

# DISCIPLESHIP GROUP

## LEADER'S GUIDE

2ND EDITION



NORTH SHORE

COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE VISION

## **The Vision:**

### Why Intentional Discipleship?



## **KEY IDEA:**

“This is what we’re made to do.”

*“If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples...effective discipleship builds the church, not the other way around. We need to understand the church as the effect of discipleship, and not the cause.”*

**Mike Breen**

*“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.”*

**2 Timothy 2:1-2**

As D-Group leaders, we’re as diverse as the personality types, giftings, and backgrounds God has given us, and yet in order to see a dynamic, multiplying movement of discipleship in our churches, it’s essential that we share some key convictions in our “DNA.” The most important conviction all D-Group leaders need to share is that the command to intentionally make disciples is the central calling of our lives.

**Intentional Discipleship ≠ Another Program**  
**Intentional Discipleship = Our Central Calling**

“Intentional discipleship,” and the attempt to practice

this in D-Groups, goes wrong when we start to view it as just another model to experiment with, or church program to dabble in, as opposed to a fundamental recommitment to the central calling for which we're made. Sounds, grandiose, I know, but it really is that central. When you read through the New Testament, it becomes abundantly clear that the Bible assumes every Christian, regardless of their age, gender, background, or spiritual maturity, will engage in intentionally imparting their faith into other people. Jesus did it. The Apostles did it. Now we're commanded to do it.

## Jesus' Example & Command

You can tell what a teacher cares about by observing the first thing and the last thing they say to their followers. When Jesus called his first disciples in the Gospel of Matthew, the first thing he said to them was, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). In this single verse, Jesus calls Peter and Andrew to become his disciples ("Follow me"), promises transformation ("I will make you into"), and hints at what the great aim of their life will be (becoming "fishers of men"). At the end of Matthew, Jesus clarifies this aim. Jesus' final command to his disciples, often called the "Great Commission," is both simple and comprehensive at the same time. In **Matthew 28:18-20**, these were Jesus' final words:

*"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 the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Jesus' final command was simple: **make disciples**.

At NSCBC, we say that a disciple is someone who is “created by the gospel to learn Christ, and lead others to do the same, by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Fundamentally, then, a disciple is a “learner,” and disciples of Jesus are people who are **learning him**—people who are learning to live with all of who they are (their intellect, their emotions, their actions) in vital relationship with all of who Jesus is. This includes learning how to rest in his finished work as their Savior, live in his kingdom as their King, share his heart as their friend, and obey his commands as their Lord.

Jesus himself had just spent three years intentionally forming these kinds of disciples, before dying and rising again to demonstrate his identity as the Savior and Lord he’d been progressively revealing himself to be all along. Now, in Matthew 28:18-20, his command to us is to continue that same work of forming disciples who “learn him.”

On the one hand, notice how simple this command is: We are to make disciples by 1) “baptizing them” (leading people into a vital relationship with Jesus as Savior & Lord, where they previously didn’t have one), and then 2) “teaching them to obey all that he has commanded us” (teaching people to live out the implications of that relationship in all of life).

But notice how comprehensive this command is, as well! Who are we to make disciples of? Every nation! What are we supposed to teach them? Every single thing Jesus commanded us!

## **The Apostles Keep it Going**

The Apostles and the early Christian community took up Jesus’ commission with gusto, and invested in others, who in turn invested in others. Even as the early

church grew and took on increased structure, the intentional making of disciples remained its lifeblood. It was constantly on the “front-burner.”

The Apostle Paul, for example, reminded his disciple Timothy that “what he heard from him in the presence of many witnesses” he was to “entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2), and at the end of his life Paul had successfully passed on his faith. Timothy, he said, had followed his “teaching,” his “conduct,” and his “aim in life” (3:10), and had already been sent to other Christians to pass it on (1 Cor. 4:16-17). If the Apostles, and their disciples hadn’t engaged heartily in the Great Commission, none of us would be Christians today!

## **It Only Makes Sense**

But we can also work backwards, starting “with the end in mind.” When you understand the storyline of Scripture, and God’s great goal for the world, the Great Commission makes good, logical sense. In fact, you can almost intuit it, even if Jesus had never spelled it out verbatim.

God’s great goal for the world is that it would one day “be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). Revelation points beautifully towards what this will look like: a kingdom made up of an uncountable multitude of disciples, drawn from every nation, overwhelmed with the knowledge of God’s glory and presence, and flourishing as they worship Jesus in joyful obedience in a renewed heavens and earth. If that doesn’t capture your imagination, I don’t know what will!

How then, does Jesus get from nobody, anywhere, obeying anything he commands to a multitude,



from everywhere, obeying everything he commands? How does he go about populating (“peopling”) the new heavens and the new earth? He does it through his Holy Spirit empowering disciples to make disciples. Viewed in this light, intentional, multiplying discipleship becomes a matter of simple necessity. Without multiplication, the earth will not be filled with the knowledge of God’s glory.

## **Intentional Discipleship = How God Populates the New Heavens & Earth**

It can be easy to take our eye off the ball. Because we’re often preoccupied with the church as an institution—its buildings, pastors, sermons, and programming—it’s easy to forget that all of these elements only exist as “trellises” to undergird and stimulate the work of growing disciples. Church buildings exist to house this process, pastors to equip for it, sermons to exhort and illuminate it, and programming to structure it. But if somehow the goal of “peopling” (making disciples who make disciples) gets lost in the process of “doing church,” none of it matters. C.S. Lewis puts it bluntly:

*“The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose”*

### **Where Do D-Groups Fit?**

D-Groups, then, are not simply another program or method in a smorgasbord of church programming options to choose from. Rather, they are an attempt to engage more directly with our central calling to make disciples by giving us a simple tool for intentionally

discipling people who multiply and disciple others. Like all tools, it's not "one size fits all," and will need to be adjusted slightly for use with different people and contexts, and yet the core DNA/values of a D-Group are essential, and thus remain the same across groups.

## **D-Groups = A tool to help us engage more directly with our central calling**

There may be seasons in a person's life and spiritual journey when a D-Group is not the best fit for them. It is, however, one of the most effective tools we have right now for catalyzing intentional, multiplying discipleship, and it can be used by a wide range of people. Likewise, because intentional, multiplying discipleship is central to our calling as Christians, the onus is on every individual Christian to ask, regardless of the tool they use, "Am I discipling others with the aim to their multiplication in a similarly intentional and committed way?" We will not see **a gospel movement on the North Shore** without multiplying discipleship.

