



A Guide for Making Relational Disciples

JOHN MUSGRAVE

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Special thanks to Brad Andres
for his assistance in
helping me flesh out ideas
and make this book a reality.

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by John Musgrave

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Preface

In 2020, the Ohio Ministry Network started a ten-year journey to see Ohio forgiven, healed, and whole in local churches and ministries through the power of the Holy Spirit. To accomplish this significant task, we have aligned our efforts around four drivers: Leader Development, Church Health, Church Multiplication, and Missions Partnership. Within each driver, three Key Result Areas were defined. These key result areas are the specific goals that need to be in focus, leading us to see **Ohio for Jesus**.

In Church Health, these are the three Key Result Areas:

Seek the Spirit

Discipled leaders demonstrate their absolute reliance on God's plan for Kingdom expansion: Spirit-empowered believers living and worshiping in community.

Share & Invite

Discipled leaders embrace an evangelism lifestyle, modeling the joy and priority of sharing their personal story of God's love and mercy with those in need of salvation.

Make Disciples

As a result of the intentional effort of the first two Key Result Areas, our churches and ministries are believing for 250,000 new disciples to enter into God's kingdom and become responsible members of His Church by the year 2030.

To accomplish these goals, we know that we have to adopt new habits and patterns in our daily lives, both within ourselves and within our church families, which we've described as the "every disciplines." You will find the complete list of Every Disciplines in the appendix of this book.

This book, however, is focused upon this discipline in the discipleship area:

Each year, pastors & discipled leaders review the effectiveness of current soul-winning strategy and training.

The State of our States

A 2015 Barna study on the state of discipleship in the United States gives us important information that every pastor and congregational leader should consider when thinking about the best approach to discipleship.

- Many leaders report a shift away from an emphasis on knowledge (curriculum-driven) toward life transformation
- The preferred definition of the spiritual growth process is becoming more Christ-like
- The two most significant barriers to spiritual growth:
 - The busyness of life
 - Lack of commitment
- An isolationist approach to spiritual growth is common among U.S. Christians; 37% prefer to grow on their own
- The Screen Age, or the digital era, is changing the rules of spiritual formation. Information, accurate and inaccurate, influences how people understand God
- People are more distracted than ever before by too many choices about how to spend their time
- The rise of "self" has created a narcissistic culture where

people must not only convert to the ways of Jesus; they also have to de-convert from the religion of self to a great extent

- 66% of practicing Christians agree that the “highest goal for life is to enjoy it as much as possible”
- 75% believe that the “best way to find yourself is to look inside yourself”
- 91% believe that “you have to be true to yourself”
- Only 20% of adult believers are involved in some form of discipleship (Sunday school, small group, meeting with a mentor, etc.). This percentage increases to 50% in churches that practice discipleship as a core value¹

These and other cultural metrics may be calling us back to a more biblical intentional relational discipleship mode. In light of these metrics and other current discussions, discipleship and spiritual formation have become hot topics in the Church world today. Through the years, discipleship has come to mean different things to different people. Churches have used different tools and resources with the goal of producing disciples of Christ throughout the ages. In Ohio, we have used tools like Sunday School, Small Groups, We Build People, and/or The Purpose Driven Life.

In recent years many have indicated a need to change our church philosophy from telling to training. Discipleship needs to include teaching; teaching must include relationships. Our teaching must move from telling to training. It is our hope that these pages will guide you in reviewing and assessing your discipleship strategy and training process. However, if you read no further, please consider this single suggestion: I believe you will strengthen your discipleship process by intensifying your focus on intentional relationships.

¹ Barna Group, New Research on the State of Discipleship (2015), barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/.

For example, let's consider discipleship as a braided cord consisting of knowledge, relationship, and experience.

When I was young, my father taught us how to braid three strands of rope together. It became evident that this braided cord was so much stronger than a single strand or even two strands of cord side by side. There was something about the braided cord that made it stronger! We believe many of our churches are doing one or two things "right" in their discipleship process but lack the third strand and lack the ability to braid the strands together. That third strand many churches are lacking is relationship.

After all, in the Church world we often say, "It's not about religion but relationship," yet we often move away from relationship in our Church discipleship processes. We've got the relationship with Jesus, now let's move back into relationship with one another.

CHAPTER 1

What Is Discipleship?

“Who is the one person that influenced your discipleship journey?” This question was posed to my classmates and me during our master’s program. Think through that for a moment before you continue reading: “Who is the one person that influenced your discipleship journey?”

As a group we came to this general conclusion: Each of us had been influenced in our discipleship journey by multiple people, guided in seasons by this person and that person. Essentially, each one of us is a hodgepodge of multiple discipleship relationships. Likely that is accurate for you as well. That’s not a negative thing, but the problem that surfaced in our discussion was this: **None of us in the room could identify our primary interpersonal discipleship relationship.** Some people call this role a mentor, others a coach, and for others a teacher. We know who they could have been, yet we still could not identify the primary interpersonal discipleship relationship from either direction: Who were we primarily and regularly receiving guidance from and who were we giving guidance to? It remained an unresolved question. We all felt it: What we knew in our minds was absent in our daily actions or practices.

If you had been in our classroom discussion, who would you have named as your spiritual parent? How about your spiritual son or daughter? Take a moment to reflect. Throughout this book, we will use the term **spiritual parent** to refer to the leader of a discipleship relationship and the term **spiritual child** to refer to the learner of a discipleship relationship. The family language is prominent in this context because we want you to consider the intimate relationship present within discipleship. As we will discuss in more detail in a later chapter, discipleship is not gaining knowledge, discipleship is an intentional relationship.

I am personally indebted to my spiritual parents, who spoke into my life, modeled for me, and allowed me to grow in my walk with Jesus. As we move further into discipleship, and further into Ohio for Jesus, we should consider enlarging our discipleship vision to see grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and even great-great-grandchildren in the Lord.

Discipleship Described

Please allow me for a moment to describe, not define, discipleship. I would like to suggest that discipleship is the development of devotion to the teachings and practices that nurture an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus and result in living like Him while also leading others closer to Him. Simply put, discipleship is an intentional relationship, first with Jesus then with spiritual parents in the faith. As church leaders and pastors, we've got Jesus. But what about the sons or daughters in the faith?

Disciplines

Discipleship involves the development of spiritual disciplines, both in our lives and in the lives of others. What is important to remember about the work of spiritual disciplines is this: spiritual disciplines do not change us; they place us in position for God to change us through His Holy Spirit. As a spiritual parent, we have the privilege of creating a space where change

What is Discipleship?

can take place. While we do so, it is the Lord's desire that He continues to shape all of His people, the parent and the child. Furthermore, the practice of spiritual disciplines will steady us in the Lord for the difficulties that may lie ahead.

Difficult

We do not want to minimize the discipleship process nor come across as stating that spiritual formation is easy. Discipleship from beginning to end is a call to follow Jesus. Discipleship takes on a rapid pace; it is intense and not for the faint of heart. Discipleship does not take the scenic route. Discipleship demands determination, dedication, and development. Discipleship is difficult.

As pastors or church leaders we know the difficulty of transformation in the discipleship process. Yet, it's another difficulty to work to bear the burdens of others while we are adopting interpersonal discipleship relationships.

Progressive

While justification and sanctification are important theological terms, which need to be included in our doctrine, these terms do not help us grasp either the difficulty or the ebb and flow of discipleship.

Spiritual growth is a journey. People progress one step at a time. Sometimes, they digress backwards; but what joy comes when they progress forward! What matters is not so much how far you have gone but more that you are heading in the right direction and that you keep moving forward.

Even if your spiritual child begins to walk astray, do you continue to progress toward the Lord? Do you continue to minister and pour yourself out, as the Lord did for us even when we would wander? It's difficult to minister when we've opened our hearts to interpersonal relationships and they've been crushed. Yet, our Lord was crushed for our iniquities.

As we experience the joys and sorrows of discipleship, we will continue to grow in our relationship with Jesus while we obey Him in making disciples.

