

# STARTING ...

... a Men's  
Discipleship  
Group ...



## How can I start a New MEN'S DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

**WARNING: The SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT of MEN.** While this manual is aimed at the need for men to be discipled – it contains principles that would be appropriate for Ladies groups or couples groups, or indeed mixed groups, but with the understanding that many men are much less likely to attend or to contribute to the discussion if the balance of the sexes tips beyond the comfort level. In general men disclose less about themselves in mixed company, so if you can keep men's groups for men only most men will definitely do better.

**DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS** are called by many titles: Cell Groups, Small Groups, Life Groups, Accountability Groups ... but unless they address the real issue of becoming a more devoted follower of Jesus, then they are really missing the point.

Disciples are people who follow closely after their Master. In the time of Jesus, rabbinical schools developed the next generation of rabbis by the discipleship pattern of spending time together to absorb, as well as be taught in formal sessions, how to live like the master. Often that would include more than doctrine and holy practice. It would extend to detail of food and dress, till it became very evident whose disciple an individual was because of the way they dressed, and the diet they followed. Disciples learned to teach as their master taught, and in general when it came to a choice of career, the serious disciple would continue in the training of the rabbi in the hopes that this would also become his living: training and leading the next generation of learners.

Now there are few today who lead their followers in a career ministry like that, although some are doing so, enrolling their students in a two or three year practical discipleship course. More often our pastoral candidates take 3 or 4 years in a college setting of formal education, supported by educational grants and scholarships, or the resources of a few benefactors. Those same trainees may then transfer to an apprentice-style tutelage as a curate or associate, but the same intense kind of mentoring is rare for lay leaders. Certainly God does not call us all to leave home and enrol in theological college. However, Jesus does call us all to be His disciples, and as His disciples to teach others His way. Jesus' command recorded in Matthew 28 to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.", is still considered today to be Jesus' commission to the whole church, not just to those who decide on careers in ministry.

Every local church today needs mentors (disciplers) who will take others into a discipleship relationship, so that they may be taught everything Jesus commanded. Jesus is calling you to that role also.

If this is a desire you have come to sense as almost inescapable ...it is because God is calling; it is because you need it; and it is because there are others that God is preparing to be a part of what you will be doing. In that case, this short booklet is for you – to think through the Why, the What and the How....

So, begin at the beginning, and watch what God will do as you honour His vision and plan for you.

## 1. IT'S TIME TO PRAY

So, you feel God's call on your heart to start a small group for men? Great! Most meaningful change happens in the context of relationships. And there is probably no better setting for any man to develop significant spiritual relationships than in a small group setting. That is the model we see Jesus used with his 12 disciples

As you go about preparing to gather your men's group, it is a great idea to **bathe your efforts in prayer**. Here are some things you might want to pray about and for:

- For God to show you what kind of group He wants you to lead: men who are new believers, men with battle-scars, emerging young leaders, etc. In general it is good for like to lead like: but unless you are in a really big setting that may not be possible.

### Now PRAY ALSO:

- For God to lead you to the right individual men, and that he would prepare their hearts for your invitation. Take a look at the categories of men in the companion manual "Designing a Local Ministry for Reaching Men Who Need Christ."
- That you would be able to devote the time necessary to be prepared to lead.
- That you find the right material for your group. I have found generally it is good to start with the teaching Jesus gave his disciples, beginning at Matthew chapter 5.
- For the right time and location.
- For God to richly bless your group, that He would use it to draw each man in the group closer to Him and to each other.

### ACTION:

1. Spend some time this week in prayer about your calling to disciple others through a small group. Pray through the items above and ask for His guidance as you move forward. Keep a Prayer Journal close at hand and jot down any ideas God brings to mind while you are praying – names, subject matter, or any other thoughts God brings to you as you pray.
2. Tell a brother or spiritual mentor about your desire to start a small group. Ask him to pray for you too. Also, ask him to pray for specific people he thinks would be interested in joining a group.

READ: *Brothers! Calling Men into Vital Relationships*, by Geoff Gorsuch and Dan Schaeffer. More than any other book, this one will give you the "rules" for men's small groups. (Available at Amazon.co.uk: Order it now so you have a chance to read it before your group has met more than once or twice).

## 2. WHAT KIND OF GROUP?

Why do you want to lead this group? Come up with a sentence or phrase that describes your purpose. (e.g.: "I'm looking for men who will become a band of brothers to be there for each other, to encourage each other to be authentic as followers of Jesus.") This will help you as you invite men and start your group. If you have to think it out every time someone asks then you will feel unprepared. Having a mission statement like this one allows potential recruits to know what they are being asked to join.

Also decide what kind of group you want to lead. You could wait and make a group decision, but if you make the definition too wide, you will find it more difficult to focus the group on a common purpose and method. – then your group will likely fall apart. Leaders lead – and men like that.

