

## Small Group Dynamics

### What Is Success and How Do We Measure It?

When pastors or churches want to know about the effectiveness of our discipleship process, “A Journey with Jesus”, they ask about how successful it is. By this they usually want specific numerical answers to their questions before taking on the process for their church.

It might be wise to ask the pastor to define what success means to him before answering his questions. Then ask him what the goal of his church is, how they measure success against that goal and what his success rate is.

When talking about the issue of discipleship there are at least six levels of success that can be observed.

1. General obedience to the Word of God ... the Great Commission ... “to make disciples.”
2. Using the prescribed process:
  - **Stay** until you are clothed with power from on high.
  - **Go** into all the world.
  - **Preach** repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus name.
  - **Baptize** those who believe the message ... in the name of Jesus.
  - **Teach** those who have been baptized to observe all that Jesus commanded.
3. When an individual goes through the discipleship process himself. (Young man)
4. Checking for an individual’s fruit (Observing and listening to him)
5. When an individual leads others through the process. (Father)
6. And when those others who have been led through the process lead others through the process. (Grandfather) *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)*

### Spiritual Opposition

It has been our experience over the years that the discipleship process has come under constant attack from the enemy ... the kingdom of darkness in opposition to the kingdom of light. Since the purpose of the discipleship process is to transform people into the image of Jesus Christ it only stands to reason that opposition would be fierce! In John 15:18, Jesus said, *"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you."*

People who have not been adequately trained and equipped are largely ineffective against their enemies. So stopping discipleship before it begins or in its earlier stages is supremely strategic for the opposition. This opposition has been primarily manifested in three ways; 1) stopping or slowing the information concerning the discipleship process, 2) unclear understanding of what discipleship is within church leadership and 3) general apathy of many Christians in their spiritual lives.

## **Reflections on Spiritual Parenting**

Most people learn to parent (disciple) after having gone thru the process themselves and observe their grandchildren.

As spiritual parents you are the key people in the Kingdom of God. And God, Himself, trusts you with His children.

- What will you do with them and how will you treat them? \_\_\_\_\_
- What kind of spiritual children will you have? \_\_\_\_\_

Look at the fruit of your natural lives. What kind of children have you produced? Evaluate each of your children after one generation or 22 years.

- What kinds of adults have they become? \_\_\_\_\_
- We have all made mistakes in parenting ... what would you change? \_\_\_\_\_

Believe in God's grace ... He redeems us and gives us more chances.

Believe that God will help you ... while recognizing your need to change by renewing your mind.

Jesus equated leaven to teaching in Matthew 16:12 and then Galatians 5:9 goes on to say, "*a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.*" What you teach ... either by your words or actions ... will produce a product.

It is a good idea to keep reminding yourself that you are teaching "children" ... even though in the flesh they may appear as "grown-ups." ("Be the adult" ... "use discipline" ... "let them suffer" a little – Remember, Jesus learned by the things He suffered.)

If you take on Christians who are "newborns" or very young in their faith you might want to begin their instruction with some preliminary teaching. These downloadable helps can be found on the "key2changes" website.

Don't become discouraged if people drop out. In fact, at almost every transition point (babes to children to young men to fathers) we have encountered resistance. It's pretty much like raising kids.

Being a spiritual parent requires time, effort and patience but the reward is great.

Keep reminding your children of who they are in Christ (identity) and what their Father in Heaven wants them to become (destiny).

We are a messy people trying to follow a perfect God. How can we do that? \_\_\_\_\_  
Yet God wants us to make heaven more crowded.

Once you have completed your first discipleship process ... we would like you to become available to help other churches and groups in your area going through the process.

## **Using "Why" Questions**

Children ask a lot of “why” questions of their parents. It is one of the ways they learn. Why, is a probing question, which seeks to know the reasoning behind someone’s thoughts or statements.

As spiritual parents you should be using “why” questions on God’s children to determine where they are at spiritually. When confronted with the first “why” question people usually respond superficially or as I call it, “in the flesh.” If you ask them a second “why” question to their response ... the next reply will come from the soul (the person’s mind, will or emotions). If you press them with a third “why” question it will come from their spirit.

## **Teaching**

As adults we know that people learn in three primary ways: 1) observation, 2) verbal and/or written instruction and 3) by doing. The “A Journey with Jesus” discipleship series contains all these elements. However much of the “controllable” time is spent in classroom instruction. Therefore, we have found that one of the most effective ways to teach through the materials is to have the people; 1) read the lesson beforehand, 2) write down questions they have concerning the lesson and 3) record what their take-a-ways from the lesson were.

