

OVER 300,000 COPIES SOLD

GREG OGDEN

A Guide to Building  
Your Life in  
CHRIST

DISCIPLESHIP  
ESSENTIALS

REVISED AND EXPANDED

Completely revised  
and updated text

Now includes a  
leader's guide

A proven  
guide for  
making  
disciples

25 studies  
designed  
for use in  
mentoring  
relationships

Great small  
group material



Taken from *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden.  
Copyright © 2018 by Greg Ogden. Published by InterVarsity Press,  
Downers Grove, IL. [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)

# Getting the Most from *Discipleship Essentials*

What would happen to the church of Jesus Christ if a majority of those who claim to follow Christ were nurtured to maturity through intimate, accountable relationships centered on the essentials of God's Word? What would happen if these same followers were equipped to multiply themselves by becoming disciple makers? Self-initiating, reproducing disciples of Jesus would be the result.

*Discipleship Essentials* is specifically designed to implement small, reproducible discipleship units. The vision that stands behind this tool is an ever-expanding, multigenerational discipling network. This tool brings together three elements which create the climate for the Holy Spirit to bring about accelerated growth.

*The first element is the unchanging truth of God's Word.* We have moved into a post-Christian era in the Western world. Previously, when Christendom reigned, it was generally assumed that there was such a thing as a "revealed" truth or at least scientific, objective truth that was true for all. But now in these post-Christian times relativism prevails, especially in the realm of morals and lifestyles. "Live and let live" is the byword that reflects today's highest value—*tolerance*. It is assumed that all lifestyles and moral convictions are equal, because all truth is personal. In the midst of this morass of relativism, each of these twenty-five chapters is built around a "core truth" that is true for all, because the source of this truth is a God who is the same for all.

For many, the Christian life seems like a mishmash of disconnected tiles. We have pieces of truth collected from sermons, private study, the wisdom of fellow believers, insightful books and so on. Yet we have not put them together so that they together tell a coherent story. One person who used this material in a discipleship group said it was like seeing the empty spaces of a mosaic being filled in, so that she could now see the complete picture of the Christian life and message. The lessons are sequentially laid out so that there is logical flow and tiles are connected.

Yet for the truth of God's Word to be released in its transforming power, it must be pursued in the context of trusting, intimate and lasting relationships.

*The second element in the Holy Spirit's laboratory is transparent relationships.* The individual has replaced the family or community as the basic unit of our society. Serial and discarded relationships mark our era. The prevailing philosophy is personal fulfillment

based upon what feels good or right for me now. Many have not even witnessed the health of long-term, loving commitment. At the core of every human being is the desire for deep and satisfying relationships because we are created in the image of God. God made us for relationship with himself and with one another. A small discipleship group is a place to learn how to be intimate and self-revealing in a safe place over time. What we will ultimately have when all is said and done is the people we love.

Transformation occurs when we grapple with the truth of God's Word in the context of transparent relationships. It is a biblical axiom that the Holy Spirit will have free sway in our lives to the extent to which we open ourselves up to one another. Honesty with God is not sufficient. We give God permission to reshape our lives when we risk self-revelation and confession to others. We can't grow in Christ by ourselves. We are people made for community.

There is a *third element that creates the climate for transformation—life-change accountability*. Accountability is taking the relational context of discipleship to another level. Accountability means giving your discipling partners authority to call you to keep the commitments you have made to one another. You will convene your discipling relationship around a mutual covenant (p. xvi). A covenant is a shared agreement whereby you clearly state your reciprocal expectations. In so doing you are giving each other permission to hold you to your agreement.

In summary, when the truth of God's Word is at the heart of self-revealing, intimate relationships rooted in life-change accountability, you have the ingredients for Spirit-motivated transformation. This tool provides the structure for these three elements to come together. Add to this discipling unit a vision for equipping followers of Jesus to pass on the faith from one generation to the next, and you have the components to renew a ministry from the bottom up.

