

## MAKING DISCIPLES IN COMMUNITY BY JIM MCDANIEL

Many church leaders wonder about the necessity and effectiveness of small groups in leading people to be mature disciples of Jesus. This article attempts to address these issues by justifying and describing certain essential elements of an environment that is needed to fulfill God's commands to make disciples.

### A DEFINING MOMENT IN THE PLAN OF GOD



Having pronounced His personal mission of atonement for the human race complete and before leaving Earth in bodily form, Jesus defined the mission that is to engage all His disciples until His return. At the end of his gospel, Matthew recorded an eloquent and succinct statement of the main component of this assignment, called The Great: *“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*<sup>1</sup> The original language makes it very clear that Jesus had in mind one primary directive, "make disciples," which is carried out in three activities that are to touch all the ethnic groups on the planet: going, baptizing and teaching.

### GOD’S PATTERN

The record in the book of Acts and the New Testament letters give us the model of the Apostle's method for carrying out this mandate. Paul gets the primary focus because he was tasked to reveal God's pattern for how the church is to function.<sup>2</sup> His broad strategy was to intentionally engage people in order to proclaim the gospel in strategic locations, gather new believers into long-term, committed, local family-like communities, often meeting in homes, pass on to them the core doctrines of The Faith that included standards of conduct befitting people who have been reconciled with God, then appoint, train and release leaders to continue the teaching and shepherding of the local church into full spiritual maturity with the intent that the churches would reproduce the process.<sup>3</sup>

Further study of the New Testament gives us more detail about the process. All disciples are supposed to intentionally engage and enlighten the people around them by demonstrating a godly life and providing an explanation of the gospel. That's the "going" part of the commission. For some, this means crossing significant cultural and, or, physical distance to reach those who have not heard. (Rom. 10:14-15; 15:18-22) Through the act of baptism, new believers are accepted by, and declare their identification with, a new genus of human being -

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the family of the reborn, the Body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:12-14; 18; Gal. 3:26-28) The third element, Jesus' command to teach, requires some explanation because our cultural background makes us prone to misunderstand it. First, it does *not* simply mean to pass on information or religious tradition. It *does* mean that each new member of the body is to be engaged in the formation of a new personal character, a Christ-like character that comes about by learning the truth about God and His perspective on the world then allowing these new values to change their manner of living. Another way of putting it is that disciples help one another work out and guard in their mind and behavior, the whole manner of life that Jesus demonstrated, including living in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit while being in a constant relationship with the Father. Jesus intends each disciple to reach a high level of maturity in this process, while accepting that no one becomes perfectly Christ-like in their natural lifetime.

### OUR STATUS

Unfortunately many Christians find the process of becoming a mature follower of Jesus Christ to be a haphazard process in which they stumble through a barrage of sermons, books, conferences, information, and courses sometimes unclear of the goal and unaware that there is supposed to be a basic plan for the process. It's not surprising why. While some churches in past eras at least had catechisms to present basic information to converts, few churches today have a plan of ordered learning for establishing people in The Faith nor do they have an effective environment that intentionally guides people into the level mature Christian character the New Testament expects. Part of the reason is that by accepting current western educational norms which primarily teach people by imparting encyclopedic structures of knowledge in classroom settings, the church has often suppressed Biblical concepts of making disciples.

This article sets forth a brief justification and concepts needed to help a local church improve this situation.

### OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Since Jesus clearly defined the task that every Christian should be involved in until His return, every responsible church member and especially every leader *must* be concerned about their role and effectiveness in accomplishing it. Church leaders have many expectations laid upon them by their congregation. However, Eph. 4:11-13, explains that God has given leaders to the church for the primary purpose of bringing people to a high level of unity and maturity of character:

*“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”(Ephesians 4:11-13)*

A word of warning. If you are looking for a pre-designed program, then you are looking in the wrong place. I don't mean that this article lacks practical content, I just want to emphasize that making disciples involves looking at yourself first. You must let God transform your own character, values and vision, then transfer yourself effectively to others. To do this effectively requires some insight into the goal and process involved.

## DISCIPLE MAKING - THE GOAL

Since God expects every disciple to grow to maturity, we need to know what a mature disciple looks like! With a little bit of work, we can glean from God's word some essential characteristics of mature disciples.

