

Disciplehouse Startup Guide

Rhythm,
community
& mission



VALUES



Rhythm

Closeness to Jesus and prayer as a natural part of everyday life.
Fixed breaks during the week where body, head and heart find rest.



Community

Share your faith, your life, and pray together with the collective.
Be part of a church community.



Mission

Use your gifts to love God and people through practical actions.
Share Jesus with those God has placed in your life.



Disciplehouse startup guide

A Disciplehouse is a group of people who live together in a collective. A group that individually and together practice healthy and biblical rhythms in everyday life. The purpose is to facilitate more people to get to know Jesus better, gain experience in living as followers of Jesus in their everyday lives and create a home with that as a starting point.

Disciplehouses basically find themselves together and arrange their own place to live. They live together and meet regularly for weekly gatherings. All disciple houses need a house mentor and a clear ownership of the congregation/organization. The house mentor guides and holds the collective accountable in the disciplehouse values.

Over the next five weeks, this booklet will guide you through the conversations necessary to find your rhythm as a sustainable and viable Disciplehouse. The guide is written in a way that makes it easy to read aloud as part of a conversation, and allows everyone to participate in the decisions that need to be made.

Table of contents

Week 1: Construct our Disciplehouse (w/house mentor)	2
Week 2: Weekly Gathering (w/house mentor)	6
Week 3: Weekly Gathering Assessment	12
Week 4: My Sacred Rhythm	14
Week 5: Our Vision (w/house mentor)	20
Our Disciplehouse Plan	22
Tips & Guidance	24

Week 1

Build our

Disciplehouse

Today's gathering, with house mentor

The weekly gathering usually starts with eating dinner together before we start the targeted conversation and content. Today we have a lot to work through, so we start the conversation while we are eating.

The goal for the day is to settle a good deal of the basic details surrounding everyday life in the disciplehouse. By settling these decisions early, it will be an easier transition into the shared rhythms of the house.

Welcome and introduction (15 minutes)

We take a round where everyone introduces themselves.

Do you have siblings? Where are you in the sibling group?

What do you like about the idea of Disciplehouse?

If you had written a bestseller, what kind of book would it be?

The House Mentor (2 minutes)

All disciplehouses have a house mentor who follows up with you regularly, and a clear ownership of a local church or organization. I am your house mentor; a guide and helper for you throughout the year. I will meet with you at least every other month, and preferably more often in the start-up phase. When we meet, I will be happy to share something, and to use a questionnaire as a starting point for conversation about life individually and in the disciplehouse.

Different roles in the house (5 minutes)

Disciplehouse has no leader in the house, but we strongly recommend that you land different roles with clear areas of responsibility. The coordinators own the responsibility and delegate tasks based on this. Here are some tips for coordinator roles:

- **Communication:** Responsible for internal communication, gathering times, clarifying postponements and dialogue with house mentor.
- **Leading the weekly gathering:** Responsible for leading through the weekly gathering; ensuring that everyone joins the conversation and that we stay focused.
- **Meals:** Responsible for organizing and delegating communal meals, purchasing and distributing payment.
- **Practical:** Responsible for organizing and delegating housework, laundry, and routines for a good home.
- **Social:** Responsible for celebrations and social events for the house.
- **Mission:** Responsible for regular outreach initiatives at the house.

A disciplehouse is something that must be owned and created by you who live here; you live together as a kind of family and create your home.

We won't be choosing who has these different roles right now, but we'll come back to that throughout this guide. Think about what you think you'd be a good fit for, and what you want to contribute to the community.

Fixed time for the weekly gathering (10 minutes)

Disciplehouse is the regular weekly gathering that everyone prioritizes. What day is convenient for everyone to meet? Everyone eats dinner, so the easiest thing is often to meet around a dinner table, with time to talk together. Gathering in the evening can also be a good thing, but this time is more likely to clash with other activities. We set aside at least an hour and a half for the weekly gathering (two hours if it includes dinner).

We recommend that you choose Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday as your fixed day, as Friday and weekends are often vulnerable to holidays and travel. What day and time is suitable? Review and agree on a mutual commitment.

