

ABC Guide for Groupings



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Follow Me
and I will make you fishers of men.
Matthew 4:19

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Foundations and Fundamentals

Definition: Relational Discipleship Network (RDN) draws their definition of a disciple from Matt. 4:19: *Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.* For them, a disciple of Jesus is a person who follows Jesus, is transformed by Jesus, and joins with Jesus on his mission. Putman, *Discipleshift*, p.54

RDN's Disciple-Making Process: Along with that definition, RDN identifies three necessary components to the disciple-making process: The Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God. Together they bring about spiritual maturity in people's lives. Putman, *Discipleshift* p.137

Hope's Disciple-Making Process: As we settle on our definition of a disciple at Hope, it would seem imperative that *we agree* to emphasize these three components in our disciple-making process as well. So, let's begin there: As a member (or disciple of Jesus) at Hope, I agree to follow the Lord by:

- Being immersed in the Word of God
- Being yielded to the Holy Spirit
- Being in relationship with others



Discipleship Covenant: This material is covered more broadly in Hope's *Discipleship Covenant* that is included as a pamphlet for your perusal. In the end, please understand that we are highlighting an invitation to you from Jesus himself rather than from us. Our invitation toward you to connect with us as we join Jesus on his mission.

Outward Expressions of our Commitment to Jesus: In light of Jesus' call to follow Him, we recognize that carrying out this discipleship process includes:

A. Regular time with God in His Word, letting the Spirit disciple (teach) us directly. This includes time alone for prayer and reflection to hear from and yield to the Holy Spirit. (SCOPE²). It also involves time with God and others in His Word like in worship and small group, other great ways to be disciplined both directly and indirectly by the Holy Spirit.

S Standing
C Commitment
O Offered to the
P Potter (God)
E Every day (Early)



B. Disciple-ee: Regular God-time with other Christians through which I am disciplined (by Holy Spirit – indirectly). This could be 2-3, 4-15, or more people. These become times to discuss and potentially pray about the impact of God (and His Word) on various areas of our lives including relationships at home, church, work, and community as well as with God directly. Prime areas for this occur in small groups of 4-15 and cultivating groups of 2-3. Church is a great place to draw from for such relationships, but Christians from other churches are also a great source of discipling relationships.

C. Disciple-ee: Irregular times that arise with teachable moments, living out Deuteronomy. 6:6-7:

These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk about them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

God uses many things to get our attention and teach us. Much of discipling takes place along the way, “life-on-life” as some say. You don’t need to “go” somewhere to make disciples; you can make disciples while you’re “going”.

D. Disciple-er: Regular God-time with others (Christians and non-Christians) through which I am discipling others. This views parts B, C through the eyes of discipling rather than being disciplined. We want both. It is as I yield to the Holy Spirit directly (one-on-one with God’s Word, prayer, reflection, etc.) and indirectly (small group, cultivating, worship), that I transform, becoming more like Jesus as I grow spiritually.

Disciple-Making Process

In seeking to grow as disciples of Jesus, this time in His Word includes three components we consider necessary for spiritual growth: God's Word, His Spirit, & His people.

1 IMMERSING IN GOD'S WORD The Immersion plan puts you in God's Word daily, encouraging you not only to read the Word, but meditate on it, responding in your spirit, thoughts and emotions. Highlight words and phrases that catch your attention and ask God about them, knowing that He desires to shape and mold you as His disciple. Consider journaling, even if only a line or two. Feel free read the context (verses before and after) to scripture passages.

2 YIELDING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would remind His disciples of what He taught; That Spirit helps us too. The opening and closing prayers here remind you to yield to the Spirit in both these devotions and in life itself.

OPENING PRAYER: Spirit of God, You are my primary teacher of God's Word; I yield my heart and mind, my soul and spirit, my will and imagination to You as I immerse myself in the Word during these dedicated moments. Teach me in Jesus' name, Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spirit of God, I pray that You use this time of devotion today to shape and influence my thoughts and emotions, actions and attitudes throughout the day. May all who encounter me also encounter You in me. Again, I yield my heart and mind, my soul and spirit, my will and imagination to You as I immerse myself in the rest of my day to God's Glory; in Jesus' name, Amen.

