

Christ's Pattern for His Church: Disciples making Disciples

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Christ's Pattern for His Church requires us to make Disciples capable of making Disciples: This is the Great Commission Mandate

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How do converts become true disciples of Christ? What has to happen in order for a new believer in Christ to become a disciple? We know that a true disciple denies himself; he takes up his cross daily; he follows the Lamb; he loves the brethren; he puts sin to death; he walks by means of the Spirit; he is zealous for good works; and he serves God.

True disciples grow into disciples as the result of systematic encouragement, counseling, and teaching by maturing brethren. It says in Acts 14:21-22, “Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.” Disciple-making is the aim or goal of The Great Commission. The Body of Christ is to commit itself to the task of making disciples. But we have many shallow Christians today; folks who follow Christ in a tentative, stuttering and sputtering manner—who are not equipped to reproduce their faith in others.

We need to return to the Word and uncover again the secret behind Paul's optimism and effectiveness as a disciple-maker. When we pour over Paul's New Testament epistles we find the Apostle Paul's heart throbbing and beating with a disciple-making passion. For Paul, pastor and missionary, disciple-making is his controlling mandate, his sacred trust and deputation—the central work that commands his full attention and energies. Colossians 1:28-29 encapsulates the lengthy process of disciple-making in just two verses. The near context of these verses is *Christ in you* (a reference to the Christian's union with Christ – 1:27). Because the believer is *in Christ*; and Christ is *in him*—discipleship and Christian maturity are real and possible.

In equipping others in biblical discipleship, it is helpful to think in terms of the following scriptural essentials which we have designated the five “C’s” of discipleship:

- I. The Call to Discipleship** (The Great Commission itself—Matthew 28:18-20)
- II. The Cost of Discipleship** (The self-denial commanded by Christ of every disciple—Luke 9:23-26)
- III. The Cross of Discipleship** (The power for change found in the cross—2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
- IV. The Cost of Disciple-making** (The joy in mentoring others—1 Thess 2:1-12)
- V. The Christ-likeness that comes by Discipleship** (The goal of presenting every man complete in Christ—Colossians 1:28-29)

Disciple-making should be the normal agenda and priority of every Christian. Getting people into small groups is NOT the same as discipleship. Our small groups need to be *training groups* where believers learn how to study the Word; pray with each other; and work on spiritual growth. A biblical church must keep returning to the mandate found in The Great Commission. Our faithfulness calls for continuous training and discipling of all members of the church.

The goal of all ministry is to nurture disciples. Disciple-makers are to invest in their disciples in such a way that they are equipped in conviction; character; and competence—only in this way will we be able to multiply disciples (2 Tim 2:2). The Scriptures call us to abandon ourselves to Christ and the gospel, realizing that God is focused on people-growth by the power of the Spirit.

Congregations tend to slip into religious ‘forms’ while abandoning the N.T. function of the church which is making disciples. Church leaders must recapture this vision for disciple-making and in response, call the brethren to refocus on the Word and helping people be shaped into Christ-likeness through discipleship. When church leaders cast the vision for discipleship instead of ‘hoarding talent’—then growing members of the body will be far more intentional at constantly training others so that replication takes place. This will mean that many of our disciples will be called to other places; other churches; and to mission fields—this replication and movement of disciples is how the early church spread all over the known world in just a few decades (note the example of the Thessalonian believers—1 Thess 1:6-10).

Questions to help assess your church’s commitment to the Great Commission:

- What is your ecclesiology: Christ’s pattern for His church, or an entrepreneurial business model?
- Have you embraced the *transformation mandate*—that every believer is a disciple and every believer is a discipler?
- Are you modeling discipleship from the pulpit—knowing that only if the members of the body are ‘gospel saturated’ will they know how to speak into the lives of the brethren?
- Do you know why Christians choose isolation when they ache for community?
- Are you making the mistake of calling Bible study ‘discipleship’ when in reality discipleship actually only takes place when teaching and personal biblical counseling overlap?
- Why is it that we may find we have a surplus of teachers; but we will never have a surplus of shepherds?
- Is your ministry animated by The Great Commission? Is your ministry characterized by that N.T. function of bringing each member to maturity through discipleship?
- Are you convinced that preaching is not the only ministry of the Word and that discipleship is necessary to move believers to maturity?
- Are you convinced that shepherding from the pulpit has its limitations and that life on life soul care can only take place in discipleship?

What is the long-term cost of spiritual weakness due to a lack of discipleship?

- The life of the body suffers
- The spiritual safety of the body suffers
- Assimilation of new members into the body suffers
- The usefulness of the body suffers
- The ability of the church to please Christ suffers

Additional questions related to discipleship for church leaders to consider:

- Do you see a *disconnect* between your church's stated philosophy of ministry and the present lack of discipleship?
- Would you agree that the longer a church postpones discipleship, the greater the temptation will be to shape church programs by market forces and financial considerations?
- Have you considered that the choice to not make discipleship a priority is a choice for immaturity (Eph 4:14-16)? Pastors and elders are to be utterly intentional in preparing the members of the body to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11-12ff.).
- Is it true that for too long it has been common for churches to offer a *mélange* of Christian activities and ministry options without real intentionality in the area of discipleship? There are a host of advantages of "mainstreaming" the discipleship vision from the pulpit and from every church leader. First of all, it provides a consolidation of our purpose and it ties us much closer to one's biblical philosophy of ministry. "Mainstreaming" the vision of discipleship plants a much needed optimism in the person in the pew that they can be (and should be) involved in soul care.

Spirit-engendered ministry is very often NOT pushed through a programmatic grid. Instead it happens spontaneously. As stewards of the discipleship vision, church leaders must complete their part in the ministry "chain reaction" by seeking to unleash the mutual edification of the body. The discipleship vision needs to be reiterated because it easily slips from view. The members of the body must be equipped and unleashed to bring the body to maturity. As stewards of the giftedness of the church body, leaders must see church programs as only an attempt to set conditions for ministry.

What does Christ require of a true disciple?

I. The Cost of Discipleship

A. A true disciple of Jesus Christ is a person who does not live by his natural desires—but instead lives by the loving rule of Christ, his Head. A true disciple is conformed to the will and likeness of his Head. When Christ set forth the cost of discipleship—He usually did so when talking about His own impending death. It says in John 12:23-26, "And Jesus answered them saying, 'The hour has come for the Son of

Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall my servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

B. Christ joins His own ordeal (the cross of Calvary) to the ordeal the true disciple will undergo in a life of self-renunciation. The Father gave Christ a ‘Bride’—the elect of every age—a people without number from every tribe, tongue, and nation. But Christ must die for His Bride in order to resurrect His Bride who lies in the cold tomb of her spiritual deadness and depravity.

This is such a thrilling truth. The context of true discipleship is Christ’s own death for us. It was Christ’s cross-work on our behalf that brought forth the infinite fruit of reconciliation; both spiritual reconciliation (salvation), and cosmic reconciliation (the renewal of creation—Col 1:19-20).

C. We have a “death” to undergo as well. Self-denial is the cost of true discipleship and it is also the cost of fruitfulness. Jesus gives an illustration from nature in John 12:23-26. A shiny wheat kernel has a tough resilient seed coat. It repels dust and scuffing and moisture.

But in order for that wheat grain to reproduce; it must go down into the darkness of the soil—be permeated with water until the seed coat bursts. If you pulled a seed from the ground in that state it would look dead—even rotten (Jn 12:24).

But this death-like state is the prerequisite to germination. The kernel swells and the beginnings of leaves sprout and push their way above the soil line into the sun. When the plant comes to maturity; what was once a single seed is now a series of wheat heads filled with ripe grain.

D. What a picture this is of true discipleship (planted in the dark soil for the purpose of seed germination). The individual who follows Christ will have to die to self in order to bear fruit. Jesus warned against *abiding alone*—He warned against *loving one’s life in this world* (Jn 12:25).

The Lord Jesus made stringent demands on those who would be His disciples. In today’s culture of consumerism and easy-believism—it is all-too common to think that a person can *add Christ to his life*. Such is not the case according to our text.

In many Christian circles today; folks are promised that Christianity will save them from hell and guarantee them a place in heaven. The assumption common today is that once eternal life is secured, the individual has every right to enjoy the best that this life has to offer.

E. Countless souls are sadly mistaken about the requirements of discipleship; but Christ removes all middle ground. He defines what a commitment to Him actually looks like. Therefore to preach on discipleship passages tends to produce shock among many listeners. For multitudes of professing Christians have the utmost difficulty reconciling the passages on discipleship with their own ideas on what Christianity should be and what Christianity should afford them.

They reason in the following manner, “How can Christianity be a free gift if following Christ requires me to die to self and lose my life for His sake and the sake of the Gospel?” The words of Christ are very clear. There is hardly any room for misunderstanding if His words are accepted at face value.

II. The terms of discipleship as laid down by the Savior of the world:

A. A supreme love for Jesus Christ.

“If any one comes to Me, and does not hate his father and mother and wife, and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

This grates on our 21st C. ears. Does Christ really command supreme love to Him without any rivals? Won't divine grace allow something less than this from the saved?

Actually the most difficult clause in this passage is the expression, *“Yes, [hate] even his own life.”* Self-love is one of the most stubborn hindrances to discipleship. Not until we are willing to lay down our lives are we in the place where He wants us to be.

When preaching the necessity of a disciple's love to Christ; it is essential to stress that our love to Him is *reflexive* (a response enabled by His love to us first). In other words, as the Apostle John says, *“We love, because He first loved us”* (1 Jn 4:19). Our love to Christ is a response to seeing Him as He really is—to seeing who God is towards us in Christ.

Christ is God's infinite treasure given freely to sinners who believe and repent. But the key mark or evidence of believing and repenting is not only turning from sin to God; but also an apprehension of Christ as one's greatest treasure. *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it”* (Matt 13:45-46). This is the fulcrum, the leverage point—the entire issue: if the sinner sees Christ as precious beyond measure; then no sacrifice is too great to have Him.

Paul saw this treasure principle as an *“either or prospect.”* We must release our hold on all the things that are in the world in order to gain Christ. *“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I might gain Christ”* (Phil 3:8).

B. A denial of self.

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself. . .” (Matt 16:24). Denial of self is not the same as denying oneself certain activities or pleasures such as foods, drink, or possessions. Self denial means complete submission to the lordship of Christ over all of life. It is the affirmation that self has no rights at all.

In self-denial, self abdicates the throne that Christ may be sovereign over one's life. Paul summarizes this principle in 2 Corinthians 5:9, 14-15. *“Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.” “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”*

Thus denial of self is the end of a self-directed life. Self denial results in *universal obedience* to the lordship of Christ. It is living without ‘compartments’ in one's life. It is living as Christ's possession.

C. A deliberate choosing of the cross.

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross. . .” (Matt 16:24). No doubt you have heard some suffering saint utter, “My chronic illness is my cross; my gout is my cross; or

my wayward spouse is my cross.” But this is not what Jesus is referring to. The cross taken up by a disciple is not some physical infirmity or mental anguish. The cross we take up is a path that is *deliberately chosen*.

It is a path of *radical identification* with Christ which will involve a degree of dishonor and reproach from the world. Jesus told His followers to expect to be misunderstood and even hated for Christ’s sake (Jn 15:18-16:2). To deliberately choose the cross is to set out on the *narrow way* spoken of by Christ (Matt 7:13-14). The narrow way is the way of transformation and renewal by the Word and the Spirit (Rom 12:1-2).

Those who do not choose the narrow way simply allow themselves to *be conformed to this world* and its ways and values. How different is the walk of the true disciple—he is always watching his own steps and making frequent ‘course corrections’ to assure that he daily choosing the narrow way; the way of the cross.

D. A life spent in following Christ.

“*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*” (Matt 16:24). Christ is our example of obedience. His life was totally conformed to the will of His Father. Christ’s life was lived in the power of the Spirit.

It was a life of unselfish service—of zeal, of expenditure, of self-control, of meekness, of kindness, faithfulness, and devotion (Gal 5:22-23). The life of His disciple must manifest the fruit of Christ-likeness (Jn 15:8). Those who follow Christ *gather with Him* (Luke 11:23)—they are *fishers of men* (Matt 4:19). Those who follow Christ take their “marching orders” from Christ—they have made Christ’s cause their cause. They are *zealous for good works* (Titus 2:14).

Their boldness for kingdom values is a result of following Christ. “*Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus*” (Acts 4:13).

E. A fervent love for all who belong to Christ.

“*By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (Jn 13:35). This is the love that desires the very highest for a person in light of eternity. It is a love able to esteem others as better than oneself. It is a love which covers a multitude of sins. It is a love that suffers long and is kind (1 Cor 13:4-7).

It is a love that finds great joy in sacrificing for the sake of the kingdom. In fact one pastor put it this way. The world’s definition of happiness is self acquiring what it desires. But the Christian’s definition of joy is as follows: *When my life intersects with the lives of my brethren at the points of sacrificial love for the kingdom of God—it is inestimable joy.*

John Piper has noted well that the experience of Christ’s love *fits us to love the brethren supernaturally*. “*Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart*” (1 Pet 1:22).

The reception of God’s love produces an irresistible desire to pass the Father’s love on to others. In fact, loving the brethren is the supreme test of love to God (1 Jn 3:14-24). Says William McDonald, “Without this love, discipleship would be a cold, legalistic asceticism.” But all our instruction, including

our training of disciples, is to dove-tail into the action of love. “*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*” (1 Tim 1:5).

F. An unswerving continuance in His Word.

“*If you continue in My Word then you are My disciples indeed*” (Jn 8:31). Genuine discipleship demonstrates a *track record* of faithfulness. It is not a flash in the pan moment of blazing glory—it is as one pastor has said *long obedience in the same direction*.

Jesus is emphasizing *continuance*. Being a disciple requires endurance, stamina, holding fast, determination. Countless individuals start well only to fall away through neglect (Heb 2:1-3).

In the parable of the soils, the good soil is identified by the fact that the *good seed* (the Word of God) dominates exceptionally so as to bring a harvest! This is God’s Word controlling the life; revolutionizing everything in one’s life—dictating your values on pleasures, cares, possessions, and life direction.

Disciples persevere by *looking unto Jesus* as a habit of life (Heb 12:1-2). They stir themselves to action by feeding their faith on the promises of God’s Word. “*And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*” (Heb 6:12-13). True disciples manifest a devotion to the Word that fits them and furnishes them for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

G. A forsaking of all to follow Him.

“*So therefore, no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions*” (Luke 14:33). This is perhaps the most unpopular of all of Christ’s terms of discipleship.

Christ is laying out a specific requirement in regards to the world’s goods. In effect, He is issuing a command not to stock pile this world’s goods. Maintain material possessions that are absolutely essential and that could be used for the spread of the gospel. A true disciple is controlled by a passion to advance the cause of Christ. The genuine disciple invests everything above his current needs in the work of the Lord—and then leaves the future with God.

In seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, he believes that he will never lack food and clothing. Therefore he cannot hold onto surplus funds and resources when he knows that souls are perishing for want of the gospel. In *giving up all his own possessions*, he offers what he cannot keep anyway, and what he has ceased to love. He plows the cream of his time, talent, affections, and resources into the cause of Christ.

Theses seven terms of discipleship are clear and unequivocal. When we examine our lives in light of these seven requirements—is it not easy to say, “Lord I am an unprofitable servant?” Confessing our past failure, let us courageously face up to the claims of Christ upon us and seek from now on to be true disciples of our Glorious Lord.

How we need to recline upon the mercy and grace of Christ. For our Savior’s grace has brought us into a relationship of sonship, status, favor, and acceptance with God. The grace of Christ holds us up and sustains us—He is our life (Col 3:1-4).

Our steady progress toward maturity cannot be reduced to the mastery of a moral code. Though moral excellence is required of God's people (2 Pet 1:5), the saint who is being made like his Savior is steadily growing in his heart-knowledge of Christ.

No small part of our conformity to Christ is a result of beholding the glory of Christ. *"But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord the Spirit"* (2 Cor 3:18).

Listen to the Apostle Paul as he speaks about the knowledge of Christ which is central to maturity: *"That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Col 2:2-3)).

Paul's passion as a disciple was to *know Christ*—ours must flow from the same motive (Phil 3:10).

Christ's Pattern for His Church (Part One)

Life in the body: *Is the church an institution or a living organism?*

I. God has a specific plan or pattern for the Body of Christ.

A. *The church is a living organism composed of interdependent parts; the church is not an institution.* Those in union with Christ are also in union with one another. The living 'body analogy' for the church helps us understand the true organic nature of the church (1 Cor 12:12-13, 18). (Gary Inrig, *Life in His Body*, Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1975, p. 30).

The church is an organism of interdependent parts (12:22-25). What difference does that make in the way we 'do church?' It makes a world of difference! We know from history (and perhaps also from our own experiences) that the church tends to revert to an institution. In this lesson we will be examining how the gospel puts a check on that kind of declension.

The scriptural premise in this lesson is that our commitment to the gospel keeps the true organic nature of the church in view (and it keeps the true nature of the church central in our practice). By "organic" we mean that the church is a living body by virtue of its union with Christ. Believers are spiritually joined to Christ and to one another. ***By constantly emphasizing the reality of our union with Christ and one another in the Body, the gospel helps check the drift toward institutionalism. Only when we are saturated with the gospel will we be kept from the tendency to 'redefine' the church as an institutional structure made up merely of programs, activities, gifted individuals, and teachings.***

B. *The body of Christ is the corporate expression of the grace of Christ. The gifts in the body at work are each a facet of Christ's character reproduced and made visible* (John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic*, Victor, 1996, p. 101). The church must be saturated with the gospel in order to 'be the gospel'. In Christ we have all we need for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). God intends that the local church be a corporate display of His glory and wisdom—that is His plan for the church. How often do we think about the nature of the church in this way? Our institutional thinking

lets us settle for a concept of the church as ‘Christian culture’ instead (Eph 3:10-11; Jn 13:34-35; Jn 17:21-23) (Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, Crossway, 2005, p. 26).

God’s character is known by both the truth of the gospel and by the church’s organic union with Christ as her members function in harmony—showing collectively the character of Christ. God bids His people to enter His plot; His story—to be part of the big picture to manifest His glory through a supernatural community animated by Christ (Lane/Tripp, *How People Change*, New Growth Press, 2006, pp. 93-94).

The church is a medium of revelation—revealing the character of God. It does so ONLY when it incarnates the disposition of Jesus in our relationships. Only then will nations and angels behold in it the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10ff.). Wooing, winsome, conquering grace is a function of the church manifesting the qualities of Christ her Head (Charles Jefferson, *The Building of the Church*, New York: Macmillan, 1913, p. 154).

C. *The fellowship of the members of the body is proof of the divine power of Jesus—“that they may be one” (Jn 17:21-23).* According to Christ’s prayer to the Father in John chapter seventeen, the unity of the brethren is evidence to the world that Christ came from heaven. The Lord declares His ministry to be that of binding men together by indissoluble bonds (Jefferson, p. 48-52).

