

 **DISCIPLES** PATH

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A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
DISCIPLE-MAKING

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 **LifeWay**
Biblical Solutions for Life

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INTRODUCTION

God uses everyday people like you and me to make His children into mature, world-affecting disciples. This statement is nearly unfathomable. That the God of the universe concluded that we would be the primary earthly tool through which someone begins to look more and more like Him is a mystery beyond comprehension. Yet that's exactly what He chooses to do.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

If this seems like an overwhelming and daunting task, don't let it be. You needn't be fearful that you don't have what it takes or that you can't pull it off. When Jesus gave the command to make disciples He made this declaration, "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus Himself is "with you always." You are not alone.

The same Jesus who calls each of us to make disciples is with us every step of the way. You'll be blindsided by the number of times you don't know what to say, yet the right and wise words come spilling out of your mouth. Or, you think you've blown it, and, in the moment you need it most, you hear a word of encouragement through the still small voice of the Holy Spirit or as you read God's Word. In indescribable whispers or through the words written thousands of years ago in Scripture, He lets you know, at the precise moment your heart is in need of it, that the action you took or the words you spoke were used in ways that accomplished His goals. You'll be ambushed by the power of a simple prayer and how God will answer it when you do not have the ability to meet the need of the person you're discipling.

You are not alone. In fact, if you go it alone, you can only accomplish in the lives of those you're discipling what you, a flawed and fragile human being, are capable of—and that is never enough. Disciples are made as a disciple-maker works in tandem with our all-knowing, all-powerful God to do what only can be done through this unfathomable partnership.

THE RIGHT RESOURCES

In order for you to accomplish the goal of making mature disciples, LifeWay Christian Resources has created a curriculum that takes the guesswork out of the process. You see, in order for a mature disciple to be made, it is essential that there be a biblical, intentional, and systematic approach in place. For this reason, LifeWay recruited fifteen church leaders from around the country who have been making mature disciples for decades. The LifeWay team worked alongside them to create a ground-breaking disciple-making series entitled Disciples Path. This series includes six studies: *The Beginning*, *The Way*,

The Call, The Truth, The Life, and The Mission. Each of these studies can be done independent of the rest, but it would be much more effective if they were done in succession over a period of time.

As you can see by looking at the diagram below, the series follows a strategic pathway. The sequence that these resources are best used in was determined by the team of church leaders that joined us in the creation of the series. They believe, as do we, that the order of the studies as seen in this diagram moves the person being disciplined logically forward into ever increasing levels of understanding and maturity.

What sets these studies apart? Each of these studies incorporates the practices of Jesus—teaching, conversing, learning, modeling, practicing, and reporting. The disciple-maker teaches and models a practice of a disciple which leads to conversation which then guides the disciple to practice what was taught and modeled. Then, the disciple in training reports to the disciple-maker what was experienced,



leading to another transformational conversation. Spiritual growth is the outcome when each of these principles and/or practices is carried out.

The Disciples Path series was carefully crafted to be used in a one-on-one disciple-making relationship, a one-to-three or -four disciple-making relationship, and in groups of five to twelve.

WHY THIS MANUAL?

This manual was created for the purpose of preparing you as you utilize the Disciples Path series to make disciples. What you'll find in the pages that follow is a succinct guide to disciple-making. If you utilize the principles and practices found in these pages, pray daily for those you're discipling, depend on the Holy Spirit to be your teacher, guide, and encourager, and give your heart to disciple-making, you will experience the most fulfilling ministry you've ever done—making disciples that make disciples.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

In 2013, I (Philip) was teaching on small group ministry at the Kiev Theological Seminary in Ukraine. Using an interpreter, I taught a group of church planters for a week about the need and the process of small groups in their new churches. At one point, I was convinced that they were just not getting it—not surprising given the cultural and language hurdles that I needed to overcome to teach. While there, I learned something that is true in all of the places where we lead.

- Just because you speak does not mean that they heard you.
- Just because they nodded their heads in affirmation does not mean that they understood.
- Just because they said they understand does not mean that they agree.
- Just because they agree does not mean that they will do it.
- Using a lot of words should never be equated with people actually understanding and following through on what you've said. Instead, plenty of explanation is always needed.

Whenever we lead, a necessity occurs that is often overlooked—the need to define our terms. We are regularly in churches across the country and speaking at conferences in which no one in the room has taken the time to define what he means when he uses the word “disciple.” When that happens, we often build up a collection of buzzwords and everyone we lead just nods their heads in support of our impassioned teaching. When it comes to identifying the meaning of the word *disciple*, I know we can do better.

In the book *Transformational Discipleship*, how to define the word *disciple* was key to the process. In the Greek language, the word can be understood as pupil, apprentice, or learner. It was and is a term that has a generic sense to it. In fact, one could say that everyone is a disciple. The question is simply: about *what* subject or to *whom* are we a disciple?

The meaning of the word is simple, but the impact of the concept is life altering. When a person becomes a disciple of Jesus, it indicates that he or she has become His follower. We surrender our lives for Christ to be our Master, the One who pays for our sin and establishes our relationship with God. Our faith in His work makes us His disciples. So then, what does a disciple do? It is all determined by how we follow.

Jesus taught that the choice as to whom a disciple will follow affects everything. In Luke 6:39-40, it reads, *“He also told them a parable: ‘Can the blind guide the blind? Won’t they both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.’”* The parable and explanation give us the sense that discipleship happens and that it has consequences. When we give our lives over to someone as “blind” as we are, all of us wind up in a ditch. The implication is that we need to seek a master that is greater than us so we can be led toward life rather than toward ruin. It is why we choose Jesus. When we become His disciple, the passage above helps us to see that three things characterize the life of a disciple. Discipleship is about being led in a direction, trained in the truth, and formed in our character.

BEING LED

First, being a disciple is about being led. In their book on the subject, Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby describe spiritual leadership as “moving people on to God’s agenda” (Spiritual Leadership). Leadership and discipleship are very close concepts in this arena. They both involve guiding people from one place to another. In some cases, leadership is about physically moving people to action or to a new place. With the specific idea of being a disciple, it means being led and following after someone, often in a new direction. Being a disciple means making the choice to be led.

In Jesus’ parable, He used a negative example about the blind following the blind to illustrate the role of a disciple. Disciples are followers. They must willingly take the hand of a guide and go where they are led. In the discipleship process, a disciple is a willing follower. As we help people understand what it looks like to become a disciple, they must see followership as a new way of life. But we are not dealing with blind men following blind men. Instead, a new disciple of Jesus is taking the hand of a person who can see where he or she is going.

Disciples may be able to see now but they rarely know where to go. They need to willingly hold out their hands to another and allow themselves to be led. It is an act of humility and teachableness.

TRAINED IN THE TRUTH

Secondly, being a disciple means being trained in the truth. Now that a person has given himself over to Christ, it is our responsibility in the church to guide him in what he must know and do. We cannot underestimate the power of truth-training. If we do, then disciples will carelessly stumble into a way of living life that may or may not look like their Master. Training often carries the connotation of a sterile classroom. With the forming of a disciple, we should aim for so much more.

The teaching by Jesus is that disciples need to be fully trained. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:20, He left us with the instruction of “teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.” A disciple is not someone who only wants a portion of the truth or the training. When we agree to be a disciple, it works through our whole life. But we must keep in mind that training requires multiple styles for proper learning.

Too often, the training that takes place for disciples means being quarantined to a classroom setting. It becomes an opportunity for lectures to take place—non-stop lectures. Certainly, some of the training that a disciple wants and needs is knowledge-based. A disciple wants to know more of the Word of God, how He has revealed His character and His ways to us. But since life does not occur exclusively in a classroom, a disciple needs training to occur in the everyday circumstances of life as well. Being a disciple means learning in a holistic fashion about how the gospel and the whole of Scripture intersects with daily living.

FORMING OUR CHARACTER

Thirdly, being a disciple means having our character formed to imitate our Master. Some years ago, the United States Army used a marketing campaign that had the motto: “Be all that you can be.” For the purposes of recruiting soldiers, it fit very well. But when it comes to people of faith, we know that a fundamental transformation must take place to be a disciple. Disciples of Jesus are people who no longer want to simply be all that they can be on their own. Instead, they want to be like Jesus.

Jesus' teaching in Luke 6 ends with the idea that a disciple will become like his teacher. After all, it is a great idea to be led well. It's even better to be trained how to live well. But, it is a whole other level we want to reach in which we live like our Master. To do so, it takes having our character formed to be like Him.

Philippians 2:5-11 is a passage that reminds us to take on the mind of Christ and live like Him—as a humble servant. Being a disciple of Jesus is not a mental exercise of knowing the right things, and it is not a religious exercise of simply going the right places. Being a disciple is allowing our whole character to be transformed. It is the replacement of our values with God's values. It is where our disposition is changed so that we see others through the lens of eternity rather than as temporary interruptions to our lives. Disciples of Jesus come into a willing participation with the King of the universe and we lay down our lives as living sacrifices.

We are not participating in a treaty where we keep sovereign boundaries and simply trade favors with God. We have joyfully surrendered our lives, demolished our borders, and are happy to have lives being shaped to look like Jesus. A disciple is one who has chosen an absolute surrender to go, learn, and be formed. It is the life that will continually follow Jesus and display a witness of Him to everyone around the disciple.

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CHAPTER 2: WHY MAKE DISCIPLES?

Why ask why? It is in asking and answering the *why* question that we intuitively give ourselves wholeheartedly to a cause. When joining a cause or are being asked to complete a task, people focused on efficiency ask the *what* question or the *when* question or the *who* question or the *how* question. The answers to all of these questions are important if the job is going to be completed effectively. But knowing what to do, when to do it, who will join us in it, or how it's going to be done, doesn't create an urgency for the work to be done.

It is only when answering the *why* question that a disciple-maker is excited about disciple-making. Knowing *why* enhances the willingness to carry out the responsibility for the right reasons and enhances a passion that aids the disciple-maker to stay in the game over the long haul. It's important that we understand the reasons we are making disciples.

JESUS EXPECTED IT

Jesus never anticipated that His bride would become a people who simply hosted religious events and weekend worship experiences. He declared that the church should, *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matt. 28:19-20). Because Jesus demanded it and we are His servants, this is enough reason to be a disciple-maker. But there are more and other important reasons to join the hundreds of thousands who have gone before us who were disciple-makers.

MATURE DISCIPLES EVANGELIZE

Mature disciples intuitively tell others about the Jesus who has transformed their own lives. In Acts 3, Peter and John, two people who had been disciplined to maturity by Jesus, are telling a group about Christ and offering them the opportunity to *"repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19). They were evangelizing in a public place. Peter and John were then taken by the authorities, kept in jail overnight, and later brought before the Sanhedrin. There they were commanded "not to preach or teach at all in

the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). The disciples' response proves to us that those who are mature in Christ cannot keep their mouths shut about the One for whom they boldly and proudly live. The response they gave was, "*Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:19b-20). Mature disciples tell others about Christ no matter what the cost.