Communication channel (5 minutes)

The next thing we need to talk about is how we will communicate together. Here you can create a Messenger group or other form of message chat.

Is one of you going to be responsible for communications? You get everyone on a common platform and make sure everyone is actively using the platform and using it in a good way.

Food and serving (10 minutes)

It's a good idea to agree on a system for preparing dinner or arranging snacks for the weekly gathering. If you want a fixed dinner or meals together several days a week, you can, for example, have a joint food account.

It's a good idea to make a list of the rotation you follow for food responsibility, as well as talk through how you'll divide the cost fairly. If one of you loves to cook, this could be a regular task for one person. You could also do take-out.

- **How do we do it with food/snacks and weekly gathering?**
- **Will someone be responsible for the food and organize this?**

House values (45 minutes)

Trust and predictability are keys to vulnerability and honesty. When we are going to be real and honest with each other, we need to be able to trust that what is shared personally in the gathering will not be shared outside the group.

What do I need to feel good?

What does it take for me to feel safe?

We write down sentences we agree on here. Hang them up visibly in the house.

The next three weeks

We will continue the process of building our Disciplehouse for the next three weeks. I, the house mentor, will also be there in weeks 2 and 5. Next week we will talk specifically about the regular weekly gathering and what it will contain. In week 3 you will test a weekly gathering without me. In week 4 you will work on personal goals and work specifically on period goals for rhythm, community and mission. In week 5 I will join again, and together we will agree on and land our Disciplehouse plan for the coming year.

Until next time

When we meet next week, everyone will share more about themselves. Over the next few weeks and months, we will encourage everyone to share their life and faith stories with each other, but we will start small. Honesty, vulnerability, and trust are something that must grow, not something we can expect. We share what we feel ready to share.

For next week's gathering, we want everyone to come prepared to share something about themselves that you would like the rest of us to know. Something from your job, your studies, your background, your family, something you like to do, or an experience that was special to you. To make this easier; **bring a physical thing that you can use as a starting point when sharing.** Like a picture, a book, a trophy, or something else that describes what you are going to share.

End the gathering with a prayer and make sure everyone agrees on the plan for next week's gathering; time, place, and what will be served..

Week 2

The weekly gathering

Today's gathering, with house mentor

Today we will get to know each other better by sharing something from our own lives, and there will be room for questions. Relax, be curious, make room for laughter and having fun together.

Our goal for the second part of the gathering is to specify what we want a regular weekly gathering to look like - and how we can do some unusual weekly gatherings from time to time.

Share about yourself (1 hour)

If you have eaten, move to the sofa or somewhere you can sit comfortably and hear and see each other well.

We will get to know each other better by showing the thing you have brought and sharing something about yourself with the others. Remember that trust and vulnerability are built over time through faithful surrender to each other and sharing experiences together. Be open and show each other respect now as we get to know each other better.

Set aside 45 minutes to 1 hour for this part. Divide the time by the number of people in the group and set a countdown so everyone gets an equal amount of time. Don't interrupt people while they're sharing, and use the remaining time to ask questions and get to know each other better.

Designing our weekly gathering (2 minutes)

Last session we agreed on a fixed time each week where we prioritize the weekly gathering. Today we are going to talk about what the gathering should contain. The goal for the next session is to come up with a model for what your weekly gathering should look like, which you will test in practice next week.

Find a sheet of paper on the table between you where you can write down the program and content for the weekly gathering you are attending.

Reading the Bible together (15 minutes)

The foundation of a Disciplehouse is our shared desire to follow Jesus in our daily lives. The Bible is our source for understanding what that looks like, and we want it to be the focus of our gatherings. The Bible gives life, endurance, and produces fruit (Luke 8:11;15, Hebrews 4:12). The Bible was written to be read aloud together and discussed. Remember, God is not afraid of questions.

When you have the weekly gathering; set aside 30 minutes to 1 hour of the gathering to read the Bible together and discuss the text. End with the questions: “How does what we read/talked about affect the life I live?” and “Is there anything I should do/listen to/read for next weekly gathering?”.

