

Pursue Discipleship

Introducing and Multiplying
DNA Groups



A **Next Steps** Resource of Mercy Hill Church

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Introducing and Multiplying DNA Groups

nick weber

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And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

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A Great Commission

Are You a Disciple of Jesus Busy Making Disciples of Jesus?

At the close of Jesus' earthly ministry, he leaves his disciples with a commission—and a *great* one at that! We read of it in Matthew 28:16-20. I would like to direct your attention there for a moment as we begin:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Though there is certainly much that could be brought out from a text like this, I wanted us to read it here up front simply because it sets up the broader issue I will be concerning myself with in this booklet: namely, the issue of *discipleship*.

When we open our New Testaments and read, we can't help but come to the conclusion that anyone who would bear the name of Christ, anyone who would call him/herself a "Christian," is, in biblical terms, a *disciple* of Jesus. So, in the text we just read, these eleven who had been following and learning from Jesus for the past three years or so of his public ministry are there in verse 16 referred to as the eleven "*disciples*."

And as we read on in our New Testaments, what we come to understand is that being one of Jesus' disciples is not a stagnant sort of thing. There's a certain explosiveness to it. There's an out-flowing, ever-replicating momentum that is set off in the heart of each disciple. So, again referring back to Matthew 28, Jesus, speaking to these eleven disciples, calls them to move out and make more: "Go therefore and *make*

disciples . . ." (v. 19). In other words, these eleven disciples are to unleash a disciple-making movement in the world.

And so they did! It's in view of their ministry that we read in Acts 6:7: "[T]he word of God continued to increase, and the number of the *disciples* multiplied greatly . . ."¹ And this momentum has carried on into the present. It's why Mercy Hill is even here today.

Disciples of Jesus are to be busy making disciples of Jesus.

Here is the very heartbeat of the church of God. Here is both our identity and our purpose. Here is who we must be and what we must do. If we are not engaged in this, we are, as Jack Miller has said, "living out of accord with our whole reason for being in this world."² It's no wonder we feel so out of sorts, so empty, so embittered, so aimless, so dissatisfied. We are not doing the very thing we have been created and redeemed and sent out in Christ to do!

Disciples of Jesus are to be busy making disciples of Jesus.

So let me ask you here even as we begin: *are you a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus?*

- The front end of discipleship, as we may or may not realize, is, in fact, evangelism. Making disciples begins with making converts. Are you going with the gospel to unbelievers? Are you starting conversations, asking good questions, listening to their stories, and engaging them meaningfully with the good news of Jesus?
- But discipleship, as we often think of it, certainly carries on into our relationships with other believers as well. Making disciples doesn't stop at making converts, it's only just gotten started. Are

¹ Any emphasis in Scripture citations has been added by the author.

² C. John Miller and Barbara Miller Juliani, *The Heart of a Servant Leader: Letters from Jack Miller* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub, 2004), 313.

you helping other Christians in their journey towards Jesus? Are you openly, honestly, meaningfully involved with others and pursuing Christ together with them?

Again: are you a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus?

If Not, Why Not?

If not, why not? What is it that is keeping you from such magnificent work?

While there are many reasons we may find ourselves negligent in these duties (some more honorable than others), it is my sense that one of the more significant reasons may be that we simply don't know how to go about it. We barely know how to be a disciple of Jesus ourselves let alone how to help others along in it as well. It feels too lofty for us. It feels too overwhelming. It feels too confusing. We wouldn't really even know where to start.

Oh sure, in one sense, Jesus gives us all we need there in verses 18-20 of Matthew 28. He says that we are to baptize people into his name and proceed to teach them all that he commanded, and that he will be with us in it as we go. That really is, again, in one sense, all that we need. We have his sacrament. We have his word. We have his Spirit. Isn't that enough?

But, in another sense, we still get confused, don't we? We still feel like we could use some help—a little more direction perhaps. What exactly does Jesus mean with these verses? How should we even begin to approach what he is calling us to here?

I do think that every Christian and, especially, every local church, should try to give themselves to working out just how they will pursue this idea of discipleship to Jesus. What will they make of it? How will they go about it? How will they encourage and cultivate it in their community of saints?

So now here we come to what I am really after in this booklet. I have wanted for quite some time to fully develop and introduce to you what I

am here calling DNA Groups.³ These groups really are just my attempt to help us along in this discipleship thing—to put some flesh on the bones, to put some color in the picture that Jesus outlines for us in Matthew 28. I want everyone in our church to be a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus. And I hope my efforts here will somehow serve that glorious end!

Not a Program but a “Culture”

Now, to be clear, I am not interested in providing here a sort of one-stop-shop for discipleship. Do you know what I mean by this? I am not thinking, nor am I even wanting, what I am putting forward now to be seen as the only way to go about pursuing discipleship to Jesus. My goal in all of this is not to strong-arm God’s people into one way of doing things. Some of you, I know, are already busy with discipleship in one way or another. And I rejoice that it is so!

All I want to do here is simply offer some help to those of us who are a bit confused. I want to provide some sort of *orienting vision* and *supporting structure* for people to make use of as the Lord leads. You can take our stuff on DNA Groups and use it wholesale, you can customize it to fit your needs, or you can discard it altogether. But whatever you do, please do something! Be a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus!

More than anything, what I want to develop here at Mercy Hill is what we might call a “culture of discipleship.” I’m not interested in developing a *program* of discipleship, per se, but rather a *culture*. What I mean by this is: I don’t want us thinking that discipleship is merely taking a class or reading a book or going through a curriculum and then somehow we’re done. I want it to be a part of our everyday life. I want it to be a normal thing here for people to be engaged meaningfully in each other’s lives, pursuing Christ together, and inviting unbelievers to join in

³ I should mention that, while the vision and content developed for these groups is largely my own, the name was inspired by those groups commonly found in the Soma family of churches.

on the journey. DNA Groups are just one way I'm looking to help develop that.

I want it to be a normal thing here for people to be engaged meaningfully in each other's lives, pursuing Christ together, and inviting unbelievers to join in on the journey.

The Plan for This Booklet

So, with these introductory matters now behind us, in what remains of this booklet I want for us to first consider the broader biblical and theological background that stands behind the idea for these DNA Groups. And then we shall come around to deal more specifically with what these groups are, how they function, and how you can get involved!



Are you currently engaged meaningfully in other people's lives and pursuing Christ together with them? Are there people who truly know you—your passions and joys, your trials and temptations? Are there people whom you truly know? Or have you been attempting the Christian life alone?

The Gospel and Our Genetics

Biologically Speaking

Before we consider the biblical background that is situated behind the vision for these groups, let me first remind us what, biologically speaking, DNA even is. This will actually set us up for what we'll go on to look at next in the Scriptures.

Now, I'm certainly no scientist, but I am at least aware (as I'm sure you are as well) that DNA is the carrier of genetic information in our bodies. Our genes, transferred from our parents, influence and help determine many of our body's biological and physical characteristics. As such, there's naturally going to be this similitude between my parents and myself in many ways . . . because I share some of their DNA.

If you've ever brought a newborn baby home from the hospital then you know firsthand what I'm talking about. When word gets out that your little one is now at home, family and friends start stopping by with gifts and meals. And what do they want to do? Let's be honest. They don't want to see you. They want to see the baby! And when they do, without fail, within moments, the discussion begins . . .

They start trying to figure out just who your baby looks like. She has her dad's eyes, her mom's hair, great grandpa's smile, Aunt Betsy's dimples, and on it goes, right?

By God's grace, I've brought three babies home now from the hospital and here's the general consensus: Chloe looks more like my side of the family; Bella looks more like Megan's side of the family; and Levi looks like some sort of a mix between the two.

Now, I bring this up here to make a point. However people parse out the traits of our children—whether they look more like dad's side or more like mom's side—we can be quite sure of at least one thing: they are going to look in many ways like their parents—like part of the family—because they share their genes . . . their *DNA*.

