



DISCIPLE-MAKING
STEPS

MICROGROUPS

AND

PRUNING

David Kornfield, 2020

This article is the third in a series of articles on disciple-making¹. Here we highlight microgroups and pruning. Microgroups are a powerful way of connecting deeply for life transformation. Pruning moves us into a new phase of greater fruitfulness. It is indispensable for authentic disciples and disciple-makers and even more so for those who would lead disciple-making churches or movements. Let's begin by looking more carefully at microgroups.

¹"First Steps in Disciple-Making" focused on definitions, the value of multiple models and selection and chemistry. The second article highlighted the vision and theology of disciple-making and deepened selection processes and criteria. A fourth article walks into finding a mentor/discipler and more practical "how to's" of disciple-making.



[Click Here to Access the 1st Article](#)



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MICROGROUPS

Good DNA. Good disciple-making movements and ministries' DNA is profoundly relational (life-on-life), Christ-centered, Scripture-based, focused on intentional growth and on multiplying. The microgroups of Global Discipleship Initiative ² bring these concepts to life in a deep and powerful way. Here are some of their features:

1. **A personal invitation** to walk together as a weekly group of 3 or 4, preferably 4, with a covenant for 12-18 months. (Ninety-minute meetings; ninety minutes of homework).
2. **A curriculum** that connects the great truths of 1) discipleship, 2) the Gospel, 3) the person of God and 4) the Church. ³
3. **Rotational leadership** after the first two months, thus ensuring that everyone practices leading well. In twelve months with a group of four everyone will have led ten times! This highlights the best of leader-follower disciple-making tied into collegial disciple-making.
4. **Multiplication** in new groups at the end of 12-18 months. While many disciple-making models advocate multiplication, this one actually does it in measurable visible ways.
5. **Intentional (not just accidental) and accelerated growth** (not so slow that it is difficult to know if there are real changes). While the material/manual/curriculum is the same in every group, each is a new adventure based on the life issues in which each person chooses to grow.

²See their website: <https://www.theglobaldiscipleshipinitiative.org/en-us/>. Greg Ogden, author of *Discipleship Essentials* and Ralph Rittenhouse lead this ministry dedicated to seeing disciple-making microgroups in every country of the world by 2026.

³Spelled out in Greg Ogden's book, *Discipleship Essentials* available in sixteen languages. The principles behind that book are detailed in another book by him, *Transforming Discipleship*. At the same time, it is possible to use the microgroup principles with other good books or resources on disciple-making, particularly if they include good questions for discussion and application.

Related to intentional accelerated growth is the need to focus keenly on **application** of what we read and study and of what the Holy Spirit is focusing on in any given person's life. Bible study and the study of good books can be but more information if we don't apply what we're learning (Mt 7:24-27; John 5:39-40; James 1:19-22). One way to resolve this is to take time near the beginning of each meeting to share applications done during the week, before opening new reflection. And the last part of the meeting could focus on application for the next week along with a prayer encounter with the Lord.



Much of what is described above is fleshed out in a **Disciples' Covenant**: five commitments as stated in *Discipleship Essentials*. Microgroup members begin by committing to the following:

- 1. Complete all assignments on a weekly basis prior to my discipleship appointment in order to contribute fully (see "Suggested Study Format" in the introduction to the book).**
- 2. Meet weekly with my discipleship partners for approximately one and one-half hours to dialogue over the content of the assignments.**
- 3. Offer myself fully to the Lord with the anticipation that I am entering a time of accelerated transformation during this discipleship period.**
- 4. Contribute to a climate of honesty, truth and personal vulnerability in a spirit of mutual up-building.**
- 5. Give serious consideration to continuing the discipling chain by committing myself to invest in at least two other people for the year following the initial completion of this book.**

The microgroup model calls for 90 minutes of preparation and 90 minutes of meeting. Many pastors and leaders will balk at a three-hour commitment. But those whose hearts are aroused or even inflamed with being disciples of Jesus and disciplers with Jesus will find the time. This will be greatly helped if we understand the need of pruning our lives and how to do it.



PRUNING

This begins with developing a biblical conviction of the need for pruning. Meditating on John 15:1-3 and Hebrews 12:1-2 helps greatly. A few highlights from these Scriptures include:

1. For the fruitful person, pruning is not optional.
2. Anyone who hopes for a significant season of greater fruitfulness must prune.
3. Pruning includes not just activities but also besetting sins (Hb 12:1).

