

# Introducing and Multiplying DNA Groups (Part 1)

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:16–20)

### Are You a Disciple of Jesus Making Disciples of Jesus?

- A. Let me be clear straightaway here: Though I just read these famous words that come to us at the close of Matthew’s gospel—often referred to as the Great Commission—I do not intend to deal with them bit by bit as I usually would. These verses simply set up the broader issue I will be concerned with for the next three weeks or so. It’s the issue of discipleship.
- B. When we open our New Testaments and read, we can’t help but come to the conclusion that anyone who would bear the name of Christ, anyone who would call him or herself a Christian, is, in biblical terms, a disciple of Jesus.
  - 1. So these eleven who had been following and learning from Jesus for those three years or so of His public ministry are here in [v. 16](#) referred to as the eleven “disciples.”
- C. And as we read on in our New Testaments, what we come to understand is that being one of Jesus’ disciples is not a stagnant sort of thing. There’s a certain explosiveness to it. There’s an out-flowing, ever-replicating, momentum that is set off in the heart of each disciple.
  - 1. So, in the text we just read, these eleven disciples are not permitted by Jesus to stop and congratulate themselves on their own successful discipleship to Him. No! They are commanded to go out and make more: “Go therefore and make disciples . . .” ([v. 19](#)). These eleven are to unleash a disciple-making movement in the world.
    - a. And so they did! It’s in view of their ministry that we read in [Acts 6:7](#): “[T]he word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly . . .” And it’s carried on to this very day. It’s why we are here gathered in this room this morning.
      - i. Disciples of Jesus are to be busy making disciples of Jesus.
- D. Here is the very heartbeat of the church of God. Here is both our identity and our purpose. Here is what we must be and what we must do. I shall say it again: We must be disciples of Jesus who are busy making disciples of Jesus.

1. If we are not doing this, we are, as Jack Miller has said, “[living out of accord with our whole reason for being in this world](#)” ([The Heart of a Servant Leader](#), p. 313). It’s no wonder we feel so out of sorts, so empty, so embittered, so aimless, so dissatisfied. We are not doing the very thing we have been created and redeemed and sent out in Christ to do!
- E. Let me ask you here even as we begin then: Are you a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus?
1. The front end of discipleship, as we may or may not realize, is, in fact, evangelism. Making disciples begins with making converts. So let me ask you: Are you going with the gospel to unbelievers? Are you starting conversations, asking good questions, listening to their stories, and engaging them meaningfully with the good news of Jesus?
  2. But discipleship, as we often think of it, certainly carries on into our relationships with other believers as well. Making disciples doesn’t stop at making converts, it’s only just gotten started. So let me ask you: Are you helping other Christians in their journey towards Jesus? Are you openly, honestly, meaningfully involved with others and pursuing Christ together with them?
    - a. Are you a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus?

## If Not, Why Not?

- A. If not, why not? What is it that is keeping you from such magnificent work?
1. While there are many reasons we may find ourselves negligent in these duties (some more honorable than others), it is my sense that one of the more significant reasons may be that we simply don’t know how to go about it. We barely know how to be a disciple of Jesus ourselves let alone how to help others along in it as well. It feels too lofty for us. It feels too overwhelming. It feels too confusing. We wouldn’t really even know where to start.
- B. O sure, in one sense, Jesus gives us all we need there in [vv. 18-20](#). He says that we are to baptize people into His name and proceed to teach them all that He commanded, and that He will be with us in it as we go. That really is, again in one sense, all that we need. We have His word. We have His Spirit. Isn’t that enough?
1. But, in another sense, we still get confused, don’t we? We still feel like we could use some help—a little more direction perhaps. What exactly does this mean? How should we begin to approach it?
    - a. And I do think that every Christian and, especially, every local church, should try to give themselves to working out just how they will pursue this idea of discipleship to Jesus. What will they make of it? How will they go about it? How will they encourage and cultivate it among their congregation?
- C. So now here we come to what I am really after this morning. I have wanted for quite some time to fully develop and introduce to you the idea of what we are here calling DNA Groups.

1. These groups really are just my attempt to help us along in this discipleship thing—to put some flesh on the bones, to put some color in the picture that Jesus outlines for us in [Matt 28](#).
  - a. I want everyone in our church to be a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus. And I hope my efforts here will somehow serve that glorious end.

