

**Leading Small Groups With Purpose, Lesson #4**  
**Book by Steve Gladen; This Study Guide by Josh Hunt**  
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## Chapters 7 – 8 Discipleship

### OPEN

Let's each share your name and complete this sentence: "I think a disciple is. . ."

### DIG

- 1. Let's start with the question Steve starts with: what has made the most impact on your spiritual growth?**

Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture. If churches could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice is clear. They would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible—specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives. The numbers say most churches are missing the mark—because only one out of five congregants reflects on Scripture every day. — Hawkins, G. L., & Parkinson, C. (2011). *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

- 2. How have people impacted your walk with God?**

When people tell their faith stories, they always talk about the individuals they believe God put in their paths. You hear things like: "Then I met this couple." "Then I ran into an old friend from college." "A guy at work invited me to church." "A lady I barely knew said she had heard about my circumstances and asked how she could help." "One afternoon my boss called me into his office." I've never heard a faith story without a relational component. There's always mention of that guy, that couple, that neighbor I barely knew.

We call these providential relationships because when people tell their stories, they are convinced God providentially brought these individuals or couples into their lives. Encounters that initially appeared accidental or random are eventually viewed as divine appointments. As you're reading this, I bet you can think of that person, couple, or perhaps group God brought along at just the right time. And if you are like most people, this is not a one-time occurrence. At every critical juncture in our faith journeys, there are individuals whose paths intersect with ours. In some cases, long-term relationships are formed. On other occasions, the relationships are only for a short time. But in either case, there is no doubt in our minds that the encounters were providential. — Stanley, A. (2012). *Deep and wide: creating churches unchurched people love to attend*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

### **3. What makes a spiritually impactful relationship impactful?**

Two things make a relationship providential: when we hear from God through someone and when we see God in someone. When either of those things happens, our faith gets bigger. Isn't it true that when we see God's faithfulness in someone else's life, it is easier to trust him with ours? That's the power of a divinely ordained relationship.

Whenever I talk about providential relationships, I can't help but think about Dan Dehaan. I was fifteen when I met Dan. He was in his late twenties. After our first encounter, I decided I wanted to be like Dan when I grew up. Dan taught our church camp every summer. He was the communicator that made the Scriptures come alive for me. I still remember a message he gave in the summer of 1975 about the dangers of drifting. Beyond summer camp, Dan took a personal interest in Louie Giglio and me. He took us camping. Rafting. Had us over to his house. Dan taught us how to have a quiet time. Sometimes when I'm watching Louie preach, I see traces of Dan. — Stanley, A. (2012). *Deep and wide: creating churches unchurched people love to attend*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

### **4. What does Mark 3.14 teach us about discipleship?**

Having called his men, Jesus made a practice of being with them. This was the essence of his training program—just letting his disciples follow him.

When one stops to think of it, this was an incredibly simple way of doing it. Jesus had no formal school, no seminaries, no outlined course of study, no periodic membership classes in which he enrolled his followers. None of these highly organized procedures considered so necessary today entered into his ministry. Amazing as it may seem, all Jesus did to teach these men his way was to draw them close to himself. He was his own school and curriculum.

The natural informality of this teaching method of Jesus stood in striking contrast to the formal, almost scholastic procedures of the scribes. These religious teachers insisted on their disciples adhering strictly to certain rituals and formulas of knowledge which distinguished them from others; whereas Jesus asked only that his disciples follow him. Knowledge was not communicated by the Master in terms of laws and dogmas, but in the living personality of One who walked among them. His disciples were distinguished, not by outward conformity to certain rituals, but by being with him, and thereby participating in his doctrine (John 18:19). — Coleman, R. E. (2006). *The Master Plan Of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell.

### **5. Jesus seemed to concentrate a lot of time and attention on His small group. One could say that His primary ministry was that of being a small group leader. Why do you think Jesus focused so much attention on so few?**

It all started by Jesus calling a few men to follow him. This revealed immediately the direction his evangelistic strategy would take. His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes would follow. Remarkable as it may seem, Jesus started to gather these men before he ever organized an evangelistic campaign or even preached a sermon in public. Men were to be his method of winning the world to God.