To assist you in thinking clearly about the task of teaching ... I have included the “Seven Laws of Teaching which follows:

### **Seven Laws of Teaching**

This is a clear and simple statement of the important factors governing the art of teaching. It has been used with great success as a handbook for teachers in the church school.

<b>Seven Laws of Teaching</b>	<b>Stated as Rules for Teaching</b>
1. A TEACHER must be one who KNOWS the lesson or truth or art to be taught.	1. Know thoroughly and familiarly the lesson you wish to teach -- teach from a full mind and a clear understanding.
2. A LEARNER is one who ATTENDS with interest to the lesson.	2. Gain and keep the attention and interest of the pupils upon the lesson. Do not try to teach without attention.

<p>3. The LANGUAGE used as a MEDIUM between teacher and learner must be COMMON to both.</p>	<p>3. Use words understood in the same way by the pupils and yourself -- language clear and vivid to both.</p>
<p>4. The LESSON to be mastered must be explicable in the terms of truth already known by the learner -- the UNKNOWN must be explained by means of the KNOWN.</p>	<p>4. Begin with what is already well known to the pupil upon the subject and with what he has himself experienced -- and proceed to the new material by single, easy, and natural steps, letting the known explain the unknown.</p>
<p>5. TEACHING is AROUSING and USING the PUPIL'S MIND to grasp the desired thought or to master the desired art.</p>	<p>5. Stimulate the pupil's own mind to action. Keep his thought as much as possible ahead of your expression, placing him in the attitude of a discoverer, an anticipator.</p>
<p>6. LEARNING is THINKING into one's own UNDERSTANDING a new idea or truth or working into HABIT a new art or skill.</p>	<p>6. Require the pupil to reproduce in thought the lesson he is learning -- thinking it out in its various phases &amp; applications till he can express it in his own language.</p>
<p>7. The TEST AND PROOF of teaching done -- the finishing and fastening process must be a REVIEWING, RETHINKING, REKNOWING, APPLYING and REPRODUCING of material that has been taught ... the knowledge and ideals and arts that have been communicated.</p>	<p>7. Review, review, review, ... reproducing the old, deepening its impression with new thought, linking it with added meanings, finding new applications, correcting any false views, and completing the true.</p>



## **6.1 - Small Group Life Cycle**

Small groups of all kinds are an integral part of a healthy and vibrant congregation. They train new leaders and give the congregation a growing base of educated and involved members. They provide education and instruction, and most importantly, fellowship and community.

Just as individuals go through stages of development over our lifetimes so do groups. As you put together small groups for the upcoming year, it is important to their health that you provide your leaders with training and leadership development.

*Stage I: Birth and Infancy (2 to 3 sessions)* - *Forming* is characterized by participants being polite and often superficial in their interactions in the group. People are testing the amount of compatibility with others. Anxiety is usually high. The individual's need is to establish safe patterns for interaction. The group's need is to establish criteria for membership and interaction. Typical questions include, "Do I want to be part of a group with these people? Are they going to accept me? At this stage the group is very dependent on the leader to provide guidance and direction.

*Stage II: Childhood (6 to 7 sessions)* - *Norming* characterized by individuals beginning to challenge differences as they seek to retain (or regain) their individuality, influence and power. This may be directed at the leader or other emerging leaders. Individually people are working out their own control needs so that they maintain a sense of control while still being part of a group. This may come as direct attacks on the facilitator or covert non-support of the work of the facilitator or group. The group's need is to persevere so that they develop norms and patterns for decision making within the group. Usually the most unpleasant of all the stages, it is, however, vital for the group to go through this stage.

*Stage III: Teenage (5 to 6 sessions)* - *Conforming* is characterized by the group finally becoming a team or cohesive unit. It negotiates roles and processes for its work and study, tackles goals and works together collaboratively. Individuals are working on care and affection for others and fellowship among the members.

*Stage IV: Maturity (30 to 100 sessions)* - *Performing* where the group is working on achieving its goals by recognizing the unique gifts of each member and utilizing them to everyone's benefit. There is a real sense of accomplishment with the final accomplishment of the goals.

*Stage V: Old Age and Demise (5 to 6 sessions)* - *Reforming/Transformation* is the achievement of the goal and the decision on how to move forward – either re-forming into a new group or ending. Groups that have achieved their goal and bonded interpersonally tend to want to hold onto the experience and stay together. We see this often in Education for Ministry groups who devise a "Year 5" group or some other way to stay together. But what developmental theory tells us, and what many of us know from experience, is that when a group has achieved its goal it should recognize and celebrate that achievement and their ending. A critical part of transformation is dis-engagement. "Failure to disengage, to recognize that the life of the group, as its members have experienced it, has come to an end, will only lead to a hollow, unfinished feeling in the future. Even if the members were to remain in contact, or if a reunion were to occur (which seldom happens), the experience will never be the same, as the contexts of each of the members will have changed."

