

# **Talmidim**

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**Talmidim/ Michael LaBorn.** -- 1st Ed.

ISBN 978-1729746868

Dedication to Bishop Carlis Moody Sr

*I have only known you for a few years, but I am so deeply inspired by the lifetime of faithfulness you have demonstrated. Reading your books, hearing your stories, it reminds me that there is hope. That despite all of my own failures and mistakes, if I run the race, there will come a day where others will look at me and see a man like you. Thank you so much for letting me be a part of your legacy. I love you, Grandpa.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I may get all of the recognition, but a book like this is never the product of one person. So many people have been instrumental in developing the way I think and the way I lead. They are all partially responsible for the teaching in this book.

First and foremost, I am so grateful to serve a God who not only loves me, but loves me enough to never let me sit still. I am so grateful for the passion He has shut up in my bones.

Second, my wife Elizabeth. Although you have only been in my life for the second half of my journey, I can see your fingerprints all over my work. The times you supported my passions even when I failed to deserve it. The times you've risked your life letting the girls do your hair so that I was free to write and study. The times you patiently let me work when I really should have been paying better attention to you. Thank you. You are an incredible woman and you deserve just as much of the credit for this work.

Mike Pearson, my passion for discipleship ran through your veins first. Thank you. There are so many men and women who love God deeper today because you took the time to love me.

Sarah Berning, thank you for letting me lecture you on every single concept I added to this book. Your encouraging nods and appropriate chuckles were more helpful than you know.

To all of my kiddos, thank you for letting me practice on you. Sorry if I screwed any of you up!

And lastly, to my children. Olivia, every time you tell me how much you love Jesus, my heart grows more desperate to make sure more of my generation is teaching their children to know Him. And Anastasia, whenever I needed inspiration

during the writing of this book, I would close my eyes and remember your big smiling face as you said your nightly prayer. You two have made me only more passionate for developing men and women of God. Loving you, and dreaming for you, it inspires me. Thank you for letting me love you.



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# *Introduction*

Growing up in the Church, my generation was constantly being told that we were better equipped to finish the mission of Jesus than any generation that had come before. Pastors and Youth Leaders across the nation told us that we would go places that previous generations had not been able to. They told us that God had anointed us to bring the gospel to the furthest reaches of the world and that we had been given a calling by God to bring change to the Church. That we would wake up God's people and remind them of who they are.

I grew up hearing this from every direction. It seemed that the Church, as a whole, was in consensus. My generation would be a generation of change for the body of Jesus and consequently, for the world.

So imagine my heartbreak when ten years later, I finally began voicing that prophesied passion for change and growth in the Church, and most of my generation had already walked away.

I don't know if I believe the hype. I don't know if God has anointed my generation to finish the work. To reach the last unreached people groups of the world. I don't know if we have been chosen to change the world. Maybe we have been, maybe we haven't. But I can tell you this. My generation is quickly giving up. We are walking away in droves. Less young people are staying with the Church once they reach adulthood than in any other generation. And instead

of sitting in our offices and chalking it up to the “offendable spirit” of the millennial generation, maybe we need to do something about it. Maybe we need to accept that something is wrong and fix it.

Discipleship is the method by which God designed the Church to grow. But as a whole, the Western Church has either abandoned discipleship, or turned it into something it was never designed to be. That is why this book exists.

If we are going to finish the work Jesus left us to do, we have to bring health back into the body of Jesus. And the only way to do that is through biblical and healthy discipleship. Having said that, discipleship is not something that can be taught in a few simple steps. It requires a real shift in your thinking. Which is why I want to encourage you not to rush through this book. Take time. Stop, think, meditate, grow. Let’s develop something real together, and then let’s change the world.

*Part One: THE  
FOUNDATIONS*



## *Be Fruitful and Multiply*

The Word of God is, without question, the most influential book in existence. Regardless of your spiritual affiliation or religious devotion, the likelihood is that you will recognize and even be able to quote dozens of passages from the Bible. Even the most avid critics of Christianity have, at some point in their life, heard the Word of God quoted or have even read it themselves. They may even have a dusty copy on one of their bookshelves. There is no denying the Bible's popularity. Especially in America, biblical principles are so commonplace that even those who claim to hate religion casually use them in their personal philosophizing. It's just the way it is. If you are breathing air in the western part of the world, you have heard John 3:16 at least a hundred times, you can probably quote the Lord's Prayer without any hesitation and the likelihood is that you could not only quote, but teach on, at least one portion of the beatitudes. God's Word, although largely not respected or understood in this culture, is familiar to the majority of western civilization.

Another passage of scripture that has become a household quote in western culture comes right from my favorite book of

the bible: Genesis. It is that quote I would like to take this chapter to unpack for you:

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “**Be fruitful and multiply** and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*  
*Genesis 1:27-28 (emphasis my own)*

## be fruitful and multiply

I am a firm believer that the Word of God only makes sense if it is read in context. Which is why, as we explore scripture together in this book, I will do my very best to explain why I interpret things the way that I do. I don't want you to just accept my understanding. I want you to understand it yourself. Which brings me back to the text.

I have heard dozens of people teach on this text and, without exception, it is used to encourage traditional family values as the original command. And although that interpretation is not inappropriate, it is not necessarily complete either. To best understand this text, we need to ask ourselves a couple of questions. Starting with what the actual command meant.



## what did God actually command

This will be our easiest question to answer as we unpack this text together. God created man to be in His own image, which we know from Genesis 1:26 is wrapped up in community. Referring to His desire to create humanity, God referred to Himself in the plural, demonstrating for us that community is a foundational part of His very identity. A concept that we are very familiar with as Christians. By telling Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply”, he was telling them to expand their family. Or, as I am sure you have already figured out, to procreate. But that is not the end of the story. Why God commanded them to procreate is just as important as the actual command itself.

## why did God command this

As we have already established, in the very process of planning out humanity’s design, God made it very clear that community is a foundational part of His nature. And it is reasonable to assume that in the creation of a people “in His image”, He would design them to function from an intimate sense of community as well. Which we see immediately demonstrated by the fact that He created humanity “male and female”, forcing them to work together and to complement one another in order to satisfy His design. Looking at Adam, God’s first reflection was that it “was not good for man to be alone”<sup>1</sup>.

Community is foundational to the design of humanity.

I say all of this because the text we are looking at shows God commanded Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” and to “take dominion” over creation, suggesting that the purpose of procreation was to expand the community of humanity for the

purpose of ruling within creation. They weren't separate commands. In one breath, God laid out the entire design for His creation. He made mankind to rule the earth *together*.

Procreation was not about the preservation of humanity. Prior to the fall, humanity was designed to live forever<sup>1</sup>. If community were not such a fundamental part of our design, Adam could have just ruled creation on His own forever. But instead they were commanded to bear children so that they could expand the community God had designed them to become, and to better equip themselves to live out His design for creation itself. To rule *together*.

### does this still mean the same thing

Enabling Adam and Eve to reproduce and then commanding them to do so had less to do with giving them the chance to experience parenthood and much more to do with steering humanity toward its responsibility to look and rule the way God did. It was about community.

There's only one problem. The moment sin entered the world, procreation stopped expanding the community of God. From that moment forward, procreation added to a sinful community and therefore did not satisfy its purpose. We could "multiply", but we were no longer capable of being "fruitful". Which begs the question: If having children stopped being able to expand God's community at the tree, are we still required to have them?

## are we required to have children

In Matthew 19, Jesus was addressing the subject of divorce and, in response to the rigid standard He had set, the disciples asked Jesus if it wasn't just better to not be married. Jesus replied, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.<sup>III</sup>"

A few decades later, Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to get married if they struggled with sexual temptation, and he made two similar statements. "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman<sup>IV</sup>" and "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.<sup>V</sup>"

Now here we are, roughly two thousand years later, still teaching the Church that building a family is the height of God's desire for us when Jesus, Himself encouraged those of us who can handle celibacy to choose to do so. Is marriage an incredible blessing? Yes. Are children capable of teaching us things about the love of God that will change us forever? Absolutely. I am in no way suggesting that you have been steering in the wrong direction if you chose to raise a family. Raising a family is honorable and beautiful. But in no way can anyone tell you that you are biblically required to.

The initial design for procreation was that through the reproduction of ourselves we would further develop the community of God. With the introduction of sin into the world, man became so fully corrupt that even our offspring are sinful upon their conception<sup>VI</sup>. And with our children being sinful by nature, they

cannot, by definition, expand the community of God. So what are we to do now?

## discipleship

*“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

*Acts 2:44-47*

I want to reiterate that I am not anti-family. I have a family. An incredible family. I would not trade them for the world. What I am showing you here is what I see in the Word of God. I am not pushing an agenda or pressing for a “new revelation”. I am just showing you what is clearly laid out in the Word of God. When the first Adam died at the tree, the community of God died with him and humanity lost its ability to develop that community. But miraculously, we received a second chance. God gave us a second Adam, and when that second Adam died at his own tree, that community was reborn and with its rebirth came a new method of reproduction: discipleship.

I am tempted to caution you. I’m tempted to tell you how much time and energy discipleship will take when it is done right, and to caution you to not do it at all if you aren’t prepared to give it your everything. But I can’t. Discipleship is the only

tool we have for the healthy development of the body of Jesus. It is the satisfaction of the very first command God gave us and you *must* do it. So instead of cautioning you to run, I am going to challenge you to rise to the occasion. Search out the nature of discipleship, both theologically and practically, and give yourself over to raising young men and women of God. This isn't something you can afford to ignore.

Be fruitful. Multiply.

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<sup>I</sup> Genesis 2:18

<sup>II</sup> Genesis 3:22

<sup>III</sup> Matthew 19:11b-12

<sup>IV</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:1

<sup>V</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:8

<sup>VI</sup> Psalm 51:5



## *Common Mistakes*

Every great movement comes with its own mistakes. Whether those mistakes ruin the momentum of the movement largely depends on the character of the people who make them. I am writing this book because I am aware that most men and women of God, at some point, attempt to make disciples. And most of those same men and women make some pretty major mistakes early on that discourage them from continuing down this important and very necessary path. Don't give up. Without discipleship, the Church cannot grow any depth. Without discipleship, our churches fill up with men and women who are enamored by the thought of God with no actual relationship with Him. Without discipleship, the Church cannot be what Jesus died for it to become. We need you. Discipleship matters.

It blows my mind to think about how little I actually knew about discipleship when I first began teaching young believers. I was so hungry to effect change, and with no one to teach me, I made so many mistakes. Mistakes I could have easily avoided if discipleship was a flourishing culture in the American church, with mature believers to teach me. Instead, I had to learn everything the hard way. This chapter is my attempt to

point out a few traps that I, myself, have fallen into while making disciples, as well as traps I've watched others walk into. If you pay attention and avoid these easy, but deadly, traps, you may just find yourself effecting real change.

### nurturing gifts, not people

I began pouring into Bristol's life when he was very new to the faith. He had come back from a youth camp freshly converted and desperately in love with Jesus. I invited him and a group of other freshly converted and excited young people to start meeting with me to learn and grow together. It was an incredible time of pursuing God. Hungry to grow closer to God, Bristol took every opportunity to grow and learn. He searched out the scriptures, hounded me with questions night and day, showed up at our house with a Bible and a pen regularly and expectantly. He was the real deal. He was genuinely hungry for God.

As Bristol pursued God, he not only grew in his understanding of God but also in his giftedness. As he grew closer to God, his passion to know God quickly became a passion to make Him known. He became known for his bold and regular presentation of the gospel, for his passion for God's presence and prayer, and for his ability to communicate truth. The same way he constantly sought me out to learn and grow, others began to search him out. His gifts grew so fast and so naturally that they quickly outshined him. What I mean by that is, people saw his usefulness and his extraordinary gifts and they often didn't see *him* because they were so busy looking at those gifts.

I wish that I could say that I noticed a problem right away and addressed it. But I didn't. When the youth pastors and ministry



leaders in our church and area began to notice Bristol, I called it “fruit”. I was so busy being proud of him for the incredible growth in his life that I didn’t notice him vanishing amidst the attention. I didn’t notice him having less and less time for genuine community because he was so busy being the church’s prodigy. I didn’t notice the hungry young man slowly drifting away from himself because he was so weighed down with the responsibility of being “gifted”. I didn’t protect him.

Eventually, he walked away from the Church completely. Although he did eventually recommit himself to Jesus and go on to develop into a mature and effective man of God, he spent a year of his life running from Jesus. One day he was so excited to be like Jesus that he was filling a bathtub and trying to walk across the water, and the next he was hiding from his Christian friends and compromising every boundary he had set for himself. The reality of being seen but never known cannot develop mature Christians. Young men and women have to be more than the benefit they can bring the Church. We have to see them. We have to love them. We have to know them for who they are and pour into them as people. One thing I always say to the young people I teach is, “Your gifts develop naturally. Community is the only thing you need to fight for.”

I absolutely believe that. I’ve experienced it time and time again. If you want to raise healthy disciples, you need to be intentional about pouring into them as people and not treating them like assets to the Church. Furthermore, you need to be the voice that protects them when others try to treat them that way. They are not mature enough to know the difference between spiritual growth and dangerous flattery.

Which brings me to the next mistake I would like to highlight.

## giving newbs a platform

As Christian leaders, we get very excited when new believers get passionate about the Kingdom. When we see new converts growing in their understanding of the Word, or demonstrating natural leadership, we get so excited that we will do anything to encourage that. Our natural response to passionate faith is to provide a platform for ministry, thinking that giving them “ownership” will not only inspire them to go deeper, but will also inspire others to get real.

In theory, it's not a bad move. But the result is rarely spiritual maturity. Some people, like Bristol, get overwhelmed and run. Others, however are like my buddy Yaakov. Instead of running because he didn't want the pressure, Yaakov embraced the pressure and let it convince him that he had to be someone he wasn't. As a result, he ended up backing himself into a corner and forfeiting his growth for the sake of deserving his position.

*Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? **He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.***

*1 Timothy 3:2-6 (emphasis mine)*

Yaakov grew up in the Church, but he didn't really commit himself to Jesus until he was an adult. Regretting all the wasted

years, he threw himself into the work of the kingdom immediately. He signed up to serve in his local church's youth ministry, began discipling young adults, and threw himself into as many ministries as he could manage with his schedule. He pulled away from all of the unhealthy relationships in his life, got his swearing under control and began to teach the Word of God to others.

On the surface, he had it all together. Seeing that and his passion for leadership, his Church leaders began giving him opportunities to not only serve, but to lead. He became a central leader in multiple ministries and became someone others felt they could lean on when they needed to grow. Once again, on the surface, things were beautiful. However, unfortunately we go a little deeper than the surface as human beings. Underneath the well prepared sermons and the twenty-plus hours of service each week, Yaakov was barely functioning. He only opened his bible to prepare sermons, didn't pray unless someone asked him to, and although he had dealt with all of his outward issues, he was losing his battle with pride, pornography and all of its companions.

Yaakov was an incredible young man, and his hunger for God was very real, but with each new level of responsibility, it became harder and harder for him to grow. Those who should have been teaching him started to see him as a co-laborer and failed to pour into his life. And the more people leaned on him, the more ashamed he was to say that he needed help. Instead of growing, Yaakov kept his secrets and just dedicated himself harder to the ministry to make up for his short comings.

And do you want to know the saddest part of this story? This is such a common story in the church that I guarantee you a dozen young men are reading this book and are about to text

me to ask if they are Yaakov. That is how regularly I come across this. There is a reason Paul said not to choose fresh converts for leadership. As a discipler, you need to be intimately aware that your disciples need room to grow.

Leadership, if done from a place of maturity and intimacy with God, is not draining. Jesus said His burden was light and his yoke was easy<sup>vii</sup>. He meant it. Done right, pouring into the Church is natural and exhilarating. But when we put people behind a pulpit or in front of the prayer line before they have developed a real and deep relationship with God, we force them to choose between a position in the body and growth in their relationship with Jesus. Most choose the position and spend a career (because that's what ministry becomes for them) drained and complaining about needing rest, until finally they crack and expose the unhealthiness they let fester inside.

