

# Introducing & Multiplying DNA Groups (Part 4)

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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)

### Fourth and Final

- A. We have now come to the fourth and final sermon in this series we’ve been calling Introducing and Multiplying DNA Groups.
- B. In the first sermon of this series, you might recall, I simply made the case from the verses I just read there in [Matthew 28](#), that every Christian, or follower of Christ, is to be a disciple of Jesus busy making disciples of Jesus.
  - 1. And I explained that my hope with the launch of these DNA Groups is to provide some sort of orienting vision and supporting structure to help us move towards that call together as a church.
- C. DNA Groups, as we’ve defined them, 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.”
  - 1. In the past weeks, we’ve broken down that definition, paying particular attention to those three basic steps that constitute our acronym DNA—Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ.
  - 2. Last time I showed you the biblical model for change that stands behind and informs my understanding of those three basic steps.
- D. Now, as a way of wrapping all of this up, I simply want to: (1) take from much of what we’ve said thus far and draw out five guiding principles for our DNA Groups; (2) And then I’ll close with a few brief practical remarks (and I’ll be looking to show you how you can get involved in the coming weeks).

## (1) Guiding Principles

### Guiding Principle #1: God’s Agenda for Our Lives Is Change

- A. Here is the one thing we have been saying all along, but it cannot go unmentioned once more here. The goal of your salvation is your transformation. Jesus gets ahold of your life to remake it, recast it,

renew it—to bring love and life where there once was only self-centeredness and death. Discipleship to Jesus is about conformity to His image.

1. If we are not changing, if we are not being transformed from one degree of glory to the next as we follow behind Him, then we are not following Him in the right way—because that’s the point!
- B. Let me quickly read you some of those key verses we’ve already looked at in messages past, and I’ll add a few more, just in an effort to drive this home:
1. [1 Corinthians 15:49](#): “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven [Jesus].” Jesus came, lived, suffered, died, rose so that you could be renewed in His image. What we lost in Adam is being renewed in Christ.
  2. [2 Corinthians 3:18](#): “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”
  3. [Colossians 3:9b-10](#): “<sup>9b</sup> [Y]ou have put off the old self with its practices<sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”
  4. [1 John 3:2](#): “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.”
  5. [Romans 8:29](#): “For those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son . . .”
  6. [Ephesians 2:8-10](#): “<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” You have been saved not by good works but for good works. Salvation unto transformation!
  7. [1 Thessalonians 4:3a](#): “For this is the will of God, your sanctification . . .” We often get all worked up wondering: what is God’s will for me? Well, Paul tells us right here: your sanctification, your holiness, your growth in godliness, your conformity to His image.
  8. And, finally, from the mouth of our Lord Himself, [Luke 6:40](#): “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.”
- C. It needs to be crystal clear in our DNA Groups that this is the point—this is why we’re gathering, this is where we’re going! This is our common goal for our discipleship to Jesus because it is His goal for us in it. God’s Agenda for Our Lives Is Change!

## Guiding Principle #2: The Vinedresser Is Always at Work

- A. This second principle flows out of the first. God’s agenda for our lives is change and renewal into His image . . . and He is always at work in our lives to see that such change truly does come about.
- B. There are plenty of verses I could bring out at this point, many of which have brought such comfort to me through the years. Let me just list a few here:
1. [Philippians 1:6](#): “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

2. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24: “<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”
  3. Hebrews 12:10b-11: “<sup>10</sup> [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup> For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”
  4. Hebrews 13:20-21: “<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”
- C. But the text I particularly want to draw your attention to on this point is [John 15:1-2](#), where Jesus says to His disciples: “<sup>1</sup> I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”
1. Did you catch that? God doesn’t say of the good branch: “At last! Finally I’ve got some fruit from it. My work here is done.” No! The clear implication of Jesus’ words here is that when this branch first starts to bear fruit, God’s work with regard to it is truly only just beginning!
- D. God is not satisfied with the fruit in your life as it now is. He wants more for you. Because you are not yet fully conformed to the image of His Son, He is not yet done with His work on you. God doesn’t punch the clock and go home for the weekend. God doesn’t take vacation time. The Vinedresser Is Always at Work.
- E. This means that, if you are in Christ, and you are sitting across the table from me—if you’re a part of my DNA Group or whatever—without even knowing how you’re doing, or what’s really going on in the details of your day-to-day, I can know, from the start, at least one thing: God is at work in your life to bring change and renewal in some way.
1. And it’s our job, not to resist this work, but to help one another locate it and partner with Him in it!

