



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, biblically anchored, 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/ 3-4 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, are already in community with, and/or have a similar enough schedule and location for a season.

FREQUENCY. We recommend meeting weekly or bi-weekly.

TIME BOUND. We recommend setting an initial timeframe meet, e.g. 3-6 months, and then regularly “check-in” to reevaluate for the next season.

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

COVERING OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP. Every DG should be covered by/connected to a community lead, women’s discipleship lead, or other church leadership for nurture and accountability. If you are not in a Cornerstone Community feel free to reach out to Pastor Justin with any questions.

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 > LIFE¹

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

¹ Adapted from "Fight Clubs" by Jonathan Dodson

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.

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?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.

STARTING

“How do I get into a DG?”

Ask your community leader and/or your women’s discipleship lead 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). If you aren’t in a Cornerstone Community, reach out to communities@downtowncornerstone.org for next steps to get plugged in.

“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 should we start our DG?”

We recommend that the first meeting of your DG would review this starter guide, share brief testimonies, pick the book of the Bible you will read first, and pray together. If you are unsure where to start reading in the Bible, consider the gospel of Mark, or the letter of Ephesians (though any book of the Bible will serve you well).

“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 sending them off.

CONTINUING

“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 first and most by God’s Word. Here are a few books that work well in the DG setting:

- *Now That I’m a Christian*, C. Michael Patton
- *You Can Change*, Tim Chester
- *Habits of Grace*, David Mathis
- *When People are Big and God is Small*, Ed Welch
- *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer
- *Finally Free*, Heath Lambert
- *Knowable Word*, Peter Krol
- *Women of the Word*, Jen Wilkin
- *God’s Big Picture*, Vaughan Roberts
- More book recommendations: bit.ly/dccreadinglist

“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.

“I’m in a DG outside of a Cornerstone Community. Who do I go to with questions?”

If you are in a DG that is not under a specific Cornerstone Community, then you can reach out to Pastor Justin, who is the Pastor of Communities, with any questions, concerns or guidance.

REPLICATING

“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. If you find that your current time/rhythm is not ideal for all members of the DG, consider replicating into multiple DGs.

“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. That said, it is OK to keep a DG going, even as folks move about the city, provided you’re able to continue to meet regularly together.

OTHER

“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.

“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 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.

PRACTICAL TIPS

“What has worked really well for your DG?” Advice from DCC Leaders

- *Meet regularly and, if possible, weekly.* Meeting weekly allows you to get deeply connected with the others in your DG.
- *Meet outside your regular rhythm.* Mix up your meeting by doing something together outside your regular DG meeting. This allows for even deeper relationships to form. Some suggestions are to meet up for dinner, serve together or go for a hike.
- *Alternate between reading a book of the Bible and a book about the Bible.* This allows you to study the word as well as gain knowledge from others within topics like Christian living, Theology, etc. Check out the DCC Bookstore for resources on what to read.
- *Commit to doing a study together then reevaluate your DG.* Choose a book of the Bible to walk through together for a certain period of time and then reevaluate if you want to continue with another book or finish meeting as a DG. This allows people to commit to DG without feeling like it's indefinite.
- *View DGs as a place to edify one another and grow in Christlikeness.* It can be easy to make DGs social time, where you spend the allotted time catching up on life. Instead, make sure that your DG's primary purpose is to build one another up by discussing the word and applying it to each others lives and seasons.
- *Pray together.* Don't neglect to devote part of your time together to pray for one another.
- *Check in throughout the week.* Sending a quick text that you are thinking and praying for another member of your DG can make a big difference in your relationship. Knowing that someone is there with you and for you will deeply benefit your friendship with one another, as well as your walk with Christ.

APPENDIX: HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE.

OBSERVE, INTERPRET, APPLY (OIA)²

The OIA method uses three main steps to study the Bible. Each step builds on the previous one to arrive at the author's main point and what that means for us today.

- Observation - What does it say?
 - *Genre.* Is this passage poetry, prose, letter, narrative, prophecy, wisdom or song?
 - *Words.* How many times are key words repeated? How are things described or labeled? How does the narrator name characters and do they change along the way?
 - *Grammar.* Identify the subject, verb and object of each sentence. What are the main verbs? Who does what, and to whom or what is it done?
 - *Structure.* How does the passage fit together? Break it into paragraphs or stanza. Notice transitions.
 - *Mood.* What tone does the author use? Does the passage inspire action, evoke emotion, or challenge assumptions?
 - *Context.* Where is the passage in the larger book? Where is the book in relation to the rest of the Bible? What are the circumstances of the people in the passage or the people who first read the book? Pay attention to repeated words, phrases, and ideas.

² For a deeper dive into the OIA model, see *Knowable Word* by Peter Krol or *Women of the Word* by Jen Wilkin

- Interpretation - What does it mean?
 - *What* questions clarify or define your observations, as in, “What does that phrase mean?” “Who,” “Where,” “When,” and “How” questions also fit into this category. These kinds of questions transition you from observation to interpretation.
 - *Why* questions uncover the author’s purpose, as in, “Why did he say that?” These questions could be considered the essence of interpretation.
 - *So what* questions draw out the implications, as in, “So what does he want us to do about it?” They transition you from interpretation to application.
- Application - How should I change?
 - Head (everything we think & believe) - Identify what you think -> identify what God wants you to think instead (especially about his attributes, his character, and his world) -> begin thinking God’s thoughts
 - Heart (who we are) - What kind of person does God want you to be? What do you desire or value and how does that match up with Jesus’ desires and values? What ungodly character traits should you turn from and what Christ-like characteristics can you imitate instead? In what areas do you tend to rely on your performance, and how can you rely on Christ’s performance? Are yours the heart attitudes others should seek to acquire?
 - Hands (everything we do) - In light of what you read, what is God calling you to do about it? What do you need to add or take away from your daily rhythms?

DELTA MODEL³

The Delta Model is a template based approach to guiding bible application, through a sequence of questions reflecting on the passage being studied. Each of the questions aims to stimulate a specific kind of thought—noted in parentheses--which you will read about in the following section.

- What is the will of God as revealed in this passage? (Understanding)
- In light of God’s will, what aspect of his character is in view in this passage? (Understanding)
- What are practical ways that we can put the will of God into practice? (Application)
- In light of the above, what are practical ways that we fail? (Application)
- What thoughts are revealed by these actions? (Analysis)
- What beliefs about God are revealed by these actions? (Analysis)
- How are you doing in this area? (Evaluation)

THE FLEX MODEL

The Flex Model works from broad, open-ended questions of the passage of scripture, then to interpretation, then to application - and is used in various formats for personal study and small group discussion. There are three kinds of questions:

- *Discovery*: Basic. Quick. Open ended.
 - What stands out to you? What has impacted you? Does anything surprise you?

³ Developed by Glen Johnson during his graduate study of Spiritual Formation and Education Theory

- *Deepening*: Going below the surface. Wrestling with an idea to understand it better.
 - What is the text saying, specifically? What is the author's aim in communicating this way? Can you summarize what is being said in your own words?
- *Application*: Applying the content of the passage to my life.
 - So what? How does this impact my life? What do I do now? How should I change? Where can others help me, and I help them in this area?