Please don't set your disciples up for failure. Give them room to grow. In our culture, we equate spiritual leadership with spiritual maturity, and as a result, the moment people get serious for Jesus they begin seeking spiritual leadership. Give them what they need, not what they want. Give them room to grow. The amount of young people I have seen get stuck in shallow relationships with God because their leaders allowed them to jump into ministry before they knew God would blow your mind. Spare your disciples the major humbling that *will* come later by making them grow before letting them lead.

discipline: too little,  
too much

I am going to share Javan and Angela's story with you, but this story could easily represent half a dozen young couples I have come across during my time in ministry. Which is why I am sharing it. It's why I am sharing all of these stories. These are not isolated incidences. They are the norm in American Christianity.

Javan and Angela are a young couple I met from another Church in our area. They were both heavily involved in leadership within their home church and were serving on a pretty regular basis. They were really the perfect couple. They both loved God, both served the Church, and both openly lived righteous lives...on the surface. Behind the scenes, it eventually became public knowledge that they were having a sexual relationship. Their Pastor's response was to remove Angela from ministry and to distance himself from her entirely.

Only Angela.

After removing Angela from leadership, Javan continued to serve in every capacity he had before. Even getting more responsibilities. Angela's friends and family were outraged, but from my perspective, both of these young people were failed in that situation.

Although Angela did need to be removed from leadership, she needed much more than that. She needed the men and women who had been pouring into her life to rally around her and to help her develop her character and her relationship with God deeper. She needed discipleship to intensify. Instead, everyone disassociated with her even after she repented and changed her life. And Javan, though a valuable asset to the

church, needed the exact same thing. Instead of praising his gifts, he needed to be humbled before the Lord and taught what real intimacy with God looks like.

Sin does not condemn us when we are In Christ. However, and listen closely, it does reveal the condition of our relationship with God and it shows us just how well we understand our identity.

*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*

*1 John 1:5-7*

This is not to say that if we ever sin, we are not saved. In fact, the text goes on to say that we are liars if we say we have not sinned. The point of this text is to say that once we come into Christ, His nature will naturally change the way we live and think, and we will begin to live the way He does. In righteousness. Real relationship with God, meaning an actual community with Him – not just a promise, changes us fundamentally. So when we continue to walk in habitual sin, it is an indicator that something about our community with God is not right. We shouldn't ignore it.

As leaders in the house of God, we have to pay attention to what is happening in the lives of our disciples. It is not enough to just teach them theology and to lead a song or two on the acoustic once a week at Bible study. We need to know them intimately. We need to understand the way they think and pay

attention to the way they live their lives. Because their lives are what speak for them. Every Christian who is serious about Church thinks they are a healthy Christian, but their lives will never lie about them. If you do not know them intimately, all you will see is the surface level that they have worked hard to shape into an acceptable story. If you want to see the real story, you have to know them intimately.

And once you know them, you have to be absolutely determined to shape them into something that looks like Jesus. That's really what I want to talk about here. If you spend any real amount of time in ministry, you *will* encounter Javals and Angelas. I have had disciples get pregnant, get people pregnant, fall back into drugs, text me drunk, get into fights, lie to my face, struggle with habitual sin, the works. Sin is something you will absolutely have to deal with if you are raising Christians, and that is something we will talk about more in depth later, but for now let me say this: If you want to raise healthy men and women of God, you need to be absolutely determined to shape them into something that looks like Jesus. You cannot ignore sin and you cannot shut people out of your life because they disappoint you. Obviously, there are biblical parameters for when you need to shake the dust off your feet and move on, but until they make a conscious decision to live in open sin, you need to remain faithful to correct them *and love* them in the midst of their humanity.

Discipline has to be a part of discipleship. We cannot ignore problems or chase problem children away. Both destroy lives.

## overshadowing your prodigy

One of the very first mistakes I made in discipleship involved a guy named John. John was a fresh convert, and I was teaching him basic theology and helping him to develop an intimate relationship with God. We spent a lot of time together praying, seeking God, worshipping and studying the Word. To be honest, we were inseparable. We spent time together almost every day and he was growing fairly quickly. Now, there were many mistakes I made while teaching John, as he was one of the first people I ever tried to teach, but the most notable was my failure to acknowledge him as an individual.

For this to make sense, you need to know that I am a pretty charismatic individual. I am loud, and friendly and I may just happen to have a gift or two. Being a quiet person, John's personality was quickly swallowed up.

For months, we sought God together. I taught him how to pray, how to read the Word, how to chase the Lord, and we loved Jesus together. It was a beautiful friendship, but the entire time, he was growing bitter toward me because no one saw him. Wherever we went, I was the center of attention because of my personality and my recognized gifts, and he was often viewed as the guy with Michael. He didn't like it, and I didn't even notice it was happening.

We did eventually talk about it and move past it, and he went on to become an incredible man of God. But for a long time, his relationship with God and his relationship with other Christians was incredibly strained because of the months he spent feeling invisible in the Church. All because I did not take the time to make sure that his identity wasn't being swallowed up by mine.



And honestly, this is a mistake I see happening a lot in western discipleship. Far too many ministry leaders only make disciples for the purpose of developing more leaders for their ministry. They raise disciples to be driven by the same vision that drives them and they don't allow them to develop into the people God designed them to be. It's not healthy. As men and women of God, your job is to raise Christians, not to raise side-kicks.

Early on in ministry, I began saying that discipleship is producing in others what God has produced in you. And I stand by that thought, but it is important to know that as you pour into other people's lives, you remember that they are other people's lives. It is very easy to make discipleship about reproducing yourself, and it just isn't. The body of Jesus is made up of feet and hands and legs and eyeballs and all different kinds of gifts and personalities, and if you fail to raise people for who and what they are, the body of Jesus suffers.

### feeding them your faith

Around the same time I was pouring into John's life, a group of young people began to meet with me for regular discipleship. We would just spend time together praying, worshiping and talking about Jesus. It was very casual, but also very deep. Some of my happiest memories are with that group of young guys. They were so serious about pursuing Jesus. I remember once, we were randomly at a local grocery store grabbing some snacks for a movie night, and spontaneously I told them, "Let's go pray for people."

They did it. I can't tell you the number of times we were in public and one of them saw someone in need and immediately

met their need, whether it was spotting them the five dollars they needed to pay for their fast food, or praying for their disability. These kids were the real deal. The encounters we had with God are so unbelievable that I won't bother telling you about them. These kids were amazing. Except for one significant problem.

About a year after we began doing discipleship together, I started to pull away and let them figure out their own paths, like I always do, and they naturally began to each go their own way. And almost immediately, their passion and effectiveness began to dwindle. They were all plugged into incredible ministries and surrounded by communities of believers, but for some reason, their drive died. They stopped being spontaneous, they stopped being desperate, and their prayer lives stopped being as effective.

It took me a long time to figure out what happened, but I did eventually figure it out. When it began happening with my next group of guys. For a year of their lives, those young people were living life with me, doing extraordinary things for the Lord. They were seeing the sick healed, they were experiencing God's presence and making Him known everywhere they went. But they were doing it based on my gifts and my relationship with God. They didn't know who they were though.

I had exposed them to real faith and invited them into my personal relationship with God. One that involved a decade of desperately pursuing Him and walking with Him faithfully. And instead of working toward developing their own history with God, they just kind of coasted off of mine. Instead of trusting God, they trusted the relationship I had with God, and when they had to do things alone, that unshakable faith sure shook.

This is such a dangerous trap. Avoid it at all costs. Your disciples have to develop their own history with God. They cannot base their faith, and their ministry, off of what you have with Jesus. They need to know Him and trust Him and walk with Him themselves. It's important. Not only will your relationship with God not always be in front of them to rest in, but Jesus made it very clear in Matthew 7 that the act of serving God would not be enough if the reality of knowing Him was overlooked.

They have to build their own history with God.

### let's wrap it up

There are many more mistakes I have experienced and witnessed when it comes to discipleship, but these five represent the mistakes that I have seen repeatedly happening in the church. They are mistakes that I have seen do serious damage to young people's futures. They are mistakes that I beg you not to make. People's lives matter.

When a doctor treats someone, they do so with the understanding that if they do not pay good enough attention, or perform their duties well enough, someone's life could easily be lost, and it would be their fault. I approach discipleship the exact same way. If we do not pay attention and love these young believers the way Jesus does, we could do irreparable damage.

I don't want to scare you, but I do want you to take this seriously. I have seen someone leave the faith and never return over each and every mistake I listed above. I can point to dozens of backsliders who will tell you that the only reason they left the Church was because of how they were treated by the Church. How we love people, how we raise them – it matters.

So let's move forward with a determination to pursue a biblically, and practically, sound understanding of how to raise young men and women of God.

## *Follow Me*

As a culture, we love to develop methodology. For everything we aspire to do, there are dozens of self-help conferences and webinars we can participate in to grow and learn the dos and don'ts of the industry. In fact, just the other day I was scrolling through social media and I ended up watching a series of short video's on how to invest in the stock market that I didn't intend to watch. Once I came across them, however, I found myself watching video after video, despite the fact that I am not particularly interested in the stock market. Methodology fascinates us in the west. We've convinced ourselves that if we really get a grip on the newest and most effective methods in life, business, love, etc., we will be truly successful. Which has translated into how we operate as the body of Jesus.

I read stories of how in so many nations around the world, the Church operates similarly to how it did in the early days of the faith. By faith and by the intimate direction of the Holy Spirit. However, here in America, everything is done according to the most recent study or by the newest teaching from some famous Pastor who has finally decided to share his secrets. I don't want to criticize too harshly because there is absolutely

nothing wrong with us wanting to do things to our very best ability. In fact, a determination to give God our best is something to be applauded, not criticized. However, there is something so beautiful and so sacred about stripping back the methodology and the focused plans, and leaving room for you to need God.

I am not saying you should throw away wisdom and experience from those who came before us. Not at all. But as a culture, sometimes we make the mistake of drowning out God's voice with the weight of our programs and methodology and leaving no room for Him to inspire or lead us directly. I don't want to do that to you. Discipleship is an intimate and sacred thing, and it cannot be broken down into a set list of steps, or a fool-proof method. Discipleship is much more than a teaching program. I can't give you twelve steps to successful discipleship. But I can give you some basic principles and share some of my experiences to help you

## basics of discipleship

Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the twelve disciples, Paul and Timothy. The list goes on. Discipleship is not a new concept. We often don't really give biblical discipleship its proper attention because, to be frank, we don't recognize it as discipleship. Don't get me wrong, we know that Jesus disciplined the Apostles. But a lot of the time when we read about the life of Jesus, we have this terrible habit of writing off anything He did or said because "He's Jesus". Please don't do that. Jesus lived His life as a man devoted to the service of God. Meaning His life, His ministry, they are all solid examples for you.

Discipleship in the lives of these men was much more than a program. For each one of these young men being discipled, it meant stepping completely out of their lives and following these men of God. It meant entering their lives, walking with them as they walked with God, encountering them intimately and without interruption. For many of them, it meant leaving behind family and friends as they followed behind the men God had divinely placed into their lives. Discipleship was more than a school of ministry. It was giving up one life and being raised into another.

As I have already communicated, I do not believe in trying to lay out a roadmap to any kind of ministry. The Church is not a business and people are not a product. You cannot approach them the same way. When you deal with human beings, you always have to approach them with an understanding that people are fluid, individual beings, and that everything you do depends not only on what you know, but on who they are. So it is just very impractical to try laying out any kind of twelve-step program for healthy discipleship. It doesn't exist. However, I can help you gain some perspective that will help change the way you look at discipleship.

## the call

*So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. **Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him.** And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah...*

*1 Kings 19:19-20a (emphasis mine)*

I have been making disciples for over a decade. I've disciplined men, women, boys and girls. I've raised Christians who were gifted teachers, worship leaders, evangelists. The works. If you raise Christians for long enough, you will find yourself pouring into every kind of Christian. But despite the diversity, there comes this moment. This very distinct and intensely satisfying moment where you look at this man or woman you have raised to maturity, and despite all of their individual gifts and personality traits, you see yourself.

I have had this moment dozens of times, and each time is as beautiful as the first. I remember the first time Frederick disagreed with me theologically and was right. I still smile when I think about the first time Bristol looked someone in the eyes and told them what God had spoken to him about them. The first time Amanda had to stop singing in the middle of leading worship because she was so overcome with love for Jesus that all she could do was cry. The first time Andrew proudly told me that one of his classmates had called him a loser for talking about Jesus. And the day he told me that classmate had accepted Jesus finally. With every disciple I have ever raised to maturity, there has been a moment where I have looked at



them and seen myself. Whether it was in their worship, or their prayer, or their evangelizing, or in their thinking or even in how they responded to their mistakes. I've seen myself, and it's brought me an unbelievable amount of joy.

Every time I begin teaching someone how to walk out this life with Jesus, I look forward to that moment. Not because it's the most important goal but because it's the marker that says I've finished the race. It's what tells me that all the time and energy and pain I've poured out for them was worth it. That they will go on to satisfy the desires of Jesus. I live for that moment where I get to look at them and genuinely say, "You can do this."

And I'm not alone in looking forward to that moment. Jesus said to the disciples, "whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do,"<sup>viii</sup>. Paul said to Timothy, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus...for I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come."<sup>ix</sup>

No healthy Christian makes disciples with the desire to keep them feeding from their hand. It is always the intention of great men and women of God to develop more great men and women of God. Something demonstrated in the above text by Elijah.

It is very easy to overlook the manner in which he called young Elisha, but it does have some significance. A Prophet's mantle had two purposes: To keep them protected from the cold, and to identify themselves. By definition, a Prophet's mantle was his glory. It was meant to identify men of great stature, either religiously or politically. Meaning, if you saw someone wearing it, you understood that they were declaring that they had been chosen and anointed by God.

So, with that understanding, really reconsider our opening text. Elijah did not just text Elisha and ask if he was free for a weekly Bible study. No, he walked up to him in the middle of his work day, interrupted his life, and handed him the very symbol of his own anointing and calling from God. In essence, he said, "This life you have been living is over. From this day forward, you are anointed by God in the same way that I am anointed by God."

I share all of this because I want you to understand the deeply important nature of discipleship. For far too many of us, discipleship is just about doing what we're supposed to do. We look at it as our Christian duty, and we teach young Christians just so that the Church will have leaders tomorrow. But it is so much more than that. It is so much deeper.

Elijah lived in a time where Prophets were hunted down and subjected to cruelty and abuse. The Queen, Jezebel, and her husband had abandoned the worship of the one true God, and as a result, those who spoke for Him were in perilous danger<sup>x</sup>. It had reached a point where so many of the Prophets of God were in hiding that Elijah genuinely thought he was the last of his kind<sup>xi</sup>. He spent a significant portion of his life feeling alone and terrified by the anointing God had placed on his life. So he did not take what he was doing lightly.

By calling Elisha into his anointing, he asked Elisha to let go of everything. To abandon life as he knew it and to chase something of far more value. To give up a family and friends and work and play, and to embrace the identity God had breathed into him. The call was about much more than a discipleship program or a weekly bible study. It was about embracing the life God had for him.

## letting go

*So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. **And he left the oxen** and ran after Elijah...*

*1 Kings 19:19-20a (emphasis mine)*

Now I want to look at this same story from Elisha's point of view. Imagine growing up in a culture that, for many generations, had been the sole people who belonged to the God above all gods. Because remember, Yahweh was not the only one being worshiped by the people of the earth<sup>xii</sup>. But time and time again, when confronted, He proved to be the one true God. The King above all Kings, the Lord above all Lords, the God above all gods. And in the midst of His greatness and His power and His superiority, He had chosen only Israel. Only Elisha's people. However, in Elisha's day, a wicked ruler had not only forgotten their heritage but had so completely rejected it that God's Prophets were being hunted down and murdered. Being a faithful Jew was not the safest life choice as Elisha was growing up.

