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# Part One: Foundation for Discipleship Groups

## 1.1 A Vision for Community

### The Theology of Discipleship Groups

A central theme which runs throughout the Bible is that God is creating a people who belong to him. Whether in the old covenant or the new, the work of God is the calling of a people. He is not merely saving individuals. He is building a new community in which he is the central participant. He is forming a new society out of the ashes of a fallen and rebellious human race. The development of a community lies at the heart of God's covenant promise "I will be your God and you will be my people." The church must answer the call to be a new community with the utmost seriousness. God communicates this in a number of ways.

*In revealing himself as a Trinity, God demonstrates that he is a community in and of himself*

There is much about the Trinity that is a mystery to us. However, the fact that God has revealed himself to be triune makes it clear that community is intrinsic to the structure of reality. Community and friendship are not created but are foundational to the universe. If God were only one, this would not be true. If he were dual, in him there would be love, but because he is Triune, community is the highest form of life in the universe. God has always existed in a lifestyle of community.

*"Within God's very nature is a divine 'rhythm' or pattern of continuous giving and receiving— not only love, but also glory, honor, life...each in its fullness. Think. God the Father loves and delights in the Son (Matt. 3:17), Jesus receives that love and pleases the Father (John 8:29). Jesus honors the Spirit (Matt. 12:31) and the Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son (John 16:14). Each person in the Trinity loves, honors and glorifies the other and receives love and honor back from the others there is never any lack." – John Samaan, Servants Among the Poor Newsletter*

*"The three divine persons are not there simply for themselves. They are there in that they are there for one another. They are persons in social relationship. The Father can be called Father only in relationship with the Son; the Son can be called Son only in relationship with the Father. The Spirit is the breath of the one who speaks. Being a person means "being in relationship." –Jurgen Moltmann, Humanity in God*

Having been made in God's image, we are built for community and connection. When we live outside of community and interdependence on one another, our very humanity is compromised and subverted. We live out of accordance with our true nature and thus are bound to feel a sense of emptiness and a lack of fulfillment.

### *God calls his people to a community mind set*

1. When God created humanity, He proclaimed that it was “not good for man to be alone.” Just as God existed in community with himself in eternity past, he created people to exist in community not only with Him, but with each other.
2. Israel was addressed and dealt with primarily as a community, not as separate individuals. The covenant and the commandments were directed to them as a people. The calling that they had received from God was received as a nation and was meant to be lived out as a nation. It was not a calling given to separate individuals.
3. When someone within the community sinned, God dealt not just with the individual offender, but with the corporate body. A striking example of this is found in the book of Joshua. When Achan sinned by taking plunder from Jericho, the entire nation suffered the consequences of his actions. Interestingly, in the next battle in which Israel was soundly defeated, Achan was not harmed at all. God could have singled out Achan and dealt with him alone. He did not. Instead, he clearly taught the lesson that the actions of one person affect everyone. God sees his people as being deeply connected to one another and responsible for one another and treats them accordingly.
4. In calling the Twelve apostles Jesus was reconstituting Israel as the community which is to testify to God’s character and ways by the quality of its life together. God did not lose interest in developing a community and shift his focus to the saving of individuals. The church is the new Israel. It is the new community which he is forming and to whom he has committed himself.
5. In Mark 10, Jesus expects that his people will be able to rely on one another as members of a new family which he has created. People who have become followers of Jesus are now each other’s brothers, sisters, mothers and children. Even their possessions and capital (homes and fields) are viewed as belonging to each other in some significant sense. Interestingly, Jesus does not suggest that the number of fathers is multiplied with the formation of this family. God alone is viewed as the Father of this new family and thus our connectedness is further emphasized.
6. Romans 12:1 reads, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies (plural) as a living sacrifice (singular), holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” It is the church as a corporate body that is in view here as the living sacrifice, not the lives of individual Christians. We are to offer ourselves to God as a community. For Paul, community has priority over individuality. When he turns to offer ethical instruction after 11 chapters of doctrinal instruction, the first issue he addresses is the lifestyle and the conduct of the community.
7. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the metaphor of a body to emphasize the fact that we belong to one another and need each other. We are all baptized in the one Spirit and as partakers of that one Spirit are to be seen as intimately related and connected to one another. We are not to say “I don’t need you” to anyone within the community. We are affected by what is going on in one another’s lives whether we know it or not: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored every part rejoices with it.”

8. In the OT, the tabernacle and temple are called God's dwelling, or his "house" (I Chron. 6:48, 25:6; Ezra 5:2, 15). In the NT, the people of God themselves now become the dwelling of God. Individual Christians receive the Holy Spirit and now become "living stones" being built up into God's "spiritual house" (I Peter 2:5). I Cor. 3:9 says: "you are God's building". It is together that we are the building in which God dwells.
9. In addition to these specific examples of God's call to community, one ought not to lose sight of the fact that the great majority of the New Testament writings were not addressed to individuals, but to entire communities. They were meant to be read as communities, interpreted by communities and embodied by communities. Thus the question, "what does this mean to us?" is meant to have priority over the question "what does this mean to me?" This is not to suggest that we should not view ourselves as individuals or that our individuality does not matter. However, though we are never less than individuals, we are always more than individuals. Therefore, the later question is most appropriately asked in the form, "What does this mean to me as a member of this community?"

### ***God reveals the purposes of the Christian community***

1. God desires to be in community with humanity. God created us that we might enjoy dwelling with him and one another— that we might share the common life together. He takes delight in being in relationship with his people. As Gareth Icenogle comments, "Community is the purpose for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, being born, living among us, dying and being raised from the dead."
2. The Christian community exists in order to provide support and encouragement to one another so that we might lead God-pleasing lives. Living up to God's standards and commandments on our own is too hard. We need each other for strength. When living in community, we can remind one another of the lifestyle to which we are called. We can call each other on our failures. We can provide examples for one another of what it means to walk faithfully before God. We can preach the gospel to one another when we are forgetting it and provide support for each other when obedience seems difficult and compromise looks like a better option.
3. The Christian community is to be a "city set on a hill". It is to be a contrast society which by its lifestyle and character draws the nations to God. Initially, Israel existed to be a light to the nations and a community through which the rest of the world would be blessed. Now the church has taken up that mantle. The church exists for the purpose of making the character and ways of God known to those who have not yet embraced the Christian faith. By the quality of our life together and our love for one another we are meant to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." We are meant to be a compelling example of the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed so that the people of the world are attracted to God. We are to avoid being conformed to the world for the sake of the world. We are to be distinct and set apart in our lifestyle for the benefit of those who are not followers of Jesus.
4. The above points lead us to the conclusion that it is impossible to speak of a person's spiritual maturity apart from looking at their involvement in the Christian community and the health of their relationships. Spiritual maturity is an unintelligible concept apart from community.

### *A community which embodies the gospel*

The community which God is forming is forged by the gospel. The gospel gives us our distinct identity and values. We are to uniquely embody the story of what God has done in Jesus Christ in our life together. Therefore, by the quality of our life together, the church both proclaims the message of the gospel and is the goal of the gospel. Understood in this way, we can say that the church is the good news.

1. We are to be a worshipping community. The message of the gospel is that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners— when we were separated from him and wanted nothing to do with him. We are not defined by what we did or have done to become God’s people, but by what God has done in Christ to make us his. We are therefore, first and foremost, a people who are grateful to God and who stand amazed at the wonders of his love. As a result, we worship God with our praises and by celebrating the Lord’s Supper.
2. We are to be an accepting community. The message of the gospel is that we have been accepted at our worst. We are to extend a similar acceptance to one another without demanding that they change before we offer it to them. We need neither frown upon nor be shocked by other people’s sin and weaknesses. We are to extend grace rather than judgment.
3. We are to be a holy community. Though we are to accept people as they are, we are not to be content with leaving others where they are. The gospel tells us that we are destined to become like Jesus and that God has already begun the process of changing us from glory unto glory. We are to urge one another to throw off what is not in keeping with what God has made us to be and to put on all that is in accordance with the new reality of our status as sons and daughters of God.
4. We are to be a truth-telling community. Bonhoeffer writes that “there is no kindness more cruel than the kindness which consigns another person to their sin.” The gospel gives us the motivation to truly care about people. We are to be marked by gentle but honest truth telling which will lead others to want to change. We won’t be harsh because we know our own weaknesses and flaws. But neither will we shrink back out of a fear that we will be rejected since we have the only acceptance which ultimately matters. We can also hear the truth from others. Because we are accepted in Christ, we are free to admit our flaws.
5. We are to be an upbuilding and encouraging community. The work of Christ in the church is *oikodomeo*, or “building up”. “God is the one who can build you up” (Acts 20:32) and “In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21). The church grows not by joining physical stones but by joining and uniting human lives filled with the Spirit of God. So, too, the main work of the living stones themselves is *oikodomeo*. “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up” (I Thess. 5:11) and “Speaking the truth in love...the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Eph. 4:15-16). Because of the acceptance which comes to us in the gospel, we do not have to resort to tearing others down in order to feel good about ourselves. Petty rivalries and competitiveness vanish. Confident that we are loved by God, we are free to encourage others and desire the best for them. We are enabled to work for the prosperity and success of others.

6. We are to be a sacrificially generous and giving community. Paul writes, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). We are to follow suit: spending and being spent on behalf of others. The early Christians were known for their radical generosity: “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need” (Acts 2:44,45) and “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had...There were no needy persons among them. From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need” (Acts 4:32-35). We also ought to be known for being promiscuous with our money and possessions.
7. We are to be a suffering community. Jesus loved us while we were yet enemies. He didn’t retaliate against us. He suffered our slighting of him and the wrath of God on the cross in order that we might be turned into his friends. We also are to avoid retaliation. We are to love to the point of suffering whether that suffering love is directed toward those inside the community or outside the community. We are to offer forgiveness to those who harm or persecute us.

### *Some Implications of God’s Call to Community*

To have the quality of community life which God expects from the church requires deliberate effort. This cannot happen only (or even mainly!) in the large worship service. We cannot assume that merely by gathering together in large groups that we will be able to embody the gospel or carry out the functions which God intends for his people to fulfill. We will be incapable of being “a city set on a hill.” We will not be able to proclaim the good news credibly. To do this requires face-to-face groups. It demands ongoing significant relationships which are consciously pursuing Christian community and not settling for casual social involvement with one another. It requires a concrete group of people who know each other’s faces, names and lives and who regularly spend time together. It requires what the Bible refers to as house churches. The New Testament epistles talk of “the church that meets in their house” (1 Cor. 16:19; Romans 16:5). Acts 2:24ff and Acts 20:20 tell how the Christians all met in homes as well as in the temple courts. If we follow this pattern, we will be living in a very concrete way as the light of the world and the salt of the earth and the nonbelieving world will not be able to dismiss the Christian message so easily.

Many churches expect the pastoral staff to “build up the believers”, but the Bible expects believers to “build up one another”. Many churches expect the pastoral staff to attract and win new persons through programs, but the Bible says that the body grows member-to-member as each speaks the truth in love, builds up, and equips the other.

The early church certainly recognized that the essence of being the church was face- to-face every member ministry in small groups. Paul assumes that when they meet together “each one of you has a psalm, a teaching...let all things be done for building up (oikodomeo)” (1 Cor. 14). Paul is clearly talking of house churches, in which everyone participated. He assumed everyone ministered.

Too frequently our approach to Discipleship Groups is to ask the question, “What am I getting out of this?” But on the basis of everything that has been said, the first question that should be asked is, “What am I giving into this group?” We should be concerned as to whether or not we are striving to build others up and to speak the truth in love. We should be concerned about whether or not we are communicating God’s love to others and being honest about ourselves. If people approach their groups in this way it will completely transform our communities. It will set them apart from many Bible study groups which often give new information and increase our Bible knowledge (though most of us have far more input than we can apply) but fail to change our lives.

Nurtured within a culture which encourages a radical individualism, our ability to participate in a robust community life has been severely diminished. The muscles required for life together have wasted away and atrophied. It is no wonder that many of our attempts at being a community are unfulfilling and sub-par. Simply put: we are not very good at it. But this can be no excuse for avoiding it. After all, it is what we were created for and it is what God expects from us. The more we work at it, the better we will become at it. We must recommit ourselves to developing the muscles necessary to become God’s new society.

## 1.2 Christ Church East Mission and Values

We long to be a church that embraces God’s call to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). We believe this happens through gospel-centered community that is committed to multiplying. Our mission and values reflect this desire.

### CCE Mission

Passionately gathering people to rejoice in the sufficiency of Christ.