A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH IS NEVER VOID OF SPIRITUALLY MATURE LEADERS

One of the most tragic realities in the present day church is that she is lacking in spiritually mature leaders. In a biblical church, a few of the essential leaders are deacons, pastors, and elders. First Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 unveil the requirements necessary to take on any of these roles. All of the expectations of these important leaders are character traits or outcomes of a person who is making disciples of his or her own household. These character traits are not self-willed, they are the result of having been disciplined to maturity. A church that is making disciples is never void of spiritually mature leaders. On the other hand, a church that isn't making disciples is often overtaken by a spiritually immature leadership team which leads to disastrous results.

DISCIPLE-MAKING TRANSFORMS THE CHURCH ENVIRONMENT

Many churches suffer with a church full of immature followers of Christ. Because of this, the church is constantly dealing with petty arguments and unhappy congregants. At the same time, those who visit the church are hesitant to join as they sense the tension and immaturity of the people who make up the church. A church that makes disciples is full of people who exhibit the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). A church made up of people exhibiting these characteristics is a magnet for both believers and unbelievers.

DISCIPLE-MAKING TRANSFORMS HOUSEHOLDS

Many families are made up of husbands and wives that are church attenders but have never been disciplined. Because they have never matured spiritually these couples live a life of carnality often leading to self-centeredness and ultimately, in many instances, divorce. For those who do stay together and raise children, their children are void of parents who nurture them spiritually so, when they reach adulthood, these children often leave the faith for the rest of their lives. In the era in which we live, only

those parents who have been discipled are going to take seriously the call that God gave to His people, *“These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”* (Deut. 6:6-9). For those who lead in the home, disciple-making is a priority.

DISCIPLE-MAKING RELIEVES THE PASTORAL WORKLOAD

Many pastors are overwhelmed with an unending number of counseling sessions, mediating conversations between those who are at odds with one another, and easing the tensions of immature believers concerned that the church isn't "meeting my needs." Over time, a disciple-making church is filled with people who need less pastoral counseling because those who have been discipled depend more and more on the power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, are mature in Christ so they are less prone to conflict, and when conflict does arise they follow biblical directives to clean up the mess that has been made (Matt. 18:15-17). Growing disciples realize that it isn't the church's role to meet their needs; rather, it is their role to serve Christ through the church, and in so doing, they will find fulfillment.

MATURE DISCIPLES MAKE DISCIPLES

Jesus had no Plan B. His one plan for bringing the world into an eternal relationship with Him was through people and churches that make mature disciples that make mature disciples. In John 17, as Jesus is praying to His Father, days before going to the cross, He prays an astounding prayer. This is one small part of that prayer, *“I have glorified You on the earth by completing the work You gave Me to do”* (John 17:4). What is this work Jesus is speaking of? Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, and taught teachings that would transform the mindset of the world for all generations. So, which of these amazing accomplishments is Jesus speaking of? None of them. In LeRoy Eims' book, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, he wisely reminds us that, *“When you read the prayer carefully, you'll notice that He did not mention miracles or multitudes, but forty times He referred to the men whom God had given Him out of the world. These men were His work. His ministry touched thousands, but He trained twelve men. He gave His life on the cross for millions, but during the three and a half years of His ministry He gave His life uniquely to twelve men”* (p. 28). And these twelve men went on to disciple those under

their care. Mature disciples make disciples and, if we do that, we will over time bring Jesus to the world—one disciple at a time.

Why make disciples? Because Jesus expected it. Because mature disciples share the gospel with those far from Christ. Because every church needs spiritually mature leaders. Because churches that exhibit the love of Christ draw unbelievers to join them in the journey to know Christ. Because families are falling apart and spiritual maturity is the only means through which a home will be Christ-centered. Because pastors are unable to do what God called them to do because they are forced to deal with petty issues and self-centered people. Because making disciples that make disciples will bring Jesus to the world. We make disciples because Christ desires to change lives, and only through the gospel is that possible.

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CHAPTER 3: THE TRANSFORMATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Once you have a basic understanding of what a disciple is and why we should seek to make more, then we need to construct a framework about how the process can take place. In my (Philip) book *Transformational Discipleship*, we created a framework to describe the three elements that are necessary for discipleship to take place. It is called building a Transformational Sweet Spot (TSS).

After a broad-reaching survey was completed on the state of discipleship in North America, we came up with eight attributes of a disciple. In order to facilitate the growth of those attributes toward the TSS, we boiled down the process to the three basic elements of Truth, Posture, and Leadership. In a simple sentence: *Transformational discipleship occurs when biblical truth is applied by godly leaders to a believer in a humble posture.* It is a broad enough statement to allow for various disciple-making processes to take place and specific enough to include key elements for any process.

TRUTH

Truth matters. It seems a statement that is unnecessary to make and yet, inherently, we all know it must be stated. The truth of the gospel specifically and the whole counsel of God generally must be communicated in the disciple-making process. We must continuously emphasize the gospel because of our tendency to slouch toward pleasing God by our vain, human efforts. We need the whole counsel of God from Genesis to Revelation because the story of God is foundational for the story of us. For discipleship to occur, God's revelatory truth of who He is must be applied to who we are to become.

We need truth also because of what happens when it is left out. If missing, we have an equation in which a leader—who could be well-meaning or a tyrant—imposes a great deal of opinion on a vulnerable disciple who was ready to learn. You will likely get transformation but not the preferable kind. Truth is needed so that pooled ignorance does not win the day in the discipleship process.

One other word about truth in this framework has to do with the spiritual disciplines. Applying the truth requires teaching, study, memorizing, meditating, and a host of other activities around the Scriptures. In the process, the disciple-maker must guide disciples to understand how to be self-feeders.

Once disciples have learned how to interpret and obey God's Word, then they can begin to reproduce the process and become disciple-makers as well.

POSTURE

A disciple must decide to be in a humble or teachable posture if transformation is to occur. As a parent, it reminds me of trying to direct one of my boys when they were preschoolers. When they would refuse to do something, I would pick them up to get everyone moving in the right direction. Often they would bow their back and strain against me. The refusal to be humble would result in a great deal of aggravation on both our parts.

In biblical terms, it is the same idea as when people were described as stiff-necked. They refused to bow to God's power. For transformation to occur, disciples must decide that being humble is the better course. It starts with the recognition of our own weakness. Knowing that we really have zero to bring to the process that God is doing in us is actually a blessing. If God desires to know the weak and shape them into the image of Christ, then embracing our weakness is a blessing.

But discipleship should not stop there because we can have a tendency to shut ourselves out of community when we think about being weak. After all, no one enjoys admitting that we have a glitch in our system. It is why the church must embrace an attitude of interdependence. The disciple-maker and the disciples are relying on one another like the trees of the Sequoia National Forest. Though they are the largest trees on the planet, their roots are actually quite shallow. The secret to staying upright even in the midst of terrible storms is that all of the roots intertwine with one another. They are interdependent. In the disciple-making process, we come into a similar relationship of relying upon one another.

Humility and interdependence must be coupled with an outward facing posture as well. A disciple must embrace the idea that Jesus' mission was to transform him but His mission did not end with him. As we point disciples to being humble and connected to one another, we need to keep them looking ahead as well. Our desire is for them to become agents of God's compassion to the needy and disciple-makers to those who do not yet know Him.

LEADERS

For any of this to take place effectively, we need godly leadership. When we consider the nature of discipling leadership, it is not for the need of a know-it-all or a dictator who barks orders. Instead, the spiritual leadership needed is more influence than mere instruction. Discipleship, though it must have truth, does not simply need teachers who quarantine the process to a classroom. Transformation will more likely occur when we lead teachable disciples with the truth in real-world environments. Leaders will affect change when they are modeling their own discipleship as often as they are verbalizing it.

As leaders, we must live at the intersection of the four ideas of truth, vulnerability, love, and a multiplying attitude. Leaders have the ridiculously great blessing of taking God's truth and infusing it into others' lives after we've integrated it into our own. For that reason, we must constantly evaluate how we are leading. Is it toward people merely mimicking neat religious lives? Or, are we witnessing transformation because of what they learn and witness from gospel-centered disciple-making? Leaders are in the position to irrigate what was once a desert with the living water of the gospel. It is introducing a dry and parched person to the streams of living waters that flow within him because of Christ.

The framework that provides an environment for transformation is not a complicated system. However, it takes a dedicated life. As we press forward to discover the role of a disciple-maker, keep in mind the balance (and sometimes the tension we'll feel) to bring God's truth to teachable people as a godly leader.

CHAPTER 4: GATHERING THOSE YOU WILL DISCIPLE

Disciple-making is relational. It's not just informational. In other words, it is not just filling the heads of the person or people you're discipling with Bible knowledge. In too many instances someone "teaches a class" and believes they're going to make a mature, practicing, biblical disciple. While learning what God is telling us through the Bible is essential, as it is through Scripture that God reveals Himself and the gospel, it is necessary for a disciple-maker to be much more than just a teacher. If the people they're discipling will someday exhibit the courage of Jesus, the compassion of Jesus, practice what Jesus practiced, and, over the long haul be transformed more and more into the likeness of Jesus, there is much more involved than espousing knowledge. Disciples are made as a disciple-maker befriends and mentors a disciple.

In the Gospels, on many occasions, Jesus is described as "Rabbi." The disciples of Jesus knew Him not only as the Son of God but also as a practicing Rabbi. In the book, *Sitting at the Feet of Jesus*, we find a description that helps us understand the essential principle of relational disciple-making as the disciples of Jesus might have understood it: "To follow a rabbi meant something other than sitting in a classroom and absorbing lectures. Rather, it involved a literal kind of following, in which disciples often traveled with, lived with, and imitated their rabbis, learning not only from what they said but from what they did—from their reactions to everyday life as well as from the manner in which they lived. The task of the disciple was to become as much like the Rabbi as possible" (p. 51).

An effective and biblical disciple-maker does life alongside those he is discipling so that he lives life more and more like the ultimate and eternal Rabbi, Jesus Christ. This begins with concluding who we will disciple.

WHO WILL YOU DISCIPLE?

Discerning, not deciding, who you will disciple is the first and substantially weighty step in the disciple making process. It is vital that you use wisdom and discernment when concluding who you will disciple. You are going to give much of yourself and much of your precious time in making mature disciples. Few things are more frustrating than investing in someone for weeks, months, or years only to realize he is not as passionate about becoming a mature disciple as you are about discipling him to maturity. There are a few crucial things to keep in mind as you decide who you are going to disciple.