So imagine what kind of dilemma Elisha must have faced when Elijah showed up in his field. He was not only the last public Prophet of their people's faith, but a dangerous and conspicuous enemy of the King of Israel. In fact, not long before their unexpected meeting, Elijah had challenged a host of Baal's Prophet's and called down fire from heaven, demonstrating the superiority of the God they had corporately rejected in Israel.<sup>xiii</sup> It is safe to say that Elijah was enemy number one

during Ahab's reign. And yet, there he was, standing in Elisha's family field.

I imagine Elisha following behind his pair of Oxen, faithfully working the field as his father expected of him. Knowing that if the work did not get done, it would not just affect him but the entire family. In my imagining, I see him look up in confusion when he sees the outline of a tall, frail man as he peaks over the hill in the distance. He stops following behind the Oxen and watches cautiously as the man gets close enough for Elisha to see the dark mantle hanging around his shoulders. I imagine him realizing what it meant and wondering what kind of trouble was at his doorstep. Fighting within himself to decide whether he would provide whatever service this prophet had come to ask of his family, or whether he would think of his family first and turn him away. I picture sweat glistening on his nervous brow as Elijah closed the distance between them. Biting his lip, a little afraid as the Prophet finally came to a stop. And then, finally, I imagine the look on his face as Elijah calmly unfastened the fur cloak from around his shoulder and gently strung it over Elisha's young body. I imagine a tear falling from his eyes, the way it does when you truly feel the sacredness of God's presence.

Lastly, I imagine Elijah stepping back, smiling deeply, and then walking away.

***And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah***

Really consider what Elisha was giving up as he chased after the older man. He lived in a home that could afford twelve pairs of Ox. They were not peasants. They were likely wealthy. In a land where struggling was the norm, Elisha enjoyed the peace

of mind that comes with a daily meal and a regular rest. Despite the identity crisis their people, as a whole, were facing, Elisha could have rested in a security that was rare in their time, and even rarer among their people.

Running after Elijah meant leaving it all behind. He didn't live in a culture like ours, where we can chase God as a viable option for our lives and, if it turns out badly, we can change our mind and study accounting. He didn't have the option of getting his bachelor degree in business on the side just so that he had something to fall back on. It was all or nothing for Elisha. He could choose the Oxen, or he could run after Elijah.

What Elisha did in that moment is something that is so sacred, so beautiful, and so missing from discipleship in our culture. For Elisha, discipleship meant embracing a calling from God. It was about more than having his favorite preacher explain the scriptures to him. It was more than growing as an individual or beefing up his college application by interning at a local Church. For Elisha, chasing Elijah meant a complete and utter abandonment of everything that made his life what it was. It meant dying to himself.

## follow me

*So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. And he left the oxen and **ran after Elijah**...*

*1 Kings 19:19-20a (emphasis mine)*

There is a fundamental problem with the way we, as Americans, idealize Church leadership. I remember being a young

leader in my Church and being told by one of my Pastors that I could not be an effective leader if I was too friendly with my students. He reminded me that when parents get too close to their children, they often lose their respect and that the same was true for ministry. It made sense, so I took his advice wholeheartedly.

I put a little distance between myself and the students that I served, and I tried to make a point of denying them access to the more intimate parts of my life. Yes, I still spent an enormous amount of time with them, pouring into their lives, encouraging them, loving them, teaching them about Jesus. But they were conspicuously unwelcome in my inner world. I did not invite them into the way I thought. They didn't know my story. Outside of Church activities, we did not spend time together. I would have never even considered going to a movie with one of my students, or just hanging out at the park. It never would have happened, because after all, I was their leader, not their friend.

It did not take me very long to realize that, while I did find it easier to demand their respect while I maintained some professional distance, it came at the cost of actually knowing them. And without knowing them, there was no chance I would ever be able to develop the deepest parts of them. Yes, I could teach them the foundations of Christianity, and I could shape their bones into something that looked like a model Christian. However, without truly knowing them, I was incapable of ever developing the parts of them that went deeper than surface level. And furthermore, without knowing me, they would never understand just how deeply rooted my relationship with Jesus went. Let alone be able to replicate it.

It is incredibly important to understand that Elisha did not just run. He ran *after Elijah*. He wasn't running away from the oxen, he was running toward Elijah.

As leaders in the house of God, we have to understand that the only way we can lead people into mature depth with God is to show it to them. Intimacy can't be learned from books alone. You can teach them theology and explain the logistics of relationship with God, but if you want them to actually walk with Him, you have to take them by the hand and go for a stroll together. Your history with God has to become their history with God. Your journey has to include them. That is what discipleship is.

After being chosen, Elisha followed Elijah, learning to know God the way that he did. And when Elijah died, Elisha was so fully developed that he was able to successfully take over Elijah's particularly difficult ministry and flourish in it. When Jesus died, his disciples were able to spread his message to the nations, in the midst of being hunted and killed for their determination to do so. When Paul died, Timothy was able to take over in his footsteps and serve the Church in the spirit of his calling.

Discipleship is more than a program, more than a Bible class. It is a man or woman of God taking a young believer and including them in their story. Letting them so close to you that your vision, your passion, your mission, your love for God becomes their reality. We have to take it seriously. The relationship we build with our disciples will shape the relationship they build with God. How we walk while they follow us will shape the path they, themselves, walk. This is not a game. This is not just a part of our story. It is someone's life, and if we want to do it well, we have to respect that and we have to invite

them into our story with an understanding that embracing this life with Jesus means the abandonment of all else.

When Elijah called Elisha, he offered his everything. When Elisha decided to follow, he let go of everything. Then they walked.

This, at its core, is the nature of discipleship.

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<sup>viii</sup> John 14:12b

<sup>ix</sup> 2 Timothy 4:1a,6

<sup>x</sup> 1 Kings 16:29-33

<sup>xi</sup> 1 Kings 19:10

<sup>xii</sup> This is not to say that I believe there are more than one God. I do not. I am simply acknowledging that the other people groups of the earth had contrary faith systems, and that over and over again, God demonstrated His superiority.

<sup>xiii</sup> 1 kings 18:20-40



## *More Than A Teacher*

Even ignoring the fact that He is God's Son, Jesus was someone that had such an incredibly profound impact on his generation that history, as a whole, remembers Him. Obviously Christianity keeps His name relevant, but even outside of our faith, Jesus remains known and respected. Other religions acknowledge Him as a wise teacher and prophet. Some even acknowledge Him as divine. Regardless of how they see Him, or how they try to explain the power He walked in, they all recognize Him as an anointed and monumentally impactful teacher. But those of us who know Him understand Him to be so much more.

Jesus changed the entire course of humanity in the span of three years. Most of us spend our entire lives working to make our mark in the world, and He managed it in three years. And yes, He died for the sins of the world, so it's a different ballpark. But I'm not even talking about the salvation of mankind. I am referencing the fact that, in three years of ministry, Jesus managed to shake the core of an entire

people group and lay the ground work for a movement that would go on to sweep the globe, breaking and elevating empires, shaking religious systems and changing the very climate of the world.

In three years of active ministry, Jesus changed the course of humanity. And He did that with two primary tools: the Cross, and discipleship.

I really want you to think about what I am saying here. After laying His life down and satisfying God's demand for justice, it was the men and women He had spent time with, loving and teaching, that went on to rapidly spread the good news of humanity's salvation to the nations. After opening the door for freedom, His disciples went on to found the Church, which went on to shake nations, depose tyrannies, and reintroduce humanity to God. Discipleship was one of the most powerful tools Jesus used in His mission to reconcile humanity and God. So tell me, why has the Church all but abandoned it?

### forgotten power

Jesus, more than any other religious leader the world has ever seen, proved that developing others was the most powerful way to advance the kingdom of God. Better than conferences. Better than a powerfully delivered sermon series. Even better than a book filled with biblical exposition such as this one. Discipleship is the forgotten power of the Church. And it's a power the Church desperately needs to reclaim.

It wasn't a fluke that after Jesus ascended to heaven, His disciples went on to continue His mission with the same

kind of maturity and power that He began it in. It was because they had spent three years of their lives completely devoted to not only His teaching, but his example, His companionship and His mission. Discipleship was the method Jesus used to develop the Church, and it is important to note that for Him, it was more than a Tuesday night bible study. It was a lifestyle.

I cannot point to a set list of steps Jesus used to develop healthy disciples because Jesus was not about methods or programs. Sometimes He taught His disciples, sometimes He refused to. Sometimes He encouraged them, sometimes He rebuked them. Sometimes He kept them at His side, sometimes He sent them off to do the work on their own. There are no twelve steps to biblical discipleship. There is only walking together toward God.

Jesus did not chain Himself to methodology, and if we want this generation of the Church to walk in the kind of life and power that the first generation of the Church did, we need to start raising them the way Jesus did. In freedom. With all of that said, there are a couple of things that I believe we can safely pull from His story to help us grow in our own leadership and influence.

## Jesus taught His disciples

I know it is odd that I opened this chapter pointing out that Jesus was more than a teacher and the very first thing I take time to point out about Him is that He was a teacher. But I don't want to over emphasis any one part of His life and ministry. Yes, Jesus did much more than teach His disciples,

but it is important to not forget that He did, in fact, teach them. However, it looked much different than most discipleship settings in our generation.

I have been a part of well over a dozen discipleship programs, youth groups, para-church ministries and churches and one of the things I would say is that, as a culture, we understand the need for good teaching. Our Pastors and ministry leaders understand that if they want to build an impactful ministry, they have to bring biblical, interesting teaching. Often, a Pastor's success is measured by how large his church or ministry has grown, which is often determined by how relevant his teaching is. Not to say that this is a biblical measurement, but it is definitely one we employ in western Christianity.

Jesus was not as concerned about such matters. He did not seem fazed by rejection or apathy among the people. He was focused on the mission, not being accepted. He did what God told Him to do and I genuinely believe He would have continued to do so whether anyone followed Him or not. However, in the midst of that laser focus, He did take the time to shape the minds and hearts of those men He was pouring into personally.

If you read through the gospels, you will see Jesus throwing mysteries out for the masses to unravel, but then stepping aside to help His disciples actually understand them. He regularly addressed their beliefs and their identity and drove them toward a fuller understanding of God, themselves and the kingdom of God. Jesus was far more than just a teacher, but it is important that we acknowledge that He did take His responsibility to nurture their understanding seriously.

*Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."*

*Matthew 13:10-11*

Matthew 13 is a perfect example of this particular aspect of the relationship between Jesus and His disciples. As a public speaker, Jesus often taught in mysteries, giving parables that represented great spiritual truths and then leaving the people wondering what they meant. In the above referenced instance, Jesus gives the crowds several parables and then simply walks away. Confused, the disciples went to Him and asked for an explanation and, without hesitation, He explained the parables to them.

The longer you are in ministry, the more you will realize that no matter how gifted you are as a teacher, the majority of people will let you inspire them, but they will not genuinely let you teach them. They will listen to your well prepared sermons, even omitting the occasional round of applause or an enthusiastic "Amen, preacher!", and will leave inspired, but wholly unchanged. Which is why discipleship is so incredibly important. The more we rely on the gifts and wisdom of only a few individuals as a Church, the more shallow our growth as a whole will be. Jesus understood this.

He took the time to teach them at a deeper level, to address their shortcomings, to unravel the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, and to develop their identity. Although discipleship is much deeper than a weekly bible study, teaching does

have to happen, and it has to happen at an intimate level. It has to be more than the ABC's of the faith. As their teacher, it is imperative that you address their deepest needs, their preconceived notions, their identity and most regularly, their questions.

Raising disciples is very similar to parenting. They will ask you questions that will shock you, that will confuse you, that will leave you reeling for answers. They will have "revelations" that are so wrong that you won't believe they had the necessary confidence to actually approach you with their thoughts. And it won't be once or twice. You have to remain patient and diligent with them.

I remember Tanner and Josh, two of my most gifted disciples, coming to me and saying once, "I think we were all angels once, and we told God, 'To prove our loyalty to You, send us down to earth with no memories so that we can find our way back'."

They weren't joking. While in prayer and reflection, they had come to this very real, and frustratingly wrong revelation and brought it to our discipleship group with an astounding amount of confidence. To the point of being willing to argue for their new truth when I dismissed it.

This is discipleship. It is not taking a group of seminary-trained pastors-to-be and giving them a few months of hands on training before they take over their own parishes. Discipleship is taking infants and raising them. It is rooting out the crazy things society and life and even the church have taught them about God and introducing them to a worldview that makes no sense from the outside. It requires patience, and diligence, and above all else, a real understanding of, and intimacy with, God.

## Jesus loved His disciples

*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down  
his life for his friends.*

*John 15:13*

In my twenty-eight years on this earth, I have personally known quite a few people who have been convicted of serious felonies. I have known murderers, rapists, pedophiles, thieves, bank robbers, gang bangers, and people who have committed a host of felonies less serious in nature. This is all while I surrounded myself with people who loved Jesus and while I was not living a lifestyle that was not likely to put me in relationship with anyone who had a low regard for the law. David was not joking when he said that we were sinners from our mother's womb<sup>xiv</sup>. The sinful nature is literally everywhere you look. You cannot escape it. And yet, despite all the life-changing mistakes these men and women made, Jesus died for them. And most of the people on that list are devoted Christians today.

Let's bring it a little closer to home. Hours before the imprisonment that would lead to His death for the sins of the world, Jesus sat and ate a meal with those twelve men He had spent three years of His life intimately pouring into. They enjoyed Passover meal together, and unbeknownst to them, Jesus gave them the mercy of a goodbye. After which, He casually made this statement:

*And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'"*

*Mark 14:27*

Really consider the weight of His words. Jesus had just spent three years of His life raising those men. He had laughed with them, taught them, corrected them, shaped them into men who were so close to God that even diseases and devils obeyed them. He had poured His life out for them and was hours away from pouring out His very blood so that they could be set free from the weight of sin and death. And during His last religious observance with them, He interrupted the festivities to announce that in a few hours, they would all abandon Him.

Can you imagine that moment? Can you imagine being Peter, the rock, standing at the right hand of Jesus and hearing Him say that you would abandon Him? Or how about John, "the one whom Jesus loved"<sup>xv</sup>. Imagine being him, having just lovingly sharing a goblet of wine and a loaf of bread with Jesus and your brothers in faith, and hearing that very soon, your declarations of love would turn to open betrayal.

For most of us, I would wager that last meal would have gone a little differently. And I say that from personal experience. I have been in a room with people who came to me for discipleship, who I loved and poured my time and energy and effort into, who then went on to distance themselves from me the moment it hurt their public image to say they were my students. It is painful to know that despite all you have been and done for someone, the moment it suits them, they forget you. So I can imagine that if it had been me in that room, with



knowledge that in a few hours I would face the hardest day of my life and all of my disciples would abandon me in my time of need, I would have addressed them with a certain level of hostility.

I may have told them something along the lines of, “In a few hours, you will all abandon me. And it will be the biggest mistake of your lives, because I am about to bring salvation to the world, and you missed out.”

Petty, but let’s be honest with ourselves. Better yet, let’s be honest *about* ourselves. A lot of us would have felt that way if we had been the one in that room with them. But that is not how Jesus felt, and it’s not what He said. Instead, He loved them, He *expressed* His love for them, and He chose them to represent Him in the world, going so far as to give them authority over the entire community of people He was dying to build.

Jesus loved those men. Not because He had to, or because He didn’t have better options. But because He knew them. We see that demonstrated over and over again as He addressed them both corporately and individually, demonstrating his intimate knowledge of not only who they were becoming, but who they already were. He recognized the strength within Peter, openly acknowledging him before his peers<sup>xvi</sup>. He chose three of them to accompany Him to the mountain where he would meet with Moses and Elijah<sup>xvii</sup>. And let’s not forget the moment He chose John to care for His mother in His absence!<sup>xviii</sup> Jesus knew these men. He loved these men. He trusted these men.

Discipleship was much more than a classroom for Jesus. He was raising these men to be God’s spokesmen to the earth, and He took that responsibility seriously. He got to know

them on an intimate level. He loved them as more than students.