3 RELATING WITH OTHERS At least once a week, connect with a small group of people (2-12) also walking with the Lord. You can even talk through this material, sharing what you are learning or wrestling with while in God's Word (9:30am at Hope is an option). Encourage, admonish, strengthen, and love each other in these get-togethers. This is the third way God matures people. So whenever you can make it happen, do so; don't ignore it.

Micro-Groupings

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

Jim Rohn, motivational speaker, is known for the phrase “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with”. It’s an interesting thought to consider. Who you hang out with definitely impacts who you end up becoming. Another motivational speaker known as Solomon the Wise, said “*walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm*”. (Proverbs 13:20)

Why Micro-Groups?

Micro-groups in the church environment is a catch-all phrase to capture the variety of deeper spiritual relationships between a handful of individuals. This can include prayer partners and cultivating groups, accountability partners and triads, maybe even a personal board of directors. In many cases, a person will have more than one micro-group. He may have an accountability partner with one person and a prayer group of three as well. One relationship may be primarily discipling a newer or younger Christian, another may be a peer level relationship, say two fathers talking about Godly parenting, and a third micro-group may be focused on someone mentoring you.

My time in ministry, particularly since focusing on discipleship, has led to this discipleship key: Those Christians making the greatest impact on others spiritually – fulfilling their God-given purposes, are personally in one or more healthy, active micro-groups. These micro-groups are more impactful than worship attendance (though they nearly always go), more impactful than small group participation (another very powerful tool of the Spirit), more impactful than personal bible study and spiritual commitment (as awesome as this discipline is!). These micro-groupers are being disciplined – **by the Holy Spirit** – in such groups (as well as by God directly in prayer, meditation, study, etc and through worship, small group, and personal study). This is a good time to point out that if God is

not in the top five of people you spend time with (YES – God is a person!), then don't expect to become more like Him. Of course, you need to ask yourself, "Is becoming like Jesus, becoming more God-like, high on my priorities?"

If you do an evaluation of the people you most hang around, what will you find about them? Are they seeking God? Clearly not everyone in our lives will be in this place, but you definitely want key friendships to be centered in the Lord. Merely wanting such friendships but not pursuing them carries little value. Action is of key importance to spiritual growth as a disciple.



So let's consider: We all have relationships at varying levels of acquaintance. Though many contacts in life tend to be casual and superficial, we need and benefit from deep interaction as well (see Eccl. 4:10-12; Col. 3:9-10; 1 Ptr 3:15). These deeper relationships of 2-3 people, *micro-groups* for our purposes, offer a place to open up and share beyond the small talk of sports, weather, fashion, or make-up. All small groups should generate deeper sharing at some level, but cultivating groups go deeper faster. They can become a great source of strength, support, and insight for our personal lives. Once a sense of trust is established and we feel free to share more private aspects of who we are (strengths and weaknesses, dreams and fears), lots of growth can result. To become intentional about such possibilities creates more opportunity for that personal growth – for all parties involved. The greatest of these relationships happens when each person serves as a catalyst for the other's growth, making the benefits mutual.

As you invest in a God-centered micro-group, you can expect to see your life, your attitude, and your behavior change for the better (Eccl. 4:8-12; Heb. 10:24; James 5:16). In a word, this is accountability, a mutual agreement to spur one another on toward greater and more godly lives. Knowing that trust takes awhile to build between people, our starter group booklet provides initial questions to facilitate a deepening rapport or connection early on. We hope that in God's timing, a relationship of accountability blossoms with mutual benefit. How does this happen?

These Bible issues seem essential:

- **ACTIVE LISTENING** *James 1:19 says, "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."*
- **NON-JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE** *We can be accepting of an individual regardless of the situation. Matthew 7:1-2 says, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*
- **CARE FOR EACH OTHER** *1 John 4:21 says, "And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."*

Of course one of the other keys we have learned regarding micro-groups is this: You can hide in a church; you can even hide in a small group; But you can't hide in a micro-group. You have to hide from a micro-group. Often when we are avoiding our fellow groupers, we are avoiding something in ourselves that we don't want to face, hence the hiding. (you can see more about this with the Small Group info)

Finally, cultivating groups are not merely a time to complain about how life has dumped on us or a place to put others down; rather, it is a system to help us become more Christ-like (Psalm 133:1). A healthy cultivating group will include time around Bible readings, personal sharing, active listening, intentional prayer, and mutual support.