First... Pray before concluding who will be discipled. Jesus is always our best model for disciple-making. Before deciding who His twelve would be, Jesus prayed all night. Check it out, *“During those days He went out to the mountain to pray and spent all night in prayer to God. When daylight came, He summoned His disciples, and He chose 12 of them—He also named them apostles (Luke 6:12-13).*

Secondly... Realize, you cannot disciple everyone. Jesus had many followers. He chose twelve from the many and gave three years of His life to discipling those twelve personally. Limit the number of people you disciple to the number of people you believe you have time to teach weekly, connect with ongoing, care for when necessary, model the practices of a disciple regularly, and pray for daily. It’s much better to disciple a few well than to take on too many and have none of them reach spiritual maturity.

Finally... Not everyone who says he wants to be discipled is willing to make the necessary sacrifices. In order for someone to become a mature disciple, he must be willing to journey alongside you while being involved in some essential spiritual disciplines daily. It is a life he must stick with over time.

Once you’ve discerned who you will disciple, the next step is gathering them for the process.

HOW WILL YOU GATHER THOSE YOU DISCIPLE?

Step 1: Create a list of people who may be ready to be discipled. There are multiple ways to create a list of possible people to be discipled.

- A disciple-maker praying that God would lead him or her to the right people. As God reveals these people, you simply write their names down.
- A disciple-maker recalling people he or she has come in contact with that have one or more of the following desires: 1) a longing to live for and more like Jesus, 2) an appetite to know and live God’s Word, 3) a thirst to serve Christ with all of his being, 4) a calling to full-time, bi-vocational, or volunteer ministry, 5) a person self-aware enough to disclose that she knows there must be more to the Christian life than what she is experiencing at present.
- A church leader announcing that a disciple-making group is going to be started and making a sign-up sheet available to all.
- Making the church membership aware of the opportunity via the weekend worship guide with the email address of an individual where those interested can email to make their interest known. A phone number to call is also effective.

Step 2: Meet with each person individually to cast vision, unearth expectations, and answer any questions. I have found that the following series of introductory statements is effective when asking people to join you on a disciple-making journey. You must provide your own conclusions, as every individual's journey, and your understanding of them, is different. Sample conclusions are in parentheses.

1. I've been praying and... (God longs for you to go on a journey to become a mature disciple of His).
2. I see in you a passion to... (know God more deeply and live wholeheartedly for Him).
3. I would like you to join me... (as I gather a few people to disciple them).
4. It will demand... (that you commit to joining a few others who are going on this journey, a daily time with God, attending a weekly gathering, and stepping out of your comfort zone to not just *learn* what God is telling you in the Bible, but to *do* what God is telling us in His Word.)
5. If you will join me in this, I will... (promise to do my best to teach you what I've learned and am learning and to be a spiritual mentor to you).
6. I'll check back with you in... (a week. During that time pray asking God to tell you if this is the right group for you and to conclude whether or not you're willing to make the necessary sacrifices to become a mature disciple of Jesus.)
7. Do you have any questions?

Step 3: Call the individual on the date you stated and asked him if he is going to join you. If the answer is yes, celebrate. If he says no, or that he is not ready at this time, let him know that there will be more opportunities later. You do not want to try to coerce anyone into joining you on this journey. In most instances, this ends poorly as the person isn't wholeheartedly involved. Those who are not ready seldom do what is expected of them between gatherings, and they end up exiting long before becoming a spiritually mature disciple of Jesus.

You may wonder why I am so straightforward concerning asking someone to make a meaningful commitment prior to coming on board. The reason is the principle of counting the cost that Jesus established. At one point, when large crowds were following Jesus, the healer, the demon extractor, and celebrity teacher Jesus turned to them and said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:26-27).

Jesus then went on to say, "For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to make fun of him, saying, 'This man started to build and wasn't able to finish.'" Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with 10,000 to oppose the one who comes against him with 20,000? If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not say good-bye to all his possessions cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:28-33).

What was Jesus' point? He's telling those in the crowd that before choosing to follow Him and become one of His disciples, count the cost. If you're unwilling to give all of your heart to Him and the discipleship journey you're about to take, then you're not ready for it.

Jesus knew that if someone hasn't committed to the journey and Jesus is not his first priority, he will drop out when it gets difficult. In the same way, if the people you're recruiting are not ready for the journey, they will throw in the towel when it becomes challenging or seems demanding. A commitment to, at least, attending meetings weekly without missing unless there's a true emergency, spending time with God daily, and stepping outside of one's comfort zone to live what has been learned, is not too much to ask. In fact, asking for a commitment to these things is the right thing to do.

CHAPTER 5: THE ROLE OF THE DISCIPLE-MAKER

One Tuesday night, as I (Rick) was leading the small group God had given me to shepherd, I came to an obvious, but often overlooked, awareness concerning the disciple-making process. Both the disciple-maker and the disciple need to be vividly aware of the role each of them plays in one another's lives.

As we came to the end of the study that night, I scanned the room asking myself how I could aid someone in learning how to study the Bible on her own. I realized I was leading a group made up mostly of spiritual babies so I wanted to ask someone to complete a simple task. It would be something that wouldn't take much time but connect one of the group members to a tool that she could use in her spiritual journey for a lifetime. I simply asked one of the ladies in the group if she would go to a website I suggested (an online commentary), check out what the commentary unveiled concerning a particular passage of Scripture, and come back with a report for the group.

Through the grapevine I heard that this woman was incensed. The question she was asking, "How could he give me homework? Who does he think he is?" And, because I hadn't established the role I played in her life (the role of disciple-maker), this was a very fair question to ask. In my mind, I was the person that was discipling her. In her mind, I was the guy responsible for leading a weekly Bible study that she graciously attended.

It forced me to evaluate my role. My intent was good, but my approach was obviously lacking. After all, if you're going to get permission to ask someone to step out of her comfort zone, it's essential that she know the role you play as a disciple-maker.

DEFINING THE ROLE

When LifeWay brought the church leaders together who would later create the Disciples Path series, one of their greatest concerns was that the curriculum we were creating might be considered an end in and of itself. They were wise in understanding that curriculum doesn't make a mature disciple, rather curriculum is an essential tool in the toolbox of disciple-makers. Because discipleship is relational, it is essential that the disciple-maker be clearly aware of the practices of an effective disciple-maker.

The practices of an effective disciple-maker can be summed up in three terms: Model, Mentor, and Meet.

When we study Jesus' relationship with His twelve disciples, we are immediately aware that He did more than just teach them. He did life with them. They were by Jesus' side when He taught kingdom principles, interacted with His detractors, chose to eat with sinners, raised the bar of expectation on those who followed Him around but hadn't yet chosen to be one of His followers, cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, and the list goes on and on. Jesus' disciples were with Him in almost every situation that they would someday be in. Why would Jesus choose this path? Because Jesus, the most effective disciple-maker and the model of disciple-making, knew that people are much more apt to do what they've seen done, not what they've been told to do.

MODEL

The first role of the disciple-maker is to model the lifestyle of a disciple of Jesus Christ. The Disciples Path series makes it easy to know how to be a model for those you're discipling. Over and above exhibiting the character and practices of Jesus to the best of your ability, simply involve yourself in those actions that the group you're leading is being asked to do.

The Disciples Path series requires two practices between meetings. 1) Reading Scripture daily is established. In each of the six disciple-making studies that make up the Disciples Path series, you'll find a list of required daily readings. Because daily time in God's Word is essential to spiritual growth, it was determined that reading the Bible daily was going to be a required discipline. You'll definitely want to model this practice.

2) Applying what is learned is directed. At the end of each session, you'll find three categories of opportunity: Worship, Personal Study, and Application. Because, as we've already established, it is in doing what God calls us to do that ultimate spiritual growth takes place, each of these categories offers a list of opportunities to be accomplished between meetings. It is important that you work with each of the people you're discipling and choose one or a few of these to be completed between meetings. More importantly, it's vital that you model accomplishing these actions by choosing some for yourself and reporting at the next meeting what you learned in doing them. Remember, what you model gets done.

MENTOR

The second role of a disciple-maker is to mentor those he or she is discipling. A mentor is someone who is a trusted teacher, advisor, and supporter. In order for a mentor/discipler to fulfill those roles, it is imperative that the person being disciplined know that he is going to receive three things from the person discipling him: encouragement, accountability, and answers to the many questions that will come to mind. Practicing these three things while disciple-making will capture the heart of the person you're discipling. It is also essential that you realize that you are teaching the disciple important skills.

Too often disciple-makers focus only on the heart and forget that a discipler teaches necessary skills to the disciple. For instance, an effective disciple-maker teaches the one he is discipling how to have a time with God each day, what many call a quiet time. He will also want to teach the disciple how to memorize Scripture. Another skill every disciple needs to know is how to share the gospel with others. When teaching anything it's important that the disciple-maker utilize a systematic approach. That approach will look something like this. Step 1) Model the expectation. Show the person how to do what is being taught by doing it in front of him. Step 2) Let him try it in your presence. Step 3) Give words of encouragement concerning how he did what he did followed by redirecting those areas where he fell short. Step 4) Ask the person you're training to do the thing again. Repeat 3 and 4 above until the person gets it right. Step 5) Set him free to do what he is now capable of doing on his own.

MEET

The third role of the disciple-maker is to meet with the person/persons being disciplined. Every disciple-making group should meet at least weekly. When the group meets, it's essential that the group utilize curriculum that takes the disciple on a disciple's journey. It is for this reason that LifeWay produced the Disciples Path series. Each of the studies in the Disciples Path series utilizes principles and practices that, if used as written, will achieve the goal of producing a maturing disciple.

The principles and practices of a good meeting include five important elements. 1) Reporting what was learned between meetings as group members involved themselves in daily Bible reading and other expectations, 2) Answering the questions that have arisen in the minds of group members, 3) Prayer, 4) Involvement in a conversational Bible study, 5) Engaging in an activity designed to help group members know how to practice the biblical expectations unearthed during the Bible study.

Between meetings it will be important that disciple-makers engage in five other activities. 1) Pray for those you're discipling daily. 2) Make yourself available to answer any questions from disciples. 3) Meet any emotional or material needs that surface. 4) When possible, meet for a meal or get the group together just to hang out. The more a group laughs together the more they are willing to talk about real life together. 5) Train those you're discipling in the skills of a disciple.

You will want to keep in mind that the number of people you're discipling effects the disciple-making relationship. Some disciple-making groups are one-on-one (what Philip calls a micro-group), one-on-two to four (what Philip calls a mini-group), or a group of five to twelve (what many call a small group). The principle that needs to be remembered is this: *The more people that are in a group, the more difficult it is to have transformational conversations and to train them in the skills a disciple must learn.*

If you are discipling one other person, it will be very easy to know precisely what is taking place in that one person's life. You can spend your entire time during the weekly meeting checking with her

concerning what she struggled with, what the Bible said to her as she read it each day, even training her in a particular skill as you meet together. This is often possible when discipling groups of three or even four. Some would say that this is an effective number to disciple as they learn from each other and learn to be disciple-makers themselves as they get to watch their disciple-maker as he trains the others. In groups of six to twelve, it becomes increasingly necessary to get with group members outside of the weekly group meeting. This is so that you can know them personally, encourage them up close, hold them accountable in real and authentic ways, and answer the questions they may be hesitant to ask when a larger group is in the room with them.