## **His Supernatural Backing**

We can be encouraged because Jesus promises to provide his supernatural power and presence to us the more closely we engage with the mission we've been given. When Jesus ends his Great Commission with the promise, "and behold I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20), he's not making a general theological statement about God's omnipresence ("I am with you always"), but giving a promise of his personal empowerment: "Behold...as you go, and be about what I'm about...I will be with you in that endeavor, in enabling power."

Therefore, the more we focus our passions and efforts on making disciples who make disciples, the more

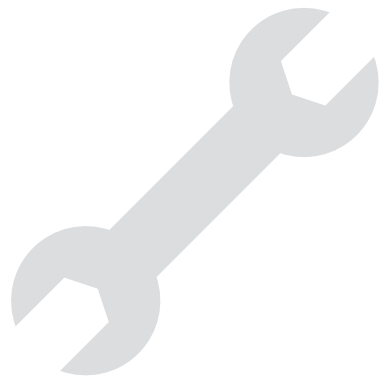
we can expect Jesus to lavishly pour out his Spirit in enabling power, working wonders in our midst—creating hunger, bringing deep transformation, raising up new believers. I've seen him do it again and again! This only makes sense as well. To use an admittedly odd analogy, it's like a parent who promises to provide gas money to their teenage driver, so long as they go on the errand for which they were sent. Go on the assigned mission, use the resources of the parent. Don't go on the mission, don't use the resources of the parent. His power accompanies his mission.

We have a clear mission, and a powerful Christ who stands behind it. Will we commit ourselves to the central task for which we're made? If we do, we will experience the thrill of his nearness and power like we've never imagined.

THE TOOL

## **THE TOOL:**

What Is A D-Group?



## **KEY IDEA:**

“A D-Group is a tool to help us engage with our central calling.”

*“It is not the methodology that transforms lives. It is only the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ applied to a needy soul by the power of the Holy Spirit. The methodology is only helpful in that it brings the desperate sinner into prolonged contact with God and his word in the context of community with others who are also pursuing the Lord.”*

**Neil Cole**

*“When we bring together transparent relationships and the truth of God’s word in the context of covenantal accountability for life change around a missional focus, we have stepped into the Holy Spirit’s hot house that makes life change possible.”*

**Greg Ogden**

What is a discipleship group (“D-Group”)? A D-Group is simply a tool that aims to help us engage more faithfully with our central calling to make disciples who make disciples. It’s a way of giving structure and direction, so that intentional, multiplying discipleship goes from “good idea” to “actual reality.”

What makes up a D-Group, then? Put simply:

**D-Groups =  
intentional → discipleship → that multiplies**

To add just a little more “meat on the bones” to this definition:

**D-Groups =  
intentional → discipleship → that multiplies**

Leader-initiated,  
covenanted  
relationship

In a highly relational  
context, with 4  
key elements  
conducive to deep  
transformation  
(Bible, Openness,  
Obedience, Mission)

Having the  
explicit aim to  
multiply, from the  
outset

## **Intentional**

D-Groups are intentional, first in that they are **leader-initiated**. Jesus prayerfully sought his Father’s wisdom for who he should disciple (Luke 9:12-16), and then he intentionally invited his disciples to follow him. In D-Groups, unlike other groups in the church, participants are prayerfully and intentionally invited by the leader to join their group for the next year.

Though a personal invitation might feel overly “exclusive,” the invitation is a crucial component of D-Groups. This is so, because a direct, personal invitation, when prayerfully and thoughtfully extended, provides a dynamic of healthy empowerment to the entire year. Thus, the “call” itself is a means of grace. The invitation says, “I’ve sincerely prayed about this, and I sense the Lord is leading me to you. Here’s the

potential I see in you.” In my experience with D-Groups so far, this dynamic of empowerment, which the invitation helps to create, has lasted the entire year.

D-Groups are also intentional in that they involve signing a **covenant**. Early in the year, the members of the group are encouraged to sign a physical covenant, or agreement to each other, committing to be faithful to the key aspects of the vision and purpose of the group, and committing to be faithful to one another.

While some might resist the personal invitation as overly exclusive, others may resist a covenant as overly rigid or restrictive. In reality, the opposite is typically true. In a world where many of us are all too familiar with the low hum of anxiety that comes from subconsciously wondering if people will “bail out” on us—or wanting to bail ourselves—a covenant brings the freedom of knowing there will be people who will stick with us, through thick and thin. Thus, covenants are commitments ultimately based out of love for one another. David Brooks describes covenant commitment as “falling in love with something, and then building a structure of behavior around it for those moments when love falters.” In 1 Samuel 18:3, “Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.”

Covenants are also freeing because they provide the **clarity** on who we want to be and what we want to be about. Perhaps you’ve experienced groups before where the lack of clarity ultimately undermined the original aim of the group. Are we supposed to read the chapter beforehand, we wonder, or was that just a suggestion? I know I’m supposed to attend regularly, but does that mean every week? Questions like this can cause unwarranted frustration or bitterness, if not

explicitly discussed at the outset.

In summary, D-Groups are intentional because a leader who deeply resonates with Jesus' commission to make disciples personally invites people into a covenanted relationship. This creates the crucial context of empowerment, freedom and clarity, within which the real work of transformative discipleship can take place.

## **Discipleship**

The discipleship that takes place within D-Groups is meant to be simple enough that any follower of Jesus can do it, and then turn around and lead others in it, even as a new Christian, in roughly twelve months' time. This discipleship happens in a close relational context and is based on four elements that further create an environment conducive to deep transformation, when engaged in consistently.

The context is close and relational, because groups are typically made up of 3-4 people only, of the same gender. Their small size enables for deeper sharing, more personalized encouragements, and more attention and prayer for each person than if it were a larger group. On the other hand, because the groups are not one-on-one, the sources of input into disciples' lives are diversified. Likewise, even the addition of a third person tends to give the groups a "team" feel, rather than a more hierarchal structure (with a clear discipler, and a clear disciple). In all, 3-4 people seems to be something of a "sweet spot" for relational discipleship. Among his 12 disciples, it's worth noting that Jesus invested further in this same size group, as he invested in Peter, James, and John.

