



# HANDBOOK

D-GROUPS • FOLLOW JESUS TOGETHER



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## SECTION 1 | THE VISION

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### Discipleship 101

#### ***What is a disciple?***

A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ, living in an ongoing posture of attentiveness to his spiritual presence. “Disciple” comes from the Greek word *MATHETES*, which in ancient times was understood as a student or apprentice of a skilled master. Before the coming of Jesus, the term *MATHETES* was used all over the Mediterranean world in Greek philosophical schools and Jewish rabbinic circles. It exclusively referred to a group of elite men with high intellectual or religious status who were invited into an apprenticeship relationship with a prestigious Greek philosopher or a respected Jewish rabbi. Jesus adopted this apprenticeship model as the core identifier for his ministry, but he adapted it to include women, people from low social status, and even people from despised ethnic groups. Jesus’ discipleship was not focused on attracting the elite, the religious, or the super spiritual; its focus was on extending a radically inclusive invitation to the lowly and the least. Jesus’ discipleship was so captivating that people who chose to follow him remained as close to him as possible during his time on earth. This continued even after his resurrection, but now through an ongoing engagement with his spiritual presence. Today disciples of Jesus are people who follow Christ in spirit by learning how to remain attentive to and led by his presence through all matters of life, day by day. A disciple is one who enters into a lifelong journey of learning from Jesus and his followers how to become like him and who, over time, actually does!

#### ***What is the Gospel?***

The gospel is the message of whole-life restoration through Jesus Christ that reconciles us to God and to others. The word *gospel* literally means “good news.” Through his revolutionary teachings on the kingdom of God and his miraculous demonstrations of God’s power, Jesus revealed very good news – that we no longer have to live at odds with God, nor do we need to live in hostility with other people. Jesus taught that the kingdom of God (the realm of God’s perfect rule and reign) is not accessible through military might, political power, or even religious status but only by following him closely as his disciple. Through his ministry, death, and resurrection, Jesus revealed that his good news message is holistic, liberating us from the power of individual sin as well as the oppression of structural sin. In essence, he revealed a gospel that is both vertical and horizontal, resembling the cross, as it vertically restores us to God and horizontally restores us to our neighbors. A gospel that includes only one of these elements is not the whole gospel message of Jesus Christ. Therefore, our understanding of the gospel must be big enough to include breaking the power of individual sin in our personal lives as well as overcoming the systemic evils of our world that perpetuate widespread oppression and division. Jesus’ gospel is concerned about both.

## ***What is transformation?***

Transformation, like metamorphosis, is the process by which someone or something undergoes a total re-formation at its core. Transformation is different from change in that it is not temporary, nor can someone or something make it happen to themselves. Transformation into the likeness of Jesus is not possible simply by changing outward behaviors or patterns; it is only possible when people rhythmically create space for God to have influence in the inner workings of their mind, heart, and soul. This decision to rhythmically create space for God reveals to us how deeply we are being shaped by our relationships, culture, circumstances, and the systems around us on a regular basis. And, by building such spiritual practices into our individual rhythms and our communal gatherings, the Holy Spirit will have greater access to our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and even our social structures. When the Holy Spirit is given greater access, then the power of God is able to shape (and reshape) us to desire the countercultural values and norms of the kingdom of God. In time, this inward spiritual process of re-formation will be revealed outwardly as our behaviors and corporate witness will begin to reveal the character of Christ in our actions as we live the kind of life that Jesus lived. A deeply formed inner life becomes a visibly transformed outer life, blessing our loved ones, neighbors, organizations, communities and society at large.

## ***Why is community necessary?***

No movement can happen by the sole efforts of an individual. Revolution requires the unified efforts of a diverse community. Have you ever noticed that Jesus' entire ministry took place in the context of his small group? Though Jesus regularly retreated to quiet places to have moments of silence and solitude, his ministry took place around people. Jesus' discipleship community was characterized by authentic, interpersonal relationships that were cultivated over time in the context of everyday life. And this group of followers included all kinds of people, even people who had strong animosity toward one another. Jesus needed to bring together as many different kinds of people as possible to reveal what the kingdom of heaven looks like, and how his kingdom would be ushered in. If Jesus were only in the business of saving individuals from eternal condemnation, then he wouldn't have spent so much time forming a new kind of community. This countercultural group of Jesus followers eventually came to be known as "the Church," the movement that quickly spread throughout the Middle East and Africa and eventually made its way to the farthest reaches of Asia and Europe. It brought together people from different ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and ideological backgrounds who were previously at odds with one another; and this is what got peoples' attention! God's method for restoring all of creation includes a community of individuals who are willing to live shoulder-to-shoulder with others who don't look, think, act, or vote like us. It requires people who desire to humbly learn from one another how to live like Jesus among people of all backgrounds. And it requires an eclectic community of disciples who are willing to be led by the Holy Spirit in repairing our world's broken systems together.