Take notice... Jesus had his seventy disciples, his twelve disciples, and his closest group of three disciples. It's fine to disciple more than a few, but it will be a bit more challenging. In order to effectively fulfill your role as a disciple-maker, make sure the number of disciples you gather will all benefit from the training you offer.

CHAPTER 6: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GROWING DISCIPLE

Every summer, high school football teams around the country gather for summer practice. The goal of the coach is to lead a team of players to win a championship. Sometime before the first game, and most often before the first practice, the coach unapologetically shouts out what it's going to take from every player if the team is going to thrive. The most important motivational declaration of the year takes place in the locker room on this particular day. And the uninhibited speech goes something like this, "If we're going to win the title, you need to decide right now that you're going to do whatever it takes, no matter how hard it gets! I need a commitment from you and now's the time for you to make that commitment. Not only that, if we're going to win the title you're going to have to listen to these coaches and be willing to learn from them! They know more about this game than most of you will ever know. You will give them your full attention every minute of every practice and every second of every game! And when they tell you what to do, you don't argue with them, obey them. Now... if you've got some questions that you want answered, all of these coaches care about you and will answer your questions. Just ask them. They are here to teach the game and to teach you about life. Let's go win a championship!"

The goal of every coach... win a championship. The goal of a disciple-maker... spiritual transformation in the lives of those he or she is discipling. Just like every great football player, in order for spiritual transformation to occur the disciple must commit to growing in some specific characteristics.

A PREDETERMINED COMMITMENT

In order for someone to continually grow toward Christlikeness, he or she must commit to a disciple's lifestyle. Jesus didn't downplay the expectations of a growing disciple. In fact, He asked much of those who were His followers. These learners were committed to following Jesus wherever He went, listening to His teachings, and obeying His commands no matter what. They not only learned from Him, they served Him. At the point they chose to follow Jesus they left everything and committed to a new lifestyle. As they deepened their understanding of Jesus' ways, His expectations, and His love for them, they began to give more and more of themselves.

For most of those who choose to become fully committed followers of Christ in today's western world, the commitment won't demand that we leave our homes or die for Jesus as almost all of His earliest disciples did. But it will demand setting aside time to be in God's Word daily and carrying out some specific expectations. In the research behind *Transformational Discipleship*, we discovered that there are eight areas of discipleship at work in maturing believers: 1) Bible Engagement, 2) Obeying God and Denying Self, 3) Serving God and Others, 4) Sharing Christ, 5) Exercising Faith, 6) Seeking God, 7) Building Relationships, and 8) Unashamed. As you disciple people using the Disciples Path series, you should begin to see these actions become normal attitudes and actions.

A CERTAIN HUMILITY

John 13 reveals the character of Christ like few other passages do. Jesus is seated at the table with His disciples. Without fanfare and without being prompted by the ongoing conversation Jesus spontaneously, "*got up from supper, laid aside His robe, took a towel, and tied it around Himself. Next, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around Him*" (John 13:4-5). The disciples who served Jesus so many times and in so many ways must have been dumbfounded. The role Jesus was taking on was that of a lowly servant. The lowest of the low, slaves of the lowest rank were the ones who washed the feet of weary travelers. Yet, the Son of God, was modeling for His disciples an attitude that every disciple should have: serving at the discretion of the One in authority over them. It shouldn't surprise us that Jesus was capable of this. After all, Jesus had purposefully served others throughout His entire earthly life.

Jesus did only what the Father directed Him to do (John 8:28-29). So, every disciple must come into the disciple-making process with a humility that opens the door for him to serve Jesus as subjects serve their king. It is only as a disciple embraces humility of this type that he can carry out the expectations of Jesus, the expectations that oftentimes calls us to give more than we have, love the unlovely in ways we would rather not, care for those who would never care for us, and give our time and lives to the cause of Christ.

AN UNDETERRED CURIOSITY

Disciples who are truly striving to grow have an unfathomable curiosity. I (Rick) once sat at the lunch table with a 73-year-old man. He had been a church member for decades and was in a men's accountability group. But he had never truly been discipled. For the first time in his life he had someone he felt confident asking questions of. He drilled me. First this question, then the next, then the next. He had been holding these questions in his heart for at least 23 years (he'd become a believer at 50) without

anyone to speak to about them. These were the types of questions that needed to be answered in order for him to trust God fully. Questions like, "How could a loving God allow me to grow up without parents?"; "How is it possible that God could punish all of us for the sins of Adam and Eve; I wasn't even there?" As we ended the meal, about an hour and a half later, he said, "Maybe this is why God put you in my life, I've got a lot of questions I need answered."

All growing disciples are full of questions. The curiosity they have is normal and important. It is essential that you, the disciple-maker, be willing to engage in conversations in which you simply answer questions. And, if you don't have the answer to the question, simply say, "I don't know but I'll do my best to find out." And then do. Ask your pastor, check out an online commentary, call up a friend who has more understanding than you do. But there is one caution we would offer. When God has left something a mystery, don't give some patented answer. Simply say, "I don't know that anyone will know the answer to that question until they're in heaven, but I do know that I can trust God no matter what His answer is."

By the way, if your disciple-making journey is like mine, you'll learn more while digging for the answers to these questions than you will listening to a myriad of sermons.

A WILLINGNESS TO ABIDE

Many disciples believe that it is up to them if they are going to accomplish the work God has for them to do. They will try to pray enough to earn God's favor. Perhaps a disciple will try to read the Bible more, memorize lots of verses, and mimic the tone of others' voices when she reads it. It is our nature to attempt some feat to coerce growth from our lives. The truth is, if disciples strive to do all God has for them to do on their own power, they will grow tired quickly and many will give up in becoming mature disciples of Jesus Christ. A disciple of Jesus Christ, first and foremost, understands that her responsibility is to draw her nourishment from Jesus Himself. In John 15 Jesus tells all believers that we are His branches and that He is the vine that brings nourishment to us. He said, "*Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me*" (John 15:4-5).

Barry Sneed and Roy Edgemon remind us of the disciple's responsibility, "The branch has no other responsibility except to receive from the vine, through its roots and sap, all of its nourishment. If we recognized that we receive nourishment through the Holy Spirit, our relationship with Jesus would be the most important thing in our lives. We would not grow weary in God's work if we concentrated on our relationship with Jesus," (*Transformational Discipleship Bible Study*, p. 8). A few sentences later

they unearth the fact that to abide “means to dwell always with Jesus, to be continually operative in Jesus, in His influence and energy; to be rooted and knit to Him by the Holy Spirit” (p. 8).

Abiding in Jesus is to have perpetual fellowship with Him. This comes through prayer, study of and memorization of God’s Word, living in Christian community with others who are on an authentic journey with Christ, and serving Christ wholeheartedly and sacrificially. But, if doing these things is done without being in a love relationship with and a heartfelt connection to Jesus, it is simply legalism bathed in hard work.

CHAPTER 7: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A DISCIPLE-MAKER AND A GROWING DISCIPLE

Earlier, we mentioned the importance of establishing the role of the disciple-maker as well as the role of the disciple. It is also important that the disciple-maker understand the relationship he or she has with the one being discipled.

When Paul described his ministry as a church planter and disciple-maker in Colossae, he wrote these words, *"We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ."* (Col. 1:28). The word "mature" means someone who is full grown, adult, or of full age. Paul was nurturing spiritual children toward spiritual maturity. In 1 Thessalonians, when Paul described his relationship with the people who make up the church in Thessalonica, he declared, *"You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers. As you know, like a father with his own children, we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory"* (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

There is a very telling statement in this passage, *"like a father with his own children"* (1 Thess. 2:11). The relationship a disciple-maker has with those he is discipling is that of a spiritual parent. And what does a spiritual parent do? A spiritual parent does as Paul pointed out he had done for those he was discipling: *"we encouraged, comforted, and implored each of you to walk worthy of God"* (1 Thess. 2:12a). Let's take a quick look at how the relationship is defined as encouraging, comforting, and imploring.

ENCOURAGING

In this context, to encourage is to appeal to the spiritual child you're discipling. Children need to be both challenged and encouraged. They are the practices of every parent raising godly children wisely and the practice of every great disciple-maker. In this role, you are guiding the disciple to obey God's expectations while offering reassurance throughout the process. The encouragement you give will allow the disciple to feel the confidence to press ahead in the process.

COMFORTING

It is important that a disciple maker also comfort the spiritual children he is discipling. To comfort in this connotation is to reassure the disciple so that they will stay the course. Comforting denotes the affectionate and compassionate counsel of a loving, caring father. When comforting, it's important to exhibit a compassionate father's love rather than exercising a stern father's authority.

IMPLORING

A parent will often find himself passionately and emphatically urging a child forward. Parents will authoritatively declare what the child needs to get done, how to live, and how to carry out his or her responsibilities. As spiritual parents, we know what is necessary for growth. As the word *implore* is used in this passage, it describes an authoritative tone and points to the earnestness of the appeal maker, the spiritual parent.

Every disciple-maker needs to remember that his or her role is primarily a relational one. You are not just fulfilling the role of a *leader* to the ones you're discipling. Don't fall into the trap of simply recruiting people to fulfill your own goals. Also, your role is not that of a *boss*. The disciple-making process is not the chance to simply drive people through a system so you can stand back and feel fulfilled with the work. Finally, you are more than just a *friend*. Though friendship is vital, your role goes deeper than mere sentimentality. Disciple-makers and disciples will become good friends but your place in their lives is something more in this time of life. Leading people through processes and befriending them are good things. But no child needs a parent who treats him in such a way.

Disciple-makers are spiritual parents to those they are discipling. They take pride in seeing that every disciple is taking steps forward toward maturity. They realize and accept that every child has his or her own personality and mature at his or her own rate. They nurture the ones they are discipling by encouraging, comforting, and imploring out of a heart of deep love so that the ones they're discipling walk "*worthy of God*."

CHAPTER 8: THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN DISCIPLE-MAKING

The very basis of being a disciple means being in relationship with the Master. Our Master—Jesus—has by extension made being a disciple also mean being a part of the church. Earlier in describing the Transformational Discipleship Framework, it was noted that interdependence is a key component for disciples to remain in the proper posture for discipleship. Without the willingness to proverbially bow to the work of others in our lives and meeting the needs of others, discipleship can easily become merely a mental exercise. The interaction one has with the community of believers is often the place where the training of a disciple becomes the natural manner of living for a disciple.

In using the word *community*, we are describing the closeness of our relationships and not the proximity of our locations. We live in communities where there are common traits like economics, size of homes, traffic patterns, and the like. But just one visit to a Home Owners Association board meeting and you'll see that the concept of "community" stops when the meeting starts. As members of a church family, we must never settle for mere proximity. We need relational closeness because it is the environment in which disciple-making takes place. Let's look at four ways community helps the process.