The kind of group you want to lead will influence the type of participants you ask. Conversely, if God has put a certain man or group of men on your heart, or a certain type of individual – new believers, bikers, or sportsmen for example – then choose the kind of group accordingly. Be sure you can identify personally with the group profile you choose.

There are many different types of small groups. Below is a list of ideas for groups, along with a suggested size and the types of people this group would be most appropriate for (but this is an art not a science). REMEMBER – groups of men only can generally be more open together.

Type of Group	Suggested Size	Types of Men
Bible Studies	6 to 12 - remember, 12 is a number that's been successfully used before	Disciples; Leaders
Discussion Groups	4 to 8 men	All types
Support Groups: specific issues like addictions	6 to 12 men	Hurting men from one problem area
Prayer Groups	2 to 6 men	Disciples; Leaders
Accountability Groups	4 men	Disciples; Leaders
Fellowship/Affinity Groups	2 to 8, depending on the type of activities	Men who need Christ; Fringe Men
Mentoring Groups	2 to 4 men	Disciples; Leaders
Mission Groups: service projects	5 or more men	Mixed regular and fringe men; Disciples/Leaders

## SELECTING MATERIAL

**Bible Studies:** If you have the time, aptitude, and interest you can develop your own curriculum. If not, try either of these websites, under the resources tabs [www.NCMM.org](http://www.NCMM.org)), or [www.ChristianMenTogether.com](http://www.ChristianMenTogether.com). There are also many Bible study guides available from publishers through venues like amazon.com, but most likely your church leadership team will have options to suggest.

Of course not every Bible Study needs curriculum. If you chose to study a particular passage or book of the Bible, some of the group will be able to read around the passage from on-line commentaries such as are available at BibleGateway.com, while others will find books in the church library or elsewhere that will give depth to the discussion. Be sure to encourage each man by emphasizing that the Spirit of God reveals truth to the group through the contribution of each man. As each member remains open to God, each will be able to disclose truth that helps the others. If anyone comes up with ideas that seem off-track to you – you can gently correct the mis-direction by asking the group “Does that sound like what God would say to us? – What else might God be saying?”

**Workbooks:** Workbooks give men a chance to interact with the material and prepare for their meetings. They take a little more work and preparation, so men need to buy in up front. Again, there are many different workbooks available from publishers and ministries.

**Book Studies:** One of the most effective ways to start a small group is to study a book with discussion questions in each chapter. Again the above web-sites will have some suggestions and guidance on the appropriateness of each recommendation for the various types of groups.

**Accountability Groups:** Build relationships with men to help you stay on track. Come up with your own list of questions, or order free wallet sized accountability cards at [www.DiscipleMen.com](http://www.DiscipleMen.com).

**ACTION:**

Decide on the type of group, and order any sample of materials you might like to use.

**Application Questions:**

1. What kind of group do you want to have? Why?
2. Does this kind of group bring any specific men to mind? As you begin to focus on specific men, pray for them. Make a list of potential recruits and pray your way through the group asking God to allow the men to opt-in or opt-out according to how He wants to develop the group. Remember those who do not opt-in at the start may do so later.

Keep in touch with your brother who's praying for you. Does he have any insight for you on the type of group to have or the men who would be included?

### **3. ALL SET – FOR YOUR FIRST GROUP EVENT**

In the last section we talked about determining what kind of group you will have. Now it's time to get going.

Take the list of men you thought you might like to have in your group. A good rule of thumb is that you need to ask two men for every slot in your group. Continue to pray over their names. Ask God to give you names you might not ordinarily think of.

Decide when and where you want to meet. Friday mornings are good because most men try to be back in town by then, and it's often a catch up day. If all your men are from the same church, meet on Sunday, on Wednesday evenings, or one morning during the week.

Invite the men to an informational meeting to discuss the new small group. Pick the time, place, and stick to one hour. As you invite them...

- Do explain to men what you are trying to accomplish and why.
- Don't ask men for a long-term commitment right away.
- Unless you feel strongly otherwise, do tell the men you will initially meet for 4, 6, or 8 weeks (pick a number), then decide as a group where to go from there.
- Do graciously let men decline your offer.

## THE FIRST MEETING is informational:

- Have coffee and donuts or cokes and cookies. Plan to meet for about an hour.
- Start on time and open with a brief prayer.
- **For 10 minutes:** Mention (again) your purpose for wanting to start a men's small group. Give the men an opportunity to comment on your proposed **Purpose Statement** for the small group (You may want to write it out – Francis Bacon said, "Writing maketh an exact man"). They will appreciate being asked, and feel a stronger sense of ownership.
- **Next 40 minutes:** Depending on how many men you have, ask each man to take 3 to 5 minutes to share briefly where he is on his spiritual pilgrimage today, and what he hopes to "give and get" from the group.
- **5 minutes:** Inspire them with your vision for the group. Encourage the men. Don't go too far too fast. Be sensitive that most men will not jump in until they have tested the waters for a few weeks (or months).
- **Last 5 minutes:** Show men samples of the materials you will have available at the actual kick off meeting. Set the date and time and make sure every man knows where and when this first meeting will take place.

