

DISCIPLESHIP 101

***A GUIDE FOR MAKING AND
MULTIPLYING DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS***





A black and white photograph showing the silhouettes of five people in profile, facing right, against a light background. They appear to be in a group conversation. The person on the far right is the most prominent, wearing glasses and a dark shirt. The others are slightly behind and to the left. A large, curved black shape is visible on the left side of the image.

WHY SHOULD YOU START A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

Any sustainable, fulfilling, and successful project begins with a mission statement. Beginning a discipleship group is no exception. If you are going to start a discipleship group, you need to be able to answer “Why.”

Olive Baptist Church’s mission is to develop fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. A discipleship group is a tremendous and proven way to help believers in their faith. Let’s examine some scriptural and practical considerations of why we are called to be disciple makers.



JESUS' **COMMAND**

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus challenges his followers with The Great Commission. The overarching goal is to “go and make disciples.” *Jesus’ plan to reach the nations with his eternity-transforming message is through individuals making disciples of others.*

Discipleship groups are a tremendous way to develop disciples and obey Jesus’ command.



JESUS' EXAMPLE

When we examine in the Gospels how Jesus developed disciples, we clearly see the small group model. Jesus ministered to crowds, but most of his ministry was spent with twelve men (Luke 6:13). Think about that! Eugene Peterson said, “Jesus it must be remembered, restricted nine-tenths of his ministry to twelve Jews.” Jesus broke down the group even smaller with intentional focus with Peter, James, and John (Mark 1:29-31, Mark 5:37, Mark 9:2, Mark 13:3, Matthew 26:37). Jesus exemplified the small group discipleship model.



PATTERN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Discipleship continued after Jesus ascended to heaven and was the method the church continued to use as the Gospel spread across the globe. A crucial text for considering discipleship is 2 Timothy 2:1-2, where Paul encourages: “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.”

Notice a few things about this passage. First, Paul refers to Timothy as “my child”. You do not refer to someone as your spiritual child unless you have a depth of relationship with them that goes beyond corporate gatherings. Next, notice his command to Timothy in the next verse: “entrust to faithful men.” So, Paul is instructing Timothy to pass on those things he heard in a corporate setting (“many witnesses”) to individuals who can be trusted in smaller settings. Last, notice the purpose of this process, “who will be able to teach others also.” This is the Great Commission!

***THE GOAL WAS NOT JUST TO TEACH OTHERS SO
THEY COULD BE BETTER DISCIPLES, THE GOAL
WAS TO TEACH OTHERS SO THEY COULD BE
BETTER DISCIPLE-MAKERS.***

For another great example of the pattern of discipleship in the New Testament church, check out Titus 2:1-10. This gives us a wonderful example of discipleship in the local church that is threaded through all ages, genders, occupations, and spiritual maturity levels.



**SMALLER GROUP
SETTING IS IDEAL
FOR DISCIPLESHIP**

**DISCIPLESHIP
GROUPS ENABLE
REPRODUCTION**

SMALLER GROUP SETTING IS IDEAL FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Here's the fact of the matter:

DISCIPLESHIP IS MESSY AND COMPLICATED.

To disciple someone it will require more than a surface level involvement in a life. It will take wrestling with the application of the gospel in the midst of a broken, sinful world. It will take understanding the sin struggles, fears, and worries of the disciple. Because each disciple is an individual, with an individual walk with Christ in an individual context, discipleship by necessity will take more than a Sunday morning gathering. Within a smaller group setting, people can see on a deeper level the implications of Scripture on their lives. They are more likely to be honest with their struggles, and they can better receive help on how to specifically apply the gospel to their daily context.



DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS COMPLEMENT SUNDAY WORSHIP

