

A STEP BY STEP APPROACH TO BEGINNING AND SUSTAINING A DISCIPLE-MAKING MINISTRY

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I. PRACTICAL STEPS TO CREATING A SMALL, REPRODUCIBLE DISCIPLESHIP GROUP

Step 1: Pray

Ask the Lord to place on your heart hungry people to whom he is drawing you. Take your time. Let the conviction settle in. Only then go to the next step.

What are you looking for? You are trying to sense a teachable spirit and as Paul says, "entrust to faithful or reliable ones who can teach others also." (II Tim. 2:2)

Qualities you are looking for:

Loyalty: At least a willingness to consider the implications of what it means to attach ourselves to Jesus as the one who is supreme in our life.

Teachability: Jesus did not look for those who would by the world's standards commanded respect or influence. We should resist the temptation to do so as well.

Step 2: Make a personal invitation

Approach a person in the following way: "The Lord has been placing you on my heart, and I sense that I am to ask you if you would be willing to join me and one or two others on a weekly journey together toward becoming better disciples of Jesus?"

Don't set yourself up as the discipler who is the model of what a disciple is supposed to be. Your role is to facilitate an environment that has the following characteristics:

- **Relationship Transparency:** Get to the points of sharing the deep things in our life
- **Truth in Community:** Apply the truth of God's word to all aspects of our life in a relational environment
- **Life-Change Accountability:** Help each other to identify those places that need to be brought into conformity to God's will
- **Step 3: Tell them what is involved**

If you are using a curriculum such as *Discipleship Essentials*, give them an overview of the content and how you will cover it.

- A. Review the overall table of contents to get a feel for the overall content and flow.
- B. Review the format of a lesson
- C. Tell them it will take approximately 1-2 hours/week to complete the lessons depending on how rapidly you are covering the content.

Step 4: Review the Covenant (p. 14, *Discipleship Essentials*)

Disciples need to have a very clear sense of what is expected of them. Walk through the covenant line by line and have them restate the expectations in their own words. Mention that you will be meeting weekly for approximately a year.

As you read each line you could ask them to repeat what they think they are committing themselves to:

- What do you think you are being asked to do?
- Could you put that in your own words?
- What expectations does this create for you?

As you conclude the review of the covenant, you might ask: how much time do you sense that this would take for you to be involved? Is this possible? Would you need to rearrange your schedule in any way to make this group a priority?

Step 5: Ask the disciple to prayerfully consider the invitation.

Specifically, ask them not to give you an answer on the spot, but to examine whether they have the time and the heart for what lies ahead. Ask them to pray about this over the next week, count the cost, and then give you an answer that has been prayerfully discerned.

Step 6: Inform them that there will be at least one other person joining you.

If this is your first invitation, this person may even have a suggestion as to who might be the third or fourth person.

Step 7: Set the first regular meeting and get started

Find quiet space where you will be able to grow into intimate transparency. At the first session ask each person to share their process of making a commitment to the group.

Locations for meetings:

- Private home
- A quiet nook in a restaurant
- Private office:

Avoid spaces that are too public:

- Coffee house
- restaurant which is too noisy, etc.

Step 8: Guide the participants through the sessions

Go only at a pace that is comfortable. Encourage questions. Address personal matters. The curriculum is only a tool, not something to which to be enslaved.

The curriculum is laid out so that you can just progress through it at a pace that is workable.

Step 9: Model transparency

The group will go as deep as the willingness of the convener to be vulnerable.

II. FIRST FEW MEETINGS OF YOUR GROUP

A. At your first meeting **review the covenant together**. Read through it line by line; ask if there are any questions, and ask each person to say what they think they are committing themselves to. Again, ask them to put into their own words what they think the covenant is asking of them. Then sign the covenant in each other's presence and date it. Remind them that there will be an opportunity to review and renew the covenant after lessons 8 [p. 80] and 16 [p.146]. This is a time of self-evaluation and course correction.

2. **Get to know each other** as you are jumping into the curriculum. If you are relative strangers to each other, here are some fun things to share together for an initial introduction. Create some fun ice-breaker questions:

- A. Where were you born and where did you grow up?
- B. Tell us some things about your family of origin:
 - 1. Siblings: where are you in the birth order?
 - 2. What was one of your favorite family activities?
- C. How did you choose your profession or school (if you are a student)?
- D. If married, how did you meet your spouse and share some things about how the relationship developed? Is there any funny story connected to this?
- E. What is an interest or hobby that you like to pursue in your spare time?
- F. Why are you interested in a group like this now?

3. **Share your faith journey** to give background to where you are at the moment in relationship to Jesus Christ.
 - A. As the facilitator, take the lead here.
 - B. What are some elements to include in the faith story?
 1. What brought you to faith in Christ?
 2. What have been some of the ups and downs of your faith journey?
When have you felt closest to God and when have you felt furthest away?
 3. Who has been particularly influential in shaping your faith?
 4. What are some of your deepest desires now in relationship to Christ?
What would you like Jesus to do for you?
 - C. Don't try to hear all of the stories of the faith journey all in one session. Perhaps a couple at a time can do so, and then you can mix in the faith journey stories while getting going on the lesson material.
4. As the facilitator, **lead the first 4-6 lessons**, while letting the group members know that you will be rotating facilitation so that they can practice and get the feel for how to guide people through the discoveries. It is important to create this expectation from the beginning and then to shift the responsibility. There is nothing like doing something like this to give people confidence that they can lead their own group.
5. Keep reminding people that they are there for **two purposes**: 1. Their own growth as a disciple, and 2. growing in the ability to disciple others. You will need to keep reinforcing that there will come a time soon when they will be in the "lead" position.

III. GROWING A DISCIPLE-MAKING NETWORK

1. Establish a **small oversight group** who can keep track of who are in the discipleship groups and where they are in the progress. Start to create a visual image of the growing network.
2. You could **create your own newsletter** that you put out approximately quarterly that has articles on discipleship, short testimonies from those who are benefitting from the relationship (transformation that has taken place), or from those who are leading their first group. Keep a list of those participating in the growing network.
3. **Hold semi-annual gatherings of all the people** who have or are going through the discipleship process. Invite Pastor Ogden (or someone like him) in as a guest speaker to continue to inspire the people involved and to keep the vision of reproduction alive.

4. Make sure your **small oversight group is available for problem solving** or helping to find answer to come of the difficult questions that arise.

Continuing to Develop Your Disciple-making plan

Step 1: Start your own discipleship experience: Who are the 2 or 3 other people the Lord may be bringing to mind who could be invited into this experience?

Step 2: What curriculum will you use?

- A. Selected portions of Scripture?
- B. A written curriculum such as Discipleship Essentials?
- C. What kind of content do you think people can handle?
- D. What criteria should you use to determine your curriculum?

Step 3: Consider who else in your ministry can begin to lead these types of small, reproducible groups. Your very first group should be made up of potential leaders.

Step 4: How can this careful approach to growing disciples be the foundation of your leadership development plan. As a leader your key role is to grow disciples who can themselves become leaders. How does this approach assist that goal?