The group of 3-4 people then engages weekly in these 4 key elements:



**1) BIBLE:** The “**bread and butter**” of D-Groups is consistently reading a large intake of Scripture. As a norm, D-Groups will typically read between 6-25 chapters of Scripture a week, depending on the genre and season.

D-Groups have no additional curriculum other than God’s word, and require no secondary resources. While D-Group leaders may sometimes point their group members to helpful secondary resources to illuminate the Scripture reading (study Bibles, videos, etc), this is not required. Thus, D-Groups really are word-driven, taking their form, direction, and agenda from the Holy Spirit’s work to illuminate and apply his word. Members of the groups are drinking in and “inhabiting” the Biblical story, day-in, day-out, week-in, week-out. This does not at all preclude slowing down and really meditating on smaller portions of Scripture, but the key point is that members are reading enough to be firmly planted in and driven by the overall biblical story. (See APPENDIX 3: “Why Read Large Portions of Scripture?”).

**2) OBEDIENCE:** The “**focus**” of D-Groups is obedience to Jesus as Lord. This is both the implicit subtext of the groups, and their explicit aim. Every week, after reflecting on the Scripture and the Lord’s work in our lives, groups are encouraged to ask some form of the question, “What is the Lord telling you to do, and what are you going to do about it?”

This focus keeps D-Groups from becoming just another Bible study and aims to keep us from the deception of being “hearers of the word,” but not “doers.”

**3) OPENNESS:** The “**posture**” of D-Groups is an

open and honest “walking in the light.” Groups aim to provide a safe context for confessing sin, and also specifically give time to ask if there is any sin of the heart or hand that members need to confess. Members are open about their struggles, fears, and idols, but also about their hopes and victories, as well. This kind of openness is met with encouragement, safety, and care from the leaders and other members, not with guilt, shame, or the sour perceptions of white-knuckled “accountability” some Christians have come to expect.

For many people, this may be the hardest part of being in a D-Group—allowing people this kind of access into their lives. Though openness and vulnerability can be scary, it is an immense blessing to live your life as an “open book” before a small group of other people, letting them carry your burdens with you, and speak into your real life. The conviction behind this openness is that individual transformation is a community project.

**4) MISSION:** The “**orientation**” of D-Groups is outward-focused. In other words, these groups don’t exist for the sake of themselves and their members. While individual spiritual growth into the image of Christ is the inevitable by-product of these groups, that growth is meant for the blessing of others, with our love of God spilling over into love of neighbor.

We don’t merely hope that our spouses, kids, neighbors, and co-workers benefit from the overflow our discipleship—our discipleship is for them. D-Groups aim for gospel-fueled self-forgetfulness by focusing on how the transformation we’re experiencing is fitting us to be better spouses, children, friends, and employees, who more concretely love and serve our neighbors

in our everyday contexts. Among these neighbors, D-Groups share a special focus on those who are close to us and far from Christ, praying by name for those in our daily lives who are not yet Christians, and spurring one another on to bold ways of extending the gospel to them in word and deed.

To summarize then, the type of discipleship that happens in groups defined by these 4 key elements is this: word-fueled obedience to Jesus, in an open and honest community, for the sake of our neighbors.

## That Multiplies

Finally, D-Groups are unique in that their explicit aim is to multiply. When members consider joining a D-Group, they do so knowing that the ultimate goal of the year is not simply to be discipled, but to eventually “get on the playing field” themselves as disciple-makers. When members sign the covenant at the beginning of the year, they’re committing “to give serious consideration to leading a group themselves at the end of the year.” Because multiplication is the explicit aim of the groups, this affects the discipleship goals of the leaders, as well as the structure and scope of the groups themselves. Instead of only asking “what do we want people to experience by the end of the year?” leaders should be asking themselves, “what do we want people to be able to lead others in experiencing by the end of the year?”

This means that the structure and scope of what happens in D-Groups should be **narrow** and **simple**, with just a few tangible “handholds,” like the 4 key elements above, to pass on. As a general axiom, “simple is transferrable, whereas complex breaks down.” It’s often counterintuitive, but leaders need to resist the urge to “crowd out” a simple, transferrable process with

other emphases and practices—even good ones—like complex ways of praying, journaling, scripture memory, secondary reading, etc. In his book, *Cultivating a Life for God*, Neil Cole suggests, “Perhaps the reason that we don’t see multiplication of disciples more often is that we are trying to do too much too soon in the process. We fail to grasp the fact that discipleship, following Christ in simple obedience, is a lifelong pursuit. We attempt to teach our disciples so much in the first year that we unintentionally sabotage the rest of the years by intimidating them into thinking it’s way too hard for common people to do.”

Therefore, while additional emphases and practices might be suggested or modeled, from time to time, as ways of growing deeper, or, on some occasions, adopted by group members as obvious ways of deepening the 4 key elements (e.g. a group may decide to memorize one verse together, from among the larger reading each week, as a way of further implanting the Scriptures), such additional practices shouldn’t be understood as a necessary element of D-Groups. Read the Bible and obey it. Walk in the light. Focus on our neighbors. Wash, rinse, repeat.

Though we can sometimes view multiplication as something that only the “spiritual elite” can do, the irony is that at the heart of multiplication is the conviction that there are no spiritual elite. Multiplication says, “there’s nothing I can do that you can’t do, too.” Or, more accurately, “there’s nothing of utmost significance that I can do, that you can’t do, too.” Simply put, if disciples can’t reproduce our process within a year, then it’s too complicated.

THE PEOPLE

## **The People:**

### Who Should Be In a D-Group?

## **KEY IDEA:**

“Choose Hungry People.”

*“Disciple-making that truly reproduces is propelled by an intrinsic motivation.”*

Neil Cole

“Discipleship is supposed to be easy.” That’s what I’ve often told people, a bit tongue-in-cheek. Living as a disciple and making disciples, are, of course, the hardest things we will ever do. There’s nothing easy about opening yourself up to a group of brothers or sisters in Christ, or following through on a concrete, Spirit-led step of obedience. Likewise, there’s nothing easy about the “daily grind” of saturating yourself with Scripture, consistently praying for group members, and in many cases, waking up early to meet together. No, the process of following Jesus in a multiplying, relational community is not easy at all. That’s why Jesus urged his own disciples to “count the cost” of following him before they embarked (Luke 14:25-33).

When I say, “discipleship is supposed to be easy,” I mean that simply getting people to show up and participate is supposed to be easy. Not sweating out week-by-week whether people will follow through on their commitment to engage the process is supposed to be easy. And you’ll find that it actually is...if you

choose hungry people.

