

Discipleship Group Handbook

Discipleship Groups create a rich, relational environment that promotes rapid and intentional growth toward spiritual maturity. The groups are composed of 3-5 men or women who meet weekly for six to eighteen months to become mutually accountable to develop spiritual disciplines, engage on mission together, and multiply the group to make disciples who make disciples.

...so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Colossians 1:28



DISCIPLESHIP GROUP COVENANT

Discipleship Groups focus on growing to full maturity in Christ by developing spiritual disciplines, engaging in God's mission, and multiplying the group to make disciples who make disciples.

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

2 Timothy 2:2

“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

Desiring to fully experience all that God desires for my life and all that He intends for me to be...

- I commit to the Lord and to fellow group members that I will intentionally pursue spiritual growth with the expectation and anticipation that God will do a great work in my life.
- I will complete assignments and engage in group discussion to grow in knowledge and obedience to Christ.
- I will strongly prioritize meeting weekly with my group at a mutually-agreed time.
- I will encourage and pray for other members of the group.
- I will occasionally lead the discussion in the group with the help of my leader.
- I will seek to be spiritually encouraging to other members of the group.
- I will be honest, transparent, and truthful with members of the group and will maintain confidentiality of vulnerable items shared in the group.
- I will prayerfully consider leading a group once I grow in my maturity and readiness.

Signed:

Name

Date

Discipleship Group Overview

1. Groups meet weekly, for 60-90 minutes, at a time that fits everyone's schedule.
2. A high priority commitment to the meetings is critical to its success.
3. Trust and transparency develop over time.
4. The leader is an equal member of the group regarding accountability and growth.
5. The meetings focus on helping equip people to walk the faith, not just teaching.
6. Meetings include review and encouraging accountability about the things Jesus commands.
7. A key to the meeting is each member sharing what they are reading in God's word and how they are obeying.
8. You don't have to be perfect to be a part.
9. Members will leave the group with specific self-challenges for the coming week.
10. Groups may meet together for six to 18 months.
11. Typically, once the group is complete, they will shift to a monthly meeting as each person leads a group that they have enlisted.
12. In some, rare instances, an individual may repeat a second group before leading.

End Goals for Each Disciple

Participation in a Discipleship Groups is expected to last from six to eighteen months, depending on progress toward maturity, readiness to lead a group, and meeting the mileposts outlined below.

1. Consistent daily time in Bible study, Scripture memory, and prayer.
2. Consistent participation in worship, church membership, small group, and service to the local church.
3. Consistent financial generosity with understanding and movement toward the Biblical tithe, if not there already.
4. Character development in the fruit of the Spirit.
5. Positive relationships in marriage/dating, family, work, and neighborhood.
6. A lifestyle of consistently engaging in spiritual conversations and training in sharing Christ.
7. Beginning to disciple someone else.

Discipleship Group Meeting Outline -- The Five Looks

The length of the meeting should be 60-90 minutes. More “Focus Time” (under Bible) is encouraged for groups with new or nominal believers to make sure they know the basics of the faith and spiritual life. Remember, the goal is to *teach them to obey* (Matthew 28:18-20), not just to *teach them*.



Fellowship - Look Around (10 minutes)

We are “looking around” to our group. Use this time to catch up with one another and what’s happening in each other’s lives.

Accountability - Look Back (5-15 minutes)

We’ll offer encouraging accountability for assignments from last week.

- A. Scripture Memory – Scripture is chosen either by leader or from individual reading.
- B. Challenges from Last Week – Check progress and encourage.

Prayer - Look Up (10-15 minutes)

We’ll take prayer requests here and very briefly pray for one another. We’ll pray more for each other throughout the week, but desire to maximize our time together.

Bible - Look Down (10-40 minutes)

“Looking down” represents a posture of looking down as we read God’s Word. We’ll share with one another what God is speaking to us.

- A. Reflection – What we are learning and obeying from God’s Word. (5-10 minutes)
Encourage group members to bring one key item from their time in God’s Word that week.
- B. Focus Time – Focus on the Bible, spiritual beliefs, and practices. (5-20 minutes)
The leader determines the amount of focus time based on the maturity level of the group.

