



**MERCY HILL**

**DNA Group  
Facilitator Manual**

Last Modified: **March 26, 2026**



# Contents

<b>Part 1: A Vision for Discipleship.....</b>	<b>5</b>
A Great Commission.....	7
<i>Are You a Disciple of Jesus Busy Making Disciples of Jesus?</i> .....	7
<i>If Not, Why Not?</i> .....	8
<i>Not a Program but a “Culture”</i> .....	9
The Plan for This Manual.....	9
The Gospel and Our Genetics.....	10
<i>Biologically Speaking</i> .....	10
<i>The Biblical Storyline</i> .....	11
What Is a DNA Group?.....	15
<i>Discipleship as the Means</i> .....	15
<i>Towards a Definition</i> .....	15
<b>Part 2: Unpacking the Definition .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Every Word Counts!.....	19
<i>Discover, Nurture, and Apply</i> .....	19
<i>Smaller Groups</i> .....	22
<i>Committed and Consistent</i> .....	22
<i>Together</i> .....	23
<i>Until He Is All In All</i> .....	25
<b>Part 3: A Biblical Model for Change.....</b>	<b>29</b>
The Model Behind the Steps.....	31
<i>The Three Trees</i> .....	31
<i>Six Elements</i> .....	32
Mapping Our Basic Steps onto the Biblical Model.....	37
Putting It All Together.....	38
<i>Reduction #1: Just Change the Heat</i> .....	38
<i>Reduction #2: Just Change the Fruit</i> .....	39
<i>Reduction #3: Just Change the Root</i> .....	39
<i>Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ!</i> .....	40
<b>Part 4: Guiding Principles .....</b>	<b>41</b>
Guiding Principle #1: God’s Agenda for Our Lives Is Change.....	43
Guiding Principle #2: The Vinedresser Is Always at Work.....	44
Guiding Principle #3: Your Situation Is for Your Sanctification.....	45
Guiding Principle #4: The Heart of the Person Is the Heart of the Matter.....	47
<i>Implication #1: Heart-Work Is Tough Work</i> .....	48
<i>Implication #2: Heart-Work Is Tender Work</i> .....	49
Guiding Principle #5: Good Questions Are a Great Start.....	49
<b>Part 5: Getting Practical .....</b>	<b>53</b>
The Three Frameworks.....	55
<i>Framework #1: Life</i> .....	55

<i>Framework #2: Scripture</i> .....	56
<i>Framework #3: Resource</i> .....	56
Using the Three Frameworks.....	56
<i>General Tips</i> .....	56
<i>Tips for Using the Life Framework</i> .....	57
<i>Tips for Using the Scripture Framework</i> .....	58
<i>Tips for Using the Resource Framework</i> .....	60
Preparing for Launch!.....	61
<i>The Starter Checklist</i> .....	61
<i>The Starter Studies</i> .....	62
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>65</b>
Appendix 1: Diagramming the Onramps .....	67
Appendix 2: Framework Cue Cards .....	69
Appendix 3: The Feelings Wheel .....	73
Appendix 4: How to Facilitate a Book Discussion .....	75
Appendix 5: How to Facilitate a Sermon Discussion.....	79
Appendix 6: Connection to Our Mission and Values .....	83
Appendix 7: Additional Resources .....	85

# Let's Get Started!

This manual has been designed to help encourage and equip those interested in facilitating a DNA Group at Mercy Hill. It is meant to correspond with our five-part online crash course.<sup>1</sup> We pray you find it helpful!<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://mercyhillchurch.org/dna-group-facilitator-training-hub>

<sup>2</sup> For a quick overview of the DNA Group Facilitator training process, see Appendix 1 of this manual.



**Part 1:**  
**A Vision for**  
**Discipleship**



# A Great Commission

## Are You a Disciple of Jesus Busy Making Disciples of Jesus?

At the close of Jesus' earthly ministry, he leaves his disciples with a commission—and a *great* one at that! We read of it in Matthew 28:16-20. I would like to direct your attention there for a moment as we begin:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 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."

Though there is certainly much that could be brought out from a text like this, I wanted us to read it here up front simply because it sets up the broader issue I will be concerning myself with in this manual: namely, the issue of *discipleship*.

When we open our New Testaments and read, we can't help but come to the conclusion that anyone who would bear the name of Christ, anyone who would call him/herself a "Christian," is, in biblical terms, a *disciple* of Jesus. So, in the text we just read, these eleven who had been following and learning from Jesus for the past three years or so of his public ministry are there in verse 16 referred to as the eleven "*disciples*."

And as we read on in our New Testaments, what we come to understand is that being one of Jesus' disciples is not a stagnant sort of thing. There's a certain explosiveness to it. There's an out-flowing, ever-replicating momentum that is set off in the heart of each disciple. So, again referring back to Matthew 28, Jesus, speaking to these eleven disciples, calls them to move out and make more: "Go therefore and *make disciples* . . ." (v. 19). In other words, these eleven disciples are to unleash a disciple-making movement in the world.

And so they did! It's in view of their ministry that we read in Acts 6:7: "[T]he word of God continued to increase, and the number of the *disciples* multiplied greatly . . ."<sup>3</sup> And this momentum has carried on into the present. It's why Mercy Hill is even here today.

Disciples of Jesus are to be busy making disciples of Jesus.

Here is the very heartbeat of the church of God. Here is both our identity and our purpose. Here is who we must be and what we must do. If we are not engaged in this, we are, as Jack Miller has said, "living out of accord with our whole reason for being in this world."<sup>4</sup> It's no wonder we feel so out of sorts, so

---

<sup>3</sup> Any emphasis in Scripture citations has been added by the author.

<sup>4</sup> C. John Miller and Barbara Miller Juliani, *The Heart of a Servant Leader: Letters from Jack Miller* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub, 2004), 313.

empty, so embittered, so aimless, so dissatisfied. We are not doing the very thing we have been created and redeemed and sent out in Christ to do!

---

## *Disciples of Jesus are to be busy making disciples of Jesus.*

---

So let me ask you here even as we begin: *are you a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus?*

- The front end of discipleship, as we may or may not realize, is, in fact, evangelism. Making disciples begins with making converts. Are you going with the gospel to unbelievers? Are you starting conversations, asking good questions, listening to their stories, and engaging them meaningfully with the good news of Jesus?
- But discipleship, as we often think of it, certainly carries on into our relationships with other believers as well. Making disciples doesn't stop at making converts, it's only just gotten started. Are you helping other Christians in their journey towards Jesus? Are you openly, honestly, meaningfully involved with others and pursuing Christ together with them?

Again: *are you a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus?*

## **If Not, Why Not?**

If not, why not? What is it that is keeping you from such magnificent work?

While there are many reasons we may find ourselves negligent in these duties (some more honorable than others), it is my sense that one of the more significant reasons may be that we simply don't know how to go about it. We barely know how to be a disciple of Jesus ourselves let alone how to help others along in it as well. It feels too lofty for us. It feels too overwhelming. It feels too confusing. We wouldn't really even know where to start.

Oh sure, in one sense, Jesus gives us all we need there in verses 18-20 of Matthew 28. He says that we are to baptize people into his name and proceed to teach them all that he commanded, and that he will be with us in it as we go. That really is, again, in one sense, all that we need. We have his sacrament. We have his word. We have his Spirit. Isn't that enough?

But, in another sense, we still get confused, don't we? We still feel like we could use some help—a little more direction perhaps. What exactly does Jesus mean with these verses? How should we even begin to approach what he is calling us to here?

I do think that every Christian and, especially, every local church, should try to give themselves to working out just how they will pursue this idea of discipleship to Jesus. What will they make of it? How will they go about it? How will they encourage and cultivate it in their community of saints?

So now here we come to what I am really after in this manual. I have wanted for quite some time to fully develop and introduce to you what I am here calling DNA Groups.<sup>5</sup> These groups really are just my attempt to help us along in this discipleship thing—to put some flesh on the bones, to put some color in the picture that Jesus outlines for us in Matthew 28. I want everyone in our church to be a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus. And I hope my efforts here will somehow serve that glorious end!

## Not a Program but a “Culture”

Now, to be clear, I am not interested in providing here a sort of one-stop-shop for discipleship. Do you know what I mean by this? I am not thinking, nor am I even wanting, what I am putting forward now to be seen as the only way to go about pursuing discipleship to Jesus. My goal in all of this is not to strong-arm God’s people into one way of doing things. Some of you, I know, are already busy with discipleship in one way or another. And I rejoice that it is so!

All I want to do here is simply offer some help to those of us who are a bit confused. I want to provide some sort of *orienting vision* and *supporting structure* for people to make use of as the Lord leads. You can take our stuff on DNA Groups and use it wholesale, you can customize it to fit your needs, or you can discard it altogether. But whatever you do, please do something! Be a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus!

---

*I want it to be a normal thing here for people to be engaged meaningfully in each other’s lives, pursuing Christ together, and inviting unbelievers to join in on the journey.*

---

More than anything, what I want to develop here at Mercy Hill is what we might call a “culture of discipleship.” I’m not interested in developing a *program* of discipleship, per se, but rather a *culture*. What I mean by this is: I don’t want us thinking that discipleship is merely taking a class or reading a book or going through a curriculum and then somehow we’re done. I want it to be a part of our everyday life. I want it to be a normal thing here for people to be engaged meaningfully in each other’s lives, pursuing Christ together, and inviting unbelievers to join in on the journey. DNA Groups are just one way I’m looking to help develop that.

## The Plan for This Manual

So, with these introductory matters now behind us, in what remains of this manual I want for us to first consider the broader biblical and theological background that stands behind the idea for these DNA Groups. And then we shall come around to deal more specifically with what these groups are, how they function, and how you can get involved!

---

<sup>5</sup> I should mention that, while the vision and content developed for these groups is largely my own, the name was inspired by those groups commonly found in the Soma family of churches.



Are you currently engaged meaningfully in other people's lives and pursuing Christ together with them? Are there people who truly know you—your passions and joys, your trials and temptations? Are there people whom you truly know? Or have you been attempting the Christian life alone?

# The Gospel and Our Genetics

## Biologically Speaking

Before we consider the biblical background that is situated behind the vision for these groups, let me first remind us what, biologically speaking, DNA even is. This will actually set us up for what we'll go on to look at next in the Scriptures.

Now, I'm certainly no scientist, but I am at least aware (as I'm sure you are as well) that DNA is the carrier of genetic information in our bodies. Our genes, transferred from our parents, influence and help determine many of our body's biological and physical characteristics. As such, there's naturally going to be this similitude between my parents and myself in many ways . . . because I share some of their DNA.

If you've ever brought a newborn baby home from the hospital then you know firsthand what I'm talking about. When word gets out that your little one is now at home, family and friends start stopping by with gifts and meals. And what do they want to do? Let's be honest. They don't want to see you. They want to see the baby! And when they do, without fail, within moments, the discussion begins . . .

They start trying to figure out just who your baby looks like. She has her dad's eyes, her mom's hair, great grandpa's smile, Aunt Betsy's dimples, and on it goes, right?

By God's grace, I've brought three babies home now from the hospital and here's the general consensus: Chloe looks more like my side of the family; Bella looks more like Megan's side of the family; and Levi looks like some sort of a mix between the two.

Now, I bring this up here to make a point. However people parse out the traits of our children—whether they look more like dad's side or more like mom's side—we can be quite sure of at least one thing: they are going to look in many ways like their parents—like part of the family—because they share their genes . . . their *DNA*.

## The Biblical Storyline

And this understanding of DNA really sets us up now to discuss the biblical background to DNA Groups. I wonder if you realize that the entire story of Scripture can be told, in one sense at least, from the perspective of genetics. Let me quickly run us through the four chapters of the biblical storyline—Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation—and I'll show you what I mean.

### Chapter #1: Creation

Humanity, we learn in Genesis 1:26-27, was originally created “in the *image* of God.” The idea here is familial.<sup>6</sup> It's presenting Adam and Eve as God's children. When we say today that a child is the “spitting image” of his parent, we are not too far off from what it means for man to be made in the image of God. We were his children with, we might say, our Father's DNA. We looked like him. We were created to, as a mirror, reflect him and his glory into the world all around. When others looked at us, they were to see something of him.

We see this in the way the creation narrative plays out. I wonder if you've ever noticed this:

- In Genesis 1, God is naming and ordering his creation. But then in Genesis 2, we see that Adam is given the authority to name and order things as well—with the animals and, ultimately, his bride.
- In the opening verses of Genesis 1, God is the one who is fruitful and multiplying and filling his creation with all manner of plants and animals and life. But then down in verse 28, we see that he goes on to tell Adam and Eve to “[b]e fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”
- In the opening verses of Genesis 1, God is clearly portrayed as the supreme King and Ruler over all. But then down again in verse 28, we read that Adam and Eve are told to “subdue . . . and have dominion” on the earth—albeit in a subordinate and God-honoring way.

And on we could go. But the point, I think, is quite clear: we were designed to image, to look like, to reflect our heavenly Father in all the earth! In other words, again, we had something of our Dad's DNA.

### Chapter #2: Fall

With this now in view, the fall of Genesis 3 can be understood as a sort of *genetic mutation*. The hearts of Adam and Eve, you recall, turn from God and, consequently, the very essence of human nature becomes corrupted and shot through with sin.

---

<sup>6</sup> In the nearby context of Genesis 1:26-27, this idea of being in the “image” of something else shows up again, only this time it is referring specifically to a father and his son: “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own *likeness*, after his *image*, and named him Seth” (Gen. 5:3). Seth was in the “image” of his father, Adam. We are meant, it seems, to read back into Genesis 1 this idea of a child-parent relationship even between humanity and God! This explains why, later, Luke is willing to go so far as to refer to Adam as “the son of God” (Luke 3:38). Seth was in the image of his father, Adam. And Adam (and, with him, all humanity [cf. Acts 17:29]), amazingly, was in the image of his Father, God. To be made in God's image, then, is to be like, even look like, God's child!

At the tree of testing (v. 6), the image of God in man was not fully lost, but it was most certainly marred. We still looked something like our Maker, but now with severe deformities. Like a mirror broken, we still reflected our Father to some degree, only now in fragments and flashes.

As a result, by nature we are all now something a little less than human—less than what God at first created us to be. We are selfish, rebellious, sinful, divided, confused, broken.

- We still name things in God's world, but now we often use our names to degrade and tear down.
- We still bear fruit and multiply and fill the earth, but now we fill it with sin and division rather than righteousness and shalom (cf. Gen. 6:5).
- We still subdue and have dominion, but now, sadly, it is usually with self-centered intent.

And we see this stuff coming out in us early, right? Just this last week, my kids were outside playing in the backyard, and I started to catch onto what they were doing. My girls had filled their wagon with all sorts of stuff—balance bikes, toys, wood, rocks, outdoor pillows—and they're making Levi (their little brother) pull it all around the yard. And they're barking orders at him and things. When I asked them what in the world they were doing—catch this—they said they were trying to train him so he'll get stronger and eventually be able to pull them around wherever they'd like to go. In other words, they're raising him up to be their personal slave! To put it another way: they're learning how to subdue and have dominion—only it's a bit mixed up from the sort of thing God intended, isn't it?

