

DISCIPLESHIP HANDBOOK

6 ELEMENTS OF A DISCIPLESHIP LIFESTYLE

by

Bobby Harrington & Josh Patrick

Discipleship Handbook

*The Six Elements of a Personal
Discipleship Lifestyle*

By Bobby Harrington and Josh Patrick

Dedicated to the elders and their wives of Harpeth Community Church

*David and Susan Sanders, Mike and Linda Shake, Tony and Kathy Dupree,
Ed and Barbara Kaeser and Cindy Harrington.*

And Todd Wilson

In fond appreciation

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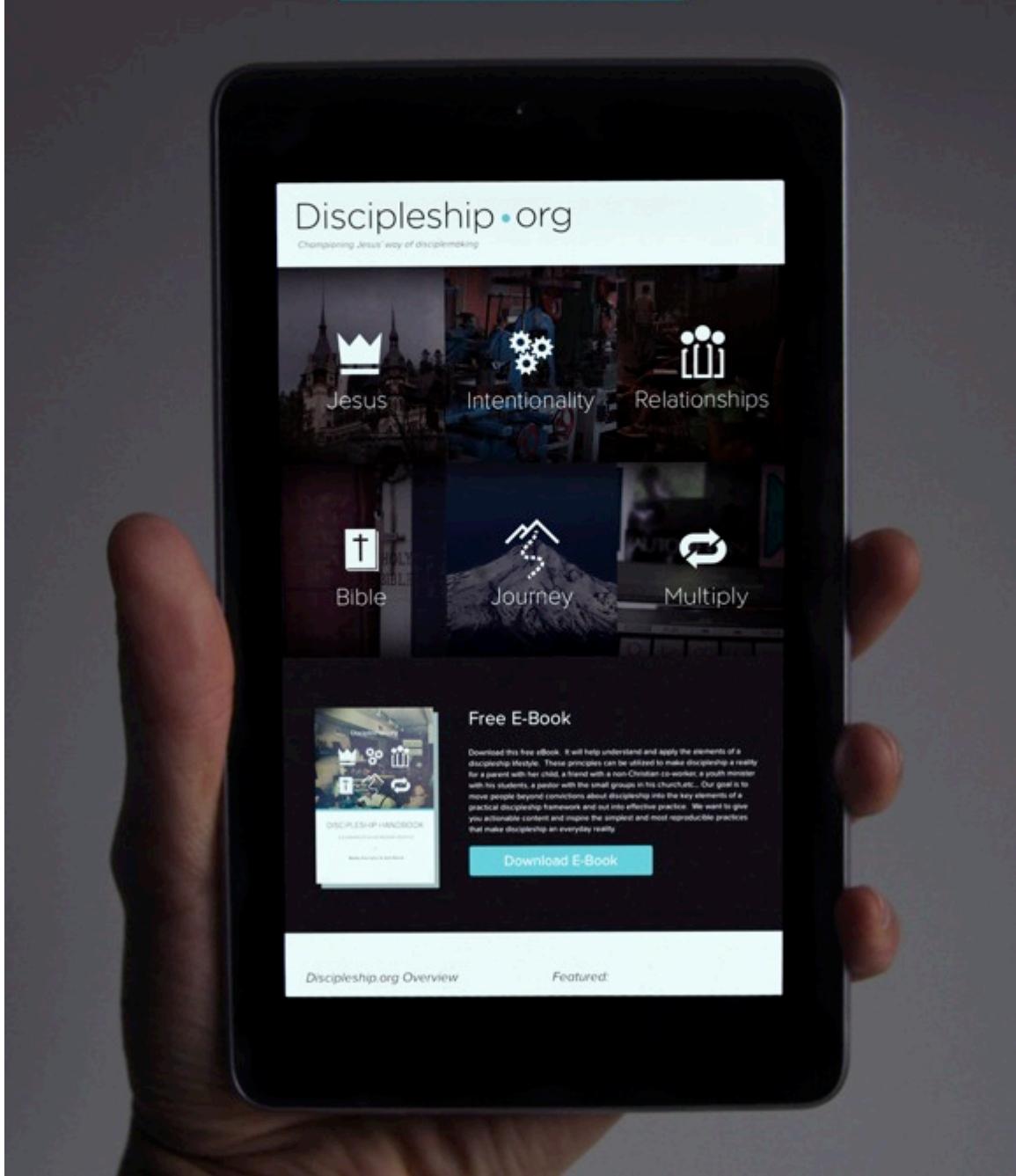




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The Discipleship Lifestyle

Discipleship seems to be the hot topic and latest trend across the Christian landscape right now. This brings us much joy, but we believe that discipleship was never meant to be a temporary fad. We're convinced that from the beginning it was God's plan to heal and redeem the world through a revolution of disciple making.¹ We also believe that Jesus and the apostles clearly state that discipleship is the core mission of the local church.²

We hear from a lot of people who are personally convinced that discipleship is very important, but they need help. They say things like, "I believe in discipleship, but I need someone to tell me or show me how to do it!" In discussions, public talks and church seminars, we find a common trend that disturbs us—the vast majority of Christians report that they have never been personally discipled by a more seasoned follower of Jesus. So they have a hard time knowing how to disciple others. It makes sense: *How can you equip others to trust and follow Jesus if you have never been equipped?*

So, if making disciples of Jesus is the greatest cause on earth (and Scripture tells us it is), how do we equip people to do it? Our prayer is that this recent fascination with discipleship turns into wholehearted devotion. We call it the **discipleship lifestyle**—which is *being a disciple of Jesus and making disciples of Jesus*. We've put together this eBook as a practical handbook for how to engage in the discipleship lifestyle.

This book also serves as an introduction to the elements of discipleship and a discipleship framework found on the website discipleship.org—where you can learn everything you want to know about discipleship and the discipleship lifestyle.³

This short eBook equips you with a basic knowledge of discipleship so that you can disciple one or more people. You may be a parent who wants to know how to disciple your children. You may be a small group leader who desires to disciple those in your small group. Or you may be a church leader who hopes to disciple future church leaders. This eBook contains the basic elements or framework for discipleship that can be applied in countless situations. We also have provided questions at the end of each section to help you think through how these principles apply in your exact discipleship situation.

About the Authors, Bobby and Josh

We both serve in ministry at Harpeth Community Church, near the Harpeth River, in Franklin, Tennessee, and we really like working together. We have written this handbook for our church, for disciple makers and for the wider audience of discipleship.org.

Bobby is the lead and founding pastor of the church and is now in his mid-50s. Josh is the teaching and discipleship minister in his mid-30s. Bobby has learned everything the hard way and is guiding Josh so that he might have an easier path (we are smiling as we write!). Bobby has age and experience; Josh has abundant zeal and creativity. We hope you will find those qualities to be a good mix as you read this book and focus in on specific discipleship principles that you'll find throughout this handbook.

These principles are not theoretical for us. We seek to live them out every day in our homes, relationships, community, church and in our relationships with staff. We fall short of them, but they guide us. They are life-giving principles for those who seek the discipleship lifestyle.

We were both tremendously blessed by older men of God who discipled us early in our lives and ministries. These dear brothers replicated in our lives some of the principles that Jesus demonstrated with His disciples. For that, we are overwhelmingly grateful. But we believe that any disciple can become a disciple maker even if they were not discipled themselves. The key is to look closely at the life of Jesus, take His words to heart and seek to replicate His method. We want to show you at a basic, simple level the elements of that method and equip you to personally disciple people.

DEFINITIONS

As we begin, we think it's important to define words we'll be using throughout these pages. We have two specific definitions foundational to the effective use of this manual. We want to define "discipleship" and "disciple." For the purposes of this book, we equate disciple making with discipleship. We have learned that clarity on what we are doing (discipleship) and what we want to produce (disciples) is essential for effectiveness.

Discipleship

Let's start with a simple definition of discipleship. Please note, again, discipleship or disciple making refers to what we mean when we say we *make* disciples. Matthew 28:19-20 gives us a summary description of Jesus' mandate:

(19) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

These verses provide a surprising amount of gold, with succinct clarity on disciple making.⁴

1. *Helping people* - We have to initiate and be intentional—because we are to “go” and “make” disciples (vs.19).
2. *Trust* - Disciple making is about repentance and conversion with the accent on grace—baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (vs.19).
3. *Follow* - Disciple making is about obedience and sanctification (increasing holiness)—“teaching them to obey everything I commanded you” (vs. 20).
4. *Jesus* - He is the object and focus in discipleship; disciples are to become His “apprentices” and “live life” as He would live—“make disciples” (vs. 19).⁵

With these four components from Matthew 28 in mind, we define disciple making this way:

Discipleship is helping people to trust and follow Jesus.

This is a simple definition, but not a simplistic one. The full meaning of it is wonderfully life altering.

We have found this definition easy to use in a local church context, where high school students easily adopt it as their language. It encompasses all the teachings in the Bible telling us to do nothing and just rely on God—His Grace, His promises and His power. And it encompasses all the teachings in the Bible where we must act—obedience, faithfulness and resisting sin. Both parts are essential to the Great Commission in Matthew 28. And we have found that both parts are essential to balanced discipleship.⁶ We will use this definition as the foundation for helping people with all six elements of the discipleship lifestyle (see below).

Disciple

The second key definition refers to what it means to be a *disciple*. We are indebted to Jim Putman who encouraged us to frame our definition of a disciple around Matthew 4:19. It makes it easy to reference and memorize.⁷

And He said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (ESV).

You can easily divide this verse so that it becomes a framework for the three key parts we find in the rest of the New Testament on what it means to be a disciple. These three parts include (1) “following” Jesus (head); (2) “being changed” by Jesus through the Holy Spirit (heart); and (3) being committed to the mission of Christ “fishers of men” (hands). Based on those three parts, check out our definition:

A disciple is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus and committed to the mission of Jesus.

We always come back to this definition when we talk about disciples. If the people are *following* Jesus, being *changed* by Jesus, and *committed* to the *mission* of Jesus, then they are biblical disciples, as we understand it. Clarity on these points is essential for disciple makers and churches.

The Holy Spirit

Note this very important biblical teaching in our “discipleship” and “disciple” definitions: The presence and power of the Holy Spirit are vitally important in disciple making. He is the agent that draws us to follow Jesus (John 16:7-11; 1 John 2:20-27); that changes us into Jesus’ image (2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Galatians 5:22-23); and that powers our partnership in Jesus’ mission (Matthew 28:20; Acts 1:6-8).