But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord. This makes me very happy. I want you to be wise in doing right and to stay innocent of any wrong.

- Rom 16:19 NLT

Obedience

Discipleship calls not for new decisions or better church attendance but for obedience to the call of Jesus Christ.

Christian discipleship offers no programs, no set of principles, no elitist ideal, and no set of laws. Discipleship means, quite simply, Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. The sole content of discipleship is to develop obedience to Christ.

Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.

- 1 John 5:3 NLT

Thus, we obey Christ in making disciples by cooperating with the Holy Spirit.

Building the Kingdom

By His Spirit

Then he said to me, "This is what the Lord says to Zerubbabel: It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. Nothing, not even a mighty mountain, will stand in Zerubbabel's way; it will become a level plain before him! And when Zerubbabel sets the final stone of the Temple in place, the people will shout: 'May God bless it! May God bless it!'"

- Zech 4:6-7 NLT

The Spirit empowered Zerubbabel (and his team) to build the temple, to begin rebuilding the kingdom. Similarly, the Spirit empowers us to build His Kingdom, not a physical kingdom (yet) but a spiritual kingdom, the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven.

What is Discipleship?

As disciples of Jesus, we are all participating in building the Kingdom of God. This kingdom isn't built with brick and mortar but with hearts and minds dedicated to Christ. When we make the decision to enter into a spiritual parenting relationship with someone, we must partner with the Holy Spirit, trusting Him to assist us in building another part of His spiritual house, a disciple of Jesus.

As we participate in building the Kingdom, in discipling a spiritual son or daughter, the Holy Spirit will empower us and guide us. As we remain sensitive to the Spirit, He will lead us while we are talking with others. He will lead us in the selective process of deciding which individuals to pursue in becoming spiritual sons or daughters.

Selecting the Bricks

Is it possible that the disciples chose Jesus just as much as He chose them? Jesus knew that it wasn't just an education but that there was something in the hearts of the disciples that would drive them on. Jesus knew, even with the foreknowledge of abandonment and failures, that there was something He could build on in the hearts of the disciples.

The multitudes dwindled, but then 12 remained because Jesus saw something in them. The twelve disciples developed into 70 because there was something in them. The 70 to 120 because, you guessed it: there was something in them.

Sometimes, the missing piece in our discipleship is the "want" from the spiritual son or daughter. If it's not there, then you're going to beat your head against the wall until that happens in them. If he or she doesn't want it, there's nothing you can do to make it happen.

There was something in Peter, he wanted it. James wanted it. John wanted it. And Jesus picked up on that. This want was cultivated in the heart before the disciples became leaders of the church.

We can live a life worthy of the calling of Christ that makes people want what Jesus offers in the spiritual realm. Yet, we can't control when or how that desire develops. We can't control the wants of others. This is a spiritual thing, that only God can place in the inner person. Thus, we intercede, pray, and cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the discipleship process of building the kingdom.

Note: There may be some people whom we will want to disciple, but, for some reason, someone else is meant to be their spiritual parent. Be sensitive to the Spirit. In that case, pray that God sends someone with gospel influence into their lives. In the meantime, pour out what you can and graciously transition them when the time comes.

Fishing for People

Building a kingdom is one analogy in the work of discipleship. Fishing for men is another.

And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." - Matt 4:19 NASB

Follow Me – Disciples of Jesus must follow Him. It's that simple: Jesus leads, we follow.

In a very real sense, we will be calling people to follow Jesus. Yet, in following Jesus they will also be brought into a relationship with us, thus following us. All the while, Christ is the head of the church. As such, He will lead and guide our discipleship journey with others.

Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. - Col 1:18 NLT

What is Discipleship?

When Jesus met with the twelve, he shared scriptural principles with them and educated them in the things of the law, but more importantly, He revealed how He, Jesus, is the fulfillment of the law and the Living Word. We have the privilege of sharing scriptural principles with those we disciple. Joining with the Holy Spirit, we work to impart spiritual truth. We do this by instruction and more importantly by example, in the lives we live.

Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. - 1 Peter 5:3 NLT

You should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ. - 1 Cor 11:1

I Will Make You - Disciples of Jesus are changed by Him, through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, was able to move head knowledge to heart transformation. The twelve found themselves convinced; not only did they mentally understand but they were spiritually transformed. The Spirit's conviction on their hearts led them to change, real change. We believe this movement of head knowledge to heart transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit, and it is cultivated when a spiritual child sees scriptural principles lived out, in the life of their spiritual parent.

This head knowledge and heart transformation cultivates reproduction. The fish that Jesus caught became fishermen: fishers of men!

Fishers of Men - Disciples of Jesus are saved for a purpose. We join Jesus on His mission to love and reach a lost and hurting world. We begin to do what He asked us to do, make disciples, and the disciples we invest in begin to make disciples of their own, and the disciples they invest in continue the reproduction. So head knowledge moves to heart transformation, and heart transformation moves to hands in action.

As we begin to enter intentional relational discipleship with others, we will begin to see not only spiritual children but spiritual grandchildren and great-grandchildren! This will move the kingdom from addition to multiplication.

Making Disciples

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...

- Matt 28:19–20 NASB

Traditionally, much emphasis has been placed on the beginning of this phrase “Go.” It is a missional command: “to go” into all the world. However, lost in translation is the reality that there is only one main verb in this sentence: “make disciples.” The Bible Exposition Commentary explains, “The Greek verb translated go is actually not a command but a present participle (going). The only command in the entire Great Commission is ‘make disciples’ (‘teach all nations’). Jesus said, ‘While you are going, make disciples of all the nations.’”² Therefore, in essence, we should consider thinking in this way:

- In your going, make disciples...
- As you go, make disciples...

How do we make disciples? 1. We immerse people into the reality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 2. We guide them into sound teaching, which results in sound living, that is obedience to Jesus.

Furthermore, I would also like to suggest that the word “nations” (ethne in Greek), while it certainly includes a worldwide focus, also includes a localized focus. The word ethne can be appropriately understood as “peoples, cultures, subcultures, social classes, occupational groups.” “The apostle did not have in mind modern nation-states such as India or

2 W.W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 107

Mexico. He had in mind cultural groupings—languages, tribes, castes, and lineages. When peoples, cultures, subcultures, social classes, and occupational groups are turning responsive ... the biblical mandate to bring the ethne to faith and obedience falls on our ears with particular force.”³ It’s not so much a matter of going but, rather, of making disciples in the people groups around us.

Thus, the question for us then becomes: **Are we making disciples where Jesus has placed us?** In our going and coming—in our everyday life—are we making disciples? Our lives must revolve around being a disciple of Jesus and participating in His mission, making disciples of all people, fishing for people. Jesus invites every Christian into the business of duplicating our faith into others. We are to make disciples by meeting them where they are.

Meet Them Where They Are

As a result of our obedience to make disciples, oftentimes, our discipleship relationships solely consider where we want the disciple to go. Yet, wisdom and discernment should consider where the person currently is and where Jesus is calling them to go as we begin the discipleship journey with them.

Jesus met the woman at the well where she was, at the well. Jesus met Peter, James, and John at the seashore. Jesus met Matthew at the tax collector’s booth and Nicodemus at night. I believe discipleship begins by meeting people where they are and relationally walking with them into a growing relationship with Christ. We are to make disciples, meet them where they are, so that they becoming devoted to discipleship.

3 Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 40

Let's revisit the example from the preface:

When I was young, my father taught us how to braid three strands of rope together. It became evident that this braided cord was so much stronger than a single strand or even two strands of cord side by side. There was something about the braided cord that made it stronger! I believe many of our churches are doing one or two things "right" in their discipleship process but lack the third strand and lack the knowledge to braid the strands together.

Mike Breen in *Building a Discipleship Culture* describes the braided cord like this: "There seem to be three different ways that we learn, but unequivocally we learn best when there is a dynamic interplay between all three at one time.

1. Classroom / Lecture passing on of information – The classroom experience is based on passing on facts, thoughts, processes, and information.
2. Apprenticeship – If you are going to learn how to do this, you are going to need someone to show you how.
3. Immersion – The key to immersion is having access to the culture you are hoping to shape you."

