

YOUNG ADULT EDITION

DEEP CALLING

a **12 week** small group
discipleship journey

Facilitator Guide

Tara J. VinCross, author
T. Jason Vanderlaan, contributing editor

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Tara is passionate about helping people create space in their lives to become deeply rooted in the love of God and serve the world from their passion and giftedness — a conviction shaped by years of accompanying people through questions of calling, doubt, and belonging. She is the author of the Deep Calling Discipleship Series, Deep Roots baptismal Bible study guides, and several children's books, including Sabbath Song: Jesus' Rhythm of Rest. She and her family enjoy traveling, mission trips, outdoor adventuring, and trying new vegan restaurants. Connect with her at taravincross.com.

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INTRODUCTION



Welcome to The Journey

Welcome to the *Deep Calling* discipleship journey for young adults! As a facilitator, you have a unique opportunity to help make space for participants to show up for the work God desires to do in their lives. Thank you for investing your time and energy into the lives of young adults. The gift you are offering them, through connection with Christ, is truly priceless.

Young adulthood is a unique and formative stage in a person's life development. Many people (of all ages) are looking for easy and immediate answers. The most radical shift we can make in our understanding of discipleship is to move towards viewing it as a life-long, intentional process. Rather than a quick fix or overnight metamorphosis, discipleship is a journey. We grow daily in relationship to God, in community with others, and in understanding our purpose. There will be ebbs and flows to each of these areas in our lives. There are times your soul will feel so full of life, health, and strength that you can hardly contain the joy. There will be other times when your soul feels dry and your spiritual practice feels devoid of meaning. I experience this, too. This is part of what it means to be a disciple. We yoke ourselves to Jesus and keep pressing forward. As Paul did, we remember to press on toward the goal for which Christ is calling us heavenward (Philippians 3:14). I live for this day and the next one. I am not defined by the past, nor do I live in the past. Yesterday's spirituality and vitality is not life for today.

I want to invite you, once again, to experience grace. To hear the Holy Spirit whisper, "Lay down your heavy burden of guilt and feelings of not-enoughness when it comes to your own devotional life as well as your ability to lead others into experiencing a deeper relationship with Me." Many of us struggle with devotions. We struggle with discipleship. We struggle with prayer. We wish there was a "just do this," so the church will then be what it is called to be. There is no "silver bullet" or "this is the answer," though we wish there were.

There is *an* answer though. Trust in God's grace on the journey. Walk with the One who loves us deeply and who won't let us go. This is not a cliché, but an expression of reality. The answer is not a program but a deeply personal God. The answer is not found in right religious practice, but in a growing relationship.

As people, and especially as leaders, it is tempting to look for "the fix," to seek that one thing that will solve the problem for ourselves and for those we serve. Instead of a fix, we are invited to turn again to fix our gaze on Jesus. We are invited on a journey.

HOW WE GROW

In the process of following Jesus, there are three key areas where growth occurs in the life of the disciple: (1) growth in our relationship with God, (2) nurturing relationships with others in community, and (3) developing purpose through witness and service on behalf of others. Three values, as you see here: God (first), Community, and Purpose. These three values serve as the foundation for the growth that happens during the 12-week small group discipleship journey. Each exercise, interaction, and method is meant to facilitate growth in these key areas. (See Figure 1.)

A person grows by experiencing information (knowing), reflecting on it (being), and applying it to their life (doing). This is the experiential learning process Jesus used. Jesus' invitation to His disciples was, "Come, follow me" (Matthew 4:19) and "Learn from me" (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus wanted His disciples to learn through an experience of shared life (Mark 3:14). In this process, they gained experiential knowledge about Jesus' ways (Mark 7:17; Acts 4:13), reflected in a change of heart and attitude (John 6:66-69, 13:1-9), and took action — doing and applying what Jesus taught them (Mark 6:7-13; Luke 10:1-12).

Nonetheless, it is easy for humans to focus on knowledge alone. In one interchange with the teachers of the law, Jesus said, "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you possess eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39-40). Knowledge of the Scriptures is intended to lead to a heart understanding of Jesus and the action of coming to Him which leads to life. Knowledge requires action (James 1:22). Jesus desires that disciples both hear and act on the word. "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24).

