



# DISCIPLE GROUPS



**PRAY**  
TOGETHER.  
**GROW** AS  
DISCIPLES.  
**DEVELOP**  
AUTHENTIC  
FRIENDSHIPS.

# Handbook

# *St. Thomas Disciple Group Handbook*

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## **Overview**

Disciple Groups<sup>1</sup> meet bi-weekly for prayer, fellowship, and encouragement in our Christian life. While Disciple Groups aren't bible studies, members do pray with and apply Scripture; rather than just friends hanging out, members grow into deep friendship. Disciple Groups focus on *personal conversion*, growth in prayer and holiness (*transformation*), and embracing a missional life (*mission*), within the context of one's vocation.

### ***Fellowship***

*We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ... that your joy may be complete*<sup>2</sup>. Prayer centers the Disciple Group's fellowship on the Lord.

### ***Conversion***

*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. You are not your own. You were bought with a price.*<sup>2</sup> Conversion begins with faith, repentance, obedience – and giving ourselves without reservation to God. Disciple Groups are a place to grapple with fully yielding our self to God and embracing his plan for our life.

### ***Transformation***

*Without holiness we shall not see God. You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*<sup>2</sup> Disciple Groups pursue holiness, that is, becoming God-like. The Lord's indwelling presence transforms us into irresistibly good and attractive persons!

### ***Mission***

*Love one another as I have loved you. Go and make disciples of all nations.*<sup>2</sup> *The Church exists in order to evangelize*<sup>3</sup>. *Intercede without ceasing*<sup>2</sup>. Disciple Groups encourage a missional life of charity and evangelism, within the framework of our basic vocation.

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<sup>1</sup> also known as a Men's Group or a Women's Group.

<sup>2</sup> Quotes, in order: I John 1.3-4; Luke 9.23; I Corinthians 6.19-20; Hebrews 12.14, Matthew 5.48; John 13; Matthew 28.19, I Thessalonians 5.17 (RSV-CE)

<sup>3</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

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## **Launch**

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Meeting #1 | 10 Min – Greeting and Prayer  |
|            | 15 Min – Talk <sup>4</sup> : What are Disciple Groups? (see pages 2-5)  |
|            | 60 Min – Share your faith story: Describe the faith and spiritual helps or challenges you experienced in your family of origin. If you have fully embraced faith, what factors influenced your decision? If not, what challenges your faith?  |
| Meeting #2 | 10 Min – Greeting and Prayer  |
|            | 15 Min – Talk: Disciple Group Dynamics (see pages 6-9).   |
|            | 60 Min – Share your vocation story: If you are single, how are you discerning your vocation? How does being single further your prayer life, your pursuit of holiness, and being missional? If you are married, describe your courtship. What have been the greatest blessings and challenges of your marriage? |
| Meeting #3 | 10 Min – Greeting and Prayer  |
|            | 15 Min – Talk: Conversion   |
|            | 50 Min – Is Jesus “Lord of your life”? Discuss what challenges you experience in fully entrusting your life to Christ. In what areas do you struggle to live righteously today? How do you grapple with them?   |
|            | 20 Min – Ongoing Groups: Meeting Basics and Signups   |

The first meeting gives the vision and experience of a typical group meeting. Interested folks come to the second and third meetings, after which they decide to commit to a group for six months.

## **Meeting Basics**

- A. Purpose: Prayer, Fellowship & Sharing
- B. Location: someone’s home is most welcoming and comfortable, but a room in a school or parish center also works.
- C. Agenda (1½-2 hrs)
  - 1) Meet and greet (5-10 min)
  - 2) Prayer (10-15 min)
  - 3) Break-out refreshments, casual fellowship (10-15 min)
  - 4) Personal Sharing (60-70 min)
- D. Sharing Formats: Each member shares about different aspects of their lives, according to a framework called one’s *Plan of Life*. Occasionally a group may want to consider how to live various aspects of the Lord’s teaching on discipleship, *Jesus Challenges*.