## CONTEXTS FOR DISCIPLING

Discipling in the minds of many has become associated with a one-on-one, teacher-student relationship. In writing *Discipleship Essentials* I experimented with this material in a number of contexts. Up to that point my discipling paradigm had also been one-on-one. In addition to this traditional approach I led a group of three, a *triad*, and a discipleship group of ten. I was startled by the difference in dynamics. I have come to see groups of three or four as the optimum setting for making disciples.

Why do I believe that a triad or quad, known as “micro groups,” is superior to one-on-one? (1) The one-on-one sets up a teacher-student dynamic. The pressure is upon the discipler to be the answer person or the fountain of all wisdom and insight. When a third person is added, the dynamic shifts to a group process. The discipler can more naturally make his or her contribution in the dynamic of group interchange. (2) Micro groups shift the model from hierarchical to relational. The greatest factor inhibiting those who are being disciplined to disciple others (multiplication) is the dependency fostered by one-on-one relationships.

The triad/quad, on the other hand, views discipleship as a come-alongside relationship of mutual journey toward maturity in Christ. The hierarchical dimension is minimized. (3) The most startling difference between one-on-one and threes or fours is the sense of “group-ness.” The sense of the Holy Spirit’s being present in our midst occurred much more often in the group versus the one-on-one. (4) There is wisdom in numbers. The group approach multiplies the perspectives on Scripture and application to life issues, whereas one-on-one limits the models and experience. By adding at least a third person there is another perspective brought to the learning process. The group members serve as teachers of one another. (5) Finally, and not to be minimized, by adding a third or fourth person who is being equipped to disciple others, the multiplication process is geometrically increased.

You might ask, if three is better than two, why isn’t ten better than three? The larger the group, the more you water down the essential elements that make for transformation. (1) *Truth*—Learning occurs in direct proportion to the ability to interact with the truth, which becomes more difficult with an increased number of voices contributing. It also becomes increasingly difficult to tailor the rate of learning to the individual, the larger the size of the group. (2) *Transparent relationships*—Self-disclosure is integral to transformation, and openness becomes increasingly difficult in direct proportion to the size of the group. If we are not free to divulge our struggles, then the Spirit will not be able to use the group members to effectively minister at the point of need. (3) *Life-change accountability*—The larger the group, the easier it is to hide. Accountability requires the ability to check to see if assignments were completed, or commitments to obedience were maintained. Greater numbers decrease access to a person’s life.

## ROLE OF THE DISCIPLER

*Discipleship Essentials* can be used in a number of contexts (personal study, one-on-one, one-with-two or a discipleship group of ten), but whatever the context the key person is the discipler. Tools don’t make disciples. God works through disciples to model life in Christ for those who desire maturity. Simply covering the content violates the intent of this tool. The tool is a vehicle which helps create the context and provide content for disciplers who want to invest themselves in love and commitment to growing disciples. The tool raises the issues of discipleship, but the discipler embodies the principles in life patterns and convictions. Modeling will be where the real instruction occurs. Remember Jesus’ words, “Every one when he is fully taught will be *like* his teacher” (Luke 6:40 RSV).

The most recent studies in secular education reveal that modeling is still the most significant learning dynamic. Neither coercion nor rewards shape human behavior as much as a “motivated attempt to resemble a specific person.”<sup>1</sup> The lowest level of learning is compliance when one individual has control over another. The second level is identification. Influence is maintained because of a desire to remain in a satisfying relationship. Internalization

is the third and highest step, for the desired behavior has become intrinsically rewarding. Modeling creates an atmosphere that affects values, attitudes and behavior.

Some of the specific roles a discipler will carry out are as follows:

1. The first and key role of the discipler is to issue an “invitation to accountable relationship.” The commitment is described and the covenant is signed (see p. xvi for “A Disciple’s Covenant”). The discipler becomes the “keeper of the covenant.” The discipling process should not commence until the invited disciple has prayed over and signed the covenant of commitment. Without the covenant there are no mutually agreed-upon standards for accountability.

