



ARE YOU
READY TO BE
AN APPRENTICE?
Commitments and
Requirements



THE
APPRENTICE
SERIES

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Commitments and Requirements

One of the key components of the Apprentice Series is the level of commitment participants must make. These requirements should be clearly communicated to everyone as the class is being promoted.

It is often difficult to ask people to commit to a study- or small-group experience. Our natural instinct is to remove obstacles that might turn someone away. This is a compassionate approach, and there are situations in which it is best to remove obstacles and requirements. However, the Apprentice class is not that type of situation. The long-term result of lowering expectations will be that people have a limited amount of transformation in their lives. This is important. These requirements are not meant to be impressive—these expectations are conducive to greater transformation.

Over time, many churches have become ineffective in multiple areas of ministry, such as evangelism, missions, and worship, because those who come have never had their hearts deeply touched by God's love or have lost that love along the way. While God works in many ways, those who have participated in and led Apprentice groups have found it is better to keep the requirements high and start with fewer people who deeply desire to grow closer to God. Many classes have been undertaken based on lower expectations, and the results confirm this logic—lower commitment leads to less transformation.

As those who commit the time and energy to the study begin to see how God is at work in their lives, they cannot help but be enthusiastic in sharing with others what they have found. They draw others in with their good news, and gradually more and more people become interested in what they have experienced. Over the long term, more people are deeply blessed when we ask for a higher level of commitment in the beginning. With this in mind, consider asking people to have these desires and commitments in mind before joining a class:

☞ DESIRE TO GROW deeper in their relationship with God. People do not need to be spiritual giants to take this class, nor do they need to be highly educated. The desire is important. If they have the desire, they will be blessed.

☞ ASK THOSE INTERESTED IN TAKING THE CLASS TO WRITE A BRIEF ESSAY explaining what they hope to get from the class. It only needs to be a few paragraphs long. This task accomplishes several things. First, it gives those interested a chance to reflect on their desires and motivation. Second, it communicates that the nature of this study involves a relatively high level of commitment. Third, it gives the group facilitator a chance to learn more about the spiritual journey of those interested in the class. And finally, if someone has misplaced expectations for the study, then the facilitator can visit with them about this and perhaps direct them to a better class.

☞ MISS NO MORE THAN FIVE SESSIONS. Many of us live busy and complicated lives, making it difficult to attend anything on a weekly basis. However, the effect of a small group will be most powerfully felt when those in the group have established a certain level of trust with one another. This type of trust can only be developed if everyone is present and participating in the discussion.

☞ KEEP UP WITH WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS. The books are the centerpiece of this study. People need to know in advance that they must read the assigned chapter each week in order to get the most out of the study and to be able to contribute to the discussion in class.

☞ DO THE SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE EACH WEEK. People respond differently to each practice, so while many of the practices are simple, that doesn't make them easy. People may be tempted to choose which practices they will do, but if that happens, they will be missing out on the growth and self-knowledge that comes from trial and error.

☞ PARTICIPATE IN 90 MINUTE WEEKLY GATHERINGS. If you look at the Small Group Guide in any of the Apprentice Series books, you will see it is designed to last from 60 to 90 minutes. For many people, a shorter class sounds more appealing, but we've learned that 60 minutes simply is not enough time—even with a group of only six or seven people.

The issue is not the number of activities you engage in, it's the amount people will want to discuss the material and how it applies to their lives.

- 🌿 **TAKE A RETREAT.** The curriculum recommends three possible retreats—an Opening Retreat, a Silent Retreat, and a Closing Retreat. Each one has a unique purpose. Depending on your setting, you may want to include one, two, or all three retreats. Commit to using at least one retreat in the course of the study. Retreats give people a chance to leave their normal environment and spend time with each other and with God. Their relationships will deepen through extended time together, and without their normal routines, they will be liberated to interact

with God in fresh ways. The Opening Retreat is especially helpful if you are forming a group where the participants do not know each other well. The Silent Retreat is good if a group has been together for some time and is willing to experience life in silence together. The Closing Retreat is really a chance to celebrate the completion of the second book, to thank each other for the time shared, and to prepare for the summer break and how that time will be used.

These requirements are a lot to ask, but the goal of all of them is not to be impressive—the goal is to lead individuals into a deep and loving relationship with a good and beautiful God!