Cohorts defined

In ancient times, a cohort was a military unit, one of ten divisions in a Roman legion. Today, it means any group of individuals with something in common.

Discipleship naturally happened simply from a group of people hanging out and growing together. And discipleship will not happen overnight. To understand what discipleship is on a deeper level, we must understand what discipleship is not. It's not a small care group of men and women who will cry on each other's shoulders because of trials and struggles. While this is a part of it, this is not the main goal of a discipleship cohort. It's also not about the numbers. Whether you have three or twenty in a discipleship group. What matters most is the quality of relationships you build with one another and the quality of the relationship each person has with God. Cohort groups free us up to engage in meaningful and authentic relationships. When two (or three, or four) broken people come together and have nothing to hide, no one to impress, no mask they are trying to put on, it becomes much easier to engage in honest relationships. Honest relationships are at the center of effective discipleship.

A Discipleship Cohort is a group of 3-6 people who will commit to doing community while vertically pursuing the life of Jesus together. Cohorts use the strategy of Jesus to Invite, Invest, and Inspire.

INVITE

Invite Means Choosing. It's about identifying and pursuing others with an invitation to join a cohort group and journey together. We all long to belong and there is an honor to be included and part of a team. Cohorts can last 3-5 months or even longer to multiply into new cohorts.

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INVEST

Invest Means Consistency. It's about commitment and making the priority of time to invest in each other regularly. Cohorts should try to meet often and consistently; weekly or every other week. Cohorts can meet in restaurants, coffee shops, or homes.

Invest Means Content. It's about selecting the right material the cohort will study together, discuss, and apply to their lives. Cohorts can choose from resources like the VP Podcast, Vertical Pursuit Discipleship Book, or other bible study resources.

Invest Means Caring. It's about showing support and encouragement for each other. Care is about helping to meet the practical, spiritual, and emotional needs of each other. It's about creating a safe place to be authentic, transparent to share struggles, receive prayer, and help in confidence and trust.

Invest Means Cultivating. It's about reaping what you sow. You get out of community and relationships what you put into them. Doing life together and sharing life experiences forms bonds and memories that can last a lifetime. Moving beyond a Bible study and actually going on adventures, retreats, mission trips, or just celebrating special occasions together can reap a harvest of relational and spiritual fruit.

INSPIRE

Inspire Means Championing. It's about sharpening each other and cheering each other towards achieving greater things and living out the Jesus life. Championing can be challenging each other, motivating each other, and celebrating each other as we seek to live out the values of Jesus. Faith and courage can be contagious and spurring one another on to do things that in and of ourselves would lack the tenacity to do alone.

Inspire Means Creating. It's about expanding and making more disciples through multiplication. All healthy things grow and need to reproduce. Inspiration is the act of affirming and empowering others to start new cohorts to disciple more people.



Using the VP discipleship triad

When Jesus was mentoring his disciples, he spent time incorporating conversations centered around knowing, being, and doing. Knowing who we are in Christ, then being who we are in Christ, leads us to do the work of Christ. As we meet and share our lives together through Bible study and sharing, we grow in our knowledge of Christ. Being is related to our identity as children of God. And as ones with knowledge of God and awareness of our identity as God's ambassadors, we do the works of the kingdom.



When you meet as a cohort, be sure to not just grow in knowledge but take the time to discuss how that knowledge is affecting your being. Each cohort time should also incorporate action steps to live out the doing. Jesus would often send out the disciples with a mission of doing or trying. As the disciples went out and applied what he commanded, they would learn first hand from putting into practice what they were learning. Think of it as trial and error. Sometimes doing was met with success and other times with failure.

Cohorts should be a safe place to circle back and process with your friends what is working and what is not. It's in the processing space that others can rework their strategy of doing and make the changes to try again. Following Jesus in the doing is not about not failing; it's about failing forward and having a support team to cheer you on in the process.

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TEN PRACTICES TO LEADING A HEALTHY COHORT

Don't Do All The Talking. The best leaders facilitate conversations rather than dispensing information. The best leaders strive to facilitate the conversation and keep it moving from member to member rather than talking to the members.