Now, obviously this is just a humorous example, but as we get older it gets increasingly less humorous (doesn't it?!)—with the way we manipulate, the way we abuse, the way we hurt one another . . . the way we make it all about number one . . . *me!*

---

*At the tree of testing, the image of God in man was not fully lost, but it was most certainly marred. We still looked something like our Maker, but now with severe deformities. Like a mirror broken, we still reflected our Father to some degree, only now in fragments and flashes.*

---

Sadly, we now, by nature, look a lot less like God and a lot more like the devil (John 8:44; Eph. 2:1-3; cf. Rom. 1:18-32). We are in desperate need of what we might call *genetic rewiring* or *image renewal*. We need to be changed from the inside out. We need new hearts and a new nature. We need to be remade in our Father's image. Because we've gone and made a mess of it.

### **Chapter #3: Redemption**

The surprise of the gospel is that God, in Christ, actually enters into the mess we've made and makes this renewal possible!

I love what Bonhoeffer says concerning our being restored into God's image: "[T]here is only one way to achieve this purpose and that is for God, out of sheer mercy, to assume the image and form of fallen man. As man can no longer be like the image of God, God must become like the image of man."<sup>7</sup>

Jesus, the eternal Son of God—whom Paul calls "the *image* of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15),<sup>8</sup> whom the author of Hebrews describes as "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb. 1:3)—comes down from heaven. Perfect son; perfect child; perfect image—reflecting without distortion the glory of his Father into a fallen world—in the way he walked and talked and led and served and lived . . . and died.

Of course, the troubling truth of the matter is that, when faced with such pure and holy brightness, in our sin, we couldn't bear it. Just as we marred the image of God when it was put on us at first in Eden, so when it came to us in the person of Jesus we tried to mar it once more. With our chains and our lashes and our thorns Jesus was ravaged nearly beyond recognition. And, as we nailed him to the cross, it's as if we were taking hammer to mirror. "I can't bear see God's image in this world any longer!"

We left the Son of almighty God hanging there on a stick in the dark . . . reduced to shards.

---

*Where we had been broken in Adam, we now can be restored in Christ. He came to rewire our genetics, to renew us in his image, to put us back together—to make us fully human in the most divine way!*

---

At Calvary, in our arrogance, I suppose we thought we were doing away with the image of God once and for all. But, truly, God, in his grace, was making a way for us to be renewed in that image forevermore! On the cross, Jesus was suffering under the judgment of God in our place. There he was disguised under the image and "likeness of sinful flesh" and condemned (Rom. 8:3). And when he rose from the dead three days later, victorious over sin and grave, a new door of possibility was thrown open for us: "[J]ust as we have borne the *image* of the man of dust [Adam], we shall also bear the *image* of the man of heaven [Jesus]" (1 Cor. 15:49).

Where we had been broken in Adam, we now can be restored in Christ. He came to rewire our genetics, to renew us in his image, to put us back together—to make us fully human in the most divine way!

But it is a process.

---

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995), 299.

<sup>8</sup> Note that Jesus has not been *made* in the image of God (like you and I), but he himself *is* the image in complete and perfect expression. He is the eternal "model" or "archetype," you could say, after whom humanity was originally patterned.

It begins when, by God's sovereign grace, we are born again into the family, as it were, from above through the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). All at once we come alive and we see the kingdom and it's glorious King! As Paul puts it in 2 Cor. 4:4, in the new birth, our eyes are opened to see "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the *image* of God"—and, this time, wonder of wonders, we don't despise it . . . we delight in it! We actually find ourselves wanting to reflect it.

And as we fix our eyes upon Jesus and follow after him as disciples, Paul tells us, we will do just that: "[W]e all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another*" (2 Cor. 3:18). We see him. We love him. We learn from him. And we start to look more and more like him!

Elsewhere, Paul makes it abundantly clear that this transformation, though ultimately guaranteed for those who are in Christ, isn't automatic or without effort on our part. We actually get the privilege, we might say, of participating in this process of renewal as we, through repentance and faith, put to death the old man and put on the new. Listen to the way he exhorts the church in Colossae:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, *which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*. (Col. 3:5-10; cf. Eph. 4:17-24)

We reckon our old man dead with Christ and our new man alive with him. We start loving God and loving others, reading Scripture and caring for orphans, singing Psalms and washing feet, saying prayers and serving the outcast. Our stone hearts begin to beat again. The broken mirror is brought to reflect God's light once more. We start looking like our Father as we were designed to at first.

We have *his eyes*, and *his smile*, and *his voice*, and *his hands*. We're being renewed in his image. Because of grace. Because of Jesus!

## **Chapter #4: Consummation**

God, in his Son, is bringing us back to himself and renewing us in the image we had marred. We who had made ourselves children of wrath have been adopted back in as children of the living God (cf. Eph. 2:1-10). And, lest we fear somehow falling short of this end goal, God promises that he himself will finish for us what he's begun in Christ: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears *we shall be like him*, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2; cf. Rom. 8:29-30; Phil. 1:6).

Oh Christian, keep your eyes on him. Follow closely behind him. He is not only your Savior and your God, he is also your Destination and your Goal. By his grace we now share in his genes and, soon, we shall share in his glory!



Why do you think the Bible puts such an emphasis on us being created and renewed in the image of God? What's the big deal? Why is it so important? In what ways would you say you haven't been looking like Jesus lately? In other words: where do you think you need this renewal most?

## What Is a DNA Group?

### Discipleship as the Means

Now, at this point you may be wondering: what in the world does all of this have to do with discipleship and DNA Groups? In a word: everything! You see, discipleship to Jesus is the way we are slowly renewed in his image.

When you think about it, as Jesus set out to make disciples, what was he doing? He was calling people out of darkness—away from their broken way of life and the realm death—and he was inviting them to follow him, to learn from him, and to start living and looking more and more like him. In other words, again, discipleship is his way of rewiring our DNA.

This is why, by the way, the last chapter of Deitrich Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship*, which I quoted from earlier, is entitled "The Image of Christ." Let that sink in. A book on *discipleship* . . . ending with a chapter on the *image of Christ*. This is no coincidence. Bonhoeffer knows that the ultimate aim in discipleship to Jesus is renewal in his image! That's where this train finally let's off. That's the end of the road for the disciple. That's the point.

As Paul puts it in Romans 8:29: "[T]hose whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son . . ." He calls you into discipleship and then he conforms you into his image. To put it another way: renewal in the image of God is the *end*; discipleship to Jesus is the *means*.

---

*Discipleship to Jesus is the way we are slowly renewed in his image.*

---

### Towards a Definition

Now we're calling these discipleship groups at Mercy Hill *DNA Groups* for two simple reasons:

- First, the idea of DNA keeps ever before us the *ultimate goal* of discipleship: namely, renewal in Christ's image and likeness—that we would start to look more and more like him, like children of our heavenly Father. We mentioned above that being renewed in the image of God through

Christ is not instantaneous, but a process. Well, DNA Groups exist to foster and facilitate in our church this ongoing process of growing up more and more into the image Jesus. The goal in these groups is to let him touch the deepest places of our being (our DNA, you might say) and influence every aspect of our lives.

- But more than merely keeping this goal before us, the idea of DNA also outlines for us the *basic steps* involved in accomplishing it. Here is where DNA becomes our acronym standing for the process of *Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying* Christ.

Now before I work out just what each of these steps entail, let me give you the definition of a DNA Group in its entirety: **A DNA Group is a smaller group of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until he is all in all.**

# **Part 2: Unpacking the Definition**



# Every Word Counts!

Every word in our definition counts. All I want to do now is simply unpack it bit by bit. I want to help us make sense of it and see how it is all grounded and exemplified in Jesus' own disciple-making ministry.

---

*A DNA Group is a smaller group of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until he is all in all.*

---

## Discover, Nurture, and Apply

Let me begin with those three key words that form the basis for our acronym: "DNA Groups are smaller groups of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to *Discover, Nurture, and Apply* Christ . . ."

As we approach this idea of Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying Christ, it might help you to imagine us going on a journey from *head, to heart, to hand*. Let's look at these one by one and you'll see what I mean.

### Discovering Christ → Head

Discovering Christ simply means that we come to see more of him—who he is, what he has done, what he teaches, what he promises. We uncover more of the glory of his person and work. We explore the width, breadth, height, and depth of his love for us at the cross. We get knowledge of him in our heads.

Discipleship to Jesus really is first and foremost an expedition of discovery. We will never stop uncovering the riches of the glory of God in Christ. Not now. Not ever. Not during our years on earth. Nor through all eternity in heaven!

### Nurturing Christ → Heart

Nurturing Christ takes the things discovered about him and attempts to draw it all down into our hearts. We are not satisfied merely knowing truths about Christ with our heads, we want to relate to him, trust him, love him, worship him with all of our hearts. Here is the place where we repent of our wanderings and our idolatries and our false alliances, and we re-root ourselves by faith in Jesus. Here is the place where we cry out with that man in Mark 9:24: "I believe; help my unbelief!"

As a side-note—though, as I said, we will always be discovering more about God, his glory, the gospel, and so forth—I am convinced that it is this Nurture piece that is often the big issue in our discipleship to Jesus. Oh sure, when you first start following Jesus there is much to learn, much that you don't know about the basics of sin and grace and salvation and things. But as we carry on in our discipleship to him,

we can be prone to think that the problems we still deal with are all resulting from some lack of knowledge on our part. We need new truth, a new verse to memorize, a new book to read.

But, often, it seems to me at least, this is not the case. Often the real issue in the matter is not that we lack some knowledge of God's accomplishment or promise. *It is rather that we have failed to properly, deeply, wholly embrace the things we already know of him—the things we already know he has said.* We've discovered the truths of Christ with our heads but have we nurtured them in our hearts?

Here is where the real battle is waged.

To give you an example, how many people in our church have struggled off and on this past week with a sense of anxiety and fear do you think? I dare say all of us have in one way or another.

Now, without knowing the nuances of our situations, I can at least in simplistic terms lay out for us what we need—and for most of us it's not new knowledge of Jesus! We know what the Bible says in Hebrews 13:5-6: "[God] has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear . . .'" We've read this text. We've heard sermons on this text. Some of us have probably memorized this text.

And yet still we fear. Why?

Because there is breakdown between what we *know* and what we *believe*. There is often an awfully large gap between our *heads* and our *hearts*. And this Nurture piece attempts to bridge that gap through repentance and faith and prayer to Christ for help. "Why am I not embracing this? What am I looking to for comfort and security instead? How can Jesus come to my rescue here? Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

---

*There is often an awfully large gap between  
our heads and our hearts.*

---

## **Applying Christ → Hand**

Applying Christ looks to move all of this out into our lives. True and vibrant faith in one's heart leads to love and obedience in one's life. "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that *bears much fruit*" (John 15:5).

Returning to our previous example, if I truly believe that God is my ever-present Helper, then I will not be afraid, then I will have peace even in the face of formidable circumstance, then I will be able to move towards others in love instead of always caving in with self-concern and self-pity.

It will *change* my life.

We are not satisfied to only know Christ with our heads—that would be mere *intellectualism*. Nor are we satisfied when once his truths have reached our hearts—that would be mere *sentimentalism*. The full range of religious motion should move from the *head* through the *heart* to the *hands*.

---

*The full range of religious motion should move from the head  
through the heart to the hands.*

---

Remember: discipleship to Jesus has as its end conformity to his image. He doesn't save us by grace so we can remain in sin. He saves us to renew us. Grace transforms. As we follow him we start to reflect him—we start to look more and more like him.

## Modeled in Jesus

Now I want to show you in brief how Jesus modeled this process wonderfully for us in his own discipleship ministry while on the earth.

- He began with a call to *Discover* him: "Follow Me" (Luke 5:27; cf. Matt. 4:18-22; John 1:43). In other words: "Come, see, listen . . . discover who I am."
- And as the disciples came to discover many things about him, Jesus was not satisfied with letting it all remain merely intellectual and external. He attempted to move the matter towards their hearts: "But who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:20). In other words: "It is not enough to know about me intellectually, you must know me personally. Now that you have followed after and discovered much about me, who am I to you?" Here is the call to *Nurture* Christ.
- But even a profession of faith—"[You are] the Christ of God" (Luke 9:20)—was not the end goal for Jesus. The embrace of him as Christ by faith in one's heart effects a change in one's nature that will start to work out in one's life. The disciples were not called and saved merely to remain as they were. They were called and saved to be conformed into the image of the Son. And this has practical implications: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). In other words: "All that you have seen in me is what I now want to do in and through you." Here is the call to *Apply* Christ.

Do you see it? Our three steps are right there in our Savior's own discipleship ministry. What an awesome thing!



Do these three steps make sense to you? Have you ever thought of discipleship to Jesus along these lines before? What's helpful about this acronym? Is there anything still confusing about it? If you were to facilitate a DNA Group, what might it look like to walk these steps out together?

## Smaller Groups

Return to our definition: “DNA Groups are *smaller groups* . . .”

DNA Groups, for the most part, will be intentionally kept small (typically 2-4 people).<sup>9</sup> Because these groups aim for renewal in Christ at the “molecular” level, each member of the group must have space to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ for him/herself. There is a deeply personal aspect to our faith. It is *my head, my heart, and my hand* that must be realigned with God. If each member is to personally engage with the Lord and one another at this deep level, the groups must be kept small to provide both the time and intimate atmosphere appropriate for such work.

Jesus, again, is our model at this point. Certainly, he ministered to *large crowds* at times (Luke 6:17-19), but he specifically gave his attention to the *twelve* (6:12-16) and, even more narrowly, to the *three* (8:51; 9:28). He understood that if he was to get into his disciples’ hearts and see real fruit in their lives, he would have to get them into smaller, more intimate groups.



Why might it be important that the group is kept small? Have you ever been a part of a smaller group like this before? What was good about it? What was hard? If you were to facilitate a DNA Group, what expectations, hopes, and fears would you bring into it?

## Committed and Consistent

“DNA Groups are smaller groups of *committed* people who meet on a *consistent* basis . . .”

Committed and consistent. We must face here the simple fact that, unless this small group of people is committed to and consistent with one another, little growth can take place.

You recall, perhaps, that when Jesus called his disciples there could be no shuffling of feet. Those who tried were met with sobering words: “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Far better were those disciples who, when called, seemed to sense the majesty of the one calling them and immediately left everything to follow him (5:11, 28). Jesus knew that commitment and consistency were required for true and lasting discipleship and conformity to his image to take place.

---

<sup>9</sup> We are not dogmatic about this. Exceptions can certainly be made. But, in general, these groups will be more fruitful if they are kept smaller, for reasons I am about to explain.

Obviously, we are not calling for commitment and consistency to a DNA Group with even remotely the same kind of severity, but a principle is here established for us and it is worth our consideration: if we want to grow as a disciple towards Jesus, we must meet to pursue him together on a regular basis.<sup>10</sup>



How are you with commitment? Do you often start and stop things? Why would consistency together be important? What will make it hard? If you were to facilitate a DNA Group, how could the other group members help you with this even in the midst of your busy life? How could you help them?

## Together

"DNA Groups are smaller groups of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ *together* . . ."

With this word "together" I have something quite important in mind. Too often, in my opinion, with discipleship there comes this sort of top-down, one-way approach, where one person is "making a disciple" of the other and not the other way around.

---

*Far better than the "me-over-you" model of discipleship is the "me-with-you" model that we see in the Scriptures. We are co-travelers—  
young and old, novice and mature, fresh and seasoned—behind  
Calvary's King.*

---

While, certainly, discipleship does involve more mature believers pouring into younger ones, to say that this is merely a one-directional process is a gross oversimplification and even a dangerous reduction of what Jesus intended. Far better, I think, than the "me-over-you" model of discipleship is the "me-with-you" model that we see in the Scriptures. We are co-travelers—young and old, novice and mature, fresh and seasoned—behind Calvary's King. I am not making you *my* disciple. I am inviting you to follow along with me as *his* disciple!