In *Discipleship by Design*, Harvey Herman describes the braided cord in this manner:

"Jesus set out to change the world by changing men... Jesus' method of discipleship presupposes that His followers live in communities of committed relationship with one another.

- Jesus picked men and stayed with them! (Relationship)
- Then He showed them how to understand the word of God! (Knowledge)
- He also taught them how to pray! (Experiential / Apprenticeship)
- He gave them assignments in ministry and then reviewed their ministry upon completion. (Experiential / Immersion)

“We believe the most fertile atmosphere for people to come to faith and maturity in Christ is the following:

Warm exposure to a group of people fervently committed

- to the God of the Bible
- to One Another
- to the Task of Evangelizing the community”⁴

As we meet a new convert where they are, braid in the cord of knowledge, intentional relationship, and experience, I believe we will raise up men and women of God who reflect the life, love, and power of Christ.

Devoted to Discipleship

The early church devoted themselves to a unified practice of discipleship. As we move into the book of Acts, we see this recorded by Luke:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

- Acts 2:42-47 NRSV

Many of us are familiar with the context of this verse. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, transformed from deserter into director of the movement of God. Following his preaching, about 3,000 welcomed the message and were baptized (see Acts 2:41). The Scripture quote above, beginning in Acts 2:42 is held in two possible perspectives: 1. A description of the early church after Pentecost. 2. An integral part of Pentecost

⁴ Harvey Herman, *Discipleship by Design* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), Kindle 394-412

and the culmination of the events during Pentecost.

As incredible as a spiritual ingathering of 3,000 converts might be, still, a community of committed disciples is a greater testimony! Understanding this section as the culmination of the events during Pentecost and an integral part of Pentecostalism, we can see the people's response to Peter's preaching. Repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sin, and immersion in the Holy Spirit leads to a communal devotion to the unified practice of discipleship.

These passages are not a description of an institutional reality; rather, they link the people and purpose of Pentecost to a robust life in the early church marked by four elements of discipleship: Apostolic Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread, and Prayer. These four elements of discipleship reflect the pattern of the New Testament churches. When we seek to pattern ourselves in the likeness of the early church in Acts, we are presented with plain, practical, and potentially powerful practices that if committed to in the spirit of Jesus, will hopefully result in God's miraculous power and consistent growth of His Church.

Apostolic Teaching

The early Christians devoted great attention to reliable accounts of Jesus' ministry and teaching. Those who had walked with Jesus—the Apostles—carried the authority to transmit Jesus' message. The records of their teachings and instructions to early churches would later become part of our New Testament Scriptures. Thus, a disciple is committed to the reading, study, and understanding of the Scriptures, the Word of God. We are thankful for the wonderful resources that allow us to devote ourselves to the Word.

Fellowship

Not only was there a commitment to the message and teachings in developing a relationship with Jesus, but there also was a commitment to fellowship: transparent, honest, encouraging relationships with others who followed Christ. The relationships enjoyed with one another unified the people in love and purpose: unified them in Christ. Today, this fellowship is enhanced by the local church, Bible studies, and small group ministries.

Breaking of Bread

Whether the phrase “breaking of bread” references eating together in homes, or a community meal (agape love meal), or the Lord’s Supper (communion meal), the purposes remain intact. Individuals gathered together in the presence of Jesus and one another to develop and sustain community, to express thankfulness to God, and to share with one another the goodness of God.

Prayer

As we read through the book of Acts, we see prayer as a high priority of the Church. Prayer is a recurring theme. Often, when there is prayer presented, the Holy Spirit presides. Prayer resulted in direction, miracles, praise, perseverance, visions, and other manifestations of the power of God. Prayer still leads to the same today.⁵

Continual Practice

The 3,000 or so persons who had such a powerful experience with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost immediately began devoting themselves to a new lifestyle in light of Pentecost. In the Greek language, Luke makes a shift at the beginning of Acts 2:42; he moves from the past tense to the present and continual description.

5 Fire Bible: Global Study Edition (Springfield MO: Life Publishers International, 2009)

Leading up to Acts 2:41, Luke describes what happened at Pentecost as simply in the past. Yet, Luke transitions his writing at Acts 2:42 to the imperfect tense, meaning a past time yet continual action. This is an important distinction because Luke is no longer relating one-time occurrences in the history of the Church but is now **describing the habitual lifestyle and repeated practices of prototypical Christians**. It then follows that we could understand the response to the message as “they continually devoted themselves...”⁶ or “they began devoting themselves...” to the teachings of the apostles, fellowship together, the breaking of bread, and unified prayer together.

It is obvious in this passage that the experience of the 120 became the experience of the 3,000. They all continued; they began to live out in their daily lives the teachings of Jesus. Jesus (one) became 120, which in turn became 3,000.

6 For further explanation see: Fredrick William Danker, editor and reviser. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Accordance electronic edition. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 881. (Abbreviated hereafter: BDAG.)

CHAPTER 2

What About Knowledge?

I may be old-school, but during the height of COVID-19 (2020), we all wrestled with this question: How can we disciple people when we are restricted from gathering together in crowds? It was a struggle. Many turned to online broadcast. It disseminates knowledge. It can develop thought and understanding in the head, but when we are all isolated and alone, it's difficult to change the heart. It's the difference between agreeing that we should love people and responding in love to the person who caused us emotional pain.

Thus, discipleship as the movement of Jesus needs to be something different than knowledge transmission. It is something that is incarnational; discipleship is in-person, in-flesh interactions that develop maturity in us. James makes the same argument this way: "faith without works is dead." It is not knowledge that makes one a disciple, it's a way of life, a continual practice of living in obedience to the commands of Jesus that marks us as disciples. It is with this in mind that we must ask ourselves this question: what about knowledge?

What About Knowledge?

Knowledge matters. Biblical intelligence matters. Yet, knowledge alone isn't enough. Consider this passage from the Apostle Paul on the subject:

... [mere] knowledge causes people to be puffed up (to bear themselves loftily and be proud), but love (affection and goodwill and benevolence) edifies and builds up and encourages one to grow [to his full stature]. If anyone imagines that he has come to know and understand much [of divine things, without love], he does not yet perceive and recognize and understand as strongly and clearly, nor has he become as intimately acquainted with anything as he ought or as is necessary.

- 1 Corinthians 8:1-2 AMPC

In other words, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor 8:1 CSB). To be clear, our suggestion is not neglecting education, but is rather emphasizing relationships. Many of us have heard this maxim, “Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”⁷ It is the depths of relationship that solidify knowledge and invite the transformational presence of the Holy Spirit.

So, if you have a knowledge-based ministry, please continue to develop it as the Lord leads and guides. But while you’re working at an educational aspect, add to the mix intentional relationships and possibly you’ll see discipleship move forward in a more robust manner.

Don’t Tell Me, Show Me

Here is a tension I’ve observed in my years as church health director in regard to new believers and discipleship. One group in the church thinks they know how to do discipleship. It’s what worked for them. It’s even how they were discipled. It’s the class. New converts go straight to reading the Bible, going to Sunday school, or discipleship 101. But many churches no longer have Sunday school and they have quit the class. So, the question is this: Is attending the class true discipleship or is discipleship something more? In our classes we may provide

⁷ Michael F. Andrew, *People Don’t Care How Much You Know Until They Know How Much You Care* (2015), <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/show-how-much-you-care-michael-f-andrew>

knowledge, even good knowledge, but are we answering the questions the new convert is asking?

It appears that new believers in the 2000s tend to be inquisitive. Their culture has shaped them to ask questions, to be skeptical of authority, and to assume that everyone wants something from them. They don't want to be told what to do, but they do want a guide to show them the way. They yearn for spiritual parents.

As a spiritual parent, it looks like walking with a new believer, inputting wisdom when invited, and allowing them to fail when needed. As I read the gospels, I get the picture of Jesus doing life with, becoming a spiritual parent to, the twelve disciples. He imparted knowledge by using everyday life illustrations and responding to the questions posed. Could it be that 2,000 years removed, He's still teaching us how to make disciples in the same way?

