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STARTING A DISCIPLE MAKING SMALL GROUP

Designed for Following Sermons

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By Bobby Harrington

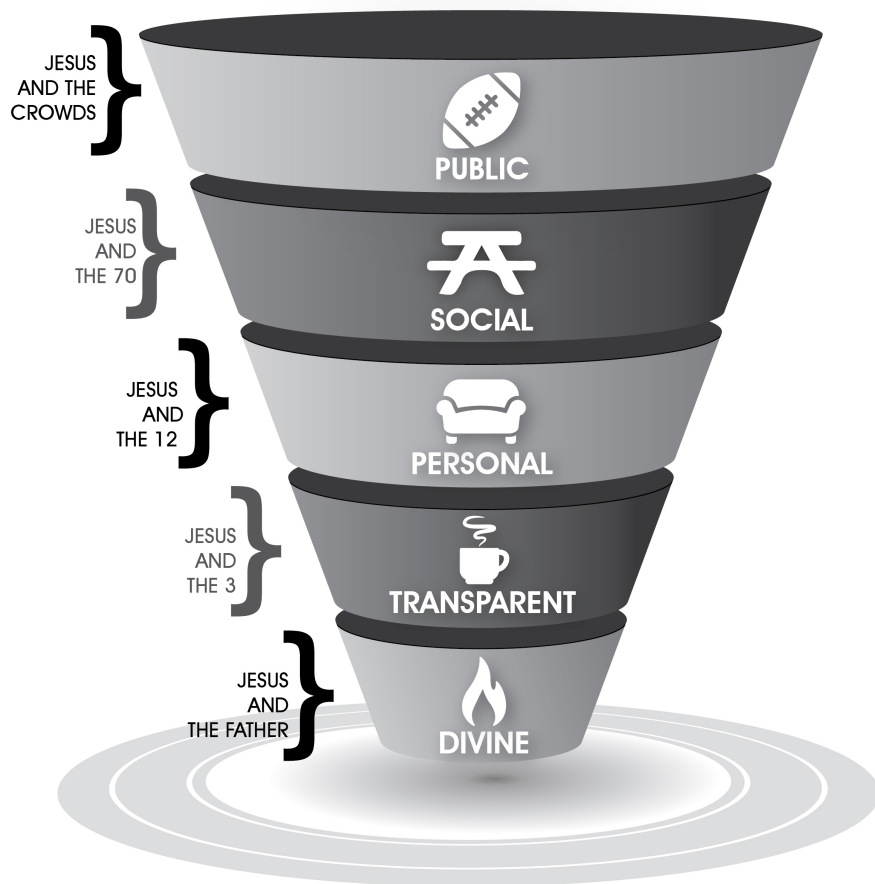
Starting a Disciple Making Small Group

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Introduction

Disciple making is the core mission of the church. It is an intentional, relational focus on helping others to place their faith in Jesus and become more and more like Jesus. So, we invite people into a relational, scripture-based process by which they can learn to trust and follow Jesus.

A quick look at the discipling relationships that Jesus modelled is a good guide for us. Jesus invested a lot of time in the personal space – the space of Home Groups – with his twelve disciples. Jesus used a more intimate space – the transparent space – to go deeper as he intently disciplined Peter, James, and John. Check out the five relational spaces below.



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See Harrington and Absolom, *Discipleship that Fits: The 5 Kinds of Relationships that God Uses to Help Us Grow*

Understand Group Sizes in Discipling Relationships – Outside Sunday Services

1 - The Social Size Group (Missional Community and Large Sunday School Class) - is the range between 18 and 70 people, where we share snapshots of who we are, and thereby seek to build affinity with others. In this size of group we build neighborly relations (people we can call upon for minor favors), we start to identify with whom we would like to become closer friends, and we reveal elements of our identity and our journey. This is often the size of an extended family or a smaller family size church. It is ideal for missional communities. In some larger churches, this is the size of a big Sunday school class.