---

<sup>10</sup> To be clear, when you join a DNA Group, it's not as if you are signing on for life. Each group is encouraged to have regular checkpoints where members can prayerfully evaluate whether they feel God is calling them to continue on or not. Some groups will have clear finish lines (e.g. if you are meeting to go through a book or some other resource and you've come to the end of it). Other groups will be more indefinite (e.g. if you are meeting to simply talk about life and pray together). But every group will likely have its own "life cycle." And that is okay. The most important thing is not that you stay in one group for years on end, but that, however long you are in that group, you are fully present and engaged—you're *all in*. Be committed. Be consistent. And watch what Jesus will do!

What this means is that every member of a given DNA Group should be operating within what I call the three relational dimensions of discipleship: *Leaning*, *Learning*, and *Leading*.

## **Relational Dimension #1: Leaning**

By *Leaning*, we understand that no Christian is an island, that each member of Christ's body needs the other. No one stands alone.

Even the great apostle Paul, we could say, "leaned" in on those whom he was discipling. He shares burdens, asks for prayer, and speaks of being personally ministered to and refreshed by others.

Look at Romans 15:30-32, for example:

I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God *on my behalf*, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and *be refreshed in your company* (cf. 1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 1:8-11; Eph. 6:18b-20; 2 Tim. 1:16).

"I need your prayers. I need you to refresh me." That's Paul talking. If Paul the apostle is saying that to those whom he is leading to Jesus, how much more should we? He may be their father in the faith, but he still calls them brothers and sisters in Christ. He is in this discipleship to Jesus thing together with them.

---

*If you are not willing to lean on or learn from the other members of your DNA Group, you certainly are in no place to be leading them!*

---

## **Relational Dimension #2: Learning**

By *Learning*, we understand that every Christian, however mature in the faith, still has much to learn. Others have knowledge, experiences, and gifts that we don't. The moment we think we have nothing to learn from another is the moment we prove ourselves to truly be the fool: "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise" (1 Cor. 3:18; cf. Rom. 12:3, 16b).

## **Relational Dimension #3: Leading**

By *Leading*, of course, I have the other side of this in mind. Every Christian, however new in the faith, has something to offer. Paul would say it is often upon the parts of the body we think insignificant and unimportant that God bestows the greatest honor (1 Cor. 12:21-25).

To put it bluntly: if you are not willing to lean on or learn from the other members of your DNA Group, you certainly are in no place to be leading them! True movers and shakers in the kingdom of God lead from down low (Mark 10:42-45)!

## Modeled in Jesus

Again, we see something of this even in Christ's own disciple-making ministry, do we not?

- No doubt, we could say that he leans in on and shares himself with his disciples in many significant ways. He lets them in on his Gethsemane distress—inviting them to stay awake and watch and pray with him (Matt. 26:38). He receives from his disciples provision for his physical needs (Luke 8:3). And, my personal favorite, he calls his disciples “friends” (John 15:15). They are not merely his pupils, his students, his proteges. They are his closest and dearest *friends*. His heart and life have been interwoven with theirs!
- And though we know that “in [him] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), he holds it all with such humility. He doesn't speak over his disciples, but rather listens and attends to them.
- And, when he does speak, he says just enough—with meekness and tenderness. He leads from down low.

But, having said this, we still understand that disciple-making for us is of a different category altogether than it was for Jesus, right? He could simply say, “Follow Me”—full stop. And it was enough. He is, after all, as Thomas would say, “[our] Lord and [our] God” (John 20:28). For us, on the other hand, it is not so much ours to say, “Follow me”<sup>11</sup> as much as it is to say, “Follow him with Me.”

We are in this discipleship thing together.



Which of the three relational dimensions of discipleship do you think will be hardest for you to live out? Why? If you were to facilitate a DNA Group, how could the other group members help you with this?

## Until He Is All In All

“DNA Groups are smaller groups of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together *until he is all in all*.”

Too often, I think, we segregate our religious/spiritual lives from our normal/everyday lives. As such, we are prone to reduce what salvation and discipleship to Jesus really means. We get that the gospel covers

---

<sup>11</sup> Of course, I am aware that Paul himself in places says virtually just this. But there are two things to keep in mind here: (1) he is an Apostle and, as such, has been given authority in the church in a way that no subsequent Christian ever is; and (2) when he calls us to imitate or follow the example we see in him, he means: “Follow me as I follow him!” (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6). In other words, he is essentially saying what I have been calling us to say here: “Follow him with me!”

our past sins and failures, we are assured that the gospel secures our future entrance into the gates of heaven, but we are often at a loss for how the gospel really touches things in the here and now. O sure, we talk and think of it on Sundays, but we have really no idea how it connects to our Mondays.

Here is where we must remember that God's redemption is co-extensive with his creation. By this I simply mean: his redemption will one day encompass everything—from soul, to body, to nature; from marriage, to family, to friendship; from sleep, to work, to hobby; and so on. There is no divide in our lives between things that are "sacred" and things that are merely "secular"—between things that Christ cares about and things that he doesn't. He cares about it all. He died to bring transformation to it all.

Christianity is not merely another religion, it is a new way to be human (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). And we take this new humanity with us into everything that we do. This is why Paul can say to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "[W]hether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." There is nothing in your life beyond the bounds of Christ's kingdom. There is nothing in your life so mundane, so menial, so commonplace that it cannot be redeemed in Christ and handled in such a way so as to bring glory to God. Every aspect of a disciple's life ought to be increasingly brought under the Lordship of Jesus and transformed by his Spirit and grace!

So DNA Group members get into each other's lives and ask: what does this "all" Paul speaks of look like for you?! "[W]hatever you do, do *all* to the glory of God." How can Christ be all in all?!

How can Christ be glorified when you're working in a cubicle, or changing a diaper? How does the gospel change the way you sit in rush hour traffic, or relate to your neighbors, or drink a cup of warm coffee on a cold morning?

Discipleship to Jesus should touch and transform every part of our lives!

---

*Every aspect of a disciple's life ought to be increasingly brought under the Lordship of Jesus and transformed by his Spirit and grace!*

---

DNA Groups exist to help us make these connections that we might integrate our lives into a composite whole united and marching under the banner of God's glory!

Think of Christ's disciple-making ministry again. Jesus didn't merely offer his disciples doctrines to be believed or rituals to be performed or Sunday meetings to attend. He offered them back their *humanity*. And that is why his discipleship ministry took the shape that it did.

Certainly he shared Scripture with them, prayed with them, visited synagogues with them, and did ministry with them; but he also walked dirt roads with them, laughed at silly jokes with them, wept in the face of loss with them, ate fresh bread with them, drank good wine with them, slept under the stars with them, and did ordinary everyday stuff with them. He showed them not just how to do the "spiritual" stuff

for the glory of God, but how to do it all. He showed them what this new humanity looks like in every sphere and context.

He showed us that true discipleship is not satisfied *until Christ is all in all*.



Would you say you are putting all of your life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and doing it for his glory? Or are there areas you are either unwilling to give him or unsure what surrendering to him even looks like? Are there aspects of your day-to-day to which Jesus and the gospel just don't seem relevant? If you were to facilitate a DNA Group, what area of your life do you hope to see Jesus influence most?



**Part 3:**  
**A Biblical Model for**  
**Change**



# The Model Behind the Steps

In the first two parts of this manual we put forward the definition of a DNA Group and fleshed it out in much detail. We saw that the ultimate goal in discipleship is our renewal in God's image and that the process for this renewal can be broken down into three basic steps: *Discover* Jesus and the gospel (with our heads), *Nurture* these things through repentance and faith (in our hearts), and *Apply* them by the Spirit in our lives (with our hands).

It is because of the fundamental importance of these steps that I actually want now to lead us into an even deeper consideration of them. To be more specific, I suppose you could say I actually want to show you what stands in back of them.

There's a substructure, a biblical model for change and renewal, that stands behind and really informs my understanding of Discover, Nurture, and Apply. And I want you to see it. I want our DNA Group members in general and our DNA Group Facilitators in particular to know how it is that people change and grow and come to look more and more like Jesus. How does progressive sanctification and image renewal actually work? And how can we partner with God in this? My hope is that this model will equip you to more wisely interact with and love the other members of your DNA Group.

## The Three Trees

The model that I am now going to present to you has come to be referred to over the years as the "Three Trees." It was originally developed by David Powlison.<sup>12</sup> Powlison was the former executive director of the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation. He only recently passed away from pancreatic cancer and the countless tributes that sprung up on the internet in the days after his death are testimony to the significant impact this man had on the world of Christian thought in general and biblical counseling in particular. And I dare say it is probably his work on this Three Trees model that has been most influential of all.

While at Westminster Theological Seminary, I had the privilege of taking a course from him that was essentially just an extended discussion of and elaboration on this model: *Dynamics of Biblical Change*. This course truly did change my life (no pun intended!).

The model he puts forward in this class for biblical change and sanctification is at one and the same time *simple* (able to be easily comprehended) and *complex* (able to manage and make sense of the vast complexities of life). And, of course, it is eminently biblical. I certainly cannot do much more here than merely summarize the model for you, but I trust even in this you shall find great help for your growth in grace.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> This model has been taken up and expounded upon by many after him—most notably: Tim Lane and Paul Tripp in their book *How People Change* and Andrew Nicholls and Helen Thorne in their little workbook *Real Change: Becoming More like Jesus in Everyday Life*.

<sup>13</sup> I should say, if this leaves you wanting more, you might consider: reading *How People Change*; going through *Real Change: Becoming More like Jesus in Everyday Life* with your DNA Group; or even taking the course I just mentioned through CCEF's online program. You won't regret it!

But now enough of these introductory words. Let us press on to quickly consider the model itself! The idea for it really seems to have sprung from a text in Jeremiah—Jeremiah 17:5-10. It reads:

Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

Now, in an effort to keep things streamlined, let me simply read to you how Lane and Tripp break down this vivid image put forward here by Jeremiah:

In verse 8, the image of Heat describes life in a fallen world. In verse 6, a Thorn bush in the wasteland represents the ungodly person who turns away from God. Verses 5 and 7 give a clear reference to the Lord as the Redeemer who comforts, cleanses, and empowers those who trust him. [In our model] [w]e represent this part of the passage by the Cross to summarize all of God's redemptive activity on our behalf. In verses 7 and 8, we see the metaphor of a Fruit tree. It represents the godly person who trusts in the Lord. Verses 9 and 10 show us a God who does not simply focus on our behavior. Though he does not ignore it, his focus is on our hearts. He is the ultimate searcher of hearts, because they are central to the change process he undertakes in us as our Redeemer.<sup>14</sup>

## Six Elements

From this then, there are at least six important elements I should like to draw your attention to and elaborate upon. And with these we are starting to fill in the details of our model (see Figure 1).

---

<sup>14</sup> Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change*, 2nd ed. (Greensboro, N.C: New Growth Press, 2008), 83.

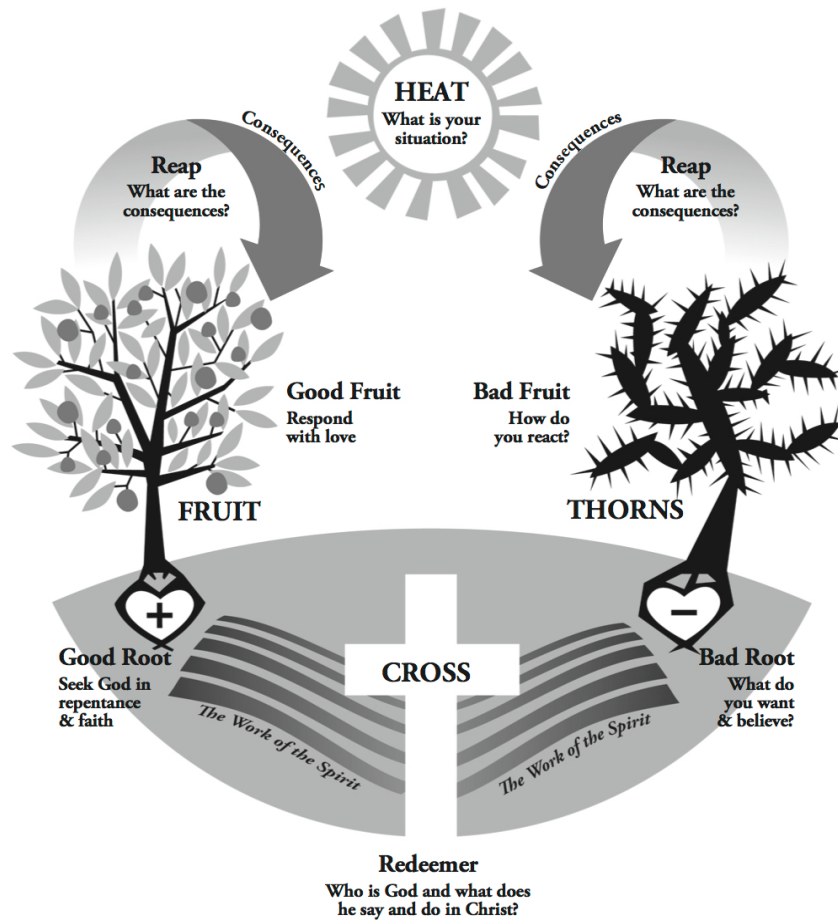


Figure 1<sup>15</sup>

## Element #1: Heat

Heat represents the *situation* or circumstances a person finds him or herself in. Whether things are especially hard or good, there are certain pressures and temptations that we are inevitably facing at all times (cf. Deut. 8).

- In moments of hardship, we are tempted to abandon hope in God and put our trust in something else that might bring some sort of immediate relief. We are tempted to self-save and take matters into our own hands.
- In moments of blessing, we are tempted in a different direction, are we not? When things are going well, we are tempted to forget that "[e]very good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). Indeed, we are prone to forget God

<sup>15</sup> This diagram originally appeared in Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change Study Guide: How Christ Changes Us by His Grace* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2010), 48.

entirely. And instead we start to act as if we don't need him, as if we have accomplished such good things in our own strength.

When you think of it, is this not precisely what we see play out over and over again in the story of Israel?

- In harder situations they throw up their hands and accuse God of abandoning them—"He's brought us out here to kill us!" They call on other gods and other nations to help where it seems YHWH has left them hanging.
- But in more pleasant situations, it's no better. In fact, it's often worse. They get drunk on their own prosperity and it usually requires some hardship to sober them up and bring them back to reality.

So heat, then, is the situation we find ourselves in—whether good or hard. It's the context for our growth in grace. It's the surroundings whereby God tests and exposes our hearts and our true colors are shown.



Read Deuteronomy 8 carefully. How can both hard and good situations produce a heat that exposes and tests/tempts the heart? How have you experienced this personally as of late?

## Element #2: Thorns

Thorns represent our ungodly (and often initial) *reactions* to the heat around us.

- Here is where the man who, upon getting news that his boss has let him go, stomps down through the hall and slams the door to his office in a fit of rage.
- Here is the woman who, upon being made fun of at the gym for her weight, promptly heads to the bathroom stall and gags out her latest meal.
- Here is my son who, when one of his sisters takes a toy from him, responds by taking a handful of her hair.

Life is hard. The heat gets turned up. We are often sinned against. But this does not justify our own sinning. Yet, in the face of severe heat or drought (or whichever of Jeremiah's images you want to use), sadly, this is often how we respond. Self-love, self-pity, self-concern. Not the fruit of love for God and others . . . but thorns.