Mental or Experiential

Wisdom is not the memorization of knowledge; it's the application of knowledge through experiences. Wisdom is acquired by living and talking with the wise. Wisdom is seen ultimately in and through living like Jesus. The words of Jesus are meant to result in a life-changing experience, a new reality, a new way.

Thus, there is no discipleship in embracing truth in the head, unless that truth also penetrates the heart and transforms one's life. In essence, discipleship is experiential not mental. Discipleship is more about modifying our behaviors than memorizing our Bibles.

The Bible was not given for our information but for our transformation. — D.L. Moody

Devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42) would involve not only receiving and believing the message of

Christ but also aligning one's life with His life. Obedience to Christ's commands and conformity to Christ's life are the non-negotiable characteristics of being a disciple and the source from which all other discipleship practices flow. This is what is meant by being devoted to the teaching of the apostles: not simply information—but transformation.

Class or Community

If knowledge alone was enough for discipleship, classrooms would manufacture disciples. Yet, disciples are not manufactured, they're reborn by the spirit of God. They then grow and develop into spiritual maturity through community.

Some people talk of discipleship as creating community. The work of creating community allows us to initiate a spiritual formation or discipleship journey. Spiritual formation allows those who are separated and isolated to not just feel like but actually become a part of the family of faith.

Imagine adopting a child from the foster care system. The first time they arrive at your home, for the placement visit, they are a guest. Yet, as you've adopted them, they are family. It would be strange to keep them in the foyer as a guest when they are now family. So, you sit with them in the living room as friends and they move into your kitchen and sit at the table as family.

Spiritual formation allows believers to mature and grow in their knowledge and ability to complete Christ's work in their lives, the Church, and the world. The new believer moves from a guest to a friend to becoming part of the family. We believe this progression from guest to friend to family is foundational and even essential to any Biblical discipleship process.

Never Alone

Two thousand years ago, Jesus approached twelve seemingly unsuspecting Galileans and bid them, "Come, follow me."

For the next three years, they walked alongside Him as He disciplined them. Toward the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus commissioned His disciples to go and do the same—to take the Gospel message to the world and make disciples of all peoples.

The Great Commission is an audacious undertaking, all the more so given the fast and sweeping changes taking place in the broader culture. People are lonelier, more distracted, tethered to their screens, and searching for meaningful lives. We, through intentional relationships, can provide a pathway to a more meaningful relationship with Jesus and more meaningful lives.

As Christians bring the unchanging message of the Gospel to the world, effective approaches to discipleship become more important, especially in a world that is increasingly polarized around spiritual issues. We must move beyond a book, a group study, or a classroom environment and invest in the lives of others with intentional relationships. Classes keep an institutional space between teacher and student. Communities bring everyone together to the table before Jesus.

Spiritual Parenthood

Imitation

Please follow with me as I trace this aspect of spiritual parenthood and imitation through Paul's progression of thought in the letter to the Corinthians.

He begins this recurring theme by proclaiming this:

For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. So I urge you to imitate me.

- 1 Cor 4:15–16 NLT

He then moves to present that knowledge isn't enough but that love (relationship) is required for spiritual growth (see 1 Cor 8:1). Following, Paul moves to rearticulate this idea:

*... you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.
- 1 Cor 11:1 NLT*

I would suggest that imitation is not transmitted through education; rather, discipleship is transmitted through relationships. Please consider this: **Sometimes people will imitate the actions of our faith in Christ before they comprehend the depths of our faith in Christ.** And, by the way, that is okay! Just as a child imitates a parent without complete understanding of the action, motives, or beliefs associated, so also will a young child in the faith begin to imitate their spiritual parent. Just as a family relationship results in close proximity and discussion on these aspects, so also should a discipleship relationship result in the same.

Transmitting Spiritual DNA

Revisiting what Paul writes regarding imitation in his letter to the Corinthians, he continues with the highlighted phrase:

*For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. So I urge you to imitate me. That's why I have sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. He will remind you of how I follow Christ Jesus, just as I teach in all the churches wherever I go.
- 1 Cor 4:15–17 NLT*

Paul was the spiritual father of the Corinthians as well as Timothy, who lived in close enough proximity to transmit his spiritual DNA. Paul reproduced both the Gospel and himself in Timothy. As a reminder, Timothy was one of Paul's early converts; then he was later selected to become Paul's disciple and later became Paul's fellow worker.

Teams Transmitting Spiritual DNA

As a final illustration of this point, please consider with me the team writing to the Church of the Thessalonians. To start, a team, not an individual, wrote this letter:

Paul, Silas, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.
- 1 Thess 1:1 NIV

Paul's disciple has become his co-worker and is writing this instruction to the church with him. Together, they write in verse six: "You became **imitators of us** and of the Lord..." (1 Thess 1:6 NIV) The team became individuals transmitting their spiritual DNA to reproduce both themselves and the gospel of God in others.

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God...
- 1 Thess 2:11–12 NIV

Notice the term disciplined "each of you." This seems to reveal an interpersonal approach to ministry, the intentional relationship that results in discipleship.

Living like Jesus

Some would interpret "disciple" to mean "learner". Yet, for our purposes, knowing is not enough. The Lord did not call us to learn information but to live transformation. If we referred to the Hebrew Talmud, it would articulate that a disciple is "not only someone who knows the words, but lives of the life of the master."⁸

As we look at Jesus, we see how He talked with people, how He shared His life with His disciples, and how He engaged in discussions and questions with individuals. We also see in the story of Jesus that the disciples began imitating Him. They learned from Him as they observed, asked questions,

8 Gracin, Martina & Budiselić, Ervin. (2019). Discipleship in the Context of Judaism in Jesus' Time - Part 1. 13. 205-222.

and followed Him. Yes, they gained mental knowledge, but more so, they grasped wisdom through their experience. They began doing what Jesus did, sometimes even before they could comprehend it.

CHAPTER 3

Discipleship Meetings

The Spiritual Parent

If we want to make disciples of Jesus, we must live as disciples of Jesus. No matter how seasoned we become as leaders, our call to follow Christ never changes. **Our first and most important calling in life and ministry is not to lead others but to follow Him.**

And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach, 15 and to have authority to cast out the demons. - Mark 3:14–16 NASB

This is why Paul explained to the church in Corinth, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Cor 11:1 NIV) The best discipleship tool we possess is our transformed lives.

As we follow Christ, we will become **an** example (not **the** example). As an example, we may find ourselves becoming a spiritual parent. Hopefully, not just a spiritual parent but a spiritual grandparent and great-grandparent!

If you have children, you’ll likely be able to identify with one of these statements: No matter how ready you thought you were, you were not ready when they were born. Even though you were not ready at all, you likely did just fine raising your children.

My wife Barb and I have two children, David and Danielle. Both were born while we were serving as pastors in Girard, OH. Trust me when I tell you, we were not ready to be parents. Neither time when we left Trumbull Memorial Hospital with a new child in our care did we leave with an instruction manual on being a parent or raising kids. We, as parents, were and are a work in progress. We learned as we went! Today, both David and Danielle are grown and are parents of their own! We grew as people while we grew as parents.

Thus, as we become spiritual parents and make disciples, we will continue to grow as followers of Jesus while we grow as spiritual parents. And the same will be true for our children in the Lord. Once they follow Jesus, grow in discipleship, and spread the kingdom, they themselves will become spiritual parents and continue to grow in the Lord and in their abilities to become spiritual parents.

Two Simple Questions

Since his baptism one year ago, as of this writing, I've met with Joey one-on-one twice each month. Some would see Joey as a bit ADHD. Part of how that affects him is that he struggles to read. So, I don't ask what he is reading, but I do ask what he is listening to. He listens to the Bible, and he listens to podcasts regularly. He is really challenged to read a book, but he'll listen to something without hesitation. He'll probably never attend a discipleship class, but he does meet with me twice a month for a discipleship discussion. In our discipleship discussions, I turn to two simple questions to guide our time:

- What is God communicating to you?
- How are you responding to Him?