The Biblical Storyline

And this understanding of DNA really sets us up now to discuss the biblical background to DNA Groups. I wonder if you realize that the entire story of Scripture can be told, in one sense at least, from the perspective of genetics. Let me quickly run us through the four chapters of the biblical storyline—Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation—and I'll show you what I mean.

Chapter #1: Creation

Humanity, we learn in Genesis 1:26-27, was originally created “in the *image* of God.” The idea here is familial.⁴ It's presenting Adam and Eve as God's children. When we say today that a child is the “spitting image” of his parent, we are not too far off from what it means for man to be made in the image of God. We were his children with, we might say, our Father's DNA. We looked like him. We were created to, as a mirror, reflect him and his glory into the world all around. When others looked at us, they were to see something of him.

We see this in the way the creation narrative plays out. I wonder if you've ever noticed this:

- In Genesis 1, God is naming and ordering his creation. But then in Genesis 2, we see that Adam is given the authority to name and order things as well—with the animals and, ultimately, his bride.
- In the opening verses of Genesis 1, God is the one who is fruitful and multiplying and filling his creation with all manner of plants

⁴ In the nearby context of Genesis 1:26-27, this idea of being in the “image” of something else shows up again, only this time it is referring specifically to a father and his son: “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own *likeness*, after his *image*, and named him Seth” (Gen. 5:3). Seth was in the “image” of his father, Adam. We are meant, it seems, to read back into Genesis 1 this idea of a child-parent relationship even between humanity and God! This explains why, later, Luke is willing to go so far as to refer to Adam as “the son of God” (Luke 3:38). Seth was in the image of his father, Adam. And Adam (and, with him, all humanity [cf. Acts 17:29]), amazingly, was in the image of his Father, God. To be made in God's image, then, is to be like, even look like, God's child!

and animals and life. But then down in verse 28, we see that he goes on to tell Adam and Eve to “[b]e fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”

- In the opening verses of Genesis 1, God is clearly portrayed as the supreme King and Ruler over all. But then down again in verse 28, we read that Adam and Eve are told to “subdue . . . and have dominion” on the earth—albeit in a subordinate and God-honoring way.

And on we could go. But the point, I think, is quite clear: we were designed to image, to look like, to reflect our heavenly Father in all the earth! In other words, again, we had something of our Dad’s DNA.

Chapter #2: Fall

With this now in view, the fall of Genesis 3 can be understood as a sort of *genetic mutation*. The hearts of Adam and Eve, you recall, turn from God and, consequently, the very essence of human nature becomes corrupted and shot through with sin.

At the tree of testing (v. 6), the image of God in man was not fully lost, but it was most certainly marred. We still looked something like our Maker, but now with severe deformities. Like a mirror broken, we still reflected our Father to some degree, only now in fragments and flashes.

As a result, by nature we are all now something a little less than human—less than what God at first created us to be. We are selfish, rebellious, sinful, divided, confused, broken.

- We still name things in God’s world, but now we often use our names to degrade and tear down.
- We still bear fruit and multiply and fill the earth, but now we fill it with sin and division rather than righteousness and shalom (cf. Gen. 6:5).
- We still subdue and have dominion, but now, sadly, it is usually with self-centered intent.

And we see this stuff coming out in us early, right? Just this last week, my kids were outside playing in the backyard, and I started to catch onto what they were doing. My girls had filled their wagon with all sorts of stuff—balance bikes, toys, wood, rocks, outdoor pillows—and they’re making Levi (their little brother) pull it all around the yard. And they’re barking orders at him and things. When I asked them what in the world they were doing—catch this—they said they were trying to train him so he’ll get stronger and eventually be able to pull them around wherever they’d like to go. In other words, they’re raising him up to be their personal slave! To put it another way: they’re learning how to subdue and have dominion—only it’s a bit mixed up from the sort of thing God intended, isn’t it?

Now, obviously this is just a humorous example, but as we get older it gets increasingly less humorous (doesn’t it?!)—with the way we manipulate, the way we abuse, the way we hurt one another . . . the way we make it all about number one . . . me!

At the tree of testing, the image of God in man was not fully lost, but it was most certainly marred. We still looked something like our Maker, but now with severe deformities. Like a mirror broken, we still reflected our Father to some degree, only now in fragments and flashes.

Sadly, we now, by nature, look a lot less like God and a lot more like the devil (John 8:44; Eph. 2:1-3; cf. Rom. 1:18-32). We are in desperate need of what we might call *genetic rewiring* or *image renewal*. We need to be changed from the inside out. We need new hearts and a new nature. We need to be remade in our Father’s image. Because we’ve gone and made a mess of it.

Chapter #3: Redemption

The surprise of the gospel is that God, in Christ, actually enters into the mess we've made and makes this renewal possible!

I love what Bonhoeffer says concerning our being restored into God's image: "[T]here is only one way to achieve this purpose and that is for God, out of sheer mercy, to assume the image and form of fallen man. As man can no longer be like the image of God, God must become like the image of man."⁵

Jesus, the eternal Son of God—whom Paul calls "the *image* of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15),⁶ whom the author of Hebrews describes as "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb. 1:3)—comes down from heaven. Perfect son; perfect child; perfect image—reflecting without distortion the glory of his Father into a fallen world—in the way he walked and talked and led and served and lived . . . and died.

Of course, the troubling truth of the matter is that, when faced with such pure and holy brightness, in our sin, we couldn't bear it. Just as we marred the image of God when it was put on us at first in Eden, so when it came to us in the person of Jesus we tried to mar it once more. With our chains and our lashes and our thorns Jesus was ravaged nearly beyond recognition. And, as we nailed him to the cross, it's as if we were taking hammer to mirror. "I can't bear see God's image in this world any longer!"

We left the Son of almighty God hanging there on a stick in the dark . . . reduced to shards.

At Calvary, in our arrogance, I suppose we thought we were doing away with the image of God once and for all. But, truly, God, in his grace, was making a way for us to be renewed in that image forevermore! On the cross, Jesus was suffering under the judgment of God in our place.

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995), 299.

⁶ Note that Jesus has not been *made* in the image of God (like you and I), but he himself *is* the image in complete and perfect expression. He is the eternal "model" or "archetype," you could say, after whom humanity was originally patterned.

There he was disguised under the image and “likeness of sinful flesh” and condemned (Rom. 8:3). And when he rose from the dead three days later, victorious over sin and grave, a new door of possibility was thrown open for us: “[J]ust as we have borne the *image* of the man of dust [Adam], we shall also bear the *image* of the man of heaven [Jesus]” (1 Cor. 15:49).

Where we had been broken in Adam, we now can be restored in Christ. He came to rewire our genetics, to renew us in his image, to put us back together—to make us fully human in the most divine way!

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But it is a process.

It begins when, by God’s sovereign grace, we are born again into the family, as it were, from above through the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). All at once we come alive and we see the kingdom and it’s glorious King! As Paul puts it in 2 Cor. 4:4, in the new birth, our eyes are opened to see “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the *image* of God”—and, this time, wonder of wonders, we don’t despise it. . . we delight in it! We actually find ourselves wanting to reflect it.

And as we fix our eyes upon Jesus and follow after him as disciples, Paul tells us, we will do just that: “[W]e all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another*” (2 Cor. 3:18). We see him. We love him. We learn from him. And we start to look more and more like him!

Elsewhere, Paul makes it abundantly clear that this transformation, though ultimately guaranteed for those who are in Christ, isn’t automatic or without effort on our part. We actually get the privilege, we might

say, of participating in this process of renewal as we, through repentance and faith, put to death the old man and put on the new. Listen to the way he exhorts the church in Colossae:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, *which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*. (Col. 3:5-10; cf. Eph. 4:17-24)

We reckon our old man dead with Christ and our new man alive with him. We start loving God and loving others, reading Scripture and caring for orphans, singing Psalms and washing feet, saying prayers and serving the outcast. Our stone hearts begin to beat again. The broken mirror is brought to reflect God's light once more. We start looking like our Father as we were designed to at first.

