

ABIDE GROUPS

LEADER GUIDE

A CASE FOR DISCIPLESHP

If you've attended Salem Chapel for even a short time you've no doubt heard or seen our mission statement multiple times, but just to refresh your memory here it is:

“Salem Chapel exists to glorify God by making and mobilizing disciples who represent the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every man, woman and child.”

As you read that statement closely I want to draw your attention to a few phrases. The first phrase is *“exists to glorify God.”* We believe first and foremost that God's mission for His church is that in whatever we do, we bring attention and praise to Him. Our greatest goal is not that we make Salem Chapel look awesome, but that whatever we say and do points to the goodness and greatness of God.

The second phrase I want to draw your attention to is *“making and mobilizing disciples”*. Disciples are in short, followers seeking to change. When we talk about disciples, or followers, of Jesus we are talking about people who recognize that Jesus has invited them to not just like Him but to be with Him and become like Him. A disciple accepts this is a lifelong journey full of invitation and challenge that leads to spiritual growth. We desire at Salem Chapel to be a place where disciples are both made and mobilized. Disciples are made as they abide with Christ and in fellowship with each other, and they are mobilized when they make Christ's mission (Matt. 28:18-20) their own mission and go out to make disciples of others in their social circles where they live, work, and play.

The final phrase I want to highlight is the phrase *“represent the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every man, woman and child.”* It is easy to gloss over and miss the weight of this statement. Really? We think we can represent the Gospel to **every** man, woman and child? Is this really possible? What would this look like? Jesus told us as the church to go and make disciples of all nations, that's a lot of people! And it seems unrealistic to think we can even make a dent in only a single city like Winston-Salem, let alone the entire world. But Jesus often calls us to do things that seem impossible to us but are more than possible for Him (Matt. 19:26). And as is the case when Jesus calls us to respond, He doesn't leave us wondering how.

Jesus literally gave the model for how to represent the Gospel to every man, woman and child...personalized group discipleship. Sure, Jesus spoke to the crowds and the masses on occasion, but He invested the bulk of His time with 12 “nobodies” who later went on to become the leaders of His church which we now see expressed around the world today. Even within those 12 disciples, He often spent time with an even smaller group of only 3.

It's often easy to think that the best way to make other disciples of Jesus is to just ask them to come to church, or tell them to watch a sermon on our website or livestream, or invite them to attend some sort of evangelistic event. Can disciples be made at things like this? Sure, some can. But if those are the only ways disciples can be made, will we accomplish the mission of reaching every man, woman and child? No.

There are many people who will never come to our church for any number of reasons. They may have been hurt by a church or a pastor in the past or by someone else who claimed to be a Christian, maybe they don't have a way to get there or would feel like they wouldn't be welcomed if they came, or maybe they simply don't have the time or space in their schedule to come and don't understand why they should make it a priority over something else they enjoy. How do we reach those people? ***By mobilizing disciples who make disciples a few at a time.***

See, Jesus' plan wasn't for the 1 to reach the multitudes, but for the 1 to reach the few, then for the few to reach a few more, then for those few to become the many who reach the many, and then the many to become the multitude who reach the multitudes. What starts off small and intentional can quickly become something exponential and incredible in only a few generations.

So, can we really represent the Gospel to **every** man, woman and child? Yes, but it will take every one of us doing in the power of the Holy Spirit what disciples do...making disciples a few at a time.

HOW DO ABIDE GROUPS HELP ME IN MY MISSION TO MAKE DISCIPLES?

If we recognize the personal mission before us to make disciples, a reasonable follow up question to that mission is simply “HOW?” At Salem Chapel there are multiple “vehicles,” if you will, for discipleship: Sunday Morning Services, Salem Kids, Thrive Students, Life Groups, Restore and so on. So, if we have all of these, why do we need Abide Groups? How do they play a part in accomplishing the mission of the church? Let’s start with a definition first, Abide Groups are simply this:

Groups of 3-5 people that meet for a season to mutually encourage one another to abide in Jesus.