The miracle of regeneration has made us “new creatures” made for true community (salvation in Christ has restored our ability to reflect the Creator—the sphere in which that takes place is relationships). We have something for which the world hungers—TRUE COMMUNITY. A group of individuals committed to one another where it is safe to know and be known—a place where you belong, are missed when absent, and where you make a significant contribution. The world wants community, but not on Christ’s terms.

Because of the grace of God there is no one on earth better equipped for true community than a believer. Consider our equipping: true believers have died with Christ and are now controlled by Christ’s love so as to no longer live for self but for Him who died and rose on their behalf (2 Cor 5:14-15). They are alive in Christ and joined to Him in an immutable covenant of love. They have the very righteousness of Christ imputed to their account (a new identity). They are indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit who is eager to produce the fruit of the Spirit. Their relationships with the brethren are held together supernaturally by Christ. They have the living Word of God which spells out God’s will for their relationships. They can be endlessly generous with forgiveness and acceptance because they have received both in infinite measure from Christ.

D. *In order to understand the true nature of the church, we must grasp the fact that God the Father through the Son has formed a new humanity* (‘Christ in you’—see John 14:16-21 and Colossians 1:25-27). By union with Christ we are complete in Him (all the benefits of His Person belong to the believer). Our supernatural union with Christ also means that believers are supernaturally joined together into a social structure called the ‘Body of Christ.’ This is how Christ sees us—as His body on earth. This makes a world of difference in how His church is to function.

Because by nature, the Church is a living organic body by virtue of union with Christ; our relationships among the brethren no longer exist for social reasons alone. a.) God intends that the relationships in the body exist for mutual edification. b.) God intends that collectively we are to manifest the character and disposition of Christ. c.) God intends that our body life (fellowship) as ‘true community’ reflect the very communal life of the Godhead (see John 17).

In this context the scriptural commands *to bear one another’s burdens; defer to one another; consider others as more important than yourself; accept one another; maintain unity; say the same thing (doctrinally)*—make perfect sense.

In order for the church to reveal Christ, her glorious Head, she must live upon Him and live out her vital connection to Him AND live out her connection to the brethren. This is central to the mission of the church. Now, we live upon Christ by living upon His gospel. We live upon Christ by becoming saturated with the gospel and by allowing the gospel to be the mould into which our lives are ‘poured’—the gospel provides the shape of genuine Christianity.

In applying the truths from this portion of the lesson, we ought to ask ourselves the following kinds of questions: How strong is my desire to get to know the brethren? Why is it often weak? Have I considered that my desire to know God parallels the desire to know my brethren?

II. The members of the body are vitally connected to Christ and to one another.

A. Justification by faith (righteousness from outside of us—the righteousness of Christ imputed to us) is the basis for true community. Without justification, we could not know our brother—intimacy and transparency would be blocked by ego and by self-protection. But Christ opens the way to our brother. Christ opens up peace, love, acceptance, and service (Rom 15:1-7). Christ alone is the source of all unity (Eph 4:1-3); He is the ground and strength of our fellowship (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954, pp. 23-24, 30, 39).

Because Christ before God carries the status, worth, acceptance, favor, sonship, and standing of each believer; we can afford to ‘take the risks’ required to form close relationships with other believers. For in Christ, God treats us as if we had fulfilled perfect righteousness—He identifies His Name with ours—calling us His own children (1 Jn 3:1). *If we truly believed this spiritual reality, just how much more would we pursue close relationships with the brethren?*

B. The purpose of the church—“that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10) demands two non-negotiable essentials: a.) that the individual members are connected to Christ, and, b.) that God’s blueprint be followed (Inrig, p. 11). Thus, in order to carry out God’s purpose for His church, we will have to take His blueprint seriously.

The following kinds of questions can help us examine our philosophy of ministry so that it might be brought into alignment with Scripture: How does God’s purpose for the church

absolutely rule out a ‘spectator’ role for believers? How can we prevent sending the message that church attendees are merely ‘consumers’ of spiritual commodities?

C. Our philosophy of ministry must be entirely shaped by Christ’s pattern for His church. The life of the church is defined by the true nature of the church: a group of individuals who have life in Christ in common. The members are united together in the reality of the indwelling Spirit. The presence of the indwelling Spirit gives the church a supernatural dynamic which is unique among all human organizations (Robert Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1972, pp. 21-22, 27).

The term “members of one another” (Rom 12:5) implies interdependent cooperation among believers (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25; 1 Cor 12:21-25). Christ, by His finished work for us, took the separation; the ‘dis-relatedness’ of our sin, and He gave us the right relatedness of true community in its place. In redemption He gave us, as a gift of grace, His own right-relatedness to the Holy Trinity (Lane/Tripp, pp. 79-80).

D. The church is a true community of people who are committed to doing spiritual good to others (Dever and Alexander, p. 41). From the nature of the church revealed in Scripture flows the function of the church.

It is time we ask the following kinds of questions: How can I be more deliberate in getting together with another person for the purpose of his or her spiritual good? Why does the individual believer experience an impoverished spirit when he or she discontinues mutual edification in his relationships in the body of Christ? We know the answer: we are created anew in Christ for supernatural relationships. If we neglect the pursuit of these relationships we rob ourselves and others of the appointed channel of transforming love and grace.

Growing believers ought to labor in love to more fully connect other believers to Christ. Mutual edification in the gospel is paramount for spiritual health (Rom 15:14). David Powlison comments that countless counseling crises occur because people don’t know how to get in touch with the living Lord Jesus (C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, Zondervan, 1986, p. 169).

III. The corporate function of the body is gospel-driven and Christ-dependent.

A. True fellowship involves translating vertical fellowship with the Lord into horizontal fellowship with the brethren (1 Cor 1:9-10) (MacArthur, p. 115). The body is only healthy when its members are in subjection to Christ its Head and are responding to His commands under the loving rule of His Word—only then is the church functioning properly (Saucy, p. 29).

B. The body is lavishly supplied with all its needs for life, health, growth, and unity as it holds fast to Christ, its Head (Col 2:19). The individual members of the body then function as channels of spiritual nutrition in relation to one another that the body might grow “with a growth that is from God” (Col 2:19) (Saucy, pp. 30-31).

We need a better understanding of the gospel in order to get closer to Christ. The church is weak on the present benefits of Christ's work because the church is weak on the gospel. Only when the church is immersed in the gospel will she truly begin to see Christ as her 'Source Person' for all she needs (Lane/Tripp, pp. 4, 6, 13, 238-240).

C. *We need an incisive awareness of the gospel's implications for corporate life together—the gospel must enjoy a central position in the church so as to govern the way the church functions.* Then the church will gain traction. God concentrates His power in the gospel, so rather than thinking up new methodologies and programs; let us turn to the gospel for our oneness, walk, warfare, worship, worldview, witness, and wholeness (Dever and Alexander, pp. 21-22).

IV. Christ is building His church; He commands every member to build with Him.

A. *To edify is to build up. We are commanded to please our fellow believer so as to “build him up” (Rom 15:2).* The fact that we are members one of another in a living organism is not grasped by most church members. Let all be done with a view to building up the body—we must be intentional and we must be always conscious of what Christ is building (Jefferson, p. 29).

B. *Only a true disciple of the Lord can build the church. A true disciple is characterized by a life spent in following Christ.* “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt 16:24). Christ is our example of obedience. His life was totally conformed to the will of His Father. Christ's life was lived in the power of the Spirit. It was a life of unselfish service—of zeal, of expenditure, of self-control, of meekness, of kindness, faithfulness, and devotion (Gal 5:22-23). A disciple of Christ follows His example of obedience to the Father (Jn 15:8; 1 Pet 2:21-25).

Those who follow Christ *gather with Him* (Luke 11:23)—they are *fishers of men* (Matt 4:19). They take their “marching orders” from Christ—they have made Christ's cause (the Father's glory) their cause. They are *zealous for good works* (Titus 2:14). Their boldness for kingdom values is a result of following Christ. “Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

C. *True fellowship with the brethren is a vital means of grace; the Bible alone cannot make you strong and bring you to maturity.* God's grace flows through social bonds—the brotherhood is the atmosphere in which the gospel truths blaze (Jefferson, pp. 70-72). Sanctification is a ‘group effort’—it requires the corporate dimension. Close fellowship with other believers saved by grace causes the gospel truths to “blaze” (by means of fervent love for one another; our close communion with one another; and our communal sacrifices for the advance of Christ's kingdom).

D. *In order to build up our brethren, we must be deliberate* (Dever and Alexander, p. 37). ***Are you deliberate about pursuing discipleship relationships? Are you deliberate in seeking to be mentored as well as to spiritually mentor? What decisions would you have to make in order***

to put yourself under the teaching of the mature; and seek to help those who are less mature than you are? Is building possible without making these decisions?

The consumer-spectator-passive mindset cuts the nerve of being “others oriented.” God is calling His people to be outward oriented in order to bring each member to maturity and to draw the lost to Himself (2 Tim 2:2; Rom 15:14; Col 2:19; Eph 4:16ff.; Heb 10:22-25).

E. *Believers are to bear one another’s burdens, to build up one another (pointing out evidences of grace), and to encourage one another. We are to spur on our brethren to greater faithfulness* (Dever and Alexander, 197-199). It is common to come to our church services without this edification mandate on our minds. In order for us to change, we will have to be more deliberate in our fellowship. Consider ways that you can be more deliberate about spiritual conversations intended for the good of your brethren. What are some specific ways you can fulfill the command in Hebrews 10:24-25? “*And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds*” (10:24). This passage of Scripture is about being deliberate.

It is rare for church members to embrace the mentality set forth in Ephesians 4:12: the saints are to be equipped “for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” Paul tells us in that passage that the members of Christ’s body are to do the work of service of building up the body. That means that church members are responsible for the major part of the transmission of the transforming Word of God to one another. This activity (the Word passing from member to member) is to be the normal function of the church! What would have to happen in order for our thinking to shift from the pulpit as the major source of the Word to our conversations with other believers as the major source of the Word?

V. The believer’s sanctification takes place within the context of the body of Christ.

A. The Christian community (the local church) is the context for change. Individual redemption is played out in our relationships (Lane/Tripp, pp. 76-79). Are we in the habit of thinking about our relationships as the context for sanctifying change—that it is group effort? Why or why not?

One of the biggest reasons why is because relationships make us vulnerable—they reveal character. Relationships involve risk—we risk being offended and offending. The community is a mirror—our self-absorption shows up. Community is the very thing we need to move us out of self-centeredness. The corporate body is needed to make me like Christ (Lane/Tripp, pp. 83-86).

B. *We need the body of Christ in order to make us like Christ. Sanctification is a ‘group effort’.*

There is substantial change in individuals within the community of faith as the gospel is applied to friends and family. When the gospel is applied to our relationships and to our affections, it pulls us above our preoccupation with personal happiness to enjoy God’s blessings in Christ and to share those blessings with others (Lane/Tripp, p. 251).

Spiritual maturity is a mutual process achieved by interdependent ministry in the body. We are gifted by God for the common good (1 Cor 12:7). This is not a matter of terminology—

the issue at hand turns upon the very nature of the church (Inrig, p. 45). Our fellow believers are agents of our change. God's plan for our maturity operates through human instruments (MacArthur, p. 73).

Several years ago I was introduced to a Christian man who had plumbed the depths during a period of severe backsliding. He has used drugs and experienced homelessness. As I spoke with after the morning church service, he shared something profound with me. "One of the many things God has taught me through my time of rebellion is this: you cannot love pleasure and God at the same time; the love of pleasure will kill your love for God." Here this disheveled man in front of me was declaring a scriptural principle which stuck with me. He was not afraid to prayerfully speak the Word into my life even though I was a pastor and he was a struggling, returning believer.

This is where we sometimes get 'crossed up'—we imagine that permission to speak the Word into the lives of others depends upon talent, giftedness, or earned degrees. Biblically that is not the case. Mutual edification between all believers is to be the norm. *What kind of attitude is needed if we are to be willing to learn from each other that we might grow together into full maturity in Christ?*

VI. Each believer is a steward of God's grace for the purpose of building with Christ.

A. Believers are stewards of God's grace. Each Christian has been given a spiritual gift which is to be employed in serving the body (1 Peter 4:7-11). The unity of the body depends upon a deep and practical appreciation of the diversity of gifts in the body (1 Cor 12:14-31). This depth of appreciation also means that we are willing to be on the receiving end as others exercise their gifts.

B. New Testament metaphors help us understand the nature and function of the church. The church is a "**Temple made up of living stones**" (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-10). "*Living stones being built together*" clearly communicates the communal nature of the church. Each stone is fitted for close contact and a perfect fit in relation to the other stones in the building—each niche is filled and each stone is adequately fitted for it by "*the measure of Christ's gift*" (Eph 4:7) (Saucy, p. 35).

The living stones are "framed together in the Lord" into an abode or habitation of God (Eph 2:21)). The Greek word for 'fitted' or 'framed' together is meant to describe the whole elaborate process of preparing the surfaces of the stones by cutting, rubbing, testing, and setting (Reinecker/Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976, p. 527).

As in any masonry building of cut stones, the quality of the building is judged by the closeness of the stones to one another. The fewer gaps, the greater is the quality. In this analogy the church is built of members in close communion with each other by reason of the Spirit's work of placing them strategically in the body (1 Cor 12:18).

Each believer is a temple individually (1 Cor 6:19), and collectively. The living stones comprise a royal and holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). The believer's primary sacrifice is himself (Rom 12:1-2; Heb 13:15-16; Phil 2:17). We cannot truthfully offer sacrifices to God without also serving our fellow brother, sharing our goods, and building up the community (Saucy, pp. 35-42,

95). The very essence of worship is giving ourselves back to God without reservation. Therefore, it is vital to worship that the believer find his or her place of service in the body of Christ.

The church is a body with Christ as its Head (Eph 4:7-16). The members of Christ's body are to operate in an interdependent manner (vv. 11-15). Each individual member is to make a contribution to the growth of the body into maturity (vv. 15-16). We need to rethink our sanctification—it is tied to the contributions we make to the maturity of the body. This takes us back to intentionality: *we are to relate to one another in a caring, encouraging, and edifying way for the intent of their spiritual good*. Mutual edification has as its great goal the spiritual maturity of each member. But, it is a growth and maturity that is both individual and corporate (Eph 4:11-13). Teaching, serving, admonishing, and discipling are the appointed means of this spiritual growth (Rom 15:14; Col 1:28-29). Genuine ministry is slavery to Christ and to one another lived out in our corporate life (Saucy, p. 131).

Christ's Pattern for His Church (Part Two)

Intentional body life: *fellowship focused on fulfilling the Great Commission*

INTRODUCTION: “*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*” (Eph 4:11-13).

We observed in our previous lesson that God's pattern for the body through Christ has a very specific purpose—to build up the redeemed unto the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God—out of which flows fruitfulness and spiritual maturity (Eph 4:12-13) (John MacArthur, *N.T. Commentary on Ephesians*, Chicago: Moody Press, p. 156). The *unity of the faith* is the content of the gospel in its most complete form—especially as it is lived out ‘incarnationally’ by believers who are properly taught to faithfully carry out the work of service (4:12) (Ibid.).

The redeemed are to be built up unto the true knowledge (epiginosko) of the Son of God (4:13).

This is the knowledge of Christ Himself as the embodiment of God's treasure, and as the Source Person/Supplier of all the church needs (Col 2:3; Eph 1:18; 3:8) (Ralph P. Martin, *The New Bible Commentary*, Leicester: Intervarsity Press, p. 1116). The deep knowledge of the Son of God is only attainable by prayer, study of the Word, fellowship with Him, mutual edification, and obedience (John MacArthur, p. 157).

Yes, the church grows by the action of Christ on its behalf, but we must understand that Christ is working to accomplish this end through the activity of each member. The fact that Christ causes the growth of the body in no way negates the efforts of the believers in building the body (MacArthur, p. 161).

We saw in our previous lesson that Christ exerts a unifying action of spiritual growth by means of His working through ‘every joint which He supplies’ (4:16). “But speaking the truth in love, we are

to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16).

As each ‘joint’ (member of the body) exercises Christ’s gift for ministry there is a “chain reaction” produced by Christ among His servants. The whole body is built up, and love becomes the atmosphere (Martin, p. 1116-1117).

In the process of mutual encouragement and the responsibilities of edification exercised, each part is playing the role for which it was appointed. Love becomes the air that is breathed. Christ imparts His risen life within the congregation (ibid.). It is in this manner that the body engages in the *corporate experience* of Christ. This means that our Christian fellowship does not exist for social needs alone. The communion of the saints has the aim of building up and equipping one another to fulfill the Great Commission. We are to be ever conscious of the fact that Christ is our life individually and corporately.

The phrase, ‘every joint supplies’ conveys a much needed truth about the function the body. Christ holds the body together. He makes it function; but He does so ‘by that which every joint supplies.’ The Spirit of Christ, working through the gifts, provides a *flow of ministry* that produces growth (MacArthur, p. 162). The scriptural description of the function of the local church is glorious and desirable; but it requires that the members of the body embrace Christ’s pattern for the church with whole-hearted enthusiasm and obedience. In order to realize Christ’s pattern; each individual part of the body must come in close enough contact with other members that their gifts result in growth. Christ facilitates the effectiveness of the gifts in mutual ministry; but the gifts cannot work EXCEPT by close relationships of genuine spiritual ministry (Ibid.).

In order to cultivate close relationships with the brethren we will have to overcome some of our fears. This is possible through the gospel. Instead of choosing distance from others in an effort to guard our own hurts, concerns and vulnerabilities; we have ‘permission’ through the gospel to draw close to other forgiven sinners. As we saw in our last lesson, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us in justification is the basis for intimate relationships within the body of Christ. The Lord has given us everything we need to have close fellowship those who also have life in Christ.

This is a revolutionary truth: God cannot work to unify and mature the members of the body where relationships are not intimate. No genuine progress in the growth of the body takes place unless each member in union with other members responds to the direction of Christ the Head who rules the body by His Word. An obedient response to Christ means that each part of the body is doing exactly what it was designed to do (Ibid.).

In summary, in order to experience growth unto a mature man; the body must hold fast to its Head and the body must be committed to the pattern of mutual ministry set forth by Christ (Col 2:19). Every individual member is to stay close to Christ and faithfully use his or her spiritual gift in close contact with every other believer. Through this commitment and ministry, the Lord’s power will flow for the building up of the body in love (4:16) (Ibid.).

Thus the process of the church growing and consolidating itself in love is dependent upon the interrelatedness of the parts of the body. When each part works properly; the body receives what it needs (A. Skevington Wood, *NIV Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 771). This is the glorious truth of Christ's sufficiency in His body—a truth that is all too rarely understood and practiced. In support of this truth, John MacArthur brings out an emphasis in the Greek. The use of 'growth' in the middle form (4:16) means that the body under Christ's direction and empowerment produces its own growth. In other words, growth takes place through "resident dynamics" and not through outside forces. The vital power within causes growth as the church builds itself up in love (Ibid.).