We have *his eyes*, and *his smile*, and *his voice*, and *his hands*. We're being renewed in his image. Because of grace. Because of Jesus!

Chapter #4: Consummation

God, in his Son, is bringing us back to himself and renewing us in the image we had marred. We who had made ourselves children of wrath have been adopted back in as children of the living God (cf. Eph. 2:1-10). And, lest we fear somehow falling short of this end goal, God promises that he himself will finish for us what he's begun in Christ: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears *we shall be like him*, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2; cf. Rom. 8:29-30; Phil. 1:6).

Oh Christian, keep your eyes on him. Follow closely behind him. He is not only your Savior and your God, he is also your Destination and

your Goal. By his grace we now share in his genes and, soon, we shall share in his glory!



Why do you think the Bible puts such an emphasis on us being created and renewed in the image of God? What's the big deal? Why is it so important? In what ways would you say you haven't been looking like Jesus lately? In other words: where do you think you need this renewal most?

What Is a DNA Group?

Discipleship as the Means

Now, at this point you may be wondering: what in the world does all of this have to do with discipleship and DNA Groups? In a word: everything! You see, discipleship to Jesus is the way we are slowly renewed in his image.

When you think about it, as Jesus set out to make disciples, what was he doing? He was calling people out of darkness—away from their broken way of life and the realm death—and he was inviting them to follow him, to learn from him, and to start living and looking more and more like him. In other words, again, discipleship is his way of rewiring our DNA.

This is why, by the way, the last chapter of Deitrich Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship*, which I quoted from earlier, is entitled "The Image of Christ." Let that sink in. A book on *discipleship* . . . ending with a chapter on the *image of Christ*. This is no coincidence. Bonhoeffer knows that the ultimate aim in discipleship to Jesus is renewal in his image! That's where this train finally let's off. That's the end of the road for the disciple. That's the point.

As Paul puts it in Romans 8:29: “[T]hose whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” He calls you into discipleship and then he conforms you into his image. To put it another way: renewal in the image of God is the *end*; discipleship to Jesus is the *means*.

Discipleship to Jesus is the way we are slowly renewed in his image.

Towards a Definition

Now we’re calling these discipleship groups at Mercy Hill *DNA Groups* for two simple reasons:

- First, the idea of DNA keeps ever before us the *ultimate goal* of discipleship: namely, renewal in Christ’s image and likeness—that we would start to look more and more like him, like children of our heavenly Father. We mentioned above that being renewed in the image of God through Christ is not instantaneous, but a process. Well, DNA Groups exist to foster and facilitate in our church this ongoing process of growing up more and more into the image Jesus. The goal in these groups is to let him touch the deepest places of our being (our DNA, you might say) and influence every aspect of our lives.
- But more than merely keeping this goal before us, the idea of DNA also outlines for us the *basic steps* involved in accomplishing it. Here is where DNA becomes our acronym standing for the process of *Discovering*, *Nurturing*, and *Applying* Christ.

Now before I work out just what each of these steps entail, let me give you the definition of a DNA Group in its entirety: **A DNA Group is a smaller group of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until he is all in all.**

Unpacking the Definition

Every word in our definition counts. All I want to do now is simply unpack it bit by bit. I want to help us make sense of it and see how it is all grounded and exemplified in Jesus' own disciple-making ministry.

A DNA Group is a smaller group of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until he is all in all.

Discover, Nurture, and Apply

Let me begin with those three key words that form the basis for our acronym: "DNA Groups are smaller groups of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to *Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ . . .*"

As we approach this idea of Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying Christ, it might help you to imagine us going on a journey from *head*, to *heart*, to *hand*. Let's look at these one by one and you'll see what I mean.

DISCOVERING CHRIST → HEAD

Discovering Christ simply means that we come to see more of him—who he is, what he has done, what he teaches, what he promises. We uncover more of the glory of his person and work. We explore the width, breadth, height, and depth of his love for us at the cross. We get knowledge of him in our heads.

Discipleship to Jesus really is first and foremost an expedition of discovery. We will never stop uncovering the riches of the glory of God in Christ. Not now. Not ever. Not during our years on earth. Nor through all eternity in heaven!

NURTURING CHRIST → HEART

Nurturing Christ takes the things discovered about him and attempts to draw it all down into our hearts. We are not satisfied merely knowing truths about Christ with our heads, we want to relate to him, trust him, love him, worship him with all of our hearts. Here is the place where we repent of our wanderings and our idolatries and our false alliances, and we re-root ourselves by faith in Jesus. Here is the place where we cry out with that man in Mark 9:24: "I believe; help my unbelief!"

As a side-note—though, as I said, we will always be discovering more about God, his glory, the gospel, and so forth—I am convinced that it is this Nurture piece that is often the big issue in our discipleship to Jesus. Oh sure, when you first start following Jesus there is much to learn, much that you don't know about the basics of sin and grace and salvation and things. But as we carry on in our discipleship to him, we can be prone to think that the problems we still deal with are all resulting from some lack of knowledge on our part. We need new truth, a new verse to memorize, a new book to read.

But, often, it seems to me at least, this is not the case. Often the real issue in the matter is not that we lack some knowledge of God's accomplishment or promise. *It is rather that we have failed to properly, deeply, wholly embrace the things we already know of him—the things we already know he has said.* We've discovered the truths of Christ with our heads but have we nurtured them in our hearts?

Here is where the real battle is waged.

To give you an example, how many people in our church have struggled off and on this past week with a sense of anxiety and fear do you think? I dare say all of us have in one way or another.

Now, without knowing the nuances of our situations, I can at least in simplistic terms lay out for us what we need—and for most of us it's not new knowledge of Jesus! We know what the Bible says in Hebrews 13:5-6: "[God] has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear . . .'" We've read this text. We've heard sermons on this text. Some of us have probably memorized this text.

And yet still we fear. Why?

Because there is breakdown between what we *know* and what we *believe*. There is often an awfully large gap between our *heads* and our *hearts*. And this Nurture piece attempts to bridge that gap through repentance and faith and prayer to Christ for help. "Why am I not embracing this? What am I looking to for comfort and security instead? How can Jesus come to my rescue here? Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

*There is often an awfully large gap between
our heads and our hearts.*

APPLYING CHRIST → HAND

Applying Christ looks to move all of this out into our lives. True and vibrant faith in one's heart leads to love and obedience in one's life. "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that *bears much fruit*" (John 15:5).

Returning to our previous example, if I truly believe that God is my ever-present Helper, then I will not be afraid, then I will have peace even in the face of formidable circumstance, then I will be able to move towards others in love instead of always caving in with self-concern and self-pity.

It will *change* my life.

*The full range of religious motion should
move from the head through the heart
to the hands.*

We are not satisfied to only know Christ with our heads—that would be mere *intellectualism*. Nor are we satisfied when once his truths have

reached our hearts—that would be mere *sentimentalism*. The full range of religious motion should move from the *head* through the *heart* to the *hands*.

Remember: discipleship to Jesus has as its end conformity to his image. He doesn't save us by grace so we can remain in sin. He saves us to renew us. Grace transforms. As we follow him we start to reflect him—we start to look more and more like him.

MODELED IN JESUS

Now I want to show you in brief how Jesus modeled this process wonderfully for us in his own disciple-making ministry while on the earth.