At quick glance that probably sounds like it could be a description of several other things at Salem Chapel, and you’re right! That’s because there is a common thread of intentional discipleship in every ministry at our church. Two key differences with Abide Groups are flexibility and portability.

First, let’s address flexibility. All our other ministries happen at certain times and on certain days. Life Groups for example meet only on a few days a week at specific times in specific locations. If you have a certain schedule or situation that is opposite of the way Life Groups are structured, or you can’t get to where a Life Group meets, or you can’t figure out the childcare challenges...how can you be a part? You can’t unless your circumstances change. But maybe you don’t have control over those circumstances, then what? You need something else, something with a little more flexibility to take advantage of the gift of biblical community and discipleship, Abide Groups can provide this.

Second, what are we talking about when we say Abide Groups are portable? This simply means that it’s easy to get started and easy to reproduce results. There are many ways to obey Christ in making disciples, are you saying Abide Groups are the only way to do this? Nope, not at all. But we know a couple things: reading and obeying God’s Word and practicing prayer are always essential parts of growing in relationship as a disciple of Jesus and He works powerfully in us when we are regularly doing these things. Abide Groups are simply a framework and a context for helping you plan to do this regularly and with intentionality with others. Abide Groups are something you can start, do, and train others to do all within a relatively short time. That’s pretty portable. And if you follow this pattern for 3,5, 10+ years, how many disciples can be made this way? It’s staggering to think about it.

OK, SO WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO LEAD AN ABIDE GROUP?

CAN ANYONE LEAD AN ABIDE GROUP?

Any follower of Jesus can lead an Abide Group, however being familiar with how the Bible Reading Tool and Prayer Tool work are necessary for modeling to the other participants. Leaders can of course make use of the training materials and videos at saalemchapel.org/discipleshiptools as a resource to help train their groups on how to use the tools. The leader in an Abide Group is more or less the initiator of the group rather than a teacher or the “most mature” disciple in the group. However, the leader does bear the responsibility of setting the tone for what will happen: he or she will introduce the discipleship tools, and sets the expectations for faithful participation and making new groups when their season is ended.

HOW MANY PEOPLE SHOULD I INVITE TO JOIN ME?

Abide Groups should aim to have 3-5 people who are serious about growing in their relationship with Jesus. You can also invite someone who is just exploring a relationship with Jesus and is curious. Diving into God’s Word and asking questions as they go is an incredible opportunity for evangelism and growth for everyone in the group. We set the limit at 5 because it gets a lot harder to share and have time to time to discuss when the group gets larger than that.

HOW OFTEN DO ABIDE GROUPS MEET?

Abide Groups meet on a regular schedule for a limited time. Groups should meet at least once a month, but could be as frequently as weekly. Meetings can be on a fixed schedule or be adjusted each time to the schedule constraints of the participants. Groups should meet frequently enough however that it is a regular rhythm for the group participants. Abide Groups should commit to meet regularly for a set time of around 6-18 months tops. At the end of this season, group members are encouraged to then lead their own groups.

HOW LONG SHOULD OUR MEETINGS BE?

Abide Groups should plan for an hour at least, though it could go longer if you like. This could happen over a lunch break, at breakfast one day a week, between classes, or maybe even after a round of golf or another hobby those in your group would enjoy. Be creative and find a time that already makes sense in your participants’ schedules and it will be more likely to stick as a regular pattern.

WHAT HAPPENS IN AN ABIDE GROUP?

During your Abide Group meeting you’ll spend time sharing what God has shown you from His Word and how you are seeking to obey. The Bible Reading Tool will be the model that you use, like Life Groups. Once everyone has shared their steps of obedience, then participants can plan to help keep each other accountable to do the things God has directed. Groups can then finish their time together in prayer using the Prayer Tool as a guide. Another suggested rhythm you may employ in your Abide Group is periodic scripture memory that you learn between meetings and recite when you get together..

CAN YOU SUGGEST A SCHEDULE OF HOW TO USE OUR TIME?