First it's important to grasp that God considers personal character and truth, or doctrine, as inseparable. (Matt. 15:18-19; Rom. 12:1-2; Titus 2:1 and following) In fact, the Scripture never conceives of teaching that does not motivate behavior. (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:20-24; Titus 2:1) The early church leader James, made the issue black and white for us by proclaiming that belief in God which does not result in appropriate behavior won't even save us. In fact, according to him, hearing God's word without responding with action is a waste of time. (James 1:23-25; 2:14-26) This implies that the ultimate outcome of disciple-making is wise and worthy living that corresponds to the teaching of God's word rather than the accumulation of information and insight alone, a perspective that is echoed by the other New Testament writers. So, knowledge and insight are intended to transform character such that a person exercises godly wisdom along with patient, thankful and worshipful dependence upon God as they face the challenges and circumstances of life. (1 Tim. 1:5)

Since, as I have mentioned, the Apostle Paul had the unique role of bringing to light the administration of God's family, the church, (Eph. 3:8-10; 1 Tim. 3:14-15) his letters were given to us as tools to help bring churches to the full maturity of household order and behavior that God intended. Then let's use the teaching and the problems Paul addresses in his letters to create a composite picture of a mature disciple. (I'm indebted to Jeff Reed of [BILD](#) for developing and promoting these

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concepts.) While this list isn't complete, it gives us an idea to work from. A mature disciple:

- Is established in a full understanding of the whole gospel. (Romans)
- Is sound enough in their understanding of the gospel that they are not drifting in any way toward a distorted or different gospel. They are not in danger of, after “having begun by the Spirit,” now being “perfected by the flesh.” (Galatians)
- Stands firm in the gospel, unshaken by those who might draw attention away from the basic focus on the furtherance of the gospel with alarming teaching on future events accompanied by irresponsible living. (1 and 2 Thessalonians)
- Does not create divisions or conflicts that would be characteristic of an immature believer who is not fully established in the gospel. (1 Corinthians)
- Does not use conflicts and problems to undermine the trustworthiness of leaders trying to establish them in the gospel.(2 Corinthians)
- Exhibits proper conduct in the local household of God, living a godly life in harmony with God’s house order in the church. (1 Timothy)
- Understands the relational implications required within the community of faith and how they affect the unity of the church as it pursues one-minded commitment to the furtherance of the gospel. (Philippians, Philemon)
- Grasps the significance of their role in the unfolding plan of God and its accompanying riches and is walking worthily under this one purpose. (Ephesians, Colossians)
- Has a working knowledge of the Scripture's structure, history and main themes, a correct method for its study, and habits of study and prayer that effectively sustain their continued faith, spiritual growth, ministry, and development of a biblical world view as they process the moral and spiritual issues they face in life. (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews)

You can probably see that while many churches verbally advocate this level of discipleship, few have provided meaningful goals, expectations, effective plans or means of assessing progress. They try but are not very effective at it.

## DISCIPLE MAKING -THE PROCESS

Regardless of their physical age, the Scripture likens new followers of Jesus to infants who need to be brought to mature stature.

*"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." (Hebrews 5:12-14)*

It isn't by accident that training disciples is likened to raising children. Disciples and children have many characteristics in common. (1 Cor. 3:1; Heb. 5:12-13) Keep the following in mind as we continue to discuss the process of disciple-making:

- Both are intended to grow and must grow to be effective in life.
- Both have the essential equipment they need to function but need guidance and assistance because their faculties and skills aren't developed.
- Both have an inborn desire to grow and only stop growing when they fail too often, are hurt too much or lack challenges and encouragement from others who care about them.
- Both need guidance, accountability and support of a family.
- Both must learn things according to an order, starting with easily digested, but nutritious "milk," graduating to solid food when it can be handled properly.

### ORDERED LEARNING

Let's briefly address the concept of ordered learning just mentioned by first considering Paul's words to the Colossian church:

*"Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to [ the elementary principles of ] Christ." (Colossians 2:6-8)*

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The Roman concept behind the word variously translated as basic, elementary, or first in these verses corresponds to our idea of the ABCs. We must learn the letters before words and complex written communication. You see, this scripture, and others, presume that there are first principles that every Christian should be taught and challenged to work into their lives as soon as possible in order to be equipped to go on to live the Christian life effectively and to be able to reach maturity. (Eph. 3:17; Col. 2:8; Heb. 5:12; 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:13; Hebrews 5:12; Jude 3; Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 2:8; Heb. 5:12) While there definitely are facts and concepts that must be mastered, we are not simply talking about using the so called "Texas model" of education: sit, git, spit and fergit. We are talking about laying a foundation that becomes a new personal world view, set of values and behaviors.