- He began with a call to *Discover* him: "Follow Me" (Luke 5:27; cf. Matt. 4:18-22; John 1:43). In other words: "Come, see, listen . . . discover who I am."
- And as the disciples came to discover many things about him, Jesus was not satisfied with letting it all remain merely intellectual and external. He attempted to move the matter towards their hearts: "But who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:20). In other words: "It is not enough to know about me intellectually, you must know me personally. Now that you have followed after and discovered much about me, who am I to you?" Here is the call to *Nurture* Christ.
- But even a profession of faith—"[You are] the Christ of God" (Luke 9:20)—was not the end goal for Jesus. The embrace of him as Christ by faith in one's heart effects a change in one's nature that will start to work out in one's life. The disciples were not called and saved merely to remain as they were. They were called and saved to be conformed into the image of the Son. And this has practical implications: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). In other words: "All that you have seen in me is what I now want to do in and through you." Here is the call to *Apply* Christ.

Do you see it? Our three steps are right there in our Savior's own discipleship ministry. What an awesome thing!



Do these three steps make sense to you? Have you ever thought of discipleship to Jesus along these lines before? What's helpful about this acronym? Is there anything still confusing about it? If you were to join a DNA Group, what might it look like to walk these steps out together?

Smaller Groups

Return to our definition: "DNA Groups are *smaller groups* . . ."

DNA Groups, for the most part, will be intentionally kept small (typically 2-4 people).⁷ Because these groups aim for renewal in Christ at the "molecular" level, each member of the group must have space to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ for him/herself. There is a deeply personal aspect to our faith. It is *my* head, *my* heart, and *my* hand that must be realigned with God. If each member is to personally engage with the Lord and one another at this deep level, the groups must be kept small to provide both the time and intimate atmosphere appropriate for such work.

Jesus, again, is our model at this point. Certainly, he ministered to *large crowds* at times (Luke 6:17-19), but he specifically gave his attention to the *twelve* (6:12-16) and, even more narrowly, to the *three* (8:51; 9:28). He understood that if he was to get into his disciples' hearts and see real fruit in their lives, he would have to get them into smaller, more intimate groups.

⁷ We are not dogmatic about this. Exceptions can certainly be made. But, in general, these groups will be more fruitful if they are kept smaller, for reasons I am about to explain.



Why might it be important that the group is kept small? Have you ever been a part of a smaller group like this before? What was good about it? What was hard? If you were to join a DNA Group, what expectations, hopes, and fears would you bring into it?

Committed and Consistent

"DNA Groups are smaller groups of *committed* people who meet on a *consistent* basis . . ."

Committed and consistent. We must face here the simple fact that, unless this small group of people is committed to and consistent with one another, little growth can take place.

You recall, perhaps, that when Jesus called his disciples there could be no shuffling of feet. Those who tried were met with sobering words: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Far better were those disciples who, when called, seemed to sense the majesty of the one calling them and immediately left everything to follow him (5:11, 28). Jesus knew that commitment and consistency were required for true and lasting discipleship and conformity to his image to take place.

Obviously, we are not calling for commitment and consistency to a DNA Group with even remotely the same kind of severity, but a principle is here established for us and it is worth our consideration: if we want to grow as a disciple towards Jesus, we must meet to pursue him together on a regular basis.⁸

⁸ To be clear, when you join a DNA Group, it's not as if you are signing on for life. Each group is encouraged to have regular checkpoints where members can prayerfully evaluate whether they feel God is calling them to continue on or not. Some groups will have clear finish lines (e.g. if you are meeting to go through a book or some other resource and you've come to the end of it). Other groups will be more indefinite (e.g. if you are meeting to simply talk about life and pray together). But every group will likely have its own "life cycle." And that is okay. The most important thing is not that you stay in one group for years on end, but that, however long you are in that group, you are fully



How are you with commitment? Do you often start and stop things? Why would consistency together be important? What will make it hard? If you were to join a DNA Group, how could the other group members help you with this even in the midst of your busy life? How could you help them?

Together

"DNA Groups are smaller groups of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ *together* . . ."

With this word "together" I have something quite important in mind. Too often, in my opinion, with discipleship there comes this sort of top-down, one-way approach, where one person is "making a disciple" of the other and not the other way around.

Far better than the "me-over-you" model of discipleship is the "me-with-you" model that we see in the Scriptures. We are co-travelers—young and old, novice and mature, fresh and seasoned—behind Calvary's King.

While, certainly, discipleship does involve more mature believers pouring into younger ones, to say that this is merely a one-directional process is a gross oversimplification and even a dangerous reduction of

present and engaged—you're *all in*. Be committed. Be consistent. And watch what Jesus will do!

what Jesus intended. Far better, I think, than the “*me-over-you*” model of discipleship is the “*me-with-you*” model that we see in the Scriptures. We are co-travelers—young and old, novice and mature, fresh and seasoned—behind Calvary’s King. I am not making you *my* disciple. I am inviting you to follow along with me as *his* disciple!

What this means is that every member of a given DNA Group should be operating within what I call the three relational dimensions of discipleship: *Leaning*, *Learning*, and *Leading*.

RELATIONAL DIMENSION #1: LEANING

By *Leaning*, we understand that no Christian is an island, that each member of Christ’s body needs the other. No one stands alone.

Even the great apostle Paul, we could say, “leaned” in on those whom he was discipling. He shares burdens, asks for prayer, and speaks of being personally ministered to and refreshed by others.

Look at Romans 15:30-32, for example:

I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God *on my behalf*, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and *be refreshed in your company* (cf. 1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 1:8-11; Eph. 6:18b-20; 2 Tim. 1:16).

“I need your prayers. I need you to refresh me.” That’s Paul talking. If Paul the apostle is saying that to those whom he is leading to Jesus, how much more should we? He may be their father in the faith, but he still calls them brothers and sisters in Christ. He is in this discipleship to Jesus thing together with them.

RELATIONAL DIMENSION #2: LEARNING

By *Learning*, we understand that every Christian, however mature in the faith, still has much to learn. Others have knowledge, experiences, and gifts that we don’t. The moment we think we have nothing to learn from

another is the moment we prove ourselves to truly be the fool: “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise” (1 Cor. 3:18; cf. Rom. 12:3, 16b).

RELATIONAL DIMENSION #3: LEADING

By *Leading*, of course, I have the other side of this in mind. Every Christian, however new in the faith, has something to offer. Paul would say it is often upon the parts of the body we think insignificant and unimportant that God bestows the greatest honor (1 Cor. 12:21-25).

To put it bluntly: if you are not willing to lean on or learn from the other members of your DNA Group, you certainly are in no place to be leading them! True movers and shakers in the kingdom of God lead from down low (Mark 10:42-45)!

*If you are not willing to lean on or learn from
the other members of your DNA Group, you
certainly are in no place to be leading them!*

MODELED IN JESUS

Again, we see something of this even in Christ’s own disciple-making ministry, do we not?

- No doubt, we could say that he leans in on and shares himself with his disciples in many significant ways. He lets them in on his Gethsemane distress—inviting them to stay awake and watch and pray with him (Matt. 26:38). He receives from his disciples provision for his physical needs (Luke 8:3). And, my personal favorite, he calls his disciples “friends” (John 15:15). They are not merely his pupils, his students, his proteges. They are his

closest and dearest *friends*. His heart and life have been interwoven with theirs!

- And though we know that “in [him] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), he holds it all with such humility. He doesn’t speak over his disciples, but rather listens and attends to them.
- And, when he does speak, he says just enough—with meekness and tenderness. He leads from down low.

But, having said this, we still understand that disciple-making for us is of a different category altogether than it was for Jesus, right? He could simply say, “Follow Me”—full stop. And it was enough. He is, after all, as Thomas would say, “[our] Lord and [our] God” (John 20:28). For us, on the other hand, it is not so much ours to say, “Follow me”⁹ as much as it is to say, “Follow him with Me.”

We are in this discipleship thing together.



Which of the three relational dimensions of discipleship do you think will be hardest for you to live out? Why? If you were to join a DNA Group, how could the other group members help you with this?

