



Growing in Christ Together

A 16-Week Discipleship Journey

Justin Kuravackal, Abe Meysenburg,
Jeff Vanderstelt, Brad Watson

Leader Guide
Discover - Nurture - Act

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Every Church. Every Person. Every Place

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ISBN:

Growing in Christ Together, Leader Guide Paperback: 978-0-9968493-8-8

Growing in Christ Together, Leader Guide ebook: 978-0-9968493-9-5

Cover and book design | Nathan Parry

Editing | Caitlin Wilson

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Acknowledgements

We owe a tremendous amount to Tim Chester, our brother across the pond in Sheffield, England. He introduced Saturate to several concepts that rapidly became part of the fabric of how we understand and speak about the gospel as a family. For many of us, Tim's ideas have become inextricably woven into what we teach others to help them become more like Jesus and how we live out the gospel in the everyday. Tim later published these thoughts in *You Can Change* - apart from the Bible, the best book we have read on the gospel and becoming more like Jesus. We've used endnotes with page references to credit him. We highly recommend purchasing the book to dive deeper into discipleship in community.

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INTRODUCTION TO

DNA GROUPS

The term “DNA group” refers to a group that ideally consists of three people—men with men, women with women—who meet together weekly. DNA groups provide a structure for us to care deeply for one another and to foster growth as disciples of Jesus. (For more on the structure and number of participants of a DNA Group, see Appendix 1.)

DNA is an acronym that reminds of us three key components of discipleship: discover, nurture, and act. The goal is to help one another discover Jesus in the Scriptures, nurture the truths of the gospel in our hearts, and faithfully act on what the Spirit calls us to do.



Video: See video on the role of DNA groups in communities on mission:
<https://saturatetheworld.com/dna-resources/>

Our DNA group should be a major factor in our growth as a disciple, someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life.

Why Should I Be in a DNA Group?

As disciples who’ve been saved and made righteous, Paul exhorts us to “be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Romans 12:2). Discipleship requires life-on-life interaction and can only happen in community. We grow primarily through the experience of life in gospel community. A DNA group can be a key catalyst for growth and transformation in our lives.

One of the main ways this happens is by giving each other regular reminders of the truth of the gospel. Hebrews 3:12 warns, “Take care, brothers and sisters, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” We are often tempted to forget who God is, what He’s done for us in Christ Jesus, who we are as a result, and how we live out of our new identity. Hebrews 3:13 says one of the major ways to prevent this

“falling away from the living God” is to “encourage one another daily . . . so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

Every single day we need to be encouraged with the truth that we are deeply loved and accepted by the Father purely on the basis of what Jesus has done! Our new identity as sons and daughters of God shapes everything about our life as disciples of Jesus. Understanding this new identity also gives us the boldness and humility to be honest with our DNA partners when we are tempted to hide our sin or to blame others. Regular encouragement from our DNA partners can be a significant help in our battle against sin and against the lies of the enemy.

What is the Goal of DNA Groups?

The overall goal of a DNA group is to foster discipleship relationships that help each person grow to become more like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. The goal is not merely to hang out and have fun, or even to build friendships, though hopefully all of that will happen! The goal is to challenge one another to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

As disciples, we should experience transformation at every level, affecting our whole person: head, heart, and hands. The specific discipleship goals for a DNA group meeting can be understood by unpacking the acronym:

Discover: Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will study the Bible and ask the Four Questions. The goal is to teach the head.

Nurture: Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will repent and believe in the gospel. The goal is to shepherd the heart.

Act: Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will listen and obey as He calls us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The goal is to empower the hands.

The “Discover-Nurture-Act” Process

At each meeting, a DNA group should walk through the three-step process of discover, nurture, and act. Each of these can only be done with the help of the Holy Spirit, so praying throughout the process is imperative.



Video: “Details of a DNA”—Jeff Vanderstelt teaches on what DNA groups are, why we do them, tips, and the process of discover, nurture, and act.
<https://saturatetheworld.com/dna-resources/>



Discover

Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will study the Bible and ask the Four Questions: Who is God, What has He done, Who are we, and How do we live? The goal is to teach the head so each person either learns or is reminded of the truth about who God is, what He’s done, who we are, and how we live, every time the DNA group meets.

Discover primarily involves discipling the head. In John 8:31–32, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Discover is about uncovering the vital truth about who God is, what He’s done, who we are, and how we should live.

