

Lesson 2: Discipleship Groups

Intro

In the last lesson we reflected on Jesus' commission to make disciples of others and the principles He practiced in making disciples. If we want to help people be disciples of Jesus, we would not find a better or more effective method than the one Jesus used.

The six principles of discipleship

Write out again the seven principles of discipleship that Jesus practiced.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

If we were to formulate these principles in another way, a way that would fit to our situation today, they would look like the list below:

Principle #1: Discipleship is a call to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

Principle #2: Growth in discipleship needs fellowship.

Principle #3: Discipleship is learning by example.

Principle #4: Discipleship needs prayer, supplication, and intercession.

Principle #5: The foundation for growth in discipleship is the word of God.

Principle #6: Discipleship is always training for outreach.

Principle #7: Discipleship is outreach.

How do we put the principles into practice?

How can we put these principles into practice today so that we can help people to live as disciples of Jesus? Surely there is more than one concrete way to put these principles into practice. For example, growth in discipleship can take place through reading good books, personal conversations with others, Bible study, sermons, seminars, or small groups. Each of these methods has its place. But there is one idea that would be more effective at putting Jesus' principles into practice than the previous listed suggestions: a discipleship group. You may be wondering, "A discipleship group? What is that?"

A Discipleship group is ...

A discipleship group is a small group consisting of about three to six members who have decided to meet weekly for about 90 minutes to study lessons on discipleship and put them into practice. Each member receives the material beforehand and works through it personally before the discipleship group meeting.

The target group is ...

A discipleship group is not the place for people who do not know Jesus. That is what small groups like outreach Bible study groups are for. The discipleship group is intended for Seventh-day Adventists or people who have already decided to be baptized. This

discipleship program is challenging because its purpose is to bring about a lot of change. As Seventh-day Adventists, we must have higher standards than those who are not an Adventist. I would like to show in the following pages how a discipleship group can put these principles into practice, just as Jesus did while He was on earth.

Principle #1 Discipleship is a call to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

When Jesus called the disciples to leave everything behind and follow Him, they had to make a decision. They could not be “part-time” disciples who could come and go depending on how they felt each day. Jesus wanted them to follow Him wholeheartedly. He expected a commitment.

If we want to run a successful discipleship group, we need *commitment*. We need to find church members or friends who are willing to commit to the discipleship adventure. There are many who do not want to take on such a responsibility or make a commitment. People who have this mindset are not the right ones for a discipleship group. It is better to start out small, but with committed group members.

Commitment is the key to a successful discipleship group. Without it, there will be no success and we will give up in frustration. We need to understand that commitment is not just about us. Our example has a large influence over the whole group. When I am faithfully taking part in a discipleship group, positively contributing, and fulfilling my assignments, I am encouraging others through my example. But the opposite is also true. The half-hearted effort of a group member can bring discouragement to others and ultimately lead the group to failure.

Think about it! We need commitment in many areas of life. We have contracts at work, in our studies, for our apartments, and when we buy a car. Life cannot function without these commitments. We show others that they can trust us by following through on commitments. We are expected and prepared to commit to all these things in life. Is not our relationship with Jesus much more important than all these other things? Is it too much to ask that our commitment to Him be greater and in more earnest?

Commitment for the discipleship group

To give weight to the commitment, it is important that the members of the group form an agreement. In a way, they make a covenant. This can be verbal or written, but make sure it is clear and sincere. It might be better to make the agreement on a Module basis (3 modules, 15 lessons each) rather than for the whole set of 45 lessons. (For further understanding please look at the lesson overview of this three-module discipleship course.) This way opens the possibility for an evaluation at the end of each module and a renewed commitment to the next. It is easier for someone to commit to one module, when they know that afterwards they have the option to continue or not.

The verbal or written agreement for the discipleship group can look like the following:

I desire to be a part of this discipleship group with the expectation that God will use this time to grow my faith in Jesus Christ and bring change in my life. I am aware that this discipleship group can only succeed when each member is fully committed. I commit to the following points:

- 1. I will attend weekly group meetings, with the exception of illness or some unforeseen emergency that prevents me.*
- 2. I will carefully prepare for each weekly lesson and fulfill my assignments so that in our meetings we can work together to learn as much as possible.*
- 3. I commit to learning the weekly memory verses on time and to keep them fresh in*

my mind.

4. *I will contribute through active participation, openness, honesty and trust so that we can achieve the set goals in our weekly meetings.*
5. *My goal is to learn how to start my own discipleship group or an outreach Bible study group in the near future.*

I know that this commitment is not only valid before the group and myself, but also, and most importantly, before God. I will do my best with God's help to keep and live by the above-mentioned five points.

This commitment creates the basis for accountability in which we encourage one another to stay true to our promise.

Principle #2 Growth in discipleship needs fellowship.

