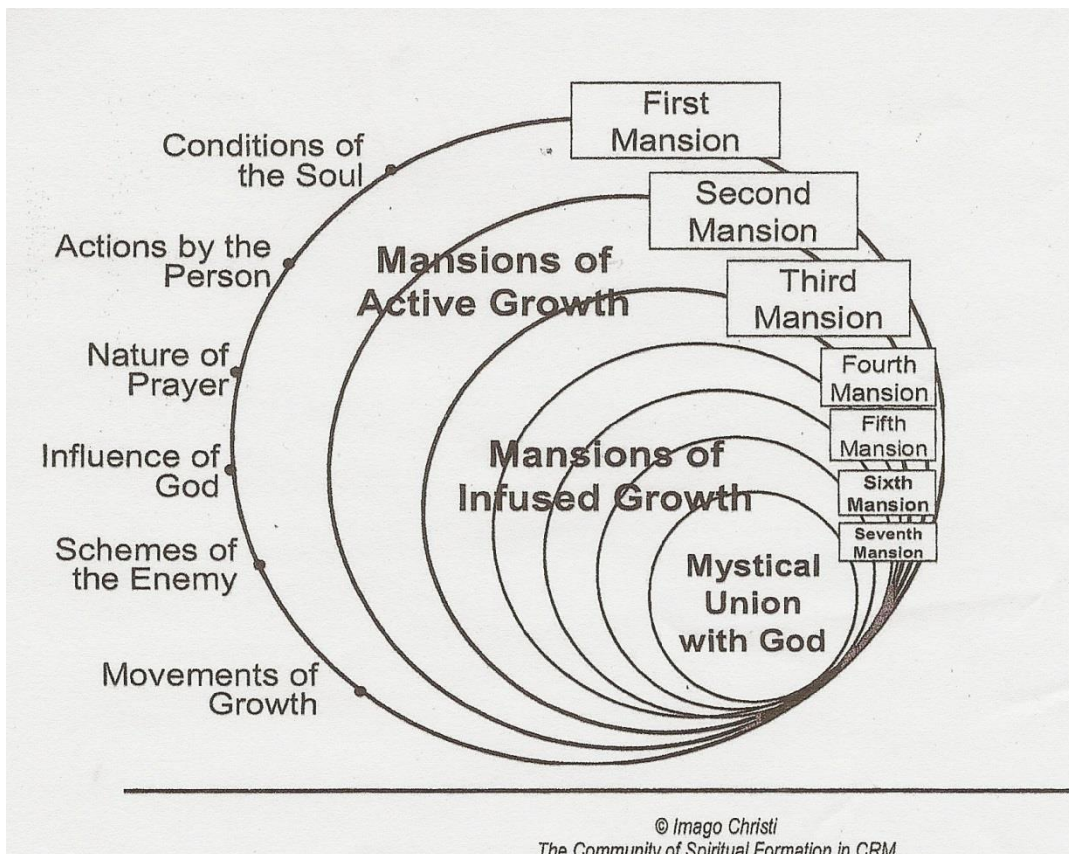


LD – Discipleship 2.3 – Intentionally Discipling Church Leaders

Introduction: As a Seminary student I was challenged to envision a more dynamic discipleship experience for the local church as presented in Acts chapter 2. Two thousand years of the church age has resulted with the acceptance of a more tepid understand rather than the vibrant and alive Spiritual life Scripture promises. This was not always the case during the church age, and we should not be content with our present status quo. Periodically the Spirit ignites a passion that culminates in a revival and reformation. Many Church leaders believe that our present complacency is an indication that the Spirit is about to ignite a new wave of Spiritual Leaders. I pray this is so... come Lord Jesus!

A. INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP: Discipling is much more than merely learning facts, repeating “correct” theology, or spending a moderate amount of time and effort in reading Scripture. It is a life-style where Jesus’ character and nature are being formed in every disciple in the life long process of Sanctification. Such a life-style does not happen by chance. It involves deliberately and intentionally discipling men and women to become the leaders in the Church that God has invited [called] them to become. Obviously, this process is more an art than science. Discipling is a process... a life-long process; rather than a program or a project. Thus arrival is more of an ascending spiral culminating in union with Christ, than a finish line we cross at some determinative location. Tom Ashbrook in his definitive Mansions of the Heart explores Teresa of Avila’s concepts of Spiritual Growth as represented in the spiral diagram below:



In this context Spiritual growth is an ongoing process with some recognizable locational landmarks, and predictable spiritual influences we discover and explore.