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<sup>4</sup> Talks given by the disciple group ministry leader or by an individual promotor or facilitator. See also \_\_\_\_\_ for videos of talks as well as other disciple group tools and ministry aids.

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## E. Make it Great

- 1) Start and end on time!
- 2) Commitment → 3 week “try out”, then 6 month (initial) commitment
- 3) Confidentiality → Builds trust and transparency
- 4) Candor → Allows us to share what God is really doing
- 5) Balanced Sharing → Equal share time!
- 6) Role of Facilitator → encourage #1-#5

## **Plan of Life Sharing Format**

The Plan of Life categories provide are useful even without a written plan:

- I. Relationship with the Lord
  - A. Conditions for Discipleship: Repentance; Surrender (of one’s entire life); and Obedience
  - B. Daily Personal Prayer and Scripture Reading
  - C. Sacramental Life
- II. Ongoing Conversion
  - A. Overcoming habitual sin and dealing with “legacy sin”
  - B. Trusting God with our entire life: big things to little details
  - C. Study: Catechetical, moral and spiritual formation
- III. Growth in Holiness (*Becoming like Jesus*)
  - A. Becoming Like Jesus
  - B. Christian Identity & Worldview
- IV. Relationships
  - A. Christ-centered friendships and fellowship
  - B. Supportive of our Christian Life
  - C. Detracting from our Christian Life
  - D. Parents and Extended Family
- V. Vocation & Apostolate
  - A. State of Life (Discerning/Courting; Single/Married; Retirement)
  - B. Parenting & Care for Family (parents, siblings, etc)
  - C. Universal Apostolate of Intercession and Evangelism
  - D. Other Apostolates (if applicable)
- VI. Work/Study
- VII. Household and Financial Resources
- VIII. Personal Health

*Write out a Plan of Life.* Complete the attached Plan of Life Worksheets, identifying (a) strengths, (b) weakness and (c) immediate changes for each category. Make changes doable! Discuss your

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Plan of Life in your Disciple Group (and with your spouse and spiritual director) to help clarify, deepen and improve it, but remember that this is *your plan* – and not one someone gives to you. Revise your Plan of Life at least once per year, e.g., during Lent. (see \_\_\_ for more blank forms).

### **Jesus Challenges**

Have I fully responded to his call and embraced a new identity? What areas of my life need more formation – and what practical steps will address such shortcomings? Do I live as a disciple in my daily life? Have I embraced the work of a disciple, especially “making more disciples”? Anyone following the Lord must obey his commands and embrace his teaching, beginning with the Gospel:

- Call to Discipleship
  - Requirements
  - Primary identity
- Training (formation)
  - Love of God and neighbor
  - Righteousness
  - Practices
  - Heart of a Disciple
  - Work of a Disciple
- Daily Life
  - Expectant Faith, Life in the Spirit, Confidence
  - Manner of Life
- Mission

Jesus Challenges pose this New Testament teaching in the form of questions (see Appendix \_\_\_). Limit discussion of Jesus Challenges to fifty minutes, leaving time for general sharing.

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## **Disciple Group Dynamics**

### *Personal*

- Candor, Transparency & Authenticity
- Confidentiality
- Encourage one another in love
- Pray for one another on at least a weekly basis
- Regular attendance

### *Group*

- Focus
- Balanced Participation
- Peer to Peer
- Safeguard Personal Autonomy

### *Sharing*

- Positive sharing
- Personal Application not Theological enquiry
- One Size Doesn't Fit All
- Goal Setting & Accountability
- Not a place to solve deep seated problems (emotional, physical, marital or otherwise)

### *A. Candor & Confidentiality*

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus (who died to save and transform us) Philippians 2:4-11

Kids learn early what happens by letting your guard down – somebody pulls the chair out from under you! We quickly learn to guard our weaknesses and cloak our vulnerabilities. Yet *candor* is indispensable for sharing in a disciple group:

- Identify problems and weaknesses
- Admit sins and shortcomings
- Welcome encouragement and suggestions for improvement

*Strict Confidentiality* allows free sharing of struggles and challenges. Only a fool makes himself vulnerable to blabbermouths. Anyone who violates confidentiality except for grave reasons (e.g., to avert serious harm to someone) should be strongly rebuked if not expelled from the group.

