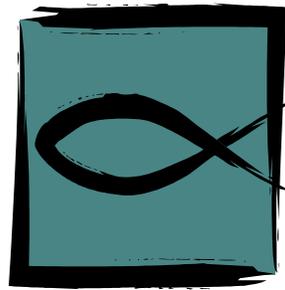


# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

San Antonio, Texas



## Discipleship Group Leader's Handbook

*"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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"...*

*Matthew 28: 19, 20*

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## Meeting #1-What & Why

### 1. What is a Disciple?

- "A disciple is a committed follower of Jesus Christ who seeks to live a life marked by continued growth understanding and obedience." – *The Big Book of Small Groups*
- **A Few Notes:**
  - ⇒ Discipleship must be learned
  - ⇒ Disciples learn best in community of other disciples.
  - ⇒ Discipleship groups offer a wonderful setting for making and growing disciples.
  - ⇒ To be effective, discipleship group leaders must be committed to being disciple-makers.

### 2. What Is a Discipleship Group?

- *A Discipleship Group is an intentional, face-to-face gathering of 4-12 people on a regular time schedule with a common purpose of discovering and growing in the possibilities of the abundant life in Christ.*<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Purpose of Discipleship Groups

- First Presbyterian Church commits to Discipleship groups of 4-12 people so that:
- There is a planned, stable environment in which to share our lives in Christ
- We will be a "priesthood of believers" who love God and one another, continually abiding in the teachings of His word.
- We will support each other through specific times of our lives
- We will have the opportunity to fellowship, pray, discover personal gifts, and study the Bible in the warmth of a small group setting.
- We have a biblical mandate to be a *body* – a family. Our faith is strengthened by our relationships with others!
- The church will be strengthened by strengthening the individuals in the church
- People not yet committed to a relationship with Christ can witness and be invited to experience first-hand the joys of this life of participation in the Body of Christ.

### 4. Discipleship Groups and the FPC Vision Elements in the Strategic Plan

- Train congregation in skills of faith (sharing, encouragement, inviting, witnessing, apologetics)
- All members in at least one Bible study per year
- Mentor program for training in spiritual development
- Formation of neighborhood groups to create opportunities for fellowship/discipleship in homes

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<sup>1</sup> Some phrases here taken from Roberta Hestenes

## 5. Biblical Basis for Discipleship Groups

- ***In the Old Testament...***
  - ⇒ Numbers 26:21-49 describes the clans of Israel and their subgroups. God designed these groups to be small communities; through these small relational cells, the people of Israel young and old were taught God's law and how to walk in it.
- ***In Jesus' Ministry...***
  - ⇒ Luke 6:12-16 – Jesus chooses twelve disciples, teaching them not by lecture or by study but by being in relationship with one another. A discipleship group of thirteen!
- ***In the Early Church***
  - ⇒ Acts 2:42-47 – This model description of the church's life includes the Greek word *koinonia* ("fellowship") and the means by which they accomplished this fellowship. "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46) shows that much of their fellowship was in small gatherings of people in the very small homes of the first century. The church began with discipleship groups!
  - ⇒ Romans 16:3-5 – Paul urges the Roman Christians to "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. ...Greet also the church that meets at their house." Since houses in the first century seldom held more than 12 or so people at once, this passage confirms what Acts 2:42-46 described – New Testament Christians continued to meet in homes for worship, study, discipleship and fellowship.
  - ⇒ James 5:16 – James urges the saints to confess to one another – a necessarily interpersonal work of the church. Such confession could be done with two people (as the Roman Catholic Church does confession today) or in a group of people sharing with and supporting one another.
  - ⇒ 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 – Paul says, "You know how we lived among you for your sake. {6} You became imitators of us and of the Lord...." This describes Paul's habit of not just lecturing the Thessalonian Christians, but discipling them through living among them in relationship with them.
  - ⇒ Hebrews 10:24-25 – encourages the early Christians to continue to meet together. As this is before any church sanctuaries were built, this "meeting together" occurred in people's homes, in groups certainly quite small.