The Great Commission ends with a promise. Jesus tells us that He will be present with us through His Holy Spirit as we make disciples: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). We depend on this promise. And we believe that the Spirit’s presence needs to be our mindset underlying all that we do as disciple makers.

Discipleship is for both Non-Christians and Christians

Our definitions for “discipleship” and “disciple” apply to both non-Christians and to Christians. Many people refer to discipling non-Christians as evangelism. We do not quibble (or take issue) with that. But we find it easier and more biblical to think of disciple making as something we do for both non-Christians and for Christians.⁸

Jesus was making disciples of Peter, James and John (and the others) before they truly believed. In fact, it is fun, or intriguing, to ask yourself: “When were the disciples truly converted?” Follow the storyline of Peter in the Gospel

of Luke and try to pinpoint the moment when he was fully converted (Good luck with that!).

Disciple making includes much more than just conversion because it focuses on helping people obey everything that Jesus commanded. That is a really big, lifelong shift. Look again at discipleship in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (NIV).

Disciple making is much more than baptizing people. It is equipping people to embrace the lifestyle of surrender and obedience to *all of Jesus' teachings*.

Yes, conversion is the most important step in the journey, but life transformation is the goal. The mission He entrusted to us is to teach people to form their entire lives around His Lordship. This is why our definition of disciple is not just the commitment to *follow Jesus*, but also to “*being changed by Jesus*” and “*being committed to His Kingdom mission*.” We seek whole life discipleship.

The Six Discipleship Elements

Over 50 years ago, Dr. Robert Coleman wrote a book called *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, which was an examination and a summary of Jesus' method of making disciples. He identified nine principles in Jesus' method of disciple making.⁹ Dr. Coleman's work is widely accepted as the agreed upon standard description of Jesus' discipleship method by Bible scholars and church leaders. We worked with him and republished his material for a new generation.¹⁰ But we all agreed that nine principles are too many to easily remember, and they do not easily translate to all spheres of life, especially in contexts like marriage or parenting.

At discipleship.org, we worked closely with a large group of discipleship leaders to identify and summarize the six elements of discipleship. This group included Coleman, Bill Hull, Jim Putman, Francis Chan, K.P. Yohannan, Jeff Vanderstelt, Todd Wilson, Alan Hirsch, Josh Shank, Robby Gallaty and others. We simplified the nine discipleship principles from the life of Jesus into six one-word elements.¹¹ The simplicity of one-word principles makes it a bit easier to remember and apply the concepts. These six words apply to all the major spheres of life (family, friends, community and church) as we seek to make

disciples. We have also created icons and definitions for each one. We call them the core elements of disciple making.

 **Jesus** - Jesus is the original disciple maker and centerpiece of discipleship. Our goal is to know, treasure and promote Him.

 **Intentionality** - To make disciples, we utilize strategy and a roadmap for those we are discipling.

 **Relationships** - Discipleship happens best in the context of genuine life-on-life connections grounded in *Christlike* love.

 **Bible** - The Word of God is the manual for making disciples. The Bible is living and active. By it we encounter Jesus and learn to form our lives around Him.

 **Journey** - There is a traceable, but sometimes disjointed, growth story from the new birth to spiritual parenthood where the Holy Spirit leads us on a shared, formative journey.

 **Multiply** - Authentic discipleship repeats and multiplies, where the disciple becomes a disciple maker, reproducing the discipleship process.

The purpose of this discipleship manual is to introduce you to each of these six elements and give you some ideas on how to put them into practice. The website discipleship.org will be filled with more information (especially as the months and years go by), so this will serve as a useful introduction to the elements. Make sure you regularly check the website for more information on each element.

Together, the elements form a framework for disciple making that can be applied in various discipling relationships. For example, if you are the senior pastor of a church and you want to begin the disciple-making journey with a handful of key leaders or your staff, you can create a simple plan using these elements and this handbook. They also apply if you are a friend who wants to disciple a non-Christian co-worker, or a youth minister with his or her students, or a small group leader with a small group. The possibilities are limitless. If your goal is disciple making and you embrace these elements, we think you will be able to apply these concepts in hundreds of places.

Introduction Coaching Questions

The following questions will help you identify the people God may be leading you to disciple. At the end of this handbook, we've provided specific

guidelines to help you structure a formal meeting schedule. We've drawn these questions from what we have found to be effective.

- 1. Are you a biblical disciple yourself?** This might be a hard question to ask yourself, but it is an important one. Do you need to first be discipled? You might want to review the material below under **Disciple** before you make that decision.
- 2. Are you willing?** Do you believe in discipleship as we are defining it? Are you ready to ask God to help you become a disciple maker, even if you do not have it all figured out? We hope you are.
- 3. Who is receptive to you?** Who easily listens or is receptive to what you have to say about the things of Jesus? This could be a non-Christian or a Christian. Our friend, Dave Beuhring, puts it this way: "In whose ears are your words big?"¹²
- 4. Is it a good investment?** Is the person you're thinking about discipling faithful, available, teachable and reliable (FATR)? This kind of person makes your investment of time and friendship a good and wise one. If you are a church leader, these are especially important questions.¹³
- 5. Is God in it?** Is there someone you feel God might be nudging you toward? Do you naturally have good chemistry with someone that might serve as the foundation of a discipling relationship? Or is God asking you to ask Him for someone to disciple (you might be ideal for someone you do not yet know).
- 6. Where will you get the necessary tools?** Discipleship is helping people to form their lives around Jesus as Lord. Where is the person you want to disciple in their journey (see more below)? What tools do you need to help them take the next step?

Ask God to help you make a decision and step out in risk-taking faith. Our goal, as you read this handbook, is to move you into a framework that leads to effective practice. In what follows, we hope you will find actionable content and practical guidance.

Jesus

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Colossians 1:28

Everything in discipleship goes back to Jesus. More than any other thing, the Jesus we believe in and the gospel we preach lead to the kind of disciple we make. Our view of His identity and mission impacts how we go about making disciples. Going straight to the biblical accounts to get an accurate picture of Him is vitally important. Rather than create a version of Jesus that conforms to our agenda, we need to lay down our preconceived notions, open our Bibles and ask, “Who is this man, what did He do, how did He do it, and how can I join in?” To discover the answers to these questions, we need to intentionally search the scriptures.

It begins with how we approach conversion. In his important book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard calls much of what passes for conversion today as “bar code faith”:

“Think of the bar codes now used on goods in most stores. The scanner responds only to the bar code. It makes no difference what is in the bottle or package that bears it, or whether the sticker is on the ‘right’ one or not . . . there is something about the Christian that works like the bar code. Some ritual, some belief, or some association with a group affects God the way the bar code affects the scanner . . . And the payoff for having faith and being ‘scanned’ comes at death and after. Life now being lived has no necessary connection with being a Christian as long as the ‘bar code’ does its job . . . it is not necessary to be a good Christian in order to be forgiven. That’s the main point of the bar code . . .”¹⁴

Vast numbers of preachers and teachers propagate this false version of what Jesus calls for in conversion. They simply ask people to “make some kind of deal” with Jesus. Is the real Jesus worthy of something more? Is He just asking for this kind of shallow response to Him?

The German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this approach “cheap grace.” We treat God’s grace as a “cheap thing” when we say that we accept the benefits of Christ’s death, but we do not truly value Jesus and His gospel and make them precious in our lives. As Bonhoeffer put it,

“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without

confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”¹⁵

What makes this approach so tragic is its popularity and influence in North America today. It is the reason why over 80 percent of Americans claim to be Christian (in some sense) and feel that they are at peace with God, while they live life on their own terms without any visible or active faithfulness or obedience to Christ.¹⁶ Most have been given a false security and a false sense that they have a “real relationship with God.” They claim to believe in Jesus Christ, but the way they live doesn’t demonstrate that.

A proper understanding of *Jesus and the gospel* helps us connect salvation and discipleship.¹⁷ The real Jesus does not ask for a *bar code faith*, *cheap grace response* or what is simply a *transactional gospel*. The heart of the problem is that preachers, teachers and evangelists just start at the cross and ask for a decision. Yes, the cross is at the heart of Jesus and His gospel, but there’s so much more to the story.

We must not skip the life, teaching, resurrection and current reign of King Jesus, to say nothing of His teachings on what it means to be a disciple. The Jesus of the Bible offers salvation (the forgiveness of sins, a new relationship with God and the promise of heaven) *and* a new life, here and now (a life of following Jesus and becoming a Jesus-centered person). God does not just grant eternal life in the future; He also gives us a new life in Jesus NOW.

Jesus and His Gospel

As an example, just a brief look at Mark’s Gospel indicates that the gospel of Jesus is much more than just the cross. Mark begins his Gospel by saying that the gospel is summed up in Jesus, as *everything about Him* is the gospel:

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1, ESV).

So, this passage teaches us that the whole book of Mark is about Jesus, who, in His person, is the gospel. Early in Mark’s narrative, Jesus calls people to repent and believe in the gospel:

“The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15).

When Jesus makes the invitation in this passage, He has yet to die for the sins of people, but He still invites them to believe in *the gospel*.¹⁸ Here, the gospel is

about Jesus, His in-breaking kingdom and the need for repentance.

As we read further, Mark tells us that *Jesus and His gospel* includes the call to make serious commitments to obedience. We cannot be true disciples unless we are willing to lose our life *for the gospel*:

“Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it’” (Mark 8:34-35, NIV).

Jesus and His gospel require wholehearted devotion, even as we acknowledge that we can stumble and fall. As humanity’s true king, Jesus calls for full surrender. In the words of 20th-century theologian and author William McDonald, He calls for “true discipleship.”¹⁹

So, what Jesus offers, as Scripture shows, is the invitation of the *gospel* to come to Jesus for both salvation and a new life. Both parts are integral. The coupling of these teachings is the full Jesus and the whole gospel. Jesus has a core gospel focused on His grace through the cross. But He is a teacher, example and our ever-present and reigning Lord. Jesus offers salvation and a way of life.

The storyline of Jesus and the gospel fits within the broader story of God’s relationship with humanity and His kingdom, as outlined in the Old and New Testaments.²⁰ Here’s a summary of the key movements of God’s story as told in the Bible.²¹

CREATION: God created the world. He is holy and loving. He created us to live with Him in paradise.

