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USING JUST THE BEGINNING

DISCIPLING NEW BELIEVERS OR THOSE RECOMMITTING THEIR LIVES TO JESUS

Providing you are reaching out in some way and being effective then from time to time, you will gather alongside you individuals or small groups of people who have heard and answered Jesus' call to follow Him. This is the most important life-changing, life-impacting and life-enhancing decision a person can ever make which is why we as disciplers and group leaders carry the responsibility to follow up and nurture these new babies in the Kingdom from the very beginning.

Their decision to follow Jesus needs reviewing and explaining further in order for the new disciple to be clear on what they have done, to receive assurance of forgiveness, peace of mind and the reassurance they are loved and accepted. They also need to be given the opportunity to grow in confidence in their relationship with Father God with other members of a small group and to begin praying with and for those around them.

When we have been believers for many years we easily forget the significant cultural transition the new disciple has to make from the 'world' into God's Kingdom. Whether we realise it or not God's family has a language, behaviour and tacit level of expectation all of its own:

- ❖ We use unusual or outdated words as commonplace i.e. Sabbath, atonement, Lord, etc. We talk about the 'power in the blood' or being 'washed in the blood'; these all need explanation.

- ❖ We hope the individual will join a local small group and begin to share and talk to people about themselves and their spiritual journey. This can be very challenging, even threatening, especially when most group members are more than likely to be complete strangers.
- ❖ We expect these gatherings to take place in the intimacy of people's homes. In many communities people NEVER go inside someone's house.

Just the Beginning is the tool we have designed to assist this initial follow up and enable a new disciple to make this transition from one kingdom to another. Hopefully, it will result in the new disciple growing in excitement at being part of God's family and nurturing a hunger and desire to go on following Jesus whatever the personal cost to them might be.

Friendship first

New disciples rarely come out of no-where (although that does happen of course). Usually there is a Christian believer somewhere in the social network of the person who witnesses by both lifestyle and testimony. We do not need to have a first class degree in theology or have been a church member for 20 years to qualify us to nurture a new disciple so when someone makes a commitment to follow Jesus in these circumstances, if at all possible, I suggest the same friend, perhaps with an additional person, takes on the responsibility of follow up and nurture. In this context, friendship will not need to be built from scratch and hopefully the new disciple will simply be absorbed into an already existing small group friendship and social network. However, if no obvious existing personal friendship exists then one needs to be built. In both cases the disciple-maker/leader must know, first and foremost,

their responsibility to the new disciple is not to be an expert on all matters of Christian doctrine or to impart all they have learned about the Bible over the last 20 years (!) but just to *be a true friend*. This means we must be willing to stop talking ourselves, *listen carefully* to the questions and any doubts that may be expressed, to offer support and encouragement and only then gently offer relevant instruction.

'Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct...' 2 Timothy: 2:23-25

Ratio two to one

Friendships of trust are rarely formed in relationship groups larger than 2 or 3. If there is no existing social relationship or network then I advise that a pair of disciples who have recently completed New Beginnings be encouraged to take on the responsibility of the follow up and nurture of one individual. This will give their confidence a boost as they see God using them as well as multiplying the discipleship team. It also brings consistency to the relationship and avoids conflicting input by too many different voices being involved at the start.

If your discipleship base is still small and you have more than one new disciple in need of nurture then this may involve some doubling up out of necessity. Teams of two or three also provide a security safeguard should there ever be any accusation or inappropriate behaviour from either party.

Informal accountability

Think about this...if we review one section of Just the Beginning with one person each week (using the loose structure in the guidelines that follow) we are actually committing to giving quite a lot of our time to one individual over the next ten weeks. If our discipleship base is still small and we are doubling up in the process then we may well be giving 3 or more hours each week just to the follow up and nurture of new disciples; when this is multiplied over the weeks it will take to work through the process this booklet outlines then this becomes a very significant time investment indeed. In view of this it is not unreasonable to set out our stall of expectation for the relationship as early as possible by saying truthfully that in view of our own commitment of time to the relationship we expect the believer to invest their own time too. This is done by expecting them to:

- 1) Read the relevant section of the booklet BEFORE the meeting and
- 2) Make every effort to arrive promptly.

This openness and honesty helps nurture a culture of mutual honour from the outset and avoids differing unspoken expectations that could easily lead to ungodly resentments and disagreements when they are not met.

One hour

There is no need for these meetings to be any more than one hour in length unless they are lengthened by mutual consent. You can choose to be reachable at other times through the release of your email address, mobile number etc. Little and often is the name of the game.