The call to discipleship is the clear invitation of Jesus to each Christian to incarnate the gospel in everyday life. This takes place as a result of being with Christ. Over time, what takes place in the process of discipleship is a metamorphosis which transforms how individuals relate to themselves, God, others, and their purpose in the created world. This wholistic approach allows for a fuller transformation in the life of the believer. As Figure 2 outlines, one aspect of learning naturally leads to the other — knowing to being, being to doing, doing to knowing, and so on. As disciples experience knowing God and being transformed inwardly by the Holy Spirit, they will naturally do as

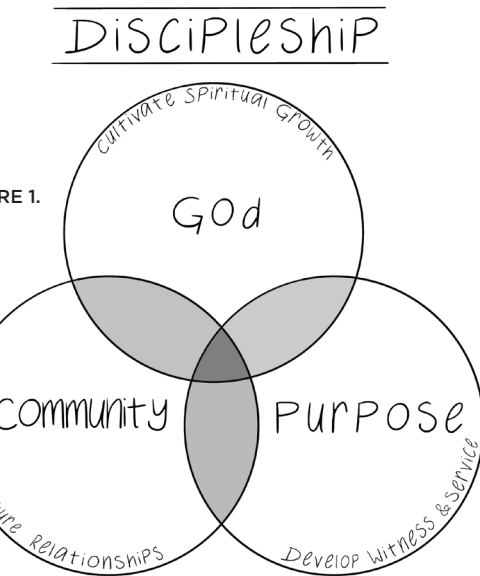


FIGURE 1.

Experiential Learning Process

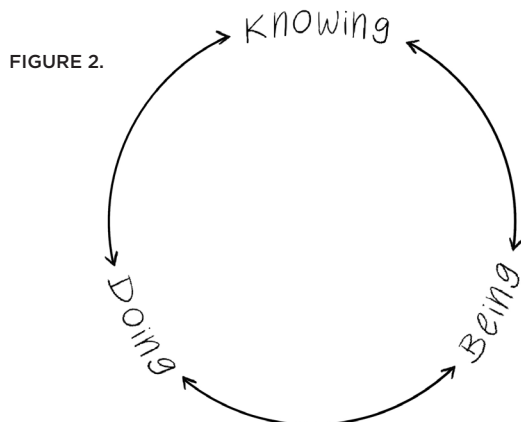


FIGURE 2.

God has commanded.

The goal of a discipleship process is to create space for learning on all three levels — knowing, being, and doing — in order to allow disciples to experience the power and change of God in their whole being. Rather than compartmentalizing growth, this allows disciples to be transformed by the Holy Spirit in every aspect of their lives through the disciple-making process. As the disciples are changed by Jesus, they are able to more faithfully and fruitfully represent Jesus in the world — just as Jesus calls them to in the Great Commission.

YOUR CALLING AS A FACILITATOR

Your purpose, therefore, as a facilitator, isn't merely to communicate information or knowledge, nor is it to have all the answers or solve every problem. You don't even need to be a perfect leader. Your job is to create space for young adults to connect with Jesus through knowing, being, and doing.

You can do this by cultivating an environment where participants feel safe and valued, open to be vulnerable, challenged to grow, welcomed when they fail, and loved no matter what. In this space, you point them to Jesus. You allow the Holy Spirit to speak – through the Scriptures, through the Holy Spirit, and through the Body of Christ. You don't have to be an expert, but rather model the process you're inviting them into. Ask questions, listen openly, be honest, allow for silence, trust God to be present and to work in and amongst you all. God is with you and God will not fail to finish the good work Jesus began in you and your young adults (Philippians 1:6).

How To Use This Book

This discipleship resource can be used for small groups, Sabbath School, campus ministry, week of prayer, one-on-one mentoring, discipleship pathways, or another use God has placed on your heart. It is designed to be both comprehensive and flexible, thus allowing it to meet your ministry needs, whatever your circumstances.

The first and last of the twelve weeks are all-day spiritual retreats, with their own specific format, as is outlined in detail for those sections. In between the retreats, each meeting follows a basic weekly rhythm:

- Connecting (Opening Prompts)
- Key Bible Passage
- Main Teaching
- Prayer of the Day
- Reflection Questions
- Personal Challenge during the week
- A final quote to reflect on

The following are notes on how to use key sections of the weekly meeting.