### *B. Encourage and Love One Another*

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

Hebrews 10:24-25

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Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience... above all these put on love... teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. Colossians 3.12-16

We encourage each other, offer suggestions, and pray. Yet we each own these questions personally and draw on God's grace.

### *C. Pray for One Another (and pray over each other)*

We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.

Colossians 1.9-11

### *D. Regular attendance (Commitment)*

Without *Commitment* groups begin falling apart. Consistent attendance is the bedrock of fellowship, sharing, and growth. Occasional attendance by even a few in the group undermines this foundation and erodes the high level of individual commitment a group requires. Trying out a group for two or three sessions allows discernment of whether one can commit to consistent attendance (80%+). If one's circumstances or interests prevent consistent attendance, one should resign from the group or figure out how to make most of the meetings.

### *E. Focus and Balanced Sharing*

Some of us share too little and some too much! Members should elicit more from the 'too little' by probing and open-ended questions and gently curb the 'too much'. The facilitator should keep an eye on the time and occasionally gently ask a person to 'wrap it up' or interrupt with something like, "Say, this is very good, but I wonder if anyone else would like to share". All of us need to have some humility about such blind spots. The facilitator also helps to maintain the group's focus, to avoid bogging down on peripheral issues, and to maintain a positive atmosphere. In fact, this is the responsibility of the whole group.

### *F. Strive as Peers*

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

I Thessalonians 5:11

We strive together for holiness and mission, discussing our challenges and choices. Even though some people seem more "transformed" than others, God has plenty more work to do in each of us.

### *G. Safeguard Personal Autonomy*

Unlike barnyard animals, God made us free to choose, and rejoice in, his goodness, truth, and beauty. We all occasionally make bad choices. A group can encourage and challenge us, but *only*



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I can embrace God's plan for my life. Each of us must make decisions for himself and avoid any semblance of governing their life "by committee".

A group protects one's personal autonomy by:

- relating to each other on a peer-to-peer, brother-to-brother basis
- limiting itself to discussion and offering advice (but sin should always be challenged)
- being wary of undermining one's personal autonomy.

### *H. Positive Sharing*

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. (II Cor 12.9)

I can do all things in him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4.13)

The Plan of Life framework involves (a) sharing about what is going well, (b) framing problems and challenges as opportunities for growth, and (c) discussing tangible steps to change and grow. No whining. Of course, there is plenty of room for empathy and encouragement, but always keep a positive frame of reference. We have a big God who can handle any problem over time and with our cooperation; the support of brothers and sisters in Christ can be a great additional help.

### *I. Personal Application not Theological Enquiry*

Disciple Groups focus primarily on practical growth in holiness and knowing God. Theological enquiry and advanced biblical exegesis are for a venue other than a Disciple Group.

### *J. One Size Doesn't Fit All*

God gave each of us unique families of origin, upbringings, personalities, gifts, capabilities, relationships, life experiences, educations, work experiences, family needs, privileges, and challenges, and, if we are married, a unique wife and unique children. We retain our individuality even as we take on more of Jesus' character, holiness, love for others, and zeal for God's reign. God work of transforming us often varies somewhat from one person to the next.

Our patterns of life also vary a lot. Some pray an hour per day and have lots of discretionary time. Others prayer less and have demanding work and family responsibilities, chronic energy or pain, deep emotional scares, etc. Some come from intact, loving, and devout families. Others hardly know one or both of their parents. Some are starting their careers and looking for a spouse, others have large families, while others are ending their work.

### *K. Goal Setting and Accountability*

*Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.* Proverbs 27.17

A New Year's resolutions to exercise quickly fades absent joining an exercise class. Joining a team makes us accountable to make practices and work hard. A disciple group can have a similar effect with our moral and spiritual goals.