## Element #3: Turning Heart

But there is something underneath the thorns.

In the world of botany, we refer to that fundamental part of the plant beneath the thorns, beneath the ground, as its roots. If things are off in the branches above ground, it's often because things are off in some deeper more fundamental way beneath the ground in the roots.

In the biblical understanding of how human beings work, we liken this idea of roots to the person's heart. The heart is understood as the center of a man and the seat of his will and desires and emotions. It is to this that Jeremiah refers there in verse 5, if you noticed: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose *heart* turns away from the Lord." There is something beneath the sinful, thorny reactions of people: namely, a heart that has turned away from the Lord.

Here is where we begin to talk about things like *motivations*. Why do people react the way they do? What are they hoping to get out of it? What are they afraid of? What are they believing? Who or what are they trusting? Who or what are they serving? Who or what are they loving?

When a person's heart has wandered from the Lord, it will manifest itself in the person's life.

- Somewhere beneath the man's angry slamming of his office door is a heart that has forgotten God's promise to protect and provide for him and turn all things for good (cf. Rom. 8:28). He feels like the layoff was unfair and he wants the whole office to know about it. He is not trusting God to avenge and make things right in his own time (cf. Rom. 12:19). He wants justice, even vengeance, *now*. He may go home and start a smear campaign online. He may key his boss' car on the way out. He's been hurt and now he wants to hurt in return. The heart has turned away from God. The root has gone bad.
- The woman in the bathroom stall, as tragic as that picture is, has wandered from her identity in Christ. She is not justified or accepted on the basis of her appearance or waistline but on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross. He loves her. He has given his life for her. He has washed her with the water of his word and will present her to himself "in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). He has made her beautiful. But she wants the guys to notice her. She wants the ladies at the gym to respect her, even envy her. She's lost her way. Her heart has turned. The root has gone bad. And it's starting to show above ground in her life now in devastating ways.

---

*When a person's heart has wandered from the Lord,  
it will manifest itself in the person's life.*

---

#### **Element #4: Cross**

But the picture back in Jeremiah 17 makes it plain that running underneath all of these hard and hot situations there are streams of living water available to us if we should so desire.

- Here is where we remember what the Psalmist says in Psalm 46:1: "God is our refuge and strength, a *very present help in trouble*."
- Here is where we remember what Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation *he will also provide the way of escape*, that you may be able to endure it."

- Here is where we remember that text we always read at Christmas but desperately need to remember all the yearlong: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, *God with us*)” (Matt. 1:23).

God is with us in the heat. And we see this most profoundly, of course, in the person and work of Jesus, represented in our model here as the cross—the third “tree,” as it were.

I love how Nicholls and Thorne sum this element up:

[The cross] represents all the promises of God’s mercy, culminating in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Through the cross of Christ our “bad root” is transformed. We are forgiven. We are given a new life. We are connected to streams of living water—the Spirit of Christ. It’s in going to Jesus and asking for forgiveness for our self-centered desires, thoughts, and actions that transformation begins and continues. Change happens as the Spirit brings us to the God of mercies.<sup>16</sup>

So the man in our example, catches himself before he slams that door and, instead, he prays. He speaks to the God who is near. He asks Jesus for help. He kneels down on the floor underneath his desk, and he opens his Bible and reads. He sets his roots down into the streams of living water available to him in Christ.

And something changes . . .

## Element #5: Trusting Heart

Through personal engagement with Jesus in his Word, through repentance and faith and desperate prayer, the turning heart is now becoming the trusting heart: “Blessed is the man who *trusts* in the Lord, whose *trust* is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream . . .” (Jer. 17:7-8a).

There is something changing inside. This man’s identity is no longer wrapped up in his work. He isn’t as worried about being wronged. He’s just spent time with the Son of God who was wronged for him, who was crucified for his sin. Jesus gives him strength to face his own injustices with patience and love. He packs up his things, walks over to his boss’ office, shakes his hand, looks him in the eyes, and says: “Thanks for the years here, sir. I’m really going to miss you all.”

And he means it.

## Element #6: Fruit

In other words: with roots sunk deep into the streams of living water, this tree begins to bear new and surprising and good fruit: “[It] does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, *for it does not cease to bear fruit*” (Jer. 17:8b).

---

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Nicholls and Helen Thorne, *Real Change: Becoming More Like Jesus in Everyday Life* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2018), 10-11.

Notice: the heat hasn't changed (he still has a bad boss). But the heart has. Because of Jesus. And therefore, this man can walk through the same exact situation albeit in a radically different way—in a way that looks like his Savior!

## Mapping Our Basic Steps onto the Biblical Model

This is the biblical model for change and image renewal that stands behind the basic steps of Discover, Nurture, and Apply. Let me quickly show you how these steps map onto this model (see Figure 2):

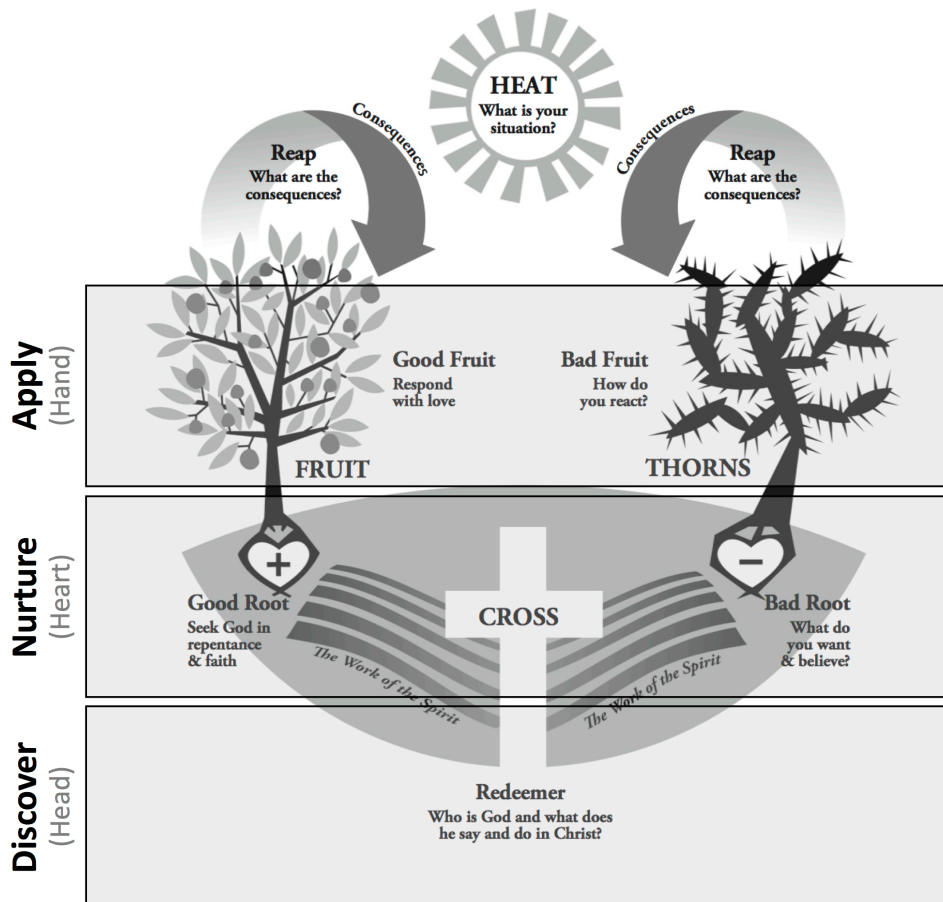


Figure 2

- *Discover* corresponds with the *cross* level in the Three Trees model. We come to learn more of who God is and what he has said and done in Christ.
- *Nurture* corresponds with the *root* level in the Three Trees model. Our hearts need to move from loving, trusting, and obeying false gods and gospels to loving, trusting, and obeying the one true God and gospel as revealed in Jesus.
- *Apply* corresponds with the *fruit* level in the Three Trees model. We are after transformation and renewal in the image of Jesus, and this means our hands need to shift from bearing the fruits of the flesh to bearing the fruits of the Spirit through the cross of Christ (cf. Gal. 5:16-24).



Read Jeremiah 17:5-10 once more. Do you see the model and its six elements represented? How does this model speak to you? How does it relate to what you are currently facing? Which tree are you most like right now? Why? If you were to facilitate a DNA Group, how do you think this model might inform your approach?

## Putting It All Together

In an effort to show you how all of this fits together, let me return to the example of that woman I mentioned. Maybe she's a part of your DNA Group. She needs to change. You can see it. God wants it for her. You want it for her. But how do you help?

It's important to see that, in our efforts to help her, we must consider every aspect of our model and each of these three steps or we shall find that, in the end, we have actually done her a great disservice.

That being said, the unfortunate reality is that we often do tend to reduce things and focus in on one piece to the neglect of the others. Let me show you three potential reductions you might be tempted to make in your well-meaning attempt to help this woman change and grow. And, in seeing what not to do, we'll finally land on what exactly it is that we should do.

### Reduction #1: Just Change the Heat

Some of us may be tempted to merely focus on changing the heat. If we can change the situation, or get her out of that gym and away from those nasty ladies, then that will change her—she'll feel better about herself at last. So you encourage her to cancel that gym membership and try out another one—maybe a gym like the one I drove by the other day. In big letters on the wall outside of the building they have a sign that reads: "Judgment Free Zone." Maybe she'd feel better there.

But tinkering with the situation externally, is only a superficial fix, is it not? This woman's problems will follow her to a new gym, won't they? If it's not the ladies at the gym that set her off then it will be the commercials that run on the TV she watches before bed, or the magazine covers she passes by while checking out at the grocery store.

Changing her situation may help her feel better momentarily, but, all the while, the stuff going wrong on the inside at a fundamental level has still been left unaddressed.

Aren't we all prone to this sort of thing? We like to blame our problems on stuff outside of us. We kid ourselves into thinking that if we tinker with our situation and get it just right, all will be well with us. "If I could just get a different job; if I could just get a different house in a different city that's not so expensive; if I could just get that different relationship with a different woman—well, then all would fall into place for me and I would be happy, at peace, free."

But it never works.

## Reduction #2: Just Change the Fruit

Others of us might recognize that there is still something on her part that God would want to change, but we simply focus on the fruit or Apply level. We analyze her behavior, see that it's wrong, and tell her to "Just stop it."

It sounds cold and harsh and yet how many of us parents talk to our kids in exactly this way? "I see your behavior. I don't like it. So *just stop it.*" "Why, Daddy?" "Because I said so. And that should be enough for you!"

Sadly, we often don't go much deeper than that—to the heart underneath their behavior. What were they wanting? Why did they do it? And how can Jesus bring fresh help to those places?

The human person is complex and the change process is equally so. We can't "just stop it"—though sometimes we all wish it were that simple.

## Reduction #3: Just Change the Root

There are others of us who might see the superficiality of this fruit approach and try to move towards the heart at that root or Nurture level. We get that our actions are a result of certain beliefs and desires and things. But, nonetheless, we are still prone to make terrible reductions.

Here is where secular psychology puts forward things like Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy. So, for this woman, if she wants to change her behavior, she simply needs to change the way she thinks. She needs to change the way she talks to herself, thinks about herself, etc. "Here's what I want you to do: right after you wake up in the morning and right before you go to bed in the evening, go into your bathroom, look at yourself in the mirror, and repeat these three words at least ten times: '*I am beautiful.*' Say it until it rings truer to you than any of that other negativity people have been unloading on you."

They're trying to get at the stuff on the inside. They can see that she's struggling with deeper issues of identity and acceptance and things. And such strategies might bring relief for a little while. But, again, the solution doesn't go deep enough.

Her positive self-talk will eventually fail her because it's not rooted in ultimate reality—the ultimate reality that is revealed to us in the gospel. She doesn't just need to change the way she talks to herself. She needs to let Jesus talk to her. She needs to let him tell her what to think about herself. She needs to let him lead her to the cross. It's only there in the light of the cross that she can both own up to her sin and confess the wandering of her heart, while at the same time finding forgiveness and acceptance and security in the one who loves her so much that he gave his life for her.

---

*She doesn't just need to change the way she talks to herself.  
She needs to let Jesus talk to her.*

---

## Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ!

So here is where, at last, we have finally come to that cross and Discover level. This woman cannot change on her own. She needs to be led to Jesus and encouraged to re-root herself in him.

You see, we need the whole model and every step—Discover, Nurture, and Apply . . . *Christ!* That is the only way to true and lasting change. And the point of these DNA Groups is to engage in this sort of thing together!



In your attempts to help others grow in Jesus, which reduction do you think you are more prone to (just change the heat; just change the fruit; just change the heart)? Why? Can you think of a recent example? How does the full process of Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying Christ provide a better way?

# **Part 4:**

# **Guiding Principles**



As a way of distilling much of what we've seen thus far, I simply want to draw out five guiding principles for our DNA Groups. They will build, one on the other, as we go . . .

## Guiding Principle #1: God's Agenda for Our Lives Is Change

Here is the one thing we have been saying all along, but it must be mentioned yet once more here: The goal of your salvation is your transformation. Jesus gets ahold of your life to remake it, recast it, renew it—to bring love and life where there once was only self-centeredness and death. Discipleship to Jesus is about conformity to his image. If we are not changing, if we are not being transformed from one degree of glory to the next as we follow behind him, then we are not following him in the right way—because that's the point!

On this, let me quickly list for you here some of those key verses we've already looked at, and I'll add a few more in an effort to drive this home:

- 1 Corinthians 15:49: "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust [Adam], we shall also *bear the image of the man of heaven* [Jesus]." Jesus came, lived, suffered, died, rose so that you could be renewed in his image. What we lost in Adam is being renewed in Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 3:18: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are *being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another*. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."
- Colossians 3:9b-10: "[Y]ou have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, *which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*."
- 1 John 3:2: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears *we shall be like him*, because we shall see him as he is."
- Romans 8:29a: "For those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined *to be conformed to the image of his Son . . .*"
- Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." You have been saved not *by* good works but *for* good works. Salvation is unto transformation!
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3a: "For this is the will of God, *your sanctification . . .*" We often get all worked up wondering: what is God's will for me? Well, Paul tells us right here: "your sanctification"—your holiness, your growth in godliness, your conformity to his image.
- And, finally, from the mouth of our Lord himself, Luke 6:40: "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained *will be like his teacher*."

It needs to be crystal clear in our DNA Groups that this is the point—this is why we're gathering, this is where we're going! This is our common goal for our discipleship to Jesus because it is his goal for us in it.

God's agenda for our lives is change!

# Guiding Principle #2: The Vinedresser Is Always at Work

This second principle flows out of the first. God's agenda for our lives is change and renewal into his image . . . and he is always at work in our lives to see that such change truly does come about.

There are plenty of verses I could bring out at this point, many of which have brought such comfort to me through the years. Let me just list a few here:

- Philippians 1:6: "And I am sure of this, that *he* who began a good work in you *will bring it to completion* at the day of Jesus Christ."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24: "Now may *the God of peace himself* sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; *he will surely do it.*"
- Hebrews 12:10b-11: "[God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."
- Hebrews 13:20-21: "Now may the *God of peace* who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, *working in us that which is pleasing in his sight*, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

The text I particularly want to draw your attention to on this point is John 15:1-2 where Jesus says to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit *he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*"

Did you catch that? God doesn't say of the good branch: "At last! Finally I've got some fruit from it. My work here is done." No! The clear implication of Jesus' words here is that, when this branch first starts to bear fruit, God's work with regard to it is truly only just beginning!

