

DISCIPLESHIP FAQ'S

WHAT IS A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

A Discipleship Group is gender-specific closed group of 3 to 5 believers (including the leader) who meet together weekly for the purpose of accelerated spiritual transformation over 12 months. While Life Groups exist for the purposes of community growth and fellowship, they have an underlying additional purpose (or they should have): evangelism. Life Groups are designed to reach lost people by getting them involved in the group. A Discipleship Group, on the other hand, consists of believers who desire a deeper walk with Christ. The format of a Discipleship Group is not one of a teacher- student, but a roundtable discussion. Everyone in the discipleship group commits to reading the Bible, memorizing Scripture, journaling, praying and accountability. The format of a Discipleship Group is not one of a teacher-student, but a roundtable discussion.

HOW DO I FIND A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

Making disciples in a Discipleship Group flows out of the Life Groups. Life Groups are a great “fishing pond” for Discipleship Groups. As people form friendships and bonds in Life Groups, handfuls of them will decide to take the next step and begin a discipleship journey together in a Discipleship Group. If you would like to be in a Discipleship Group, talk to your Life Group leader, or fill out the “Share Interest in Joining a Life Group” form.

HOW DO I LEAD A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

The only absolute requirement for leading a Discipleship Group is that you be intentionally pursuing Christ. You do not need to be a master teacher or have all of the answers; you do not need to be able to say, “Listen to me.” If you can say, “Follow me; I’m pursuing Christ,” you have the tools you need to lead a Discipleship Group. As a Discipleship Group leader, you set the tone for the group’s atmosphere. You are not lecturing students; you are cultivating an intimate, accountable relationship with a few close friends. Joel Rosenberg and T.E. Koshy wrote in their book *The Invested Life* that the discipleship relationship is “more personal, more practical, and more powerful. A teacher shares information, while a discipler aims for the heart; a teacher measures knowledge, while a discipler measures faith; a teacher is an authority, while a discipler is a servant; and a teacher says, ‘Listen to me,’ while a discipler says, ‘Follow me.’”

HOW DO I CHOOSE DISCIPLES?

The first step in establishing a formal disciple-making relationship is choosing disciples. Jesus, our example in selecting disciples, spent time in prayer before selecting men (Luke 6:12-16). The word disciple means learner. Begin by asking God to send you a group of men or women who have a desire to learn and grow.

When people approached Jesus about becoming His disciples, our Lord held a high standard. One man said, “I’ll follow you, but let me go bury my father.” Now, the man’s father had not yet died—the man was reaching for an excuse to postpone the kind of commitment that Jesus expected of him. Jesus responded with something that the man would have understood to mean, “You can’t do that. The kingdom is too important.”

Your Discipleship Group should consist of believers of F.A.I.T.H.: Faithful, Available, Intentional, Teachable, and Hungry. A faithful person is dedicated, trustworthy, and committed. Consider a potential disciple’s faithfulness by observing other areas of his/her spiritual life, such as church attendance, Life Group involvement, or service in the church. Faithfulness is determined by a commitment to spiritual things.

Discern an individual’s availability by his willingness to meet with and invest in others. Does this person carve out time to listen, study, and learn from others? Is he accessible when called upon? Does she have a regular quiet time with God of reading the Word and praying? Availability is measured by a willingness to serve God.

Not everybody who attends a Life Group is teachable. A teachable person has a desire to learn and apply what is taught. One who is teachable is open to correction. Recognize teachability by observing one’s response to God’s Word. For example, after hearing a sermon on prayer, do they begin to pray more regularly? Or after a lesson about the dangers of the tongue, does the person implement changes in their speech? A teachable person not only listens to what is taught, but also applies it to his or her life.

After discerning that an individual is faithful, available, intentional, teachable and hungry, prayerfully approach him or her and ask, “Would you be interested in studying the Bible, memorizing Scripture, and praying together?” Many people are open to that. All you have to do is ask. We don’t recommend that you say, “Would you like for me to disciple you?” as this question may come across in a derogatory manner. Keep in mind that men should disciple men, and women should disciple women.

HOW MANY PEOPLE SHOULD BE IN THE GROUP?

Because accountability works well in a smaller setting, the ideal size of a disciple-making group is 3 to 5 – you and 2 to 4 other people. We recommend that you do not have more than 5, and remember that a one-on-one relationship is not as ideal.

WHERE SHOULD WE MEET?

Find a meeting place away from the church. Restaurants, coffee shops, bookstores, diners, and homes are all good options. Meeting outside the church in the community encourages your group members to publicize their faith, teaching them it is okay to read the Bible at a restaurant or pray in public. Be sure to select a place that is convenient to all group members.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE MEET?