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A decision to disclose one's progress in spiritual growth is a powerful incentive. Praise and encourage each other's progress. Challenge each other. Accountability simply harnesses a natural force among people.

### *L. Tackling Deep-seated Problems*

Western culture more and more fiercely attacks almost every aspect of God's plan for our lives, creating a wake of misery and destruction. Some bear emotional and psychological scars that require help beyond that of a Disciple Group. Some patterns of sin are so addictive and so diminish our wills – ranging from substance abuse to pornography – that they also require professional help.

A Disciple Group is our spiritual base, but some will need help from psychologists, marital counselors, and programs for breaking sex and substance addictions, such as AA and other Twelve Step programs. The group should support and encourage a person grappling with such problems without letting them dominate the group's discussion.

### **Facilitator and Annual Evaluation**

Rather than as a theological or biblical expert or spiritual director, a facilitator serves by:

- Scheduling meetings
- Setting an example for attendance, enthusiasm, listening to and questioning person sharing
- Encouraging Positive Disciple Group Dynamics, especially balanced sharing and maintaining focus.

The facilitator role may rotate among members. However, often one person will serve as facilitator for a long time.

At least once per year, the group should both freshen up its sharing by each member redoing their Plan of Life (Appendix A) and completing a 'Disciple Group Dynamics Evaluation Form' (see Appendix B). This is also a good time to consider rotating the facilitator.

## Appendix A: Jesus Challenges

Anyone following the Lord must obey his commands and embrace his teaching, beginning with Jesus' words on discipleship in the gospels. Have I fully responded to his call and embraced a new identity? What areas of my life need more formation – and what practical steps will address such shortcomings? Do I live as a disciple in my daily life? Have I embraced the work of a disciple, especially “making more disciples”? The Gospels state Jesus' *requirements* and *training* to be his disciples, according to the following topics:

- Call to Discipleship
  - Requirements
  - Primary identity
- Training (formation)
  - Love of God and neighbor
  - Righteousness
  - Practices
  - Heart of a Disciple
  - Work of a Disciple
- Daily Life
  - Expectant Faith, Life in the Spirit, Confidence
  - Manner of Life
- Mission

Implicit in each of the Lord's teachings and commands is the question of how we will respond. This format poses Jesus' discipleship teaching in the form of questions to each of us. The other members of your Disciple Group should encourage you, offer suggestions, and pray for you. Always remember that you are the one who has to grapple with these questions and commit to growth – above all, resolving to seek, continuously and humbly, the Lord's grace to change. Limit the number of questions to what your group can share and discuss in about fifty minutes and always leave at least fifteen minutes for more general sharing.

### I. Call to Follow Jesus

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Upon the revelation of God's loves for me follows the question: Will I accept his invitation into divine fellowship and discipleship? Jesus calls us first to recognize that he is *the only answer* to the problem of sin and *the only way* to gain intimacy with God and to experience his love (John 3.16 and 14.6, respectively). Our response requires a superhuman level of trust in God known as *faith*. To paraphrase St. Augustine, the Lord must give what he commands, above all, faith. And from faith, *conversion*: repentance, obedience, and baptism - plus a willingness to “sell everything to follow him”.

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All four gospels record Jesus beginning his ministry by calling people to become his disciples. Our response requires that we: (1) Repent; (2) Believe; (3) Sell all, lose one's life, and embrace the cross; (4) Obey Jesus in everything; and (5) be Baptized both in water and the Holy Spirit.

