

SMALL GROUP DISCIPLESHIP

1. Gather broadly – select carefully

It would be a mistake to take the first six people that come along and form a group. You will want to be much in prayer over the important matter of selecting the right members.

Notice the example of Jesus as described in Luke 6:12-13: “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, **and spent the night praying to God.** When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.” (NIV) If Jesus spent all night in prayer before selecting His disciples– how much more we should make it a matter of great prayer.

Look for “FAT” Christians: Faithful, Available, and Teachable, but don’t expect to find perfect people. Consider not only who these people are right now, but also who they can become.

2. Challenge to the vision

When forming your small group, **the initial challenge is very important.** You want to convey much more than merely “join the group.” Jesus demonstrated this principle when He challenged the 12 disciples. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “*and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19).

Jesus invited his followers to join Him in a great adventure. He imparted vision for what they would become and how they would influence others.

3. Maintain clear purpose

Remind your new group often of its vision and purpose.

“We want to experience the exciting and dynamic Christian life so that we can pass it on to others.”

When forming a new group, **be careful of watering down your challenge.** There is a saying, “How you get them is how you keep them.” If you initially challenged the group with, “We will have a great time and build strong friendships in the group,” then you will have to make sure

they keep having a lot of fun and fellowship. The vision should be so much more than that.

There is great value in repeating the purpose of your discipleship group often and keeping the vision in front of your members.

4. **Teach “transferable truths” – 2Timothy 2:2**

Use the **KISS** method: **Keep It Simple, Stupid!** It takes a wise person to take the profound and make it simple. Complicated concepts rarely change lives. The most basic biblical truths have the greatest impact. So stick with the “basics.” Be a collector of illustrations, stories, and physical demonstrations that can make spiritual truth clear and practical.

Make no assumptions when it comes to spiritual growth. Just because people use Christian jargon and can throw around a few verses doesn’t necessarily mean that they truly understand what they are talking about. And it certainly is no guarantee that they are applying spiritual truth.

Observe your group members in a variety of situations, and then you will be able to discern what type of Bible study would best meet their needs.

5. **Spend quality time together**

Jesus spent huge amounts of “quality time” with his disciples. We see it even in His initial call, recorded in Mark 3:14. “He appointed twelve-designating them apostles-that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.” (NIV)

The most effective teaching and training comes in the context of meaningful relationships. Or as a common saying goes, “**They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.**”

Informal time spent together enables you to model biblical truths. By observing their lives, you will gain practical insights on how to best disciple them. Valuable things happen outside the confines of “the official group meeting.”

6. **Move with the movers**

Should we allow new people into the group once it starts?” That’s a tricky question. Small groups allow for two very important spiritual dynamics: honesty and accountability.

If you continually add newcomers you will have an exciting “gathering” type group, but you will see less growth in the lives of the members. That’s because your original members will find it

difficult to be totally open in front of the newcomers. Thus, **discipleship groups should normally be “closed” to the original members, and those members should have all made the same commitment.**

As for your overall discipleship approach, remember these keys–

- Continue to challenge the most hungry.
- Never prioritize the “half-hearted” over the “whole-hearted.”

Depending on where you are in the development of your ministry, a more low-key “gathering” approach might be more appropriate. However, if you are serious about building strong disciples, you will eventually need small groups that ask for a high commitment and that build both intimacy and accountability among members. These growing disciples will be able to lead others to Christ and eventually begin their own new discipleship groups.