

The Discipleship Group

I. An Overview:

A Discipleship Group is for someone who wants to become more like Jesus and be part of the exciting adventure of helping others to know God and become more like Jesus, Romans 8:29. This is what we call discipleship.

A Discipleship Group is made up of two to three people of the same gender (ideally, from the same pastorate) who meet for 60-90 minutes bi-weekly (could be more or less). The Discipleship Group embraces the practice of 3 spiritual disciplines, putting each member in position to receive the Life Transforming work of the Holy Spirit. The simple tool used by a Life Transformation Group consists of three *spiritual disciplines* designed for spiritual growth.

1. Honest Confession in Community
2. Reflective Reading of Scripture
3. Prayer for the advancement of God's kingdom

Through these simple practices, essential elements of vital spiritual ministry are released to common Christians without the need for specialized training. It taps into the seed of the personal work of the Spirit of God in the life of a disciple to help that seed grow and bear fruit. The Discipleship Group empowers the common Christian to do the uncommon work of reproductive discipleship.

Who should be in a Discipleship Group?

Each person in a Discipleship Group should meet two requirements. Hunger for Jesus and a commitment to the process.

- Hungry: is to be humble, ready to receive and repentant knowing that you are broken this puts you in a position to be hungry for what God has for you through his word and also through the other members of your Discipleship Group.
- Commitment to the process- You have to be willing to do what you say you are going to do. You are committing to the others in your group. Most importantly you are committed to growing in Jesus and reproducing that life in others.

While it is not required it is recommended that someone in a Discipleship Group have a basic knowledge of Scripture and an ability to spend meaningful time alone with God in His Word. If they do not have these basic skills they may find a Discipleship Group to be a big stretch. They may want to consider supplementing their Discipleship Group with the 7 Essentials of Discipleship and Formed by His Word. Also someone with a long-term area of crises sometimes is unable to get outside of their own issues in order to help the others in the group. While it is appropriate for this to happen during a season of crises if this is your long term pattern than counseling or Celebrate Recovery would be a better fit for your next steps of discipleship.

How Many People and How Long?

A group should not grow beyond three but multiply into two groups of two rather than a single group of four. If a fourth person is added to the group, it is recommended that the group move toward expanding. Once the fourth person has demonstrated sufficient faithfulness, then the group should expand into two groups of two. The group should commit to the Discipleship Group for a term (a term is the seasonal rhythm of LFA Fall, winter, spring and summer it coincides with our TFL cycle) and then assess after each term if they will:

1. Continue as a Discipleship Group.
2. Focus on another area of spiritual formation: (ie attend a life stage TFL class, season of Sabbath rest, attend a TFL of 7 essentials of discipleship)
3. Create/attend a new Discipleship Group.

How to Start a Discipleship Group?

The first step is to identify desire. Do you want to become more like Jesus and get in on the essential mission of the church of Jesus to make other disciples? Do you have some people in your life that you can invite to go deeper in their intimacy with Jesus, connection with you. The first thing to do is talk to your pastoral leader. Each Discipleship Group needs a leader, someone to initiate and give direction. This person should be accountable to a pastoral leader, because to be in authority one should be under authority. The next thing you do is contact some people. If that is your intention, you will call two other people and invite them to join you in pursuing a deeper walk with Jesus. After you contact them you gather them together and lay out for them the structure of Discipleship Group and ask for their commitment.

II. An Explanation of the 3 Spiritual Disciplines of the Discipleship Group:

I. Honest Confession in Community

Before the Discipleship Group meets, each member will read the questions and consider the 7 aspects of life (see Part III) and identify one aspect of his life in which he wants to offer confession. This confession could consist of sharing:

- a celebration of something God has been doing or perhaps something God has been teaching them
- the identifying of a temptation or vulnerability
- the confession of sin

After each member of the Discipleship Group introduces the aspect of life he has chosen and offers his confession the group leader steers the focus to further discussion and/or prayer based on what has been shared.

Some principles to consider regarding honest confession.

1. The group must cultivate an atmosphere of complete trust and become the setting where participants feel they can be honest and vulnerable. Confidentiality must be established and maintained. Discuss your boundaries as a group.
2. The goal of having accountability is not just for sin management but rather to foster honest relationships that are transparent and caring, relationships where healing can come through the confession of sin and interactions with truth.