### **Am I a Disciple of Jesus?**

- Have I **repented** of my sins? (Mt 4.17, cf. Mt 3.11-12).
- Do I **believe** that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died for my sins, and that he gives us his Holy Spirit?
  - “Who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16.15, cf. Mark 4.41)
  - Do I believe that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life ... that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3.16-18)?
  - Do I believe that “the only way to the Father is through him” (John 14.6, Mt 7.13-14)
  - Do I believe in the Creeds and teaching of the Church, built upon Peter and inspired by the Holy Spirit (Mt 16.18-20, Jn 15.26, 16.13)?
- Have I **sold everything** to follow Jesus? In what sense?
  - “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” (Mt 13.45-46)
  - “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mt 16.24).
  - “Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Lk 12.33-34)
- Do I **obey** Jesus in everything? Is he Lord of my Life?
  - Do I do the will of the Father? (Mt 7.21-27)
  - “he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.” (Jn 3.36)
- Have I been **baptized** with water and the Holy Spirit?
  - And John bore witness, “I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven ... he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” (Jn 1.32-3)
  - Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (Jn 3.5)
  - And while staying with them he charged them *not to depart* from Jerusalem, *but to wait* for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days *you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit ... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ...*” (Acts 1.4-7)

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## II. Training

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The “finished product” of being disciplined by Jesus is *to be like Jesus* (Lk 6.40, Mt 10.25), as Jesus instructs and exemplifies in the gospels. Holiness, *being God-like*, requires not merely keeping, but exceeding, the Law of Moses (Mt 5.17-20): God intends to make us “perfect like our heavenly father” (Mt 5.21-48). Our hearts must become as pure as our deeds and filled with God’s own empowering Spirit (Jn 7.37-39); Jesus’ disciples ultimately will love others as God himself does.

### A. *What is my Primary Identity?*

- a. that of a **Disciple**? (title for Jesus’ followers, 213 times in gospels)
- b. **Son, Daughter, Temple of the Holy Spirit**... as one loved by, and intimately united to, God?
  - i. To all who received him, who believed in him, he gave power to become children of God (Jn 1.12)
  - ii. “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (Jn 14.23)
  - iii. “If you love me ... you will know the Spirit of Truth, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (Jn 14.15-17)
- c. Part of the **Body of Christ** (Jn 15.1-11; 17.9-26)

### B. *Love of God & Neighbor, Righteousness*

- Do I **Love God** with all my heart, mind and soul (Mt 22.34-40)?
  - What exactly does this mean on a practical level in my life?
  - Do I submit my life to God at the beginning of each day?
- Do I **Love my Neighbor** as myself (Lk 10.25-36)?
  - What exactly does this mean on a practical level in my life?
  - Who is my neighbor? What pain and expense do I take to help others? How do I balance “loving my neighbor” with “caring for my family”?
  - Do I love even my enemies (Mt 5.43-47)?
- Does my **Righteousness** exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees?
  - Am I Keeping the Ten Commandments?
    - i. Do I believe that the Church is the Pillar of Truth (I Tim 3.15) and that the Lord entrusted teaching and governing authority to St. Peter and his successors (Mt 16.19)?
    - ii. Have I formed my conscience according to Scripture and as the Church authoritatively teaches (Ten Commandments, Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part III, Section II)?
    - iii. Do I examine my conscience daily?
  - Do I lust or have sex outside of marriage (Mt 5.27-30)?
    - i. Do I look at pornography?
    - ii. Do I masturbate?

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- iii. Am I living chastely, i.e., having no sexual relations except in marriage?
- Do I grow angry or insult others (Mt 5.21-22)?
- Do I speak falsely (Mt 5.33-37)?
  - i. Am I a person of honesty and integrity?
  - ii. Can my word be relied upon?
  - iii. Do I cheat on my taxes? Or in any of my dealings with others?