# The Essentials

## **1) Jesus is always the true focus of discipleship**

Our Discipleship Ministries team *exists to develop a culture of relationship-based discipleship by providing opportunities to inspire a journey of life-long Christian spiritual formation.* So what is a culture of relationship-based discipleship? We believe that it's important to consistently identify and challenge our assumptions because our assumptions are what inform our beliefs and behaviors. Jesus commissioned his earliest followers to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). However, many people today mistakenly assume that Jesus was instructing his first disciples to disciple other people, and this is not the case. To disciple someone is to take on the role of making someone like yourself instead of teaching them how to become like Jesus. Can you see the distinction here?

Throughout his three years of public ministry, Jesus made it abundantly clear that discipleship to him meant learning primarily from him and being influenced primarily by him. Jesus instructed people to follow him and connect other people to him. Thus our role is to make disciples of Jesus, not to make disciples of ourselves. Discipleship today can easily get lost in an over-focus on a particular church, pastor, ministry leader, or the latest Christian vlogger. But true discipleship is focused on growing an authentic connection to the living and guiding presence of Jesus himself. If we take on the role of making other people like us, we will pass along all of our issues and dysfunction to others and the world will continue to deal with the same problems it always has. So, as disciple makers, our role is to connect people to Jesus by teaching them how to learn from him and remain immersed in his presence day by day. Simply put, our job is to get people connected to Jesus and continually redirect people back to him every day.

## **2) Discipleship to Jesus is inherently multicultural**

What is culture? What is your culture? How do you engage with people from cultures that are very different from you or cultures that make you uncomfortable? Though the philosophical and rabbinic forms of discipleship in the ancient world were exclusively reserved for men of elite societal status, Jesus' discipleship was adapted to reflect God's heart of hospitality and belonging that included women and people from every distinct people group for the first time in world history. Jesus told his followers to "make disciples of all *ETHNOS*," the Greek word meaning "ethnic groups." In other words, Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples of people from the ethnic groups they were uncomfortable with, the ones they were afraid of, and the ones they intentionally avoided. Think about the racial or ethnic group that you are most uncomfortable around; the religion you are the most unfamiliar with; the people whose politics or ideology you disagree with most strongly; the neighborhoods you are most afraid to go through. These are the people Jesus is commissioning you to go and make disciples of.

Jesus' disciples are the kinds of people who go out of their way to develop friendships with people who we wouldn't naturally associate with. But in order to be ready for this, our journey of discipleship must

include self awareness and cultural humility. We must first be able to name and describe our own culture and how it has shaped our perspectives, beliefs, behaviors, and theology. We must come to accept that our way of being in the world is not the “right” way but simply one way that’s no better than the ways of others who live differently than we do. This allows us to embrace a posture of humility, acknowledge the distinctions between people groups, and consciously look for how the image of God is uniquely imprinted upon each distinct race, ethnicity, and nationality. We can then learn how to create spaces of belonging for people who are different from us by tearing down cultural barriers and building cultural bridges in their place. If our discipleship circles are not multicultural, then we must ask ourselves what factors are inhibiting them from being the way Jesus intended them to be. We must engage in the patient work of evaluating our own perspectives, values, and norms to see how they are informing the systems of homogeneity we are intentionally or unintentionally reinforcing.

### **3) Disciples of Jesus are *in*-formed by God’s mission**

What do you want to see happen in the world? Is what you desire for this world the same as what God desires? We all have underlying priorities and agendas we are largely unaware of, yet they often guide how we live and what we believe to be important. So what are God’s vision, mission, and values for the world? And how were you uniquely created to be part of this? We see in Scripture that God shared his universal mission with Abraham, a mission to form a group of people into a holy movement that reflects his goodness and Godness throughout the world so that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” (Genesis 12:1-3). God made his intentions clear – that he does not want his favor to be hoarded by his people but that he instead wants it to be shared as a blessing to all the families of the earth. This mission is best illuminated in Jesus of Nazareth.

It took Jesus thirty years of growth, stretching, challenge, and maturity before he was ready to begin his public ministry. He needed to go through a patient process of seeking God’s will, submitting to God’s ways, and being empowered by God’s Spirit in order to carry out God’s mission. Why would you or I be any different? God’s mission for this world is so vast and counterintuitive that it must be slowly worked into us over time. Like Jesus, we must meditate on it and prayerfully live into it daily. It must be patiently formed into us over time, lest we be quick to act in our own power or be misguided by our own agendas. In the age of social media reactivity and hashtag activism, how might God want to slow you down to his pace and have his mission formed into you? Like Jesus, disciples are people who seek God’s will, submit to God’s ways, and receive God’s supernatural power so we are equipped to carry out God’s mission everywhere we go. We join the reconciling work of God by partnering with what he is already doing to bring restoration to society and wholeness to all the families of the earth. Disciples of Jesus are *in*-formed by God’s mission to join the supernatural work of Christ in “making all things new.”

