



DISCIPLESHIP GROUP

starter guide

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WE ARE SO ENCOURAGED YOU WANT TO START A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP!

This guide is designed to equip you with a basic framework for intentionally investing yourself in making disciples who will make disciples. The goal is not to overwhelm, but rather to make discipleship accessible and aimed at the right target.

WHAT IS A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

A discipleship group is a closed group of 3-5 people who meet for a focused season of intentional spiritual growth with the intent to multiply at the end of that season. This is not a program, but rather a tool to help you keep discipleship focused on the right goals.

HOW IS A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP DIFFERENT FROM A GOSPEL COMMUNITY?

Several features distinguish a Discipleship Group as an excellent complement (not replacement) for Gospel Communities. These groups are intended to be time-bound, small, and focused on a particular area of spiritual growth. Further, because of their size and scope, multiplication is a more accessible goal.

SO, IT'S BASICALLY A BIBLE STUDY THEN?

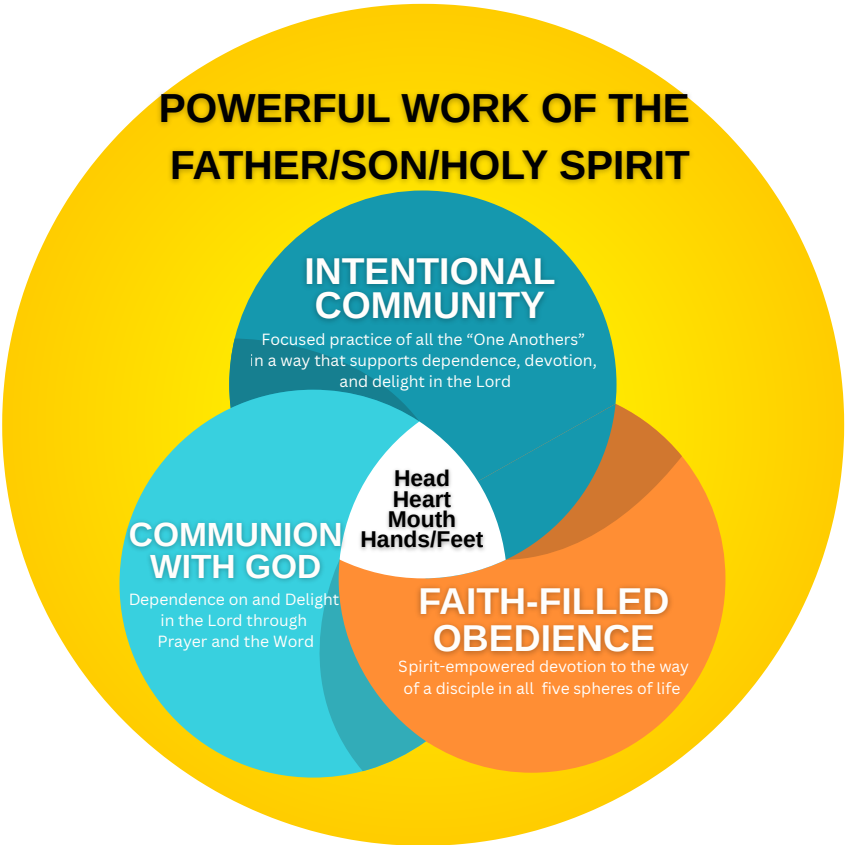
Not exactly. You will study the Bible, but many (not all) Bible Study groups tend to focus on information and knowledge as the primary aim. A discipleship group is focused on transformation through three key areas - habits, heart transformation, and holistic fruit. Your Discipleship Group will hold one another accountable to ensure all three of these areas are fully functioning and working together.

Essentials of Purposeful Disciple-Making

Before we rush to the specifics of the Discipleship Group format, we must make sure we understand the definition of discipleship and the components essential to all disciple-making.

Discipleship Defined: Taking your next steps with dependence on, devotion to, and delight in Jesus, and helping others to do the same.

Within the context of the powerful work of our Triune God, discipleship requires four essential components:



COMMUNION WITH GOD

Discipleship is all about our relationship with the Triune God. God the Father adopts us through the incarnational saving work of God the Son and empowers us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. God saves us for relationship with him. To this end, Jesus told us that the greatest commandment is that “you shall Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37, ESV). We are making disciples of Jesus, not ourselves or another teacher. We must train them to have an abiding relationship with him, learning to depend on and delight in him through prayer and the word.