### *C. Practices*

- Do I **spend time daily** with the Lord?
  - Am I taking **time to pray** each day?
    - i. Do I persevere (Lk 11.5-10)?
    - ii. Interceding always, rejoicing constantly and giving thanks in all circumstances (I Thess 5.14-16)?
    - iii. the Lord's Prayer – for "daily bread" (Mt 6.5-15)?
    - iv. *for* the Holy Spirit (Lk 11.11-13)
    - v. *through* the Holy Spirit (Jn 7.37-39, Eph 6.18)?
  - Do I **abide or dwell in the Lord** through receiving the Eucharist (John 6.56) and through personal prayer (Jn 14-15)?
  - Do I **intercede** for others to encounter and grow in the Lord?
    - i. pray for the Lord's Kingdom to come (Mt 6.10)
    - ii. for the Lord to send out evangelists (Mt 9.37-38)?
  - Do I **live by Scripture** (Mt 4.4), reading and meditating on the Word of God regularly?
- Do I **give alms** (Mt 6.42)?
  - Do I give of my sustenance, and not just my abundance, to the poor (Mk 12.31-34)?
  - Do I feast the poor and maimed, those who can't reciprocate (Lk 14.12-15)?
  - Does all of my charitable giving and support for the Church total a tithe (tenth) of my income (Lev 27.30-32)?
- Do I **fast** regularly (Mt 6.16-17; 9.15)

### *D. Heart of a Disciple*

- Do I have the **Heart of Jesus' Disciple**?
  - Am I **poor in spirit**, recognizing my own sinfulness and limitations (Mt 5.3)?
  - Do I **mourn** my sins, the evil in the world, and the many lost (Mt 5.4)?
  - Am I **meek**, like Moses (Num 12.3) and the Lord himself when incarnate (Mt 11.29), reliant on the power of God (Mt 5.5, Jn 15.1-6)?
  - Do I **hunger and thirst** for righteousness (Mt 5.6)?
  - Am I **merciful** towards others as the Lord is towards me (Mt 5.7; Lk 6.32-36)?
  - Am I **pure-hearted** (Mt 5.8)?
    - i. ... free of interior defilements (Mt 15.18-20; 23.27-28)?
    - ii. Do I speak good or evil, revealing the state of my heart (Mt 12.33-37)?
  - Do I **seek retribution** (Mt 5.38-41)?

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- Do I **forgive others** as the Lord has forgiven me? (Mt 6.12; Lk 17.3-4)
- Do I **judge others** (Mt 7.1-5)?

The Lord “trains” or forms us to become like himself, that is, perfect (Mt 5.42) and holy (I Ptr 1.15-6). Becoming holy means taking on the character and likeness of God in terms of our identity, our morality, and our virtues and appetites – the greatest of which is love for others. In a word, one becomes “god-like”, irresistibly attractive and spiritually beautiful.

### III. Daily Life

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Holiness in Daily Life also requires a manner of life that both expresses our new life and reinforces it. As God is love, so we will become deeply loving. As God radiates beauty and goodness, so will we. As God engages deeply in interpersonal relationships, so will we.

#### *A. Expectant Faith, Life in the Spirit, Confidence*

- Do I live daily in **expectant faith**, believing and relying upon God to act (Mt 14.22-33, Lk 17.5-6)?
- Do I ask for more of the **Holy Spirit daily** (Jn 7.37-39), just as the Samaritan woman drew her daily water from the well (Jn 4.7-15)?
- Do I **seek first the kingdom** of God and trust the Lord to provide (Mt 6.33)?
  - Do I serve God or Mammon, do I **love money more than God** (Mt 6.19,20-24)?
  - Do I **rest secure in the Father’s love** and providence for me (Mt 10.29-30)?
  - Am I **anxious**? Do worries about material goods and security prevent me from seeking first the kingdom of heaven (Mt 6.25-34)?
- Am I **courageous in the face of persecution** (Mt 10.17-33)?
  - Do I stand for the Lord even if at great personal cost (Mt 5.10-11)?

#### *B. Manner of Life*

- Do I **live as a son or daughter of God** (Jn 1.12-13)?
  - Do I embrace my fellow disciples as Brothers and Sisters in the Lord?
    - i. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. (Mt 19.29)
    - ii. Stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Mt 12.49
  - Am I really connecting with my fellow parishioners?
  - Do I imitate Jesus example of **loving and serving the disciples** as Jesus loved us, from mere foot-washing to dying on our behalf (Jn 13.3-17, 34)?
- Am I **diligent in my work**, especially for the kingdom (Jn 12.25-26), even as I rely upon God’s power and providence (Jn 15.1-7)?
- Do I live as a good and faithful **servant of the Lord**, rather than for myself (Mt 24.45-51)?