COMMUNITY IS A PLACE OF PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL.

When we come to the disciple-making process, it is more partnership than anything. Some years ago, I (Philip) was on staff where Henry Blackaby author of *Experiencing God* is a member. We would periodically have breakfast together. One morning after Henry had shared some wonderful insights with me, I was gushing on and on about how great it was to have him as a mentor in my life. Henry looked funny at me and said something along the lines of: "I'm not your mentor. I'm your friend."

It was painfully obvious then (and it would be still today) that Henry is farther ahead of me as a disciple of Jesus. But in that moment, Henry wanted to stress that we were in this process together. He had no desire to hold his maturity over my head with a "Why can't you do this too?" attitude. Instead, partnership in the gospel was laid as a common foundation so we could walk toward imitating the Lord together.

The word in the Greek language translated as *church* in the New Testament is *ekklesia*. Its basic meaning is “the called out ones.” It expresses the need for participation and not just association. Disciples do not just show up at the same places. We do life together.

COMMUNITY PROVIDES ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PROGRESS.

One of the easiest exercises to do when it comes to maintaining accountability in disciple-making is to test ourselves with the “one another” sayings of the New Testament. By our count, there are 31 of these statements. It is not possible to disciple someone in a relational vacuum. Instead, we learn that the entire Christian life bears out that we must constantly relate to one another well. A misreading of them will press us to simply make it a checklist of good deeds we are to accomplish for other members of the church. A more proper understanding will drive these statements into the heart of how we care for and disciple one another.

The statements are for the good of someone besides you. Therefore, they can obviously be dropped into the middle of our disciple-making process to ensure that we are helping others move forward. The statements like “Love one another” (John 13:34), “Instruct one another” (Rom. 15:14), and “Serve one another” (Galatians 5:13) all serve as checkpoints for how a disciple is progressing in spiritual maturity. As a disciple-maker, they also serve as reminders to us in how we lead.

COMMUNITY PROTECTS US.

We often use the softer biblical images for the church but we should never ignore the more brash ones. We are a family, and families protect each other. We are the bride and our Groom will cover us. But we are also an army, the ones who attack the gates of Hell and walk around in spiritual armor with a sword (the Scriptures) in our hands. The work of making disciples is not for the faint of heart because there is a war to wage and protection to give.

Hebrews 3:13 says, “But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin’s deception.” The work we do in disciple-making is not to help people avoid telling little white lies and slightly obscure their bad behavior. The community of faith works in such a way to keep people from being hardened and deceived. Dealing with sin’s outcomes is not something that we leave anyone to deal with single-handedly. Instead, we “ride shotgun.”

Have you ever heard that phrase? My kids use it when they want to ride in the front passenger seat of our car. "I call shotgun." The phrase comes from the Old West days when stagecoaches were carrying passengers or precious cargo. One cowboy would sit atop the wagon to control the horses. Another cowboy would sit beside him with a shotgun in order to protect them from bandits. As disciple-makers, we and the church family are riding alongside disciples to protect them from the trouble that shows up unannounced and the trouble that they might get themselves into. The church is a beautiful family but also a brutish force to protect one another.

COMMUNITY PROVIDES GRACE WHEN WE FALTER.

Within the community of faith, we hear the gospel often, are given guardrails to grow, and find protection from those forces that will derail growth. But, one thing that all disciples need to know is that the church will give grace when they mess up. Disciples, both brand new and seasoned, are going to fall into sin. After all, that is why it's referred to as temptation. It's tempting. When we do, we need to understand restoration.

The very relationship that a disciple has with Jesus is based on the reconciling work that Jesus has accomplished. When a disciple messes up, it falls to the faith community to rally to his side. If we constantly expect an inexperienced believer to "make up" for his sins then we are undermining the very nature of the life-giving gospel. Instead, the church as a whole, and disciple-makers in particular, model grace-giving and forgiveness when disciples stumble. It creates a lasting image for how they can become imitators of Christ as well.

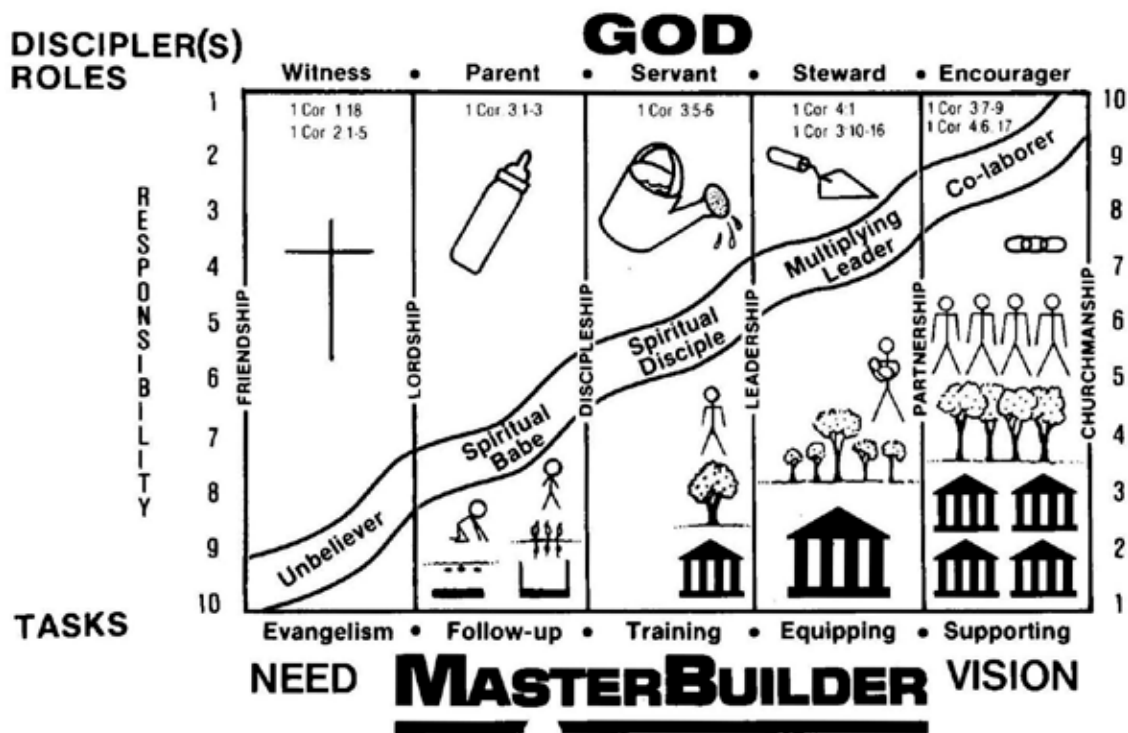
The community called the church is, at its core, a collection of disciples. We enter into a relationship with Christ through faith that is personal but is never to remain private. Being a disciple is a constant exercise of moving beyond ourselves and allowing the whole family of God access to our lives. As disciple-makers model that lifestyle, we will more effectively produce other disciples that are ready to be multipliers as well.

9

CHAPTER 9: THE STAGES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Every Christ-follower is a disciple but not every disciple is at the same stage of spiritual growth. When the apostle John wrote the book of 1 John he pointed this out. He helped us understand this principle as he indicated some stages of spiritual growth by using the phrases "little children," "young men," and "father:"

"I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven because of Jesus' name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know the One who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have had victory over the evil one" (1 John 2:12-13).



We need to know what stage each person we're discipling is in so that we know what that person needs from us in order to grow into the next stage. Just as a baby needs milk from her parents before she can crawl, and she needs baby food from her parents before she can eat solid food, so a disciple has various needs that must be met before that child can move to the next stage.

Some years ago, LifeWay created a diagram that has been used to describe the various stages of spiritual growth. As you can see, the stages of spiritual growth are described as Unbeliever, Spiritual Babe, Spiritual Disciple, Multiplying Leader, and Co-Laborer. You will find these terms going from the bottom left of the diagram to the right upper corner of the diagram on what looks like a flowing ribbon.

Below, starting with the unbeliever you will see what is the **ROLE** of the discipler in each stage, the **PROCESS** being experienced by the person being disciplined, the **TASK** being performed by the disciple, the **EMPHASIS** of the discipler, and the **COMMITMENT NEEDED** by the person being disciplined before he or she can move into the next stage.

You'll want to come back to this periodically to remind yourself of these various stages and to ask yourself, "What stage is each of the people I'm discipling in and am I performing the task necessary, emphasizing the right thing in order to take each of them to the next level of spiritual growth?"

UNBELIEVER

Role of discipler: *WITNESS*

Process being experienced by person being disciplined: *FRIENDSHIP*

Task performed by discipler: *EVANGELISM*

Emphasis of discipler: *CROSS*

Commitment needed to enter next stage: *LORDSHIP*

SPIRITUAL BABE

Role of discipler: *PARENT*

Process being experienced by person being disciplined: *LORDSHIP*

Task performed by discipler: *FOLLOW-UP*

Emphasis of discipler: *SPIRITUAL FOOD (MILK)*

Commitment needed to enter next stage: *DISCIPLESHIP*

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLE

Role of discipler: *SERVANT*

Process being experienced by person being disciplined: *DISCIPLESHIP*

Task performed by discipler: *TRAINING*

Emphasis of discipler: *CULTIVATION*

Commitment needed to enter next stage: *LEADERSHIP*

THE MULTIPLYING LEADER

Role of discipler: *STEWARD*

Process being experienced by person being disciplined: *LEADERSHIP*

Task performed by discipler: *EQUIPPING*

Emphasis of discipler: *BUILDING*

Commitment needed to enter next stage: *PARTNERSHIP*

THE CO-LABORER

Role of discipler: *ENCOURAGER*

Process being experienced by person being disciplined: *PARTNERSHIP*

Task performed by discipler: *SUPPORTING*

Emphasis of discipler: *COOPERATING*

Commitment needed to enter next stage: *CHURCHMANSHIP*

CHAPTER 10: WHEN THE DISCIPLE STRUGGLES

In your mind, you likely have a scene that plays out for the perfect disciple-making scenario. In it, your instruction and modeling is without any fault. When you gather disciples together in a room, they are prepared, spiritually minded, and ready to be molded. Everyone is busy reading the Bible regularly, ministering to one another, and sharing their faith with friends who are not believers yet. It is beautiful. Every week you have one of your disciples volunteer to begin a new group so he can become a disciple-maker as well. And then you wake up.

Making a disciple never goes so smoothly. Why? People are messy. As a disciple-maker, your life is messy. The lives of those disciples in your care are messy. It is an undeniable part of the disciple-making process because we are dealing with real life. So we have to get to the question behind the question. The question is not, "Why are disciples not growing quickly?" The real question is: "Why don't disciples understand who they are now?"

