

WHY BANDING?



“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

James 5:16 ESV

A discipleship band is an intentional group of three to five men or women who meet regularly to engage in transformational questions and pray for one another. A band is different from a community group, accountability group, or a traditional Bible study - it is focused on personal transformation through deep evaluation with honest, vulnerable sharing and praying for one another. Banding invites God to meet each person where they are, to thank Him for their successes, and to ask God to help them in their struggles.

If this is a new concept or you are hesitant to get involved in a band, here is why we think that joining a discipleship band is valuable for every believer.

TRIED AND TRUE

In the early 1700s in Herrnhut, Germany, the Moravians began to organize themselves into small groups called “choirs.” Men and women had their own “choirs” where they shared life together and confessed their sin to one another. Soon after, they experienced an outpouring of the Spirit, started a 100-year prayer meeting, and began sending missionaries all over the world. Some of these missionaries went to England, where they came into contact with a young seminary student named John Wesley. Wesley started a group that others called the “Holy Club” where they asked each other questions about their walk with God, confessed their sin, prayed for one another, and ministered to the needy in their community. As revival broke out in England through his ministry, he organized believers into bands. Each person in the band answered specific questions, confessed their sin, and received prayer. These bands were incredibly effective in facilitating continued spiritual growth in people’s lives long after Wesley had left their town. Although John Wesley later founded Methodism, this approach to spiritual formation is not exclusive to the Methodist movement. Many missionary organizations all over the world today use a similar approach to help believers grow spiritually and reach their community.

CONNECTION

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35). His heart and His command is for His people to love one another deeply.

However, we live in a world that is starved for real connection—something deeper than comments and likes and a face on a screen. You have probably felt it too. We were made for deep connection, not for isolation or shallow friendships. We have more information and

entertainment at our fingertips than anyone in history, and yet there is an epidemic of loneliness. We don't need more content. We need more connection.

Bands are designed to foster true friendship and deep connection. Each person in a band shares their successes and struggles at each gathering. They share from their heart what God has been speaking to them. The group responds by encouraging them and praying for them. Very little of that happens in a typical visit to a church service in our world today. An intentional band of brothers (or sisters) in Christ is a counter-cultural breath of fresh air. It's a place where you can be seen, known, and loved.

FORMATION

In Ephesians 4:13, Paul says that maturity as a believer is to become more like Jesus! We must be intentional about the kind of person that we are becoming. And because we were made for connection, we grow faster and stronger when we're growing together in community with our brothers and sisters. Discipleship Bands are not only a place to connect, but a place where our souls can be formed to be more like Jesus through these relationships.

One of the most transformative parts of discipleship bands is that you can go deep. Because bands are small and remain closed for the term, each person can share from the depths of their heart. Because they are same-gender groups, no topic is off limits or too deep. Because the groups are confidential, you can be vulnerable without fear. When you're ready, you can share your biggest failures and your most painful memories with people you can trust who will bear your burdens with you.. If you wholeheartedly engage with your band, your spiritual formation will be accelerated and strengthened.

Another transformative element of a band is accountability. When you share that you were struggling to make time for prayer and Scripture reading, your band members will check in on you to see how it went since your last meeting. They won't shame you or kick you out, but they will ask you about the steps you are taking in your walk with the Lord. When you see others confess and receive encouragement and prayer, it emboldens you to confess the things that you have kept in the dark. When you confess a sin, they will remind you that you are forgiven, but it helps you to win that battle against temptation next time when you know they will ask you if you have any sin to confess. No one will throw any stones, but there is mutual accountability to keep obeying what Jesus has commanded you to do.

The final aspect of formation within discipleship bands is consistency. Like a rock worn down by the waves, we are formed by what we do consistently. Gathering consistently with your band will build an increasingly closer connection between you and the others in the band. Because you'll be answering the same questions every week, they will become etched into your heart and mind. You'll begin to consider your answers ahead of time. You'll think "I should share about that as a struggle I've faced." You'll take time to read the Scriptures and listen to the Spirit so you are ready to share what God is speaking to you.

And if the Holy Spirit convicts you of a sin, you'll know immediately what to share with the group.

SHARED MISSION

While we receive encouragement from one another and are formed to be like Jesus by the consistent questions in the band meeting, we also have a shared mission to accomplish. Jesus commanded us to make disciples and teach them to obey His commands (Mt. 28:18-19). The mission of every disciple of Jesus is to make more disciples who are learning how to obey Jesus in everything! It doesn't stop with you!

In the band meeting, each person answers the question, "*Where have you shared or shown the love of Jesus outside of the church?*". Walking together on mission keeps us focused and encouraged. When we feel like we're alone, we're less likely to boldly share the gospel. When we're ridiculed for our faith, it can be disheartening. But when we have sisters or brothers who are cheering us on, it strengthens us to fulfill the Great Commission!

RECEIVING PRAYER

Every time you meet, someone in your band will pray for you! You might even be receiving more prayer than you ever have before in your life when you join a band. So when you go through hard times, you'll have people in your corner praying for you. When you are wrestling with a tough decision, they will pray to God for wisdom for you. When you are hurting, they will pray for healing for your soul. We're all in this together. You're not alone!

WHY NOT COMMUNITY GROUPS?

Community groups are valuable in several ways. They are really good at building connection—some people even say their group feels like family! The group discusses how Scripture affects their life and prays together. However, community groups are limited in their effectiveness to form people to have Christlike character. The depth is often limited by the group size, and by the fact that they include both men and women together. People are less likely to be vulnerable in these environments.

It's also limited because a typical community group gathering doesn't include an element of being challenged to grow. While a person likely experiences connection and can process living unto Him with their group, their character formation is limited because the group format doesn't challenge them very much.

In a discipleship band, a person is challenged each time they gather by having to answer the questions to the group. Once trust is established, they are free to be very vulnerable in a same-gender, small-size group. And on top of that, bands usually develop a deep connection among one another like community groups. We believe that discipleship bands are a more effective strategy than community groups to form disciples to become more and more like Jesus.