God is not satisfied with the fruit in your life as it now is. He wants more for you. Because you are not yet fully conformed to the image of his Son, he is not yet done with his work on you. God doesn't punch the clock and go home for the weekend. God doesn't take vacation time.

The Vinedresser is always at work.

This means that, if you are in Christ, and you are sitting across the table from me—if you're a part of my DNA Group let's say—without even knowing how you're doing or what's really going on in the details of your day-to-day, I can know from the start at least one thing: *God is at work in your life to bring change and renewal in some way.*

And it's our job, not to resist this work, but to help one another locate it and partner with him in it!

# Guiding Principle #3: Your Situation Is for Your Sanctification

Now, again, this third principle flows out from the ones that have come before it. God's agenda for you is change. He's always at work to see more of his Son in your life. And one of the primary ways he works towards this is by sovereignly engineering your situation (your circumstances—or, what we referred to in our three trees modal as your "heat") in such a way that your heart is tested and exposed so that, in the end, he can lead you to a deeper and richer encounter with him and you can be further healed and transformed.

The quintessential example of this is Israel in the wilderness. When God brought them into a difficult situation, when God turned up the heat on them there in the desert, what reason does he give for doing so?

The answer comes in Deuteronomy 8:2: "And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, *that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart . . .*" (cf. v. 16). He engineered their situation in such a way that it would bring out what was in their hearts, lead to a deeper relationship with and reliance on him, and ultimately work for their sanctification.

What this means for us is that all of life is the stage for discipleship. If we want to grow as disciples of Jesus, we don't have to read some particular book on the subject, or go through some multi-level program at the church, or travel to some far-off country as a missionary. All we have to do is meaningfully connect with God in our current context, in the midst of what we are presently facing, in the place he has put us, in the situation he has sovereignly engineered for us.

God is working on our hearts by way of our immediate situations.

This is what I think Jesus is getting at when he says to his disciples in Matthew 6:34: "[D]o not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. *Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*" Don't worry about whether you'll be ready to fearlessly face cancer if it comes for you in your later years, or if you'll have enough faith to face some future downturn of the economy or the loss of some loved one. What is God calling you to face today? That is sufficient.

Maybe the big heat in your life today will simply be Bay Area traffic. Can you face that in reliance on Jesus, with peace and patience, and even joy? If you get cut off by another car, can you not only refrain from cursing them, but bless them in your heart and pray for them?

If you are learning to abide in Jesus and bear fruit in the midst of today's troubles, you are setting yourself up to be ready for tomorrow's—whatever it may be!

So the question we must always ask in our DNA Groups is: where is the place I am feeling heat *today*? What am I facing *right now*? That is where God wants to work. That is what he wants to speak into and leverage for my sanctification and growth in godliness.

This is why, by the way, every suggested framework I provide as a way of organizing our DNA Group meetings begins with at least a few quick questions about what's been good and what's been hard in each of the group members' lives lately.<sup>17</sup> Make no mistake. These aren't mere social niceties. These questions are of strategic importance. Our answers to these questions will often help us locate the very place God is presently attempting to do his deepest work on us.

---

*Our given situations are not irrelevant to the matters of discipleship.  
They are the very context for it and the means whereby God  
accomplishes his goal for us in it!*

---

Our given situations are not irrelevant to the matters of discipleship. They are the very context for it and the means whereby God accomplishes his goal for us in it! Your situation is for your sanctification.

Now, there is something to bring out under this principle that is of particular importance when it comes to the dynamics of a DNA Group. To back into it, let me first read you a humorous article from the Christian satirical publication, the *Babylon Bee*. I came across this quite a while ago and never have forgotten it because, honestly, it touches on what I guess you could say is a pet peeve of mine. Listen to this:

Report: Every Single Person At Church Doing 'Fine': ERIE, PA:

The results of Pastor Mike's informal survey are in: every single member of Bayfront Methodist Church is doing either "fine," "good," or "real good." When the pastor pressed for details, members responded with some combination of, "No really, I'm doing great," or else, "Yeah, things are good, things are good."

The survey was conducted as the pastor faithfully stood at the doors of the church after the Sunday service, shaking the hands of each churchgoer as they left and asking how they were doing.

"It's really quite spectacular," the pastor told reporters Tuesday. "You would think, given the state of our fallen world, that at least one person would be going through a crisis or battling some kind of indwelling sin that they need help with. But not at this church—we're all doing fine it seems. Praise the Lord!"

Prayer requests for the week included several reports of distant friends and family that were struggling with sin, but nobody in the church reported needing prayer for themselves. "Prayer? Me?" one congregant said to Pastor Mike, a puzzled expression on her face. "No. I mean, you can pray for me generally, but really I'm not in much need of anything right now. I'm doing awesome, really." She was later spotted at a coffee shop, bawling her eyes out over some personal struggle, according to sources.

Reporters then asked Pastor Mike how he was doing. "Who, me? Oh yeah, I'm doing just fine," he confirmed.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> See "Appendix 2: Framework Cue Cards."

<sup>18</sup> <https://babylonbee.com/news/report-every-single-person-church-fine>

You know what they're getting at here, right? You've seen this at work in the church, haven't you? We have this tendency to hide ourselves from one another. We put on our Sunday best and come in acting like we have it all together—as if, because we're Christians, our lives aren't hard and we no longer struggle or sin. When people ask us how we are doing we deflect with Christian platitudes like "Too blessed to be stressed!" Have you heard that one? (Perhaps, you've even used it!)

Well, I'm sorry, but according to my read of Scripture, that statement is actually thoroughly unbiblical! It's actually a perfect example of what theologians would call "over-realized eschatology." You are claiming something for yourself now that will only be true for you in the end. The only time that statement will be true of you is when you are with Christ in glory, fully conformed to his image.

In the meanwhile, it is in the places of heat and temptation and stress that God is looking to do his best work. And if we refuse to admit that we are feeling any of that then we are actually standing in resistance of the very work he is trying to do! It's okay to not be okay. God already knows you're still a mess in many ways. And he's actually trying to bring you to that realization as well so he can meet you in that place and heal.

DNA Groups, in particular, are the space we are trying to create here at Mercy Hill where we can get real about this stuff.

To be clear: this doesn't mean you shouldn't use discernment in what you share and how you share it. But it does mean that if you are unwilling to be honest about the places you are experiencing heat—the ways you are feeling tempted and tried—then you should not be surprised when you come to find that you are also not growing much either.



Do you agree with the assertion that the idea of being "too blessed to be stressed" on this side of heaven is thoroughly unbiblical? Why or why not? What other Scripture references would you put forward to support your opinion? Have you experienced the sort of "deflecting" described by the *Babylon Bee* article? Have you yourself taken part in that? Why do we do this? Why do you think sharing about what we are currently "facing" is so important for DNA Groups to function well? What might you do to create a safe space for people to open up about these more personal matters of their heart and life?

## **Guiding Principle #4: The Heart of the Person Is the Heart of the Matter**

Here, again, this principle continues to build on those that have come before it.

We saw this specifically back in Deuteronomy 8, didn't we? God brought Israel into the heat of the wilderness ultimately "to know what was in [their] *heart*" (v. 2).

We saw this as well when we looked at Jeremiah 17:5-10. I didn't make much of it at the time, but I wonder if you noticed the sort of jarring flow of thought there in those verses:

- In the first three verses, it's as if Jeremiah has taken up a paintbrush and he's working on a canvas. There's a thorn bush and a fruit tree and a flowing stream of water. It's all quite picturesque.
- And then, suddenly, in verses 9-10, it's as if he just drops the brush and he makes this bare-faced, even rugged, assertion about the state of man's heart: "The *heart* is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the *heart* and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.'"

It seems a strange transition at first, does it not? But, after consideration, I think it makes quite a lot of sense. What Jeremiah is doing here is highlighting for us the critical factor that will determine whether we are going to bear thorns or fruit: namely, "*the heart*"—particularly, the heart as it stands in relation to God.

We must never lose sight of the fact that, as we come together in our DNA Groups, what we are attempting to do at a fundamental level is heart-work. We are looking to help one another re-root our hearts in God—his Word, his gospel, his Spirit. It is only in this that true and lasting change can be effected.

But, now, if DNA Groups are coming together to do heart-work, there are at least two implications we must keep in mind at this point:

## Implication #1: Heart-Work Is Tough Work

First, heart-work is tough work. Again, Jeremiah just says it: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (v. 10).

What this means is that every member of your group is going to try to bob and weave, distract and deflect, self-protect and blame-shift—do anything but let his or her heart be brought out into the open and exposed for what it really is. We don't want others to see what's really going on in there. We ourselves often don't even want to see what's really going on in there.

It is true that, for those of us who have come to faith in Christ, our hearts have been circumcised—the law of God has now been written there in a life-giving way by his Spirit (Jer. 31:33). But there is still much that remains of our old ways. We still have a lingering sickness. We still have blind spots. We still have twisted desires and motives that we are often unaware of.

As the heart is desperately sick, so we desperately need our brothers and sisters in Christ to bring truth, to bring light, to bring life, to bring the healing that is found only in Jesus.

## Implication #2: Heart-Work Is Tender Work

But there is one more thing we must keep in mind. Because it is the heart that we are seeking to engage in our DNA Groups, certainly, as we have just seen, we must be *bold and courageous*, not settling for surface conversations but attempting to go deeper with each other towards the truth of things. But, and this is perhaps an implication even more important than the first, because it is the heart that we are seeking to engage in our DNA Groups, we must also be incredibly *gentle*. Heart-work is tender work.

Consider the difference in a doctor's approach when he's coming to treat your skin rash and when he's coming to operate on your heart. The former can be done with little concern for cleanliness or precision. But the latter requires the utmost caution and care. Everything in the operating room—from its furniture to its fixtures, from the surgeons to their utensils—is sanitized through and through. A careless doctor can kill here. A careful doctor can heal here. Engaging the heart is a big deal.

In a DNA Group, you are attempting to enter the realm of the heart, spiritually speaking. We dare not march on in there and poke and prod and rip and tear and act like we know what we're doing—like we know what a person needs before we ever really listen to them, understand them, pray for them, share life with them. We may even use Scripture and so convince ourselves that we must be doing the work of God. But as it is with a surgeon's scalpel so it is with the God's Word, which the author of Hebrews reminds us "is sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12)—a careless Christian can use it to *wound*, but a careful Christian can use it to *heal*.

If I'm honest, I think one of the reasons we respond to people asking how we are with Christian clichés like "Too blessed to be stressed" is that we've opened up to Christians before about the stuff that's really going on in our hearts, and they haven't handled it well. We've been burned. We've been wounded. They went straight away into preacher mode, lecture mode, truth-telling mode, before they ever thought to put an arm around us, listen to us, and just love us right there in the mess.

So we grow used to hiding because we've been hurt.

Heart-work is tender work. The stuff that's going to go down in your DNA Groups should be handled with such humility, such empathy, such compassion, such patience, such mercy, such love . . . such tenderness.

## Guiding Principle #5: Good Questions Are a Great Start

This last principle, as with the others, follows from all those that have come before it. If I know God's agenda for your life is change; and I know he's always at work to bring it about; and I know that one of his primary means of accomplishing this work is via the situations he puts you in; and I know that in these situations, good and hard, your heart is being brought out so it can be brought back to Jesus in more meaningful ways; and I know that heart-work is both tough and tender work . . . then I shall see the great importance of asking good questions.

Good questions are suited to deal with the *toughness* of heart-work.

They help us get inside another person's situation. And they help us see beneath the various reactions in their behavior to the deeper motivations and realities of their heart. Like an x-ray machine they bring out into the open things that otherwise would likely remain hidden. In fact, David Powlison, whom I mentioned above, actually wrote an article entitled "X-ray Questions: Drawing Out the Whys and Wherefores of Human Behavior."<sup>19</sup> In this article he lists all the varieties of questions we can make use of to really get inside the heart of another person—or our own for that matter.

And yet the wonderful thing about good questions is that, not only do they help us draw out the heart of a person, they do so in a way that is *tender*.

Surely you've seen this play out in your own experience.

- When you're struggling and you open up to others about it, some people will make quick assumptions about what you're going through and what you need and they immediately jump in to give you advice.
- But then there are others, wise in the caring of souls, who have learned to slow down and ask questions. They listen well and they walk slowly, patiently, with you towards the place of help—hand in hand.

---

*There are few things that open up a person  
like good questions and a listening ear.*

---

There are few things that shut down a person's honest communication like another's quick assumptions and superficial advice. But, on the contrary, there are few things that open up a person like good questions and a listening ear. The former is degrading and dehumanizing. It implies that you can't figure it out and you need me to step in and show you the way. The latter is wonderfully dignifying and rehumanizing. To ask you questions is to imply that you are smart enough to know the answer. It implies that God is already speaking to you—that you are probably already thinking about these things and have wonderful insights to share.

Make no mistake, good questions challenge and expose and lead. But they do so in a way that is humble and gentle and inviting. That is why I say: good questions are a great start.

Let me wrap all of this up by reading to you from Paul Tripp's book *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hand*. I think you'll see how he really brings everything we've been saying here full circle:

It is tempting to think that insightful people have all the right answers, and in one sense that is true. But it is also true that you don't get to the right answers without first asking the right questions. . . .

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.ccef.org/shop/product/jbc-volume-18-1-pdf/>

Our thinking always rides on the rails of our questions. Good thinkers like to walk around a topic and look at it from different angles. They like asking new questions and asking old questions in new ways. Good thinkers don't make uncorroborated assumptions, and they don't allow themselves to think they know more than they actually do.

If you want to help people to see brand new truths (and old truths in brand new ways), you need to take on the habits of good thinkers. Asking good questions is one of the most important.

. . . [W]hen you bring well-constructed, creative, biblically-shaped questions to a person's life, you are doing more than getting to know them and uncovering where change is needed. You are, in fact, ministering to that person.

When I ask you questions you would never ask yourself, I am teaching you to view yourself through biblical lenses. I am doing something God can use to change you in fundamental ways.

. . . Asking good questions is vital to helping people to face who they really are and what they are really doing.

As sinners we all tend to recast our own history in self-serving ways. We hide behind the difficulty and pressures of the situation or the failures of others. We look for external explanations, not internal ones. We are more impressed with our righteousness than we are horrified at our sin.

Because of this, we all need people who love us enough to ask, listen, and having listened, to ask more. This is not being intrusive.

. . . [I]n the Messiah's hands, our questions can become keys that open people's prisons and cause them to rely on Christ in new and profound ways.

*Through our questions Christ changes people.*<sup>20</sup>

God's agenda for our lives is change. And asking good questions of one another is an important part of that process.



"There are few things that shut down a person's honest communication like another's quick assumptions and superficial advice. But, on the contrary, there are few things that open up a person like good questions and a listening ear." How have you experienced this to be true, both in the way others have attempted to minister to you and in the way you have attempted to minister to others? If you were to facilitate a DNA Group, what will you do to try to guard against the former and promote the latter?

---

<sup>20</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002), 172-173, 180-181; emphasis added.



# **Part 5: Getting Practical**



# The Three Frameworks

After all of this, the question arising now in your mind I'm sure is: "Okay, well and good. All of this sounds nice. But what do these groups actually look like? What exactly do they do?" Let me try to make sense of that now for you.