One hour (or an hour and a half maximum) is a perfectly adequate amount of time to chat, share, answer questions and spend a few

moments praying for one another. I know of one disciple-maker who has a very time-consuming and stressful job, leads a church and home group and has a young family but still effectively discipled numerous believers each week using this method.

Setting

Until our relationship with the new disciple has had time to grow, the new disciple may be nervous about inviting us into their home or coming to ours and we especially want to avoid all behaviour that might replicate the follow up methods of cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses. Therefore, consider meeting in a non-threatening public environment e.g. *Costas* or *Sub-way* where we can sit informally on sofas, just 'hang out' and be 'normal'! We can also indulge in a cake or bowl of soup in order to chat and share over a meal.

If you think you will feel self-conscious about praying for one another in such a public setting then simply choose not to adopt a traditional prayer posture (bowed head and eyes shut) and pray conversationally with eyes open instead. Remember, this is NOT the setting for deep prayer ministry or deliverance; although these things may happen in time as people progress through the discipleship process.

If you choose to meet in a private coffee shop and do not eat then check with the owner beforehand that he/she will not mind you taking up a table for around an hour. It would also be considerate to avoid busy times.

Something social

It is a religious mind-set that causes us to think that unless we are involved in some aspect of 'proper' Christian ministry (e.g. a prayer

meeting or Bible study] then what we are doing is a waste of time for building God's Kingdom. This is actually a misguided approach: many deep and lasting friendships are formed in the sharing of some 'down time' together e.g. an outing to the cinema, chatting on a ramble or jog or laughing together in the swimming pool. Doing social activities together helps to broaden the new disciple's friendship base and build a sense of belonging and acceptance which is vital to their continuing on their journey with Jesus.

Reappraise the relationship

In view of the fact we are giving our time to nurture individuals and because this is not the only thing we do with our time, it behoves us to regularly take stock of what we are doing and challenge the commitment of those who consistently fail to read the relevant section of the notes or who are repeatedly late or fail to show without good reason. Some of those we seek to nurture may actually be well known attention seekers or (I hate to say it) time wasters who have done the circuit of almost every local church. These are needy people who are to be pitied rather than blamed and who are completely capable of having their unresolved spiritual issues healed **providing they are willing** to give the time, make the commitment and persevere with the effort it takes to be free. The commitment must be MUTUAL, not just on our side otherwise it will not work. When this scenario happens we need to seek Father's wisdom in prayer to know which relationships to let go of and which to stick at. Often we are asked to persevere with a relationship even when there are no visible signs of commitment to the relationship from the other side and that is hard.

USING JUST THE BEGINNING FOR FOLLOW UP AND NURTURE

The following pages contain guidelines and conversation pointers for using Just the Beginning on an informal low-key 2:1 friendship basis with a new believer or someone who has recently recommitted their life to Jesus.

Please write your own personal comments or reminders around the printed text or use the notes page at the end of each session. It would not be advisable to try to follow the notes word for word as it is impossible to script a conversation. For this reason it is probably best to NOT take this Leader's Guide with you to a meeting in a coffee shop; instead, use a highlighter pen to highlight text in your own personal copy of Just the Beginning which may prompt your memory. Alternatively, jot a few notes drawn from the guidelines across the top of the page or into the margin of your copy of the booklet. Try to make the conversation as informal and natural as possible by avoiding coming across as a teacher instructing a pupil.

If you decide not to use the content of the guidelines at all then please consider the following loose structure for an hour-long meeting:

- a. Ice breaker allowing you to get to know one another better.
- b. Review of relevant section of Just the Beginning.
- c. Reaffirm the main teaching point.
- d. Share and pray for one another.
- e. Arrange the next meeting.

GROUP LEADER'S PREPARATION

THIS WILL BE THE SAME EVERY WEEK.

1. Make sure your new disciple has a copy of Just the Beginning. If not you can download the reproducible pdf file from the members section of the web-site [www.newbeginningsdiscipleship.com] and print off a copy for them.
2. Contact the new disciple and your third group member by phone to confirm the venue, location, date and time of your first meeting. Subsequent meetings should also be confirmed if necessary.
3. Ask both the disciple and your third group member to re-read the appropriate section of the booklet prior to each week's meeting. It will be an opportunity for any questions the new disciple has to be discussed, explained and reviewed. It will also be an opportunity for them to receive reassurance and pastoral prayer. Be careful to keep the main thing the main thing and not get side-tracked down too many doggy trails!
4. Make sure you revise the same section each week. In preparation for your first meeting make sure you are confident in using the content of *Appendix A Is God Real?*