INTENTIONAL BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

Jesus said that the second greatest commandment is like (intertwined with) the first, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). We learn this love in the context of Christ’s family, the local church. Our Sovereign Lord saved us into this family, which is designed to help us grow into maturity in Christ. The church does this by obeying the “one another commands” of scripture, thus embodying Christ and his love to each other.

FAITH-FILLED OBEDIENCE

Discipleship is not merely an intellectual exercise, but results in devoted obedience in all of life. At Oak Hill, we define “all of life” in five spheres: our personal walk, our family, our church, our community, and our world. Discipleship must pay attention to the holistic fruit displayed in all five of these spheres.

THE JOURNEY OF TRUTH

Holding all three of these parts together is an understanding of how the disciple interacts with the truth of God’s word. Truth must be understood (head), internalized (heart), expressed (mouth), and embodied (hands/feet). Effective discipleship will pay attention to all four stops on this journey.

Spaces for Purposeful Disciple-Making

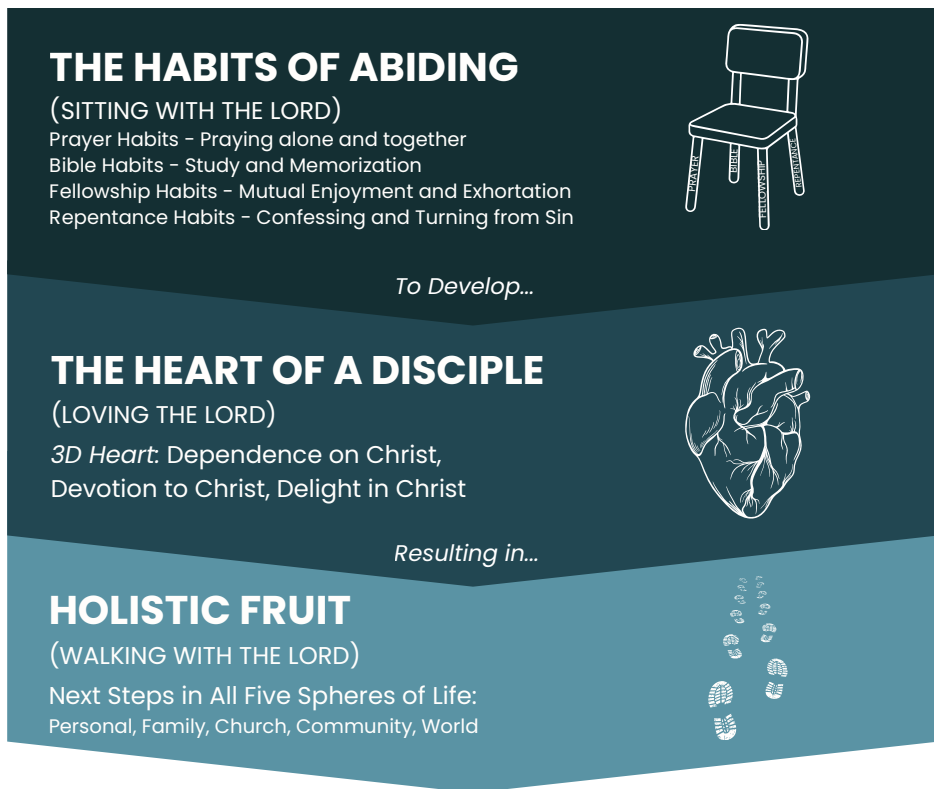
It is broadly acknowledged that different types of spaces and groups play unique and important roles in discipleship by emphasizing these essential components in different ways. Understanding these group dynamics will help you see where your discipleship group fits as part of a bigger picture.



Discipleship Groups form the most intimate and focused space in our church's discipleship pathway. Their size allows for the type of transparency needed to foster deep communion with God, deep intentional community, and deep faith-filled obedience. *Consider how the content, commitments, and relational connections you choose for your discipleship group will complement and enhance growth that is being facilitated in the other discipleship spaces.*

What to Expect in a Discipleship Group

The graphic below shows how group members commit to habits of abiding together to develop the heart of a disciple, resulting in holistic fruit of in all five spheres of life.