The action pages in *Discipleship Essentials* are the tools for facilitating this accountability role. After lessons 8 (p. 67) and 16 (p. 134) you are asked to review the original covenant and recovenant together. An action page after lesson 20 (p. 173) asks you to prayerfully consider who will be your discipleship partners for the next leg of journey in order to continue the discipleship chain.

2. Initially, the discipler is the group convener and guide. The lessons are laid out in such a way that the discipler simply walks the partners through the discussion format. But as soon as possible, the members should rotate the task of guiding the weekly format as a way to equip and prepare for leadership at the conclusion of this group.

3. The discipler prepares the assignments of *Discipleship Essentials* just as the disciples do. Even though the discipling appointment will be guided by questions asked by the discipler, the guide shares his or her own responses to the discovery questions in the natural flow of conversation.

4. The discipler models transparency by sharing personal struggles, prayer concerns and confession of sin. The discipler does not need to have all the answers to biblical and theological questions. Feel free to say, “I don’t know, but I’ll try to find the answer or let’s research this together.” The power of modeling is not dependent upon a false perfectionism. The discipler will gain as much insight into Scripture and the Christian life as those who are being discipled for the first time.

## SUGGESTED STUDY FORMAT

Though *Discipleship Essentials* is twenty-five sessions, I would not expect that you could cover the assignment in twenty-five weeks. The relationship is always primary. Just plowing through the lessons would violate the spirit of this type of group. Every group will vary in length according to your style of learning, the depth of personal matters you are sharing at any given time and the detours you take to pursue issues raised by the study. Remember that the idea behind a small, tailored discipleship group is to proceed at the pace that is comfortable for the participants. Don’t feel obligated to cover every question, but use this book as a menu from which to select, especially if some of the material is familiar and already incorporated in your life.

The assignments are to be completed individually in their entirety prior to the discipling appointment. Each lesson contains discussion guides specifically designed for each of the following elements:

**C Core Truth**—The core truth serves as the nugget around which each lesson is built. The rest of the chapter is designed to further clarify the central focus. Begin each lesson with a review of the core truth’s question and answer.

**M Memory Verse**—When we commit the Bible to memory, God’s viewpoint on life slowly becomes ours. The psalmist writes, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). This discipline helps us grow to be more like Christ as we are grounded in his truth, encourage other believers with God’s Word, and share our faith with others. These verses should be reviewed approximately every sixth lesson.

**I Inductive Bible Study**—The place to discover reality from the only perspective that counts is the Bible. We are not interested in stowing away truth as if we were simply trying to acquire more knowledge. The object of this Bible study is to encounter reality and then through God’s power bring our lives in line with it. Larry Richards has summarized well the reality structure of God’s Word: “That is, in the Word of God the Spirit of God has revealed the true nature of the world we live in, the true nature of man and of God, the ultimate consummation of history, the pattern of relationships, and response to God and to life which corresponds with ‘the way things really are.’”<sup>2</sup>

**R Reading**—Each lesson concludes with a teaching printed in the guide. This reading is intended to provide a contemporary discussion of the eternal core truth that will challenge our lifestyle and stimulate our thinking. The follow-up questions will help make the learning concrete.

Weave prayer through all that you do. Begin by acknowledging Christ’s presence through the Holy Spirit, and open your life to what he may desire to do in you. As you deepen your life together through personal sharing, prayer is a response to the burdens you unload or the blessings God gives. Finally, intercede for one another that you can make the changes in thought, word and deed that the Lord has brought to your attention.

<sup>1</sup>*The Study of Identification Through Interpersonal Perception*, quoted in Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence O. Richards, *Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), p. 29.