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The purpose of this article is to sketch out some concepts that we can apply to further the process of discipleship. Rather than attempting to solve a problem beyond my capabilities, I instead hope to provide here some concepts for leaders to ponder in developing the next generation of church leaders:

1. Scripture presents three capacities in which disciples are invited to serve God. These ministries are presented in the Old Testament and land squarely in the New Testament... New Testament equivalent provided:
 - a. King – Spiritual leader and administrator. The role of the king was to advance the kingdom of God by providing for the social/political context that would allow spiritual growth and health. This is roughly the position of elders in the church.
 - b. Priest – Spiritual ambassador and mediator. The role of the priest was to enable the faithful in being aware and entering into God’s Presence. This is the role of the pastors and worship leaders in the church.
 - c. Prophet – Word ministry of teaching and preaching. The role of the prophet is to make God’s Word known and applicable. This is the role of teaching pastors and lay leaders.
2. All three capacities are aspects of Servant leadership, with the defining quality always being humility – it is a privilege and a great responsibility to receive such an invitation to minister, but it always should be accommodated and accomplished with humility and self-sacrifice.
 - a. First and foremost, we serve God and the people of God... not merely the church organization or administration, etc. It is necessary to know what organization you are involved with and to ascertain whether their values, integrity, and character are a fit with your own. It is naive to presume that just because something is “doing good work” or is identified as a “Christian organization” that it is a proper fit. We need to take personal responsibility for what we do and which organizations we align ourselves with.
 - b. We are invited as faithful sons [and daughters] to partner with the Spirit in furthering God’s will and purpose... remember that we have been bought at a price and will answer to God for what we do in His name.
 - c. The Spirit’s work always begins in the heart and mind of a Christ Follower, and then it works its way through us into the lives of others we engage and serve.
3. We start as disciples and lovers of God and His Word, and as God works this thoroughly into our mind and heart we pass it on to others.
 - a. Pass along what you have learned and experience... we need both aspects of knowing – mentally and relationally for the Truth to become real and vital to those we serve. The medium we work with is the life we live.
 - b. Serious disciples should have several other disciples you are involved with teaching, coaching, and mentoring. When they are ready to pass it along themselves encourage them to do so, and continue to guide them as Paul guided Timothy until they are ready to stand on their own.
 - c. Always have a faith community that supports you and works with you. It is never wise and Scripture doesn’t encourage us to be a lone wolf Christian... we need the advice, input, and

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counsel of others we trust and respect. And we need to support and guidance of other believers as we pursue our callings.

4. Two main leadership positions are indicated in Acts 6 – they are 1) Elders... those who are dedicated to teaching the word and prayer; and 2) Deacons... those who minister to the needs of the Body of believers.
 - a. “Waiting of tables” is not a bad thing... but it was keeping the most capable from doing the best thing... being engaged in Word and prayer ministry. Prioritize your work as good-better-best, and don’t allow the best to be held hostage by the least. However, there are always times in humility that the least or lesser good is appropriate. This takes wisdom and discernment.
 - b. “Prophetic vision” is based on compassion born through our own personal pain in identifying with the pain God suffers when His people suffer, fail, and flounder. Compassion is always delivered in humility, if Spiritual arrogance develops it’s a sure sign you are working in your ego or flesh. It may not necessarily mean your service is in error, but that your motives need to become realigned. Why you do something is as important as what you do... the Lord always weighs the motives (Proverbs 16:1-3).
 - c. Patient and expectant prayer go hand in hand – CS Lewis wrote in *“A Grief Observed”* – “When I lay my questions [about pain and suffering] before God I get no answer. Instead, rather a special sort of ‘no answer.’ As though [God] shook His head not in refusal but in waiving [off] the question. Like [saying], ‘peace child, you do not understand’.” The unspoken understanding in Lewis’ thought is that one day, we will understand. Until then, press into God as a child presses into their parent, and do what God has placed in your heart and before you until He redirects you.
 - d. Enlightened and experiential faith rejoices together in proclaiming, “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet *from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!*” Job 19:25-27 – NASB. It is truly wondrous that the Old Covenant Prophet Job had such a clear understanding of New Covenant eternal life. We now have the benefit of knowing Jesus and the Eternal Life He has invited us into... much more so than the OT leaders did. As such, we now have a greater responsibility before God.

B. DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS – GODLY INTROSPECTION IS AT THE HEART OF AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP:

Scripture demonstrates that the 1st century AD disciples asked many questions of Jesus, the Apostles, and themselves. They demonstrated thoughtful responses to questions and introspection leading to contemplation and discovery. I find it hard to understand why we fail to ask God and one another hard questions about life, faith, and our eternal hope. I believe it is a good habit to routinely return to this habit of thinking and questioning. This is not doubting, but pressing in to understand what you know, what you are learning, and why you are doing something rather than another... it is a test of our thought process as well as our motives and direction.

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Here are some examples of questions for discipling Christians to regularly ponder individually as well as in small groups:

1. Regarding Christian Character:

- a. How is humility shaping your life? Do you see a change in who you were and who you're becoming? This is one of several things you should be journaling about.
- b. How is integrity and honesty developing in you? Do you speak the truth in love? Scripture is a two-edged sword... it may be employed for defense and offense, to heal and to wound. We need to use it to heal others, and as defense against the adversary of our souls.
- c. Are you someone who can be trusted? Are you a thoughtful and reliable confidante? Do others seek your thoughts and counsel?
- d. Where is pride developing in my heart/mind? What are the tell-tale signs? Pride is the primary fault of any spiritual leader.
- e. Do you often feel you need to defend yourself? What attacks precipitate it? What wounds allow these attacks the sensitive opportunity to penetrate us?
- f. When are you most suspicious or distrustful? Does it speak of a justifiable fear or of a character flaw?
- g. Is evidence of Spiritual fruit forming in your life? How does Galatians 5:16-26 apply to you?
- h. Do you tend to measure yourself against others? Is this sober contemplation and evaluation? Or is it a potential problem of being judgmental?
- i. When tempted with disobedience what resources do you rely on to remain obedient? Who do you meet with as a mentor or coach to keep you properly aligned?
- j. Do you consistently do what you know to be right regardless of who is watching? Character has long been described as what you do when no one is watching. It is wise to understand that there will always be someone watching you that you don't expect. When Christ's Character is being formed within, our nature reflects His and we do the things He would do.
- k. Do the people closest to you affirm that your values, actions, words, and attitudes are in alignment with a Gospel centered life? Where to you believe they are on target or off center? Why?
- l. What behaviors/traits of others do you find most offensive? To what extent do you have the same?

2. Regarding our Love of God:

- a. How, when, or where do you most intimately experience Jesus? How often do you go there?
- b. Are you a consistently joyous and peaceful Christian? Would your spouse and best friends agree?
- c. What aspect in your life are you most open and dependent upon God? What is the least? Why?
- d. How do you spend your discretionary time? Do you make time to "waste time" with God? And do you realize that it is very cool to do so with others who are like minded and hearted?

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- e. How often to you radiate the Hope and Love God has instilled in you? Is it a part of your nature? Or only an image you desire to project?
- f. Where is God meeting you in prayer? What Words of love or reproof do you hear? God is always interested in promoting healing and nurturance in our heart and life... even His reproof is intended to heal and bless.
- g. How much time do you spend in Scripture, prayer, meditation? How does God meet you there?
- h. Is Jesus your “Lord and King” or merely your “Savior and friend”? We know that He is both but we tend to begin as immature disciples relying on Jesus as our Savior and Friend... and He will always be so. But it is important that we respond to Jesus as Lord and King... this is the message Jesus constantly presented and challenged His disciples and the Jewish leaders.
- i. Do you think God is satisfied with your Spiritual life? What about your own Spiritual Life do you think He loves the most?
- j. Disciples are Spirit dependent and Spiritually alive Biblical Theologians... to what extent does this describe you?