## Not a Program but a “Culture”

- A. Now, to be clear, I am not interested in providing here a sort of one-stop-shop for discipleship. Do you know what I mean by this? I am not thinking, nor am I even wanting, what I put forward here to be seen as the only way to go about pursuing discipleship to Jesus. My goal in all of this is not to strongarm God’s people into one way of doing things. Some of you, I know, are already busy doing it in one way or another. And I rejoice that it is so!
  1. All I want to do here is simply offer some help to those of us who are a bit confused. I want to provide some sort of orienting vision and supporting structure for people to make use of as the Lord leads.
    - a. Listen, you can take what I’ll be providing in these next weeks and use it wholesale, you can customize it, or you can discard it. But whatever you do, please do something! Be a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus!
- B. More than anything what I want to develop here at Mercy Hill is what we might call a “culture of discipleship.” I’m not interested in developing a program of discipleship, per se, but rather a culture.
  1. What I mean by this is that I don’t want us thinking that discipleship is merely taking a class or reading a book or going through a curriculum and then somehow we’re done. I want it to be a part of our everyday life. I want it to be a normal thing here for people to be engaged meaningfully in each other’s lives, pursuing Christ together, and inviting unbelievers to join in.
    - a. DNA Groups are just one way I’m looking to help develop that.
- C. So here’s the plan for this morning. I’ve really only got two things for us: (1) I want to make sure we’re clear on the broader biblical-theological background that stands behind the vision and intention of these groups; (2) And, in that, we’ll simply make our way towards a definition for these groups. And then we’ll be done.
  1. Let me remind you again that this is part 1 of 3, so I’m just trying to get the conversation started. I’m not going to be able to address some of the practicals or ways you can get involved just yet. That should be coming in the weeks to come.
    - a. But still, I would encourage you, even as I’m preaching this morning, be praying about what part God might have you play in the rolling out of these groups.

# (1) The Background

## Biologically Speaking

- A. Before we consider the biblical background that is situated behind the vision and intention of these groups, let me first remind us what, biologically speaking, DNA even is. This will actually set us up for what we'll look at in the Scriptures.
- B. Now, I'm certainly no scientist, but, at least at a cursory level, I know that DNA is the carrier of genetic information in our bodies. Our genes, transferred from our parents, influence and help determine many of our body's biological and physical characteristics. And there's naturally going to be this similitude between my parents and me in many ways because I share some of their DNA.
- C. If you've ever brought a newborn baby home from the hospital then you know firsthand what I'm talking about.
  - 1. When word gets out that your little one is now at home, family and friends start popping in with gifts and meals. And what do they want to do? Let's be honest. They don't want to see you. They want to see the baby! And when they do, without fail, within moments, the discussion begins. They start trying to figure out just who your baby looks like. She has her dad's eyes, her mom's hair, great grandpa's smile, Aunt Betsy's dimples, and on it goes, right?
    - a. By God's grace, I've brought three babies home now from the hospital and here's the general consensus: Chloe looks more like my side of the family; Bella looks more like Megan's side of the family; the jury's still out on Levi but it seems to me he's kind of a mix between the two.
- D. Now, I bring this up here to make a point: However people parse out the traits of our children—whether she looks more like her dad's side or more of her mom's side—we can be quite sure of at least one thing: the kid is going to look in many ways like her parents—like part of the family—because she has their genes . . . their DNA.

## The Gospel and Our Genetics

- A. And this understanding of DNA really sets us up now to discuss the biblical background to DNA Groups.
  - 1. I wonder if you realize that the entire story of Scripture can be told, in one sense at least, from the perspective of genetics. Let me quickly run us through the four chapters of the biblical storyline—Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration—and I'll show you what I mean.

### Chapter #1: Creation

- A. Humanity, we learn in [Gen 1:26-27](#), was originally created “in the image of God.” Now, I've gone into this before, but remember that the idea here is familial. It's presenting Adam and Eve as God's children.

1. When we say today that a child is a “spitting image” of his parent, we are not too far off from what it means for man to be made in the image of God. We were His children with, we might say, our Father’s DNA. We looked like Him. We were created to, as a mirror, reflect Him and His glory into the world all around.
  - a. When others looked at us, they were to see something of Him.
- B. We see this in the way the creation narrative plays out. I wonder if you’ve ever noticed this.
  1. In [Gen 1](#), God is naming and ordering His creation. But then in [Gen 2](#), we see that Adam is given the authority to name and order things as well—with the animals and, ultimately, his bride.
  2. In the opening verses of [Gen 1](#), God is the One who is fruitful and multiplying and filling His creation with all manner of plants and animals and life. But then down in [v. 28](#), we see that He goes on to tell Adam and Eve to “[b]e fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”
  3. In the opening verses of [Gen 1](#), God is clearly portrayed as the supreme King and Ruler over all. But then down again in [v. 28](#), we read that Adam and Eve are told to “subdue . . . and have dominion” on the earth in a subordinate and God-honoring way.
- C. And on we could go. But the point, I think, is quite clear: We were designed to image, to look like, to reflect our heavenly Father in all the earth! In other words, again, we had something of our Dad’s DNA.

