

Five Essentials for Flourishing SmallGroups

The "WHY?" From 1 Thessalonians 1

The catalytic intersection of all five dynamic elements found in 1 Thess chapter one develops a "soil" conducive to fruitful Christian SmallGroup ministry...when the Holy Spirit stands center-stage. Each of the "DiscipleMaking Companions" interweave all five of these pathways through which we experience God's presence. This is the "secret sauce" in the "Companions" since these align with how God designed us to grow. DiscipleMaking is more than education that teaches knowledge, more than coaching/training in a discipline, than counselling, although we will help and support one another. The end-result of DiscipleMaking in the 1st century was a follower whose life reflected the life and thinking of the master. It's holistic. Yes, convey knowledge and training, yet continue on until disciples think and respond like the master (Luke 6:40). LifeChange. And our chief Discippler is Jesus, even though He uses us as flesh-&-blood examples.

As you launch a SmallGroup using "DiscipleMaking Companion" with **all** the interconnected aspects, you will automatically tap into these cutting-edge learning dynamics. Everything is intentional. Each "Companion" is like the banks of a river providing structure to free the powerful flow. However, if you prefer to modify a "Companion," feel free to mix these five essentials in the proportion that best releases life in *your* unique group. However, I would first encourage you to thoroughly digest this article to see the **WHY?** To do something, all we need is the **What?** and **How?** In order to modify any interconnected system, it's best to thoroughly understand the **Why?** What follows provides a quick overview of **WHY?**

1. Relational Belonging (*koinonia*, 1 Thessalonians 1:6a):

Learn to know and to enjoy one another. As we interact openly around the passage, we experience belonging and embody the truth. Jesus is **the Master**, yet flesh-&-blood models are still crucial, even imperfect ones. God designed us in His image, the image of a loving, interactive SmallGroup-of-Three who constantly give themselves to one another. "Companion" fits for private study, although community releases this relational aspect so crucial to turn knowledge into LifeChange. Participating together releases fun!

What has been built into "DiscipleMaking Companion" in this area?

1. The "group-influenced" teaching style encourages an interactive format where each comes as both a learner and a teacher, deepening relationship.
2. Through our daily lives, the "gratefulness" response under the "Starters" bullet point helps us to know one another better.

3. The first motivation for adult learning is community-based learning. Need releases desire, which occurs when we see friends changing.
4. Another motivation for adult learners is an attitude of joy/fun in a group, which is experienced in a free-wheeling group dynamic.
5. Doing the one project at the end of the 5-weeks is normally either a group project or debriefing in group. We bond around shared tasks, especially as they release life.

2. Biblical Responsiveness (*koinonia*, 1 Thessalonians 1:6b):

Bring the group to the point where each loves the Bible and accepts it as His authority that is at work in us (2:13). Scripture as enlightened by the Spirit is central to each meeting since God's Word forms and informs every other element. For maximum LifeChange, develop group-influenced community learning with the Holy Spirit as the ultimate teacher. Now each comes as both a learner and a teacher. Each "Companion" consecutively works through a book or extended passage, training with an aim to become lifelong *life-learners*.

What has been built into "DiscipleMaking Companion" in this area?

1. The pre-preparation in this interactive style releases more buy-in. Active learning increases from **5-10%** retention up to **90%**.
2. Retelling last week's passage and telling current stories of our encounter as truth impacts our world both deepen understanding (under the "Starters" bullet point).
3. Reading the passage out loud provides another opportunity for insight, especially for verbal learners, one of four types.
4. Since each studies on our own, we all bring back fresh bread for our spiritual "pot-luck." As each debriefs, learning accelerates, especially since each shares in the unique way they learn best. This aligns our learning with studies showing we learn in at least four different ways (*S-A-V-I* learning).
5. We encourage jotting down insights gathered during the week. Studies indicate that the act of writing alone helps us to store what we write as "Can't forget" stuff. This aids in retrieval, even if we don't look at our notes.
6. Discovery must move to obedience to release growth, making truth relevant for our everyday lives. This relevance is a third powerful motivation for adult learners. God's invitation to fuller life comes alive as we follow through on our "I will..." desire. **WHY?** Beyond study, learning happens when truth encounters our everyday life.
7. Repeating this same holistic process each week gains a growing sense of competence in discovering God's truth personally, the fourth primary motivation for adult learners.
8. "DiscipleMaking Companion" focuses on whole books and extended passages, rather than scattered verses. Our minds have

difficulty retrieving lightly related bits and pieces. Since context is crucial to understanding any book, this natural way of learning by studying *one* book at a time provides the context.