### CCE Values

#### ***Grace is enough***

In a performance-driven world, we actively rest in the finished work of Christ.  
Ephesians 2:8-9

#### ***Faith comes by hearing***

In a self-help world, we faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of God.  
Romans 10:14-17

#### ***We need each other***

In a lonely and isolated world, we compassionately move towards one another.  
Romans 12:10, 13, 15-16

#### ***Our neighbors matter***

In an indifferent world, we intentionally engage our neighbors with the gospel.  
Matthew 22:36-40

## Part Two: Structure of Discipleship Groups

### 2.1 What are Discipleship Groups?

Discipleship Groups are basic Christian communities. Believing that discipleship and evangelism are activities best carried out in a communal context, Discipleship Groups provide that context. They are gatherings of 8 to 12 people meeting weekly from late August through May at the University Center or in homes, coffee shops, and offices throughout the city. In these groups, people come to know God, experience His presence, develop and foster community, nurture and care for one another, and participate in God's work in the world. They are led by trained lay leaders from the congregation who are given on-going support.

#### What is the Purpose of Discipleship Groups?

##### 1. *To make disciples*

The words of Matthew 28:19-20 are familiar to most, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." But few understand the radical nature of this command. Jesus commands us to make disciples, not just converts, and he connects discipleship with obedience. Discipleship is the process by which a person becomes a more fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

How does this happen? Scripture makes it very clear that this does not happen in isolation. All major exhortations in the New Testament to holy living are plural (Rom 6:1-23; Gal 5:13-6:10; Eph 4:17-6:18), meaning that discipleship is to successfully happen in the context of a loving and caring fellowship. Discipleship Groups are the place where the truths of scripture are applied to life through loving confrontation and healthy accountability.

##### 2. *To provide fellowship and mutual care*

Fellowship can be defined as seeking to share with others what God has made known to you while letting them share with you what they know of him. Through fellowship, we find strength, refreshment, and instruction for the soul. Discipleship Groups exist to create a context for dynamic fellowship.

As people spend time in fellowship, they become aware of one another's needs and opportunities arise for them to fulfill God's command to care for one another. "God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor 12:24- 26). Discipleship Groups are one of the most strategic venues through which this mutual care can be achieved. Why? Because it is nearly impossible to achieve this level of care in a Sunday morning worship service. It is too easy for people to slip through the cracks. In the context of a Discipleship Group, people can give and receive specific, personal care

These groups also serve as a key way to integrate people who join our community and to keep the leadership aware of the concerns and troubles which face the members of our congregation which might otherwise remain hidden.

### **3. *To exercise spiritual gifts***

God has given spiritual gifts to every Christian (1 Cor 12:1-7). He fully expects us to use them. However, the church is sometimes compared to a football stadium where you find 22 people who desperately need a rest and thousands of people who desperately need exercise. Discipleship Groups are a place where spiritual gifts are discovered and exercised within the group itself, the larger church, and the world. They are a place where a vision for ministry and service are developed.

### **4. *To discover Christianity***

Discipleship Groups are a place where individuals who are seeking truth can be invited and encouraged to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Nonbelievers, because they are created in the image of God, long to be a part of a community of believers who love each other well. We see this dynamic occur in the early church in Acts 2:47, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Authentic Christian community is a powerful evangelistic tool.

In addition, Discipleship Groups serve as a place where we can remind one another of our call to share the gospel and pray for those with whom we are sharing the good news.

## **How do Discipleship Groups Fit into Christ Church East as a Whole?**

Discipleship Groups are *the primary place for pastoral care* at Christ Church East. Churches do one of two things: They either practice systematic care and encouragement of the congregation or systematic neglect of the congregation. Our network of Discipleship Groups is the means through which we seek to practice the former. It serves as the nervous system of our church. In them, the gospel motivates people towards a richer relationship with God. In them, the gospel heals the wounds we incur in this broken world. In them, the gospel calls people into the service of God's kingdom.

Though the Bible does not command us to organize small group ministry, it does presuppose that a significant relational life exists within the church. Where this does not happen naturally, the church must cultivate it. Discipleship Groups are Christ Church East's chosen means of cultivating this relational life. Because of the foundational role they play in the life of our church, we hope that a great majority of people will be involved in a Discipleship Group.

## What are the Distinctives of Christ Church East Discipleship Groups?

### 1. *Accessibility*

We expect our Discipleship Groups to grow and multiply. Therefore, they must be open to new people. Group members are expected to invite neighbors, friends, and people they meet at church, Christian and non-Christian alike, to try out the group or be included in group activities. The church website features a map where people can locate groups in their neighborhood or community.

### 2. *Leadership*

Each group has a trained and supported leader along with an apprentice. Leaders attend periodic training sessions throughout the year and are shepherded by an elder. We are committed to raising up new leaders through apprenticeship training.

### 3. *Multiplication*

Each group is committed to growing towards intentional multiplication. When a group grows to 16 adults, leadership will help the group leader and apprentice develop plans and strategy towards multiplication. A new group is formed with a committed core of 6-8 adults.

### 4. *Life Together*

Discipleship Groups are not merely events or meetings, but a people doing life together. The “one another” commands of the New Testament cannot be experienced in a weekly meeting, let alone in a Sunday morning worship service. Discipleship Groups must therefore be seen as dynamic, organic relationships that are nourished by all sorts of activities and experiences. While your Discipleship Group may meet once a week for time in the Word, prayer, and fellowship, you should also come up with ways your group will “do life” together and serve together throughout the week.

### 5. *Multigenerational*

Discipleship Groups are not organized and populated around specific seasons of life. They are intentionally multi-generational (single, married, married with children, empty nester, and retired). When groups and ministries are divided along generational lines, the wisdom and perspective of multiple generations are lost. We have much to learn from each other.

### 6. *Curriculum*

Discipleship Groups have the option of studying the sermon scripture using the sermon study guide or choosing curriculum from a pre-approved list of resources.

## **7. *Gender specific time***

Some struggles and hardships are difficult to share in a mixed gender context. If you are leading a mixed gender group, you will need to plan for gender specific time. This can be accomplished by breaking into men and women's prayer time at the end of each group. Or, at least once a month, men and women can meet separately.

## **Overall Ministry Structure**

Because Discipleship Groups are the primary place for pastoral care at Christ Church East, they are embedded in a shepherding structure that ensures people are known and cared for.

- Discipleship Groups are the frontline of pastoral care at Christ Church East. Each member of a group is cared for by a trained and equipped Discipleship Group Leader.
- Discipleship Group Leaders are shepherded and supported by an elder who is experienced and equipped to mentor and care for them.
- Elders are trained, encouraged and supported by a Staff Pastor.

## **2.2 Discipleship Group Leader Support System**

The role of Discipleship Group Leader is a high calling. Leading a weekly Discipleship Group and caring for its members demands much time and energy. Because of this, it is critical that leaders are supported and cared for. The following is a description how this is accomplished.

### **Discipleship Group Leader Kickoffs**

At the beginning of each semester (August and January), Discipleship Group Leaders and Elders gather on a Sunday morning before the worship service for fellowship, training, and prayer. This is meant to be a time of encouragement and preparation for the semester ahead.

### **Ongoing Training and Support**

Between the semester kickoffs, Discipleship Group Leaders will gather with their shepherding elder on a Sunday morning for ongoing training, support, and care (once in the Fall, twice in the Winter/Spring). These are intended to equip leaders with the tools they need to effectively lead a Discipleship Group and provide mutual care and prayer support from other leaders.

The following questions are designed to facilitate these mid-semester meetings between Elders and Discipleship Group Leaders. While this time is in no way scripted, it is important to evaluate the health of both leader and Discipleship Group. These questions are not meant to provide a platform for self-righteousness or to induce guilt. Rather, they are designed to cover some of the bottom-line commitments that are important to the Christian life.

### ***Leader Health***

- How is your relationship with God?
- How is your marriage and family?
- What truth from the Bible studies or sermons over the past few weeks has God been using in your life? How have you been applying those truths in specific ways?
- Have you prayed for everyone in your Discipleship Group this week?
- What nonbelievers have you been praying for? What things have you been doing to reach out to them with the gospel?

### ***Group Health***

- What successes are there to celebrate from your group?
- Do you have an apprentice? If so, what activities are they performing in your group? If not, are you praying for one?
- What troubles or frustrations are you experiencing in your group?

### ***Prayer***

- Pray for personal and group concerns that have arisen out of your discussion.

## Part Three: The Leader of Discipleship Groups

### 3.1 Leadership Job Descriptions

#### Discipleship Group Leader

The Discipleship Group Leader is the most important pastoral link in a church that is organized around Discipleship Groups. The leader is the person who is at the closest level of care and concern for the members of the church. As a leader, your primary responsibility is to see that your group members mature biblically. You will also be responsible to consistently keep your elder informed about the spiritual health of the group and its members.

##### Prerequisites:

- Professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ
- Member of Christ Church East
- Seeking to maintain a healthy personal relationship with God

##### God Modeling:

- Consistent, obedient walk
- Leading through repentance
- Biblical

##### Stewardship Organizing:

- Well prepared to lead weekly meetings
- Well balanced group meetings including all essential elements
- Recruit and train apprentice leader for future group

##### Leadership Shepherding:

- Pray weekly for each member of the group
- Facilitate genuine personal sharing of strengths, weaknesses, spiritual progress, needs, and problems
- Encourage group members to spend time together outside group meeting
- Encourage members to serve the church in area of giftedness
- Responsible for group growth (conversion & assimilation)

##### Duties to Elder:

- Attend kickoff meetings and mid-semester training gatherings
- Welcome feedback from shepherding elder
- Report group progress and problems to elder

#### Discipleship Group Shepherding Elder

The shepherding elders serve in a pastoral capacity overseeing Discipleship Groups. As a shepherding elder, your chief pastoral responsibility is to see that the groups you serve are healthy and functioning well.

##### Prerequisites:

- Elder of Christ Church East
- Experienced participant and leader of Discipleship Groups
- Seeking to maintain a healthy personal relationship with God

##### Duties to Staff Pastor:

- Attend kickoff meetings and lead mid-semester training gatherings
- Work closely with Staff Pastor to provide support for Discipleship Group Leaders
- Identify future elders from mature Discipleship Group Leaders

#### Duties to Discipleship Group Leaders:

- Pray weekly for leaders under your care
- Meet individually, as needed, with Discipleship Group Leaders for prayer, accountability, and ongoing training
- Assist each Discipleship Group Leader to identify and train apprentices
- Pastor and counsel Discipleship Group Leaders

#### Duties to Discipleship Group Members:

- Seek to know each group member by name
- Know how to handle a crisis and how to make referrals when necessary

## 3.2 Motives for Leadership

### Appropriate Motives for Leadership

#### *Serve Christ*

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col 3:23-24).

#### *Shepherd others*

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

#### *Use your gifts to serve others*

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13).

#### *Communicate the message of reconciliation*

“...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:19-21).

## Wrong Motives/Hindrances to Leadership

### *Self-exaltation*

“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips” (Prov 27:2).

### *To feel important or gain prestige*

“On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed— God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else” (1 Thess 2:4-6).

### *Because someone pressured you*

“Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers— not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve” (1 Peter 5:2).

## 3.3 Qualifications of a Leader

### Doctrinal Qualifications

- Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
- Do you believe the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, the only rule of faith and practice?
- Is there anything within the Nicene Creed with which you disagree?

#### Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

## Moral Qualifications

Though multiple passages in the Bible speak to the qualifications of a leader, the following two passages provide a great summary of such qualifications.

In 1 Timothy 3:1-12, Paul lists several things that Timothy should watch for in the persons he appoints as elders. While Discipleship Group Leaders do not hold the office of elder at Christ Church East, they are the front line for pastoral care at the church and should therefore exhibit such characteristics. Let's look at some of these qualifications:

- They must be above reproach. That is, there should be no grounds for accusing them of improper Christian behavior.
- They must be temperate (self-controlled), prudent (sensible), respectable (demonstrating good behavior), hospitable, uncontentious, good managers of their own households, of good reputation with those outside of the church, not given to (addicted to) wine.
- They must not be new converts (1 Timothy 3:6). Discipleship Group Leaders should be mature Christians.
- Leaders must be able to communicate the truth of the Gospel and facilitate discussion in a Discipleship Group setting.

During his last supper with the disciples in John 13:1-17, Jesus got on his knees before each man and washed his feet. The apostles were shocked, and Peter was particularly incensed. But Jesus asked them in verses 12-16, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

According to Jesus, anyone who seeks to lead others must have the attitude of a servant. Washing feet was something customarily done by the house servant, not by the host. Jesus was demonstrating that there is no job too small nor too humiliating for a leader to do for his or her people.