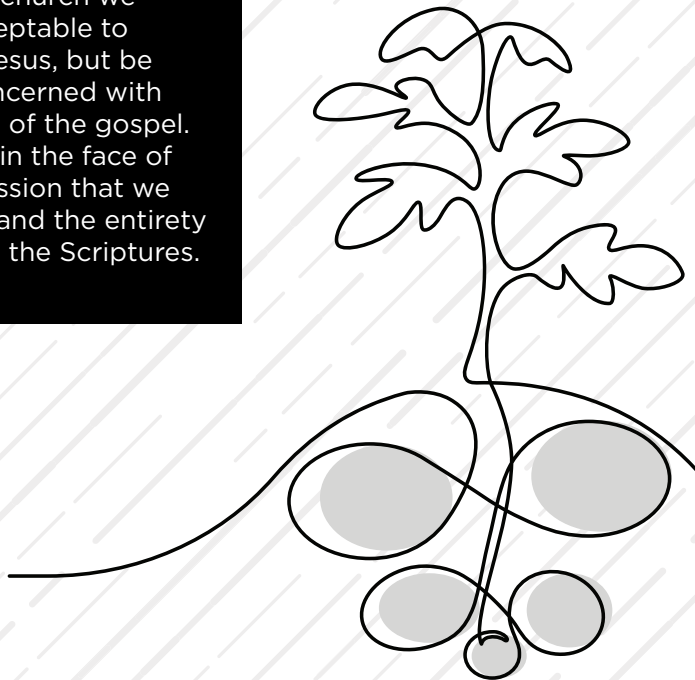
Discipleship groups provide a space where deep gospel relationships can be formed and thrive in ways that corporate gatherings cannot. This is not at all to discredit corporate worship gatherings, as these are a necessity for the life of the local church. However, discipleship groups provide a setting that complements the Sunday worship service and enables the individuals in it to practically live out the truths they are learning from the pulpit of the church in their own lives.



DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS ENABLE REPRODUCTION

EVERY DISCIPLE MUST BE A MULTIPLIER.

Christians are designed to reproduce. The gospel spread from the ancient Middle East to our country because the early believers believed this. The sad reality is that in the modern, western church we have made it acceptable to be a disciple of Jesus, but be completely unconcerned with the multiplication of the gospel. This flies directly in the face of the Great Commission that we looked at earlier, and the entirety of what we see in the Scriptures.



Colossians 1:5-6 says, “because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, **THE GOSPEL,** which has come to you, as indeed

IN THE WHOLE WORLD IT IS BEARING FRUIT AND INCREASING

- as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.”

This passage provides a great example of the gospel coming to a group of people but not stopping with them.

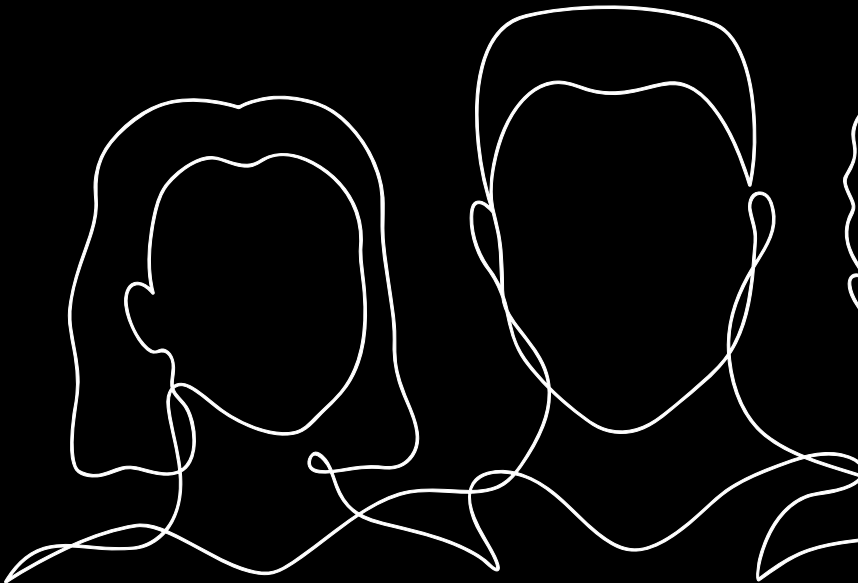
EVERY CHRISTIAN IS DESIGNED TO BE A REPRODUCER OF THE GOSPEL

that has transformed them. David Platt says it like this: “Will the Word stop with you, or spread through you?” Once you understand that the goal of discipleship is reproduction you can clearly see the necessity of discipleship groups. This understanding provides a great opportunity to see individuals take the step from being a disciple of Jesus, to being a disciple-maker for Jesus. You cannot become a reproducer by mistake. It will take intentional equipping and this takes place most naturally within the local church when done in discipleship groups.

WHO SHOULD YOU INVITE TO YOUR DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

Now that you understand the purpose and potential of a discipleship group, I hope you are brimming with excitement to start your own. Not to temper your excitement, but before you become a discipleship guru, there is a very important ingredient to a successful discipleship group that we cannot overlook: the people you invite. This very well could be the decision that makes or breaks your discipleship group.

HAVING MEMBERS WHO AREN'T COMMITTED OR IN AGREEMENT WITH THE PURPOSE OF YOUR DISCIPLESHIP GROUP IS SURE TO HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE OTHERS IN IT, AND THE GROUP AS A WHOLE.