If we really believed that Christ's power is now at work through each individual believer to producing a resident dynamic—giving the body what it needs—we would do some things differently. One of those changes would be this: we would probably think twice before bringing in a well-known Christian professional every time we wanted to have an impactful seminar; workshop; or conference. Our knee-jerk tendency to bring in a celebrity outsider can have the net effect of obscuring the truth that through Christ, the body supplies what it needs—producing its own growth.

Application: As our lesson continues, we will discover how we may more fully adopt this mindset above—that the body produces what it needs through the sufficiency of Christ working through its individual members.

The following section is adapted from, *The Trellis and the Vine*, by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne.

I. The priority of the Great Commission.

A. Jesus commissions His disciples to make disciples of all nations. *"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'"* (Matt 28:19-20).

In verses 19-20, the main verb is not 'go'—instead the emphasis is upon command to 'make disciples'. "Make disciples" is the main verb. Three subordinate participles are 'hanging' upon the command "make disciples." The sense is: *make disciples—going (or 'as you go'), baptizing and teaching* (Marshall and Payne, pp. 11-12).

Baptizing and teaching is the means by which the disciples are to be made. "Baptizing" here refers to the initiation of disciples into repentance and submission to the authority of Jesus Christ, the reigning Lord of the world. (Christ's lordship is unfolded in texts such as Psalm 2; Hebrews 1:1-3; Daniel 7:13-14). The 'teaching' that Christ's disciples are to do reproduces what Jesus Himself has done in them (Matt 12:38). We are to make disciples by teaching. As our subsequent lessons unfold we will explore together that this 'teaching' is especially personal teaching as takes place in disciple-making relationships.

Traditionally the Great Commission has been interpreted as sending money and missionaries overseas. But the emphasis of the sentence is not on 'going', but on making

disciples. The commission is not fundamentally about doing missions ‘out there somewhere’. The point being stressed in the verses is all of Christ’s disciples have been commissioned by their Lord be engaged in disciple-making. Thus, disciple-making is the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple—the world is the scope of this commission (Ibid, p. 13).

We would not want to stop sending out missionaries; but we must also see disciple-making as our central task in our homes and neighborhoods and churches. It is binding upon all of Jesus’ disciples to make others what they themselves are—disciples of Jesus Christ (D. A. Carson in *The Trellis and the Vine*, p. 13. D. A. Carson, ‘Matthew’ in Frank Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1984, p. 596).

B. A true disciple is a disciple-maker; not just a member of an institution. The error which erodes our ability to carry out the Great Commission is as follows: we are captive to entrenched traditions long practiced—as a result our focus has shifted away from our main task and agenda of disciple-making (Marshall and Payne, p. 15).

In order to fully embrace the Great Commission, it will require a mind-shift about the nature of ministry: are we growing people who are disciple-making disciples of Christ? Our need for a mind shift concerning the nature of ministry is captured in the following phrases:

1. From ***running programs*** to ***building people***
2. From ***running events*** to ***training people***
3. From ***using people*** to ***growing people*** (a huge shift away from church ‘volunteers’)
4. From ***filling gaps*** to ***training new workers***
5. From ***solving problems*** to ***helping people make progress as disciples***
6. From ***clinging to ordained ministry*** to ***developing team leadership***
7. From ***focusing on church polity*** to ***forging ministry partnerships***
8. From ***relying on training institutions*** to ***establishing local training***
9. From ***focusing on immediate pressures*** to ***aiming for long-term expansion***
10. From ***engaging in management*** to ***engaging in ministry***
11. From ***seeking church growth*** to ***desiring gospel growth in believers***

This mind shift which moves the church corporately into the Great Commission cannot be achieved through superficial change, or implementing small groups. Small groups are not the issue. The small groups (or home fellowships) need to be TRAINING groups; trained on how to read the Bible, pray with each other, work on spiritual growth, and live as a disciple-making disciple of Christ. Without this drive and focus small groups have a very minimal role in fulfilling the Great Commission. It always comes back to the issue of ongoing, continuous training and discipling of ALL members of the church.

Traditionally church members tend to think about church involvement in terms of jobs: usher; Bible study leader; Sunday School teacher; treasurer; trustee; board member; elder;

worship leader; nursery worker; money counter etc. The implication of this way of thinking is for members of the congregation to think that if all the jobs are taken then there is really nothing for me to do in church. If all roles are taken then the member is reduced to a passenger or spectator (Ibid, p. 26).

However, if the real work of God's people is *people work*—the prayerful speaking of His Word by one person to another—then the jobs are never taken. How we need this 'mind shift' in our thinking; for the opportunities for Christians to minister personally to others are limitless (examples of hospitality, etc.).

II. The gospel is the focal point of what God is doing in the world

A. *There is nothing more vital than what God is doing in the world by means of the gospel. His plan will determine the destiny of every individual. We therefore need to recapture the radicalism of Jesus: "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60).* Radical identity with Christ makes us radically identified with Christ's plan, purpose, and mission in the world. The growth God is looking for is growth in people—the growth and development of believers. The growing vine Jesus spoke of in John chapter fifteen is made up of individual born again believers, grafted into Christ by His Word and His Spirit, and drawn into mutually edifying fellowship with one another.

But, 'people growth' only happens through the power of God's Spirit applied to people's hearts. This can happen as we speak the Word to someone; in small groups; large groups; over a backyard fence; over dinner; over morning coffee; on the patio; in formal or informal Bible study—or even in speaking a Scripture-based truth without even referring to the Bible. The contexts are nearly limitless; but the what happens is always the same: a Christian brings a truth from God's Word to someone else, praying that God would make that word bear fruit through the inward working of the Spirit—that's 'vine work' (gospel growth in individual believers), all else is trellis (or church 'infrastructure' supporting the vine) (Ibid, pp. 38-39).

B. *The Spirit is at work through the gospel at every stage of growth. The same gospel by which we were saved is the source of our being built up daily.* "Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth" (Col 1:5-6).

The gospel keeps growing people after initial salvation (1:9-10). "For this reason also, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding and that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:9-10).

It's interesting how little the Bible says about numerical church growth and how much the Word of God says about gospel growth (of individuals). Gospel growth produces growth in the knowledge of God which causes believers to bear fruit in their lives (1:9-10). Gospel growth (or gospel formation) focuses upon the progress of the Spirit-backed Word of God as it makes it progress in the world—believer by believer. The vine is Jesus and we are grafted into Him to bear fruit for God (Ibid, pp. 36-37).

C. Who really does the vine work of Colossians 1:28-29? Answer: we teach the priesthood of all believers (a biblical truth recovered since the Protestant Reformation); but if the truth be known; most church members are little more than spectators. As a result, we have centralized pastoral ministry and care and a passive laity. What is a true disciple of Christ? *“And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s shall save it’”* (Mark 8:34-35).

To be a disciple is to be a slave of Christ and to confess His Name openly before others. *“Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before man, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven”* (Matt 10:32-33). Thus the call to discipleship is a call to confess our allegiance to Jesus in the face of a hostile world; to serve Him and His mission whatever the cost (Luke 9:60). The Great Commission makes this calling clear: to be a disciple is to be a disciple-maker.

The world watches our goings and comings: we may attend church; read and pray during the week; attend a Bible study—BUT, would someone observing from the outside say: “Look: there is someone who has abandoned his life to Jesus Christ and His mission?” In the book of Acts we see this confession and allegiance being worked out in practice, in the face of opposition and persecution. All disciples regarded themselves as “servants” of Jesus (see Acts 4:29-31) (Ibid, pp. 42-43).

D. The basics of body life as an intentional fulfillment of the Great Commission are as follows: each working part makes the body grow with a growth from God. It builds itself up in love (Eph 4:15-15). That is our premise in this lesson: we must see body life in Christ as existing to corporately fulfill the Great Commission. That ‘vision’ of the purpose of body life must inform all we do. The picture in the body metaphor is that all the different parts of the body are fulfilling their proper role and function (but each one is speaking the truth in love). There are countless contexts for the ministry of mutual edification; but all of the members “speak the truth in love” to one another (Ibid, pp. 44-45).

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16). What ensues when Christ is dwelling in your hearts with thankfulness is: godly encouraging speech to one another. In this case teaching and admonishing—this is the heartbeat of discipleship. Teaching, admonishing, instructing one another is to be the normative activity of the body (Rom 15:14; Heb 3:12-13; 10:24-25).

This means that God wants all Christians to be regularly speaking to each other—urging and encouraging each other to stick with Christ (Heb 10:24-25). The central purpose in getting together is mutual encouragement—spur others on to love and good deeds as we wait for Christ. How can this happen without us opening our mouths and speaking to one another? It's hard to understand that this can happen without us speaking to one another (Ibid, pp. 46-47). This means fellowship not an end itself—that is the fulfillment of social needs. Our fellowship is unto the building up of the body of Christ (Eph 4:12).

We make our contribution for the good of others (1 Cor 12:7). Let all be done for the building up (1Cor 14:26). We are to pursue the same goal—edify the congregation in love which takes place through speech whether word of exhortation, encouragement, or admonition. We all are to edify—we are all builders—we are all urged to abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58).

E. All believers are to live a lifestyle of evangelism—this is essential to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. *“But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet 3:15).* The Thessalonian believers are an example of the Great Commission. They manifested deep conviction and they were imitators of Paul (1 Thess 1:5-10).

As a result, the Thessalonian converts became missionaries without joining a mission agency (Ibid, pp. 48-49). Paul calls ordinary believers to be imitators of him (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). Every believer is to be a disciple, and every disciple is to have Paul's orientation: *the glory of God in the salvation of others*. The Christian without a missionary heart is an anomaly. A lifestyle of evangelism involves alertness regarding opportunities with unbelievers (Col 4:4-6). Disciples of Christ have a missionary heart which will manifest itself in a readiness to pray for the lost; to be engaged in gospel outreach; and to use hospitality for the sake of evangelism (Ibid, p. 52).

F. Does the normal Christian life include disciple-making? To suffer with Christ for the sake of the gospel is the gift of grace given to every believer (see Phil 3:7-9; 1:6-11; 3:9-10). To live this way is the lifestyle “worthy of the gospel” itself (1:27-30). *“Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain or toil in vain” (Phil 2:14-16).* To embrace a lifestyle worthy of the gospel is to possess the goal of being shining beacons (2:15). “Holding fast to the gospel” means as partners with Paul, speaking out for its defense and confirmation (Ibid, pp. 61-65).

“Gospel partnership” is the normal Christian life. Standing together united in the gospel in this ‘corrupt generation’—longing; striving; working; to see the gospel be defended and proclaimed—and bravely coping with the conflict; struggle and persecution which inevitably follow. There aren't two classes of Christians: gospel partners and then spectators. No, we're all in it together—all partners for the gospel. Even in secular organizations; membership demands something more than passivity and consumerism. In the local church every member is to

be a partner in ‘vine work’ (the building up of the saints to maturity). Leaders, pastors, and elders are responsible to teach, warn and encourage. They are foremen, organizers, guardians, mobilizers, teachers and models. They provide the conditions under which the rest of the partners can get on with the vine work of prayerfully speaking God’s truth to others. But at a profound level—pastors and elders are also just partners in this divine commission to advance the gospel (Ibid, pp. 66-67).

Here are just a few of the ways you may begin to prayerfully speak the word of God to others: as an introduction to sharing the gospel, ask an unbeliever “what has gone wrong with the world?” Come along side a fellow believer and offer to pray for their teen son or daughter in school. Start studying a Christian book with another believer. Write a letter of encouragement. Call an elderly friend and pray on the phone with them. Meet with another believer and talk about the Sunday message. Look for ways to share with others how the Scriptures are changing your life (perhaps how Ephesians chapter five has turned your marriage around). Ask a “How can I pray for you?” Ask, “What is the Lord doing in your life?” Ask, “What spiritual battle fronts are you facing?” “What ministry burdens and opportunities are on your mind and heart?”

All of these are examples of prayerfully bringing the Word into lives of other believers. The contexts are so numerous: a group gathering, a dinner, over the backyard fence, or over the phone. Everyday ministry is how we decentralize pastoral ministry (Eph 4; Titus 1:9; 2:3-4; 1 Cor 15:58). Our N.T. ecclesiology demands that every believer be involved in vine work (Ibid, pp. 54-58).

In our next lesson we will explore more fully the question of how converts become true disciples of Christ. We will continue to find that true disciples grow into disciple-makers as the result of systematic encouragement, counseling, and teaching by maturing brethren. It says in Acts 14:21-22, “*Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.*” Disciple-making is the aim or goal of The Great Commission. The Body of Christ is to commit itself to the task of making disciples.

We need to return to the Word and uncover again the secret behind Paul’s optimism and effectiveness as a disciple-maker. When we pour over Paul’s New Testament epistles we find the Apostle Paul’s heart throbbing and beating with a disciple-making passion. For Paul, pastor and missionary, disciple-making is his controlling mandate, his sacred trust and deputation—the central work that commands his full attention and energies. Colossians 1:28-29 encapsulates the lengthy process of disciple-making in just two verses: “*And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.*”

CONCLUSION: For further reflection—in order to keep our ‘mind shift’ on track, let us consider that God’s “plan of the ages” (His eternal purpose) is to glorify Himself through the Church (Eph

3:10-11). This begs the question, “What has to happen in order for the church to reveal the glory of Christ?” The answer in brief is twofold. First we must ‘sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts’ fully acknowledging that He bought the church; He owns the church; He is its ultimate Shepherd/Pastor; and He rules the church by His Word. Therefore the church is not ours to shape as we please. And second, if we are to grow a church pleasing to God (a church which reveals the glory of Christ); then we will have to pay closest attention to Christ’s pattern for His church revealed in His Word.

How we need to examine our religious forms and traditions—for many of them have replaced the New Testament mandate of our Lord to fulfill the Great Commission. Our fascination with methodologies and hyper-structuralism tends to conceal the living organic reality of oneness with Christ; the Head of the church. Only by obedience to Christ’s pattern for His church will men and angels behold the glory of God in the church (Eph 3:10-11).

Christ’s Pattern for His Church (Part Three)

Intentional body life: *training disciples to be disciple-makers*

This section adapted from the book, *The Trellis and the Vine*, by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne.

I. Disciple-making is training in righteousness.

A. Scripture affirms that ‘training in righteousness’ is a function of spiritual disciplines and life habits anchored in the truth of God and the will of God in Scripture. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for **training in righteousness**” (2 Tim 3:16). The opposite of ‘trained in righteousness’ is ‘trained in greed’ (2 Pet 2:14).

In the secular workplace training is assisting others to reach a level of proficiency. But biblically this is not the essence of training. Scripturally speaking, training is much more about Christian living and thinking than about particular skills or competencies. “Trained in righteousness” places the emphasis where it ought to be; on personal godliness (2 Tim 3:16; Heb 5:13-14).

The baton we pass on is sound doctrine (2 Tim 2:2; 1 Tim 4:6). “*If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing. . .*” (1 Tim 6:3-4a). The heart of training is to impart sound doctrine. Not academically alone; but also developing the ability to reject false religion and false philosophy (Titus 1:9) and to conform the hearts and lives of those we disciple to sound doctrine. Sound biblical theology produces a godly life and good fruit. Good biblical teaching results in a godly life based on sound, health-giving teaching. This is continuous; generational; and lifelong (Marshall and Payne, pp. 70-71).

B. Sound doctrine is not an end in itself; sound doctrine is the means of equipping us to live wisely unto God; it equips us to know God and to conduct our lives with godliness. Accurate biblical

teaching is the basis for bearing good fruit. Paul says of the power of Scripture: “*When you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe*” (1Thess 2:13). The word of truth causes the believer to constantly bear fruit (Col 1:6-10).

C. Close relationship is the vehicle of training. Pouring your life blood into others is the privileged cost of effectual training. “*But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives because you had become very dear to us*” (1Thess 2:7-8). Likewise, Paul’s relationship with Timothy also exhibits this model of close relationship (2 Tim 3:10-11). His training may be likened to spiritual parenthood: love them enough to want to see them flourish—be prepared for the long term; faithful; Spirit-enabled nurture by God’s mercy (Ibid, 74-75).

The trainer is calling upon the trainee to adopt his way of life. Thus, model and imitation are the foundation of training (1 Cor 4:14-17; 11:1). Paul is a godly model. His ambition to save others was to be the ambition of those he is training. However, even the best spiritual leaders are not an example of perfectly achieved holiness; but are modeling the way of the cross. Consider Paul’s ‘boast’ “*But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world was crucified to me, and I to the world*” (Gal 6:14 and Gal 2:20).

D. Our teaching of disciples is to be personal teaching in a relational space. In that arrangement, there is as much ‘caught’ as there is ‘taught’. Some of the training takes place by ‘osmosis’, and not just by formal instruction. In relational training the hearts of trainer and trainee are exposed (you get to know one another’s character: speech; moods; attitudes; heart; responses to situations; etc.). Progress is not just measured by performance, but by integrity of heart.

Does the individual love God and neighbor, are they submitting to Christ’s word? Is their speech in line with the Word? Trainees need to see the heart of trainer: their sins; struggles; confessions; fears; realities; successes; failures—and their responses to these. In relational space training, there is significant time spent together, and honest open mutual sharing of their lives. This interface between trainer and trainee ought also to include the home and home life of both.

We need to clearly see how commitment to the relational approach differs substantially from the programmatic formal approach. Yet, programs and formal training in a group setting can enhance all the more if the personal-relational is already there in place (Ibid, pp. 76-77).

II. What are the major areas of content in our training of disciples?

A. The gospel versus competency—it is always the gospel first. The nature and goal of training: through personal relationship, prayer, teaching, modeling, and practical instruction, we want to see those we are discipling grow in the following major areas:

Conviction: their knowledge of God and understanding of the Bible. First hand convictions make you deliberate in serving Christ. Conviction means that you make your belief yours. This

involves knowing what you believe and why you believe it. Conviction is inseparable from the willingness to make the sacrifices a disciple of Christ is called upon to make.

Character: the godly character of life that accords with sound doctrine. Ordering one's life by God's truth so that doctrine becomes our wisdom to live rightly unto God and our passion to know God and make Him known.

Competency: the ability to prayerfully speak God's Word to others in a variety of ways. This area of development involves growth in the ability to communicate God's Word to others with sincerity, love, and penetrating application. Competency is demonstrated through personal teaching and counseling of others so that disciple-making becomes one's lifestyle. In so doing, this level of training 'closes the loop', disciple becomes disciple-maker.

