



**Leadership Lab
International**
Disciple Makers for Life

A GUIDE FOR DISCIPLE MAKERS

Bible Talks in Disciple Making

A guide for leaders preparing to teach, with examples from “Speak, I’m Listening” (1 Samuel 3)

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THE NINE STEPS

- 1 Start with the passage, not with the talk
- 2 Find the main point
- 3 Work out a short outline
- 4 Give them time to ponder along the way
- 5 Ask two kinds of questions
- 6 Now add the games, object lessons and sketches
- 7 Set the room up for relationship
- 8 Ask God for wisdom the whole way through
- 9 You do not have to go it alone

A Bible talk is not a performance you deliver. It is one of the ways we make disciples — which means the goal is not that they heard a good talk, but that they met God in His word and you learned something about what is going on in their hearts.

Here is the order that has served us well. Work it in this sequence. The extras come last for a reason.

1 Start with the passage, not with the talk

Before you plan anything, get familiar with the passage. Read it several times, slowly. Read it out loud. Read it in another translation.

Ask God to help you understand it — what is the main point, and which parts should be brought up. Prayer is not a formality, and it continues right through to the night you speak.

- **Choose shorter narrative passages when you can.** A story with a beginning and an end keeps the Bible teaching focused and is far easier for people to comprehend — especially teens. You can cover other parts in small group time, so stick to a portion of the passage. A sprawling passage produces a sprawling talk and will lose the focus of those you are stepping alongside.
- **Let the passage set the agenda.** You are looking for what is already there, not for a place to hang something you already wanted to say.

FROM “SPEAK, I’M LISTENING”

1 Samuel 3:1–10. Ten verses. One night. One boy, one old priest, one voice. Short enough to read aloud in three minutes and still have the whole room holding the same picture.

2 Find the main point, and let it help the discipleship focus for that gathering

Once you can say the main point in one sentence, you have something to build every other decision on. Anything that does not serve it comes out — however good it is.

- Write the big idea as a sentence you could say from the front or just have in mind.
- Write the one sentence you want them to carry home. If they forget everything else, this is what remains.

FROM “SPEAK, I’M LISTENING”

Big idea — “God speaks today. How do we put ourselves in a place where we can hear His voice?”

Take home — “God was the one calling. Samuel heard him because he was in a place where that voice could reach him — and because a spiritual father taught him to recognize whose voice it was. The caution was Eli had not taught Samuel how to listen to God.”

Notice what the main point sentence does: it keeps God central. That is not an accident, and it leads to the one caution that matters most.

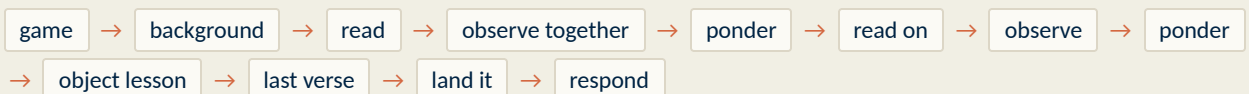
A CAUTION: DON'T MAKE THE TALK ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL STORY

Keep it focused on God. Your story can serve the passage in a sentence or two, but the moment the talk becomes about what happened to you, the room starts learning about you instead of meeting God. Ask yourself honestly: if I took my story out, is there still a talk here? If not, go back to the passage.

3 Work out a short outline that supports the main point

Short. A few moves, each one carrying the main point forward. If you cannot see the shape of it on half a page, it is too complicated to follow from a chair.

FROM "SPEAK, I'M LISTENING" — THE WHOLE SHAPE WAS



Every one of those moves serves the same main point about God speaking, trusting Him, and us being in a place to hear. Nothing is in there because it was clever.

4 Give them time to ponder along the way — not only at the end

This is the change that turns a talk into disciple making. If all the thinking happens after you finish, most of it never happens at all.

Break the passage into sections and stop at each one, so that you are journeying through this true story together rather than you reporting on it afterward. Where you have both teens and adults in the room, this also lets each of them meet the passage at their own depth.

- **Stop where the story stops.** The pauses should fall at natural seams in the text.
- **Let the silence be longer than is comfortable.** People need a few seconds before an honest answer surfaces.
- **If time permits, tell your leaders in advance where the pauses are,** so they are ready rather than surprised.

FROM "SPEAK, I'M LISTENING"

A "Thought to Ponder" sits in the middle of the passage, right after Eli's sons are described — not saved for the end. The leaders' note in the outline says it plainly and can help leaders prepare for their small group times: "Leaders, I would like to encourage you to think about that in your own lives and give space in the small group time to think about this together."

5 Ask two kinds of questions — and avoid yes and no

There are two kinds worth preparing, and you want both.

- **Observation questions about the passage.** What is happening here? What does this tell us about the person, the time, God?
- **Bridging questions into their lives.** Where does this land on a Tuesday?

Avoid yes and no questions. They feel like participation but they close the door. A yes or a no tells you nothing, and as a disciple maker you are trying to understand what is going on in the hearts of the people you are discipling. You cannot do that from a nod.

Closed, then open — the same question, reworked

INSTEAD OF

TRY

“Could you hear your teammate?”

“What made it easier to pick out their voice?”

“Do you have a quiet time?”

“Where are the places in your week where God would have a chance at having you listen to His voice?”

“Is anything distracting you?”

“What’s loud enough in your life right now to keep you from noticing?”

“Do you have someone discipling you?”