3. Regarding our Priorities:

- a. Are materialist attachments getting in the way of your walk with Jesus? Meditate upon Matt 6:33 and its context in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-7:27).
- b. What is the theology that you are living? 1) Grace and love, or 2) works and Law, or 3) prosperity and gratitude? Works and Law are good, but are more reflective of the Old Testament Covenant. The New Testament Covenant is based upon the Old, but as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount He is all about Grace and Love. Gratitude is the hallmark of the New Covenant; however Prosperity was considered an Old Covenant proof of God’s love. Prosperity may be in a Christian’s experience, but Gratitude should be in all Christians.
- c. What has God been saying to you regarding your stewardship of His resources? Meaning your time, money, influence, talents, and relational resources? Your “Gifts” are more than your money, God is interested in all the time and resources you possess and invest in His Kingdom. Doesn’t mean we have to give everything away... but we should be contentiously investing appropriately.
- d. What is your normal routine? Sketch out a daily calendar and observe how and where you’re spending your time. What does this say about your priorities? What might you need to change?
- e. To whom are you a good friend? What is it about them that engages you? Are there others you should treat likewise?
- f. Worldly employers expect that your job will not only define who you are but should take precedent over all other priorities, while a Christian disciple’s identity is based on “Imago Dei” and Imago Christi, and our priorities should consider first God, then spouse, family, friends, and ministry in their order of priorities. Do your priorities reflect the world view or God’s Kingdom view?

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- g. What things feed your soul? What things drain your soul? How is your walk with God affected? Do more of the things that feed your soul.

C. EMPLOYING THE TEACHING/COACHING APPROACH TO DISCIPLESHIP:

1. The development of a more serious discipleship training process is what is necessary to support the local church. Most church leaders have recognized the need to train and nurture to purposefully develop more mature believers in their congregation. In the past, the church has been known for both the Word ministry of feeding the body, and equipping lay leaders for their own ministry. In recent years, most churches have focused more on attracting and retaining a congregation through relevant teaching, vibrant worship, and services for the young. All of these recent elements are of course good things and should be done, but the good is often the enemy of the best as lay leaders are not adequately being developed for this present generation as well as for future generations.
2. For more effectively developing leadership and discipleship I believe that employing a more integrated “Three-fold Discipleship Approach” is appropriate including:
 - a. Biblical Literacy – in forming the Mind of Christ. This is knowing God’s Word... what it says, and how to apply it.
 - b. Spiritual Formation – in forming the heart of Christ. This is loving God and others... it is the Great Commandment.
 - c. Leadership Development – in forming the mission of Christ. This is doing the work of advancing the Kingdom of God... it is the Great Commission.

These three necessarily go together in a holistic manner – much like a sailboat, to be functional and reliable it needs: 1) an adequate keel to stabilize it... likened to Biblical Literacy; 2) a sail to power us which is a personal vital relationship with God that drives and motivates us... likened to Spiritual Formation; and 3) a tiller in the hands of a Spirit dependent disciple... likened to Leadership Development. I see this concept best advanced in a more collaborative team teaching/coaching approach in small communities.

3. To this end, I have developed an extensive array of articles and papers from my Western Seminary notes and assignments, as well as from various seminars and research projects available, and they are provided for free online in pdf format at www.authenticdiscipleship.org.
 - a. Depending on the type of discipleship relationship you are developing, there are at least 3 group approaches:
 - i. For mentoring and coaching, this should be one on one.
 - ii. For small group study and accountability, this should be 3-6.
 - iii. For a medium size group study in more of a classroom approach, the optimum size group for discipleship training is between 12 and 24.
4. The www.authenticdiscipleship.org materials have been developed for use in these three group environments lead by a mature lay leader or elder. Those who have committed to a series of training

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classes, I believe that they should begin with hermeneutics which teaches us how the Bible communicates, and then continue through remaining articles of the three-fold approach.

- a. The intention is to develop a more focused and balanced discipleship paradigm of teacher/coaches with the three-fold approach of Biblical Literacy, Spiritual Formation, and Leadership Development.
 - b. The more mature disciples should be engaged to challenge a group with developing a passion for knowing and loving God, to develop core Biblical competency, and then then in turn be able to develop their own groups of disciples.
 - c. I would expect these teacher/coaches to select three or four disciples from their medium group who emerge as particularly interested and talented individuals for additional personal mentoring with the hope that they would lead similar discipleship groups.
 - d. Ultimately, you cannot pass along what you don't have. A passionate love of God is more "caught than taught." Meaning you catch it like a Holy infection from one who is vitally alive in God.
5. There are a number of problems that may derive from older "conventional" methods of developing a disciple from a traditional "teaching approach" rather than an interactive & collaborative "teaching/coaching approach" coupled with a more holistic and integrated mind/heart/hands methodology. Historically, the church has focused on informing their congregation members and observing conformation to desired behavioral goals, rather than encouraging and expecting transformational living through committed discipleship in a teaching/coaching relationship. By far the greatest advantage of a teaching/coaching approach is the recognition that each believer has within them all they need to advance personally and spiritually – they have their own God given abilities and resources, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to help and guide them along their journey.
- a. Teacher/coaches continually affirm the responsibility of the individual disciple for their own life before God. The goal is to develop disciples who desire to please God and honor Him with their own life.
 - b. The teacher/coach's role is to come alongside a disciple already on their spiritual journey and encourage and enable them to more consistently develop according to their own timing and priorities along the way: 1) helping them to see what they already know; 2) to keep focused on their own God given purpose; 3) to continue moving on their God directed path.
 - c. The traditional discipleship approach typically employed is based upon programmatic approaches that ironically create and maintain a believer's dependency upon the church, rather than their personal maturity and direct dependency upon God. The church-dependent tend to be more tractable and are often left in a less mature spiritual state, while the God-dependent are more independent thinking, more mature, more submitted to God's leading, and more dangerous to our spiritual adversary. They are also ultimately much more helpful in advancing the Kingdom of God through the local church.