FALL: Adam and Eve rebelled against God due to Satan’s influence. Humans are now separated from God, gravitating to sin in thought, word and deed. Satan has major spiritual control over the whole world.

ISRAEL: God reached out and promised Abraham that He would bless the world through him. Abraham placed his faith in God and became the father of the nation of Israel. Through Moses, God redeemed the people of Israel from Egypt and gave the Law and the Ten Commandments. Through the tabernacle/temple, God forgave the Israelites of their sins. God also foreshadowed His kingdom promises to Israel: A perfect king will descend from King David; a faithful people will follow Him; the Kingdom will never end; and they will live in a paradise land.

KING JESUS: God sent Jesus as the Messianic King to announce, embody and establish the Kingdom. Jesus is the fulfillment of Abraham's promise and Israel's prophecies. He was the ideal Israelite and teacher, and He took the penalty for our sin on the cross, rose from the dead and defeated Satan. He ascended to heaven, where He now reigns. He invites people into His "already, but not yet Kingdom." His message is salvation by grace (free gift) through faith for all people, and He will return to judge the living and the dead.

RESTORATION: Jesus redeems those who place their faith in Him. True faith is empowered by God's Spirit so people turn from their sin (repentance) and surrender their lives to Jesus. After Jesus returns to judge humanity, His reign will be fully established. He will take His children into the eternal kingdom in the renewed paradise of God in the New Heaven and New Earth.

This summary tells the broader storyline of Jesus and His rightful claims on us. The Jesus described in this summary is the one who calls us into a life of discipleship. This is the Jesus we are called to follow.

Within the story of Jesus and the Kingdom is the most central part of the gospel—His victory over sin and death for the sake of humanity through the cross. The core gospel is central, but the full gospel is bigger than its core. Again, we need to emphasize both.

The Heart of Jesus' Gospel

The core gospel of Jesus' cross is the foundation of salvation. Our eternal destiny depends on whether or not we are saved by God through Jesus in His cross—in His death, burial and resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15: 1-6 is vital in this regard. It shows us that Jesus' work on the cross is the key, or foundational, item of our faith:

"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received ... " (ESV).

Paul's language is clear—your faith in Jesus and His work on the cross is the basis of your standing with God. You are saved through it, and there is nothing more important! The passage goes on to summarize the core gospel:

"Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the

scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the 12. Then He appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep” (ESV).

The gospel focuses on Jesus Christ’s death for our sin. But the gospel is not just His death; it includes His burial and resurrection—and how they are in accordance with the broader story of Scripture. Jesus is God’s son, and He conquered sin and death. He is now the reigning king of humanity, and His Kingdom will be fully consummated when He returns. Our response to Jesus and his cross is faith. We receive what he has done for us as an act of grace, a free gift.

Paul summarized it in his letter to the Ephesians: “... by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8, ESV). John 3:16 also sums it up: “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (ESV).

The Nature of Saving Faith

And consistent with the requirements of Jesus and His gospel; the faith response described in the Bible must be full and life-changing.²² The reformers used to say, “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.” True faith includes both trust and submission—we *trust* and *follow*. At this point, our discipleship definition comes into play. Discipleship is to help people *trust and follow* Jesus.

A disciple *follows* out of a genuine *trust* that acknowledges Jesus and all for which He stands (Romans 3:20-25; James 2:20-25). We will not follow unless we trust. The concept of being a disciple is rooted in Jesus and His gospel, but it also flows out of what it truly means to be saved by grace through faith.

Faith is a living thing. It is an ongoing dynamic: a responsive interaction between the disciple and the Lord. Faith follows Jesus as our grace-giver and King. True faith not only trusts, it also obeys. Jesus is our Lord, our King who is—at this present moment—ruling and reigning at the right hand of the Father. Everything comes from Him and exists by His power, and is intended for His glory. Jesus is to be followed, obeyed and treasured above all else. No other way is worthy of Him.

“Bar code faith,” “cheap grace” and the “transactional gospel” lead to a phenomenon we’re calling cultural Christianity—a counterfeit, watered-down and powerless version of Christianity. True faith leads to discipleship.²³ The following list of comparisons demonstrates what we mean.

CULTURAL CHRISTIAN

I believe in Jesus.
I pray through Jesus.
I affirm Jesus' general saving role.
I maintain a safe distance from Jesus.
I like Jesus.
I ask Jesus to fulfill my agenda.

DISCIPLE OF JESUS

I truly trust and follow Jesus.
I surrender to Jesus.
I participate in Jesus' mission.
I get as close to Jesus as I can.
I am changed by Jesus.
I am willing to throw myself into Jesus' mission.

About 150 years ago, a man named Charles Blondin came to the United States from overseas. He was fascinated with Niagara Falls, so much so that he resolved to walk over Niagara Falls on a tightrope. So he made a hemp cord 1,100 feet across, 160 feet above Niagara Falls, and announced he was going to cross from one side to the other. He was quite a showman. A crowd of 100,000 people gathered to watch him walk a tightrope across Niagara Falls, inch-by-inch, step-by-step. Can you imagine the drama of that moment?

This is life or death. He had no safety net. He crossed all the way over on his first attempt. Many people, of course, were taking pictures of him, so he did it again. This time he brought a camera with him and took a picture of the crowd while they were taking pictures of him. He went another time and took a chair with him. He even balanced a chair on the rope and stood on the chair. He went back another time and made an omelet. He actually lowered it to passengers on the Maid of the Mist (a boat in the river below) so that one of them could have it for breakfast. He went another time and took a wheelbarrow with him. The crowd went crazy.

After he returned with the wheelbarrow, he turned to the crowd and asked them, "Do you believe I can do this?" Of course, they all shouted they believed. Then he asked them, "Now, who will get into the wheelbarrow?" Then, it got really quiet. All 100,000 people were silent, except for a man named Harry Colcord who knew Blondin. He had worked with him. He got into the wheelbarrow—inch-by-inch...step-by-step. Can you imagine that ride? In a wheelbarrow, on a tightrope, crossing over Niagara Falls? They made it to the other side.

The crowd went crazy again, but the crowd didn't get in the wheelbarrow. Everybody applauded Charles Blondin, but only one man trusted him enough to let him lead him across a tightrope. Jesus never went up to people and said, "Admire me." He only said, "Follow me." He said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me."

“Get in the wheelbarrow and let me lead you.”

That is what faith does. It trusts enough to follow. That is what disciple makers want in those they disciple. They don’t just trust. They follow Jesus, as the book of Revelation says, “wherever He goes” (Revelation 14:4).

Jesus says that one day all of humanity will be divided into one of two camps: those who truly trust and follow Him and those who do not. There will be no third option. There will be no respectable distance keepers who admire Him from afar but withhold their devotion. Who are the real disciples? How will you make true disciples of Jesus? Before going any further, we encourage you to carve out some time and go to a distraction-free place to be alone with God and ask yourself these questions:

Coaching Questions About Jesus

1. In what ways does a person’s understanding of Jesus and His gospel impact the kind of disciple they become?
2. What is the transactional gospel, and why is it less than what the Bible teaches? How dangerous is the transactional gospel?
3. Why is the bigger story of God so vital to understanding Jesus and His cross?
4. What do you think about the contrast between being a biblical disciple or a cultural Christian? How does a proper understanding of Jesus impact this contrast?
5. How can the simple definition of discipleship as “helping people trust and follow Jesus” help you as you make disciples?



Intentionality

Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it.

1 Timothy 4:8-9 (NLT)

Intentionality - discipleship requires us to have strategy, direction and a clear sense of *next steps* for those we are discipling.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes intentionality as “the fact of being deliberate or purposive” (yes, *purposive* is a word!).²⁴ We must state, up front, that this concept may be hard for people to believe in or grasp in our day. This concept means that disciple makers know where other people need to go, and they have a plan to help them get there.

We live in a time where we celebrate humility in moral and spiritual circles and we do not like those who talk and act like they might know the way. We are suspicious of those who claim knowledge or insight about a spiritual journey for others. Our postmodern world pushes away from absolutes. Instead, we prize the modesty of uncertainty and admire self-professed expressions of doubt. Among Christians, there is now a common posture that people take, saying, “Only God can guide people.” “Our only job,” they say, “is to pray and trust the Holy Spirit’s guidance in another person’s life.”²⁵

The problem with this posture is that it can be at odds with the teaching of Jesus and with discipleship as it is found in the Bible. Let’s carefully examine a few sections of Scripture that make this point clearer.

We want to start with the primary text on discipleship in the New Testament, again from Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:19-20:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (NIV).

This text begins with two imperatives: “go” and “make.” Jesus is commanding us to be intentional. We can only follow Jesus’ teaching in this text if “we make the decision to go” (into the world of lost people, those without Christ) and “we make disciples” (help people to follow Jesus by our efforts). The second imperative is key: We can only “make disciples” if we know what a disciple is

and how to make one. A disciple maker, by definition, is guided by intentionality and planning. She helps people trust and follow Jesus.

We find balance here because the text ends with a promise of Jesus' presence. He tells us that in the disciple-making process He is with us always, to the very end of the age. So, we do our part and we trust that Jesus is in us, making it happen through our efforts. I make disciples, but I do not do it by myself. And I do not just leave it to Jesus. He commanded me to do my part, as He works through me.

If I do not pursue an agenda and if I do not have a basic sense of direction, I cannot make disciples. If I fail to have a plan or basic sense of direction, it deviates from what Jesus tells us. I won't make disciples.

I need a plan because, according to the text, making disciples includes my role in teaching them "to obey everything that Jesus commanded."²⁶ My job is to be intentional, to be helpful in teaching them about Jesus and what Jesus commanded.

You might be thinking about discipling your children. As we said earlier, these principles apply in all the spheres of life. The most important discipleship commission for parents is found in Deuteronomy. It is also the most succinct description of discipleship in the Bible. It is called the SHEMA (pronounced *Ske-ma* or *sh'ma*), which in Hebrew means, "hear."²⁷ We think you'll find this passage very helpful:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deut. 6:4-9, NIV).