The initial objective of Jesus' plan was to enlist men who could bear witness to his life and carry on his work after he returned to the Father. John and Andrew were the first to be invited as Jesus left the scene of the great revival of the Baptist at Bethany beyond the Jordan ( John 1:35–40). Andrew in turn brought his brother Peter ( John 1:41–42). The next day Jesus found Philip on his way to Galilee, and Philip found Nathanael ( John 1:43–51). There is no evidence of haste in the selection of these disciples, just determination. James, the brother of John, is not mentioned as one of the group until the four fishermen are recalled several months later by the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1:19; Matt. 4:21). Shortly afterward Matthew is called to follow the Master as Jesus passed through Capernaum (Mark 2:13–14; Matt. 9:9; Luke 5:27–28). The particulars surrounding the call of the other disciples are not recorded in the Gospels, but it is believed that they all occurred in the first year of the Lord's ministry.<sup>1</sup>

As one might expect, these early efforts of soul winning had little or no immediate effect upon the religious life of his day, but that did not matter greatly. For as it turned out, these few early converts of the Lord were destined to become the leaders of his church that was to go with the gospel to the whole world, and from the standpoint of his ultimate purpose, the significance of their lives would be felt throughout eternity. That's the only thing that counts. — Coleman, R. E. (2006). *The Master Plan Of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell.

## 6. What is the goal of discipleship?

First Baptist of Orlando is a role model of this strategy, which senior pastor David Uth summarizes in a statement he routinely makes to his six thousand congregants: "We're not here to make you Baptists; we're here to make you disciples of Christ." This statement may sound glib, but it reflects the idea that the goal is not to inspire people to fall in love with the church and all of its activities; the goal is to help them fall in love with—and surrender their lives to—Jesus.

In all of its teaching and communication, First Baptist is direct and unambiguous about the discipleship goal of its ministry. But that's not their real distinctive. What distinguishes First Baptist, and other thriving churches like them, is their persistent, overarching commitment to that pursuit. In part 3, you'll find many stories and details from these best-practice churches that illustrate how they live out this commitment in everyday ministry. But for now, the salient point is this: everything starts by committing to the life-changing (not activity-creating) goal of discipleship and making it the top priority for all ministry efforts. The resolve of best-practice churches to achieving this objective is so steadfast that they risk letting people walk out the door—in fact, they encourage them to do so—if becoming a follower of Christ is not a commitment they're willing to make.

We see a similar type of resolve in other leaders who accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. John F. Kennedy put a man on the moon. Vince Lombardi grew a professional football dynasty in an off-the-beaten-path town in northern Wisconsin. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired a nation deeply entrenched in its prejudices to rethink its values and embrace equality regardless of race. Less dramatic but creating enormous cultural impact, CEO Steve Jobs regularly catapults Apple to the top of Fortune's most-admired list with wildly successful technical innovations, like Macintosh computers and the iPad.

Each of these difficult achievements began with clear, unambiguous goals. JFK famously declared, "We will put a man on the moon in this decade." Lombardi said, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only

thing.” King gave voice to the aspirations of all African Americans in his “I have a dream” speech—describing the goal in concrete terms: that our children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. Steve Jobs constantly reminds employees that “real artists ship,” meaning that delivering working products on time is as important as innovation and design. What’s important is that every one of these leaders used simple words to articulate difficult goals—goals that were far from easy to accomplish. — Hawkins, G. L., & Parkinson, C. (2011). *Move: what 1,000 churches reveal about spiritual growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

**7. What does Steve mean by saying that discipleship is more caught than taught? What is the application for us as group leaders?**

Jesus’ method of making disciples was largely about spending time with them. It was discipleship by hanging around. The Navigators published an article in *Discipleship Journal* that explained it this way:

Go places with them, listen to them, talk to them, think with them, pray with them. Follow-up is not done by something, but by someone—not a method or a system, but you.

