



“Contrary to Western evangelicalism's obsession with the individual, discipleship is and always was a group project.”

-Steve Murrell, *Wikichurch*

Reminder of why we do this – discipleship & its associated spiritual change happen best in groups, in circles not in rows

As small groups, we are the primary discipleship vehicle of Grace Community Church; **we are where people go to experience and practice Knowing Christ and Making Him Known**

Training Overview

Main Takeaway:

- 1. Everyone in a Life Group at Grace should have a ready answer for the question:
“What aspect of your personal spiritual growth are you currently working on?”
- 2. Every Growth Group leader at Grace should have a plan to support that growth.

There is no expectation of perfection on either end, but this is what we are working toward.

The first element of these training materials is for the first part of that, the next three are for the latter.

These training materials are designed to guide you through an interactive process that will deepen your understanding of key leadership skills and equip you to use them effectively in your group. Please make sure you engage the reflection questions as you progress through these materials. Those are designed to help you process what you are learning and retain it for future use in your leadership journey.

What you will find in these materials:

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If you ask a group of people to answer this question, you may very well have as many different answers as there are people in the group!

Such discussions offer the opportunity for personal reflection:

- How do you approach situations in which you think differently than other people?
- How open are you to seeing another person's viewpoint? To changing your mind as a result?
- How persuasive are you in getting others to see things from your viewpoint? To change their minds?

As leaders, we are tasked with shepherding the people in our groups, helping them to identify and pursue areas in which they are growing in Christlikeness. This requires both the capacity to be effective in changing people's minds and openness to having your mind changed. We are tasked both with teaching and remaining teachable.

On that note – taking on a leadership role can seem from the outside like the final step in a journey of growth. We tend to think, “I learned all of these things, and now that I have experience under my belt, I'm done growing and I am ready to pass that on to others.” But those of you who have led for a while know that the truth is actually the very opposite!

Being a leader in a ministry will usually grow you more than it grows the people you are leading. As you progress through these training materials, keep this tucked in the back of your mind. Consider which of the topics addressed are your own strengths, and which are areas in which you need to grow. Treat this with open curiosity, not judgment or shame. It is a chance for honest evaluation. **You can't help other people grow further than you yourself have grown, and thus as leaders we need these chances to check in and evaluate what we need to attend to in our own spiritual growth.** This is between you and God, an honest taking stock of where you are at as a leader.

Helping our Members Identify What to Work On

Six Domains of Well-Rounded Faith¹

Abide in Christ: Regular quiet times; seeking Christ's guidance; relationship with God motivated by love not fear; experiencing joy more than anxiety; trusting Jesus in times of trouble; retaining confidence in God's love during distress; evidence of life change resulting from worship

Live in the Word: Regular Bible study; comparing cultural ideas to biblical standards; using a biblical worldview to interpret life; responsiveness when Scripture reveals need for personal growth; confidence in the truth of Scripture; replacing improper thoughts with God's truth

Pray in Faith: Prayers focus on God's will more than personal needs; trust in God's timing; prayers of thanksgiving, praise, confession, and requests; intentionally seeking improvement in prayer life; awareness of dependence on God; regular participation in group prayer

Fellowship with Believers: Seeking to live in harmony with faith family; seeking and extending forgiveness; placing interests of others above own; encouraging others; patience and openness to feedback; gentle and kind in interactions; engage in accountability for spiritual growth

Witness to the World: Sharing faith with and regularly praying for nonbelievers; supporting mission efforts; supporting those who are new in faith; prepared to share testimony at any time; actions prove commitment to the Great Commission; making personal faith known to others

Minister to Others: Understand and use personal spiritual gifts; serving others without expecting something in return; serving and contributing sacrificially; going out of your way to show love to others; expecting God to regularly use you in Kingdom work; regularly serving in a church ministry

¹ Reference: Lifeway Spiritual Growth Assessment, https://blog.lifeway.com/growingdisciples/files/2013/08/Spiritual_Growth_Assessment.pdf; this document is also available on the Discipleship Group Leader webpage – www.gracecomm.org/LGL

Meet Clyde²

Clyde is a 51-year-old man who grew up in a Christian home. In fact, his father was a Baptist pastor! Clyde was baptized at the age of 6, attended youth group faithfully throughout his teenage years, and led a small Bible study group of his own during college. Clyde is currently an active participant in a men's study at church and regularly serves as a teacher on the Children's Ministry team. He currently works as a manager at a communications company. Clyde is open about how he doesn't find it particularly fulfilling, but is grateful that he has a reliable paycheck. You have heard him joke several times about how he just has to coast through another 14 years and then he can retire and "live a life of leisure," as he puts it.