## SECTION 2 | SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

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### Why Spiritual Disciplines?

*“Disciplines are intentional ways we open space in our lives for the worship of God.” Adele Calhoun*

*“They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42*

### Building a Relationship

The word “discipline” can carry with it negative connotations; harsh, boring, dull. But the idea of Spiritual Disciplines is to engage in intentional practices that can help create an environment within our lives to experience God in deep and meaningful ways. In any human relationship, if we want to get to know someone and we want them to know us, we have to spend time with them, talking, laughing, working, living, and little by little a relationship and bond is built. Building a relationship with God happens much the same way. We talk (prayer), laugh (celebration and joy), work (sacrifice) and live while paying attention to what God is doing in the world and in our own lives. And little by little we begin to really know the one we are spending time with. Clearly, there are also some significant differences in building a relationship with a person and with God, but the basic concept is quite similar. Spiritual disciplines help us to be intentional about opening ourselves up to God, and it creates space for us to interact with God. As we read, pray, worship, sacrifice, give... we put ourselves in a posture to experience real transformation from a great love with God.

### Coming Closer

In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said:

*“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the *unforced rhythms of grace*. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” (MSG)*

Jesus is not laying a heavy burden on the disciples here, but inviting them to learn the *unforced rhythms of grace* that would allow them to live *freely and lightly*. This doesn’t mean that practicing the Spiritual Disciplines is always fun and easy, it does require intentionality and commitment. But, it does mean the purpose of this intentionality is a closer relationship with Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is important to check our motivation for engaging in spiritual practices. It will not give us “brownie points” with God or help us “work the system,” they simply put us in a place where we can begin to notice and respond to what God is doing in the world around us.

Following are three Scripture-focused disciplines and three prayer-focused disciplines to get you started. *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Calhoun is another great resource that includes a comprehensive list of disciplines. Come by our office if you’d like a copy!

# Scripture-Focused Disciplines

## Read through a chapter or a book of the Bible

This is probably the most common way people approach Scripture, to simply read through it. When we approach our reading as a spiritual discipline a few steps might be helpful. *Before you begin, invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the reading.*

### Step 1: Observation—What does the passage say?

Take your time, read closely and carefully. Don't rush past passages that may be familiar, but pay attention to repetition, emphasis, references to time. Imagine yourself within the text, either as a participant or an observer. Note only what you can observe based upon what the text says.

### Step 2: Interpretation—What does the passage mean?

There are great study notes in many Bibles that can help passages come to life. There are also online resources and commentaries that can be easily accessed. But, don't go too quickly to external resources. Pray about what you are reading and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to greater understanding.

### Step 3: Application—What am I going to do about what the passage says and means?

Not every passage of Scripture will move you to immediate action, but it will guide you to a deeper understanding of God and God's Kingdom values. Little by little you will see patterns that reveal God's character, and your character will begin to be re-shaped through the work of the Holy Spirit.

## Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina (Devotional Reading) is listening to God speak through Scripture as it is read out loud.

- **Silence:** Quietly preparing the heart to hear from God and experience his presence.
- **Initial Reading:** Read the passage slowly and out loud, lingering on key words or phrases. This is not a time to analyze or interpret, just a time to listen.
- **Meditation:** Read the passage again and "savor the words"
- **Respond:** Read for a third time, this time entering into a dialogue with God. Pray about what you read and observe how your heart responds to what has been read.
- **Contemplate:** Rest in the silence, allow some time for what you learned to sink in. At this point, the group can engage in conversation or prayer to live out what you heard throughout the week.

## Memorize Scripture

There are so many good reasons to memorize Scripture. Here are a couple:

- Jesus memorized Scripture and quoted it during his time on earth. When he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he responded with Scripture. Even while on the cross, Jesus quoted Scripture.
- Memorizing Scripture renews our mind. Scripture shapes us with truth. When we have Scripture committed to memory, we can more easily resist temptation and become open to God's empowerment. When we focus on God's truth, we see God, ourselves and the world more accurately.