A number of Jesus’ statements from John’s gospel highlights the importance of His word and His Spirit in helping a disciple discover truth:

Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” —John 17:17

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. —John 14:26

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. —John 16:13–14

Jesus' death on the cross makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to live in us! His Spirit is our teacher, the one who makes Jesus even more real to us as we grow in our faith. Our motivation to discover comes from the great gift Jesus has given us and from our desire to know Him more. Discover is not about information but about relationship and transformation.

In light of Jesus' prayer in John 17:17, studying the Bible should be the primary way DNA groups discover together. As a group, choose a passage of scripture and read it throughout the week. Each person should utilize the Four Questions as he or she studies on his or her own. Consider using a journal to capture key thoughts and insights that the Spirit brings to mind. Group members should come to the weekly meeting ready to answer these three questions:

1. What did you discover this week? What did you learn? What were you reminded of?
2. Where did the Spirit lead you to repentance and faith this week?
3. How have you struggled with sin/unbelief in your life this week?

When the group meets, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak through His word! Read through the whole passage once or twice together. Share any insights from the week, and write down new things the Spirit illuminates.

Discover in This Guide

This book will guide your group toward the regular rhythm of discovering the word of God together and apart. We've set up each week to have specific Scriptures to read, articles to dive into, and questions to process that will lay the foundation for future DNA discussions long after you've put this guide away.



Nurture

Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will repent and believe in the gospel. The goal is to shepherd the heart so each person is brought to repentance and renewed faith every time a DNA group meets.

Nurture primarily involves discipling the heart. The word heart is used more than 850 times in the Bible and is used to describe the very center of our being. It includes our mind, our emotions, and our will. In Romans 10:10, Paul says it's the part of us that exercises faith or belief. "For with the heart a person believes. . . ."

In Luke 6, Jesus says the fruit of a person's life—their words and their actions—is an indicator of what is present in his or her heart. "Each tree is known by its own fruit . . . out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:44–45). So regardless of what we know in our heads, the fruit of our lives is determined by what we believe in our hearts. We may know God is great and in control and affirm His sovereignty and power, yet we worry. What we know does not align with what we believe in that moment.

When we worry, we're placing our hope in something other than God. We're believing that something other than Him is in control and can give us security. Paul's assessment of this misplaced belief is that we've ". . . exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). By placing our faith in something other than God to give us what only He can give, we are actually engaging in false worship, in idolatry.

DNA groups are designed to help identify these areas of sin and idolatry in our lives. Nurture is about ensuring what we know aligns with what we believe.

It is possible to be overzealous in our desire to root sin out of one another's

lives. Nurture is not a witch-hunt or a game of “whack-a-mole,” where we wait anxiously with a big mallet, smacking down every little indicator of sin and unbelief as it pops up in people’s lives.

In reality, we should be even more quick to point out evidences of grace than we are to call out sin or to start poking around, looking for evidence of unbelief.

However, the fundamental assumption is that within a week’s time every believer is going to sin and therefore needs to:

- › Confess our sins to one another (James 5:16)
- › Repent before God (Revelation 3:19)
- › Turn back toward Jesus in faith (Hebrews 12:1–2)
- › Experience the ongoing forgiveness and cleansing of Jesus (1 John 1:9)
- › Observe the fruit of the Spirit being produced in our lives as a result (Galatians 5:16–25)

Nurture in This Guide

After the Scripture readings and articles we’ve included each week, the conversation will turn toward our hearts. Not only will we look at content, we’ll look at how that content profoundly challenges, changes, and confronts you. This will be done through questions, examples, and specific exercises to build these nurture conversations that will continue after this guide.



Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will listen and obey as He calls us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The goal is to empower the hands so that in light of his or her repentance each person knows what to do and whom to tell every time the group meets.

Act primarily involves discipling the hands. Once we’ve discovered the truth

about who God is and what He's done, repented of our sin/unbelief, and renewed our faith in Jesus, we need to ask the Spirit to guide us in changing the way we live. Our repentance must have some practical impact on our lives.

When John the Baptist was baptizing people, preparing them for the arrival of the Messiah, he exhorted them to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance,” meaning “demonstrate through your life that your repentance is legitimate.”

This was a part of Paul's message, as well. As he was telling the story of his conversion to King Agrippa, Paul said, I “. . . declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:20).