Pruning is not just making adjustments. Adjustments is trimming the fruit tree, more aesthetic than substantive. Genuine pruning is cutting off half or more. To our surprise, God has intervened with COVID19 in exactly this way.⁴ However, it hasn't taken most of us long to refill our lives with new virtual activities to replace our earlier workaholic pace. COVID19 is a unique kairos of God. It probably won't be repeated. If we don't prune now, we probably never will.

⁴See my article titled "COVID19 and Disciple-Making: Binding the Strongman", WEA, April 2020 ([CLICK HERE TO ACCESS](#))

Pruning with a purpose. Henry Cloud's book, *Necessary Endings* speaks loudly and clearly about discerning which relationships and activities to prune and how to do that. He wisely points out that we won't know what to prune until we are clear on the purpose of our pruning. What is the fruit we are looking for? What does it look like? It's not enough to just say we want a simpler or more balanced life. We need to focus our energy and time in the direction of the fruit we desire. The following questions can give us some insight.

1. What do I want my life to look like? This is the core question since we all reproduce according to our kind. All other pruning and fruitfulness questions begin here.⁵
2. What kinds of disciples (fruit) do I want to produce?
3. What kind of disciplers (fruit multipliers) do I want to produce?
4. What kind of healthy discipling church or ministry do I want?

Without clear objective answers to these questions, we will never prune effectively. Once we've got some clarity on what we're pruning for, we're ready to develop a pruning plan.

⁵Edmund Chan in his book *A Certain Kind (Intentional Disciplemaking that Redefines Success in Ministry)* says "The compelling question of disciplemaking is not merely 'Are we making disciples?' but rather, 'what kind of disciples does God call us to reproduce?' and, more importantly, 'What kind of disciples are we?' *Be the certain kind!*"