## Accountability Qualifications

Because Discipleship Groups are the front line for pastoral care at Christ Church East, it is important that the leaders of these groups be accountable to the church's leadership. For this reason, every leader must have completed the Discovery Class and be a member of Christ Church East.

It takes an average of 5 to 6 hours per week to carry out the tasks of a Discipleship Group leader well. Are you willing to make the following commitments?

- Are you willing to convene a group weekly and give the necessary time to preparation?
- Are you willing to follow up those who miss your group meeting or fail to attend for a period of time?
- Are you willing to commit yourself to developing an apprentice leader and to the multiplication of your group?
- Will you make every effort to attend the kickoff meetings and mid-semester training gatherings?

### 3.4 Three Responsibilities of a Discipleship Group Leader

#### Making Disciples

Jesus calls us to make disciples. “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” (Matt. 28:18-20). But what is a disciple and how do you make a disciple?

#### *What is a disciple?*

The word disciple means follower or learner. A disciple is a follower of Jesus who is being increasingly conformed into the image of Christ in four major areas: Word, prayer, community, and mission. A maturing disciple increasingly finds joy and life in God’s word. “Give me life according to your word” (Psalm 119:25b). A maturing disciple increasingly expresses dependence on Christ through prayer. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). A maturing disciple increasingly moves away from isolation and towards community, embracing the numerous “one another” commands in the New Testament. Finally, a maturing disciple increasingly gives his/her life away for the sake of the gospel. “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:8).

#### *How do you make a disciple?*

The Great Commission in Matthew 28 is bookended with two great truths. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”, and “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”. Jesus alone has the authority and power to transform people. And his call on our lives to make disciples is a participation in what he is doing. This should give the Discipleship Group Leader great hope and freedom.

With Christ’s authority and presence as the foundation, we turn to Paul’s exhortation to Timothy on the “how” of making disciples. “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:1-2). Discipleship is a life-on-life, highly relational process. As a disciple-maker, you help people engage the Word, prayer, community, and mission through highly relational teaching and modeling.

## Shepherding People

### *The Group Leader as Lay Shepherd*

Shepherding or pastoring God's flock is not the exclusive responsibility of paid clergy. Instead, the New Testament continually refers to "house churches" run by lay leadership. Additionally, the "one another" passages require lay shepherding in order to be fulfilled. In one sense, therefore, all believers are called to shepherd, or nurture, one another in Christ. A Discipleship Group Leader is someone who is particularly gifted in this area. You should not have to feel a call to vocational ministry in order to be an effective group leader.

Once you have become involved in a few people's lives, you quickly realize both the thrill and the terror of shepherding. The thrill is participating in the work of the Holy Spirit as people are transformed into the likeness of Christ. The terror comes from always feeling stretched beyond what you are capable to give. Therefore, humble reliance on Christ alone, heartfelt gratitude for his mercy, and sincere repentance for sinful actions and motivations must characterize the attitude of the leader.

### *The Character of an Effective Shepherd*

#### *Warmth*

Treat people hopefully, as they *potentially* are. So much of pastoral warmth is a function of non-verbal cues, including movement, posture, eye contact, expression, attitude, and timing. The key means of warmth is to talk personally, not afraid to express compassion and affection, and to praise honestly but liberally. Be careful, however, because people can spot a counterfeit compliment.

#### *Transparency*

Also called biblical sincerity, this is a function of Christian humility (a self-forgetfulness, a lack of self-consciousness). It is being open about your own thoughts and feelings and your own limits as well. Transparency means being truthful about your concerns and your needs. It is not simply "spilling your guts," because that can be done to draw attention to yourself, or to manipulate others. The motivation behind transparency is service to others. Transparency is also integrity, not being radically different in public from what you are in private.

#### *Active Listening*

*What active listening is not:* 1) Parrot. "I hear you saying..." 2) Guru. Spouting clichés and quotes. 3) Detective. Firing lots of questions. 4) Drill sergeant. Providing pat answers. 5) Swami. Predicting the future. 6) Florist. Being super-duper positive. 7) Judge. Showing the error of their ways. 8) Historian. Recounting your experience endlessly. *What it is:* 1) Asking open-ended questions that encourage more elaboration. 2) Slowing down your responses by checking the other person's content through paraphrasing. 3) Finally, providing alternative solutions and checking their evaluation of each. How long do you listen before providing answers? *Longer when:*

1) The person knows the answer but needs more support than information. 2) You know the answer will be hard to hear. 3) You do not know the person well. 4) You are not sure what the person really wants from you. *Shorter wher:* 1) the person is sinning by the very conversation [gossip, slander, etc.]. 2) the person's excessive talkativeness is a clear avoidance of an important issue. 3) the person is intoxicated or severely depressed 4) this is an often-repeated survey of the same ground.

### ***Serving***

Watch for "crunch" situations in people's lives. Find out about family or personal crises (sickness, death, problems) and offer support, prayer, and loving deeds. Find out about job-related problems or living situation "pinches". Can you provide any help?

Invite people to do things that you believe they would enjoy doing: a visit to a gallery, a sporting event, etc. It is "serving" if you can provide something to make an event easier (a free ticket!). Last, connect people with others who might be helpful to them in their profession or in ministry.

### **Cultivating Community**

Community is derived from the biblical concept of fellowship. The Greek word for fellowship is "koinonia", which means participation or sharing. It's used to describe three kinds of fellowship in the scriptures: fellowship within the Trinity, fellowship between Christ and his people, and fellowship between his people. Our fellowship, or community, is to reflect the unity, love, and other centeredness within the Trinity. Discipleship Groups provide an excellent context for developing this kind of community.

### **The Four Stages of Community**

Community does not happen automatically. Where it exists, it is because people have invested a significant amount of time and effort in relationships.

In terms of *time*, relationships usually move through at least the following stages:

#### ***Stage One: Getting Acquainted***

- Everybody has to start on this level. It cannot and should not be skipped over or rushed through. Before they could be a team, even Jesus and His disciples had to first get to know one another (see John 1:35-39).
- How do people usually feel at this stage?
- What questions are they asking themselves?

- Here are some ways to help your group members get better acquainted:
  - Give them a roster of all the Discipleship Group members, including phone numbers, e-mail addresses, birthdays, etc.
  - In the early stages of a group, start every meeting with an icebreaker question or game (“Today was a good day because . . .”; “One good thing that’s happened since last week is . . .”; see Appendix for other sample questions).
  - Do things together just for fun (go to a movie, restaurant, or concert; play putt-putt; host a murder mystery; progressive dinner; etc.).
  - Celebrate their birthdays and anniversaries as a group.
  - Engage in mission together.
- It is likely that your group will spend at least the first few months at this stage.

### ***Stage Two: Feeling Relaxed***

- As time goes by, trust is established. You loosen up and feel more comfortable with each other. You enjoy each other’s company. This is a natural result of the investment you have made in Stage One.
- Ways of helping your group members feel more relaxed with each other:
  - Have someone share his or her story at each meeting.
  - Take a retreat as a group.
  - Have a white elephant gift party.
  - Go to a special place at Christmas time.
  - Watch a movie together and critique it.
  - Ask members of the group “fill in the blank” type questions, such as: “Tomorrow, something I will most likely take for granted is . . .”; “Last year at this time I never would have thought God would . . .”; “One attribute of God which I most appreciate is that He is . . .”; etc.
  - Give everyone a long sheet of paper and pens or markers. Have each person draw a timeline of his or her life, showing three to five major life events.

### ***Stage Three: Being Vulnerable***

- It is a sign that great progress has been made when people in your group feel vulnerable enough to ask a question, confess a sin, confront a problem, express a need or frustration, pray, voice a minority view on a matter, or take a turn at leading the Bible study.
- Ways of encouraging your group members to be vulnerable before each other:
  - *Model*/vulnerability. Share your own struggles and needs.
  - Encourage questions.
  - Ensure that confidentiality is honored.
  - Ask questions that get to the heart. Examples: “What do you look forward to as you grow older?” “What is it that often drives us to fear intimacy?” “What changes will you make this week as a result of our discussion tonight?”

- Allow time for prayer requests. But note: Keep prayer requests limited to personal or sincere needs. Have someone keep a record of the requests. Pray for one another at each meeting.
- Be flexible. If someone in the group needs special care at your meeting, drop or amend your agenda as required.
- Do something that gets your group out of their comfort zone. Go on a mission trip together; do a prayer walk; serve the homeless a meal.

### ***Stage Four: Experiencing Oneness***

- A good Biblical example of this level of friendship is David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1-4).
- Here there are no secrets. There is such commitment and security in the relationship that you can be completely you and not be afraid (see 1 John 4:18).
- Not everyone will bond at this deepest level. Usually, God gives us just a handful of “Jonathans” throughout our lifetime.

### **Time and Effort**

Not only does community take *time* to achieve, it also requires *effort* on the part of everyone in the group.

- According to the Bible, love is not just a feeling of affection; it is an action.
- Look up the following verses and identify the “one another” command stated or implied in each:
  - Romans 15:7
  - Colossians 3:13, 3:16
  - Ephesians 4:32, 5:21
  - 1 Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11
  - Romans 12:10, 14:13, 15:14, 16:16
  - 1 Corinthians 12:25
  - 1 Peter 3:8, 4:9
  - James 5:16
  - Galatians 5:13
  - John 13:14
- Think a little more about that last passage (John 13:1-17). What was Jesus telling us to do when he said, “You also should wash one another’s feet” (vs. 14)?
- In what specific ways might you encourage your Discipleship Group to wash one another’s feet?

## **3.5 Evaluation Tools**

### **What are the forms for?**

The following form is to assist leaders and elders in determining the health and growth of all Discipleship Groups. The means by which we can ensure consistency in the Discipleship Group ministry is by holding every group accountable to the same set of standards. This form will help you periodically evaluate your group health.

## Discipleship Group Evaluation Form

	Leader:	Apprentice:	Host:
Use of Time	Announced start time? Actual start time? Ending time? Time breakdown in minutes: Fellowship/Food _____ Study _____ Sharing _____ Prayer _____ Other _____	Did the group begin and end on time? Are any elements of group life either dominating or getting short changed? Did the group flow smoothly? Pace of the group – was it too fast or did it drag?	Score E A W
Atmosphere	Was the group warm and welcoming? Was the environment open, accepting, and safe?	Did participants reflectively listen, or just “fix” people’s problems? Were visitors made to feel comfortable?	Score E A W
Bible Study	Was the scripture read aloud? Was the discussion guide used? Was the curriculum engaging? Was the leader prepared? Was the scripture applied to life?	Was interaction spread out evenly among participants? Did the leader dominate too much? Did the leader ask good follow-up questions?	Score E A W
Sharing	Was there a significant time of sharing? Was there an environment of openness, acceptance, support, and safety? Were the participants transparent and honest?	What percentage of the group participated? Was there a disruptive or dominating person? How could more people participate?	Score E A W
Prayer	Was there enough prayer? How was the prayer time structured? What percentage of the group prayed? Did the leader model heartfelt prayer?	Were the prayer requests impersonal and distant, or were they personal, focused on character change, and kingdom-centered?	Score E A W
Outreach	What is the group doing to reach out? Evangelism Mercy Missions	How is the group bringing in new participants? Does the group have a sense of being part of the overall church community?	Score E A W
Community	Does the group have an apprentice leader? How is the apprentice participating in the leadership of the group? Is attendance consistent? If not, to what do you attribute the inconsistency? Does the group spend time together outside of regular meetings?	Are there any people in the group who have dropped through the cracks? Have they been contacted? Are there people with particular problems in their lives that need help/counseling outside the group?	Score E A W

E = Excellent A = Average W = Needs Work

## **Part Four: Leading Your Discipleship Group**

### **4.1 Essential Elements of Discipleship Groups**

The primary goal for the Discipleship Group meeting is to develop a Christian community *where Jesus Christ is experienced in his presence and power*. This is a community where, by the Spirit, Jesus ministers through one another so that people are cared for and encouraged to live a God-pleasing life. This is a community where Christ transforms and changes our lives as individuals, as small communities, and the larger communities of which the group is a part.

The agenda of the group should be arranged in such a way that allows for this to happen. Healthy Discipleship Groups contain the following elements: fellowship, transformational Bible study, and sharing/prayer. An outward focused mission is also part of a healthy group. As a leader, you should be asking yourself whether the goals of the group are being achieved. Is your group experiencing Christ over time? If not, is it because your group is imbalanced? While all four of these elements will not necessarily receive equal emphasis at any particular Discipleship Group meeting, over a series of meetings a balance between these elements must be achieved.