9. I believe *BIG-small-BIG* learning best aligns with the storing/retrieval process God has built into our memory. We encourage a rapid reading to begin (*BIG, survey*). Then we study a segment, usually a chapter, by reading the portion daily to soak in it (*small, analyze*). Also read the whole book once per week to put the pieces back together (*BIG, synthesize*). Repeated reading deepens leaning so we begin to think the author's thoughts.
10. Additionally, **one** key theme interweaves throughout each "*Companion*" with a one page article towards the end.

3. Intentional Mutual-ministry (*koinonia*, 1 Thess 1:7-10):

The lub-dub heartbeat of God is "*receive & give*." Whatever we *receive*, freely and quickly *give away*. We grow as we pass it along as servants, like Jesus. If we receive forgiveness, give it away. If acceptance, give it away. If love, kindness, grace or insight, give it away. *Upward* toward God, *outward* toward the needy world, and *inward* to build up this faith-community. We are not only changed in the giving, but our city and region is also impacted by God's presence (1 Thes 1:8-9a). We learn as we reflect on encounters with truth, not just by study. Intentionally doing the Word builds on the rock, not the sand (Matt. 7:24-27). If we do not respond, we deceive ourselves (James 1:22). The DiscipleMaking process happens through obedience (Matt. 28:19-20), thus the "*I will...*" choices.

What has been built into "DiscipleMaking Companion" in this area?

1. As we tell fresh stories of our life on the way ("*Starters*" bullet point), we personally relive our encounter with truth. This intentional response deepens truth both in us and in others.
2. As we debrief our insights, we minister mutually to one another.
3. Praying for personal needs models and releases mutual ministry.
4. The "*Live Out Loud*" projects call for an intentional choice to be active learners.

4. Intimate Worship (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3):

Radical disciples must be worshippers. Worship gives the love we have received back to Him, an essential expression to release growth. Expand our view of worship. At the heart of all worship, our wholehearted allegiance celebrates our worthy God (Romans 12:1).

What has been built into "DiscipleMaking Companion" in this area?

1. As we relate what we are grateful for, this also lifts our hearts to the Giver in worship.

2. As needed, add other aspects of worship beyond the "*Companion*," like worship through communion, "popcorn" prayers of praise/adoration, giving financially towards a project, or singing worship songs to God.

5. Compassionate Mission (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5):

God called us together to be a worshipping church *in mission*. *Mission* is the most difficult of the five aspects to bring into "*Come & Follow Me*" SmallGroups, so work hard to incorporate *mission*. When God looks to jump start a life or a nation spiritually, He first presses on the *Kingdom mission* pedal. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God in His first post-baptism message (Mark 1:14-15). When Jesus called His first disciples out of "*Come & See*" (John 1:35-51) into the higher commitment of "*Come & Follow Me*" (Mark 1:16-20), He called them to become "*fishers of men*." Although *Kingdom mission* seems to be the most threatening for most of us, Jesus strategically challenges His followers to higher commitment here. We follow Jesus as our **moral** model so let's also follow in **ministry**.

What has been built into "DiscipleMaking Companion" in this area?

1. Share a "*one idea to one person*" encounter, aimed at those outside.
2. Occasionally bring requests to pray for your neighborhood or city. Prayer turns our hearts toward the object of our prayer, in this case, our neighborhoods and city, our work place and acquaintances.
3. Many of the "*Live Out Loud*" projects are outwardly focused.
4. Also, add any other additional *mission* outreach for which the group has passion for, either weekly or a one-time event.
 - Intentionally throw a BBQ as a group, inviting people who need Jesus. Unleash the power of John 17:20-23 at your "*Levi party*."
 - In group, use "*Telling My Story*" to prepare each to share our "3-minute testimony" of how we came to Christ. This deepens our grasp of Scripture (Philemon 6) and also boosts *koinonia* as we get to know each other better.
 - Encourage each member to identify a couple people God has laid on their hearts who need Jesus, and pray together for them.



What stood out beyond what you normally use as you teach?