*No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”*  
*John 15:15*

If you want to raise the kind of disciples Jesus did, you have to invest in them at a deeper level than we have been taught to in the western Church. It has to be about more than regular Bible study. Your relationship with them has to be real. You need to know them. You need to love them. You need to have a deeper relationship than just that of teacher and student. You need to be friends. You need to be family.

## Jesus developed His disciples

*...Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples...*  
*John 4:2b*

This text is not actually addressing baptism or the ministry of the disciples, but I find it fascinating to look at anyway. Really think about it. At this point in His ministry, Jesus had acquired a fair amount of recognition. Wherever He went, crowds would form to hear Him preach about the kingdom of heaven and to see Him work miracles. The sick were healed, the dead were raised, and demons were forced to flee. Jesus had quickly risen to the forefront of the nation's

attention. So ask yourself, why were the disciples the ones baptizing people?

Whether it was because He was teaching them how to do public ministry, or because there were way too many people getting baptized for one man to do it all, the reality was that Jesus allowed those He was pouring into to do the work at His side. And that is something I'd like to explore.

As I pointed out in an earlier chapter, giving new believers a platform too early is a mistake that can drive them down very unhealthy paths, so I want to take this opportunity to talk about the other side of the coin.

It is very easy to approach discipleship as a way to develop your ministry, instead of as a method of developing people. Often, the reason ministers give their disciples opportunities to lead too quickly is because they see a gifting in them that will benefit their church or ministry. So, excited for growth or for an opportunity to appear successful, they show off their disciples and give them a platform, or a pulpit, or a microphone, expecting the opportunities to inspire them to go deeper with Jesus. Instead, they usually end up causing pride to attach itself to their disciple's gifts, and it ruins the fruit they could have had if they had been allowed to grow in a healthy environment. Then on the other side of the coin, there are a lot of ministers who refuse to let their disciples have any attention or any opportunities because, in their head, they are the one with a gift and their student is there to learn, not to hone in on their territory.

Neither of these approaches are healthy. You cannot hand someone a platform before they are like Jesus, and you cannot hide someone in the closet because they aren't as good

as you. Both of those behaviors stunt the growth of your disciples. Jesus, unlike most, did not employ either of those unhealthy habits. Instead of choosing who was more gifted, He just lived out His mission and invited His disciples to live it out with Him.

He did not give them titles or opportunities that would confuse them on their level of maturity or giftedness, but while He allowed them room to grow, He included them in the work He was doing. Instead of acknowledging their extraordinary gifts and pushing them onto the stage, He invited them into His story, to help Him achieve the things God had called *Him* to do. He even went so far, as they developed, to send them on their own to continue His work, but always in community, and always in a way that made it clear they were preparing the world for what He was doing. He never bloated them up or beat them down. He just developed them.

That was the beauty of the relationship Jesus built with the disciples. He didn't shove them out of the nest, expecting them to make Him look good. Instead, He held them close, and invited them to do the work together. And in doing so, He let them grow as students, while forcing them to grow and develop without the pressure of a platform.

Discipleship has to be about developing people, not bettering your ministry. It cannot be about better staffing your Church or demonstrating your leadership. It has to be about their growth, their development, their place in the body of Jesus.

## closing thoughts

Discipleship is much more than a program to me. My disciples are more than students to me. So far as my heart for them goes, they are my children.

A dozen fully grown adults just got annoyed as they read that. Too bad, get over it. It's true. As I start pouring into a young person's life, they become more than just a pupil to me. Their life matters to me. Their feelings matter to me. Their needs and their wants and their dreams matter to me. My home becomes their home. My food becomes their food. My maturity is there whenever they need to lean. My wisdom is available whenever they need to pick my brain. My money is there when they get into a jam and need help. I pride in them when they accomplish something, and I cry for them when they struggle. I come before the Lord on their behalf regularly and passionately, and I don't hesitate to chase them down when they skip a beat and try to walk away from Him.

I can't tell you how many times my wife and I have looked at our bank statement in shock at the amount we've spent on food because of the constant mouth's we had joining us for dinner on the daily. And it would shock you to know how many times we've been in a situation where someone has slept at our house so often that we've wondered if they had moved in. Or if you knew the amount we've spent covering someone's bill or grabbing some groceries for someone or meeting some other need we usually weren't ask to meet.

We've brought our kids on trips with us. We've offered them a home when they needed one. We've brought them

home for family holidays and confronted their biological families when issues at home couldn't be ignored. We have loved them, and sacrificed for them, and given when our own family went without more times than I can count. We have prided in their accomplishments and genuinely grieved when they have lost themselves. Discipleship, for my wife and I, is more than a program. These kids... they are our family, and we can't imagine life without them.

That is what I mean when I say that Jesus was more than a teacher. For Jesus, discipleship was about relationship. It was not about positions, or programs, or success. It was about loving people and helping them to love God more effectively. If we want to develop the Church the way He did, we have to strip back the ulterior motives and the numbers-driven methodology and we have to make real relationship the core of our effort.

Discipleship has to be about love

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<sup>xiv</sup> Psalm 51:5

<sup>xv</sup> John 20:2

<sup>xvi</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>xvii</sup> Matthew 17:1-8

<sup>xviii</sup> John 19:26-27

## *The X Factor*

“Michael, why did God...?”

It was a Sunday evening and my wife and I were sitting with a group of our disciples in a local pizza parlor, studying the Word and enjoying our favorite pizza together. I don't remember what we were discussing and I don't remember what question Johnny asked me. But I remember knowing that there wasn't really an answer to his question. Which is something that every teacher has to come to terms with at some point. Not every question has a satisfactory answer, and pretending they do only confuses your disciples and feeds your pride.

Sitting there in the pizza parlor, I put down my food, quickly wiped my hands and responded, “Two plus X equals seven. Why?”

Shrugging, Johnny answered, “No clue.”

“Because,” I said, “Someone decided that X equals five.”

x equals five

*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.  
Genesis 1:3*

Have you ever sat down and asked yourself why God created the world in the manner that He did? For instance, why did God create light? The obvious answer is that by providing illumination, He enabled us to see. But, on the other hand, as our Creator, He could have easily shaped us in a way that enabled us to see just as clearly in the dark. Or perhaps He created the sun to provide the earth the necessary warmth to sustain life. But once again, could He not have created life to be sustainable in the cold?

The real answer to the question is: because that's how He decided to do it.

You see, if you decide to make disciples, which I hope you will, your life will be filled with questions. Some of them will be profound and will require a deep understanding of theology to address, but the majority will be as simple as, "Why did God create light?"

Your life will be filled with questions and if you are anything like me, you will be tempted to find an answer to each and every one of them. There's nothing wrong with that. After all, as their teacher, they come to you anticipating that you will know where to find the answers they can't. But in the midst of their questions and your answers, I want you to keep one thing in mind: sometimes the answer is X.

Let's revisit my conversation with Johnny in the pizza parlor. Continuing our teachable moment, I told the group, "When you do algebra, you are trying to find the answer to a real problem, and finding that answer requires that you trust the given value of X. If you try to do the equation without finding out what X stands for, or if you decide that its given



value is wrong, you will find it impossible to find the correct answer. The same is true in the kingdom.”

Think about it. If X equals five, and you don’t know that, suddenly the answer to the equation  $2 + x$  is  $2x$ , when in reality, the answer is 7. Algebra does not work if we do not acknowledge the variable’s value. Which brings me to the point of this thought: In the Kingdom, the variable is God.

## X equals God

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

*Isaiah 55:8-9*

I am a very analytical thinker. I love to examine the scriptures and to draw out every morsel of insight. I am desperately in love with God and because of who I am, that love translates into a desire to understand everything there is to understand about Him. I think about Him all day long. I meditate on His Word during every activity of my life. I sneak moments to read the scriptures and I spend hours just considering the implications. As a result, there are things about God’s character and kingdom that many of us never really grasp just because we aren’t curious enough to think about them, but I’ve thought about them.

It’s just who I am.

But there came a point where I had to recognize that despite my extensive study and the small fortune I had spent on commentaries, biblical expository writings, conferences and other resources, my actual understanding was, and still is, incredibly infantile. I was like a small child, sitting on my Father’s lap, thinking I understood how he balanced the checkbook

when all I really understood was that there *was* a checkbook. That is what it is like chasing the mysteries of God. Despite my growth and my desperate search for the deepest parts of God, there is still a world of things about Him that I don't even know exist, let alone understand.

Paul told us that there is coming a moment where we will know Him the way He knows us<sup>xix</sup>, but until then, I am someone who is *becoming* like God. And while I am still in my time of "becoming", His thoughts are higher than my thoughts. His ways are higher than my ways. And I have to accept that at the end of the day, after my theology and study have broken a question down to its deepest and most innate nature, the answer will always be the same: *because God said so*.

### because God said so

As an analytical thinker, I want to understand every single aspect of every single thing God has done. But regardless of whether I understand His motives or the inspiration behind His decisions, the core is always the same: *God decided*. It is not necessarily comfortable, and no one comes to this conclusion with a sense of accomplishment but, as teachers, we have to lead our disciples into real understanding, not just take opportunities to impress them with our deep thinking.

Resist the urge to create significance where there is none. Avoid making up answers when there isn't one. Don't get me wrong, the majority of questions you will be asked have an answer, but if you can teach your disciples that the core of everything in existence is a decision that God made, you can spare them a lifetime of mediocre thinking regarding the Kingdom of God. Teach them that, despite this generation's determination to be in charge of their own identity and their

own future, it actually all rests in God's decisions. Furthermore, teach them that that's ok.

*God decided.* It can be very hard to swallow for a lot of young people. The idea that their lives, their future, even their identity is out of their own hands. That everything rests in what God has said. It can be tough to accept, but it is important that they do accept it. It is the most foundational piece of information you need if you want to develop a biblically sound theology. Which begs the question: how do we help them accept it?

I only have one piece of advice: show your work.

### show your work

As a child, I remember the incredible frustration I felt having to show my work in school. The older I got, the easier it became to look at a problem and know the answer without having to put any real effort in, so it got more and more frustrating being forced to take the extra time to write down the method I was supposed to use to find the answer. Now that I am an adult, I deeply appreciate the discipline that taught me.

I have spent years studying God's Word, and as a result, I can often look at a text and tell you exactly what it means without much thought. The longer you spend studying God's Word, the easier it becomes to find answers. And as a teacher, when one of my disciples asks me a question about scripture, more often than not it is something that I have thought about before and can offer quick opinions on. But I try not to do that. I try not to just give them answers too often. The point of discipleship is to raise men and women who know how to search out God themselves.

Personally, I have made it my practice to always explain why I think what I think. I don't want my disciples to just rest in my understanding. I want them to actually understand.

Which is why I often ask questions that take whatever subject we are talking about and strip it down to the X Factor, so that we can build it back up from the foundation. It's important to me that my disciples truly understand that everything rests on the same foundation: God's Will.

What I mean by that is this: every question you will be asked can be stripped down to a point where the answer is "because God said so". Whether it is a deep theological quandary such as "did God create sin" or a trifle curiosity like "why did God create light", the core of it rests in a decision that God made, and if you want to be an effective teacher, you need to bring everything down to that level and work your way back up so that they not only see how to study the scriptures, but also so that they really get a grasp of how much authority God has.

For instance, let's address the question I mentioned above. Did God create sin? I am asked that question by nearly every person I disciple. Here is a quick example of how I handle it.

First, I deal with free will. I take them to Genesis 1:26, and I explain to them that free will exists because we are made in the image of God and God has a will, therefore we must have a will in order to be like Him. I then walk them through the rest of Genesis 1 and explain that not only does God have a will, but He has a *creative* will, and that as beings who share His image, so do we. And as such, we are capable of not only disobedience, but of actually shaping our own path. Then I strip it down further and explain that sin, at its core, is just behavior outside of God's nature and will, and therefore exists simply because we were created with the ability to shape our own paths. By telling them this, I show them that the real question is not "did God create sin" but actually "why did God give us a creative will". At which point I usually walk them through Genesis 1 again and show them that although God existed before time and exists outside of space, we see

Him actively operating from within time “in the beginning” and in space “hovering over the waters” so that He can experience and enjoy what He was creating (He said that it was good), and I use that information to explain to them that although God is fully satisfied in Himself, He takes pleasure in creating and in shaping His image, as all great artists do, and that in the midst of creation God *decided* to choose humanity to bear this part of His image.

Did you see what I did there? I walked them through my entire thought process and I stripped this question that boggles so many minds down to its core, to the moment where *God made a decision*. And by doing so, I robbed it of its mystery and its power and I helped equip them to think things through from a firm foundation.

Having stripped it down to a decision that God made, I then rebuild it. I show them that since God shaped creation to look like Him and chose man to represent Him (remembering that the only reason we are the best choice is because He chose us. There is no reason other than God wanted to), He gave us the ability to will and to create the same way that He does, and by doing so, He gave us power to rebel. I explain that sin was not born of God’s desire for its existence, but that it is actually a byproduct of God’s desire for a people who look like Him.

### conclusion

Regardless of whether you agree with my conclusions on free will and original sin, please pay attention to the example I set for you there. As a teacher, you will be tempted to just rescue your disciples every time they don’t understand something. Resist that temptation. Ask them questions that will make them think. Make suggestions that open the door to further exploration. Read scripture together, figure out at what point one of God’s decisions resulted in whatever reality you

are exploring together, and then build from that foundation. Resist the temptation to make life easier for them. Actually force them to grow.

The X factor changes the story. Embrace it.

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<sup>xix</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12

# *Stick-Figure Theology*

Grab a pen and a piece of paper.

Ready? Ok, good. Now, I want you to take your pen and to do your very best to draw a perfect picture of yourself. Capture everything you love about yourself. The depth of your eyes, the flow of your hair, the warmth of your skin-tone. With just a piece of paper and pen, I want you to capture everything that makes you you. There's only one catch, I want you to draw yourself as a stick-figure.

Done? Great! Now examine the picture and tell me, does it look like you?

Of course it doesn't. You are not a stick figure.

This is one of the deepest mysteries of the Kingdom. We were created in the image of God. To look like Him, to think like Him, to rule like Him, to love like Him, to fully and completely represent Him...as stick-figures.

## TALMIDIM

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

*Isaiah 55:8-9*

As westerners, we are conditioned for self-centeredness. Even the most insecure among us live as though we are worthy of the world's focus. Whether we are gifted and charismatic and feel we deserve attention, or sad and broken and feel the world is out to get us, our nature is to feel that we are intimately important to the world's narrative. Even when we hate ourselves, even when we feel invisible, we naturally believe that other people's stories revolve around ours. We don't see ourselves as a miniscule piece in a grander puzzle. We see our life as the puzzle, and everything else as the background. But the truth is, the story is not about us. In fact, it can't be about us, because we are just stick-figures in a picture that is about a man.

Really try to take in what I am saying here. God is infinitely *other*. His thoughts are higher than ours, His ways are higher than ours, His being is higher than ours. We walk around, subconsciously believing that we are the center of a story that we are actually supporting Characters in. And the result? We simultaneously approach the story's main character with inappropriate familiarity and dangerous disregard.



## approaching the main character

Let's go back to your drawing. With only a pen, paper, and your imagination, you sat down and attempted to create your image. This stick-figure was made to look like you, but as we've already established, it is unable to because it is a stick-figure and you are a human. The stick-figure, by nature, cannot be what you are. However, that doesn't change the fact that it was created to be like you. So how can we help your drawing get closer to the goal? How can we teach this inanimate object how to be who, and what, you are?

Because of your stick-figure's natural limitations, he is not capable of grasping what it is like to be a breathing, thinking, creative being such as yourself. In fact, the only thing he can understand is the world you created for him. Therefore, the only way you can teach him anything about yourself is to shape his world in a way that looks like you.

I imagine you see where I am going by now, but let's let it play out anyway.

I want you to consider your strength. No matter how you compare to other men, in comparison to your stick-figure reflection, you are a superhero. Think about it. You can lift his entire world in one hand. You can blow it across the room with one breath or destroy it with one crumbled fist. In relation to his existence, you are everything. So, with that understanding, I want you to take your pen and use it to explain that strength to your reflection.

