

A person in a blue jacket stands on a rocky outcrop, looking out over a landscape. In the foreground, a waterfall cascades into a pool. In the middle ground, a large, conical mountain with distinct horizontal layers dominates the horizon. The sky is a deep, dark blue, filled with a dense field of stars, including the prominent band of the Milky Way galaxy. The overall scene is serene and majestic, suggesting a connection to nature and the universe.

# dna.

## **A MINI GUIDE TO DNAS**

WHY THESE ARE CRUCIAL TO YOUR  
SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND HOW YOU  
CAN GROW WITHIN COMMUNITY.



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# You Were Made For More

Have you ever thought about why God made you in his image (Gen. 1:27)? What is that supposed to look like? In what ways do we resemble the creator God? Paul tells us that God has a deep desire to see you formed into the image of Jesus, which is your true and better self (2 Cor. 3:18). In one sense, we are made in God's image, but in another sense, we need to be formed into the image of Christ.

Why do we need to be formed into the image of Christ? Because simply by waking up, we are being formed into something. If it is not intentionally being formed into the image of Christ, then we are being deformed from that image of God into the image of something else. This is why it is so dangerous that many Christians have a temptation to simply drift through life, assuming change will happen automatically.

Many of us live at such a pace of life, that even if you try to focus on your spiritual formation (becoming like Jesus), it's in the cracks of your schedule and apart from community. We might become masters of behavior modification, but never experience true and lasting transformation.

Maybe you do genuinely want to become like Jesus, but unfortunately try to do it alone. Spiritual formation doesn't happen in isolation. Because you are created in the image of a communal God (Triune God), you cannot experience the life you long for apart from community.

This is why resilient disciples are always grown in the soil of trusting relationships, where you can be known, belong, and be loved. There is something immensely powerful about being able to share your life with people, who can listen empathetically, meet you with love, and encourage you on your journey. A DNA is one way that this is possible.

# What is a DNA?

Discipleship to Jesus requires a safe space where you can open up to a few trusted spiritual friends, in order to grow deep roots, for the purpose of bearing much fruit. A DNA can help you grow in your relationship with God, with others, and even with yourself. It is a relational space where you can be vulnerable about where you are and where you want to be.

In partnership with the Spirit, we have personal responsibility for our own spiritual growth (it's someone else's responsibility to grow me). A DNA can be a space to reflect on what your

relationship with God has been like recently. For some, it may be a launching pad to initiate an intentional pursuit of God.

But, a DNA is different from a Bible study. For some, it may feel like we are not spending enough time in scripture together. While studying the Bible together is a helpful practice, information alone will not produce change in our lives. We often try to solve problems by thinking together or throwing Bible verses around, but remain surface level in spiritual growth. A DNA holds its foundation in the reality that we are called to be with Jesus in prayer and Scripture meditation consistently outside the group. This foundation means that your relationship with God through Scripture and prayer should naturally flow into the group.

It also may feel different than any accountability group that you have ever been a part of. A DNA isn't centered around behavior modification, but we hope the good news of Jesus changes you deeply. A DNA isn't a group therapy session, but we hope you find healing there. It is a space where you can practice being present with God, yourself, and others.





The goal is spiritual friendship that encourages one another to truly see God as good. As Timothy Keller says, "You have to think of yourself as a dearly loved child of God or you're really not able to live the Christian life at all. Unless you are governed by the idea that you are a dearly loved child, you can't live. You were built for family love. You were built for it. You were built to have a loving father, a loving parent. You were built for it, and until you see that's true of you, you can't live a life of imitation of God." Becoming like Jesus begins with seeing yourself as a beloved child of God.



So what is a DNA? It is a safe environment where 3-5 men or women (gender specific) gather regularly to help one another grow in their relationship with God, others, and themselves. The most healthy groups are not events, but intentional friendships. This work involves a three part process:

1. **Discover** what lies below the surface in our own hearts
2. **Nurture** one another through empathetic listening and gospel encouragement
3. **Applying** God's love in your daily walk, always seeking to be not only a hearer of God's word, but doer



# Discover

In the Garden, after Adam and Eve sinned, the all-knowing, all-present God who created them walks through the garden and asks “Where are you?” They were hiding in their shame. He knew where they were. He needed them to become aware of where they were relationally with him.

From an early age we are taught to hide. Children in primary school are already able to hide hurt and sadness. Masking it with laughter to ensure their parents are happy. Masking it with anger to protect themselves from further harm. We continue hiding all through life and reach a point where we don't know the difference between our true selves and our false selves that we project to the world.

Pete Scazzerro says, “We can only change what we are aware of.” Getting beneath the surface with our emotions allows us to be aware of where we are. In finding out where you are in relation with God, you can find a loving Father who has already been looking to bring healing in your life.

In a DNA, we walk into a safe space where you can honestly ask yourself, “where am I?” You can take down the

mask which has protected you for so long to show the scars or still open wounds of broken relationships personal failures, or the effects of living in a fallen world. To do this, you must practice digging beneath the surface.

Geologists say that 90% of an iceberg hides beneath the surface of the water. This is how we live. We leave 90% of ourselves hidden. Hidden to others and at times, if we are honest, hidden to ourselves. “If I just don't look at it, it's not really there.” We hide sin because of our guilt and shame. We hide wounds because of our hurt and fear. We hide, which fuels the fire of true loneliness. We may be around others, but because we hide 90% of ourselves, we are alone together.



Maybe you were raised in relational environments where vulnerability was unwelcome, emotions were ignored, or you didn't have care for one another displayed for you. Emotions often have a bad rap as being negative. Like a check engine light that you hope simply goes away. However, emotions are one of the key tools to dig beneath the surface. The extent to which we learn to identify our feelings is often the extent by which we discover the wounds and sins that make it so difficult for us to receive and give love.

Chip Dodd details Eight Core Emotions that we can identify. None of these feelings are bad. They are just feelings. And they tell us a lot about what we are currently believing about God, ourselves and the world around us.

**HURT** reveals that you are capable of feeling pain. You're in need of attention & healing. To ignore it can lead to resentment.

**LONELY** reveals that you were made for relationships. You're in need of intimacy. To ignore it can lead to apathy.

**SADNESS** reveals that you lost something valuable. You're in need of comfort. To ignore it can lead to being demanding.

**ANGER** reveals your values & passions. You're in need of your voice being heard. To ignore it can lead to depression.

**FEAR** reveals that you perceive danger nearby. You're in need of protection. To ignore it can lead to self-protecting rage.

**SHAME** reveals to us that you are a finite human. You're in need of attunement. To ignore it can lead to contempt.

**GUILT** reveals that you are broken. You're in need of forgiveness. To ignore it can lead to self-condemnation.

**GLADNESS** reveals that desires can be fulfilled. You're in need of celebration with others. To ignore it can lead to sensuality.





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## True Friendship

*The true soul friend will not accept our self-deceptions, but will gently and firmly confront us with our soul blindness. Soul friends want each other to settle for nothing short of becoming the whole and holy person they are called to be.*

*- David Benner in “Sacred Companions”*

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**Be Known,  
Belong,  
&  
Be Loved**

# Nurture

“Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable.” - David Augsburger

The best therapists, doctors, and caring professionals are exceptional listeners. They ask good questions and then listen with empathy. If we are going to care well for the soul of another, the same must be true of us. Before we can offer support or advice, we must listen well.

“When we learn to empty ourselves of our own preoccupations in order to be fully present to another, we are following the example of Christ, who emptied himself of his equality with God in order to participate fully in our human plight. By showing attentive concern to others, listeners point beyond themselves to the listening God. Such conversations take place not just for our own sake, but as a sign and witness to the God who takes human need to heart.”

- Deborah Van Duesen Hunsinger

There will be times within the DNA when the Spirit will invite members to speak the truth in love to another (Eph. 4:15). We want to follow the wisdom from the Apostle James who encourages Christians to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). When we do

speak, we want to ensure that we are sharing words that comfort, encourage, and build up (1 Cor. 14:3).

Ultimately, all our care comes from Jesus. However, as Paul David Tripp says, his desire is to use each of us as “Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands.” Paul writes in

2 Cor. 1:3-4, that Jesus comforts us, “so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

Nurture also means leaving space for each member of the DNA to share and receive the same comfort and care that you have received. That means not dominating a time together and being aware that others need the opportunity to share as well.



# Apply

God is always speaking to us through the Scriptures and community. It is essential that we take what we are hearing from God (through the Bible and others) and then put the truth into practice. As Christians, we are encouraged to be doers of the word, and not hearers only (James 1:22).