This is not to say that there's no room for grace, as people fully live into engaging the discipleship process, but it is to say that, as a leader, it shouldn't feel like pulling teeth to get people to engage the process. If it does, you've probably picked the wrong people. Your sweat, struggle, and prayer should go into the process of discipleship and multiplication itself, not into cajoling your people to engage with it in the first place! This is counterintuitive for many people, but it's part of the genius of Jesus' discipleship model. In the brief pages that follow, we'll describe who you should prayerfully invite into a D-Group, and pre-emptively answer a few possible objections:

## Who Should I Invite?

The main qualification for who you should invite into your group is that they need to be **hungry to grow**. This doesn't mean that they can't be nervous about aspects of the group, but their hunger for God ultimately overrides their fears about the commitment or their wondering whether they can eventually multiply. From talking to people, you can usually get a pretty good sense of whether their mindset is, "I'm nervous, but I'm positive this is the next step for me," or "I'm not really sure I want to commit myself in this way."

Because Jesus promised to be with us as we go and make disciples, we can trust that he is raising up hungry people for us to invest in. Therefore, don't be discouraged if you have to ask several people before finding the hungry ones whom Jesus is raising up for intentional discipleship—because he is raising them up.

In looking for those hungry people consider people

who will be faithful, available, and teachable (F.A.T.):

**Faithful:** They're the type of person who is known to follow through on their commitments.

**Available:** They make themselves available to be invested in. Additionally, there are no foreseen life events that might make it hard for them to participate over the next year (e.g. moving away from the area after a graduation).

**Teachable:** They've demonstrated a genuine openness to being taught and transformed.

Finally, you should choose people of the same gender.

## Considering Hesitancies

It's helpful at this point to pre-emptively answer two potential hesitancies you might feel to these suggestions on who to invite. I've certainly thought these myself:

**Q)** Isn't it unloving not to invite someone who's not deeply hungry to grow? And how will we ever reach the more "disengaged" church people if we only focus on those who are hungry?

**A)** While this is understandable, it's first worth noting that Jesus himself let people walk away from potential discipling relationships with him. Jesus was incredibly gracious in that he consistently invested in disciples who were sinful and hard-hearted, and who misunderstood him—in fact, those are the only kind of disciples there are! The disciples were, however, committed to engaging with Jesus. When the rich young man, for example, refused to follow Jesus, and "went away sorrowful" upon hearing the cost of



discipleship (Matthew 19:16-22), Jesus let him walk away. We don't know how the story ends, but we do know that Jesus made no effort to chase him down.

Or in Luke 9:57-62, Jesus is approached by another series of people eager to enter a discipling relationship with him. When he lays out the concrete cost for each of them, each hesitates, suggesting modest qualifications to the parameters Jesus set (“Let me first bury my father” ... “Let me first say farewell to those in my home”). While it's not clear how this story ends either, it is clear that Jesus made no attempt to whittle down the requirements or bargain them into following him.

It's instructive for us, then, that Jesus, the most loving man who ever lived, let people walk away. Apparently, he saw some kind of wisdom in investing more of his time into hungry people. We should follow him in this.

Second, there are many contexts for discipleship in the church that are wide open to people who are currently somewhat “disengaged” with their faith (corporate worship, Christian Formation, etc)—and this is as it should be. These contexts are amenable to a certain level of anonymity, where people can feel free to “try out” the faith, or observe others who are, before committing themselves to following Jesus in transparent, accountable relationships with others. The point here is simply that choosing not to pursue people for D-Groups who are not manifestly hungry hardly leaves them without discipleship contexts! In fact, all the same contexts for them still exist as there were before D-Groups were started.

Finally, and most importantly, investing the most in people who are hungry right now is actually the best

way, over the long run, to reach those who aren't. In the end, what those who are less hungry need is not to be talked into something they don't want to do. What they need is to be "swallowed up in a sea of increasing health" all around them. As the number of hungry, multiplying disciples steadily grows, and even reaches a tipping point, such that intentional, multiplying discipleship becomes the "new normal" in a church, the compelling nature of this vibrant discipleship movement will punctuate the habitual shell of disengagement in many people, in a way that all of our attempts to convincing them to embrace intentional discipleship before they're hungry could never do. But, in order to see this happen, we need to be freed up to invest everything we have in those who are hungry.

**Q)** Is it unwise to invite a hungry Christian if they're a new believer? If we invest in hungry Christians who may not be as spiritually mature yet, how do we guard against theological error?

It is entirely possible to invite very young Christians, even new believers, into D-Groups! First, new believers typically have an intense hunger to grow in their relationship with Christ. This hunger needs to be supported and fanned into flame. Second, because new believers typically haven't had time to settle into a Christian subculture that tends to foster a "consumer Christianity," discipling them to obey Jesus and multiply their faith "while the cement is still wet" will bear lasting fruit. Finally, new believers typically know more people who are not Christians, so discipling them to grow and articulate the gospel is likely to be both evangelistically fruitful and energizing to the whole group.

Some might be worried about guarding the theological purity of a discipleship movement. The fear goes something like this: “If a new believer, with little doctrinal knowledge, is released after a year or so’s time to go and multiply disciples themselves, how can we be sure they won’t unintentionally lead people astray, into doctrinal error?” While this concern is entirely understandable, we need to push back on it with careful fervency, lest we create a culture of disempowerment that unintentionally undermines the church’s vibrant potential for multiplication.

First, in my experience, there is simply no evidence or a correlation between being a newer believer and greater amounts of doctrinal error. Anecdotally, I’ve observed the opposite. While newer believers often have a harder time articulating the orthodox faith they hold, as their theological vocabulary is still emerging, it is typically newer believers who are most ready to bow the knee to the central doctrines of orthodox Christianity—Jesus’ full divinity and humanity, the exclusivity of Christ’s salvation, etc—whereas it is the older, more restless, Christians—over-educated and under-obedient, and who have lost their sense of awe in Christ’s great saving work—who start sniffing around the edges of doctrinal purity. Most of the “deconversion” stories I’ve heard, for example, or stories of slides into gradual unorthodoxy have come from people who have identified as Christians for quite some time.