Replicate Ministries has a really helpful acronym for deciding who should be considered for your discipleship group: F.A.I.T.H. A discipleship group that has maximum impact for the kingdom must have men or women full of F.A.I.T.H.

***WE SHARE THE GOSPEL AND LOVE
INDISCRIMINATELY, BUT IN ORDER
TO STEWARD OUR TIME WELL FOR
MAXIMUM KINGDOM IMPACT, WE MUST
DISCRIMINATE WITH WHO WE INVITE TO
BE PART OF OUR DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS.***

Jesus spent an entire night of prayer before he picked the twelve men he would invest in (Luke 6:12-13). While you may not need to hold an all-night-prayer vigil, here are some characteristics to consider as you prayerfully decide who to invite to your group.



WHO TO INVITE?

***FAITHFUL
AVAILABLE
INTENTIONAL
TEACHABLE
HUNGRY***

1 *FAITHFUL*

Your discipleship group is designed to take individuals who are already disciples of Jesus, who desire to be formed into his image, and grow to make disciples of others. Some key questions to ask when considering who to invite would be: “Are they faithful to the weekly worship service?”, “Are they part of a connection group?”, and “Do they make an attempt to serve when given the opportunity?” You are not looking for an individual who you might confuse with the Apostle Paul, you are just looking for people who takes their Christian walk seriously and has shown a desire to grow.

2 *AVAILABLE*

Some people simply do not have time, or will not make time to be part of a discipleship group. This is very important to identify before you start. Nothing is as detrimental to the life of a discipleship group than inconsistent attendees. If someone is not available, it is ok. Life has many seasons. Let them know that you would love to have them in the future if their schedule opens up to allow for it.

3 INTENTIONAL

Intentionality in the life of the prospect member of your discipleship group is an essential component to success. One must take seriously the process in their life of being conformed to the image of Christ.

DISCIPLESHIP WILL NOT HAPPEN ACCIDENTALLY.

Consider if someone understands that intentionality is necessary for discipleship occur.

4 TEACHABLE

Pastor Robby Gallaty wisely states, “You won’t learn anything until you admit you don’t know everything.” If someone is going to be a part of your discipleship group having a desire to learn and a spirit open to learn from others is key. To be a disciple is to be a student of Christ. Having a humble spirit which is willing to learn will be important in the discipleship journey.

5 HUNGRY

A discipleship group is a means to the end of accomplishing God’s mission for His church. Spiritually apathetic individuals who have absolutely no desire to be pushed out of their comfort zone will contribute to defeating the purpose of a discipleship group.

A GENTLE REMINDER: IF YOU ARE GOING TO LEAD A GROUP OF THIS NATURE, YOU MUST YOURSELF POSSESS ALL OF THESE CHARACTERISTICS AS A LEADER. BE FAITHFUL IN PRAYER AND GROWING YOUR OWN WALK WITH CHRIST.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IN YOUR DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

**AS COMMITTED FOLLOWERS OF
JESUS, WE ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT
SEEING THE GOSPEL REPRODUCED
IN THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS, AND
IN ORDER FOR THAT TO HAPPEN
IT TAKES AN INTENTIONAL
DISCIPLESHIP GROUP SCHEDULE.**