### Guiding Principle #3: Your Situation Is for Your Sanctification

- A. Now, again, this third principle flows out of the ones that have come before it. God’s agenda for you is change. He’s always at work to see more of His Son in your life. And one of the primary ways He works towards this is by sovereignly engineering your situation (your circumstances, what we called last week your “Heat”) in such a way that your heart is tested and exposed so that, in the end, He can lead you to a deeper and richer encounter with Him and you can be further healed.
- B. The quintessential example of this is Israel in the wilderness. When God brought them into a difficult situation, when God turned up the heat on them there in the desert, what reason does He give for doing so?
1. [Deuteronomy 8:2](#): “And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart . . .” (cf. v. 16).

- a. He engineered their situation in such a way that it would bring out what was in their hearts, lead to a deeper relationship with and reliance on Him, and ultimately work for their sanctification.
- C. What this means for us is that all of life is the stage for discipleship.
  - 1. If we want to grow as disciples of Jesus, then we don't have to do go through some multi-level program or travel to some far-off country. All we have to do is meaningfully connect with God in our current context, in the midst of what we are presently facing, in the place He has put us, in the situation He has sovereignly engineered for us.
    - a. God is working on our hearts by way of our immediate situations.
- D. This is what I think Jesus is after when He says to His disciples in [Matthew 6:34](#): “[D]o not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”
  - 1. Don't worry about whether you'll be ready to fearlessly face cancer if it comes for you in your later years, or if you'll have enough faith to face some future downturn of the economy or the loss of some loved one. What is God calling you to face today? That is sufficient.
    - a. Maybe the big heat in your life today will simply be Bay Area traffic. Can you face that reliance on Jesus, with peace and patience, and even joy? If you get cut off by another car, can you not only refrain from cursing them, but bless them in your heart and pray for them?
      - i. If you are learning to abide in Jesus and bear fruit in the midst of today's troubles, you are setting yourself up to be ready for tomorrow's—whatever it may be!
- E. So the question we must always ask in our DNA Groups is: where is the place I am feeling heat today? What am I facing right now? That is where God wants to work. That is what He wants to speak into and leverage for my sanctification and growth in godliness.
- F. This is why, by the way, every suggested framework I provide as a way of organizing our DNA Group meetings (which you can see in your handout) begins with at least a few quick questions about what's been good and what's been hard in each of the group members' lives lately.
  - 1. Make no mistake. These aren't mere social niceties. These questions are of strategic importance. Our answers to these questions will often help us locate the very place God is presently attempting to do His deepest work on us.
    - a. Our given situations are not irrelevant to the matters of discipleship. They are the very context for it and the means whereby God accomplishes His goal for us in it! Your Situation Is for Your Sanctification.
- G. Now, there is something to bring out under this principle that is of particular importance when it comes to the dynamics of a DNA Group. To back into it, let me first read you a humorous article

from the Christian satirical publication, the Babylon Bee. I came across this probably two or three years ago and never have forgotten it, because, honestly, it touches on what I guess you could say is a pet peeve of mine. Listen to this: [Report: Every Single Person At Church Doing 'Fine': ERIE, PA:](#) "The results of Pastor Mike's informal survey are in: every single member of Bayfront Methodist Church is doing either "fine," "good," or "real good." When the pastor pressed for details, members responded with some combination of, "No really, I'm doing great," or else, "Yeah, things are good, things are good."

The survey was conducted as the pastor faithfully stood at the doors of the church after the Sunday service, shaking the hands of each churchgoer as they left and asking how they were doing.

"It's really quite spectacular," the pastor told reporters Tuesday. "You would think, given the state of our fallen world, that at least one person would be going through a crisis or battling some kind of indwelling sin that they need help with. But not at this church—we're all doing fine it seems. Praise the Lord!"