If we think about discipleship at all, we tend to want to make it much more complicated than this. We develop notebooks, we print material, we develop courses, we have people sign things, and we have people commit things.

Jesus’ method of making disciples was largely about hanging around. Jesus realized that Christian living is more caught than taught. — Josh Hunt. (2013). *The Effective Bible Teacher*.

**8. If we are going to make disciples as Jesus made disciples, how much time do we need to spend with our group outside of formal group time?**

Effective Bible Teachers do this as well. They spend as much time as is reasonably possible with their students. They go to lunch on a regular basis. They fellowship together. They stick around after church. They go out to dinner. They have people in their home. They practice hospitality, as the Scripture commands. (For more on this, see my book *Christian Hospitality*.)

Ineffective Bible Teachers are quite the opposite. They are more or less like school teachers. They are content to present the material and go home. They give their lecture, click their PowerPoint slides, and call it a day.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach I simply need to ask a question: who is the most Effective Bible Teacher you have ever had? My wife has asked this question dozens of times in seminars where she teaches teachers. The answers are always the same. The most Effective Bible Teacher is not the one who lectured the best, or was the most polished, or the most articulate. The most capital effective Bible Teacher is always the one that followed the with-them principle. — Josh Hunt. (2013). *The Effective Bible Teacher*.

## 9. What are some practical ways we can spend time “with them”?

I think about a teacher in my own life—Barry Price. He taught me about half the years through junior high and senior high. He kept moving up with me. He was the best Sunday school teacher I ever had. Funny thing about that though, I don’t remember any Bible study lessons he actually taught. What I do remember is he had me in his home. He took me snow skiing with his family.

I remember one time he got stopped for speeding on a snow skiing trip. After the policeman left and we were on our way his young daughter spoke up in protest, “That bad policeman. He should not stop Daddy.”

“No dear, that policeman did not do a bad thing. That policeman did the right thing. Daddy did the wrong thing. Daddy was driving too fast.”

I don’t remember any lessons Barry Price taught about taking responsibility or admitting that you are a sinner, but I remember what he said to his daughter that night in the car. I will never forget. — Josh Hunt. (2013). *The Effective Bible Teacher*.

## 10. Hebrews 3.13. What are some practical ways members of your group encourage one another daily?

Consistent with the concern of the letter to the Hebrew ecclesia, Christians who give up meeting together give up their ability and opportunity to “encourage” and “spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” This mutual encouragement and spurring only happens in face-to-face encounters of living spirits. This “encouraging” (exhorting) and “spurring” (inciting) process is only possible in the continuation of “meeting together” and “drawing near to God” (Heb 10:24–25). It can only happen when the ecclesia meets together in spite of difficult and painful times.

In Hebrews 10 the call to continued “meeting together” is immediately followed by an exhortation:

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. You need to persevere. (Heb 10:32–34, 36)

The ceasing of meeting together in small house groups would undermine the ability of the saints to help one another through the terrors of persecution and pain. Those who do not meet together have no group of friends and family in Christ to spur, to encourage, and to help them keep going when there are no other visible signs hope. The meeting together in the group may be the only visible hope during the darkest moments. This is what was said of Bonhoeffer in the face of death:

Bonhoeffer always seemed to me to spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident and profound gratitude for the mere fact he was alive.... He was one of the very few persons I have ever met for whom God was real and always near.... He found just the right words to express the spirit of our imprisonment, the thoughts and resolutions it had brought us.

Bonhoeffer had found the presence of the Holy in the midst of the void and the joy of living in the community of the Spirit even in prison and the face of eminent death. He simply found joy in being with another human being. — Icenogle, G. W. (1993). *Biblical Foundations For Small Group Ministry: An Integrative Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

**11. Imagine someone who attends worship every week, but does not attend a group. They know very few Christian friends and hardly ever hang out with them. Why won't they ever be disciples?**

But Christianity was designed to be lived out in community. It is learned best as a group exercise. There is no such thing as a disciple who is not in some sort of community. Many of the commands of scripture are “one another” commands. They are things we are do for and to and with each other. They cannot be done alone. They can only be one in the context of relationships that form as a result of being in a small group together. — Josh Hunt. (1995). *You Can Double Your Class in Two Years or Less*.