⁹ Of course, I am aware that Paul himself in places says virtually just this. But there are two things to keep in mind here: (1) he is an Apostle and, as such, has been given authority in the church in a way that no subsequent Christian ever is; and (2) when he calls us to imitate or follow the example we see in him, he means: “Follow me *as I follow him!*” (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6). In other words, he is essentially saying what I have been calling us to say here: “Follow him with me!”

Until He Is All In All

"DNA Groups are smaller groups of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together *until he is all in all*."

Too often, I think, we segregate our religious/spiritual lives from our normal/everyday lives. As such, we are prone to reduce what salvation and discipleship to Jesus really means. We get that the gospel covers our past sins and failures, we are assured that the gospel secures our future entrance into the gates of heaven, but we are often at a loss for how the gospel really touches things in the here and now. O sure, we talk and think of it on Sundays, but we have really no idea how it connects to our Mondays.

Here is where we must remember that God's redemption is co-extensive with his creation. By this I simply mean: his redemption will one day encompass everything—from soul, to body, to nature; from marriage, to family, to friendship; from sleep, to work, to hobby; and so on. There is no divide in our lives between things that are "sacred" and things that are merely "secular"—between things that Christ cares about and things that he doesn't. He cares about it all. He died to bring transformation to it all.

Christianity is not merely another religion, it is a new way to be human (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). And we take this new humanity with us into everything that we do. This is why Paul can say to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "[W]hether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." There is nothing in your life beyond the bounds of Christ's kingdom. There is nothing in your life so mundane, so menial, so commonplace that it cannot be redeemed in Christ and handled in such a way so as to bring glory to God. Every aspect of a disciple's life ought to be increasingly brought under the Lordship of Jesus and transformed by his Spirit and grace!

So DNA Group members get into each other's lives and ask: what does this "all" Paul speaks of look like for you?! "[W]hatever you do, do *all* to the glory of God." How can Christ be all in all?!

How can Christ be glorified when you're working in a cubicle, or changing a diaper? How does the gospel change the way you sit in rush

hour traffic, or relate to your neighbors, or drink a cup of warm coffee on a cold morning?

Discipleship to Jesus should touch and transform every part of our lives!

DNA Groups exist to help us make these connections that we might integrate our lives into a composite whole united and marching under the banner of God's glory!

*Every aspect of a disciple's life ought
to be increasingly brought under the
Lordship of Jesus and transformed
by his Spirit and grace!*

Think of Christ's disciple-making ministry again. Jesus didn't merely offer his disciples doctrines to be believed or rituals to be performed or Sunday meetings to attend. He offered them back their *humanity*. And that is why his discipleship ministry took the shape that it did.

Certainly he shared Scripture with them, prayed with them, visited synagogues with them, and did ministry with them; but he also walked dirt roads with them, laughed at silly jokes with them, wept in the face of loss with them, ate fresh bread with them, drank good wine with them, slept under the stars with them, and did ordinary everyday stuff with them. He showed them not just how to do the "spiritual" stuff for the glory of God, but how to do it all. He showed them what this new humanity looks like in every sphere and context.

He showed us that true discipleship is not satisfied *until Christ is all in all*.



Would you say you are putting all of your life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and doing it for his glory? Or are there areas you are either unwilling to give him or unsure what surrendering to him even looks like? Are there aspects of your day-to-day to which Jesus and the gospel just don't seem relevant? If you were to join a DNA Group, what area of your life do you hope to see Jesus influence most?

The DNA Group Charter

James 1:18-27

While there are many texts we could point to as constituting a sort of "charter" for our DNA Groups, James 1:18-27 stands out as one of the most poignant:

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion

that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

This text sets forth the basic ideas that should guide and govern each DNA Group. I think it is helpful to see all that we've been talking about to this point put succinctly and pointedly in one single text. Let me walk you through it briefly here as a way of tying all of this together.

Verse 18: The Primacy of God's Sovereign Grace

Verse 18 keeps before us the vital truth that we owe the whole of our Christian lives to the grace of God shown to us in Christ. It is "of his own will" and "by the word of truth" (that is: the gospel) that we have been born again—given a new genetic foundation and the breathless anticipation of bearing fruit for God. My salvation and ongoing renewal in the image of Christ is ultimately the work of almighty God!

When we come together in our DNA Groups, may we not for a moment think that we are to grow into Christ's image by our own strength. This is not some sort of self-help thing. We are, in these moments, collectively casting ourselves upon the mercy of God and calling out to him as our only hope and help in this life and the next. If you want to grow in Christlikeness it will only be by way of God's sovereign grace. As Paul has said elsewhere: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Verses 19-21: The Call to Discover Christ

Having located us squarely within the realm of God's grace, verses 19-21 call us to listen before we speak. This is true in our relationships with one another, and it is especially true in our relationship with God. We are to be hearers of the word. "[F]aith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). It is only upon hearing that

we can “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save [our] souls.”

Here, we could say then, is the call to Discover Christ. In every DNA Group meeting, even as we discuss the details of our own lives, we are, in it all, always looking to press in and hear from him. We must keep the Word of God ever before us. Every member should bring his/her Bible, not just as an empty gesture but as a holy commitment to keep our meetings and our ears open to the voice of God. We want to hear from one another, no doubt. But we want to hear from him first and foremost!

Verses 22-25: The Call to Nurture Christ

But then, as we keep reading, verses 22-25 remind us that hearing alone is never enough. The gospel is meant to change us from the inside out. Hearing must lead to being and doing or something is wrong with our hearing. As we look into the mirror of God’s word, we see not only where we have fallen short in our sin, we see who God is making us to be in his Son by way of his Spirit and grace. We see not only who we should be, but who God is making us to be. This word is no longer something outside pressing in on us, it has been planted within us and is coming out (cf. Jer. 31:31-34)!

This, I believe, is what James is getting at with that phrase he coins there in verse 25: the “law of liberty” (cf. 2:12; Rom. 8:2). Consider Bible scholar Douglas Moo on this point:

God’s gracious acceptance of us does not end our obligation to obey him; it sets it on a new footing. No longer is God’s law a threatening, confining burden. For the will of God now confronts us as a law of liberty—an obligation that is discharged in the joyful knowledge that God has both “liberated” us from the penalty of sin and given us, in his Spirit, the power to obey his will. To use James’ own description, this law is an “implanted word”, “written on the heart”, that has the power to save us (v. 21).¹⁰

¹⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 16; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 101.

Here, we could say then, is the call to Nurture Christ. We must not only hear God's word, but look into it as one looks into a mirror. Therein we see a clearer reflection of both who we've been in our flesh and who we truly are in Christ. We are forced to deal honestly with ourselves, but only in the light of his grace. As Tim Keller is now famous for saying: "We are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe, yet more loved and accepted in Jesus than we ever dared hope." DNA Groups keep both sides of this in balance. We are not scared to be honest with one another about our sin and weakness because we know the one who has already accepted us and is committed to seeing us through. We repent of latest sin and rest in fresh mercy. Each group must keep Christ and the reality of our union with him ever in the foreground. Being precedes doing. Before we talk about what we will do for him, we must remind ourselves of who we already are in him by his grace!

Verses 26-27: The Call to Apply Christ

Verses 26-27 remind us that true religion has concrete expression. We do not merely hear and hear, talk and talk, even pray and pray. We must eventually *do*. The endgame of our faith is works—love for God and neighbor. True faith grows hands and feet. It walks to the orphanage after dinner and reads bedtime stories to the motherless. It enters the widow's lonely cottage and puts a kettle for tea on the stove.

Grace changes. Faith works.

True faith grows hands and feet.

