

Small Groups that have the DNA of a Gospel Planting Movement

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There is a minimum DNA required for groups to replicate past the first generation. Let's take a look at each element.

Prayer. Just as prayer is an essential element of movements, prayer is also a critical element of groups. From the first meeting, we embed prayer in the group process. Remember, we never ask lost people to bow their heads and pray. We don't explain what prayer is. We don't have a lecture about this being an important part of group DNA. Instead, we introduce a simple question, "What are you thankful for today?" Each person in the group shares. Later, after they choose to follow Christ, we say, "You remember how we open each meeting with the question, "What are you thankful for?" Now, as followers of Christ, we talk with God the same way. Let's tell Him what we are thankful for?"

Intercession. All intercession is prayer, but not all prayer is intercession. That is why we separated intercession and prayer as parts of the DNA of groups that replicate. Intercession involves sharing personal concerns and stresses as well as the concerns and stresses of others. A simple question, "What things have stressed you out this week?" introduces this DNA element to groups of lost people. Again, each person shares. After the group becomes a baptized group of believers we say, "In the same way that you shared things that stressed you out with each other, now you can share those same things with God. Let's do that now."

Ministry. David Watson defines ministry as, "God using His people to answer the prayers of the lost and of the saved." As any group – lost or saved – shares needs, there is going to be a group desire to make a difference. All the group needs is a little nudge. Ask the question, "As we shared things that stressed us out, is there any way we could help each other during the coming week?" Follow it up with, "Do you know anyone in your community that needs our help?" Embed this DNA from the beginning and you won't have to worry about motivating the group to transform their community when they become Christian.

Evangelism/Replication. Did you know that lost people can evangelize? Well, they can if you keep it simple enough. Evangelism, at its core, is sharing the Gospel with someone else. When working with lost people, they don't know the whole Gospel. That is totally ok. We just want them to share the story they just heard with someone who wasn't in the group. We get them to think this way with a simple question, "Who do you know that needs to hear this story this week?"

If that person is interested, rather than bringing them into the existing group, we have the first lost person start a group with them, their friends, and their family. So the first lost person experiences the study in their original group and then replicates the same study in the group they started with their friend.

We have had groups that started four other groups before the first group ever became a group of baptized believers. Within a few weeks after the first group was baptized, the other groups came to a place where they chose to follow Christ and were baptized as well.

I know this sounds crazy. Stick with me and some of the questions I know you have right now will be answered in a bit.

Obedience. Like I said before, [obedience is a critical element of Gospel Planting Movements](#).

Obedience has to be present even at the small group level, even with groups of lost people. Now, we don't look at groups of lost people, shake our finger, and say, "You must obey this passage." Instead, we ask, "If you believed passage is from God, what would you have to change in your life?" Remember, they don't believe in God yet, so "If" is totally acceptable.

When they choose to follow Christ, you adjust the question, very slightly, "Since you believe this is from God, what are you going to change in your life?" Because they've asked this question all along, new believers don't struggle with the idea that they need to obey God's Word; that God's Word requires something of them; that God's Word requires them to change.

Accountability. Building accountability into the group DNA starts in the second meeting. Look at the group and ask, "You guys said that you were going to help (fill in the blank) this week. How did it go?" Also ask, "Several of you identified things that needed to change in your life. Did you make those changes? How did it go?" If they didn't do anything, encourage them to give it a try this time and be ready to share what happened the next time you get together. Emphasize that it is important for the group to celebrate everyone's accomplishments.

Initially, this will surprise everyone. They won't expect it. The second meeting, however, several will be ready. After the third meeting, everyone will know what is coming and will be prepared.

Obviously, this practice continues after everyone is baptized.

Worship. You can't ask lost people to worship a God they don't believe in. You shouldn't force them to lie by singing songs they don't believe. But, that being said, planting the seeds of worship into the group DNA is possible.

When they talk about things they are thankful for, it will become worship.

When they talk about the changes they made in their lives as they respond to Scripture, it will become worship.

When they celebrate the difference they made in their community, it will become worship.

Worship songs are not the heart of worship any more than a flower is the same as its seed. Worship is the product of a relationship with God. Singing praise songs is one expression of the joy our relationship with God brings.

Yes, eventually they will sing praises. The DNA for worship, however, is embedded long before they start to sing.

