



## **Christian DNA Groups – A Workbook for the First Year** By Nigel Coles

### **Quick Start Guide**

“You don’t need a lot of equipment. You are the equipment.”  
– Matthew 10:9 The Message.

“Keep it simple.’ – Bill Shankly.

‘Everything is fine, but the ship is still headed in the wrong direction’ – Edward De Bono.

Equipment list:

- A Bible.
- An adventurous spirit.
- Two other people.
- A notebook.

Imagine your life as a follower of Jesus Christ where you actually get around to acting on those nudges from the Holy Spirit. You develop confidence in God’s creative work in your own life, to the point others actually ask you regularly what makes you who you are? You no longer begin your prayer time feeling as if you need to remind God who you are. Hopefully, starting, or joining, a DNA group will help you close that gap between your best intentions and harsh reality.

Jesus gave us what we call ‘the great commandment’. He distilled the law and the prophets into a single sentence: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself.’<sup>i</sup>

Jesus sends us with what we call ‘the great commission’: ‘go and make disciples of all nations ....’<sup>ii</sup>

Jesus instructed us with a new commandment: ‘love one another, as I have loved you.’<sup>iii</sup>

This is the Christian DNA Jesus anticipated seeing reproduced in our lives and, consequently, multiplied in many others.

If you meet for an hour each week you’ll quickly discover you have time to ask yourself some searching questions, which will potentially impact your life and the lives of those around you. Essentially, we’ll be trying to embody both the great commandment and commission and I’m simply using the term ‘missional DNA’ to focus attention on this.

The initials DNA you'll use here represent:

**Discipleship** – frankly, it's the best word we're given in the Bible, which most usefully describes the intention of somebody to live for the glory and worship of God. It's a word, which gets us into the heart of our relationship with God.

**Ngagement** – the corny bit, but maybe, therefore, a reminder that this is so often the weakest link in our relationships according to Jesus' commandment. I too often meet whole church communities who are trying to follow Jesus and living good lives, but no one notices because no one knows them!

**Authenticity** – who are we are shouts louder than what we say. The truth, we so often try to avoid, is we need to change ourselves before we even think about seeing change in others. Lives of integrity always speak volumes.

## **GETTING STARTED....**

### **The basic overview.**

Anyone who's been a Christian longer than a couple of days will recognise the crucial importance of asking Jesus 'what, on earth, do I do now?' This need never goes away, but it is easily forgotten. A DNA group is simply a mechanism you are able to use, to help you to be more likely do this, in community with others, on a regular enough basis to grow more of the character of Jesus to be seen in your life.

Essentially, what we call 'the great commandment' is the wonderful provision by Jesus, summarising how to live a life pleasing to God.

***'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'***

The genius in what Jesus says here is how, in so few words, it covers everything we need be concerned about in the whole of life. You don't believe me? Check it out for yourself! Take a closer look and you'll notice how it breaks down into three areas of relationship:

Our relationship with God – love the Lord with all you are.  
Our relationship with our neighbour – love your neighbour  
Our relationship with ourselves – as yourself.

It may be simple to say, but even those who have been following Jesus for many years, testify to this being an all-embracing, life-long challenge. Although this is undoubtedly by God's design, it is amazing how little attention we give it.

### **Weekly pattern.**

The pattern I encourage people to use is to meet weekly with two other people:

- to encourage *one another*.
- to listen *to Jesus*.
- to pray *for others*.
- to reflect on the practise of *being a disciple*.

You'll be working regularly round a cycle of action based learning by using these four familiar words to provoke questions:

**LISTENING: Where is God speaking into my life?** We begin with the word of God, listening for his voice What is he saying?

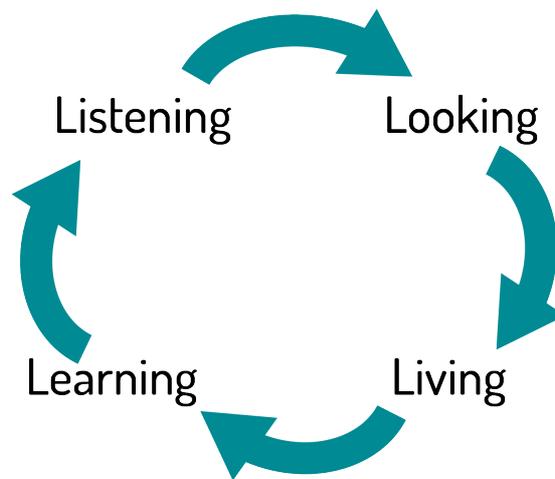
**LOOKING: Where is God at work?** What is God up to (in my life and those around me? It may be God's word causes us to look for where he is at work in our relationship with him (up), others (out), or ourselves (in). This is where using **D**iscipleship (up) **eN**gagement (out) and **A**uthenticity (in) is useful shorthand.

**LIVING: How shall I pursue my partnership with God?**

If wherever God grabs our attention is the word of God, then we need to co-operate, if we are willing to allow him to pursue his purposes through us. So, identifying how we might begin to act on his word is important.