## A DISCIPLE'S COVENANT

In order to grow toward maturity in Christ and complete *Discipleship Essentials*, I commit myself to the following standards:

1. Complete all assignments on a weekly basis prior to my discipleship appointment in order to contribute fully (see “Suggested Study Format”).
2. Meet weekly with my discipleship partners for approximately one and one-half hours to dialogue over the content of the assignments.
3. Offer myself fully to the Lord with the anticipation that I am entering a time of accelerated transformation during this discipleship period.
4. Contribute to a climate of honesty and personal vulnerability in a spirit of mutual up-building, and maintain strict confidentiality in order to foster trust.
5. Give serious consideration to continuing the discipling chain by committing myself to invest in at least two other people for the year following the initial completion of *Discipleship Essentials*.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Dated \_\_\_\_\_

*The above commitments are the minimum standards of accountability, which are reviewed and renewed after lessons 8 and 16. Feel free to add any other elements to your covenant.*

# Part One

## GROWING UP IN CHRIST

Welcome to a relational discipleship journey that promises a time of accelerated spiritual growth. This intimate, highly invested experience brings together three ingredients that the Holy Spirit will use to form Christ in you: vulnerability, truth and accountability. *Vulnerability* happens when you open your life in a self-revealing way to other believers, giving permission for the Spirit to work in you. The more honest and transparent you are with others, the more you are entrusting your life to the Lord. The *truth* of Scripture serves as the cutting edge for growth. Since the material in this study is laid out in a sequential and systematic way, you will enjoy seeing the truth take shape before your eyes. Finally, *accountability* involves entering into a mutual covenant with others in which you are giving each other authority to hold one another to your commitments. The combination of these three elements serves as the mold that God uses to give his shape to your life.

*Making disciples* is the theme of chapter one. Solid foundations will be laid in your life, and a part of spiritual maturity is the desire to pass on that faith to others. May God so take hold of you that you are equipped to invest in others and to make it a commitment for life.

*Being a disciple* (chapter two) is serious business. The only way to be molded into the person God wants you to be is to abandon self in obedience to Christ.

Chapters three through six introduce the “spiritual disciplines”—practices God uses in our life to keep us rooted in Christ. Chapters three to six focus on the disciplines of faith, what God uses in our lives to help us grow up into Christlikeness. The word *discipline* sometimes carries with it a certain heaviness or weightiness, but the idea of discipline in this book is thought of in the way Richard Foster speaks of it in his *Celebration of Discipline*. He says that spiritual disciplines are those practices that put us in the presence of God where we can have an intimate relationship with him.

*Quiet time*, the subject of chapter three, introduces the practice of a daily routine of meeting with the Lord. A quiet time can become a safe place where you experience the Lord as your fortress and protector as well as your closest friend. It can be the place in your day where you freely pour out your heart in an unedited fashion and where God can speak back to you through his Word and Spirit.

*Bible study* is a key ingredient in a quiet time. This book teaches the inductive method, an investigative study where you discover the meaning of a biblical text through a series of discovery questions. This method is used throughout these studies to guide the unearthing of God's truth. *Prayer* is another key ingredient of a quiet time. A simple guide for prayer is provided in chapter five to give structure to the dialogue of prayer.

Finally, in chapter six we focus on *worship*. Whether private or public, worship is the activity that will characterize our eternity in heaven, and we can experience a bit of that awe and wonder even now.

## **PREPARING FOR THE TASK AHEAD**

The best way to prepare for your discipling session is to take a little time each day to work through the material. It is much better to spend twenty minutes each day than to do it all in one evening. Discipline takes practice to incorporate into our daily routine. It has been shown that new habits take approximately three weeks to become comfortable and another three weeks to become a part of one's way of doing things. Pray that these disciplines will become second nature to your life and your partners'.

You have a wonderful, painful, delightful, challenging adventure ahead. God bless you as you grow up into him.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Making Disciples

### LOOKING AHEAD

**MEMORY VERSE:** Matthew 28:18-20

**BIBLE STUDY:** Luke 6:12-16; 9:1-6, 10

**READING:** A Biblical Call to Making Disciples

### **C**ORE TRUTH

*What is discipling?*

*Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to make disciples who make disciples.*

1. Identify key words or phrases in the question and answer above, and state their meaning in your own words.
2. Restate the core truth in your own words.
3. What questions or issues does the core truth raise for you?