The above training 'grid' is foundational for plugging in courses. Once the personal/relational, and the goal (the 3 'C's' listed above) are on track, a variety of curriculum can be drawn upon and 'plugged in'. As the church at large has drifted from the Great Commission, programs have replaced discipleship. The efficient and the programmatic have replaced the personal. In order to recover our ability to fulfill the Great Commission, we cannot be content with church programs alone. We must become encouragers who engage in mentoring (the relational side of discipleship). Our efforts at training must go beyond bare academics to the development of **conviction**, **character**, and **competency** in our disciples (Ibid, pp. 78-79).

B. Gospel growth is growth in the knowledge of God's will so that the disciple will ever walk more worthily of the gospel (Phil 1:27; Eph 4:1). Gospel growth is both the spread of the gospel geographically and the growth of the gospel in the individual (Col 1:3-6; 9-10). We must identify this as prime or we will be prone to measure growth solely by participation in church programs and functions. Numbers are not a reliable index of growth. How are we measuring growth—by the number attending a program? **Genuine gospel growth will make us unmistakably missional.**

C. WARNING: when gospel growth takes place, people will move off to do missions. There are radical implications of the three C's of training described above. Gospel growth will radically change the way we think about people: not as cogs; not as job fillers—we won't cram a person into job description, but equip and train them in order to release them to ministry (Ibid, 81-83). According to Ephesians chapter four, church leaders are to see themselves as stewards of the giftedness of the body who are charged by God to develop the giftedness of the body.

"Stop forbidding prophesying; do not quench or stifle the Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19-20). If you stifle God-given giftedness, you quench the Spirit. "Release people to giftedness in ministry" is the same thought positively expressed as do not quench the Spirit. There is effort required to do this and obey God at this juncture (Jay Wegter, *Toward a Pauline Ecclesiology*).

We must come along side in order to confront; train; admonish; and encourage. Affirmation, interview, and release to ministry all call for vulnerability and risk. We'd rather

control than confront because we are uncomfortable with a ministering laity (1 Cor 14). We prefer to structure because we are security-driven and thus more comfortable with control. The issue is about releasing gifted people to ministry (Ibid.).

Pastors, elders, and disciplers are to examine the use of gifts and equip the gifted people in light of God's Word (equip by example, by instruction, by nurture, and by opportunity to use giftedness). In a biblical ecclesiology we see churches building ministries around the giftedness of the person. Don't shove the person into a job description. Because we are security-driven, we cram people into a job description and fall back on pragmatism and the world's methods. When we shove people into a job description; frustrated mediocrity is often the result (Ibid.). One discipler exhorted his disciple with the following wisdom: "The divinely energized power flows through your authenticity; then, when you are authentic, you are operating by God's power through your experience, giftedness, and vision."

Growing believers may be used to doing too many things well, cut back so that you do the few things well that nobody else can do. This is where the authenticity is unleashed. Sadly, people want structure (security) instead of these liberating principles of Scripture. How has God built you? Your training, experience, giftedness, passion, and vision make up your uniqueness (Ibid.).

D. *The essence of training is equipping unto service.* As biblical truth is prayerfully spoken, applied, and heard, the Spirit works within—gospel growth (gospel formation occurs). Christians should be trained to be vine workers (trained to serve through disciple-making by means of mutual edification).

First of all, Christian maturity is not individualistic, or self-focused (it cannot be reduced to spiritual self-improvement or academic training). To grow like Christ is to grow in love and desire to serve and minister to others. Training, as understood scripturally, describes the growth of all Christians in **conviction, character, and competency**, so that in love they might minister to others by prayerfully bringing the word of God to them—whether non-Christians in outreach, new Christians in follow up, or all other Christians in daily growth.

Every Christian is a potential vine worker because that is the calling of every believer (Rom 15:14). Training is the stage of Christian growth in which people are equipped, mobilized, resourced, and encouraged to do that work of nurturing the vine. It is that stage of growth in **conviction** (beliefs), **character** (godliness) and **competencies** (skills and abilities) which leads them to minister effectively to others (Marshall and Payne, 84-85). This is reproducing reproducers—it is the biblical mandate to make disciples who become capable of making other disciples of Christ (2 Tim 2:2).

III. The advantages of 'mapping' progress in Christian growth

A. *Training believers to be vine workers means that discipleship is about sound doctrine and a godly life—training them in godliness and right thinking so that they will be able to minister to*

others. Measuring progress keeps us intentional. A gospel growth ‘grid’, or ‘map’, is extremely helpful to know where Christians and non-Christians are in your church or social sphere:

Outreach	>>	Follow up	>>	Growth	>>	Training
Raising issues	Gospel	New believer	Need help	Solid	General	Specific
Larry	Cheryl	Joyce	Leslie	James	Conrad	Bob

General equipping would include such essentials as: Basic Bible doctrines; How to Study the Bible; or Fundamentals of the Faith. Special equipping may include more focused areas such as: Effective Personal Evangelism; Christian Apologetics; Hermeneutics; Sermon Preparation; Old Testament Survey; or Elements of Biblical Counseling.

Authors Marshall and Payne argue for the necessity of “inefficient people ministries” as well as organized “efficient” group ministries. By “inefficient” the authors mean people to people ministry which is not a part of an organized church program. Paul commands the Thessalonian believers to be involved in each other’s lives to the degree that exhortation, encouragement, and admonishment flow very naturally: *“Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing. But we request of you brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live at peace with one another. And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all men”* (1 Thess 5:11-14).

Notice how focused the people to people commands. The pattern here is a lay ministry; not a professional one. Training must be utterly intentional, personal, and proactive, or it won’t take place. Centralized pastoral care where ministry is consolidated around clergymen (and/or pastor as CEO) is unfortunately the norm in our evangelical churches today (Ibid, pp. 86-91).

Application: The question is not have we managed to get everyone in a home fellowship; but the real question is (if we are to have a N.T. ecclesiology shape and control our actual philosophy of ministry): not just are people being cared for and are they involved; but are they growing as disciples and in mission? Do our fellowships exist as missional communities intent on fulfilling the Great Commission?

B. Genuine spiritual growth only takes place as the Holy Spirit applies the Word of God to people’s hearts. All Christians have the privilege and responsibility to prayerfully speak the Word of God to each other and to non-Christians as the means by which God gives this growth. Out of this comes the training litmus test or ‘canon’: “Are our congregations training centers in which believers are being taught to minister God’s Word to others?” And, “Are our believers being taught and trained to be disciples of Christ who, in turn, seek to make other disciples?”

When we are able to answer these two questions in the affirmative, then the congregation will be a gathering of disciple-making disciples in the presence of their Lord. People ministering to people then becomes dominant, and structures, or (trellis’) become recessive (by trellis is meant

the church's programs and infrastructures). We must be utterly intentional in training in order to go beyond small groups to actual habitual lifestyle vine work (Ibid, pp. 92-100).

- C. *God expects all Christians to be disciple-makers by prayerfully speaking God's Word into the lives of one another.*** Small groups may give us care; a chance for friendship; being known—but this is not the same thing as intentional gospel growth. Speaking into people's lives involves personal teaching; penetrating application; encouragement; exhortation; imploring; warning; and rebuking (Acts 20:20) (Ibid, 101-104).

IV. The blessed result of disciple-making

- A. *Staying intentional: churches don't make disciples; disciples make disciples (Matt 28:19-20).***

According to Scripture, every disciple of Christ is not only part of the vine; but also a vine worker, a disciple-maker, and a partner (Jn 15:1-5; 1 Cor 3:5-9) (Ibid, p. 122). Our goal over time is to convert all disciples into disciple-makers, to train all the Christians as vine workers: people with the conviction; character; and competency to minister to others. As the number of these workers grow; the more people begin prayerfully speaking the Word of God into others lives—a chain reaction occurs in so many ministry contexts.

- B. *"Growth chaos" takes place (which can't be controlled by programs—the vine outgrows the trellis—sending out tendrils in all directions)—people begin starting things; taking ministry initiative; meeting with people; dreaming up new ideas*** (Ibid, pp. 124-126). ***Christ's pattern for His church is a ministering laity:*** All Christians should teach each other; though all are not teachers (Eph 4; Col 3:16; 1 Cor 12:29; James 3:1). All Christians should minister to one another; yet some are set apart as ministers (1 Pet 4:10-11; 1 Tim 3:8-11). All Christians should abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58); yet Paul regarded himself and Apollos as fellow workers laboring among the Corinthians for their growth (1 Cor 3:5-9). All Christians should make disciples and speak to others about Christ (Matt 28:19; 1 Pet 3:15); yet some are identified as evangelists (Eph 4:11) (Ibid, pp. 129-131).

- C. *Calling is mediated through disciple-makers—this is pivotal because the current model is to wait for someone to say "I feel called to ministry," and then to begin the process of equipping.*** Pastors, elders, and disciplers should be 'talent scouts'. Scripture suggests that people are called and set apart by others (2 Tim 1:6-7). Spiritual leaders should be actively recruiting suitable people within their churches and challenging them to expend their lives for the work of the gospel. This author can testify from his life experience that it was his mentor who was the source of encouragement and calling to pursue a Christian education for the purpose of ministry.

- D. *Realism in discipleship: it is hard; it requires perseverance.*** We would rather avoid the messy, often unpredictable aspect of pouring our lives into others—we tend to opt for a sanitary church program where the personal is minimal: it's just a teacher standing before listeners. ***The goal of all Christian ministry is to make disciples who make other disciples to the glory of God.*** We

want to see people converted from their spiritual deadness and sin; and once converted, be followed up and established as mature disciples in Christ, and once established, to be trained in knowledge, godliness, and skills so that they in turn will make disciples of others. This is the Great Commission—it is making genuine disciple-making disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is a long term endeavor—usually unimpressive in comparison to a packed room poised to hear a dynamic speaker; but patiently persevere in disciple-making (1 Cor 15:58) (Ibid, pp. 151-152).

V. A mind shift is essential if we are to accurately assess our ministry direction and then realign it with the Great Commission.

A. *Jesus gave His disciples a vision for world-wide disciple-making. There will be no significant change without this Great Commission mind shift.* A missional community made up of vine workers is the opposite of a group of spectators and consumers harnessed to the yoke of an institution. Church leaders, both clergy and laity, must labor to constantly cast the vision for disciple-making and then set the conditions for that vine work—then church members can get on with prayerfully speaking the Word of God into the lives of one another (Ibid, pp. 154-155).

This must take place in vision-casting, mind-shifting ways so that years of tradition do not stand in the way of the radical vine work called for in the Great Commission (Ibid, p. 161). The motivation to serve and be trained will come from the gospel (gospel formation) and from a deep work of the Spirit of God in people's hearts. It will come from grace not guilt (Ibid, pp. 162-165).

B. *Diagnostic questions to evaluate your current ministry practices:*

- Is there a culture of one-to-one disciple-making in your congregation?
- Do your Bible study leaders know what it means to shepherd?
- Are your leaders themselves training oriented? Are they seeking to train more leaders?
- Does everyone in your church know a basic way to share the gospel?
- Do your people know how to encourage someone through the Word of God?
- Do your people know what it means to serve Jesus and live out their faith in everyday life?
- Is there a core group in your church whose members understand the priorities of the church and know how to train others in those priorities?
- Are you training; recognizing; and unleashing/releasing individuals to ministry?
- Is the next generation of gospel workers being raised up? (Ibid, pp. 172-173).

C. *The more we become like Jesus; the more we will want to pour out our lives in love and service to others.* Are the members of your congregation being effectively taught and equipped to serve? What gospel formation/transformation does is transform people from a worldly minded self-centered way of living to a heavenly minded other-person way of serving—wanting and sacrificing to see others grow. Leaders motivate by means of vision (not by compulsion)—give your disciples frequent tastes of ministry by taking them with you (Ibid, pp. 176-177).

D. *Disciple-making should be the normal agenda and priority of every Christian.* We reiterate: getting people into small groups is NOT the same as discipleship. Our small groups need to be

training groups where believers learn how to study the Word; pray with each other; and work on spiritual growth. A biblical church must keep returning to the mandate found in The Great Commission—otherwise we are just ‘playing church’. Our faithfulness calls for continuous training and discipling of all the members of the church (Col 1:28-29).

E. *The goal of all ministry is to nurture disciples. Disciple-makers are to invest in their disciples in such as way that they are equipped in conviction; character; and competence—only in this way will we be able to multiply disciples (2 Tim 2:2).* The Scriptures call us to abandon ourselves to Christ and the gospel, realizing that God is focused on people-growth by the power of the Spirit.

However, congregations tend to slip into religious ‘forms’ while abandoning the N.T. function of the church which is making disciples. Church leaders must recapture this vision for disciple-making and in response, call the brethren to refocus on the Word and help people to be shaped into Christ-likeness through discipleship.

When church leaders cast the vision for discipleship instead of ‘hoarding talent’—then growing members of the body will be far more intentional at constantly training others so that replication takes place. This will mean that many of our disciples will be called to other places; other churches; and to mission fields—this replication and movement of disciples is how the early church spread all over the known world in just a few decades (1 Thess 1:5-10).

F. *Spirit-engendered ministry is very often NOT able to be pushed through a programmatic grid. Instead it happens spontaneously.* As stewards of the discipleship vision, church leaders must complete their part in the ministry “chain reaction” by seeking to unleash the mutual edification of the body. The discipleship vision needs to be reiterated because it easily slips from view. The members must be equipped and unleashed to bring the body to maturity. As stewards the church leaders must ***see church programs as only an attempt to set conditions for ministry—this is a needed part of the mind shift*** (Wegter, *Toward a Pauline Ecclesiology*).

G. *We need to recognize that the Holy Spirit is the true ‘Administrator’ of ministry? He is sovereign in ministry and over ministry (1 Cor 12:12-26).* He administrates the New Covenant; we don’t. Pastors led by the Spirit will fully embrace Christ’s pattern for His church (Eph 4:9-16). That means they should always be working to equip and unleash the giftedness of the body. This is precisely where a breakdown occurs most often. Church leaders tend to deeply underestimate what the Spirit intends to do through lay people. And the consequence of that miscalculation is that pastors slide back into the mindset of the clergy-laity split. It is as if the Spirit is dependent upon their leadership, programs, and teaching. From that perspective ministry stops with its reception by the layman who is the “end user.”

In order to break out of this all too common pattern, church leaders must see their role as working to ‘complete the loop’ so to speak of the discipleship continuum. By ‘continuum’ we mean that each believer is to be living the life of a disciple who is learning to be a disciple-maker. In other words, the “loop” of discipleship ministry scribes the following circle: leaders equip members to do the work of ministry. Members edify the body and take responsibility to bring one

another to maturity. Lay leaders grow into church leaders who continue the cycle of equipping for the growth of the corporate body.

Church leaders teach; but most commonly NOT with a view (or with the expressed purpose) of training the members to do the lion's share of ministry. Church leaders haven't done their job until they labor to see the loop closed—to see those under their equipping released to ministry, and to see those released to ministry equipping others and releasing them to ministry. *“And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also”* (2 Tim 2:2).

A pastor friend recently shared the following account with me. “During a sermon series on the nature of the church, I told the congregation that church attendance and devotions are not enough. God requires that you see all of your relationships as opportunities to move others closer to Christ. Everyone you know is either moving closer or further from Christ—God wants to use you to move them closer to Christ” (Wegter, *Toward a Pauline Ecclesiology*).

If you dropped every religious activity—everything—and simply said: I’m going to disciple three people into the kingdom, in 11 alterations, the entire American population would be Jesus followers ~ Alan Hirsch

Many people in churches today get the idea that they pay the pastor to do ministry for them. It’s the mercenary mentality, I’ll pay you to do what I’d rather not do. But the Bible says a pastor’s job is to equip you to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11-12) ~ Jeff Vanderstelt

The down side of [this Bible conference] is that none of you will be equipped by this. You’ll get informed. But that’s all. Equipping begins when you go out and obey Jesus. We do not gather for the sake of gathering. We gather and train for the purpose of sending you right back out again ~ Jeff Vanderstelt

Christ’s Pattern for His Church (Part Four)

The indispensable power of the cross of Christ in disciple-making

I. It is Union with Christ that guarantees ultimate Conformity to Christ (Eph 1:4).

- A. *Conformity to Christ is to begin now; we are not just to wait until glory. In Christ and His promises we have everything we need in relation to life and godliness—our Savior is a fountain of life (2 Pet 1:3-4).*** This full sufficiency in Christ is a reality which the believer needs to explore and reckon. To be united to Christ is to have as one’s possession all the benefits of Christ’s glorious Person at work in one’s Christian walk. This means that by reason of union with Christ, the believer is in possession of the benefits of His life; His death; His resurrection; His heavenly advocacy; and His endless Priesthood.

This was Paul's confidence as a disciple-maker. Those eternally united with Christ experience real changes in their being—changes that produce repentance and transformation of character. Union with Christ (or Christ in you) is our *hope of glory* (Col 1:27). Christ's vicarious death in our place makes us new creatures (2 Cor 5:17). So radical and monumental was that great exchange—Christ's life for ours—His righteousness for our sin—that the moment a sinner is saved, it marks the beginning of conformity to Christ. *Christ in you* means you are being fitted for eternity—***discipleship keeps this process of conformity to Christ on schedule.***

B. The transforming power of 'Christ in you' was Paul's hope; it drove his optimism in both evangelism and discipleship. But Paul knew that all his efforts at disciple-making did not ultimately rest upon the forcefulness of his exhortations to self-denial, to devotion, and to repentance. Paul built solely on the foundation of Christ (1 Cor 3:11). The self-denial called for in discipleship is a response to who Christ is—it is our response to discovering Him as Lord of All—and what He has done—it is our response to life in Him—the experience of His fullness.

II. The Means of Disciple-making

A. Paul's disciple-making was by proclamation and by admonition. “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me” (Col 1:28-29).

According to Colossians 1:28-29, Paul's message is not a system or methodology, but the glorious Person of Christ. Christ fulfills the deepest longing and hope of mankind. Christ is the source of new life in His people. “**We proclaim**” is the message of the resurrection (Acts 4:2); of forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:38); of Christ (Phil 1:17-18); of His death (1 Cor 11:26); of the mystery (1 Cor 2:7).

The Apostle teaches and admonishes—these are the two attendant circumstances or tones of Paul's verbal ministry and ours as well. To **admonish** is to address especially the will and the emotions. It includes the idea of warning.

Admonish: a putting in mind, it is used of correction and training in righteousness, whether encouragement, reproof, or warning—admonish contains instruction that addresses things that are wrong and call for warning and change—whereas teaching has to do primarily with the impartation of positive truth (Vines Theol. Dict. pp. 22-23).

The Greek word for admonish (*nouthesia, noutheteo*) is where we get our word for nouthetic counseling. Growing believers are to be adept at admonishment (Rom 15:14). This is a superb reminder that true discipleship contains the element of counseling and admonishment. When we admonish, we bring to the attention of believers where repentance is needed—“*Correct a wise man, and he will love you*” (Prov 9:8). “Remind them,” and “remember” are frequent terms in the Word. Act upon what you have been taught so as to love the truth and be conformed to it.