Challenge – Look Ahead (2-5 minutes)

“Looking Ahead” involves planning for intentional spiritual growth. We’ll leave with 1-3 specific challenges that will help us grow spiritually. They should be very intentional and engaging.

- A. Self-established Challenges. It is great when these come from our own time in the Word. This teaches the link between God’s commands and our obedience. Three major sections are:
 - 1. **Personal** – What are your personal spiritual goals for the coming week?
 - 2. **Relational** – What relationships do you need to focus on this week?
 - 3. **Missional** – How can you positively influence someone’s life this week? Who?
 - a. Evangelistic – Where and with whom are you most likely to start a spiritual conversation?
 - b. Encouraging – How can you encourage believers around you? Share your growth.
- B. Leader-established Challenges.
 - 1. Spiritual Growth Mileposts
 - 2. Discerned needs
 - 3. Bible study

Close the meeting by asking someone to pray.

My Discipleship Plan

This document can be reviewed frequently to evaluate needed areas of growth.

Evaluation – Score 1-10 with 10 being great. **Obstacles** – What keeps you from mastering this discipline.

Goals – What is your next step to improving in this discipline.

Growth Item	Description	Evaluation	Obstacles	Goals
1. Worship	Worshiping God individually and in a church worship gathering.			
2. Scripture	Spending time each day in the word and on a systematic reading plan.			
3. Prayer	Spending time in strategic prayer (a list) and throughout the day over various needs.			
4. Obedience	Are you growing in Christ and putting His commands into practice?			
5. Group	Part of a small group or Sunday school class for community, Bible study, and encouragement.			
6. Memory	Strategically memorizing scripture for the benefit of self and for sharing Christ and encouraging others.			
7. Accountability	Part of a same gender group of 2-5 people who can be honest with one another.			
8. Serving	Using your spiritual gifts and abilities to serve Christ by serving others through the church.			
9. Generosity	Consistent giving to and through the church and in other ways.			
10. Sharing	Frequently starting spiritual conversations with the hope of developing redemptive relationships and leading others to Christ.			
11. Missions	Involved in praying, giving, and going to other parts of our nation and the world.			
12. Discipling	Intentionally helping others grow in their relationship with Christ so that they can lead others.			
13. Other	Use this space to indicate another desired growth area.			

LEADER SECTION

Assumptions, Principles, & Thoughts



1. Ultimately, if we read the Bible and do what Jesus did, a handbook of this type would not be necessary.
2. Most of us who are mature believers in the church today were not disciplined. We ultimately found maturity, but it was not along the path of Jesus' Plan A.
3. Compiled in this handbook is a mixture of Biblical truth and best practices gleaned from trial and error disciple-making. Biblical truth should prevail over pragmatic approaches. (See note.)
4. What we pass on to others is vital in disciple-making. We must pass on full-maturity, which includes making disciples of others, not just of ourselves.
5. You had one job. That's what I see Jesus telling us. We've all seen pictures and videos of major mistakes when people didn't accomplish their "one job". Jesus' last words gave us our "one job" of making disciples.
6. We make disciples by "teaching people to obey", not just "teaching people". Discipleship is personal and relational and intentional. It may resemble life coaching in many ways.
7. Jesus modeled different size groups. There were the multitudes, the 70, the 12, and the three—Peter, James, and John. The approaches in this handbook will draw from all of those while focusing on the type relationship that Jesus had with His three closest disciples.
8. Although transparency is not the ultimate goal, it is an important tool along the way. Transparency happens best in small, same-gender groups.

Pragmatic Approaches

Doing what works is what got the church into trouble over the decades. In the North American church, we settled for culturally pragmatic and programmatic approaches that eventually stopped working. At that point the church had wandered too far away from disciple-making to know how to get back on track. This problem may have actually been centuries in the making. The proposed remedy is a "new" plan of studying closely what Jesus did and seeking to model that plan, along with reliance on God to do His part in changing hearts and lives.

Why not just do 1 on 1 discipleship?