**12. Look over the list of practical suggestions in Chapter 8. What are some things that would never work for you and what are some things you would like to try.**

We want to move people from thinking about discipleship to doing something about discipleship. We want to make doers of the Word. We want to teach for application.

**13. Convince me that you are convinced it is important that we get people into the Word.**

Professionally, I'm a behaviorist, which means I study people's actions and responses to environmental stimuli. I like to figure out why people do what they do, and when beneficial to their well-being, I like to help determine how their behaviors can be modified. Unlike a psychologist who might hand you a box of tissues and encourage you to spill every emotion you've had since kindergarten, I work with observable and quantifiable processes. It's something like working with people that medical science can't appreciably assist; my job enters in with “Whether or not you can get better, you certainly can do better.”

Put simply, I spend many late nights and early mornings sifting through raw data about human actions, analyzing responses to surveys, building statistical models, testing hypotheses—and connecting a whole bunch of “behavior dots,” so to speak. I gather my data through carefully constructed questionnaires and interviews. (Yes, I used to wear thick-framed glasses; but no, I don't own a pocket protector.)

When I applied these methods to research about Scripture engagement as it relates to behavior and spiritual life, here's what I learned: The Bible matters—a lot. In fact, spiritually and behaviorally speaking, we found that nothing comes close to having the Bible's impact on the spiritual lives of those who engage it.

Engaging God's Word consistently makes the difference in regard to lasting spiritual growth—especially in the realms of overcoming temptations and changing negative behaviors (overcoming past wounds, addictions, etc.). As for the puzzling disconnect between believers and Bible reading, I uncovered 11,000 excuses for neglecting God's Word. I also heard thousands more reasons why people do read the Bible—and about the powerful ways in which it has changed their lives. — Cole, A., & Ross, M. (2012). *Unstuck: your life. god's design. real change*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

#### **14. What are some practical steps we could take to get our group in the Word?**

From the beginning we have looked for ways to coax, bribe, bait, and equip everybody from kindergarten up to engage in some kind of private devotional exercise. I'm constantly telling people during the weekend services to go home and read their Bibles. The practical application for many of our messages is to go home and begin praying a specific prayer. Often, we will print the prayer on a card and hand it out at the end of a message or series. Occasionally, I will select four to eight passages that go along with a series and we will create memory verse cards to hand out to our congregants. Not an inexpensive endeavor. We encourage people to read ahead for the next week.

As mentioned earlier, one of our most important ministries, Starting Point, introduces seekers and returners to the importance of self-study and prayer. In that environment, attendees are given simple guides for reading the Bible on their own. In addition, they are given Bibles along with the curriculum.

On the giving side of things, we are very upfront with the importance of what I refer to as priority, progressive, percentage giving. Priority as in: give first, save second, and live on the rest. Percentage as in: choose a percentage and give it consistently. Progressive is a challenge to up the amount by a percentage every year. While I'm a big believer in tithing, people who have never given away a percentage of their incomes are not going to begin with 10 percent. Sure, some will. But if you are going to teach people to tithe, you may have to start with some baby steps.

On the family side, parents of elementary-age kids are given a Parent Card every month. This card is a simple guide to help parents lead their children in a daily devotion. Every year our middle school and high school divisions create a curriculum or weekend event around the importance of private spiritual disciplines. Recently, our high school ministry created an entire weekend experience around the theme To Hear God Speak ... Hide and Seek. We build a gadget-free quiet time into the daily schedule of all our student camps. Each student is given a devotional to read and is required to sit alone for thirty minutes to read, reflect, and pray. One of the most emotional and memorable moments of my summer is standing on a hotel balcony and seeing eight or nine hundred high school students spread out along the beach reading their Bibles, scribbling notes, and praying. It gives me hope for our nation and our world. For many of those kids, that exercise jump-starts their devotional lives.