## Chapter #2: Fall

- A. With this now in view, the fall of [Gen 3](#) can be understood as a sort of genetic mutation. The hearts of Adam and Eve, you recall, turn from God and, consequently, the very essence of human nature becomes corrupted and shot through with sin.
  1. At the tree of testing ([v. 6](#)), the image of God in man was not fully lost, but it was most certainly marred. We still looked something like our Maker, but now with severe deformities. Like a mirror, broken, we still reflected our Father to some degree, only now in fragments and flashes.
- B. As a result, by nature we are all now something a little less than human—less than what God at first created us to be. We are selfish, rebellious, sinful, divided, confused, broken.
  1. We still name things in God’s world but now we often use our names to degrade and tear down.
  2. We still bear fruit and multiply and fill the earth, but now we fill it with sin and division rather than righteousness and shalom (cf. [Gen 6:5](#)).
  3. We still subdue and have dominion but, sadly, it is usually with self-centered intent.
- C. And we see this stuff coming out in us early, right? Just this last week, my kids are outside playing in the backyard, and I start to notice what they’re doing. My girls have filled their wagon with all sorts of stuff—balance bikes, toys, wood, rocks, outdoor pillows—and they’re making Levi (their little

brother) pull it all around the yard. And they're barking orders at him and things. When I ask them what in the world they're doing—catch this!—they say they're trying to train him so he'll get stronger and eventually be able to pull them around wherever they'd like to go. In other words: They're raising him up to be their personal slave.

1. To put it another way: They're learning how to subdue and have dominion—only it's a bit mixed up from the sort of thing God intended, isn't it?
  - a. Obviously, this is just a humorous example, but as we get older it gets increasingly less humorous, doesn't it? The way we manipulate, the way we abuse, the way we hurt one another. The way we make it all about number one . . . me!
- D. Sadly, we now, by nature, look a lot less like God and a lot more like the devil ([John 8:44](#); [Eph 2:1-3](#); cf. [Rom 1:18-32](#)). We are in desperate need of what we might call genetic rewiring or image renewal. We need to be changed from the inside out. We need new hearts and a new nature. We need to be remade in our Father's image. Because we've made a mess of it.

### Chapter #3: Redemption

- A. And the surprise of the gospel is that God, in Christ, actually enters into the mess we've made and makes this renewal possible.
  1. I love what Bonhoeffer says concerning our restoration in God's image: "[T]here is only one way to achieve this purpose and that is for God, out of sheer mercy, to assume the image and form of fallen man. As man can no longer be like the image of God, God must become like the image of man" (*The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 299).
- B. Jesus, the eternal Son of God—Whom Paul calls "[the image of the invisible God](#)" ([Col 1:15](#)), whom the author of Hebrews describes as "[the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature](#)" ([Heb 1:3](#))—comes down from heaven. Perfect son. Perfect child. Perfect image—reflecting without distortion the glory of His Father into a fallen world—in the way He walked and talked and served and led and lived . . . and died.
- C. Of course, the troubling truth of the matter is that, when faced with such pure and holy brightness, in our sin, we couldn't bear it.
  1. Just as we marred the image of God when it was put on us at first in Eden, so when it came to us in the person of Jesus we tried to mar it once more. With our chains and our lashes and our thorns, Jesus was ravaged nearly beyond recognition. And, as we nailed Him to the cross, it's as if we were taking hammer to mirror. "I don't want to see God's image in this world anymore!"
    - a. We left the Son of almighty God hanging there on a stick in the dark reduced to shards.
- D. At Calvary, in our arrogance, I suppose we thought we were doing away with the image of God once and for all. But, truly, God, in His grace, was making a way for us to be renewed in that image forevermore!