In the Transformational Discipleship framework, the idea of the Identity Lens is a critical part of a disciple's posture. Remember, for transformation to take place in discipleship, we need godly leaders to apply scriptural truth to disciples that are in a teachable posture. A major part of that posture is understanding your new identity in Christ. When a disciple struggles, it is very often because he is losing sight of what Christ has done for him and is doing in him.

Think about it this way: who you believe you are will determine how you live. As disciples, we must understand that our identity in Christ will move us through the many struggles we will face. Let's walk through a few of the ways the Bible identifies us as disciples and how it can counteract the struggles disciples will face.

FAMILY

The church is referred to as the "household of God" in several places (Eph. 2:19; Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 3:15). The church is not just a collection of people with similar interests. We are a family of children all adopted by God. It is a powerful image. For many people you disciple, they have not experienced a healthy or loving family. The revelation from God that He is our Father and that we are supposed to be one big happy family will be a beautiful answer to a lot of prayers. It is the one thing they've hoped to

experience in life. For others, it will be the answer to their marital crises, parenting woes, and a new way to begin to understand their own families. Plus, at its heart, it aids the disciple in better understanding how deeply entrenched our relationships are with one another in the disciple-making process.

But, as you lead people through the discipleship process, some will struggle with belonging. For all the disciples you lead who embrace being a part of a family, some will push against it. The issues of guilt and an expectation of rejection will plague some. As you lead them in understanding their new identity in Christ, the process requires patience—on your part and their part. We live in a performance based society. Even in some families, sons and daughters are judged by how well they perform. When they struggle with belonging, remind them that their identity is now based on the God who chose to adopt them and not how they earned a spot on the team.

BODY

Disciples are also known as members of the “body of Christ.” Especially highlighted in the letters from Paul, the imagery helps people to see that they can move from belonging to participating. New disciples (and some who are not so new) want to know how they fit into the work of the church. As you guide them forward, they will begin to sense certain callings from the Spirit to minister, be involved in the church family, and become disciple-makers as well. For some, their first impulse will be to simply imitate you. Helping them to understand the body of Christ teachings will guide them toward fulfilling the specific assignments that God will give to them.

The body of Christ imagery will also help when a disciple struggles with his or her identity. Whenever someone feels defeated for not performing well in his faith, the reminder of how the body works will dispel his misunderstanding. We want to set aside the fear for him that his work is to be compared with your work or someone else’s work in the church. Rather than rushing to the proverbial front of the class to be a teacher, God may want that person to do ministry that will gain little notice. Fully embracing the Lord’s teaching about being an equal member in the body of Christ will enable disciples to drop the comparison game.

BRIDE

Disciples are also known as the “bride of Christ.” Being guys, Philip and I (Rick) are not really great at fully understanding this image. But the Bible paints a great picture for us of the bride swept up by the groom and cared for throughout the rest of her days. For the disciple, the biblical portrait comes with the

assurance that we will be loved. It contains the great moments of the discipling process when we get to say it out loud, "We are loved," and you show it with your life, "I am loved... no matter what."

But, sadly, some will struggle with simply being loved. It happens because of the performance mentality already mentioned or not being able to let go of guilt over past behavior. For some, being loved seems impossible. As one leading them forward, you have the incredible privilege of constantly reminding disciples of how deeply they are loved by Jesus the Messiah. We must ingrain it into their identities in Christ that being in a covenant relationship with Christ means that God's love is greater than any mistake or rebellion.

AMBASSADORS

A final image that disciples need embedded into their identity is that of "ambassadors." In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul teaches that we are representing the King to the world and pleading with our friends to follow Jesus. By embedding this truth into our process, we help disciples naturally move toward mission. In fact, we are building in a replication mindset from the very beginning when we teach disciples that they are now ambassadors. Speaking on behalf of our King is their opportunity to invite new people to become citizens of a better kingdom.

Some of the disciples you lead will struggle with being a part of the work that reaches back into the world. They carry a fear of falling back into their old patterns of life. Additionally, they don't want to fail in their new lives and being ambassadors sounds somewhat difficult. As we unveil their new identity, we can dispel the myths surrounding their fears. As ambassadors, they can now embrace God's strength and message rather than trying to summon their own. Their identities are now based on God's ability to rule the world and not on their ability to conquer it for Him. As you guide disciples through their fears, continually allow them to see that your own faith is engaged daily in the idea that we can put our hope in God's work of redemption and we simply plead with others to accept the gift that has already changed us.

How a person perceives his identity will greatly control how he lives out his life. With the disciples in your care, ensure that they fully embrace these and the many other biblical images for who they have become through Christ's work. Many of the conversations initiated with believers through the Disciples Path will allow you to drive these points home. As they integrate biblical truth about self, then they will more fully embrace their relationship with Jesus.

CHAPTER 11: “GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”

As you come to this, the last chapter of this short disciple-making manual, we want to thank you for joining us in making disciples. We also want to remind you of God’s plan for disciple-making. We mentioned in Chapter 3 that Jesus had no plan B, that, in order for the world to hear the gospel and have the opportunity to respond to Jesus’ offer of grace, mercy, and eternal life with Him, it would be essential that we make disciples that make disciples. How will we go about doing that and remain committed to it?

DISCIPLE SOMEONE WHO WILL DISCIPLE SOMEONE ELSE WHO WILL DISCIPLE SOMEONE ELSE

Paul modeled generational disciple-making and told Timothy to do the same. He wrote, *“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* (2 Tim. 2:2). Notice, Paul told young Timothy that he was responsible to make a disciple that made a disciple that made a disciple. Timothy was to be a generational disciple-maker. It should be the goal of each of us.

JUDGE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR DISCIPLE-MAKING BY GENERATIONAL STANDARDS

Many disciple-makers judge their effectiveness as a disciple-maker by how many people they have disciplined. While discipling others is a very fulfilling accomplishment, it shouldn’t be the way we ultimately judge our success. A much wiser way to conclude whether or not we’ve been most effective is to conclude how many people that we’ve disciplined have disciplined some who have disciplined others and so on. When each of us disciplines some who discipline some, the number of disciples made is literally beyond comprehension and our disciple-making touches generations of people long after we are gone. Making disciples that make disciples is the marker of a world transforming disciple-maker.

USE THE DISCIPLE'S PATH SERIES TO DISCIPLE GENERATIONS OF DISCIPLE-MAKERS

We are often asked, "How do I go about getting the people I've discipled to disciple others?" This is a very fair question. Many people don't feel as though they have what it takes to be a disciple-maker or they don't believe that they are ready to take on such an awesome responsibility. First time disciple-makers realize the need for and sense a responsibility to disciple others, but they are uncomfortable with the idea.

You can remove their concern by simply reminding them that they are to do what you have done with them, including using the Disciples Path series as they disciple the next generation. When someone uses the same curriculum in the disciple-making process that they were discipled with, that disciple-maker already has a passion for the curriculum, feels comfortable with it, and is much more willing to disciple someone else. Encouraging the next generation of disciple-makers to use the Disciples Path series when making disciples is the best way to get someone to consider becoming a disciple-maker.

CONCLUSION:

We are so grateful that you have chosen to join us in becoming disciple-makers. At LifeWay we have a goal, to see a biblical small group within walking distance of every person on the planet making disciples that make disciples. For many, that walk will be from the church parking lot to a room in the church building. For others that will be a Tuesday night stroll to a house on the street, cul-de-sac, or the apartment building where a particular person lives. For a few it will be into the coffee shop near the local mall. For some it will be across a college campus or through a college dormitory. For those many miles and cultures away from most of us, in third world countries, it may be a journey of many miles down dirt pathways through multiple villages to enter a candle lit hut. And still for others, people groups experiencing persecution, that walk may take them to a tiny apartment where the windows are covered with yards of black material so that no one can be seen and where whispers rather than celebratory conversations instill the principles and practices of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

No matter where disciples are made, we must make them. Always remember that Jesus said, "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...*" (Matt. 28:19a). God Himself is relying on us to make an eternal difference in the world by making disciples that make disciples.

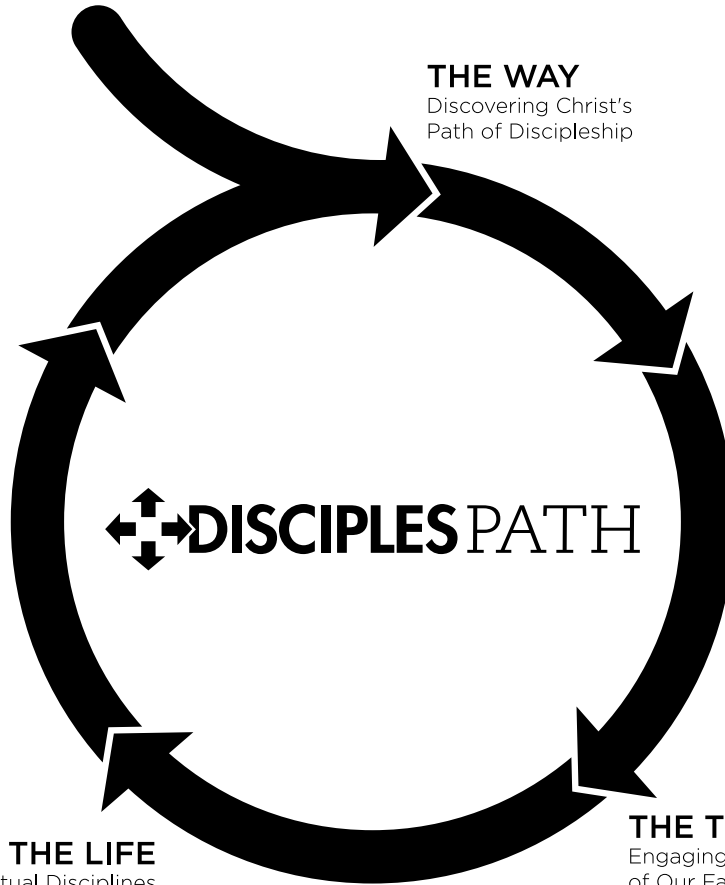
DISCIPLES PATH

THE BEGINNING
First Steps for New Disciples

THE WAY
Discovering Christ's
Path of Discipleship

THE CALL
Counting the Cost
of Following Christ

THE MISSION
Joining God in His Work



THE LIFE
Living the Spiritual Disciplines

THE TRUTH
Engaging the Foundations
of Our Faith

TAKE THE NEXT STEP.

Disciples Path is a series of resources founded on Jesus' model of discipleship. Created by experienced disciple-makers across the nation, it is an intentional path of transformational discipleship. While most small-group studies facilitate transformation through relationship and information, these disciple-making resources do it through the principles of modeling, practicing, and multiplying.

- Leaders model a biblical life
- Disciples follow and practice from the leader
- Disciples become disciple-makers and multiply through the Disciples Path

Each of the six studies in the Disciples Path series has been written and approved by disciple-makers for one-on-one settings as well as small groups. The series includes:

1. THE BEGINNING

Take the first step for a new believer and new disciple, exploring the foundations of following Jesus and discovering the answers to questions that all disciples ask.