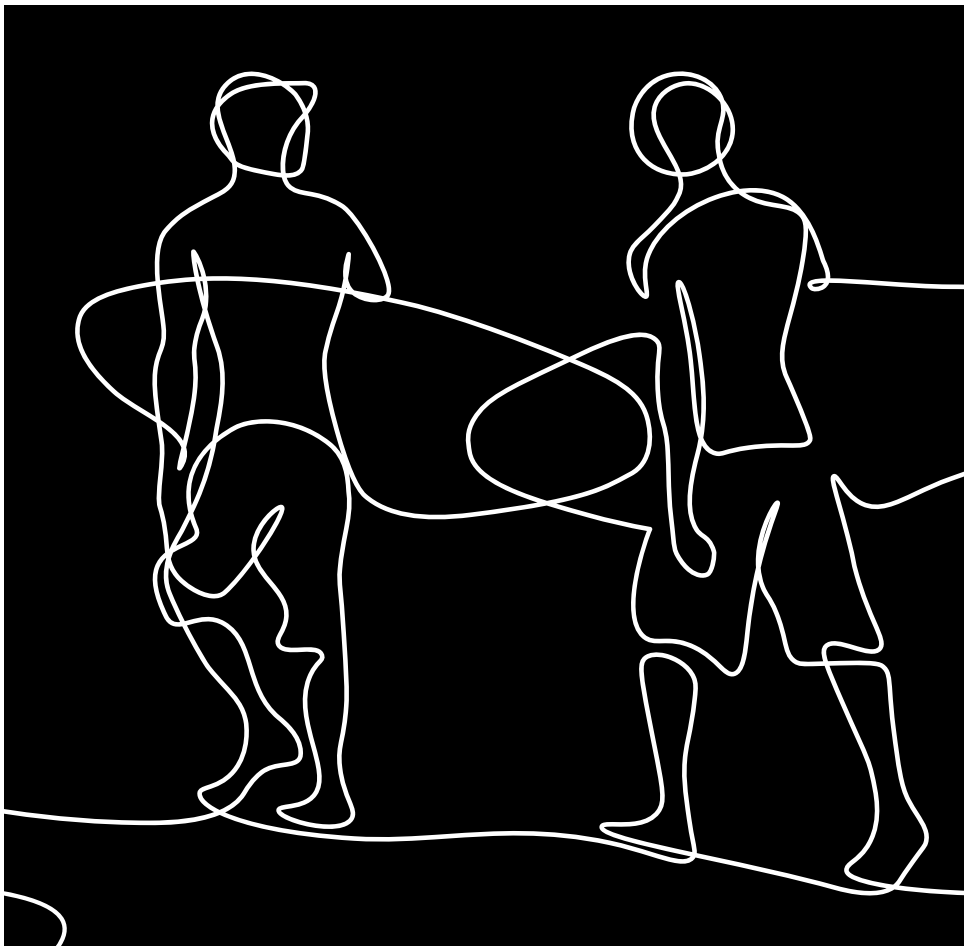
Consider these two necessary characteristics of a successful discipleship group:

BRIEF AND REPLICABLE,

as well as these three cornerstones that are non-negotiables for including in your time together:

SCRIPTURE INTAKE & STUDY,

PRAYER, AND ACCOUNTABILITY.



BRIEF

People are busy. In order to ensure group members will stay committed, you need to respect their time. While a three-hour long discussion on theology may be a nice treat, it is not a good way to sustain consistent attendance to your group.

**IF YOU KEEP THE TIME BRIEF, YOU WILL FIND THAT
YOUR GROUP WILL BE MUCH MORE CONSISTENT.**

People will respect you as the leader, because you respect their time. One hour to 90 minutes is a great time frame to work with. Aim for no longer than an hour. An hour is plenty of time to meet as long as you are intentional about how you spend that time.



REPLICABLE

The goal of discipleship is always reproduction and multiplication.

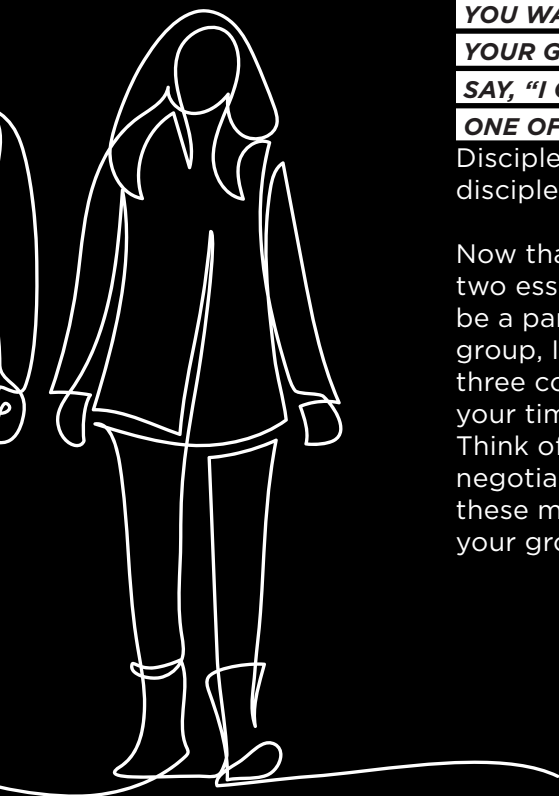
**YOU SHOULD HAVE A SIMPLE
FORMAT AND STICK TO IT FOR
THE MOST PART.**

Consider simplifying your group discipleship for the sake of reproduction.

**YOU WANT THE MEMBERS OF
YOUR GROUP TO CONFIDENTLY
SAY, "I COULD START
ONE OF THESE."**

Disciple-makers making disciple-makers.