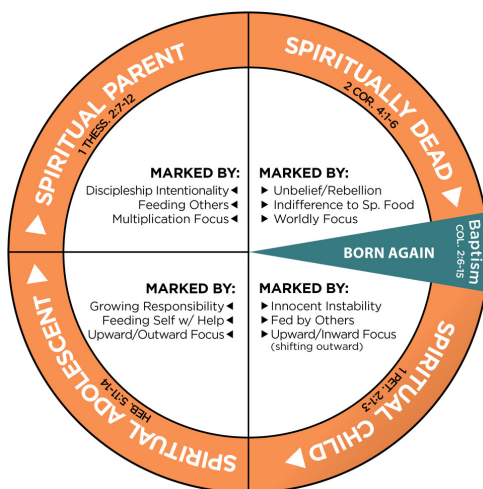


Discipleship Groups mutually commit to **habits** of abiding, learning to *sit with the Lord* until his truth moves from head-level understanding to heart-level internalization. Your Discipleship Group will purposefully select biblical content based on the goals and maturity of the group, setting a timeline appropriate for the needs of the group. Each time you are together, you will have transparent dialogue around what the Holy Spirit is doing in your **heart**, increasing your *love for the Lord*. You will hold one another accountable to *walking with the Lord* in all of life, confessing sin and weakness, and committing to bear **holistic fruit**.

Who should be in a discipleship group?

Jesus spent a great deal of time praying about his closest discipleship relationships, and we should too (Luke 6:12ff). Here are some things to take into consideration as you pray and invite.

Discipleship Groups work best when there is some level of prior relationship established, mutual commitment, and shared eagerness for growth in Jesus. They should be made up of people who are in multiple stages of spiritual maturity. We need friends in our own growth stages, but they rarely challenge us as much as when multiple growth stages come together.

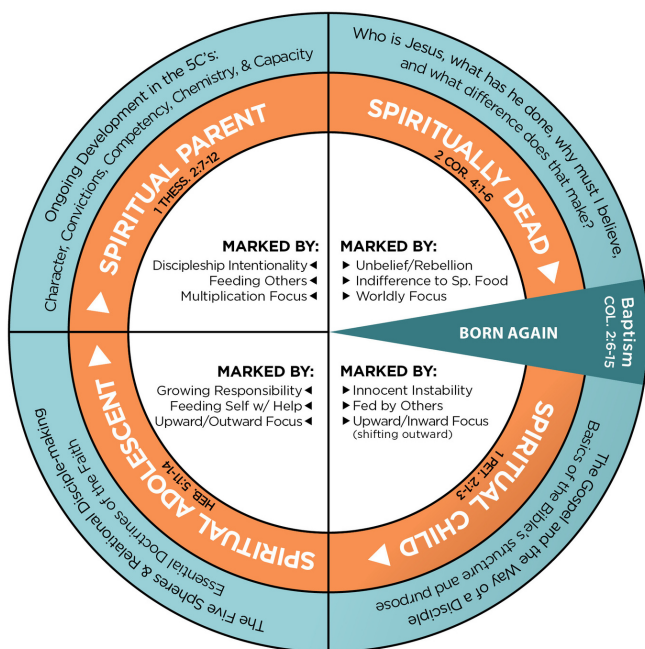


A discipleship group may be initiated in one of two directions: either a “spiritually younger” individual asks a more mature believer to help them grow in Christ in a specific way, or a “spiritually older” believer asks a “spiritually younger” believer if they would be interested in being discipled in God’s word in an intentional way.

In either case, the initiator should recognize their own spiritual maturity and ensure the group has someone who is well established in their faith to facilitate. That person will have the opportunity to grow through the rigors of teaching and modeling, while the others are growing through observation and experience. It is wise to have at least three, but no more than 5 people in a group (6 if three couples are meeting together) to balance the priorities of multiplication and transparency.

What should a Discipleship Group study?

Because discipleship is not merely about the transfer of information, but rather is holistic and transformative, careful attention must be given to the content the group studies together. Different growth stages have different capacities and needs that build on one another throughout the Christian walk. In a Discipleship Group, the selected content from God's word becomes both the power and standard by which to grow in a specific area of following Jesus, and also the opportunity to practice habits of abiding that facilitate communion with God. Therefore, the content should be firmly grounded in the word of God (helping participants engage with the Bible itself) and targeted to reach the needs of the "spiritually youngest" person in the group. "Spiritually older" members will grow through the challenge of actually making disciples (answering questions, modeling, loving, etc.). Use the blue circle in the diagram below to consider the needs of the members in your group in their growth stage.