2. THE WAY

Walk through the Gospels and follow the journey of Jesus and the first disciples.

3. THE CALL

Gain a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Christ in everyday life.

4. THE TRUTH

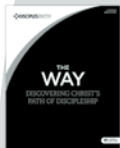
Dive into the doctrinal truths of biblical discipleship.

5. THE LIFE

Take a deeper look at the essential disciplines and practices of following Christ.

6. THE MISSION

Get equipped for God's mission and discover your role in joining Him in the world.



To learn more or take the next step, visit lifeway.com/disciplespath



Take a glimpse into the first Disciples Path study, *The Beginning*. The following pages contain the entire contents of Session One.

THE **BEGINNING**

FIRST STEPS FOR NEW DISCIPLES

SAMPLE

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Welcome to *The Beginning*. This resource serves as an introduction for new disciples of Jesus to the core truths of the Christian faith. As you get started, consider the following guides and suggestions for making the most of this experience.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Because the process of discipleship always involves at least two people—the leader and the disciple—each session of *The Beginning* includes a practical plan for group engagement and discussion.

This plan includes the following steps:

- **GET STARTED.** The first section of the group material helps you ease into the discussion by starting on common ground. You'll begin by reflecting on the previous session and your recent experiences as a disciple. After spending time in prayer, you'll find a practical illustration to help you launch into the main topic of the current session.
- **THE STORY.** While using *Disciples Path*, you'll find opportunities to engage the Bible through both story and teaching. That's why the group time for each session features two main sections: **Know the Story** and **Unpack the Story**. **Know the Story** introduces a biblical text and includes follow-up questions for brief discussion. It's recommended that your group encounter the biblical text by reading it out loud. **Unpack the Story** includes practical teaching material and discussion questions—both designed to help you engage the truths contained in the biblical text. To make the most of your experience, use the provided material as a launching point for deeper conversation. As you read through the teaching material and engage the questions as a group, be thinking of how the truths you're exploring will impact your everyday life.
- **ENGAGE.** The group portion of each session ends with an activity designed to help you practice the biblical principles introduced in Know the Story, which are fully explored in Unpack the Story. This part of the group time often appeals to different learning styles and will push you to engage the text at a personal level.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Each session of *The Beginning* also includes content for individual use during the time between group gatherings. This content is divided into three categories:

↑ **Worship:** features content for worship and devotion. These activities provide opportunities for you to connect with God in meaningful ways and deepen your relationship with Him.

→ ← **Personal study:** features content for personal study. These pages help you gain a deeper understanding of the truths and principles explored during the group discussion.

← → **Application:** features content for practical application. These suggestions help you take action based on the information you've learned as you grow in Christ.

Note: Aside from the reading plan, the content provided in the individual discovery portion of each session should be considered optional. You'll get the most out of your personal study by working with your group leader to create a personalized discipleship plan using the "Optional Activities" checklist included in each session.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- You'll be best prepared for each group discussion or mentoring conversation if you read the session material beforehand. A serious read will serve you most effectively, but skimming the Get Started and The Story sections will also be helpful if time is limited.
- The deeper you're willing to engage in the group discussions and individual discovery each session, the more you'll benefit from those experiences. Don't hold back, and don't be afraid to ask questions whenever necessary.
- As you explore the Engage portion of each session, you'll have the chance to practice different activities and spiritual disciplines. Take advantage of the chance to observe others during the group time—and to ask questions—so that you'll be prepared to incorporate these activities into your private spiritual life as well.
- Visit Lifeway.com/DisciplesPath for a free PDF download that includes leader helps for *The Beginning* and additional resources for disciple-makers.

A NOTE FOR DISCIPLE-MAKERS

Several years ago I was a part of a massive research study that sought to discover how the Lord often brings about transformation in the hearts of His people. The study became a book called *Transformational Discipleship*. Basically, we wanted to learn how disciples are made. Based on study of Scripture and lots of interactions with people, we concluded that transformation is likely to occur when a godly **leader** applies **truth** to the heart of a person while that person is in a teachable **posture**.

- **LEADER:** You are the leader. As you invest in the people you're discipling, they will learn much about the Christian faith by watching you, by sensing your heart for the Lord, and by seeing you pursue Him. I encourage you to seek to be the type of leader that can say, "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."
- **TRUTH:** These studies were developed in deep collaboration with ministry leaders who regularly and effectively disciple people. The studies are designed to take the people you disciple into the Word of God—because we're confident that Jesus and His Word sanctify us and transform us. Our community of disciple-makers mapped out a path of the truths we believe are essential for each believer to know and understand.
- **POSTURE:** Hopefully the people you will be investing in adopt a teachable posture—one that is open and hungry for the Lord. Encourage them to take the study seriously and to view your invitation to study together as a sacred opportunity to experience the grace of God and the truth of God.

We hope and pray the Lord will use this study in your life and the lives of those you disciple. As you apply the truth of God to teachable hearts, transformation will occur. Thank you for being a disciple-maker!

In Christ,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Geiger".

Eric Geiger
Vice President at LifeWay Christian Resources
Co-author of *Transformational Discipleship*

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Congratulations! If you've chosen to live as a disciple of Jesus, you've made the most important decision imaginable. But you may be wondering, *What does it mean to be a disciple?*

To put it simply, a disciple of Jesus is someone who has chosen to follow Jesus. That's the command Jesus gave to those He recruited as His first disciples: "Follow me." In Jesus' culture, religious leaders called rabbis would gather a group of followers, called disciples, to follow in their footsteps and learn their teachings. In the same way, you will become more and more like Jesus as you purposefully follow Him in the weeks to come. Jesus once said, "Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

On a deeper level, disciples of Jesus are those learning to base their identities on Jesus Himself. All of us use different labels to describe who we are at the core levels of our hearts. Some think of themselves as athletes or intellectuals. Others think of themselves as professionals, parents, leaders, class clowns, and so on.

Disciples of Jesus set aside those labels and base their identities on Him. For example:

- **A disciple of Jesus is a child of God.** In the Bible we find these words: "Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are!" (1 John 3:1). We are God's children. He loves us as our perfect Father.
- **A disciple of Jesus is an alien in this world.** Disciples of Jesus are aliens, or outsiders, in their own cultures. Because of this identity, Jesus' disciples abstain from actions and activities that are contrary to Him. Peter, one of Jesus' original disciples, wrote these words: "Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you" (1 Peter 2:11).
- **A disciple of Jesus is an ambassador for Christ.** Another of Jesus' disciples recorded these words in the Bible: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God'" (2 Corinthians 5:17,20). Ambassadors represent their king and country in a different culture for a specified period of time. Because we have been transformed by Jesus and are now His disciples and ambassadors, we represent Him to the world through our actions and by telling others about Him.

The journey you are about to take is one that will transform you more and more to be like Jesus. Enjoy! No one ever loved and cared for people more passionately than Jesus. No one was ever more sincere in His concern for others than Jesus. And no one ever gave more so that we could experience His love than did Jesus on the cross.

As you grow to be more like Jesus, you'll find that your relationships are stronger, you have more inner peace than ever before, and you look forward to the future as never before.

That's the blessing of living as a disciple of Jesus.



SESSION 1

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

YOU WERE CREATED BY A PASSIONATE GOD
WHO RELENTLESSLY PURSUED YOU TO BRING
YOU INTO HIS FAMILY. WELCOME HOME.

REFLECT

In this study, we'll explore what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. You're probably reading this because you've recently made a decision to take a step of faith. This decision may seem like something you initiated, but God has been at work in your life and pursuing you for quite some time. Take a moment to describe some of your encounters with God:

Describe the first time you heard about God.

Describe the first time you prayed to God.

Describe a time that God may have been present and active in your life but you didn't recognize it at the time.

PRAY

One of the ways we communicate with God is through prayer. At its core, prayer is simply talking to God—telling Him what's on your heart and actively listening for His response. When you're starting out, it might feel uncomfortable, erratic, and difficult. If so, don't worry. That's normal.

Spend a few moments with God by bowing your head to acknowledge who He is. Close your eyes to block distractions. If you need help getting started, here's a five-point prayer for guidance. We'll be looking at other approaches to prayer in the next few sessions.

- Greet God. How you address God may depend on what you want to talk to Him about. He functions in a limitless capacity: Father, Daddy, Friend, Almighty, Savior, and Redeemer.
- Tell Him what you're thankful for.
- Tell Him what you're concerned about.
- Ask Him to help you understand the elements of the study today.
- Take time to listen for His response.

INTRODUCTION

New creation. Saved. Born again. Redeemed. These are just a few ways the Bible describes “conversion,” our response to the great gift of salvation, through which we’re forgiven for being less than God created us to be. Jesus called the disciples, “Follow me” and explained that we must be “born again.” But what does “born again” mean?

Ultimately, salvation or to be “born again” means leaving your old ways behind and trusting God. He initiated a relationship with you and offered you a way to experience that relationship. And you responded. That’s what just happened to you. You’ve turned from your old life and turned toward God. You’ve been freed from sin and made right in His eyes. And you’ve been rescued from the enemy of God, Satan, and adopted by God.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What old things are you hoping will go away?

What new things do you hope Jesus will bring to your life?

The way we experience God’s grace and mercy looks different for different people. Perhaps it felt as though you turned a corner in your life and discovered God right in front of you, or maybe you felt like He chased you down and caught you from behind. Regardless of how you describe your own journey, all such stories share a few things in common—a change in what you believe, a transfer of loyalty, and a reversal of direction. God forgives, saves, restores, and reconciles.

Are there people you’ve “followed” over the course of your life? There are a few ways you can follow someone or something. You can follow people on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. You can follow a favorite sports team or celebrity gossip. You can follow a philosophy or an idea. But when the Creator of the Universe, God in the person of Jesus Christ says “follow me” (see Matt. 4:19), we know intuitively that’s something much different.

KNOW THE STORY

One day as Simon Peter was cleaning his fishing nets after an unsuccessful day on the water, Jesus climbed into his boat. Jesus had an unusual instruction for Simon Peter with a miraculous outcome. He told Simon Peter to push back out into the water and to cast out his net again. With much hesitation he did as Jesus said. The net filled up with fish. After the massive amount of fish began to sink his boat, Simon Peter realized who Jesus was and it brought him to his knees.

⁴ When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ "Master," Simon replied, "we've worked hard all night long and caught nothing! But at Your word, I'll let down the nets." ⁶ When they did this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets began to tear. ⁷ So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them; they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, because I'm a sinful man, Lord!" ⁹ For he and all those with him were amazed at the catch of fish they took, ¹⁰ "Don't be afraid," Jesus told Simon. "From now on you will be catching people!" ¹¹ Then they brought the boats to land, left everything, and followed Him.

LUKE 5:10-11



What are some practical examples of what it will look like to follow Jesus in your life?