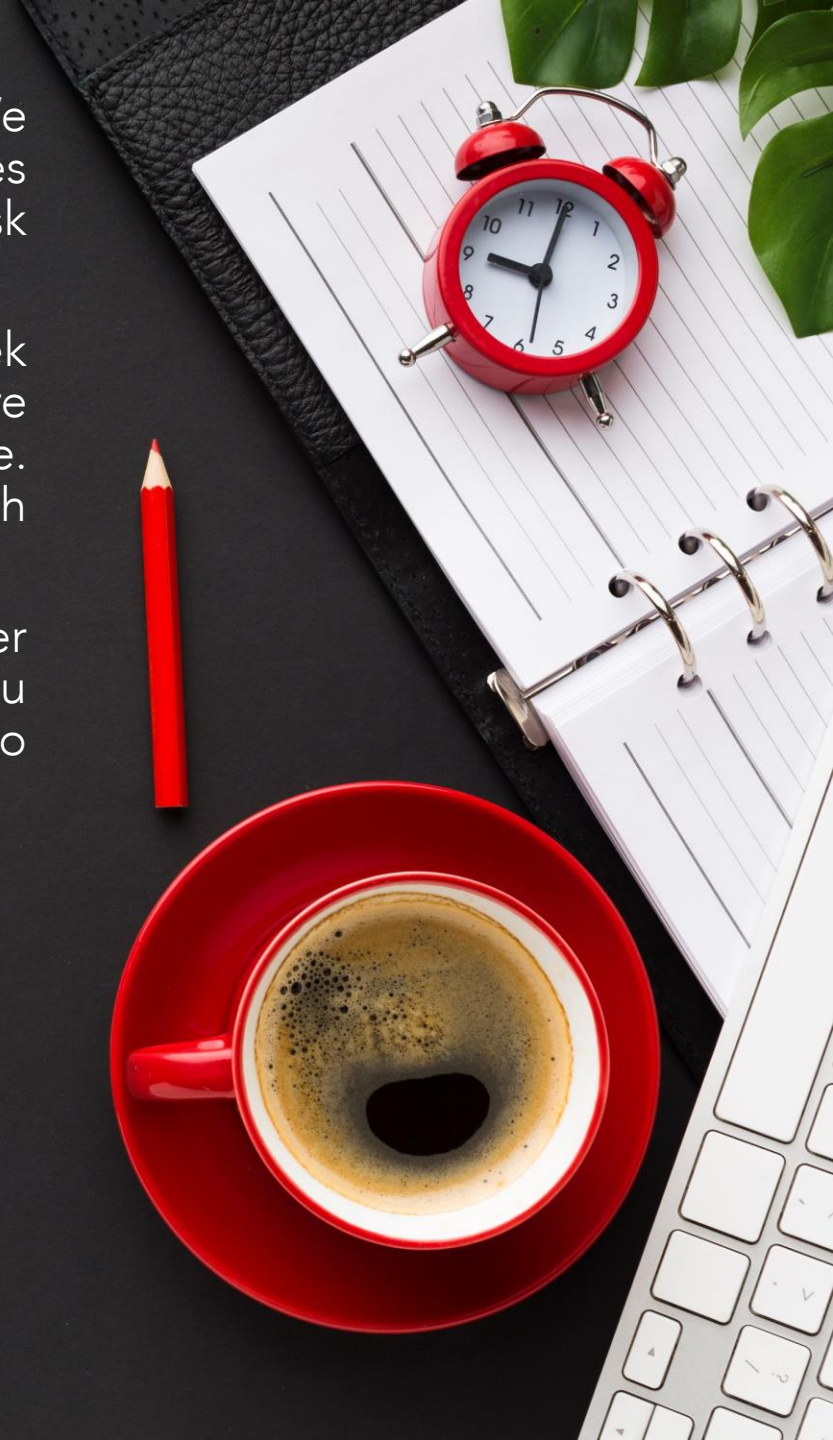


Be a genuine disciple/learner. Ask for help. Alone, no (Gn 2:18; Ec 4:7-8)! We all have major blind spots. And even once we see them, no one changes significantly on their own. Ask for your spouse's perspective and help. Ask your mentors, your colleagues, your team and your followers.

Develop **a lifestyle of pruning**. Don't simply make some decisions this week and then move on. Time is accelerated in COVID19. New opportunities are coming at most of us at an alarming rate. We are in full-blown kairos time. God wants to do major changes in us individually, in our group, in our church and in our work or ministry.

A lifestyle of pruning will be marked by weekly activities. Consider brainstorming options with others that share your calling. See if together you can list ten or more good options from which you can prioritize four. Try to articulate them in measurable ways. Here are some possibilities:

1. **Read, meditate and apply a chapter from Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings*.**
2. **Limit daily meetings or reduce the time given to any given meeting.**
3. **Identify besetting sins or areas of vulnerability and do something about them (Hb 12:1).**
4. **Grow in activities that are restful and renewing. Take the sabbath seriously.**
5. **Do one more pruning activity chosen monthly from the larger list**





Accountability. Most plans end up forgotten. They delude us into thinking we are going to grow! A plan's value will usually be proportionate to our accountability. We are talking about establishing pruning habits, not just pruning once. With this perspective you could consider being accountable on a regular basis. For instance,

1. Weekly, write a short phrase describing how well you did each of your activities and give yourself up to one or two sad faces ☹ ☹ or one or two happy faced 😊 😊, sharing that with your spouse and an accountability partner. This might take a few minutes.
2. Monthly talk for half an hour with your mentor about how you're doing and how you can improve.

Paraphrasing, Hebrews 12:11 "No pruning seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

May God bless and guide you in discerning what parts of this article you can apply to your life and your disciple-making. The fourth article in this series will walk further into steps for finding a mentor/discipler and practical disciple-making "how-to's".

DISCUSSION/APPLICATION QUESTIONS

for individuals or small groups

1. Significant changes rarely take place alone. Discussing and applying these questions in a small group can be life changing.
2. What caught your attention? (Is God saying anything to you?) ⁶
3. What further questions or insights come to your mind? ⁷
4. What will you do this week based on what you are learning? ⁸



⁶ This is one of the most powerful questions you can ask in studying Scripture or anything else. It focuses on what the Spirit is bringing to people's attention. It enables a real flow of Spirit-filled insights. Other more specific questions may be helpful or necessary. At the same time, they can draw away from what the Spirit may be saying to a given person, pushing them in one specific direction. Many have found that making this the main question they use is life-giving.

⁷ This also can be an unusually powerful question. True disciples ask questions. True disciplers do the same. This question keeps pushing people to learn, to grow, to expand their thinking and perspective.

⁸ Having just a few questions to discuss is helpful. With too many questions, people can easily get lost and may not get to the last question which should normally be application. If we don't take substantive time on the application question, we may have largely wasted our time. As someone once said, impression without expression leads to depression. If not depression, at least luke warmness, and the deception of thinking we're growing, though we're studying, rather than growing.

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