## 6.2 - Questions for Five Levels of Communication

### Level One

**Casual** conversation - these questions are difficult to use in a group setting, as there is no **real** sharing going on. These questions can be used as a welcoming time as group members enter the meeting location.

#### Examples

1. How are you?
2. Did you have any trouble getting here?
3. Would you like to help yourself to some refreshments?
4. Can I take your coat?

### Level Two

Exchange of **facts** - these questions can be time wasters if not controlled and used to move the meeting on. These questions should be used by the leader to establish freedom to speak openly within the group not just one on one as in “level one” conversation. They should be used when the group first assembles as a **bridging** question to move the group to “level three” conversations.

#### Examples

1. Are you all comfortable?
2. Has anyone heard the news about? (Pick a current topic)
3. Did you all have a good week?
4. Did you all get the invitation letter to this group?
5. Did you have any questions concerning it?

### Level Three

Exchanging **thoughts** and **opinions** - this is the **primary** sharing level for groups and consumes the majority of time. People are sociably most comfortable at this level. It is a place that people regard as relatively safe from exposure to risk in opening up ... while on the other hand it has enough intimacy that people do not perceive it as idle chitchat. This level of conversation must be reached quickly and maintained in order to retain people's interest in the group.

#### Examples

1. What is your name and can you tell us a little bit about your family?
2. How long have you been coming to our church and what were the events surrounding your coming here the first time?
3. What do you like best about our church so far?
4. Last week was Thanksgiving ... what was one thing you were thankful for?

## **Level Four**

Sharing **feelings** - these questions serve as a bridge for:

1. Moving the group to “level five” conversations,
2. Increasing the level of trust between group members,
3. Stretching the group members ability to share, or
4. Personal ministry within the group.

**Sensitivity** to the leading of the Holy Spirit for the group usually becomes evident during this time. Normally these types of questions occurs a little later in the meeting after substantial “level three” conversation and they usually require some form of action such as moving to “level five” conversation, returning to “level three” conversation or stopping to do personal ministry.

### **Examples**

1. Using weather terminology how would you describe your past week?  
(Sunny, partly cloudy, stormy, overcast, drizzle, cold, etc.) Why?
2. When you do something stupid, how much does it bother you to have other people notice and laugh? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 10.
3. How have you changed in the last year? Be specific.
4. What three words would you use to describe how you are feeling right now?

## **Level Five**

Sharing of **hopes, dreams, fears, and failures** - these questions are used to develop trusting relationships and to facilitate bonding of group members with one another. This type of sharing usually occurs in the latter stages of a group meeting after sufficient conversation at “level three.” This level of conversation is difficult to **maintain** for extended periods of times and requires an **action** to bring closure to it before the meeting ends. Returning to a lower level of conversation or proceeding into personal ministry within the group are two ways to bring closure to “level five” sharing. Perhaps the best way is to deal with the closure of the issues discovered in “level five” conversation is in the closing prayer of the group meeting.

### **Examples**

1. If you could not fail, what would you like to do?
2. If you had your life to live over, what would you change?
3. What is one change that frightens you?
4. Would you like to know the exact date of your death? Why or why not?

## **Remember**

Don’t ask questions that can be answered with the words “**yes**” or “**no**”.

\*\*\* Break into triads and practice these questions.

## **Group Sharing Questions**

### **Level Two**

1. What are some sounds you associate with your childhood?
2. What are some scenes you associate with your childhood?
3. What are some smells you associate with your childhood?
4. What were your favorite activities as a child?
5. What is your favorite animal?
6. What is your favorite car?
7. What is your favorite song?
8. Where did you live between the ages of 7 and 12, and how many brothers and sisters did you have? What kind of a car did your family have? Who was the person in your family you felt closest to?
9. What's the story behind the longest time you've gone without sleep?
10. What was your first job? What do you remember most about it?
11. What is one tradition in your family?
12. The school I attended was...

### **Level Three**

1. How would you go about trying to change someone's mind?
2. What is something you have changed your mind about?
3. When did God become more than a word to you?
4. The hardest thing I have ever done...
5. The gift I will never forget (apart from my conversion)...
6. If you were to go to live on the moon and could carry only one thing, what would it be?
7. What would you do if you were to see?
  - ... a person being robbed?
  - ... a person drowning?
  - ... a house on fire?
8. What is your favorite comic strip? Why?
9. If your house were on fire, what three items (not people) would you try to save?
10. What would you do if you could take a day off work this week?
11. What's your favorite scar on your body? How did you get it, and can you show it to us?
12. What room in your house do you like best?
13. What is one thing you want to accomplish next week?
14. If you had a time machine that would work only once, what point in the future or in history would you visit?
15. When was the last time you did something for the first time?
16. Which of the following restrictions could you best tolerate: leaving the country permanently, or leaving the state in which you now live?
17. At a meal, your friends start belittling a common friend. What do you do?
18. I first remember cute as...