3. The groups must be quick to listen and slow to speak making plenty of space for the work of the spirit

A Simple Outline of a Discipleship Group

- * Discipleship Groups meet bi-weekly for 60-90 minutes.
- * Discipleship Groups are groups of two or three (the 4th person is the beginning of the second group and multiplication is imminent).
- * Discipleship Groups are not coed.
- * Discipleship Groups practice a pattern of 3 Spiritual Disciplines:
 1. **Honest Confession:** mutual accountability
 2. **Reflective Reading of Scripture:** repetitively, in entire context
 3. **Prayer for the advancement of God's kingdom:** strategically, specifically and continuously.

4. However after listening the group members need to make sure they are speaking and engaging.

5. The group leader should steer this discussion and make space for prayer and the setting of goals or next steps as needed.

6. The Book Study: It may also work for an Discipleship Group to add a book to its scheduled reading. The addition of the book would be an add-on to the Biblical reading plan, not a substitute for it. For a period of time you could substitute the majority of your "honest confession" time to dialogue about the book. However be careful to give people some opportunity to bring up issues that are pressing on them that are not related to the book.

2. Reflective Reading of Scripture

1. The power of the Discipleship Group system lies in the unleashing of God's Word into the lives of His people. At the end of every Discipleship Group, each member of the group shares if he completed his reading and also explains what God is teaching him through the reading. After that, he gives his Scripture reading plan for the next 2 weeks.
2. The goal is to have people regularly reading God's Word. Sometimes a member may want to meditate on a single verse, passage or story to soak in a particular truth. Other times, he may choose 20-30 chapters to get a clearer understanding of the big story of God, His ways, and His character.
3. The entire Discipleship Group can have the same reading plan or a different plan for each member. The purpose of sharing is that in 2 weeks, when the group comes back together for accountability, the whole group will benefit as each member shares what God has been speaking to him through His Word. If any one in the group was unable to complete the reading planned, the same reading assignment is to be taken up again.
4. The primary point of reading Scripture is to know God as revealed in the Biblical story. We want to know what He is like. As a result, Scripture will teach us about ourselves (how we relate to God, what we treasure, and what our tendencies are). Finally, we want the truth about God and us to change us, to alter how we think and what we do. We want God's Word to literally give shape to our lives.
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3. Prayer for the Advance of God's Kingdom

1. Prayer happens in the Discipleship Group in a couple of ways. The first is that each member of the Discipleship Group is to identify two or three people God has laid on his heart, those who are his highest evangelistic priorities. Members share these names at a group meeting and all members write the names down. Every time each member does his Bible reading, he is to select one of the names and pray using any of the themes listed below.

2. The second way that prayer happens in the Discipleship Group is when members commit to pray for the particular needs of the other members of the group throughout the week.
3. Thirdly, during the Discipleship Group, members will get in the regular habit of stopping at anytime to lay hands on one another and praying for one another's specific needs or requests.

III. Discipleship Group Confession Questions:

Below please note 7 aspects of your life. Each of these 7 aspects is essential to who you are as a human being. The point is that often we tend to overlook certain areas. The questions are designed to put your mind on issues that the Holy Spirit may want to address. Obviously the 7 overlap; they do not exist independently of each other. In other words, your faith impacts your family, your family influences your finances, etc. However, for our purposes, these aspects are listed separately so that you can focus on each without ignoring the others.

As a disciple of Jesus, these 7 aspects of your life will require your attention in order for you to be whole and mature as a follower of Jesus. To put it in the negative: neglect in any of these 7 areas will in some way stunt your growth. Neglect could also potentially lead to a disqualification in ministry and hinder the glory of God revealed through you.

Faith

What has God been teaching you about Himself and about your heart in His Word? Are you walking in obedience to His voice? Are you daily seeking His counsel to guide you in every aspect of your life? Are you walking securely or insecurely in your identity as a son of God? Are you pursuing freedom from destructive patterns, strongholds and hopeless areas in your life? In what ways are you seeing an increased need to trust in Jesus?

1 Jn. 4:10; 16;19, Is 55:3, Ps 27:8 and Mark 12:30-31, Eph. 4:27, Jn. 10:10, Is 61:1, 1 Tim 4:7, 2 Tim. 2:25-26., Col. 3:16, Acts 2:42, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Col. 4:2, Eph. 6:18, Philip. 4:6, Luke 18:1-8, 1 Tim. 2:1-4 and Acts 17:27

Family

Living Faith at Home: How often do you have "prayer times" as a family (not including meals)? In what ways have your family prayer times been beneficial? How frequently and in what ways over the last month have your family had "Faith Talks?" Over the last month, what "God Sightings" has your family noticed?