6. Along these lines, Greg Hawkins and Cally Patterson in their book Reveal,¹ identified the tendency of many local churches to provide excellent introductory programs for the early stages of Christian growth, which was then followed by the failure of the church to challenge and harness the more mature Christians in their congregations who desired to go deeper in their spiritual relationship and in service to the Body of Christ. They noted that while many of the less mature were satisfied with their nominal church experience, that the most mature in the Body were not satisfied and longed for more active engagement in ministry. Unfortunately, the failure to adequately engage these maturing disciples led to a high percentage of them considering leaving their church. These more mature believers were more dependent upon God than the church, and unfortunately the church found no creative means to engage them in service.
7. It is important for us to note that the local church is a “Bifurcated Entity” – on one hand it is the earthly “Organization” that allows for corporate meetings and worship, and on the other hand it is the “Organism” that is the mystical Spiritual Body of Christ united by the Blood of the Lamb and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. The organization is a part of this fallen world that has been corrupted by Sin, and longs for the second coming of Jesus when the material world will be redeemed and made perfect.
 - b. The Organism is already perfect as a consequence of Jesus’ first coming, and with the indwelling Spirit we already enjoy God’s Perfection.
 - c. All too often the “organization” is the encouraged focus of activity rather than the “Organism.” A Teaching/Coaching Approach to three-fold Discipleship presents a wonderful way to work through the former to go on into the latter. Along these lines... most local churches invest a disproportionate amount of resources in the organization, and often neglect or underserve the Organism. This is a critical error.
8. Another problem that we as Christian leaders need to consider is how we can work together for the benefit and unity of the Church at large... locally and regionally, identified as numerous local denominations and congregational bodies. We need to fight for a more interconnected approach to advance the cause of Christ, and avoid the imposition of restrictive and segregational theological positions. Too often we define things by “what they are not” rather than “what they are.” Instead we should focus on the major truths that serve to integrate us, rather than focus on the minor aspects that separate us. [See Biblical Literacy/Theology/Introduction to Theology – Degrees of Certainty... <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Introduction%20to%20Theology.pdf>].
9. We understand that God has made each individual uniquely, and each person has the Holy Spirit indwelling them to guide them on our own unique Spiritual journey. Scripture teaches that we are each different elements of a unified body defined as an “Organism” (Romans 12:4-5). Yet most discipleship training efforts tend to employ a “one size fits all” approach that forces organizational conformity and programmatic uniformity. A teaching/coach approach allows for more personalized training and development, and for the Spirit to play a much greater role in the discipleship process. Accordingly,

¹ Hawkins & Parkson. Reveal: Where are You? Willow Creek Association, 2007

what tends to be less stressed in most discipleship efforts is that each person is responsible before God for their own Spiritual development. An effective teaching/coaching approach would provide a wonderful means to help spur on the most mature to their best possible God-given potential.