Scripture. Scripture is central to the meeting. The group reads Scripture, discusses Scripture, practices recalling Scripture with each other, and is encouraged to obey Scripture. Scripture does not take second chair to any teacher. Scripture is the teacher.

We'll discuss this more in the next Group DNA element.

Discovery. When working with lost people, we have to avoid falling into the role of explaining Scripture. If we do, we become the authority rather than allowing Scripture to be the authority. If we are the authority, replication is limited by our leadership capacity and the time we have to teach every group. Consequently, shifting from Scripture being the authority to the teacher being the authority, will keep groups from replicating like they should.

This is a hard shift to make. We love teaching. It makes us feel good. We know the answers and want to share that knowledge with others.

But, if we want to disciple people who look to Scripture and the Holy Spirit for answers to their questions, we can't be the answer-person. We have to help them discover what God says to them in His Word.

To reinforce this idea, we call the outsiders who start groups, facilitators. They facilitate discovery rather than teach. Their job is to ask questions that get lost people to examine Scripture. After they read a passage, they ask, "What does this passage say about God?" and, "What does this passage tell us about humanity (or mankind)?" and, "If you believed this was from God, what would you have to change about the way you live?"

The discovery process is essential to replication. If groups do not learn to go to Scripture and rely on the Holy Spirit to answer their questions, they will not grow like they should and they will not replicate much, if at all.

Group-Correction. A vast majority of our group leaders and church leaders have no institutional Biblical training. When people hear this, they ask, "What about heresy? How do you keep your groups from going crazy?" This is a great question. As leaders, we should ask this question.

First of all, all groups have the tendency to be heretical in the beginning. They don't know everything about God's Word. They are in a process of discovering God which moves them from disobedience to obedience, but it is impossible for them to know everything from the beginning. As the group reads more together, as they discover more about how God wants them to relate to them, they become less heretical. That is part of discipleship.

If we see them going too far away from Scripture, we'll immediately introduce a new passage and lead them through a Discovery Bible Study on that passage. (Notice that I didn't say 'teach' or 'correct.' The Holy Spirit will use Scripture to correct their behavior. They just need to be directed to the right passage.) After they go through the additional study, they recognize what they need to do. More importantly, they actually do it.

Secondly, we need to realize that heresy usually begins with a highly charismatic (I'm referring to charisma, not the denomination!) leader, with some education, who teaches the group what the Bible says and what they must do to obey it. In this case, groups accept what the leader says and never examine it in the context of Scripture.

We teach groups to read the passage and examine how each group member responds to the passage. Groups are taught to ask a simple question, "Where do you see that in this passage?" When someone makes a weird obedience statement, the group asks this question. When someone

adds in a detail when they retell the passage, the group asks this question. This question forces all group members to focus on the passage at hand and explain their insights and obedience.

The facilitator models group-correction. They also model focusing on the passage at hand.

Priesthood of the Believer. New Believers and Not-Yet Believers need to realize there are no intermediaries standing between them and Christ. We have to embed DNA that removes the barriers and perceived intermediaries. That is why Scripture must be central. That is why outsiders facilitate rather than teach. That is why the group is taught to self-correct based on what Scripture says.

Yes, leaders will emerge. They have to emerge. It is natural. But leadership is identified by functions that define a role. Leaders are not a different class of spiritual or a special status. If anything, leaders are held to a higher level of accountability, but their accountability doesn't give them special status.

If the DNA for the Priesthood of Believers is not present, you will never have a church. The discipleship process must establish this DNA.

What does a meeting look like?

That is a ton of explanation for something that is really quite simple, but very deliberate. The question is, "What does it all look like when you fit it into a meeting?" Here is a simple outline with the DNA elements in parenthesis:

Ask: What are you thankful for this week? (Prayer/Worship)

Ask: What has stressed you out this week? What do you need for things to be better?
(Intercession)

Ask: What are the needs of the people in your community? (Ministry)

Ask: How can we help each other with the needs we expressed? (Ministry)

Ask: What did we talk about last week? (Accountability)

Ask: Did you change anything in your life as a result of last week's story? (Accountability/Obedience)

Ask: Did you get a chance to share the story with [the person they identified]?
(Accountability/Worship)

Ask: We identified several needs last week and planned to meet those needs. How did it go?
(Accountability/Worship)

Say: Let's see what the Bible teaches us this week. Read this week's passage. (Scripture)

Ask for someone to retell the passage in their own words. Like they were telling a friend who wasn't there. (Accountability/Evangelism)

Ask the Group: Do you agree with their retelling? Is there something they added or left out that they shouldn't have? As long as the group doesn't miss a key component of the passage, continue.