How'd it go? Did you draw a mountain? Did you cast its imposing shadow over the expanding valley to show him just how uniquely mighty you are among a world of lesser things? Or did you draw a vast ocean, opening his eyes to

see that despite the strength and stability of his world, you are a force that cannot be measured? A force that shapes the world and breaks down even the most stable of formations? Or did you create, for him, a temple? A strong fortress where he could rest and know that it is only in your presence that he is safe from the dangers of the world he lives in?

However you did it, whatever stroke of the pen you used, do you think it was enough? Do you think he stood at the foot of your great imposing mountain and awed in your might, or do you think he determined in his heart to conquer it? To plant his flag at its peak? Do you think he stepped into the waves of your immeasurable waters and wept at the unbelievable power of the current, overwhelming him and changing the course of his direction as if he had no power in the world? Or do you think he refused to bend? Do you think he climbed back out of the unforgiving water and built a boat, unwilling to surrender? And do you think he bowed low in your temple, grateful for the safety of your presence? Or do you think he erected images and statues to better reflect his own personality? Do you think he missed the point entirely and chose his own comfort and taste over the sanctity of worship?

This is the reality of fallen humanity. Made in the image of God, but unable to be like Him. Created to be His people, but unwilling to surrender. We are a people that know we matter, but don't understand why. This is the great tragedy of the tree. Not just that we died, but that we didn't notice.

*This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

*Matthew 13:13*

We are stick-people on a page and we are surrounded by a world that God has literally shaped Himself into. Creation itself is designed to reveal God<sup>xx</sup>. To focus our three-dimensional eyes on an infinitely deeper reality. And like the Jews, when confronted by the teaching of Jesus, we have two options: one, we can stand at the foot of the mountain and determine in our heart to conquer its peak, or we can look up, take in its majesty, and actually see it for what it is: beyond us.

## behold the mountain

How we approach God matters. Not only will it determine how intimate we can become with God, but it will inspire the way in which those we teach approach Him. God is *other*. He is different. He is higher. He is greater. He is *more*. There is no getting around this fact. And it is high time the Church stops approaching Him as equals. It is time we stop pretending that just because we are made in His image, He is not something to behold. A mountain will always be a mountain, regardless of whether you forget to awe in it. So please, don't forget to awe in Him.

This chapter was one I really looked forward to writing, because this one thought can change everything in your life. It can change how you read the Word, how you pray, how

you teach, everything. You see, this generation is so absorbed with itself that it has largely failed to see God for who He is, and as a result, we have shaped our theology, our ministry methodologies, our church traditions and everything else solely around how they affect our story.

When we read the Word, we ask ourselves how it can apply to our lives rather than asking ourselves what it means. When we worship, we focus on how good it feels to be in His presence rather than on how magnificent and worthy He is. When we pray, we chase our needs and desires rather than falling on our faces in surrender. Our faith, as a generation, is entirely about improving our story. We've forgotten to behold the mountain. We've forgotten what it means to stare up into the face of God and to tremble in awe. To gaze into His glory and lose ourselves in that beautiful marriage of fear and adoration. We've forgotten that we are stick-people, and that despite God's endless effort to chase us, the story is not about us.

## conclusion

I am a stick-figure, incapable of seeing God in His fullness. Though I draw near, I see through the filter of my limitations. Despite the deep realities I have spent years learning, my understanding is so infantile that I have nothing to pride in. I am nothing, and I stand at the foot of the mountain, staring up in awe and trembling at the sight of something so vast, so great, that I cannot hope to grasp it all. Let alone conquer it.

This is what it means to be a man of God, and this is something you have to teach your disciples if you want to

raise them to be the kind of Christians who touch God. To awe in God. To approach Him with humility, understanding that no matter how gifted we are, we are still stick-figures. No matter how smart we are, there is more we cannot grasp. No matter how aware they are of their identity, they must die to self and approach God from the altar of their graves.

I can't provide you with the ABC's of teaching this. I have made dozens of disciples, and each of them learned this in their own way, in their own time. All I can say is this: live it. Accept that you, my friend, are a stick-figure, and let your life do the teaching. That's the secret. Demonstrate, for your students, what it looks like to approach God in awe.

*The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.*

*Psalm 25:14-15*

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<sup>xx</sup> Romans 1:19-20



## *Part One Conclusion: Life or death*

Have you ever had a truly serious medical emergency? One that required that you go to the hospital with the understanding that there was a possibility you would lose your life? Those kinds of experiences are beyond terrifying. Whether it was a car accident, a ruptured appendix, or unstable heart palpitations, you probably found yourself immediately relieved as you arrived at the hospital. It's our nature. We know that the hospital is filled with medical experts and that no matter how bad off we were, once we have arrived our chances of survival grow. But how would you feel if when you arrived at the hospital, the Doctor's quickly informed you that their hospital happily staffed self-educated physicians?

When you arrive at the hospital, with your life in your hands, you know that your future is in the hands of these medical experts. And if your Doctor chooses not to read

your file, or to pay attention to your medical history or current medications, your life will absolutely end.

Well, you may not be a Doctor and your disciples may not be laying before you bleeding from their ears, but this is no less serious a responsibility. The Word of God makes it very clear that the condition of your spiritual life is far more important than how well your body is holding together. You cannot take this job lightly. If you come to the table unprepared, you could very well make mistakes that could cost young Christians everything.

### count the cost

*For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?*

- Luke 14:28

It is very tempting to paint healthy discipleship as an easily achieved reality. But I can't. The truth is, discipleship will cost you everything. Because life with Jesus costs you everything.

In the passage I just shared with you, Jesus was talking to His disciples and He literally told them that to follow Him meant the abandonment of all else. That is the cost of this life we have chosen. To live a life of complete surrender to Jesus. Hearts so fixed on Him that there is no room for any competing lovers. Paul, teaching on the desperate nature of the Christian life, made this bold statement, "the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as



though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.”<sup>xxi</sup>

In our culture, our Preachers spend the majority of their time behind the pulpit teaching us to be better spouses and stewards, so imagine if your Pastor stood before the congregation next Sunday and told you to live as though you had no wife or material possessions? But that’s exactly what Paul did. He wrote to a Church that was obsessively struggling with their relationships and their standing in society and he said to them, “Stop worrying about all of that! We don’t have time!”

The truth is, the Church has grown very comfortable. We know, intellectually, that Jesus said He would be returning soon, but we’ve gotten bored waiting for Him. We’ve stopped believing Him. We genuinely believe we have all the time in the world, and because we have lost our sense of urgency, we have stopped caring if we are ready. That is a mistake.

Jesus is coming for His Bride. I don’t know if it will be tomorrow, but it may be. And if it is, will He recognize us? That’s something we have to seriously think about. He made it clear that when He returns, He is only looking for those He knows. In Matthew 7, He said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare

to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"<sup>xxii</sup>

As a generation, we have replaced intimacy with God for service and the result is that we have built an entire era where the Church is not recognizable as the Bride of Jesus. So tell me, what happens if He comes back for the Bride tomorrow? And even more terrifying to consider, who will He hold responsible for the condition of His Church?

### **we will have to face Him soon**

With every blink of your eyes and every breath from your lungs, we get closer to that moment where we will have to face Jesus. Take that in. It isn't something we should forget easily. Though we are forgiven and guaranteed a future with Him, really consider the fact that we will have to face Him soon. Imagine what it will be like when He begins to point to the people you came into contact with throughout your life. Picture His face as He tells you of everyone who came to you hungry, needing something to eat. Or those who were broken and needed your shoulder. Or those who were lost, desperately in need of someone to introduce them to Him.

Tell me, will He name those people with a smile, proud of your faithfulness? Or will tears drown His face as He collects people He loved, people He desperately longed for...and will never know?

This job, it matters. It can't be put off for another day, and more importantly, it can't be done half-heartedly. Discipleship will cost you everything because discipleship is the difference between life and death. Take it seriously. Prepare your heart, prepare your character, and prepare your family.

Do what it takes to make sure you are ready to handle the weight of raising Christians. Consider everything we have discussed so far and do whatever work needs to be done to make sure you, yourself are approaching God in a healthy and mature way, and then make the decision that you will take your responsibility to reproduce Jesus seriously. This is life or death. It matters.

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<sup>xxi</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

<sup>xxii</sup> Matthew 7:21-23



*Part Two:*  
*Practical Advice*



# *They Will Know You By Your Love*

*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you  
have love for one another.*

*John 13:35*

Blink your eyes. Done? Great. Now tell me, what happened while you were blinking your eyes? Did you take a breath during that blink? Did you see red behind your eyelids from closing them too tightly? How many times did your heart beat? Did your stomach growl? Did your ears ring? Did anyone look at you weird? Did your breathing quicken? Did you become more aware of your heartbeat or did it vanish in your concentration? And how about a little further from home? Was anyone else in the room? Did anyone leave? Did anyone enter? Did anyone else happen to blink at the same time as you?

Can you answer all of these questions? Or did you somehow happen to miss everything happening around you during your brief, but focused, blink?

The truth is, it's not likely that you can answer many of my questions, if any at all. Your blink was too quick for you to have possibly taken in everything the moment had to offer. In such a short span of time, you were forced to focus on one thing: blinking. Your breathing, your heartbeat, your grumbling stomach; they all happened naturally as you focused on the one thing you were supposed to be doing: blinking.

Here is what I want you to understand: In one blink, this life will end and everything you know will be over. In one short span of time, you will never need to evangelize again. You will never need to heal the sick or cast out a devil or raise a dead person from their grave. For the rest of eternity, you will be absolutely focused on one thing: community.

This life feels like an eternity but the truth is, it's only enough time for one blink. So we have to make a decision. Do we spend it fighting for things that will vanish when the blink is done? Or do we focus on the thing we were made for and let the rest naturally happen as we satisfy our purpose?

## defined by love

*Then God said, "Let us make man in **our** image..."*

*Genesis 1:26a*

From our very first introduction, God reveals Himself to be a being who is completely centered around community. We like to think that God created us out of loneliness as He sat alone on His throne wishing there was someone to worship Him. The truth is, He was never alone. From before



the “beginning”, God was an *our*. His very nature is intimacy. He is three, He is one. He is so wound up in community that generation after generation of the Church have confused themselves, wondering if He is actually one being or not. So when He made us in His image, it is only natural that He also made us to be so intimately connected with one another that it would actually define us.

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

*1 John 4:7-8*

God is love. Think about the implications of that statement. In my short life, I have heard so many definitions for love. *Love is an emotion. Love is a decision. Love is a daily choice.* No... biblically, love is much more than any of that. Love is an identity. God *is* love<sup>xxiii</sup>.

We need to understand that when God made us in His image, He was doing more than giving us creative power or giving us His eye color or his manly hairline. He was designing us to be defined by love.

God is love, I am like God, therefore I. Am. Love.

Community is not just a gift that some Christians have been blessed to walk in. Community is the foundation of our existence. We were made to love one another. We were made to walk with God *together*. Which means that as we make disciples, Community needs to be central to our experience together.

I don't want to waste any more of your time convincing you of something that, if you are reading this book, you probably already know. But I do want to offer you a couple of practical pieces of advice that will help you develop your disciples in a way that will satisfy this part of their design.

### disciple in community

Early on in my journey of making disciples, I made it my personal practice to only teach one person at a time at that level. I was still a youth group leader, so obviously I taught on a larger scale, but when it came to intimate discipleship, I felt I owed my students my full attention. I would choose one student to pour into and I would give them my undivided attention for as long as they needed me, before moving on to my next student. I believed that by focusing on them exclusively, I was giving them my best. However, what I didn't consider was that if they were designed for community, separating them from community was probably not the best way to help them develop.

I realized a few years in that the most effective way to make healthy disciples was to raise them in the same environment they were created to flourish in. So instead of devoting myself to one student, I took a group of young people and devoted a little over a year of my life to helping them develop as a body, and the result was a group of far more mature disciples than I had previously experienced. Many of the problems I had experienced previously just didn't exist in this new setting. That, coupled with the fact that Jesus made disciples the same way, convinced me that I had stumbled onto something.

This is not to say that you cannot do discipleship one-on-one and bear fruit. You can. I've done it many times, but in some way, shape, or form, community has to be

incorporated in a very tangible way. It cannot be something that you teach in word only. It has to be an experiential reality for them. It has to be something that is demonstrated openly as they grow. It is not just another theological thought. Community is foundational to the Christian worldview. Without it, we fail to develop our disciples in the image of Jesus.

Practically, my advice would be that as you pursue a life of raising Christians, you make a point of discipling more than one person at a time. It is not the only way to do it, and there are other ways to demonstrate community for your disciples, but in my experience, the benefit to discipling this way is substantial enough where I would call this the easy choice. Actually raising them in community is so powerful in shaping the way they operate once they are no longer under your care. I have found that it not only develops the way they think, but it develops humbler, more gifted disciples as they are forced to experience a setting where they are not the center of the story, and where everyone's gifts matter.

For myself, I try to model the way Jesus discipled. I usually have a group of around ten students that I am pouring into on a regular basis. This group would be one that I meet with intentionally to study with and pray with at least on a weekly basis, also allowing them intimate access to my life and family. Meaning that they are welcome to call or text at any time, and I will answer. They are welcome at our home for dinner, welcome to come hang out if they need company, welcome to just be a part of our lives. They know us. They are people that I will go out of my way to text as I am studying the Word, to hear what they think or to share a thought I found interesting. They are people that I will invite over just to worship or pray or think about an out-of-the-box thought I've had. They are family.

And then within that group, there are usually a select few who are more interested in knowing us than the rest. Either they are particularly inspired by our lives, have more free time than the others, or are just a little hungrier to grow. Regardless of why, there are a few who we end up spending a larger amount of time with. Often, these individuals end up spending so much time with our family that they practically move in. They will eat dinner at our house constantly, fall asleep on our couch on a regular basis, and even join our family for outings and trips. They are incorporated right into the family. I remember one pair of young men who would show up at our house practically daily, eager to learn the Word, pray together and just spend time with our family. They would fall asleep on our couch so often that we started to wonder if they lived there. One of them even kept blankets and pillows in the trunk of his car.

Some of you are reading this right now and wondering if I've lost my mind. You probably turned to your spouse and said, "This guy really needs to learn how to prioritize his family." But the truth is, that's exactly what I'm doing. Jesus did not choose His disciples and then tell them, "Hey, meet me at the synagogue on Tuesday night so we can study." When they asked Him a question, He didn't say, "How about we talk about that next week at group, I'm a little busy right now."

No! He went to those twelve men and He asked them to lay down their lives and to follow Him. And in practice, that meant literally abandoning the life they were living before and investing entirely into the purposes, and mission of Jesus. They slept where He slept, ate what He ate, went where He went. They sat under His teaching daily and they became His family. Instead of going home for religious holidays, they ate with Him. When they had questions, they asked Him. When they had needs, they went to Him. That

was discipleship with Jesus, and I have done my very best to make that what discipleship looks like with me as well. My disciples and my family are not two separate things to me.

Which brings me to my next piece of advice.

### learn how to love them

Equally important to exposing them to community is actually having community with them. I touched on this a little already, but I want to take you a little deeper into what this actually looks like. Let's look at Frank's story.

Frank was sixteen when we started discipling him. At the time, we had a discipleship group that consisted of about ten people, and we had five or six of them that I would call our "core group". Meaning that they were the kids who were constantly eating at our house and joining us for family outings and things of that sort. Frank was one of our more invested kids. He was one of the ones who always came prepared to dive into scripture together. He read the Word on His own, didn't struggle to understand it, and was always ready to help others grow. Suffice to say, we were very proud of him. His growth was quick, and it was deep, and we never struggled to find encouraging words for him.

We were constantly expressing to Frank how much we loved him, how proud we were of him, and encouraging him in his gifts and in his hunger for the Lord. We gave him encouragement, we validated his gifts, and we affirmed his identity. But there came a moment where I realized something devastating: despite all of our effort, he didn't feel loved.