Most of us want to become the best we can be, people of excellent character; and most of us realize that trusted friends and family are a great asset toward that end. Because they know us, they can help us better see our inner self, our desires, including how our life is lining up to what God desires. Those who know us well can give us different insights about issues, relationships, and challenges unfolding in our lives, and about how we are dealing with all of it! Cultivate

IntentionalLiving
... do more than just believe

In becoming a *Cultivator of Godly Relationships*, you become intentional about three things:

- Being connected to someone else you choose,
- Being in God’s Word regularly, and
- Being prayerful about others.

As you consider people to partner with, look for someone walking in the Spirit whom you trust to keep a confidence, who respects biblical principles and godly wisdom. Seek someone who has courage to confront you yet is sensitive to your feelings, someone who will encourage you even in failure, and who has your best interests at heart.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up
~ Eccl. 4:9-10

It would seem natural to look within your church and/or small group community to find such potential relationships. And that is a great place to look; then consider your other regular hangouts of work, neighborhood, hobby locales – and don’t forget family. These micro-groups can be done at a distance, but as you might imagine, it takes a different commitment.

A note about spiritual warfare:

Paul concludes Ephesians with a warning and encouragement. Making disciples is not something done in neutral, safe territory – it happens amid spiritual warfare. There is always a battle to fight. As we help others deal with their sin nature and besetting sin, the devil works against us and seek to frustrate the process and sideline people who are growing... but we do not fight unarmed or unprotected; hence the armor of God. In your own life, you too will struggle against the devil as you grow and change. This battle is ever-present, and the enemy will try to persuade you to justify your own sin... or he will shame you with it so you feel like giving up! To succeed, we must be ready. We need to have our armor on, prepare to stand our ground.

Putnam and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, p. 90,91

Why Immersed in the Word of God?

As we carry out this plan to immerse in God's Word regularly, we do so expecting to meet God through the experience. A person may read the bible with different intentions, among them:

- Intellectual (to learn about God and His ways)
- Emotional (for strength, comfort, support)
- For Guidance (seeking direction, advice)
- Experiential (to encounter God through His Word)

So what is our primary purpose in immersing in God's Word?



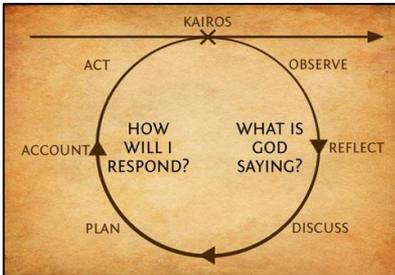
Our chief goal with God's Word is to bring about an encounter with the Living God, known as the Father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – our Father in Heaven – Abba. We know God uses such encounters to create, sustain, or grow faith in His people and complete work He aims it to do in and through us.

As you engage God's Word, remember that it is ***“living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”***. (Hebrews 4:12).

And please know that there will be times when God challenges you through His Word. Gladly embrace this truth, keeping in mind this other verse from Hebrews: ***No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it”***. (Hebrews 12:11)

Helps for your Personal Discipleship Time

One of our goals with discipleship through Hope is that each person (like you) defines her/himself as a disciple of Jesus, believing that the mandate of discipleship is coming directly from Jesus Himself. That means you are responding to His call on your life, following Him, letting Him change you, and working with Him in His mission to help make disciples of other people along the way.



God is always trying to speak to us, using moments in our lives to get our attention. Two basic questions we want to get familiar with asking daily relate to the learning circle:

- 1 What is God saying to me?**
- 2 What am I going to do about it?**

Mike Breen, Lifeshapes, 3DM Ministries

We don't expect everyone to be a mature disciple immediately, but we do expect everyone to be on the path to maturity. We are going to be learning how to listen for, hear, and respond to Jesus' voice. As one grows in this process, it is natural to have questions arise – write them down. Later that day or week, bring it up in your group or ask another disciple whom you trust to help direct you; do not simply make up your own answer.

In addition to the basic questions above, you may find others helpful as well throughout the week: What did you learn? Is this new or a reminder of past learning? What did you wrestle with this week because of God's Word? Is this new or has it persisted for awhile? Did God convict or comfort you in some way? How so? What emotions are you feeling? What questions do you have about the readings?