We choose in advance where we will read, and preferably for at least a month at a time. Look through the list of tips for different ways to read the Bible. We take a look at what we could think of, and decide what we want to test next week.

Tips for reading the Bible together

Choose a book of the Bible to read together, based on the questions below. You may want to start with the Gospel of Mark.

- *One of you reads the text aloud.*
- *Another person retells what one remembers. The others supplement.*
- *What does the text say about God, Jesus, the Spirit, or God's plan?*
- *What does the text say about us humans?*
- *What can I do, and what do I need to change?*
- *Who else needs to hear this?*

Gratitude & Honesty (15 minutes)

We will now agree on how to do part two of the weekly gathering. Part two focuses on talking honestly about life together, and gathering each other where life is and in following Jesus. Here it is good to start lightly and with gratitude. Feel free to take a look at the following:

- Share something that has been fun or exciting in the last week.
- Share something you are grateful for this week.

We then move on to honesty and accountability. As Christians, we are called to put off the sin that weighs us down and binds us (James 5:16a). Here we can (a) continue an honest conversation based on the first part and the input from the Bible, or (b) choose one of the following topics as a starting point. In the initial phase, it is good to use this time to let each person share their faith and life story. Take a round of how you could do this part.

Topics for honest conversations

- *Have you given Jesus room in your life this past week?*
- *Do you live in balance between activities and relaxation?*
- *Have you given your loved ones respect, understanding or generosity?*
- *Have you allowed yourself to escape into unhealthy dreams about others?*
- *Do you control money or does money control you? Do you give?*
- *Do you use your God-given talents to build society? Does your faith influence your work and/or study routine?*
- *How do you take responsibility for creation?*
- *Is there someone you need to ask for forgiveness or to forgive?*
- *Have you read the Bible this week and heard Jesus speak to you? How does that affect your daily life?*
- *Are you honest with those around you? Do you allow others to be honest with you about your blind spots?*

Prayer & intercession (10 minutes)

As followers of Jesus, we are called to share and pray for people who do not know Jesus (Luke 10:1, Romans 10:1). Here, all of us in the house should choose 1-3 names of friends/relatives that we can pray for together. Ask for:

- That God will draw those close to Him (John 6:44)
- That we or someone else should share the gospel with them (Col 4:3-6)
- That they will hear and believe God, and see their need for forgiveness and restoration (John 16:7-14)
- That they should confess Jesus as Lord, trust in Him, grow in faith, bear fruit (Romans 10:9; Col. 2:6-7; Luke 8:15, John 15:9-15)

A good way to end the weekly gathering is:

- Be quiet and listen to God together.
- Please share if you have any thoughts or pictures.
- Pray the "Our Father" together and read the blessing.

Alternative weekly gathering (10 minutes)

The weekly gatherings do not always have to follow the recipe you have worked with today. Community and mission are two of the headings in Disciplehouse. These can be made concrete in alternative family evenings for you at the house for a few weeks, or as mission evenings where you practically share Jesus further with words or actions. Look at the list of tips and have a round where you share your thoughts.

Tips for «family nights»

Spend time together in a way that allows you to get to know each other better and see new sides of each other. Example: Don't watch a movie at home; play a game together or go to an activity.

Game night, paddle tennis, picnic, birthday party, bowling, cooking night, overnight stay, mini golf, kayaking, cinema, concert, theater.

Tips for «mission nights»

An activity that takes you out of the living room and into gathering people who need Jesus in a very concrete way through word and action. Be a blessing together for someone outside the house.

Clean up the neighborhood, cook for a neighbor, go on a prayer walk, support the school team in an activity, give away clothes, join a local church at a mission event.

Until next time (5 minutes)

When we meet next time, we will test out a weekly gathering based on the plan we made today.

End the gathering with a prayer and make sure everyone agrees on the plan for next week's gathering; time, place, and what will be served..