5. Do not expect a brand new believer to have mature concepts about God. Allow them to talk freely but make a mental note of any misconceptions you pick up and ensure you correct lovingly and gently using scripture wherever possible. Be mindful of 2 Timothy 2:23-25!
6. Take your Bible and diary (to arrange the next meeting).
7. Ahead of your meeting pray for the new disciple and your planned time together. If you have time then it would be ideal for you and your third group member to meet together to do this but it may not always be possible. Consider the following points when you pray:
 - a. Ask the Holy Spirit to come and sit with you as you talk and share together.
 - b. Invite Him to be Lord of all the conversation and ask for His help to cement your small group relationship with genuine loving care, compassion and lasting friendship.
 - c. Make a declaration out loud to bind the enemy, making him ineffective from interfering, causing confusion or stealing what Father God intends to be achieved through the meeting.
 - d. Ask the Holy Spirit to apply the protection of the blood of Jesus over the travel arrangements to and from the meeting, the meeting itself and everyone involved.
 - e. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any hidden needs the disciple may have.
 - f. Ask God to give you all a deeper hunger for Him and acknowledge your own desire to grow spiritually through exercising this ministry of discipleship.

WELCOME TO GOD'S KINGDOM

1. Getting to know you time: in this first meeting give opportunity to general conversation that will help you get to know a little about the person's background. Understand your relationship will deepen and grow over a period of time so you do not need to know about every aspect of who they are or what has happened in their life in this first meeting. Consider talking around one or more of the following areas:
 - a. Where do they live? How did that come about?
 - b. What is their current situation in terms of family?
 - c. ... or work?
 - d. ... or interests/hobbies?
 - e. Whole section 10-15 minutes.
2. Discuss what drew them to follow Jesus. Do not be surprised if they can identify God having been at work in their life over a long period of time. Consider talking around one or more of the following:
 - a. What was going on in their life at the time?

- b. Can they identify the moment where they became aware of God breaking into their life in some way? When He began to speak to them?
 - c. Gently ask them to reaffirm what they think they have done in committing to be a follower/disciple of Jesus.
 - i. If they talk about sin and forgiveness, reassure them of God's promise of a new beginning with Him.
 - ii. You may wish to turn to *Appendix A - Is God Real?* and review the content of the prayer on p.38 of *Just the Beginning*.
 - iii. If you are uncertain whether someone has really responded to Jesus' call then encourage them to pray the prayer again now.
 - iv. Follow this by praying a short prayer for them.
 - v. Invite the Holy Spirit to come (this could be interesting in *Costas!*).
 - d. Whole section 25 minutes.
3. Review the scripture and highlighted text at the bottom of p.5 of *Just the Beginning*. Explain that Jesus wants us to be aware of His closeness with us as much as possible which means we have to begin to build an ongoing relationship with Him.
- a. Talk about how we do this through prayer, reading the Bible and fellowship with other members of God's family.

- b. If the person has not yet got a Bible then consider one of the following options:
 - i. Give them one.
 - ii. Advise them on what translation might be good for them [New Beginnings materials generally use the NIV translation].
 - iii. Go to the shops with them to buy one.
- c. Chat around the issue of fellowship, especially that we grow better when we are together:
 - i. Does the person have an existing church preference or connection? If so, ask if they want you to connect them to someone in that place? Have they already done that themselves?
 - ii. If there is no existing church preference or connection then invite the person to your own home group/fellowship group and encourage them to become a part of your believing family for the time being.
- d. Understand that different personalities connect with God and relate to Him in differing ways: some prefer noise and modern music whereas others find God in the peace and formality of organised liturgy. Our job is not to try to coerce the new believer into joining our preferred family grouping but rather to encourage them to want to get connected as soon as possible into whatever part of God's family they feel is most relevant to them.

- e. Experience shows that people will stay connected where they feel loved, valued and sense they belong. Whilst an individual might express a preference for a certain church they may never go on to be followed up, nurtured or gain that sense of belonging in that environment which is why your weekly nurture meeting is so important.
 - f. Whole section 15 minutes.
4. Pray for one another.
- a. Encourage the new believer to begin praying for others as soon as possible. If you pray conversationally and naturally this will be easier for them to emulate and reproduce.
 - b. Share something you can ask the new believer to pray about for you.
 - c. Whole section 5-10 minutes.
5. Arrange the next meeting.

AFTER THE SESSION:

1. Telephone, email or visit the disciple as the Holy Spirit guides you. Try to avoid 'crowding' them.
2. Be aware that until people have dealt with their unresolved spiritual issues there may be a real spiritual battle for them to turn up each week. Pray for each new believer you are nurturing every day this week and visit individuals as necessary.
3. Prepare for next week's meeting.

