

STRATFORD EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

GUIDE FOR DISCIPLESHIP CLASS AND BAND MEETINGS

Allan Chesswas *November 2025*

“Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.” – Leviticus 19:2

DISCIPLESHIP BAND GUIDE

Discipleship bands are small groups of people who meet together to better learn to obey the commands of God, particular:

- To be perfect as God is perfect (Matt 5:8),
- To be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16),
- To be blameless (1 Tim 5:7) and beyond reproach (1 Tim 3:2),
- To bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2),
- To correct, rebuke and exhort one another (2 Tim 4:2),
- To confess our sins to one another, that we may be healed (James 5:16).

Not that we consider that we might eradicate sin entirely in our bodies – but that we would nonetheless work to this end, growing in virtue and eradicating vice.

And not only that we eradicate vice – but that we would also be courageous in virtue.

A discipleship band establishes general rules of Christian conduct expected of those in attendance, in accordance with the command of scripture to be holy, and establishes a pattern of mutual discipleship and accountability regarding the commands of God in the Bible.

Discipleship bands were famously championed and developed by John Wesley in the 18th Century in England. These discipleship bands became known as Methodists, and their commitment to this way of life resulted in the rapid spread of evangelical Christianity throughout the United Kingdom and North America in the 18th Century, and throughout the world in the missionary movement of the 19th Century.

Discipleship bands were adopted by Christians in a range of other denominations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, but their popularity has waned in recent times. This may be because vice has so captured us through the technological innovations of the last 100 years. It may also be due to the tendency of the rules that were established by the Methodists to be prohibiting rather than moderating, in relation to matters the Bible is not prohibitive on (ie alcohol, worldly books and arts).

This guide adopts the guidelines of the Methodist Societies for band meetings drawn up by John Wesley in 1743. It does not adopt all of the rules for Methodist Societies, but includes the consideration of these rules, and prayerful adoption, and/or modification and addition, as part of the business of discipleship bands.

A band meeting guide based on the Methodist model is outlined on the following two pages, and the 1743 guidelines are included as an Appendix.

From Stratford Church Plant 2026 Constitution Documentation. Allan Chesswas, 2025.

CLASS MEETINGS AND DISCIPLESHP BANDS DISCUSSION GUIDE

To this end, we intend to commit to discipleship classes and band meetings, as per the Methodist pattern, but fortnightly

The rules of these class and band meetings are:

1. To meet once a fortnight, at the least, men meeting with men and women meeting with women.
2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason.
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.
4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, the temptations we have felt, since our last meeting.
5. To end every meeting with prayer, suited to the state of each person present.
6. To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.
7. To use the Rules of the Methodist Societies for band meetings drawn up by John Wesley in 1743 as a point of reference in considering our state, and to discuss the accuracy and efficacy of these rules in the light of scripture, and to adopt, amend and add to them accordingly.

As per Wesley's 1743 instructions, some of the questions proposed to every one before he is admitted among us may be to this effect: —

1. Have you the forgiveness of your sins?
2. Have you peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit, that you are a child of God?
4. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?
6. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
7. Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plain and home?
8. Do you desire that every one of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
9. Consider! Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear, concerning you?
10. Do you desire that, in doing this, we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?
11. Is it your desire and design to be on this, and all other occasions, entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?

Again, following Wesley, any of the preceding questions may be asked as often as occasion offers; the four following at every meeting: —

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?

In addition to this, that our eyes would be ever set on Christ and his cross, and the task of preaching the gospel, and knowing that our greatest temptations are to shrink back from the task of testifying to Christ, the following questions would always be asked: —

1. What opportunities have you had to testify to the power of the blood of Christ since our last meeting? What opportunities have you taken? What opportunities have you failed to take?
2. What opportunities have you had to call people to repentance since our last meeting? What opportunities have you taken? What opportunities have you failed to take?
3. What concerns or anxieties can we pray about to help you to be a bold witness to and for Jesus Christ and his Lordship?

Finally, the time may be used to discuss, adopt, amend and add to the Rules of the Methodist Societies for band meetings drawn up by John Wesley in 1743 in our own bands, to enable us to better correct, rebuke and exhort one another.

Appendix: Rules of the United Societies, 1743

The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies, May 1, 1743.

1. In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to Mr. Wesley, in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired, as did two or three more the next day, that he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That he might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), he gave those advices from time to time which he judged most needful for them, and they always concluded their meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.
2. This was the rise of the United Society, first in Europe, and then in America. Such a society is no other than "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."
3. That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled the leader.

It is his duty:

- I. To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order:
 - a) to inquire how their souls prosper;
 - b) to advise, reprove, comfort or exhort, as occasion may require;
 - c) to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the preachers, church, and poor.
- II. 2. To meet the ministers and the stewards of the society once a week, in order:
 - a) To inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reproved;
 - b) To pay the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.
 - c) To show their account of what each person has contributed.

4. There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies: "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as:

- The taking of the name of God in vain.
- The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling.
- Drunkenness: buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity.
- Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.
- Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling.
- The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.
- The giving or taking things on usury—i.e., unlawful interest.
- Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers.
- Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.
- Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as:
 - The putting on of gold and costly apparel.
 - The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus.
 - The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.
 - Softness and needless self-indulgence.
 - Laying up treasure upon earth.
 - Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

5. It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly: By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men:

- To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison.
- To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine that "we are not to do good unless our hearts be free to it."
- By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another, helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only.
- By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.
- By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord's sake.

6. It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are:

- The public worship of God.
- The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.
- The Supper of the Lord.
- Family and private prayer.
- Searching the Scriptures.
- Fasting or abstinence.

7. These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

Rules of the Band-Societies

The design of our meeting is, to obey that command of God, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

To this end, we intend —

1. To meet once a week, at the least.
2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason.
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.
4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, the temptations we have felt, since our last meeting.
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