## Prayer-Focused Disciplines

**Contemplative Prayer:** a time to “rest in God” and depend on Him for communication – not a time to ask for things or list off concerns, simply a time to listen and become aware of His presence. Can be done in the first 5-10 minutes of a meeting like so:

- **Settle into silence.** Say to God, “Here I am; I am with you.” Be in the moment and recognize that God is present, there is nothing you need to say or do to summon Him.
- **Relax your body and take deep breaths.** Notice where your mind wants to go and feel free to repeat a phrase to bring it back, think: “Be still and know that I am God.”
- **Meditate on Jesus:** Choose a word or characteristic of Jesus, and meditate on it. Some examples of this are Jesus as the Good Shepherd, Counselor, Healer, Defender, Advocate, King, etc.

**Pray the Psalms:** The book of Psalms has been used for centuries as the prayer book of the Church. Walter Brueggemann says, “The Psalms, with a few exceptions, are not the voice of God addressing us. They are rather the voice of our own common humanity – gathered over a long period of time, but a voice that continues to have amazing authenticity and contemporaneity.”

Here are some simple ways to approach the Psalms as an avenue for prayer:

- **Start at the beginning.** There are 150 Psalms, starting with Psalm 1 read through it in the morning, afternoon and evening. On day two read Psalm 2, etc... Even if you don't read every day, each time you open your Bible, take a few minutes to read through a Psalm.
- **Update the language of the Psalms.** Put it into your own words. Augustine of Hippo said. *“If the psalm prays, you pray. If the psalm laments, you lament. If the psalm exalts, you rejoice. If it hopes, you hope. If it fears, you fear. Everything written here is a mirror for us.”* The psalms give us a pattern to use in everyday life experiences.
- **Focus on an idea.** If anything in the psalm sticks out to you, pause...ask the Spirit to guide you. Meditate on it throughout the day. You may find that the word or phrase that has captured your attention is a place where God is at work in your life.

**Start a Prayer Journal:** Journaling can be a great way to keep track of your prayers. We often pray and then go on with our everyday lives. Writing your prayers can help you remember how God has answered in the past and can build your faith as you pray for things in the present.

- Start with gratitude. As you begin each day, start with being thankful. Take a few moments to think about what you are grateful for and allow gratitude to shape your prayers.
- Simple prayer. Make a list of the things that are concerning you that you want to release to God. Remember that God may answer those prayers differently than you hope, but it's OK to tell God what you want.
- Be real. God already knows what is in your heart. It is only when we are open and honest with God and with ourselves that we make room for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. If you are struggling, tell God. If you are happy, tell God. If you are angry, tell God.
- Look back. From time to time it is good to look back at your journal to see places where God has met you and has answered your prayers.

## SECTION 3 | HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

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### What Does A Healthy Leader Look Like?

One of the ways our Discipleship Ministries team develops a culture of relationship-based discipleship on campus is through equipping student leaders. Healthy leaders are much more likely to develop a culture that truly inspires other students to grow.

Following is a list of qualities to identify in healthy Christian leaders. Feel free to take time to honestly reflect upon which of these qualities you see in yourself and which ones are lacking. Consider asking a few trusted friends or mentor-figures for their feedback as well.

#### 1. Healthy leaders are self-aware

Self-awareness is an ongoing practice that requires the choice to actively utilize resources (such as personality tools, therapy, self-reflection practices, pastoral counseling, etc.) and to accept feedback from trusted individuals. As leaders in the spotlight, we must aim to always have an accurate view of ourselves: our needs, strengths, and weaknesses. True self-awareness in leaders prevents and dissipates pride, self-deception, and denial, and helps us understand our motives and needs for a healthy and successful time in ministry.

#### 2. They embrace cultural humility

Cultural humility is the ability to grow acutely aware of one's own culture without positioning it above or below other cultures, then to move toward the cultural differences in others with courage and compassion. Cultural humility is rooted in a posture of acceptance of difference and a genuine desire to learn from the distinctions in different people groups, even when it becomes uncomfortable. In order for a leader to develop cultural humility, they first must be able to name and describe their own culture and the influences that contribute to their culture (such as their race, ethnicity, social location, and faith tradition).

#### 3. They lead from a place of spiritual & emotional health

Healthy leaders are spiritually and emotionally whole, rooted and grounded in relationship with God. They choose to take responsibility for their own spiritual and emotional needs. They are both reverent toward God and respectful of others. This means they are willing to listen, are open to learning and desire to help people succeed.

#### 4. They are dedicated to the health of others

A healthy leader is not trying to convince people to do things or see things their way. A healthy leader is committed to the growth and well-being of others. This includes not only having clear and agreed upon expectations but also by providing accountability.

## **5. They seek out accountability for themselves**

Accountability is critical to the long-term growth and health of a leader. It is important to remember that accountability is only effective when the person is truly authentic and vulnerable. Seeking out a safe place to share can be a challenge, but it can also help a leader identify and develop in areas of personal weakness.