1. One on one falls into a leader-student mindset. It hurts reproduction.
2. The conversation becomes a ping-pong game.
3. The sessions can become counseling vs. Iron on Iron.
4. Jesus did groups—Peter, James, and John.
5. With more than one, accountability resides in the group, not just from the leader.
6. Multiplication is better than addition.
7. Three to five people is the maximum size possible to pass on quality, transparency, and accountability, while being an optimal size for an effective disciple-making environment.

Why not just do this with my Small Group or Sunday School Class?

1. Small Groups and Sunday School classes have their place, and it's an important place to teach God's word, develop spiritually encouraging relationships, and minister together. But it is not the most effective environment for creating spiritual growth.
2. Discipleship Groups are closed group, not an open group like Small Groups should be. The high accountability of a Discipleship Group is not practical for an open group like Small Group or Sunday School. Also, a guest in an open group can get blind-sided in a Discipleship Group.
3. Everyone who is in a Discipleship Group must be all-in. See the Covenant.
4. Most Small Groups are couple or co-ed groups. Men are more likely to be honest and transparent with men who share their same struggles; likewise, with women.

Understanding Input & Output Goals

Be aware of input goals and output goals. For example, if the goal is to lose 20 pounds, that is an output goal. The input goals might be to exercise daily and cut portions in half. Actions (input goals) have consequences (output goals).

Discipleship input goals are Bible study, Prayer, Scripture memory. Output goals are faithfulness to Christ, healthy relationships, displaying the fruit of the spirit, etc.

Possible Curriculum

1. For relative mature believers, have the group be on a Bible reading plan and share what they learn and how they are obeying. This group needs to see the process so they can replicate it. They also may need to learn and practice starting spiritual conversations, sharing the gospel, and discipling others. We're assuming that they have healthy habits of Bible study, prayer, Scripture memory, etc. Everyone has gaps. You may find that some of your assumptions of someone's spiritual maturity were over-rated.
2. For new believers, include a longer teaching time and possible homework. An excellent series of 13-week basic discipleship courses is called New Life in Christ. You can download this free resource at NewLifeDiscipleship.com/products/English. The leader can distribute weekly lessons on a single sheet of paper, front and back, or simply share the link.
3. For a middle group in maturity, consider Discipleship Essentials by Greg Ogden. It is a 25-session resource that can take up to a year to complete.
4. **DON'T LET THE CURRICULUM LEAD THE GROUP.** You are to lead the group and make disciples. Don't let the group become overly focused on the curriculum. It is a tool. Finishing a resource doesn't make you a disciple.
5. Each level of group described above should be on a Bible reading plan. People can follow their individual plan, but it is also helpful to be on a plan together so that you hear what others are getting from it. To stay on track, we recommend selecting a plan together at BiblePlan.org. It emails you each day what you are supposed to read. Many plans are available. In some ways, it's good to think long term and let people choose a reading plan like they should do for the rest of their lives.

Suggestions for Week 1

1. Do run the regular meeting week 1, but since there is nothing to be accountable for, inject some additional components into the first meeting.
2. Review the discipleship plan and discuss areas of desired growth.
3. Here are some good questions to help you get to know one another.
 - a. What are your hobbies?
 - b. Tell us about your family.
 - c. Tell about how you came to Christ or why you are interested in a spiritual growth group.
 - d. Who has had the most spiritual impact on your life?
 - e. How do you think growing in Christ will be helpful to you?

Top 13 Leader Mistakes

The leader sets the culture of the group and is an indispensable part of its success.

1. Using the group as a teaching time. (See next section.)
2. Not being a mature and still-growing disciple himself.
2. Not handling group dynamics well. Mainly, this refers to maintaining some balance of how much everyone participates. It involves bringing the quiet person out somewhat and helping the verbal person understand how to make a point and quit talking.
3. Not moving through the meeting in a timely manner.
4. Not leaning into accountability strongly.
5. Not being specific in challenges. They must be achievable, reasonable, and measurable.
6. Not creating the expectation to multiply.
7. Not being involved relationally throughout the week.
8. Not praying for one another.
9. Not setting a pathway or expectations for maturity.
10. Not focusing on initiating gospel conversations, one of two weak links in discipleship. The other is multiplication.
11. Not releasing the group members.
12. Not evaluating progress.
13. No mission or ministry experiences together.