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- Am I great in my own eyes or great in the Lord's reckoning, i.e., imitating his love by being **first in serving** others (Mt 18.1-6)?

### *C. Life Objectives & Watchfulness*

- Do I relate to all of my possessions as merely a **steward** rather than as their owner (Mt 25.14-30)?
  - Do I deploy my resources for the kingdom or for me?
  - Am I about my Master's business?
  - Do view myself and all of my possessions, attributes and relationships as belonging to the Lord?
- Do I live knowing that **I will be judged** by the Lord (Mt 16.27), at least, in part, based upon
  - ... whether I used my resources for the Kingdom of God (Mt 25.14-30)?
  - ... and whether I treated my fellow believers as if they were the Lord himself (Mt 25.31-46)?
- Am I **watchful of the Lord's Return**? Is my **life dedicated to our Lord's business** or my own?
  - Do I believe and expect his return (Mt 24.29-31)?
  - Am I watchful and ready (Mt 24.36-44, 25.1-12)?
  - Am I diligent about the Lord's work even though his "return" is delayed (Mt 24.45-51; cf. Lk 21.34-36)?
  - Am I fully "Invested" in the Lord's return (Mt 25.14-30)?

### *IV. Mission*

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Sending or commissioning overlaps our training in discipleship. Our training as disciples should bear immediate fruit for the kingdom in terms of tangibly caring for others, both materially and spiritually. As James says, faith without works is dead. While we are only saved through faith and not by works, as we become more and more like God, our lives bear more and more fruit. A lack of fruit calls into question the genuineness of one's faith.

- Do I **do the works of the Father** (Jn 9.4)?
- Am I **doing the works that Jesus did** (Jn 14.12)?
  - Am I loving others as Jesus did (Jn 13.34-35)?
    - i. Do I properly care for my family?
    - ii. Do I quietly give alms (Mt 6.2)?
    - iii. Love the poor, the sick, the persecuted brethren as if they were the Lord (Mt 25.31-46)?
  - Do I support the Church?
  - Do I exercise the spiritual gifts including praying over others?
- Have I accepted the Lord's commission to **evangelize**, to "make disciples of all nations" (Mk 16.14-18, Jn 17.18)?
  - Interceding for people to enter the kingdom (Mt 6.10)?



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- Who have I spoken with, or prayed for, to encounter the Lord and to become his disciple this past week?
- What tangible steps have I taken to help people know the Lord and become his disciple?

All of the Lord's commands, teaching, and training is for our happiness – above all, entering a life with God and his people. We even find deep happiness in sacrificing and working for his kingdom, however difficult and costly that may be. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are caught up in a joyous eternal fellowship into which we – and countless others – shall participate. Our deepest joy is enjoying God's beauty, being in this fellowship, and loving and caring for others.

Through prayer and the sacraments, we *draw near* to God and experience his beauty and love, but we also *draw in* his transforming power, that is, the Holy Spirit. This section lists Jesus' teaching on discipleship – the content of our formation as disciples - rather than identify the many means by which the Lord transforms us, such as a daily prayer time and examination of conscience, and the sacrament of Confession.

Jesus' discipleship teaching provides the basic framework for discipleship, although it is not exhaustive. God has further unfolded specific pathways of discipleship through the ages, particularly in the lives and teaching of the Saints.