Helps for your Micro-Group Discipleship Time

- Share your highlighted words/phrases – and 'why' if you can.
- Share which verses made the biggest impact on you.
- Share themes/topics that stayed with you through the week.

Prayer Journaling

Basic Tools

Choose something that feels comfortable to write in. Experiment with side-bound and top-bound books, as well as lined and unlined paper. Some people do not feel comfortable writing on a thick pad of paper, so a slimmer notebook would be a better choice if this describes your preference. You can use anything from a spiral-bound notebook to a fancy logbook with a tooled-leather binding.

Choose writing implements that are comfortable to write with. Regardless of whether you prefer pencil or pen, blue, black, or colored ink, ballpoint or fountain pen, find something that is easy to hold and use.

Keep a Bible on hand, if you like, so that you can add verses to your entries. Also keep a separate notepad with which to write various thoughts or tasks or responsibilities that crop up with in your meditation time. This enables you to not lose the thought but remove it temporarily so as to not distract you at the current time.

How to talk to God through journaling:

1. Try to schedule time to pray and write in your journal. Many write in the early morning when it's quiet and the mind is clear. Whatever you choose, it is best if you're alone and it's quiet – and a comfortable spot to write.
2. Date your journal entries.
3. Read Scripture for Inspiration. Scripture that tells you who you are in Christ,
4. Write a key thought from your reading in your Journal.
5. Write down your reactions and concerns to God. (S.O.A.P.)
6. Write down the thoughts or describe the pictures you receive spontaneously.
7. Share what you're hearing with a trusted spiritual companion.

Check out what you hear from God. A good way to discern if we're hearing from God versus our own inner voice or those of others is to check out what we hear in the following ways:

- **Know your Bible; the Spirit does not contradict himself.** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. *2 Timothy 3:15-17*
- **Learn to connect with the Holy Spirit within you.** Spontaneity is the key; the idea is to learn to catch the flow of the Spirit within as you must catch the wind when sailing. Don't be afraid to follow that inkling (and even write for God) when that connection occurs. To protect from wrong voices, I was taught to re-read journal entries after three weeks and then separate Spirit Inspiration from other things to better discern the voice of God.
- **Check out what you see or hear with spiritually mature believers.** You need to trust their judgment and know that they too are seeking after God. *"Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said."* *1 Corinthians 14:29*
- **Be willing to accept the Spirit's communication at your heart level.** Not everything will make sense to your mind; *"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."* *Romans 10:10-11*
- **Obedience and application makes real what you believe.** Many Christians over the years have noted that often, when God seems to go silent, it may be because He has already given previous instructions that have not yet been obeyed or taken care of. *"Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?"* *MSG James 2:17*

Being in Relationship with Others

Jesus commanded us to do two things really well. He said, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the other commands and all the demands of the prophets are based on those two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)

God’s plan is to first radically change us personally through a deep, abiding, love relationship with Him. Then His plan is to use us; to live through us to draw others into the same kind of life-changing, life-giving, love-relationship with Him. His plan is to do that by our loving others as He loves us.

This was Jesus’ simple and yet very intentional model of discipleship. Through Christ’s model of loving God and loving others in intentional relationship, people came to know Him and the Father, their lives were radically changed by Him, people began to mature in their faith, and then started pouring their lives into the lives of others – disciples began making disciples, and the world was never the same again.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men” Matthew 4:19 (NIV). Jesus is asking us to follow Him – His ways and His example – and in doing so we will make disciples. *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 1John 3:18 (NIV)*



HELPFUL GROUND RULES FOR GROUPS Repeat bold parts of ground rules *weekly*, just not explanations that follow.

Confidentiality: What is shared in the group stays in the group. This is to be a safe environment where people can be real, open and honest with their struggles and their victories. We will hold things shared in the group confidential unless permission is granted to share these things with people outside the group.

Listen: Value one another during the discussion by really listening to what is being shared. Try not to get caught up in thinking about what you're going to say next or how you're going to respond – focus on listening. Be aware of how much you are talking; we want to give everyone a chance to share in the group. Along with listening comes this addendum:

Pause: After someone shares, pause to allow the group to feel the weight of what's shared and to fully consider it before the next person shares. This also provides the one sharing opportunity to continue with a thought without feeling rushed.

Don't Fix: Let's try to hear what people are sharing without trying to fix them. If they want your advice, let them ask for it.