#### **Fellowship**

Use the fellowship time (approximately 30 minutes) for more than just casual conversation. As the leader, ask questions of the group that cause people in your group to talk about real life issues. If someone in your group has been unemployed, ask them how the job search is coming. If someone was planning on having a hard conversation with a parent during the previous week, ask how that went. Ask questions that cause members of the group to reflect on and share about their relationship with God.

#### **Transformational Bible Study/Discussion**

Life-change takes place when God's truth and the power of the Holy Spirit are together operating on our hearts. The clearest and most certain place where truth can be found is in the Scriptures. For this reason, any group which hopes to see lives transformed will be spending time together in the Word.

As a general rule, Bible study should last no more than 45 minutes. The key to this time is transformation. Additional layers of Bible knowledge do not always equate to heart change, because people fail to act on or apply what they have learned. Whether you are studying the sermon scripture or working through a curriculum study, make sure you are applying the Word to everyday life.

#### **Sharing/Prayer**

Since much of the sharing of life's joys and struggles will happen during the fellowship time, much of the 30-minute sharing/prayer time can be devoted to prayer. As you gather prayer requests, remind group members to keep their requests succinct so that a majority of the time can be spent praying. In addition to sharing personal prayer requests, it is important to get people to focus on prayer needs outside of themselves. One way to achieve this is by asking the following question, "How does Christ want to use me to touch the hurts in the world this week?"

Depending on the size of your group, you may want to break up into smaller groups for prayer. Regardless, it is important to keep variety in your prayer time. You may stay in the large group for prayer one week, but then have the men and women pray in separate groups the following week. Place a priority on your prayer time. Don't let the Bible study or the sharing time dominate such that your prayer time is consistently reduced to a quick closing prayer at the end.

### **Gender Specific**

Some struggles and hardships are difficult to share in a mixed gender context. If you are leading a mixed gender group, you will need to plan for gender specific time. This can be accomplished by breaking into men and women's prayer time at the end of each group. Or, at least once a month, men and women can meet separately.

### **Child Care**

To enable all the adults of a Discipleship Group to participate in the study/discussion and sharing/prayer time, the church will reimburse for childcare workers at the group.

### **Outreach**

The vision for evangelism at Christ Church East has always been and continues to be relational versus programmatic. Evangelism isn't done by the experts (whatever that means!); it's done by every member of the congregation. We also believe that evangelism is not merely an individual task, but a communal one. This is one of the striking truths that surfaces in Acts 2:42-47 ("The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved"). For this reason, Discipleship Groups are essential to evangelism. Groups should be accessible and welcoming to nonbelievers as they experience the love of Christ through your group in tangible ways. Your group may also plan some parties/socials to create non-threatening opportunities to build relationships with nonbelievers.

## **4.2 Facilitating Dynamic Discussion**

### **Four Facilitator Actions**

- *Acknowledge everyone who speaks during a discussion*  
Even if several people speak at once, make sure to recognize each one. Also, respond to laughter or a groan or a deep sigh – remember, 90 percent of communication is nonverbal.
- *Clarify what is being said and felt*  
Say, "Let me see if I understand what you are saying."
- *Turn it back to the group as a means of generating discussion*  
Don't be the answer person. Ask, "What do others of you think about what was just said?"
- *Summarize what has been said*  
Offer statements like, "So far it seems like we have been saying..." or "Nancy, could you try to summarize the key components of the discussion so far?"

## Questions

One of the most important keys to facilitating dynamic discussion is generating the right kinds of questions and offering appropriate responses. Here are some guidelines for the kinds of questions and responses that would help your group engage in meaningful, challenging discussions.

### *Opening Questions (Initiating discussion)*

Use an opening question to help the group warm up to each other, get to know one another better, and to let them hear their own voices. Opening questions are speculative and thought-provoking, preparing group members' minds and hearts for the topic to be discussed.

You may want to broach the topic of discussion with a short, creative illustration or story that will answer the question, "Why do I want to discuss this topic tonight?"

Examples:

"What do you look forward to as you grow older?"

"What is it that often drives us to fear intimacy with one another?"

### *Observation Questions (What does this passage say?)*

Make sure the facts are discovered before launching into an interpretation. When Bible studies go off on tangents, often it is at this point. The questions should be simple, but not insulting to the intelligence. [Example: (from John 3) "When did Nicodemus come to see Jesus and why do you suppose he came then?"]

- Observation questions generally begin with who, what, when, and where.
- Look for repetition of key words, contrasts, cause and effect.
- Are any doctrinal statements made about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, myself, sin, purpose in life, salvation, freedom, etc.?

### *Interpretation Questions (What does this passage mean?)*

The overall question is, "What is the point of this passage?" Keep the group to the text itself. We do not want to bring our own ideas to the passage yet, but want the scripture to speak to us.

- List any difficulties or questions of meaning.
- Why did the author write this? (At this point it might be helpful to know something about those to whom the passage is written and in what cultural context it was formulated.)
- How did the author intend his writing to be understood? What is the underlying principle that would help us understand his teaching?

### ***Application Questions (What does this passage mean to me?)***

A Bible study is not complete until it leads to personal life application. After we have discovered the facts and we think we know why the author wrote what he did, we should then ask, "So what? How does the main point or general principle make a difference in the way I live my life today?"

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to forsake?
- Is there a promise to claim? If so, what are its conditions?
- Is there an example to follow?
- What new truth does this teach me about God's will for my life?

### **Evaluating Your Questions**

Ask yourself the questions before you ask others. Imagine what people might answer. If you can't come up with any answers reconsider whether you ought to use that question. If your answers lead to further questions, consider asking those questions also. Good questions always fit the following criteria (from *How to Lead Small Group Bible Studies*, NavPress):

1. *Is it clear?* (Is the question easy to understand and remember? Does it address one topic? Does it avoid unnecessary problems?)
2. *Is it relevant?* (What is the point of asking the question? What answer do you expect? Does it relate to truth the group already knows? Can the group answer it? Does it focus on the meaning of the text and flow of the study? Is the response practical? Does it clarify the understanding of the text?)
3. *Does it stimulate good discussion?* (Does it grab attention? Lead to personal involvement? Leave some room for a creative response? Give everyone an opportunity to respond? Avoid embarrassing group members?)

### ***Silence in Response to a Question***

A few seconds of silence is expected. However, sometimes you will ask a question and (to your dismay) *no one* will answer. Why? Silence in response to a question usually indicates one of the following problems:

1. *Too Deep.* It's a good question. People just need more time to think. Rephrase the question, which gives people more time to think without the embarrassment of silence: ("In other words, what are the deep issues of our heart that this passage confronts us with. What are you convicted about?").
2. *Too Easy.* It's so obvious, people are afraid to respond. They might even think that it is a trick question. Perhaps you could just answer it yourself: ("Well, of course the blind man wanted his sight restored. Let's move on..."). Note this for your preparation and avoid overly simple questions next time.

3. *Too Vague.* No one understands what you are asking. Rephrase with greater clarity. Sometimes, you will need to guide people in the direction that you want their response: ("When I mean 'apply this to your life', I'm looking for things that deal with your relationships with others in the church body. How does this show us ways to care for one another?").
4. *Too Personal.* Ask the question in third person or break the group into smaller groups of twos or threes: ("Break into groups of twos and pray about ways that you ignore Christ's desire for intimacy with you. Pray for means to overcome your cold-heartedness. We'll regroup in five minutes.").
5. *Too Hopeless.* It may just be a bad question. Either make it into a good one or ditch it and get on to the next question.

### Sharing and Accountability Questions

The following questions are valuable aids as your group gets to know, challenge, and support one another. These questions can be used during fellowship time prior to starting the Bible study or during the sharing/prayer time after you have completed the Bible study. They can also be used during one-on-one meetings with the members of your group.

#### *Using the Quaker Questions*

1. Where were you living at age 7, and how many brothers and sisters were in your household?
2. What were the winters like?
3. What was the center of warmth in your life when you were 7 years old? (This can be a person, a place in the house, or a time of the year - like Christmas.)
4. When did God become more than just a name to you?  
Once a group is up and going you can continue to make up questions along these lines or get them from other sources. Two such source books are: *The Book of Questions* by Gregory Stock, Workman Publishing, 1987, and *201 Great Questions* by Jerry Jones, NavPress, 1988.

#### *Sample Sharing Questions for Group Bonding*

Before your group has deepened its level of comfort enough to share very personal questions, you will need to get past the introductory stage. Use questions that are personal, but less threatening to "bridge" the trust level into the deeper questions. Examples:

##### A. Questions Dealing with the Past

1. Tell about the neatest birthday present you ever received.
2. Share one of the happiest days of your life.
3. What is the best advice you ever received?
4. What can you identify as a "turning point" in your life?
5. Share a time when your feelings were hurt.
6. Share a time when you believe you were led by God.

## B. Questions Dealing with the Present

1. How do you tune into God?
2. How would you describe yourself to someone who doesn't know you?
3. Describe a typical day (or Tuesday, or Saturday, or Friday evening).
4. If you had to move and could only take three things with you, what would you take?
5. Give three words that describe how you feel right now.
6. What social problems are you particularly concerned about?

## C. Questions Dealing with the Future

1. Describe your ideal house and how you would furnish it.
2. What would you do if someone willed you a million dollars?
3. What is something you think God wants you to do?
4. What spiritual goals are you reaching for? Why?
5. If you could do anything you want this time of year, what would it be?
6. What epitaph do you want on your tombstone?

### *Questions to Rekindle Warmth*

Another set of questions which may prove helpful in getting the group to warm up when you sit down for your meeting each week are the following.

1. What was an important event in your life this past week? Take one minute to fill us in on the details.
2. What is one of the better things that happened to you this week?
3. What was a significant thing which happened to you this past week?
4. Who has had the greatest influence on your life since we gathered last?

The good thing about these questions is that you can ask any one of them week in and week out and the answers will be always changing. You will probably want to break the rut from time to time and use an ice-breaker with a bit more creativity. However, these questions help to bring out what is going on in people's lives and can be relied upon time and time again.

### *Going Deeper with Personal Implication Questions*

During your Discipleship Group, don't be afraid to get personal. When discussion seems too general, vague or abstract, a "personal implication question" helps keep the conversation more direct and specific. Press the issues home to people's hearts in a loving, but direct manner. For example:

1. How would what you are talking about affect you personally?
2. Have you ever struggled with this issue personally?
3. We are often abstract when discussing Scripture; how does this affect you daily?
4. How has God been working in your life lately?
5. Are there things you have been convicted about? How did the

conviction come about? What steps are you taking to deal with those things?

6. What have you heard in the sermons recently that have been particularly convicting or comforting?
7. What areas of obedience have you been working on?
8. Where have you recently experienced God's kindness and love in your life?

#### *John Wesley – Classes and Bands*

Wesley's "Classes" were for Christian and non-Christian men and women. They met in groups of twelve once per week. During meetings, members reported on spiritual progress, needs and problems. Others would offer advice, encouragement and prayer. "Bands" were more intense spiritual training for Christians. They were smaller in size (5-10) and were divided by age, sex and marital status. They routinely covered the following accountability questions:

1. What sins have you committed since the last meeting?
2. What temptations did you face but did not give into?
3. How were you delivered from those temptations?
4. Where else did God give you help or victory to live as a Christian?
5. What have you thought or done which you were unsure as to whether it was sinful or not, or where have you been unclear as to God's will?

#### *George Whitfield - Societies*

Whitefield's "Societies" were small groups of Christians who met for accountability in spiritual experience. Questions included:

1. Are you sure you are a Christian? Are you sure God's Spirit lives inside you? Is the Spirit shedding abroad God's love in your heart? How clear is his witness? Are you enjoying it? Why or why not?
2. What scriptures is God using in your life?
3. In what ways is God helping you overcome sinful habits? In what ways are you becoming more aware of your sins and faults? How are you increasing in your understanding of them?
4. In what ways are you growing in love towards other people?
5. Which fruit of the Spirit are you growing in most and which are you most lacking?
6. Are there certain promises and assurances in the Bible which are particularly precious to you right now?
7. Are you becoming aware of certain situations which are dangerous to you and creating temptations?
8. Can you recognize the first motions of sin in the heart: pride, lust, carelessness, bitterness, envy, self-indulgence?

#### *Jack Miller's Questions*

Jack Miller created a list of questions that are penetrating. You may want to use these questions, along with any above, in your own personal devotions or self-examination.