What is God communicating to you? What is He saying to you? This may be during worship gatherings, church groups, commuting to work, listening to music, listening to podcasts, prayer, Scripture, random moments, through other people, in conversation, etc.

How are you responding to Him? What are you going to do about it? Are you learning a new thought process? If so, how will you continue to engage in that? Are you being prompted to create a new habit? If so, what does that look like?

“What is God communicating to you?” this presupposes that there is reading of Scripture, reflection and prayer naturally occurring in the disciple’s life that leads to hearing from the Lord. “How are you responding to Him?” presupposes that faith grows in action (James 2:17–24). The question assumes as we hear from God that we respond in faith. Often, this faith is identifiable with practical next steps in addition to shifts in mental processes.

The greatest proof of Christianity for others is not how far a man can logically analyze his reasons for believing but how far in practice he will stake his life on his belief. - TS Elliot

The Awkward Silence

Asking questions is the best way to facilitate reflection. One part of your role as a spiritual parent is not to tell them what they need to know but to help them discern for themselves what they need to know. Your role is to facilitate reflection and revelation from the Holy Spirit.

To facilitate this time, the two questions will prompt reflection then lead to conversation and discussion. I’ve learned that the reflection period may often be an awkward silence as they are looking within themselves and remembering or processing moments of their week. Let it be silent. Let them speak first after they’ve processed.

Preparing in Advance

You may discover that after a few meetings of consistently asking the same two questions the disciple will begin preparing responses in advance. Or, of course, you may not. If not, it may be beneficial to give them the two questions you will be asking so they are able to reflect ahead of time. This will lead to their

reflection with the Holy Spirit occurring first, followed by their processing with you transpiring second.

Discerning the Goal

If we were to begin exercising with a personal trainer, the first question would be this: What do you want to achieve? If someone wants to lose 50 lbs of flab it is a different training approach than if someone wants to gain 20 lbs of muscle. Our discipleship efforts will be bolstered if we keep this in mind.

Normally, as committed followers of Jesus, we find ourselves wanting people to grow more than they want to grow. This creates problems; we attempt to lead them where they have no interest in heading. It's easier to tell them where they should go, but maturity requires that we lead people toward Jesus along their way, not ours. Simply put, when people aren't buying into the process, then they aren't being disciplined. The more they own the process the more they get out of it.

Thus, sometimes it will be helpful to ask them a few questions: What do you want out of this discipleship relationship? What are you expecting in your relationship with Jesus and your relationship with a spiritual mentor?

How Much Time?

I can say up front that, in my pastorates, I spent too much time either with or preparing for the crowd and not enough significant time in interpersonal discipleship relationships. Now, allow me to ask you a question: How much of your time is devoted to one-on-one or one-on-two discipleship?

Usually, most respond to that question with very little, if any time. It's humbling to consider. Somehow, we've lost ourselves to the perils of ministry. We are simply too busy. Pastor, allow me to share this with you: there will never be time for relational discipleship until you make the time for relational discipleship.

Consider these interactions in the life of Christ: Nicodemus at night or the woman at the well by Samaria, both of them away from the crowd. Even Jesus' calling of His disciples seemed to happen away from the crowds, not from within the crowds. Moreover, Jesus had an inner circle of disciples, three of them, which He seemed to give more attention to than the other twelve.

Pastor, a time must come when we say it is worth it to invest in the one. When we do this, it will require an intentional shift in schedule, in priorities, in resourcing. It requires us to deny ourselves. How so? Crowds chant for ego; relationships chisel for character. To remove our primary focus on the crowd is to feel as though we will be "doing less" for the kingdom. Yet, only as we develop discipleship relationships will we see Ohio won for Jesus. As we develop discipleship relationships, and they in turn learn how to engage in a discipleship relationship with others, we will see exponential growth for the kingdom. It's Kingdom math: $100-1=99$ Yet $1x1x1>99$.

Daily Doses

My wife, Barb, is discipling Sandra. Sandra was on the verge of very poor choices one year ago. She is in her mid-30s and she looks to Barb as a spiritual mom. Barb talks or texts with Sandra a minimum of a dozen times a day. In my perspective, it seems almost constant. But Sandra has also constantly grown. She's a different lady today. It's a result of relational discipleship.

Some people may need hours over coffee, others minutes in the gym, and still others seconds over the airwaves. But, all in all, the intentional relationship to make disciples will guide people closer to Jesus.

One-on-One

In considering the principle of discipleship the question might be asked, "What is the benefit of one-on-one discipleship? Wouldn't it be better and faster to teach groups of people,

or at least two or three at a time?” Certainly, group teaching and discussion play a very important part in Christian development. Nonetheless, there are several reasons why one-on-one discipleship has a unique function that cannot easily be met in a group setting:

Open Communication

If an individual is meeting with another Christian one-on-one, they are usually more willing to be honest in speaking about questions they have or struggles they might be going through. Often people are hesitant to share personal problems in front of others, but in a one-to-one relationship they would be more likely to talk about the areas in which they really need help. In this way, one-on-one discipleship can focus specifically on their particular needs and create more open communication.

Greater Accountability

In a one-on-one relationship, the person being disciplined can be held accountable in areas in which they need the most growth. This is an important aspect of Christian development.

Individualized Attention

One-on-one discipleship allows plenty of time to discuss issues thoroughly and make sure the person being disciplined truly understands the concept being discussed. Conversely, in a group there may not be enough time to effectively meet individual needs and ensure individual comprehension.

Greater Intimacy

An intimate relationship is much more likely to develop when two people meet together. Deep sharing and growth is much more probable in this type of relationship.

Greater Transferability

A group setting may not effectively equip someone to disciple another believer. With one-on-one discipleship, individuals are trained and equipped to pass on their faith through discipleship, thereby reproducing reproducers.

Apprentice to Master

To illustrate the importance of one-on-one discipleship, let's suppose that you wanted to become a carpenter. One of the best ways to learn would be to find a master carpenter who was willing to teach you one-on-one. The master carpenter would spend a great deal of time with you, the apprentice, and you would learn the skills of carpentry by listening, watching, following, and finally imitating the exact movements of the carpenter. The carpenter would be able to watch your individual progress and spend extra time working with you in the areas that needed more help. The master would be able to evaluate whether you were really learning the skills properly and could correct you when necessary because the master would recognize where you were having difficulty. The master could also give you praise and encouragement as they observed the areas in which you were doing well.

This sort of individualized attention would not be possible if you were part of a group of trainees, but because you were being taught one-on-one you would be receiving the kind of teaching that was specifically tailored for you. Afterward, you would be well trained and qualified not only to be a carpenter but also to teach other individuals how they too could become skilled carpenters. Eventually, you could reproduce the skill of carpentry in many, many students over a period of years. It is this sort of "see and do" skill training that is the heart and soul of one-on-one discipleship. As Paul said, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us" (Phils 3:17 NASB).

When I was growing up, my dad did a lot of his own mechanical work on our cars. It was not uncommon for his Saturday mornings to be used for changing the oil, changing the brakes, or performing a tune-up on one of our cars. While he was involved in this project he would ask me to come over and join him, asking me to watch him as he did the work. As a

child I must have watched him do various maintenance tasks dozens of times.

Today, I would discourage you from calling me if you needed work done on your car. Now, you would think, after watching my dad change the oil twenty times, I might know how to change the oil on the car. You would think, after watching my dad change the brakes ten times, I might know how to change the brakes on the car. You would think, after watching my dad tune up a car fifteen times, I might know how to perform a tune-up on the car.

But, and this is an important but, my dad never turned to me, handed me the tools, and asked me to do the work. He gave me the educational or classroom knowledge, but he did not allow me to apply or experience the task. I would suggest that if discipleship and spiritual formation are limited to the classroom or educational settings and are not moved to the relational and experiential we will fall short in our attempts to develop fully devoted followers of Christ.