“Who’s your Eli?”

And when you ask, actually wait. Do not rescue the silence with your own answer — the moment you answer your own question, you have taught them that they do not need to.

6 Now add the games, object lessons and sketches

Once you know where the passage is going, and only then, add the other elements. Built in this order they serve the point. Built first, they become the point and the passage gets bent to fit them.

The test for any of them: **what does this teach, and is it what my passage teaches?** If the game teaches something true but different, change the game, not the passage.

Games with a purpose

- **The debrief matters more than the game.** Plan the questions before you plan the rules.
- **Call back to it later in the talk,** so the room feels the connection instead of being told about it.

FROM "SPEAK, I'M LISTENING"

A blindfolded cup-sorting relay, where one player who cannot see is guided by one teammate who can see the whole grid, while every other team is shouting at the same time. It teaches picking one trusted voice out of the noise, and trusting someone with a view you do not have. Later in the talk, one line does the work: "Remember in the game: the blindfolded player needed someone who could see the board."

Object lessons

- Simple, physical, and safe. One idea per object.
- The best ones create a moment the room feels before you explain it.

FROM "SPEAK, I'M LISTENING"

A volunteer sits in a chair with their eyes open, easily. Then, blindfolded, they hear the chair shaken and dragged and returned to exactly the same spot, and are talked down into it. Two sentences land it: "Nothing about the chair changed. Only what you could see changed." and "You could sit down blindfolded because of what you already knew with your eyes open."

Short dramas and sketches

A ninety-second sketch can put a room inside a story faster than five minutes of explaining. Some shapes that work:

- **Play the scene straight.** Two or three people act the passage itself — Samuel getting up three times and being sent back to bed three times gets funnier and more uncomfortable each time, which is exactly the point.
- **Play the modern parallel.** Someone trying to have a real conversation while a phone buzzes, a friend talks over them, and music plays. Then read the passage and let the room make the connection.
- **Play it wrong on purpose.** A sketch where someone completely misreads who is speaking to them, then ask the room what they would have done differently.

Keeping a sketch useful

- Under two minutes. Three actors at most.
- Rehearse it once. Once is usually enough, and none is usually a disaster.
- **End on the question, not on the laugh.** The laugh is fine — but the last beat should hand the room something to think about.
- **Use your students in it where you can.** A teen who acted in the sketch is far more likely to talk in the circle afterward.

7 Set the room up for relationship

How you arrange chairs teaches something before you say a word. Rows point everyone at you. A circle points them at each other.

- **Use a circle, or several smaller circles with a leader in each.** Smaller circles are far more conducive to relational disciple making, and they build trust much faster than a room in rows.
- **Four to six people per circle.** Big enough that no one is on the spot, small enough that no one can hide.
- **A leader in every circle** — someone who knows names, who will notice who did not speak, and who will follow up during the week.
- **The leader does not answer first.** And when they do answer, they answer honestly. A leader's honest, unpolished answer gives everyone else permission.
- **Same circles over time, where you can.** Trust is built by returning to the same faces, not by being reshuffled every session.

This is where you will actually learn what is going on in their hearts. The talk opens the door; the circle is where you walk through it.

8 Ask God for wisdom the whole way through

In the preparation, yes — but also while you are giving the talk. You will see things in the room you could not have planned for: a question that opens something up, a silence that needs waiting on, a point you had prepared that clearly should not be made tonight.

- **Be willing to drop a point.** A prepared outline is a servant, not a master.
- **Pray for the specific people who will be in the room,** by name, before you go.
- **Pray after, too** — for what you saw and heard, and for what to do about it this week.

9 You do not have to go it alone

Always feel free to ask for help. Those of us who have been doing this a long time would gladly step alongside you as you learn to use Bible talks as a form of disciple making. You could do some of the following:

- Send your outline to someone a week ahead and ask what is unclear.
- Ask a more experienced leader to sit in and debrief with you afterward — not to grade you, but to tell you what they saw in the room.
- Ask your circle leaders afterward what came up. They heard things you did not.
- When something did not work, say so out loud to someone. That is how you grow and we grow together as we go and make disciples.

One-page prep checklist

Work down this list in order. Do not skip to the bottom half before the top half is done.

THE PASSAGE

- ☐ I have read the passage several times, out loud, and prayed over it.
- ☐ It is short enough to hold in one sitting — ideally a narrative with a beginning and an end.
- ☐ I can say the main point in one sentence.
- ☐ I have written the one sentence I want them to take home.
- ☐ If I removed my personal story, there would still be a talk here.

THE SHAPE

- ☐ My outline fits on half a page, and every move supports the main point.
- ☐ I have marked where we stop to ponder — spread through the talk, not saved for the end.
- ☐ I have written observation questions and bridging questions.
- ☐ I have checked every question: none of them can be answered with yes or no.

THE EXTRAS

- ☐ Any game, object lesson or sketch teaches what my passage teaches.
- ☐ I have planned the debrief questions, not just the activity.
- ☐ I have a callback line that ties the activity into the teaching.
- ☐ Anything physical has been checked for safety, with a second leader assigned.

THE ROOM AND THE PEOPLE

- ☐ Chairs are in a circle, or in smaller circles with a leader at each.
- ☐ Every circle leader knows the plan and knows where the pauses fall.
- ☐ Our team is praying for the people who will be in the room, by name.
- ☐ I have asked someone more experienced to look at this — or to sit in or to meet up.