Don't rescue: When one shares something deeply personal and/or painful, there is a tendency to step in (even interrupt) to "help" them feel better. This can cause them to discontinue the sharing and result in them not going as deeply as they might have gone otherwise. Resist the temptation to rescue.

No Cross-talk: Be considerate of others as they are sharing - don't be having side conversations.

Use "I" Statements: It's easy to talk about issues of others, but for our purposes, speak basically for yourself. Try to use "I" statements rather than "them", "the church", "us", "we", etc.

No Convincing: We will occasionally remind you of this, though not weekly. Share your opinions – a difference in opinion is welcome. However, please don't try to convince others to your way of thinking.

Transparency: While not a rule, this is a big part of beneficial and healthy time together: We encourage you to share from your heart, let down your walls so that others can really know you. This isn't just struggles and fears, but also the positives – dreams, hopes, answered prayers, etc. We understand that's easier for some and we'll respect your boundaries.

Listening in Group Life

- *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)*
- *...let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance - Proverbs 1:5 (NIV)*

Listening Exercise: Discuss the questions below. (Use a whiteboard if available.)

- What does it feel like to be listened to?
- What does it feel like to not be listened to?
- What are some reasons we don't listen well?
- What are some hindrances to listening?
- What does listening well look like?
- Why is it important for us to listen well in home groups?

Listening: Discuss the following tips; role play as needed.

- Genuinely care about the speaker.
- Have a heart of love and compassion for them.
- Think of them as being precious to God
– with “HANDLE WITH CARE” stamped on the forehead.
- Appreciate their willingness to share openly and honestly – regardless of what's being shared.
- If possible, create an environment conducive to sharing.
- Minimize distractions, noise, and interruptions. Relax and don't rush.
- Don't listen with an intent or attitude to fix the person.
- Listen to gain understanding and perspective.
- Pay attention to the speaker.
- Be alert, maintain eye contact, encourage continued conversation by saying, “yes”, “I see”, ah ha”.
- Be truly interested – there's a difference between looking interested and being interested – and people can tell.
- Don't interrupt the speaker. Pause after they've completed a thought to give them time to continue on or go deeper before you speak.
- Be comfortable with silence.
- You can't listen while talking. Listen more than you talk.

- Don't react too much to what's being shared or how it is being shared.
- Keep your emotions in check.
- Observe how things are said – the emotions and attitudes behind the words.
- Don't judge, make assumptions, or jump to conclusions.
- Check the filter you're listening through – your attitudes, beliefs, emotional associations, personal experiences, prejudices.

Try to listen below the surface, consider the speaker's perspective and circumstances. Listen to the person as well as the words they are speaking. Analyze what is being said and how it's being said. Separate the relevant from the irrelevant, consider implications.

Use active listening techniques:

- Clarify what they are saying
- Paraphrase, restate, or summarize what is being shared
- Seek understanding by using statements like, "What I hear you saying is..."

Consider your non-verbal communication:

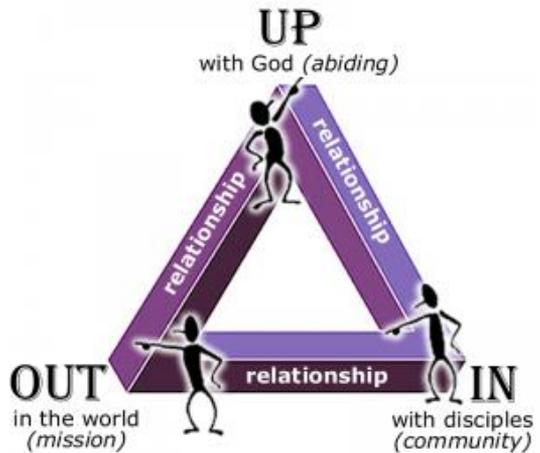
- Watch your facial expressions, lean slightly forward, keep an open, relaxed posture, don't fidget, don't look at your watch, nod your head while they're speaking to show you're listening and interested.

Draw the speaker out by using phrases like, "That's interesting. Tell me more about that." "I'm not sure I fully understand you. Can you elaborate?" "That must have been difficult. How did that make you feel?" Develop your skills by watching others, practicing, and asking for feedback.