**LEARNING: What am I learning?**

That is, from my experiences of the past week. Hopefully we shall all be encouraged at what God is up to in our life and the life of others when we stop and reflect. (This could be the starting point for your DNA group if you prefer).



Individually, as we aim to keep working round this cycle, our DNA Group becomes an anchor point which helps us ensure learning really does take place.

We may find we start in different places – for example, we encounter God in an experience during the week. What is important, however, is that we go round the cycle, if we are to understand what God is saying to us and how he is at work in the encounter.

These are all individual responsibilities, but are all better developed in community. Biblically, they're all designed for community rather than the individualistic way we approach life in the West. *“The church is at its best in twos and threes – not in two or three hundreds, or two or three thousands”*<sup>1</sup>

You can ensure there's space for each dimension, either by working through them as parts of the hour, or however long you meet for, or by treating it more as a normal conversation.

**A. What am I learning**

...or in ordinary language: What's happened this week?

DNA groups serve to help develop a weekly rhythm in our response to the character of Jesus. So, begin by simply asking what we normally ask one another when we meet 'how's it going?'

To begin with, in any relationship, (and especially us Brits!) we tend towards being pretty superficial and vague at this point. 'OK fine' is as much sharing, of what's going on inside, as most men do for a good few weeks. However, one of you will gradually introduce some more probing questions. Three basic sub-questions should cover a catch-up from one another about what's been going on for us:

- What's giving me stress?

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Sweet in the foreword of *Organic Church* by Neil Coles, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2005

- What's causing me thanksgiving?
- How am I getting on with what I was trying to practice?

Once you get used to thinking about these three things, you'll find you include them in the 'what's happened this week/how's it going?' question.

You'll be encouraged to work on a particular 'spiritual practice' each month as you work through the cycle of a DNA group. So, your own response to this question might be a reflection on the actual practice of your monthly focus, such as an aspect of prayer, or what we've done with what God spoke to us about last week, when we were together, or apart.

So we'll be encouraged to focus upon just one practice a month and work at building that more effectively into the rhythm of our life. Each week we'll be encouraged to ourselves 'how will I develop this?' and then the following week, 'how did God lead me'?

Therefore, the answer to the normal question, 'what's happened this week?' becomes a prompt to reflect on what you are learning from God. This could include what happened as a result of last week's "looking" and "listening" to the Bible (whether together, or apart) and what's going on around you (especially in the web of your relationships with other people).

Increasingly, this will be the moment of really learning what you might otherwise miss. Life gets busy, too busy often to stop and consider things enough to verbalise our thoughts to anyone else.

### **B. What is God speaking into my life?**

(LISTENING carefully to what God might be saying) What is Jesus saying to me?

I find asking the question 'where is God grabbing my attention?' about whatever passage we're reading, is the most helpful one. Use whatever works best for you, but do stop and ask! Each group will need to be asking this, or a similar question, after reading any section of the Bible together.

DNA groups serve to help develop a weekly rhythm in our response to God's words in the Bible. Here you'll use the passage provided, but with a view to allowing the particular passage to ask you some questions:

- Where is God grabbing my attention?
- What is God saying to me?

God speaks, but we often don't hear, so stopping with others to intentionally listen is hugely beneficial.

### **C. Where is God at work?**

(LOOKING to identify where God is already working, so we might join in.)

What is God up to (in my life and those around me?)

It has been startling realising how much of what God is doing we miss. A DNA group is partly about tuning in- to what God is saying, but also about opening our eyes – to what God is doing.

I find it thrilling to hear how people are discovering God is already at work, in them and those around them. The invitation is already there to join in what God is up to – hearing from him and alerting us to where his word is active already, or where he's calling us to be a catalyst, is one of the tremendous privileges of being a Christian.

Every person involved in a DNA group will find they are being encouraged to regularly focus their praying for themselves, one another, and other people. Whilst you'll be listening carefully to God's word and looking for where he's at work, it won't be apart from you, as if you were simply a spectator, but discerning more clearly where, in your own life and in interaction with others.

#### **D. How shall I pursue my partnership with God?**

Who is Jesus sending me among? (Where are we LIVING it out)

DNA Groups serve to help develop a weekly rhythm in our response to the people around us (our 'neighbours' as described by Jesus). Pray for up to three people, not yet Christians, each week. Most people tend to need to build up to three over a period of time. Inevitably, over time, other questions will arise for you along the lines of 'is God asking me to be the answer to the prayers of those around me?'

- What am I doing this week?
- What will I do this week?
  - on the basis of this passage (that is, what you believe God is speaking into your life)
  - in the light of the practice you've chosen to adopt to develop whichever habit you're focusing upon that month.

The four words, look, listen, live, and learn, merely provide a framework for a cycle of decision, practice, and reflection. You may know it as the action-reflection cycle from elsewhere. We shall work with it to help us all regularly focus upon the challenge to grow in our authenticity as followers of Jesus, to regularly focus upon the challenges to grow in our life of discipleship and in engagement with our neighbour.

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<sup>i</sup> Luke 10:27.

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

<sup>iii</sup> John 15:17.