## **M**EMORY VERSE STUDY GUIDE

Jesus' mission statement for the church is to make disciples. These pivotal verses (Matthew 28:18-20) are commonly referred to as the Great Commission.

1. *Putting it in context:* Read Matthew 28. What key events precede Jesus' giving the Great Commission, and how would they have affected the disciples?
2. The memory verses are *Matthew 28:18-20*. Copy these verses verbatim.
3. What do these verses teach us about Jesus?
4. Why does Jesus stress his authority (v. 18) as a backdrop to his command to "make disciples"?
5. What do the action words of "go, baptizing and teaching" tell us about how disciple-making is to be carried out?
6. When is a disciple made?
7. How have these verses spoken to you this week?



## INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Jesus always lived with a view to the end of his earthly ministry. The preparation of a few who would carry on his ministry after he ascended to the Father was ever before him. This Bible study focuses on the training and transference of ministry to his selected disciples.

1. Read *Luke 6:12-16; 9:1-6, 10*. What do you suppose Jesus included in his all-night prayer? (See the reading on p. 6 for some ideas.)
2. What can you learn about Jesus' strategic purpose for the selection of the Twelve from 9:1-6?
3. What power and authority was given to the disciples? What power and authority can we expect to receive from Jesus today?
4. What was Jesus' role with the disciples after their return (9:10)?
5. What questions do these passages raise for you?
6. What verse or verses have particularly impacted you? Rewrite key verses in your own words.

## **R**EADING: A BIBLICAL CALL TO MAKING DISCIPLES

When Jesus commanded his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), he spoke the mission statement for the church. Jesus told his disciples to do what he had done during his three years of ministry. Jesus made disciples by selecting a few into whom he poured his life.

### **JESUS’ METHOD OF DISCIPLEMAKING**

What was the strategic advantage of having twelve men who would “be with him” (Mark 3:14)? There are many reasons, but two seem most relevant.

*Internalization.* By focusing on a few Jesus was able to ensure the lasting nature of his mission. We might wonder why Jesus would risk others’ jealousy by publicly selecting twelve from a larger group of disciples (Luke 6:13). Why didn’t Jesus simply continue to expand his growing entourage and create a mass movement? The apostle John captures Jesus’ caution when people clamored to him because of the marvelous signs: “But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone” (John 2:24-25 NRSV).

Though Jesus ministered to the needs of the crowds, he knew they were fickle. The same ones who shouted “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday were shouting “Crucify him” five days later on Good Friday. Knowing

the whims of the throng, Jesus built his ministry on a select few who would form the superstructure of his future kingdom. Disciples cannot be mass produced but are the product of intimate and personal investment. A. B. Bruce summarizes this point: “The careful, painstaking education of the disciples secured that the Teacher’s influence on the world should be permanent, that His Kingdom should be founded on deep and indestructible convictions in the minds of a few, not on the shifting sands of superficial impressions on the minds of many.”<sup>1</sup>

*Multiplication.* Just because Jesus focused much of his attention on a few does not mean that he did not want to reach the multitudes. Just the opposite. Eugene Peterson puts this truth cleverly: “Jesus, it must be remembered, restricted nine-tenths of His ministry to twelve Jews, because it was the only way to reach all Americans.”<sup>2</sup> Of course, you could substitute any nationality here, which is exactly the point.

Jesus had enough vision to think small. Focusing did not limit his influence—it expanded it. When Jesus ascended to the Father, he knew that there were at least eleven who could minister under the authority of his name, an elevenfold multiplication of his ministry. Robert Coleman captures the heart of Jesus’ methodology when he writes, “[Jesus’] concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes but with men the multitudes would follow.”<sup>3</sup>

## PAUL'S APPROACH TO DISCIPLEMAKING

We see that the apostle Paul adopted the same goal and methodology in his ministry that Jesus modeled. Paul's version of the Great Commission is his personal mission statement. "We proclaim [him], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:28-29). Paul is so passionate about making disciples that he compares his agony over the maturity of the flock to the labor pains of a woman giving birth: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19).