The church leaders living in the first few centuries after the Apostles died can give us some insight into what some of the first principles are. They summarized the Apostles teaching in two parts, the proclamation ([the kerygma](#)), ([afn.org](#)) which was the foundation for the later church creeds that summarized key beliefs of the Christian faith, and the "teachings" (the [didache](#)) which describe essential Christian values and behaviors. While these form a simplified summary of Apostle's teachings which we have in the New Testament, they give us insight into how they made disciples. In later centuries, other church leaders formed their own creeds and catechisms as well as tomes of church doctrine. They too are very valuable for study and reference, but we must realize that these later formulations are influenced by the cultural and church issues of their time as well as a growing body of tradition.

In summary any plan for completing the Great Commission should integrate an orderly way of passing on core concepts of a Christian world-view, beliefs and behaviors with life transformation. BILD's [First Principle Series](#) is a set of group discussion based workbooks lays a good foundation for discipleship.

As a side note, I have observed that many conflicts and stresses in the lives of Christians are often due to not having been exposed to some of these core teachings and/or not having been expected to work them into their lives early in their Christian walk. In that regard I can even recommend the First Principle Series for older Christians, especially if you want to disciple others.

## RELATIONSHIPS

To fulfill Jesus' commission, it's not good enough to say that it's Jesus' life that is to be transferred so let Him do it. Believers need a healthy set of close relationships to grow and to fulfill their role in the body of Christ. We should not

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be surprised that a disciple's relationship with God is described in family language. After all, the concept of family is inherent in the very nature of God. (See Building a Church of Small Groups for a good treatment of this) The Scripture tells us that God has *adopted* us, that Jesus is our *brother*, that God now treats us as full *heirs* of all that the Father has created as we wait until we are at home in His *house*. We have changed *citizenship* to be that of our new father. We are *brothers* and *sisters* in one family. A healthy family talks openly, knows each others history, helps one another through times of difficulty and stays in touch. It facilitates the development of each member's character and its diversity works to build well rounded maturity. So we need to be involved with one another because God has ordained it to be that way

Paul knew this. He was not satisfied with simply gathering a large group of converts but was intent on delivering each Christian to a significant level of maturity through a process of admonition and teaching which he often referred to as *fathering* and *mothering* those who came to Christ under his preaching. (1 Thess. 2:7,11) This shepherding of God's people required intense, committed relationships to be built across racial and cultural boundaries.

*"In the wake of Paul's travels throughout the Mediterranean, Christian communities sprang up, consolidated, and began to multiply. This was the outcome of a deliberate policy on his part. He not only proclaimed the message about Christ and brought people into an intimate relationship with God, but he also explained the consequences of that message for the life of his converts and led them into a personal relationship with one another. As we have seen, for Paul the gospel bound believers to one another as well as to God. Acceptance by Christ necessitated acceptance of those whom he had already welcomed (Romans 15:7); reconciliation with God entailed reconciliation with others who exhibited the character of gospel preaching (Phil 4:2-3); union in the Spirit involved union with one another, for the Spirit was primarily a shared, not individual, experience. The gospel is not a purely personal matter. It has a social dimension. It is a communal affair. To embrace the gospel then is to enter into community. A person cannot have one without the other."*<sup>4</sup>

The Bible is filled with statements that teach we were designed to experience Christ together. Hebrews 10:23-25:"Let us hold on firmly to the faith we profess, because we can trust God to keep His promise. Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another, to show love and to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming

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nearer.”(GNB) In the book *Leading Christians to Maturity*, Ralph Martin is quoted as saying that Christian community can be described as a family relationship.

*“Coming into community means passing from relationships based primarily on my convenience or my need, to relationships that are based on commitment: whether it’s convenient or not, whether I need you or not, I commit myself to be a brother or sister to you. Entering community life involves a conversion from being concerned primarily about my good and the good of my family to taking a concern for our good, the good of the people of God, the good of the body of Christ in our area. We pass from a position of independence and isolation into a relationship of interdependence and into a shared life.”*

Passing on a new world-view, beliefs and values effectively involves learning truth in an environment where people teach one another the truth of the God's word and where people feel safe enough to expose their failures, fears, and weaknesses and help one another process them for the purpose of becoming like Christ and participating in His mission to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Large corporate meetings have important, unique aspects of preaching, a sense of acceptance by being part of a large movement of people, a sense of security, and the operation of a variety of gifts, but disciple-making depends on high quality relationships. Building the trust that it takes to transfer a life takes a long time of frequent contact in a relaxed setting.