Retreats:

In my ministry, these retreats have taken place at different locations over the years, including a Christian retreat center, a summer camp, a hotel conference room, a university campus, someone's home, or a nearby park. My favorite locations allow for food to be easily available at the same location, and provide ample outdoor space for participants to move between the indoors and the natural setting outside.

The retreats provide an extended period of time for personal reflection and community building. Mostly, the participants are given time to spend alone with God, using only their Bible and their journals. Participants are encouraged to trust God and come into the silence, knowing and expecting that God is waiting to speak to them. After each time alone, participants are then invited back to share in their small groups, allowing each person to process what God has been speaking to them.

Near the end of the retreat, the group is led to an art room with various supplies, including paper products, paint, clay, yarn, and markers. Participants are instructed to spend time in silence with God, listening to God answer the question, "Where do you, God, want to take me from here?" Using

whatever art supplies they want, they explore this question with God. Each person then shares with the entire group what they created and how God spoke to them. The revelations of God's direction are astonishing and beautiful. For many, using the art supplies in this process opens them up spiritually and allows them to go deeper with God.

The day concludes with the spiritual companions anointing each other with olive oil and praying for one another in affirmation of how God engaged with them during the retreat. This is followed by a group conversational prayer to close out the retreat.

One helpful consideration is that, for younger or more active groups, you may need to cut off 15 minutes from the opening retreat's Session 2 & 3, and add in a 30 minute break of more active time. This could be a 30-minute block after lunch (like going on a short hike or playing a team-building or otherwise physically engaging game), or extending the Morning Break and Afternoon Break by 15 minutes each, and adding some structured or unstructured physically-engaging activities to one or both of these time blocks.

Connecting (Opening Prompts):

Each week, there are two options: reflection questions for reflection individually, or with a spiritual companion or small group, as well as an alternate group activity. You can use either or both of these, depending on how much time you have and how your group prefers to engage. Remember, these icebreakers aren't just for fun, but also to draw people to each other and build trust. It is a great way for you, as the facilitator, to learn about your group and how they interact. These observations can be very insightful as you lead them through other parts of the discipleship process.

Key Bible Passage & Main Teaching:

The main teaching can be used as a template for preaching, or you can have the group read it aloud together, or you can even have the group read it ahead of time and simply do an overview and discussion during your meeting time.

If you do choose to preach the main teaching, be sure to keep it short and to the point – no more than 15 minutes. Feel free to tell the stories and illustrations as they are or share your own personal experiences that illustrate the points in a similar way.

Prayer of the Day:

After the main teaching section, invite a time of silent, reflective prayer. Encourage participants to journal their thoughts in response to the main teaching. Each week there is a prayer offered to help guide the participants into a conversation with God in response to God's Word and Calling for the day. Invite the participants to explore the prayer and make it their own, revisiting it throughout the week during their daily prayer time as well.

Questions:

The reflection questions can be used to facilitate small group discussion after the main teaching, and/or for personal reflection once the participants return home.

If they are used for a small group discussion, encourage participants to also revisit them during the week, as there is something different to be gained by slow quiet reflection in addition to group discussions where you can learn and gain from others.

Similarly, if you only have them do these questions at home, I would still recommend giving some time for group discussion of the main teaching, as this kind of engagement is important, not just for

learning and growing, but also for connecting and building relationships. Also, be sure you at least give a brief overview of these at the end of the meeting, or touch on one or two key ideas they may want to explore. This can help plant seeds of curiosity that will take root throughout the week.

Personal Challenge & Final Quote:

The Personal Challenge is not just “homework” but rather a way to put into practice what participants are learning each week. These are reflective and practical actions which reinforce and extend the main teaching and discussion questions of each week’s focus.

As the weeks progress, you may want to include a time at the beginning of each meeting for participants to briefly share about their experience of the prior week’s personal challenge. This can be a time for both celebration and encouragement. You may also want to consider starting a group chat where participants can share their progress and experiences, or encourage spiritual companions to meet with each other once in between meetings to share about their personal challenges.

