



DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS



Discipleship Groups @ Willingdon Church

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS (D-GROUPS) @ WC

Jesus' disciple-making practices were lived out in relationship with his "D-Group," Peter, John, and James, as well as the 12 and the 72. Jesus taught them, sent them out, and "debriefed" their experiences with them. He continually revealed who he was to them and drew them into his circle of friends (John 15:15), teaching them everything God, his father, had taught him. Jesus also gave his disciples his final and all-encompassing mandate in Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus made it clear that he had the authority to send out his disciples and that his authority would accompany them in their disciple-making. Jesus' primary mandate to his followers is to "make disciples." How? By teaching everyone in every nation to do what Jesus did and to live and Jesus lived.

Today, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, this intimate connection to Jesus is available to all of Jesus' followers. With this in mind, WC invites men and women to form **Discipleship Groups**.

A Discipleship Group consists of 2-5 people of the same gender (possibly part of the same Life Group; 3 is ideal) who want to be intentional about their growth as disciples of Jesus. A D-Group is characterized by the complete openness and honesty developing a context in which nothing is held back. The D-Group space is the most impactful for discipling relationships because people see each other heart-to-heart, life on life. Like Jesus' "inner circle," these groups meet together in the presence of Jesus to share...

- their moments of encounter with God (**Meeting with Jesus**),
- their places of personal vulnerability and struggle (**Walking with Jesus**),
- and their opportunities for ministry to others (**Leading people to Jesus**).

D-GROUP LEADERSHIP

D-Groups are led by people who God leads to invite others into a deeper spiritual relationship. If you sense God's leading to start a D-Group, sign up online, and we will provide training videos for your review.

Steps to starting a D-Group

1. Pray about the group. The first step is to ask God who you should invite to the group. It would be great to take time to fast and pray over the names of people you are being led to.
2. Make the group small and gender-based. Do not go beyond six people in your group. Be prepared to ask people to commit to a weekly meeting. We also provided a group covenant which may be helpful for people to sign.
3. Meet weekly. We recommend that you met weekly in a relational place if possible. If not, Zoom works as well but will take more initiative on the part of the leader. You might want to start by getting to know one another's backgrounds—perhaps by completing a spiritual biography exercise listed in this guide. This will mean that your group will have to devote one week to each person's biography and then at least 6 months to develop transparent relationships.
4. Life on Life. We cannot state strongly enough that the goal is to walk through the material in a life-on-life context instead of an educational context. The format is designed for open, honest sharing with each other. It is essential that you, as the leader, set an example by sharing your reflections. Take the initiative to pray for each other, text each other, talk often, set up a WhatsApp group or text group. The goal is to follow Jesus' example, who invited those he was discipling into a relationship with him that encompassed all of life. That is why the covenant asks the group to commit to growing together, eating together, and serving together.
5. Groups use the simple template provided in this guide to engage in God's Word, reflect on their lives, confess sin, take steps to grow in holiness, and follow the Spirit's leading to reach others. It is very important that all group members commit to reading God's Word during the week and reflecting on

what God is teaching them; otherwise, group sharing will simply be opinions rather than what God is working on in our hearts and minds.

This method is a conversation geared toward working on character formation: the questions participants ask of one another are the processes that help facilitate discipleship. The key in peer-to-peer discipleship is not to try to do too much at once: engage with God, ask questions of one another, and respond to God's leading. Once a peer-to-peer discipleship group reaches five people, members should begin looking toward multiplication into more than one group.

All participants must take responsibility for the group's success. Group members make covenantal commitments to meet, care for each and follow up with each other. While assignments may be taken on by individual group members regarding group logistics, the success of the group depends on the engagement and ownership of the group by all group members.

Discipleship Groups form based on the following seven commitments:

COMMITMENTS:

- **Purpose:** We submit together to the purpose of *growing, persevering, and multiplying as disciples of Jesus*. In a discipleship group, our social connection is only the beginning; we measure the value of our meeting by how it *fuels our love for Jesus and for people* (Matthew 22:34-38), *trains us for godliness* (1Timothy 4:8), leads us to *abandon any allegiance that rivals Jesus* (i.e. idols) and leads others to follow Jesus.
- **Availability:** Except in emergencies, we will *attend every meeting we schedule together*. We can expect immediate follow-up if we miss a meeting.
- **Confidentiality:** We will be *trustworthy* for one another, never sharing with others the confidential things we discuss unless we are given permission or it involves the immediate harm of a vulnerable person.
- **Vulnerability/Truthfulness:** Seeking maximum self-awareness, we will *trust each other with ourselves*, sharing our worst parts just as much as our best parts. We will *speak honestly* and *share the whole truth* as best we know it; withholding important truth is no better than lying.
- **Loving Accountability:** In a spirit of love, we give each other *permission to give and receive encouragement, exhortation, and correction from one another*. We are committed to *guarding one another's integrity* as fiercely as we protect our own and *walking alongside one another as we take responsibility* for our actions.
- **Obedience:** We will support each other in growing our *obedience* to the *leading* of the Holy Spirit and *personal alignment* with God's word.
- **Spirit-led multiplication:** We will commit to *leading* others in their *growth* as disciples of Christ as the Spirit leads. We recognize that Christ calls all of his followers is to make disciples of others.