## 6. Pilot Program Covenant Statement

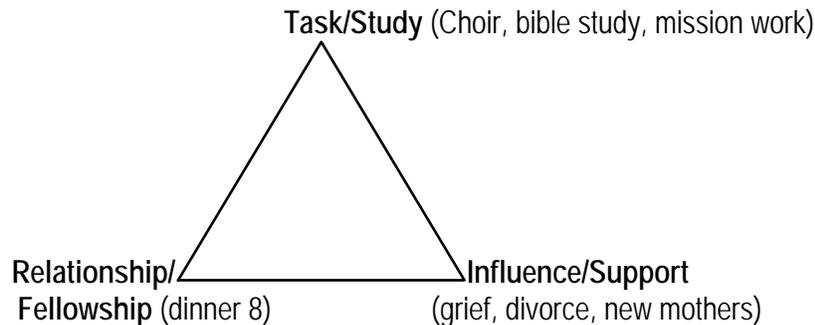
- **This group is formed with these purposes in mind:**
  - ⇒ To learn what it means to be a disciple
  - ⇒ To understand how a discipleship group is the means by which community, spiritual growth and evangelism are achieved
  - ⇒ To offer participants a "taste" of the discipleship group experience through fellowship, study, prayer and transparent sharing
  - ⇒ To learn how to lead a discipleship group and to train leaders within a group
- **To that end we will meet for an hour and a half each week for seven weeks and covenant to:**
  - ⇒ *Full Participation*
  - ⇒ *Mutual Support Through Sharing of Personal Prayer Requests*
  - ⇒ *Shared Leadership*
  - ⇒ *Strict Confidentiality*

NOTES:

## Meeting #2-Emphases, Components and Qualities

### 7. The Three Emphases of a Successful Discipleship Group

- Each discipleship group will define where its group is located in the triangle by its covenant statement. Some groups may be more study oriented, while others may focus on relationship or support. In any event, all three points of the triangle should be emphasized.



### 8. The Three Components of a Successful Discipleship Group

- **Discipleship:** The purpose of discipleship groups is to make disciples – not simply participants who attend, study & serve, but disciples who learn, grow & disciple others. This is in obedience to Christ's command in Matthew 28:18-20.
- **Leadership:** Disciples are not made unless there are disciple-makers, ordinary people who can help them to learn and apply the Christian life. Therefore, leadership is essential to discipleship group ministry. The discipleship group ministry of our church exists to help equip effective leaders who can make disciples through discipleship groups.
- **Community:** People can only learn and grow in an atmosphere of love and acceptance. That atmosphere is Christian community. Community is not one aspect of group life but is the very structure within which the group operates. A healthy community will produce healthy disciples.

*Therefore the goal of discipleship group ministry is discipleship; the foundation is leadership and the structure is Christian community.*

### 9. The Qualities of a Successful Discipleship Group

- Voluntary
- Small (4-12)
- Shared (Goals/Covenant)
- Prayerful (Hebrews 10:22)
- Intentional
- Regular (in its meetings)
- Mutual (shared ownership)
- Edifying (Hebrews 10:23-24; 1 Corinthians 14:26)
- Fellowship (Hebrews 10:25; 1 Corinthians 1:9)
- Evangelism ("Empty Chair Policy")

NOTES:

## Meeting #3-Leadership Described & A Prayerful Leader

### 10. Ingredients for a Good Group Leader:

- A Leader is one who because of good character qualities is able to lead others in a positive way (growing in maturity).
- Leadership comes in many different personalities (e.g., quiet persons may work best in leading discipleship groups!).

### 11. What the Discipleship Group Leader Is Not...

- ⊗ Not necessarily an educator, theologian or evangelist
- ⊗ Not a therapist/encounter group leader
- ⊗ Not ultimately responsible for the group members' results, progress, answers, response to Christ or orthodoxy.
- ⊗ Not a master of ceremonies who has to be talking in between each person's input
- ⊗ Not responsible for the groups' happiness or conversation
- ⊗ Not a dominant talker

### 12. What the Discipleship Group Leader Is...

- ✓ Honest about his/her life (TRANSPARENT SHARING) so that the group will feel permission to share with one another
- ✓ One who creates an atmosphere of acceptance as modeled by Jesus Christ
- ✓ One who introduces others to what it feels like to be loved, accepted, forgiven and supported by others
- ✓ One who shows others how to minister, care for, and support one another by actually doing it for other group members
- ✓ One who brings the group to a stage of "shared leadership" so it can thrive and multiply apart from the participation of the original leader
- ✓ A part of the group!