Following Jesus' method, Paul invested in individuals to make disciples. He too had his sights on the multitudes, but he knew that solid transmission of the faith would not occur as readily through speaking to an audience. Paul encouraged Timothy to use a personal style to link the gospel to future generations when he exhorted him, "And the things *you* have heard *me* say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to *reliable* people who will also be qualified to *teach others*" (2 Timothy 2:2, emphasis added). Paul envisioned an intergenerational chain of disciples linked together through personal investment. Contained in this verse are generations in the discipling network, creating the following path: Paul → Timothy → reliable people → teach others.

We know Paul lived out this admonition, for his letters are filled with the names of

those to whom he gave himself. Paul replaced himself in the battle with soldiers like Timothy, Titus, Silas (Silvanus), Euodia, Syntyche, Epaphroditus, Priscilla and Aquila. They accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys, were entrusted with ministry responsibility and became collaborators in the gospel. Paul attributed the change in their lives to the impact of the message of Christ in his life on them.

The Bible teaches us not only the message of our faith but also the method by which that faith is to be passed on to future generations. We are called to do God's work in God's way. The manner in which the Lord works is incarnational: life rubs up against life. We pass on Christlikeness through intimate modeling. Paul said, "I urge you to imitate me" (1 Corinthians 4:16) and "You became imitators of us and of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

## DISCIPLEMAKING TODAY

Disciplemaking ensures that the gospel is embedded deeply in the lives of mature believers who serve as links to the future. Discipling then is a relationship where we intentionally walk alongside a growing disciple or disciples in order to encourage, correct and challenge them in love to grow toward maturity in Christ.

This book brings together three ingredients necessary to produce maturity in Christ. *Relational vulnerability* means honest, self-disclosing and confessional relationships that give the Holy Spirit permission to remake us. Second, *the centrality of truth* is emphasized when people open their lives to one another around the truth of God's Word

and the Lord begins to rebuild their lives from the inside out. And third, *mutual accountability* is authority given to others to hold us accountable to mutually agreeable standards—“iron sharpening iron.”

We will not make disciples through methods of mass production that attempt shortcuts to maturity. Robert Coleman clarifies the challenge: “One must decide where he wants his ministry to count—in the momentary applause of popular recognition or the reproduction of his life in a few chosen men who will carry on his work after he has gone.”<sup>4</sup> The irony is that focusing on a few takes a long-range view by multiplying the number of disciples and therefore expands a church’s leadership base. Though adult education programs and small group ministries are good tools to produce maturity, without the focus of small discipling units a solid foundation is difficult to build. Keith Phillips’s chart

Year	Evangelist	Discipler
1	365	2
2	730	4
3	1095	8
4	1460	16
5	1825	32
6	2190	64
7	2555	128
8	2920	256
9	3285	512
10	3650	1,024
11	4015	2,048
12	4380	4,096
13	4745	8,192
14	5110	16,384
15	5475	32,768
16	5840	65,536

compares the numeric difference between one person a day coming to Christ and one person a year being disciplined to maturity.<sup>5</sup> Catch the vision and invest yourself now!

<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Eugene Peterson, *Traveling Light* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1964), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup>Keith Phillips, *The Making of a Disciple* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1981), p. 23.

## READING STUDY GUIDE

1. What were Jesus’ reasons for choosing twelve to be with him?

What can we learn from this about how to bring people to maturity in Christ?



# Leader's Guide

What are the critical elements for a successful discipling journey? In the pages ahead I have tried to distill thirty years of wisdom learned through trial and error so you don't have to repeat the mistakes I made. To put it positively, the core elements of a successful journey are laid out systematically to give you tracks to run on to arrive at your destination: more and better disciples of Jesus who in turn can make disciples themselves.