1. Is God working in your life?
2. Have you been repenting for sins lately?
3. Are you building your life on Christ's free justification or are you insecure and guilt-ridden?
4. Have you done anything simply because you love Jesus?
5. Have you stopped doing anything simply because you love Jesus?
6. Do you see the fruit of the Spirit growing?
7. Do you think God is happy with your missionary zeal?
8. Do you see yourself as growing spiritually?

### 4.3 The Art of Active Listening

Have you ever spoken to someone and received nothing more than a blank stare in response? When you watch TV, are you always paying attention to it?

We find from such everyday examples that we tend not to listen, because we are bombarded with unnecessary sound that demands nothing from us. This habit even spills over into our relationships, where we hear but we do not listen to our loved ones. You've heard the story: (Wife in panic) "John, Jimmy has cut his finger off. We've got to rush to the hospital!" (Husband from behind the newspaper) "Fine, honey. Uh, what time are you leaving?"

In Discipleship Group interaction, there is a difference between passive and active listening. Passive listening requires nothing from the listener: no involvement, no interest, and no response. "In one ear and out the other" describes it! Active listening, on the other hand, requires expectancy, interest, involvement, and caring. The following chart contrasts active to passive listening.

	Passive Listening	Active Listening
Attitude	Rejecting, critical <i>"I'm really not interested."</i>	Receptive, accepting <i>"I really want to hear."</i>
Focus	Me – what I want to say <i>"What do I think?"</i>	Other person – you think about what others are saying <i>"What does he mean?"</i>
Response	This is what I've been thinking <i>"I think you should..."</i>	Clarifying first what you have heard the other person say <i>"You think..." "Do you feel?"</i>
Message	What you said isn't important <i>"I didn't really hear what you said."</i>	You heard both the feeling and the need in the message <i>"I heard what you said."</i>
Results	Speaker experiences frustration, anger <i>Listener communicates "I don't care."</i>	Speaker is willing to compromise or tell more <i>Listener says, "I care about what you said."</i>

As we explore some of the skills involved in active listening, we should begin by considering the following ideas:

- Be aware that you are listening through many wrappings. Discrimination, preconceived notions, your own theology, politics and family background (which may be very different from the speaker's) are a screen through which you hear. The goal is to cut through your own wrappings and hear the speaker as if you were in his or her shoes.
- The speaker is relating through many wrappings: preconceived notions, family background, political, theological and intellectual ideas. Be aware that the person may not be saying what he or she means because of anxieties, defense mechanisms, or hidden agendas. This leaves us with quite a challenge! Not only must we put aside our own opinions and prejudices, but we must be able to see through to the "real person" of our speaker.

Here are some hints for active listening:

- Communicate your care and concern by your "body language". Face the person. Squarely, or for groups, in a circle. Maintain an open position (don't fold your arms across your chest or sit behind a desk). Lean toward the speaker (or at least don't back away). Maintain natural eye contact. Remain relatively relaxed.
- Listen expectantly, holding the speaker in high regard. (If you do not feel like it, ask God to help you see the person through His eyes.)
- Suspend judgment initially. Hear the person out.
- Wait before you respond. It's better to allow a pause than to interrupt a thought in process. The quieter a person is, the more apt we are to interrupt (especially if we are very verbal). Resist the temptation to jump in too soon.
- When you do respond, empathize with the feelings the speaker is conveying. A person feels understood when you have identified his or her feelings accurately.
- The best way to communicate this understanding is simply to restate what the person has said, allowing him or her to correct you or to add to what you have identified. This is important for the speaker, who may still be sorting out exactly what his or her own feelings are. There is a difference between expressing empathy (putting yourself in the speaker's shoes) and sympathy (identifying in my experience similar feelings). At this stage, it is more helpful if you put aside your own experience and focus on the speaker's. Sometimes when we add our own frustration or anger or confusion to the situation, the original speaker is not helped at all! It is also possible to trivialize the problem by saying, "Oh, we've all felt that at one time or another!"
- Make sure your understanding of the conversation is to the speaker's satisfaction. The most important thing you can do initially is to understand the person as if you were in the same shoes.

## 4.4 Group Prayer

### The Glory of God at the Center of your Prayer

Too often, we pray merely for circumstances in our lives: difficulties, health, relatives, work situations, psychological adjustment, immediate burdens, and so on. There is nothing wrong with that, except when it pushes aside prayer that's God-centered and ignores the critical level where change occurs.

In any of the methods listed below, you want to avoid prayer which is completely self-focused. Often larger issues which are closely related to the interests of the kingdom of God are ignored. One way to counter this is to have the glory of God at the center of personal requests— asking that through the answer to these requests people might see the power, love and beauty of God and so bow before him.

Lives are transformed from the inside out. Following the wise advice of David Powlison, we need to pray for change at the level where change occurs. Therefore, when seeking prayer for change, focus on real heart issues. Instead of saying, “pray for my sickness so it'll get better,” say something like, “my current sickness is really drawing out my bitterness, my tendency toward self-pity and discouragement. I've also been complaining a lot lately and wounding those around me. Could you pray that God would use this experience to mold my character, to make me more like him, so that others can see what a great God we follow?”

As a leader, if you begin to pray with a kingdom-centered focus and with a heart-change focus, then your group will begin to change the way it prays. As you model effective and courageous prayer, the prayer lives of those around you will be enriched. For new Christians, this is a great opportunity to learn a lifetime of prayer.

### Elements of Kingdom-Centered Prayer

“Show us your Glory!” is the theme of kingdom-centered prayer. Three elements of this kind of powerful prayer can be seen: it is focused on God's presence and kingdom, it is bold and specific, and it is prevailing and corporate.

#### *It is Focused on God's Presence and Kingdom*

Jack Miller talks about the difference between “maintenance prayer” and “front-line prayer” meetings. Maintenance prayer meetings are short, mechanical, and totally focused on physical needs inside the church. But front-line prayer has three basic traits:

1. A request for grace to confess sins and humble ourselves.
2. A compassion and zeal for the flourishing of the church and reaching the lost.
3. A yearning to know God, to see his face, to see his glory.

These focuses are not meant to be trite. It is quite clear when listening to a prayer meeting whether these traits are present. A helpful study is to look at Biblical prayers of revival such as found in Exodus 33 (described above), Nehemiah 1, Isaiah 62 and 64, or Acts 4. These three elements are easy to see. Notice, for example, in Acts 4, that the disciples, whose very lives are threatened, did not ask for protection for themselves and their families, but only for boldness to keep on preaching! “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31 RSV).

Or, look at the history of revivals and renewals of the church. Jack Miller describes the dramatic change that took place in his church when they changed their weekly prayer meeting (which was always dull and poorly attended) from "maintenance prayer" to "front-line prayer." The concerted prayer that began on Fulton Street in 1857 was prayer for revival. And what a revival resulted: between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people were converted in the next two years! God's people must pray for revival. He will choose when the revival comes, but he certainly will withdraw from sending a revival if his people aren't praying for it.

### ***It is Bold and Specific***

Lloyd-Jones notes that the greatest men and women used by God were quite bold in prayer, highly specific, and filled their mouths with arguments. In commenting on Moses' prayer for glory in Exodus 33, he writes:

*"I commend to you the reading of biographies of men who have been used by God in the church throughout the centuries, especially in revival. And you will find this same holy boldness, this argumentation, this reasoning, this putting the case to God, pleading his own promises. Oh, that is the whole secret of prayer, I sometimes think. Thomas Goodwin uses a wonderful term. He says, "Sue him for it, sue him for it!" Do not leave him alone. Pester him, as it were, with his own promise. Quote the Scripture to him. And, you know, God delights to hear us doing it, as father likes to see this element in his own child who has obviously been listening to what his father has been saying."*

It is important to note that the boldness comes from a strong relationship with God. Lloyd-Jones continues to explain that those who know that they are sons and daughters can come before the Lord as their Father and address him in a bold, specific manner. It would be disrespectful, except that we are merely asking for what God wants – his glory to be shown in the world. Those who don't have a deep relationship with God cannot show this boldness because they don't rely on their status as children of God and because they aren't seeking God's will, his kingdom rule. “What is happening here is this: we are not seeing a man under the law speaking to the lawgiver. No, it is a child here speaking to his Father. And the little child can take liberties with his father that a grown-up man, who is not his child, would not dare to take” (p 196). See here also where the other elements (a deep understanding of the gospel and boldness) of renewal integrate.

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, p 197. Lloyd-Jones devotes almost half of his book to prayer in revival. Another recommended book is *Concerts of Prayer*, by David Bryant (Regal, 1984), which shows how to set up prayer meetings for renewal.

### *It is Prevailing, Corporate*

By this we mean simply that prayer should be constant, not sporadic and brief. Why? Are we to think that God wants to see us grovel? Why don't we simply put in our request and wait? The answer is that we should not be so impertinent. Sporadic, brief prayer is such because we do not make time for it. It shows a lack of dependence, a self-sufficiency, and thus we have not built an altar that God will honor with his glory fire. We must pray without ceasing, pray long, pray hard, and we will find that the very process is bringing about that which we are asking for— to have our hearts melted, to tear down barriers, to have the glory of God break through.

This also means that individual believers need to be the front-line of prayer. Although leaders must set the pace, we all are called to this priestly office of prayer. It should be found in our worship services, in our prayer meetings, in our Discipleship Groups, and most of all in our devotional life. Prayer of this sort renews the heart and the church. In short, why wait for everyone else to lead the charge?

An example of the effects of kingdom-centered revival prayer from The Denver Post, January 20, 1905:

#### *Entire City Pauses for Prayer Even At the High Tide of Business*

Remarkable outburst of gospel sentiment ... noonday meetings draw congregations unprecedented in numbers. For two hours at midday all Denver was held in a spell. The marts of trade were deserted between noon and two o'clock this afternoon, and all worldly affairs were forgotten, and the entire city was given over to meditation of higher things. The Spirit of the Almighty pervaded every nook. Going to and coming from the great meetings, the thousands of men and women radiated this Spirit which filled them, and the clear Colorado sunshine was made brighter by the reflected glow of the light of God shining from happy faces. Seldom has such a remarkable sight been witnessed – an entire great city, in the middle of a busy weekday, bowing before the throne of heaven and asking and receiving the blessing of the King of the Universe.<sup>2</sup>

### **Two Methods for Group Prayer**

The first decision you have to make regarding method is whether to pray as a large group or in smaller groups of 3 to 5. Feel free to ask the group for their preference in this decision.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Rebirth of America*, Arthur DeMoss Foundation, 1986. p. 65.

### ***Break into Smaller Groups***

If you break up in smaller groups, you may want to divide by male and female as well. *Advantages to smaller groups:* each person can talk more, share more honestly, and pray more fully. Plus, breaking into smaller groups prevents the prayer time from going on for an oppressively long time. *Disadvantage:* everyone is not in touch with what is going on in the lives of all the group members. One way to partially overcome that disadvantage is to ask if anyone has something they would like the whole group to be praying for.

When you send people into the smaller groups, give them clear directions about what they are to do. For example: "When you go into your groups pray along these two lines: Each person first ought to share one area of application from the Bible study which God spoke to you about and ask people to pray for you in that area. Second, ask for prayer in any other area of your life where you have needs." You might add, "Make sure you don't spend all your time talking and have very little prayer itself."

Depending on the group's preference, you may keep these smaller groups the same from week to week, change them regularly or change them periodically.

### ***Remain in a Large Group***

*Advantages to larger groups:* Creates a greater sense of community and connectedness between the members. *Disadvantages:* Sharing, as well as the prayer itself, can go on for an oppressively long time. Clock-watchers and folks with short attention spans (which is just about all of us) may find this so distressing that not only will they be unable to enter into the prayer but may not return to the group, or at the very least dread the prayer time. None of these consequences are desirable. In addition to this problem, the sharing may not be as vulnerable and honest; people may feel they have been given too short of an amount of time to share or pray. However, if the person guiding the prayer time is aware of these dangers and how to avoid them, praying as a whole group can be a very good experience.

If you choose to go this route, you will probably need to say something to this effect: *"We are going to spend some time praying for one another's needs. Just a few words before we share our requests with one another. To prevent the sharing from going on too long so that little time is left for prayer, please try to be as succinct as possible. This allows each person who has requests to have the opportunity to mention them. There is no reason why after praying we can't individually ask each other more about the things shared or even pray more for each other. However, by keeping our requests short we make sure that everyone can benefit from the time and make sure that we actually get down to the work of praying. This is not to discourage anyone from sharing. It is merely a way of being considerate. Does anyone have something they would like prayer for?"*

That introduction will be enough for most people. However, invariably there are some people who go on much longer than they need to. In those cases, you will probably need to break in on them. After they have gotten the basic gist of their request across, wait for them to take a breath and then say "Thanks for the request, Jim. Does anyone else have something for which they would like prayer?" Generally, the person will not be offended and the rest of the group will be relieved as well.