### 13. Prayer and Discipleship Groups

*“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective!” (James 5:16)*

Since the true benefits of a discipleship group are spiritual, a discipleship group cannot succeed without God’s blessing. This makes prayer the most important thing you and your group can do. Some suggestions:

- ✦ **Pray about your dream for leading a group.** God’s guidance can help you clarify your calling to serve, and can give you courage to persevere when the group’s progress might discourage you.
- ✦ **Pray for each of your group’s members (or prospective members).** Every discipleship group’s goal can be summed up in one word: transformation. Regardless how talented a leader you may be, only God can bring that person to the group, and only God can transform that person’s life.
- ✦ **Pray for the group each week before it begins.** You need wisdom to lead, sensitivity to nurture others, and inspiration to reveal God’s word and leading. Prayer prepares you.
- ✦ **Pray with your group during each meeting.** Model prayer for your group members.<sup>2</sup>

#### NOTES:

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<sup>2</sup> If your group is for people exploring the Christian faith for the first time, then leading the group in prayer may not be appropriate.

## Meeting #4-Your Group's Covenant Statement

*The **covenant statement** is the written and often-spoken expression of your group's purpose and the way(s) the group achieve that purpose.*

***No better way** exists to communicate clearly and quickly the purpose, goals, details and expectations of your group. This communication allows new people to commit (or decide it's not for them) more quickly. It also keeps existing members united in a well-known and well-owned group identity and purpose.*

### 14. The covenant statement should have these components:

- ✦ **Purpose** – why does this group exist?
- ✦ **Goals** – what specific, achievable steps are you taking to achieve your purpose?
- ✦ **Meeting Details** – when, where, how long and for how many meetings will your group meet?
- ✦ **Expectations** – what makes a group member, and what is expected of that member?

#### Sample Covenant Statement

"The purpose of our group is..."

"To that end, we will..."

"We will meet .....at.....for .....weeks."

If you come twice you are part of this group and agree to:

regular attendance

strict confidentiality

full participation

shared leadership

mutual support regular prayer

welcome new members

### YOUR COVENANT STATEMENT:

## Meeting #5-Stages of a Discipleship Group

### 15. Evolution of a Discipleship Group

- Every group goes through certain stages of growth and development. These stages look different in each group, and are encountered at different speeds and in different ways. Here is a general description of group stages, what group members are feeling, thinking and doing, and how you can respond as a leader to help facilitate each stage:

	Exploration Stage	Transition Stage	Action Stage	Termination Stage
<b>Time Period</b>	1-2 Weeks	2-5 Weeks	6+ weeks	End of initial covenant period
<b>Group Member's Thoughts</b>	Do I belong? What is expected of me? What can I expect of others?	Can I trust this group? Whose group is this? Is this group going to work?	Let's do something. I'm willing to risk and give to others.	Was it worth it? What did I learn about myself? God? Others?
<b>Group Member's Feelings</b>	Anticipation Anxiety Excitement	Low enthusiasm Beginning Tensions, Anxiety, Impatience	Acceptance, Determination, Warmth, Freedom	Warmth, respect, Admiration, Sadness
<b>Group Member's Actions</b>	Giving information; accepting others initially	Attending sporadically; expressing irritation; giving biographical information.	Sharing positive feelings; distribution of leadership; taking risks; giving feedback; willing to share transparently	Expressing love and respect; showing appreciation to individuals.
<b>Leader's Actions and Attitudes</b>	Empathy, Warmth, Concreteness, Caring, Effective Communication	Empathy, Encouragement, Confrontation, Self-disclosure, Flexibility	Challenging Supporting, Giving Feedback, Risking, Keeping Goals Clear	Reflecting, Reinforcing, Reviewing, Being Thankful
<b>Leader's Planned Activities</b>	Self-descriptive sharing, Socials, one-to-one times	Trust-building exercises, Self-disclosure, Covenanting, Prayer-partners	Risk-taking, outreach, gift identification, feedback	Review Celebration, Gift-giving, Exploration—re-covenant, divide