Prayer requests for the week included several reports of distant friends and family that were struggling with sin, but nobody in the church reported needing prayer for themselves. "Prayer? Me?" one congregant said to Pastor Mike, a puzzled expression on her face. "No. I mean, you can pray for me generally, but really I'm not in much need of anything right now. I'm doing awesome, really." She was later spotted at a coffee shop, bawling her eyes out over some personal struggle, according to sources.

Reporters then asked Pastor Mike how he was doing. "Who, me? Oh yeah, I'm doing just fine," he confirmed."

- H. You know what they're getting at here, right? You've seen this at work in the church, haven't you? We have this tendency to hide ourselves from one another. We put on our Sunday best and come in acting like we have it all together—like because we're Christians our lives aren't hard and we no longer struggle or sin.
  - 1. When people ask us how we are doing we deflect with Christian platitudes like "Too blessed to be stressed!" Have you heard that one? (Perhaps, you've even used that one!)
    - a. Well, I'm sorry, but according to my read of Scripture, that statement is actually thoroughly unbiblical! It's actually a perfect example of what theologians would call over-realized eschatology. You are claiming something for yourself now that will only be true for you in the end. The only time that statement will be true of you is when you are with Christ in glory, fully conformed to His image.
      - i. In the meanwhile, it is in the places of heat and temptation and stress that God is looking to do His best work. And if we refuse to admit that we are feeling any of that then we are actually standing in resistance of the very work He is trying to do!
- I. Look at me. It's okay to not be okay. God already knows. And He's actually trying to bring you to that realization as well so He can meet you in that place and heal.
- J. DNA Groups in particular are the space we are trying to create here at Mercy Hill where we can get real about this stuff.

1. To be clear: this doesn't mean you shouldn't use discernment in what you share and how you share it. But it does mean that if you are unwilling to be honest about the places you are experiencing heat, the ways you are feeling tempted and tried, then you should not be surprised when you come to find that you are also not growing much either.

## Guiding Principle #4: The Heart of the Person Is the Heart of the Matter

A. Here, again, this principle continues to build on those that have come before it.

1. We saw this specifically there in [Deuteronomy 8](#), didn't we? God brought Israel into the heat of the wilderness, ultimately, ["to know what was in your heart" \(v. 2\)](#).
- B. We saw this as well last week when we looked at [Jeremiah 17:5-10](#). Now, I didn't make much of it at the time, but I wonder if you noticed last week the sort of jarring flow of thought there in those verses.
1. In the first three verses, it's as if Jeremiah has taken up a paintbrush and he's working on a canvas. There's a thorn bush and a fruit tree and a flowing stream of water. It's all quite picturesque.
  2. And then suddenly, in [verses 9-10](#), it's as if he just drops the brush and he makes this bare-faced, even rugged, statement about the state of man's heart: ["9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 10 'I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.'"](#)
    - a. It seems a strange transition at first, does it not? But, after consideration, I think it makes quite a lot of sense. What Jeremiah is doing here is highlighting for us the critical factor that will determine whether we are going to bear thorns or fruit: namely, ["the heart"](#)—particularly, the heart as it stands in relation to God.
- C. We must never lose sight of the fact that, as we come together in our DNA Groups, what we are attempting to do at a fundamental level is heart-work. We are looking to help one another re-root our hearts in God—His word, His gospel, His Spirit. It is only in this that true and lasting change can be affected.
- D. But, now, if DNA Groups are coming together to do heart-work, there are at least two implications we must keep in mind at this point:

### Implication #1: Heart-Work Is Tough Work

- A. First, heart-work is tough work. Again, Jeremiah just says it: ["The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" \(v. 10\)](#).
1. What this means is that every member of your group is going to try to bob and weave, distract and deflect, self-protect and blame-shift—do anything but let his or her heart be brought out into the open and exposed for what it really is.