Notice the intentionality that God prescribes through Moses. "Impress" God's commandments upon your children. "Talk" about God's commandments when you "sit down," when you "walk," when you "lie down," and when you "get up." This is bold, mindful and ongoing "intentionality." I (Bobby) worked with friend and pastor Jason Houser and Chad Harrington (my son), and wrote *Dedicated: Raising Children to Trust and Follow Jesus*, that describes this kind of intentional, relational discipleship for parents.²⁸ Please bear in mind that this passage describes how parents were to help their children think about God's commands and "meditate on them, so that their obedience would not be a matter of formal legalism, but a response based upon understanding."²⁹

And note: The method of discipleship described in Deuteronomy 6 is the same method of discipleship Jesus used. To fully engage in this analysis, you might want to quickly review the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' life with His disciples. They offer a very inspirational vantage point. Jesus impressed God's commands on the disciples. He talked about the Kingdom of God when they sat down, when they walked along the road, when they lay down, and when they got up. Jesus' method was highly intentional and life application-oriented.

As Dr. Robert Coleman shows us in his *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Jesus invested the majority of His time in the 12, and especially in three key leaders (Peter, James and John).³⁰ His method of intentionality was so deeply rooted and pervasive with His disciples that we can just sit back in awe. We are constantly gaining new insights about intentional discipleship as we continue to look closely at Jesus. If we are thoughtful and prayerful, we can apply many of the same practices today.

When Paul describes how he discipled Timothy and how Timothy should, in turn, disciple others, he writes about a highly intentional process. In 2 Timothy 3:10-14, Paul recalls what it was like for Timothy to learn from him.

"You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured ... But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it." (NIV)

This is the kind of intentional discipleship that I (Bobby) received when I first went into ministry.

At age 29, I became the senior pastor/minister of an older, established church in Calgary, Canada. That church had a semi-retired minister on staff named Cecil Bailey. He and his wife, Levine, took my wife, Cindy, and me under their wings. They never stated it outright, but they sought to pattern their discipleship after Paul's example in 2 Timothy 3. They invited us into their world.

I fondly remember, like it was last week, how they took us with them on a fun-filled road trip to meet all the leaders they knew within our fellowship of churches. Over the months and years that we worked together, the Baileys regularly had us over for supper, lunch or for a "cup of tea" (older Canadians love "having tea"). We laughed, cried and even disagreed with each other. We got to know their children, grandchildren and their way of life. We learned of their persecutions and suffering in ministry and the kinds of things that happened to them. Their friendship made us stronger and wiser and ready for

years of ministry. They loved us and discipled us. And it made a big difference in our lives and ministries. We are indebted to them.

Within this framework, Paul instructed Timothy to adhere to a highly intentional discipleship path for leaders in the church. In 2 Timothy 2:2, he describes it succinctly: “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” (NIV)

Timothy was to take the things Paul had taught him and entrust those same teachings to reliable people. He was to exercise wisdom and discernment in how he applied this strategy because he was instructed to discern and teach it to reliable people. This is a highly intentional discipleship strategy. Wise Christians follow this same kind of intentional strategy and planning today.

Paul was very strategic and careful with both his life and his doctrine, for both are key parts in the discipleship process (1 Timothy 4:16). We think it is very important to delineate the discipleship Paul is talking about and a kind of discipleship that is often practiced today—the difference between *intentional, relational* discipleship and *classroom* discipleship. Far too many people think of discipleship as teaching the Bible or a download of Bible facts. Teaching and doctrine are important, but as we will emphasize in this book, focusing on Bible knowledge is too narrow in scope to capture what Jesus and the apostles practiced.

Review the following contrasts.³¹ The next chapter on relationships will make the distinction clearer. At this point, we are sharing it simply to point out that “intentionality” is focused on relational discipleship for life.

EDUCATIONAL DISCIPLESHP	INTENTIONAL, RELATIONAL DISCIPLESHP
Requires attention to Scripture	A personal relationship pointed to Jesus
Scripture and Holy Spirit	Scripture, the Holy Spirit and relationships
Head	Head, heart and hands
Academic	Teaching/modeling/coaching
Emphasizes factual knowledge	Emphasizes life application
Information	Transformation
Content	Supportive relationship
No breaking of bread	Breaking of bread
Start and stop time/quick	Meet in homes daily/takes time
Teacher has all the answers	Let's figure it out together
Large group	Small group
Building/campus	Home
Lesson is the agenda	Doing life together
Setting is formal	Setting is casual

Now let's take a moment to stand back and see how the six elements of discipleship work together. **Intentionality** naturally follows knowing **Jesus** and the commission in Matthew 28. Intentionality causes us to go and make **disciples**. We go and enter into **relationships**. Relationships are the essential environment for discipleship. Then, as we will see, it is within the context of relationship that the **Bible** is most effectively utilized. Then, coming out of biblical teaching, the disciple maker is mindful of the spiritual **journey** and the coalescing of life stories along this path. And then with growth, the disciple reaches a point where he or she has matured enough to join the disciple maker and **multiply** the discipleship process with others.

Intentionality is the guiding component to each step. It begins with an intentional focus on relationships and Bible study. Then you guide the disciple along the steps of the journey. At each step, it is vitally important for a disciple maker to embrace his or her role as the guide and director of the process.

Intentionality Coaching Questions

1. What is intentionality and why is it important in discipleship? Review Matthew 28:19-20. In what ways do both “going” and “making disciples” require intentionality?
2. What is the intentionality process of Deuteronomy 6? How did parents apply it? How did Jesus apply it? How can you apply it?
3. Why is the distinction between educational discipleship and intentional, relational discipleship important? What specific things do you plan to add in your discipling relationship?
4. What is the strategy Paul describes in 2 Timothy 2: 2? How can you apply Paul’s intentionality in your goals as you make disciple(s)? What is your strategy?
5. Each discipling relationship requires specific knowledge and practical skills. For the discipling relationship you want, what special knowledge and skills do you need? If you do not have them, how can you acquire them?

Relationships

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

John 13:35

Relationships—genuine life-on-life connections grounded in *Christlike* love—create and sustain the environment for discipleship.

Scripture gives us many examples of people investing in relationships with other people. It's one thing to sit in a church gathering—watching and listening—but it's another thing to be taught about Jesus with a few others who know you well. In the context of relationship, truth can be transferred from one life to the next. Questions can be asked. Real-life stories can be shared. Sin can be confessed. Accountability can be offered. Encouragement can be given. This process describes how Jesus made disciples. Jesus' ministry clearly shows us that disciple making is a relational process built on trust.

In the first story of Genesis, God makes sure we hear Him say with His own voice that we were created to connect with other people:

"It is not good for man to be alone."³²

So our desire and capacity for relationships are part of our hardwiring. Are you sharing your life with other disciples? Are you spiritually connected to the body of Christ? Are you facilitating biblical community for those you're discipling?

When I (Josh) moved to Franklin, Tennessee, five years ago, I sat down with some older, seasoned church leaders and asked them to help me understand the spiritual climate of the area. One of the questions I asked was, "What is the main barrier that keeps people from growing and maturing in Christ?" Every one of them agreed. It was unanimous. They all said, "Isolation."

We live in a culture that settles for faux friendships and shallow connections. We'd rather watch actors pretend to engage in real relationships on TV than forge safe, vulnerable connections of our own. A while back, a piece in the *Los Angeles Times* by Neal Gabler got my attention.³³ The last paragraph of the piece took my breath away:

"The fact is that we miss the friendships we no longer have, and we know that texting, Facebook or emails cannot possibly compensate for the loss. So we sit in front of our television sets and enjoy the dream of friendship instead: a dream where we need never be alone, where there are a group of people who would do anything for us, and where everyone seems to understand us to our very core, just like Jerry and George,

Chandler and Joey, Carrie and her girls, or the members of the McKinley High glee club. It is a powerful dream, and it is one that may now be the primary pleasure of television.”

Americans now have, on average, fewer friends than a decade ago. In the place of actual friends and confidants, we have two substitutes.

One is social networking sites, which Gabler calls “friendship lite.” When someone “friends” you, that doesn’t mean you’re now doing what historically friends have done: met, talked, listened, shared, encouraged, challenged. It just shows that at some point your lives have brushed against each other.

The other is TV—from *Cheers* and *Cosby* to *Friends* and *Seinfeld* to now *Modern Family* and *Parenthood*. Gabler notes that the basic unit on television now is the flock: “be it the extended family of brothers and sisters, grandfathers and grandmothers, nieces, nephews and cousins, or the extended circle of friends.” It shows friends who are in constant contact, chatting by phone, sitting around dining room tables, meeting at coffee shops, “sharing everything all the time.” What sad irony that we watch TV shows where deep, life-giving friendship is happening around the clock while it’s increasingly difficult to find in real life.

When Jesus made disciples, He chose relationships as His specific method. Like Robert Coleman, we have come to believe that Jesus’ method is perfect. It combines the best wisdom and knowledge of the ages. If Jesus’ method emphasized relationships, shouldn’t our lives do the same? The goal is to make disciples the way Jesus did.

When we say that Jesus put a priority on relationships, we don’t just mean that Jesus was always hanging out with people (which He was). Jesus invested in and got to know the people He was discipling. He constantly entered into their world, and He invited them into His world. The tenderness that He experienced with Mary, Martha and Lazarus reflected the cultivation of deep relationships over a period of months and years (John 11). We should plan to do the same with those we seek to disciple.

But there is more. Throughout His life, Jesus teaches us a certain kind of relationship that is grounded in self-giving love (*agape* love in the Bible, and we simply call it Christlike love). Jesus constantly put the needs of others first. His death on the cross was not an isolated event. Rather, it was the culmination and natural conclusion of how He lived every day. He was constantly laying down His life for others. And then He gave us this vitally important summary statement in John 13:34-35:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love each other. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (NIV).

Christlike love is not just the environment of discipleship. It is also the evidence of discipleship. And so this kind of love becomes our highest priority as disciple makers and disciples.

Below are some of the statements that guide us as we think about relationships and discipleship.³⁴

- Without relationship, there is no discipleship, just the passing of information.
- We cannot accomplish what Jesus wants us to accomplish, or be what • Jesus wants us to be, without doing it the Jesus way—which is relationships.
- Jesus’ whole methodology is about relationships.
- If a church does not create relational environments for discipleship, people will seek other ways to find relationships outside church structures.
- You can impress people in a lecture setting—but can usually only deeply impact people through a real relationship.