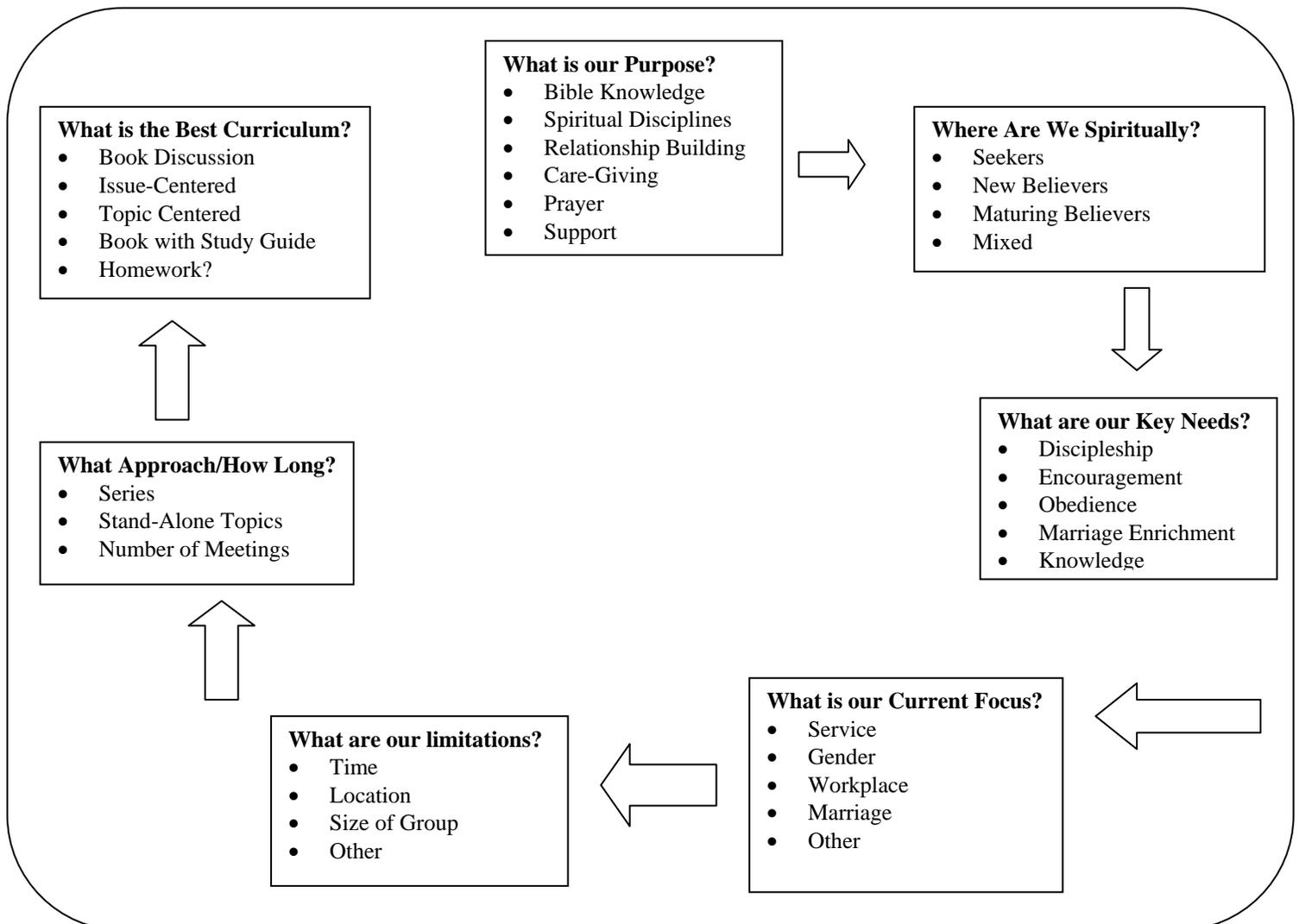
- A discipleship group that lasts longer than 12 weeks generally becomes a "family". A "family", by nature, is less inclusive and focused on outreach than a discipleship group. One of important facets of a discipleship group is evangelism—always looking for someone to fill the "empty chair".
- Goal of a discipleship group at the end of a covenant period is to renegotiate. After about 12 weeks, a discipleship group should be ready to divide. By utilizing shared leadership during the experience and the concept of team leadership as the group divides, group members should be ready.

NOTES:

## Meeting #6-Highlighting Leader Resources

### I. Choosing Curriculum Materials for Your Discipleship Group

Choosing good curriculum for your group is a complex decision that can dramatically affect the goals of your discipleship group. The Discipleship Group Ministry of First Presbyterian exists to help you in all aspects of group leadership – let us help you find the right resource for your group. Below is the process through which we would guide you to help you find the materials best suited to your discipleship group's needs.



#### **Important Points:**

- Jesus did not say, "Go into the world to finish the curriculum!" Our job is to make disciples. Never let your curriculum drive your group. Be prepared to be flexible and respond to opportunities for prayer, community building and service.
- Never substitute a curriculum for the Bible. All material should lead the group into the Word!