DISCIPLESHIP GROUP COVENANT Date: _____

To the best of our ability, we agree to uphold these commitments to one another, within the following parameters:

We will meet every _____ at ____:____ am/pm.

Location: _____

We will renew or revise our commitment to one another on this date: _____

Signed:

_____ Name	_____ Phone	_____ Email
_____ Name	_____ Phone	_____ Email
_____ Name	_____ Phone	_____ Email
_____ Name	_____ Phone	_____ Email
_____ Name	_____ Phone	_____ Email

BEGINNING WELL:

We recommend the following approach to begin well together.

First Meeting

Purpose: Get to know one another's story and establish a climate of support and encouragement.

- After a few minutes of **general connection**, go over the **commitments** above together. Take a few minutes to express your hopes for the **role of the group** in your discipleship to Jesus.
- Share something that you are anticipating in the coming week about which you are (1) **excited**, (2) **anxious**, (3) potentially **vulnerable to stumbling**, and (4) and called to be **obedient** in following the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Review the **structure** for the second meeting, which will require some preparation (below).
- Agree on a **meeting schedule** and sign the group covenant above.
- **Pray** for one another and invite God to use these meetings to work his will in your lives.

Second Meeting

Purpose: Sharing personal spiritual biographies.¹

When Christians share their spiritual story it is often limited to their conversion story. Transparent discipling relationships require more. To develop deeper, transparent relationships in the group all participants will have the opportunity to share their whole story, including the positives and the negatives. In order to be

¹ Discipleship.org This material was developed by Radical Mentoring and it is edited and used Bobby Harrington with Regi Campbell's permission.

honest about the good, the bad, and the ugly, it is helpful to have a grid to guide us. The following is the guide we will use for sharing our spiritual biographies. The leader will go first to set the example for the group.

Divide into decades – draw a line on a piece of paper and divide that line into sections, creating one section for each decade of our life. We'll call this your "lifeline."

Each section represents a decade. Assigning a number, it goes like...

0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70

If you are a follower of Jesus, ask God to remind you of the critical events, turning points, moments of truth, disasters, failures, victories, etc..... the critical life-shaping events that occurred in each decade of your life. If you are not a Jesus follower, do the same thing to the best of your memory. Put a number on the space to mark your age when the event happened. Put it above the line if it was a positive event... put it below the line if it was a negative one. Your graph and notes might start to look like this...

		3	5 6				
0-10	1 2	11-20	4 21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70

Notes on the example lifeline:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. My dad abandoned our family | 1. Mary left me |
| 2. My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer | 2. I decided to explore what it means to trust and follow Jesus |
| 3. I met Mary, my future wife | 3. I was baptized |

Now take a few minutes and complete your "highs" and "lows" on your lifeline with a brief note on what happened to make it a significant event. If you end up with more than 12-15 points, strike through any that do not seem as formative to your faith journey.

The God Part

Beside each of your notes, write down where God, as you understand him, was in each of these moments. Be completely honest. On the positive ones, did you see His hand at the time? When did you begin to see God as real or not? How was God guiding you, blessing you, and protecting you in these positive events? If you still have trouble seeing God in one or more of them, say so. On the negative ones, those below the line, what did God teach you? How did he redeem the situation for His glory? Or did the event weaken your faith in God? Here are some examples of how the notes might look from the examples above...

EVENT	GOD
1. My dad abandoned our family.	1. I didn't know God then. I felt alone and abandoned. Unloved.
1. My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer.	2. I thought, "if there is a God, how could he be good?" I turned away in anger and unbelief.
3. I met Mary, my future wife.	3. Mary was a Christian. I loved her instantly, so I "paused" my unbelief and started acting like I believed, especially around her.