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**Appendix B:**

**Plan of Life Worksheet (1 of 4)**

**I. Relationship with the Lord**

A. Repentance, Surrender, & Obedience

B. Daily Prayer & Scripture

C. Sacramental Life

|                   |  |  |  |
|-------------------|--|--|--|
| Strengths         |  |  |  |
| Weaknesses        |  |  |  |
| Immediate Changes |  |  |  |

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Plan of Life Worksheet (2 of 4)

**II. Ongoing Conversion**

Habitual & Legacy Sin/ Trusting God / Study

**III. Growth in Holiness**

**IV. Relationships**

Strengths

Weaknesses

Immediate Changes

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

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Plan of Life Worksheet (3 of 4)

**V. Vocation & Apostolate**

A. State of Life

B. Parenting & Care for Family

C. Intercession & Evangelism: D. Other Apostalates

Strengths

Weaknesses

Immediate Changes

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

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Plan of Life Worksheet (4 of 4)

**VI. Work / Study**

**VII. Household and Financial Resources**

**VIII. Health**

|                  |                          |  |  |
|------------------|--------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Strengths</b> |                          |  |  |
|                  | <b>Weaknesses</b>        |  |  |
|                  | <b>Immediate Changes</b> |  |  |

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### **Appendix C: Disciple Group Dynamics Evaluation Form**

|   | Rate Your Group<br>(1=Not Good, 5= Very Good) |
|---|---|
| <b>Prayer</b>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pray together for at least ten minutes at each meeting</li> </ul>                                | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <b>Personal</b>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candor, Transparency &amp; Authenticity</li> </ul>   | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to regular participation</li> </ul>   | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidentiality</li> </ul>   | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage one another in love</li> </ul>   | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to pray for one another on at least a weekly basis</li> </ul>                         | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <b>Group</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain Group Focus</li> </ul>  | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balanced Participation</li> </ul>  | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer to Peer</li> </ul>  | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguard Personal Autonomy</li> </ul>   | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <b>Sharing</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive sharing</li> </ul>  | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on personal application over theological enquiry</li> </ul>                                | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding “one size fits all” mentality</li> </ul>  | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of Goal Setting &amp; Accountability</li> </ul>   | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not a place to solve deep seated problems (emotional, physical, marital or otherwise)</li> </ul> | 1 2 3 4 5                                     |

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## Appendix D: New Parishioner Class

A New Parishioner's Class helps ground us in the practical ways of embracing conversion, the call to holiness, and a life of mission. The New Parishioner's Class is best conducted as a brief presentation followed by a small group discussion of thirty to forty-five minutes. Ideally, the discussion group continues as a Disciples Group after the completion of the New Parishioner's Class.

One New Parishioner's Class is the Group Study, *Made for Joy*. Below is a convenient cross-reference to the Plan of Life categories:

|  | <u>Made for Joy</u> |
|--|---------------------|
| I. Relationship with the Lord  |                     |
| A. Conditions for Discipleship: Repentance;<br>Surrender (of one's entire life); and Obedience | I:1-3; II:1,7       |
| B. Daily Personal Prayer and Scripture Reading   | I:4-6               |
| C. Sacramental Life  |                     |
| II. Ongoing Conversion   |                     |
| A. Overcoming habitual sin and dealing with "legacy sin"                                       | II:2-4              |
| B. Trusting God with our entire life: big things to little details                             | II:1,7              |
| C. Study: Catechetical, moral and spiritual formation  | II:11               |
| III. Growth in Holiness ( <i>Becoming like Jesus</i> )   |                     |
| A. Becoming Like Jesus   | II:5                |
| B. Christian Identity & Worldview  | II:6                |
| IV. Relationships  | II:8                |
| A. Christ-centered friendships and fellowship  |                     |
| B. Supportive of our Christian Life  |                     |
| C. Detracting from our Christian Life  |                     |
| D. Parents and Extended Family   |                     |
| V. Vocation & Apostolate   | II:9-10             |
| A. State of Life (Discerning/Courting; Single/Married; Retirement)                             |                     |
| B. Parenting & Care for Family (parents, siblings, etc)  |                     |
| C. Universal Apostolate of Intercession and Evangelism   |                     |
| D. Other Apostolates (if applicable)   |                     |
| VI. Work/Study   | II:7                |
| VII. Household and Financial Resources   | II:8                |
| VIII. Personal Health  |                     |

# *DISCIPLE GROUP HANDBOOK*

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Mission Capital