### Application:

1. Keep praying. Talk to your brother/prayer-partner about how things are going and ask him to keep praying too.
2. Call each man who attended this week and find out what he thought about the group. Give him a chance to share his thoughts with you privately. Invite him to come back the next week.

Finish reading *Brothers! Calling Men into Vital Relationships* before the next meeting. Now you're on your way.

## 4. BEING AN EFFECTIVE GROUP LEADER.

As you begin meeting with your small group, you can take one of two approaches to leading: teacher or shepherd.

**A teacher** decides what his students need to know and then instructs them using a specific plan – covering a series of vital lessons.

**A shepherd** guides and protects. He is along for the journey, goes after those that stray away from the group, and is willing to risk his life for those in his charge. He listens for questions – especially those that indicate a struggle or uncertainty about a key belief – and he plans a way to explore that question in the group.

Which kind of leader would you rather follow?

There is no set agenda for a small group meeting. In general, you should spend your time as follows (based on a 90-minute meeting time):

- 30 minutes on the material – this includes reviewing the material and discussion
- 45 minutes of sharing – what's going on in guys' lives, follow up on previous week's issues if warranted

- 15 minutes of prayer time – includes gathering prayer requests and some time to pray together

Here are some hard-learned lessons about leading an effective discussion:

- Air time for every man every week.
- You should draw out the quiet man without making him feel uncomfortable. Sense his pace. Privately ask the man who talks too much to help you draw out the other men.
- Don't talk more than 25% of the time. If there is silence when you ask a question, don't try to fill the space.
- Ask open-ended questions, not ones that can be answered, "Yes," or "No." Instead of asking, "Do you struggle with making good decisions?" ask "What kind of decisions do you find difficult? ... and when they give examples follow up with another open question like "Why is that a hard decision to make?"

Other Suggestions to Be Effective

- Contact your men each week between meetings. **This is crucial.**
- Plan on spending five hours per week on your personal ministry including group time (phone calls, personal visits, counselling men, etc.). Take each man to lunch as opportunity arises. Invite their family to your house for dinner.
- Credo: "Long term, low pressure." A small group is many things, including a hospital for men with broken wings. Make yours a "safe place" for men. Do not put pressure on men to conform to certain behaviour. Instead, show men Christ.
- After your group is formed host a couple's social outing.
- If you are a marketplace small group, encourage your men to be actively involved in a Bible believing church.

#### **Application:**

- Check in with your brother/prayer-partner and tell him how things are going. Make sure, however, not to break confidence with anyone in the group. Just talk about yourself and how he can pray for you as you shepherd the men in the group.

## **5. WHAT WILL MAKE YOUR GROUP LAST?**

Value is what makes a group last. Every time a man shows up, he has decided not to do something else. Most men have many choices, so your small group has to meet the "real and felt needs test" or it won't last. Real needs are met through content, felt needs through caring.

**Content:** simply put, use good stuff. No matter how much guys like to get together, if your material is second rate or irrelevant, they won't keep coming. If you are going to do a Bible study, make sure it is a practical, application-oriented Bible study. If you are spending hours preparing each week so that you can explain the origin of the Greek word used in the text – unless your guys are all seminary students or scholars – you will not be feeding your guys' souls.

Every day, men face a world hostile to the Christian worldview. Your small group material needs to equip them in this battle to live, as Gordon MacDonald puts it, like a “Christ-follower in the real world.” Be practical, relevant, accessible, fun – yes, fun.

**Caring** creates, captures, and sustains disciples. Men will come if they sense you really care about them. If they don't, they will eventually drift away-but rarely tell you why.

The first way to show that you care is to do what you say you are going to do. Start on time. End on time. Do the lesson you said even if no one else prepared. Don't cancel meetings at the last minute. But caring isn't just about what happens during your group meetings.

A survey asked men's leaders what they felt were the most effective methods to keep men coming back. The overwhelming answer: It's what happens between the meetings – personal phone calls, coffee or lunch, e-mails, social activities.

**Real needs and felt needs:- Content and caring.** Keeping your eye on both of these areas will ensure that your group will last. And you will know you have succeeded when you hear men saying:

- *"I really feel like my group cares about me personally;"*
- *"The leader makes sure I get a chance to air my thoughts;" and*
- *"I cannot believe how my life is changing."*

Congratulations on completing this “How To” manual. Our desire at CMT is that this coaching has equipped you to better reach the men in your community, and disciple the men in your church.

We want to make these coaching resources as effective as possible. Would you give us your valuable feedback? Please take a moment to go to our website ([www.ChristianMenTogether.com](http://www.ChristianMenTogether.com)) and share your comments with us: **Thank you!**