Many of the core values that drive our culture outside the Church severely limit our ability to connect to others. Real relationships require that we invest and risk. To make a real friend, we will have to invest our time and effort into someone, and he will have to be open and allow us in. We’ll need to make time to cultivate this friendship, and we’ll have to expend effort to get to know him. We’ll need to take some risks and let him get to know us. We’ll have to let him into our worlds—the good, the bad and the ugly. And as time passes, trust will grow and eventually solidify. That’s the only way genuine relationships happen.

Relationships are anything but convenient. They won’t happen in a crowded schedule or a hurried life. If you find yourself saying, “I just don’t have time to connect to that person,” you should probably take a hard look at your commitment to disciple people. Jesus didn’t view people as obstacles or distractions that hindered His ministry. People were His ministry.

When we describe the element of “relationships” in discipleship, we include the local church as an essential part. In fact, we believe that relationships are the best way to think about and define the local church. The word “church” is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which literally means “those called out.” In biblical times, it was a favorite word used to describe “the called out people,” “the assembly” or “the congregation.”³⁵

The term is never used in the Bible to refer to a building. Church buildings did not even appear until hundreds of years after the Bible was written. We believe that the best way to think of church is to see it as a support community or extended family for those who want to be disciples of Jesus.

We read in Acts 2:42-47 the first description of a church:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common.⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

We realize the times were different, but still, this is striking, don't you think? They "devoted" themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and praying together. That's a cool description of discipling relationships. That's a cool definition of a local church. So this is not just a "go to a worship gathering once a week and cross that off the list" thing. Church and discipleship were about community and connectedness.

It should be the same today. If we want to make disciples like the early church made disciples, we will need to look more and more like the early church. It's about sharing life with others without set agendas other than to make much of Jesus and join Him in His cause to heal and restore the world.

Authentic, biblical community offers the ideal setting for sustained life change. Relationships are where we recover from the effects of sin and receive the support we need when we struggle. Community is where God does His best work. Nobody flourishes when they stand alone. Nobody breaks the power of sin or overcomes an addiction by going it alone. Nobody experiences a deeper life with God than when they stand alone. And nobody can become a disciple all by himself.

Few churches realize how important it is to adopt a structure that establishes relational discipleship and the ministry of all believers as their foundation. This is easier to do in a church plant, but traditional churches can also make adjustments without changing everything they are currently doing. Jim Putman and Bobby talk about this in their book, *DiscipleShift: Five Shifts to Help Your Church Make Disciples Who Make Disciples*.³⁶

Wise church leaders look at the different kind of discipling relationships

and the needs of their community. Jesus made disciples in different discipleship contexts or relationship settings. He spent a lot of time with Peter, James, and John, and less time with the crowds. It is helpful to think about the different discipleship contexts, as the following diagram shows.



Some churches will function with an accent on small groups or on house church groups, with a focus on 10 to 20 people. Other, more established churches may do better focusing on close discipling groups of four or five people (same sex) who meet early in the morning or in the evening and review deeper accountability questions. Then again, other churches will prefer social-sized groups of 30 to 80 people because it fits the social needs of their culture and they can accomplish more ministry. This is an especially good size for groups committed to both discipleship and a missional lifestyle. Bobby and missional leader Alex Absalom will soon be publishing a book on this topic, helping church leaders assess the different discipling relationships and enabling them to determine which relationships are best to develop in their church.³⁷

Truly connecting is not the same as knowing a bunch of people or having a lot of contacts in your cell phone. It's not the same as being involved in lots of conversations. We can be in many conversations and remain disconnected. We can have droves of contacts, but have no real connections.

Hebrews 10:24 instructs us, “Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.” Make sure you are in Jesus-centered relationships with safe people who know all about you and love you anyway. And be intentional as you facilitate these experiences for the ones you’re discipling. When you do this, you are making disciples the way Jesus did. There is no Plan B.

Relationship Coaching Questions

1. Why is a commitment to relationships so important in disciple making? Are you willing to prioritize relationship with the person(s) you are discipling?
2. What does it mean to share your whole life (the good, the bad and the ugly) with other people? How have you encountered Jesus through other people sharing their whole life?
3. How do you plan to disciple others in the context of biblical relationship?
4. What other time commitments are you willing to give up so that you can invest in discipling relationships?
5. Why is a church community important in discipling relationships? How will you integrate this in your discipleship plan and make it a priority?

Bible

**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking,
correcting and training in righteousness.**

2 Timothy 3:16

The Word of God is living and active; by it we encounter Jesus and learn to form our lives around Him.

In discipleship, we form our lives around Jesus as Lord. This means that discipleship is first and foremost about how we live. Are we truly *following* Jesus, being *formed* by Jesus and *faithful to the mission* of Jesus? Too many people have made discipleship about knowledge of the Bible only. They equate discipleship with education. But the focus of discipleship is practical and life-oriented on how we live every day.

At the same time, we do not move too far away from study because discipleship requires knowledge of Jesus and His ways. Jesus' Lordship is expressed when we carefully follow the teachings of the Bible. The apostle Paul described it this way in 2 Corinthians 10:5:

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

Notice that last phrase, “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” If obedience to Jesus Christ is our goal, then it requires a certain way of thinking. In Romans 12:2-3, the apostle Paul puts it this way:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

“Transformation,” Paul says, is first grounded in “renewing the mind.” So knowledge is not the focus of discipleship, but it is vitally important. How we think is the biggest determiner of how we live. Understood properly, it’s pretty much impossible to overstate how important getting people into the Bible is to discipleship.³⁸

Discipleship requires a manual, and the most basic manual of all is the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 describes the role Scripture should play in the life of a disciple:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

According to this passage, and commensurate with countless others, Scripture finds its origin in God. God is who inspired and “breathed into” it. God speaks to us through the human authors who wrote the Bible.

Consequently, we must be very careful to teach those we are discipling to follow the teachings of the Bible. Timothy warns us about the importance of knowing and adhering to the Bible’s teachings:

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

The Word of God is our ultimate and final authority—when we feel like it, and when we don’t; when it suits us, and when it doesn’t; when we are ready for it, and when we are not. Teaching this requires great patience and careful instruction. But if we don’t instill this value in the people we’re discipling, they may be taken captive to the myths of false Christianity.

We provide the following guidelines to help you lead people along the discipleship journey, specifically to study and apply the Bible in their lives. We have to get people into Scripture. Too often, disciple making focuses on secondary books or teaching *about* the Bible without a proper focus on the explicit teachings of Scripture.

1. We get into the Bible with people because it helps them develop faith in Jesus.

The idea that to understand anything about the Bible you have to first become a Christian and receive the indwelling Holy Spirit is a wrong one. We believe that one of the best places for someone to start his or her search to know God is in a group of three to five people studying the Bible.³⁹ Personal Bible study is essential to ongoing growth wherever you or the person you’re discipling is on that journey.

Some sections of the Bible particularly encourage us to live with the scriptures. In Romans 10:14-17, the Apostle Paul points out that until we hear and understand the teachings about Jesus Christ, it is impossible to believe in Him. The primary way people in the first century heard about Jesus was when someone came and told them about Jesus (without printing presses, books were rare). Once people were exposed to these teachings, they could believe and be saved.

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? . . . Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:14-17).

The central factor in faith development is exposure to the word of Christ. The same principle is at work today: For spiritual seekers to become disciples of Jesus, they must be exposed to and understand the clear teachings in the Bible about Jesus.

The Romans 10:17 principle also applies to people who are Christians. The famous 19th-century Christian leader D.L. Moody described his spiritual growth this way:

“I prayed for faith, and thought that someday faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the 10th chapter of Romans . . . I had closed my Bible, and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible, and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since.⁴⁰⁴¹

The key to developing and seeing your faith grow is active exposure to the teachings of the Bible, especially those about Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 4:12 teaches this same principle. Although the primary reference in this verse is the spoken Word of God, the principle applies equally to the written Word of God: “For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Isaiah 55:11 states the same principle, saying that God says when His Word is given to people, “It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

2. We approach the Word of God with a mind sensitive to the Spirit of God.

One thing ultimately important in Bible study and Bible interpretation—and necessary for God's Word to have true impact in our lives—is the Holy Spirit's personal presence. The apostle Paul described it for us this way.

"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us . . . The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to Him, and He cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:12-14).

We are consistently amazed to meet non-Christian people who will tell us they spent a little bit of time reading the Bible, and it just doesn't make sense. At times it almost seems like they are saying, "You Christians must be weird because you can understand that strange book!"

Then, on the other hand, we know of countless Christians, even teenagers and new Christians, who simply and easily grasp even profound biblical teachings. Not only do they grasp them, they also see how to apply these teachings to their lives. When one group gets it and one group does not get it, the difference is often the indwelling presence of God's Spirit.

The non-negotiable starting point to understanding and applying the Bible is a *heart for* the author of Scripture. The Christian leader Martin Luther described his experience:

"The Bible is alive, it speaks to me. It has feet, it runs after me. It has hands, it lays hold of me."⁴²

The power in effective and life-transforming Bible study is a person's spiritual disposition before God. Teach those you are discipling that their spiritual disposition before God is fundamental.

3. We view the Bible with a special focus on Jesus and His ways.

There's an old expression that we really like: "Major on the majors; minor on the minors." Nowhere is this principle more important than when you guide others in a Bible study. There are many things in the Bible, but not all of them are central or primary. Jesus is central. The person and teachings of Jesus guide us in how we understand or filter those teachings that are not central and primary. The religious establishment of Jesus' day missed this principle. In Matthew 23:24, Jesus described these leaders as blind guides, who would strain out a gnat (focus on a small, incidental teaching) but swallow a camel (miss a major teaching).

The Bible teaches us that certain doctrines are fundamental and central. The central message of the Bible is that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the focus, for the gospel is all about Him—His life, His teaching, His cross, His resurrection, and His ascending to the place of highest honor in heaven, as He now is our reigning Lord (Acts 10:38-43; 1 Cor. 15:1-8). As much as we emphasize Jesus' Lordship, we want to stress that it is a natural response to all that Jesus is and all that Jesus has done for us, especially in His grace. It is all a gift—even the Holy Spirit's empowerment within us so that we can respond in faith and faithfulness.

Numerous passages point us to the centrality of Jesus and how to form a mindset for Bible study by focusing on Jesus. Here are just two examples:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him" (John 3:16-17).

