

Introduction to

DNA Groups

Why DNA Groups?

We are called by Jesus to make disciples (Matt 28). Because discipleship isn't just "a class" we attend, but an "all of life" thing, we need to find ways of doing *all of life* together. DNA groups help provide a context for that to happen. They provide the environment where we propel each other deeper into the gospel, becoming increasingly rooted and established in Christ (Col. 2:6-7).

What is a DNA Group?

The term "DNA group" refers to a group that ideally consists of 3-4 people— men with men, women with women—who meet together weekly. DNA groups provide a structure for us to care deeply for one another and to foster growth as disciples of Jesus.

DNA is an acronym that reminds of us three key components of discipleship: **discover**, **nurture**, and **act**. The goal is to help one another discover Jesus in the Scriptures, nurture the truths of the gospel in our hearts, and faithfully act on what the Spirit calls us to do. Our DNA group should be a major factor in our growth as a disciple, *someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life*.

Why Should I Be in a DNA Group?

As disciples who've been saved and made righteous, Paul exhorts us to "be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Romans 12:2). Discipleship requires life-on-life interaction and can only happen in community. We grow primarily through the experience of life in gospel community. A DNA group can be a key catalyst for growth and transformation in our lives.

One of the main ways this happens is by giving each other regular reminders of the truth of the gospel. Hebrews 3:12 warns, "Take care, brothers and sisters, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." We are often tempted to forget who God is, what He's done for us in Christ Jesus, who we are as a result, and how we live out of our new identity. Hebrews 3:13 says one of the major ways to prevent this "falling away from the living God" is to "encourage one another daily . . . so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Every single day we need to be encouraged with the truth that we are *deeply loved* and *accepted* by the Father purely on the basis of *what Jesus has done!* Our new identity as sons and daughters of God shapes everything about our life as disciples of Jesus. Understanding this new identity also gives us the boldness and humility to be honest with our DNA partners when we are tempted to hide our sin or to blame others. Regular encouragement from our

DNA partners can be a significant help in our battle against sin and against the lies of the enemy.

What is the Goal of DNA Groups?

The overall goal of a DNA group is to foster discipleship relationships that help each person grow to become more like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. The goal is not merely to hang out and have fun, or even to build friendships, though hopefully all of that will happen! The goal is to challenge one another to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18).

As disciples, we should experience transformation at every level, affecting our whole person: *head, heart, and hands*. The specific discipleship goals for a DNA group meeting can be understood by unpacking the acronym:

- **Discover:** Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will study scripture and unpack truths about who God is and what Jesus has done. The goal is to teach the head.
- **Nurture:** Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will repent and believe in the gospel. The goal is to shepherd the heart.
- **Act:** Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will listen and obey as He calls us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The goal is to empower the hands.

The “Discover-Nurture-Act” Process

At each meeting, a DNA group should walk through the three-step process of discover, nurture, and act. Each of these can only be done with the help of the Holy Spirit, so praying throughout the process is imperative.

DISCOVER

Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will study a portion of scripture to discover truths about God. 4 questions to ask during this time are: *Who is God? What has He done? Who are we? and How do we live in response?* The goal is to teach the head so each person either *learns* or is *reminded* of the truth about who God is, what He’s done, who we are, and how we live, every time the DNA group meets.

Discover primarily involves discipling the head. In John 8:31–32, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set

you free.” Discover is about uncovering the vital truth about who God is, what He’s done, who we are, and how we should live in response. Jesus came to set the captives free (Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61). It is through discovering God’s truth that we are set free from the lies we believe and the bondage we experience.

A number of Jesus’ statements from John’s gospel highlight the importance of His word and His Spirit in helping a disciple discover truth:

Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” —John 17:17

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. —John 14:26

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. —John 16:13–14

Jesus’ death on the cross makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to live in us! His Spirit is our teacher, the one who makes Jesus even more real to us as we grow in our faith. Our motivation to discover comes from the great gift Jesus has given us and from our desire to know Him more. Discover is not about information but about relationship and transformation.

The Bible in DNA Groups

In light of Jesus’ prayer in John 17:17, studying the Bible should be the primary way DNA groups discover together. As a group, choose a passage of scripture and read it throughout the week. Each person can utilize the 4 questions as he or she studies on his or her own. Consider using a journal to capture key thoughts and insights that the Spirit brings to mind. Group members should come to the weekly meeting ready to answer these questions:

1. What did you discover this week? What did you learn? What were you reminded of?
2. Where did the Spirit lead you to repentance and faith this week?
3. How have you struggled with sin/unbelief in your life this week?
4. What lie(s) might you be believing? What is the truth?

When the group meets, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak through His word! Read through the whole passage once or twice together. Share any insights from the week, and write down new things the Spirit illuminates.

NURTURE

Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will confess, repent and believe in the gospel. To *confess* is to *admit your struggles*. The Biblical definition of confess literally means “to agree with God.” Confession is agreeing with God and calling our sin what it is. To repent means “to change your mind.” It is deciding to think and act differently...to make a 180-degree turn.