The goal of Christ-centered teaching is to present every man complete in Christ. Paul will not rest from this goal. This is the heart of everyone who seeks to shepherd God's lambs. It is the heart of a disciple-maker. We labor so that each convert moves to maturity that he may be perfect, mature, complete, irreproachable and blameless at the coming of Christ. "Perfect" means to have one's heart wholly devoted to God so as to walk blamelessly before Him in His ways and His will (Rom 12:1-2). It is to be assured in all the will of God (Col 4:12). The true discipler is not satisfied with anything less than the full maturity of every believer (1 Thess 5:23; 3:13).

B. The goal is to present all complete in Christ at the return of Christ. Such maturity in Christ is possible because of union with Christ. Union with Him is the guarantee of conformity to Him (see Romans 6). According to **Colossians 1:28-29**; Paul gave himself uncompromisingly to this task. In view of full perfection in Christ on the last day, Paul extends all energies in the exercise of his ministry. Conversion of individuals is only the beginning of growth. The "day of Christ" will test the quality of everyman's work (1 Cor 3:10-15).

Vs. 29-- "I labor"—Paul exerts himself to the point of weariness. The Greek word for work here speaks of exhaustion from physical labor. In his pastoral efforts, Paul toiled day and night in the cause of the Gospel (1 Thess 2:9; 1 Cor 4:12).

Vs. 29-- "Striving"—The Greek (*agonizomai*) word is where we get our word agonize. In the Greek culture, the word was used of striving and struggle in an athletic contest in an arena. Though the context is different in this passage, the word still retains its original color of an athlete straining as he exerts.

Vs. 29-- "According to God's power"—the struggle Paul, and we, are engaged in is according to the work of God's power. The knowledge of God's almighty assistance will shape the way we strive and think about our work of ministry. We have a supernatural work to do—it is beyond our natural powers. Supernatural power was at work in Paul and in every true believer. God's power is at work in His laborers—it is power and strength from above (Eph 1:19; 3:7; 16; 20; 2 Cor 3:5). We struggle, but according to God's working. God is invisibly, but powerfully at work where Paul toils laboriously and energetically—it is also true of us (1 Cor 15:10; Phil 4:13).

Faith in Christ is our link with the source of strength that enables us to rise above natural limitations. Let us not be tempted to constantly measure the size of our task against the weakness of our limitations. God desires through us to impart grace and glory to the recipients of our gospel proclamation. God actually refers to us as His "co-laborers" or "fellow workers" (1 Cor 3:9). Faith puts our eyes back on Christ instead of on our limitations and the smallness of our harvest. Endurance is needed if we are to reap! See 1 Corinthians 15:58 and Galatians 6:9. Even the smallest earthly business venture requires planning, labor, and endurance, how much more so the work of God which lasts to eternity? There is a cost to disciple-making; but it is miniscule compared to the glory to come and the harvest that will surely follow our labors.

C. In our own disciple-making we are to follow Paul's example of instruction, exhortation, and nurture (1 Thess 2:10-12). Great care is needed when handling the subjects of the law and sin. If growth is to be equated with more life, freedom, relationship, and righteousness, then we must

not communicate that growth is merely mastering a code (God's law). Our emphasis should not be upon keeping the creed or the law, but upon ***living the life in the Son***. It is so easy to burden and deaden with duty. Christ said that His yoke was easy and His burden was light (Matt 11:30). The child of God by definition is not under sin and law as a dominating, controlling, condemning force. He has passed from death to life—he is free from the controlling principle of sin and death.

In order to preach for growth in the inner man (a necessary component of discipleship), we must deal with our listeners in their being alive! We must not make the Christian life an oppressive harness. Avoid generating a sense of condemnation. We must steer clear of forever talking about duty, focusing on failure, intensifying a sense of grievous disobedience, and deepening a sense of condemnation. This doesn't promote growth (Hywel Jones, "Preaching for Conversion," sermon, Banner of Truth Conference 1993, San Diego, CA).

Our entire eligibility for God's favor is Christ; by union with Him we have the Savior's blessed availability— all by gracious donation. We must avoid grieving the hearts of the righteous. Sanctification is relational; it is living the life of *toward-ness* to God in Christ as His beloved possession, set apart for Him (Ibid).

When promoting growth in the disciple, we are to press down the "template of truth" on the understanding and the affections. There are particular truths that promote growth. Make much of the love of Christ. The truth concerning His love is a *constraining truth* that promotes likeness to Him and conformity to His commands (as we saw in the previous section). Our obedience is achievable by virtue of His energy. When we deepen these "indentations" by means of the die, or template, of truth, growth will result. How easy it is to lose sight of the Lord Jesus Christ. Other things become central and He is marginalized in the process.

Beloved, the Church thrives only when Christ has preeminence in all things. Christian people are right and correct when they hunger to hear how perfectly suited Christ is for their every need (Heb 7:26-27). Our personal teaching in disciple-making must hold Him before Christian people. Set Him before them as their "Source Person" and it will cause them to hunger for Him; feed upon Him; and yearn to be like Him. Our ***strength and energy*** for obedience is the Person of Christ. He is to be preeminent and central in all of ministry. He is to have first place (preeminence) in everything (1 Cor 2:1-3).

D. *The motivation for growth is the gospel, not the Law.* Use the gospel to keep your people aware of what they owe, who they are, what they were, and where they are headed. The gospel is the Christian's "identity, map, and compass" so to speak. The gospel tells him what he was; who he is now; and what he will become. It tells him where he has come from; where he is now; and where he is headed. The gospel tells him that this new identity, direction, and destiny are all because of Christ. The precepts and laws of God must be filtered through Christ and Him crucified. Are we consciously seeking to bring our listeners to delight—so that in their affections they want to receive Christ's love and law in their hearts? Our tendency as ministers is to attempt to make biblical commands stand alone from Christ's finished work and present power.

But, it is the experimental knowledge of Christ's love that gives us the disposition to love one another, and to bear one another's burdens. His love gives us the disposition to please and obey our Heavenly Father. His precepts give us the specifics of how to please God; He directs our love by His precepts. We need to view our living the Christian life in this way instead of merely adherence to a code.

E. *We must understand that our being "in Christ" is our strength. Our union with Christ is vital, living, and organic; it is not merely federal representation (Rom 5:17-19). The mind of Christ is available, the might of Christ is available—we don't have to fulfill a single command by ourselves, in our own strength.* We operate in the realm of grace full and free. We cannot barter for God's infinite goodness in Christ, we cannot exchange anything for it; it is still for nothing, it is still all of grace (Rom 5:1, 2). The dictates and absolutes of discipleship do not change this ruling principle of divine grace.

F. *In order to press down these truths upon the minds and hearts of our disciples, we will have to speak in "three different tones."* This ministry of pressing down the die of truth has three "tones" or "strands" that function together. The Apostle Paul used them in conjunction (1 Thess 2:11). *"Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploing each one of you as a father would his own children."*

Exhorting: is to appeal by argument. It is not the same as laying down the law. It is face to face, side by side ministry as when the Apostle Paul acted as a spiritual father and mother. Laying down the law is not as effective, though it might seem so. By contrast, the exhorter asks the question, "What will make people rise up, want to be more like Christ, and want to obey?" "What will make them more like Christ in attitude, word, and deed?" Faithful shepherds keep exhorting. They are willing to patiently reason with the sheep—helping them build a case for obedience and a case against disobedience. We are not to assume that our people have thoroughly thought through the benefits of obedience; and the consequences of disobedience.

Encouraging: is to comfort humans in their frailty. Distressed minds and hearts need to be consoled. So many are distressed within and without. They are living with turmoil of soul, with stress, fear, anxiety, and condemnation. Even under the Old Covenant, the Levitical priest exemplified compassion and empathy (Heb 5:2,-3). How much more do we, under the new covenant, need to show compassion and empathy. We must not send the message that we have arrived spiritually. We can be too hard. Our own infirmities are always with us. Let us not be too censorious, too overbearing, or too demanding. Sheep need continual encouragement. Our encouraging of hearts is not only to lift spirits and to comfort; but also to motivate the brethren to love and good deeds (Heb 10:25).

Imploring: is to warn the indifferent; it is to withstand the rebellious face to face. It is to confront in specific areas where obedience is lacking. We implore in the context of a "spiritual family." We are to implore our people to go to perfection. Yet, some are 'not of us' as the

Apostle John cautions (1 Jn 2:19). If individuals persevere in disobedience, that sin might bring them to a point of irrevocable apostasy. Disobedient believers must be taught to submit to the Heavenly Father's discipline (Heb 12:4-13). In some cases of protracted disobedience in a believer, that correction from God may claim the health and life of the individual that their spirit may be saved in the day of Christ Jesus (1 Cor 5:5).

In all three of these tones (exhorting, encouraging and imploring), God is the One who is ultimately speaking by means of His Word. He is the One who calls us to call His people into His glorious kingdom. God is the one who is speaking through us His ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20). We are calling men and women to communion with Christ. We are setting forth the Son of God—and life in Him (Ibid.). ***Christ is the gift of all gifts.*** We need to inculcate more longing and more yearning to know Christ and to be like Christ in Immanuel's land (Hywel Jones).

In order to preach to the life of God in the soul, we must preach and speak in all three tones: in speaking truth, we ***exhort***, in communicating compassion, we ***comfort***, in exercising firmness we ***warn***. The Apostle Paul spoke in all three of these tones and so must we if we are to pay the cost of disciple-making (1 Thess 2:11).

III. The Cross of Discipleship

A. Paul's disciple-making always begins with "we proclaim Him!" The admonishing and the teaching follow. It is the proclamation of Christ in His fullness that is the foundation for all ethical action and religious devotion (Col 1:28-29). Paul knew that his listeners must also build upon Christ. All of their own striving and repenting must rest upon *Christ and Him crucified*. The centrality of Christ must always be our proclamation in discipleship—or our efforts will be met with disappointment.

We proclaim Him and His cross-work—for only in the Christ-centered—cross-centered life do we find the divine power and love necessary to make a disciple. Only in His glorious Person and work upon Calvary are found the divinely powerful resources necessary to make a disciple. When Paul was among the Corinthians, his message focused upon the cross, the heart of the gospel—this is the truth with which God associates His power (Rom 1:16-17). *"For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"* (1 Cor 2:2).

B. The cross produces real transformation—radical changes that can only be adequately described as an entirely new creation. In Christ's atoning work there is a death applied to us; a resurrection performed upon us that implants a new life principle; there is a spiritual circumcision in which the dominance of the flesh is cut, severed, and removed (Col 2:11-12).

Christ's death and resurrection affects these changes in the believing sinner. Therefore, our approach to discipleship must have the centrality of Christ at its center. For it is in the hearing and believing of this sweet message of the God-man standing in your room and stead that the poor sinner receives the power and the motives for discipleship. That means that when we proclaim Christ, we do so with the goal in view of making disciples and bringing them to maturity.

For the Word of the Cross is a message filled with divine power. When the converted sinner hears what Christ has done to slay our old man and how we have been resurrected to an entirely new form of existence—it opens his understanding to spiritual realities that are life-changing. He discovers the source of power for personal holiness (“*Christ in you*”). This has immense consequences and crucial application for our own methodology in making disciples. We proclaim Christ, admonishing and teaching.

C. *We must follow the Pauline order—we proclaim Him—then we admonish and teach. Because only Christ and His cross can make a true disciple—you cannot by your own efforts.* All of our instruction, exhortation, pleading, and admonishment must be anchored in Christ and His cross. And here is why—because ***the devotion, the diligence, and the sacrifices made by a true disciple constitute a series of faith responses to Christ, the Lord of Glory.*** The life of obedience lived out by a true disciple takes place because he has ever clearer views of his Savior. Faith-based obedience is never separated from its object; the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, as disciple-makers, ***we proclaim Him***—for in Christ there is limitless transforming power.

Paul gives us our pattern—for he joins the power of God in the cross with the believer’s response of diligence and consecration. The power of the message of the cross believed produces consecration and devotion to Christ which we will see shortly. Our disciple-making must be characterized by both *proclamation* and *practice*; by *exhibiting* the supremacy of our Savior and by *exhorting* believers to follow Him without limits or reservations.

D. *Bare principles and moral injunctions will not produce lasting change in the listener. In the final analysis our most impassioned pleas for our listeners to be good; to try harder; to stop sinning—must be joined to the display of Christ—or the flesh will conclude that in itself are the resources necessary to crucify the flesh.* We must preach to our hearers what we preach to ourselves—namely that Christ is the Divine Architect of the new man (Col 3:9-11; Eph 4:20-24).

The cross of Christ has redeemed and purchased us making us God’s possessions for His holy and loving purposes. Christ’s mediatorial work has poured us into a life mould—totally shaping us to live for God’s glory (Col 3:10-11). On this side of the cross, true discipleship is living the new life Christ has wrought for us. We do not live a life of self-denial so that Christ will accept us—no; God has accepted the believer *in the Beloved* (Eph 1:3-6). Discipleship, with its life-style of self-denial, is living the life Christ has wrought for us.

Our Savior lives through us (Gal 2:20). Paul’s overflowing joy as a disciple of Christ emanated from his understanding that he was living an *exchanged life*. Paul could say with complete confidence that Christ was living His life through Paul. The old Paul had been *crucified with Christ*. The new Paul was nothing less than a daily cognizance of the reality that *Christ lives in me*. Paul was animated by this truth—it permeated his understanding—*Christ is expressing His personality through the vehicle of my fleshly body* (Gal 2:20). Paul was so conversant with his divine resources in Christ that he could actually say of himself, “It is no longer I who live!”

Let us mark this down in our own disciple-making—exhortation without this Word of Christ and Him crucified can produce exasperation. I remember the formula this way: exhortation without enablement equals exasperation. When we exhort—we must never fail to imbue our listeners with their infinite resources in Christ.

These gospel spiritual realities of identification with Christ stretch our understanding to the limit. Just to think that in the mind of God, the elect were so fully identified with Christ their Head as to gain His life. So intimate was this identification that in Christ's crucifixion, our fallen human natures were judged *so that we should no longer be slaves of sin* (Rom 6:6). This is Paul's victory cry—*those who have died are freed from sin—sin is no longer master over them* (Rom 6:5-10ff.). Our Adamic nature with its original sin—that bottomless vile vent of rebellion and pollution was once and for all judged in the body of Christ in His death.

- E. *The Apostle does not relegate this doctrine of co-crucifixion with Christ to the realm of theory. He immediately plows it into practical use.*** The believer is to ***reckon, count, consider*** himself dead to sin and alive to God. He is to present the members of his body to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:11-13). How blessed this is to know that our fruitfulness as disciple-makers is tied to the Word of the Cross. For the message of *Christ and Him crucified* comes with assurances that the message of the gospel is God's power to all who believe (Rom 1:16-17).

The proclamation of Christ's indestructible life and His intercession for us in His passion and His glory cannot fail to produce a life of true discipleship in the elect. You and I need that assurance. Paul was seeking to prove to the consciences of the Corinthians that Christ was in him (2 Cor 13:3), and that all of his motives in ministry issued from the Person and work of Christ (see 2 Corinthians chapter five).

Paul's point is that only Christ's cross can produce the mindset of a true disciple of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5, the Apostle expounds his motives for serving God, and he expounds the source of those motives. ***Paul's motive for service was the controlling love of Christ.*** This motive issues forth in an action—the believer no longer lives for himself—he lives the life of a true disciple. *“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf”* (2 Cor 5:14-15).

Paul says that he is constrained or controlled—he is so affected by a sense of incarnate love as to be controlled. He makes the will of Christ the rule of obedience. The true Christian is controlled by a sense of divine love so as to consecrate his life to Christ. The one who lives supremely for family, science, world, mankind, or whatever else is not a Christian. Christ died and rose on our behalf. That is, He died in our stead. The theology of this verse (5:14) is more profound than merely *an obligatory response of our love to Christ's love*. The cross has an inner result only understood in terms of substitution. He died for me as ***Substitute***. He met the demands of justice for me (the basis and reality of my justification)—I died with Him—co-

crucifixion is the basis for the whole possibility of my discipleship and sanctification. The power of Christ's cross is life-transforming. The sacrificial work of Christ is not merely an example of ultimate obedience for the disciple of Christ to emulate. The cross of Christ exerts the power to *make new creatures who will walk as disciples of Christ*.

F. This is a profound truth in relation to discipleship because the cross of Christ produces actual changes in the sinner—changes which make the new believer willing to pay the cost of true discipleship! Therefore we must fix in our minds that the cross provides each of the following three necessities for true discipleship. The cross provides the **motivation** to live as a disciple (we are controlled by the love of Christ); the cross provides the **obligation** to live as a disciple (we are to no longer live for ourselves); the cross provides the **enablement** to live as a disciple (we have *died with Christ*).

We cannot emphasize this truth too strongly: when the cross of Christ is applied to a believing sinner by the Holy Spirit, not only is salvation the result; but also there will be a willingness in the individual to meet the demands of true discipleship (2 Cor 4:15).

The nature of the atonement is learned from its effect—one effect is “therefore, all were dead” (lit. Grk) (2 Cor 5:14). His death secured their death. “Having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore **all died**” (5:14). The use of the word “all” in the last clause serves grammatically as a ‘qualifier’, in other words, it limits (or qualifies) the atonement as to its design and effect. Thus, we surmise that, “Christ died for all who died when He died” (Hodge, MacArthur, et al). Christ's people are so united with Him that His death is their death (the same argument of Christ's solidarity with His people is set forth in Romans 6:1-14 and Galatians 2:20).

Dying with Christ involves death to sin and self and involves the obligation to die to sin and self. All who died with Christ receive the benefits of his substitutionary death (imputed righteousness; forgiveness; adoption; sanctification; sonship; deliverance from the sin's dominion; etc.). The specific character of the atonement—it was ultimately designed for those who partake of that new life of which Christ's resurrection is the pledge and pattern. This is how Paul defends his conduct before the Corinthians. Christ's love claims him in such a way that in relation to others, he can no longer exist for himself. In contrast, his opponents (the false apostles) boast to the Corinthians that they are religious, spiritual, and something in themselves.

Paul wanted his readers to know that his old self-centered life was gone (now it is righteous, resurrection life in Christ). Paul's disinterested motives (motives from agape love) are a result of the cross. God's design in the atonement was to **found** the relationship with the forgiven sinner so that all emanates from being in Christ. Divine love proceeds from Christ and streams down to the elect, producing conformity to their divine Head (Rom 8:28-29).

“Having concluded this” or “We thus judge” (2 Cor 5:14). This clause assigns the reason why Christ's love exerts constraining, animating, controlling power. Christ's death not only placed upon the believer the obligation for devotion, it *secured that devotion!!* They died in Him

to a self-directed selfish life. Our faith response to this reality involves reckoning ourselves dead to sin. “*Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*” (Gal 5:24).