2 - The Personal Size Group (Small Group) – this is typically a group of 8 to 16 people, where we share personal information. Think, for instance, of friends talking over dinner, revealing personal thoughts and feelings about their ongoing lives and relationships. The size and physical closeness of this group is representative of the emotional qualities of a personal relationship where we have a person friendship. This is the typical small group in a church.

3 - The Transparent Size Group (Transformation Group) - this is when you are with just two to four other people, making a group of 3 to 5 people—and often you develop very close relationships characterized by complete openness and candor. In the transparent space nothing is held back. The transparent space is the most impactful of the discipling relationships because people see each other eyeball-to-eyeball, heart-to-heart.

This guide explains the model for Personal Size Group – a Small Group - that is being used in many discipling relationships.

It is the model we use in my home church.

I pray that it will help you to make disciples who make disciples.

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7 Disciple Making Rhythms

Have you ever read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John with this simple question in mind: *How did Jesus make disciples who make disciples?*¹ What did He actually do in His everyday relationships with the twelve men He invited along? We would suggest that **Jesus modeled seven recurring, relational rhythms** in His disciple-making efforts with the twelve men He invited along. Jesus made disciples who make disciples:

1. Grounded in and flowing from **FASTING and PRAYING** in relationship with His Heavenly Father.
2. Actively loving people and **INVITING ALONG** those who **WELCOMED** Him into their lives to love others together.
3. **SERVING** with those He invited along.
4. **EATING** and debriefing with those He invited along.
5. **RESTING/SABBATHING**--retreating and resting with those He invited along.
6. **LEARNING** and living the Gospel of His Kingdom with those He invited along in all of these relational rhythms.
7. **MATURING** them **WHILE MULTIPLYING** with Him to one day send them off to make disciple-makers, too.



The Seven Rhythms...

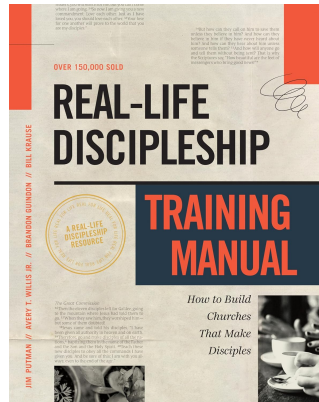
¹ The following is from Jason Dukes' ebook, *Inviting Along*, see <https://discipleship.org/shop/inviting-along/>.

These disciple making rhythms are helpful to us today because we can emulate them in our groups.

1. **Prayer and Fasting** – We start our Group with prayer and fasting, and we seek to pray and fast together on a regular basis.
2. **Inviting Along** – We invite our apprentice leaders (first) and then other people to join our group, including a few people who do not yet believe in Jesus.
3. **Learning** – Three times a month we will study together.
4. **Sabbathing/Resting** – Once a quarter we will just “chill together,” with a picnic or social gathering together, etc.
5. **Eating** – Once a quarter we eat together and by sharing a meal, we share our lives.
6. **Serving** – Once a quarter we will serve others in need as a group.
7. **Multiply while Maturing** – After eighteen to twenty-four months (only eighteen if you do not break for the summer) we will multiply the group by separating into two groups.

7 Steps for Leaders to Start a Small Group

1. **Make the Group about Disciple Making** – 95% of groups in North American are not formed with a leader who knows that his or her job is disciple making. The leaders of a Sermon-based small group should be recruited and trained upfront with a focus on disciple making. The following manual by Jim Putman and his team may be the best training manual on how to develop small groups focused on disciple making and I recommend it to everyone.