1. On the cross, Jesus was suffering under the judgment of God in our place. There He was disguised under the image and “likeness of sinful flesh” and condemned (Rom 8:3).
  2. And when He rose from the dead three days later, victorious over sin and grave, a new door of possibility was thrown open for us: “[J]ust as we have borne the image of the man of dust [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven [Jesus]” (1 Cor 15:49).
    - a. Where we had been broken in Adam, we now can be restored in Christ. He came to rewire our genetics, to renew us in His image, to put us back together—to make us fully human in the most divine way!
- E. But it is a process.
1. It begins when, by God’s sovereign grace, we are born again into the family, as it were, from above through the Holy Spirit (John 3:3; 1 Pet 1:3, 23). All at once we come alive and we see the kingdom . . . and it’s glorious King!
    - a. As Paul puts it in 2 Cor 4:4, in the new birth, our eyes are opened to see “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”—and, this time, wonder of wonders, we don’t despise it . . . we delight in it! We actually find ourselves wanting to reflect it.
  2. And as we fix our eyes upon Jesus and follow after Him as disciples, Paul tells us, we will do just that: “[W]e all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). We see Him. We love Him. We learn from Him. And we start to look more and more like Him!
- F. Elsewhere, Paul makes it abundantly clear that this transformation, though ultimately guaranteed for those who are in Christ, isn’t automatic or without effort on our part. We actually get the privilege, we might say, of participating in this process of renewal as we, through repentance and faith, put to death the old man and put on the new.
1. Listen to the way he exhorts the church in Colossae: “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col 3:5–10; cf. Eph 4:17–24).
- G. We reckon our old man dead with Christ and our new man alive with Him. We start loving God and loving others, reading Scripture and caring for orphans, singing Psalms and washing feet, saying prayers and serving the outcast.
1. Our stone hearts begin to beat again. The broken mirror is brought to reflect God’s light once more. We start looking like our Father as we were designed to at first. We have His

eyes, and His smile, and His voice, and His hands. We're being renewed in His image. Because of grace. Because of Jesus!

## Chapter #4: Restoration

- A. And God promises to finish for us what He's begun in Christ: *"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).*

## (2) The Definition

### Discipleship Is the Means

- A. Now, at this point you may be wondering: What in the world does all of this have to do with discipleship and DNA Groups? Well, in a word: everything! You see, discipleship to Jesus is the way we are slowly renewed in His image.
1. When you think about it, as Jesus set out to make disciples, what was He doing? He was calling people out of darkness, away from their broken way of life and the realm death—and He was inviting them to follow Him, learn from Him, and begin to live more and more like Him. In other words, again, discipleship is His way of rewiring our DNA.
- B. This is why, by the way, the last chapter of Deitrich Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship*, which I quoted from earlier, is entitled *"The Image of Christ."* Let that sink in. A book on discipleship . . . ends with a chapter on the image of Christ. This is no coincidence.
1. Bonhoeffer knows that the ultimate aim in discipleship to Jesus is renewal in His image! That's where this train finally let's off. That's the end of the road for the disciple. That's the point. *"[T]hose whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son . . ."* (Rom 8:29). He calls you into discipleship and then He conforms you into His image.
    - a. To put it another way: renewal in the image of God is the end; discipleship to Christ is the means.

### Towards a Definition

- A. Now we're calling these discipleship groups at Mercy Hill DNA Groups for two simple reasons:
1. First, the idea of DNA keeps ever before us the ultimate goal of discipleship: namely, renewal in Christ's image and likeness—that we would start to look more and more like Him, like children of our heavenly Father.
    - a. We mentioned above that being renewed in the image of God through Christ is not instantaneous, but a process. Well, DNA Groups exist to foster and facilitate in our church this ongoing process of growing up more and more into the image Jesus. The goal in these groups is to let Him touch the deepest places of our being (our DNA, you might say) and influence every aspect of our lives.



2. But more than merely keeping this goal before us, the idea of DNA also outlines for us the basic steps involved in accomplishing it. Here is where DNA becomes our acronym standing for this process of Discovering, Nurturing, and Applying Christ.
- B. Now we'll look at what exactly I mean by this in the coming weeks, but let me at least draw things to a close here this morning by providing you with a full definition for these DNA Groups: DNA Groups are smaller groups of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until He is all in all.

## Closing Questions

- A. If you want to know what that means, come back next week. But for now, let me wrap things up by encouraging you to consider a couple of questions:
1. Are you a disciple of Jesus? Are you letting Him put you back together?
  2. If you are, one of the ways He puts you back together and renews you in His image is by making you others-centered just like He was. So let me ask you, if you are a disciple of Jesus, are you busy making disciples of Jesus—pouring your life out to help others along in their journey towards Him?
    - a. Or are you busy with something else? Is it all about you? O God has so much more for you in that. I pray you'll join me in making a go at this great commission to be a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus.