

The Four E Disciple Making Plan Series

How to Use the Four E Plan (Acts 8:30-31)

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

How to Use the Four E Plan

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Stepping Out in Faith

1. During my freshman year of college, I was invited to lead a small group of high school students to a weekend youth event by my former youth pastor. He was unable to lead these students at this event because of a scheduling conflict. While I had led small group discussions in high school and done various service projects, this was the first time I would be responsible for coming up with my own teaching content to spiritually invest in others. It was also my first time being totally on my own, without any support or oversight.
2. My former youth pastor let me know I would be overseeing the students at this multiple-day event, leading devotions at the end of each day, and essentially being a fill-in youth pastor. As a leader of a group at this event, I would also participate in the leader activities for the entire group of hundreds of students for this mini youth camp. I had to get up on stage in front of everyone. All of these activities that I had never done before made this experience a very stressful one. I was out of my comfort zone and praying that God would help me do a good job.
3. I felt as if I had been thrown into the deep end of the pool, without a floatation device, after only one or two swimming lessons. While it was a great experience and gave me opportunities to learn, in several situations, I had to overcome fear. If I was unwilling to be uncomfortable, I would not have served or had the chance to learn and grow. While this still happens, discomfort in serving Jesus is much more common at the beginning of the Engage stage—when we take our first steps in faithfully serving Jesus for the benefit of others.

- B. Serving Jesus requires courage. It is scary. Fear can easily take over. We are going to feel uncomfortable at times, especially at the beginning. These experiences are all a normal part of the growth process. Knowing this reality, Jesus regularly gave His disciples the following encouragement:

³⁶ But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, “Do not be afraid, only believe.” (Mk. 5:36)

- C. A father whose daughter was so sick she was about to (and eventually did) die (Mk. 5:21-24, 35) was given some life advice from Jesus. It is the same piece of advice He gave repeatedly to others in different circumstances. Jesus commands those who are following Him to cease feeling anxious, apprehensive, and fearful about the events and situations they are facing (“Do not be afraid”, v. 36).¹ The normal starting point with Jesus is to operate from an emotional condition of undesirable emotions. Did you notice that the person who is wrestling with fear is a leader in the Jewish church—called the synagogue (“the synagogue official”, v. 36)? Facing fear is not reserved only for new or immature disciples; it is for everyone.

¹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Mark 5:36 “Do not be afraid”

- D. Instead, disciples overcome fear by deepening their trust in God’s oversight of their lives and their confidence in the goodness of Jesus (“only believe”, v. 36).² The Biblical way to overcome fear is to strengthen our trust in Jesus. We can do this by becoming informed about how faithful, wise, and good He is. We can observe the heart and character of God throughout the Scriptures and observe how faithful He is to lovingly care for those who belong to Him, as well as observe these same characteristics in Jesus in the Gospels. Disciples need the strength to be courageous and confident in the way they live for and serve Jesus. Christianity is not for cowards (Rev. 21:8). This is an encouragement, not a criticism.
- E. Despite these reservations, disciples are to live for Jesus and offer Him a life of service (2 Cor. 5:15, Jn. 12:26). That means we need to overcome our fear, take a step of courage, and learn how to serve Jesus as effectively as we can. To help us accomplish the church’s primary mission of making disciples, we are going to learn how to practically implement our Four E Disciple Making Plan.

II. Our Need for Help

- A. Have you ever tried reading the Bible? How did it go? It is a safe assumption to expect everyone making first attempts at reading the Bible will run into some difficulties. This seems to be the common experience of everyone. The Bible is a complex and often confusing book. Many times, when we start to read the Bible for the first time, it is a struggle. We don’t know where to start or how to read it in a way that we can get more out of it, and we can have a hard time understanding what we are reading because it feels like we’ve entered a whole different world—and we did!
- B. An important passage of Scripture that can help us to understand how to implement our disciple making plan comes from a description of how ministry worked in the early church:

³⁰ Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.” (Ac. 8:30-31)
- C. While it is possible to learn from the Bible on our own, it is better to have someone help us. Going alone is slower, more confusing, and less effective. As I started reading the Bible for the first time, I struggled on my own for quite some time before I learned how to engage with God’s word in a more productive way. My hope is that your experience can be better than mine by getting help from others.
- D. An African government official, who had a desire to learn about and worship God, traveled to Israel to worship God at the temple in Jerusalem (Ac. 8:26-29). As he was traveling back home, he was reading the Bible; this is where Philip met him (“heard him reading Isaiah the prophet”, v. 30). Under God’s supernatural, divine guidance, Philip was put in the path of a person who had a desire to learn more about God so that he could be used by God in this person’s life. This man’s spiritual desire for God was being expressed in the action of reading the Bible—the book of Isaiah.

² Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Mark 5:36 “believe”

- E. Philip began the conversation by using a brilliant question as he asked the man who was reading the Bible if he understood what he was reading (“Do you understand what you are reading?”, v. 30). Philip, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit (Ac. 6:5), knew the importance of helping people understand the message of God and who Jesus is (Ac. 8:5). For people to progress with God, they need to understand the word of God, just as Jesus emphasized. A person’s understanding is directly connected to their fruitfulness (Mt. 13:23). Knowing all this, Philip was intentional about the question he asked.
- F. The man’s response is also very instructive. Essentially, he admits the Bible is very difficult to understand without help (“Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?”, v. 31). This man was aware of and felt his spiritual need to learn more about God. He was actively taking steps that he knew to take to meet this need on his own. However, he also realized his own limitations. Although he had a desire to learn more about God and worship Him, he was struggling to do that on his own. His desire was a good starting point, but it was not enough; he needed someone to guide him. He needed a spiritual mentor—someone who understood the Bible well enough themselves that they could explain it accurately to him.
- G. The man’s spiritual interest and curiosity led the man to welcome Phillip into his life to help him understand God’s word (“And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him”, v. 31). Community is needed to help us understand the message of the Bible. The conversation that followed focused on the details of the Bible and how to understand God’s word (Ac. 8:34). Philip helped this man understand who Jesus is, and the African official ended up believing in Jesus (Ac. 8:35-38).
- H. A desire and a seeking for God led this man to Jesus with Philips’ influence, in connection with the word of God. This is how discipleship works in the kingdom of God. Each element of desire for God, the word of God, and a good mentor is important. Each of these elements were necessary to produce spiritual impact and response. This type of environment is the most productive when it comes to fruitfulness. This is why we want everyone to use our disciple making plan as recommended.

III. How to Use These Tools

- A. The resources we are providing in the Four E Disciple Making Plan are intentionally flexible. We want them to be able to be used in a variety of ways. These self-guided studies are intended to be learning experiences of self-discovery. They have been designed for maximum flexibility so the content can be adapted for multiple presentation forms. Although structuring these tools to different situations will require a little work, these studies can be easily modified to fit the way you will be using these guides that are most comfortable for you. These tools are also designed to implement necessary Biblical convictions of spiritual growth in a progressive and comprehensive way.
- B. Our Four E Disciple Making Plan is primarily intended to be used in a discipleship relationship. That is, a more experienced and knowledgeable disciple getting together with one (or a few) other people who are not as far along in their Jesus journey as the mentor. It is our desire that these resources be used in a small community with other Jesus followers for maximum benefit. We want to encourage you to pursue Jesus with others, rather than in isolation as an individual.

These booklets are to be used to guide Bible study and spiritual conversations that help people move forward in the Christian life toward spiritual maturity.

- C. These same studies can also be used in the context of a small group. A small group leader could lead a discussion on each of these studies. The provided questions can be used as conversation starters as people share their thoughts and answers with one another. Group members can ask their unanswered questions related to the study, and the group can work through those questions together. A small group should never be more than twelve people. Larger groups will lead to people not being able to participate and might cause some people to feel more uncomfortable in sharing because there are too many people. Small groups are generally a little bigger than a discipleship group.
- D. While more presentation and formatting changes will need to be made, these studies can also be turned into a teaching presentation for a class—perhaps for Sunday school, a mid-week class, a topical class, or some other type of class larger than a small group. The teacher of the class can take the content of these studies, personalize them, and put their own style on how to communicate the information from these studies. These studies are intended for smaller groups, but they can be used for larger formats as well.
- E. Even though our Four E material is designed to be used in community, if a person is not ready or comfortable with participating in these studies with others, they can at least use it personally for themselves. They can sit down on their own and use these studies as their personal time in Scripture. The provided tools can be used for devotional reading. Disciples are to stay connected to Jesus, and one of the primary ways this is accomplished is by regularly reading Scripture for ourselves. This isn't ideal, but it is the minimal way people can participate in our Four E Disciple Making Plan, which will still be of significant benefit. If nothing else is being done, our hope is that people will at least be willing to use these studies by themselves for their own personal Bible reading. Anyone and everyone can at least use our material this way.
- F. Least common, but still an available option, would be for those who have opportunity to preach sermons or teach publicly to large groups of people to use the material provided for this purpose. Like those who teach a class, this presentation format will require the most amount of work to adapt our disciple making plan into a sermon form. However, the material can be used in this way by adding illustrations, points of application based on the application questions, and an opening. As we can see, the tools and information provided are extremely flexible and can be formatted to fit almost any situation, all while maintaining a strong focus on disciple making and forward movement in the Christian life.

IV. Preparing to Meet

- A. Now let's shift our focus to the specifics of using this plan. Community Alliance Church's Four E Disciple Making Plan was inspired by David Helm's book entitled *One to One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian*. In this book (and on his website matthiasmedia.com), he provides helpful advice for how to use these types of resources. Getting and reading this book is strongly encouraged because it will give you a much better idea of what we are trying to do with our disciple making plan.

- B. Since the goal of all this is to meet regularly with others to read the Bible and talk about what we are learning, we can begin our implementation of this plan by thinking about what we will do to prepare to meet with another person. All effective service of God starts with prayer and a humble attitude of dependence on God. A critical part of faithful service of Jesus is the wisdom to know who to invest into. Pray, asking for God to help you identify a person in whom He is already working. Someone who has a desire and willingness to invest time and effort into their own pursuit of Jesus and spiritual growth. A person who is open and teachable. Ask God to join you and be part of this whole process.
- C. Here is how Jesus did this step:
¹² Now it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer with God. ¹³ And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: (Lk. 6:12-13)
- D. When you've spent some time in prayer and can identify one or two people you can get together with on a regular basis to read the Bible and have a conversation, invite others to join you on your Bible reading adventure. Maybe you won't be the teacher and someone else won't be teaching you, but you can meet with others to learn and grow together as peers. Whatever the dynamics of your discipleship group or relationship is going to be, the point is to be encouraged to spend time reading, thinking about, and talking over Scripture. Having the accountability of doing this with others can help motivate us to carry through and stick with spending time in God's word. Going alone, it is too easy to drift away and neglect this essential spiritual habit.
- E. Jesus was constantly inviting other people to join and following Him in different capacities:
²³ And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Lk. 9:23)
- F. The next step is to plan your time together. When will you meet? Where will this conversation take place? What are you trying to accomplish? Some groups may be comfortable enough meeting in a public space so no one carries the burden of hosting the group. Other groups will want to meet somewhere private so they can feel freer to talk about spiritual or personal items. All the logistical details will need to be figured out. Be intentional. Hoping and wishing for it to happen on its own probably will not work well. A decision must be made that is realistic and manageable for everyone involved. Someone needs to take charge of organizing and initiating the details.
- G. Again, we learn from Jesus. It is clear He had a specific plan in mind as He invited His closest disciples into the most demanding form of following Him:
¹⁹ And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of people." (Mt. 4:19)
- H. Another item that will need to be decided by the group is how everyone will be expected to participate. This means your group will either require preparation before the meeting or not. If your group decided to prepare beforehand, make sure each person knows that they will be expected to read the Bible verses connected to each lesson and answer all the questions before meeting together. This is the most recommended way of participating. However, if the best everyone can do with the time that they have is to get together without any preparation and

work though the study together as a group, this is better than not meeting at all. In this scenario, people only need to show up on time and make sure they have their Bible and study book with them. Pick the format that will work best for your group.

V. What Do I Do When We Get Together?

- A. After everything is lined up and we are prepared to meet with others to read and discuss the Bible, the next question that must be answered is, “What do I do when we get together?” The structure and flow of the fathering must get worked out. It is likely that each group will take on a life of its own. If an individual takes on the role of leader and teacher, their personality and style will greatly impact how the meetings play out. However, some general guidelines will be helpful.
- B. It is highly recommended that each spiritual conversation begins with prayer. It is a good habit to get into the routine of asking God, through the Holy Spirit, to help you understanding God’s word and apply it in meaningful ways in each person’s life. Regularly reminding ourselves that we can’t produce any fruit on our own and we have a need to stay connected to Jesus to be spiritually productive is a healthy habit.
- C. It is also a good idea to read the main passage for each study in its entirety together as a group. Even if the group has already read the text and answered all the questions in their preparation, that may have been a few days to almost a week ago (or more if you aren’t meeting every week). For the main passage to be fresh in everyone’s mind, reading it together as a group is preferred. This will also enable everyone to have the text being discussed open in front of them during the conversation.
- D. Once the passage is read, what follows is a spiritual conversation about the passage being studied, the lesson, what people are learning, and how they are trying to act on what God is showing them. The reason we want these groups to be small (2-4 people) is so everyone has a chance to participate and feel comfortable enough opening up on a personal level. No one person should monopolize the conversation. Everyone should be able to participate. Each person should be given the opportunity to be able to share their thoughts and ask their questions. Each group may not be able to answer all the questions everyone has, but at least they have the space to be able to vocalize their questions. If possible, the group should do their research and come back with an answer the next week for any unanswered questions.
- E. Another critical aspect of these spiritual conversations is the response. Each group needs to spend time talking about what each person is going to do about what they have learned. Bible study is about transformation. Perhaps one person will need to change the way they are thinking about themselves or a situation. Another person may need to figure out how to develop a particular character trait that they are lacking. Still another may need to take a specific course of action that may be a challenge for them. Whatever the case, each group should not skip the implementation part of the study.
- F. Finally, the group can end their time together in prayer. This time the prayer can be focused on asking for God’s help for applying what has been learned in the study. Try to make this prayer practical and future oriented. How does each person desire to change? What action is a person going to be taking? Bring these scenarios and desires to God asking for His Spirit to empower

you to be able to do the things God is asking each person to do through His word. Each person could pick an application directly from the text and pray for the ability to implement it in their life on a regular basis.

- G. The leadership of Community Alliance Church has a plan to create a room designated for the purpose of using these disciple making studies. This room will be designed with a comfortable living room feel type room that can be used for meeting with others. Once we get the toddler nursery moved to its new room, we can begin putting together our space for disciple making. Our hope is that this comfortable room can encourage you to engage with our disciple making plan in a more convenient and less time-consuming way. While it can be good to invite people into your home, that can take time and effort that you don't have. For this reason, we want to provide a comfortable, at-home feel space that you can simply walk in and use without additional hassle on your part. We want to motivate maximum participation with our disciple making plan, and providing a usable space for this purpose is one way we can do this. As the meeting ends, make sure everyone knows when you will be getting together the next time.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Be encouraged to overcome fear and step out of your comfort zone with an attitude of trust in Jesus. Take that step and see what God will do. Start the process of figuring out how you are going to personally participate in CAC's disciple making plan. Determine that you will begin meeting with others to read, study, and discuss the Bible in the next month. Take the necessary steps to line this up and start meeting with others!
- B. I can make a promise to those who are willing to participate in our disciple making plan. As you invest yourself this way and you observe God working in you and using you to work in the lives of others, you will experience a satisfaction and joy that nothing else can compare with. To know that God is using you personally to produce eternal fruit for His kingdom is one of life's greatest joys. It touches our heart and soul in a unique way. Being used by God is a privilege that only faithful disciples experience and enjoy. Learning how much this can impact you is life changing. That's not an overreach, it's true!