Week 3

Test our Weekly Gathering

Today's gathering, without a house mentor

Today we are going to try to organize a weekly gathering. Last gathering we planned what a weekly gathering for us might look like. We are now going to test this out in practice, so that together we get experience of a weekly gathering before we land the final framework together with the house mentor in two weeks.

Weekly gathering (2 hours)

We are conducting a weekly gathering as we outlined last week.

Evaluation (10 minutes)

Let's take a round where each person briefly shares something they liked about the gathering and something they wish was different. Note it in the box below while it's fresh in their minds, and we'll take the time to evaluate and plan the way forward for the weekly gathering in two weeks.

When we meet next week, we will focus on our personal rhythm and make this concrete by working on our own goals under the headings of rhythm, community, and mission.

End the gathering with a prayer and make sure everyone agrees on the plan for next week's gathering; time, place, and food.

What worked well?

What could have been different?

Week 4

My Rhythm

Today's gathering, without a house mentor

Today we will work on our personal rhythms as followers of Jesus for the period we are here in Disciplehouse together. We will concretize this personal rhythm by setting 1-2 personal half-year goals under the headings of rhythm, community and mission.

Rhythm, community & mission (15 minutes)

Living and working so closely with others who share the desire to live for Jesus is a unique privilege and an opportunity to be a support and help for each other in becoming more like Jesus.

Rhythm is about my relationship with Jesus. Learning to hear his voice, comfort and guidance. Closeness to Jesus and prayer become a natural part of everyday life. You have regular breaks during the week where body, head and heart can rest.

Community is about standing together with other believers — having people around you with whom you actively share your faith, joys, challenges, and your grief. This includes both a close, smaller group and the wider church family.

Mission is about living for something bigger — using your unique gifting wherever Jesus leads you, both through your actions and by speaking about Him to the people placed in your life.

We'll go around and share the associations we have with these terms so we can build a shared understanding.

Setting personal goals (5 minutes)

We're now going to set personal goals for this period under the three headings. A recommended timeframe is the next six months, but you're free to agree on a different period together. Go ahead and schedule a weekly gathering at the end of that period where you can share how things went and set new goals for the next stretch.

The goals you set should motivate growth in your life with Jesus. Feel free to try something new. Maybe it's praying fixed daily prayers from a prayerbook. Maybe you've never gone regularly to confession or spiritual care. Maybe this is the time to share your faith story with your classmates or colleagues.

We'll take plenty of time with each category so you can think both on your own and out loud together. Start from where you are right now — what matters in your life at this moment. Don't try to overhaul everything at once. Set goals that you can actually live with, goals that can become part of your ongoing rhythm. It's better to decide to read the Bible for 10 minutes on weekdays than an hour every single day.

Make your goals measurable so you can clearly answer whether you've reached them at the end of the period. And don't assume you have to do everything alone. Remember that the house is around you — use one another actively to stay accountable and help each other reach the goals.

Take a moment now to agree on the timeframe for your goals, and schedule the follow-up gathering in one of your weekly gatherings at the end of that period.

Rhythm (25 minutes)

Choose one or two goals for your daily rhythm with Jesus. Start by taking 10 minutes on your own to think, pray, and draft your goals. Then spend 10 minutes sharing your thoughts with each other and giving feedback. Use the final 5 minutes to settle on your goals and write them down somewhere you'll see them regularly.

Rhythm: Tips for goals

- **Bible Reading:** *Read Scripture in different ways — an entire book at a time, just a few verses that you let sink in, study a passage in depth, read together with others, follow a reading plan or an app.*
- **Prayer:** *Pray with others, make specific prayer lists, use fixed prayers (such as daily office prayers), worship and adoration.*
- **Sunday Service:** *Take part in your church's celebration of the risen Jesus.*
- **Inspirational Gatherings:** *Join study evenings, prayer gatherings, and larger gatherings.*
- **Balance:** *Cultivate balance between work and rest, school and exercise, hobbies and serving in the church.*
- **Study:** *Read Christian books. Listen to a podcast series.*
- **Fasting:** *Fast from TV, internet, your phone, or food.*
- **Retreat:** *Go on a Christian retreat.*
- **The Holy Spirit:** *Listen for the Spirit throughout the day. What is He prompting you toward? Who is He sending you to?*
- **Discipleship:** *Do you have a mentor or spiritual guide you meet with regularly? Is there someone you are investing in yourself?*