Discipleship-Oriented Groups

In reading through the Gospels, one can see that Jesus has three great loves covering three distinct aspects of his life evident in his life of ministry:

- **UP:** A deep, abiding relationship to his Father and an attentiveness to the leading of the Holy Spirit
- **IN:** A constant investment into close relationships with a small group of disciples
- **OUT:** Entering into the brokenness of the world, looking to transform people individually (coming into relationship with him) and systemically (bring hope to the disenfranchised)



List of questions to address in each meeting for discipling

- How is your heart? How are you emotionally?
- How is your walk with God?
- Who are you investing in, to feed them spiritually?
- What are you reading, listening to, doing, to feed spiritually?
- Describe for me your prayer life; what is going well?
- How do you wish your prayer life were different?
- How are you physically? How do you feel physically?
- How are your relationships with your family?
- How are your relationships with your friends?
- Recent successes? Recent struggles?

Option A: Immersion-centered SG/MG

In this plan, your group shares comments, questions, and insights from your individual time in the weekly *Immersion* devotions. You are encouraged to take notes during your daily immersion time in order to look back on the notes for sharing during this part of your time together. You will be surprised how much the choice to take notes in the moment stirs significant conversation in the group setting. Each member of the group is expected to prepare ahead of time by participating in the daily devotions from Hope's Immersion material.

PART ONE: CATCHING UP WITH "ONE ANOTHER"

God calls us to love one another. This is a time when we practice this intentionally. Spend 20-30 minutes catching up with one another. This can range from very formal (using the selected *one another* command from *IMMersion* that week) to quite informal (discuss what is on your minds). Here are some sample questions from using the "Be compassionate to One Another" command:

1. Who was compassionate to me this past week? Thank God.
2. Who lacked compassion toward me? Forgive and pray for them.
3. To whom did I fail to show compassion? Seek forgiveness.
4. To whom did I show compassion? Praise God for faithfulness

You can also answer Hope's two basic measures

- How is God growing me at this time?
- How is God using me to help others grow at this time?

OPENING PRAYER This is a good time for you as a leader to practice leading others in prayer and teach others.

PART TWO: SPENDING TIME IN GOD'S WORD TOGETHER

The Initiating questions listed below are for getting started, but once you have the hang of it, formal questions will rarely be necessary within your group. As you look back on the last week or so of devotions, answer:

- ❖ Which devotion did you enjoy the most?
- ❖ Which devotion challenged you?
- ❖ Which devotion didn't make sense?
- ❖ Which devotion led to good prayer time with God?
- ❖ How did your behavior get affected by the devotions this week?

This last question will always lead you into the last area

- ❖ How is God working on you this week (past and future)?

PART THREE: FOLLOWING UP WITH ONE ANOTHER

This is about how the devotions of the past weeks and the group time you are concluding will impact your daily life. This could relate to repentance based on time in God's word that day, on relationship building or restoration, healing, training, self-discipline, witnessing, spiritual fruit-bearing, participation, studying, prayer, etc. Once you have trust established in your group, let them hold you accountable to life changes that you want to see occur.

In light of this, let your fellow groupers know what to:

- ❖ Pray about over the next week for you?
- ❖ Ask you about the next time you gather?
- ❖ Plan on time and date-wise for the next two meeting times?

CLOSING PRAYER Have someone or multiple people pray for the group and other concerns

Option B: Bible Storying-centered SG/MG

In this option, the default story for the MG/SG is Saturday's Story for the Week from the *Immersion* Devotions. You are always welcome to use a story of your choosing as well. This format is a great for filler weeks between series or when parts of the SG will be absent and the group still wants to meet. One person is required to prepare ahead of time in this format (the story-teller.)

PART ONE: CATCHING UP WITH "ONE ANOTHER"



LAST WEEK'S STORY This icon is a reminder to consider asking: Did anyone re-tell the week's story? Would anyone be willing to share what happened or how it went?

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PART TWO: SPENDING TIME IN GOD'S WORD TOGETHER



HOOK QUESTION: You are free to use the one listed with this icon or make one up. If you are new or restarting and the make-up of the group is different, share

- Your name
- Number of brothers and sisters growing up
- One fond memory with one or more of the siblings

STORY TIME After everyone has answered the Hook Question, it's time for a story; Use the Facilitator's Transition: "Alright, thanks for sharing; Time for our story: The setting is... give the background listed and introduce the storyteller:

Storyteller: This is a default plan for telling God's story in the group environment. You and the group and welcome to alter the plan, but please do so only after you have used the default setting a few times. There is learned wisdom in its set-up.