Ideally, you should meet once a week for about an hour to an hour and a half. This schedule does not prohibit those you are discipling from calling you throughout the week or coming by for counsel when needed. Opportunities outside of the weekly meeting should be taken to build the relational aspect of your group. Think meals, coffee hangouts, backyard hangouts with your families, etc. It is important to remember that discipleship is about the relationship between you and your group members, not about checking a requirement box. Disciple-making is a way of life, not a program.

IS THERE AN ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENT?

Yes, and it is not negotiable. The first time I meet with a potential group, I explain the disciple-making covenant with them. Since we’re going to spend our lives together for the next twelve to eighteen months, I want to know if they are committed. Some people have said after the initial meeting, “Uh, this isn’t really for me. I’m not interested.” That’s okay. I allow potential disciples to opt out of the group on the front end after understanding the expectations spelled out in the disciple-making covenant. Remember, you are looking for people who want to be disciplined, people who have a desire to grow and learn. An unwillingness to commit reveals that they are not ready to be in a Discipleship Group. It’s the example Jesus set for us.

WHAT DO DISCIPLESHIP GROUP MEETINGS LOOK LIKE?

Begin with prayer. Ask each participant to present one prayer request at the start of each meeting. Assign a person to pray over the requests, and ask the Lord to sharpen each of you through your relationship.

Here are some elements that your weekly meetings can include:

- Open with prayer.
- Have a time of intentional conversation by briefly sharing the highs and lows of the week.
- You can also share celebrations and praises.
- Quote your Scripture memory verses for the week.
- Study the Word of God together. A great way to do this is to share HEAR journals from the week. The goal of studying the Bible is to apply the Word of God. Remember, knowledge without application is useless information.

Here are some good application questions to utilize:

- What are you hearing from God, and what are you doing about it?
- What is God teaching you, and how is it affecting your life?
- Is there a promise to claim?
- Is there an action or attitude to avoid?
- Is there a principle to apply?

Spend a few moments asking questions and keeping each other accountable. All accountability should be saturated with grace, not legalism. You can’t expect what you don’t inspect. Share prayer requests and close with prayer.

HOW DO I CHALLENGE MY DISCIPLESHIP GROUP TO MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE?

Proverbs 25:11 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.” How many times has a Scripture come to mind when you needed just the right words in a situation? Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would bring to remembrance all that He said (John 14:26). Those passages of Scripture we have memorized will be brought to our memory at the right moment – but we must learn them.

Group members will memorize Scripture if you hold them accountable through reciting verses to one another at every meeting.

SHOULD I DISCIPLE UNBELIEVERS?

The preferred method is a gathering of born-again believers seeking to grow in their faith. How can you determine if someone is saved or not? We recommend beginning every group by asking each person to share their testimony with the others. Next, ask them to explain the gospel. A great resource for anyone struggling with belief in Christ is Greg Gilbert’s book, *What is the Gospel?*

WHEN SHOULD I ASK SOMEONE TO LEAVE THE DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

These are some reasons for asking someone to leave the group: they don’t possess a teachable spirit, they are not faithful in attending meetings, they are not completing assigned work and putting in the kind of effort you require, they are living a lifestyle of blatant and unrepentant sin, etc.

Teachability is an indispensable quality for growth. One situation where someone may be asked to leave is if he or she monopolizes the group discussion week after week. It will be obvious they want to demonstrate their superior knowledge of The Word rather than learn from interacting with others.

Additionally, laziness will breed complacency in the group. Missing meetings, refusing to memorize Scripture, failing to log HEAR journal entries, or sitting idly by during discussion times lowers the morale of the others in the group. This type of behavior must be addressed immediately. Meet with this individual privately to inquire about his or her attitude and actions. Remind him or her of the commitment made at the outset of the discipleship relationship.

Like Jesus’ relationship with His disciples, ours is a serious relationship, as well: a relationship built upon a mutual commitment to Christ and each other. Tragically, some will not follow through with that commitment, forcing you to confront them about their unfaithfulness.

WHAT IF I DON’T KNOW THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION?

There is no shame in not knowing all of the answers to every question. Simply confess that you may not have all the answers, but you will find them. Then do so before the next meeting. Ask your pastor or another spiritual leader to help you with the answer. Never give the impression that you have all the answers.

It is less important to know answers than it is to know how to seek them. It is better to say, “I am not the smartest man/woman in the world because I know all the answers, but because I know where to find the answers.” You may not have total recall when it comes to biblical history, theology, and doctrine, but with time you can locate them!

WHEN DO I SEND OUT DISCIPLES TO MAKE DISCIPLES?

Always begin with the end in mind. Your group should meet for 12 months, and they should expect that final date from the very beginning. Some groups develop a closer bond, which results in accelerated growth; others take longer. We do not recommend meeting for longer than 18 months. Some group members will desire to leave the group and begin their own groups. Others, however, will want to remain in the comfort zone of the existing group. Some will not want to start another Discipleship Group because of the sweet fellowship and bonds formed within the current group. Remember, the goal is for the men and the women of the group to replicate their lives into someone else.