19. As a child I...
20. People who dominate should be...
21. There are times when I...
22. Loving someone is...
23. Worship services...
24. Weak people are...
25. If you are employed, tell what you do on your job? What do you like best about your job? What do you dislike most about your job?
26. How would you describe yourself to someone who does not know you?

#### **Level Four**

1. What were the circumstances of your coming to faith in Christ?
2. What colors are most like your personality? Why?
3. What was the happiest moment of your life?
4. Tell us about your first date?
5. The greatest compliment I ever received...
6. Let me tell you about my best earthly friend...
7. My greatest disappointment...
8. Where did you feel warmest and safest as a child?
9. Nothing is so frustrating as...
10. When I pray I...
11. When I enter a crowded room I...
12. I feel the Bible is...
13. To me God is...
14. The thing I like about myself is...

#### **Level Five**

1. What is one change you expect for yourself in the future?
2. What is the greatest regret of your life?
3. If you could take a pill that would enable you to live until you reach 1000 years, would you do it? Why?
4. I fear most...
5. My greatest desire is...
6. Ten years from now I...
7. Who are you?
8. What are you worth?
9. Where are you going?
10. Why are you here?

## 6.3 - Helpful Thoughts

### Spiritual Growth:

- God's ultimate goal for your life on earth is not comfort, but character development.
- God's word provides the truth we need to grow, God's people provide the support we need to grow and circumstances provide the environment in which we need to practice Christlikeness.
- God wants you grown up.
- Spiritual growth is not automatic. It takes an intentional commitment.
- You must want to grow, decide to grow, make an effort to grow, and persist in growing.
- Discipleship – the process of becoming like Christ – always begins with a decision.
- When the first disciples chose to follow Jesus, they didn't understand all the implications of their decision. They simply responded to Jesus' invitation. That's all you need to get started: Decide to become a disciple.
- Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.
- Farmers "work" the land ... not to get the land, but to develop what they already have.
- Stop thinking immaturely: think maturely. Get rid of stinkin' thinkin'.
- Spiritual growth is the process of replacing lies with truth.

### God's Word:

- The Bible needs to be my authority:
  1. Not culture (everyone is doing it)
  2. Not tradition (we've always done it)
  3. Not reason (it seems logical)
  4. Not emotion (it feels right)
- Assimilate the truth:
  1. Receive God's word.
  2. Read the Bible.
  3. Research or study the Bible.
  4. Remember God's word.
  5. Reflect or meditate on God's word. Meditation is focused thinking. It takes serious effort. You select a verse and reflect on it over and over in your mind.

- Without implementation, all our Bible studies are worthless. Help yourself to implement what you have learned by writing out an action step.
- The action step should be:
  1. Personal (involving you)
  2. Practical (something you can do)
  3. Provable (with a deadline to it)

## **Testing and Trials:**

- Problems force us to look to God and depend on Him instead of ourselves.
- Everything that happens to you has spiritual significance.
- If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. But if you'll look at Christ you'll be at rest.
- Give thanks **in** all circumstances, not **for** all circumstances.
- If you are facing trouble right now, don't ask, "why me?" Instead ask, "What do you want me to learn?"
- Every temptation is an opportunity to do good.
- God develops the fruit of the Spirit in your life by allowing you to experience circumstances in which you're tempted to express the exact opposite quality. Character development always involves choice, and temptation provides the opportunity.
- Every time you defeat a temptation, you become more like Jesus.
- Temptation follows a four-step process.
  1. Desire. Satan identifies a desire in you.
  2. Doubt. Satan tries to get you to doubt what God has said about the sin.
  3. Deception. Satan is called the "Father of Lies."
  4. Disobedience. What began as an idea gets birthed into a behavior.
- Overcoming temptation
  1. Refuse to be intimidated by it.
  2. Recognize your pattern of temptation and be prepared for it.
  3. Request God's help.
- Defeating temptation
  1. Refocus your attention on something else. Do not try to resist temptation.
  2. Reveal your struggle to a godly friend or support group.
  3. Resist the devil.
  4. Realize your vulnerability.

- Temptation begins by capturing your attention. What gets you attention arouses your emotions. Then your emotions activate your behavior, and you act on what you felt. The more you focus on “I don’t want to do this,” the stronger it draws you into its web. So when temptation calls you on the phone, don’t argue with it, just hang up. You defeat bad thoughts by thinking of something better. This is the principle of replacement. You overcome evil with good.