## DISCIPLE MAKING - A STRATEGY

It's common to see church leaders create discipleship and membership training based on the modern secular educational system. So we have Discipleship 101, 201, 301 etc.. After all, since it is the way most of us in western culture were taught we naturally turn to it. If we want to teach a group, set up a class and design the lectures. Today's leaders have even taken the classroom to the student through video technology. But how effective is this method in forming character? Not very. Think again about training a child. I would argue that the classroom approach is largely ineffective in bringing Christians to maturity of faith and character. It may work for a few. It is certainly better than nothing. Lecture is an efficient method of passing on knowledge to a group and it does have a role in teaching disciples. However, Jesus and His Apostles demonstrated that preaching and lecturing are only supplementary to the process of walking alongside people,

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helping them to be transformed as they face the difficulties God brings into their lives - throughout their entire lives.

Furthermore, Christians are supposed to be *characterized* by their love for one another. (John 13:35) How can they demonstrate that level of love for one another without having lasting close relationships? Do "we", the church, only love people when we engage in some organized "ministry" sanctioned and led by our church leaders? I'm disappointed by the explosion of "ministries" that do all kinds of good stuff, but ignore the fact that too many individuals in our congregations seem about as connected to one another as they are to their colleagues at work.

As a result of all we have considered so far we can say that at a minimum, an effective church discipleship plan must engage people in a process and an environment whereby they can fulfill their role in Christ's body by:

- being established in the first principles of the faith (Col. 2:6-8; 1 Thess. 3:2)
- being lovingly encouraged and admonished to progress toward full spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:11-16)
- giving and receiving love in authentic, meaningful relationships (John 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:22)
- serving the Body of Christ according to the grace given to them (Rom. 12:6)
- participating in the advancement of the gospel among unbelievers (2 Cor. 5:14-20)
- developing their life mission (Acts 9:6; 15-16; Eph. 3:8; 4:7; Col. 1:10; 1 Tim. 6:17-19)

Small groups of people provide an environment where the type of relationships people need to grow in Christ and serve God by serving one another can be intentionally built.

### LIFE GROUPS

**Groups happen where life happens.** It doesn't really matter what you call them as long as you are training and unleashing people to engage in discipleship whenever and wherever they can, and want to get together. While group leaders need to be accountable to the elders of the church for their skill, conduct and teaching, they should not be restricted to institutionally designed meeting places and times. Groups can and should meet around life's activities and challenges whenever and wherever people find a convenient time and place to regularly get together. Every ongoing adult team, class, study or group in the church can be a

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group. It could be called a Life-on-Life environment to emphasize the personal relationships and the transference of one life to another.

**No One Stands Alone** is the Life Group motto at one well known church. Whether you use that or not, it expresses another value that must be communicated as part of a church-wide discipleship plan. One objective of the church needs to be to have every member be known, disciplined and shepherded in an authentic community—a place where people can know and be known and care for one another.

### EVERY LIFE GROUP MUST BE DRIVEN BY CERTAIN CORE VALUES.

In my opinion one of the reasons small groups, or for that matter any church program, dwindles and eventually becomes ineffective is because leaders are overly concerned about form rather than function. Possibly it's because most of us are naturally more comfortable with the control that accompanies specifying when, where and how people do things, than with equipping people with skills, mission, vision and values, focusing on outcome and allowing people to be flexible and creative.

For those of you who are not familiar with the importance of using mission, vision and core values to motivate and lead an organization, I refer you to another one of my posts on the subject. I'll just say here that they are indispensable and very biblical (despite the cry of some that they are too "corporate" and secular.) You can either institutionalize and "program" your small groups, which will start out looking good, but defeat their effectiveness in the long run, or you can unleash and lead through your leaders by instilling and re-enforcing your mission, vision and core values in them and holding them accountable through your ongoing relationship with them.

The following are core values that I have used and recommend. Some of them came from Donahue's excellent book "[Building a Church of Small Groups](#)". In my experience the importance of the first three cannot be understated. I will go so far as to say that without them a small group program will likely do more harm than good.