Clyde regularly attends a church Life Group alongside his wife, Jeanine. They have been married for 27 years and have two adult sons. Their youngest moved out of state about six months ago, and though their oldest lives nearby he is busy with his own young family. Jeanine has shared with the group that she is struggling with empty nesting and feels aimless now that her childrearing years are behind her. Clyde has shared very little about how he feels about the recent transitions in his family, except to say that he wants to help support Jeanine. He told the group that he has been encouraging her to find a hobby in which to invest. In a private conversation with you, Jeanine shared that she wishes Clyde would spend more quality time with her. She complained that his avid interest in sports keeps him frequently away attending games and other events, and when he is home he keeps the TV on and tuned to a sports channel more often than not. When you encouraged her to talk to Clyde, she said she has tried and he did not seem to take her concerns seriously.

In a church group setting, Clyde is often first to jump in with an answer to a question posed to the group. The other members look up to him and respect his high level of biblical knowledge. He also describes himself as a prayer warrior and faithfully writes down prayer requests as they are shared in the group. You have noticed that he does not often share his own requests, however. Most of Clyde's social connections are people he met through church, and he prefers to seek Christian-owned businesses whenever possible so that he can financially support other believers.

² Note: Clyde is not a real person. His story was developed as a training vignette based on common dynamics we see in our groups at Grace. The picture is a stock image retrieved from searching "middle aged man" on an image database site.

Reflection Questions

Which of the six domains (or aspects of one) represent strengths for Clyde?

Which might be areas in which he has room to grow?

Which area of potential growth might be most important for Clyde to focus on currently?

You will refer back to the specific growth edge you identified as you progress through the remainder of these training materials and think about how you as a group leader could help Clyde.

Equipping Ourselves to Help Our Members Work On It

Five Stages of the Change Process

Transtheoretical Model of Change³ – Developed by Prochaska and DiClemente, this originated as a model to help with addiction and health-related behaviors (e.g., starting a diet), but has since been widely applied to any process of personal improvement and change, including spiritual growth.

1. Precontemplation – the need for change is not recognized, and the person may deny it if others point it out or assert powerlessness to do anything about the needed change. Example: The Pharisees in the New Testament (Luke 18:9-14)
2. Contemplation – there is now recognition that there are consequences if change doesn't occur, but the person's commitment to change is still lacking. Example: the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-31)
3. Preparation – the person is actively making a plan to establish change. Example: Peter, who proclaims Jesus, but is still confused by what all that means (Matthew 16:13-28)
4. Action – the person is carrying out the steps of the plan made at previous stage. Example: Paul carrying out missionary missions (Acts 14:1-7)
5. Maintenance – the person is monitoring progress, evaluating and addressing changes to their plan as needed to avoid falling back into the old pattern. Example: the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1-21)

³ Reference: Prochaska, J.O., DiClemente, C.C., & Norcross, J.C. (1992). In search of how people change: Applications to addictive behaviors. *American Psychologist*, 47, 1102-1114. PMID: 1329589.

“Reverse” Brainstorm: Undermining Clyde

Think about each stage of change. What could you do in your group that would be ***the least helpful*** to Clyde at each stage? Be as creative as you like!

Precontemplation

Contemplation

Preparation

Action

Maintenance

Good Leadership at Each Stage of Change

Now let's shift attention to what would be helpful. Below are ideas for what good group leadership looks like at each stage of change. Add your own thoughts and ideas to the table, as well.