How a Leader Can Kill the Discipleship Process by Talking Too Much

1. Over-talking can be a real challenge for pastors who are so accustomed to talking.
2. People learn by processing information in order to speak it. Don't disrupt that process.
3. Please don't teach other than a brief, specified teaching time. Talking too much and sharing profound knowledge also makes the group members feel like they can't replicate what you do in the group.

Disciple-making in God's Word

Let's set the tone with disciple-making scripture.

Matthew 28:18-20	make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to obey
Colossians 1:18	present them fully mature in Christ
Philippians 4:9	keep putting into practice all you received
John 14:12	anyone who believes will do the same work I have done
2 Timothy 2:2	entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also
1 Cor 11:1	imitate me as I imitate Christ
Colossians 2:6	you must continue to follow Him
Eph 4:13	mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ
Ephesians 4:15	we must grow up in every way
Hebrews 6:1	move beyond elementary principles
1 Peter 2:2-3	crave pure spiritual milk so that you might grow up in your salvation
Col 1:10	pleasing, bearing fruit, growing
Acts 20:20	I never shrank back from telling you everything you needed to hear
Luke 6:46	why do you keep calling me Lord, when you don't do what I say?

Essential Elements of a Discipleship Group

For a successful discipleship group, please evaluate these critical components.

1. Leadership
2. Modeling
3. Intentionality
4. Relationship
5. Challenge
6. Accountability
7. Pathway
8. Equipping
9. God's Word
10. Prayer
11. Multiplication
12. Commitment
13. Hunger
14. Time
15. Trust
16. Vulnerability
17. Boldness

Discipleship Essentials For the Group

1. Effective Leadership
2. Intentional Destination
3. Modeling & Example
4. Challenge & Accountability
5. Relationships
6. God's Word & Prayer
7. Multiplication
8. Hunger, Desire, Willingness

Growth Stages

Spiritual Stage	Unbeliever	Infant	Immature	Emerging	Mature Believer
Characterized By	Unbelief	Excitement, Ignorance	Self-Centeredness Dissatisfaction	Outward-Focus	Intentionality
Statements/ Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no God • The Bible is full of myths • Religion is for the weak • There are many ways to God • I don't believe in hell • I've been good, so I'm okay with God • There are no absolutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't have to go to church to be a Christian • I don't know how to read the Bible • Why should I give my time and money? • It's just me and Jesus • Why do I still have problems in my life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't think this church is meeting my needs • I like things just like they are • I didn't like the music, so I can't worship • Why don't we have _____ Ministry? • No one calls me to check on me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can I engage in serving? • I would like to share what God is teaching me • I will call ___ to check on them • I am praying for people to come to Christ • I am thankful for Godly leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe God is leading me to invest in others • I will pray for opportunity to share the gospel this week • I want to focus on discipleship with my children • I will be committed to mentoring the next generation
Action Needed	Evangelize: Hear the Gospel	Equip: Spiritual Disciplines	Equip: Grow Spiritually	Engage: Seek To Serve	Engage: Disciple Others

Source: Real Life Discipleship & Calera Baptist Church

Possible D-Group Annual Study Outline

Every other month on the fourth and fifth weeks you meet, you can do a make-up or a topic of special interest to the leader or the group. See “Other Schedule Notes” below as well.

September

Following Christ
Assurance of Salvation
Obedience & Baptism
Sharing God’s Story

October

Sharing Your Story
Relational Network
Community

November

Conflict
Bible Study
Prayer
Scripture Memory

December

Sin & Grace
Faith & Trust
Worship

January

Service & Gifts
Being & Making Disciples
Financial Obedience
The Trinity

February

Filled with the Holy Spirit
Fruit of the Holy Spirit
Spiritual Warfare

March

Making Disciples (Repeat)
Making Disciples Level 2
Lord’s Supper & Baptism
Handling Failure

April

Sharing God’s Story (Repeat)
Sharing Your Story (Repeat)
Relational Network (Repeat)
The Bible

May

Finding God’s Will
End Times
Tongue
Obedience (Repeat)