Now, before we move on to the third catalyst, there's an important facet of this one I don't want you to miss. The sooner we can get unbelievers reading their Bibles and praying, the better. You don't need to be shy about pushing them to do so. But for it to work, you've got to put the cookies on the bottom shelf. The way you talk about the Bible on the weekend will determine their interest in the Bible during the week. You've got to make it accessible. You've got to give them permission to read it before they believe it. As I mentioned during the discussion of the first catalyst, if you present the Scriptures in helpful terms, you've just removed an obstacle.

This is another reason we print prayers and hand them out. People who don't normally pray often don't know where to begin. It may be second nature for you. It's terrifying for some of them. Terrifying. They need printed prayers to prime the pump. Now, I've been around long enough to know that somebody out there in reader world is thinking: But does God hear the prayers of unbelievers? I'm inclined to think God hears whatever he wants to hear. Based on what Luke tells us in Acts 10 about Cornelius, the

Roman centurion, we know God hears sincere prayers. Heck, Cornelius got a visit from an angel. I've never had one of those and I have a master's in theology. So I wouldn't worry too much about encouraging the seekers, skeptics, and Roman centurions in your church to start praying. — Stanley, A. (2012). *Deep and wide: creating churches unchurched people love to attend*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

**15. Who encouraged you to get into the Word? How did you get into the habit of daily Bible reading?**

The core discipline of the Christian life is to spend time daily alone with God in a time of prayer and Bible reading. There are other disciplines, of course, but this is the main one.

Truthfully, I have no concept of what it means to live the Christian life without spending some time most every day alone with God in unhurried prayer, Bible reading, meditation, scripture memory, and worship. There may be a way to live the Christian life and not have this time, but I cannot imagine it.

If the students are to have a quiet time, the teacher must have a quiet time. Speed of the leader; speed of the team.

Most people need ongoing, life-long accountability to help them in this area. Most people have a very external frame of reference. We all tend to do what we see the people around us doing. It is a good idea to ask your group on a regular basis, "What have you learned in your personal time alone with God the last week or two? What is God teaching you these days?" I have been in groups where this is just about all we talked about and it was a really positive experience for all of us.

The daily quiet time is the most important discipline of the Christian life. If you don't do anything else, other than help. — Josh Hunt. (2005). *10 Marks of Incredible Small Group Leaders*.

**16. What keeps people from daily Bible reading? Why don't people read more than they do?**

They would likely say they are too busy. Most of us do what we really want to do.

**17. How would you explain about having a quiet time to someone who never heard of the idea?**

The Navigators have a little booklet called Seven Minutes with God. The point of it isn't to limit your time with God to seven minutes, but to make quiet time doable. Who can't set their alarm seven minutes early? It's a baby step. Anyone can do it. Once you get there, you might have so much fun that you want to do more. But, if a leader asked for an hour of prayer up front, it might be so overwhelming that you'd end up doing nothing. Sometimes we do well to ask for baby steps. — Josh Hunt. (2010). *Make Your Group Grow*.

**18. How many of the people in your group have regular quiet times?**

One-quarter of the sample set aside time daily. Another 21 percent said they did it a few times a week, and 13 percent said weekly. Thus, a majority (59 percent) of our sample spends time alone with God at least weekly, and this is encouraging. Any leader will want to see these numbers grow, but it is a good start. Obviously we don't know for certain the quantity or the quality of these devotions, but it is a

good thing that so many churchgoers are trying to worship God. — Waggoner, B. J. (2008). *The shape of faith to come*. Nashville: B&H.

### **19. How do we encourage people to have a quiet time without it just becoming another rule to follow?**

When I was first introduced to the idea of Christian discipleship, I was given a list of seven spiritual disciplines I should practice every day—things such as a daily quiet time, Bible study, Scripture memorization, and prayer. All of those disciplines were very helpful to me, and I am grateful for every one of them. They gave me a structure for my spiritual growth. Indeed, we will examine some of these disciplines in later chapters.