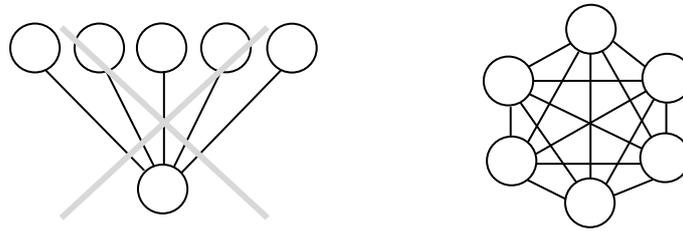
Remember, fellowship played a central role in Jesus' discipleship process. He invested an enormous amount of time and energy in his small band of disciples. Jesus knew that His sermons would not be enough for His followers to become mature disciples.

Paul's description of the church being a body brings this point clearly home (see 1 Corinthians 12). The individual members need each other and cannot survive without each other. In many places we are encouraged to be there for *one another*.

- ..., but that the members should have the same for *one another*. (1 Corinthians 12:25)
- Therefore comfort each other and edify *one another*. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- As each one has received a gift, minister it to *one another*. (1 Peter 4:10)
- Bear *one another's* burdens. (Galatians 6:2)
- And let us consider *one another* in order to stir up love and good works. (Hebrews 10:24)

Growing in faith can only happen within Christian fellowship and authentic relationships that are stamped with openness, mutual responsibility, and accountability. To grow spiritually we need interaction, exchange, encouragement, help, admonishment, and friendship. Sermons and seminars about discipleship have their place, but they are missing the relational element that can only be found in a fellowship. Change happens best within the context of committed relationships in which there is open accountability in the areas of faith, encouragement, admonishment, and prayer with and for each other.

The best atmosphere for spiritual growth is small groups where we study together what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, putting into practice the lessons we have learned and encouraging one another. The model is not one of a teacher who stands before their class and teaches (chalk-and-talk teaching). But rather a small group circle where the leader of the discipleship group is also an interactive learner.



The group remains vibrant through fellowship and the cultivating of open relationships (learning in fellowship). That is why the context of this discipleship course is a small group—a discipleship group.

Principle #3 Discipleship is learning by example.

The discipleship group leader's responsibility is not only to methodically go through the topics. He must demonstrate that he practices these things in his own life and is a life-long learner.

Principle #4 Discipleship needs prayer and supplication.

Along with interaction and Bible studies, prayer is an essential component of the discipleship group. We pray about each member's requests. We pray for others. As well as talk with God about the lessons we learned from that day's topic. You will find practical tips for leading out in prayer in the next lesson.

Principle #5 The foundation for growth in discipleship is the word of God.

"God's word is living and powerful." (Hebrews 4:12) That is why God's word is at the center of a discipleship group. Members intensively study God's word both before and during the discipleship group meeting. The lessons are built so that the answers can always be found in the listed Bible texts. It's not only important to understand the meaning of the text, but to also apply it in our daily lives. The goal of Bible study is to be transformed through the reading of God's word.

As discipleship is the center of the Third Angels Message (see Revelation 14:4,12), the lessons put the different aspects of discipleship in the context of the Adventist message and worldview. Besides teaching discipleship promoting a clear Adventist identity is a definite goal of this discipleship course.

The discipleship topics are divided into 4 modules that reflect the 4 stages of the discipleship path.

Step	Evangelize	Nurture	Equip	Empower
Goal	Converted Christian	Growing Christian	Missionary & Worker	Leader & Trainer
Module	Jesus, My Life	With Jesus Ahead	My Life for Jesus	Leaders for Jesus
Focus	Discipleship Character of God Plan of Salvation Repentance Forgiveness Steps to salvation Righteousness of Christ Assurance of salvation	Be filled with the Holy Spirit How to study the Bible Prayer Knowing God's Will Living a victorious Christian Life	Principles of evangelism Friendship evangelism How to run small groups How to give Bible studies	Principles of Christian leadership Teamwork How to run discipleship groups How to run Sabbath School Action Groups How to conduct a church service How to train others

In addition to prayer and Bible study is the memorization of Bible texts. Each lesson has a memory verse that every member will be expected to learn before and recite during discipleship group meetings. Through this method we give God the opportunity to work on our hearts. Lesson 5, in Module 1, tells us why it is important to memorize Bible texts and gives practical tips on how to memorize verses so they will be anchored in our long-term memory.

Principle # 6: Discipleship is always training for outreach.

Jesus had a clear goal for training His disciples so that they would continue to work and make disciples of others even when He was not physically with them. Of course, a discipleship group is formed to strengthen the faith of the group members. But the main goal, in the context of Jesus' great commission, is the multiplication of leaders. It is not an endless circle; it has a beginning and an end. In short, the discipleship group is a training ground for those who are dedicated to Christian growth and want to begin their own discipleship or outreach Bible study groups to train others.

Principle # 7: Discipleship is outreach.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave his disciples the Great Commission. This commission is taken very seriously in a discipleship group. A discipleship group is not

just there for the members of the group. Rather, it seeks to reach out to lost people. Practical ways will be discussed in the next lesson.

Challenge

1. Continue to pray for people with whom you could establish a discipleship group.
2. Continue to plan specific steps for starting a discipleship group.



Bible Study

Please study **Acts 19:8-10** carefully and take notes on the content, meaning, and life applications of these verses. Be sure to write down good questions for each.

What does the Bible text say?
(content, meaning, application)

How can I ask questions about this?
(Questions on content, meaning, and application)