Before A DNA meeting comes to a close, members of that DNA will reflect on what has been discussed. The group will spend one or two minutes in listening prayer, seeking to discern what God is wanting to say to us, and what it would look like to

apply that word to their life in the upcoming week. Each member will be asked to share what they sense God is saying to them.

To apply what you are learning in the DNA meetings is to wrestle honestly with questions like: How can I embody the truth that has been revealed to me today? What is the invitation God is inviting me to say yes to today? Is there a sin I need to repent of? Someone I need to forgive? A hard conversation I need to have? A new practice I need to pick up or an unhealthy habit you want me to drop?

Learning to show up relationally in a DNA is a pathway to healthy relationships, deep connections. You will be working out relational muscles that you may have never used before. Once those are strengthened, you will find that you're able to apply those same muscles in all of your relationships. You'll be able to more quickly know what's going on beneath the surface in yourself and help others discover this in themselves, so that you and others can be formed into the image of Jesus.

**Discover** what is beneath the surface of your own life and how hiding has been holding you back.

**Nurture** one another with great care as we confess sins and expose wounds for the purpose of gospel restoration.

**Apply** the truth of God's love to the most vulnerable parts of your life. Then with the power of the Spirit and encouragement of your DNA, step into the true and lasting life change you've longed for.



# DNA RULES OF

- 1. Show up prepared and on time.** We recommend your DNA follow a Scripture reading plan together. Come prepared to share what your conversations with God have looked like in light of what you have been reading in the Bible. Bring your Bible with you. You can also put this booklet in your Bible to reference so you don't need your phone.
- 2. Begin with a couple moments of silent prayer.** Take note of what you're feeling in the moment. You might pray, "*God, I know that you are here. Help me to be present with myself, you, and my DNA. Help me know where I am.*" It can be helpful to remember Ephesians 3:14-21. As a Christian you can call God your Father, you can remember that you are rooted in love, that his spirit is in your inner being, and that Christ wants you to know the unknowable depths of his love, "how wide and long and high and deep" his love is for you. And remember that he is able to do immeasurably more than we ask. If we know this great love, we can face any fear of sharing our vulnerabilities.
- 3. One by one, do a feelings check-in.** To help you become present to God and one another with your heart (not just your head), we recommend each DNA meeting start with the members each taking time to identify how they are coming into the room. Choosing from the eight feelings (pg. 8) is a great place to start. Each member can choose to elaborate (or not) on the feelings they share. Often you may feel a combination of multiple emotions as you reflect on your discipleship, your family, your work, etc.
- 4. Confess Sins and Temptations.** Give each DNA member an opportunity to confess any sins or temptations that they have been wrestling with during the week prior to the meeting. If we come with the expectation that we are all broken with unwanted sinful habits and temptations, this can move from taboo to freeing. Remember as you listen, your job is not to fix or convict the person.



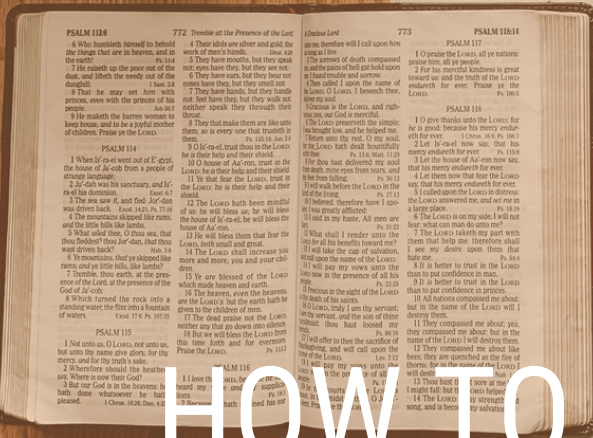
# ENGAGEMENT

- 5. Listen and Respond.** After each person shares their heart, thank them trusting the group enough to share. As a DNA, we want to do the best we can to nurture our brother or sister in a way that is meaningful to them at that moment. Therefore, we listen with curiosity (not judgement) & respond empathetically, “I can relate to that anger,” “you aren’t alone in that temptation,” etc. Also, we can offer support, “**Is there anything you need from me right now?**” “**Is there anything I can do to help?**” The person may request to be comforted or encouraged, to be prayed for or reminded of the gospel. They might ask for wisdom for a big life change opportunity upcoming (job change, moving, etc).
- 6. Spend a few moments in listening prayer.** Ask God, “*Is there anything you want to say to me? Is there anything you want to say to someone else in the DNA through me?*” After a few moments of silence, invite DNA members to share what they believe they felt God saying. Encourage each member to find a practical way to apply what they heard from God.
- 7. Keep everything confidential.** Never share information outside of your DNA. With time, each member will grow in trust for one another. This is essential to our relational health and spiritual development. Should gossip or slander occur, this must be dealt with swiftly and directly.