### 1. AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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“It’s not about the lesson, it’s about the life.” I know this will make some of you nervous. Your thinking uh-oh, we are going to abandon content. Nothing is further from the truth. The slogan makes sense when you fully grasp the concept that God intends His Word to change lives! Becoming a mature disciple is about

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forming habits and character based upon truths of the Word of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit uses parts of the Body of Christ, people, to come along side us to care, advise, pray, hold accountable, challenge and encourage. In fact it is highly unusual, and not the Biblical intention, that we grow without the loving challenge and patient ear of other Christians. That means people need a group of caring, trustworthy people with whom they can share “their story” and tell their current challenges. The Body needs to know when one of its members is faltering, missing, needs special care, etc. That’s what authentic relationships are about. God expects us to put in the work it takes to develop them. Group leaders must be given skills to facilitate this type of environment. It doesn’t always come naturally.

Some elements of authentic relationships are:

- Safety that promotes self-disclosure.
- Knowing and being known means dismantling surface barriers as well as deeper defenses, such as fear, shame, pride, and laziness.
- Giving and receiving care
- Active listening that flows into thoughtful remembering
- Humility
- Truth-telling
- Admonishing and be admonished
- Affirmation
- Relationships outside the group meetings. This is actually a very significant indicator of authentic relationships.

## 2. TRUTH MEETING LIFE

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It’s common to find two types of small groups in churches: Truth focused and Life focused. The first is a teaching time with little application, discussion or self-disclosure. The second is experience based with lots of support, care and disclosure, but little correction or application of Biblical truth. The goal of healthy Christian community should be life transformation where Biblical truth is applied in the context of a caring community. This means that the Word is not only studied, but applied to real life.

In a few of my leader training seminars, I have had people tell me that they didn't know their small group was supposed to be applying the Word to life. They were just studying it for the sake of study. They were surprised and pleased to learn some simple techniques for engaging people in application.

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The Truth Meeting Life value means leaders find ways to engage people in a discussion about the Scripture being considered in a way that gets them to evaluate themselves in light of the truth. Socratic discussion facilitates this very well, but takes some training for leaders to become skilled at it. Having said that, it doesn't take much more than a caring heart and authentic relationships to make this happen. A very simple way to get started is to use an excellent resource called the [Serendipity Bible](#) which includes group starter and discussion questions tailored to a variety of needs. Poke around [thehiddenmanna.org](http://thehiddenmanna.org) for further resources.

### 3. HEALTHY CONFLICT

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If conflict is completely absent from your group, something is amiss. As authentic relationships are developed in an environment where Biblical truth is being applied to life, conflict is inevitable. When conflict is handled in a healthy manner people grow. For example people often drop out of a group when they are uncomfortable. If it is because they cannot handle a conflict, they miss an opportunity to grow. Learning to admonish one another in love is necessary to building healthy family relationships which, in turn, are necessary for healthy spiritual growth and the proper functioning of the Body of Christ.

Sometimes leaders shy away from conflict or don't teach their group what to expect and how to handle it. It is never easy, but Jesus promised to be with us to the end of the age. He will give us wisdom and His spirit will work in the lives of the group.

In my opinion if pastors are not regularly reinforcing the concept that it is God's plan for people to be committed to building relationships in community, and giving Biblical examples of how God uses conflict to build Christian maturity, and being involved in groups themselves, many people quickly bail out of difficult relationships and groups and find other things to do with their time, leaving a crippled small group discipleship plan and perhaps discouraged leaders.

### 4. ACCOUNTABILITY

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You could say that authentic relationships involve accountability, but I find that people are so unused to this that it needs to be emphasized. Life Group members need to be taught healthy ways to hold each other accountable for spiritual growth. Christ-centered authentic relationships will foster a loving accountability between people where people set their own goals and the others in the group simply help them by showing interest and challenging them inside and outside of the group.

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In addition, every *group leader* must have an ongoing accountability to the church leadership for:

- Meeting basic qualifications of leadership and receiving ongoing coaching and training
- Maintaining the objectives of Life Groups
- Using approved curriculum
- Working at developing new leaders
- Keeping records of group activities and attendance

There is another side this leadership accountability. Church leaders must consider group leaders to be lay pastors who are shepherding the flock whether they are called that or not. They are people who need to be trained and coached by the church leaders on an ongoing basis. Some churches don't do this and then wonder why their groups drift into false doctrine or die off.