What will make it difficult to follow Jesus? In what ways will it be easy?

Being a Christian isn't about following rules; it's about following a Person. It's not about asking Jesus to follow us but about deciding to follow Him. Jesus doesn't stand in a far off place and demand that we get our act together before approaching Him; rather, He invades the reality of our lives and beckons us into a life larger than our own.

Following Jesus is ultimately about doing what Jesus did the way that He did it. It's that simple. We love the people He loved, serve the people He served, and do the things He did. We strive to replicate His character, ways, and mission.

UNPACK THE STORY

Creation. Fall. Redemption. Re-creation. These four events represent the great story of God—the gospel story. It was the story Simon Peter was swept into and it's the story you have now been swept into. Our lives make sense only as we understand them against this backdrop. Let's examine each of these events.


CREATION—In the beginning, God created. At the sound of His voice, galaxies were hurled into orbit and the smallest organisms were established. Water was pure, creation was untainted, and life was perfect. Then God created man and woman. Fashioned with His own hands and infused with His own breath, He created Adam and Eve to be in relationship with Him and to be stewards of His creation.

Why do you think it's important to know God as Creator?

FALL—Then, the Villain entered the story. Twisting the words of God and promising a better life, Satan planted a seed of unbelief in the woman's heart. Eve doubted the goodness and trustworthiness of God and reached for the very thing that compromised her relationship with Him. Adam and Eve believed a lie, turned against God, and pursued a story of their own making which left them separated from their Creator. Sin entered the world through humanity and everything broke. And that's what sin is: turning away from God's desire with actions, attitudes, or thoughts.

Discuss the idea that everything broke when sin entered the world through humanity.

How do you see sin's effects today?



“God created man and woman. Fashioned with His own hands and infused with His own breath, He created Adam and Eve to be in relationship with Him and to be stewards of His creation.”

Violence. War. Dishonesty. Greed. Sickness. The perfect creation became overgrown with evil, chaos, and despair. It was soon overrun with people who searched for meaning and salvation through selfish ambition. The world needed a Savior.

For centuries, God pursued His people. He gave them leaders, prophets, and priests to guide them into relationship with Him. But over and over, the people became distracted and turned their attention to man-made gods. God's complete redemption was yet to come.

REDEMPTION—In order to reverse the disastrous effects of sin, to free people from the clutches of the Villain, and to restore people to God the Father, Jesus came to the earth with His eyes on the cross. Fully God, Jesus made the perfect sacrifice to pay the debt of our sin and to cancel the curse of death on our lives. Fully human, Jesus was able to fully represent man before God. Redemption had come. On the third day, Jesus rose from the grave to conquer sin and death once and for all.

What is significant to you about Jesus being both fully God and fully man?

RE-CREATION—The story didn't end at the empty tomb; it had just begun. The great story of God would explode across the globe and change the hearts and lives of men and women for all eternity. All of creation is moving toward a great day when Jesus returns and fixes everything that's broken once and for all.

When you read the overarching story of God, is there anything that surprises you? Why?



"All of creation is moving toward a great day when Jesus returns and fixes everything that's broken once and for all."

Here's a simple description of what it means to follow Jesus: doing what Jesus did the way that He did it. Read Philippians 2:5-11 together, aloud. Using this passage as a guide, make a list with the space provided of the attributes and actions of Jesus that His followers should imitate.

Philippians 2:5-11

Attributes of Jesus

⁵ Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. ⁷ Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, ⁸ He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow— of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth— ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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PRAYER REQUESTS:

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In addition to studying God's Word, work with your group leader to create a plan for personal study, worship, and application between now and the next session. Select from the following optional activities to match your personal preferences and available time.

↑ **Worship**

- Read your Bible. Complete the reading plan on page 16.
- Spend time with God by reading and answering the questions on page 17.
- Connect with God each day. Start each morning with the five-part prayer included in the beginning of this study. At the end of every day, reflect on the times you felt closest to God and when you felt most distant.

➔ ← **Personal Study**

- Read and interact with "How Jesus Came" on page 18.
- Read and interact with "Why Jesus Came" on page 20.

← ➔ **Application**

- Connect with your church. Attend a church worship service and take notes as the pastor teaches from the Bible.
- Connect with others. Seek out someone of the same gender who has also recently come into a relationship with Christ. Discuss your individual experiences over dinner or coffee.
- Memorize 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come." Share this newly memorized verse with two different people.
- Spend time journaling. Benjamin Franklin said, "The shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory." Keeping a record of the things you are learning and the ways God is working in your life is a great way to track your spiritual growth. Each day, write down one thing you are learning about God.

- Other:



WORSHIP

READING PLAN

Read through the Gospel of Mark this week. Use the space provided to record your thoughts and responses.

Day 1

Mark 1:1-20

Day 2

Mark 1:21-45

Day 3

Mark 2:1-17

Day 4

Mark 2:18-28

Day 5

Mark 3:1-19

Day 6

Mark 3:20-35

Day 7

Mark 4:1-20

HOMECOMING

The first words preached by Jesus are found in Matthew 4:17 where he said: "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" It's also the foundation for the first sermon preached in the book of Acts, when Peter declared: "Repent ... and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

When we hear "repent" we often think it includes punishment or correction. But this word gives life. It doesn't mean "get your act together" or "clean up your behavior" so much as it means to simply turn around: to turn from sin and turn to God. It implies readiness. It results in a complete change of mind, heart, and action, but the first step is to turn around and see God.

Repentance isn't something we do in order to come to God, it's simply our coming to God. What is your reaction to this statement?

Take a moment and read Luke 15:11-24. What are your initial thoughts from the parable of the lost son?

This story follows the journey of a man who strays far from home and far from the man he was destined to be. But eventually he backs away from his depraved life, turns around, and walks back home. And that's what repentance is. It's homecoming. And when we return home, we don't find a father who is angry or eager to say "I told you so." Rather, we see a Father who runs to us. Jesus doesn't call us to repentance to just change our behavior. He calls us to change our hearts and where we rest our heads. It's about who or what we are trusting in.

Before trusting in the work done by Christ on the cross, what were the things you trusted in?

The journey home begins with repentance at the cross. The greatest plot twist in history was God himself coming to earth to deal with sin. At the cross, Jesus took all our sin onto him and paid our debt. This paved the way for us to go back home. Because of this we know we were created by a passionate Father in heaven who relentlessly pursues His children to bring them back to the family. Welcome home.

Give an example of an area in your life in which you need to change direction.

Have you ever thought that your sin made you too far removed from God's pursuit of you? Explain.

HOW JESUS CAME

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

ISAIAH 9:6

God made a promise at the very beginning of time that He would make things right, and that's what the coming of Jesus was about. Jesus came not just to teach moral lessons or to set good examples. He came to liberate, make things right, and start a revolution. Let's look at four of the ways Jesus came to us.

1. **Jesus left His rightful place in heaven and came into the chaos of humanity.**

In a stone feeding trough for animals, the voice of God was heard in the cry of an infant. He came dressed in the skin of His own creation, subjected Himself to the care of His own creation, and fixed His eyes on the salvation of humanity. He turned water into wine. He showed mercy to sexually promiscuous women. He healed the sick. He commanded dead men to walk out of their graves. He loved and showed honor to the scum of society.

But we do see Jesus—made lower than the angels for a short time so that by God's grace He might taste death for everyone—crowned with glory and honor because of His suffering in death.

HEBREWS 2:9

Have you ever thought of Jesus in these terms? How does the way Christ came to Earth encourage you as we live in a culture tainted by sin?

2. **Jesus came as a man.**

He was born; He had a physical body and physical limitations; He expressed human emotions; He grew physically, emotionally, and relationally (see Matt. 1:18, John 4:6, John 19:28). Because He was fully human, He's able to represent us, to pay our penalty, to mediate for us before God, to serve as our example, and to identify with us.

⁷ He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, ⁸ He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

PHILIPPIANS 2:7-8

3. **Jesus also came as God.**

His birth was supernatural. He claimed to be God, God declared him to be God, and even the demons recognized Him to be God. He displayed attributes of deity such as working miracles and forgiving sins (see Matt. 1:18, Col. 2:9). Because He was fully God, He was able to offer a perfect sacrifice.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true One. We are in the true One—that is, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

1 JOHN 5:20

Is it difficult for you to grasp the thought of Jesus as fully God and fully man? Why or why not?

Why is it important that He is both?

4. **Jesus came to serve, sacrifice, and save.**

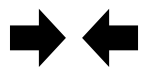
Romans 5:8 declares, “But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!” He is uniquely designed to represent people to God and God to people. Because He is fully human, He can offer the sacrifice on our behalf. Because He is fully God, He can offer the perfect sacrifice.

⁹ God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 JOHN 4:9-10

The Bible teaches that salvation isn’t found in what we do for God; rather, it’s all about what He has done for us. What is your reaction to this statement?



WHY JESUS CAME

Being a Christian isn't about what you do for God; it's about what God has already done for you. Jesus paid our debt, freed us from sin and death, and reconciled us to God and others. Jesus divinely disrupted and reversed the story of humanity. On the cross, our guilt, the bondage of sin, and our separation from God was reconciled. During this exercise you're going to unpack these terms for better understanding.

Guilt: Everyone understands words like “guilt” and “debt.” But what many don't realize is that we're born into much less-than-favorable standing with God—by association with Adam. We're literally “born into” guilt and bondage. But Jesus paid a debt that He didn't owe and that we couldn't pay so that the charges of sin are canceled against us. Through Jesus, we experience forgiveness and cleansing. This is called *propitiation*.

He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

Journal your thoughts on the concept of guilt.

Bondage: Jesus defeated the power of sin and death on the cross, liberating us from its grip on our lives and granting us eternal life in Him. Through Jesus, we are freed from sin. This is called *redemption*.

²² But now, since you have been liberated from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the end is eternal life! ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 6:22-23

Journal your thoughts on the concept of bondage.

Separation: Jesus removed the wedge between us and God and made a way for us to have a relationship with Him. Through Christ, we are reunited with God. This is called *reconciliation*.

¹⁰ For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life! ¹¹ And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have now received this reconciliation through Him.

ROMANS 5:10-11

Journal your thoughts on the concept of separation.

Respond to the following statement: Jesus' work on the cross pays for our sin and removes our guilt. It liberates us from bondage and restores our relationship with God.

Which term do you not fully understand? Who will you seek out this week to gain a better understanding of this?

Jesus didn't die on the cross to give us comfort and safety. Some people sell salvation like it's an insurance plan or a safety net. Unfortunately, we sometimes think that coming to God means that everything will be OK. Life will get better. Sometimes, it gets worse. We aren't promised that everything will be OK; we're promised His presence. He doesn't promise to keep us safe; rather, He invites us into a dangerous story to be proclaimers of hope in the midst of a very unsafe world.

Jesus didn't die to make us safe but to make us proclaimers of hope in an unsafe world. How might this affect the way you view life?



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