He knew we loved him and he knew we were proud of him, but he wasn't experiencing it. He wasn't actually satisfied with the community he was having with us. For the longest time, we couldn't figure out where the disconnect

was, until finally it clicked. I realized that everyone Frank was close with was a more physically expressive person. He and his closest friends were always hanging on each other, wrestling and hitting each other. We had always dismissed it as adolescent rough housing, but as I thought about it, I realized that that was actually how they were expressing love to each other. So I gave it a shot. A few dozen fist bumps and some playful roughhousing later, he was a whole new kid.

Everyone experiences love in their own way. There is no cookie-cutter outline for how to express love to people. Some people need regular hang outs and long talks to feel valued. Some, like Frank, need high-fives and playful shoving. Some need affirming words and the occasional unexpected gift. And some just need you to say it out loud. Everyone is different, and effective discipleship depends on you not only loving them, but loving them in a way that actually satisfies them. Community is not about sharing a space. It's about intimacy, which means actually experiencing love.

On a practical front, the only tool you need in order to do this effectively is your eyes. It is human nature to express love in the way you, yourself experience love. For instance, I myself feel very loved when people affirm me and my gifts. So, naturally, when I am trying to express love, I go out of my way to tell them how incredible they are and to acknowledge the areas of their lives where they excel. It comes as second nature for me to show love in that way because it is the way in which I experience love myself. The same is true for everyone else. How they experience love is how they will express love. So the only thing you need to do in order to find out how best to express love to your disciples is to watch them express love to each other.

If Amanda is constantly telling everyone how incredible they are and appreciating their gifts, show her love by telling her how incredible she is and by appreciating her gifts. If Billy and Jack jump up to push each other at every opportunity, join in the next fight and give them both an old-school beat down. If Josh is that guy who gets your kids a stuffed bear every Christmas, make sure you grab him a souvenir on your next family vacation.

The concept is simple, but it can be hard to express love in ways we aren't necessarily comfortable with. But love is not about our comfort. It is about community. It is about genuinely connecting with other people and satisfying their need to be valued and appreciated and wanted. It is important and it can't be overlooked. So make the effort. Pay attention to who your disciples are and love them in a way that actually satisfies their needs.

### respect everyone's purpose

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

*1 Corinthians 12:12-13*

I love to write. It brings me deep satisfaction to take my computer and create something that I know will go on to change many lives. It is one of the deepest joy's I have in life. And yet, as I raise children who look and behave so much like me, I don't have any desire to push them toward writing. It doesn't occur to me that because I am a writer,

they must be a writer. Why? Because writing is something that I do, it's not who I am. My children can therefore be just like me and not enjoy it.

This is something that far too many men and women of God need to learn. What you do for the Church and who you are, they are not the same thing. Though you may Pastor your Church, or lead worship, or teach, or evangelize with an insane amount of ease, those things will all pass away or change in nature in one blink, as we talked about earlier. They are not who you are. And when you are making disciples, it is important that *what you do* does not become what you focus on reproducing in your disciples.

Every disciple I have ever made has developed into someone who looked like me. It's the natural result of that level of investment into someone's life. Some of them develop my biblical insight. Some of them develop my desperate love for people. Some of them develop my bold demanding nature. Some of them develop characteristics I didn't even notice I had until I saw it in them. They all look like me in some way, shape or form. And yet, only one or two of them has followed my footsteps in ministry. Very few of them are passionate about the things I am passionate about, or fight for the things I fight for. It is like I am a foot who keeps reproducing hands and arms and legs and kidneys. Because despite where I fit in the body of Jesus, my *identity* is that I am in the body of Jesus at all.

I was taught for years that when you make disciples, you should make sure that you are choosing people who are like you. If you are prophetic, you should disciple prophetic people. If you are an evangelist, disciple evangelists. Pastors, pastors. Worship leaders, worship leaders. It's just the way it was, and still is, done. Understanding that discipleship is essentially just reproduction, ministry leaders decided that it's impossible to reproduce gifts that are different than your own.



The problem with that thought is, discipleship doesn't develop gifts. The Holy Spirit does.

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone...All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

*1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 11*

I don't want to spend too much time talking about this here because we will be focusing on it more in depth later, but I do want to point out one simple, important truth. It is not your job to develop your disciple's gifts. It's your job to teach them how to be healthy Christians.

Take apples, for instance. Healthy apples grow because there is a healthy apple tree present. There is nothing you can do to cause an apple to begin growing from the branch, and once one is growing, there is nothing you can do to cause the apple to grow faster or to grow differently. The only thing you can do is to make sure the tree stays healthy. The apple, itself, will grow naturally, without any intervention from you.

The same is true for your disciples. It is not your responsibility to decide what their gifts are, or to develop their gifts for them. It is your job, instead, to see what kind of tree is growing, and to water it. It is your job to keep the soil healthy so that the tree can grow, and to encourage whatever God starts attaching to its branches.

The truth is, as Paul said, the body of Jesus is made up of many kinds of people. Some of us are good at teaching, some hear from God remarkably well, some have an astounding degree of faith, some do miraculous things

regularly, and so on and so forth. The Spirit of God has equipped us, as individuals, to demonstrate different parts of His nature and power for the sake of the body, but that doesn't change who we are. Who we are is the part of us that is eternal. The part that will still exist after Jesus returns and the imperfect nature dies. That is who you are.

So what I would challenge you to remember is this: As you make disciples, reproduce the eternal part of your identity. Teach them who they are in the grand scheme of creation. Teach them their nature and their authority and their value. But when it comes to the parts of their nature that are not eternal, just celebrate them. Value their gifts, encourage their gifts, welcome their gifts, guide them in their gifts, but don't get in God's way by insisting that your disciples grow in the direction you have, or in a direction you see fit. Recognize and respect who they are as an individual.

## *Bringing Down Strongholds*

Everyone enjoys a good underdog story. Especially ones where the big bad guy shows up with immeasurable force only to find the smaller nation that we are rooting for reinforced so deeply behind their walls of stone that despite their inferior forces, they cannot be touched. There is nothing like seeing a sea of monstrous enemies being held back by nothing more than a well-built wall.

A well designed stronghold can not only even the playing field between two very unevenly matched armies, but can actually change the entire course of a war. It can hold out armies of considerably larger size and force much stronger enemies to abandon their advance. A stronghold can take a people with absolutely no hope of survival and turn them into victors.

The problem lies in the fact that it is not only the “good guys” who have walls.

## not just the good guys

If ever there was an underdog, it is the devil. Now, from our perspective, the Church often feels like the underdog. We are a light in a sea of darkness, surrounded by sin and death. Everywhere we turn, the world is spinning out of control around us. We often feel lost in the debauchery of our generation. Unable to move or breathe without encountering someone or something from the dark side. But the truth is, despite all the blatant sinfulness permeating our generation, the enemy has already been defeated.

*And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

*Colossians 2:13-15*

Jesus did not just defeat the devil. He made him a public spectacle. He utterly, and savagely, defeated Him in open battle and demonstrated His superior power by submitting to death and then overcoming it anyway. A lot of people like to think of God and the devil as equal partners in this cosmic wrestling match for our morality and souls, but the truth is, the devil is greatly outmatched. Picture every war film you've ever seen, every time a smaller nation has had to hide behind their walls to save themselves from the overwhelming certainty of death that stretched before them. That

is the devil's reality. He cannot hope to best God. Cannot hope to even hold his own ground. He knows that to compete is to be utterly, and humiliatingly, defeat. So instead of an open contest, he erects walls around his victims, protecting himself from assault as he fights for their affections.

That is what I want to talk about in this chapter. Not demonic possession or spiritual warfare, though they are important, but the efforts of the enemy to prevent your disciples from the influence of God's presence. I want to help you really understand how the enemy ensnares people and equip you to break right through his defenses.

### what is a stronghold

*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,  
2 Corinthians 10:3-5*

One of the hardest realities you will face as a leader is watching the struggles your disciples will experience. As you get to know your kids, the secret parts of them will surface. Their struggles, their fears, their habitual sins, their secrets. You will learn things about them that most people don't know. Some of it may surprise you, and some of it may make perfect sense to you. Regardless, it will challenge you to watch them struggling to overcome their old nature. Almost as much as it challenged you to overcome your own.

In order to help them overcome the struggles, habits and burdens they will face, you need to understand that your disciple is not the actual problem. It is very tempting to deal with sin by telling your disciples to make better decisions or to suppress their temptation until they stop being tempted by them but the truth is, their habitual sins and burdens go much deeper than a behavior and can't be dealt with by teaching them proper time management or encouraging them to put proper locks on their phones and computers. As Paul told the Corinthians, our fight is not with flesh. When dealing with habitual sin, hang-ups and behaviors, the enemy is not your disciple. It is *arguments and lofty thoughts raised against the knowledge of God*.

The enemy doesn't enslave us by showing up in our room and forcing the demon of lust down our throats. He subtly tells us that our unmet needs are possible to satisfy. He lures us away from righteousness by devising methods for our fulfillment that circumvent God's provisions.

*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

*James 1:13-15*

If you want to understand your disciple's inability to break free from sin, you need to understand that addiction is always rooted in real need. When Satan came to tempt Eve, he

didn't come out of left field. No, he tempted her with her design. He said, "*you will be like God*"<sup>xxiv</sup>. Eve was designed to be like God<sup>xxv</sup>! It was her nature. Her identity. Her purpose in life. Satan didn't try tempting her to become something she wasn't. He tempted her to satisfy her Godly needs by taking her life into her own hands.

Your spirit craves to be satisfied. It has needs. It needs intimacy. It needs joy. It needs peace. It needs freedom. And the sinful nature, whether by the inspiration of the enemy or your natural flesh, seeks to convince you that those needs are best met by taking matters into your own hands. Instead of satisfying your need for intimacy through a devotion to God's presence and a biblically grounded community, the enemy convinces you that sex will scratch your itch with less hassle. And as you engage in sexual relationship after sexual relationship, you find your itch scratched, and you become rooted in that belief until you reach a point where you resent anyone who tells you differently.

That is what a spiritual stronghold looks like. It is when your mind is so barricaded by something that you believe that opposing thoughts become foolishness to you. We've all experienced this before. Someone who knows the truth but refuses to accept it. No matter how reasonable your arguments are or how well your thoughts are laid out, they just refuse to listen. The truth, no matter how compelling, is held at bay, just like the opposing army is held at bay when they face the impenetrable wall of an enemy's stronghold.

A stronghold, in its nature, is just a thought, belief, or perspective that has been so thoroughly ingrained into a person's thinking that they are unable to entertain any other way of thinking. This can be a good thing when it is God's

Word they have used to fortify their mind, but when it is misconceptions or lies that they believe, it causes them to get stuck in behaviors and habits that are sinful, by nature.

Thankfully, God is a little more difficult to hold at bay than human armies. There is hope. No matter how stuck your disciple is in their thoughts and behaviors, freedom is not only possible, but easily achievable.

### bringing down strongholds

*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

*John 8:31-32*

This is a very important text for you, as a leader, to understand while trying to help your disciples find freedom from habitual sin. When Jesus used the word "truth" here, He was not talking about "honesty". He wasn't saying that if you are honest with yourself, you will be free. A lot of people take this text and teach that a real self-assessment opens doors to break bad habits. In other words, counseling brings freedom. But that is not what Jesus was saying.

Jesus was teaching that if you abide, or stay, in His Word, you will become His disciples and you will see things the way He sees them, and when you see things the way He sees them, it will produce freedom in your life.

Let's go back to an earlier analogy. An apple does not grow because someone decides to grow an apple. It grows



because an apple tree exists. The apple tree, according to its nature, grows apples. It cannot change its mind and start growing oranges. Apple trees grow apples and orange trees grow oranges.

Before you come into the kingdom, let's say that you are an orange tree. And when you meet Jesus, you are reborn into an apple tree. Here's the problem. You still *feel* like an orange tree. Your branches still have some oranges hanging. Your roots still have some orange-tree DNA. The point of discipleship is to expose you to the design of God for your life so that, as you are enveloped in God's life and presence, the parts of you still clinging to the last vestiges of oranges start to wither up and die.

This is what Jesus was explaining to His disciples. As you abide in His Word and submit yourself to His teaching, your perspective will change. As you walk with Him and develop a history with Him, you will see His nature and His design for your life more clearly. And as your perspective grows clearer, the lies that were erected around your mind will start to unravel.

Strongholds are not broken by learning good tips on control or by studying the nature of your disciple's specific addiction. They are broken as you walk with Jesus and explore His design for humanity and for the Church. As you learn who you are, and the way God feels about you, the things you foolishly believed about yourself start to fade away in the light of reality. As you start to accurately see God, yourself, and what that relationship can look like, you will naturally learn how to respectably satisfy the needs you are filling with sinfulness. So the key is not in studying your

sin, but in studying your identity. The sin part works itself out.

### practical advice

Kyle and I began doing discipleship together when he was twenty years old. He was a freshly appointed youth leader and had been struggling with sexual sin for several years. After a lot of good advice and hard decisions, he thought that he had beaten it. He had programs on his phone and laptop that reported any suspicious internet activity to a close friend of his. He had stopped watching television shows and movies that had a lot of sexual content. He didn't wait until he was too tired to make good decisions to go to bed. He even sat down and told his mom what he was struggling with because he felt that he would be more likely to succeed if he knew his mother would be asking him how he was doing regularly. Kyle had read all the books, listened to all the sermons and taken everyone's advice. He had fought the good fight for his freedom.

However, as he started his second year in college while also serving in youth ministry, he found himself getting stressed. He was struggling to find the time to do anything and his schoolwork was suffering because of it. Overwhelmed one night, he slipped back into old habits and before he knew what had hit him, he was stuck just as badly as he had been a few weeks before.

I remember him calling me crying, telling me he thought he had beat it, but now he was back at it just as badly as before. Calmly, I asked him, "Kyle, how did you beat it?"

“What do you mean,” he said, “I put privacy settings on my internet, I stopped watching bad movies, I did everything I was supposed to!”

Without any hesitation, I told him, “Kyle, you didn’t beat it. You suppressed it. You won’t beat it until you stop needing it at all.”

You won’t stop eating until you’re full. It is as simple as that. We are a generation that have taught ourselves that pizza satisfies better than chicken, dating satisfies better than marriage and sex satisfies better than real relationships. We choose gratification over real satisfaction as a practice and it shows in our spiritual lives. As we come into the kingdom, we know things have to change, but we don’t understand how to actually satisfy our needs. So instead of developing as Christians and seeing it manifested in our behaviors, we just try to suppress our unhealthy desires and we end up leaving our needs unmet, instead of satisfying them the way God designed us to satisfy them. And as I said already, if we leave our needs unmet, we will find a way to fill them when the hunger gets real.

Practically, freedom is not something I can boil down to a set list of steps. But what I can tell you is this: If you take the necessary time to teach your disciples *who they were made to be*, what they are supposed to do will happen naturally.

What I mean by that is, if they understand how God designed them, how He feels about them, and how their needs were intended to be met, they can satisfy those needs in biblical ways. And once they are full, they are full.

Freedom, by nature, is attained by being satisfied in Christ.

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<sup>xxiv</sup> Genesis 3:5

<sup>xxv</sup> Genesis 1:26

# *Pneumatology*

*“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also And you know the way to where I am going.”*  
*John 14:2-4*

Imagine that you have spent a lifetime wanting a woman. You have wooed her. Pursued her. Chased her. Loved her desperately. Did everything within your power to protect her and provide for her. And over the years, she has turned her heart toward you from time to time, but over and over again, things got in the way. Each time you thought you’d won her heart, something stole it back from you. And then it happened. She was finally yours. She had turned her eyes toward you and only you. The only catch was, you had to leave for a while to build the life you were going to share with her.

Imagine that, knowing it would be awhile before you could return for her, you wanted to leave someone to stay

with her. To protect her for you. To provide for her needs for you. To tell her all about who you are. Who would you choose? Probably the person you trusted most in the world. Right?