Faith in His having died for us is the source and principle of the Christian life. Paul’s motive—the constraining love of Christ—is followed by another action—as a new creature in Christ; he no longer judges according to the flesh (2 Cor 5:16-17). To judge after the flesh means judging by the external or outward side of life. Paul is saying that since his conversion, he no longer estimates any man by the world’s standard of judgment. Thus, Paul exposes the error of his opponents with a powerful argument: his opponents used the same criterion of evaluation on Paul that the unbelieving Jews did on Christ! Christ’s weakness (as the suffering Servant and Savior) was a stumbling block to both unbelieving Jews and Gentiles.

Now that the cross was the center of Paul’s existence, he had obtained a new knowledge of Christ and a new set of values. Paul had known Christ “*according to the flesh.*” Prior to his salvation, Saul of Tarsus, by means of ‘fleshly judgment’, viewed Jesus as a crucified messianic pretender, cursed of God. When he saw Christ *according to the flesh*, he regarded Him as unbelieving Israel did—as an imposter perishing under the displeasure of God (Is 53:3, 4).

Paul’s new values include his ‘theology of the cross’—to know the power of Christ’s resurrection, we share in His sufferings (we are like Him in His death) (Phil 3:7-14). As a saved man, Paul now recognizes that Christ’s suffering was vicarious—accomplished in the room and stead of Christ’s people. On earth, Christ’s true identity as Lord of Glory was hidden behind weakened mortal flesh—but Paul now knows Christ as both suffering Messiah and exalted Lord of Heaven. Union with Christ has ***transformed*** Paul—as a new creation, he has a different standard of judgment—old opinions, views, plans, desires, principles, and affections have “*passed away.*” Now he has new views of truth, new apprehensions of his destiny and purpose. Our work as disciple-makers involves repeatedly proclaiming Christ and the accomplishments of His cross.

Our disciples need to grasp that the Spirit’s work in regeneration is a “first fruits” creative work that makes each believer a representative of a coming new world order! The transformation has affected a kingdom transfer (Col 1:13). Here we are, radically identified with the cross, yet citizens of the new heavens and the new earth (Phil 3:20-21). The recreated man in Christ is part of the new cosmos coming (the theme is *replacement*—new world, new body, new values). With this perception comes a new standard of judging—the pretensions of the world sink into insignificance. A new creation by union with Christ is the ground of all our hope. A true disciple, like Paul, is animated by Christ’s love and a true disciple does all his evaluating by means of kingdom values. Friends of the cross have an eternal value system. No man who sets his mind on earthly things can be said to be a *friend of the cross* (Phil 3:18-19).

Christ's Pattern for His Church (Part Five)

Implementing discipleship: *why we must be disciplined in the gospel*

INTRODUCTION: Our premise is that without an abiding commitment to live by the gospel, we sentence ourselves to fruitless Christianity. Why does fruitless Christianity exist? Authors Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp refer to the cause as “the gospel gap,” other writers describe it as “cultural Christianity.” In a word it is the phenomenon of believers who are not radically identified with Christ and therefore are not producing the expected fruit of faith—they are ineffective and unproductive Christians (Timothy Lane, Paul Tripp, *How People Change*, pp. 3-4, 6-8). As Lane and Tripp indicate, the *gospel gap* produces a different kind of Christianity (which we will call *cultural Christianity*). The term ‘gospel gap’ was coined to refer to Christians who have a very weak grasp of following: *the present benefit of the work of Christ; the power of the cross; and the transforming reality of future hope.*

Lane and Tripp state that allowing the gospel gap to remain uncorrected produces a serious set of consequences: *we will miss out on lives that are gospel-shaped; Christ confident; and change-committed.* And, in place of those graces the remaining vacuum will be filled with other things—even religious things (Ibid, p. 7).

The problem of pervasive cultural Christianity was addressed by William Wilberforce more than 200 years ago in his book, *Real Christianity*. Wilberforce argues that in the West we have settled for a cultural version of Christianity that is far from the real thing (*Real Christianity*, Regal, 2006, p. 24). Unlike genuine Christianity, cultural Christianity is unmoved by spiritual realities and the precious things of God. Wilberforce observes that this unbiblical form of Christianity is characterized by adherents who have no spiritual eyes to behold the infinite riches of Christ; therefore they do not regard heavenly treasure as their primary pursuit in this life (Ibid, pp. 42-43, 53, 68).

In addition to these flaws, the author goes on to say that cultural Christianity is not missional in its mindset and direction—it has no passion to advance the kingdom of God. It is not devoted to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Its expression of Christianity is compartmentalized and shrunken and, worst of all, is tailored to the tastes of the religious consumer (Ibid, pp. 71-72).

Now the only reason we are beginning this section with a critique of contemporary Christianity is to emphasize that true discipleship (as the heart of the Great Commission) has fallen by the wayside—it is being neglected in even the most respected evangelical churches. And, we are paying a high price for ignoring discipleship. In defense of this observation, we note that throughout the history of the Church there has always been a tension between uncontested loyalty to Christ versus cultural Christianity’s contentment with externals. Singular devotion to Christ is never a private solitary matter; it always issues forth in faith-energized vision for ministry and truth-driven service to the body of Christ. Consecration to Christ is expressed by love to the brethren which is lived out by offering sacrificial help to them for their growth to maturity (Ibid, pp. 76-81).

Assisting others in their spiritual growth is the very essence of discipleship (Col 1:28-29). The scriptural answer to the gospel gap and cultural Christianity is intentional discipleship. We are

members one of another—and Christ has called us to live as such (Eph 4:25). The church of Christ is like no other organization or community. It is animated by its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Its members have life in common in Christ and are organically joined to Him. The Head of this body is the glorious Lord of the universe. He rules His body by His infallible Word, the Holy Scriptures. The members of His body are members one of another and are indwelt and empowered by His Spirit. Therefore, because of the uniqueness of the church and because of its supernatural origin and existence; human wisdom will always fail to produce a local church that is pleasing to Christ. For, manmade structure if pressed too far will have a suffocating effect on the work of the Spirit of God.

Grant Horner comments on the negative effects of hyper-structuralism in the church, “In my years of serving in the local church I have noticed that the spiritual growth curve suffers when a heavy-handed ‘top down’ CEO management approach is employed. A business model of church leadership often leaves leaders oblivious to what the Spirit is doing in peoples’ lives.” Horner’s comments are based on the truth that the church is an organic entity; therefore we cannot be biblical if we try to run it like a corporation. In reality, our efforts at ministry are at best are attempts to cooperate with the Spirit and set conditions for ministry. The Holy Spirit is the true source of fruitful ministry. Horner goes on to say, “Church leaders, instead of always conceiving of a new program, ought to look at what God is doing; then water, fertilize, and nurture it instead of tamping down a grassroots work” (Grant Horner, Professor of English, The Master’s College).

So why do so many churches opt for hyper-structural top down programs? One key reason is because discipleship is sometimes ‘messy’—we cannot always quantify and measure the efficiency of everything that is taking place. In relational discipleship there is much that could be regarded as imprecise and without guaranteed results. In other words our efforts at genuine discipleship cannot be successfully shoved through a programmatic grid or a tight structure—like the nature of the church itself, discipleship relationships are to a great degree organic and fluid.

(See Paul Zahl’s comments on the error of *objectifying* the church in *A Short Systematic Theology*, pp. 88-89. And see also Tim Chester and Steve Timmis’ observations on why everything we do as a church must always be defined by the gospel, *Total Church*, pp. 16-17. And also John Stott in *Total Church*, “Our static, inflexible, self-centered structures are ‘heretical structures’ because they embody a heretical doctrine of the church.” If “our structure has become an end in itself, not a means of saving the world [fulfilling the Great Commission] it is “a heretical structure.” John Stott, *The Living Church*, UK, Intervarsity, 2007, p. 58.)

I. What is it so essential to be discipled in the gospel?

A. Jonathan Edwards offers the scriptural insight that true spirituality is knowing, tasting, and seeing the beauty of God’s holiness. What sets the saint apart from all others is that he sees the glory or beauty of divine things. The Bible speaks of this glory as the central thing that makes God and His ways attractive—that lures humans in love to Him. This is the light that makes the Person of Christ so ravishingly beautiful, that He has drawn the hearts of millions to Himself for the last two millennia. This is the brightness that all saints see in comparison to which their own hearts appear filthy (Gerald R. McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards on Revival, Spiritual Discernment, and God’s Beauty,” *Reformation and Revival* 6:1 Winter 1997).

B. What does the church become when deprived of the regular revelation of Christ's glory? In the first place; she becomes spiritually malnourished, for she was called into existence to glorify Christ and to commune with the Godhead by feeding upon Christ. It is by the church's intake of Christ that she is able to manifest Christ. Without this *feasting* upon the things of Christ, she will experience declension. And, a decline into cold formalism and institutionalism is not foreign to any of us. For we have witnessed this same tendency toward lukewarm-ness in our own persons. We are all too familiar with the kind of spiritual chill that can come over the soul and numb its operations (Rev 2:4-5).

It is Christ who has purchased His church. He owns the church and rules the church by His infallible Word. When believers forget that Christ owns and rules His church—then there is an inescapable pull in the direction of man-centeredness.

C. As disciples we must know why the gospel addresses the condition of the human heart. Paul chided the Corinthian believers for boasting in men (1 Cor 4:7). Why do we boast in distinctions if God alone is the distinction-maker? The apostle states, “*Why do you boast as if you had not received it?*” Sin is not only lawlessness; it is self-justification, the desire to seek intrinsic differentiation from others—this was at the heart of the Corinthian catastrophe. We tend to divide the human race up between those who are achieving a standard and those who are not, and then drawing from that distinction our differentiation from others (Paul F. M. Zahl, *A Short Systematic Theology*, pp. 54-55).

The grace of God demands that we see ourselves from the divine perspective. This is absolutely essential in living out gospel community as a local church. Only the gospel gives us identity in the Lord instead of in our achievements. Because of the gospel, all true differentiation; all individual identity is a gift by grace which frees us from self (i.e. ‘self-justification’). The redeemed have freedom and identity by a different ‘measure’ than the one applied by mankind—the child of God has status, favor, sonship, identity, acceptance, and standing ALL by divine grace. “*Who made you to differ (God alone), why are you boasting as if you did not receive it from someone (from Christ)?*” (1 Cor 4:6-7).

D. As disciples we must know that only the gospel can reverse our tendency to be self-justifiers. Self-justification is the action of defending our intrinsic worth. This defense of our intrinsic worth has manifestations (flesh fruits, Gal 5:19-21), which are all traceable to original sin. BUT, through the wonder of ‘guilt transfer,’ Christ has brought believing sinners to God (1 Pet 3:18). Self under judgment cannot possibly experience close proximity to God (Job 3:25). We require a substitute, or we will forever be banished from God’s presence, favor, life, love, light, and blessedness (Ibid, pp. 56-57).

The good news of the gospel is about the divine action to accomplish such a work of guilt transfer by substitution. God alone is free to affect that moral transfer (Jn 1:29; 10:18; Rom 6:23). Christ died for me—this is a one to one substitution (Gal 3:13; 2 Cor 5:21; Rom 7:25). We have life by His blood (Lev 17:11; Rev 7:13-14). Christ voluntarily assumed our moral liabilities; our guilt and our condemnation. He became of no reputation. He was sold under sin and thus paid the price of that sin as our substitute (Rom 7:14).

E. As disciplers we must know why the gospel is good news. The gospel is ONLY incredibly good news if we realize that the human condition was a kind of dead end—like a cul de sac (Paul Zahl). There is no escape; no exit except by guilt transfer—without that guilt transfer, all of our hopes, dreams, and meaningful relations will turn to ashes once we enter our death bed. The wonder of redemption is that we are dealing with “the atoned and the atoning God.” God has plucked out His own heart in the bruising of His Son for us. He has “split” Himself so to speak in order to accomplish this guilt transfer. His requirement of perfection in the human being necessitated a guilt transfer in order for us to be restored to Him (Ibid, pp. 68, 70, 76-77).

Now the dynamics of our blood-bought life in Christ free us to radical honesty in our biblical self-confrontation. The gospel has set us free from self-justification (from attempting to prop up self by enforcing distinctions). Therefore, because our status in Christ is immutable, we can afford to face the worst things about ourselves without fear of being diminished. This is the dynamic: the believer’s life is “life as it is” and “life as God imputes to us through Christ.” This is a formula for radical heroism in dealing with sin. It is a formula for humility; for service; for true community—for intimacy through Christ—for trust and closeness—for freedom from paralyzing self-consciousness (Ibid).

F. As disciplers we must know why the gospel as the glory of Christ is the indispensable key to ongoing holiness. We must frequently meditate on the glory of Christ to be free from earthly cares and affections. *But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit* (2 Cor 3:18). Only the saved see and savor the glory of Christ. God’s glory in the face of Christ ought to be the aim of gospel preaching. If we conceal the glory of Christ; we cripple the sanctifying work of the Spirit who wishes to exalt Christ and reveal His glory to the saints. Christ as revealed in the gospel is our *worldview*; we are to see all of life through Him—all of our purpose, direction, and hope emanates from Him (John Piper, *God is the Gospel*). Only a continual view of the glory of Christ will stir us up and encourage us to watch and continually fight against the deceitful workings of sin. To experience the things of Christ’s glory has the power to make us want to do the things that please Him.

Seeing Christ’s glory is the only way to obtain holiness, comfort, and preparation for eternal life. The chief privilege in this life is to ‘see’ the glory of God in all His holiness displayed in Christ (Owen, *The Glory of Christ*). Our sin, guilt, lust, cravings, insecurities, and desire for happiness—all combine to make the soul restless. Christ has everything the sinner needs. In all things He is perfectly suited to all the needs and cravings of the immortal soul. “All my springs are in Thee” (A. A. Bonar, *The Person of Christ*).

To believingly ‘see’ God in our nature, dying and bleeding for us, eradicates our sinful fear and suspicion of God, and it sets us free to love one another. Faith in the gospel opens up to the understanding Christ’s full sacrifice; for Christ is the essence of the gospel. “If I see Him who is the atonement to be God-man, then I see an offering so vast, and so extensive in its applications, that every crevice of the conscience must be reached” (A. A. Bonar).

We have no life in ourselves. The saints are dependent upon God for continual communication of His goodness and power to them. Christ continues to supply spiritual life, grace, and strength to His redeemed people. The goodness, grace, life, light, mercy, and power which are the origin of the new creation are all of God's origin. It pleased the Father that the fullness of God's divine nature should be in Christ as Head of the church (Col 1:17-19). These qualities in Christ are communicated from Him to His church—He makes them available to the church (John Owen). This revelation of Christ in the gospel is our 'food'—without a steady diet of Christ as He is displayed to the saints in the gospel; the church cannot fulfill her mission.

G. The power of Christ's love received has an effect upon our lives of enabling us to bear fruit for the glory of God. We must not be content to think of the love of Christ in a general way. Instead, we must dwell upon God's wisdom, goodness, and grace shown in eternal acts of His divine nature and pity—all given to us in Christ (John Owen). The church cannot maintain its fervency apart from communion with Christ. When He comes and shows Himself amidst our meditation and communion with Him; He brings with Him peace, comfort, joy, and assurance. Christ's intent is that we 'feast' with Him by means of these spiritual refreshments (Rev 3:20).

How are we to receive these things? Look on the glory of Christ by faith. Meditate on the glory of His unique nature—His humbling of Himself to come into the world—His present high position in heaven—His love and grace. Our hearts will be spiritually affected in some degree by His constraining love—which is the source of all our spiritual comforts and power. Christ knows perfectly the eternal blessedness which will be enjoyed by those who believe in Him (Jn 10:10) (John Owen).

The church cannot maintain its fervency apart from communion with Christ. Without the experience of these things (the spiritual comforts Christ brings), our Christianity is heartless, lifeless, and useless. Without a steady diet of Christ as He is displayed to the saints in the gospel; the church cannot fulfill her mission. This revelation of Christ in the gospel is the source of our ongoing transformation. We can say we believe the promises about the eternal glories of heaven; but where is the proof of our faith if we do not experience the enjoyment of these spiritual blessings here and now? (Rom 15:13; 1 Pet 1: 3-9). We must take a steady view of Christ's glory—and seek Him with all our heart. In this way alone will the believers who collectively make up the church recover from stagnancy. Christ's glory alone will bring us back to joy—to love in *our hearts*; in *our souls*; and in *our relationships* (Owen).

Only those who are committed to beholding the glory of Christ now are truly pressing on to that perfect view of the glory of Christ in heaven. Believers who are delighted to see the glory of Christ experience Christ's transforming power. Those who make it their full purpose of heart to behold His glory will be changed into His image. When our trust in Christ is constantly exercised; virtue proceeds from Christ to purify our hearts, increase our holiness, strengthen our graces, and fill us with joy—at times joy inexpressible filled with glory (1 Pet 1:8). Christ's glory beheld quickens the understanding at the same time as His love is communicated to the heart.

APPLICATION: At salvation the Spirit of God grants the believing sinner an eternal relationship with the Triune God through Christ. Our walk in the Spirit is to be characterized by diligently caring for this relationship which has been graciously granted. Many believers need to rethink their definition of salvation because it is common to conceive of salvation as a kind of spiritual commodity rather than what it really is. To be in possession of eternal salvation is to be a partaker of a relationship graciously granted by the Spirit of God. Sanctification is to diligently care for that relationship given. God's saving grace is relational from top to bottom—from start to finish. Carnal believers and false professors discount this pervasive truth—making salvation into a body of impersonal merit composed of Christ's morality plus theirs. Discipleship involves guiding and helping one another learn to care for, and maintain their relationship with the Lord.

II. Gospel discipleship stresses that justification drives sanctification

A. *The Pauline model of sanctification grounded in gospel discipleship: our practice and walk is grounded in our position in Christ. This dynamic is seen in the relationship between the indicative and the imperative which characterizes Paul's epistles.* The indicative drives the imperative. Is sanctification merely moral obligation? Or, is it based upon the gracious reality of a new identity; a new status; a new relationship; and a new power source. Christ traded places with the sinner so that the believer might be justified. Our growth is anchored in the fact that our relationship with God is forever settled in Christ.

Now, who God is toward us in Christ has become our world; it fills our horizon; it is an endless source of joy. Our desire set on the precious things of God deepens our eternal value system. But, as soon as we drift away from fixing our affections on things above (Col 3:1-2); our tendency is to become preoccupied with temporal things. Philippians chapter 3 verses 18 and 19 warn that those who set their minds and appetites upon earthly things are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” The power of the cross is seen in its ability to *detach us* from the world (Gal 5:14); and *attach us* to the Lord (Rom 6:5ff.).