10. As Church leaders we also face another problem over the emphasis on the corporate service as the principal means of teaching and outreach. Too many people come to church on Sunday for their weekly “spiritual meal” and unfortunately they leave “fat, dumb, and happy” to engage in their normal world situations, and do not think about spiritual matters until the next service. That is not how God intended disciples to live in community. Disciples are to be centered on loving and serving God “24/7” and not just at church sponsored functions. It is how we live out our lives day by day. We do a disservice to believers when we dumb down the message or remove individual responsibility that accompanies the high calling to discipleship. Rather, we should be encouraging believers to go deeper in their Spiritual journey, pressing on to maturity rather than being content to remain immature and dependent upon weekly congregational spiritual milk.
11. Each believer has a place in the Body of Christ – which is the mystical union of disciples joined by the Holy Spirit. We should be encouraging one another to grow, to challenge each other to see the Spiritual reality as the ultimate reality, and to engage the dominant society in a loving Christian counter-cultural way. It is both surprising and condemning that the statistics for divorce, adultery, and other moral failings are nearly identical in the church community as in the dominant society that surrounds it. God’s people can and must do better than this. But the problem remains that we have capitulated to the worldly standard of entertainment and service selections, instead of aspiring to a higher spiritual standard. This is not saying that excellence and entertainment are bad or cannot be a means for blessing the community of God’s people, but the higher standard needs to be lifted up and aspired to. A more integrated approach to discipleship is a wonderful way to break this cycle of settling for less.

D. INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP INVOLVES AN INTEGRATED APPROACH WITH BIBLICAL LITERACY, SPIRITUAL FORMATION, AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

1. What does it take to be conduits of God’s Love? It is helpful to understand the concept of a “Spiritual Trellis” – meaning a structure that helps form and arranges intentional growth. Think of this as how a vine grows best on a trellis support:
 - a. **Read Matthew 11:28-30 – from the Amplified Version** – Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden *and* overburdened, and I will cause you to rest. [I will ease and relieve and refresh your souls.] Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble (lowly) in heart, and you will find rest (relief and ease and refreshment and recreation and blessed quiet) for your souls. [Jer. 6:16] For My yoke is wholesome (useful, good—not harsh, hard, sharp, or pressing, but comfortable, gracious, and pleasant), and My burden is light *and* easy to be borne. **Also from the Living Version** – Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden

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I give you is light.”

- b. **Underline the words that speak to you in the verses above.**
 - i. **What calls to you? Why does it call to you? Learn to recognize the “Unforced Rhythms of Grace” as God invites us into His peace and rest.**
 - ii. **What are you Resisting? Is there something that God is inviting you into that you don’t want to hear or respond to? Maybe some old pain or fear that needs tending too? Learn to live freely and lightly.**

2. Discipleship thoughts that come out of this verse:

- a. **The Great Commission is more of an accompanying and less of an ascending... it is ‘traveling with’ others in responding to God’s invitations.**
- b. **‘Rest’ – our life is not just about work... we need Sabbath rest as well. Scripture teaches that we are slaves no longer; we are free to embrace Grace and accept His rest. Too many disciples use their ‘doing’ as a measure of their faithfulness, rather than their ‘being’ of their character meaning who they are in Christ. Jesus reminds us there is a rhythm that includes rest and relaxation, joy and play, as well as work and struggle, including even pain and suffering.**
- c. **‘Identify and engage’ a piece of Sabbath in intentional intimacy each day... use this time to read Scripture, to accomplish your journaling, and to pray to find and engage your own rhythm of Grace. Use this time to set up your weekly study... it is best to do a piece of it daily, but occasionally life will get in the way and you’ll need to do a larger chunk at one time. Remember these are times that God is inviting us to enter into His rest... we just need to make time to engage Him, look for what He is saying to us or inviting us into, and accept it as a gift of grace.**

3. Discipleship engages my personal identity in relation to God:

- a. **How would you describe yourself to people you don’t really know? Does God show up in your description?**
- b. **How would you describe your Spiritual Life up to this point? What demonstrable difference has God actually made in you?**
- c. **What do you hope/expect from your involvement in intentional discipleship? Are you seeking God by pressing into Him? Realize that spiritual rhythms develop the capacity to engage God by looking for and sensing His Presence, and then deliberately pressing into Him.**

4. Discipleship develops best in a community of like-minded people. In developing a discipling community there are crucial “Group Expectations” that need to be understood as real, validated, clear, and reinforced. These are the rules of engagement that will define our interaction in all of our meetings together:

- a. **Participation – everyone is expected to engage and participate. No mere sight-seeing allowed. This experience depends on each of us being prayerfully engaged and actively involved.**
- b. **Confidentiality – we are free to say whatever God places on our hearts, and free to disclose our innermost fears and struggles. For this to work, everyone must feel safe and protected... it is not OK to breach this trust.**