Community (25 minutes)

Choose one or two goals that express healthy relationships and generosity. Start by taking 10 minutes on your own to think, pray, and draft possible goals. Then spend 10 minutes sharing your thoughts with each other and giving feedback. Use the final 5 minutes to settle on your goals and write them down somewhere you'll see them regularly.

Community: Tips for goals

- ***Inclusive/outward:*** *An inviting culture in the collective; an open community where visitors are invited in and feel a sense of belonging in the community.*
- ***Forgiveness:*** *go to communion, confess your sins to someone you trust, ask others for forgiveness.*
- ***Worship:*** *Where is my place in the worship service? Where do I celebrate that Jesus lives together with other Christians?*
- ***Simpler lifestyle:*** *drop activities in favor of relationships. Spend less time on TV, computers and games and more time being quiet. Don't buy more, but use what you have.*
- ***Eat:*** *use meals to invite Christians and non-Christians into your circle of friends.*

Mission (25 minutes)

Choose one or two goals that express healthy relationships and generosity. Start by taking 10 minutes on your own to think, pray, and draft possible goals. Then spend 10 minutes sharing your thoughts with each other and giving feedback. Use the final 5 minutes to settle on your goals and write them down somewhere you'll see them regularly.

Mission: Tips for goals

- **Service:** *What are your gifts and strengths? How are you using them to serve others? Do you have a specific task or area you want to contribute to?*
- **Evangelism:** *Share your faith with those who don't know Jesus. Invite them to explore faith in Him.*
- **Compassion:** *Do you notice the needs of the people you meet? What does your neighbourhood or city need? In what ways are you helping make the world more just?*
- **Sent:** *Who are you sent to?*
- **Bless:** *Speak life-giving words, give people your time, your resources, and what they need.*
- **Lead:** *Jesus wants to lead you into your mission. Ask Him to show you what to do. Start with small steps.*

Closing (5 minutes)

Next week, when we meet again, we'll summarize and put the framework for our Discipleship House on paper together with the house mentor. We'll share the personal goals we've set with one another, and we'll look at how the house mentor will follow us up going forward.

Close the gathering with prayer, and make sure everyone is clear on the plan for next week's gathering — the time, the place, and what will be served.

Week 5

Our plan

Today's gathering, with house mentor

Today we'll start by sharing the goals we've set — explaining why we chose them and giving one another space to ask questions so we can understand each other better.

The aim for the second part of the evening is to agree on and write down the concrete details for how we will live as a Disciplehouse in the year ahead. Together we'll decide what our weekly gatherings will look like and when our house mentor will visit.

Personal goals & prayer (1 hour)

Last week we worked on personal goals for the upcoming period. Now we'll take turns sharing the goals we've chosen and why we chose them. These goals are part of what it means to be a Disciplehouse — we stand with one another and want to help each other on the journey of following Jesus. After each person shares, we'll leave space for questions before we pray together for the one who has shared.

Feel free to set a timer so that everyone has the same amount of time to share.

Determine the plan for the house (1 hour)

Over the past weeks we've talked through the different roles in the house, how we communicate, how we meet, how we run the weekly gathering, possible alternative formats, and we've agreed on a timeframe for our personal goals.

Now we're going to turn these conversations into a concrete plan and write everything down. This is how we form a shared agreement about what we are committing to together. The plan isn't set in stone, but if we choose to make changes later, it's important that everyone in the house agrees.

Closing

We have now completed the startup phase of Disciplehouse. Remember that discipleship and being a fellowship is about standing together and making good priorities — both in the good seasons and in the hard ones.

Close the gathering with prayer, and make sure everyone is clear on the plan for next week's meeting: the time, the place, and who's bringing the food.