As a general rule, once a person has shared their prayer request you should probably solicit the next request by saying something to the effect of, "Thanks. What else? Is there something else we can be taking to God?" This keeps the sharing time flowing and lets people know what is expected of them.

## **Various Approaches in Large Group Prayer**

In general, it is too time consuming to have people share both areas of application from the Bible study and areas of personal need. Therefore, just after the Bible study is over, have a short season of corporate prayer without any sharing; thank God for what he has taught you and ask him to change you in accordance with the truths which were learned. After that, then use one of the following approaches to large group prayer.

### ***Random Sharing of Requests and Praying***

This gives people who want to share and/or pray the opportunity to do so. It also gives those who do not desire to share or pray the freedom to decline. The negative is that certain group members may dominate week after week. Try to keep requests balanced.

### ***Sharing and Praying in a Circle***

Tell the people in the group that they are going to share requests as you go around the room and that the person on their right ought to be prepared to pray for them. If you go this route, you ought to tell people that they are free to decline if they would like.

### ***Using Liturgical Forms***

By using a form, someone leads and the rest join in on that topic in informal prayer.

Father, we pray for your holy, catholic church, that we may all be one.  
[*pause*]

Grant that every member of the church may truly and humbly serve you.  
That your name may be glorified by all people. [*pause*]

We pray for all pastors and missionaries. That they may be faithful ministers of your word and sacraments. [*pause*]

We pray for all who are without Christ and without hope in the world. That by your sovereign mercy, they might seek you and find you. [*pause*]

We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world.  
That there may be justice and peace on the earth. [*pause*]

Give us grace to do your will in all that we undertake. That our works might find favor in your sight. [*pause*]

Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief, trouble, or sickness. That they may be delivered from their distress. [*pause*]

We pray for our own needs and those of others. [*pause*]

(Look in *The Book of Common Prayer* for additional forms.)

### ***Using Historical Prayers***

We can greatly enrich our prayer lives by looking at the prayers of Christians in earlier times. The Puritans and others have left a great legacy of prayer that gives us a richer *language* of prayer from which we can draw. We can learn much by seeing what concerns were important to others and how God's people have praised him throughout the ages. Again, this is most effective when it's used only occasionally, allowing your group to develop its own life of prayer. Some good resources include: *The Valley of Vision*, Puritan prayers collected by Arthur Bennett (Banner of Truth), *A Diary of Private Prayer* by Bailey (Colliers) and *A Call to Prayer* collected by Caryl Micklem (Eerdmans).

### ***Shared Prayer***

Essentially, you are cutting out the time of sharing previous to the actual praying. Have people share their request as they briefly pray. So, Jane begins by praying, "Father, I pray for Greg whom I have shared the gospel with at work, that you might draw him to yourself." Then after the first person has prayed, one or two other people agree with the first person in prayer. When they have finished, another person mentions their request through prayer and two more follow him up by adding their support through prayer.

## **Suggestions for Encouraging Group Prayer**

Here are some tips for leading prayer in your Discipleship Groups:

- Use the "model" approach to encourage others to pray. For instance, after leading the opening prayer yourself a few times, invite another person to open the meeting in prayer.
- In the extended prayer time, avoid "going around the circle." This puts pressure on the individual who may not wish to pray aloud.
- Make it clear to your group that a sentence prayer is all that's needed to "make our requests known to God."
- Avoid giving advice through your prayers. For example: "And Lord, please help Mrs. Smith to see that she needs to join Weight Watchers."
- Rather than spend precious minutes sharing prayer requests in great detail (especially those that require a family history), try going directly to prayer and conversing with God. In this way, the focus remains on Him who is able to do something in the situation, and the group does not dwell on the topic with advice or speculation.
- Don't be afraid of silence. As we agree in our hearts in God's presence, we are praying.
- As requests are made in the group, someone might wish to maintain a "Prayer Journal" and record requests and answers as they come. This has been tremendously encouraging to groups which wanted "hard proof" that prayer works.
- Encourage your group members to pray for each other during the week. You might want to establish prayer partners who will be in touch with each other between meetings.

## 4.5 Troubleshooting Tips

There are a few problems or difficult situations which arise with great regularity in Discipleship Groups. These can cause some degree of anxiety for the leader as well as many of the members. The following are the most common troubles which arise and some suggestions for how to deal with them.

### The person who dominates the group

This most common way to deal with this person is to say, "*Jeff has been saying a number of helpful things. Does someone else have something to add?*" or "*We have heard a lot from some people on the previous questions. Can we hear from some of the others of you on this next question?*" If the person is regularly giving long-winded answers to questions, the leader may need to jump in when the person takes a breath and simply ask, "*Does anyone else have something to add?*" If the person does not seem to get the hint that they are occupying more than their fair share of the time, you may need to address them privately along these lines: "*I really do appreciate your enthusiasm and willingness to share your insights. However, something which you might not be aware of is that the frequency of your speaking and the length of your responses have a potentially stifling effect on other people sharing. I am sure you don't mean for that to happen, but I am afraid that it sometimes does.*" Having said that you might ask the person, "*Does this make sense?*" This gives you and the individual a chance to interact.

One other way to deal with this and many other kinds of potential problems is to have periodic evaluations of the group. At such an evaluation you might ask the group as a whole, "*What do you think about the balance of participation in the group? Is there anything which is stifling participation in the group? Is there anything which if it were changed would facilitate greater participation from the group as a whole?*" Though this may strike you as fairly risky, it has a great number of benefits. It provides opportunities for the truth to be spoken in love and it allows for the community to solve its problems together rather than relying on one individual to do all the work. It can often bring great healing in the group and bring it to new levels of honesty and maturity.

### The person who says something that is heretical

There will undoubtedly be many times when someone gives an answer to a question that is absolutely incorrect and which may even qualify as heresy. What should you do? First of all, avoid your initial impulse to correct the person. It is likely that the person does not realize that he or she is saying something which is out of accord with Christian doctrine. If you are too quick to correct the person you may well end up stifling his or her future impulses to participate in the group. That would be disastrous. The group needs to remain a safe place for people to share. It needs to be a place where people are free to make mistakes. Second, remember that groups tend to self-correct the heresy which arises within them. Usually you can just say, "*Thanks for sharing. Does anyone else have a different opinion or something else to add?*" Generally, the more mature members of the group will provide insights which are more in keeping with the truth of the Scripture. By affirming the insights of the more mature believers, the individual who made the heretical comment and others who might have been swayed by them will come to see the comment was off-target. It will then be unnecessary to confront them directly.

However, if you don't think the statement has been countered adequately and that significant confusion remains then you might feel compelled to say, "*I appreciate what all of you have shared. However, I think what the Bible says about this is...*" Finally, if someone shares something that just cannot be supported by the text under consideration it is often quite appropriate to point the group back to the text and ask, "*Just how do you see your point arising from the text? Is that really what it says?*" The only caution before proceeding in this manner is to make sure that the mistake is serious enough to warrant it. Assuming that the people in your group are attending a worship service in which they are getting good teaching you might decide that such an approach would do more harm than good.

### **The person who rarely participates**

The first thing to determine is whether the questions you are asking are sufficiently open-ended so that they encourage sharing. Some kinds of questions can stifle participation. Assuming the questions you are asking encourage participation, you might just need to let the group know that the responses that have been given to the question don't exhaust everything that can be said. By simply asking frequently, "*Does anyone else have something to add?*" you might solve the silence problem. If that doesn't work and the problem of quietness is widespread you could say to the group at large, "*We are mostly hearing from just a few people. We would really love to hear from everyone. All of you are valuable to the group and I am sure that you have insights that the rest of us can benefit from. We need to hear what you have to say.*" If the problem is just with one person, you might want to say something similar to them in private. Let them know that you are glad they are part of the group even if they choose to rarely share, but that you are sure the group would benefit from what they thought. Realize, of course, that some people are just quieter by nature and that some only share when they are convinced that their thoughts would contribute to the furtherance of the discussion. What you should AVOID doing is putting a person on the spot by calling on them by name. They may truly not have anything to say about the particular question under consideration and you will only succeed in embarrassing them. They may choose to stay away from the group in the future.

### **The particularly troubled person who drains all of the life out of the group**

How you handle this situation depends on the particular person in question. Usually, you will have to approach the person and address the behaviors which are disrupting the group. This will take both courage and tact and will often require firmness as well. But you should not avoid it. We have a responsibility to one another. If a person lacks social skills or is behaving in a socially inappropriate manner it is important to help them. Speaking the truth in love requires leaders and members to confront dysfunctional group behavior, even though it may make you uncomfortable to do so. It is suggested that you seek insight from other group members and your elder as to how to handle difficult people. On some occasions, you will need to help the person seek out another group which would be better for them.

### **The group keeps going off on tangents**

The first thing you will need to decide is whether the tangent is valuable enough to pursue or whether it qualifies as unhelpful. When the tangents are in the latter category just remind the group that you have limited time and that you think the group will be best served by sticking to the text. You might say, *“That really is an interesting question and those who are interested in it can pursue it if they like after we close. In the meantime, I think we would benefit most if we stuck to the passage at hand.”* At other times you might just say, *“We seem to be getting off on a tangent again. Let’s stick to the passage at hand.”* Then ask a question which turns people’s attention back to the text. It is up to the leader to keep the group on track.

### **Someone asks a major question just as you run out of time**

You will probably be best served by saying, *“That is an important question but if we try to get into it now we won’t be able to do it justice. I would be glad to get together with you either after the group or at another time to talk to you about it. Or if the group would like to we can take up the question at another meeting.”*

### **The group is overly intellectual, not heart-felt**

It is very easy for groups to use the Bible as foil which prevents them from really interacting with one another. If this takes place it is important to get the group to become involved in personal sharing. You will need to spend much more time using sharing questions which get people talking about their personal lives. As long as the group avoids genuine interaction, it will not be transformational in nature.

### **Prayer requests are too far removed from the genuine needs of people’s lives**

As with many of these issues, the most important thing you can do is to be honest and forthright about the problem. You should point out to the group its patterns of behavior. You will need to call the group to vulnerability about their own needs. You might say, *“It is certainly a good thing to be praying for the needs of people outside this group for whom we have concerns, but let’s make sure we do not do so at the expense of praying for character issues and difficulties which we are facing in our own lives. We need to be engaged in the mutual ministry of praying for one another’s needs.”* If group members do not talk about the difficulties they are facing, the unwillingness to deal with reality will eventually create boredom and frustration in the group. Members will then drop out.

### **People are long-winded in their prayer requests, and the prayer time becomes too long**

If you are going to pray together with the entire group, ask people to be concise in their sharing of prayer requests and succinct in their prayers. Your other option is to break up the group into pairs or triads and allow them to share and pray in these groups. With this arrangement, people will have more time to both share and pray.

## Following up with those who fall through the cracks

Inevitably, some individuals who have attended your Discipleship Group will stop coming. Our natural inclination is to assume they would not want to be contacted. We believe that they will perceive us as a nag or a bother. We are afraid we will just make them feel guilty. We may also assume that the reason they stopped coming is that they did not find the group beneficial. The first lesson of follow-up is simply this: Make no assumptions! In years of following people up I have rarely run across someone who was not glad that they had been called. We fear follow-up, but we need not do so. It communicates to people that you care. It communicates that their absence was noticed. Often your phone call is the first indication to them that people in the church do care about them as an individual. They are more than part of the masses. It can be a turning point in their relationship with the church and with your Discipleship Group. Even if the individual does not return to your group, they are usually glad that they have been contacted. Ultimately, we should be following up with people because we believe that Christian fellowship is essential to living a God-pleasing life. Aware that they may not be benefiting from this means of grace, we should call them out of a sincere desire to see their Christian life flourish.

### *When to follow up*

You may make it your practice to follow up with people on any week which they do not show up for the group and have not contacted you beforehand to make you aware that they would be absent. The benefit of this type of procedure is that it doesn't make individuals feel like they have been singled out. You might even announce to the group that this will be your practice. Also, by doing follow-up weekly it becomes a normal habit and discipline in your life as a leader. However, this can be a labor-intensive practice and for that reason you may decide on a different pattern of follow-up. Instead, you may choose to follow up with anyone who has missed two or three meetings without letting you know that they would be absent. If you follow this route you must discipline yourself to follow through on it. It becomes much easier to procrastinate with this methodology which often leads to putting it off entirely. If a person's attendance is especially erratic you may also choose to follow up with them.