Passive/Controlling tendencies: (Start thinking about those closest to you and move outward: spouse-children-mom-dad-extended family). What do you see God doing in your family? What have you done to love, enjoy, lead, submit to, or serve your family over last month? Have I withheld forgiveness, remained frustrated, or damaged another person with my words?

Sexuality: Am I honoring God with my sexuality? Have I lusted after anyone and not valued God's image in them? Have I exposed myself to sexually alluring material or allowed my mind to dwell on inappropriate thoughts?

Gen. 1:27, Job 31:1, I Cor. 6:18-20, Philip. 4:8, Matt. 5:28, I Timothy 4:7, James 4:7, Deut. 6:6,7 Psalm 119:9-11, I Cor. 13:4-8

Priorities

Are you being responsible with your time and keeping your priorities? How has procrastination hindered the achievement of your priorities? How can you be more effective in achieving the priorities God has given you? Are you giving your time to any questionable activities that may be keeping you from pursuing areas of primary calling?

Prov. s 13:16 & 21:5, Matt. 25:29; I Pet. 1:13, Rom. 12:2

Health

Are you being a faithful and generous steward of the physical body that God has given you? Is your life characterized more by resting in God or striving? How are you practicing Sabbath?

I Tim. 4:12, Acts 8:18-19, I Cor. 9:25-27, Gal. 5:24, 25

Friends

What have I done to love, enjoy, lead, and serve my friends above myself? Have I withheld forgiveness, remained frustrated or damaged another person with my words? Which close friend knows my heart and struggles and is walking with me and speaking truth into my life? (Start thinking about those closest to you and move outward: Close friends-church family-co-workers-neighbors, etc.).

John 15:12-13, Matt. 6:14, Eph 4:29, Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 12:30-31, Rom. 15:7, Prov. 27:7, Prov. 3:3, I Cor. 12:12

Finances

Are you being a faithful and generous steward of God's money, possessions, and time? Are you worrying about or being influenced by a love for money or materialism instead of trusting God? Would you characterize yourself as resting in God or striving? Are you wisely creating savings and spending plans?

2 Cor. 9:6-8, Heb. 13:5, Matt. 6:24, Acts 2:45, I Tim. 4:7 & 6:6-10, Mark 12:41-44, Philip 4:11-19

Mission

How are you reproducing your life in others through making disciples? What are some of the ways over the last month that you took opportunities to live missionally by moving towards those in darkness to share Jesus? (Think about those you know first and then about those you don't know: neighbors-coworkers-community-country-world). In what ways have you seen the advancement of God's kingdom over this last month? Are you praying for and remembering the sick, hurting, and needy? Are you informed about global issues and seeking to advance God's Kingdom in South Jersey and the nations of the earth?

Matt. 10:7-8, Col. 3:23 & 4:3-5, Is 58:10, Eph. 6:19-20, Matt. 25:14-30 & 28:18-20 and Mark 12:30-31, Romans 13:3-8

IV. Discipleship Group Prayer Tool:

A Way to Pray for the Advance of God's Kingdom in a Life

- 1) I pray, Lord, that You draw _____ to Yourself (John 6:44).
- 2) I pray that _____ seeks to know You (Acts 17:27).
- 3) I pray that _____ hears and believes the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).
- 4) I ask You to prevent Satan from blinding _____ to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).
- 5) Holy Spirit, I ask You to convict _____ of his/her sin and his/her need for Christ's redemption.
- 6) I ask You to send someone who will share the gospel with _____ (Matt. 9:37-38).
- 7) I also ask that you give me (and/or my fellow disciple) the opportunity, the courage and the right words to share the truth with _____ (Col. 4:3-6; Eph. 6:19-20).
- 8) Lord, I pray that _____ turns from his/her sin (Acts 17:30-31; 1 Thess. 1:9-10).
- 9) Lord, I pray that _____ would put all of his/her trust in Christ (John 1:12; 5:24).
- 10) Lord, I pray that _____ confesses Christ as Lord of his/her life and grows in his/her faith and bears much fruit for Your glory (Rom. 10:9-10; Col. 2:6-7; Luke 8:15).