Here, we could say then, is the call to Apply Christ. Each DNA Group is encouraged to creatively incorporate such things into their rhythm of life together. Christians are good at meetings (too good!). We do Sunday Services, we do small groups, we do studies, we do seminars, we do conferences. We meet so often with one another that we have little time for anyone or anything else! Fight against this current! If God is

convicting us about evangelism, let's use our group time to go out and share. If we are attempting to grow as husbands, let's use our group time to plan a date night with our spouses. If we are wanting to reach the city, let's use our group time to go serve with City Team downtown.

So, bringing all of this together: we hear and receive his word (Discover); we look into the mirror of his word and embrace who he says we now are in him—loved, accepted, justified, forgiven, free (Nurture); and then we go off and live out of that identity in the Spirit—we go out and do the word (Apply).

We must let God lead our groups from Discovering Christ, through Nurturing Christ, to Applying Christ together . . . until he is all in all!



What stands out to you in James 1:18-27? Which step comes most naturally to you: Discover, Nurture, or Apply? Which step do you think you might have the most difficulty with? Why? If you were to join a DNA Group, how can the other group members help you with this?

In the Light of the Cross

Insist on These Things

At the risk of redundancy, I'd like to look at just one last text in an effort to clear away any possible fog of misconception. Let it never be thought that this process of growing up into the image of Jesus is some sort of legalistic, moralistic, self-empowered attempt at transformation. No! Brothers and sisters, DNA Groups do all of their "dirty work" in the light of the cross. He lived the life we should've lived. He died the death we should've died. And when he rose again from the dead, we rose from the dead in him! We are born again. By virtue of our union with him by his Spirit through faith, we have his genetics, a new nature. "If anyone is

in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Much of DNA Group meetings will be spent reminding each other of our true identity in Christ and helping one another work that out by faith through love. We are not laboring *for* the Father's acceptance but *from* it.

DNA Groups do all of their "dirty work" in the light of the cross. . . . We are not laboring for the Father's acceptance but from it.

Perhaps the clearest exhortation towards this end in all the Scriptures is found in Titus 3:3-8:

We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, *not because of works done by us in righteousness*, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to *insist on these things*, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

Did you see it? We've been saved "not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy"; we've been regenerated and renewed by "the Holy Spirit"; we've been "justified by his grace."

And we are to "insist on these things." Why? So that we can go on sinning that grace may abound? No! "So that those who have believed

in God may be careful to devote themselves to *good works*.” Our good works flow out from the fountainhead of his grace. We are able to be conformed more and more into Christ’s image only because we are wholly rooted and resting in Christ’s grace.

The call on DNA Group members is to help one another “insist on these things” not so that we may be careless in our sin but so that we may be careful to devote ourselves to good works, by his grace for his glory!



In your own words, what is the gospel? How does God’s grace relate to your good works? Which of these two extremes are you more prone to: *license* (God’s grace covers my sin so now I don’t need any good works) or *legalism* (God’s grace covers my sin but now it’s up to me to produce good works)? If you were to join a DNA Group, how can the other group members help you with this? What would it look like to insist on the things of the gospel together?

What Exactly Do These Groups Do?

Three Frameworks

After all of this, the question arising now in your mind I’m sure is: “Okay, well and good. All of this sounds nice. But what do these groups actually look like? What exactly do they do?” Let me try to make sense of this now for you.

While each group will certainly have its own flavor, you can get a sense of what they might look like by checking out what we call the three DNA Group “Frameworks.” We’ve developed these frameworks as a

way of providing structure and direction for DNA Groups to make use of if they so desire. Each of the three frameworks designed for use in Mercy Hill's DNA Groups utilize carefully crafted questions as a way of guiding the process of discipleship to Jesus and renewal in his image. They all have the same end goal (to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ until he is all in all) but they come at it from three different angles or starting points.

To see the types of questions asked within each of the three frameworks, refer to "Appendix 1: Framework Cue Cards."

Framework #1: Life

The Life Framework takes each member's life as its starting point and moves towards God and the gospel together from there.

We share about the ups and downs of our lives since the last meeting—where we've seen God at work, where we've felt his absence, how we are processing these things, how Jesus has been leading us faithfully through it all. Every person is heard and cared for. We minister to each other from the Scriptures. We make space to pray for one another with honest empathy. We find help to carry on in the way of discipleship. We look more and more like Jesus.

Framework #2: Scripture

The Scripture Framework takes the Scriptures as its starting point and moves towards the heart and life of each member from there.

Verses are read from the old Book. Questions are asked. We seek understanding together. We seek God's face together. We seek the good news of Jesus together. And then we repent and re-root ourselves in these realities. We seek to draw clear and crisp lines between the truths of Scripture and the details of our daily lives. We find God's word to be more relevant than we ever could've thought and his Spirit to be more present than we ever could've hoped. We minister to each other from the Scriptures. We make space to pray for one another with honest empathy. We find help to carry on in the way of discipleship. We look more and more like Jesus.

Framework #3: Resource

The Resource Framework takes some other Christian resource (e.g. a sermon, book, article, etc.) as its starting point and moves towards Jesus and the transformed life from there.¹¹

A resource is chosen that seems particularly pertinent to the group (e.g. a book on parenting, a sermon series on the doctrine of vocation, etc.). The resource is engaged and understood. Lines are drawn both back towards the Word of God and forward towards the heart and lives of each member. We feel like we are being challenged and growing in matters in which we've long felt stuck. We minister to each other from the Scriptures. We make space to pray for one another with honest empathy. We find help to carry on in the way of discipleship. We look more and more like Jesus.



Which of these three frameworks seems most interesting to you? If you were to join a DNA Group, which (if any) would you prefer to use? Why? How would you go about using it?

How Can You Get Involved?

Two Onramps to Involvement

Have you caught the vision? Do you see why such groups might be important for your own discipleship to Jesus? Do you want to get

¹¹ For help in finding good resources to use, check out "Mercy Hill's Recommended Resources" online at mercyhillchurch.org.

involved? If so, great! Here are the two primary onramps to involvement that we'd ask you to prayerfully consider at this point.¹²

Onramp #1: Participate

If you simply want to be a part of a group and are not sure you feel ready to facilitate one yet, this onramp is for you! We can break it down into three simple steps:

STEP #1: CATCH THE VISION

While certainly not required, you may find it helpful to read through this booklet (if you haven't already!). It will help greatly if all the members of a given DNA Group are familiar and on board with the underlying vision and ultimate goal of these groups.¹³

¹² We should mention that, while the onramps identified here outline a more "formal" approach to involvement, we would never discourage you from pursuing these things in more "informal" or "organic" ways. It is my hope that many are already doing much of what I've been encouraging in this booklet on their own together—talking honestly about the deeper things of life, studying the Bible, meeting to go through resources, etc. If you already have a group like this, keep going! Feel free to use any of the material here you find helpful. As was stated way back in the introduction, my goal in all of this has never been to strongarm God's people into one way of doing things. I simply realize that, though many might of us want to be a part of meaningful discipleship relationships, we are often confused as to what to do and where to begin. DNA Groups are my humble attempt to provide an orienting vision and supporting structure in hopes of helping us forward.

Having said this, there are a few "benefits" that come with integrating any group you've started (or may start) into the formal DNA Group ecosystem at Mercy Hill: (1) *Initial Training*—while we cannot offer much here, we do take new DNA Group Facilitators through an initial "Crash Course" in an effort to help set you and your group up for success. (2) *Increased Exposure*—your group will be added to our church website and, if desired, we can even utilize our various communication channels (e.g. Sunday announcements, church newsletter, etc.) to help you get the word out. (3) *Reactive Coaching*—if you are in need of help or guidance in any way, you can reach out to us and we will do our best to prioritize caring for you and your group.

¹³ If you prefer listening to reading, the contents of this booklet roughly correspond to the first two sermons in the series *Introducing & Multiplying DNA Groups* which can be found online at mercyhillchurch.org.