Special note on Week 11 (Personal Mission Plan & Group Service Project):

The format for this week is slightly different than usual, leaning more heavily into hands-on and interactive elements. It also requires a significant amount of prior work to be completed in order to get the most out of the experience (such as assessments for spiritual gifts, personality type, and love languages). As such, it is important to remind the participants for a week or two prior which “homework” will be needed in order or be prepared for that week’s session.

Additionally, you as the facilitator will have to prepare the materials needed for the Personal Mission Plan poster, as well as options for the Group Service projects. This session can be one of the most richly rewarding for both facilitators and participants, so be sure to plan ahead to make it happen practically and prayerfully!

THE 8 CALLS OVERVIEW

The heart of this discipleship journey is centered around the 8 Calls of God, through which God develops an experiential relationship with us. They are:

- A Call to **Devotion**... living in a daily rhythm of love.
- A Call to **Prayer**... engaging in conversations with God as a friend.
- A Call to **Rest**... experiencing Sabbath restoration.
- A Call to **Community**... entering into life together.
- A Call to **Healing**... finding wholeness in the midst of our brokenness.
- A Call to **Witness**... discovering our call to own and tell our story.
- A Call to **Serve**... joining Jesus in incarnational ministry and mission.
- A Call to **Bless**... celebrating life with a prophetic voice, speaking what is not as though it were.

As we hear the eight calls of God in our lives, we respond by developing devotional habits. These spiritual disciplines are simple practices that help us make space for God. We immerse ourselves in the presence of God, and God transforms us!

Likewise, as a facilitator, you create space for your young adults to experience the same thing each week and throughout the week. As you help them to hear and respond to the calls of God in their lives, they experience knowing, being, and doing as disciples of Jesus.

FACILITATING FOR YOUNG ADULTS

While the experiences and personalities of each young adult vary greatly, there are some basic principles which can help guide you as a facilitator to more effectively minister to this age group.

- **Emphasize belonging before believing or behaving.** Young adults are more open to spiritual growth if they feel like they are loved and accepted, even if they still have questions or behaviors that don't "fit in" with the usual church environment. Many are questioning the values and practices they inherited from their childhood upbringing and are seeking to form something authentic for themselves. Give them space to explore this within the loving embrace of Jesus and the Body of Christ.
- **Prioritize participation over preaching.** Knowing information is good, but it is useless apart from doing and being. Young adults especially remember and put into practice what they discover together rather than what is spoon-fed to them. Try to listen more than you share advice, ask questions, encourage exploration and curiosity, and trust the Spirit to guide you and them, too.
- **Remember growth comes in stages.** Not everyone will be at the same point in their spiritual journey. Some were raised in a Christian family and some are new to the faith. Both pathways come with unique strengths and challenges, and there is a spectrum of possibilities in between. Meet each individual where they are and see how the Spirit is working with them at that moment, in that phase of their journey.
- **Consider the whole person.** While we often think of discipleship as just focusing on the "spiritual" life of a person, in reality, it is a wholistic journey. Young adults are in a developmental stage that emphasizes identity and intimacy. They are making big decisions about relationships, education, and vocations. Invite them to bring each and every aspect of their life into the discipleship process and into their relationship with Jesus.

Above all, love them as the Father loves them, welcome them as Jesus welcomes them, and pray for them as the Spirit prays for them. God is with you. Amen.

WEEK 1 | Opening Retreat

(9AM - 5PM)*

Learning to Hear God's Voice

9:00 - 9:30am	Welcome, Opening Prayer, Worship Songs, Orientation
9:30 - 10:00am	Session 1: Cultivating Quietness - Listening to God <i>Psalm 46:10. Why were you drawn to this journey?</i>
10:00 - 10:45am	Ground Rules, Spiritual Companions, Small Groups
10:45 - 11:00am	Morning Break
11:00 - 11:45am	Session 2: The Still, Small Voice <i>1 Kings 19:3-15</i>
11:45 - 12:15pm	Small group time <i>What did God speak to you?</i>
12:15 - 1:15pm	Lunch
1:15 - 2:00pm	Session 3: Hearing God in the Word <i>James 1:21-25</i>
2:00 - 2:30pm	Small group time <i>What was God speaking to you?</i>
2:30 - 2:45pm	Afternoon Break
2:45 - 4:00pm	Where does God want to take you from here? <i>In this art room, using whatever supplies you want to use, I invite you to answer this question about where God is leading you on this journey.</i>
4:00 - 5:00pm	Group closing time <i>What would you like this group to pray for you about?</i> <i>Prayer for one another and anointing</i> <i>Group Prayer</i>

Facilitators Notes

A WORD ABOUT TIMING: every group is different, and God will lead you in what is best for your context. Where an eight-hour retreat is possible, I've found it creates space for something unhurried — a settling into God and one another that shorter gatherings don't always allow. And it's important to go with what you can do, even if it's for a shorter duration. Trust God to lead you in your context and adjust as needed.