Precontemplation	Contemplation	Preparation	Action	Maintenance
• Normalize need for change! Every single Christian is in a growth process that will not end until we go home to Jesus or He returns here to us • Use appropriate self-disclosure to model willingness to embrace the challenge of growth and change • Provide feedback about what you notice in each other's lives • Emphasize that Scripture commands us to be continuously growing in Christlikeness • Ask discussion questions that center on application (e.g., "How will we each be different as a result of what we have learned?" "What are you not doing currently that this passage indicates you should be doing?")	• Main goal = raise person's level of concern about the problem to the point that they are ready to do something about it • Support identified areas for potential change with scriptural encouragement. What evidence is there from the Bible for the pros/cons of change? • Ask questions to encourage reflection (e.g., "How would you know if this did become a problem?" "Is there anyone else in your life who wishes this aspect of your behavior would change?" etc.) • Avoid being judgmental or overly pushy – that can tip a person into defensiveness instead of willingness to consider a change • Challenge problematic beliefs as needed	• Lots of energy needs to be devoted to this stage – don't shortchange it! • Assist in identifying and setting small, achievable goals; little steps over time add up to big distance covered! • Identify and employ social support for the person • Encourage, encourage, encourage! • Identify potential barriers to change and strategize what to do when they are encountered	• Celebrate successes and normalize failures as part of the process • Identify alternative coping strategies or healthier substitute behaviors as needed • Include accountability check ins into the group routine • Cheerlead and support	• Continue regular check ins • Tracking and celebrating progress – "Hey, look how far you have come!" • "Practice the new pattern until it is the true pattern" – eventually the new way of doing things will become the new normal, and it will be like second nature • Temptations to go back to old behavior patterns may come up, and having a plan for how to address them can help • Recognize spiritual growth isn't done – can start planting seeds for the next step or a new area to work on

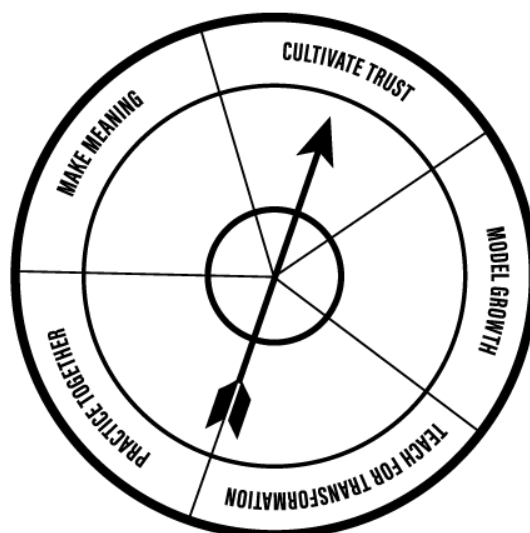
Leader's Prayers at Each Stage of Change

Below are ideas for how you as a leader could pray for your members at each stage of change. Add your own thoughts and ideas to the table, as well.

Precontemplation	Contemplation	Preparation	Action	Maintenance
Ask the Holy Spirit to move their hearts toward willingness to change	Ask the Holy Spirit to open their eyes to the need for change and soften their hearts to be willing to accept it Avoid praying against things that will bring about Christlikeness (e.g., asking God to take away a struggle that He might actually be using to open the person's eyes)	Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen their resolve and remind them of the truth of who they are in Christ	Ask the Holy Spirit to stand between them and anything that might tear down their progress	Ask the Holy Spirit to continue to strengthen resolve for change and to begin planting seeds for next step of growth

Practical Support for Spiritual Growth⁴

The Fuller Youth Institute developed a Five Point compass for nurturing faith through character development. Though the research and application of this has predominantly been applied to working with youth, I believe the practices and strategies provided by this model are applicable to groups of all ages.



Cultivate Trust	Model Growth	Teach for Transformation	Practice Together	Make Meaning
• Create a relational environment characterized by safety and investment in one another as people; • Trust is absolutely foundational for transformational relationships • accomplished through time and meaningful connections • prioritize listening and letting people know they are valued exactly as they are now	• Admitting our own shortcomings and areas we are working on normalizes and give permission for others to do so, as well • Let your group see you live out your faith • Be willing to admit mistakes in group leadership and demonstrate willingness to learn from them • Be comfortable with the tension of not knowing everything and not doing everything perfectly	• Don't just teach <i>about</i> something, but incorporate stories, personal reflection, and experiential learning • Example: Scripture memorization on a topic related to the relevant issue (let the Bible do the work for you)	• Go out and live your faith together! • Serve in a community organization, pray out loud for one another, etc. • Practice what you preach	• Meaning and purpose give an anchor to behavior • All behavior is purposeful, so we need to have the right purpose • Be willing to deal with deep issues like identity and belonging • Emphasize Scripture application and personal reflection

⁴ Reference: Accessed September 29, 2026 from <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/guide-to-cultivating-faith-beyond-youth-group>

Brainstorm: Helping Clyde

What practical strategies would help Clyde with regard to each compass point? Be specific about what you could say and/or do in the group setting.

