

Workshop Guide
Focus on God's Word
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Today we will discuss effective disciple making in the student ministry small group setting. "Discipleship" is a term we use when speaking, but it is also a method many of us do not know how to effectively employ in our ministries. In this workshop, we will identify three primary objectives that will help to address a discipleship deficiency in your small groups resulting in a small group experience that is both satisfying to the leaders and substantive for the learners.

During the workshop, there are four moments where you are encouraged to meditate upon a particular thought or question with your group leaders, listing out certain criteria and/or discussing certain issues currently affecting your small group setting. As you engage in these moments together as a team, be courageous enough to lean into the difficult realities that may or may not exist in your ministry. Most of our efforts have good intentions. But our tireless efforts can, at times, prevent us from recognizing our inherent flaws in our systems or our activities. Improvement will come only when we see the need to improve, so don't simply gloss over what needs to be thoroughly examined and critiqued. Your efforts will be more effective in the long run if you do so.

REMEMBER YOUR PURPOSE

To begin, our first of three primary objectives in small group ministry is to REMEMBER YOUR PURPOSE. Before we address the "what" of our ministries, we must first address the "why." What are your goals? How can you judge yourself as successful if we do not focus on a particular objective?

GROUP ACTIVITY #1:

**What are your primary purposes in your small group ministry? Don't be vague; be specific. Take a few minutes to consider making a list of what you (your leaders) believe is/are your primary purpose(s) in small group ministry.*

You may have found this activity very revealing in a variety of ways. Perhaps, it was simple to list out your group's goals. Perhaps, you realized that your goals are unclear. Do you feel your goals are too cliché, or are they truly reflective of the culture that currently exists in your current ministry setting? Regardless of where you fall on the "purpose" meter, here is a great way to measure your level of effectiveness when it comes to having and achieving a purpose. Use this three-fold approach:

Three-Fold Approach

1. Know Information

KNOW is short for "knowledge." Small groups are based on Bible study. Bible study is built upon the transfer of knowledge, information. In small groups, leaders share their knowledge of theology, doctrine, biblical storylines and characters, and more. Consequently, leaders should be capable of teaching well and communicating effectively. Perhaps, this means leaders need to be trained (we will discuss this later).

2. Show Participation/Demonstration *Apprentice Model*

SHOW is all about the synthesis of information, putting thought into action. What good is information if there is no way to use it to benefit the learner or the world at large? The Bible

teaches that “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”¹ Jesus modeled how to effectively lead a small group ministry. Jesus did not only lead “Bible studies,” but He often provided opportunity for his apostles to put knowledge into practice. They were essentially his apprentices. They would observe how Jesus carried out His ministry, then they would assist and even be sent out to perform the same ministry. Consider these examples below of moments when Jesus modeled an apprentice-style of ministry with his small group where they not only learned but were given the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of a concept:

<i>They witnessed His many miracles</i>	<i>Jesus’ disciples baptized people</i>
<i>Jesus sent the 70 out to preach the gospel</i>	<i>Jesus taught them to pray, took them to pray.</i>
<i>Jesus asked them their idea of who He was?</i>	<i>The apostles cast out demons from people.</i>

GROUP ACTIVITY #2:

**Take a few minutes to brainstorm some practical ways you can create opportunities for your students to SHOW the knowledge they’re gaining in your small groups. How can you move from INFORMATION to PARTICIPATION? Write down a list of 5 ways you can make this shift become a reality.*

3. Grow Transformation

This final step is key. Knowledge must lead to life change. We aren’t looking for simple behavior modification. You can train a dog to behave, but good behavior isn’t the goal. We desire to see hearts transformed. Our exchange of information (KNOW) must ultimately lead toward transformation (GROW). Romans 12:2 states, “**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Emphasis added). 2 Corinthians 5:17 reminds us that “those who are in Christ are a new creation...” This is not a modification, it’s a restart.

The three-fold approach to finding purpose in small group ministry is an approach modeled by Jesus Himself. It is specific enough to guide your plans yet generic enough to allow for your own unique touch. As you remember your purpose, keep in mind the need to KNOW, SHOW, and GROW.

RECOGNIZE YOUR PROBLEMS

Now that you have clear purposes for which to strive in your small groups, it’s time to move forward to our second primary objective of this discussion. None of us are perfect; neither are our systems. Even if we could get it perfectly right, our “rightness” will only be brief due to the ever-changing context of students and the world in which they live. Consider a few common issues present in many student ministry settings and might be present in your current small groups’ setup. On the left side of this list are symptoms of a BROKEN SYSTEM that plagues many. The right column lists ideas that might be employed to correct the brokenness to create a BETTER SYSTEM:

Broken System

-Ruled by Tradition

If it worked once, keep doing it always.

Better System

-Ruled by Needs

If our students need it, let’s make it happen.