However, while learning those disciplines I came to believe that my day-to-day relationship with God depended on how faithfully I performed them. No one actually told me that God's approval of me was based on my performance. Still, I developed a vague but real impression that God's smile or frown depended on whether or not I did my spiritual exercises. The challenge to be faithful in my quiet time, while good in itself, probably contributed to this impression.

My experience is not unusual. A friend of mine who ministers on a university campus told of a student who was exceptionally diligent in having his daily quiet time. My friend asked the student why he was so rigid in his practice, and the young man responded, "So nothing bad will happen to me." He was not being disciplined by grace but by fear.

We are performance-oriented by nature, and our culture, and sometimes our upbringing, reinforces this mindset. All too often a child's acceptance by his or her parents is based on the child's performance, and this certainly tends to be true in our society. We carry this same type of thinking into our relationship with God. So, whether it is our response to God's discipline of us or our practice of those spiritual disciplines that are so good and helpful, we tend to think it is the "law" of God rather than the grace of God that disciplines us. — Bridges, J. (2004). *Growing Your Faith: How to Mature in Christ* (pp. 38–39). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

### **20. How are you doing these days in terms of your time alone with God?**

We moved next into the living room. This was a quiet, comfortable room with a warm atmosphere. I liked it. It had a fireplace, a sofa, overstuffed chairs, a bookcase and an intimate atmosphere.

He also seemed pleased with it. He said, "Indeed, this is a delightful room. Let's come here often. It's secluded and quiet, and we can have good talks and fellowship together."

Well, naturally, as a young Christian I was thrilled. I couldn't think of anything I would rather do than have a few minutes alone with Christ in close companionship.

He promised, "I will be here every morning early. Meet me here and we will start the day together."

So, morning after morning, I would go downstairs to the living room. He would take a book of the Bible from the bookcase, open it, and we would read it together. He would unfold to me the wonder of God's saving truth recorded on its pages and make my heart sing as he shared all he had done for me and

would be to me. Those times together were wonderful. Through the Bible and his Holy Spirit he would talk to me. In prayer I would respond. So our friendship deepened in these quiet times of personal conversation.

However, under the pressure of many responsibilities, little by little, this time began to be shortened. Why, I'm not sure. Somehow I assumed I was just too busy to give special, regular time to be with Christ. This was not a deliberate decision, you understand; it just seemed to happen that way. Eventually not only was the period shortened, but I began to miss days now and then, such as during mid-terms or finals. Matters of urgency demanding my attention were continually crowding out the quiet times of conversation with Jesus. Often I would miss it two days in a row or more.

One morning, I recall rushing down the steps in a hurry to be on my way to an important appointment.

As I passed the living room, the door was open. Glancing in I saw a fire in the fireplace and Jesus sitting there. Suddenly, in dismay, it came to me. He is my guest. I invited him into my heart! He has come as my Savior and Friend to live with me. Yet here I am neglecting him.

I stopped, turned and hesitantly went in. With downcast glance I said, "Master, I'm sorry! Have you been here every morning?"

"Yes," he said. "I told you I would be here to meet with you." I was even more ashamed! He had been faithful in spite of my faithlessness. I asked him to forgive me, and he did, as he always does when we acknowledge our failures and want to do the right thing.

He said, "The trouble is that you have been thinking of the quiet time, of Bible study and prayer, as a means for your own spiritual growth. This is true, but you have forgotten that this time means something to me also. Remember, I love you. At a great cost I have redeemed you. I value your fellowship. Just to have you look up into my face warms my heart. Don't neglect this hour, if only for my sake. Whether or not you want to be with me, remember I want to be with you. I really love you!"

You know, the truth that Christ wants my fellowship, that he loves me, wants me to be with him and waits for me has done more to transform my quiet time with God than any other single fact. Don't let Christ wait alone in the living room of your heart. Every day find a time and place when, with the Word of God and in prayer, you may be together with him. — Munger, R. B. (2010). *My Heart--Christ's Home*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press.

## **21. How can we pray for one another this week?**