Our Disciplehouse plan

Use the form to record the decisions you've made together as a Disciplehouse over these past weeks. Once it's filled out, take a photo or make a copy for everyone in the house and the house mentor.

Roles in the house (see day 1):

- Communication: __: _____
- Food: _____
- Practical: _____
- Social: _____
- Mission: _____

Other roles: _____

Communication platform: _____

Other agreements for the house:

Weekly gathering (see day 2)

Day: _____

Time (start & end): _____

Meal plan (if any): _____

House values:

Program for regular weekly gatherings:

Alternative weekly gatherings:

Date for follow-up gathering for personal goals (see day 3):

Plan for follow-up from the house mentor:

Appendix

Tips & Support

How to navigate conflict?

- Remember that conflict is good. It's what leads to being closer. Shallow relationships never have conflict; growing relationships do.
- You don't have to agree, only reach an understanding you can live with.
- Your relationship is more important than this single issue. Determine that you're going to stay committed to each other while you work through this issue.
- Keep talking to each other. Relationships dissolve when we isolate. Compromise and commitment come when we stay at it.
- Talk to each other, not everybody else. We want to validate our feelings by finding people who'll back our position, but this leads to gossip. Talk out conflict with the people involved, not people who aren't.
- Keep to the facts. Very often conflicts escalate to places that end up being all about hurt feelings and egos, not the actual issues. Recognize your feelings, even voicing them, but remember that the other person has been emotionally affected as well. Keep a cool head, or take a break until you are able to have one.
- It's okay to fight, but fight fair. Stay away from low blows or cheap shots. Respect the other person and speak in a way that expresses your concern without placing blame. It really goes a long way toward reaching a resolution.

<https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2013/conflict-in-small-groups.html>

How to build close relationships?

In a time when it's easy to hide behind filters and crowds, authentic relationships have become rare. In a Disciplehouse, where the goal is to live with intention and authenticity, it is easier to build deep relationships that reflect Jesus, both in the everyday and to the world around us.

Vulnerability and Trust: Use the first weekly gatherings to share your faith stories and pray for one another. Take your time so everyone feels truly heard, has space to listen to God, and can listen to each other. This creates a culture where people speak honestly about their faith and their everyday lives.

Time: Close relationships require time together. Agree on when and how often your Discipleship House wants to spend time as a group. Meals, prayer, Bible reading, and worship are good starting points. Be realistic so the group can experience success, not exhaustion.

Hospitality: Practicing hospitality builds community. When you create a space that others enjoy being part of, something relational happens both for those who host and those who are welcomed in.

Serving: Sharing responsibility and serving one another in the home fosters an environment focused on something bigger than ourselves. This can include both practical tasks in the house and outward-facing initiatives.

Celebration: We believe in a God who encourages us to outdo one another in showing honor. Talk together about how you want to practice this. (Examples: celebrating birthdays, spiritual breakthroughs, or meaningful milestones.)

Relationships That Endure:

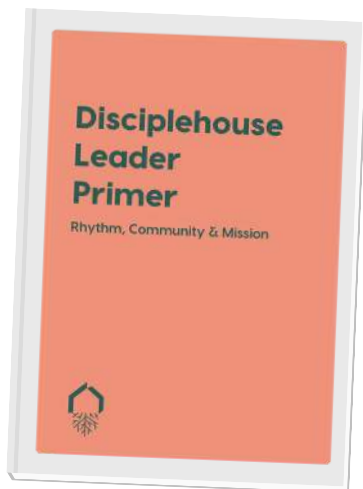
- By practicing love of neighbor, healthy conflict resolution, and forgiveness
- By learning each other's strengths and weaknesses, communication styles, and boundaries

«A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.» John 13:34-35 (ESV)

See our Leader Primer

This guide is designed as a resource for house mentors. Its purpose is to explain why the Discipleship House model is valuable and to provide practical tools, insight, and approaches for mentoring and follow-up.

It offers guidance on how to support the house well, how to encourage spiritual growth, and how to help the group stay focused on its shared commitments.



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