Be Comfortable With Silence. Embrace the 15 seconds of silence, which may seem like an eternity. Realize that through silence, the Holy Spirit is working on people. Learn to be comfortable with ambiguity.

Be A Good Listener. So simple yet so hard to do. Don't just listen – actively listen. James 1:19 tells us to be slow to speak and quick to listen. The best leaders listen with their eyes and ears.

Don't Answer Your Own Questions. The whole purpose of asking the question is to create an environment where group members feel safe to share. It's not about getting the right answer. When people are silent with some of these questions, embrace the silence. If no one really speaks you could say something like, "Paul, you look like you were going to say something…"

Ask Open-Ended Questions. Open-ended questions help to tell more than a simple yes or no. Questions like, "What did you like about the verse or chapter of the book?" will bring up more than yes/no questions. Use what or how questions to get people to open up.

Make Sure Everyone Understands The Purpose Of The Cohort From Day One. Your job as a leader is to cast a compelling vision. Keep that purpose at the forefront of every meeting and look for ways to promote vision-casting.



Try To Involve Everyone. Your cohort might be too big if everyone isn't able to speak their thoughts. Cohorts of over eight members will have difficulty doing this. In those cases, it's best to divide the cohort in half.

Remember, The Focus Is Not On Getting Through The Material. Know that if you are very task-oriented, you may concentrate more on getting through the study than allowing members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

Pray. Pray before your meeting, after your meeting, and during meetings. Pray in-between cohort meetings. Ask God for his help and leading. It is helpful to make a list of prayer requests and keep them on a bedside table so you can be very specific in your prayer request.

Remember That God Is In Charge. You were not selected to lead this cohort on your own; God chose you, He will be with you. Trust in His power and lean on him for support.

Cohorts
use the strategy
of Jesus to Invite,
Invest, and
Inspire.

HOW TO START YOUR DISCIPLESHIP COHORT

Pray: Take a few weeks and prayerfully consider two or three others you can invite into the cohort.

Invite: Personally approach each person. You might ask something like, "The Lord has placed you on my heart. Would you be willing to join me and one or two others on a weekly journey to explore a better life?" Ask each person to prayerfully consider the invitation. Specifically, ask them to not respond immediately but to really examine whether they have the time and the heart for the journey.

Communicate: If you are using resources, be sure everyone has what they need ahead of time, and find a time everyone will meet consistently.

Expectations: People need a clear sense of what is expected of them. Talk about vulnerability, commitment, and what potential the group has to multiply to start new cohorts.

Time & Place: Set the first regular time together and get started. Quiet places are best to develop transparency and intimacy. At the first gathering, ask each person why they decided to commit to the cohort and what they hope to get out of it.

Guide & Facilitate: Take time and move at a comfortable pace. Encourage questions. Address personal matters. Life will happen while you are together. The Vertical Pursuit resources are only tools, not something to check off your to-do-list. Remember, discipling cannot be forced through a curriculum. Discipling relationships require an individualized approach that takes into account the unique growth of those involved. The goal is Christ-likeness, not to complete the curriculum. It's all about loving God and each other.

Keys For Growth: The group will only go as deep as your willingness to be vulnerable, honest, and transparent. Intimacy, accountability, and transparency are paramount.

Multiplication: Within your cohort, always look for those who may launch out and start a new cohort on their own. When the time is right, it's important to celebrate and encourage others to step out on their own to start a new cohort.


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Join the VP discipleship tribe by leading a cohort today!

Jesus intentionally invested himself in the lives of a few men. He ministered to large crowds but went deep with a small group. This idea goes against our Western philosophy that everything bigger is better. Jesus understood the exponential impact of twelve men on the world. Limited on earth by time, Jesus could not train crowds of people, but He could impact the lives of a few who would then disciple others.

Imagine with me. What could happen if we followed the example of Jesus? Imagine the impact of a small group of Christ-followers with whom we invested not only our knowledge but our very lives. I believe the result would be exponential.

Think of those who have, or are, investing in your spiritual growth. Be sure to express your gratitude for their influence in your life. Begin praying about who God is calling you to help grow spiritually. Discipleship is about the continual investment in others. Let's make disciples who make other disciples.

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