- Tell the story, starting with "This is a story from God's Word" and ending with "this is God's story from His Word"*
- Retell the story a second time; do NOT skip this – it is VERY helpful, both for storyteller and listeners; don't try to be exactly the same, even the order can change – just cover the material a second time.*
- Have facilitator lead a rebuilding of the story by asking questions of the group from a chronological standpoint. Avoid too much commentary about the story as of yet, reminding the group that you will handle all of that through questions in a few moments – but don't be rigid about it. Note: By going in a circle rather than jumping around, all people end up participating, but let people help one another remember the order and details of the story.*
- If desired, this is a good point to review the story in your bible to assess the accuracy of the overall storytelling. It adds time, but some really enjoy this part. Then Ask the following questions*
 - What did you like – or learn new – about the story?
 - What did you not like – or not understand about the story?
 - What are the people doing in the story?
 - Who do you identify with?
 - What is God doing in the story?
 - What might God be asking of you triggered by this story? How is he challenging you?

OTHER POSSIBLE QUESTIONS: Another sets of questions that you may use – and remember – keep it simple for others to replicate:

- What do we learn about God in this story?
- What do we learn about mankind or ourselves in this story?
- What did you learn new in this story?
- What should you do differently because of this story?

CLOSING and CLOSING PRAYER

PART THREE: FOLLOWING UP WITH ONE ANOTHER

Start with administrative details. What is happening next week? Fellowship time?¹ Service opportunity?² Who is being invited?³ Is there a story?⁴ Who is telling it – you or someone else? What is the story? Where are we gathering? Remind everyone of time and place, and the ability to invite others. Be strategic and intentional. Encourage them to retell the story to someone else during the week. Then close with prayer.

Regarding the story or from your devotions of the past weeks, share how you hope to see God impact your daily life. This could relate to repentance based on time in God’s word that day, on relationship building or restoration, healing, training, self-discipline, witnessing, spiritual fruit-bearing, participation, studying, prayer, etc. Once you have trust established in your group, let them hold you accountable to life changes that you want to see occur.

In light of this, let your fellow groupers know what to:

- Pray about over the next week for you?
- Ask you about the next time you gather?
- Plan on time and date-wise for the next two meeting times?

CLOSING PRAYER Have someone or multiple people pray for the group and other concerns

¹ Why Fellowship as a separate event in Group life? We hope fellowship occurs every time a group gets together in part or in whole. But fellowship as a stand-alone event is intended as a low-key entry point for friends from outside the group to meet your group (hopefully also your friends 😊). These friends can be church or not, Christian or not, members of church or not. This is a major pathway for determining potential discipling relationships.

² Why Service Event Opportunities in Group life? Like fellowship, service opportunities are an inroad to meaningful relationships that can develop into discipleship opportunities. This can be both for those you are serving and for those you might ask to serve alongside you in an activity.

³ What about Invitations? Our Paths of Discipleship. This tends to be the most difficult area for groups to excel in. We get comfortable with those currently in the group rather than continue to seek out others to share the great experience for the sake of God's Kingdom. Invitations are intended to go out to other church members, other Christians, and of course those who do not yet call Jesus their Lord.

⁴ Why "Storying" in a Small or Micro-Group setting? Telling Bible stories (storying) is one of the simplest ways to share God's Word -- and we can all tell stories. Most people remember stories better than mere details -- both telling and listening. AND storying does not require one to remember every detail to be effective. The Holy Spirit is quite capable of using us and his Word without direct quotes.

Option C: Bible Book, Topic-Driven Material

In this plan, the group works through a pre-determined set of materials such as a book of the Bible or scriptural topic. You might use Portals of Prayer in this slot or a Bible App material. Usually the materials drive this section of the gathering time but questions have been collected to assist if a group is working directly through a section of the Bible. Below is a Spiritual Check-up system created for men wanting some accountability for godly lifestyles.