Second, the decentralization of theological awareness that takes place as a result of multiplying discipleship actually serves as a safeguard against congregational doctrinal error. If the pulpit ministry slides into doctrinal error, as some have, or more benignly, if the pastor simply makes a misleading comment in a

sermon one week, a congregation that has had rich, theological reflection multiply itself out amidst its members will be far better “inoculated” against this influence than one where the preaching pastor is the only voice of doctrinal reflection.

Third, there is no better way to ensure that newer Christians grow into a robust, theological understanding than to immerse them in the pages of Scripture, 365 days a year under the gentle guidance of another Christian. While the preaching ministry of the church can provide the categories and the framework for healthy doctrine, it is insufficient to fill out all the rich, biblical nuances, much less to process everyone’s questions. This happens best in the trenches of intentional discipleship.

Finally, it’s simply worth remembering that D-Group discipleship doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Very rarely will a younger believer immerse himself or herself in the Bible with no guidance whatsoever, and then attempt to pass on his or her faith with no guidance either. Ample helpful resources (study Bibles, Bible Project videos, etc) are available as “guardrails” for newer believers, not to mention their disciplers themselves, and the ministries of the local church, including the preaching ministry.

We shouldn’t pass over newer believers when considering who to disciple. The most important qualification for anyone is simply **hunger for growth**. Choose hungry people, invest in them, and then have the confidence to release them in the power of the Holy Spirit!

A T E M P L A T E

# A Template: A Sample Meeting



## KEY IDEA: “Keep It Simple.”

*“Simple is transferable whereas complex breaks down.”*

Neil Cole

As we explored above, in relation to multiplication, simpler structures are always better. While leaders should be attentive to the Holy Spirit and discern when to deviate from a typical weekly template, it is helpful to have some kind of plan or template to work from when meeting together weekly. Without this, it will be hard to multiply into future generations. Here is a suggested 75-minute template, which highlights the **4 key elements** of **BIBLE**, **OPENNESS**, **OBEDIENCE**, and **MISSION**.

## Using the Template

You may want to use this template word for word with your members. It helps to have something tangible and concrete, so you could print this out or copy it and give it to them to reference. Likewise, even if this is not the exact template you go with, you could give it to your members when they consider their own multiplication.

A template is just that—a template—meaning it can, and likely should be deviated from when needed. What is important is that the 4-key elements of **Bible**,

week. A leader may have different preferred questions for reflecting on the Bible reading, for example, but it's essential that your group members have their Bibles open and are reflecting at a heart level on what the Scriptures are saying, and what obedience it is calling forth from them. Or, you may have different ways of surfacing and promoting openness, obedience, and mission, but it's important that all are present, every week. If one or more of these elements is missing, here's what is likely to happen:

**Missing Bible:** The group's own agenda and biases dominate the time together, rather than the agenda of the Holy Spirit, working to illuminate and apply the word he inspired.

**Missing Openness:** The group deals with surface-level sins and struggles, and so the change that results is also more surface-level and behavioral, rather than transformation from the heart.

**Missing Obedience:** The group becomes just another "Bible study." The Scripture reflections don't carry out into concrete, noticeable acts of obedience, and the group risks hypocrisy and self-deception.

**Missing Mission:** The group becomes or remains inwardly bent, hyper-focused on its own needs and growth, but not spilling out into concrete acts of love, service, and justice for others, nor courageously impacting the lost for Christ.

Finally, here are some basic tips for each part of your time together:

**1) Bible reflection:** Because of the amount of assigned reading, you certainly won't cover everything. That

## **SAMPLE 75-MINUTE MEETING TEMPLATE:**

Gather, catch up, one person open in prayer (5 min)

### **1) Discussion of Past Week's Bible Reading (30 min) - BIBLE**

- Did you complete the reading for the past week?
- Where did you see the character of God in the reading?
- Where were you challenged to obey?

### **2) Personal sharing & Prayer (30 min) - OPENNESS, OBEDIENCE, MISSION**

- Where have you seen the Lord at work in your life, over the past week?
- Openness: What sins do you need to confess in the past week, whether in your heart/attitude, or in your actions?
- Obedience: What do you sense the Lord telling you to do, and what are you going to do about it?
- Mission: How's it going with loving the people Jesus has given you to love? Who is one person this week, in whose life you want to be used as a witness for Christ?

### **3) Prayer (10 min)**

- Pray for the needs and the requests of the group members
- Pray by name for those in whose lives we want to be used as a witness for Christ—for a door to be opened for the gospel, for open hearts, and for boldness and compassion in our words and actions.



is totally fine! The purpose of the Scripture reading element of D-Groups is about getting your members into the habit of daily Bible reading, not about completing the reading for the purpose of discussing all of it at the weekly meeting. This means that there will be key insights and points from the selections you read that simply won't get shared—again, this is totally fine!

Think of the Bible reflection time more like a “potluck,” where every member of the group brings some dish or appetizer to the table, some gleaning from how the Holy Spirit spoke through the Scriptures to them over the past week. Whether you choose to use the two questions above or not, the key framework to remember when helping people reflect is that you're trying to get people to uncover 1) who God is through that week's Scripture reading—his character, his goodness, his heart, his desires, etc—and then 2) what our response should be.

Whatever questions you ask to surface this, I do recommend keeping them fairly consistent week-by-week, as again, this helps with multiplication. As a leader, you are not preparing a Bible study! You are merely asking a consistent set of simple questions of the text, every week, and letting your members all contribute to answering them.

**2) Openness:** Often times, confession of sin will happen simply during the Bible reflection time. Don't be surprised if your members get to the time for confession of sins, and say something like, “Well, I already shared when we were talking about 2 Corinthians that I was convicted about my lack of generosity and needed to confess that to God.” The Holy Spirit works through his Word to surface sin and

the need for confession and repentance, and I've seen over and over again how he sovereignly plans ways in which the precise content of the weekly reading intersects with our specific sins and struggles.

However, it's also helpful to have a set time for members to "unburden" themselves of their sins and "walk in the light" during their personal sharing time. This may feel awkward at first, but most acts of growth feel awkward! Likewise, confession is the natural "flip side" of obedience, because the points where we need fresh obedience are the points at which our attitudes or actions have been "off." So don't be surprised to hear people share things like:

*"I confess that I've just been impatient and short with my kids this past week, and I haven't given them my full attention" (openness/confession).*

*"This week, I want to put my phone away when I get home from work, and generally just be more present with them" (obedience).*

*"I've felt a lot of discontent and bitterness this past week about being single" (openness/confession).*

*"I need to surrender my relationships to God" (obedience).*

As a leader, you can model healthy confession and openness with your group, while recognizing that not everybody feels comfortable opening up to the same degree and at the same pace. If it takes several months to get people to truly open up, that is absolutely fine. Some may not even open up to the degree you would have hoped, by the end of the year—but they will certainly open up more than they otherwise would have. By your own openness and warm acceptance and encouragement of others' openness, you will help

to create an environment for this openness to take place, even for those who are most naturally hesitant.