## **6. They provide a calming presence & emotionally well-differentiated leadership**

Adulting is not easy. There are countless challenges that each person faces on a daily basis and sometimes we can get overwhelmed. A healthy leader will not panic when those challenges come. They know their own limitations and can calmly and confidently offer their support and connect with other resources when necessary.

## **7. They are prepared AND remain flexible**

It is important to do your work as a leader, to develop a plan for how you will lead those in your group. It is also important to remain flexible. As we follow Jesus together we will likely need to adjust our plans to respond to the immediate needs of others. Having a plan is important to help the group feel confident that they are truly going somewhere, but loving people well is much more important than sticking to a plan.

## **8. They handle conflict**

Dealing with conflict can be tricky and there are many ways to do this. It is important to know yourself and to be aware of how you handle (or avoid) conflict. As a leader, you will very likely need to confront a person in your care at some point. It is important that you approach this with love, grace-filled humility and confidence. Remember that our overarching goal is to follow Jesus together.

## **9. They model authenticity**

A deadly trap for leaders is the idea that they need to be “perfect” or have all the answers. A healthy leader will share appropriately about their own personal journey. This kind of openness can set the tone for others to also be honest about their own struggles & will help create a culture of honor & respect for each person.

## **10. They Sabbath**

As leaders, it's common to forget to prioritize rest. Yet rest is critical for our success and vital for our restoration. God modeled the Sabbath for us first by resting from the creation of the world (Gen. 2:2), proving to us that it is both possible and important to choose rest, even for the strongest leaders. Simply put, the Sabbath is “a day to pray and to play.” It's a weekly 24-hour period of time that aids you in creating space to connect with God, self, and others in ways that will refresh your soul & recalibrate to God's timing.

# Safe People<sup>1</sup>

The Discipleship Ministries team believes in and values safe relationships! Safe relationships are made up of safe people. As a student leader at APU, it is our hope and desire that you are a safe person to others and that you experience safety from others. *Safe People* are people who (1) draw us closer to God, (2) draw us closer to others, and (3) Help us become our truest most authentic selves - the real person God created us to be.

## There are three characteristics of *Safe People*:

### PRESENCE

Presence refers to our ability to connect with others and *be with* others in a way that demonstrates their value and the significance of the moment. Presence is expressed when we take time to sit with someone and listen or by simply stating, "I'm here if you need me," "I'm praying for you," or "how can I support you?" These statements communicate availability, openness, and care.

### GRACE

Grace implies love and acceptance that is unconditional and free from shame and condemnation. This is a quality that allows relationships to be safe. Grace is expressed when we respond to others without judgment but with compassion and understanding. This can be communicated by stating, "I understand..." and by challenging the other to have self-compassion when they are being hard on themselves.

### TRUTH

Safe relationships enable us to speak the truth to one another - providing appropriate confrontation when needed that does not threaten our presence or the grace we extend. It is our presence and deep acceptance of the other that enables us to speak the truth. Truth is often expressed when we remind others of their identity in Christ when their behaviors or self-perceptions are contradictory. We can remind others of their status as children of God and joint-heir with Christ as well as the myriad of blessings afforded to those of us who are in the Body of Christ. Truth may also require us to share with others their need for Christ and extend an invitation for deeper fellowship and greater commitment.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Cloud & John Townsend, *Safe People: How to Find Relationships that are Good for You*.

## Supporting Students Well

It is possible that a student in your care will face grief or emotional distress sometime this year. College is a unique stage in which stress can be compounded, life can feel overwhelming, and everyone is learning who they are and who they want to be. You are not expected to handle all forms of distress that another student is experiencing. When you know a fellow student is distressed, use your resources.

Here at APU we have a team of pastors and trained pastoral counselors, available to provide support when needed. Pastoral Counseling is a confidential space that helps students navigate life's questions, concerns, highlights, and lowlights. Students can email [spiritualcare@apu.edu](mailto:spiritualcare@apu.edu) or [click here](#) to sign up for an appointment or to receive additional information.

If you encounter a student who may benefit from meeting with a pastor, feel free to connect them with pastoral counseling. If you are uncertain about whether a student should meet with a pastor, feel free to email [spiritualcare@apu.edu](mailto:spiritualcare@apu.edu).

### APU Care Team

As a Student Leader, there will be times when you realize the level of care a student needs is beyond what you are able to provide. That is okay! In fact, it is healthy to become aware of your capacity as well as your limitations. You are part of a larger system of care built to provide support for APU students. The Care Team is a confidential group of APU Staff and Faculty who meet regularly to discuss the overall health and wellbeing of the student body.