Jesus Our Example

Discipleship is the primary method of teaching Jesus used in His three years of physical ministry on Earth. Jesus' main focus was not on large groups of people, but rather He focused on twelve men who were known as His "disciples."

These disciples spent a great deal of time with Jesus. The time they spent together was not in a classroom or in a synagogue. Rather, Jesus taught His disciples on the streets of the city and in their daily activities as they traveled about together. They learned the skills of prayer, evangelism, living in obedience, spiritual warfare, showing compassion, forgiveness, and many other things. But how? They learned by listening, watching, discussing, and finally imitating the actions, attitudes, and teachings of Jesus, the Master Teacher.

Over a three-year period, Jesus not only taught His disciples to understand the truths of the Christian faith, He also trained and equipped them to pass these truths on to others. Jesus wanted His disciples to reproduce this principle of discipleship in other people. He wanted them to disciple other believers in the same way that He had disciplined them. We can also see the principle of discipleship practiced by others such as the Apostle Paul.

Paul took two younger men, Timothy and Titus, under his care. He used the principle of discipleship as he trained and equipped them to understand and pass on the Christian faith. Paul then instructed Timothy to continue the process of discipleship, telling him, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2 NKJV). From this verse we can see how the Apostle Paul “reproduced” himself through discipleship.

CHAPTER 4

Designing Your Discipleship Plan

Internally, there is a frustration within me. As the Church, we've stayed busy. But busyness isn't necessarily faithfulness in discipleship. Many churches have a good track record of investing time, money, and energy without accomplishing much kingdom growth in making disciples. Often, when pondering a new approach to discipleship, we think we need to attend a conference, buy some curriculum, or even hire a new staff person.

Yet, many of us simply need to remember the joy of discipleship. Recall the joy of when you made a difference in someone's life. Remember the joy of watching someone grow in a deeper revelation of God. Paul speaks of this joy this way regarding the discipleship of the Thessalonian Church: "For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?" (1 Thess 3:8-9 NIV)

All of us want to be able to say we participated in the Great Commission. In our going, in our living, may we make disciples of peoples dedicated to Jesus. Now let's discover how we can lead our churches to experience the joy that comes from making disciples.

Designing Your Church's Discipleship Plan

We believe it is possible for every local church to have an organic, vibrant, living, systematic, inclusive discipleship system. We believe this discipleship system can be holistic, transformational, replicable, and Spirit-empowered.

Some people may promote a cultural shift prior to becoming a disciple-making church. We believe every church and every pastor, at their core, desires to make disciples. It has been part of their stated vision, but they have lacked the tools, resources, or strategy to make it their reality.

Before we move into our suggestions, please understand this: **You do not have to change your entire church culture to create discipleship. I believe, by simply adding the cord of intentional relationship, your church's discipleship effectiveness will become stronger and go further.**

Additionally, a healthy culture of discipleship within a church family is created by the senior leadership and upheld by a clear plan. This plan will understand that to invest in fewer is to allow the Spirit to work deeper in people's lives.

Furthermore, when pastoral transition takes place in your church, because people have been in discipleship relationships with one another, the church community will be more solid and unified, not just around a preacher but instead around Christ and one another.

More so, defining communal discipleship in your church includes creating a process and establishing a goal. If you do not have input and outputs that are clear, how will you know if you are making disciples?

Thus, the spiritual parent should have some outcomes for their interpersonal and relational discipleship efforts. Likewise, churches must define their expectations of communal discipleship and guide their members in that direction.

The Pieces

Here are the pieces that create the picture of local church discipleship:

- Relational
- Intentional
- Memorable
- Equipping

The missing piece in most local church discipleship plans seems to be intentional relationship.

We've done a good job in Church culture of making things memorable. We've also developed classes and videos that equip people with knowledge they need to perform tasks and develop skills. Yet, if we can add intentional relationships to this process, we will go further than before.

Anything your church creates should include these four elements:

1. The plan should be relationship-driven, not information or institution-driven.
2. The plan should be intentional to disciples where they live, work, and play. Think in terms of missional discipleship.
3. The plan should be organic, welcoming others to share in the planning. This generates passion and purpose and will fuel people's desire to count the cost of discipleship.
4. The plan should be transformative, moving away from head knowledge, classroom, and curriculum and moving toward authentic life change.

This book is not intended to be a manual for discipleship. There are plenty available. Which manual fits your church culture, pastor or church leader, is up to you. But if you do not include the interpersonal relationship, then we believe you may be falling short on biblical discipleship. Although there

are many, here are four resources we'd like to suggest to help you design a process that will focus on intentional relational discipleship: *Building a Discipleship Culture* by Mike Breen, *The Forgotten Way* by Alan Hirsh, *Discipleshift* by Jon Putnam, and *Discipleship by Design* by Harvey Herman.

Step One: A Clear Picture

I would again compare this to your first day at the gym and your initial conversation with a personal trainer. The personal trainer will ask you some questions to ascertain your current health condition and ask if you have any specific goals. Likewise, the first step in designing a discipleship plan for your church is to obtain a clear picture of your church's health.

Church Health Assessment

Allow these questions to guide you in drawing your current church health picture:

- Is discipleship a stated core value?
- How is discipleship currently demonstrated in the church?
- What percentage of the annual budget is earmarked for discipleship?
- What discipleship processes are currently in use?
- To what degree are they successful?
- Is there a small group structure in place and being used?
- To what degree are these small groups successful?
- Which demographics (millennials, students, new believers, etc.) do you want to reach?
- Do you have a way to evaluate your discipleship processes?

The Ohio Ministry Network Church Health department has a few other tools that can help with this assessment as well. Please see the appendix for more information and resources.

Step Two: Setting the Course

Once you obtain a church health snapshot of where you are, then you can begin charting where you want to go. Think of GPS directions: Where you are is your starting point. The GPS must know where you are before it can get you where you want to go. Then you enter an address or destination into the GPS. What follows is that the GPS guides you from where you are to where you want to be. The great thing about the GPS is that it even provides you with multiple routes; the freeway, avoiding toll roads, and even the back roads! So it is with your church's discipleship plan. You must set the course; then you'll have the guide to get you where you're heading.

Next is dedicating the time to determining and defining your church's core values or missional goals. Below are three examples. The first two are the core values of two of the ministries Church Health partners with, Acts 2 and Church Life. The third example is from my home church.

Acts 2: Worship | Grow | Connect | Go | Serve

Church Life: Spiritual Life | Spiritual Community | Discipleship Ministries | Outreach | Visionary Leadership | Management

Bellefontaine First Family: Room to Meet with God | Room to Connect with Others | Room to Grow in Our Walk with God | Room to Engage our Community

Take a few minutes to list your church's core values or missional goals below:

Now that you've listed your core values or missional goals, ask yourself these questions: Where does discipleship fit into these values and goals? Is discipleship a piece of these values or is

discipleship the warp and weft of these values? Most churches will articulate discipleship as a part of their core values and vision statement, but is it foundational?

I would suggest some of the following questions that might help you clarify how significant discipleship is in the overall context of your church and ministry.

- Is there a part of your ministry budget that is earmarked for discipleship?
- Does the ministry calendar display segments of each week or month that are given to discipleship?
- Is the money and time you are currently investing in discipleship bearing fruit?

Years ago, I was in a conversation and someone said to me, “Show me your checkbook and your calendar and I will discover what’s important to you.” The same is accurate with our church organizations. These are challenging questions, but we believe that these and other challenging questions may serve to propel the discipleship value and vision forward. If we are not careful to examine our practices, we may discover over time that our assumptions about a focus on discipleship were misguided and/or lacking in effectiveness.

This book, this concept of intentional relational discipleship, is surfacing the challenge of moving from a value and a vision to a strategic plan and to smart goals in the area of discipleship. If discipleship is a value and part of my vision, what do I need to be doing daily, weekly, monthly, and annually to see discipleship happen in a more meaningful way?

Step Three: Assessing the Journey

On the GPS, there’s a handy section that displays the arrival time and another section that shows what the next action is. These items provide you with a sense of knowing that you are traveling in the right direction toward your destination. So how will you know if your church is making headway in the

right direction?