**3) Obedience:** The flip side of openness is obedience. This can come out both in your reflection on the Bible reading, through asking questions like, “Where do you feel called to obey what you’ve read?” and/or through specifically asking some form of the question, “What do you sense the Lord telling you to do this week, and what are you going to do about it?” I highly recommend asking this question, because it helps train people be Holy Spirit led, and to value concrete obedience.

When we ask, “What do you sense the Lord telling you to do this week, and what are you going to do about it?” we are not asking our members to look outside of Scripture for such direction. This is absolutely not some weird quest to discern a secret leading of the Lord through piecing together signs and omens—far from it! This is as simple as helping people see how basic it is to read the Scriptures, discern their obvious implications, look critically at their lives, and see where obedience is needed. It may sound like:

*“That passage in the Sermon on the Mount from our Matthew reading this week hasn’t left me...the one about how if we hate our brother in our heart it’s the same as murder. That’s a scary thought. I need to pray specifically this week for God to release me from all the bitterness and disdain I’ve been feeling towards my boss.”*

It’s helpful as well to remember that obedience can involve either an action to take or an attitude to embrace. Without concrete action steps, we risk **hypocrisy**—the Apostle Paul reminds us that “the

kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power” (1 Cor. 4:20). On the other hand, when we take action steps without a heart change, we risk **legalism**. Concrete action steps could be:

*“I need to apologize to my wife for how harsh I was last night...by the end of the day.”*

*“I want to follow up with my neighbor and ask him what he thought of the sermon.”*

*“I want to drop off flowers for my co-worker after her surgery.”*

Attitudes to embrace could be:

*“I want to be more patient this week, and slower to get angry with my kids.”*

*“I need to look at the kids in my classroom through a more compassionate lens.”*

*“I want to approach my visit with my mom this week with more of a sense of thankfulness that she lives so close to us, rather than bitterness that my other siblings aren’t pulling their weight in taking care of her.”*

**4) Mission:** This final emphasis is meant to keep your group focused outwardly. One way of encouraging this focus during the time of personal sharing is to have members answer some form of the question, “How are you doing loving the people Jesus has given you to love?” To stir people’s reflection, they might want to think in terms of these categories:

**Intimates:** spouse, children, parents, immediate

family

**Church family:** we have a unique responsibility to care for our church family, and “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2)

**Neighbor:** as Jesus defined it, our neighbor includes everybody we run into on a day to day basis: co-workers, store clerks, classmates, etc. You can help your group pay special attention to those people who are close to them and are most open to the gospel message.

You can also pray by name for those people in whose life you want to be used as a witness for Christ over the next week.

## SUMMARY

Reading through these elements and suggestions might seem overwhelming at first glance, but in the end, this process is meant to be simple and freeing. To lump it all together, here’s what you’re really doing when you come together weekly: you’re spurring one another on to prayerful, Scripture-informed obedience to Jesus, working itself out through concrete acts of service and mission for others.

## Outside of Your Weekly Meeting

Whereas your ~75-minute weekly meeting is the heartbeat of your week, and provides the rhythm for your year, members are encouraged to be cheering one another on, praying for one another, and spurring one another on to obedience throughout the week. Examples of how to do this include:

Group members using WhatsApp or a group text to share new prayer requests, updates on previous

prayer requests, general encouragements, Scriptures that moved them from the reading, or links to other Christian resources, articles, etc.

Occasional texts or calls from the leader to individual members around the times of big events in their week (e.g. before or after a tough conversation at work that they'd asked for prayer for, or an evangelistic conversation with a non-Christian friend).

Groups might also want to do occasional meet ups or fun activities throughout the year to further bond, however it's important that groups don't feel like this is necessary, so as to keep the group experience "lightweight" and multipliable. Remember that D-Groups are not meant to carry the load of all of a person's community connections in the local church. Nonetheless, some fun activities might include:

Attending a sporting activity together or going on a hike

Having a game night

Having the families of D-group members over for a dinner

Remember: "simple is transferrable, whereas complex breaks down!"



# APPENDICES



# APPENDIX 1: How Should I Invite Someone to My Discipleship Group?

As it comes time to multiply, and you begin looking for new people to invite into your D-group, how might this conversation look, and what are the key things to communicate about D-groups? Here are 5 tips to help you with inviting people:

**1) Pray consistently for the Lord’s leading:** While you want to be wise about the type of people you invite (see D-Group Leaders’ Guide, pg. 22-24), resist the urge to “micromanage” the process of finding people for your group. Trust that Jesus is powerful present in your desire to make multiplying disciples (Matt. 28:20), and express that trust by praying daily, in the weeks leading up to your new group, that the Lord will lead you to the right people to ask.

**2) Schedule an intentional time to talk about discipleship:** When you feel that the Holy Spirit is leading you to someone to invite, schedule an intentional time to talk about it with them, even if they’re someone you interact with regularly. I recommend this, rather than an “off-the-cuff” approach (e.g. a hallway conversation, or as they’re walking out your door!) because it helps to set the tone by modeling the type of intentionality you’ll be exhibiting throughout the year. It communicates, “this is meaningful enough that I want to dedicate time to discussing this alone with you.”

**3) Explain the “heart” and “vision” of intentional discipleship before the details:** People will naturally

want to know the details of the D-group commitment, and it's important to be concrete about them. It's more important, however, that you first explain the "heart" behind D-groups, so as to reinforce the priority of intentional, multiplying discipleship. You might want to re-read pg. 5-11 in the D-Group Leaders' Guide as a refresher, to help you do this. In a few bullet points, though, here is the key "messaging" to get across for what a D-Group is and why it's important:

- D-Groups are a tool to help us engage with our central calling of making disciples who make disciples. They do this by:
- Providing a context for our accelerated transformation as disciples by emphasizing four key elements that are conducive to our growth:
  - Bible saturation
  - Openness with one another
  - Obedience to Jesus
  - Missional posture & focus
- Lastly, D-Groups are unique in that they are covenanted relationships, with the intent to multiply from the outset

**4) Explain the commitment & details:** After explaining and interacting over the heart & vision for D-Groups, you can then share the details and answer any questions they have about the specifics. Now is the time to share about the start date, the intent to multiply, how much Bible reading you'll likely do, what a typical meeting looks like, what kind of engagement is expected throughout the week, etc. The goal here is to be as concrete and upfront as possible, so that they're able to consider exactly what they'd be getting into.

