

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## The importance of habits for growing disciples



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What are your good and bad habits? Why is doing things regularly the best way to change?



### Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

As disciples we want to become like our teacher. Paul and other New Testament writers describe this as changing into the image or pattern of Christ. This is what Paul means when he prays that Christ would be “formed in you”. The hope is that everyone can grow to be “mature in Christ”. In fact, as each human being becomes more like Him, we become more fully the people God made each of us to be. Daily discipleship is gradually becoming the kind of person who will naturally live a life like the Master. If our discipleship has no impact on shaping us to become more like Christ, then it will not be discipleship.

Yet though most people want to change in some way, genuine transformation needs more than willpower. 95% of New Year’s resolutions do not last past the end of January. We can’t change by just saying, “I want to change.” Most people know that while we might be able to tweak our behaviours a little, for the deeper patterns of our personalities to change we need a power beyond ourselves.

Genuine change is a lifelong journey of letting God transform us. This happens as we give space for God in two particular places – our minds and in our hearts. Our minds are renewed so we see the world and people more and more as God sees them. We want to have the “mind of Christ”. Our innermost selves (hearts) are changed by allowing God’s Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out.



In Luke 6, Jesus points out that "there is no good tree which produces bad fruit.... Men do not gather figs from thornbushes...." (vv. 43-44) It is the inner nature of the tree that determines its outward product. Likewise, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart." (v. 45)

God doesn't want us to be people who can just do the right thing just in our behaviour. If it's all about following rules we are bound to fail. The picture the Bible gives us is that God wants to do something far more eternal – to change our inmost being – to become people who do the things Christ does precisely because they are becoming things we want to do. To become those whose natural choices increasingly look like what Jesus would do if He were in our situation, in the strength that He gives. Whose habitual thoughts, feelings and actions will become more like His.

On a daily basis, it is through habits – things which we do regularly – that God can change and grow us. Things like prayer, worship or listening to God. We are familiar with the idea of good and bad practices. Things that over time become a natural part of our lives and focus the way we live. These regular habits change us. This is obvious in our physical bodies in terms of our eating, exercising, personal care habits, but it is just as true for our inner person as well.

We do not have to make these habits up from scratch – habits are ways in which disciples have grown for millennia and are ways of living found in Jesus' life. Sometimes they have been called "spiritual disciplines". These days, more people are adopting the language of habits or practices to avoid splitting life up into a "spiritual" and a "non-spiritual" part and to avoid making discipleship sound like a duty.

Discuss: How do habits renew our minds? How do they give space for God to change our hearts?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Philippians 4: 4-9 in which Paul gives a very simple example of how habits can change us.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about people?

How does this passage call me to obey God?

What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/g108ndl1Z7w>

What struck you as important in the video?



# Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

Habits and practices are about giving space in our lives for God's Holy Spirit to shape our minds and our innermost desires, so that over time our natural expression comes to be the deeds of Christ done in the power of Christ. They give us ways of "abiding in Him", or "walking in the Spirit." As we do so, as well as knowing what to do, we gradually want to do it. James Smith writes, "Jesus is a teacher who doesn't just inform our intellect but forms our very loves. He isn't content to simply deposit new ideas into your mind; he is after nothing less than your wants, your loves, your longings."

Practices change us indirectly. We do what we can in order to enable us to do what we can't do directly. We can see this reality in any physical training. The more you train, the easier it becomes to, for example, run a marathon. And the more natural marathon-running will be. As we are being with God through worship, prayer, study and rest, we become the kind of people who want what God wants. Sometimes we get transformed in moments of "breakthrough", like Saul on the road to Damascus. But most of the time it is through the process of living. Because we are covenant partners with God, we have a part to play in this. We make ourselves available and open. But it is God who does the work, through His Spirit. "Without Him we can't, but without us He won't." We are making an effort, but we aren't earning. We are training, but we aren't trying. Richard Foster calls this 'the path of disciplined grace.' It is 'grace' because it is free; it is 'disciplined' because there is something for us to do." All the practices create the environment for the Holy Spirit to change us.

Discuss: Which habits would give God more room in my life to change me?

## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,  
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.  
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers. (Psalm 1)  
Amen.





# The importance of habits for growing disciples

As disciples we want to become like our teacher. Paul and other New Testament writers describe this as changing into the image or pattern of Christ. This is what Paul means when he prays that Christ would be “formed in you”. The hope is that everyone can grow to be “mature in Christ”. In fact, as each human being becomes more like Him, we become more fully the people God made each of us to be. Daily discipleship is gradually becoming the kind of person who will naturally live a life like the Master. If our discipleship has no impact on shaping us to become more like Christ, then it will not be discipleship.



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### Additional notes:

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