"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The mindset revealed in these passages, and others, points us to the heart of Christianity. Mark Twain once said, "Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I have always noticed that the passages of Scripture which trouble me most are those which *I do understand*."⁴³

Most of the Bible is not as hard to understand as it is to live out. For example, it is not natural to love your enemies and forgive those who have hurt you. This was Twain's point. If we put Jesus at the center of our study of the Bible, He will always draw us into what is most important. This mindset becomes formative in how we study and apply Scripture.

4. We read the Bible with an earnest commitment to personal responsibility and obedience.

The only legitimate way to develop an authentic faith grounded in what God says is to study the Bible for ourselves. We love the example of the people of Berea described in the book of Acts. They were compared to the Thessalonians and, unlike the Thessalonians, they carefully looked into the scriptures to see what was true, so that they could know the way of God and properly follow Him for themselves. In Scripture, the Bereans are highly

commended for seeking to know the truth of Scripture and searching out the true meaning.

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

Like the Bereans, if we truly want to be noble in God’s sight, we must examine the scriptures in all things to determine the truth for ourselves. As disciplers, we need to teach this principle to our disciples. Yes, we may need teachers and aids to help us. Yes, often complex issues are involved. And yes, different well-studied and highly educated Christians understand some things in different ways. But we do not follow people; we follow Jesus through the teachings of the Bible. As a disciple, I am responsible for my faith and the choices I make. We teach people to depend on God, not on us.

In fact, there are some things that we will not know for ourselves until we seek out God’s teaching in Scripture *by ourselves*! It is a fundamental principle of the Christian life:

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

“‘You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 29:13).

The best way to come to know God and know the teachings of the Bible is by studying Scripture, not the thoughts, traditions and teachings of men.⁴⁴

Bible Coaching Questions

1. Why is “how we live, not what we know” the primary focus of discipleship?
2. What does it mean to say that studying the Word of God creates faith? Explain how this happens.
3. Why is the Holy Spirit’s presence so important in discipling relationships?
4. In what way is Jesus central to personally knowing the Bible?
5. Who are the Bereans, and what is so valuable about what they did in the Bible?



Journey

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Colossians 1:28

From our new birth to spiritual parenthood, we find a traceable, and at times disjointed, story of development and growth where the Holy Spirit leads us on a shared, formative journey.

When we began to take Jesus seriously as adults, we both (Josh and Bobby) just assumed that true Christians automatically and immediately followed whatever Jesus taught. Not sure where we got that idea. Maybe it came from the Christians we knew, or maybe it was the teaching we received or the degree to which those around us emphasized, “living the Christian life.” We aren’t sure, but this false assumption is both unrealistic and unbiblical.

Remember, the definition of a disciple is a person who is *following* Jesus, being *formed* by Jesus, and *faithful to the mission* of Jesus. By definition, discipleship is a process because I must learn to follow. Formation is a lifelong process, and faithfully joining a mission requires understanding and developed effectiveness in it. The key words here are *process, formation, journey or your development story*.

When guiding people along the discipleship journey, we want to consider our interconnectedness as we travel. While the disciple cannot very effectively travel the journey without help, the responsibility for spiritual growth must never rest on the disciple maker alone. Based on Matthew 28:19-20, we teach that there are three parts to the discipleship process: 1) my part as disciple maker; 2) the disciple’s part; and 3) God’s part. Here’s a summary:

The disciple maker’s role: to make disciples of Jesus by pursuing, encouraging, teaching and coaching a person in his or her spiritual journey.

The disciple’s role: to be a faithful disciple by learning and responding in obedience to the teachings of Jesus.

God’s role: to be present in the disciple-making process. God promises to work in the process by His Spirit to transform lives and bring change.

We can always trust God to be present doing His part, but we also need to remember that disciples have to choose the path of discipleship out of the love

God has shown us. I need to understand my responsibility as a leader in light of God's role, learning to be patient and rest in God's plan and timing while being alert to opportunities He provides.

Discipleship requires us to walk with people through the next step in their journey to be like Jesus. We have already explained how important intentionality, relationships and the Bible are to the discipleship process. Now we want to emphasize the traceable development path the Bible reveals. Disciple makers are conscious of this path and lead those they are discipling, accordingly. It is an incremental journey, with next steps for everyone along the path.

Harpeth Community Church uses this diagram to offer a visual introduction to the discipleship journey. Notice that it starts at the far left with people who are spiritually lost and then moves to the far right, with spiritual parents who are disciple makers.



Various places in the New Testament detail the journey depicted in the diagram. Jesus and the apostles modeled what it looks like to guide disciples on a development journey. Sometimes they were on track; many times they were off track, with bad ideas and willful disobedience. But love becomes the glue that keeps it together.

The most important tool we have found for training disciple makers in this journey is the manual *Real Life Discipleship Training Manual: Equipping Disciples Who Make Disciples*.⁴⁵ There is no substitute for working through this manual; it is simply the most helpful tool available to help you know how to disciple people in practical terms. At Harpeth Community, we require all of our small group

leaders to work through this manual and be thoroughly trained in the process and journey of discipleship.

The discipleship journey includes five key stages. We've provided an introduction intended either as a quick reminder for those who have worked through the *Real Life Discipleship Training Manual* or as a teaser for those who have yet to study the material.

1. Spiritually Dead

Ephesians 2:1-5 describes people who are “dead in [their] transgressions and sins.” People in this stage have not yet accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. They may completely reject God, they may be seeking God, they may call themselves “spiritual,” they may even claim to know God or call themselves a Christian, but there is no true fruit. Even though some have claimed they know Jesus, they do not have the Holy Spirit living in them (at least that you can tell).

Here are some typical phrases the spiritually dead might say.

- I don't believe there's a God.
- The Bible is an unreliable book that has experienced many changes.
- Religion is a crutch for the weak.
- Christians are hypocritical, intolerant and hateful people.

The great news of Jesus is that if people respond, the spiritually dead can be born again (John 3:3-5), regardless of what they've done, where they've been, or the ungodly doubt they've harbored. Jesus is gracious, specializing in redeeming broken lives and resurrecting dead faith.

2. Infant

The writer of Hebrews challenged the readers of his letter, saying they were spiritual infants, still on milk, when they should already be teachers, eating solid food for the mature (Hebrews 5:12-14). Spiritual infants tend to lack knowledge about what Jesus really said about life. They are uninformed (not unintelligent) and are in need of truth.

When people are spiritual infants, their words reveal it. You often hear one or more of the following from infants:

- Jesus, Allah, Buddha and Karma are all talking about the same principles.
- I had no idea the Bible said that.
- Tithing? What's that?

- I don't really have time for church, and I don't really have to be that involved.

Think about a newborn baby and its needs. To grow and thrive, babies need someone to feed and care for them. In the same way, spiritual infants require the personal attention of a disciple maker/spiritual parent. They need care and protection during this vulnerable stage. They need the truths of the Christian faith to be taught and modeled to them. And they need to develop new habits that form new life patterns.

3. Child

In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, Paul described himself as a spiritual father dealing with his children, encouraging, comforting and urging them to live lives worthy of God. People in this stage are growing in their relationship with God, as well as beginning to grow in their relationships with other Christians. But children are naturally self-centered. You might hear someone in this stage say:

- I don't know if this church is meeting my needs. Maybe I should go to a different church that feeds me better.
- My small group is not taking care of my needs like they should.
- I wasn't fed at all by that sermon or the music today.
- I don't have time to read my Bible; my life is just too busy.

People in this stage need to learn to do the right things for the right reasons no matter what. They need to learn to cultivate a servant's heart rather than one that seeks self-centered purposes. As a person is leaving the child stage of spiritual development, he moves into more of a biblical worldview—making decisions more and more through the eyes and mind of Jesus.

4. Young Adult

1 John 2:13-14 describes those who are spiritual young men. They have overcome the evil one, and the Word of God abides in them. Spiritual young adults are making a shift from being self-centered to being God-centered and others-centered. You might hear these phrases from someone in the young adult stage:

- I feel compelled to pray for my neighbor who doesn't know Jesus.
- I really want to make a difference for God; maybe I can serve in the soup kitchen downtown.
- I wonder what I can do to help my church?
- Bill and Sue missed our group, so I called them to see if they're okay.
- I feel good about the money that we give back to God, and I am glad to do my part.

Spiritual young adults need help identifying their gifts. And they need ongoing skills training. When they get hurt, and they will, they need to process the pain so that they don't become disillusioned and cynical.

5. Parent

Once people are effectively discipled, they repeat the process with others. Spiritual parents make disciples because they love God with everything they've got, and they love people as they love themselves. They know there is nothing more loving a person can do for people than inspire them to follow Jesus. 2 Timothy 2:1-2 describes people who are strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. They are reliable disciples who have developed to the point where they are qualified to teach others. The following statements characterize the parent stage:

- I wonder if God is leading me to invest in Bill and to help him mature in his faith.
- I want to help this guy at work. He asked me to explain the Bible to him. Pray for me as I spend time in the Word with him.
- We get to baptize someone from our small group tonight!
- The most important discipleship is with my kids. I need encouragement and accountability so that I make it a priority.

“Parents” need peer accountability and encouragement. They need ongoing training to help sharpen and hone their skills. They need to be encouraged to delegate and take active times of rest to avoid burnout.

We need to make an important qualification to this process. The journey is unpredictable and painful at times. More often than not, the path is more circular than linear. And it requires more than Bible knowledge, supportive relationships with other Christians and service. Disciple makers must remember that this path inevitably brings suffering, persecution, confusion, stumbling in and out of sin (with repentance) and both regressive and progressive steps (sometimes simultaneously). The need for constant and ongoing encouragement, love and grace is ongoing. We must remember that our God is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love” (Psalm 103:8). The people you disciple will need gentle reminders that God’s grace fuels our obedience and devotion to Him. But they’ll not only need to hear about grace; they will need to experience it firsthand from you.

Furthermore, a person can progress at one level through the steps in a few years, but then regress backward. No one travels a straight journey. It is a lifelong process. None of us have arrived until the final, grand conclusion of history (Revelation 21).

Journey Coaching Questions

1. What are the three different roles in a disciple-making relationship, and why is it important for the discipler to have a clear sense of the responsibilities in each role?
2. How thorough is your knowledge of the discipleship journey? Why is it important to know and understand the basic discipleship journey?
3. What are the five stages of the discipleship journey as the Bible lays it out?
4. What is your intended destination for the person you're discipling along the discipleship pathway? Why is it important to think "next stage" or "next steps" rather than the "entire journey"?
5. How does your life story mesh with the story of the person you're discipling?