- Always read your material ahead of time so that you can adapt it if necessary!
- Remember that the material exists to meet the needs of your group. The curriculum is your servant. You are not its slave! You may change it! For example, if a study guide has 6 or 8 questions, choose two and mark those you may skip.

## II. A Sample First-Time Agenda

1. **Welcome & Refreshments**
2. **Opening Prayer**
3. **Open Question**  
(Examples are below)
4. **Covenant Statement / Expectations described and discussed**  
(Here the leader(s) describe her/his/their vision for this group, then invite the attendees' questions, feedback, and advice. At its best, this is a time when the group feels comfortable offering changes to the covenant, so that all can understand and support the group covenant)
5. **Study Time**
6. **Prayer Requests**
7. **Business Items (if any)**  
(Here you could thank people for bringing the snacks, ask who can bring the snacks next week, remind people of any 'homework', etc.)
8. **Closing Prayer**

## III. Leading Discussion

1. **Use open questions and sharing questions.** Especially at the beginning of the meeting, it is helpful to ask open questions to aid in building relationships by permitting people to talk about themselves. It is important to begin with non-threatening "surface-level" questions. Only when some trust develops will the questions get deeper and more personal. Sharing questions are deeper than open questions, and usually invite persons to relate the topic being discussed with their own life experiences.  
Note: unless you are extremely talented in leading groups, you will want to prepare these questions in advance.
2. **Recognize** that each member of the group has a part to play. Never do anything that group members can do themselves. A good leader guides the group with a firm vision of importance goals, while allowing members the freedom and creativity necessary for growth.
3. **Stop – Look – Listen!**
  - "Stop" on time (if you don't you not only make it harder for participants to commit to future meetings, but you break your promise to the group members).
  - "Look" at the group's reactions.
  - "Listen" to who dominates the conversation, and to who stays quiet – draw the quiet persons out with sharing questions
4. **Use humor effectively.** Natural humor builds cohesion and breaks tension.
5. **Be creative.** Use creativity in planning all areas of group activities. For example, place an empty chair to symbolize a person the group wants to invite. Encourage each member to pray for a person she/he would like to occupy that chair next week.

6. **Recognize the stages of a group's growth.** Recognition of the group's current stage will help you help the group grow closer. The leader has a certain role at each stage (See "Groups Stages" for a description of these roles).

7. **Recognize the roles various members play.** Recognizing roles facilitates problem solving and understanding the dynamics of the group.

People-oriented roles include...

- the advocate – encourages others
- the tension reliever – relieves tension by joke-telling or directing attention from a tense subject
- the deviant – draws outside the lines, trying new things, questioning the status quo
- Task-oriented roles include...
- the clock watcher – makes sure everything is done properly and on time
- the summarizer – reminds the group where it has been
- the energizer – stimulates others to work toward a goal.
- Used appropriately, each of these roles can help the group; the leader should actively encourage them, and rein them in when their role begins to smother the group's other tasks...
- An encourager brings others into the discussion, encouraging them to contribute, emphasizing the value of their comments with approval and recognition.
- A clarifier handles confusion and conflict by defining the problem concisely and pointing out the issues clearly.
- An explorer is never satisfied with the obvious or traditional, but is always moving into new and different areas.
- An analyzer examines the issues closely, carefully weighing suggestions, and never accepts anything without thorough thought.
- A mediator facilitates agreement or harmony between members, finding compromise acceptable to all.
- A synthesizer is able to put the pieces of thought, opinion and planning together and synthesize them.
- A programmer is adept at organizing and moving into action.
- A deviant can challenge the group to think in new ways, and to try new things

## IV. "Open" Questions

An open questions, or "ice-breaker" usually begins each group meeting. It is designed to get every person used to speaking to the group and listening to others in the group. Open questions are non-threatening, so you can (and should) go around the circle, inviting everyone to answer.

### Examples of Open Questions...

- *What is your favorite place in the house and why?*
- *What is the best vacation you ever took and why?*
- *What is your favorite room in your home, why?*
- *When you have some free time to yourself, what do you like to do?*
- *If you could receive one unexpected present, what would you like it to be?*
- *If you could have lunch with any living person who plays a leadership role in politics, religion, art, or entertainment who would it be and why?*
- *What is one job you enjoy doing around your home?*
- *What is one place in the United States that you would like to visit?*
- *What did you like to do the most when you were a child?*

Note: until everyone in the group knows everyone else, encourage each person to share his/her name first ("tell us your name, then tell us your favorite place in the house and why")!