4. Mary left me.	4. After 12 years of marriage, Mary had enough. She wanted the husband she thought she married in the beginning... the one who wasn't criticizing her all the time. I was shocked and devastated.
5. I surrendered my life to Jesus.	5. Mary's leaving forced me to look at myself in the mirror, and I didn't like what I saw. I know God had been working on me, but I was too stubborn and pigheaded to listen. I was humbled. I dropped to my knees and asked Him to forgive me. I asked Him to change me. I was baptized, and I started to worship and pray and study His Word. My thoughts became more like His.
6. I committed to the church.	6. As I've become more and more aware of His presence in my life, I wanted to go all-in with my faith. I attended the church's membership course and made a commitment to a local church. I asked God that day to warm Mary's heart toward me. We go back together and...

Do you get the picture?

You are telling your group where you were, the role God played (or didn't play) in your life, and what happened next. In other words, you are allowing them to see the journey you've been on and how you met God in the process.

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

The goal of telling our stories is to share our thoughts and let people get to know us. Where possible, we also want to bring God the glory, discerning his hand and thanking Him for the "above the line" moments. But maybe even more importantly, we want to tell how God showed up in the bad and worked it for good, how he redeemed it.

Lastly, you end with a description of "here's where I am today." This happens once you've identified your positive and negative moments. After you've added the God part to them, you'll end with a statement of where you are right now. Again this requires you to tell the truth.

Examples

"I've gotten involved in this discipleship thing, and I'm scared to death. I don't feel worthy. I'm not sure what I have to give, but I'm in, and I want God to use me in the best way possible."

Or

"I've been a faithful student of the Bible for years. But telling my personal stuff to you guys feels very awkward and uncomfortable. I trust my leader and God that they're leading me right. I'll be praying a bunch as I step into this role of mentor. Please pray for me and let me know how I can be better at it."

Or

"I've grown in my faith but not as much as I wish I had. It's going to be a challenge to do this much reading, but I love Jesus, and I'm willing to be a faithful follower and give it my best shot."

The Bottom Line

It's about being authentic. Transparent and vulnerable. The least effective people in a disciple-making group try to keep up appearances, maintaining squeaky-clean "Sunday school" images at the expense of being real. In our best movements, we want people in our lives who will tell us the truth, and you set the tone and trajectory for others in your group by how transparently you tell your story and how much of your life you've surrendered to him.

Meeting after spiritual biographies have been shared

Purpose: Establish a climate of vulnerability and truth-telling.

- Now is the time to set a norm for vulnerability and trust together!
- After a brief time of check-in/catch-up, review the **commitments** above.
- Briefly touch base regarding the areas shared in the previous meeting (*excited, anxious, vulnerable, obedient*). *How did things turn out for you this week?*
- Next, each member takes 10-15 minutes each, uninterrupted, to share their answers to the following questions. As each group member shares, the other group members should listen carefully and note anything that they would like to follow up with a question or comment.
 - *How would you describe the state of your relationship with Christ in this season?*
 - *What 5 words describe the person you desire to be/become?*
 - *What are the top 2-3 challenges that you are currently facing that, if addressed, would make the greatest positive difference in your relationship with God or others in your life?*
 - *If the evil one sought your downfall and Christ's discredit through you, what area of your life would be the most strategic target right now? What would be the consequences if he were to be successful?*
 - *What is the greatest obedience challenge?*
- At the end of a member's sharing time, the other members should share 1-2 insights, observations, encouragements, or questions that emerge from what they have heard.
- Pray for one another, with specific attention to what has been shared.
- Review and agree on the three "movements" below (or develop your own) as a typical meeting structure.
- Confirm the date, time, and location of your next meeting.

Subsequent Meetings

Purpose: Nurture an environment of vulnerability, trust, support, and truth-telling.

- After a brief time of check-in/catch-up, review the **commitments** you have made to each other.
- Follow the recommended three-movement structure provided below, followed by a time of prayer for each other.
- Periodically allow time to evaluate your group's effectiveness together (suggestions below).
- Share your cell #s so you can text encouraging words or prayer requests with each other.

MOVEMENTS:

Once you have established your group, there are three recommended “movements” to a typical regular 60-90-minute D-group meeting.

First Movement: Meeting with Jesus (15-20 minutes)

“He took Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.”

Luke 9:28

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another.”

Colossians 3:16

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

John 10:27

Share how you have heard from God in the past week.

Bring your Bible and come prepared to share one of the ways that you have heard from God in your daily Bible reading, prayer, silence, and solitude in the past week, guided by the following questions.