1. There are legal limits to confidentiality that you share with your DNA. There are some situations (involving harm to self or others) where others are required by law to disclose information without either your authorization. These situations are unusual, and if one arises, Elders can be brought in for wisdom and direction.

# APPENDIX 1



# HOW TO READ SCRIPTURE



# BREAD

We believe that in order to become like Jesus (spiritual formation), you must first be with Jesus. You begin to look like those you hang out with, those you listen to. Look at a high school cafeteria for evidence. So, in order to look like Jesus, we need to be with him. One of the primary gifts God has given us is his written word. The Bible isn't a religious activity you need to check a box of that you completed, but Larry Crabb describes it as 66 Love Letters. Jesus himself refers to it as our daily bread. Below is a method of meditating on scripture so that it becomes less about checking a box and more about connecting with God.

**BE STILL.** Find a place where you can encounter God, ask him to fill the space, and then take a minute in stillness. Focus on slowing your breath down and calming your mind. Fix your eyes on Jesus and invite the Holy Spirit to guide your time.

**READ.** Read through the passage for the day. Read through the passage again slowly. Look for one verse that stands out, grabs your attention or interests you. Write out that verse.

**ENCOUNTER.** Taking your chosen verse begin to meditate on it. What comes to mind and how does it make you feel? What do you think God is trying to reveal through this verse and allow him to speak to your heart and mind. Write a short reflection on what you think he might be saying.

**APPLY.** Now, turn your focus outwards. Think about how you might be able to apply this to your day and write down the one thing you're going to try and live out.

**DEVOTION.** Finally, close by writing a simple prayer of devotion to God. Ask that God would fill you afresh and commit your day to him.



# APPENDIX 2

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a colorful patterned shirt, is shown in profile from the chest up. She is looking upwards and to the right with her hands raised near her face in a gesture of awe or prayer. The background is a vast, hazy landscape of rolling hills and mountains under a soft, overcast sky. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

## THE EMOTIONAL LIFE OF JESUS

Is it biblical to focus so much on our emotions? B.B. Warfield says that *“It belongs to the truth of our Lord’s humanity, that he was subject to all sinless human emotions.”* In short, because we see Jesus’ emotions on display in scripture, we can be assured of his humanity.

*We have buried the Jesus of the Gospels under intellectual doctrines that make him seem unrelatable and above the normal human experience in a fallen world. It is important to pay attention to his real humanity, his raw emotions.*

*Consider reading a passage where Jesus displayed honest human emotion before your personal check-ins as a DNA. This may be particularly relevant for those who find the check-in foreign or even wonder if it’s biblically sound.*



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Here are some examples of Jesus’ emotional experience.

**Anger** - Anger at stubborn Jewish Leaders (Mk 3:1-6); clearing the temple so Gentiles could pray (Mt 21:12-17)

**Hurt** - Gethsemane when his disciples could not stay up with him (Mt 26:40)

**Lonely** - Crying out from the cross, “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me? (Mt 27:46, Ps 22:1)

**Sad** - Weeping for Lazarus (Jn 11:17-37); weeping over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-44)

**Fear** - Gethsemane while facing the cup of wrath and the effects humans can feel in such fear (Lk 22:44)

**Shame** - He had humility and self-awareness to know who he was and who he wasn’t (Mt 4:1-11)

**Guilt** - While he was tempted to sin, he chose to love God and people. He had no guilt, which is why he was the only one qualified to be an all-sufficient savior in our place (Mt 4:1-11, Heb 4:15)

**Glad** - He was full of joy through the Holy Spirit (Lk 10:21)



For more resources on DNAs and discipleship  
in general, visit [crossingparagould.com/dna](https://crossingparagould.com/dna)