#### Examples of why to access the Care team could include:

- A student being severely ill and/or hospitalized
- A student who demonstrates unusual behavior that places their health or wellbeing in jeopardy
- A student who has experienced the loss of a loved one
- A life event that causes a student to act in atypical or abnormal ways

#### Care Team Includes Representatives from:

- Campus Pastors
- Academic Success Center
- Dean of Wellness
- Campus Safety
- Student Center for Reconciliation and Diversity
- University Health Center
- University Counseling Center
- Residence Life
- Accessibility and Disability Resources
- Athletics
- Commuter Life

*If someone in your care is in distress and needs the support of the Care Team, you can submit the APUCares form by using the following link: [www.apu.edu/apucares/](http://www.apu.edu/apucares/)*

## Levels of Care

The “Levels of Care” table (below) explains how to respond to the variety of scenarios that might come up with a student in your span of care while in your D-Group Leader role. As mentioned previously, when you know a fellow student is distressed, use your resources.

ROUTINE CARE	STUDENT OF CONCERN	CRISIS SITUATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student shows symptoms of <b>mild emotional distress</b> (e.g., depressed mood, tearful, upset, anxious)</li> <li>▪ Student shows evidence of <b>mild impairment</b> in functioning or adjustment (academic, social, or spiritual)</li> <li>▪ Student is experiencing <b>situational stressors</b> (e.g., not showing up for classes, failing a class, financial difficulty, roommate problems, homesickness)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Symptoms of <b>moderate emotional distress</b> (e.g., agitated, unstable, overwhelmed, disorganized or other unusual behavior)</li> <li>▪ Evidence of <b>moderate impairment</b> in one or more functional areas (academic, social, or spiritual)</li> <li>▪ Student recently experienced a <b>traumatic life event</b> (e.g., sexual assault, death in the family, hospitalization)</li> <li>▪ Student gives evidence of possible <b>threat to self</b> (e.g., passive suicide thoughts, self-injury, disordered eating, not engaging self-care)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student displays <b>high levels of emotional distress or psychiatric symptoms</b> (e.g., paranoid, hallucinations, delusions)</li> <li>▪ Evidence of <b>significant impairment</b> in <b>multiple</b> aspects of functioning (academic, social, and spiritual)</li> <li>▪ Student exhibits <b>disruptive or dangerous behavior</b> (e.g., acting out in class or residence; hostile, defiant or intimidating behavior; difficulty regulating emotions or behavior)</li> <li>▪ Student gives evidence of <b>imminent threat to self</b> (e.g., active, frequent suicide thoughts with plan and intention; suicidal gestures or behavior)</li> <li>▪ Student gives evidence of <b>threat to others’</b> safety and well-being</li> </ul>
<p><b>Response :</b> Routine follow up by D-Group Leader, Peer Mentor or Crew Leader. Text or email OK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consult with Crew Leader or Intern for additional support, if needed</li> <li>● Weekly follow up with student</li> </ul>	<p><b>Response :</b> Inform Discipleship staff, Intern or Crew Leader within 24 hours. Direct connection preferred; text or email OK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Submit <a href="#">APU Cares Form</a></li> <li>● Collaborate with Discipleship staff for ongoing care</li> <li>● Weekly follow up for ongoing care</li> </ul>	<p><b>Response :</b> In case of immediate danger, alert Campus Safety or call 911</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inform Discipleship staff <b>Immediately</b> - text, call or go to office until you reach someone.</li> <li>● Submit <a href="#">APU Cares Form</a></li> <li>● Discipleship staff will coordinate ongoing care for student and leader</li> </ul>

If you have any unanswered questions about how to respond to a student in need, please reach out to your Crew Leader for additional clarification.

## SECTION 4 | D-GROUPS STARTER KIT

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### Preparing for D-Group

- **Choose a Few Curriculum Options**

Prayerfully consider several discipleship-focused curriculum options. If you need help with this, reach out to [dgroups@apu.edu](mailto:dgroups@apu.edu), and we'd be glad to help! Choose two to three curriculum options that could work well for you and your potential group members.
- **Contact Your D-Group Members**

You will receive a group roster with your D-Group members' contact information. You are expected to contact each of the students individually when you receive the roster so you can welcome them into the group and let the group know where/when to meet you for your first meeting.
- **Pray for Your D-Group Members**

Pray for each D-Group member, for your first D-Group meeting, and for an openness to be directed by the Holy Spirit as you lead the group. Release any unrealistic expectations of the first meeting, your members, and yourself. Though you are the leader that God and our team is entrusting APU students with, God is ultimately responsible for the outcomes of your members and the group.
- **Plan Your First Meeting**

How will you create a welcoming space as members arrive? Which ice-breaker will you start with? How will you do introductions? Which weekly responsibilities can you delegate out? How will you end your time in prayer?
- **Unplug to Be with God**

Finally, take some time to be alone with God. Leave your devices behind, and get away to a place where you can spend some undistracted time with God. Allow yourself to relax and enjoy this time of stillness and silence. Listen for any ways that God might want to speak to you or minister to you.