¹ 1 Corinthians 8:1 (ESV)

Tradition can be a killer of success. Traditions usually develop when organizations taste success. But success was initially built upon need. When we allow traditions to dominate our plans, we miss the opportunity to be effective in meeting the needs of our people. Traditions usually appear in what we plan, when we meet, where we go, what we wear, how we travel, etc. Let need be the better indication of all that you do!

-Run by the Untrained

Are your leaders equipped to do their job?

-Run by the Trained

Train them to lead well any way you can.

It was mentioned earlier that leaders should be biblically knowledgeable and effective communicators. If they are, you are blessed. If they aren't you are responsible for shepherding them into a useful condition. This is not to suggest we should ignore biblical qualifications for leadership. This is, rather, to encourage you to lead well. Consider having an annual training meeting where all leaders come together to be taught the basics of how to lead small groups well. A few times a year, schedule time to personally interact with your leaders. Ask them about their lives. Pray for their families. Maybe even consider sending out a weekly tutorial on the upcoming lesson so leaders can be aware of your thoughts on Biblical issues.

-Reaching the Minimum

Do your groups reflect your community?

Racial, ethnic, socio-economic, lost

-Removing the Obstacles

Remove any hindrance not required biblically.

Our broken systems usually only reach a small sample size of the communities into which our churches have been planted. Typically, we worship and grow in community with those who are like us: racially, ethnically, politically, socio-economically, etc. The Kingdom of Heaven is not described in this way. In Heaven we see all tribes and tongues represented in God's Kingdom. So why do our churches seem so opposite of that idea? Naturally, the Gospel message is offensive by nature to those who reject it. So this is not an appeal to compromise on Biblical standards of Gospel centrality. It is, however, an appeal to consider what other offenses might be present. Perhaps there are hindrances built into your student ministry small group culture that you don't recognize as hindrances.

GROUP ACTIVITY #3:

**Take a few minutes to discuss and list possible hindrances that might be present within your current context. What issues (traditions) might be preventing someone you don't know from being part of your group?*

-Resulting in Loss

66% of 18-22yos leave church (2019 Lifeway)

70% of 18-22yos leave church (2007 Lifeway)

Percentage is better, but overall numbers are not

-Raising Up Disciples

Jesus modeled small group discipleship

Jesus invested in the few, producing higher retention

Jesus' disciples made disciple-making disciples

The statistics are sobering. Nearly seven of every ten students who are raised in a church culture are leaving the church after their graduation/emancipation from their parents. Maybe the college/young adult programs aren't great. Maybe the demands of studying or entering the workforce prove too much. Whatever the excuses are, the results are that churches like ours are losing more students than we're retaining. This is the truest definition of brokenness with our system. The better system must be a system that focuses less on "keeping young people" and more on "raising up disciples of Jesus." One approach is preventative in nature, lacking purpose and passion. The other is biblical in nature and demonstrates an active pursuit of the very methods with which Jesus ministered with great passion.

Consider this, Jesus never outright told people they could not follow Him, but he DID remind people of the cost of following Him on the front end.² Rather than only appeal to the crowds, Jesus focused on the few. He shared information that led to transformation through allowing participation and demonstration. Jesus made disciples who made disciples who made disciples.

REACH YOUR POTENTIAL

Now we arrive at the third and final objective of our discussion: reach your potential. Potential energy is a concept learned by elementary-aged students. Potential energy is the stored energy an object possesses (active energy is called “kinetic energy”). An object may appear now to be inactive or useless, but if acted upon by a powerful force, the potential energy of that object yields movement and usefulness.

Your small groups have **INCREDIBLE POTENTIAL** for the Kingdom of God. Even if you feel overwhelmed with the task that is before you, you’re never stuck. As a follower of Christ, you have potential and are poised for the right moment when God’s Spirit will empower you for His purposes.

GROUP ACTIVITY #4:

Take a few minutes to read **John 15:1-10 with your leaders. Take note of the terms that are repeated most often. After reading and meditating on the passage, answer this key question as a group: What Is Christ’s **ONE COMMAND** for His followers in this parable?*

You may be tempted to believe God’s primary command here is for you to “bear fruit.” Yes, that is an expectation for Christ’s followers, but that isn’t the primary directive. His primary command, however, is for you to **ABIDE IN THE TRUE VINE**. Fruitfulness might be seen in the branches, but it is only empowered by the vine. In the parable, Christ links abiding in Him to loving in obedience to Him. We abide in Christ in how we obey His commands. Our obedience yields fruitfulness. This is not legalism, but this is great news. There is no pressure for you or any other human to perform. Jesus grants our success based upon our obedience and not on our results. All we must do is trust and abide in Him. You will never reach your full potential until you rest in the **LORD** by living obediently to Him and serving His purposes.

Thank you for taking the time to consider your own group settings and possible ways to enhance your fruitfulness as a student ministry/ small group. The work you do for the Kingdom matters greatly. You are here today because many others before you were faithful to respond to the gospel and share it with others. As you do the same, you become part of a long line of faithful witnesses who place Christ above all.

² Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 14:25-33