get into a DG?”**

Ask your community leader about the DGs that already exist within your community and go from there. If there are none that have space or time that works for you, you can use the DG Primer to start a new DG (just ask someone who’s already in a DG to help you get started).

**“Should I join a DG if I can’t attend consistently?”**

We’ve found that a consistent meeting weekly or biweekly, best serves the purposes of intentional discipleship. So for your sake, and the sake of your DG, we suggest waiting until you are able to participate on a consistent basis before getting connected to a DG.

**“At what point should we replicate our DG?”**

3-4 people are ideal for a DG. The more people involved, the less time there is to share, which often results in less depth. You may have seasons where your DG is larger than that, but ideally, that is temporary.

**“We’ve built some deep friendships and gained good traction in our DG over the months/years, do I have to replicate?”**

Finding and maintaining deep, consistent, discipling relationships can be immensely beneficial for everyone involved in a DG. We encourage everyone to think in “seasons,” and consider how they are being poured into, and how they are pouring into others. For example, many DG’s end up formally replicating to help multiply disciple-making efforts, but because of the relationships built, continue meeting monthly or bi-weekly as friends to keep stirring each other up.

**“Can I invite people that aren’t in a Cornerstone Community into our DG?”**

Although there is no hard and fast rule to how DGs are formed, we encourage everyone to begin walking through Foundations, and start getting connected to a Cornerstone Community before getting involved in a DG. Ultimately DGs serve a different aspect of our discipleship and are meant to complement, not replace, participating with a community.

**“How often should we check-in on the nature and function of our DG?”**

It’s helpful to revisit this DG Starter Guide and discuss how your DG is doing a few times a year, or whenever you have someone new join.