Remember, a DNA Group is a smaller group of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until he is all in all. It is my hope that, having concluded Part 4 the way that we did, you now see just how critical asking good questions is to this process of image renewal. In many ways, a DNA Group will rise or fall depending on how skilled its members are at asking questions. These questions take us deeper into who Christ is and what he has said and done (*Discover* Christ). They get beneath the surface of our lives and into who we really are and what we really believe (*Nurture* Christ). They help us come to face what faith and obedience would look like walking out into the details of our day-to-day lives (*Apply* Christ). Answers are certainly important. But the right answers only come to those who ask the right questions.

---

*Answers are certainly important. But the right answers only come to those who ask the right questions.*

---

This is why the three "frameworks" we've developed to help provide structure and guidance for DNA Groups to make use of if they so desire are composed entirely of carefully crafted and ordered questions! Each framework has the same end goal (to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ until he is all in all), but they come at it from three different angles or starting points.

To see the types of questions asked within each of the three frameworks, please refer to "Appendix 2: Framework Cue Cards."

## Framework #1: Life

The Life Framework takes each member's life as its starting point and moves towards God and the gospel together from there.

We share about the ups and downs of our lives since the last meeting—where we've seen God at work, where we've felt his absence, how we are processing these things, how Jesus has been leading us faithfully through it all. Every person is heard and cared for. We minister to each other from the Scriptures. We make space to pray for one another with honest empathy. We find help to carry on in the way of discipleship. We look more and more like Jesus.

## Framework #2: Scripture

The Scripture Framework takes the Scriptures as its starting point and moves towards the heart and life of each member from there.

Verses are read from the old Book. Questions are asked. We seek understanding together. We seek God's face together. We seek the good news of Jesus together. And then we repent and re-root ourselves in these realities. We seek to draw clear and crisp lines between the truths of Scripture and the details of our daily lives. We find God's word to be more relevant than we ever could've thought and his Spirit to be more present than we ever could've hoped. We minister to each other from the Scriptures. We make space to pray for one another with honest empathy. We find help to carry on in the way of discipleship. We look more and more like Jesus.

## Framework #3: Resource

The Resource Framework takes some other Christian resource (e.g. a sermon, book, article, etc.) as its starting point and moves towards Jesus and the transformed life from there.<sup>21</sup>

A resource is chosen that seems particularly pertinent to the group (e.g. a book on parenting, a sermon series on the doctrine of vocation, etc.). The resource is engaged and understood. Lines are drawn both back towards the Word of God and forward towards the heart and lives of each member. We feel like we are being challenged and growing in matters in which we've long felt stuck. We minister to each other from the Scriptures. We make space to pray for one another with honest empathy. We find help to carry on in the way of discipleship. We look more and more like Jesus.



Which of these three frameworks seems most interesting to you? If you were to facilitate a DNA Group, which (if any) would you prefer to use? Why? How would you go about using it?

# Using the Three Frameworks

Let me now provide you with some tips for using these frameworks in your own DNA Groups.

## General Tips

- Remember, you are facilitating not dominating. This means you should be encouraging the group members to ask questions, engage, discuss, minister to one another, etc. It should not all be coming from you!

---

<sup>21</sup> For help in finding good resources to use, check out "Mercy Hill's Recommended Resources" online at [mercyhillchurch.org](http://mercyhillchurch.org).

- As you dive into a new group meeting, remember not to forget past conversations, prayer requests, temptations, application points, etc. You might revisit these things up front with group members or as you go along.
- Feel free to develop your own framework, approach, questions, etc. Let the frameworks we've created and the tips provided here simply get your pump primed and your imagination going!

## Tips for Using the Life Framework

- The Life Framework is a great place to start off with a new group. It requires no homework or serious planning and so likely will feel less intimidating to your group members. It will also be a helpful way to get to know each other for a season. You'll hear where a person really struggles and gets stuck. Then, as time goes on, you may identify an area that your group particularly needs to grow in. For example, maybe struggles with marriage keep coming up again and again, week after week. You might then shift to read a book on marriage or something like this utilizing the Resource Framework. Our goal is to help each other get unstuck in our struggles and sin patterns and grow towards Jesus.
- This framework is best used by focusing on one group member at a time. You proceed through the four main questions and ask/share whatever else comes to your heart for them. When one member is finished, you might all lay hands on him/her, pray, and move on to the next. Obviously, with this format, as the Facilitator, you'll need to be especially cognizant of time so all members are able to be ministered to.

## What's Been Good? What's Been Hard?

- These first two questions start to fill out the idea of what a person has been facing lately (i.e. their "heat"). And, hence, they start to identify for us the context into which God is going to want to speak and bring transformation.
- It's important to touch on each of these (the good *and* the hard). Some members of your group may only want to share the good and will be reluctant to let you into the hard. Others will talk and talk of the hard and won't see any good. We need to engage both the good and the hard and help one another trace out the way from there towards Christ.

## Where Are You?

- Here is where you are looking to find the person in the midst of their situation. How are they *really* doing? How are they reacting to what they are facing? What are they feeling?<sup>22</sup>
- Draw the heart out with tenderness and compassion.

## Where Is God?

- Tread carefully here. Avoid giving pat answers, shallow advice, or "Bible band-aids."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> You might find it useful to leverage the Feelings Wheel found in Appendix 3 of this manual. Putting words to what we feel can often be the first step towards meaningful connection with Christ and his grace.

<sup>23</sup> Make no mistake, Bible band-aids aren't for the people we put them on, they're for us. We don't like the sight of their bleeding wounds and so we quickly slap on a verse or two to get it out of view and make ourselves feel a bit better. Meanwhile, underneath our band-aid, the wound still festers. Only now this poor saint has the sneaking sense that they don't have a safe space in your group to bring the matter up again. After all, it's already been "fixed," hasn't it?

- Invite the person sharing to answer this question first. Assume they already have good thoughts about what God is saying and doing in their situation. Remember, they have the Spirit too!
- After the individual has shared, invite the other group members to share and minister to him/her as well from the Scriptures.
- Be humble and kind, but truthful and bold! Do not expect the Scriptures to bring a quick fix. Walk with one another week after week through these things with humility, patience, and hope.

## Tips for Using the Scripture Framework

- So many don't know how to meaningfully read Scripture. It seems to them to be intimidating, confusing, boring, irrelevant, etc. when truly it is the very sustenance of our spiritual lives (cf. Matt. 4:4)! DNA Groups provide a wonderful context to engage the Bible together and grow in this important life-giving, life-*changing* practice.
- Questions are provided but feel free to add your own supplemental questions under each step. As always, let the questions in these frameworks guide you, but don't let them restrict you. Go as the Spirit leads!
- Tailor the questions with particular concern for those with whom you will be reading. If you are reading the Bible with a pre-Christian you would want to simplify things significantly. Ask them the hi-level questions.<sup>24</sup>
- Don't forget to incorporate prayer for each other. You might consider waiting until the end of your group meeting for this as by that point you should have quite a lot to pray about!

## Headlines

- Before diving into your passage for the day, encourage your group to *briefly* share "headlines." As with the first two questions of the Life Framework, the point of asking for headlines up front is to get some idea of what each member of your group has been facing lately (i.e. their "heat") and, hence, start to identify the context into which God is going to want to speak and bring transformation. God's word never comes to us in a vacuum. It comes to us in context and meets us right where we're at. Knowing what a person is facing will make the time in God's word richer as we come to see how what he says and does in Scripture meets us in that place and applies profoundly!
- Don't worry about getting the fullness of everyone's personal updates up front here (you could easily spend your whole meeting on this and never get to reading the Bible!). You will have plenty of time to talk more about your lives later as you look at things through the lens of Scripture.

---

<sup>24</sup> For example, for the Discover step you might ask things like: *What do you see? What questions do you have? What do you learn about God, man, Jesus?* For the Nurture step, you might simply ask: *What do you believe? Does this seem doubtful, irrelevant, foolish to you? Or does it seem true, good, wise? Why?* And, finally, don't skip the Apply step. Ask them: *If these things were true, how would it change your life? What difference would it make?*

I would actually do something similar if reading the Bible with young children as well. This works wonderfully when reading and discussing the Bible around the dinner table with your kids!

## Discover: What Do You See?

- You'll need to decide how you're going to read the Bible together. Will you slowly make your way through an entire book? Will you take turns letting group members facilitate and bring in a text that spoke to them that week in their devotions? Will you go through certain passage lists (e.g. the "I Am" statements of Jesus, the seven sayings on the cross, the parables, etc.).
- If you are facilitating, I'd encourage you to read the text in advance so you can work through some of the more difficult interpretive issues and get a sense of how God might want to minister to your group during your meeting time.
- You might encourage your group members to read the text in advance as well so they come with some reflections already set in motion.
- During your group meeting, you might read through the text once as a whole and then move through it bit-by-bit. Make sure to slow everyone down so you can all really see what's there. Make note of challenging words, logical connections, important cross-references, etc. Do your best to interpret and understand the passage.
- See if anyone can "say it in a sentence (or two)." How would we sum it up?
- After this, my recommendation is that you identify just one verse or phrase that stands out to your group and, with that, prepare for the "DNA deep-dive." Each week, allow one member to choose what you'll be focusing in on (be sure to rotate!) and then dig in from there. What do we see in this verse/phrase? How would we characterize it? Is there an attribute to adore, a truth to trust, a promise to hope in, etc.?
- However you characterize it, it is important that you connect what you're seeing to the gospel and revel in the good news of the cross together.<sup>25</sup>
- I can't stress enough the benefit of a good study Bible for this step. Too often Bible studies spiral off into conjecture and discussion of what the text "means to me" with much of it moving quite far out of bounds. I personally recommend the ESV Study Bible for this. It has plenty of notes to help keep your study on track. When you get stumped or come to a place of debate let the commentators come in to offer help!

## Nurture: What Do You Believe?

- Here is where you are asking questions that draw out the heart of each member. These questions should move your group towards repentance and renewed faith in the gospel and Jesus. It is important to remember that this comes before application. We walk not by our own strength, but by faith in *his* strength! We must first fight to abide in Christ before we can ever begin to bear fruit for him.
- Take that verse/phrase that your group decided to go deeper with and press in on that in particular. Why did we choose this? Do we believe it (honestly)? How is it being tested in what we've been facing lately (i.e. your "heat" as discussed at the start of the meeting)?

## Apply: What Do You Do?

- Here you are trying to help your group identify what the verse/phrase focused on would really look like working out in the details of their lives. Help them picture it. Get specific. Avoid

---

<sup>25</sup> For help with this, see the "Hearts Aflame" sermons I preached back in our series through Luke's Gospel: <https://bit.ly/404Yrp1>.

painting like the *impressionists* (blurry, smudges) and try to paint like the *realists* (crisp, sharp lines)! Too often our application stays vague and, hence, it fails to gain traction in our hearts and lives.

- If you still have time at the end of your meeting, feel free to ask an open-ended question like: “Did anything else stand out to you?”

## Tips for Using the Resource Framework

- There are so many good resources out there if one knows where to look.<sup>26</sup> These resources can really help us grow in areas we need it the most (e.g. prayer, marriage, preaching, etc.).
- Some resources already come with their own plan for group engagement and discussion (e.g. books with questions at the end of each chapter, small group curriculum with accompanying participant’s manuals, etc.). In such cases, it is probably best to utilize what’s already been prepared and supplement only where you feel necessary. But in many cases a resource might not have anything pre-packaged for your DNA Group to use and it will be up to you to decide how to facilitate discussion.<sup>27</sup>
- If you are going to make use of the 3Qs below, it would be good to let your group know in advance so they can make note of these things as they engage the resource throughout the week (unless, of course, you plan to engage the resource together during your group meeting time).

## Headlines

- If you think you have time, ask for *quick* “headlines” up front just to connect as human beings. It is important that people in your group come to feel known and cared for.
- Be on the lookout for how the content of the resource might speak to what your group members are currently facing.

## Quotes: What Was Striking?

- This will be the most important part of your discussion. John Piper once remarked: “Books don’t change people, paragraphs do – sometimes sentences.”<sup>28</sup> The same basic sentiment could be expressed for sermons, lectures, and any other resource. Remember that. When you are asking for quotes that stand out to them, you are asking for those parts of the resource that God may in fact want to use to change them for good. Linger there. Ask questions.
- Take the quotes they select and try to move towards Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying together. Get the head, heart, and hand involved! The questions on the Resource Framework Cue Card and Worksheet give you some idea as to what this might look like.

---

<sup>26</sup> See “Mercy Hill’s Recommended Resources” on our website for a start.

<sup>27</sup> While there are many different types of resources to engage and many different ways of engaging them, Appendices 4 and 5 give you ideas as to how you might approach facilitating a book or sermon discussion.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/books-dont-change-people-paragraphs-do>

## Questions: What Was Confusing?

- Here you are inviting your group members to speak of matters they didn't fully understand. Remember, it's okay to not know the answer to their questions. Do your best before the next meeting to consider their questions and come ready to help them forward with it.

## Quarrels: What Was Off?

- Here you are inviting your group members to speak of matters they didn't full agree with. It's important to encourage critical thought and the testing of everything by Scripture. It's also important to see we won't always agree with everything a person says, and that's okay. We can be charitable as we pursue truth. We can, as I've heard it said, "eat the meat and spit out the bones" if need be.

# Preparing for Launch!

As you prepare to start your new DNA Group, I want to provide you with two resources to help you along. The first is what we call the Starter Checklist. The second we refer to as the Starter Studies.

## The Starter Checklist

All throughout the process of preparing to facilitate, you'll want to be thinking and praying through a number of things. Your final conclusions will likely develop and even change as you gather your group and discuss matters with them, but it is important that you at least have some initial ideas concerning the items that follow:

- **Plan:** What do you think God wants you to do with the group meeting time? Should you utilize one of the frameworks or something else?<sup>29</sup>
- **Frequency:** How often should you meet?<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Think through the details and specific plan for your meetings. For example, if you want to study Scripture together or go through another resource, how will you handle that? Will everyone read on their own and then come together with thoughts? Will people read during the group time and then discuss right on the spot? Should you do some mixture of both? How will you incorporate prayer for one another? Etc.

<sup>30</sup> We don't want to meet so infrequently that we can't gain momentum and grow towards Christ together. But we also don't want to meet so frequently that we have no time for anything else. Too often, it seems to me, Christians get bogged down meeting with each other and end up with no space left in their schedules for reaching out to the unbelievers in their lives. This ought not be! Therefore, while every group is free to determine this for themselves, I would suggest considering a frequency of twice a month. If this seems too sparse, remember too that, in time, you may want to challenge your own DNA Group members to start facilitating groups of their own (with younger believers or even with a non-Christian or two from their workplace or neighborhood. If they are only meeting with you twice a month, it may be that they can start one with others in the off weeks while still continuing to meet with you for encouragement, training, and support.

We want to move our people away from a consumer mentality and call them to live on mission with and for Jesus. All throughout the Scriptures we see that we are blessed to be a blessing. In view of this, you must not let your group members merely come and receive from you week after week. You should regularly be praying and looking for ways God might be calling them to go out and give to others. Challenge them in this. God doesn't merely want to speak to them, minister to them, give to them . . . he wants to *use* them! This is a critical part along the path of discipleship (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2).

To give you an example of what this might look like, imagine you just finished reading a helpful book on parenting together. Before you just move on to lead your group through another book study or something else, perhaps you should consider pausing

- **Location:** Where will you meet?
- **Time:** When will you meet?<sup>31</sup>
- **Duration:** How long are we committing to this group before prayerful re-evaluation? Are we open to carrying on together after this “checkpoint” if the Lord so leads?<sup>32</sup>
- **Members:** How are you planning to “find your folks”—church website, personal invite, leader assistance, etc.? Who is the group for—men, women, dads, moms, married couples, new parents, students, youth, skeptics, seekers, etc.?
- **Status:** Would you like your group to be closed or open to new members joining? How many members do you hope to have in total?<sup>33</sup>

## The Starter Studies

The following two studies are completely optional. The goal here is to give you a sense of how you might structure your first two meetings as a group. Feel free to use, adapt, or disregard these studies as you feel led.