Legalism has left a bad taste in the mouths of so many followers of Jesus that talk of works and actions can sometimes be dismissed. While the “you-are-what-you-do” mindset has certainly caused a great deal of damage in the church, the New Testament clearly calls us to change our behavior in light of the gospel.

The book of Titus is one clear example. Titus 2:11–12 says, “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. . . .” Experiencing God's grace motivates us to say “no” to sinful actions and “yes” to godly actions!

If the Spirit leads someone to repentance, either outside of the group or during the weekly meeting, spend five-to-ten minutes praying and listening together. Ask the Spirit to speak. Be quiet and listen, waiting for Him to answer two specific questions:

1. What do you want me to do?
2. Who do you want me to tell?

Act in This Guide

Each week, we'll suggest activities, next steps, or questions to help your group walk in obedience. Each of these suggestions offers equipping and a pattern for your community to follow. Don't forget to ask about what happened the previous week as people walked in obedience before you dive into the next week of material.

Transformation Together

Many would say Jesus was the greatest man who ever lived, regardless of their religious affiliation. The word "Christian" means "little Christ," as in one who seeks to walk in the ways of Jesus. But anyone who wants to be more like Him is undoubtedly confronted with a harsh reality: Many changes need to occur if we are to resemble the amazing man Jesus Christ. The concept of change is not foreign to us. Right now, there are probably several things about yourself you'd like to change. But change also raises many questions:

Why should I change? What needs to change? How do I go about changing? Why is change so difficult?

We developed *Growing in Christ Together* to help address those questions and to help you lead a small community of people (DNA group) toward lasting change.

HOW TO USE

Growing in Christ Together

Each week when you meet, *Growing in Christ Together* will help set a basic pattern for your time together. The leader of the group will walk you through the discussion. There is some variation, but roughly the same elements are involved each week:

Notes: A place to jot down notes and thoughts from the discussion or to process through the exercise.

Big Picture: This is a place for you to summarize in a few lines what you learned each week.

Discover: A short passage of scripture to read and discuss and an article to read that will help your group lay the proper foundation for a sustainable DNA group. These articles are taken from a variety of authors. Some leaders encourage everyone to read the articles beforehand, and others find it helpful to read the articles again and out loud together each week. This is something to discuss as you begin your group.

Nurture: Following the readings, the leader will guide a discussion from the content toward our hearts. This is a time directed toward how we respond to God and how the gospel is good news to us.

Act: To ensure that discipleship gets lived out day to day, you'll leave with something to think about or do before your next meeting.

Pray Together: DNA groups always pray together, but occasionally this element will appear calling you to a specific prayer focus. This can be especially helpful for new groups.

Later This Week: Each week we've suggested something to do, think about, pray about, or read when the group isn't together. We also suggest passages of Scripture to read each day between meetings, too.

This Week's Scripture Reading: From week two onward, you'll be challenged

toward daily Bible readings first through the book of Ephesians, then select Psalms, passages from the Gospel of Luke, passages from Acts, and lastly the letter of Jude. This is designed to help everyone develop the habit of learning and listening to the Spirit through Scripture.

Leader's Note

The Leader's Guide contains time markers for each element, as well as a few additional elements not found in the participant's guide. Each week, you'll get some extra guidance with headings such as "Opening," "Discover," and "Big Picture." This last one helps you know the most important points to highlight each week. It will help keep the discussion focused.

Notes:

Logistics to Think Through

Here are some things to keep in mind each time you meet:

- › Be wise about your meeting place. A coffee shop can work for some groups, but it may not give you the privacy you'll need for honest conversation. Meeting in a home or the quiet corner of a larger public space may be better options.
- › You're going to be doing some writing throughout this process. You can use your own journal or the participant's guide that's provided for you. Make sure you have a Bible with you, too.
- › You'll be scheduling additional times together, so bring some sort of calendar to each meeting (phone, laptop, paper, a pen for writing on your hand, etc.).

Leader Expectations

There are some expectations unique to the leader of the DNA group:

- › Pray consistently for the people in your group. Come with a sense of where the Spirit wants you to go.
- › Prepare by reading though the material before your meeting. Come with a sense of where the discussion needs to go. Keep the discussion focused. The Big Picture will help you discern this along with your relationship with the people in your community.
- › The Leader's Guide is not top secret. You might want to have the people in your group take turns leading toward the end of the process.