If they miss something, read the passage again. If someone states something that isn't in the passage, ask, "Where did you find [what they said] in this passage?" Reread the passage, if necessary. (Priesthood of Believers/Group Correction)

Ask: What does this passage teach us about God? (Discovery/Scripture/Priesthood of Believers)

Ask: What does this passage teach us about humanity? (Discovery/Scripture/Priesthood of Believers)

Ask: If we believe this passage is from God, how must we change?
(Discovery/Scripture/Obedience/Priesthood of Believers)

Ask: Who are you going to share this passage with before we meet again? (Evangelism/Replication)

Ask: When do you want to meet again? This is a practical question. You will never get someone to commit to a 26 week study. But, you can give them the option to meet again next week. If they are really seeking and if the meeting is filling a need, they will tell you they want to meet again.

You can find the list of Scripture Passages we use to disciple lost people into a relationship with Christ [here](#). (LINK)

Using Groups to Disciple

We use the pattern above to disciple and train our leaders – in groups. We select passages from the Bible that address behaviors our leaders need to have (or need to avoid) or things they need to do (or not do) as leaders. When we train leaders, we'll ask them to complete a Three Column Study on the passage – either as a group or as homework before they meet.

Outline of the Three Column Study

Turn a piece of paper on its side, or landscape. Then divide the paper into three columns. Label the first 'Scripture.' Label the second 'My Words' and the third 'I Will.'

Scripture

The length of the passage you chose affects how much time the study takes. Longer passages take longer to study. This isn't a bad thing, but you need to keep it in mind. Generally, try to keep your passages between 10 and 15 verses.

In the 'Scripture' column, write the passage: word-for-word. This takes time but you control how much time by choosing smaller chunks of Scripture. Break larger passages into several sections, spread out over several days. What is most important, however, is this – when you copy a passage word-for-word you actually read it through several (about five to seven) times. It is a form a forced meditation for those of us who can't sit and think about a passage without losing focus. This process also keeps us from skimming familiar passages. When you write it out you have to think about every word.

My Own Words

When you finish copying the passage, use the second column to write the passage in your own words. Write it out like you're telling a friend about it over a cup of coffee. Don't move on until you can write the passage in your own words. You see, you don't really understand it if you can tell it to someone else in your own words. And you can't obey Scripture unless you understand it. It's that simple. Sometimes, you might have to stop on a passage for a couple of days and talk it out with the Holy Spirit before you can finish putting it into your own words. When you start this process, you will probably find there are several familiar passages that you can't write in your own words. Sometimes we 'know' more than we truly understand.

I Will

In the third column we transition from knowing God's Word to obeying God's Word. Look at each part of the passage. Ask God to reveal things you need to add to your life, take away from your life, or change in your life to obey this passage. Be specific. The passage may say that God created the Earth, but you have to decide what that means in your life. How does your life change because you believe God created the Earth? What do you need to do differently? What can you do in the next 24 hours to obey this passage? Every time we open God's Word, He invites us into relationship. We call His invitation 'grace,' because we can't do anything to deserve it. Obedience is how we accept His invitation. God lives with those who obey His Word. (John 14:23-24) When we study God's Word we have a choice: we choose to obey Him or we choose to disobey Him. It is really that simple. This third column is your response to God's invitation.

With leaders, we also ask them to apply SPECK to the passage:

- S – Is there a Sin to avoid?
- P – Is there a promise, a prayer, or praise in this passage?
- E – Is there an example to follow (or not follow)?
- C – Is there a command to obey?
- K – Is there knowledge that I need to retain?

Because our leaders came to Christ with their DNA established during the Discovery Bible Study, they easily transition to following this pattern as they are discipled as leaders. Furthermore, they naturally use this pattern to train people thereby transfer good DNA. We call this Fractal Discipleship. You can read [more about Fractal Discipleship here](#).