Now that we have established two essential characteristics be a part of your discipleship group, I want to point you to three cornerstones to build your time together around. Think of these as the non-negotiables: if nothing else, these must be taking place in your group.



SCRIPTURE INTAKE & STUDY

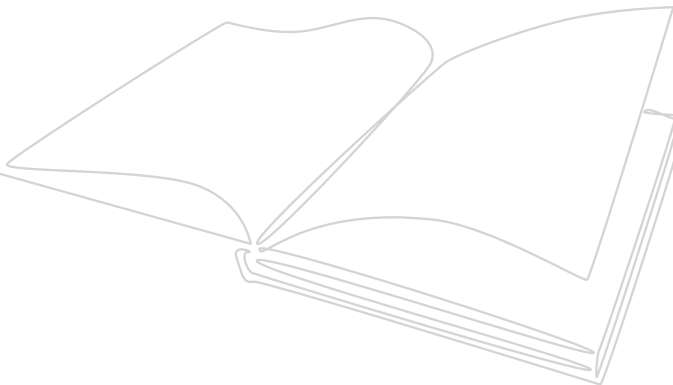
If we want to be effective, multiplying disciples of Jesus, we must be men and women of the Word. Build your discipleship group on Scripture.

All Scripture intake and study is not created equal.

WE DO NOT WANT TO POINT MEMBERS SIMPLY TO READ THE WORD, BUT TO LEARN TO MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE CONTINUALLY, INTERPRET SCRIPTURE FAITHFULLY, AND APPLY SCRIPTURE PRACTICALLY.

We want to guide people to feed themselves and others from the Scriptures for a lifetime. In order to ensure quality meditation, interpretation, and application you may find it helpful to provide your group members with helpful tools. Helpful methods include *Seven Arrows for Bible Study* or the *HEAR* method for meditation on Scripture.

Discipleship must be built on Scripture. Otherwise, we will simply be making disciples of ourselves or of culture. Scripture is God's means for believers being formed into the image of Christ and increased godliness. (2 Cor. 3:18, 2 Tim. 3:15-17). Since this is the case, much care and thought should be taken to ensure that Scripture is interpreted and applied with care in your discipleship group.



PRAYER

James 5:16 promises “the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” Prayer is a great privilege for the Christian based on our standing in Christ (Hebrews 4:16) There are staggering promises in Scripture in relation to prayer (1 John 5:14, John 15:7). And prayer is a repeated command in the word of God (Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

IF YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP, PRAYER MUST BE CENTRAL.

Often we fall into the trap of talking about prayer, studying prayer, thinking about prayer, but fail to actually pray. I encourage you to make prayer a priority in your group. Our discipleship groups may have great strategies and great discussion, but unless God is the one working in your group it is eternally insignificant (Psalm 127:1-2). Eternal fruit is developed if your group leaves more equipped and inspired to pray.

ACCOUNTABILITY

A small group of believers provides an atmosphere which enables transparency and authenticity other settings may not. Scripture encourages believers to confess their sins one to another (James 5:16). A discipleship group is not a time for individuals to come and put on their best face to impress the other group members.

IT PROVIDES A CHANCE FOR US TO BRING OUR BROKENNESS TO OTHER MEMBERS OF THE BODY AND THROUGH CONFESSION AND ACCOUNTABILITY BE HEALED.

Group leaders must model this. Being transparent with struggles encourages other members of the group to step forward and be honest about their personal battles. We minister from a place of weakness, and this is where God works His power (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Accountability also provides the opportunity to encourage one another to good works and obedience as well as to celebrate victories as you carry out God’s mission together.

WHEN SHOULD YOU MULTIPLY YOUR GROUP?

Remember: the goal for a discipleship group is reproduction. Knowing when the time is right is different for each group. The key is the maturity of the individual group member. Robby Gallaty says, “The discipleship process is not complete until the mentee becomes the mentor, or until the player becomes the coach.” You as the leader and your group member should discern together whether they are ready, willing, and capable of multiplying their own discipleship group. Multiplying too soon will lead to frustration and failure, and waiting too long will create a comfort in the current group that will hinder true discipleship. This may take between six-twelve months or longer.

THE IMPORTANT QUALIFICATION IS NOT A TIME, BUT RATHER DEVELOPING THE INDIVIDUAL INTO A HEALTHY, GROWING DISCIPLE OF JESUS WHO CAN MAKE OTHER DISCIPLES.

***Now, go make disciples for
the glory of Jesus' name!***