### Study #1

**Goal:** To get to know each other and begin creating a safe space to share hearts and pursue Jesus together.

**Agenda:** You might ask . . .

- Tell us about your family background (parents, siblings, etc.)? Do you currently have a family of your own (single, married, children, etc.)? Where are you from? What’s brought you to the

---

for a moment to pray and consider. Now that your group members have read and learned from this book, could it be that God might want them to go and read it with others—to take what they have received and give it forward? Maybe they know a young couple or two that they might invite to read along with them. So your group continues to meet together twice a month and your members now lead these new groups in the off-weeks. And on it goes!

You can see now, I hope, how a frequency of twice a month or so might be strategically wise. For it allows your group to carry on together while still providing space for your members to engage more in ministry themselves.

<sup>31</sup> Concerning location and time, obviously this may remain TBD depending on who ends up showing interest in your group. As you come to decide on these things, please do remember that, because DNA Groups are smaller, one of their assets is their ability to flex and be tailor-made to individual circumstances and schedules. Whereas larger groups (such as Home Groups) have little freedom on the matter (they must choose a more universally available time such as a weekday evening), DNA Groups can (and should!) get creative.

Mother’s might meet at the park while their kids play. Men might meet early for coffee before heading to work. Working ladies might meet for lunch at some restaurant equidistant from their various offices. Those with clearer schedules might choose to meet at a home in the evening so that they can linger freely together over dinner, dessert, or tea. Etc.

One final thing: please do remember as well that we don’t want DNA Groups to replace Home Groups for people, but rather to complement them. We hope, therefore, that the time chosen for your DNA Group would not hinder any of the members’ from getting involved with a larger Home Group of believers as well.

<sup>32</sup> It’s encouraged that every group set a regular checkpoint and time for prayerful re-evaluation. People need to know they aren’t signing on for life or they will be hesitant to sign on at all! If they don’t see a potential offramp they will probably be reluctant to onramp. It’s okay to let your group have its own natural life-cycle. Every group will be different. Some groups may carry on for years, while others just a few months. Let God do with it as he wills. Your job is to simply be surrendered and faithful.

<sup>33</sup> We use Planning Center Online’s Groups app to manage this. You will need to familiarize yourself with this app and manage the content and communications there appropriately.

Bay Area? What do you do vocationally? What does your average week consist of? Are you enjoying it?

- Describe your ideal day off. How do you like to spend your free time? What fills your tank? Why do you think?
- What's your all-time favorite movie? Why do you like it so much? What about a book? Do people even read anymore?!
- Describe your relationship with Jesus? Are you skeptical? If so, what do you find so hard to believe? Are you searching? If so, why does Jesus seem intriguing to you? Are you a Christian? If so, describe how you came to trust him.
- If you're a part of Mercy Hill Church, how long have you been with us? What initially drew you to the church?
- If you had to pick a life verse—one that's really meant a lot to you since coming to Christ—what would it be? Why? How has God used it to shape you for him?
- How do you feel like you are doing in your walk with Jesus right now? What's been good? What's been hard?
- How do you hope God will use this group in your life?

**Homework:** Before the next meeting, encourage everyone to read pages 7-41 of the *Pursue Discipleship* booklet<sup>34</sup> (or perhaps listen to the first two sermons in the *Introducing and Multiplying DNA Groups* sermon series<sup>35</sup>). Let them know that you plan to discuss the questions found in the booklet so they can come prepared.

## Study #2

**Goal:** (1) To help your group members understand what a DNA Group is and how it fits into God's larger plan of discipleship and growth in grace; (2) To finalize your vision for the group going forward.

### Agenda:

- Look through the *Pursue Discipleship* booklet and ask any of the questions that seem relevant/significant to you and your group.
- Discuss the items on The Starter Checklist (see above) and together finalize your vision for the group going forward.

---

<sup>34</sup> Find a hard copy at the Next Steps Table at the back of the Sanctuary on Sundays or download it online here: <https://storage1.snappages.site/52HRWH/assets/files/Pursue-Discipleship-Booklet-Electronic-E-74.pdf>.

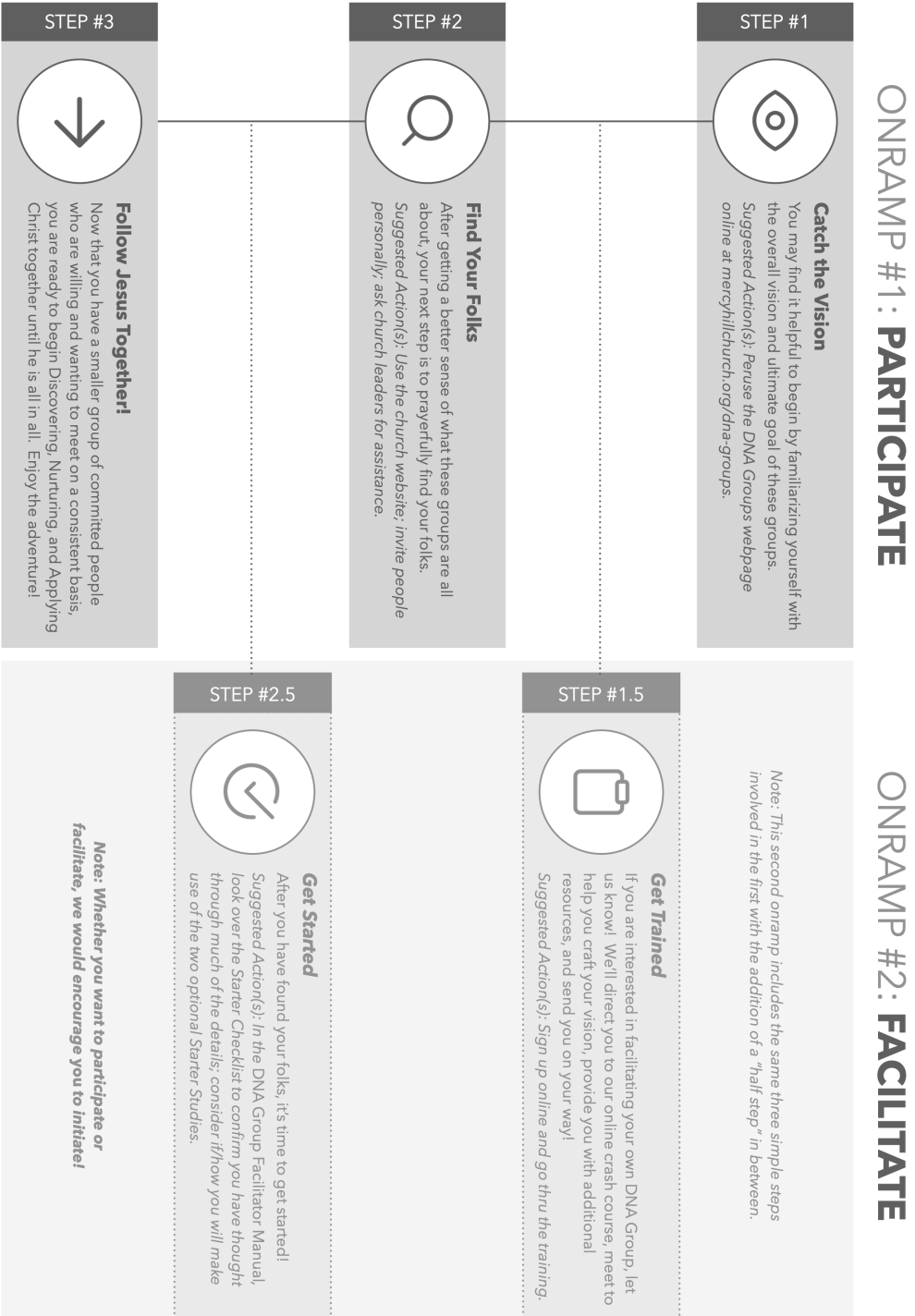
<sup>35</sup> Listen online at <https://bit.ly/4u0XlIC>.



# Appendices



# Appendix 1: Diagramming the Onramps





# Appendix 2:

## Framework Cue Cards

Each of the three frameworks designed for use in Mercy Hill's DNA Groups utilize carefully crafted questions as a way of guiding the process of discipleship to Jesus and renewal in his image. These frameworks are available in either Worksheet or Cue Card format.

- Worksheets are available for download on [mercyhillchurch.org](http://mercyhillchurch.org) where they can then be printed out and written on by the various members of your group if the Facilitator thinks this might prove helpful.
- Cue Cards are also available for download online but they are provided in the pages that follow for your reference as well. This format simply provides the questions for use in your times of discussion with no room for notes. You may want to download and save them on your phone for ease of reference.

*Whichever framework your group decides to use (if any), the goal is not that you stick woodenly to each and every question but that each member begins to get a more intuitive feel for engaging deeper discussion and asking questions that lead one another to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until he is all in all. Let the questions guide, but don't let them restrict!*

# DNA Group | Life Framework

<b>What's Been Good?</b>	What's been going right in your life lately? What evidences of God's grace can you identify? How can we give thanks together?
<b>What's Been Hard?</b>	What's been particularly trying in your life lately? Where do you most need God's help? How can we pray together?
<b>Where Are You?</b>	How are you responding to the things you are facing? What are you doing? How are you feeling? Where are you tempted? What desires or fears lay underneath your responses? Have you been walking in or out of step with the gospel (cf. Gal. 2:14)? What's been right in your responses? What's been wrong? How can we confess our sins together?
<b>Where Is God?</b>	What does God say and do in these situations? What does he promise and command? How has he been ministering to you lately? What Scripture comes to mind? Get out your Bible and read. How does the good news of Jesus meet you in these things and show you the way forward? Are you trusting in and walking with him? What would this next week look like if you were? How can we help? Who else in your life (believer/unbeliever) might need to hear this?

# DNA Group | Scripture Framework

<b>Headlines</b>	Share briefly. What's been good? What's been hard? What trials and temptations are you currently facing? How are you doing in the midst of these things? As we prepare to open the Scriptures together, where do you most need God to speak and act?
<b>Discover</b> What do you see?	What do you see in this text? What questions do you have? What answers can you find? What is God revealing to you here—about himself, about yourself? Is there an <i>attribute</i> to adore, a <i>truth</i> to trust, a <i>promise</i> to hope in, a <i>command</i> to obey, a <i>warning</i> to heed, an <i>example</i> to follow (choose one)? How does what he is revealing here connect to what he has revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus? Every verse in Scripture becomes good news when run through the cross of Christ. Let's preach the good news to ourselves once more.
<b>Nurture</b> What do you believe?	Do you believe the things God is revealing to you in this text? If there's an attribute, are you adoring? If there's a truth, are you trusting? If there's a promise, are you hoping? If there's a command, are you obeying? If there's a warning, are you heeding? If there's an example, are you following? Why or why not? What's in the way? How are these things being tested in what you are currently facing? How can Jesus come to your rescue? Let's make the good confession once more.
<b>Apply</b> What do you do?	What would this text look like walking out into the details of your life? Think again about what you are currently facing. If you adored, trusted, hoped in, obeyed, heeded, followed, how would it change your next 24 hours? Each day has enough trouble of its own. If this word from God can touch the next few hours, it will start to touch your life as a whole. Identify one thing you can do to apply this. Who else in your life (believer/unbeliever) might need to hear this? Let's bear the good fruit once more.

# DNA Group | Resource Framework

<p><b>Headlines</b></p>	<p>Share briefly. What's been good? What's been hard? What trials and temptations are you currently facing? How are you doing in the midst of these things? How can we pray?</p>
<p><b>Quotes</b> What was significant?</p>	<p>What quotes stood out to you as especially important? What do you think the author means by them? How do these words minister to you personally? In what ways should your life change in light of them? How can Jesus help? How can we? Who else in your life (believer/unbeliever) might need to hear this?</p>
<p><b>Questions</b> What was confusing?</p>	<p>What did you find hard to understand? What questions were left lingering in your mind? What would you like to tease out a bit more and consider together? Please do not be afraid to ask questions. In fact, if we don't have any questions, it likely means we're not engaging the resource all that well!</p>
<p><b>Quarrels</b> What was mistaken?</p>	<p>Was there anything that you disagreed with? Why? To disagree is not the same as being disagreeable. You can hold a different opinion with humility and charity. This is not an invitation to be nitpicky but an encouragement to think deeply. Please do not be afraid to disagree. In fact, if we agree with everything, it likely means we're not engaging the resource all that well!</p>







# Appendix 4:

## How to Facilitate a Book Discussion

The following is intended to help you prepare for and facilitate a book discussion with your DNA Group or other small group of people interested in following Jesus together.<sup>36</sup> There are obviously many different ways to do this. What follows are just some suggestions to get you started!

### First Steps:

- **Identify the resource.** Try to make sure it is both *relevant* and *accessible* to those you are wanting to engage it with. What are people passionate about? What are people struggling with? Where do we often get stuck? Where do we need to see growth? What book might help us move forward towards Jesus together? Discuss these things with your group.<sup>37</sup>
- **Determine the pacing.** At what pace will you make your way through the given material? Set out a plan for reading and discussion that you feel is both *manageable* and *marching*. You don't want it to move so quickly that you overwhelm your group members. But you also want to avoid moving so slowly that you never get through the book! Discuss these things with your group.
- **Work out the how.** Be sure that everyone in your group is clear on not only the *what?* (identify the resource), the *when?* (determine the pacing), but also the *how?* How do you want them to read it? Are you going to be using the DNA Group Resource Framework and the 3Qs (Quotes, Questions, Quarrels)? If so, you'll want to explain that to them and encourage them to mark those things and even take notes/journal as they read.<sup>38</sup> How are you going to facilitate the discussion time? Do you want different people to facilitate different weeks? Again, discuss these things with your group.

### Before Each Group Meeting:

- **Read the assigned chapter(s).** Remember to read first for understanding. The initial goal in reading isn't to come to a work with all of *your* thoughts and ideas, but to sit back and listen to *the author's*—to make sure you understand him/her rightly before you do anything else. James' advice comes in to help us here: "let every person be quick to hear, [and] slow to speak" (James 1:19).
- **Outline the author's flow of thought.** If you are the one facilitating the discussion, it is especially important that you have a good sense of what the author is actually saying. One helpful way to attempt this is to write out a quick outline of each chapter as you read it. Try to

---

<sup>36</sup> With slight modification, the same basic approach can certainly be taken in attempting to read with those skeptical of or seeking out the faith as well.

<sup>37</sup> For suggestions, see "Mercy Hill's Recommended Resources" online at [mercyhillchurch.org](http://mercyhillchurch.org).

<sup>38</sup> I strongly recommend that your group members do this as it is important that they learn to read carefully and actively. Their work with the 3Qs in advance of your group meetings will make your discussion times that much more rich and transformative.

identify the chapter's Big Idea and any main points that support it. It is often helpful to simply make note of the structure the author has already provided. Looking at the chapter and section titles will likely clue you into his/her flow of thought and help you outline it as I've here described.