STEP #2: FIND YOUR FOLKS

After getting a sense of what these groups are all about, if you desire to participate in one, your next step is to find your folks. There are a number of ways you might go about this:

- **Church Website:** Check out the current list of groups online at mercyhillchurch.org and join one with open enrollment. Feel free to email the Facilitator with any of your questions before making a decision.
- **Personal Invite:** Find someone you want to lean in on and learn from. Don't be scared. Let them know! Ask if they'd be interested in forming a DNA Group and pursuing Christ together with you for a period of time. Ask if they'd be willing to facilitate. Let them know if there's anything in particular you'd hope to learn from them and whether you'd like to read a book on some topic, go through Scripture, or just connect life on life.¹⁴
- **Leader Help:** Talk with an elder, other Mercy Hill leader, or simply fill out the DNA Groups Interest Form which can be found online.¹⁵ We can try to make connections for you, communicate through our various channels, etc. (whatever you feel comfortable with). We are here to help develop and support a culture of discipleship at Mercy Hill. And we know that a big part of that is helping *you*!

STEP #3: FOLLOW JESUS TOGETHER!

Now that you have a smaller group of committed people who are willing and wanting to meet on a consistent basis, you are ready to begin Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying Christ together until he is all in all!

¹⁴ As a word of advice, you probably won't make these sorts of organic connections and relationships if you are rarely present with the church community. Press in and get to know people! Don't rush out so quickly after the Sunday Service. Linger—even if you feel too busy or awkward or nervous. Ask a person to grab lunch or coffee later in the week. Join a Home Group. Participate in the various events and opportunities that come up. As you get to know the people in our body, God may very well lead you to a person you'd like to ask to form and facilitate a DNA Group with you.

¹⁵ <https://mercyhillchurch.org/community/dna-groups/>

Onramp #2: Facilitate

It may be that you actually feel led to facilitate¹⁶ a DNA Group. Wonderful! For this, there is, as you might expect, a little bit more required.¹⁷ This onramp includes the same three steps mentioned above for participants with the addition of a “half step” in between (to help you visualize this, you may want to refer to “Appendix 2: Diagramming the Onramps”).

STEP #1: CATCH THE VISION

As with participants, prospective Facilitators are encouraged to flip through this booklet and familiarize themselves with the underlying vision and ultimate goal of DNA Groups.

STEP #1.5: GET TRAINED

We want to help as you pray, brainstorm, and craft the vision for your group. While we cannot offer much here, we do take prospective DNA Group Facilitators through an initial time of training in an effort to help set you and your group up for success. This training is just a one-session “Crash Course” where we’ll talk through the contents of this booklet, provide you with the *DNA Group Facilitator Manual* for diving deeper if desired, and help you formulate the vision and plan for your group.¹⁸

¹⁶ We have intentionally chosen the term “Facilitator” instead of, perhaps the more common term, “Leader” for these groups. This is simply our way of emphasizing the fact that a DNA Group “Leader” is not making disciples of him or herself but rather “facilitating” the process of the group’s discipleship to Jesus.

¹⁷ One important requirement to note up front here is that the DNA Group Facilitator role is only open to Covenant Members of Mercy Hill. If you are not yet a Covenant Member, what is holding you back? Meaningful commitment to a church body should precede any attempt to lead it.

¹⁸ If you have already gone through this training process for a DNA Group you facilitated in the past, you will, under most circumstances, not be required to go through it again unless desired.

STEP #2: FIND YOUR FOLKS

As with participants above, prospective DNA Group Facilitators will need to prayerfully go about trying to find their folks. The same three basic options are open to you:

- **Church Website:** After successfully completing the Crash Course, your group will be added to our list of groups online at mercyhillchurch.org. If you prefer, we can make the church aware of it and invite them to enroll or contact you if interested.
- **Personal Invite:** You may prefer to find people for your DNA Group by way of personal invite. That is a great way to go and likely the most effective.¹⁹
- **Leader Help:** Again, as with the participants above, you may find it helpful to talk with an elder, other Mercy Hill leader, or to simply fill out the DNA Groups Interest Form which can be found online.²⁰ We can try to make connections for you, communicate through our various channels, etc. (whatever you feel comfortable with). Don't hesitate to reach out!

¹⁹ One thing must be clarified: when we say "find your folks" here we do not mean "pick your favorites." Of course DNA Groups can be the context for growing together with people you already connect well with, but I would caution you to pause and pray at this point. Remember, Jesus spends a whole night in prayer before calling the twelve (Luke 6:12-13). And we get the sense that, the next day, when he does call them, he does so not because he hopes to get something for himself from them but because he hopes to give something of himself to them. He hopes to serve and love and pour himself out for them. As a DNA Group Facilitator, that is the call! This is not cherry-picking your posse. It is laying your life down in love for others. Instead of inviting in the "coolest" people you know, you might consider inviting the most needy, broken, or lonely. Who sits alone during the Sunday Service? Who is isolated during the week? Who is being passed over by others? Who is not yet a disciple of Jesus that you would love to see come to faith? Consider starting a group with *them*! That, in any case, seems to be something our Savior would do. And I would challenge you to consider the same.

As you are praying through this step, it may also be helpful to remember that one of the strengths of the DNA Group, because it is kept smaller, is its ability to flex and adapt to individual circumstances and availabilities. Therefore, as you are attempting to find your folks, you might also consider the following: who lives near me?; who works near me?; who has the same kind of schedule as me?; who is dealing with a similar life stage as me?; etc.

²⁰ <https://mercyhillchurch.org/community/dna-groups/>

STEP #2.5: GET STARTED

At this point you'll want to check out "Getting Started" in the *DNA Group Facilitator Manual*. There you will find both the Starter Checklist and two optional Starter Studies. These resources have been developed in an effort to help your group get off to a good start. Make use of them as you feel led.

STEP #3: FOLLOW JESUS TOGETHER!

Now that you have a smaller group of committed people who are willing and wanting to meet on a consistent basis, you are ready to begin Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying Christ together until he is all in all!

Note: Whichever onramp you prefer—whether you want to participate or facilitate—we would encourage you to initiate!

For Example . . .

As we draw things here to a close now, it might help you to see a few examples of how all of this might play out:

- Maybe you and your wife want to read a Christian book on marriage. Instead of just reading it alone, you decide to begin a DNA Group and invite others to read it along with you. Three other couples join in and now, not only are you and your wife growing together towards Jesus in marriage, but you're growing in friendship with others as well!
- Maybe you've been really wanting to go deeper in Bible study. You want to learn but you don't know who to ask. On a Sunday after the service, you approach a few of Mercy Hill's leaders and ask if they have any suggestions. They do! In a couple of weeks you are paired up with a more mature believer and she begins facilitating a DNA Group with you using the Scripture

Framework. You are learning how to read the Bible and meet with God in his Word!

- Maybe you have a coworker who doesn't know Jesus but seems open to meaningful dialogue. You scan "Mercy Hill's Recommended Resources" for something that may prove relevant to skeptics and seekers. You decide on C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and ask if he'd be interested in reading it with you. To your delight, he is! You plan to meet for discussion during lunch every other week.
- Maybe you're a new mother with limited time, energy, and availability. During this stage of life you're unable to make it consistently to a Home Group or many of the other scheduled church events. But you *can* go for afternoon walks in the park while pushing a stroller! So you gather a few other moms and decide to do just that together. You make use of the Life Framework as a starting point for meaningful, gospel-centered discussions and prayer.

These few examples are really just the beginning of where all of this could go. Dream. Pray. Discover. Nurture. Apply.

Be a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus!

Want More?

If you are wanting to engage the subject matter found in this booklet further, you might consider the following resources:

- *Discipling* by Mark Dever
- *How People Change* by Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp
- *Side by Side* by Ed Welch

Need Help?

Our leaders at Mercy Hill would love to help you take this next step! If you'd like someone to chat, pray, or read with along the way please don't hesitate to reach out to us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

What's Next?