June

Parenting
Marriage
The Bible is Trustworthy

July

Case for Christ
Other Religions
Apologetics
4 _____

Aug

How to Study the Bible I
How to Study the Bible II

Other Schedule Notes

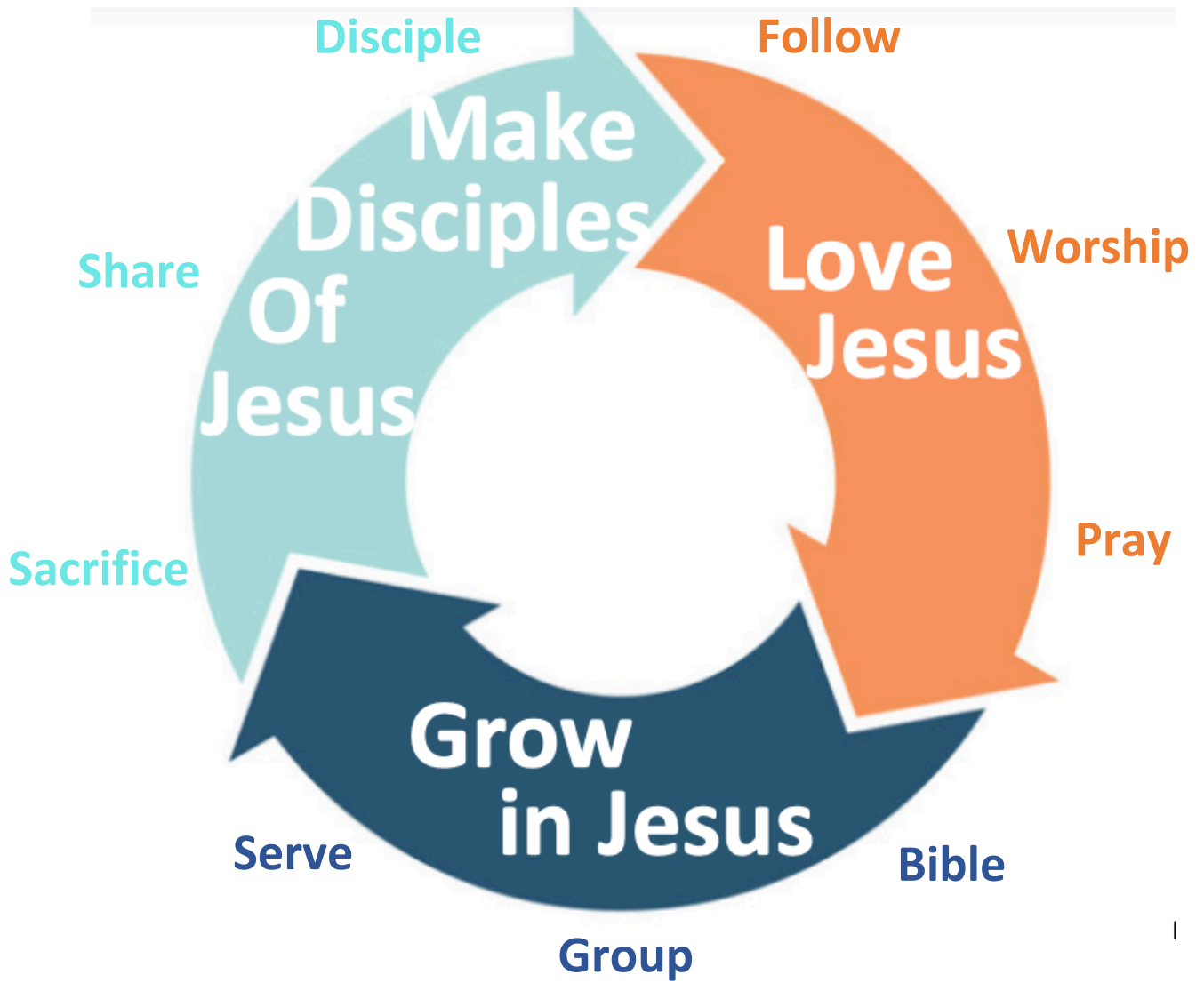
First Meeting of Month – Share a Gospel presentation as part of the session and take turns presenting.

Group Fellowship – Plan time with group members for relational time.

Group Family Fellowship – Plan time with families outside of group.