B. *Justification in Christ by faith through grace is God's preemptive strike against legalism and perfectionism (Rom 4:1-8ff.). This reality of divine grace 'up front' radically changes our motivations for pursuing sanctification.* God's preemptive strike slays our carnal motives to perfect ourselves; base our standing with God on our achievements; orient ourselves with a performance Christianity. If we see the practical value of justification; then we will find our motives for holiness to flow from the following: a desire to care for our love relationship with the Lord; to live a life of gratitude; to offer ourselves back to God as a lifestyle; to live as God's beloved and holy possession (Rom 6:11-13).

C. *A substantial part of our progress in sanctification is to continually address our tendency toward living disconnected lives.* In other words, when the gap widens between what we say we believe and how we live, we will need to admit that we are engaged in a disconnect. The greater the disconnect, the further we are sliding into carnality and hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is deadly dangerous. It can move the soul into deep presumption and self-deception concerning one's

spiritual state (see Hebrews chapters 3 and 4). Sanctification keeps putting the disconnect to death; it mortifies the disconnect—this involves pursuing a non-compartmentalized unified Christian life experience. Only the gospel consistently applied can accomplish can give us a united heart (Ps 86:11).

D. *Our propensity is to forget the gospel—not the least reason being that the gospel is 100%*

counterintuitive. Utilizing the means of grace is essential to a unified Christian life. Our gospel focus is *care for your relationship with the Lord which has been given by grace at the moment of salvation. Fixing your mind upon all God is toward you in Christ removes the element of “just do it”—or, “grind out your religious duty.”* Religious duty moves to delight only when the spiritual affections are engaged. All God is toward us in Christ must be displayed to our affections (all God is toward me in Christ includes His sovereign initiation which invited me into His Kingdom plot with its unspeakable majesty and infinite dimensions and eternal scope). Our hearts are incredibly restless in their search for an object of desire and happiness to pursue. True happiness is inseparable from holiness; therefore happiness is the byproduct of this pursuit of God in Christ and the glory of Christ.

E. *Our religious flesh welcomes a performance approach to the Christian life.* Thus, a gospel-centered walk is one of first things we have to learn. Because of our bent toward pride and independence, our flesh actually opposes God’s grace. As a result it is easy for our piety to consist of a set of religious duties which we have jammed into a compartment in our lives. This is why it is so crucial for our discipleship efforts to begin with the grace of God in the gospel. Carnal wisdom tends to treat discipleship as an extended ‘download’ of religious information and requirements. A disciple can be left with the impression that, “Each week my mentor is showing me more stuff I have to do.” Remember, the law approach to God comes natural to us; the grace approach has to be learned over time. Only when we are ‘gospel-saturated’ will we begin to live upon Christ as our ‘Source Person’ and grow in our knowledge of Him as a blessed result.

APPLICATION: Why is it so hard for us as believers to learn that Christ carries our status before God? What are some of the things we can do in our discipling of others which will keep the emphasis on transformation instead of merely information? Though discipling others is to be deliberate; it is also to be a lifestyle of love and spiritual parenting—why is discipleship the most grace-based when we are NOT carrying the burden of whether or not our efforts succeed in the short term? How can we stress that true discipleship involves radical self-denial: dying to self and dying to the flesh and its desires? (See Gal 5:24; 6:14-15; Rom 8:12-13.) How can we keep checking to see if the heart is being reached in our discipleship efforts? Why should the following ‘gospel grid’ permeate every area of our discipleship curriculum: Who the believer is in Christ; and who God is toward the believer in Christ? APPLICATION: Think of some specific questions which would target your disciple’s identity in Christ. What kinds of questions could you ask to uncover false assumptions about their circumstances; relationships; suffering; sinful habits; etc.

Christ's Pattern for His Church (Part Five)

Implementing discipleship: *developing the mindset of a discipler*

I. Implementing discipleship begins by viewing ourselves as God's ambassadors and as God's instruments for change in others.

A. *Relationships in the context of the community of the local church are the God-appointed context for change and growth.* Our individual redemption is played out in our relationships. Our relationships are to reflect our right-relatedness to God (Lane/Tripp, *How People Change*, 71, 76, 79-80). Close to 90% of the commandments in the epistles are designed to govern our relationships. The apostle Paul summarizes this ethical obligation in our relationships as, “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:1-3).

The above underscores the fact that our Christian relationships have a goal which supersedes our need for companionship and happiness. Our relationships have an eternal purpose or goal—to see and know Christ. This means that ultimately our relationships do not belong to us—they are to be used by God for transformation (Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, P & R, 2002, pp. 102, 123).

APPLICATION: What are some portions of Scripture can we feed upon that will assist us in seeing our relationships in this way? How can we move out of passivity into edification?

B. *Implementing discipleship involves a commitment to regard our relationships as divinely ordained opportunities for transformation.* To consider ourselves as ‘ambassadors’ is to understand that we represent God’s purposes to the people He has placed in our lives. As ‘ambassadors’ we die (by means of the cross) to a self-directed life in order to serve Christ, our King (2 Cor 5:14-21) (Tripp, *Instruments*, pp. 104-105).

Recently I met with a missionary from our church. As we discussed discipleship and the biblical fellowship, he brought up the fact that believers need to more passionately pursue one another in order to actually reach a level of biblical fellowship enjoined in Scripture. He shared that the church today is afflicted with a passive self-protective attitude which says, “Others ought to pursue me; I’ll just play it safe and wait until they do.”

APPLICATION: As we learn to live upon the Lord, we find that we are increasingly sensitive to the needs of others. We will take the risks needed to pursue others. Recently I was discipling a middle-aged father of two who was just beginning to venture out and disciple someone else for the very first time. He shared with me the following insights: “God is forcing me to enlarge my sphere of spiritual influence beyond my immediate family. As a result I sense, along with a deep feeling of inadequacy, a new reason not to sin; for there is another person now

who is accountable to me spiritually.” God’s call upon our lives means nothing less than allowing Him to shape our lives so that our relationships become a means of ‘incarnating’ the love; truth; and grace of Christ (Tripp, p. 97-98). What will help us make this paradigm shift in our thinking?

II. Implementing discipleship means understanding the gospel dynamics of genuine change.

A. *Christian living cannot be reduced to a set of principles to be followed.* Genuine change involves the power of God’s grace enabling true godliness. The Lord uses personal ministry to change us. We must offer people truth applied to their situation—divine truth which destroys and replaces old ways of thinking about God; self; circumstances; and relationships (Ibid, pp. 99-100).

When we are discipling others, and we lovingly confront them with God’s truth—they are coming in contact with Christ’s will and rule for them. Therefore, repentance is a determination to restore Christ to the proper place of prominence He deserves in our lives. Thus sanctifying change takes place when we abandon our own agendas and recover the Lord’s agenda for our lives—it is bowing the knee to Christ (Tripp, pp. 124, 232).

APPLICATION: If we really believed the above, would we be more willing to confront in love? Why? What would it take for us to be convinced that God wants us to speak into one another’s lives? How can we begin to think this way so that we become confident that soul care of others is actually inseparable from us cooperating with God’s purposes?

B. *Genuine change cannot be reduced to behavior modification. True, lasting, sanctifying change is always a result of the gospel.* All advances in real holiness start with Christ and the gospel. The church today is afflicted with the lie that we can change without the gospel. Only when we become saturated with the gospel is that lie reversed. And we might add that to truly become saturated with the gospel, it normally requires discipleship relationships which are focused upon the Word of grace (Lane/Tripp, pp. 26-29, 35, 234).

C. *When we are saturated with the gospel we are in the best position to commune with Christ and with one another.* By ‘gospel saturation’ we mean that the child of God is continually feeding on the Word of His grace—always affirming the great exchange which took place in Christ taking our place so that we might enjoy shared life with Him now and forever (Ibid, p. 66).

God’s grace is so much more than merely His remedy for sin. Grace is God’s commitment to complete the process which He began in each of His children. Our progress in grace means connecting our desires to God’s purposes. This process stays on schedule (or on track) the best when we have a discipler who functions as a life coach. We make forward progress as we continue to release our personal agendas in order to be controlled by what God wants. Our discipler helps us with this process (Tripp, pp. 41, 43, 49).

Real transforming change takes place when we learn to embrace our Redeemer and His assets and all He is. Lasting change must be rooted in the cross of Christ and in His promises to conform us to His image (Lane/Tripp, p. 193). The gospel drives our fellowship with the Lord and our service and sanctification. The reason why is because the gospel keeps displaying Christ and all He is and all He is toward us and all we are in Him.

Therefore, only the gospel can keep our *upward, inward, and outward* faces balanced. Our natural tendency is to have these ‘faces’ out of balance. For some lack of balance comes in the form of constant introspection and self-examination. For others it is busy-ness for God without much communion with Him. The gospel draws us back to intimate fellowship with Christ. As we abide in Him, our progress in sanctification will actually show up in our opportunities to minister to others. This is great news—for Christ tells us that fruit-bearing is a function of His words abiding in us and us abiding in Him (Jn 15:4-5) (Ibid, p. 245).

III. Implementing discipleship means investing in caring relationships.

A. In discipleship relationships we are connecting people with the resources that are theirs in Christ. We bring Christ’s help where it is really needed because we want them to learn to organize their spiritual lives so that they can think from a scriptural perspective (Tripp, pp. 184, 197).

I was very touched recently by the testimony of a young believer in our men’s discipleship group. He gave the following account of what it has meant to him to experience discipleship: “As a young believer only saved for ten months, I’d have to say that everything is still new to me. Christianity has all new concepts and an entirely new mindset. I have so many questions to get answered. One of the greatest things about discipleship is that my half thought out concepts and unformed thoughts, with the help of my discipler, can be crystallized around Scripture, and then become completed thoughts. This has a profound effect upon all of my ethical choices and relationships.”

Well, I could not have said it better than he did. He also mentioned the importance of the trust factor. Having a trustworthy discipler is highly valued by him because he is very selective about opening up his life with another person. Author Paul Tripp notes that horizontal trust is the beginning of change and of vertical hope for many (Tripp, pp. 131-132).

In discipleship we are modeling how to feed upon Christ. In reality, we can only ‘pass on’ what we are receiving in our own spirit. A clarification is needed at this juncture lest we be accused of promoting the subjective. The person being disciplined will want to know *how it is possible to live upon Christ*. Obviously, the discipler cannot successfully communicate this spiritual reality as an abstract theory; he will have to share from his own knowledge of Christ to some degree.

Is the discipler’s heart a well-watered garden of Christ, or not? Again, we can only successfully pass on to another person what we are receiving in our own spirit. Transparency about our own walk with Christ can help shape and direct our conversations with a disciple so that our words are designed to equip and train (Lane/Tripp, p. 252). Paul Tripp offers the

following wise counsel: in your honest sharing about your struggles and failures and progress remember to exalt the Lord as the key Actor in this drama of redemption (Tripp, p. 156).

B. Relationships are commonly ‘trapped’ in the casual mode. Seeing yourself as Christ’s instrument can help you break out of the mundane. Self-protection comes natural to us. Breaking out of the casual and the mundane involves loving God enough to lovingly confront a brother or a sister with the truth of the Word (Ibid, pp. 163-164, 200).

Some of the tension in a discipleship relationship which keeps it too casual issues from the misconception that the discipler is an essentially different person than the disciple. A disciple can be easily intimidated by the knowledge and spiritual maturity of a mentor. Christ-centered stories from Scripture can help break down this stereotype as the discipler himself locates his place in the story as a fellow sinner in need of grace (Ibid, p. 155).

It’s common among the younger men I disciple to hear about their lack of confidence to venture to speak into the life of another brother. The temptation is to disqualify themselves as not having enough training. As a consequence, they tend to ‘lob grenades of spiritual truth’ and then walk away. But, we must remember that cultivating close relationships is the necessary condition for access to another’s life—an access which permits life on life soul care. We can break out of timidity and out of the casual by learning how to ask questions which are a catalyst for change. Asking these kinds of questions clearly has a redemptive value which will keep the ministry direction moving forward (Ibid, pp. 172-173, 181).

C. Discipleship relationships form best when the lead discipler opens up his or life to the potential disciple. In other words, the person we disciple must see our passion; our devotion to Christ; our consecration. The opposite of this would be a more impersonal relationship based upon being assigned to a mentor. *Do we see the benefit of allowing the person we are discipling to see our spiritual passion? Why do efforts at discipleship based on church programs often eventually fizzle out?*

The vast majority of believers are not in a discipleship relationship. Thus, they have never been trained in a gospel-driven approach to living the Christian life. This means that one of the first things the lead discipler will need to share with the disciple is the priority of grace. It can be difficult for an immature Christian to really understand the freedom to which we are called as sons and daughters of God in Christ. Therefore in our efforts at serving as lead disciplers, we must pray that the Spirit of God grant a shift in thinking in our disciple. This paradigm shift will be seen in the believer’s approach to his or her relationship with the Lord. It will be new for our disciple to plot a course that is: gospel driven; cross-centered; and Christ dependent—so that the Christian life becomes the joyful privilege of maintaining our relationship with the Lord which was graciously granted at salvation. *How should the truth in the paragraph above change our philosophy or methodology in discipleship?*

Disciples who are growing and thriving often give a testimony similar to this: “Prior to understanding the gospel-driven Christian walk, I made an effort to grind out duty. My motto was ‘just do it’. But now that I have begun to understand the priority of grace for everything in the Christian life, I have had a paradigm shift in my thinking—my whole pursuit of the Lord has been revamped. Instead of deadening toil I now commonly experience freedom, joy, love and excitement in my Christian life.” Countless well-meaning believers live with a kind of ‘harness’ on their back—hoping that living ‘in harness’ will combat the potential truancy of the flesh and its sinful desires. Sadly, the harness is often little more than a coercive social-moral structure that does little to change the heart. Only the grace of the gospel can move us from a treadmill of performance to renewing liberty and joy in the Lord—from carnal performance to a place of delight in God. *Consider how our efforts at discipleship will be benefited by connecting the yearnings of our disciple with the wealth that is in Christ. How can you craft your discipleship material and your discipleship relationship to be directed at your disciple’s spiritual affections (the ‘eyes’ of the heart)?*

Summary thoughts concerning the development of a disciple-making mindset:

- 1.) Only by God’s truth can we live as we are meant to live before God. Divine truth changes lives most powerfully when it is communicated in a relational space of discipleship.
- 2.) Each and every true believer is called to be an instrument in the hands of the Redeemer in order to change the lives of others. This is God’s overarching purpose for our relationships—that they might be redemptive in nature.
- 3.) Our behavior is rooted in the thoughts and motives of the heart. Relationships and situations prompt our hearts to express those motivations and thoughts in words and actions.
- 4.) Christ has called us to be His ambassadors—this means following Him in His message; His methods; and His character. Being an instrument of change means incarnating Christ’s love by sharing in people’s struggles and then extending grace to them to help them change.
- 6.) As instruments of change we ask good questions which are designed to uncover false assumptions—especially about a believer’s identity in Christ and the commensurate responsibilities which flow from that identity.
- 7.) As instruments of change we speak the truth in love in order to lead our disciples to ongoing repentance. This repentance is always built upon the gospel call and is bathed in gospel comfort.
- 8.) As instruments of change we provide accountability which issues forth in stability; reliability; structure; guidance; assistance; warning; and encouragement (Ibid, pp. 272-274, 267).

Christ's Pattern for His Church (Part Six)

Implementing discipleship: *keeping discipleship on track*

I. The following essentials will help us form discipleship relationships and keep them on track.

A. *Keep building upon foundational truth even when seeking the 'entry points' necessary to form discipleship relationships.* After your local church identified those capable and willing to disciple others; lead disciplers may hold *dinners* and *open Bible studies* in which the Great Commission is spelled out. In addition stress is placed on Christ's pattern for His church from Ephesians chapter four (every member supplying his or her part in the edification of the body for the purpose of individual and corporate spiritual growth). During these open Bible studies, the teaching disciplers cast the biblical vision for the spiritual growth and maturity of every member (Col 1:28-29). An invitation is given to the group to form discipleship partnerships. A discipleship partnership involves a commitment between two or three believers to study God's Word and to pray together at set times for the purpose of spiritual growth.

B. *Reach out and pursue relationships in order to cultivating partnerships.* Lead disciplers begin working with the partnerships which have resulted from the group meetings—explaining the overall strategy for spiritual growth. First of all, the growth strategy involves grounding the partners in the fundamentals of ***How to Study the Bible***. This stage will involve two or three meetings with the partners in which intense instruction takes place in Bible Study Method. The second phase of the growth strategy is to select a Scripture passage for the individual partnerships to study together (we recommend a portion of Colossians 1-3 or Philippians 1-3 to begin with). The third stage of the strategy entails the partners regularly studying through the passage and praying together at set times. These prayer times will also involve ***spiritual inventory***—identifying areas where personal growth is needed. Much of the spiritual inventory will be driven by the biblical passage the partners have been studying.

C. *Keep guiding by means of the relationship and not merely by the curriculum you are using.* The lead disciplers will meet with the partners every other week for the purpose of monitoring and guiding progress. Guidance by the lead disciplers is an ongoing endeavor. Perseverance is required. During these bi-weekly meetings, the disciplers will employ a set of probing questions with the partners (see section on ***Application Questions***). These 'probing questions' are designed to make sure that the Word of God is actually being allowed to transform the believer. The guidance meetings are absolutely essential. In our age of facts being just a 'click away', it is all too common for believers to read the Bible as merely religious information, rather than as the living; abiding; life-transforming Word of God. The partners need mentoring in order to learn how the Word of God is intended to speak to all of life and to each part of our day to day existence.

D. Continue instructing in the spiritual disciplines. The lead disciplers function as mentors in the spiritual disciplines of Bible study; prayer; fellowship; Scripture meditation; and evangelism. The disciplers are there to model **life-on-life soul care**—they are to be examples of applying the Word to the specific spiritual needs of the individual. The spiritual needs of potential disciples commonly fall under four areas: 1.) *A particular sin is a stronghold in the person's life.* 2.) *The individual feels defeated and useless spiritually.* 3.) *The person complains of getting little out of their Bible reading and quiet times.* 4.) *The believer feels exasperated as if the Christian life is merely a performance treadmill.* The lead disciplers are to be accomplished at patiently showing the partners how the gospel gloriously answers each of these four common obstacles to growth.

E. Keep utilizing application questions. Employing probing questions is absolutely essential if the partners are to be transformed by God's truth. The lead disciplers are encouraged to form their own probing questions as well as using the questions provided in this resource. Without incorporating the probing questions, the process of internalizing the Word of God often miscarries. Growing believers need help in learning how to close the '**disconnect**' which commonly exists between belief and practice. The goal at this stage of growth is for the partners to gain the skill of **biblical self-confrontation**—that is to practice self-examination in light of the truth and then to make the changes required by the Bible by the power of the Spirit. This skill is seldom developed without hands-on instruction within the **relational space** offered in spiritual mentoring.