Let's start with a definition of the key vehicle you can use to transport you to this destination. What are *micro groups*?

## MICRO GROUPS

Micro groups are a container in which are held the elements of accelerated transformation and provide a simple and tested method of multiplying disciples.

**What.** One person prayerfully invites two or three others to join them on a journey of maturing in Christ as well as learning to disciple others. The original group multiplies at the completion of *Discipleship Essentials* by reaching out to two or three others. One group has now become five and so forth. Over a period of a just a few years a church is organically transformed from within to the point where the identity of the church becomes a discipling congregation.

**Why.** Since the mission of the church is to make disciples, there is a need for a specific way to do it. The micro group effectively accomplishes two very vital things: (1) by focusing on God's word in the context of intimate relationship, growth accelerates and (2) through participation in these groups one learns to create a similar experience for others, thus multiplying disciples.

**How.** Central to the micro group is the agreement to a mutual covenant. Suffice it to say for now, the covenant makes explicit the commitments that each is making to God and each other. Discipling is fundamentally a relational process of lives sharpening lives. One of the major reasons for accelerated growth is that the group members have shifted priorities to make this group a centerpiece of their week.

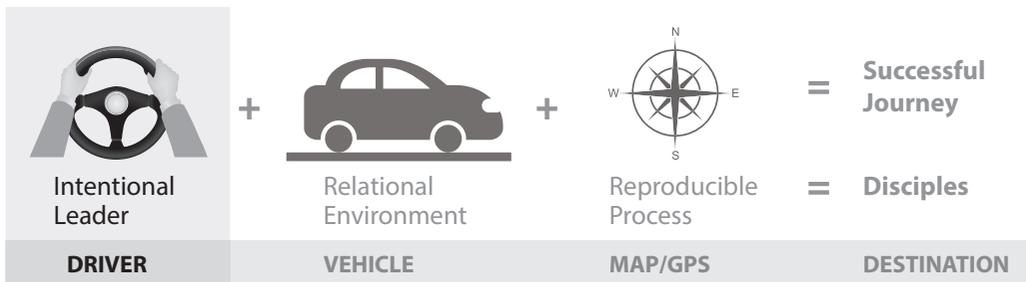
**Who.** The groups are made up of those of the same sex. Transparency and trust occurs more readily with gender-specific groups. The only other qualifier for being in a group is the

willingness to engage the covenant. Levels of spiritual maturity are not a real factor. In fact, it quite often adds to the richness of the group to have a breadth of age levels and length of time people have been exploring Christ.

**When.** The suggested meeting length is approximately ninety minutes to cover a combination of personal sharing and engaging the topical biblical content. Since the groups are small, it is usually possible to find a seam in everyone's schedule so that they can make this a priority. It should be noted that timing is a cultural matter. Rhythms that work in the United States may not at all fit other cultures.

**Where.** A general rule of thumb is to find a safe place where there is freedom to be transparent about your life (a quiet nook of a restaurant or cafe, private home, office boardroom, church, etc.).

## SUCCESSFUL DISCIPLEMAKING JOURNEY



This picture serves as an excellent overview of the key components of a discipleship journey.<sup>1</sup> For a successful road trip, you need a driver (Intentional Leader), a vehicle (Relational Environment) and a map/GPS (Reproducible Process) to get you to your destination, which is reproducing disciples.

### INTENTIONAL LEADER (DRIVER)

Every group begins with a point person taking the initiative to start a group. The following are the functions and the steps a leader takes to bring about a healthy group experience.

**Step 1: Pray for the Holy Spirit's discernment.** When it comes to deciding who should be invited into a group, discerning prayer is the place to begin. Jesus spent the night in prayer prior to calling his apostles from a larger gathering of disciples (Luke 6:12-13). Likewise, we should ask the Lord to place on our hearts those we are to pursue in joining us on this journey. Take your time. Let the conviction settle in before you approach someone.