Cultivate Trust

Model Growth

Teach for Transformation

Practice Together

Make Meaning

Barriers to Growth

The Bible tells us clearly what we are supposed to be cultivating when it comes to spiritual growth, but it additionally acknowledges that we fall short of the intended goal.

Fruit of the Spirit	Hurty Truth
But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23	For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Romans 7:19
We should be expecting such things to characterize us and our group members increasingly as we grow spiritually...	..but instead, so often what we actually experience is ourselves doing what we know we shouldn't, and failing to do what we know we should.

Consider:

If knowledge were all it took to change, we would all be millionaires with six pack abs...

If people know better, why don't they do better?

We do need knowledge – we can't do better if we know better. However, most of the Christians we can expect to have in our groups do know better, so why are they not doing better?

We cannot bring about change in the people in our groups if we emphasize knowledge alone; we have to help them apply the knowledge and dig into what interferes with change.

Very frequently, the hang up is emotional rather than intellectual.

There are certainly other hang ups, but because of the predominance of the emotional hang ups in delaying/interfering with change, we will focus our attention there for the rest of our training

Reflection Questions

What are emotions that human beings generally do not handle well?

What contributes to this difficulty?

There are lots of emotional experiences that are deeply uncomfortable: wounded pride, vulnerability, jealousy, fear, social awkwardness, we could go on and on. I like to call these “squishy” feelings because that’s how they make me feel inside - squirmy and squishy, kind of exposed, like a dog showing its belly; “squishy” is uncomfortable to sit with, and many people are unwilling to do so

“Hurty Truths” are those that hit us in the squishy feelings. The Bible does not shy away from presenting us with hurty truths. We grow when we are willing to receive the truth in them, which means managing the “hurty” part effectively – that is basically what is meant by having emotional maturity.

Pete Scazzero is an author who has spent a lot of time thinking about how emotional maturity influences spiritual growth. He talks about emotional maturity as a growing process, with people moving from being emotional infants to emotional adults (see next page).

Please note: I wouldn’t necessarily have used the labels he uses; people don’t like being labeled as “immature,” “infant,” or “child,” and that can shut down discussion before it even starts. Similarly, I think we are simultaneously in all of the stages, since God grows us at different rates in the various components of maturity. However, since it is his intellectual property I am preserving it here using his terminology and definitions. Though I would have chosen to present it differently, at its core the information has the same value.

Levels of Emotional Maturity⁵

Emotional Infant: I look for other people to take care of me emotionally and spiritually. I often have difficulty in describing and experiencing my feelings in healthy ways and rarely enter the emotional world of others. I am consistently driven by a need for instant gratification, often using others as objects to meet my needs. People sometimes perceive me as inconsiderate and insensitive. I am uncomfortable with silence or being alone. When trials, hardships, or difficulties come, I want to quit God and the Christian life. I sometimes experience God at church and when I am with other Christians, but rarely when I am at work.

Emotional Child: When life is going my way, I am content. However, as soon as disappointment or stress enter the picture, I quickly unravel inside. I often take things personally, interpreting disagreements or criticism as a personal offense. When I don't get my way, I often complain, throw an emotional tantrum, withdraw, manipulate, drag my feet, become sarcastic, or take revenge. I often end up living off the spirituality of other people because I am so overloaded and distracted. My prayer life is primarily talking to God, telling him what to do and how to fix my problems. Prayer is a duty, not a delight.

Emotional Adolescent: I don't like it when others question me. I often make quick judgments and interpretations of people's behavior. I withhold forgiveness to those who sin against me, avoiding or cutting them off when they do something to hurt me. I subconsciously keep records on the love I give out. I have trouble really listening to another person's pain, disappointments, or needs without becoming preoccupied with myself. I sometimes find myself too busy to spend adequate time nourishing my spiritual life. I attend church and serve others but enjoy few delights in Christ. My Christian life is still primarily about doing, not being with him. Prayer continues to be mostly me talking with little silence, solitude, or listening to God.

Emotional Adult: I respect and love others without having to change them or becoming judgmental. I value people for who they are, not for what they can give me or how they behave. I take responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings, goals, and actions. I can state my own beliefs and values to those who disagree with me-without becoming adversarial. I am able to accurately self-assess my limits, strengths, and weaknesses. I am deeply convinced that I am absolutely loved by Christ and, as a result, do not look to others to tell me I'm okay. I am able to integrate doing for God and being with him (Mary and Martha). My Christian life has moved beyond simply serving Christ to loving him and enjoying communion with him.