Having learned a bit more about discipleship to Jesus, let's now begin to consider what it means to live on mission for his glory and for the good of others. For this, check out the next step: *Use Your Gifts*. Find more info at the Next Steps Table on a Sunday or online at mercyhillchurch.org.

Appendix 1:

Framework Cue Cards

Each of the three frameworks designed for use in Mercy Hill's DNA Groups utilize carefully crafted questions as a way of guiding the process of discipleship to Jesus and renewal in his image. These frameworks are available in either Worksheet or Cue Card format.

- Worksheets are available for download at mercyhillchurch.org where they can then be printed out and written on by the various members of your group if the Facilitator thinks this might prove helpful.
- Cue Cards are also available for download online but they are provided in the pages that follow for your reference as well. This format simply provides the questions for use in your times of discussion with no room for notes. You may want to download and save them on your phone for ease of reference.

Whichever framework your group decides to use (if any), the goal is not that you stick woodenly to each and every question but that each member begins to get a more intuitive feel for engaging deeper discussion and asking questions that lead one another to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until he is all in all. Let the questions guide, but don't let them restrict!

DNA Group | Life Framework

<p>What's Been Good?</p>	<p>What's been going right in your life lately? What evidences of God's grace can you identify? How can we give thanks together?</p>
<p>What's Been Hard?</p>	<p>What's been particularly trying in your life lately? Where do you most need God's help? How can we pray together?</p>
<p>Where Are You?</p>	<p>How are you responding to the things you are facing? What are you doing? How are you feeling? Where are you tempted? What desires or fears lay underneath your responses? Have you been walking in or out of step with the gospel (cf. Gal. 2:14)? What's been right in your responses? What's been wrong? How can we confess our sins together?</p>
<p>Where Is God?</p>	<p>What does God say and do in these situations? What does he promise and command? How has he been ministering to you lately? What Scripture comes to mind? Get out your Bible and read. How does the good news of Jesus meet you in these things and show you the way forward? Are you trusting in and walking with him? What would this next week look like if you were? How can we help? Who else in your life (believer/unbeliever) might need to hear this?</p>

DNA Group | Scripture Framework

Headlines	<p>Share briefly. What's been good? What's been hard? What trials and temptations are you currently facing? How are you doing in the midst of these things? As we prepare to open the Scriptures together, where do you most need God to speak and act?</p>
Discover	<p>What do you see in this text? What questions do you have? What answers can you find? What is God revealing to you here—about himself, about yourself? Is there an <i>attribute</i> to adore, a <i>truth</i> to trust, a <i>promise</i> to hope in, a <i>command</i> to obey, a <i>warning</i> to heed, an <i>example</i> to follow (choose one)? How does what he is revealing here connect to what he has revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus? Every verse in Scripture becomes good news when run through the cross of Christ. Let's preach the good news to ourselves once more.</p>
Nurture	<p>Do you believe the things God is revealing to you in this text? If there's an attribute, are you adoring? If there's a truth, are you trusting? If there's a promise, are you hoping? If there's a command, are you obeying? If there's a warning, are you heeding? If there's an example, are you following? Why or why not? What's in the way? How are these things being tested in what you are currently facing? How can Jesus come to your rescue? Let's make the good confession once more.</p>
Apply	<p>What would this text look like walking out into the details of your life? Think again about what you are currently facing. If you adored, trusted, hoped in, obeyed, heeded, followed, how would it change your next 24 hours? Each day has enough trouble of its own. If this word from God can touch the next few hours, it will start to touch your life as a whole. Identify one thing you can do to apply this. Who else in your life (believer/unbeliever) might need to hear this? Let's bear the good fruit once more.</p>

DNA Group | Resource Framework

<h2>Headlines</h2>	<p>Share briefly. What's been good? What's been hard? What trials and temptations are you currently facing? How are you doing in the midst of these things? How can we pray?</p>
<h2>Quotes</h2> <p>What was significant?</p>	<p>What quotes stood out to you as especially important? What do you think the author means by them? How do these words minister to you personally? In what ways should your life change in light of them? How can Jesus help? How can we? Who else in your life (believer/unbeliever) might need to hear this?</p>
<h2>Questions</h2> <p>What was confusing?</p>	<p>What did you find hard to understand? What questions were left lingering in your mind? What would you like to tease out a bit more and consider together? Please do not be afraid to ask questions. In fact, if we don't have any questions, it likely means we're not engaging the resource all that well!</p>
<h2>Quarrels</h2> <p>What was mistaken?</p>	<p>Was there anything that you disagreed with? Why? To disagree is not the same as being disagreeable. You can hold a different opinion with humility and charity. This is not an invitation to be nitpicky but an encouragement to think deeply. Please do not be afraid to disagree. In fact, if we agree with everything, it likely means we're not engaging the resource all that well!</p>

Appendix 2:

Diagramming the Onramps

To help you visualize the steps you'll need to take if you want to get involved in a DNA Group—whether you're looking to participate or facilitate—we've put together a diagram that you'll find on the pages that follow.

ONRAMP #1: PARTICIPATE

STEP #1



Catch the Vision

You may find it helpful to begin by familiarizing yourself with the underlying vision and ultimate goal of these groups.

Suggested Action(s): Flip through the Pursue Discipleship booklet (or listen to the two corresponding sermons online).

STEP #2



Find Your Folks

After getting a better sense of what these groups are all about, your next step is to prayerfully find your folks.

Suggested Action(s): Use the church website; invite people personally; ask church leaders for help.

STEP #3



Follow Jesus Together!

Now that you have a smaller group of committed people who are willing and wanting to meet on a consistent basis, you are ready to begin Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying Christ together until he is all in all. Enjoy the adventure!

ONRAMP #2: **FACILITATE**

Note: This second onramp includes the same three simple steps involved in the first with the addition of a "half step" in between.

STEP #1.5



Get Trained

If you are interested in facilitating your own DNA Group, let us know! We'll take you through a one-session Crash Course, provide you with additional resources, help you craft your vision, and send you on your way!

Suggested Action(s): Sign up online and attend the training.

STEP #2.5



Get Started

After you have found your folks, it's time to get started!

Suggested Action(s): In the DNA Group Facilitator Manual, look over the Starter Checklist to confirm you have thought through much of the details; consider if/how you will make use of the two optional Starter Studies.

Note: Whether you want to participate or facilitate, we would encourage you to initiate!

According to Scripture, every Christian is called to be both a disciple and a disciple-maker (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). Disciples of Jesus are to be busy making disciples of Jesus. We are to be both following Christ and helping others follow him as well. At Mercy Hill, our aim is to develop and support what we call a "culture of discipleship." We want it to be a normal thing here for people to be engaged meaningfully in each other's lives, pursuing Christ together, and inviting unbelievers to join in on the journey. One of the ways we are attempting to promote this is through DNA Groups. DNA Groups are smaller groups of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until he is all in all. If you are interested in pursuing discipleship of Jesus together, this Next Steps Resource is for you!



Consider Jesus

For those skeptical or curious about Christianity and the claims of Jesus.



Be Baptized

For those ready to say yes to Jesus and "go public" with their faith.



Walk the Sacred Path

For those wanting to grow in their devotional lives (e.g. Bible reading, prayer).



Become a Member

For those interested in going all in with this local church and committing to "be the body" here and now together.



Join a Home Group

For those wanting to move towards community and live on mission for Jesus with others in the church.



Pursue Discipleship

For those interested in going deeper in their faith and growing more in the image of Christ.



Use Your Gifts

For those interested in identifying the gifts God has given them and using those gifts to serve in the church.



Spread the News

For those interested in evangelistic training and opportunities.



Serve the City

For those interested in getting their hands and feet dirty in love for others in our city and world.

Our leaders at Mercy Hill would love to help you take this next step! If you'd like someone to chat, pray, or read with along the way please don't hesitate to reach out to us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.