1. How has God’s word to you fueled a greater *love for Christ*, assurance of your *identity in Christ*, *distaste for sin* and *desire for holiness*, and *love for others*?
2. How has God’s word to you provided *direction, perspective, or correction* for your present circumstances?
3. In the coming week, how should you *respond* to and *obey* what you have heard?

We encourage the group to adopt a common reading plan together.

For daily Bible reading, we suggest WC’s Life Journal. Information can be found here:

Life Journals are available at the WC resource center for \$5. If you have never used this approach, WC offers periodic Life Journaling workshops. Attend one together!

Second Movement: Walking with Jesus (20-30 minutes)

"He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled." Mark 14:33

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." James 5:16

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." 1 John 1:7

Spend time confessing sin and confessing the faith in Jesus.

Confessing Sin: Share the ways you have faced and or succumbed to the temptation to sin against God or others in the past week. The questions provided below are a helpful tool for examination of conscience together. In each case, be **specific**, help each other to not only address the **fruit/symptom(s)**, but also the **false beliefs** (*Who am I? What has God done? Who is God?*) that drive that behavior.

Since we have last met, in your life...(leader choose a few questions to discuss)

1. What signs of growth in **knowing Jesus personally**, in your **delight in God**, **understanding of biblical truth**, and/or **in Christ-like character** (Gal. 5:23-24) do you observe?
2. How *effective* are your current **spiritual habits/rhythms** for helping you to grow in your love for God and others? Does anything need to change? Are your spiritual habits increasing your humility? (Luke 4:42, 6:13)
3. What threatens the work of Christ in and through you? How have you dealt with your **"shadow side"** (character defects,² escapes/drugs of choice,³ fears and anxieties, and/or impure/idolatrous motives)? (Romans 7:14-24)
4. Has your **behavior toward others** reflected the **sacrificial love** and **reconciling forgiveness** of God toward you? Is there any relationship that needs attention (**forgiveness** or **making amends**)? (Matthew 5:23-24)
5. How have you addressed any **battles with sexual temptation**? What might help in the coming week? (1 Corinthians 6:18)
6. How are you generously, honestly, and contentedly **stewarding the time, talent, and treasure** that God has given you? Are you growing in your generosity and obedience to Christ's teaching? (Romans 12:3-8)
7. Where are you most **vulnerable to discouragement, fatigue, despair, temptation, or spiritual attack** right now? What **self-care** is needed to restore physical, emotional, relational, and/or spiritual wholeness? (Luke 18:1; John 14:1; Gal 6:9; Ephesians 3:13)
8. Is there anything about which you have not been completely **honest** that you're hoping we won't ask about, or that you're afraid to share with the group? (James 5:16)
9. Considering what you have brought into the light today, what step(s) do you need to take in the coming week to bring your heart and life into **alignment** with God's best for you?
10. Is there a step of **obedience** the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take this week? Where is the Lord asking you to be **courageous** in applying your faith? Are you following Christ with **expectancy** in his presence and leading?

Confessing the Faith: After sin has been confessed, spend time speaking out loud to one another the **good news of Jesus Christ and his work for us**, with specific attention to **replacing the identified false beliefs with corresponding truth** (*Who am I? What has God done? Who is God?*). Hearing the truth of the gospel spoken out loud enables us to believe that the gospel is good news for us today!

² Defects of character are prevailing attitudes, inclinations, vulnerabilities, areas of brokenness that are the "root" cause of destructive and consequential sinful behaviors, e.g. blaming, judgmental, sarcasm. ([Freedom Session](#))

³ Drugs of Choice are "things or behaviors we run to when life gets hard, e.g. food, affirmation, alcohol, sex, work, TV, etc." ([Freedom Session](#))

Third Movement: Leading others to Jesus (15-20 minutes)

"And when he came to the house [where the girl had died], he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James...." Luke 8:51

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." 1 Peter 3:15

"Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel." Ephesians 6:19

Share and pray for anticipated opportunities to help people follow Jesus.

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to invest in the lives of others to guide them to follow Jesus with great faith and obedience? Is there a specific person the Spirit is prompting you to connect with?

***Share and pray for anticipated opportunities
to connect people far from God
with the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.***

Talk about how your relationship and spiritual conversations have gone with those in your life who are far from God or who are struggling to trust the gospel for themselves.

Share how you hope to communicate the gospel with this person and/or invite them into Christian community.

ON OUR KNEES (10-15 minutes)

Using the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) as a guide and based on what has come to the surface in your sharing together, lift one another to God in prayer.