Multiply

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

Authentic discipleship repeats itself, where the disciple becomes a disciple maker, reproducing the discipleship process.

As we prepared to launch [discipleship.org](#), we solicited the input of some the most effective disciple makers in North America. We were stunned by their uniform emphasis on one point (and it was especially punctuated by Robert Coleman and Bill Hull): *Discipleship is not biblical without an emphasis on multiplication.* If our vision of discipleship stops with the disciple, it falls short of the example Jesus left for us. Authentic discipleship repeats itself, where the disciple becomes a disciple maker, reproducing the discipleship process.

We believe that no one can be mature without experiencing the love of God in Christ and loving others in turn.⁴⁶ It is hard to believe that someone is truly Christlike if he or she does not personally seek and save the lost, since that was Jesus' purpose for coming to earth (Luke 19:1-11). Jesus was sent by the Father into the world for the redemption of people and He, in turn, sent His disciples into the world for the redemption of others (John 20:21). Can we truly be *like Christ* who made discipleship a high priority, but not make disciples? His last words were very clear. He commissioned us to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Discipleship for People Who Are Lost

Let's talk first about discipling lost people. We also call this evangelism. Lost people are those who do not know or claim to know Jesus. We have both lived in areas where there are few Christians. In those areas of the world, the saved and the lost are clearly distinct. And the approach is clear. We follow Jesus by entering *their world* to love and serve them as Jesus loved and served people (which is to be *missional*). And out of safe relationships established through this kind of love, we tell them about and invite them to join the Kingdom of God. We call this strategy *show and tell*.

Let's be honest. For most Christians, their closest friends are other Christians. They may have a few ongoing and meaningful relationships with lost people, but probably not too many. Christians naturally connect with other Christians, so most, if not all of their best relational energy, is invested in people they know or meet at church. The discipleship lifestyle means that we must

follow Jesus and actually *go out and find lost people* (Luke 15). We must constantly encourage people to be like Jesus by intentionally connecting with non-disciples and helping them to become disciples. This repeats the discipleship process at the most basic level. Someone taught us about Jesus. Now we want to repeat that with others. Eternal destinies lie in the balance.

In light of the Bible's overt teaching on God's eternal judgment, nothing is more important or urgent than giving a person the opportunity to trust and follow Jesus. As we said earlier, many will refer to this as evangelism, but it is more biblical to call it discipleship. Jesus didn't command us to evangelize the lost. He said, "Go and make disciples." The language of the Bible implies something much deeper and more substantial than a singular focus on conversion or a one-time presentation of information.

We can't imagine a higher priority for a local church than reaching those who are eternally lost. It's interesting that the Bible does not list numerous directives constantly telling us to reach out to lost people. Why? We believe this is because it's unfathomable that we would require such commands from God. If we really believe that God rescued us from eternal punishment when He sent His Son to die as our sacrifice and that other people do not have what we have, why should we have to be told to seek out others and share that gift with them? If we sincerely love people, how could we not want to share this Good News with them? Honesty compels us to ask two hard questions:

1. Do we really believe what the Bible clearly says about the consequences of failing to trust and follow Jesus?
2. If we believe what it says, what are we doing about it?

We can easily grow cold in our fundamental conviction that God's Word is absolutely true. The pressure from culture to be tolerant and non-judgmental often leads churches into fuzzy beliefs and soft convictions.

But we must align our individual lives and square the mission of the Church with the words of Jesus. We believe that Jesus really is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (John 14:6). No one comes to the Father except through Him. We believe there is *no other name* by which people can be saved (Acts 4:12). We believe that Jesus was telling the truth when He said that hell is a real place and that most people are going there (Matthew 7:13-14, 25:46, Luke 8:11-14).

You may want to read that last sentence again and look up those passages.

This is the most urgent issue in the universe. Our hearts should break for those who are disconnected from Jesus. We should do everything we can to help as

many as we can to see the goodness and light of the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4,6).

Charles Spurgeon exhorted his church in England with these words:

“If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped around their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let no one go unwarned and un-prayed for.”⁴⁷

Discipleship for Cultural Christians

We now live and work together in a context where cultural Christianity (described earlier) is the norm, and biblical discipleship is the exception. In a sense, this is an underlying reality in much of America, where every year 75 to 85 percent of people report in surveys that they are Christians (in some sense) and the behavior of even active church attendees looks just like the non-church attendees' around them.⁴⁸ It is a scandal.⁴⁹

It is a particular scandal in the Bible Belt. When almost everyone is a so-called Christian, it can be toxic. A kind of social club Christianity sets in, and people become part of a church for all the wrong reasons. Church leaders and biblical disciples must be tough-minded and commit themselves to faithfulness.

We believe that clarity on what it means to be saved is critical to how we go about making disciples and the stands we take. We have concluded that most people who would meet the cultural Christian description (described earlier)—those who are religiously oriented, but not actively living under the Lordship of Jesus—are either lost or in danger of being lost. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), and genuine faith shows itself in faithful living (Ephesians 2:10). Cultural Christians do not demonstrate faithful faith. We have found both David Platt and Robert Picerelli, who approach the issue from two distinct theological frameworks, to be helpful guides on this issue.⁵⁰

Discipleship for the Saved

Now let's talk about discipling saved people. Far too many people have been saved and then abandoned. Somehow, it is just assumed that they will be discipled by getting involved in a church or that it will just automatically happen somehow. It doesn't work that way. Jesus and the apostles showed us that disciples are made by other disciples. It is vitally important to raise up disciple makers who equip and disciple the saved, so that they become mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28). We must replicate disciples.

Too many people think that the minister or a pastor or the elders make

disciples. They're concerned that they don't know what to do or that they will make mistakes. This is where biblical teaching on the ministry of all believers and the coaching role of leaders is so important (Ephesians 4:11-13; Romans 8:3-8). Every disciple has the capability and responsibility to make disciples. We are all ambassadors, lights in the world and ministers of reconciliation.

Understood this way, it's the role of every disciple of Jesus to be ministers and to make disciples—and the role of every minister, pastor and elder to train, equip and coach every disciple to become a disciple maker.

The litmus test of a disciple maker is not that he or she is making disciples, but that he is making disciples *who have gone on to be disciple makers*. We learned the following formula from our friends, Dave and Jon Ferguson. This formula describes the ideal mindset of a disciple maker and what it means to be committed to repeating the discipleship process. We disciple people, focusing on training them to move on and disciple others.⁵¹

- I do. You watch. We talk.
- I do. You help. We talk.
- You do. I help. We talk.
- You do. I watch. We talk.
- You do. Someone else watches. I do. Someone else watches.

A mature disciple maker can point to several people he has discipled who are now discipling others. At the beginning, we were their disciples, but now they are our co-laborers. We may release people from being actively discipled by us, but we never release them from relationship.

Multiplying the Disciple-Making Cycle

When I (Josh) met Scott in spring 2003, it was obvious that he didn't trust or follow Jesus. His wife coerced him to an Easter worship gathering. He was a new face in the crowd, so I approached him and asked some general questions about his background. He described himself as "non-religious" and "skeptical" about the claims Jesus made about Himself. I told him that I appreciated his candor and would like to hear more of his story. He didn't reject the idea of another conversation, so I invited him to lunch. We had lunch nearly every week for 6 months. We mainly talked about sports, marriage and our careers ... and sometimes we talked about Jesus.

Scott's curiosity piqued when *The Passion of The Christ* came out in theaters. After we saw the movie together, we unpacked the experience over a cup of coffee. After his third sip, he whipped out a five-page list of questions the movie provoked. I answered the ones I knew and said, "I don't know," to the ones I didn't. A few days later, I was led to intensify my prayers for Scott and his eternal destiny. In those prayers, I discerned God prompting me to invite Scott

to join a small group of guys who met for encouragement and Bible study each week. Much to my surprise, he was quite open to such an invitation. This weekly immersion in authentic Christian fellowship ended up drawing Scott like a moth to a flame to the beauty and supremacy of Jesus. We didn't try to answer all of his questions. We had unanswered questions of our own! We just loved him, confessed our struggles, and walked with each other with no agenda. Over the course of about six months, Scott began to share our conviction that Jesus died for our sins and was raised to free us from death.

Eight years and two churches later, Scott called me out of the blue just to catch up. He told me that he had formed a discipleship group for men. He called it a "Jesus group." He said that he was "paying it forward." I immediately went silent and felt a tear fall down my cheek. All I could say was, "Thank you, Jesus."

Multiply Coaching Questions

1. What is multiplication (of disciples who go on to make other disciples), and why is it so important that this practice lies at the heart of what it means to make disciples?
2. How is it that discipleship applies to lost people, and how does this kind of discipleship work in practice?
3. In what way is it Christlike—in light of Luke 15—to go out and find lost people? How can we do that today?
4. In what way is discipleship the ongoing need of all Christians and the core mission of the Church?
5. What is the most important thing you have learned from this study, and why is it important to you?

A Plan to Engage in the Discipleship Lifestyle

This book is about engaging in the most important and challenging mission in life. Nothing matters more than being a disciple and making disciples. Nothing is more noble and inspiring.

As we close, we want to encourage you with some practical guidelines that we have found to be helpful in formal discipleship relationships. What we mean here is a relationship that has been explicitly set up for the purpose of discipleship. This formal meeting could range from a weekly study with a person at work who wants to know what the Bible teaches to a weekly small group from a local church. The possibilities are almost limitless.

The following questions and explanations will help you establish the relationship on a sound footing:

1. **What is the plan that you will propose?** In a formal discussion or study, there needs to be an intentional leader with a plan. That is you (or the person you are joining). Share your proposal with the person you want to disciple and invite them to “try it out.”
2. **How often will you meet for discussion and study?** We find that effective groups typically have a weekly rhythm. Seven days gives you enough time apart and enough time together to process teachings.
3. **How long will you meet each time for the discussion and study?** We have learned that people like time limits (a specific start and end time) because almost everyone is very busy. Make it a point to start and end on time. Sometimes you might go longer than you planned, but make sure that you explicitly get permission from those you are discipling if you see this is going to happen.
4. **What is your curriculum?** Focusing on what the Bible teaches is essential. Avoid books or material that talk about the Bible without explicitly getting you into the Bible. They typically produce less life change. Your teaching material should reflect the intentional path you want to guide people along. Your pastor can usually offer you help.
5. **What is your end goal?** Formal discipling relationships can last a long time, but most last from three months to three years. The length should reflect the end goals. For example, at Harpeth Church, we invite people who are thinking about becoming Christians or those who have just been baptized into close discipling relationships (with 2 or 3 others). These relationships usually do not last longer than six or seven months because they have a

specific goal—to ground people in the core teachings of the Bible and equip them to make disciples on their own. Once those goals have been met, we want people to move into a small group for ongoing discipleship. This kind of discipleship can last for years, depending on a person's spiritual journey.

