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## What is Discipleship Part V

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### How to Start and Lead a Discipleship Program

*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Joshua 1:8*

This primer is intended to help you and your church to start, lead, develop, grow, and manage a mentoring or discipleship or shepherding program. This article can also be used to start and lead small group Bible studies too. From smaller groups (4 to 10) as well as larger Bible Studies (10+), to even very large Bible studies and groups (100+), because the principals apply to small and large groups, the difference is how you lead and structure them. Such as a “regular” discipleship group or Bible study will have less discussion and more teaching, whereas “small group” Bible study will have more discussion and less formal teaching. Metering is usually done one on one, and then larger studies have formal teaching and then break up into smaller discussion groups, while all are Bible centered with godly prepared teachers.

So what can you start to do? Realize that learning about our Lord and Savior from the study of the Bible is incredibly important and essential! They are the primary and best means for your church to disciple its people in God’s precepts so your people can learn and grow in their walk with Christ. All Christians who are serious about their faith should be disciple and or be in a good Bible study or a small group that is studying the Bible. Yet, most churches do not do this vital call!

In the articles, *Why should I be in a small group?* and *The Importance of Bible Study*) we discussed the importance, impact and reasons why we should be in such groups. The same principles apply to discipleship; because the philosophy of small groups here at *Into Thy Word* is that they are Bible centered studies. The only difference is small groups have more discussion, and they are smaller for more intimacy, whereas Bible studies have discussion also, tend to be larger, and are more teaching centered.

Now that we understand that discipleship is essential for the formation of our Christian faith, we must realize their importance and how they help give us the ability to transfer our learning into real, practical influence to others around us. It is as *iron sharpens iron*; this means we help one another to hone our faith and develop our character. We can listen to all the sermons, read all the best books, buy great CDs, and go to seminars—even seminary; but, unless we are learning, studying and challenging one another in the Word and faith, we will only have a shallow understanding of and impact on the Christian life. Learning and Community breeds maturity and growth compared to individualism and selfishness which tends to breed pride and isolation. Do not get me wrong; we need to be in church under good teaching, we need to do our devotions individually, and be in personal prayer and study. But, to get the most out of our Christian learning so to impact our Christian living, we have to be learning and growing and working it out with others who are working it out; and that place is in Small

Groups that are Bible centered and or larger Bible studies that have discussion groups and or opportunities for discussion (Phil. 2:12-13).

## **What Does My Church Need to Do?**

Even though there is no set formula, there are a few “tried and true” ways Discipleship, Small Groups, Bible Studies and Mentoring can develop that will be more consistent and purpose-filled so they can be more impacting and rewarding for all those involved. Our primary spiritual growth comes from our personal devotional times. Our involvement in Small Groups and Bible studies helps us further our growth and be the “iron that sharpens” one another as each one in the group helps another grow in Him and apply our faith into the world! Make a commitment to develop a discipleship ministry. All the tools you need are in this article, and the rest of the resources can be found in our **Small Group channel** and in the various pages on our website. You can see our article on how to start programs (How to Start, Develop, and Evaluate Programs). In addition:

### **How to Start**

Have a clear ministry vision of what you will be doing with a Bible study and communicate this to the leaders and congregation. This will explain what it is, what it means, its values and purpose, and its benefits. Then develop a structure and plan for it.

- Put in lots of prayer!
- Who will be the leaders?
- Who will train the leaders?
- What materials will you need?
- How will they be organized?
- When and where will the meeting (s) take place?
- What curriculum will be used?
- What resources will be needed?
- What will be the obstacles and potential problems and how will you address them?
- How will the leaders of the church communicate with the Bible study leaders?
- How will accountably be structured?
- How will you deal with problems?
- How will you learn and be flexible to make changes?
- How will you evaluate it?

Then, seek how people will be encouraged and equipped, listen to input, and then make the adjustments. Then, go to the congregation with your passion and plan, and just do it!

## **Marketing Bible studies to a Church That Thinks They Are Scary**

The people in your church, whether you have no Bible studies and two Small Groups, have never had them, or half of the people are in them, need to be challenged and inspired to be Disciple or in Small Groups and Bible studies. You have to tell them why they need to be in one, that it is fun and easy, and help alleviate their fears. The

pastor must share the passion, personally be in one, and give his testimony. Then, further help enable your church membership to get in one by modeling them through demonstration, skits, testimonies, and literature. Have a table in your church lobby staffed with the leaders to sign people up and answer questions. Then, once the people are coming, continue the testimonies, share success stories, and honor the people with celebration and encouragement.

The congregation also needs to know how pastoral care and counseling will be provided (know the limits of the Small Group; they can provide listening and encouragement but not resolve serious issues or do therapy unless the leader is licensed and trained!) Mentoring, Small Groups and Bible studies can unravel deep hurts and issues that have not been dealt with prior, so people need a place to go to be helped.

### **Create Clear Leadership Responsibilities!**

Have a plan to recruit and develop leaders. Make sure the leaders are growing in their walk, have a plan to deal with problems such as crisis, conflict, and abusive people, have regular meetings for prayer, evaluation, encouragement, and mentoring and apprentice development. These people do not need to be experienced, seminary trained or theologians, but willing and able to learn and grow themselves before asking others to do so.

### **What Does your Church Need to Do?**

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