## V. "Sharing" Questions

Sharing questions often make up most of the discussion leadership in a discipleship group. They are simple one- or two-sentence questions, usually open-ended, designed to invite persons to tell something important about themselves. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer; rather, people are encouraged to talk about their past experiences, their feelings, their hopes for the future, their fears and anxieties, their pilgrimage of faith, their day-to-day situations, likes and dislikes, sorrows and joys. The stress is not on sharing ideas and concepts, but on sharing ourselves. Sharing questions should encourage some level of risk, while not forcing a person to share beyond their own desire to do so.

Note: Since sharing questions are more personal than open questions, do not "go around the circle" asking the question of each person. Those who feel comfortable sharing will speak, if you give them enough time and invitation.

### Examples of Sharing Questions...

- *When, if ever, did "God" become more than a word to you?*
- *If you could pick one character in fiction, TV or the comics to identify with, who would that be and why? If you could pick one person in the Bible or church history that you would like to be like, who would that be and why?*
- *What is one thing you worried about, or were concerned about, this week? One thing that gave you joy?*
- *Where did you live and what were you doing when you were in the sixth grade?*
- *What is one area where you would like to grow in your faith? What kind of help do you need to do it?*
- *What is one personal relationship you would like to work on? Why? How?*
- *If you could wave a magic wand that would make your job perfect, how would it be different from how it is now? What one step could you take to move toward that now?*

- *When was the first time you heard about Jesus and what did you think about Him?*
- *What is the one thing, or person, that gives you the most satisfaction?*

Note: The best sharing questions relate to the topic/Bible passage the group is studying during that meeting.

## VI. Some Guidelines for Questions

1. Match the **threat level** of the question or game to the experience of the group members and their willingness to risk. Work up to the more intimate, more frightening kind of questions. Begin safe, but do not waste valuable time on trivia.
2. **No manipulation.** Always allow people to “pass” on any question. Just the permission to say nothing emboldens most people to speak! Also, don’t put one person on the spot by asking them only a sharing question – this can work, but can also prove disastrous (“John, you haven’t said anything tonight; what is *your* greatest experience of God’s forgiveness??”) Lastly, if the question does not get the response you expected, reshape it or move on.
3. **No advice giving.** Practice good listening skills of clarification and paraphrasing, but do not judge each other or tell each other what to do. By and large, do not encourage long discussions of problems and possible solutions. As the group leader, encourage people to respond to the question asked and then move the discussion along to the next person. If a person really needs to thoroughly air a personal problem, allow them to share as they need to. If appropriate, have the group pray right then for the difficulty, then encourage conversation outside the group time.
4. **Beware of vague, general abstractions.** Stay specific, personal and here-and-now as much as possible.
5. **Encourage a win/win mentality.** Instead of a few building themselves up at the expense of others, work toward and equalized involvement on the part of all members so each can share, can affirm, be affirmed, be encouraged and be built up.
6. **Close the discussion on time,** promising to allow time on the same topic at the next meeting or (as a last resort) inviting those who are able to talk afterward.

## VII. Great Discussion

For leaders who are outgoing or extroverted, the hardest task is to stay silent during those moments after the question has been asked and before a response has been given.

For leaders who are quiet or introverted, the hardest task is to believe that you can begin and lead discussion effectively.

⇒ therefore, for both extroverted and introverted leaders, well-prepared open and sharing questions are the key to great discussion!

## VIII. Sharpening Discussion

- **To clarify...**  
"Tell us more about that..."  
"I'm not sure I understood you – could say that again?"
- **To redirect...**  
"What else?"  
"What do others think...?"
- **To justify...**  
What reasons can you give?  
Where in passage do you see that?  
How does that fit with...?

## IX. Things that Choke a Group

- ☒ Betraying confidences
- ☒ Overextending quitting time
- ☒ Lack of love and encouragement for the leader
- ☒ Lack of child care when needed
- ☒ No clearly defined purpose/covenant statement
- ☒ Bad environment of communication
- ☒ Autocratic or inflexible leadership
- ☒ Spiritual Smugness
- ☒ Becoming only a social event
- ☒ No leadership—or an unprepared leader
- ☒ Location and time not convenient
- ☒ Physical setting too large, cold and formal
- ☒ Repeated lateness or absenteeism
- ☒ Being negative and critical of others