What qualities are you looking for in the people you are calling? Perhaps the most important quality is a humble and teachable spirit. Paul instructed Timothy to find "reliable

people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). What qualities might a “reliable” person reflect? When Jesus called the Twelve they were certainly raw recruits. Spiritual maturity was not the standard (just ask Peter). What you want to see is someone who is willing to explore what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Prayer: “Dear Lord, I am willing to lead a micro group, but I need to know the people you have in mind. Please impress upon my spirit those that you desire to be on this journey together.” Once you have a settled conviction, go on to Step 2.

**Step 2: Make a personal invitation.** Here is a sample invitation you can put into your own words: “I have been praying about something I would like you to consider. I am putting together a new group whose purpose is to help each of us become better followers of Jesus. I would like to invite you to meet with me and at least one other person weekly for the purpose of becoming all that the Lord intends us to be. I personally need companions on this journey for my own continuous growth. As I was praying about who to ask, the Lord has put you on my heart. Would you be willing to join me and one or two others as we grow together to become better followers of Jesus?”

At this point, all you want is for them to say that they are willing to pray about whether they can confirm their commitment to this group.

**Step 3: Share with them what is involved.** Sit down with them and with a copy of *Discipleship Essentials* or *Essential Guide to Becoming a Disciple*, and give them an overview of the content and how you will cover it.

- a. Review the table of contents to get a feel for the overall content and flow.
- b. Review the four parts of a lesson so they can see the repeated pattern.
- c. Let them know it will take approximately one to two hours per week to complete the lessons depending on how rapidly you are covering the content, plus the weekly meeting time of ninety minutes.

**Step 4: Review the covenant in Discipleship Essentials.** Central to the group relationship is a shared commitment to a covenant. A covenant is a written, mutual agreement that states clearly the expectations and commitments in the micro group relationship. Some people may have a negative reaction to making this kind of commitment. Why is a covenant so important?

1. The covenant clarifies what you can count on from each other. Yes, there will be mutual accountability.
2. A covenant raises the stakes. It says we are about serious business.
3. The covenant puts a tool in the hands of the leader (convener) and group members to remind each other gently of their commitments, especially when they see someone lagging.

In order for the potential participant to engage the covenant, it is best for them to state in their own words what they think they are committing themselves to. As you read each line of the covenant you could ask:

- What do you think you are being asked to do?
- Could you put that in your own words?
- What expectations does this create for you?

As you conclude the review of the covenant, you might ask: How much time do you sense that this would take for you to be involved? Is this possible? Would you need to rearrange your schedule in any way to make this group a priority?

**Step 5: Ask the disciple to prayerfully consider the invitation.** Specifically, tell them that you don't want an answer on the spot, but to examine over the next week whether they have the time and the heart for what lies ahead. As they pray about their decision, it would be appropriate to share this invitation with their spouse (if they are married), count the cost, and then give you an answer that has been prayerfully discerned.

**Step 6: Set the first regular meeting and get started.** Your initial time slot together may be just a temporary gathering until you can have a more thorough discussion of what time would work best for all. The good thing about the small size of the group is that you usually can find a suitable seam in your schedules.

Find a quiet, safe space where you will be able to grow into trusting transparency.

Good locations for micro groups are a private home, a quiet nook in a restaurant, a private office space (board room before work) or a church. Avoid spaces that are too public that would make people self-conscious, such as a coffee house or a noisy restaurant.

**Step 7: Guide the participants through the sessions.** The leader should take the initial responsibility of guiding the members through the content of the lessons. Go only at a pace that is comfortable. Encourage questions. Address personal matters. The curriculum is only a tool, not something in which to be enslaved. Also mention from the outset that the leadership will be rotated among all the participants. This is to demonstrate that everyone can do this.

**Step 8: Model transparency.** The general rule of thumb is that the group will go as deep as the willingness of the convener to be vulnerable. Find suggestions below as to how to lay the relational foundations early on that encourage trust and openness.

**BUY THE BOOK!**

[ivpress.com/discipleship-essentials](http://ivpress.com/discipleship-essentials)