VIDEO: Abe Mysenburg trains on leading a DNA group in this two-part video series.

<https://saturatetheworld.com/dna-resources/>

WEEK 1

Stories

Week 1

Leader's Note

Set aside at least two hours for this first session as you'll need extra time to read the story and share your own stories. Check out Appendix 3: "Engaging Personal Stories in DNA Groups" to lead this time effectively.

Instructions

Please read "Telling Your Story with Jesus as the Hero" and "Engaging Personal Stories in DNA Groups" located in the Appendix. Come prepared to this week's DNA meeting ready to share vulnerably and listen well. If you run out of time on this first week, have the leader share his/her story, then choose someone to share theirs the next time you meet.

Big Picture

This is where we're going—the big ideas to understand more deeply this week.

- › The Bible is made up of one big, overarching story.
- › Humans were created in God's image to be like Him, but everyone has rebelled against God.
- › God has a plan for restoring everyone and everything to the way He originally created it to be.
- › It is all God's work to do this restoration.

Opening [10 minutes]

Take a few minutes to see how each of you is doing and encourage each other. Be careful; this time can easily get away from you.

Setup [2 minutes]

All of our lives are made up of a series of stories. Some of them are true (or seem true to us), and some parts of our stories are caught up in false realities. But there is a big Story that actually helps us make sense of our lives and why things work the way they do in the world. It's called the Story of God. It's a story found throughout the Bible, and it tells of an amazing God who created a perfect world full of beauty, love, and amazing possibilities. The story we're about to read is not a direct quote; it is a summary of the narrative arc of the whole Bible. It will quickly give us the big picture on what God is up to and what life is all about.



Discover

The Story of God Summary [2 minutes]

Leader's Note

You will read this and tell this story orally. Ask the other participants to put down their pens, Bibles, and participation guides. Allow them to imagine and enter the story.

This is a story found in the Bible about God, a being who has always existed and is the creator of EVERYTHING. God is the only one in this story who always does what is good, right, and perfect; the Bible calls Him holy. While God created the foundations of the earth, angels (His first creation) were there watching. They sang together and worshiped God . . . but some of these angels rebelled against God and His ways. The Bible teaches that all rebellion against God is called sin. Because of God's holiness, He will not allow sin to remain in His presence, so He sent the rebellious angels, now known as demons, down into darkness on the earth.

Then God decided to create another being, called humans, in His own image. God said, "Let us make man in our image to be like us." He then prepared the

earth as a place for the humans to live—filling the earth with plants, birds, fish, and animals of all kinds. God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, and placed them in a beautiful garden and trusted them to care for and rule over all of His creation on earth.

God lived closely with these first humans, spending time with them daily, showing them how to live life in the best possible way. They lived their life close to God and under His protection—a life that was full and complete and eternal.

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God and His authority, choosing to live in their own ways instead of His. Since God will not allow evil and rebellion to remain in His presence, Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden, away from God. Separated from God and no longer following His ways, Adam and Eve were now subject to sickness, pain, and death. God told them, “The way you have chosen to live will bring you great struggles and pain, and then you will return to the ground from which you came.” Not only were these humans now separated from God because of their sin, but they would also suffer death as they were separated from the giver of life.

After leaving the garden the number of humans on earth grew rapidly. Not only did sin spread from Adam and Eve to their sons—it spread from generation to generation.

Even though humans were created in God’s image, everyone chose to disobey God. They all constantly acted out in violence against one another. This went on for thousands of years.

Then God established a special relationship and a covenant promise—representing the deepest of all agreements—with a man named Abraham. God told Abraham, “I’ll make you the father of a great nation and famous throughout history. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. The entire earth will be blessed through your descendants. I will always be your God, and you will always be my people.”

Abraham's family, called the Israelites, were to be a new kind of people who would show the world what it means once again to live in God's ways. God gave them a vast amount of land where they enjoyed His blessings as they grew into a large nation.

As time went on, the Israelites began doing what was right in their own eyes and rebelled against God and His laws. They stopped trusting in God and worshiped idols—people, things, wealth, and power—instead of God. In their rebellion, the Israelites faced great struggles and ended up a defeated nation of slaves. However God continued to love His people and promised that one day a descendant of theirs would come to rescue and restore humanity and all of creation back to the way God originally created it.