An example of how to use your time could look like this:

- Use the first 10-15 minutes catching up and reflecting on any follow up to the steps of obedience from last time.
- Then use 30 minutes either to do a “Live Study” of a passage or use it to discuss and share items that God has revealed in reading His Word since the last time you met. Make sure you’re not just answering the first question of the Bible Reading Tool, but are sharing what the personal steps are that you want to be obedient in.
- Then take 5 minutes or so to make a plan to hold one another accountable to do the things God has directed you to do.
- Finish with 10 minutes of prayer.

Your group schedule may look a little different than this example, and that’s ok, but having time in God’s Word and in prayer are essential qualities of an Abide Group.

IS THE GROUP OPEN TO NEW PEOPLE ONCE IT STARTS?

That’s up to you, just keep in mind the group works best in that 3-5 range. We would suggest that once you get your committed few, stick with them through the season together. You’ll benefit from the trust and intentionality that comes with a smaller committed group.

ARE ABIDE GROUPS ONLY FOR PEOPLE WHO GO TO SALEM CHAPEL?

Not at all! Because of the nature of how portable Abide Groups are, you could start one with co-workers, neighbors, family members, friends from school, sports team members, people from other churches, and so on. You could even host an Abide Group with people around the world via mediums like Zoom if you wish.

HOW DOES THE GROUP MULTIPLY?

When someone agrees to participate in an Abide Group, as the leader you should set the expectation that after the conclusion of their time as a participant they will gather their own circle and lead a new group within 3-6 months.

I’M ALREADY IN A LIFE GROUP, DO I NEED TO BE IN AN ABIDE GROUP TOO?

In many ways Life Groups and Abide Groups are going after the same things when it comes to making disciples. Life Groups though often function like little churches within the bigger church. There’s an expectation of care and oversight in a Life Group that may play out very different from the environment of an Abide Group. Life Groups are also made up of people who are all a part of Salem Chapel and on mission locally together, whereas Abide Groups could be made up of people anywhere, even other churches.

Life Groups aren’t super portable either, they tend to stick together for a longer season which is actually a really good and unifying thing as it strengthens the bonds of relationship in our local church. Abide Groups though are designed to reproduce and be a short term relationship with an expectation to multiply.

You could be in both a Life Group and an Abide Group at the same time, or one or the other. Some Abide Groups could even be made up of folks who are in the same Life Group. Both discipleship environments are healthy forms of biblical community.

IF I WANT TO LEAD, HOW DO I GET STARTED?

- ***First, pray about how God wants to work through you in this.***

Ask for His strength and wisdom as you step into the mission of making disciples. Then ask yourself if you can be committed to be the “pace-setter” for your group. Can you commit to make your Abide Group a priority in your schedule?

- ***Also consider, are you practicing regular Bible reading and prayer and will you continue to do so?***

Are you familiar with Salem Chapel’s Bible Reading Tool and Prayer Tool? If not, again, review the content at <http://salemchapel.org/discipleshiptools> and after you’ve practiced these and are able to explain them you’re ready to start inviting.

- ***Now decide who you are going to invite and make the ask.***

Again, your group should aim to be 3-5 people tops. Is there someone you’ve met recently who you think would really benefit from the time together?

- ***After you know who your few are, what will your schedule be?***

Reach out and see if you can find a time that works and get commitments. Choose not only your regular meeting time, but your target timeline to complete your Abide Group season (usually between 6-18 months).

- ***Once you have your few, take a second to visit this link:***

abidegroups.salemchapel.org and let us know you’re starting a group. We only ask this so that we can pray for you and celebrate what God is doing in mobilizing disciples.

Hopefully by this point you’re saying something like, “Wow, I think I can actually do this!” The cool part is, even if this feels really big to you, you are not proceeding into this work alone. The Holy Spirit will guide you as you open up God’s Word and share that with others. He will give you discernment and wisdom when you interact with questions and responses from your few. He will show you just how much you need Him each time you meet. What a humble blessing it is to be used as a vessel of the most important message in all of history. You can do this, because God is faithful to do what He does. When you are tempted to lay down this mission, you need only draw closer and Abide with him to be reminded of why it is so worth it. May God bless you as you go!

