

DISCIPLESHIP GROUP CHEAT SHEET

FOUR RHYTHMS OF A HEALTHY DISCIPLESHIP GROUP

Here are four rhythms or movements to incorporate into your discipleship group (d-group) gatherings. You may not be able to get to all of these every time you gather, but making sure that each rhythm occurs regularly in the life of your group is a way of improving and maintaining the health of your d-group. The four rhythms are: 1) Scripture, 2) Sharing, 3) Spread of the Gospel, and 4) Supplication and Spirit.

1) Scripture... Come prepared to share what you read in Scripture this past week, yes, but more *particularly* make it a goal to bring to the group *one bit of Scripture that applies to one bit of your life*. One bit of Scripture can do any number of things. It can lead you to: 1) adore God, 2) see and hate your sin, or 3) ask for grace. To apply one bit of Scripture to one bit of your life requires at least meditation if not memorization. Dallas Willard famously said:

Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization.



This will be the most difficult of the four rhythms you will practice *outside* of your d-group meetings, but it will be the single greatest determiner of the quality of what transpires *inside* of your d-group meetings. Consider the uncomfortable reality that many of us do not consistently spend time alone with God—connecting with him through Scripture and prayer. Most Christians are afraid to talk about this topic with each other, and are even more afraid to try and help each other grow in this discipline—often out of a misguided fear of being legalistic. But this is to completely misunderstand legalism. Tim Keller observes:

These two errors constantly seek to corrupt the message and steal away from us the power of the gospel. Legalism [or religion] says that we have to live a holy, good life in order to be saved. Antinomianism [or irreligion] says that because we are saved, we don't have to live a holy, good life. This is the location of the "tip of the spear" of the gospel. A very clear and sharp distinction between legalism, antinomianism, and the gospel is often crucial for the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit to work. If our gospel message even slightly resembles "you must believe and live right to be saved" or "God loves and accepts everyone just as they are," we will find our communication is not doing... identity-changing, heart-shaping transformative work...

This is one of the most common forms legalism takes—the belief that we have to live a holy, good life in order to be saved. Let's call that Legalism 1.0. But as Dallas Willard has famously observed, grace is not opposed to *effort*, but to *earning*. In other words, striving to increasingly obey Scripture's clear command to spend time alone with God only becomes legalistic when it is done as an attempt to *earn* God's forgiveness (Legalism 1.0) rather than when it is done as a glad response to *having already been forgiven*. The same grace that forgives us *changes* us—it doesn't just leave us where it found us. Growth in maturity is possible, promised, and expected of every Christian.

Another common form of legalism is the keeping of rules *not actually found in Scripture* in a misguided attempt to please God and impress other people. Let's call this Legalism 2.0. But in contrast to "rules not found in Scripture," Christians are repeatedly *commanded* in Scripture to consistently meditate on Scripture and pray! Seeking to grow in obedience to Jesus and do what pleases him is *not* Legalism 2.0 because it is actually commanded in Scripture. Meditating on Scripture and praying is non-optional for Christians. Where we go wrong here is when we attempt to work *for* God's acceptance rather than work *from* God's acceptance. As we mature, our obedience will be increasingly fueled by grateful joy rather than guilt and fear of punishment. Razor-sharp clarity on the gospel is crucial as we broach this topic with each other and become increasingly honest about our all-too-common neglect of these non-optional private disciplines.

In one of the many "one another" passages in the New Testament, Paul urges all Christians to:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col 3:16).

We will not be able to teach and admonish each other with “all wisdom” in our d-groups if we are not first letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly! It is very likely that several members of any given group may not actually know how to meditate on Scripture or pray in a meaningful and personal way, and even if they do know how, they are very likely not doing it even two days out of seven. In light of this normative cultural reality, expect to spend the first three to six months of a newly formed d-group patiently and repeatedly focusing on the discipline of spending time alone with God, and patiently and practically equipping each other to read, meditate on, and pray Scripture. Ask the pastoral team for simple resources and tools to aid you in equipping each other to this end!