Then there were 400 years of silence between God and His people. The Israelites, called Jews, had been under the control of other nations for hundreds of years. They were now ruled by Rome, the most powerful empire the world had ever known.

Finally God sent an angel to a young woman named Mary in the town of Nazareth. The angel appeared to her and said, "You will become pregnant and have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus. He will become a king whose kingdom will never end! This will happen supernaturally by God's Spirit, so this baby will be called God's Son."

God revealed to Mary and her soon-to-be-husband, Joseph, that this boy was the long-awaited Messiah king, the one whom God promised He'd send to rescue His people! Sure enough the next year, Mary gave birth to a son whom she named Jesus, which means "the God who saves." Jesus grew up in both height and wisdom and was loved by God and everyone who knew Him. He lived a remarkable life, always choosing to live in God's ways and do what was good, right, and perfect.

As a man, Jesus called people to follow Him, inviting them to be a part of what He called the Kingdom of God and calling people once again to live under

God's rule and reign. He said, "God blesses those who realize their need for Him; the humble and poor, the gentle and merciful—the Kingdom of God belongs to them. God blesses the pure in heart and those who hunger and thirst to be with Him." He taught people that the Kingdom of God is within our hearts.

He said, "God showed His great love for people by sending me—His only son—to this world. Anyone who believes in me and lives in my ways will find life that is complete and eternal! He sent me here to save people, not to judge them. Those who want to live in sin and darkness will reject me and bring God's judgment on themselves. Those who want to live in God's ways will trust me and live forever!"

As God promised, He sent Jesus to rescue humanity from sin and the penalty of death. God accepted Jesus' perfect life in place of our own. Jesus was brutally beaten and died painfully on a wooden cross, taking the punishment that all of rebellious humanity deserved! Three days later Jesus conquered death when God raised Him back to life, and He was seen by more than 500 eyewitnesses.

Soon afterward, Jesus went to be with His Father in heaven, rising into the clouds right before His followers' eyes! He promised He would send His own Holy Spirit to come and dwell within them. The Spirit would remind them of all Jesus taught, transform their hearts to be like Jesus, and give them power to walk in the ways of God as Jesus did. Jesus also sent His followers to go out and tell others about Him—His life and His sacrifice for their sins— and lead them to trust Him and walk in His ways.

This was the beginning of what the Bible calls the Church, a community of people all over the world who, because of Jesus, once again enjoy a life that is full and complete, living in the ways of God.

We can join this amazing story. The story continues with us!

The Bible also tells us the end of this story. Jesus promised to come back one day to destroy all evil, sin, and rebellion. Then there will be no more sickness, pain, or death. God's Kingdom will come in fullness, and everyone and everything will live under His rule. Until then, we get to live in God's ways, giving people a foretaste of what life is like in Jesus' Kingdom.

Leader's Note

Read the story out loud a second time. It may seem odd to read it again, but it helps tremendously in our understanding and retention. After all, it is the story of the whole Bible in just a couple pages—it's packed with good stuff!



Nurture [20 minutes]

1. What are some of the indicators that God is the hero and the main character of this story?
2. This Story of God really includes all of our stories too. Where do you see yourself in this Story? Can you see how our stories are really about God?
3. As we have seen in this story, regardless of our rebellion, God's plans cannot be thwarted. Where in your life have you experienced God rescue you from a self-inflicted bad situation?
4. God created us in His image to be like Him and to live a life close to Him. From what you saw in the Story, what would have to change for your life to line up with God's intentions for you? Have you ever tried making those changes on your own? How did that go?

Did you know that God wants to change those things in you? He wants to make you like Jesus.

That is what discipleship is all about: letting God bring about change in our lives from the inside out so we look more like Jesus.



Act [30 minutes]

Now let's share our own life stories with each other (about ten minutes each) and see where our lives really do (or don't) line up with God's story.

Later This Week [10 minutes]

Make plans to do something fun together in the next two weeks. Get together outside of this weekly meeting to do pretty much anything you enjoy that will allow you to interact a lot and have fun together.

Wrap it Up [5 minutes]

Briefly review what you learned today. Jot down the big-picture ideas in your own words. Discuss any final questions. Pray together.

Notes:

Thanks for using *Growing in Christ Together*.

Here are a few other resources for immersing yourself in God's story and growing in your understanding of the gospel:



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