### 5. SERVICE

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Each group is expected to find some service activity in the church or community that they do periodically. It helps build morale, makes contact with potential new group members and helps people explore giftedness. "One great way for a group to practice serving is to help people who cannot return the favor or even say thank you. Scripture identifies them as the poor, orphan, widow, and stranger (P.O.W.S). Steve Sjogren's book [Conspiracy of Kindness](#) has a number of great ideas for groups and churches.

## STRUCTURE

What types of groups should I implement? I almost hesitate to discuss the topic of group organization because if you grasp and communicate the principles we have discussed so far, a wide variety of forms of groups can be implemented with success. In fact, I think that the two most important factors in putting together an intentional discipleship plan using small groups are:

- the clear definition and repetition of the mission, vision and core values of your groups to leaders and participants
- the knowledge, wisdom, and skill of your leaders

Perhaps you, as a number of people I have run into, will see the word "knowledge" and immediately presume that leaders must have seminary degrees or be gifted teachers either in person or through recordings from big-name teachers and organizations. Unless used very carefully, such an approach can

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cripple a group because it will limit discussion, self-disclosure, relationship building and disciple making. It is better to have one or two leaders who have grown to maturity by going to the Scripture in the hard knocks of life and has some training in facilitating groups than a great scholar.

The forms you choose to organize your small group ministry should reflect the needs of the culture in which you live and should be as diverse as the needs of your congregation. For example in some areas, groups meet at the church on one or two specific times each week so child care is taken care of corporately. In some cities, homes are very small and both husband and wife work so people are uncomfortable about having guests over because there isn't time to clean the house first. Since a lot depends upon understanding your culture I'll just throw out a few ideas that you can consider as you get started.

### TYPES OF GROUPS

We can roughly divide the activities carried out in a typical Life Group meeting into STUDY, CARE (relationships, sharing, prayer etc.) and TASK (service). Using the relative amount of time a group devotes to these activities, we can categorize a group into one of four types:

- Task Groups spend most of their time on a ministry service task.
- Support Groups focus their care and study time on helping people through a major life challenge.
- Interest Groups spend much of their time forming relationships around an activity or interest for outreach and very basic discipleship.
- Growth Groups focus on applying the Bible for spiritual formation and outreach.

Almost any ongoing team or group in the church can be a Life Group. When they all implement all five of the Life Group Core Values, we will go a long way to engaging everyone on an intentional path to spiritual maturity.

### LEADERSHIP

In order for any group to be recognized and advertised by the church, its leaders must meet certain qualifications: They must

- apply and be approved,
- be members in good standing,

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- must sign an agreement to support the Church's statement of faith and to be accountable to the church leadership for performing their duties and their teaching,
- must take the Small Group Leader's Boot Camp and participate in ongoing coaching/training as part of the Life Group Leader's Network.

### NEW CHURCH MEMBER PROCESS

You should think through your membership process very carefully. Regardless of the content, the way you conduct it will communicate the real nature of your ministry philosophy (how you think disciples are made) and values and will certainly communicate what expectations members feel you have of them. Consider engaging your prospective members in a small group made up of a blend of existing members (perhaps elders and their wives) and candidates. Build relationships so that people know that's how you do church. Examine the Gospel and the nature and mission of the church together. Make it natural for people to be engaged with each other. This way you communicate and extend your church culture.

*"...I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."*  
— The Apostle Paul, Ephesians 3:14-21

## REFERENCES:

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotes are taken from the New American Standard 1995 version of the Bible by The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, California

[Paul's Idea of Community](#)

[Planting Churches Cross Culturally \(this book has an analysis of Paul's method of establishing believers\)](#)

[Building a Church of Small Groups - a must read for anyone serious about small groups](#)

[Leading Life Changing Small Groups - a practical manual for leaders](#)

[Organic Disciple Making](#)

[BILD](#) is an excellent resource for training in Church-Based Theological Education and materials for disciple making.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 28:18-20 - ESV Also see Matt. 24:4-14; John 14:6; Acts 1:4b-8

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 3:8-10

<sup>3</sup> Col. 4:5; Titus 2:1; 2 Tim. 3:10; 1 Peter 2:12; Acts 15:2; Titus 1:5; Planting Churches Cross Culturally by David Hesselgrave

<sup>4</sup> Banks, Paul's Idea of Community, pg. 26-27