### **5) Encourage them to “count the cost”, then pray:**

Finally, you can invite them to “count the cost” (Lk. 14:25-33)—that is, to think through what it will “cost” them to participate in your group for the year. They can do this with you, or on their own. “Counting the cost” beforehand helps people to prepare for the commitment ahead, which also makes the commitment itself more meaningful. It helps if you encourage them to be as specific as possible when counting the cost, and give them a few examples of what the “cost” could look like for them, or what it has already looked like for you...for example:

- Lost sleep—if you’re waking up early one morning a week!
- Money—if your group meets over coffee or breakfast, for e.g.
- Lost “anonymity”—because this amount of openness and vulnerability with a few others may be new to them
- Saying no to another ministry opportunity

Finally, if they’re interested, you can suggest a set amount of time (I usually suggest a week) for them to specifically pray about whether the Lord is calling them to this.

# APPENDIX 2: Sample D-Group Covenant

## Intentional Discipleship Covenant:

Throughout the course of this year, from (\_\_\_\_\_), through (\_\_\_\_\_) we commit ourselves to the following:

- 1)** Completing the reading on a weekly basis, prior to our group's meeting times.
- 2)** Meeting with my discipleship partners weekly, for at least one hour, for a time focused on the priorities/practices of bible, obedience, openness, and mission.
- 3)** Praying consistently for the other members of my group.
- 4)** Contributing to an environment of honesty, trust, and personal vulnerability in a spirit of mutual upbuilding.
- 5)** Giving serious consideration at the end of the year to continuing to multiply disciples through investing in 2-3 other people, in a similar group.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 3: Why Read Larger Portions of Scripture?

In our discipleship groups at NSCBC, we typically read larger portions of Scripture each week (often between 6-25 chapters, depending on the genre of the book). Participants are often intimidated by this at first, but in the end, many find that reading this much Scripture is a deeply rewarding and growth-inducing experience. So why do we read large portions of Scripture?

**1) It's more consistent with the way Scripture is meant to be read:** Depending on how you measure it, most scholars say that between 45-65% of Scripture is narrative. Reading larger portions of narrative—a few chapters at a time, for example, is the most natural way to read this type of literature. Likewise, the NT epistles, for example were often read out loud, in one sitting.

**2) It helps us to understand the heart of God:** When we read large portions of Scripture, the repeated themes we pick up on help us to understand the heart of God for sinful, hurting people. We see how God deals with people in one book after the next, we notice patterns in his affections for and dealings with people. Learning the heart of God is one of the most important parts of Christian maturity.

**3) It helps us to avoid “missing the forest for the trees”:** While we may fear reading large portions of Scripture because we're afraid of missing important details, we forget that “the big picture” is also something that is able to be missed. When we miss the big picture, the effect on our faith is usually more profound.

**4) It helps us avoid missing the “trees” themselves:**

Perhaps more counterintuitively, reading large portions of Scripture is necessary in order to understand the details themselves! We can best understand individual verses and passages when we read them in light of their context. Reading larger portions of Scripture helps us to do that.

**5) It exposes us to biblical books and genres we’d be less likely to read:**

Certain books and genres lend themselves better than others to slow meditation. Not many people, for example, linger over one verse at a time in Leviticus or Nahum! There is nothing wrong with lingering over a small amount of Scripture at a time (see below)—if this is our main approach to Bible reading, or if we do this exclusively, we will miss out on the emphases, nuances, and correctives that come from reading “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

**6) It doesn’t preclude us from meditating on smaller amounts of Scripture:**

There is incredible value to meditating on smaller passages or verses! We can fruitfully do this, however, even while reading larger amounts of Scripture. In a D-Group, you’ll simply spend more time reading the Bible, period. Even in twenty minutes of Bible reading, you can often read an overview of 3-4 chapters of Scripture, then linger for five minutes or so just on one verse that stuck out to you from your reading.

## APPENDIX 4: Suggestions for Choosing Which Biblical Books to Read

As the leader, I would suggest that you yourself choose the first 3-4 books or sections of Scripture to read, to help people feel like they are being “led.” However, soon afterwards, have the other members in your group choose the books, to give them ownership.

It might be best to choose a solid string of 4-5 NT books to start with, with lots of ready application points, before moving into the Old Testament, though you’ll likely want to (roughly) alternate OT & NT books, as the year progresses. By the end of the year, I would aim to have read through the entire New Testament.

As we’ve experimented with just how much Scripture to read, we realized that though it may be hard to read 12-30 chapters every single week, what is most important is that people **a)** are reading enough that they are challenged (while doable, it should feel like a significant commitment, that takes real, daily, time and investment), and **b)** they are reading through large portions of Scripture, in context.

That said, see what works, perhaps aim for a rough goal of reading between 12-30 chapters a week depending on the type of literature. So, for a dense epistle like Romans (16 chapters), it could be read through once over the week, in its entirety, and Philippians could be read through 3-4 times in a week. When reading Genesis, however, you could take two weeks to read through the book, at a rate of 25 chapters per week.

**Some suggestions for books to start the year off with:**

Mark (16 chapters)

1 Corinthians (16 chapters)

1 & 2 Peter (8 or 16 chapters, if you read once or twice through)

Pastoral Epistles—1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus (13 chapters, once through)

**Some suggestions for OT books to include towards the beginning of the year:**

Genesis (50 chapters over two weeks)

Deuteronomy (34 chapters over two weeks)

1 & 2 Samuel (4 weeks to cover two books)

Micah (7 chapters, read twice through in one week)

**Other suggestions:**

You could work in weekly reading of Psalms and/or Proverbs, to add to target chapter totals (e.g. one week's reading could be 1 & 2 Peter, once-through + 7 Psalms—one Psalm per day—for a total of 15 chapters in a week.). Towards the beginning of the year, however, I'd avoid complicating things, and I'd also aim to give your members the "momentum" that comes from completing a whole book.