6. **How will you make relationships the foundation?** Relationships were the basis of Jesus' discipleship method, and they must be the basis of ours. A weekly meeting is just a relationship starter. How can you connect outside the formal meetings? In fact, if the focus of a discipling relationship is just a formal meeting, it doesn't really match the discipleship method of Jesus and the apostles. Real relationship development, especially just having fun or doing things together, is the heart of a discipling relationship. We must give our hearts in genuine friendship, relationship, love and support to those we disciple.

We hope that we have whetted your appetite to learn more about discipleship. If so, we recommend that you go to discipleship.org to look at all of the information, recommended books and resources. We want to make discipleship everything that God wants it to be for Christians and churches.

Discipleship.org

10 Discipleship Affirmations

1. We believe Jesus Christ is central to life and the Bible – He is supreme and worthy of all devotion, worship, and emulation. We affirm the Nicene Creed and its statements about Jesus and the Trinity (Col. 1:15-20).
2. We define a disciple as someone who is *following* Jesus, *being changed* by Jesus, and is *committed to* the mission of Jesus (Matt. 4:19). This is only possible by the Holy Spirit, and it is for God's glory.
3. We define discipleship and disciple making as helping people to trust and follow Jesus (Matt. 28:18–20).
4. We believe disciple making is the core mission of the local church (Col.1: 28-29).
5. We believe the Bible is the authoritative, reliable and final guide for discipleship and life (2 Tim. 3:16-4:2).
6. We believe Jesus' method of disciple making is the wisest and best method to follow today (Luke 6:40).
7. We believe our love for one another is the most important sign of true discipleship (John 13:34-35).
8. We believe discipleship includes serving the poor, striving for holiness and living with accountability in the local church (1 Cor. 5: 1-13).
9. We believe true discipleship and love compel us to join Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).
10. We believe our obedience to the Great Commission will result in the expansion of God's Kingdom, the betterment of humanity and God's exaltation and pleasure (Luke 19:11-27).

END NOTES

¹ A good starting point for a newcomer to this discussion would be Bill Hull's book, *Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith that Embraces Discipleship* (Baker Books, 2004).

² See Bobby Harrington, *Discipleship Is the Core Mission of the Church: Helping People Trust and Follow Jesus* (Exponential Resources, 2012; Revised 2014).

³ When discipleship.org is fully functional, we hope it will be one of the top sites for discipleship on the Internet .

⁴ The participles in vv. 19–20 are subordinate to the command “make disciples” and explain how disciples are made: by “baptizing” them and “teaching” them obedience to all of Jesus’ commandments. The first of these involves the initiation into discipleship, and the second focuses on the life long task of sanctification or obedience. See Craig Bloomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 431.

⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. (New York: HarperOne, 2006) who encourages us to think of disciples as “apprentices of Jesus.”

⁶ We find Randy Alcorn’s *Grace and Truth Paradox: Responding with Christlike Balance* (Multnomah, 2003) to be a very practical paradigm along these lines, especially for the local church.

⁷ For more information on this definition, see Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift: Five Shifts to Help Your Church Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Zondervan, 2013).

⁸ See Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington, *Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?* (Exponential and Discipleship.org, 2014).

⁹ Some may think there are only eight principles, but Robert Coleman tells us that the “incarnation” was assumed in the principles and he explicitly describes it as a ninth principle when he teaches this material today. See *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Baker, 1963). See Robert Coleman, Bobby Harrington, and Josh Patrick, *Revisiting the Master Plan of Evangelism: Why Jesus: Why Jesus' Discipleship Method is Still the Best Today* (Exponential and Discipleship.org, 2014).

¹⁰ Robert Coleman, Bobby Harrington, and Josh Patrick, *Revisiting the Master Plan of Evangelism: Why Jesus: Why Jesus' Discipleship Method is Still the Best Today* (Exponential and Discipleship.org, 2014).

¹¹ The key synthesizers were Bobby Harrington, Todd Wilson, Leon Drennan and Josh Shank.

¹² David Buehring, *The Jesus Blueprint: Rediscovering His Original Plan for Changing the World* (Higher Life Publishing, 2012).

¹³ At Harpeth Church, our staff often describes, among our leadership team, the ideal person for our investment in discipling relationships as *FATR Fives*. As paid disciple-making leaders, we are responsible to invest first and foremost as Jesus did, in other leaders that can build the ministry. In addition to being faithful, available, teachable and reliable (*FATR*), we also look for those who combine it with five talents (as opposed to those that God has endowed to be two or three talent people). We want to wisely invest our leadership time and energy, and the church usually gets the most benefit when we invest ourselves in this way.

¹⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1997), pp 36-37.

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1937), p. 47.

¹⁶ In 2010, the number was 85 percent. See George Barna, *Futurecast* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2011), Kindle location 124.

¹⁷ Much of this material is taken from Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington, *Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?* (Exponential and Discipleship.org, 2014).

¹⁸ We acknowledge that “gospel” can be a type of literature. But Bobby especially believes that it is more than just a type of literature, that the whole life of Jesus is part of the gospel.

¹⁹ For a practical exposition of how these claims relate to discipleship, see William McDonald, *True Discipleship* (Gospel Folio Press, Ontario, Canada, 1962).

²⁰ We commend the broad outline of Scot McKnight’s, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) and the *Kingdom Conspiracy* (Brazos, 2014).

²¹ Bill Hull describes the importance of this broader paradigm in *Christlike: The Pursuit of Uncomplicated Obedience* (NavPress: Colorado Springs, 2010), p. 44.

²² This theme is traced out well by two authors. Writing from a Calvinistic perspective is David Platt, *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live* (Tyndale House, 2013). Writing from an Arminian perspective is Robert Picirilli, *Discipleship: The Expression of Saving Faith* (Randall House, 2013).

²³ Robert Picirilli does a great job of showing how the emphasis that we are saved “by grace through faith” and discipleship coalesce. *Discipleship: The Expression of Saving Faith* (Nashville: Randall House, 2013).

²⁴ See the Oxford Dictionaries online http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/intentionality, accessed September 23, 2013.

²⁵ For more information on the disappearance of moral knowledge, See Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Can We Trust Spiritual Knowledge?* (Harpeth One, 2009).

²⁶ The participles in v. 19 are subordinate to the imperative command “make disciples,” and they explain how disciples are made: “baptizing” them and “teaching” them obedience to all of Jesus’ commandments describe how disciples are made. See Craig Bloomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, Broadman Press, 1992), p. 431

²⁷ J.A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (InterVarsity Press: London, 1974).

²⁸ Jason House, Bobby Harrington, and Chad Harrington, *Dedicated: Raising Children to Trust and Follow Jesus* (Zondervan, 2015).

²⁹ Peter Craigie *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1976), p. 170.

³⁰ See Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Baker, 1963).

³¹ Special thanks to Virgil Grant for his input on this list.

³² Genesis 2:18 NLT

³³ <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/oct/17/entertainment/la-ca-tv-friendships-20101017>, accessed October 1, 2013.

³⁴ See M. Scott Boren, *The Relational Way* (Houston: Touch Publications, 2007).

³⁵ One of the best proponents of this idea is Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Baker Academic, 1994). See L. Coenen, "Church," in *The New International Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1975), 1: 291–307.

³⁶ Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift: Five Shifts to Help Your Church Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Zondervan, 2013).

³⁷ See Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipling Relationships* (forthcoming, Zondervan).

³⁸ Almost every in-depth analysis of the state of discipleship in the Church today points to the supreme need for people to get into the Word of God and apply it to their lives. See Kelley, Geiger and Nation, Philip *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, B&H Publishing Group, 2012) Kindle Locations 910-918. Bill Hybels summarizes the results of the massive REVEAL studies: "We learned that the most effective strategy for moving people forward in their journey of faith is biblical engagement. Not just getting people into the Bible when they're in church—which we do quite well—but helping them engage the Bible on their own outside of church." Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011) Kindle Locations 71-72.

³⁹ Harpeth Church has study guides for those who want to disciple non-believers. I (Bobby) really like Robby Gallaty's model in his forthcoming book *Growing Up*. We also like Neil Cole's *Life Transformation Groups* described in *Search & Rescue: Becoming a Disciple Who Makes a Difference* (Baker, 2008). See also the good material at the first steps website http://stores2.faithhighway.com/Merchant5/merchant.mvc?Screen=SFNT&Store_Code=FSM&Category_Code=STFTP

⁴⁰ http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Great%20Men%20of%20God/dwight_moody-quotes.htm, accessed October 1, 2013.

⁴² Quoted in Michael Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 35.

⁴³ Quoted in Michael Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 30.

⁴⁴ Alister McGrath shows the importance of this and how to do it in our world today. See *A Passion For Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

⁴⁵ Avery Willis, Jim Putman, Brandon Guidon, and Bill Kraus, *Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual: Equipping Disciples Who Make Disciples* (NavPress, 2010).

⁴⁶ Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift: Five Shifts to Help Your Church Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Zondervan, 2013).

⁴⁷ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/74181-if-sinners-be-damned-at-least-let-them-leap-to>, accessed October 2, 2013.

⁴⁸ In 2010 the number was 85 percent, see George Barna, *Futurecast* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011). Kindle Edition. P. 124. David Olson describes the true state of church involvement in his book, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008). See lots of research and updates in George Barna and David Kinnaman's extensive research on these and related matters at barna.org.

⁴⁹ See Ronald Sider's book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2005).

⁵⁰ See David Platt, *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live* (Tyndale House, 2013) and Robert Picirilli, *Discipleship: The Expression of Saving Faith* (Randall House, 2013).

⁵¹ Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start a Missional Church Movement* (Zondervan, 2010).