Remember, as lead disciplers we are seeking to reach the hearts of those we are discipling. To be on the receiving end of probing questions can be quite intimidating for the growing believer. Therefore we want to make this use of questions as caring, non-threatening, and relational as possible. Discipleship should be somewhat spontaneous instead of reading the probing questions from a sheet of paper. Consider first internalizing the questions and then putting them in your own words. Our aim is to have the Word of God penetrate the heart. Lead disciplers may ask each partner to prayerfully consider and then answer the following questions. Ask them what must change in order to answer each of these in the affirmative:

- *Are you reading the Word for the purpose of renewing your mind and for the purpose of being transformed into the likeness of Christ? May I show you how?*
- *Are you reading the Word in order to practice self-confrontation and ongoing repentance—so that you are mortifying ego; selfishness; lust; and self-exaltation? Let's examine how this is done.*
- *Are you reading the Word in order to identify areas in which you need to grow; are you being utterly deliberate about developing Christian character? Let me show you why the Word calls for ongoing repentance.*
- *Are you reading the Word in order to know better how to please Christ your Lord—submitting to Him; learning His will for you; and taking delight in being ruled by Him through His Word?*

- *Are you reading the Word in order to fellowship with the Lord and know Him better—taking joy in communing with Him and receiving His love and grace on a regular basis?*

Lead disciplers are to function in a **catalytic manner**; drawing out the partners so that they have vital, life-transforming interaction with the Word of God. Here are specific questions that are to be utilized when studying a particular text (see also Jay Wegter's questions in the lesson, *How to Meditate on Scripture*):

- *What does this text say about my relationships; my thought life; my service; my worship; my leadership; and/or my character?*
- *What is the 'burden' of this text—in other words what error in thinking; attitudes; acting; or believing is this text designed to correct?*
- *What does this text say about God; about others; about me; about God and me?*
- *How does this text speak clearly about Christ my source of life and spiritual power?*
- *What would have to change in my life in order for me to obey what God requires here?*
- *What regions of my conscience and affections are to be 'educated' by this text?*
- *How does this text provide a 'wisdom grid' to evaluate all of life?*

F. Stay focused on the end goal of discipleship. Lead disciplers are seeking to grow a disciple who ultimately becomes capable of spiritually investing in others (making another disciple). The best leaders can do is seek to set the conditions for spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit is the One who produces the spiritual formation. Spiritual growth means learning to live as Christ's possession and then maintaining the relationship with the Lord that was imparted to us at the moment of salvation. Our relationship with the Lord is *mediated* through the Word of God and is therefore indispensable to our walk with the Lord and our growth in Him. We reiterate that spiritual growth thrives best in the **relational space** established in close relationships. Key to this closeness is **gospel saturation**—in other words, where the gospel is taught; known; loved; and applied deeply, there will be the courage to trust and to show transparency and vulnerability in our relationships.

G. Keep stressing that living as Christ's disciple is an entire lifestyle. Gospel saturation is central to grace living. Gospel saturation enables us, even grants us permission, to seek satisfaction in God so that we make it a habit to go to Him for love and grace every day. Then the Christian life becomes one continuous act of gratitude to the Lord. At the moment of salvation the believing sinner bows the knee to Christ; the Lord of the cosmos. From then on the Lord takes possession of the believer whom He has purchased at Calvary (1 Cor 6:19). Thus, living the life of a disciple involves offering ourselves back to God each day—literally presenting ourselves to Him each day. This **principle of presentation (Rom 6:11-14)**—giving all we are to the Lord each day is the essence of living as a disciple.

Many believers value privacy more than spiritual growth. As a consequence, they may view discipleship as an incursion into their compartmentalized world. Relationship is the key—for potential disciples will see in your life (as a lead discipler) that you enjoy peace and satisfaction in God that comes from having the areas of your life under Christ’s lordship, and the joy of a unified Christian experience in Christ.

A. When you are teaching your disciple from a text of Scripture; show him or her how you are using Bible study method to interpret and apply the passage. At first blush, the task of interpreting the Bible and then making a penetrating application can be quite daunting. This short addendum is meant to accompany my other article, *How to Study the Bible*. My intent is to remove some of the intimidation is often associated with exegeting the Word (to *exegete* is to make a careful, precise, searching study of a passage of Scripture). Our goal is to eliminate some of the ‘mystery’ concerning how the meaning of the text is uncovered and unpacked.

[illegible]

So knowing the occasion for which the book was written is important to proper interpretation. Why you ask? Because the text cannot mean today, in the year 2010, what it did not mean in 78 A.D. In other words, we must first solve the following problem: *What timeless truth is the biblical author communicating to believers in the 1st Century world? What spiritual problems were they facing which would be solved in part by the timeless truth in the text if that truth were believed and obeyed?*

This is often where today's Bible students are a bit lazy. They want to rush to the text and pull out "what *it means to them*" before doing any labor at biblical interpretation. Having the correct interpretation is vital. Drs. Richard Mayhew and John MacArthur agree: *God accompanies His power and authority, ONLY where there is the correct interpretation of the text!*

Now you have already familiarized yourself with my document, *How to Study the Bible*. I want to help you further by diving into a sample text of Scripture to provide you with an example of how to apply Bible study methods. Remember, our labor in finding the *proper interpretation* is foundational to making the *right application* to our lives.

First, I cannot emphasize highly enough how valuable it is to both *paraphrase* the text (saying it in your own words with as many words as necessary until you can prove you know what it is saying), AND, to *outline* the text in some form. Now to a busy college student, this will sound like just more homework. But the dividends far outweigh the effort involved. Here's why: in order to truly *feed on Christ and His Word* we will have to be able to explain the spiritual treasure we are handling to our own affections and to the 'eyes of the heart' (Eph 1:18). In other words, the timeless truth in the text must make an impression on our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. We will have to do the work of unpacking the meaning and then explaining the truth to our own souls until we are moved and wrought upon by God's Spirit—that is, until He writes the truth we are studying on our hearts indelibly.

B. Show your disciple how to ask questions of the biblical text. The sample text I want to use is 1 Peter 1:1-12. First the student must write out a couple of sentences which capture the occasion for which this portion of the epistle was written. Here are the two sentences we came up with: *Our text highlights the priority of faith in times of persecution, and the priority of gospel faith in light of the wealth of salvation's blessings and hope.*

These 'purpose sentences' provide an additional interpretive check—knowing that every verse in our segment will dovetail back to these purposes or occasion for which the epistle was written. Next, we write out the **key thought** of each verse using our own words:

V. 3 – The very presence of saving faith in us is there by virtue of God's sovereign mercy.

V. 4 -- The permanence of our heavenly inheritance is grounded upon immutable gospel promises.

V. 5 -- The protection and safe-keeping our gospel faith affords us is by the power of God Himself.

Vv. 6.-7 – The proof or genuineness of our gospel faith is made known through our trials. There is nothing in the universe more precious to God than our gospel faith, tried and found genuine.

V. 8 -- Gospel faith is not merely propositional; it is manifested by our passionate love for Christ—a love which is produced and expressed through our faith.

V. 9 – The purpose of gospel faith is the obtaining of final salvation in Christ.

Vv. 10-12 – The O.T. proclaimed and prophesied that gospel faith was coming when Messiah would appear. Now that salvation in Christ is here; we preach the message of gospel directed to this faith by the power of the Spirit.

OK, I think you are getting the idea. Yes this is work, but blessed work. Just like you are willing to drive through traffic to reach a five star restaurant, consider that this interpretive work is necessary in order to feed your soul the perfect spiritual nourishment of the Word rightly divided.

Now our work is not done once we have homed in on the meaning of the text. We then move from interpretation to the stage of *shouldering the burden of the text*. In other words, we must be able to clearly state what God is saying to us in this portion of His Word. What is He requiring of us? What does this text say about His plan and how we must stir ourselves to cooperate with His plan?

Beginning Bible students tend to be hasty at this point. They find themselves making a ‘devotional’ application that is not text-driven. A text-driven application will necessarily join the indicatives in the text to the imperatives in the text. In other words, it will join the finished work of Christ (*indicatives*) to the commands (*imperatives*) which flow from Christ’s work.

Now, lest I lose you with academic terminology, let me illustrate further: The *indicatives* of the text can be generally summarized as follows: the blessings of salvation in Christ—spiritual realities which include our position in Christ and our matchless resources in Christ. The imperatives of the text are the ethical obligations which logically flow from these indicatives (indicatives being the redemptive accomplishments of God in Christ).

So by way of example of the relationship between indicative and imperative in our text: in 1 Peter 1:1-12 text, our “living hope in Christ” (the indicative) is meant to drive our perseverance amidst testing and trials and afflictions (the imperative). We are to endure, and we are to do so KNOWING that having our faith being tested is par for the course. God, for His own glory, wants to put our tested and approved faith on display on judgment day! If I believe that with all my heart, I will obey the commands (imperatives) which follow in 1 Peter 1:13-17. This is the Word of God reaching my heart and shaping the way I think and live.

So we see that proper application will be text-driven—proper application will always exert the effort necessary to demonstrate the relationship between the indicatives and the imperatives. Now this can appear overwhelming at first to the beginning Bible student; but with just a little guidance, instruction, and supervision he or she will get the hang of it and begin to rejoice at the prospect of “handling accurately the Word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15), and learning to feed one’s own soul.

Christ’s Pattern for His Church (Part Seven)

Implementing discipleship: *looking at the cost for church leaders*

I. It is a fact that biblical discipleship is not being modeled in most Evangelical churches today.

A. Many Christians have little idea of just how valuable and biblical it is to our spiritual growth to be mentored by a maturing believer. Discipling others is like coaching in sports; it has a precise goal; it is very deliberate. We want to move the disciple through various stages of

spiritual development—from conviction to character to competency (in communicating effectively the Word of God). *Are we used to thinking in terms of a precise set of goals in our discipling of others? Why or why not?*

B. *Discipleship relationships form best when the lead discipler opens up his or life to the potential disciple.* In other words, the person we disciple must see our passion; our devotion to Christ; our consecration. The opposite of this would be a more impersonal relationship based upon being assigned to a mentor. *Do we see the benefit of allowing the person we are discipling to see our spiritual passion? Why do efforts at discipleship based on church programs often eventually fizzle out?*

The vast majority of believers are not in a discipleship relationship. Thus, they have never been trained in a gospel-driven approach to living the Christian life. This means that one of the first things the lead discipler will need to share with the disciple is the priority of grace. It can be difficult for an immature Christian to really understand the freedom to which we are called as sons and daughters of God in Christ. Therefore in our efforts at serving as lead disciplers, we must pray that the Spirit of God grant a shift in thinking in our disciple. This paradigm shift will be seen in the believer's approach to his or her relationship with the Lord. It will be new for our disciple to plot a course that is: gospel driven; cross-centered; and Christ dependent—so that the Christian life becomes the joyful privilege of maintaining our relationship with the Lord which was graciously granted at salvation. *How should the truth in the paragraph above change our philosophy or methodology in discipleship?*

II. Church leaders must fully embrace the Great Commission mandate and then begin casting the vision and “mainstreaming” discipleship.

A. *A radical paradigm shift is needed: pastors aware of the biblical mandate for discipleship attempt to set the conditions for biblical discipleship; but after a year they frequently see no net change.* Attempts are often made to assign elders to a specific number of families in order to induce shepherding. I have rarely heard of instances in which this approach translates into ongoing biblical discipleship. There is an indefinably variable about biblical discipleship: biblical discipleship is exceedingly difficult to implement by means of a program. But why is this so?

One central reason is because discipleship relationships are as unique as the individuals who form them. The discipleship curriculum may be the same in a church; but not the relationships themselves—life on life dynamic ministry refuses to be standardized. Attempts to push the relationships through a universal grid wind up killing the relational vitality they are supposed to engender and protect. I don't know why this truth seems to be lost upon so many church leaders; but I suspect it is because many of the leaders themselves are not intimately involved in discipling relationships as a lifestyle.

B. *Bottom line: discipleship relationships refuse to thrive and flourish in a formulaic setting.*

They just decline to form spontaneously when a stiff programmatic template is draped over a room

full of people. As a consequence, countless evangelical churches are at a loss as to how biblical discipleship can be implemented. In many ways the ‘entry points’ to discipleship relationships remain unknown or patently evasive.

In the following paragraphs we will explore why this is so and what can be done about it. First of all in our culture of anonymity, high accountability relationships are considered invasive. There is an unspoken social tenet which argues against forming relationships which place high value upon risk, trust, vulnerability, perpetuity, and interdependence. Secondly, people are living over-scheduled lives and are consequently guarding their time jealously. And, when suddenly someone shows deep interest in forming a relationship; questions come to mind such as: *How much time will this take? Will I be guilt-tripped? What does this person want from me? What if I really do not wish to be known at their level of transparency? What if I am not keen on giving this person access into my private life? What if I don’t like them after the first two meetings? Do they regard me as their personal project? Is this discipleship “push” merely the church ‘marketing’ its latest program?* These are some of the unspoken questions that rise up inside the prospective disciple.

How essential is Spirit-filled love and care in the discipleship relationship? What message is being sent by the discipler? “You’re my discipleship project in order to fulfill what God requires of His people.” Or, “I care deeply about you.” “You really matter to me.” “I am interested in you and what the Lord is doing in your life.”

Church leaders will continue to see frustration if they attempt to institutionalize discipleship. It is interesting that so often the classroom model of philosophy of ministry doesn’t see its weaknesses until it bumps up against the Great Commission. Then, the self-deception which has been involved in the effort to bring people to spiritual maturity becomes evident. The actual amount of life-renewing biblical knowledge truly being passed on; assimilated; and lived out comes crashing against reality. With the classroom model of philosophy of ministry do we really have people equipped and ministering? Do we actually have a room full of people who are ‘on mission’ who are living ‘missional lives’ and who are fulfilling the Great Commission? The answer is plainly, no. The hours of instruction we have given have not produced practicing disciples of Christ.

Disciples are made within relational spaces in which real life on life soul care takes place. What we can speak into a person’s life from the pulpit or the lectern is greatly limited. It is time we face this limitation. We have inadvertently sent the message that sitting under excellent instruction is equivalent to sacrificial obedience and timely progress toward spiritual maturity—but it is not. The biblical model of discipleship and equipping for ministry is nothing short of life on life soul care in which what is learned is gained within the relational space of discipler and disciple.

In our hi-tech culture of efficiency we have assumed that the quality of our academics allows us to successfully bypass the relational space dimension of learning. Without intending so, we have modeled a reductionistic approach to discipleship. The dynamic life of the body perfectly outlined in the New Testament with its sanctifying element of mutual edification, has too

often been reduced to a potluck. The classroom model of ministry remains locked in place, and the biblical pattern of the believer priest; a ministering laity; and a body ‘on mission’ is suffering as a result.

On a positive note, what can church leaders do to remedy the situation? The answer is both encouraging and convicting. Biblical discipleship cannot be taught as ‘discipleship theory’. It has to be modeled. We won’t see significant change by tossing a bi-annual token attention in the direction of discipleship. Substantive changes must take place—church leaders at all levels must attend to the foundations of discipleship if it is to be ‘main-streamed’ in the local church:

- Let the church know that the pastors are actively mentoring their ministry team.
- Continually cast the discipleship vision from the Word while in the pulpit.
- Be constant in extolling the hospitality commands in Scripture.
- Disclose more of your life explaining that change takes place through relationships.
- Frequently define the nature of genuine spiritual fellowship so that it is not mistaken for food and volleyball.
- When casting the vision for discipleship, explain that much of it takes place informally when ‘redemptive’ caring questions are asked.
- Emphasize that the priesthood of the believer exists for the purpose of body life and for the intent of bringing each member to maturity.
- Regularly stress that preaching and teaching is intended to equip the body so that Christ’s blueprint for the church, a ministering laity committed to the Great Commission might become a reality.
- Identify publicly every qualified discipler in the church and encourage them to schedule dinners for prospective disciples.
- Regularly preach on the ‘one another’ commands; but do so in the context of the Great Commission mandate to move one another to spiritual maturity.
- Keep raising the bar in your preaching and teaching so that every church member knows precisely why Christ makes biblical discipleship synonymous with true salvation.
- Stress that living out gospel community is the byproduct of being gospel saturated and the blessed result of defining all we do by the gospel.

We can see from this biblical approach that discipleship will not gain momentum unless it truly is the practice of the church leaders and the functional philosophy of ministry of the church.

Genuine change takes place when believers are disciplined under the gospel. Under the influence of consistent equipping and discipleship, it can normally take a year for a Christian to begin living the gospel-centered life. And, it can take an additional year to be living a missional life (that is a lifestyle committed to the Great Commission of evangelism and disciple-making).

This ‘two-year model’ is usually the minimum time commitment which is necessary to see a body of believers (who are being disciplined) actually gain enough momentum to begin functioning as a missional community. Gospel-centered discipleship not only prepares believers

to be disciple- makers; but in addition, growing by the gospel and growing by grace also plays a central role in their sanctification. By means of the gospel we learn to take delight in God every day. This is the only way to shed our idols; offer ourselves back to God; and live with joy in God as our life direction.

Discipleship is a kind of loop—we are always seeking to close the loop by means of making a disciple who is capable of making another disciple. We're always faced with the truism that teaching a man to fish will ultimately be far more effective than merely giving him a fish each day. Therefore in our discipleship efforts there must be a standard employed which allows us to define exactly what success means. Our shepherding; feeding; and tending have a goal far removed from keeping the sheep spiritually dependent upon us. Successful discipleship is inseparable from achieving the following goal: our disciples must be able to find their place of service in the body of Christ so that they are being nurtured and are nurturing others in discipleship. That goal alone is completely contrary to the spectator-consumer mindset of cultural Christianity. Passive Christianity is built into the "DNA" of our lower natures. Biblical discipleship is what the Lord uses to reverse that natural trajectory.

Again we are back to the biblical definition of the local church in order to be true to a scriptural philosophy of ministry. The church is a kind of pentagon or war room where the strategy for fulfilling the Great Commission ('prosecuting the war') is diligently laid out and executed (Matt 28:18-20; 2 Cor 10:3-5). The church is a kind of family in which supernatural relationships are lived out (Eph 4:25). It is a kind of Body with Christ as its Head and each member contributing to the development of the Body (Eph 4:16; 1 Cor 12:14). The church is a kind of hospital in which each person is being healed of the sin disease by means of the gospel (Rom 6:15-23; 15:1-7). The church is a kind of school, the pillar and ground of the truth, so that its members may be equipped to competently minister and make disciples (1 Tim 3:15). The church is a kind of temple eternally housing the Spirit of God and offering up spiritual sacrifices to God (Eph 2:29-22; 1 Cor 3:16-17). Apart from this understanding of the church's function and mission, there will be a drift back into institutional forms in which the church's structures fall short of fulfilling the actual mission of the church (J. P. Moreland, *Love your God with all your Mind*, Navpress, 1997, pp. 191-192).