If you have procrastinated to the point that it now feels awkward following up with the individual, you should still press on and contact the person. Their needs, and not your embarrassment, should drive your actions.

### *How to follow up*

How does one follow up with people? There are three options: face-to-face contact, a telephone call, or a note.

#### *Face-to-face contact*

This is the preferred means of follow-up. Face to face interaction allows for you to communicate your genuine concern to the person in a complete way. This option should only be taken if you are fairly certain that you will be seeing the person within the week. If you don't see the person on the occasion which you expected to see them, then you should immediately pursue one of the other means of follow-up. What should you say?

Probably something like this: *"Bill, we missed you at the Discipleship Group meeting this past week. Is everything all right?"* If missing the group is a pattern you might say, *"We have been missing you at the Discipleship Group. We have appreciated what you contributed when you have come and would love to have you there regularly. Is there a reason or reasons why you haven't been attending?"*

After asking this question it is important not to put words in their mouth. Allow them to answer for themselves. They may have been out of town. They may have been extra-busy at work. There may be some personal problems. They may not feel like they fit in your particular group. They may not feel like they are getting much out of the experience. You need to be able to respond appropriately to whatever reason they might offer. If they have been out of town or busy you might just say, *"Well, we have missed you and hope to see you soon. We will meet next on \_\_\_\_\_. Hope to see you there."* If some personal issues have prevented them from attending, then you will want to provide appropriate pastoral care for them. Perhaps you will want to schedule a time to meet with them.

If one of the last two reasons is their actual reason for not attending they will be less likely to disclose this. If you sense that they are disappointed with the group for some reason you may need to give them some help to enable them to tell you. You might ask, *"Is there something about the group in particular which has disappointed you? I really would appreciate your feedback if there is. Did you have certain expectations for the group which you feel are not being met?"* This must be asked with humility and a genuine openness to hear what they are saying. You should not register your disappointment, but in as much as you are able, affirm the appropriateness of their expectations. Of course, many people bring inappropriate expectations to a group. This becomes a moment where you can pastor them with regards to their expectations (*"Yes, I understand your desire to be involved in a group where people are not superficial with one another but share about what is really going on in their heart and life. My hope is that the group gets there. In fact, we are making progress. But that kind of interaction takes time and we still have a ways to go."... "I understand your desire for more doctrinal input in your life. It sure has made a difference in mine. However, Discipleship Groups are not especially good vehicles for transmitting doctrine. They are very important for receiving encouragement and support for living the Christian life. That is something which we all need."*

There is also the possibility that the person just does not feel like they fit in your particular group. If you sense this is the case, you could say, *"Perhaps you feel like this particular group isn't quite right for you. I certainly won't be offended if you thought this group might not be the best for you. While we would like to have you with us, it might be that you would fit into another group better and that it would be more beneficial for you. If you are thinking that may be the case, I would be glad to help you find another group."* Of course, if it turns out that their schedule doesn't fit with the time your group is meeting then it would also be appropriate to help them find another group which is more accessible to them.

### *Telephone Call*

The telephone is another good means for following up with a person. Normally you will follow much the same course as is suggested above. If you get voicemail, you might say, *"Hello. This is Bill from the Discipleship Group. We missed you at the group this past week. I'm just calling to make sure all is well and to let you know that our next meeting is \_\_\_\_\_. Please give me a call if there is anything I can do for you. Hope to see you at the next meeting. Take care."* If you get voicemail and you would like to talk to the person rather than their voicemail you might say, *"Hello. This is Bill from the Discipleship Group. We missed you recently at the group. Hope you are well. Please give me a call when you get a chance. My number is \_\_\_\_\_. Take care."* Then when they call back you can say, *"Thanks for calling back. I just wanted to make sure that everything was okay and let you know when our next meeting will take place."* This gives you the opportunity to have further interaction with them. If they don't call back, you might just leave another message letting them know when the next meeting will take place.

### *Text/Email/Social Media*

A note via text, email, or social media is a means of following up that is non-threatening and avoids putting the person on the spot, while communicating that you care. *"We missed you at Discipleship Group this past week. I hope everything is okay. Our next meeting is Hope to see you there. Thanks."* If you don't get a response, then you may want to use more a direct method of following-up.

Remember that in this process we are not interested in hounding the person. We cannot control what they will do. We don't want to be coercive. If they decide to stay away, then there is nothing you can do about that. What you can do is communicate that you care about their absence and that you take an interest in their life.

## Part Five: Leading Your Discipleship Group to Multiply

### 5.1 The Imperative of Discipleship Group Multiplication

Six reasons it's important to grow and start new Discipleship Groups:

- Reason 1: Because God is a welcoming God. He is on mission to rescue more and more people from sin and death.
  - Genesis 12:1-3
  - Matthew 11:28
  - Have you ever heard someone say they couldn't "break into" a church? What's the answer to that problem?
- Reason 2: Because Christ commanded us to introduce him to others, and the best way to do that is relationally.
  - How did you meet Jesus?
  - John 1:40-46
- Reason 3: Because God commands us to care for each other. As the church grows, caring for one another becomes impossible unless we multiply Discipleship Groups.
  - What happens when physical wounds go untreated? Spiritual wounds?
  - The most effective Discipleship Groups have between 8 and 12 people. A realistic span of care is around 1:10.
- Reason 4: Because times have changed. No longer do the majority of people in the church have a large, healthy family to love, nurture, and care for them on a daily basis.
  - What other conditions of modern life make belonging to a Discipleship Group more important than ever?
- Reason 5: Because God commands us to discover and use our spiritual gifts. As the church grows, more people will stay on the sidelines unless we multiply Discipleship Groups.
- Reason 6: Because as Discipleship Groups multiply, leaders necessarily multiply. As leaders multiply, the circle expands and the Great Commission gets done!
  - "Lay mobilization" has always been God's plan for the church (see Exodus 18:13-26; Acts 6:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:2).

### 5.2 Identifying and Training an Apprentice Leader

Leadership is the crucial resource in the church for growth, both in maturity and outreach. Therefore, the most important role behind the Discipleship Group Leader is the apprentice. As a leader, one of your major responsibilities is to train, develop and deploy leaders. Therefore, we ask that every leader be committed to replacing himself/herself by recruiting one or two leaders-in-training. You are encouraged to do this as you begin your group. And once you have begun your group you are to be constantly on the lookout for potential leaders.

## Apprentice Process Summarized

Four clear stages are marked out before a person becomes a leader. A potential leader can move through those stages anywhere from six months to two years, depending on their spiritual growth. You simply help them move from one step to the next, giving them resources and evaluating their progress.

- a. *Each stage has identifying traits, things you should look for in a developing leader.* For example, in the first stage, the “Identify Stage”, you look for newer Christians who display a passion for God and compassion for people, a teachable spirit, and a regular attendance pattern. At least two people in every group ought to fit that description.
- b. *Each stage has a gradual increase in responsibilities.* In stage two, the apprentice leads the worship or the sharing/prayer time. At stage three, they lead the study with you present. Finally, they lead the study without you by the time they reach stage four. Along the way, you’re able to give feedback and encouragement.
- c. *Each stage also has training objectives and suggested resources.* For example, in stage three, the “Intern” stage, you can cover basic Bible reading skills, basic interpersonal skills, and a vision for small group community. The resources come from existing in-house teaching. If you prefer, you could discuss a recommended book with the Intern.
- d. *Each stage can take anywhere from one to six months, at a self-guided pace.* This is basically a guided mentoring or discipleship program. Along the way, some people that you mentor may encounter blocks to leadership. They may experience instability in their life, or they may simply become too busy. Still, your extra time with them is worth the effort to help produce a more effective disciple.

## Apprentice Stages Explained

- a. *Identify Stage.* At this stage, the potential apprentice does not need to know what great plans you have for them. That might frighten them! You are simply attaching yourself to someone for additional mentoring. *Look for:* someone with a passion for God and a hunger to know Him more. They should also have a compassion for people and a desire to help others know more of God’s grace. Even though they may be a new Christian, and a relatively new regular attender at Christ Church East, they ought to exhibit signs of growth, humility and teachability. *Train them in:* basic gospel truth and encourage basic spiritual disciplines of personal bible study, worship, accountability, and service. Point them to the various Theological Maturity courses offered through the church.
- b. *Mentor Stage.* At this stage, they begin to lead small portions of the group. This is still an informal stage. *Look for:* someone able to lead the sharing/prayer time. Are they capable of this small leadership? Also, are they faithful to the group? People who have led groups in other churches may jump to this stage. *Train them in:* sections of the handbook discussing their experience leading parts of the group. Also, help them to live out the gospel and joyful repentance more fully in their lives.

- c. *Intern Stage.* Now, the apprenticeship is a little more formal. *Look for:* someone who, having gone through stages one and two, exhibits gospel confidence in their leadership. They could lead the study with you present and are beginning to have a desire to lead. *Train them in:* sections of the handbook relating to their leadership and basic Bible reading skills. Also, help them with some simple interpersonal skills that leaders need to develop. At this point, cast a vision for small group community life in the church that builds on their desire to lead. You may want to send them to a Discipleship Group training to help them see the big picture.
- d. *Apprentice Stage.* Announce to your group that this person is your apprentice and may be launching a new group in the future. How does your group react? *Look for:* someone that has the respect of the group and you feel confident in letting them run the study portion occasionally without you present. They should be able to articulate the gospel clearly from their own experience with Christ's grace and have a genuine concern for other people's spiritual welfare. *Train them in:* sections of the handbook related to their leadership. Help them to see the different aspects of group leadership.
- e. *Interview, Approve, and Launch!*

## 5.3 Healthy Group Multiplication

### Step 1: Discovering a Biblical Vision of Healthy Multiplication

Multiplication is a pattern throughout the great biblical story of God making a new people. Three biblical foundations provide motivation for multiplication.

#### *Foundation 1: The Pattern of Mission*

In Genesis 12, God speaks to Abram, draws him into an experience of his presence, and promises to make him a blessing to all the nations. The moment after God draws Abram in, God sends Abram out, "Go, leave your country and your people and go to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1).

In Exodus 3, Moses is a murderer running for his life when God appears to him in a burning bush. Moses falls on his face in worship. The Lord tells him, "I have heard the cry of my people...Now go: I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10).

In Acts 13, as the church in Antioch is praying, fasting, and worshipping one evening, God gives them a powerful experience of his presence. He draws them in and speaks by his Spirit: "Set apart Paul and Barnabas for me to go to where I have called you" (Acts 13:2).

This is God's pattern for mission: *He draws us in and sends us out.* He draws us in to know him, and he sends us out to make him known. The gospel comes to us in order to go through us.

In the call of Abram, the pattern is clear: *We are blessed to be a blessing.* Why does God reveal himself to us? Why does he draw us into his presence and move us to worship? Why does he surround us with loving community – as in Acts 13? God always blesses us so that we might be a blessing to others. Now think of your own story: How has God revealed himself to you over your

Christian life? How has he invited you into a deeper life with him through this church? How has this Discipleship Group provided life-giving friendships in Christ? Certainly, we are a blessed people. Too often in our Discipleship Groups, we want the blessing to reach us but not move through us. Our members want to each be the last ones to join a group. No one wants to exclude others from a group, but once we are in, sometimes we want to close it off. As a result, we as Discipleship Group leaders need to put the biblical vision of multiplication before our people regularly.

### ***Foundation 2: Creating Space for Outsiders***

The second foundation that provides motivation for multiplication is hospitality. Creating space for others will naturally lead to multiplication. Paul writes in Romans 12:9-13, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”

Remember the rhythm of hospitality. If our groups are regularly creating space for outsiders, growth will happen naturally, and new groups will be needed. The apostle Paul recognized the importance of hospitality for true community and sincere witness. What is hospitality? It’s *the distinctly Christian practice of creating space for outsiders*.

Put yourself in the shoes of a visitor to your church: You don’t know more than a person or two, but you want to get involved. Imagine if you were told that Discipleship Groups were the way to get involved in the church, but unfortunately each group was currently closed. What message would that send?

Imagine instead showing up to church and immediately being invited to someone’s Discipleship Group. Imagine showing up to that group for the first time and seeing several smiling faces and plenty of open seats. First-time visitors join groups that are immediately hospitable to them.