### For the First Meeting...

- Prepare the Meeting Space
- Be Fully Present as Members Arrive
- Start with an Ice Breaker
- Solidify the Meeting Day & Time
- Create a Plan of Action for the Semester
- Give Members Ownership by Delegating Responsibilities
- Go through the D-Group Covenant (see below)
- End in Prayer

## “Get to Know You” Guide<sup>2</sup>

**Get to Know Each Other.** A misconception about this “get to know you” stage is that it’s all supposed to happen all at once. In fact, you will often revisit this stage throughout the entire year together. Giving some time to get acquainted with one another at the beginning creates a comfortable environment that will enhance the comfort-level of all your members.\*

If you feel you have an approach that allows others to share who they are, then do that! If not, here are some helpful tools to use in order to facilitate sharing. Share your answers from the *About Me* section (below) with your D-group. Also have your D-group share from the *About Me* section so that each member can become acquainted with the rest of the group. Next, allow the D-Group to share their personal aspirations and who they hope to become in the near and distant future. After that, spend some time allowing them to think/share about what they are hoping to get out of this year’s D-Group experience.

**About Me:** Choose a few of the following questions and give members a few minutes to think through how they would like to answer these questions in your first meeting:

- What is your hometown? Ethnicity/Culture? Major? Year?
- What are some fun facts about you? What do you do in your free time?
- What you’re passionate about? What motivates you? and What do you value?
- Which people, events, places, experiences and/or relationships have significantly impacted or shaped who you are today? Be as specific as you deem appropriate.
  - Examples:
    - A hard time that you have suffered through/how it changed you
    - A peak experience that you loved
    - Heroes who have impacted you
    - Personal strengths or gifts
- Why did you join a D-Group?

**Who I Want to Become:** Choose a few of the following questions and give members ten minutes to think through how they would like to answer the questions:

(NOTE: The following questions can be answered personally, academically, or spiritually).

- What are you looking to gain/accomplish this year?
- What are you looking to gain/accomplish during your time at APU?
- Five years from now, describe the kind of person that you’d like to see yourself become? How about fifteen years from now?
- What are you hoping to get out of this D-Group experience?

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Peggy Hunter’s Mentoring *Get to Know You Guide*.



## D-Group Covenant

The following covenant will guide us as we commit to centering our D-Group meetings on Jesus and a life of discipleship to him.

- D-Group meeting day & time:
- D-Group meeting location:
- (Circle one) We will meet for the...                      semester // school year
- What do we hope our D-group meetings will include (i.e. honest conversations, prayer support, confession & accountability, etc.)?
- What do we hope to experience from our D-Group Leader (i.e. authenticity, humility, maturity, etc.)?
- What do we hope to experience from our fellow D-Group members (i.e. trust, consistency, acceptance, etc.)?
- What do we hope not to experience in this D-Group (i.e. inconsistent attendance, judgment, gossip, fakeness, etc.)?

We have discussed the above questions and commit to adhere to this D-Group Covenant as both consistent and active members of this group. If my availability, desires, or needs change then I will notify my D-Group Leader or the Discipleship Ministries team via [dgroups@apu.edu](mailto:dgroups@apu.edu).

D-Group Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Member 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Member 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Member 3: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Member 4: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Member 5: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Common Leader Errors<sup>3</sup>