PART ONE: CATCHING UP WITH “ONE ANOTHER”

God calls us to love one another. This is a time when we practice this intentionally. Spend 20-30 minutes catching up with one another. This can range from very formal (using the selected *one another* command from *IMMersion* that week) to quite informal (discuss what is on your minds). Here are some sample questions from using the “Be compassionate to One Another” command:

5. Who was compassionate to me this past week? Thank God.
6. Who lacked compassion toward me? Forgive and pray for them.
7. To whom did I fail to show compassion? Seek forgiveness.
8. To whom did I show compassion? Praise God for faithfulness

You can also answer Hope’s two basic measures

- How is God growing me at this time?
- How is God using me to help others grow at this time?

PART TWO: SPENDING TIME IN GOD’S WORD TOGETHER

Below is a Spiritual Check-up system created for men wanting to receive some accountability for living out godly lifestyles. It is simply an example. Any curriculum could be inserted here in section two.

A Weekly One-Hour Accountability Spiritual Check-up

Use these questions as a guide for your session. It is not necessary to ask every question, but be sure that you cover each area every week.

QUESTIONS TO START

How has God blessed you this week? What went right?

What problems consumed your thoughts this week? What went wrong?

SPIRITUAL LIFE

- ❖ God's Word: Have you read it consistently? (How many days? How long? Why not? Will you next week?) What has God been teaching you?
- ❖ Prayer: Describe your prayers – for yourself, others, praise, worship, confessions, gratitude. How is your relationship with Christ evolving?
- ❖ Temptation: How were you tempted this week? How did you respond?
- ❖ Confession: Do you have any unconfessed sin in your life?
- ❖ Church: Did you worship in church this week? Was your faith in Jesus strengthened? Was He honored?
- ❖ Witness: Have you shared your faith? In what ways? How can you improve?

HOME LIFE

- ❖ Spouse: How is it going with your spouse? (time, meaningful conversation, attitudes, intimacy, disappointments, irritations, his/her relationship with Christ)
- ❖ Children: How are your children? (giving encouragement, quantity and quality time, values, education, spiritual welfare)
- ❖ Finances: How are your finances doing? (debt, sharing, saving, spending, stewardship)
- ❖ Time: How have you invested your time around the house?

WORK LIFE

- ❖ Job: How are things going? (career progress, relationships, temptations, stress, problems, working too much?)

CRITICAL CONCERNS

- ❖ God's Will: Do you feel you are in the center of God's will and sense His peace?
- ❖ Thought Life: What are you wrestling with in secret?

- ❖ Service: What have you done for someone else this week which can't be repaid? (the poor, encouragement, mercy, service to others)
- ❖ Priorities: Are your priorities in the right order?
- ❖ Integrity: Is your moral and ethical behavior as it should be?
- ❖ High Risk: How are you doing in your personal high-risk area?
- ❖ Transparency: Is the "visible" you and the "real" you consistent in our relationship? (if not, in what ways).

PART THREE: FOLLOWING UP WITH ONE ANOTHER

This is about how the devotions of the past weeks and the group time you are concluding will impact your daily life. This could relate to repentance based on time in God's word that day, on relationship building or restoration, healing, training, self-discipline, witnessing, spiritual fruit-bearing, participation, studying, prayer, etc. Once you have trust established in your group, let them hold you accountable to life changes that you want to see occur.

In light of this, let your fellow groupers know what to:

- ❖ Pray about over the next week for you?
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- ❖ Plan on time and date-wise for the next two meeting times?

CLOSING PRAYER Have someone or multiple people pray for the group and other concerns

1. **Seeking (seeing) the kingdom. Where did you see God present and active -- working? How were you part of it?**
2. **Hearing from Jesus; spend time in His Word.** This is getting in position so that we can see what Jesus is up to around us? How is He inviting us to join Him? If we want to recognize what Jesus is up to, we need to be immersed in His word – and doing what He says. **What has he been teaching you lately?**
3. Talking with people. Start noticing people that God has regularly placed in your world. **How did you enjoy people? Who did you talk with? Who did you listen to?**
4. **Doing good. Even “small” acts of kindness** may end up being quite significant in the eyes of God – and the person we help. God prepared you to do good works, so ask: **What good can I do here?**
5. **Praying with people.** Ministering through prayer. Praying to the King on behalf someone present helps them experience a little bit of God’s kingdom. When you do it, keep it simple: Short and sweet. **AND pray for people that God puts on your heart.**