Our DNA groups provide an environment where we can be honest with God, others, and ourselves about the lies we are believing and turn to the Truth. The goal is to shepherd the heart so each person is brought to repentance and renewed faith every time a DNA group meets.

Nurture primarily involves discipling the heart. The word heart is used more than 850 times in the Bible and is used to describe the very center of our being. It includes our mind, our emotions, and our will. In Romans 10:10, Paul says it’s the part of us that exercises faith or belief. “For with the heart a person believes. . . .”

In Luke 6, Jesus says the fruit of a person’s life—their words and their actions—is an indicator of what is present in his or her heart. “Each tree is known by its own fruit . . . out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:44–45). So regardless of what we know in our heads, the fruit of our lives is determined by what we believe in our hearts. In other words: *Belief dictates behavior*.

We may know God is great and in control and affirm His sovereignty and power, yet we worry. What we know does not align with what we believe in that moment. When we worry, we’re placing our hope in something other than God. We’re believing that something other than Him is in control and can give us security.

Paul’s assessment of this misplaced belief is that we’ve “. . . exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). By placing our faith in something other than God to give us what only He can give, we are actually engaging in false worship, in idolatry.

DNA groups are designed to help identify these areas of sin and idolatry in our lives. Nurture is about ensuring what we know aligns with what we believe.

It is possible to be overzealous in our desire to root sin out of one another's lives. Nurture is not a witch-hunt or a game of "whack-a-mole," where we wait anxiously with a big mallet, smacking down every little indicator of sin and unbelief as it pops up in people's lives.

In reality, we should be even more quick to point out evidences of *grace* than we are to call out sin or to start poking around, looking for evidence of unbelief.

However, the fundamental assumption is that within a week's time every believer is going to sin and therefore needs to:

- Confess our sins to one another (James 5:16)
- Repent before God (Revelation 3:19)
- Turn back toward Jesus in faith (Hebrews 12:1–2)
- Experience the ongoing cleansing and freedom of Jesus (Romans 8:1)
- Observe the fruit of the Spirit being produced in our lives as a result (Galatians 5:16–25)

After the Scripture reading each week, the conversation will turn toward our hearts. Not only will we look at content, you'll look at how that content profoundly challenges, changes, and confronts you

ACT

Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will listen and obey as He calls us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The goal is to empower the hands to respond in faith and action. Once we've discovered the truth about who God is and what He's done, repented of our sin/unbelief, and renewed our faith in Jesus, we need to ask the Spirit to guide us in changing the way we live. Our repentance will have practical impact on our lives.

When John the Baptist was baptizing people, preparing them for the arrival of the Messiah, he exhorted them to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance," meaning "demonstrate through your life that your repentance is legitimate."

This was a part of Paul's message, as well. As he was telling the story of his conversion to King Agrippa, Paul said, I ". . . declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance" (Acts 26:20).

Legalism has left a bad taste in the mouths of so many followers of Jesus that talk of works and actions can sometimes be dismissed. While the “you-are-what-you-do” mindset has certainly caused a great deal of damage in the church, the New Testament clearly calls us to change our behavior *in light of the gospel*.

The book of Titus is one clear example. Titus 2:11–12 says, “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. . . .”

Experiencing God’s grace *motivates* us to say “no” to sinful actions and “yes” to godly actions!

If the Spirit leads someone to repentance, either outside of the group or during the weekly meeting, spend five-to-ten minutes praying and listening together. Ask the Spirit to speak. Be quiet and listen, waiting for Him to answer two specific questions:

- What do you want me to do?
- Who do you want me to tell?

Each week when you gather, don’t forget to ask about what happened the previous week as people walked in obedience before you dive into the next week of material.

Appendix: How Many Should Be in a DNA Group?

Discipleship methods have often employed a one-on-one approach. While this is certainly in line with many apprenticeship models (from which we can glean a lot about how to train someone along the way), it does not appear to be the method Jesus utilized. We rarely, if ever, find Him with only one of His disciples. We have found that 3 is the ideal size for a DNA group.

If you are accustomed to one-on-one meetings, there are a number of reasons to add a third person:

- A more-dynamic group exchange occurs.
- It is much more difficult for one person to dominate the conversation.
- There are two sets of ears filtering everything that is said, providing two unique perspectives in response.
- There’s a much greater potential for learning and development. Each person is unique and brings so much to the table.
- Here are two people loving and supporting each person in the group. No one is bearing another’s burdens alone.

On the other hand, if you are accustomed to small groups of four to eight, there's a number of reasons to limit it to three:

- Each person can contribute significantly to the group.
- No one can "hide," remaining silent for very long before someone asks, "What do you think?"
- Each person has an ample opportunity to share at each group meeting.
- Scheduled group meetings don't last multiple hours.

Though three is the ideal size, circumstances will sometimes dictate that a group be larger than three. Schedule conflicts and a lack of qualified leaders can lead to groups of four, five, and even six meeting together for a time. While not ideal, these options are better than only two people meeting on a consistent basis.