<u>WORSHIP</u> <i>Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.</i>	Express your thanks and praise to your heavenly Father for his work in your lives.
<u>PETITION</u> <i>Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.</i>	Invite God to be King in the various areas of your life, as well as for practical needs, people far from God, the church's mission and its leadership.
<u>CONFESSION</u> <i>And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.</i>	Repent of any sin, express forgiveness regarding any broken relationship, and ask for God's help in bringing reconciliation wherever it is needed.
<u>ENGAGEMENT</u> <i>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.</i>	Ask God to lead, protect and heal you wherever it is needed. Give time to listen and respond to the Spirit's voice.
<u>WORSHIP</u> <i>For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.</i>	Close by praising God for who he is, and for anticipated opportunities and answers to prayer.

RE-GROUPING: PERIODIC EVALUATION

Every 8-10 weeks improve the quality of your group's experience with a discussion about the following questions:

- *How has this D-Group been helpful for your apprenticeship to Jesus? What would have been helpful?*
- *Each member asks: How could I improve my side of this relationship? Is there anything I am doing (or not doing) that is standing in the way of this group's impact in my life?*
- *What could we do in subsequent meetings to take our relationship and discipleship to the next level?*
- *What is something we've learned together that could be transferable to others, and how can we share it?*
- *When do we anticipate multiplying, and what is our plan to facilitate this?*

Identify 1-2 takeaways that you can begin to implement at your next meeting.

CELEBRATION, TRANSITION & MULTIPLICATION

- Every 4-6 months go out for a great meal and spend time celebrating what God has done in your lives in the past season.
- Every 12 months discuss together the future of your group. Give each person an opportunity to determine whether they will remain with the group in the next season, “multiply” by starting a new group, or some other path. Based on your decision together, pray for one another and/or renew your commitment for another season.

When might it be time to ***multiply***?

- When group membership is changing naturally, e.g. someone is moving or can no longer attend. The inevitable change in dynamics will be similar to beginning a new group anyway.
- When members’ participation in the group has established a degree of spiritual and emotional health and stability (i.e. less vulnerable to immediate failure).
- When one or more members of the group become aware of others who would benefit from participating in a discipleship group.
- When the Holy Spirit makes it clear!

It is my prayer that your [plural – all of you] love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:9-11

WC D-Group

Commitments

Purpose (Discipleship) – Availability Confidentiality – Vulnerability/Truthfulness Loving Accountability, Spirit-led Obedience

Movements

1. **Meeting with Jesus** (Col 3:16, Jn 10:27) – *Share how you have heard from God in the past week.*
2. **Following Jesus** (Ja 5:16, 1 Jn 1:7) – *Confess Sin & Confess the Faith* (see below)
3. **Leading others to Jesus** (1 Pt 3:15, Eph 6:19) – *Pray about opportunities to share the gospel with people far from God.*

Questions for the Walk

In the past week...

1. What signs of growth in **knowing Jesus personally**, in your **delight in God**, **understanding of biblical truth**, and/or in **Christ-like character** (Gal. 5:23-24) do you observe?
2. How **effective** are your current **spiritual habits/rhythms** for helping you to grow in your love for God and others? Are your spiritual habits increasing your humility? (Lk 4:42, 6:13)
3. What threatens the work of Christ in and through you? How have you dealt with your “**shadow side**” (character defects, escapes/drugs of choice, fears and anxieties, and/or impure/idolatrous motives)? (Rm 7:14-24)
4. Has your **behavior toward others** reflected the **sacrificial love** and **reconciling forgiveness** of God toward you? Is there any relationship that needs attention? (Mt 5:23-24)
5. How have you addressed **battles with sexual temptation**? What might help in the coming week? (1 Cor 6:18)
6. How are you generously, honestly, and contentedly **stewarding the time, talent, and treasure** that God has given you? Are you growing in your generosity and obedience to Christ’s teaching? (Rm 12:3-8)
7. Where are you most **vulnerable to discouragement, fatigue, despair, temptation, or spiritual attack** right now? What **self-care** is needed to restore physical, emotional, relational, and/or spiritual wholeness? (Lk 18:1; Jn 14:1; Gal 6:9; Eph 3:13)
8. Is there anything about which you have not been completely **honest**, that you’re hoping we won’t ask about, or that you’re afraid to share? (Jms 5:16)
9. Considering what you have brought into the light today, what step(s) do you need to take in the coming week to bring your heart and life into **alignment** with God’s best for you?
10. Is there a step of **obedience** the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take this week?
11. How is the Lord leading you to **pass on to** others what you are learning? How are you going to help others grow in their disciple-making? (Mt 28:16-20)

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