We've already considered how discipleship is a process, a journey. How will you know if individuals are advancing in their discipleship journey with your church family? Often, we gain insight into our expectations by noting what we say in a somewhat negative way. For example, how many of us have said or thought that the people in our church are not:

- Consistent in attendance
- Committed to daily devotions (Bible reading, prayer, and meditation)
- Involved in ministry
- Connected with other Christ followers
- Good stewards of their time, talent, and treasure

Could we reverse these potentially “negative” definitions and make them our discipleship destination? The people (disciples) of our church:

- Meet with God
- Connect with Others
- Grow in their relationship with God
- Engage with their community

Jim Putnam in *Discipleshift* lists the following as characteristics of a disciple of Jesus:

- One who is becoming spiritually mature.
- One who cares for the lost.
- One who is doing life with others.
- One who loves the poor and marginalized in Jesus' name.
- One who has come to understand what righteousness is and being sanctified so that he/she lives differently in the world.
- A mature disciple worships God with his or her resources and energy.
- A mature disciple is a witness for Christ in every way.

Spiritual Disciplines

Recall once more the health coach's plan to assist you in obtaining your goal. Your coach may help you eliminate certain foods from your diet and add other foods. You would likely start with easy to moderate exercise at first and would increase the effort and time spent as you move toward your goals. Here are the two key ingredients that will be included: diet and exercise.

What are the key ingredients of a disciple's life? We might consider these spiritual disciplines:

- Conversion
- Water Baptism
- Holy Spirit Baptism
- Involvement in a Group
- Involvement in Service/Ministry
- Sharing their Faith Story Weekly
- Inviting Others to Church & Christ Weekly
- Making One Disciple Yearly

As you ponder your church's core values and vision statement you might develop a set of benchmarks for each value or vision statement. For example, if your vision statement includes, "Room to Meet with God," how will you know when your spiritual child is developing a personal value or discipline of meeting with God? If you hear them talking about Bible reading, devotions, or prayer time could it be that they are beginning to personalize behaviors that will allow them to grow into Christlikeness? If your vision statement includes, "Room to Connect with Others," how will you know when your spiritual child is developing relational connections with other believers? If you hear them talking about attending a church event or catching a ball game with someone else in the church, could these be indicators that they are beginning to connect with others? What disciplines will become evident that will give you, the spiritual parent, a sense that your spiritual child is becoming more like Jesus? The alignment

of scriptural principles, church/values/vision, and personal discipleship allows a synergy to develop that will clarify discipleship and multiply the results.

Step Four: Identifying Spiritual Parents

It may begin to feel overwhelming, thinking of all the time it will take to disciple people one-on-one. Yet, you already have some in your church family who can disciple others, and as they do, they will grow more in their own relationship with the Lord. We are not advocating that you, pastor, alone, are the discipler. This is a team approach, a family approach, for all of the body of Christ. Identify the individuals who have the potential to become spiritual parents.

Consider these steps to help you begin a renewed emphasis on one-on-one discipleship within your church:

1. Identify the individuals in your church whose spiritual DNA you desire to be transmitted and reproduced. Be careful not to judge by their personal preferences but by their wholehearted commitment to following Jesus.
2. Identify the people in your church who may already be in discipleship relationship with others, whether formally or informally.
3. Gather a small team of like-minded people who will help you launch new discipleship initiatives. You could you enlist them, bring them into discipleship relationship with yourself, with the goal of releasing them into a greater effectiveness in their own discipleship relationship?
4. Create SMART goals and action plans to reach your discipleship goals.

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Relevant

Time-bound

Step Five: Developing Discipleship Groups

As you continue to look into your discipleship culture as a church, there is one more step that can be taken once a culture of the first four steps has been established. That final step is this: developing discipleship groups.

Discipleship groups are invaluable for creating a community of disciples, committed to the Lord and to one another. These groups can be identified by some specific practices, but they share a few items in common with the one-on-one discipleship approach covered in this book. Note, these are not classrooms but are discipleship groups that reflect the discipleship process.

Group Guidelines and Practices

Each discipleship group should contain certain practices such as Scripture or theological discussion, individual discipleship reporting, mutual encouragement, and prayer.

Discipleship groups function best when the group size is between three and five people. Additionally, they function to their fullest capacity with a regular rhythm of meeting together (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.).

A discipleship group is something a disciple is invited into by a spiritual parent. It is not a right of individuals, by matter of being a part of the local church. Should a disciple prove to be unwilling to continue down the process of discipleship and/or continually miss group meetings, such a person should be excused from the group.

One-on-One Discipleship Principles

Once again, two primary questions will guide the discipleship group: What is God communicating to you? How are you responding to Him? These questions drive the essence of varying facets of discipleship. Furthermore, the values discussed earlier that are developed in one-on-one discipleship meetings are also reflected in discipleship groups. Open communication is required for all participants. Greater accountability transpires as more than one individual is included in the process.

As a group leader, one will need to remain aware of when individualized attention is needed. Some individuals within a discipleship group will excel by simply being a part of the group. Other individuals will require individualized attention within the group and/or outside of the group. This will require discernment in your role as the spiritual leader of the group.

Intimacy will develop as the group works together. Such closeness will need to be more intentionally developed in the group setting. Your role as the leader will necessitate your preparation and intentionality to develop moments that call forth intimacy amongst the group. Also keep in mind that intimacy within the group is a must; some group members may build closer relationships with others, and that's okay. As we consider the apostles, we know there were layers of relationships: the three, the twelve, the seventy.

Increased Humility

One virtue that all group participants will develop is increased humility. Humility grows as one listens and observes a spiritual parent gently correct and guide (see 2 Tim 2:24–26; Gal 6:1–5; 1 Thess 5:14; 1 Pet 5:5) a brother or sister in Christ. Humility is developed when learning to be transparent with more than one individual at a time. Humility is cultivated when disciples learn to sacrifice, not for their own sake but for the sake of their brothers and sisters. Humility is developed as individuals seek to grow in their ability to co-lead a group with the spiritual parent.

Consider the words of Paul, the spiritual parent, to the group of Christians (including the spiritual leaders, elders, bishops, deacons) at Philippi:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit

and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

- Philippians 2:1–5 NIV

Paul cultivated this same relationship of spiritual parent with others. He considered both Timothy and Titus his “true son in the faith” (see 1 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4).

Great Patience

As a spiritual parent, one virtue that will be developed in you is great patience. I cannot stress this enough, great patience is required. This will also be something your disciples will learn from you as you develop while you lead. The only way patience develops is through pressure and practice. Those pressures come as disciples observe how you deal with them alongside observing how you deal with other disciples as well.

Consider how the spiritual parent, Paul, instructed his son in the faith, Timothy, regarding faithful ministry: “... correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim 4:2 NIV). Certainly, encouragement is the fun and easier part of the admonition. But to correct or guide, and to rebuke or sternly warn, are aspects of the spiritual parent’s portfolio. To do so effectively, remaining level-headed when disciples miss the mark, requires great patience and careful instruction.

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires.

In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.
- 2 Pet 1:3-9 NLT

Transparency & Forgiveness

What better context than in a discipleship group to practice transparency, an atmosphere of openness and honesty. If there is openness and honesty, that means there are celebrations of victories and repenting of failures. In the repentance, the turning from an old way and turning toward a new way, the disciples learn and observe what it means to extend forgiveness as Christ has forgiven the Church.

Consider Peter: He failed big time! He blew it! All proud and arrogant, He declares that even if all the other disciples turn tail and run, he'll be with Jesus to the end. I can imagine the sigh and internal pain of Jesus knowing that Peter would fail. Then, in the Garden, as Jesus is practically begging them to stay awake and pray that they will not fall to temptation, they continue to fail before they fall.

But that's not the end of the story. Jesus meets them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, a familiar spot where Jesus first called Peter. See, Peter seemed to have quit and talked a few of the disciples into joining him out fishing. They caught nothing. They couldn't even catch fish anymore! But then someone calls out from the shore, "You catch anything?"