## X. What's the Right Size for your Group?

- **Growth occurs in spurts.** Most groups grow in groups! In other words new people come 2 or three at a time. If you want to encourage new members, advertise a starting point where new members are especially welcomed and elicit the support of current members to bring new people.
- **People come by invitation.** Small groups can be intimidating to newcomers but if a friend invites and brings them they are more likely to come. Sure, leaders can invite but better yet, members.
- **Groups tend to settle at a "natural" size.** For prayer groups where intimacy and trust are important, 6-8 people is the norm. For study groups, 8-12. For fellowship or mission-oriented groups, 12-20 is not unusual. In other words, size determines character, and character determines size. Rather than try to make your group grow in numbers, a more productive

strategy would be to strengthen the function of the group and start sister-groups. For example, perhaps a long-time group member has a schedule change and is unable to attend your group. This person may be ideal as a leader for a new group. Or, you can form several small groups within your group. A prayer group that grows to 8 would be well served to split into two groups of four for the prayer time; foursomes would meet in separate rooms for the intercession time and gather at a set time for refreshments afterward. The same principle applies to study or fellowship groups.

## XI. Case Studies

Many interesting and challenging things happen in Discipleship Groups. Here are some examples of situations. Possible responses are given on the following pages.

### **What would you do if...?**

1. It is time to begin, and no more than half of your expected group is present.
2. Group members arrive after your discussion is already underway.
3. A Christian in your group displays a superior attitude.
4. Your newly organized group includes five nonbelievers and eight believers.
5. After you have finished discussing a question, you notice some puzzled expression.
6. You have asked the group a question and there is no response.
7. A non-Christian begins to ask some questions in the group about man's relationship to Christ.
8. A group member insists on the truth and importance of a particular church doctrine or practice.
9. You cannot control your nerves.
10. Someone gives an absolutely incorrect answer.
11. You are studying a passage on marriage, and someone in the group asks how you feel about divorcees remarrying.
12. The group constantly goes off on tangents instead of following the curriculum.
13. Someone is very uncomfortable with the Bible's teaching on a wife's relationship to her husband.
14. One of the members talks on every issue.
15. Several group members bother others by continuing a private discussion.

16. Someone who is obviously prepared for the study does not share in the group discussion.
17. In the middle of a lively and fruitful discussion, you realize you have only three minutes left and another question.
18. A person who has been defensive about his/her religious beliefs drops out.
19. New Christians ask for opportunities for spiritual growth and sharing.
20. You cannot give group members enough time and attention.
21. New Christians ask for opportunities for spiritual growth and sharing.
22. New Christians from the group are beginning to come to church, but say they do not feel welcome.
23. You want to spin off a new group from the existing one, but you only have two current members interested.

## XII. Possible Responses to Case Studies<sup>3</sup>

1. Start on time—no matter what. Begin in prayer. When more of your group is present, explain the need to begin on time. Go back and review the covenant. You may need to change the time or day you meet.
2. Briefly acknowledge, then continue.
3. That person is insecure and has low self-esteem. Model openness and vulnerability and perhaps this will catch on. Treat her/him like other people. Do not allow this person to dominate the conversation.
4. Seize the great opportunity that you have to develop a relationship. Be sensitive to the non-believer. Don't overload with Christian jargon. Make the lesson application oriented. Meet with Christians and have them help you.
5. Ask questions to make sure everyone understands a point before moving ahead.
6. Rephrase the question. Give the group time to think of an answer. If there is still no response, answer the question yourself.
7. Briefly comment, then use the time as an opportunity to share the Gospel after the meeting.
8. Prompt the group to respond. Lead the group into a discussion of what they agree on, and warn against "passing judgement on disputable matters" (Romans 14:1, NIV)

<sup>3</sup> Since every group has its own complex personality, these generalized responses may not fit your group's situation. To be confident or your response to a discipleship group issue, talk to a trusted leader or church staff member.

9. Be honest, Disarm the situation by admitting your weakness. Have a helper lead, if necessary.
10. Affirm their attempt to contribute, then get the group to respond. Point out Scripture that clarifies the correct answer.
11. This may be a trap—do not get off track. Ask, "Why did you ask that question?" Then, build a future study around that question or agree to discuss it further in private.
12. Ask the group why they find it so difficult to keep on track. Reevaluate the relevance of your curriculum. Create an outline and follow it carefully.
13. Accept and acknowledge her discomfort, but don't get sidetracked into a detailed discussion. Offer to discuss it further at a later time, in private.
14. Use body language. Don't make eye contact. Sit next to the person. Visit after the session. Redirect questions. Change seating in the group. Give the talkative member an assignment.
15. Ask the chatting members to respond to a question. Call them by name, and ask a question. If the problem persists, address the issue privately after the meeting.
16. Ask the, "Do you have anything to add?" Talk to the person after the meeting. There may be something in their personal life that is bothering them.
17. If needs are being met, continue.
18. Establish one-on-one contact, and build a loving and trusting relationship. Express interest by continuing to invite the person to the group.
19. Plan your curriculum to meet the needs of all group members. Pair new Christians with seasoned Christians for discipling.
20. Divide the group into prayer partners and always have a support person lead. You may need to consider starting a new group.
21. Invite these new Christians to attend Discipleship Group. Follow up with a phone call and personal visit. Ask them to go to church with you.
22. Remember ... "Where two or three are gathered ..." (Matthew 18:20)