⁵ Source: Pete Scazzero with Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

Reflection Questions

What level of emotional maturity do you consider Clyde to be at?

Does he evidence components of multiple levels?

How might Clyde's level of emotional maturity impact the dynamic of a discipleship group?

Emotional Components of Discipleship⁶

In addition to identifying levels of emotional maturity, Scazzero goes on to identify six emotional components of discipleship—aspects of emotional maturity that enable and support spiritual growth. These are outlined below.

Look Beneath the Surface: This is the ability to and willingness to self-reflect in order to explore and address parts of yourself requiring transformation in Christ. Scazzero notes that it is characterized by: being able to self-assess internal experiences and emotions; willingness to explore unknown or unacceptable parts of yourself in service to allowing Christ to transform you; accepting own emotions as valid without necessarily ascribing truth to what they say about the circumstance/reality; handling negative emotions in a way that produces growth; and openness about internal experiences with God and select others.

Break the Power of the Past: This is the ability and willingness to avoid recapitulation of problematic inherited patterns. Scazzero notes that it is characterized by: capacity to resolve conflict constructively through direct and respectful communication without recapitulating patterns of conflict learned/practiced in childhood; intentionally attending to the impact of significant stressors and other life events; ability to be honest about the influence of the past on your current behavior without using it as an excuse; and awareness of how upbringing and past events influence your current functioning.

Live in Brokenness and Vulnerability: This is the ability and willingness to cultivate an identity that is not tied to need for perfection or to be impressive to others. Scazzero notes that it is characterized by: capacity to readily admit to being wrong, making mistakes, having weaknesses; being approachable to others without being easily hurt or offended; openness to constructive criticism and feedback from others; avoiding judgmentalism; willingness to see things from other perspectives.

Receive the Gift of Limits: This is the ability and willingness to maintain healthy boundaries. Scazzero notes that it is characterized by: capacity for asserting healthy boundaries to avoid being stretched too thin; recognition of when you may be either a help or a hinderance to another person; awareness of own capacity and intentionally engages in rest; and skillfulness in balancing various life roles in a biblical way.

⁶ Reference: Pete Scazzero with Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

Embrace Grieving and Loss: This is the ability and willingness to be genuine about pain and willing to process it. Scazzero notes that it is characterized by: ability to openly admit losses and disappointments without pretending nothing is wrong; taking time to grieve losses; and willingness to experience difficult emotions and explore the reasons behind them so they can be worked through.

Make Incarnation Your Model of Loving Well: This is the ability and willingness to make and maintain genuine relationships that value yourself and others for who you are. Scazzero notes that it is characterized by: willingness to genuinely enter into other people's worlds and connect with them deeply; having a strong sense of self and acceptance for who you are; ability to connect meaningfully with people who are very different from you; willingness to reserve judgment and adjust assumptions about others as needed; and avoidance of blaming others and willingness to own your own contribution to a conflict.

Reflection Questions

What emotional hang ups might interfere with Clyde's ability and willingness to grow spiritually? (Note: you might have to be creative and fill in some gaps in what you know about Clyde with assumptions or hypothetical possibilities. That is good practice for learning to think about what might impact group members, so long as you remember that with real human beings it is better to fill the gaps with grace and reserve judgment until the person tells you what is in the gap).

As a group leader, how could you help Clyde address these hang ups?

Activity: Sit down in a quiet place, just you and God, and take the **Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Assessment** (located under Resources on the Discipleship Group Leaders page, www.gracecomm.org/lgl). Be as honest and open as you can be, recognizing that there is no competition here for who the most mature Christian is. The purpose of this exercise is to gain more awareness of areas in which you may need to grow and to allow God to nudge your heart about which He might want you to focus on now.

Use the space below as needed to jot down some notes about your experience filling out the inventory.

Fall 2026 – What to Expect

August is Growth Groups month – encouragement to join groups will be coming from the front on Sunday mornings

Grace website will be updated by the beginning of September to accurately reflect current group availabilities

Please provide your current group roster and the number of openings in your group to Brandy (or Dakota if it is a Men's Group)

Fall Kick Off is September 13th – All Growth Groups will resume regularly scheduled programming at that point

Brandy will meet with all Life Group leaders in the fall to check in and see how your group is going – look for an email in September to set up a time

I'm always here!

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Additional resources can be found at www.gracecomm.org/LGL