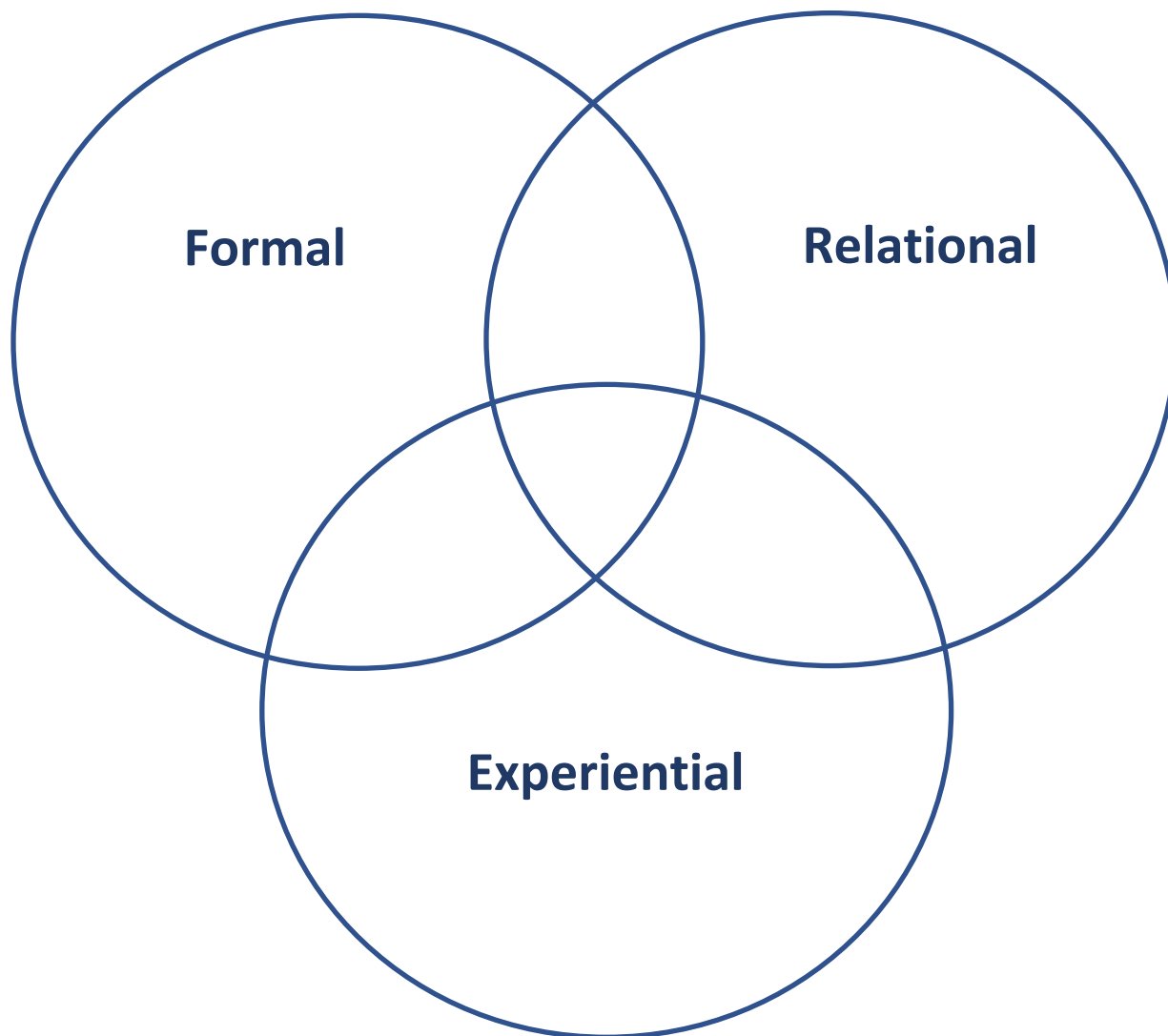
Missional Projects – Plan at least two missional projects during the life of the group.