- a. We don't want others to see what's really going on in there. We ourselves often don't even want to see what's really going on in there.
- B. It is true that, for those of us who have come to faith in Christ, our hearts have been circumcised—the law of God has now been written on our hearts by His Spirit ([Jer 31:33](#)). But there is still much that remains of our old ways. We still have a lingering sickness there. We still have blind spots. We still have twisted desires and motives that we are often not even aware of.
  - 1. As the heart is desperately sick, so we desperately need our brothers and sisters in Christ to bring truth, to bring light, to bring life, to bring the healing that is found in Jesus.

## Implication #2: Heart-Work Is Tender Work

- A. But there is one more thing we must keep in mind.
  - 1. Because it is the heart that we are seeking to engage in our DNA Groups, certainly, as we have just seen, we must be bold and courageous, not settling for surface conversations but attempting to go deeper with each other towards the truth of things.
  - 2. But, and this is perhaps an implication even more important than the first, because it is the heart that we are seeking to engage in our DNA Groups, we must be incredibly gentle. Heart-work is tender work.
- B. Consider the difference in a doctor's approach when he's coming to treat your skin rash and when he's coming to operate on your heart. The former can be done with little concern for cleanliness or precision. But the latter requires the utmost caution and care.
  - 1. Everything in the operating room—from its furniture to its fixtures, from the surgeons to their utensils—is sanitized through and through. A careless doctor can kill here. A careful doctor can heal here. Engaging the heart is a big deal.
- C. In a DNA Group, you are attempting to enter the realm of the heart, spiritually speaking. We dare not march on in there and poke and cut and rip and tear and act like we know what we're doing, like we know what a person needs before we ever really listen to them, understand them, pray for them, share life with them.
  - 1. O we may even use Scripture and so convince ourselves that we must be doing the work of God. But as it is with a surgeon's scalpel so it is with the God's word, which the author of Hebrews reminds us "[is sharper than any two-edged sword](#)" ([Heb 4:12](#))—a careless Christian can use it to wound, but a careful Christian can use it to heal.
- D. If I'm honest, I think one of the reasons we respond to people asking how we are with Christian clichés like "Too blessed to be stressed" is that we've opened up to Christians before about the stuff that's really going on in our hearts, and they haven't handled it well.
  - 1. We've been burned, we've been wounded. They went straight away into preacher mode, lecture mode, truth-telling mode, before they ever thought to put an arm around us, listen to us, and just love us right there in the mess. So we grow used to hiding because we've been hurt.

- E. Heart-work is tender work. The stuff that's going to go down in your DNA Groups should be handled with such humility, such empathy, such compassion, such patience, such mercy, such love . . . such tenderness.

## Guiding Principle #5: Good Questions Are a Great Start

- A. This last principle, as with the others, follows from all those that have come before it. If I know God's agenda for your life is change; and I know He's always at work to bring it about; and I know that one of His primary means of accomplishing this work is the situations you puts you in; and I know that in these situations, good and hard, your heart is being brought out so it can be brought back to Jesus in more meaningful ways; and I know that heart-work is both tough and tender work . . . then I shall see the great importance of asking good questions.
- B. Good questions are suited to deal with the toughness of heart-work. They help us get inside another person's situation, and help us see beneath the various reactions in their behavior to the deeper motivations and realities of their heart. Like an x-ray machine they bring out into the open things that otherwise would likely remain hidden.
  - 1. In fact, David Powlison, whom I mentioned last time, actually wrote article entitled **X-ray Questions: Drawing Out the Whys and Wherefores of Human Behavior**. In this article he lists all the varieties of questions we can make use of to really get inside the heart of another person—or our own for that matter.
- C. And yet the wonderful thing about good questions is that, not only do they help us draw out the heart of a person, they do so in a way that is tender. Surely you've seen this play out in your own experience.
  - 1. When you're struggling and you open up to others about it, some people, on the one hand, will make quick assumptions about what you're going through and what you need and they immediately jump in to give you advice.
  - 2. But then there others, wise in the caring of souls, who have learned to slow down and ask questions, and they listen well, and they walk slowly, patiently, with you towards the place of help—hand in hand.
- D. There are few things that shut down a person's honest communication like another's quick assumptions and superficial advice. But, on the contrary, there are few things that open up a person like good questions and a listening ear.
  - 1. The former is degrading and dehumanizing. It implies that you can't figure it out and you need me to step in and show you the way.
  - 2. The latter, on the other hand, is wonderfully dignifying and rehumanizing. To ask you questions is to imply that you are smart enough to know the answer. It implies that God is already speaking to you—that you are probably already thinking about these things and have wonderful insights to share.