### ***Foundation 3: The Great Commission***

“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” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Just as Jesus spoke these words to his own twelve disciples, so he is still speaking this commission to us today. Here in this important charge, we discover the third and final foundation for healthy group multiplication: *As Christ sends us, he also goes with us*. The Great Commission sends us to our neighborhoods, our cities, our enemies, and the nations to make disciples. What a huge task and responsibility! But Jesus doesn’t send us out to make him known until he has first drawn us in to know him (the first foundation), and he doesn’t send us out ill-equipped.

In fact, Jesus doesn’t even send us out alone; he promises to go with us, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” And according to Acts 1-2, Jesus is with us by giving of the Holy Spirit. See, this is the full pattern:

God first draws us into his presence to dwell with him deeply, and then he sends us out through Christ to make him known, but he also goes with us by his Holy Spirit. From the first movement to the last, God is with us – indeed, his name is “Immanuel” (Matthew 1:28).

Launching a new group is no small task. Even sending some of your closest friends out to another group can be a difficult change. But we have to remember that, in starting a new Discipleship Group to reach more people, we are both participating in and fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission!

## **Step 2: Setting Expectations for Healthy Multiplication**

After establishing a biblical vision for open, multiplying groups, how do we ensure the ensuing multiplication process is healthy? How do we set proper expectations for multiplication?

### ***1. Prioritize the Spiritual and Relational Health of the Members***

Remember, our overall goal of community life is not the total number of groups we can launch and sustain over a period of time. The goal is the formation of disciples in the image of Christ. Thus, if we neglect our members’ spiritual and relational health during multiplication – which we have been investing in for months or years prior to multiplication – we can sour our members toward ever multiplying again and lose trust with our members on where our “real priorities” lie.

### ***2. Remember that Multiplication Furthers our Members’ Spiritual and Relational Health***

Teaching the three biblical foundations for multiplication is a great place to start. In the appendix you’ll find a three-week discussion guide based on these foundations and includes discussion questions, guided prayers, and worksheets for your group. We must convince our members that multiplication is not an extra, but the biblical outflow of healthy life-giving groups.

### ***3. Set a Multiplication Expectation at the First Gathering***

Discipleship Group leaders must explicitly teach multiplication from the beginning of the group – not just before a needed multiplication. For example, when launching your first group, or as soon as a new group begins, the leaders need to give a vision for multiplication and a general timeline.

The leaders could say something like, “As we start this group, we want to remember that we are seeking not only our spiritual growth but also the spiritual growth of others. This is why we invite people into our group. When our group reaches about sixteen adults, and when new leaders are ready, we’ll slowly multiply into two groups. We expect this to happen in about 12-24 months.”

### ***4. Keep the Mission before the People***

Group leaders should be continually reminding the members of our missionary identity in Christ. We should often see new people join our group – both from church and through relationships in the community.

Experiencing growth firsthand will then help members grasp the need for creating space and multiplying.

### ***5. Multiply When Leaders are Ready, Not When You Have Too Many People***

While number of people is an important factor for multiplication, nothing is more important than your leaders' readiness. A group can be too big or too small, but with the right leaders, it will remain healthy and growing. As soon as new leaders are identified, trained, and ready, a new group can be deployed. Typically, six adults are enough to start a new group – a leading couple and four other adults.

## **Step 3: Preparing for Healthy Multiplication**

### ***Multiply into Different Neighborhoods When Possible***

There should be an expectation that we are on mission to our neighbors, and thus multiplication will occur in a way where two new groups can more effectively reach their neighbors.

### ***Set a Balanced, Realistic Multiplication Timeline***

When it comes to the “multiplication timeline,” it should seem a bit too slow for the leaders and a bit too quick for the members. In this way, it stretches the leaders to be patient and do the hard work of preparing people to multiply well. But it also stretches the members to multiply before they're 100 percent ready, thus having to trust God for the process.

## **Step 4: Practicing Healthy Multiplication**

### ***Throw a Multiplication Party***

When it's finally time to multiply, gather everyone from the original group to throw a party. It should feel more like a graduation than a funeral. Gather in the backyard, cook a meal together, or host a movie night for the kids. Do something that celebrates the successful multiplication of one community of believers into two. You may even want to take time for members to share how the group was instrumental in their spiritual journey. Or you can just party.

### ***Commission the New Leaders Publicly***

This is one of the best ways to honor and bless Discipleship Group leaders, and it also generates excitement and exposure for groups in general. Bring your new leaders up front at a Sunday worship service and commission them to their new ministry. You may bring up the sending leaders as well, or have all the elders up front to lay hands on them. Encourage the congregation to applaud the leaders' sacrificial service to the church. This communication of authority and value will be powerful in your church.

### ***Set Ground Rules for the New Group***

See Appendix 1, “The Five Rules of Discipleship Group.” For the first few weeks, you may want to read these rules out loud. Once your group understands the rules, you won't have to revisit them every week, but your members will be able to remind one another of simple rules like, “Hey,

remember we ‘Put Others First,’ so let’s give her a chance to speak.”

### ***Start the New Group with a Renewed Vision***

Once your new group starts – and both groups may want to do this – you may want to start a short series together to gain a renewed vision. Maybe you want to spend six weeks on the six chapters of Ephesians and discuss how your group will seek to grow together and reach others.

Whatever your vision of group life is, it’s ideal to revisit that vision with each new group multiplication. If your groups are multiplying every couple of years, it becomes a helpful reminder for all leaders and members. You don’t want multiplications to feel like high school breakups. Each new group is a celebration to remind both the new and the sending group of the biblical foundations for multiplication.

### ***Jump Quickly into Mission as a New Group***

Especially for a group meeting in a new location, there is no better time to start evangelistic efforts for a group. If the new group is meeting in an apartment or home for the first time, the group can spend one of the first gatherings going out and inviting people from the neighborhood. Consider setting a fun, family-style gathering about a month or two into the new group, and specifically invite neighbors to that low-pressure gathering.

## **Step 5: Maintaining Health After Multiplication**

### ***Gather Two or Three More Times with Both Groups***

About a month after the multiplication, then maybe again in 3-6 months, gather both groups together for a meal or outdoor party. This is a great way to reconnect with one another, meet new visitors that have joined since the multiplication, and hear stories from the new groups. These post-multiplication gatherings help remind us that multiplication can be done well, relationships don’t fall apart overnight, and new groups can create space for new people to experience Christ and community.

### ***Give Multiplication Testimonies at New Group Leader Training***

During Discipleship Group leader training, have leaders share testimonies of healthy multiplication. Let other group leaders ask questions like: “What has worked best? What was your timeline? What would you do differently?”

The long-term health of your Discipleship Group ministry depends significantly on the health of each group’s multiplications. And healthy multiplication is possible by setting a robust vision, reasonable expectations, with proper preparations for each new group, and continuing to care for the people in and through the multiplication process. When these elements are in place, you will likely see a slow, steady increase of new groups.

## **Appendix 1: The Five Rules of Discipleship Group**

To better facilitate depth and trust among your participants, consider reading aloud through the Five Rules before your discussion and prayer time. These guidelines can also guide your ongoing relationships with your group – since only a portion of your life together as a group will be in discussion and prayer.

### **1. We Come as We Are**

We are not perfect people, and we all need a safe place to gather and be who we are. Discipleship Groups are that safe place. What is said here stays here, and we do not gossip about information outside this group. However, if someone shares something that endangers him/herself or others, or if there are legal implications, the leader will share information with a pastor.

### **2. We Put Others First**

We are here to serve and love one another, not simply to receive care ourselves. We all participate in the discussion either as active listeners or speakers. We each keep our sharing to 3-5 minutes each, and remain actively engaged as others are speaking.

### **3. We Encourage and Comfort**

In Christ, we have the power to be present with the fulness of the Spirit's presence within us. We acknowledge that we can't fix or change one another, so we instead promise to provide encouragement and comfort. We don't express judgment or disgust toward one another's struggles. And we don't give unwarranted advice! When we want to give additional counsel, we ask permission after the gathered time.

### **4. We Journey Together**

We are relational beings, created in the image of a Triune God. Because we are created for community, we need each other to grow in Christlikeness. We invite one another into our journey and walk through life together, following up with one another throughout the week. Because God never gives up on us or leaves us alone, we commit to journeying with one another through thick and thin.

### **5. We Focus on Christ**

We don't get sidetracked by unhelpful issues in sports, politics, pop culture, and so on. In some cases, we can engage cultural issues from a Christ-centered perspective, but typically we delay these discussions until discussion time is over. We focus instead on Christ, the Word of God made flesh, because he alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We cannot change one another or even ourselves; only Christ can bring about grace, truth, and healing by his presence.

## Appendix 2: Creating Space: A Guide For Group Multiplication

### Week 1: Blessed to Be a Blessing

#### *Read*

Genesis 12:1-9

#### *Big Idea*

God draws us in to send us out. We are blessed to be a blessing.

#### *Discuss*

What fears do you have as our Discipleship Group prepares to multiply? How might this go poorly?

#### *Read*

Read the section entitled “The Pattern of Mission” under “Step 1: Discovering a Biblical Vision for Healthy Multiplication” in chapter 5.

#### *Respond*

How have you experienced the blessing of the Lord during your time in this Discipleship Group? What has been most life-giving to you?

It’s never easy to multiply a group. In fact, if we love one another, it should be quite hard! Yet, how do you envision this group blessing others by creating space for them to experience God and community?

Revisit the first question. How do you consider your fears in light of the biblical pattern of blessing?

#### *Apply*

For the next seven days, commit to praying for this group multiplication every day. Pray for the leaders who will be starting a new group. Pray for the leaders of the sending group. Pray for the process of sending out some of your own friends to be a blessing to their neighbors in a new group.

#### *Next Week*

We will continue discussing multiplication together by looking at the biblical theme of hospitality – the practice of creating space for others to encounter Christ and his community.

#### *Pray*

Let’s pray together now that the Father would soften our hearts toward his pattern of mission and toward those who have yet to experience him. Pray that his group multiplication would serve to move us to embrace a more outward-facing lifestyle. Pray also that this process would enable others in this neighborhood to encounter Christ, the church, and members of this group.

## Week 2: Hospitality as Mission

### *Read*

Romans 12:9-13

### *Big Idea*

Group multiplication is a means of Christian hospitality – creating space for others.

### *Review*

Last week, we read Genesis 12 and discussed the pattern of mission: “God draws us in to send us out. We are blessed to be a blessing.” The experiences of Abraham, Moses, Peter, Mary Magdalene, and the early church all testify: when God draws us in to know him, he then sends us out to make him known. It is a privilege to join God and the mission of the church by creating space in our lives and groups.

### *Read*

Read the section entitled “Creating Space for Outsiders” under “Step 1: Discovering a Biblical Vision for Healthy Multiplication” in chapter 5.

### *Respond*

Who was it that first invited you to this Discipleship Group – or to your first group at this church?

If you have been through a group multiplication before, share what was positive and negative about it. What suggestions and reminders do you have for the group as we prepare to multiply?

### *Pray*

First, let’s pray together that our Father would strengthen our relationships even as we multiply groups. And let’s also pray that the Father would soften our hearts toward those currently outside his church, move us to embrace a more outward-facing lifestyle, and enable us to “practice hospitality” in this neighborhood.

### Week 3: The Great Commission

#### *Read*

Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts. 1:1-11

#### *Big Idea*

As Christ sends us, he also goes with us.

#### *Review*

First, we discussed Genesis 12 and the pattern of mission: *God draws us in to send us out. We are blessed to be a blessing.* The experiences of Abraham, Moses, Simon Peter, Mary Magdalene, and the early church all testify: When God draws us in to know him, he then sends us out to make him known. It is, then, a privilege to join God and the mission of the church by creating space in our lives and groups.

Last week, we read Romans 12 and considered biblical hospitality – the distinctly Christian practice of *creating space for outsiders*. By multiplying our group, we are making room for new church members and our disconnected friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

#### *Read*

Read the section entitled “The Great Commission” under “Step 1: Discovering a Biblical Vision for Healthy Multiplication” in chapter 5.

#### *Respond*

How have you specifically seen God invite us into and fulfill the Great Commission through this group over the months or years?

How do you now see God fulfilling the Great Commission through our group’s multiplication?

How does it change your perspective that God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is intimately involved in the sending and starting of this new group? How does his ongoing presence with us change this process?

As we move closer toward our last gathering, what final questions, fears, or reservations do you have?

#### *Pray*

Let’s pray together (as we have the last two weeks) that our Father would strengthen our relationships even as we multiply groups. Let’s also pray that the Father would soften our hearts toward his Great Commission and those currently outside his church and make us a more outward-facing and hospitable people.