You can find a list of recommended word-based resources for each growth stage. to www.oakhillfellowship.com/purposefuldiscipleship (see also Appendix 2). Each Discipleship Group should regularly check-in with the an elder regarding their selected content so the elders can continue to guide and guard the teaching, as well as pray for and celebrate the discipleship happening in the group.

How should a Discipleship Group meet?

Discipleship groups could organize their meeting rhythms in a variety of ways. They could choose to meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. They could meet in a public space (like a coffee shop), a private home (around a dining table or in a living room), or even via online platforms. Select a location that considers the needs of your group and maximizes participation and transparency. Remember that space and atmosphere matter in helping people feel comfortable and secure.



Additionally, make sure to choose a regular meeting time that works consistently for all members of the group. The smaller the group, the easier this will be. Choose a length of meeting time that respects everyone's schedules. At the end of each meeting, double-check the next meeting date to ensure consistency (re-scheduling if necessary).

What commitments should a Discipleship Group make?

Each participant in a Discipleship Group should make a clear commitment to the other members that will last the duration of the group's existence. This could be done formally through a covenant (recommended) or informally through clear communication. Invite all group members to participate in creating the details of the commitment. Part of the commitment a participant should make is to start or apprentice in a new Discipleship Group some time after the current group commitment ends. This ensures discipleship is about multiplication and growth, not merely consuming information.

Below is a sample worksheet to help set goals and mutual expectations when starting a new Discipleship Group.

SAMPLE COMMITMENT CARD

DISCIPLESHIP GROUP COMMITMENT

I, along with the other members of this group commit to:

- Giving ourselves fully to the Lord as we anticipate his work of spiritual transformation.
- Communicating with the other members of this group weekly
- Meeting at the scheduled times through the end of the agreed upon season (___/___/___).
- When I am unable to meet, I will notify the other group members ahead of time.
- Committing to the agreed-upon habits of abiding in Christ:
 - **Prayer Habits:**
What: _____ When: _____
 - **Word Habits:**
Study - What: _____ When: _____
Memory - What: _____ When: _____
 - **Fellowship Habits:**
Meeting - What: _____ When: _____
Ongoing Connection - What: _____ When: _____
 - **Repentance Habits:**
What: _____ When: _____
- Contribute to a group atmosphere of discretion, honesty, and transparency.
- Pray regularly for other members of my Discipleship Group.
- Pray and look for others to invite into a new Discipleship Group when this one is over.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

MEETING RHYTHM

(Write out the time to be devoted to each meeting element)

Total Time:

Meeting Elements to Consider:

Catch-up Time, Follow-up from Habits of Abiding, 3D Heart Check-up, 5-Sphere "Next Steps" Accountability, Prayer for one another

MEETING DATES:

PEOPLE WE ARE PRAYING FOR IN THE NEXT DISCIPLESHIP GROUP MULTIPLICATION:

Provide each member a card where they can record these commitments and meeting rhythms. Printed cards (that fit well in a book or Bible) are available via the church office.

What is YOUR next step?

Discipleship Groups are not a program, but a tool. They are not a curriculum but a format. They are by no means the only way to make disciples, but we believe they can be an effective way to make disciples. Our aim is to put this tool in your hand so that you can get busy fulfilling the work to which the Lord has called you with the people he has put in your life.

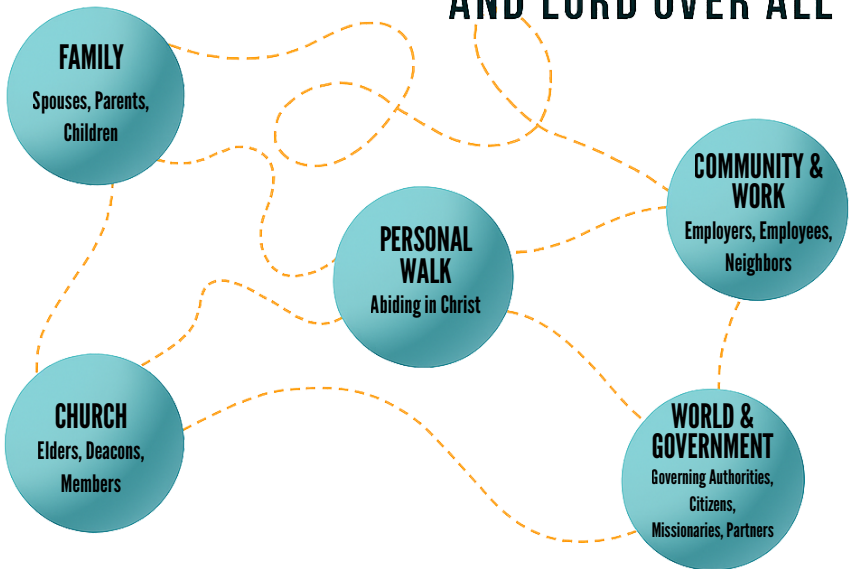
Here are some next steps we would commend to you:

- **Initiate a Discipleship Group** – Reach out to a “spiritually younger” believer (or even an unbeliever) and ask them to commit to a season of taking their next steps with you. You don’t need to wait for the elders to recruit you. Pray about the people in your sphere of influence who need the investment of intentional discipleship. If you are that person who needs intentional investment, ask a “spiritually older” person to start a discipleship group with you. Maybe this tool and your request is what they need to obey the Lord’s calling in their lives!
- **Work out the Details** – Meet one or two times to select the focus (content) of your discipleship group, the meeting location and schedule, the duration of this discipleship group, who else you could/should invite, etc. Record these on your commitment card.
- **Inform the Elders and Seek Support** – While this is not a program to be managed by the elders, the elders are collectively responsible for guarding and guiding the discipleship of the church. We are interested and invested in praying for and celebrating the work the Lord is doing in all the discipleship relationships of the church.
- **Grow Together as Disciples** – Remember, the end goal is discipleship – deeper communion with God through intentional biblical community resulting in faith-filled obedience. Seek the Lord to use the habits of abiding to form the heart of a disciple in every participant, so that each person might bear holistic fruit. As you grow, express your constant dependence upon God, commit your devotion to him, and celebrate your delight in him as he grows you into the likeness of Christ.

Appendix 1 – The Five Spheres

THE FIVE SPHERES

**JESUS IS SAVIOR
AND LORD OVER ALL**



As you abide in Christ, follow him by...

- Understanding his design for the roles he has given you in each sphere
- Fulfilling the responsibilities he gives with each of those roles
- Stewarding your time, talent, treasure, and relationships between the spheres for his kingdom purposes
- Taking your next step of faith in each sphere.

Appendix 2 – Recommended Word-Based Resources for Discipleship Group Content

Discipleship Pathway

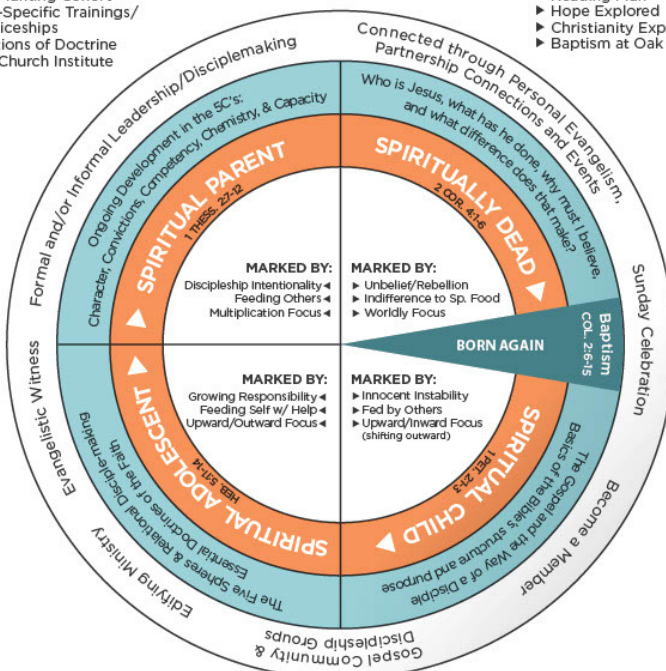
Based on your spiritual maturity, what resources do we recommend you use in your disciple-making relationships?

WORD-BASED RESOURCES for the Spiritual Parent:

- ▶ Ministry of the Word Cohort
- ▶ Church Planting Cohort
- ▶ Ministry-Specific Trainings/Apprenticeships
- ▶ Foundations of Doctrine
- ▶ For the Church Institute

WORD-BASED RESOURCES for the Spiritually Dead:

- ▶ The Gospel of Mark
- ▶ Reading Plan
- ▶ Hope Explored
- ▶ Christianity Explored
- ▶ Baptism at Oak Hill Class



DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

- Spiritual Maturity
- Growing in the Faith
- Church Participation



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