PREPARATION

- Chairs
- Bibles
- Pens/Pencils
- Paper
- Notebooks or participant journals
- Dry Erase Board and colored markers
- Art supplies (clay, canvases, paint, pastels, colored pencils, crayons, markers, glue, yarn, magazines, colored paper, mosaic pieces, etc.)
- Anointing oil

WELCOME, PRAYER, WORSHIP SONGS, ORIENTATION (30 MINUTES)

TEACHING NOTES: *Welcome the participants, begin with prayer, and sing a couple worship songs. Orient them to the space – bathrooms, etc. – and then set the stage for the day as a retreat.*



 A retreat is about spending time in the presence of God.

A retreat is not work. A retreat is not about what you do or accomplish. A retreat is not trying to get through a section of the Bible. A retreat is allowing the Holy Spirit to mentor you, nurture your heart, challenge your thinking, and help you to see your God, and perhaps yourself, in a different way.¹

Write what God brings to your mind. Try not to force yourself. Become aware of any guilt, shame, or feelings of not being 'good enough' as you come into the presence of God. Some people back away from the retreat process because they wonder if they will be able to 'do it right.' But that's not your job! A retreat, and discipleship for that matter, is about surrender. This is why it can make us uncomfortable – we are not in control. God never forces us to do anything, but throughout the day you'll have opportunities to hear God's invitations and respond to them.

So don't expect to leave today a different person. You will be changed, but not in the ways you see, expect, or even notice. Let God lead you. Today, we are creating space for God! God is the only One who knows what needs to happen in your life and mine. God is the director of our process.²

Our role is to...

- Show up
- Surrender to what God is doing

Today will be very simple. The goal is to make space for us to be with God.

We rush so much and have days filled so much with noise that, at first, silence might actually be scary. You might even think, “Why am I here today? I might get bored.” I invite you to surrender these questions and thoughts into the hands of Jesus. Offer them up to God and be open to what you may receive in return – even if it is a surprise!

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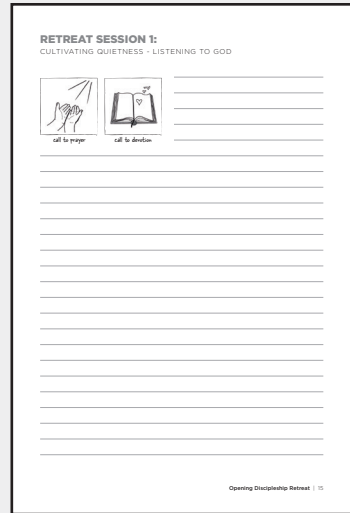
RETREAT SESSION 1: CULTIVATING QUIETNESS - LISTENING TO GOD (30 MINUTES)

TEACHING NOTES: Write “Why were you drawn to this journey?” on the board. Expand upon it by asking, “What are you expecting from God? What questions are you bringing into this retreat... about God or about yourself? What does God want to give you?”

Ask them to reflect on this question. Underneath, write out this prayer:

*"Be still and know that I am God."
(Psalm 46:10)*

Pray this passage aloud for them. Then ask them to join in repeating it aloud with you. (Alternatively, you can have this written on an index card and invite them to pray it aloud or silently to themselves, repeating the words and listening for what God is speaking to their hearts.)



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As you're praying and listening, reflect on these questions:

1. What is God saying?
2. How does this connect with my life?
3. Is there an invitation from God?

Sometimes you may sense God speaking to you clearly. Other times, you might just notice a feeling, a sense of peace, a Bible verse, or simply an awareness of God's presence. Sometimes you won't feel or notice anything right away, and that's okay, too. The goal is to be present and pay attention, listening for whatever might be here for you.