Our Purpose and Steps



The Context of Learning

Alan Briggs



Additional Suggested Reading

1. Real Life Discipleship, by Jim Putman
Real Life Ministries, Post Falls, Idaho
2. Bold Moves, by Craig Etheredge
Senior Pastor, Dallas Texas
3. Growing Up, by Robby Gallaty
Senior Pastor, Long Hollow Baptist Church
4. The Ways of the Alongsider, by Bill Mowry
The Navigators
5. The Master Plan of Evangelism, by Robert Coleman
6. Discipleship Essentials, by Greg Ogden
7. Four Chair Discipling, by Dan Spader
Sonrise Ministries

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THE END

**EVERYTHING BELOW THIS IN IN THE WORKS
OR A SEPARATE VERSION OF THE ABOVE**

Lifetime Disciple-making Commitment

Knowing that God calls us to make disciples...

1. I commit to lifetime discipleship.

Reproduce

Parent

Guide

Faithful in area.

Extra Content



Discipleship Group Meeting Outline -- The Six Looks

The length of the meeting should be 60-90 minutes. More "Focus Time" (under D) is encouraged for groups with new or nominal believers to make sure they know the basics of faith and the spiritual life. Remember, the goal is to *teach them to obey* (Matthew 28:18-20), not just to *teach them*.

A. Fellowship - Look In (10 minutes)

We are "looking in" to our group. Use this time to catch up with one another and what's happening in each other's lives.

B. Prayer - Look Up (10-15 minutes)

We'll take prayer requests here and very briefly pray for one another. We'll pray more for each other throughout the week, but desire to maximize our time together.

C. Accountability - Look Back (5-15 minutes)

We'll offer encouraging accountability for assignments from last week.

A. Scripture Memory – Scripture is chosen either by leader or from individual reading.

B. Challenges from Last Week – Check progress and encourage.

D. Bible - Look Down (10-40 minutes)

"Looking down" represents a posture of looking down as we read God's Word. We'll share with one another what God is speaking to us.

A. Reflection – What we are learning and obeying from God's Word. (5-10 minutes)

B. Focus Time – Focus on the Bible, spiritual beliefs, and practices. (5-20 minutes)

The leader determines the amount of time spent here based on the maturity level of the group.

E. Challenge – Look Ahead (2-5 minutes)

"Looking Ahead" involves planning for intentional spiritual growth. We'll leave with 1-3 specific challenges that will help us grow spiritually.

Possibilities: 1. A challenge from the leader using Spiritual Growth Mileposts.

2. A personally-chosen challenge from individual Bible study.

3. Choose one in each category: Personal, Relational, Missional. (PRIME)

F. Influence – Look Out (2-5 minutes)

"Looking Out" involves learning to verbalize what we are learning and to share our faith. We'll leave with a challenge to verbalize our faith to others.

A. Insider - Share with another believer what you are learning or how you are growing. Discuss what you will share and with who you will share it.

B. Outsider - Initiate spiritual conversation with someone outside the faith (to your knowledge).

G. Dismiss

What New Believers Need to Know

Discipleship Essentials, Greg Ogden

1. Making Disciples
2. Being a Disciple
3. Quiet Time
4. Bible Study
5. Prayer
6. Worship
7. The Three-Person God
8. Made in God's Image
9. Sin
10. Grace
11. Redemption
12. Justification
13. Adoption
14. Filled with the Holy Spirit
15. Fruit of the Holy Spirit
16. Trust
17. Love
18. Justice
19. Witness
20. The Church
21. Ministry Gifts
22. Spiritual Warfare
23. Walking in Obedience
24. Sharing the Wealth
25. Money

Making Disciples of All Nations, David Platt

1. Assurance of Salvation
2. Having a Quiet Time
3. Victory Over Sin
4. God the Father
5. God the Son
6. God the Holy Spirit
7. The Church
8. The Sacraments: Lord's Supper and Baptism
9. The Bible
10. Hearing God's Word
11. Studying the Bible
12. Memorizing the Bible
13. Prayer
14. Sharing Your Testimony
15. The Lordship of Christ
16. Faith
17. Love and Service
18. The Will of God
19. Worship
20. Know Your Enemy – Satan
21. Overcoming Sin
22. The Second Coming
23. Practical Instructions (Use of Tongue, Time, Tithes, Thanks)
24. Sharing the Gospel
25. Reproducing Your Faith