### XIII. Ending Groups

1. Some groups don't have to end—they can keep going as long as renegotiated at specific dates. Breaks can be helpful (i.e., summer, December, etc.)
2. If do decide to keep going as a group, each group member needs to feel the freedom to have permission to leave the group.
3. Some groups are ready to close...
  - Realize that people can go through a grieving process at the end of group because it's been such a good thing for them.
  - Be sensitive to their needs.
  - Can always get together again down the road (potluck, beach, concert, etc.)
  - Completion and termination are important ingredients in the life and dynamics of a group, but their importance is seldom recognized nor properly planned. (Share our group experience.)
  - Make announcement ahead of time to give the participants time to prepare themselves for leaving which will eliminate the shock of a sudden announcement that can produce feelings of abandonment.
  - Group members need to have the opportunity to celebrate the group's or their personal completion, its successes and simply the pressures of having been together and worked together.
  - One word of caution to leaders—Sometimes the closing celebration is so pleasurable that the group members ask to continue or to begin again. It is important for the leader not to give in to this very tempting encouragement, but to stay firmly with the decision.

### XIV. GO OUT WITH A B A N G !

#### End with a Big Party Celebrating Your Time Together as a Group and a Prayer Time.

1. Talk about what people are going to do next.
2. Allow time for testimonials, refreshments and prayer time.
3. Make it a celebration of what the group members have meant to one another during the time they have met. Let people conclude with feelings of: "Boy, I'm sure glad that happened. I'd like to do that again next year!"

#### Six Steps to Bring a Group to a Healthy End

1. During the last meeting, talk about your experiences and what the group meant to you. Use affirmation questions like:
  - If you could give a gift to anyone in the room, what would you give and to whom?
  - Pick someone in the room and name a characteristic they have that you are most thankful for. This ends the group on a positive note and helps member leave with good feelings about their Discipleship Group experience.
2. Fill out a written evaluation or survey, answering questions like:
  - What did you like most about the group?
  - What did you like least?

- In which area of your spiritual life do you feel you grew the most as a result of meeting with this Discipleship Group?
3. Plan to keep in touch in the future. (Set up fellowship time one month after your last meeting just to see how everyone is doing.)
  4. Give an updated list of participants to your coordinator.
  5. Let everyone know about alternative group opportunities, so interested people can get involved with new groups.
  6. Encourage all members to continue to pray for each other.

<h2>XV. Some Reference Materials for Discipleship Group Leadership</h2>
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Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

Lyman Coleman, *Training Manual for Small Group Leaders*

Louis H. Evans, Jr., *Covenant to Care*

Em Griffin, *Getting Together*

Roberta Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*

Roberta Hestenes, *Growing the Church Through Small Groups*

Richard Peace, *Small Group Evangelism*

Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book of Small Groups*

## Acknowledgements

While Bryan Eckelmann brought this document together in its final form (and therefore whatever weaknesses it has are his responsibility), many of the materials in this handbook are the product of several invaluable resources.

Pat Brodeen resurrected and revised the First Presbyterian Church "Small Group Handbook" (circa 1994); this document (and Pat's numerous improvements) contributed many of the topics, quotes and case studies.

Timberly Eckelmann's training materials for the small groups ministry of the United Presbyterian Church at Whitinsville, Massachusetts added many sections, especially the theory components and the information on group stages. Timberly also generously helped with proofing and revising many of the drafts of this work.

The latest revisions have been lovingly made by Cindy Sloan and Steve Warrick, who during this process have become valued friends and siblings in Christ's ministry.

Lastly, the efforts and prayers of the Discipleship Group Leaders Training Team – especially Steve Warrick, Cindy Sloan and Louise Peters – brought this ministry and manual to life.