2) Sharing... The word “Sharing” is “cubed” in the sticky-note graphic in order to represent three more words that start with that same letter: sanctification, suffering, and sin—in that order. Or, good fruit, what’s hard, and bad fruit. David Powlison points out that order is informed by Scripture, is full of love and compassion, and looks at the whole picture, while preventing imbalance in several directions at once. Some d-groups dive deep into the good fruit and what’s hard, and neglect honest and specific confession of sin. Other d-groups dive deep into confession of sin, but neglect to encourage each other by pointing out growth they see in each other—however small—as well as neglect to join each other on the mourning bench and weep with those who weep.

3) The spread of the Gospel... Who are your “persons of peace”? In other words, Alex Absalom explains, whom would you *most* love to see become a disciple of Jesus? The question really is that simple—whom do you sense God has called you to love the most? Who is your heart best shaped to reach for Jesus? Alan Hirsch suggests that we continually ask: 1) Are we in close proximity with those we feel called to? 2) Are we spending regular time with these people? 3) Are we too busy to develop meaningful relationships? Name your people of peace and then move to pray together as a d-group, right on the spot, for God to give you the opportunity to: 1) build a deeper relationship with them, 2) introduce them to Christian community, and 3) share the gospel with them. Pray together that God would open their eyes to the beauty of Jesus (2 Cor 4:6).

4) Supplication and Spirit... Make sure that your d-group gatherings don’t descend into some form of Christianized “talk therapy.” In a d-group, sharing that does not pivot to prayer on the spot is quickly headed toward self-effort fueled by self-will. No one changes apart from the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and as Sam Storms likes to point out, we should not presume that God will do for us *apart* from prayer what he has explicitly promised to do for us *only through* prayer! In the words of an old missions pamphlet, if our prayer is meager it is because we regard it as *supplemental* rather than *fundamental*.

There is a very real sense in which this whole cheat sheet could be reduced to the next two sentences and retain 99% of its effectiveness. *How do you ensure that you will have an effective, God-glorifying, life-transforming d-group? In the words of Ed Welch, pray one minute longer than you talk!* Far too often prayer is tacked on at the end and rushed through hurriedly in less than five minutes, after the “real work” of humanistic talk therapy and unasked for advice-giving has dragged on for hours. Strive to make heart-centered, Spirit-directed, Scripture-informed prayer a central part of your d-group gatherings, and you will never leave a d-group gathering with a sense of having wasted your time. We must strive to make prayer a fundamental part rather than a supplemental part of our d-group gatherings. This will be the most difficult of the four rhythms you will practice *inside* of the d-group meetings, but it will be the single greatest determiner of the quality of what transpires *outside* of the d-group meetings.

Are we sensitive to promptings from the Holy Spirit? Do we know how to let the Spirit guide us in encouraging, rebuking, and exhorting each other? Do we let the Spirit call Scripture to mind? Furthermore, how can we pray beyond the sick list? We need to pray for physical healing, we need to pray for loved ones and friends, and we need to ask God to change our circumstances when they’re hard. But we also need to pray for hearts devoted to him right in the middle of our circumstances, and we need to pray for his kingdom to come. We need to pray for each other that we would bear fruit in the year of drought (Jer 17:5–8). Remember that the circumstance is significant but not determinative, and praying for changed hearts in the midst of our (possibly) unchanging circumstances is always praying according to God’s will.

FURTHER RESOURCES & FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

For more information, we encourage you to read the *Discipleship Group Handbook*, which can be downloaded online (<http://bit.ly/2lxs26r>). It contains many resources in the appendices, but the actual content of the handbook is only 30 pages in length, and can be read quickly and easily. The handbook covers many frequently asked questions like: how to form a group, how frequently to meet, what is a good size for a group, how to help someone stuck in a chronic sin pattern, etc.