# APPENDIX 5: 4 Common Barriers to Multiplication

Though multiplying discipleship is Jesus' heartbeat and the lifeblood of the local church, we rarely see it happen as fully as we long for. Here are at least four common barriers to multiplication, and how we can overcome them:

## **Barrier 1: Too Little Vision**

The first barrier is essentially a “vision problem”. We don't “see” the paradigm under which multiplication operates and the end to which it serves.

We embrace a faulty **paradigm** about who it is that multiplies their faith when we think that multiplication is for the spiritual “elite”—something that only a rare group of extraordinarily gifted (or eccentric!) Christians can do. Those who multiply their faith by investing in others are probably those with some kind of formal training, we think, or maybe even a seminary degree.

The irony here is that this mindset is nearly the opposite of the truth. Multiplication rests on the very principle that *there are no spiritual elite*. When discipleship group leaders at NSCBC invest in others with the explicit expectation of multiplication, it creates a dynamic of empowerment—one that boldly declares, “I am not elite...there is nothing I'm doing right now that you can't do...or can't learn to do.”

I've noticed that we also tend to have an inadequate vision of the **end** for which multiplication is designed to serve. This is primarily because we tend to think individualistically, rather than corporately. If we think merely on an individual level, multiplication becomes

simply a Christian “lifestyle option”, to be assessed year by year, along with the other things we’re trying to fit into our schedule. With a greater, and more corporate end in sight, however—a thoroughly disciplined “Church of the North Shore”, where every man, woman, and child, is walking intimately with Christ, and aligning their lives around his reign—multiplication is an utter necessity. We simply won’t get there without it, so it’s “all hands-on deck”.

### **Barrier 2: Too Little Expectation**

A second barrier is simply a lack of explicit expectation for multiplication. With our flesh already working against us, it’s safe to assume that multiplication simply won’t happen without it being stated, felt, and expected all along.

In our discipleship groups, we sign a covenant at the beginning of the year agreeing to “give serious thought to” multiplying a similar group in around a year’s time, and I try to shepherd my groups according to the expectation of multiplication from week one. For example, I’ll often say things, “That was a great idea, suggesting that we read Judges and Ruth together—you should suggest that to your group next year”. Simply put, if it’s not expected, it won’t happen.

### **Barrier 3: Too Complex**

A third barrier to multiplication is that what we’re trying to multiply is simply too complex, and too cumbersome. Neil Cole puts it succinctly: “Simple is transferable, whereas complex breaks down”. For this reason, discipleship groups at NSCBC are incredibly simple. We read the Bible (a lot of it), and spur each other on to reflect and respond in obedience. We walk in the light with one another, confessing our sins. We pray for each other to live on mission. Wash, rinse, repeat.

Keeping things simple also requires a patient trust in God. His Holy Spirit is more than competent to work through his word, to disciple his people, and to present them “mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28) *over the course of a lifetime*. God does not need to correct every false belief, replace every idol, and instill every discipline in the people you’re investing in, all in the next six months, in order for your investment to be a success. We simply need to help people fall in love with Jesus again, take their next step, and warm them up to the idea of staying in a context that will keep growing them, year after year after year.

Neil Cole, again, says, “Perhaps the reason that we don’t see multiplication of disciples more often is that we are trying to do too much too soon in the process. We fail to grasp the fact that discipleship, following Christ in simple obedience, is a lifelong pursuit. We attempt to teach our disciples so much in the first year that we unintentionally sabotage the rest of the years by intimidating them into thinking it’s way too hard for common people to do.” (see Barrier #1 above!)

#### **Barrier 4: Too Comfortable**

Finally, multiplication is just uncomfortable—and if you’re like me, you like comfort! If we spend any significant amount of time with a small group of people, sharing life together, and pursuing a common mission, we will grow incredibly close. It can be hard to leave the comfort, then, of familiar friendships, in order to eventually branch out and multiply.

In John 12:24, Jesus said, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” He was speaking most directly about his impending death, but in doing so, he put his

finger on a principle woven into God's world—that fruitfulness is preceded by death. We need to expect that the fruitfulness of multiplying discipleship will require of us many small “deaths” along the way—deaths to comfort, familiarity, safety. When multiplication feels like a mini death, we can take heart that in this very feeling we are being conformed to the image of Jesus and the pattern of his kingdom.

There are many barriers to multiplication, but by God's grace and the power of the Spirit, we can face them, and see Jesus made famous through multiplying discipleship in our day.

# **APPENDIX 6:** Explaining Intentional Discipleship: An Investment Mindset

I've found it helpful to explain intentional, multiplying discipleship as an investment, because the word investment carries at least three connotations that help us embrace the right mindset in our discipleship journey:

## **1) Investments are long-term**

When we hear the word “investment”, we usually think “this will take a while”. We don't invest money in a mutual fund, for example, if we expect to take it out three months. Likewise, when we set out to invest in our marriage, or look to “be more invested in our grandchildren's lives”, we're typically expecting it to be a long process. Thinking of intentional discipleship as an investment helps us form reasonable expectations, and “settle in” for a multi-year journey.

## **2) Investments are costly**

Investment also implies a cost, especially up front, without seeing immediate return or blessing. If you set out to invest in your physical health after a long period of neglecting it, you'll feel the cost of lost sleep, tired muscles, and sore joints before you experience the blessings of lost weight and increased energy—and long before you're winning any weekend 5ks!

Likewise, discipleship is a costly. It will cost you time, comfort, emotional energy, privacy—and more—and this, usually long before you see the blessing of those, you're investing in thriving in their relationship with Jesus, and embracing new outlooks, desires, and hab-

its. And yet the wait is worth it. The New Testament encourages us to be like the “hard working farmer” (2 Tim. 2:6), the kind who “waits for the precious fruit of the earth, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains” (James 5:7).

### **3) Investments are worth it**

We invest in those endeavors we know are precious and worthwhile. If the goal is worthwhile, then we rarely look back and regret the investment. Nobody who invests in a healthy relationship with their children, for example, looks back when their child turns 18 and says, “I wish I could have had that time back in twenty-minute installments...I would have spent it on my phone!” Nor does anyone who has saved for retirement say, “I’d rather be broke now, but have had a little extra discretionary spending each month for these last forty years”.

Cultivating disciples who love Jesus with all their heart, align their whole lives around him, and teach others to do the same, is a worthy investment if there ever was one.



**NORTH SHORE**

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