- **Limiting yourself to leading.** The leader is also a participant in the group. You may share your answers and observations, but don't dominate the meeting.
- **Not asking good questions.** Be careful to avoid combining two questions into one. Stay away from "yes" or "no" questions by asking questions that lead to conversational answers. Be clear and concise about how you ask questions, not making them so complex that they are difficult to understand. And free yourself from assuming that you need to ask every question. Allow your group members to jump in as well.
- **Being afraid of silence after asking a question.** Don't be impatient or nervous. You must give people time to think. People often benefit more from silent introspection than constant chatter. Be patient; let the member(s) begin to feel comfortable through silences, especially after asking a probing question.
- **Trying to maintain too much control.** If the meeting "takes off", don't worry as long as it is in a direction you want to go. You may need to step in from time to time to nudge the direction.
- **Not finishing on time.** If the member(s) voluntarily stay around and fellowship, that's fine, but end the meeting at the previously agreed ending time.
- **Being afraid to admit that you don't know the answer.** Don't hesitate to say, "That's a good question, I don't know." It doesn't make you less of a leader; it just shows that you're honest. Tell the person you'll do your best to find the answer and give it to them next week.
- **Being afraid to show weakness.** As the leader, you are setting an example but that doesn't mean you're perfect. Admit a weakness. Share a sin. Admit a lack of understanding. The member(s) won't think less of you.
- **Being too concerned with getting through the lesson material.** There will be some nights when you need to put down your workbooks and minister. Relationships are more important than finishing a curriculum by a certain date. Obviously, shelving the lesson or goals isn't something to do often, but in certain cases it is appropriate.
- **Allowing discussions to become polarizing.** Two things that will polarize any group are doctrinal disputes and political debates. Neither of these topics are bad or off limits, but they do need to be handled with care. D-Group can be a great space for students to practice having civilized disagreements and learning from one another's diverse perspectives. If a dispute comes up, rather than shutting it down or adding fuel to the fire, allow members to engage in challenging conversation while remaining in good character. As the leader, you get to provide conversational "guardrails" by reminding members to respectfully engage with each other's viewpoints in a posture of curiosity and honor. After all, how we engage with one another is a direct reflection of our discipleship to Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Nav Press, *How to Lead Small Group Bible Studies*.

## Difficult Group Member Scenarios<sup>4</sup>

- **Neediness** – “I need this group to fulfill all my needs.”

Neediness becomes a problem to address when it manifests in unhealthy ways, such as:

- Taking up too much group time
- Constant crises that never get resolved
- Emotional dependency the group cannot meet
- Inability to be confronted
- Not taking group advice
- Seeing the group as “not enough.”

- **Non-Compliance** – “I don’t really care about this group.”

Non-compliance occurs in several ways, such as:

- Chronic lateness
- Irregular attendance
- Leaving early
- Not ending their talking when the group time is over
- Breaking privacy agreements
- Not engaging with the group during the meeting
- Constant disruption within the group (interrupting, not accepting feedback, outbursts)

- **Passivity** – “I don’t have anything to contribute to the group conversation.”

Passivity is not inability. Passivity is bad for the person and the group. The small group should be a place where members open up, take risks, fail, learn from their failure, internalize grace and wisdom, and translate all that to their outside lives and relationships. Help your members overcome passivity by doing the following:

- See it as a problem: Say, “We feel cut off from you when you don’t open up.”
- Help the passive member with their language: Move from passive to active language.
- Remind and internalize: Say, “Why don’t we call on you when you are withdrawing? We’ll check with you so you can safely tell us how you are doing. And after a while, we’ll see if you can volunteer on your own without our nudging.”

- **Aggression** – “I am always right.”

An aggressive member is one who is aggressive or pushy; asserts his or her own opinions all the time and tends to run over people and control the group process. People might be afraid to talk around this person for fear of what he or she might say or how they might cut someone off.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Cloud & John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*.

# Empowering Others

The one universal commission that Jesus gave to his disciples was to “go and make disciples.” D-Group Leaders strategically empower their group members to lead their peers.

## ***Identifying & Developing Future Leaders***

Part of the D-Group Leader role is actively looking for others who have the potential to be D-Group Leaders in the future. So how does this happen? Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight a few specific people for you to intentionally spend some extra time developing and slowly start empowering them to lead as they are ready. Identify who is invested in the group. Look for people who desire to mature in their spirituality, emotional stability, and social skills. Use some helpful questions to process their ability to be developed as a spiritual leader:

- **Spiritual Factors**
  - Do they see God working in their life?
  - Do they consistently spend time nurturing their own spiritual growth through incorporating Spiritual Disciplines into their weekly rhythms?
  - Are they eager to learn from Jesus and other disciples?
  - Do they share a common vision for discipleship?
  
- **Emotional Factors**
  - Are they secure enough to be vulnerable and honest with the group?
  - Are they emotionally stable? (Aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and not subject to mood swings that affect the group dynamic.)
  - How do they respond to confrontation and character development? Defensively? Responsively?
  
- **Social Factors**
  - Do they openly participate without dominating? (If there is an issue, how did they respond to the confrontation on the issue?)
  - Are they able to listen to others in a caring way?
  - Are they able to facilitate discussion?
  - Do they have low control needs?

Give a few of your members the opportunity to practice leading portions of your D-group time. Pay attention to how this goes, and respond accordingly. Genuinely affirm the student in their strengths. Kindly offer honest feedback so they can grow in an awareness of potential blindspots. Help them work through their areas of growth by humbly providing relevant suggestions. If you have questions about this process, our Discipleship Ministries team would be glad to provide you with further guidance. Just reach out and let us know!