*“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

*John 16:12-15*

Despite how He is often portrayed by the Church, the Holy Ghost is not just a source of power. According to Paul, He has searched out the mind of God<sup>xxvi</sup>. Think about that. The Holy Ghost knows Jesus in a way that you can't possibly yet. They have existed together for longer than the universe itself has existed. They have been so intimate that the lines of individuality are blurred and they appear as one. So close that, as far as we know, they are not actually separate people. That's how close they are. The Holy Ghost knows His thoughts and dreams. He knows what brings Him joy and what irritates Him. He has searched out the deepest parts of Jesus and is intimately familiar with Him in every way. And the best part is, He is here with us and willing to share.

According to the above text, the Spirit of God is not just here to give you power or to inspire you. He is here to reveal Jesus. To teach the Bride about her bridegroom. To make

her like Him. To prepare her for a life of satisfying her purpose. To prepare her for an eternity of satisfying *Him*.

*For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.*

*1 Corinthians 2:10b-12*

The Spirit of God serves one of the most beautiful functions in the Kingdom. He is the person Jesus left to take care of His Bride. To keep us safe. To provide for us. To prepare us. To teach us. To lead us. So often, we see that scripture calls Him the “helper<sup>xxvii</sup>” and we take that to mean that He is here to take a backseat to our story. But that’s not even almost true. The truth is, He is here to run the show.

He brings life to the Word as we read it. He speaks to us. He convicts the world of its sin and convicts the Church of its righteousness<sup>xxviii</sup>. He satisfies us in His presence. He reveals the will of God. He represents the Godhead in the earth. He keeps the enemy broken. He is the might of God, ever-present among His people. The fullness of God’s presence, finally attainable. There is so much to His nature and His activities in the earth, but the chances are, if you are reading this book, you are already familiar with the foundational truths of the Kingdom and you likely know who the

Holy Ghost is. With that said there is one aspect of our relationship with Him that I can offer you some practical, and important information on. That being the gifts of the Spirit.

## the gifts of the Spirit

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

*1 Corinthians 12:7*

There is so much teaching on the gifts of the Spirit, and I don't want to waste your time going over things you've heard a million times. But there are four things I feel the need to address, in order to help you develop well-rounded and healthy disciples.

First, I want you to understand that each of us was given a manifestation of the Spirit.

## everyone matters

***To each** is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

*1 Corinthians 12:7 (emphasis mine)*

One of the greatest tragedies in twenty-first century Christianity is our insistence that in order to represent God, we need to have some special calling. Although we are all the Church, only the "anointed" can actually speak for Him. You know, the Pastors and worship leaders. We might even be able to count some youth pastors. If they hear from God, any plan can be interrupted, any direction can change.



But genuinely consider what would happen if the average lay-person were to walk to the front of the Church and deliver a Word from the Lord. Imagine if one of the children church volunteers opened up their Bibles and began to teach the Church without first receiving an outline from the lead Pastor. Better yet, consider the consequences if one of the Church's teenagers grabbed the microphone on a Sunday morning and questioned the teaching of the person who held the microphone before him. And yet, that is exactly the atmosphere of the early Church.

*What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.*

*1 Corinthians 14:26-33*

This concept that a few select individuals are responsible for bearing the entire weight of the Church's gifts is something the early Church would have rejected as heresy. The Church that Jesus designed rested on the gifts of every part. As Paul taught, it was the expectation of the Church that everyone would come to the assembly ready to contribute.

Every piece of the body of Jesus is intimately important to the overall health of the body and was designed to bring it life.

*The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modest, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.*

*1 Corinthians 12:21-25*

If you want to develop healthy disciples, it is important that you take the time to see and to appreciate what they bring to the table as individuals. Each and every one of them were designed to benefit the body of Jesus with specific gifts and with a particular personality. And although the body of Jesus is meant to operate as an intimate community, the health of that community depends on every part satisfying its individual purpose. Just like the human body, when any individual piece of the body forgets its purpose, it actually becomes a cancer to the body and compromises the health of the whole. So take the time. Invest in them as individuals. Encourage the development of their character. Make room for their gifts. Value their passions. It a part of discipleship that is easily overlooked, but it is crucial to developing not

only healthy Christians, but healthy communities. Let's move on.

## to each is given

*To each **is given** the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

*1 Corinthians 12:7 (emphasis mine)*

I hinted a bit about this in a previous chapter, but now I want to take a little time to actually dive in. Those of us who recognize our giftedness typically spend at least a portion of our time and energy attempting to replicate that giftedness. Many of us fall into this trap of overlooking people as we seek to develop gifts. Prophetic people teach people to hear God's voice. Those with the faith for miracles host Signs and Wonders conferences. Pastor's raise Pastors. Singers, singers. It's just the way it goes. We treasure our gifts and passions above all else, not even realizing that in doing so, we often allow pride to distort what God designed to be one of the most beautiful demonstrations of community in existence.

As we discussed earlier, it is important that we approach the knowledge of God with a proper reverence and humility. We are stick-figures on a page, trying to comprehend realities that function on a level we just aren't equipped to grasp. So the idea that our gifts are something we can talk ourselves into is baffling to me.

For so many years, I attended the prophetic conferences, hoping to stir my gifts. I learned things that encouraged me and inspired me, but no matter how much they taught me, and how astute a student I was, God still spoke to me the way He always had. My gifts continued to develop on His timetable and nothing I did changed what He was doing in my life. I didn't suddenly adopt a new history with God, and the gifts I began to fight for became things I was constantly striving for. They never became an intimate part of who I was. No one could manage to teach me to become something I wasn't.

That is the beauty of the Holy Ghost's gifts. They don't depend on me. I don't have to strive for them. I don't have to spend a lifetime perfecting my "craft". They are gifts, freely given by the Spirit of God as He desires.

*All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apports to each one individually as he wills.*

*1 Corinthians 12:11*

So many of us waste precious time trying to coach people into gifts God didn't give them, instead of encouraging them in the ones He did. I want to encourage you to do this thing right. The gifts of the Spirit are not obtained by a force of will. They are not based on our personalities or our family genetics. They are given according to the will of the Holy Spirit of God. Our job as leaders is to walk with them in the presence of God and to encourage and stir what we see the Holy Ghost doing naturally in their lives.

## natural manifestation

*To each is given **the manifestation of the Spirit** for the common good.*

*1 Corinthians 12:7 (emphasis mine)*

I have made dozens of disciples, and each of them has been distinctly different. Get into a room with Jimmy and within a few minutes he will probably have seen the deepest parts of who you are and encouraged you. Ezekiel understands the Word of God in a way that very few ever will. Samantha's worship reveals God in a way that changes lives. Qavan has seen many more people healed than I have.

The Christians I have raised are as different as is possible to be. Some of them are compassionate, some are strong-willed. Some are loud, some are quiet. Some are prophetic, some are bookworms, some are both. I learned early on that although my disciples will all adopt parts of who I am, none of them will be carbon copies of me. Even more importantly, I shouldn't wish them to be. Although I would consider myself to be an acceptable example, my nature is not one worth coveting. Discipleship cannot be about reproducing yourself. It has to be about expanding the community of God.

You may ask yourself how it is possible to raise many different types of Christians. How a foot can raise a hand and how a hand can raise an ear. Well, the answer is simple. Whether a foot, a hand, or an ear, every member is the body of Jesus. Don't raise feet. Raise Christians. Let the Holy Spirit develop them into a foot.

Here's the truth: the gifts of the Spirit are not talents that we develop. They are attributes of the Kingdom of God that the Holy Ghost supernaturally enables us to demonstrate. In the Kingdom of God, there is no sickness. So the Holy Ghost supernaturally enables the body of Jesus to heal sickness here. In the Kingdom of God, there is no distance between us and God. So the Holy Ghost supernaturally enables the body of Jesus to hear His voice. In the Kingdom of God, creation submits to us. So the Holy Ghost supernaturally gives us power to shape the earth around us.

This is the nature of the gifts. They are not random displays of power. They are manifestations of the Spirit of God. They are attributes of the Kingdom. They are pieces of Jesus, given to parts of the body so that, as a whole, we can represent Him well. Which means that the only way they can be attained is through relationship with the Holy Spirit.

We try so hard to teach our disciples to do it all, but that is not how Jesus designed His Church. It was designed so that the whole would be intimately dependent on the many. Meaning that in order for the Church to accurately represent God in His fullness, every part has to contribute their gifts. Can we all heal the sick? Absolutely. Do we all have the gifts of healing? No. Can we all hear God's voice? Absolutely. Can we all walk into a room and discern the hearts of men? No. Though we are all the body of Jesus and have innate authority over creation, there are some who have been gifted by the Holy Ghost in such a way that waters part and mountains move at their direction. These things cannot be taught. They have to be given.

## for the common good

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good.***

*1 Corinthians 12:7 (emphasis mine)*

The gifts of the Spirit are not about extending our influence or satisfying our desires. They are about the development and health of the body of Jesus. That includes the spread of God's community, the development of the saints and the unification of the body as a whole.

As Christians, we are raised with these secret desires. Hoping to develop more noticeable gifts so that people will see our value. We want to prophesy and heal the sick and part oceans. Not because we long so desperately to reveal Jesus, but because we long to be worthy of revealing Jesus. That's not why the Holy Ghost has given us power. The Lord is less concerned about giving you gifts than He is about shaping you into a gift for the body.

He gave us power so that, as a united body, we would accurately represent God on the earth and finish the mission Jesus came here to complete.

The gifts of the Spirit are given to us as individuals so that we can appropriately play our part in a picture that is about much more than us. In the same way that individual cells in a body work together to make up a whole, but have no real value individually, so our purpose is satisfied only as we submit our individual story to the grander scheme before us. It has to be about *us*.

So, what does this all look like practically?

## practical advice

Like every reality in the Kingdom of God, the gifts of the Spirit develop naturally as you walk out your identity. As we talked about before, apples grow because an apple tree exists. There is no effort you can give to make it happen faster or in the way you'd like. Your only responsibility is to walk alongside your disciples as they grow closer to Jesus and more intimate with the body.

Community is the key to growth in the Kingdom of God. It is an intimate part of our DNA as the body of Jesus. Not only community with one another, but community with the Holy Spirit. What that looks like for you and your disciples isn't something I can dictate for you, but for me that means an enormous amount of prayer, worship and fellowship.

The gifts of the Spirit exist for the development and health of the body, which means the only environment where they can be nurtured appropriately is one where the body is healthy. An atmosphere of community, where you seek God as a body, is crucial to not only the development of your disciples, but also proper function of their gifts. So practically, my advice for you is to expose your disciples to a constant atmosphere of biblical community. Corporate prayer, corporate worship, constant fellowship. Expose them to a healthy Christian atmosphere and pay attention to how they fit into that atmosphere.

Do they seem to always have a thought to share from the Word? Encourage them to teach. Are they regularly overcome with perspective from God? Make room for their prophetic gifting. Does their faith blow you away? Encourage their fearless pursuit of God's will. Do they always have a story of someone they have chased down with the gospel? Encourage them and take pride in their courage.



If may not be your job to develop their gifts, but it is absolutely your job to recognize them and to encourage them. It is sadly something that we don't see all the often in the western Church. Instead of acknowledging and encouraging what God has done in our disciples, most of us recognize their desires and attempt to develop things in them based on what they are willing to work for. But it doesn't work that way. The Holy Ghost is the giver of gifts. The highest service we can do for our disciples is to raise them as people and let God develop their purpose.

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<sup>xxvi</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:10-11

<sup>xxvii</sup> John 15:26

<sup>xxviii</sup> John 16:8



# *Teaching Theology*

There is so much to be said about the study of God's Word. I can't possibly take you through everything there is to consider in a few pages. It is a book written by dozens of men, living in different social circles, with different levels of education and different histories with God. They wrote with different writing styles, understandings and spiritual passions. The history alone could fill many volumes of books. So there's no hope in me giving you every piece of information you will need in a single chapter. However, if you remember just a couple of things, you will be equipped to satisfy your part in the theological education of your disciples.

it's not your job to teach them  
theology

Transubstantiation. Predestination. Arminianism. Cessationism. Pneumatology. Presuppositional apologetics. The list goes on and on. As a culture, we have taken the Word of God

and derived countless areas of study. Some foundational, some recreational, and some just a blatant disregard for truth. It's what we do. We seek to understand. And there is nothing wrong with that, so long as we approach those efforts with the understanding that we are stick-figures on a page. Approaching the study of God's Word without the appropriate humility and reverence is a mistake that can cost us time, energy, and biblical accuracy.

As a teacher, it will be your instinct to attempt to walk your disciples through not only the foundational truths of the Kingdom but also through a host of enjoyable, but non-essential, areas of study. Not to say that any area of God's nature or Kingdom is unworthy of our focus, but that not all of them require a teacher.

*But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie – just as it has taught you, abide in him.*  
1 John 2:27

As you make disciples, it is important that you understand that it is not your job to teach your disciples theology. Yes, you must walk them through the foundations of the faith. They need to understand who God is, who they are, how the Church functions. They need to understand prayer and worship and the gifts God has given them. But overall, it is not your job to teach them why cessationists do not speak in tongues or why Calvinists believe that salvation happens regardless of the will of man. It is not your job to explain the semantics of signs and wonders. Or to walk them through demonology or to outline the seven heavens. It is simply your job to teach them *how to read the Word for themselves*.

I recently had someone come up to me and tell me that they had run into a young man at a local fast-food restaurant. They said he was preaching his head off to a group of young ladies, and as they listened to his teaching, they just knew that he had learned under my care. I asked what his name

was, of course, and sure enough I knew him. He wasn't one of my student, but he had recently been to my house and we had taken some time to dive into the word together. It made me laugh to think about him diving into whatever theological conversation he was so passionately involved in. Unfortunately, this same person told me that when they questioned his perfectly biblical thoughts, he was unable to defend them. Not because he was wrong, but because he had never seen it himself. He was just spouting the answer I had given him when he asked me his questions.

This is one of the dangers to modern discipleship. We make our teaching about giving our students the answers rather than developing their minds to think. And as a result, they can answer your theological questions, but don't actually know anything. It reminds me of my three-year-old. She can't read, and no one expects that she would be able to. But she regularly opens up her books and reads them to her little sister anyway. Sometimes, she even knows what they say.

Is the fact that she knew what the page said an indication that she is actually an avid reader? Of course not. She's three! She can't read. And unfortunately, most western Christians can't search out the mysteries of God either. Because we have gotten ourselves stuck in a worldview that says actual theological training is reserved for seminary students, and the layperson just needs to know what the page says.

I want to challenge that thought. You do not serve your disciples well by telling them what the pages say. You serve them well by teaching them how to read the story for themselves. To do that effectively, you need to teach them a few things.

### context is key

In sixty years, my children will be old and gray. And their children will hardly know me. Don't get me wrong, they will probably have spent a considerable amount of time in

my home. I will have loved them deeply and been a safe place for them to run, but they won't have known the man I am today. They won't have seen me grow from the foolish young boy I was to the incredible man of God I hope I will be by the time they are born. They won't have experienced my history. And yet, the likelihood is that they will trust me when I advise them. Chances are, when I offer my thoughts on the Word, they won't question.

Why, you might ask? Because they will have the benefit of knowing the history I have with their parents. I will not just be another crotchety old man to them. I will be their grandfather. Knowing my place in their parent's story will inspire them to let me have a place in their own. History gives us context. Context gives us perspective. Perspective gives us understanding.

When it comes to the Word, we often focus on individual passages and thoughts, completely ignoring our responsibility to consider the context of whatever passage we are looking at. But context matters. It is not something we can afford to overlook or ignore. Often when someone asks me about a passage of scripture, I will read the entire book before examining the passage in question. Context matters that much.

Consider, for example, this frequently quoted passage:

*Be still, and know that I am God.*

*Psalms 46:10a*

If you are a Christian, you have probably heard this verse. And the likelihood is that you heard it being used in the context of intimacy with God. Maybe your Pastor was teaching

on the still voice of God. Or, more likely, your worship leader was calling you into a time of intimate worship and he reminded you of the power of just being still before God. It is a beautiful text that has been used for as long as I've been alive to inspire us to seek depth in God's presence. But let's take a look at this same passage in context.

*Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"*

*Psalm 46:8-10*

This text, which has been used for decades to inspire people to draw nearer to God was actually intended to inspire them to stop and awe in Him. Instead of reaching out in desperate longing, this text is encouraging us to step back and to take in the magnitude of God. The writer of this Psalm was encouraging us to look up in awe at the magnitude and wonder of our God and to let it immobilize us in awe.

Context defines the story. If you teach your disciples the importance of reading the Word as a whole, instead of picking out passages and letting them hold weight on their own

merit, you will develop overall healthier and more biblically accurate Christians.

How you teach your disciples the significance of context depends entirely on your own personality, understanding and teaching methods. For me, I do it in three ways. I stress the significance of reading the entire Bible as one whole, instead of sixty-six individual stories. Because truthfully, it is one story. From beginning to end, there is one overall story unfolding, and if we read it with that understanding, it becomes much easier to grasp without adding in our own desires or opinions. Last year, I took a group of young Church leaders through the entire Old Testament, showing them how each book of the bible fits into the master story being told. By the end of that study, their ability to interpret scripture had matured at a remarkable level. I would definitely encourage this practice.

The second way I teach my disciples the importance of context is by always showing them how I reached the conclusions I reached. I am regularly asked theological questions. And by “regularly” I mean I receive multiple questions a day. People will ask me what I think of a passage, or share their own conclusions and ask if I agree, or sometimes they just want to know if scripture agrees with some new thought they’ve recently had. I am almost always willing to make the time to discuss scripture, but I have made it my practice to take the time to always explain why I believe what I believe. It makes my responses much longer, probably to the point of annoying my students, but it’s important that as they grow, they learn to reach biblical conclusions without having to come to me for help.



The third way I teach biblical context is by questioning everything openly and making room for them to do the same. This is not an invitation to become critical in your teaching or in your thinking, but it is absolutely your responsibility as their teacher to make sure what they are learning is biblically accurate. I have cultivated an atmosphere where everyone's input is welcome. So if I teach something, and someone doesn't understand or maybe even has an opinion that might contradict what I'm saying, they are welcome to interrupt me and to ask questions or to object to my thoughts. As a group, we can explore any objections or alternate ways of thinking and find an answer together. In the same way, I will openly question or challenge their thoughts when they share. By creating this kind of environment, where you actually have to know why what you are saying is true, it really pushes us all to approach God's Word with proper respect. There's no room for faking your way through. Which is why I strongly recommend that you develop an environment where your disciples make a habit of considering the study of God's Word to be a corporate practice. Yes, they should absolutely study the Word night and day. It is a deeply intimate and necessary practice. But God designed us to operate from community within every aspect of our lives. Prayer, worship, growth, even the study of God's Word, it was all intended to be something that we did together. So make a point of teaching your disciples to study God's Word in context, and together.

## conclusion

Now, is this the only thing you need to know in order to develop your theological thinking? Not even close. I could fill entire books with my thoughts on cultural relativity, the different literary styles of the writers of the Bible and the dual nature of biblical prophesy. But I won't, because the truth is, if your disciples really grasp the significance of context and corporate study, they will figure out the rest of it. I have done this enough times to be absolutely sure of that. Teach them to read the Word as a whole, and to only accept revelations and conclusions that not only make sense to the specific text, but to the overarching story. If they manage that, they will develop into biblically thinking Christians.

# *Lovesickness*

I am so in love with Jesus.

For many of us, that becomes something that we just get accustomed to saying, but it is more than that to me. I am desperately in love with the person of Jesus. As much, if not more so, than the day I first fell in love with Him. When I wake up in the morning, my first thought is how desperate I am for His presence. As I fall asleep, I typically reflect on eternity and how great it's going to be to actually experience Him face to face.

For me, Jesus is not just my King. He is the love of my life. He is my deepest passion and the person I live to satisfy. This is who I am. I am lovesick. So in love with Jesus that the thought of being without His presence completely devastates me. So in love that every aspect of my life revolves around loving Him. The way I think, the way I talk, the way I interact with others. My love for Him is central to it all.

If you are reading this book, I imagine you feel similarly. Or, if you don't, I imagine that you'd like to. And even more

so, that you'd like your disciples to. That is what I want to devote this chapter to. To helping you cultivate lovesickness in the men and women of God you are raising. But before you can do that, you need to understand a couple of things. First, you cannot teach them to love God.

## you cannot teach them to love God

I have never tried to teach someone how to love God. In over ten years of making disciples, I have never theologically shaped someone's desire for God. And yet, the Christians I raise are known for their depth. The majority of them serve in the Church and are pillars in whatever ministry they are planted in. They are desperately and conspicuously in love with Jesus.

Love is not something that you have to teach. In fact, it is not something that you *can* teach. Despite all of the conferences and preaching series' out there, you cannot coach someone into spiritual hunger for God. You can encourage them to pray more. You can teach them to worship through their storms. You can even explain the nature of love to them. But you cannot teach them how to actually love God, because love does not begin with us.

*We love because he first loved us.*

*1 John 4:19*

One of the major mistakes a lot of Christian leaders make is encouraging young believers to press in for depth. You've probably experienced this in your own walk. Whether it was during an intense time of corporate worship

or during a meaningful altar call, at some point you probably saw a Christian leader step up to the stage and encourage the body to press in for His presence. Whether that meant two minutes of crying out for revival or speaking in tongues as a body or whatever else they may have encouraged, the point remained the same. You were encouraged to take your depth with God into your own hands and to fight for it.

The problem with that thought is that your love for God is only cultivated through a revelation of His love for you. You cannot strive for depth or press in for fullness.

Early in my walk, I attended a conference in Iowa. After one of the evening services, they opened up a prayer line, which I of course went to. I have always made it a habit to get prayer whenever I am around someone whose walk with God inspires me. In this particular instance, I ended up with a petite older woman whose name I never even managed to collect. Smiling, she placed a hand on my shoulder and began to pray for God's favor and fullness in my life. I'll never forget that evening because half way through her prayer, this little older woman grabbed my chin and looked me in the eyes. Crying, she said, "You are not an orphan."

I'll be honest with you, I thought she was crazy. I knew I wasn't an orphan. In fact, my mother was at home waiting for my call so that I could tell her how my evening had been. I had a great mom. So I had no idea why this woman was telling me this. But I let it go. The conference went on and I went back to my life several days later.

It didn't really sink in until two weeks later. I was standing in the back of our youth group's sanctuary, praying for the kids during the service as I always did, and God spoke to me. I don't mean I had an inspiring thought or a feeling in

my gut. I mean that I heard the voice of God. And He said, “Baby boy, you are not an orphan.”

I remember feeling both reverently in awe and exasperated by what I was hearing. I knew I wasn’t an orphan! And yet there I was, standing in the presence of God, hearing a voice from heaven tell me this as if my life depended on it. Even more interestingly, He said it a second time. And then a third. And then I broke.

I remember rushing from the sanctuary, tears flooding down my face amidst the groaning and howling that comes with the ugliest kinds of cries. I was completely undone, and it came as a complete surprise. I thought I knew who I was. I was already known for my depth with God. People came to me when they wanted to get closer to Jesus, and here I was, finding out that for my entire walk with God up until that point, I had been absolutely convinced that God only loved me because He felt sorry for me.

I had genuinely believed that Jesus was the son of God and I was just some Christian-sinner hybrid that God was obligated to love because of a promise He had made at the cross. I thought I had loved God, but the truth was, I had been fighting for depth because I felt that was how I earned His love. I didn’t actually love Him.

That revelation changed everything for me. Suddenly the spiritual depth that I had fought tooth and nail to emulate began to naturally manifest in my life. God’s voice was clearer. His presence was constantly manifest. His love was tangible. Prayer became a deeply intimate thing for me. Worship transformed from a time of singing songs to actual awe and adoration in God. And when I prayed, God answered me.

All because I realized He loved me. All because I realized what He had fought for with me wasn't out of some sense of obligation, but out of genuine desire for me. Despite the fact that I had been incredibly dedicated to my faith and had lived a lifestyle of prayer and worship and deep study, it took a real revelation of God's love to inspire any kind of genuine depth from myself.

We love because He first loved us. It's as simple as that. Encouraging your disciples to "press in" for depth only teaches them that their relationship with God is in their own hands. The truth is, it is entirely wrapped in God's love. The only way to take them deeper is to help them see just how deep His love for them is. And there are three ways that I, personally, help my disciples to see that.

### i pray for them

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*Ephesians 3:14-19*

This should be common sense, but I can't tell you how often I encounter people who genuinely don't see how deeply important it is for them to pray for their disciples. But pay attention to what Paul was saying here. He equated comprehending the love of God with being filled with all of His fullness. Our depth is intimately dependent upon how well we grasp that He loves us.

I'm not talking about understanding the difference between *agape* and *philia*. Nor am I referencing any other kind of deep theological concept. I am talking about being able to look at ourselves in the mirror and know, without any hesitation or doubt, that God is desperately and unchangeably, in love with us.

That kind of revelation isn't something you can teach someone. Most of us come into the kingdom understanding intellectually that we are loved by God, but struggling to internalize it. Something in us feels inferior. Unlovable. Dirty. Maybe not consciously, but it's evidenced by the fact that Christians regularly replace spiritual intimacy with a lifetime of service. Giving and serving at every opportunity without ever actually drawing nearer to God.

Prayer is your chief tool in penetrating that fortress of self-doubt their flesh hides so desperately behind. If you want to see your disciples become men and women of real depth, you have to pray for them. Constantly and desperately. It is your responsibility as their leader. Knowing that God is the only one who can pull your disciples into a life changing revelation of His love, you have to be committed to asking Him to.



## i love God in front of them

*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

*1 Corinthians 11:1*

If you spend time with me, you will learn that I hold nothing back. My prayer life is just as intense in public as it is when I'm alone in my room. It's not unusual for me to just spontaneously start singing to God in the most unusual places. When I worship, it's not uncommon for me to burst into tears or to begin singing my own song, regardless of whether or not anyone else follows along. Not because I am unusually spiritual, but just because I am open about my love for God.

My relationship with God is deeply intimate. I am desperately in love with Him. My prayer life is not centered around how others feel. My worship is not a tool for training. I love Him, and my relationship does not change depending on who is in the room. Nor should it. And over the years I have learned that despite how a lot of people feel, genuine displays of love for God do not sour young Christians. They drive them deeper. Take Torrance for example.

Torrance was a very analytical thinker when I met him. For the first two months after I began discipling him, he would sit quietly and watch as I, and my other students at the time, would worship and pray with wild abandon. As we cried out to God and wept in His presence, Torrance watched. When we believed for miracles and exercised our gifts, Torrance watched. But as time went on, as he saw the

fruit of our relationships with God, he grew hungry for more. He started to see that maybe what we had with God wasn't a trick. Maybe what we had with God was real. And furthermore, maybe he could have it too.

Today, Torrance is kind of known for his worship. Everyone who has ever been near Him as he expressed his love for God has commented on the way he loses himself in God's presence. He is still the quiet thinker, but now he knows what he is worth and it has inspired a depth in him that couldn't have been achieved any other way.

As a teacher, you cannot hold back parts of yourself and expect your students to develop them anyway. They follow your lead. Much of how they feel about themselves stems from what they see in you. The way they see God love you directly effects the way they assume God feels about them. So if you demonstrate distance in front of them, regardless of whether or not you are intimate with God at home, they will settle for distance in their own relationship with God.

If you want them to grow to love God deeply, you have to show them that it is possible to love God deeply. Set an example of freedom. Set an example of lovesickness.

## i love them the way God loves them

Jeremy was from a complicated home. And his relationship with his father was even more complicated. So much so that it had actually caused him to distance himself from God out of fear of what it meant to draw near to Him as his "father". In short, he didn't trust God because of how badly his own father had failed him.

When I met Jeremy, he was very uncomfortable with male figures in his life. He was a very well behaved young guy, he just didn't open up to men for the most part. But I loved him regardless. I invested myself into his life, got to know him on an intimate level and determined to be a stable and consistent example in his life. And before I knew it, he was one of my most invested students, despite his initial reservations.

The longer you are in ministry, the more you will realize just how often people's home lives affect the way they see God. Maybe it was an abusive father. Maybe an absentee mother. Maybe they grew up in a large family and never managed to stand out among their more gifted siblings. Whatever the circumstances, you will encounter young believers who, for whatever reason, struggle to accept that they are worthy of the love of God. As the person God put in their life to help them develop as a man or woman of God, the way you express your love for them can very well determine whether or not they ever break free from the lies that hold them back from knowing His love.

Raising men and women of God means loving them the way that God loves them and helping them to see exactly what they are worth. Without that practical demonstration, embracing God's love becomes so much more difficulty, which in turn makes loving Him nearly impossible.

## Shaping worldviews

If you want to raise Christians who demonstrate desperate love for God, it is important that love be a major part of not

only your own relationship with God, but also your relationship with your disciples. As I outlined earlier in this book, for Elizabeth and I, our disciples are like our children. Not literally. In fact, some of them are nearly as old as we are. But the principle remains the same. Our life is theirs. We love them desperately. We sacrifice for them regularly and pray for them without ceasing. Our needs and our wants are often set aside so that we can be available to help them grow. We welcome them into our family and into our personal lives, and we give them full access to our story.

Discipleship is not a game for us. These young people have been entrusted into our care and we take that very seriously. We embrace our responsibility to love them and to care for them and to help them grow. And I would encourage you, no – implore you – to do the same. Pray for your disciples. Be genuine with them. And love them. That's all it really takes to develop desperate lovesickness in others.

## *Conclusion: We Grow Better Together*

You may have noticed that there are several chapters you'd expect to see in a book on discipleship that I skipped altogether. I didn't include my thoughts on prayer, on worship, on evangelism or even on godly character. There's a reason for that. As I have stated multiple times throughout this book, much of what we develop in our disciples happens naturally as we live life with them. I don't want to rob you of real growth by teaching you "tricks of the trade" that get in the way of natural, spirit-led, development.

I have been actively making disciples for over ten years and I have never taught a single person how to pray. I have never sat down with a group of disciples and explained the theological necessity for worship. I have never given anyone the ten steps to godly character or hosted a seminar on how to grow fruit. And yet, the men and women I have discipled are known for their passion in the prayer room. They are recognized for their reckless abandon in worship. And people seek them out because of their above-reproach character.

There are many things you will have to sit down and teach your disciples as you lead them, but the practices of our faith are not included in that list. I taught my disciples how to pray by praying with them. They learned that worship was more than a song by watching me dance in His presence and fall to my face in tears at the sheer thought of His majesty. They know God answers prayer because of the hundreds of times He came through when we asked Him to together. They live like Jesus because for a year or more of their life, we spent all of our time together seeking His face, worshipping Him, praying and falling madly in love with Him.

None of these things have to be taught. In fact, none of them can be taught efficiently. I can explain to you the wonder of His presence, but I can't teach you to be in awe of Him. All I can do is step into His presence with you so that we can awe in Him together.

The truth is, God designed us to grow together. So much of this life with Jesus only develops as we embrace that design. So, although it is crucial that you embrace your role as their teacher, it is more important that you reject any notion that you are different than your students. Step down into their life and love Jesus beside them. That is where prayer matures from childish requests to real intimacy. That is where worship becomes the desperate cry of a heart that has seen God. That is where the old life finally gives its death rattle and the life of Jesus manifests itself. You cannot make discipleship about station. It has to be a journey together.

So please. Take what you have learned in this book and go and make disciples. Don't develop programs that only stir the mind. Invite them into your life. Live life with them. Spend time with them. Invest in them. Love them. Be real

with them. That is where healthy discipleship happens. That is where men and women of God grow.





## *About Me*

I have been making disciples for over ten years, but that is not what defines me. What defines me is that I am desperately loved by God and that I desperately love Him back. This life is so much more than what we do, and what we have to offer. And I have devoted my life to helping my generation see that. If you would like to be a part of that, I encourage you to check out my blog at [michaellaborn.com](http://michaellaborn.com) and to sign up for my mailing list, where you will not only receive updates on what God is doing in my life, but regular teaching from the Word and encouragement to step into His plans and purposes for His Church.