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- c. **Journaling** – can be one of the key components in marking our growth because it helps to formalize a record of what has been happening in the individual during our encounters with God in real time. Periodic review of these occurrences in a contemplational manner, often opens the door to further growth and dependence. Once you realize what God has been doing, it becomes easier to look for His ongoing Presence and actions.
- d. **Preparation** – each one is expected to be fully engaged, and to do so you need to do any assigned study or work. We need to realize that we’re all adults here! It’s not OK to shortchange yourself, and it is worse to short change each other, and worst of all to short change God.
- e. **Respect** – each one has something to contribute, and it needs to be heard and valued. Make room for each other to engage and be heard. This is a big deal... don’t be a road hog, employ time management and restrain your conversations as necessary to make room for others to engage. And respect the time commitments of others... work within the allotted time we agreed to.
- f. **Goal** – this discipleship group experience is about “Soul Care” and not “Therapy.” We want to see what God is doing and catch up with the rhythms of the Spirit in our own life, and to witness what is going on in others. This is real! It is not a Christian form of voodoo, God wants to be engaged, heard, and found... learn to pay attention and look for Him!
- g. **Schedule & Duration** – it should be clearly understood that we all need to be on time every time. Respect for each other means showing up prepared when you’re supposed to and engage one another in love looking for truth and spiritual life insight. If you’re going to be late... call and let us know. If something comes up and you have to miss... you owe the group an explanation and an apology... we’re counting on your participation!
- h. **Franchise ownership** – we each need to be individually and collectively bought in, even when there are parts that make us nervous or that we like less than another. We need to accept that we own this group as a co-opt! Treat one another as partners and fellow journeyers.
- i. **Be Real** – be real with yourself, with God, and with each other. Falseness and disingenuousness are unacceptable... this will undermine our efforts to engage and encourage spiritual transformation.
- j. **Acceptance and no Condemnation** – Jesus taught the Woman at the Well... 1st about herself, then about the Kingdom, and then about Himself. Jesus never condoned what she did, but He didn’t condemn her either... as a result she responded to His Words of Spirit and Truth. My friend Tom Smith once said to me as a young man amid my own moral failure – “I will allow you the same amount of confusion that I allow myself, and that’s considerable!” No judgment, no condemnation, no excuses... it was a huge relief for me.
- k. **Scripture is our only Authoritative Standard** – we need to know what the Scripture says and how to apply it to our lives. God will not require from us what He has not already revealed in His Word. It is thus important to know what He said and what it means... this interpretative process is what we call “Hermeneutics” – the art of interpreting Scripture.

D. STUDY & IMPARTATION:

1. Henry Nouwen – “Don’t worry and focus on what you do; instead focus on how God can use you to bless and meet the needs of others.”
2. David Smith – “Nothing has made Grace more real than sin. There is nothing you have done or can do that will surprise God or invalidate His Grace... accept grace and apply it liberally, remembering that grace is strong medicine for the wounds of our heart and mind.”
3. Typical Discipling Meeting Plan – involves three things... Gather, Learn, Respond:
 - a. Gather – the group will assemble in preliminary engagement to welcome and engage one another and the Spirit:
 - i. At each meeting, take the time to understand the temperature of the group... what is the level of energy, engagement, openness, etc. Do you sense blockages or distractions? Speak into them, pray into them.
 - ii. Come prepared to give your own introduction of the key topic and thoughts of the excursion... be prepared for a time of exploration and discovery.
 - iii. Establish a welcoming attitude – gather as a circle as friends and peers anticipating engagement with God.
 - iv. The gather is important to transition from our daily activities to be present to each other in this spiritual environment. Come expecting engagement!
 - b. Learn – it always helps to focus on the major thought being addressed in the conversation topic.
 - i. The Talk before the Talk – this is about reframing our perspective to see where we’re going... like a sightseer calling out points of interest along a drive.
 - ii. Mindset of an explorer – we need to understand and communicate why this topic is important to me personally and what I learned about myself through it.
 - iii. Don’t force going through the entire lesson plan... instead be content to hit upon 3-4 main points – sort of like how a stone skips on the water. Getting together in our group and then facilitating the session seeks to make the lesson known, memorable, and applicable.
 - c. Respond – what has happened in you as you worked through the material.
 - i. Invite an engaged discovery as you progress through the gathering’s review.
 - ii. Notice what you are wrestling with as you engaged the material... what do you ‘hear’ God whispering to you? What troubles you? These are the things that God often wants access to work Grace out through your life that we can sense when alert.
 - iii. Remember, we each have much to say and offer one another... and much to receive as well. Give of yourself, and receive from each other.