- **Make note of your 3Qs.** As you read, you'll want to make note of any *Quotes* (things that stand out to you as particularly important or relevant), *Questions* (things you find hard to understand), or *Quarrels* (things you disagree with). You might consider having a particular mark you put in the margin for each so you can return to them later with ease (e.g. you could draw a star for any Quotes, a question mark for any Questions, and an X for any Quarrels). For each, use the questions on the Resource Framework Cue Card or Worksheet to help stimulate your thinking further.
- **Create a list of discussion questions.** Having outlined the author's thought and made note of things you find particularly important, confusing, or even mistaken, you are now in better position to create a list of discussion questions for potential use when your group meets next. As a suggestion, you might identify certain quotes that you will read during the discussion time and then spin off questions from it. It is important here to remember the goal of *Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying* Christ together. The questions you create should engage your group members in these three basic areas. Discover questions help us make sure we understand what the author is saying and see how it relates the Scriptures and the good news of Jesus. Nurture questions take us deeper than mere understanding and begin to ask if we really believe what we are learning? They open windows into the heart of each group member and expose where we need to repent and re-root ourselves in Jesus. Apply questions get your group thinking about how all of this will influence and affect our lives going forward.<sup>39</sup>

## During Each Group Meeting:

So you've read the assigned material. You have your simple outline, your 3Qs, and your discussion questions. What next? How do you actually facilitate a group meeting?

- **Catch up for a few minutes.** One goal in discussing books as a group is that you might grow together in friendship and community. Don't be so set on getting to and through your book discussion that you actually neglect the people in your group! Leave space for organic connection and sharing.
- **Open in prayer.** Without God's intervention and help we will accomplish nothing.
- **Revisit the last group meeting's discussion (if applicable).** Before diving into new material, summarize what your group discussed last time. Come back to any questions you left unanswered. Ask how people did in applying what they learned. Etc.
- **Review this week's reading.** Transition to this week's material. Begin with a summary of the author's thought. You might consider asking the group what they would say the Big Idea for

---

<sup>39</sup> Some resources already have questions for discussion at the end of each chapter. Obviously, you may find it best to use them. But, perhaps, you'll feel led to add a few questions of your own!

the chapter was. How would they sum it up in a sentence? After they share their answers, proceed to share your own. Then quickly walk them through the outline you created so people can be reminded of the main points and the structure of the chapter. This will serve as a backdrop to your discussion time and will hopefully help keep people on track.

- **Engage your discussion questions and the group's 3Qs.** Remember that, at this point, you should have a list of discussion questions and each member of your group should have some notes on the 3Qs for them personally. With these things in place, then, there are a couple different approaches you could take. You might start with the discussion questions you created and end by asking for the group's 3Qs if there's still time. Or you might start with the group's 3Qs and end with your discussion questions if there's still time. Either way, you'll likely find that these two elements work together in a sort of synergy. In the first approach, your discussion questions will likely lead your group to talk about some of their quotes, questions, and quarrels. In the second approach, you'll probably find that their quotes, questions, and quarrels prompt you to ask some of the discussion questions you'd been planning to ask. Let your discussion time be a living, breathing thing where, remember, your goal in it all is to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until he is all in all!

*Note: If your group is meeting to discuss multiple chapters, I would suggest proceeding through bullet points 4 and 5 above one chapter at a time (i.e. take the first chapter and review it, ask your discussion questions for it, request the group's 3Qs regarding it . . . then move to the next chapter and do the same).*

- **Close in prayer.** Certainly prayer is good for more than merely opening and closing a meeting! You may find that you want to stop and pray in the middle of things. But, at the very least, it is good to begin and end your times in prayer as it reminds everyone involved that you've been discussing these things in the presence of God! By the end, you should also have a sense of specific ways you can pray for each other. You've talked about your hearts and how the things in the book relate to your life. Leave space to pray for each other regarding these things!
- **Clarify the plan for next time.** When and where will you be meeting? What should be read for discussion? Who will be facilitating? Etc.

## After Each Group Meeting:

- **Keep the conversation going.** In the time between group meetings, you might consider ways to keep the conversation going. Perhaps you (or someone you assign) can send out a summary of the last meeting's discussion with any relevant action steps, prayer points, unanswered questions to research, etc. You may also reach out personally to people in your group on matters they asked for prayer or accountability for. The goal (as always!) is to keep your group engaging with Jesus and growing in his image and likeness!



# Appendix 5:

## How to Facilitate a Sermon Discussion

The following is intended to help you prepare for and facilitate a sermon discussion with your DNA Group or other small group of people interested in following Jesus together. There are obviously many different ways to do this. What follows are just some suggestions to get you started!

### Before Each Group Meeting:

- **Send out the sermon.** Email your group members a link to the sermon in advance to make sure everyone's heard it before you meet. As a way of encouraging their engagement, you might consider asking them as they listen to make note of any *Quotes* (things that struck them), *Questions* (things that confused them), and *Quarrels* (things that they disagreed with)—the "3Qs." These things may well factor into your discussion time.
- **Re-listen and reflect.** Consider listening to the sermon again yourself. Much like watching a movie twice, you may find that you notice things the second time through that you didn't catch before. You take the material in a bit deeper. Identify your own 3Qs. Listen especially with concern for your group—praying for them, thinking of them. What do they need to hear, focus on, etc.? How should this impact them?
- **Catch the big picture with the sermon handout (if there is one).** Look over the sermon handout where you'll find the Big Idea, main points, and a few prepared reflection questions. Here you'll get a macro vision of things. Consider how you may use this handout in your discussion and where you will still need to supplement, etc.
- **Dive deeper with the sermon manuscript (if there is one).** Look back through the sermon manuscript to get more of a micro view among the details. Make note of the flow of thought and how all the various points fit together. Identify key verses, quotes, points that struck you, etc. and begin to formulate additional discussion questions from them.
- **Bring in additional material.** Feel free to bring in additional Scripture verses, quotes from other readings, etc. if you feel it supplements and carries further the main ideas of the sermon.
- **Finalize and order your discussion questions.** Having now a strong sense of the sermon's content and a better idea of where God is wanting you to take it with your group, polish up your discussion questions and put them in an order that makes most sense to you. It is important here to remember that the goal of studying God's Word is always to *Discover*, *Nurture*, and *Apply* Christ together. The questions you create should engage your group members in these three basic areas. Discover questions help us make sure we understand what the preacher is saying and see how it relates the Scriptures and the good news of Jesus. Nurture questions take us deeper than mere understanding and begin to ask if we really believe what we are learning? They open windows into the heart of each group member and

expose where we need to repent and re-root ourselves in Jesus. Apply questions get your group thinking about how all of this will influence and affect our lives going forward.<sup>40</sup>

## During Each Group Meeting:

So you've gone deeper with the sermon and now have your list of discussion questions and things. What next? How do you actually facilitate a group meeting?

- **Catch up for a few minutes.** One goal in discussing sermons as a group is that you might grow together in friendship and community. Don't be so set on getting to and through your sermon discussion that you actually neglect the people in your group! Leave space for organic connection and sharing.
- **Open in prayer.** Without God's intervention and help we will accomplish nothing.
- **Ask an icebreaker question.** You might consider beginning your discussion by asking a question to warm everyone up and get them talking. A good icebreaker question is related to the larger topic you'll be addressing, but often only tangentially. It is a question that's easy and fun to answer and serves the dual purpose of helping people ease into the awkward space of group discussion while also affording your group members the chance to learn more about one another.
- **Reread the sermon text.** Have a volunteer or two reread the Scripture that was studied on Sunday. This puts God's Word front and center and reminds everyone that he's the one you so desperately need to hear from.
- **Revisit the sermon's Big Idea and main points.** Take time to review the main points from the sermon to make sure that people who missed it are decently caught up and that people who already heard it are sufficiently reminded. This will serve as a backdrop to your discussion time and will hopefully help keep people on track.
- **Reflect on the sermon together.** Now is the time for bringing out those discussion questions you've prepared. Following the general progression of the sermon, focus in on certain verses, quotes, or points and ask questions off of them that move your group from Discover to Nurture to Apply. If you can, leave time at the end to ask your group if they wish to share any of their 3Qs. A lot of these will likely come out in your discussion time, but there may be some lingering items your members wish to address. Here's a basic guide to handling what they may share:
  - *Quotes:* They share something from the sermon that stood out to them and explain why. You ask questions to get deeper along the D-N-A pathway and then spin out further things for the whole group to reflect on.

---

<sup>40</sup> You might consider trying to finalize these questions as early as possible so you can email them out to your group in advance of the gathering. This will give them more time to reflect, likely resulting in deeper, richer discussion when the time comes for it.

- *Questions:* They share something from the sermon that they don't fully understand. You first throw it back to them to see what they think. Then you expand it out to the group for their thoughts. And then, perhaps, you try to help answer their question yourself. If you don't know, you commit to looking into it and circling back next time.
  - *Quarrels:* They share something from the sermon that they don't fully agree with. You first make sure the quarrel is fully understood. Then you expand the matter out to the group to get their thoughts. Then you share your own heart on the matter and try to help. Remember, there are closed and open-handed issues! It's good and even healthy to struggle with things and disagree. You don't have to resolve it. Consider carrying on the conversation offline.
- **Set Aside Time to Pray for One Another.** Make space for people to share prayer requests and give personal updates. By the end here, in view of the discussion, you should already have a sense of specific ways you can be praying for each other. This just casts a net for anything else. Take notes. And take turns interceding. Encourage your group to keep praying for one another through the week.

## After Each Group Meeting:

- **Keep the conversation going.** In the time between group meetings, you might consider ways to keep the conversation going. Perhaps you (or someone you assign) can send out a summary of the last meeting's discussion with any relevant action steps, prayer points, unanswered questions to research, etc. You may also reach out personally to people in your group on matters they asked for prayer or accountability for. The goal (as always!) is to keep your group engaging with Jesus and growing in his image and likeness!



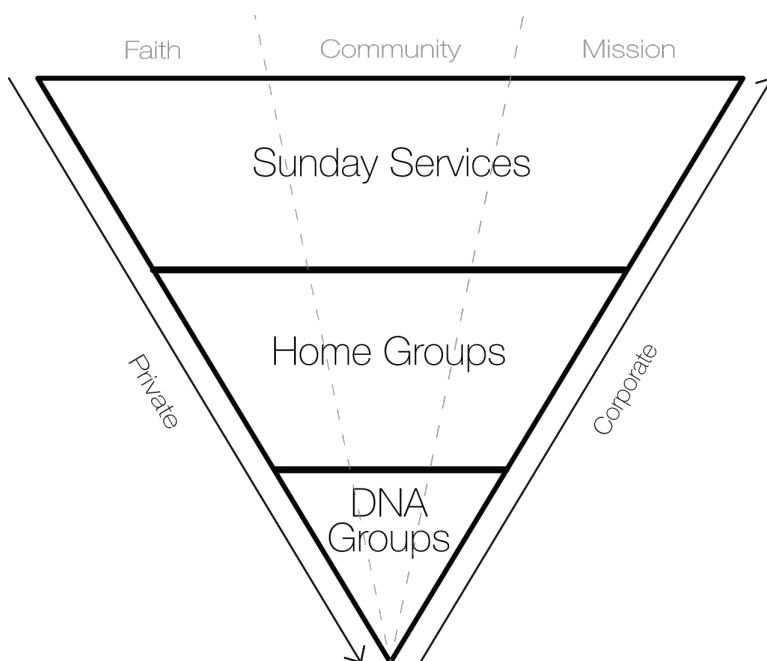
# Appendix 6: Connection to Our Mission and Values

It is important for you to see something of how DNA Groups fit into our broader mission and values as a church and how they relate to the other ministries we engage in.

Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ. Our three core values (Faith, Community, Mission) really serve to flesh out a bit more just how this restoration through the gospel actually takes place:

- How is a person restored to God through the good news of Jesus Christ? Answer: By *Faith* that is fixed upon that good news.
- How is a person restored to neighbor through the good news of Jesus Christ? Answer: By *Community* that is centered around that good news.
- How is a person restored outward to city through the good news of Jesus Christ? Answer: By *Mission* that is mobilized by that good news.

In the diagram that follows, you can see how at every level we are pursuing our values of Faith, Community, and Mission as a church, but we do so in different and equally vital ways.



- Sunday Services develop Faith, Community, and Mission at their broadest contours. The gospel is preached (Faith); we gather together as one body (Community); and in this we showcase the redeemed humanity of Christ to the fallen world around us (Mission).
- Home Groups start to narrow the contours of our pursuit of these values, bringing them closer to each individual member of the church. We are able to deal more personally with matters of Faith; we start to really know and love one another in Community; and we are able to be more nimble and practical in our Mission.
- DNA Groups narrow all of this down to the molecular level. Faith, Community, and Mission begin to merge with the very particulars of *my* life. I am able to discuss my hopes, joys, doubts, fears, confusions regarding my Faith; Community gets even richer as I let people deeper into my heart and they do the same for me; I am encouraged, equipped, and held accountable in a personal way to engage the Mission of God in every sphere of my life.



Each level in the diagram above comes with its own set of assets and liabilities. In our pursuit of Faith, Community, and Mission, what assets and liabilities would you say the DNA Group brings to the table? How is this different from the Sunday Service or Home Group context? If you were to facilitate a DNA Group, how might you try to capitalize on the assets and avoid the liabilities?

# Appendix 7:

## Additional Resources

If you want to continue to grow as a DNA Group Facilitator, you might consider engaging some of the following resources:

- *How People Change* | Lane and Tripp (book)\*
- *Real Change: Becoming More Like Jesus in Everyday Life* | Nicholls and Thorne (book for use in small groups)
- *Dynamics of Biblical Change* | Powlison (course)  
<https://www.ccef.org/course/dynamics-of-biblical-change/>
- *Side by Side* | Welch (book)\*
- *Caring for One Another: 8 Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships* | Welch (book for use in small groups)
- *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* | Tripp (book)\*
- *Life Together* | Bonhoeffer (book)
- "What Is Gospel-Centered Ministry?" | Keller (sermon)\*  
[https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/conference\\_media/gospel-centered-ministry/](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/conference_media/gospel-centered-ministry/)
- "The Centrality of the Gospel" | Keller (article)  
[http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Centrality\\_of\\_the\\_Gospel-Keller.pdf](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Centrality_of_the_Gospel-Keller.pdf)
- "Greatness, Humility, Servanthood" | Piper (sermon)\*  
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/greatness-humility-servanthood>
- "Modeling Grace through Prayer Requests" | Powlison (lecture)\*  
<https://www.ccef.org/resources/podcast/modeling-grace-through-prayer-requests>
- *Let Me Draw a Picture: Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart* | Emlet (article)\*  
[https://www.ccef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/understanding\\_the\\_influences.pdf](https://www.ccef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/understanding_the_influences.pdf)
- *How Does Scripture Change You?* | Powlison (article)\*  
[https://www.ccef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/how\\_does\\_scripture\\_change\\_you.pdf](https://www.ccef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/how_does_scripture_change_you.pdf)
- *How to Talk with Someone about Sin* | Welch (article)\*  
[https://www.ccef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/How\\_to\\_Talk\\_with\\_Someone\\_about\\_Sin\\_Welch.pdf](https://www.ccef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/How_to_Talk_with_Someone_about_Sin_Welch.pdf)
- *CCEF for Pastors* | various (website)  
<https://www.ccef.org/pastors/>
- "Patience unto Peace: Learning to Love One Another Wisely" | Weber (sermons)\*  
Part 1: <https://t.ly/WL0MW>  
Part 2: <https://t.ly/lbQJ>
- "Merciful Judgment: A Field Guide" | Weber (sermons)  
<https://bit.ly/4rHz5tD>