Nope! Throw the net over there.” Boom! So many fish! This happened once before. “It’s the Lord!” they exclaim. Peter jumps over the side and swims to shore. He doesn’t care about fish, he’s returning to his Lord whom he failed. The Lord who sought him out once more. The Lord who restored him threefold.

“Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me?”

We have to create space where people are transparent, where they share and confess sin, and where we extend forgiveness in Christ, and where we join with our Lord in expressing, “Go and sin no more.” Such a transformative atmosphere only develops through intentional relationship⁹.

⁹ For more biblical conception of this consider: Prv 28:13, James 5:16. For more on this topic see *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer or *Making Peace* by Jim Van Yperen.

CONCLUSION

Peter's preaching to the three thousand was not the win. The continuance of the three thousand, meeting together, committing to discipleship, and seeing the Lord add to the Church daily was the win. Pastor, if all you see at the end of this is that you discipled one person this year, then your vision is shortsighted. If you can't envision dedicating five hours a week to interpersonal, intentional discipleship, then you're not getting the kingdom multiplication.

Below, Jay Seidler, Chi Alpha Missionary, shares his story as a spiritual son:

In the fall of 2004, I was a 15-year-old high school sophomore in Woodsfield, OH—population 2,512. Even though I'd grown up in church with my family, I didn't know Jesus, nor had I ever read the Bible for myself. God was "out there". He was distant at best and disinterested at worst. Shooting up a quick, obligatory prayer, "God, if you're out there, bring people to me to show me who you are," I set out on a quest for truth, purpose, and meaning regardless of where it took me.

It wasn't a month later that I met Pastor Lloyd Hill, a new Ohio Assemblies of God church planter, and his

daughter, Casey, who was in the marching band with me. I had never heard of the Assemblies of God and didn't understand why anyone would plant a new church in our small rural town. There were plenty of churches and barely any people! Who in the world would move here? Nobody moves here; they only move away!

I was invited over and over to their youth group on Thursday nights but always turned it down. Finally, I agreed to come one time to keep them from asking me again. I went and never didn't go after that. I found what I was looking for: students my age who knew Jesus and could lead me to answers I was longing for. It was a come-as-you-are atmosphere where students of many backgrounds pursued Jesus together. Pastor Lloyd was there at the helm leading this newborn church and youth group with passion and conviction.

As Lloyd walked alongside of us, we lived in a spiritual laboratory. Students, including me, were getting saved, delivered, and baptized in the Holy Spirit as we lived life together. Our time together was about attending events but also about fiercely following Jesus with one another: life-on-life, life in community, and life on mission. He sent us out as missionaries to our high school and to our families. He demonstrated to us life in the Spirit and obedience to His voice. He moved us away from the religious division of the sacred and the secular where we listened for the Spirit's voice on all occasions in every situation.

On one occasion, I had just attended a conference with the church and felt the Lord call me into ministry. As I shared this with Lloyd, he encouraged me, saying, "Don't wait until later to walk it out now. You are called NOW!" From there, I began to see my whole life as a ripe harvest, and I've never looked back.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:15 (ESV), “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Some things are caught, not taught. Spiritual fatherhood says, “be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Pastor Lloyd became to me a father in the faith walking with me, not just teaching me and releasing me. His life and heart were open to us and ours to his. I saw his life in the Spirit, not just his ministry.

If Lloyd Hill wasn't faithful to disciple Jay Siedler, then where would Ohio Chi Alpha be? At some point we will see the connective effect, the culmination, of all our interpersonal discipleship relationships that result in reaching Ohio for Jesus. It sounds like addition, but it results in kingdom multiplication.

Twelve people to seventy, seventy disciples to one hundred and twenty. Then, a few years later, the disciples of Jesus were said to have turned the world upside down (see Acts 17:6). Imagine your impact as you faithfully work to win one disciple to the Lord each year. Imagine how you'll build the kingdom, brick by brick, person by person, while experiencing the joy of the Lord. Imagine how your spiritual children will become spiritual parents and how you'll eventually have spiritual great-grandchildren in the Lord. What will it be like in 10 years when your church culture has become one where each disciple wins one disciple to the Lord each year?

Let's find out together as we practice the simplicity of relational discipleship. As we do, may the Lord add to the Church daily those who are being saved. **Amen.**

APPENDIX A

Church Health Key Result Areas and Every Disciplines

Church Health - Key Result Areas

- Seek the Spirit

As pastors, directors, and disciplined leaders seek the Spirit they will demonstrate their absolute reliance on God's plan for Kingdom expansion: Spirit-empowered believers living and worshipping in community.

- Share & Invite

When pastors, directors and disciplined leaders embrace an evangelism lifestyle, they will be modeling the joy and priority of sharing their personal story of God's love and mercy with those in need of salvation.

- Make Disciples

Through seeking the Spirit, sharing our stories, and inviting those around us we will make new disciples.

Every Disciplines

Every...

- Week
 - Pastors, Directors & Disciplined Leaders pray & prepare for the Spirit's corporate & personal ministry
 - Pastors, Directors & Disciplined Leaders personally pray for salvation of one unsaved person
 - Pastors, Directors & Disciplined Leaders includes response opportunity for salvation in corporate setting

- Month
 - Pastors, Directors explain or appeal for the Spirit's corporate & personal ministry
 - Boards/lead teams intercede for disciples to be Spirit baptized
 - Disciples shares a personal gospel story outside the corporate setting
 - Disciples share personal soul-winning testimony in corporate setting
- Quarter
 - Church offers response opportunity for disciples to be Spirit baptized
 - Pastors, Directors pray corporately for disciples to be effective soul-winners
 - Disciples invite one unsaved person to accept Christ or to visit church
- Year
 - Church provides in-depth teaching on the person and work of the Spirit
 - Each disciple wins one new disciple for Jesus

RECOMMENDED CURRICULUM:

- Multiply by Francis Chan
- Emotionally Healthy Spirituality and The Emotionally Healthy Church by Peter Scazzero
- Building a Discipling Culture – Mike Breen
- Discipleship by Design – Harvey A. Herman
- Connecting – Paul Stanley
- The Disciple Making Pastor – Bill Hull
- DiscipleShift – by Jim Putman
- Rooted Network – www.experiencerooted.com

APPENDIX B

Ohio Ministry Network Organizational Identity

Mission

Developing leaders to multiply disciples of Jesus by the Spirit's power.

Vision

Recognizing a broken society is the outflow of a weakened church, the Ohio Ministry Network of pastors and church leaders seeks to awaken a sleeping giant to develop and deploy Spirit-empowered leaders for healthy, multiplying churches and ministries to see people forgiven, healed, and whole through a unified ten-year strategic initiative called Ohio for Jesus.

Values

We value **DESPERATION**

In response to staggering brokenness all around us, WE VALUE a relentless pursuit of God's presence and power via worship, repentance, prayer, fasting, Spirit baptism, Bible engagement and holy living.

We value **HONOR**

As an outflow of our love for God, WE VALUE Scripture's mandate to esteem, include and serve each

other with honor, including spiritual elders, community influencers, those in the minority, and the marginalized or suffering.

We value **EXCELLENCE**

Maximizing the effectiveness and authenticity of the Church, WE VALUE modeling a lifestyle and ministry approach marked by biblical intentionality, transparency and stewardship.

We value **COMMUNICATION**

As Great Commission partners, WE VALUE the strategic networking of personnel and resources to communicate the gospel while modeling New Testament patterns of teaching and dialog.

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John is a graduate of Southeastern University and earned his master's degree from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Church Leadership with a focus on Church Life. He is a certified Church Life consultant and an Acts 2 Journey cohort facilitator.

John has a heart and vision for Ohio's churches and pastors, and he enjoys speaking to and visiting with the pastors and churches of the Ohio Ministry Network.

John and his wife, Barb, have two children, David and Danielle, and four grandchildren. In addition to spending time with his family, he enjoys reading, photography, golf, and walking the countryside.

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