2. **The Leader fasts and prays to find an apprentice first.** It is best if each group starts with a plan to multiply from the beginning (so the group is pregnant). The leaders of a Small Group should start by asking God to help find an apprentice (couple) first. Then, ideally, after prayer, you will then both reach out to others to join your group.
3. **Determine Expectations for the Group.** A small group is 8 to 16 people who meet for discipling conversations in the context of personal relationships, but... and this is key, it is not the environment for transparency/intimacy. The purpose of a Small Group is personal relationships, scripture engagement and weekly contact and support. Where possible, those desiring a deeper level should pursue a 3-5 Transparency Group (which is a sub-group at a deeper level of discipleship).
4. **Meet weekly.** We recommend that you meet weekly. Most churches have their groups following the sermons and the sermon questions (or other agreed upon material).
5. **Life on Life.** The format is designed for open, honest sharing together. The leaders need to set the example each time for others by sharing your personal reflections. Pray for each other, text each other, and talk often. We want to follow and be like Jesus, who invited those he was discipling into a relationship with him that encompassed all of life. That is why – in the covenant – you can agree to eat together, rest together and serve others together.
6. **Review the sermon before each meeting.** The format of the study is for people to listen to the sermon and then come to apply it to their lives through small group discussion.
7. **Make a Group Covenant Up-front** – the best way to have a good group experience is to agree upon a group covenant up-front for everyone who will be in the group (see below). In most cases, if the group starts to have problems – like people not regularly attending, etc., - revisit the group covenant.

GROUP INTERACTION GUIDELINES

(Given to all regular group attendees)

Confidentiality - Keeping things that are shared in the group confidential builds trust and shows value to the person. Confidentiality can prevent gossip that only values the story; Jesus always valued the person above their story or their sin.

Don't Rescue & Don't Fix - When someone is sharing something deeply personal and/or painful, there can be a tendency to try to make them feel better about themselves or the situation. Often this will cause people to stop sharing and results in their not going as deep as they might have gone. Resist the temptation to rescue people. Try to hear what people are sharing without trying to fix them. If they want your advice, they will ask for it. You may want to take time later to ask if you may offer some advice.

No Crosstalk - Be considerate of others as they are sharing. Don't have side conversations. Trust is built in the moments when everyone feels like they are being listened to and heard by the entire group. Treat others in the group as you would want to be treated.

Use Humor Responsibly - Fun is an essential part of Small Groups; however, when meeting in the Biblical Storytelling time keep sarcastic comments, jokes, and laughter to a minimum to allow for an atmosphere of authenticity and vulnerability.

Give Everyone a Chance to Share - Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Encourage everyone to participate in group discussions.

Use "I" Statements During small group - We want to hear your personal thoughts and perspectives. Using "I" statements to answer discussion questions allows you to speak for yourself rather than generalizing by using terms such as "them," "the church," "us" or "we".

Fight for Relationship - Relationship reaches a whole new level when conflict is resolved in a healthy manner. When conflict or sin issues arise between group members, commit to fight for the relationship and discuss the struggle with the person you are in conflict with or seek wise advice.

The Small Group Covenant (Agreement)

We want to base the group on our shared commitment. We will seek to agree on the following:

1. It is my desire to engage in this group and grow in my understanding of Jesus and what it means to trust and follow him, which is to be one of his disciples (even if I am not a Christian).
2. To help us enter fully into this group process, we will seek to follow set rhythms each month.
 - We will follow-up on the sermon and apply it to our lives three-times a month
 - We will eat together one-time a quarter
 - We will serve those in need one-time a quarter
 - We will rest/sabbath one-time a quarter (hang out, watch a movie, go to a game, etc.)
3. I commit to attending every meeting/gathering, to be there on time, and where applicable, I will have my preparation work done. No exceptions, unless *providentially* hindered. I understand and agree that I will have to say “no” to important things in order to meet this commitment, and I am willing to do so.

We will meet every _____ and we commit to start on time and end on time.

We will contact _____@_____ in advance, if something prohibits us from attending.

We will take care of childcare by _____.

4. After praying about it, I will commit to and stay with the group. I understand that my leader and the group will make an investment in me – I will be fully present in the group and share my life.
5. I understand that this process is based upon scripture and Jesus Christ. I will seek to be open about myself and my relationship with God, for learning and growing in my understanding. We will also encourage each other in spiritual practices during the week--like fasting with the church and for each other, solitude, scripture memory, etc.
6. I commit to total confidentiality. What is said in the group stays in the group. I will not share with others what is said confidentially in the group without permission (even with my spouse).
7. I further commit that after _____ months, I will support the multiplication of this group - and I will pray to see if God is leading me to start a group like this one, myself.

Group Member's Name

Signature