- a. Make no mistake, good questions challenge and expose and lead. But they do so in a way that is humble and gentle and inviting. That is why I say Good Questions Are a Great Start.
- E. Let me close this up by reading to you from Paul Tripp's book *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hand*. I think you'll see how he really brings everything we've been saying here this morning full circle: "It is tempting to think that insightful people have all the right answers, and in one sense that is true. But it is also true that you don't get to the right answers without first asking the right questions. . . . Our thinking always rides on the rails of our questions. Good thinkers like to walk around a topic and look at it from different angles. They like asking new questions and asking old questions in new ways. Good thinkers don't make uncorroborated assumptions, and they don't allow themselves to think they know more than they actually do.  
 If you want to help people to see brand new truths (and old truths in brand new ways), you need to take on the habits of good thinkers. Asking good questions is one of the most important. . . . [W]hen you bring well-constructed, creative, biblically-shaped questions to a person's life, you are doing more than getting to know them and uncovering where change is needed. You are, in fact, ministering to that person.  
 When I ask you questions you would never ask yourself, I am teaching you to view yourself through biblical lenses. I am doing something God can use to change you in fundamental ways. . . . Asking good questions is vital to helping people to face who they really are and what they are really doing.  
 As sinners we all tend to recast our own history in self-serving ways. We hide behind the difficulty and pressures of the situation or the failures of others. We look for external explanations, not internal ones. We are more impressed with our righteousness than we are horrified at our sin. Because of this, we all need people who love us enough to ask, listen, and having listened, to ask more. This is not being intrusive.  
 . . . [I]n the Messiah's hands, our questions can become keys that open people's prisons and cause them to rely on Christ in new and profound ways.  
 Through our questions Christ changes people." (pp. 172-173, 180-181)
- F. God's agenda for our lives is change. And asking questions of one another is an important part of that process. Therefore, learning to ask good questions is critical for the health and proper functioning of any DNA Group.

## (2) Getting Practical

### Three Frameworks

- A. And with this, I suppose, we come to one of the practical matters I imagine you are interested in: namely, what do these groups actually do? Well, at one level, we could answer this quite simply: they come together and ask good questions.
- B. You may have noticed that your handout is a bit different this morning. I simply want to read from the front page of that now as we close: "While each DNA Group will certainly have its own flavor, you can get a sense of what they might look like by checking out what we call the three DNA Group 'Frameworks.'" We've developed these frameworks as a way of providing structure and direction for DNA Groups to make use of if they so desire. Each of the three frameworks designed for use in

Mercy Hill's DNA Groups utilize carefully crafted questions as a way of guiding the process of discipleship to Jesus and renewal in His image. They all have the same end goal (to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ until He is all in all) but they come at it from three different angles or starting points.

- The Life Framework gives you a set of questions to help you take each member's life as the starting point and move towards God and the gospel together from there.
  - The Scripture Framework gives you a set of questions to help you take the Scriptures as the starting point and move towards the heart and life of each member from there.
  - The Resource Framework gives you a set of questions to help you take some other Christian resource (e.g. a sermon, book, article, etc.) as the starting point and move towards Jesus and the transformed life from there (I'm compiling a list of recommended resources that will be coming out soon)."
- C. You can read the questions there on your own time. But let me at least say this: the goal in providing you with these frameworks is not that you stick woodenly to each and every question but that you begin to get a more intuitive feel for facilitating a group and asking questions that lead people to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until He is all in all! That's the point. And I'm just hoping to help.

## Two Onramps to Involvement

- A. I know there are still questions as to how you can actually get involved. I'm still finalizing some of this. But suffice it to say, there are really two onramps to involvement: You can Participate or you can Facilitate. I'll flesh these out more for you during announcements or something in a couple of weeks when I get back from vacation.