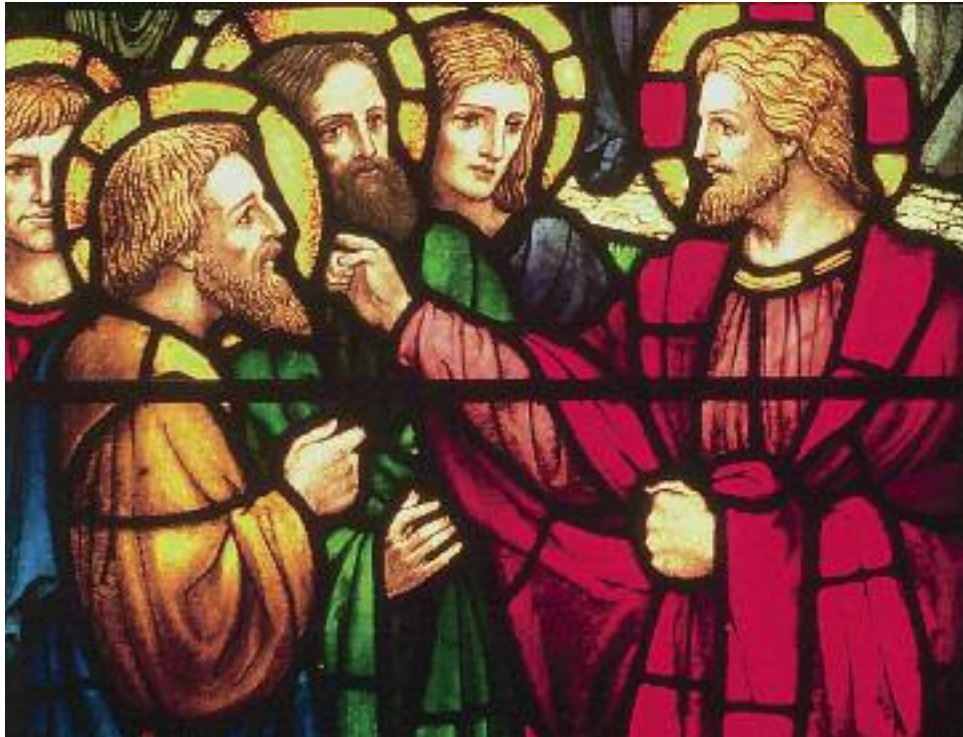


Context Tells the Rest of the Story

MAKING DISCIPLES *Jesus'* WAY

Wisdom We Have Missed



Discipling Insights for Individuals and Groups

Doug Greenwold

Author of *Encounters with Jesus*



A Digging Deeper Faith Study

What words say does not last. The words last. Because words are always the same, and what they say is never the same.

—*Antonio Prochias*

At some point in ecclesiastical history, someone snatched away the inceptive Hebrew blueprint by which Jesus' movement was being constructed and replaced it with a non-Hebraic one. As result, what has been built since is at best a caricature of what was intended. In many respects, it is downright contrary and antagonistic to the spirit of the original believing community.

—*Brian Knowles*

Those of us who know the Bible story well can suffer from knowing it well.

—*Alistair Begg*

Context rescues truth from the familiar.

—*Kenneth Bailey*

Insanity: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

—*Unknown*

Nondiscipleship is the elephant in the church.

—*Dallas Willard*

Trying to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is not the same thing as training to be His Disciple

—*Bruce Demarest*

The NT (New Testament), after all, does not come in the form of timeless aphorisms; every text was written in a given first century time/space framework. Indeed the NT authors felt no need to explain what were for them and their readers common cultural assumptions.

—*Gordon D. Fee*

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Dedication

*To Bill Bullard, Kent Hotaling and Wes Trucker,
three disciplinarians who continue to make disciples the
old fashioned way – through long-term investments in
the inner lives of others, encouraging them to live out the
lifestyle of Jesus.*

Acknowledgements

Any new work is often little more than a reweaving of the thoughts and ideas of others. As on a loom, various colored threads get woven together into a new design, which then gives rise to fresh perspectives, insights and implications.

This work is no exception. It comes with great appreciation and thankfulness for the threads that many have brought to the rediscovering of how Jesus remade His disciples including:

- E. Stanley Jones, long-time missionary to India, whose insight into John 1:14 was the kernel that resulted in the *Grace Before Truth* chapter.
- Dr. James C. Martin, founder of Preserving Bible Times, who introduced me to the first-century world of the rabbis and their disciples.
- The late Heartsill Wilson, whose insights into how people make decisions was the catalyst for the *Value Before Price* chapter.
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- Bruce Bordine and Dave and Lynn Weatherby who were most supportive and helpful in publishing this effort.
- The Luke in Context classes at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, Maryland, and the Rockville, Maryland Community Bible Study Evening Class who so graciously allowed me to teach and refine many of these thoughts over the last several years.

Preface

A Change in Plans

I never intended to write this book. It just seemed to happen. I always assumed that I would focus next on the context surrounding the birth of Jesus from the clues Luke gives us in his second chapter. That is a subject I had been researching for a few years, and something I was really looking forward to writing. Reconstructing more of what that first Christmas was really like seemed like a logical follow-on to the retelling of Zechariah and Elizabeth's journey of remarkable faith, something I had previously done from Luke's first chapter.

In fact, I even started down that "First Christmas in Context" road. As I did, two things happened. First, I began to discover more and more contextual threads about the reality of that first Christmas that I had not previously appreciated. As those insights continued to arrive on the scene, I began to wonder if I was really ready to begin contextually reconstructing Luke's second chapter. At the same time, discipling issues, questions, and frustrations from practitioners, pastors, and pew kept coming my way as I was preparing to tell the rest of the story surrounding the birth of the Christ Child.

Context Matters

As I dialogued with these disciples and disciplemakers regarding their concerns, I often shared with them some of the discipling context embedded in the Gospels. They were cultural insights and historical observations gleaned from the efforts of Preserving Bible Times and numerous others. The emphasis was not just on what Jesus did to remake the Twelve, but on the how and when He chose to do it. I was surprised and encouraged to discover that many of these contextual observations were not just new insights to these practitioners, but seemingly helpful insights as well.

As these discipling dialogues continued to unfold, I began to organize and document these contextual observations, as well as share them with others in discipling settings. That led to further opportunities to teach and speak about them, as well as incorporate them into part of Preserving Bible Times' "Bible in Context" seminar weekends. Each time I shared some aspect of this material with these audiences, I was

surprised at how much this contextual backdrop of the first-century mindset of “making disciples” seemed to be a whole new way of thinking for them. That is how this book came to be.

Challenging Paradigms

This study is not a comprehensive book on discipling. Nor is it an academic book. Rather, it is a book for disciples and discipling practitioners. Its purpose is to challenge and provoke our contemporary Western discipleship and spiritual formation paradigms by providing a contextual backdrop of what it meant to “make disciples” in the Gospels.

In the first-century rabbinic tradition, I hope you will disagree with some, or even much of what is presented herein. Yet at the same time, be willing to wrestle with the contextual issues developed as well as their implications. After that wrestling, perhaps you will move into a season of discipleship discontent, a necessary prelude for meaningful change. Then proceed to open up a discipling dialogue with those around you asking: What are we doing, why are we doing it that way, and what fruit are we getting? Finally, in the leading of the Holy Spirit, start to make appropriate adjustments in your approach to discipling because of starting to see the intrinsic discipling process differently.

Meaningful Change

As we all know, new information and insights, no matter how intriguing, are insufficient for meaningful change to occur. Those insights need to be pondered and processed if they are ever going to penetrate us, let alone marinate our hearts and minds. It is in the midst of that meditative process that the Holy Spirit touches us and transforms us, both individually and corporately.

It is my prayer that God’s Spirit will find something useful within these pages to encourage you, as well as to challenge you, to be more intentional, and therefore more fruitful in the making of disciples of Jesus Christ.

Doug Greenwold
Rockville, Maryland
October 2005

Introduction

Evangelicalism, particularly American evangelicalism, is failing the modern church. Evangelicals have done a superb job of evangelizing people, of bringing them to a knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, but they are failing to provide believers with approaches to living that keep them going and growing in spiritual relationship with Him.

—Alister McGrath¹

An individualistic Christianity leads inevitably to an individualistic god. Those who have been suckled at the breast of American culture will not easily be weaned from the milk of individualism.

—Donald McCullough²

The Bigger Picture

In the West, we have become so preoccupied with analyzing a leaf (a statement of Jesus) under the microscope that we tend to forget that the leaf came from a tree (the Gospels), and that the tree is part of a great forest (all of Scripture). This has certainly been true with respect to making disciples. As a result, we can become so focused on the ground-level issues that we lose sight of its contextual background – the bigger picture. What we really need is an elevated perspective of discipling, a different and wider point of view, one where we can see and take in the whole forest, or in the case of making disciples, the whole vineyard. Having done that, we can then parachute back down into a passage to closely re-examine what we thought we knew and understood, and discover what we may have been missing.

Taking a contextual approach to the Gospels is the difference between looking at a portion of a tapestry up close and then moving back to take it all in. While the portion being examined up close hasn't changed at all, how we now see it in relation to the whole scene does. When we reconnect with the contextual presuppositions in the Gospels, we can more clearly see the missing ingredients for “making disciples” today – ingredients that are essential for carrying out “make disciples of all nations.”

Missing Ingredients

In this present study, we will first look at four missing Gospel *perspectives* in our Western approach to discipling (Chapters 1-4), then observe three *patterns* of Jesus that seem to be missing in our contemporary discipling methodology (Chapters 5-7). We will end our contextual journey by

examining two oft-missed pieces that are essential for the fruitful making of disciples (Chapters 8-9). In rediscovering these missing ingredients, we will be in a better position to make appropriate adaptations to revitalize our contemporary approaches to what we now call “discipleship.”

Rediscovering What We've Missed

Jesus was purposeful in everything He did. As a result, He was intentional right down to His vocabulary. He knew why He had come and what He needed to leave behind – a vision and wisdom for a new Kingdom as well as for co-laboring partners who would lead it in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, His choice of words and phrases, as well as their sequencing, were deliberately chosen to communicate a timeless message. That intentionality also manifested itself in how Jesus chose and shaped the first disciples preparing them to live and lead in the Kingdom of God.

This book is not intended to be an expansive treatment of all aspects of making disciples, let alone for all cultures. There is much that others have written and observed which is helpful. Dallas Willard's, *The Divine Conspiracy*, and A.B. Bruce's classic, *The Training of the Twelve*, are two excellent resources that quickly come to mind. Rather, this book will try to emphasize those contextual issues that were foundational in Jesus' discipling methodologies, particularly those key discipling perspectives and practices that we may have either missed or lost sight of in the West.

Context Always Matters

The undergirding premise of this book is that context always matters when we encounter the inspired words of Scripture. The words in the

Bible have precise meanings, and those meanings are drawn from their context. Thus, if we are to connect fully with the intended meaning of a passage today, we need to know what its words – verbs, phrases, idioms, events, names and places – meant to those who first heard them.

Consequently, if we are going to truly understand what it means to make disciples today, we need first to establish what it meant to Jesus and His disciples. That raises some questions: What was a disciple back then, and how were they made? What did Jesus mean when He used the words “make disciples?” To answer these questions, we need to reconnect with the historical, cultural, and literary meanings embodied in those words,³ something the Gospel writers assumed their readers and listeners would know and understand.

Context is Often Missing

In contemporary discipleship books, there seems to be little emphasis given to examining the context of what it meant to make disciples during the time of Jesus. Usually no more than one or two pages are devoted to that topic, often with observations too general to be helpful. Missing is a look at the first-century contextual presuppositions and cultural givens embodied in what it meant to make and be a first-century disciple. Not having that Gospel discipling mindset makes it relatively easy to create our own Westernized notions of what we think “making disciples” was, is, or should be. And therein lies the root of much of the discipleship malady of today. By way of analogy, it is the same issue that is currently unfolding in the United States' judicial system as the courts re-interpret separation of church and state. Having become disconnected from the Judeo-Christian

ethic intentionally embedded in the original meaning of those words, courts are increasingly choosing to re-interpret them from a secular perspective.

Revisiting First-Century Context

This book revisits the Gospel record through the lenses of first-century context. Doing so allows us to see more clearly what methods and patterns Jesus used in detoxing the Twelve from their religious culture, and then remaking them so they could see and understand the Kingdom of God. It's not just what Jesus did, but the how and when He chose to do it. For the Twelve to be fit for leadership in His new relational community called the Kingdom of God, Jesus had to completely remake the interior of their lives. This included remaking their minds and hearts – changing their paradigms (how they saw things) as well as their ethos (how they felt about things).

Foundational to an understanding of biblical repentance is “to change one’s mind or purpose...involving a change for the better.”⁴ This contextual backdrop will help us understand what kind of a moral transformation climate Jesus created, and how He then chose to use that learning-teaching environment to accomplish His worldview and paradigm changing purposes. With those insights in place, we can then begin to consider their implications for making disciples today.

Compare and Contrast

Maybe it is time to look into the mirror and ask ourselves what is it that we have been presenting

to believers as “discipleship” that they do not seem to be embracing? Then ask, are we even focusing on the right things for effective discipleship? To put this question into the language of the marketplace, what are we offering and selling from our pulpits and lecterns as discipleship that the pew is no longer buying? If you are interested in these issues and related ones that pertain to the whole issue of making disciples and spiritual formation, then come along as we revisit the Gospels through the eyes of context. We will examine the essence of discipling THEN – at the time of Jesus – as well as NOW – Western discipleship today. Then we just might be in a position to ask: What does this compare-and-contrast diagnosis suggest as an effective discipling remedy for today?

Take Time to Reflect

Appropriate “Reflections to Journal and Share,” as well as some thoughts to “Ponder,” will be found at the end of each chapter. In the rabbinic tradition, you will find no fill-in-the-blank questions nor any easy questions; but, rather, thought-provoking questions to wrestle with to further hone your discernment regarding discipling issues.

For small groups and Bible studies, these guided thoughts can serve as helpful discussion questions with which to collectively wrestle. For devotional purposes, they can also serve as a guide for personal meditation and journaling. The prayed-for outcomes of both are the same – transformation by the Holy Spirit.

Reflections to Journal and Share...

- What is your sense of how discipling is working itself out in your life?

- In the church today, are we intentional about making disciples of Jesus, or do we operate as if making disciples somehow occurs by spontaneous combustion, even if we don't give it continual prayerful priority?

- From your experience and/or perspective, describe what a fruitful environment for making disciples of Jesus Christ needs to be like?

- What issues and implications do you see for people in today's Western culture reading biblical words that have first-century Middle Eastern contextual meanings?

Ponder...

Trying to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is not the same thing as training to be His Disciple.

*We seem to assume that spiritual growth will automatically result from
knowing more about the Scriptures.*

—**Bruce Demarest**⁵

Nondiscipleship is the elephant in the church.

(It sits in the middle of the sanctuary. Everyone sees it, yet walks around it and ignores it.)

—**Dallas Willard**⁶ (added)

*There is widespread discontent in North American Christianity.
Many of us are being asked to settle for life-support Christianity
instead of thriving Christianity. We should be saying,
“Are we missing out on something?”*

—**Jack Stackhouse**⁷

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

—**Psalms 51:10**

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

—**Psalms 139:23 & 24**

Prayer...

Jesus, I really do want to be an authentic disciple of Yours,

But it seems I often just do not have enough desire within me to want to live like one.

Please put within me the desire to want to consistently seek You, and to honor You in all that I do and think.

Search my heart O Lord, implant Your holy desires and fan them into flames with Your Spirit,

Creating a new heart within me.

Bathe me and immerse me in the deep wells of Your Word;

Refresh and renew me in their power.

And lead me in the ways that are everlasting starting right now.

Amen.

Notes and Sources

¹Alister McGrath, *Spirituality in an Age of Change* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), p. 9.

²Donald McCullough, *The Trivialization of God* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1995), p. 23.

³For a fuller development of this contextual approach, see Doug Greenwold, "The Case for Context" in the Appendix of *Zechariah and Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God* (Columbia, Md.: Bible-in-Context Ministries, 2004), pp. 69-75.

⁴W. E. Vine, *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Unabridged Edition (McLean, Va.: MacDonald Publishing Company, undated), p. 962.

⁵Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1999), pp. 72 and 23.

⁶Dallas Willard, *Divine Conspiracy* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), p. 301.

⁷Jack Stackhouse, As quoted in *Christianity Today*, May 15, 1995, p. 51 in an article entitled "Toronto's Blessing: Is it a Revival?"

1 Two Very Different Worlds

What words say does not last. The words last. Because words are always the same, and what they say is never the same.
—Antonio Prochias¹

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.
—A. W. Tozer²

At some point in ecclesiastical history, someone snatched away the inceptive Hebrew blueprint by which Jesus' movement was being constructed and replaced it with a non-Hebraic one. As a result, what has been built since is at best a caricature of what was intended. In many respects, it is downright contrary and antagonistic to the spirit of the original believing community.

—Brian Knowles³

The Most Important Thing

W What is the most important thing about you? That is a question I often ask to start a seminar weekend on understanding the Bible in context. It is a question that often generates long periods of silence and perplexed looks. Eventually someone will nominate “My salvation” as an answer. Often those in the room are suddenly taken aback when I categorize that response as a C-minus answer!

Until recently, I always suggested the above Tozer quote as the best possible answer to that question – What is the most important thing about you? But after pondering that more in recent years, I have now come to believe that the most important thing about any of us is simply the way we think.

A person's worldview, together with all of the paradigms that make it up, determines everything about him or her, including his or her mindset – how each sees, thinks, and understands things. It is shaped by those core convictions and foundational “first principles”⁴ that determine how we see and understand everything in our world. Contained within a person's worldview are all the presuppositions that go into forming and conditioning how each person defines his or her reality, as well as how each then responds to it. Thus, how a person thinks not only determines what he or she thinks about God, but whether he or she will even be open to accepting His Good News offer of rescue and restoration.

Our worldview, together with the hundreds of intertwined paradigms that comprise it, not only profoundly influences how we approach

the Scriptures, but how we have been conditioned to filter the Word of God to make it more palatable to our comfort zones. The irony of all this is that the one thing we almost never stop and think about is the most important thing about us – *the way we think*.

Different Worldviews

A worldview is a total way of thinking. Thus, we talk about an Atheistic Worldview, a Buddhist Worldview, and a Christian Worldview, among others. In the world of Jesus, there were multiple worldviews including those of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes and Hellenistic Jews, as well as Greco-Roman thought. Jesus' radical new Kingdom of God Worldview was more than just another competing worldview. It is a total way of seeing things that is in conflict with all other worldviews. Its purpose is to remake all the other worldviews by confronting and challenging every religious paradigm that each perspective holds to be "true."

More on Paradigms

Understanding paradigms and how they can be changed is foundational to understanding what Jesus did in remaking the Twelve. For the purposes of this book, a worldview and its paradigms are slightly different concepts that are very much interrelated. Our worldview is how we see and understand everything. It contains all the norms, standards, rules, truths, assumptions, presuppositions, thoughts and experiences within which we make our decisions, evaluations, and judgments; and how we accept or dismiss ideas that create our attitudes, biases, and prejudices.

A paradigm is a framework of all that we think and feel and thus hold to be true about *some aspect* of our life and world. Each of us has a multiplicity of paradigms that shape how

we live. This includes our financial, environmental, nutritional, fitness and marketplace/work paradigms, as well as marriage, family and childrearing paradigms. It also includes how we think about worship, prayer, forgiveness, church and being a disciple of Jesus Christ, to name just a few. All these paradigms shape how we live out our lives – expansively or restrictively – in each of these areas.

If a golf ball represents the totality of our worldview, each dimple on the surface of the ball represents a paradigm of some aspect of our life. Some circles use the words paradigm and worldview interchangeably. I was trained in a more limited marketplace definition where a paradigm is a small portion of our worldview pertaining to a certain aspect of our life. To try and keep from overusing that word, I will also use other words for paradigms – mindset, way of seeing something, perspective – but the intended meaning is the same. Looking ahead, we will deal with this whole issue of paradigms more expansively in chapter eight, particularly as they can function as obstacles and barriers to spiritual formation in the making of disciples of Jesus.

Words Have Meaning

The phrase "make disciples" was first spoken in a Semitic language and embodied a well-known paradigm that first-century Jewish listeners well understood. As such, those words had a very specific meaning within the Hebrew mindset of that period. Since then, those words have been translated into Greek and then into Latin before being translated into the constraints of the English language more than a thousand years later. Thus, a needed perspective to have on our diagnostic journey is to first disconnect from our traditional Hellenistic understanding of those words – easier said than done – and then ask how

the Jews who first heard those words would have understood them.

Original Meaning

This process of disconnecting from our Western way of thinking to engage the world of the Gospels, and then reconnecting to our modern way of thinking, is crucial. If we miss the original meaning embodied in those Gospel words, it then becomes relatively easy not only to misunderstand those words, but then redefine them and then to misapply them. As part of pursuing the original intent of the Gospel writers' words, we need to be reminded that this disconnect-engage-reconnect process is not always an easy one for Westerners:

For many of us Westerners, the Hebrew mindset is so strange, so alien, so impossible to fathom, that we quickly snap back into the comfort zone of the Hellenistic mold of studying the Hebrew Scriptures. We then impose this distorting grid over the Hebrew text – or for that matter, over the Greek text of the New Testament.⁵

From these Hebrew-Hellenistic worldview differences, two very different approaches to making disciples are formed. As a result, the first step in this diagnostic journey of what it means to make disciples is to compare and contrast the Jewish discipling paradigms of Jesus' world (THEN) with our Westernized evangelical understanding of what we today call "discipleship" (NOW).

The Individual and Others

The world of the Gospels is the world of the Middle East. It's a world where the village, the clan, the family is always considered to be more important than the individual. It's a world where personal rights are sacrificed for the benefit of the community. As we all too well know, our

contemporary Western paradigm of community is diametrically opposed to this biblical perspective. For starters, it stresses achieving personal interests at the expense of the greater community.

This difference cannot be overstated. "Me first!" and "What's in it for me?" are the cornerstones of Western culture's inalienable Bill of Individual Rights. This preoccupation with self at the expense of others has progressed into a narcissistic style of living where everything becomes selfishly defined in terms of "me." It also perverts "discipleship" into a personal search for self-fulfillment. In the West, we have evolved into the Society of Self, which has further evolved into the gospel of Self. This gives rise to two very different perspectives for approaching and then interpreting the Scriptures, including what it means to "make disciples."

The church has not been immune from this creeping cultural narcissism. The world has indeed been squeezing the church into its narcissistic mold, and the church has been far too accommodating in allowing that to happen. If you're thinking that is an overstatement, just listen to the phrases that punctuate many evangelical conversations today. It often starts with a harkening back to "when *I* repented, trusted Jesus, and *I* invited Him into *my* heart," which then leads to a continuing focus on *my* salvation, *my* Jesus, *my* spiritual gifts, *my* blessings, *my* call, and *my* ministry. Sadly, spiritual narcissism, with its overemphasis on one's blessings and what's in it for me, has become the malignant condition of Western evangelicalism. It is as if God's Providence exists mostly for my benefit – not His Kingdom purposes. Sadly, it is no longer all about Him – His glorious grace and marvelous mercy. Rather, it is far too much about me – my efforts and my blessings.

When engaging the Scriptures, whether

we adopt a Western worldview or return to the Middle Eastern worldview of the Bible will significantly shape the lenses through which we understand the Gospel record. It will also shape our understanding of the intended purpose and meaning of God's Word for today. These two perspectives can often result in two very different interpretive lenses for reading and understanding the same words, places, names and events of the Bible. The words "make" and "disciples" are not exempt from these two very different interpretive approaches. Perhaps an example will help to underscore some of these differences.

Words or Behavior

If a Greek were to ask a man, "Do you love and respect your wife?" he would most likely accept the man's response at face value as a truthful statement. Thus, if the man being asked this question declares, "Yes, I really do love and respect my wife," to a Greek the issue is over. Obviously this man loves and respects his wife. He just said so.

A Bible-times Hebrew would approach this same question very differently. First, he would not even ask the man if he loved and respected his wife. To a Hebrew, what a person says is not as important as what he does. A Hebrew knows everyone has two sets of beliefs: the one he or she espouses, and the one he or she lives out. Thus, how a person acts is the litmus test that truly reveals what he or she truly thinks, feels and values. As a result, a Hebrew would never even ask, "Do you love and respect your wife?" Rather, he would follow that man around for a while, and observe dozens of interactions between the man and his wife; and he would then know the real answer to that question.

The early Quakers had a saying that captures the essence of this approach: "It matters not what a man says; simply watch how he

treats his dog." Greeks tend to love words. Jews of the first century tend to value consistent behavior. Greeks have no problem with a dichotomy between words and actions. First-century Jews would have no problem either, but for different reasons. They put little stock in what people say, and give much more credence to what they do. This perspective also helps in understanding the book of *James*.

These two very different ways of looking at the same thing is evident in making disciples. Western evangelicalism is far too enamored with words, and is too easily seduced by them. The Hebrew perspective deals with the reality of the situation as observed through behavior. The Western perspective puts far too much emphasis on a steady stream of rhetoric from pulpits and lecterns, with far less emphasis on congruent behavior. Western evangelicals too easily accept the words "Yes, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ." Not infrequently this is accepted with little or no personal knowledge, or even with little interest in ascertaining whether that person's behavior is in any way reflective of the words he or she speaks. In today's vernacular, it's the difference between talking the walk and walking the talk.

Synthesis or Analysis

Not only have we in the West been conditioned by a Greek worldview for 2,000+ years, but we have also been shaped by 300 years of modernity thinking.⁶ This has taken its toll and made us egocentric people who instinctively prefer instant analysis and "how to" answers when engaging the Scriptures. We are also much more comfortable tearing things apart than we are fusing things together. As a result, we like to label the analytical pieces we create, convincing ourselves that in putting them in the right cubbyholes, we've actually mastered them. However, being able to list sixteen attributes of God may mean we know

about God, but it does not necessarily follow that we actually *know* God. All of this stands in stark contrast to the Hebrew perspective, which was always about synthesis and integration when wrestling with the Word of God.

Greek Peace or Hebrew Shalom

A good example of how Greeks and Hebrews approach the same word/concept differently can be illustrated by their respective approaches to understanding *Shalom* – God’s Peace. Common to both is the understanding that God’s *Shalom* embraces being rightly related to four things: to God, to the community, to yourself, and to creation.⁷ The Hellenistic approach to *Shalom* breaks it down into its four component parts, and then sequences them. The Hellenist would see a systematic progression inherent in *Shalom* starting with God, then with the community, then with yourself, and finally with God’s creation. To the Hebrew mindset, God’s *Shalom* is all four of these rightly related realities fused together at the same time. Thus to a first-century Jew, *Shalom* is a rope made up of these four theme cords indistinguishably braided together. Again, Western thought prefers to analyze, deconstruct into its individual parts, then label and sequence. By way of contrast, the Hebrew mindset is always one of synthesis – the fusing and keeping of things together.

Keep It Simple!

In today’s Western culture, we tend to favor simplistic sound bite answers to deep questions. Furthermore, we want our one-dimensional answers to be packaged in spoon-fed formulas. When it comes to the Bible, it is as if we have acute attention deficit disorder. We just do not seem to have much time to think and ponder the Word of God anymore, let alone wrestle with it – to be like Jacob. It seems we are too busy working in organizations that value people with “extraor-

dinary work ethics.” In our workplaces, we have so embraced the 1990’s notions of a one-minute manager that we are now trying to replicate that with one-minute disciples in the church!

Biblical Knowledge

Ten of the Twelve disciples were observant Jews. Their formal religious education started when they were five years old and continued through age twelve. By then, they had memorized most, if not all of their Hebrew Scriptures and thus were culturally prepared for their bar mitzvahs.⁸ Those students who showed a particular aptitude with God’s Word were encouraged to further their religious understanding by spending a few more years at the feet of a rabbi learning the oral tradition and wisdom of the sages. For the disciples of Jesus’ time, the issue was not the content of the Scriptures, for they knew their Bible very well; rather how to apply what they already knew about God’s Word to the oft-perplexing issues of daily life.

Existentialism and Evangelicalism

Existentialism is not new to the church. In terms of its theological impact, the initial roots of existentialism can be traced to a few German seminaries at the end of the 19th Century. From there it quickly spread, and by the mid-20th Century had penetrated most religious thinking, including much of American Christianity.

Among other things, existentialism involves the cutting loose of any absolutes when approaching the Word of God. It makes the individual the final authority on the purpose and meaning of a text. The core issue is: What does it mean to me? Each person becomes the definer of “truth” as he or she sees it from his or her own viewpoint, or as each has experienced it within his or her own reality. The end result is relativism at its finest. Nothing is solid ground.

And the more existentialism is embraced, the less there is any compelling need to bring integrated biblical context into discerning the Holy Spirit's intended meaning of a passage. For an existentialist within the church, the core issue is: What does the biblical text say to me for my situation today? Thus, there is no need to discern what the Holy Spirit intended to timelessly communicate within the text.

Existentialism is Alive and Well

Sadly, existentialism is very much alive and well in evangelicalism, in both subtle and not so subtle ways. For example, a very common response I often get before leading an "Understanding the Bible at it was Meant to be Understood" weekend seminar is: "Who needs this?" The preferred evangelical existential approach often seems to be some form of "I just open my Bible each day to a verse or passage and let the Spirit speak to me." While we wouldn't dare learn physics, nursing, or astronomy that way, we do seem to have this peculiar way of approaching and reading the Bible like no other book or subject! Unaware that we are often functional existentialists, we are not looking for the intended meaning of a passage – that the Holy Spirit had something very specific in mind when inspiring those precise words for us in the text.

Discerning Purpose and Meaning

Without the measuring rod of authorial intent, we are left with only two possible outcomes when approaching the Word of God, both sadly deficient. Either the Holy Spirit had nothing specific in mind when He inspired the words we are reading or, if He did, we are incapable of discerning what that intent is. While it is a fine line, and I'm certainly not trying to create a new specialized body of knowledge in suggesting this, I am convinced it is incumbent on us to do the best we can to try and to discern the Holy

Spirit's timeless intent for any passage we are studying. With that understanding in place, we are then in a much better position to ask the Spirit for discernment regarding the purpose and meaning of that passage for our life and world today.

"What Do You Think it Means?"

In the world of the Gospels, the rabbi had the role of authoritatively interpreting the Scriptures for his disciples. In modern evangelicalism, the reader of God's Word, not always under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, frequently assumes that role. However, when widespread biblical illiteracy is part of this dynamic, the implications can be unsettling. Have you ever been in a small group Bible study when a seemingly difficult passage is discussed? The typical question that the leader often sets in motion is, "What do you think it means?" That is certainly a good question. However, it is the response to it that should give us cause for concern! Often as that question progresses around the room, and each person suggests his or her opinion, it ends with a straw vote to determine the best answer! While this may be good representative democracy, it is a dubious approach, at best, to understanding God's Word. Unaware that we are often practicing existentialists, we tend to focus on what we think or guess a passage might mean rather than dig deeper to discern what the Holy Spirit intended it to mean. Then we wonder why we end up looking like clones of the culture, very much at home in our "comfortable self-centeredness,"⁹ instead of disciples of Jesus.

There is Work to Be Done!

No too long ago, I was challenged in my thinking about God's Word while reading A. W. Pink's commentary on Exodus. In one of his chapters, Pink makes the observation that "the Bible does

not yield its meaning to lazy people.”¹⁰ Oh my! It’s as if we have become too lethargic or complacent to want to do the work that is necessary to dig more deeply into the riches of God’s Word. Paul’s exhortation to “do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth,”¹¹ appears to be missing from our consciousness. Note the emphasis on work! So we dabble in our understanding of the Scriptures, and then collectively meet and share our what-do-you-think-it-means opinions. That is not the world of the Gospels, and certainly not the way that the Eleven were remade.

Then and Now

The contrast between biblical knowledge THEN and NOW is dramatic. Many observers of the contemporary evangelical scene lament the biblical illiteracy of the pew. “A mile wide and an inch deep” is a frequent characterization. There is significant irony in that observation. Many Christians are very proficient at using Web technology to be able to find information relating to any personal issue or question. Yet they can so easily get lost or confused in trying to personally understand the Scriptures. Diagnostically speaking, this is yet another enormous difference between THEN and NOW that impacts how the words “make” and “disciples” are not only understood, but are also lived out, or not lived out, in today’s world. And all this has had, and is having, serious consequences for our churches and communities of faith today as they approach the task of spiritual transformation in the making of disciples.

Seamless or Separate

These distinctions between THEN and NOW have very pragmatic implications. As was previ-

ously observed, the Western worldview has a proclivity for quantifying, dissecting and separating, even when it comes to the Scriptures. This stands in marked contrast to the first-century world of Jesus, which was all about synthesis and integration while wrestling with the Scriptures. The differences in these two worldviews become evident when each addresses the task of making disciples.

To the Hebrew mind, “making disciples” was a seamless reality, a continuous process that started with conversion and progressed to teaching followers of Jesus Christ to obey all that He commanded. To the modern Western mind, “making disciples” became something that needed to be broken down into two constituent parts - evangelism (the “saving” of people) and discipleship (the life-long process of maturing them in Christ).

Rather than keeping that Hebrew phrase “make disciples” as a unitized thought, Western thought patterns created two new pieces, and then labeled them “evangelism” and “discipleship” – two new words not found in the Bible! In so doing, it separated that which was intended to be seamless. Is this separation a distinction without a difference? Some might argue that it is. They would contend we really mean the same (one) thing with those two newly created words. Others would argue that by breaking apart the integrated understanding of “make disciples” we have unknowingly undermined the seamless intent of Jesus’ words.

It is a contention of this book that there is a marked difference between Middle Eastern and Western worldviews when it comes to understanding and interpreting the Scriptures. Furthermore, this is particularly true when it comes to the respective paradigms each has for the task of “making disciples.”

- Have you ever thought much about how you think, and why you think the way you do? How about the origins of your worldview and the many paradigms contained within it? Where did they come from?

- How did you react to the notion of balancing the importance of the community with that of the individual? Does that seem like a foreign concept to you? Which side of the scale do you usually find yourself leaning toward?

- How would you grade yourself on biblical literacy? Do you have a strategy to intentionally increase your biblical literacy? What is it?

- How did you respond to the notion of spiritual narcissism? Have you seen it manifest itself? Does any of this hit close to home? Where and why?

- How do you think that existentialism has affected you? Any thoughts on how you approach and read the Bible that needs to be revisited, revised, or remade?

Ponder

*His delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on it he meditates day and night.*

—Psalm 1:2

*I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.*

—Psalm 119:11

Prayer

*Lord, thank You for taking the initiative to reveal
Yourself to me.*

Lord, I do want to know You more.

*Please reveal more of Yourself to me through
Your Word.*

*Put within me a passion for Your word and a
diligence to study it.*

*Empower me so that I can honor You in both
what I say and do.*

*Remake me so I will think more about You and
less about me.*

*Lord, may your Kingdom come and Your will
be done on earth as it is in heaven,*

*And may that be true in my life more and more
each day.*

Amen

Sources and Notes

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¹⁰A.W. Pink, *Gleanings From Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 327.

¹¹II Timothy 2:15

2 Rabbis and Disciples

A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

—Luke 6:40

I have set for you an example that you should do as I have done to you.

—John 15:13

The Role of the Rabbi

Every first-century Jew knew that the Scriptures had authority over all aspects of life. God may have been a mystery to them, but behavior was not. Furthermore, it was scrupulous behavior¹, not the condition of your heart, that defined a “righteous” person. Thus, many Jews had a desire to honor God by doing all the right things. In the world of Pharisaism, rabbis were the teachers who had been given the authoritative role to interpret God’s Word for the living of a righteous life – for defining what behavior would or would not honor God.

Disciples Near and Far

A first-century disciple was a student and a learner, and the process of making disciples was best understood as a school of adherents.² These communities of learners encompassed both a local group of disciples who sat at the feet of the rabbi as well as a broader-based school of thought. Thus, a person would consider himself to be a disciple of Rabbi Akiva by subscribing to the interpretive manner of Rabbi Akiva. He would thus identify with Rabbi Akiva without ever having personally spent time sitting at his feet or even requesting to be his disciple. As a result, while a rabbi might have very few disciples directly sitting under his interpretive authority, he could nevertheless have many people in the culture as adherents and followers. These disciples-at-a-distance would likewise see themselves as, and refer to themselves as, his disciples.³ This was most likely the posture of Joseph of Arimathea⁴ and Nicodemus⁵ as adherents of Rabbi Jesus. We have this same identification-from-a-distance at work in our own culture. I continue to be amazed at the number of devoted Dallas Cowboys fans who have never lived near the state of Texas!

Choose Your Rabbi Carefully

The decision to request a rabbi to allow you to become his disciple and to enter into religious training with him was not made lightly. Some rabbis

interpreted the Scriptures from a literal approach. Others embraced an interpretive view that focused on the spirit of the text. Others could be found with interpretive approaches somewhere in between. Obviously, these diverse approaches would often lead to very different interpretive outcomes pertaining to issues of daily life. Since a rabbi's interpretation was forever binding on his disciples,⁶ choosing a rabbi was therefore a most significant decision. It was a choice that would forever shape the rest of a disciple's life. That choice would determine how that disciple would live the rest of his life through his rabbi's interpretive view of the Scriptures. Given these consequences, you wanted to make sure you chose a rabbi whose approach to interpreting God's Word was one with which you could identify with and live out.

Willing Submission to Authority

If a rabbi ultimately agreed to a would-be-disciple's request, and allowed him to become a disciple, the disciple-to-be agreed to surrender totally to the rabbi's authority in all areas of interpreting the Scriptures for his life. This was a cultural given for all observant Jewish young men – something each wanted to do. As a result, each disciple came to a rabbinic relationship with a desire and a willingness to do just that – surrender to the authority of God's Word as interpreted by his Rabbi's view of Scripture. In this discipling posture, the rabbi was honored more than the disciple's biological father, the one who gave him physical life. His rabbi deserved this special esteem for he would be the one who gave the disciple spiritual life – the wisdom of God's Word.⁷

Real Life Questions

Life questions were the causative factors in searching the Scriptures for authoritative direc-

tion.⁸ For example, everyone knew about the broad “no work” injunction regarding the Sabbath.⁹ But how should that command work itself out in specific terms? Thus, a real-life question regarding Sabbath observance might be, “May I light a candle on the Sabbath?” Or, “How many candles may I light on the Sabbath?” A real-life question regarding marriage might be, “Can I divorce my wife if...” A real-life question regarding tax collectors would be, “If I know my taxes are going to oppress our people, should I pay them?” It was such daily practical questions concerning righteous living that the rabbi would authoritatively address. That response was understood as coming through Scripture as defined and interpreted by the rabbi. As such, the rabbi was the matrix, the filter, the grid, through which every life issue flowed, as well as the lens through which every life issue was viewed.

Emulation

While not overtly required, invariably disciples had a deep desire to want to imitate their rabbi.¹⁰ This often included emulating how their rabbi ate, observed Sabbath, what he liked and disliked, as well as his mannerisms, prejudices and preferences. Some disciples would go to extreme lengths to try to imitate their rabbi. The story is told of one disciple who so wanted to emulate his rabbi that he hid in the rabbi's bedchamber. That way he would be better able to emulate with his own future wife how the rabbi was intimate with his wife.

Wrestling with the Word of God

Yeshivas, or groups of disciples intensely dialoging over an aspect of life and Scripture's claim on it, was a standard part of rabbinic teaching methodology.¹¹ Yeshivas would discuss the Torah (the Pentateuch), the Neviim (The Prophets), and the Ketuvim (The Writings)

which comprised the whole of the Scripture (The Tanach) as they knew it, together with the various interpretations of rabbinic sages through the ages.

Studying their rabbi's view of Scripture, and wrestling with the texts to comprehend "who God is and how God does things,"¹² were the two priorities of a disciple and the yeshiva experience. Since all disciples had memorized most, if not all of their Scripture,¹³ the issue was not the content of God's Word, but rather how it was to be lived out. As part of that process, the disciples would debate various rabbinic interpretations of the texts pertaining to a real life issue. That might involve weeks of dialogue and debate, for the rabbis were in no hurry to resolve these issues and questions. However, when the rabbi ultimately did declare his authoritative interpretation on an issue, all further debate ceased. His declared interpretation was now known and therefore binding on his disciples' lives.

Transparency

Unlike many of our contemporary discipleship programs, there was no curriculum or agenda for this multi-year discipling experience. Rather it was a continual daily relational living experience where either the rabbi would ask questions of the disciple as he closely observed the disciple's daily life, or the disciple would initiate a discussion by raising an issue or asking a question based on some aspect of his daily life.

In the dynamics of this intimate discipling community, all of a disciple's daily life was observable by the rabbi. A disciple always expected the rabbi's consistent and persistent question, "Why did you do that?" The emphasis was always on behavior formation, not just the imparting of wisdom and related interpretive information.¹⁴ In this interactive manner, the

rabbis functioned to clear up gray areas of understanding and difficult areas of textual interpretation for their disciples. By always asking questions, the rabbis were concentrating on developing discernment in the mind of the disciple, not the imparting of "how to" formulas. Notions of four steps to observant piety or three steps to effective prayer would be abhorrent to a first-century rabbi.

"You Shall Not Steal"

Observant Jews certainly understood that they were commanded not to steal.¹⁵ However, the real issue was to understand whether or not it was possible to unknowingly steal. Thus, an important issue for a disciple was: What does this commandment fully mean? How can it be authentically lived out in the often perplexing and ambiguous realities of daily life? To first wrestle with these issues, then to arrive at their application, and then to live out that understanding was what defined a first-century observant Jew. Thus, if the rabbi eventually declared that stealing time from a person included being late for a meeting with that person, that interpretation was now binding on his disciples for the remainder of their days. The only remaining issue was surrendering to the rabbi's authoritative interpretation.

Believe is a Verb

The Semitic understanding of "believe" was not based on an intellectual assent to a creed, doctrinal statement, or series of faith propositions. Rather, believe to an observant Jew was a verb in which you willingly submitted to your rabbi's interpretive authority regarding God's Word in every area of your life. Thus, to say you were a disciple in the name of Gamaliel, meant that you totally surrendered your life to Gamaliel's way of interpreting Scripture. As a

result, you conformed all of your life's behavior to his interpretations.

Jesus: A Rabbi Like No Other

Jesus was unique with respect to the rabbis of His time. He did not wait for a request from disciples-to-be before He called them to "Follow Me,"¹⁶ and He is still doing that today! Jesus' calling of His disciples in this initiating manner was a manifestation of His messianic purpose of inviting people into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was a threat to other rabbis because He referred to Himself on different occasions as the fulfillment of messianic prophecy. In part, that was why Jesus attracted so many followers to His new relational community which He called the Kingdom of God ("Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew). In addition, Jesus' rabbinic perspective was very personal and radically unique from all the other rabbis. A rabbi would claim to be bringing "light to the world." Jesus said He was more than a rabbi bringing light into the world, He was "The Light."¹⁷ He also said he was the "Son of Man,"¹⁸ a term that had overt messianic implications in the religious culture of His day. Rabbis talked about Messiah; Jesus said that He was that Messiah.¹⁹

You're Wrong!

Jesus was a very real threat to the rabbinic world for other reasons as well. He repeatedly said that there were significant holes and errors in their various rabbinic interpretive philosophies and rulings. In part, that is why many rabbis and Pharisees tried to discredit Jesus by questioning His lack of a rabbinic pedigree. From their perspective, Jesus never sat under any of the highly esteemed rabbis and sages of His day nor was He (ordained) by any of them.

Obviously this did not deter Jesus. For example, in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, He makes a series of pronouncements to challenge and even contradict the foundational paradigms of the respective worldviews of His day – the Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots and Essenes.²⁰ Jesus saw the need to dismantle all their religious paradigms before rebuilding them with His Kingdom of God way of seeing things. Thus, Jesus would often directly challenge rabbinic positions by saying, "You have heard it said, but I say unto you."²¹ A further exploration of Jesus' tearing down and rebuilding of His disciple's paradigms will be developed in the *Do and Teach* chapter.

Always Unclean!

One day it struck me that day after day in the Gospel record Jesus was making Himself ritually impure. He was always doing those things that were forbidden by the paradigms of the Pharisees. He touched lepers, touched the casket of a dead young man, walked on Gentile land, let Himself be touched by a woman with a chronic issue of blood, all acts of ritual impurity. Yet in none of the Gospel accounts do we have any record of Jesus going to the ritual purification baths to cleanse Himself from these ritually impure encounters with people. It's as if Jesus deliberately set about to redefine ritual purity for His disciples. That is something no rabbi of His day would ever contemplate doing!

In seemingly always being "unclean" by those He either associated with or touched, Jesus was also pointing forward toward the Cross. As He repeatedly became unclean by interacting with and touching these outcasts, He left them healed, clean, and restored. In doing so, the

purpose of the Cross is foreshadowed as Jesus became “impure” on our behalf so that we might be presented “clean” to His Father. What a remarkable rabbi! So different from all the others. No wonder the crowds began to seek Him out.

Essential Qualities

This revisiting of some of the contextual meaning of “make” and “disciples” allows us to make some observations regarding discipling and spiritual formation today.

The essential qualities of first-century disciples were desire and submission – what we would call obedience today – as well as emulation, community and transparency. These included

- A willing submission to their rabbi’s understanding of Scripture and his authoritative declaration of how to live life in all of its minutiae so as to honor God. It was a radical, willing, and totally conforming submission to the interpretive authority of their rabbi.
- A deep desire to emulate everything their rabbi did, and to try as best as one could to always imitate him.
- A passion and a zeal to give up any and all of their preconceived notions of how to live one’s life and then to enthusiastically embrace the way their rabbi deemed it best to honor God in all the details of daily life.
- Being in a relational community of disciples was a given in the yeshiva experience. Along with that also came intimacy and transparency. Day after day, your rabbi observed everything about you as you lived in the reality of that community experience.

Observations

A disciple of rabbi Jesus is one who totally surrenders to Him and His way of seeing and doing things. As such, a disciple comes with a willing desire to conform all aspects of his or her life to the authoritative Lordship of Jesus Christ. To Jesus, righteousness was a matter of the heart, not a codification of behavior.²² Furthermore, Jesus came to reveal further who God is and how God does things. Thus, a disciple of Jesus is one who is always asking Jesus, as revealed in Scripture, more about who God is and how God does things. As part of this posture, it needs to be understood that

- Jesus’ disciples should come with a deeply rooted desire to want to surrender to His authority.
- Jesus is always the authority. He is our rabbi as well as *The Rabbi*. It is to Him and Him alone that we surrender. Disciples of Jesus today cannot explicitly or implicitly transfer any authority to a pastor, teacher, or well-known author, and thus take any authority away from Him. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus states He will be with His disciples always. Thus, with the continual indwelling of the Spirit of Christ within every believer, there is no need for anyone else to assume His role as rabbi of His disciples. Paul stated that no one was ever baptized “in my name.”²³ He did so to make the point that no one could ever say he was a disciple of Paul. All believers, Paul insisted, are to be disciples only of Jesus Christ.
- Jesus revealed much about who God is and how God does things in His encounters with

people. Disciples learn much about what it means to be His disciples by studying the full context of Jesus' explicit and implicit teachings in these encounters. The role of the teacher-preacher-author in discipling is to be a co-disciple with certain spiritual gifts that can help open the depths and riches of the Scriptures, thus further revealing to all disciples more of who God is and how God does things.

- The central issue of being a disciple of Jesus is: How can I surrender – submit – every aspect of my life, including worldview, paradigms, career, personality, character, ethics, desires, motivations, values, family, ego, sexuality and attitudes to the authority of Jesus and His teachings?
- Small groups and one-on-one relationships can often serve much of the purpose of a yeshiva if those involved consistently ask and explore what it means to daily surrender every aspect of their lives to the Lordship of Christ. It is important that these groups and relationships define what they are about, and what their purpose is. The difference between accountability groups, Bible study groups, fellowship groups, and social groups can be vast in terms of their respective impacts on the daily, personal holiness of a disciple.

Then and Now

In the Gospel texts, Jesus would often not answer a direct question, but would respond with another question or a parable.²⁴ That was standard rabbinic teaching technique. This forced the questioner and the listeners to wrestle with the issues that came with their questions as well as with their encounter with Him. The yeshiva

environment was very intentional in wrestling with the difficult questions and issues of daily life and God's authority over them.

Today we don't seem to have as much of an appetite to wrestle with the biblical text as it relates to the daily issues of our lives and God's authority over them. We seem to prefer simple answers that we can selectively embrace at our convenience. Thus, much of what it means to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ today is often reduced to simple formulas of "how to" steps. All of us are familiar with this simplistic genre with its three steps to effective prayer, four steps to humility, and five steps to Spirit-filled living. Such an approach would never have survived rabbinic scrutiny in the first-century yeshiva environment.

Being discipled by Jesus was not a quick, fill-in-the-blank Bible study. He was not handing out principles for daily living. He came to reveal God's Truth. In fact this whole Greek notion of biblical principles was foreign to the world of the rabbis. Jesus' intent was to develop discernment in his listeners regarding who God is and how God does things, not provide easy answers without often rigorous effort wrestling with God's Word and its demands.

We Do Understand

Observe how we develop board certified surgeons, nurses, licensed electricians, school-teachers, biochemists, counselors, and golf pros today. Common to each are long periods of study, training, mentoring, practical experience, as well as continuing education. We are accustomed to the practice of placing ourselves under the watchful mentoring oversight of others who have established proficiency in our areas of interest. Ironically, we seem to put far more

passion, commitment, and dedication into becoming a disciple of someone, or some thing than we seem to do in developing and nurturing our piety as committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Thus, we are all disciples of some thing or someone – be it hedonism, atheism, career, self-absorption, athletics, our favorite cause, or Jesus Christ.

Compare and Contrast

It may be helpful at this point to compare the “make disciples” world of Jesus (THEN) with much of the world of Western discipleship today (NOW). What follows at the end of this chapter is a partial listing of what’s been developed for THEN. The reader is encouraged to revise the suggested contemporary characterizations in the NOW column.

Reflections to Journal and Share

This overview of making disciples during the time of Jesus has highlighted some of the assumptions and presuppositions embedded in the rabbi-disciple relationship. These first-century “givens” provide us with issues to wrestle with as we ask questions of ourselves, and raise issues for our small groups, churches, and informal communities of faith. This wrestling should also include our discipleship programs and ministries.

- Biblical discipling is a life shaping, life determining process. Who are the people, or what are the things that are shaping your life? Do we ever outgrow our need to be in some form of a discipling relationship?

- How would you describe your biblical understanding of making disciples to others? Do you see any cultural expectations that may have shaped our current view of discipleship today? How would you contrast the discipling of the first century with contemporary notions of discipleship today as you have experienced or observed them?

- Is “believe” mostly a creedal statement to you, or mostly a verb to live out each day?
- To what extent do we wrestle today with life issues in relationship to the Scriptures? Are we willing to conform every issue in our life to the Word of God, or do we seem to avoid wrestling at all costs? When we do wrestle, are we prepared to place ourselves under the authority of His revealed response in His Word? Have you ever found yourself not bringing an issue to the Scriptures because you didn’t want to hear, or didn’t want to have to encounter God’s authoritative response regarding money, ego, sex, alcohol, career, and pride. The reader is encouraged to add to this list.
- Re-read the section dealing with the “essential qualities” of a first-century disciple, and replace the word rabbi with Jesus. On a scale of 1-10, how would you assess these distinctive qualities of being a disciple of Jesus in your life – desire, submission, emulation, passion, community, and transparency?
- We live in a culture that chafes under almost any concept of authority. “Do your own thing” is the mantra of the day. How might this cultural malaise impact our understanding and willingness to put ourselves under biblical authority? To what extent do we even have a desire to surrender to the authority of Jesus today in the same manner that first-century disciples had a willingness to surrender to their rabbi’s interpretive authority?

- Contrast total surrender to the authority of Jesus with a partial surrender, or an occasional surrender, a convenient surrender, or even token surrender to Him. How would you assess your willingness factor in regards to surrendering to the authority of God's Word in all areas of your life? When you do surrender, is it a willing surrender, or a surrender that arises from some form of resentful, obligatory obedience?

- In today's church culture, our facade of Sabbath piety, put on with the refined religious behavioral cosmetics of our day, is about the only thing that is observable about us by our pew mates. Thus, during the week, except perhaps by our family, our real spiritual life is not observable by others in our respective communities of faith. As a result, others can't really use God's Word in our lives for "teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."²⁵ How might this tendency towards Lone Rangerism constrain our personal growth and maturity in growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

- Are there any areas of your life that are either off limits, or have limited accessibility to the Lordship Authority of Jesus Christ? What are they, and why are they off limits?

Ponder

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.

—**John 14:12**

The Bible does not yield its meaning to lazy people.

—**A.W. Pink**²⁶

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

—**II Tim. 2:15**

Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?

—**Luke 6:46**

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

—**Psalms 139:23 & 24**

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said,
“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.
Then you will know the truth, and the truth
will set you free.”*

—**John 8:31**

*To try to distill the Bible, which is bursting with life, drama, and tension,
to a series of principles would be like trying to reduce a living person to a diagram.*

—**Rabbi Abraham Heschel**

Prayer

Lord, I do want to have a deep desire for You, Your Will and Your Ways.

Yet, I confess I often find little or no desire to want to do so.

In the power of Your Holy Spirit, remind me to pray for that desire when I find it missing;

To pray for a desire to want to submit to You as a loving act of devotion and worship,

And to have a passion to want to emulate You in all that I think, feel, and do.

Lord, work in your Sovereign ways to empower me to want to be Your disciple.

Tear down all my bastions of self-centeredness and self-sufficiency.

Make me into Your person, Your disciple, Your ambassador, and the leaven in Your loaf – a person who loves You and willingly shares that love with others.

And free me from any sense of obligatory obedience, for Your glory and Your praise.

Amen

Notes and Sources

¹Joel B. Green et. al., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), p. 610.

²Ibid., p. 176.

³James C. Martin and Douglas Greenwold, *Rediscovering Discipleship: A Contextual Perspective* (Rockville, Md.: A Preserving Bible Times Discipling Discussion Paper, 2002)

⁴John 19:38

⁵John 19:39

⁶Matthew 16:19. Here Jesus declares Peter to be the successor rabbi of the band. As rabbi, he will have the authority to bind and loose with his interpretations.

⁷David Bivins, *First-Century Discipleship*, www.jerusalemerspective.com, under “Articles.”

⁸James C. Martin and Douglas Greenwold, *Rediscovering Discipleship: A Contextual Perspective*.

⁹Leviticus 23:3

¹⁰D. Thomas Landcaster, *Discipleship to Rabbi Yeshua*, www.rabbiyeshua.com, June 2001

¹¹James C. Martin and Douglas Greenwold, *Rediscovering Discipleship: A Contextual Perspective*.

¹²James C. Martin, *The Gospels in Context* (Amarillo, Tex.: Bible World Seminars, 2002), p. 9.

¹³David Bivins, *Jesus’ Education*, www.jerusalemerspective.com, under “Articles.”

¹⁴James C. Martin and Douglas Greenwold, *Rediscovering Discipleship: A Contextual Perspective*.

¹⁵Exodus 20:15

¹⁶Matthew 9:9

¹⁷John 8:12

¹⁸Luke 5:24

¹⁹Luke 4:21

²⁰Matthew 5: 3-12

²¹Matthew 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43

²²Matthew 6:21, 12:34 & 35; 13:15; 15:18, 18 & 19; Luke 6:45, 10:27 are some examples.

²³I Corinthians 1: 13-16

²⁴Luke 10:26

²⁵II Timothy 3:16

²⁶A.W. Pink, *Gleanings From Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 327.

Comparing Making Disciples THEN with (most) Discipleship NOW

World of Making Disciples (THEN)

Hebrew Way – Doing, Action

More Concrete

Integrated Context is Understood

About Integration & Synthesis –
Keeping Things Together

“Believe” is a Verb – Something You Do

Emphasis on Consistent Behavior

Community More Important Than the
Individual – Sacrifice Personal Rights for the
Benefit of the Community

Concerned with Right Doing

Willingly Submissive to Rabbi’s Authority

Submit to Rabbi’s Interpretation

Willing to Wrestle with the Text for Long
Periods of Time

Focus on Developing Discernment

Memorized their Scriptures

Live Life in Community

Live Integrated, Holistic Lives

Desire to be A Disciple

Total Surrender to their Rabbi’s Interpretive
Authority for Living

Nothing is Hidden or Off Limits to
Rabbinic Scrutiny

Life Issue Oriented

Dialogue Intensive

Focused on Men

Western Discipleship (NOW)

Hellenistic Way – Thinking, Words, Ideas

More Abstract

Most Biblical Context is Missing

About Analysis, Categorization & Labels –
Breaking Things Apart

“Belief” is a Creed – Consenting to a Series of
Propositions

Much More of an Emphasis on Ideas

Individual More Important Than the
Community – Sacrifice Community Harmony for
Sake of Personal Interests

Concerned with Right Thinking

Submissive to No One, Except Myself

Create my own Interpretation of the Text

Preference for Quick, Simplistic Answers
Through Short Encounters with the Text

Lack of Critical Thinking Skills

Widespread Biblical Illiteracy

Functional Lone Rangers

Live in Dichotomized Spheres (Sacred/secular,
faith/work)

Often Content to Just “Believe” in Jesus

Partial, Elective Surrender to Jesus’ Authority as
Convenient

Much of our Lives is Hidden from Others

Conceptually Oriented

Information Transfer Intensive

Seems More Women are Being Discipled
Today than Men

3 The Rescuer Has Come

Levi gave a large dinner at his home for Jesus. Everybody was there, tax men and other disreputable characters as guests at dinner. The Pharisees and their religious scholars came to his disciples greatly offended. “What is he doing eating and drinking with crooks and “sinners?”

Jesus heard about it and spoke up, “Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I’m here inviting outsiders, not insiders – an invitation to a changed life, changed inside and out.”

Luke 5: 30-32, The Message¹

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Matthew 21: 31c-32

Yeshua – The Lord’s Rescuer

To Westerners, His name is Jesus. To first-century Jews, His name is *Yeshua*, the Semitic meaning of which is “The Lord Rescues.” To a nation long waiting to be set free from Rome’s oppression, it was a significant name. Although few yet knew it, the long awaited Messiah had finally come, and in the most inconspicuous and improbable of ways. The Lord’s Rescuer was now here. Thus, a good starting question might be, what needs to be rescued, or who needs to be rescued? Let’s look at it from Jesus’ perspective.

Jesus’ Rescue Manifesto

When Jesus went back to His hometown of Nazareth one weekend to observe the Sabbath, the head of the Nazareth synagogue honored Jesus by asking Him to read from the Prophets, which was a prescribed part of Sabbath worship protocol. The people in Nazareth, a longtime hotbed of messianic expectation, had already gotten word of the miracles that Jesus had been performing around Capernaum. In their way of looking at things, this would have established Jesus as yet another in a long line of miracle-working Pharisee rabbis from Galilee. These rabbis were called the *Hasidim* – the righteous ones,² and they were well known for their prayer-warrior nature as well as their commitment to doing things for the benefit of the community. The presence of these miracle-working rabbis on the Galilean landscape was something these Nazarenes were very familiar with in their religious history.³ However, from their perspective, another miracle-working rabbi in the Galilee district, as wonderful as that might be, is certainly not the same thing as *THE* Messiah.

It must have been with fond anticipation that many in that synagogue audience, who knew Jesus well from his formative years, wondered what He would be reading from the prophets on this Sabbath. And particularly, they might well have wondered how would He then creatively “preach” on it? As Jesus was handed the Isaiah scroll, He started to unfold it in a deliberate manner. As the rustling of the slowly unfolding scroll continued, perhaps for several minutes, it only added to the anticipation of those in the audience. What would our hometown boy, now developing a reputation as a miracle-working rabbi, read from that great prophet today?

A Cut-and-Paste Reading

Finally Jesus got to that portion of Isaiah that He intentionally wanted to use for this homecoming occasion. It was a messianic passage that was a favorite of His audience. Unlike reading from the Pentateuch, which had to be precisely read with no deviation, a rabbi could exercise some cut-and-paste liberty in how he chose to read from the Prophets. This was a standard part of rabbinic Sabbath protocol and something the steeped-in-the-OT-Scripture audience always looked forward to hearing. In fact, the more innovative a rabbi could be with these passages, the more inventive in his editorial commentary, the more creativity “points” he would score with his audience. Thus what Luke records for us is what Jesus chose to emphasize in His cut-and-paste reading from Isaiah that particular Sabbath morning for His Nazareth “friends” and family.⁴

Starting with what we now know as the 61st chapter, Jesus began by reading the first two verses in a slightly different way than those in the synagogue were used to hearing it read. Reading Luke’s record carefully and then comparing it to Isaiah 61, we see that Jesus did

a creative rearrangement by blending parts of the first two verses of the 61st chapter with a phrase from the 58th chapter.⁵ He also omitted two phrases from those two verses. All of this resulted in the following reconstruction of the text in what we might term His Rescue Manifesto:

- 61:1a *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,*
 61:1b *because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the **poor**.*
 61:1c omitted (*to bind up the brokenhearted*)
 61:1d *He has sent me to proclaim **freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,***
 58:6c *to **release the oppressed,***
 61:2a *to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*
 61:2b omitted (*proclaim the day of vengeance of our God*)

(**bold** added for emphasis)

A Very Short Sermon!

“What was Jesus trying to communicate with this creative reconstruction of Isaiah?” some in the audience might have wondered. Some hard-liners might have wondered, “What happened to the proclamation of the Lord’s vengeance from that text?” No answers were forthcoming from Jesus. Instead, Jesus suddenly turned this growing sense of anticipation into great tension. He dramatically ended His very brief cut-and-paste reading with a concise one-sentence summary statement. In perhaps the shortest commentary on a text ever given by a rabbi in a Sabbath service, Jesus authoritatively and succinctly said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled (initiated) in your hearing.” To a Nazarene ear, that was not just creative, it was outright blasphemy!

Messiah?

To those in the synagogue audience that Sabbath morning, there was no misunderstanding, no ambiguity to be found in what Jesus had just said. He had just proclaimed Himself to be more than another miracle-working Pharisee rabbi from Galilee. He had formally and deliberately declared Himself to be THE Messiah! After His one sentence closeout statement, Luke informs us that Jesus then sat down, most likely in the Seat of Moses. Sitting in that substantial stone seat at the front of the synagogue is what the rabbis did when they wanted to authoritatively bind their listeners to what they had just said as if Moses had just authoritatively said it. So when Jesus sat down, the significance of that was not lost on His listeners. While it would be fascinating to continue to contextually unfold Luke's narrative as Jesus hometown "friends" suddenly started to turn their anger and rage on Him (the traditional reading of Luke 4:22 appears to have been mistranslated⁶), a further unfolding of that encounter is best kept for another day.

Who Are the Poor?

Returning to our initial question, what or who needs to be rescued by Jesus, we need to look closely at Jesus' choice of words. Thus, it is important to ask, what did Jesus mean when He used the words "poor," "freedom for the prisoners," "recovery of sight to the blind," and "set free those who are oppressed?" In those words and phrases resides much of the Good News that still needs to be further fathomed and proclaimed today.

In referencing the "poor," Jesus was not making reference to people who just had a shortage of coins in their tunics. Rather, Jesus

used the word poor in a much broader sociological sense to refer to anyone who was poor in status and therefore excluded because of deficiencies in education, family origin, disease, or proscribed occupation.⁷ Each of these poor had something in common. They were invisible people who had been systematically marginalized by the observant Jewish religious culture of that day. They were people without options. They were the lowly and despised and were therefore ostracized and barred from participating in that religious system. Since it was a religious culture with a "sin management"⁸ system for getting people right with God, these outsiders therefore had no hope. If the religious system was the only way you could get right with God, but the system always precludes you from participating, where did that leave you – in a catch-22 cycle of perpetual hopelessness!

We don't know the relative population sizes of those who were deemed "righteous" in this observant Jewish culture and those who were deemed "sinners." I am arbitrarily going to apply the 80/20 rule to these two populations, assuming that 80% were the righteous, observant Jewish population on the inside of the system. These were well-fed people who laughed a lot, spoke well of each other, and generally had a good life. Outside the walls of this fortress of Pharisaism lived 20% of the population who were "sinners." This was a technical term that Pharisaism created to label those people who were not well fed, mourned their state and condition, and were scorned and despised. These were people with certain proscribed diseases and occupations, birth defects, or who had come from questionable lineage. This created two very different populations:

“Righteous”

- Insiders
- Well Fed
- Esteemed
- Laugh
- “Right” with God
- Defect and Blemish Free
- Acceptable Occupations

“Sinners”

- Outsiders
- Hungry
- Scorned and Despised
- Mourn
- No Hope of Ever Being Right with God
- Had Disabilities & Diseases
- Proscribed Unclean Occupations

Faulty Theology

These “sinners” were the kinds of people that the prevailing Pharisee paradigms declared to be disliked by God. Some rabbis even declared them to be the enemies of God. Thus, if God is against you, so the Pharisees reasoned, He must have good reason for being so. Therefore, we need to make sure we honor God’s dislike of these people by making sure they are excluded from our religious and social circles. As a result, these outsiders were very much kept in a cultural prison. Sadly, it was a prison created by the religious establishment in God’s name that would keep these poor perpetually labeled as God-really-doesn’t-like-you outsiders. Sometimes it seems that our deepest wounds come not from the world, but from within our religious cultures.

Inviting the Poor

If there is any question that Jesus was using the word “poor” in a broader sociological sense, the next several chapters in Luke remove all doubt. In those chapters, Jesus lives out His understanding of what He meant by the “poor.” In those chapters, Jesus issues the first invitations to become citizens of His here-and-now Kingdom of God. Jesus invites and welcomes those who had long been marginalized and excluded – a

leper, a paralytic, a despised port tax collector, and a man with a withered right hand – into His new radical, relational Kingdom fellowship.

To the religious establishment of His day, the kinds of outsiders that Jesus was inviting into His community were not “our kind of people.” For these insiders, it was forbidden even to interact with these outsiders, let alone invite these sinners to share table fellowship with them. So observant Jews did not invite these outcasts in, and never would. Thus, Jesus was building a very diverse, as well as a very different Kingdom, one that stood in opposition to the homogenous and merciless insider world of observant Judaism.

Interestingly enough, the residue of that insider-outsider tension is still with us. Many of our communities of faith are far too homogeneous in nature. We still have implicit attitudes as insiders which distance ourselves from a wide variety of outsiders in subtle and not so subtle ways. It is always helpful for any community of faith to periodically reacquaint themselves with this contextual understanding of who the poor are, and why Jesus came to set these prisoners free. Then to ask what barriers might we have knowingly or unknowingly erected that are keeping today’s poor people away for our table fellowships.

Everything Needs to be Rescued!

With this backdrop to our question – what or who needs to be rescued? – we now have some insights:

- The “outsiders” need to hear the Good News that not only does God love them, but also that He is on their side! These poor and oppressed need to hear that God’s Messiah has now come bringing “Divine compassion for all the incompleteness in their lives.”⁹ These prisoners need to hear, and then experi-

ence the reality that they really can be set free from their prisons of perpetual humiliation, rejection, and abandonment;¹⁰ that nobodies can be accepted, welcomed, healed, restored, and Eternally loved in the Person and Power of Jesus Christ; that with Him, they are incredibly special some bodies!

- The “insiders” need to be set free from the blindness of their religious culture to rediscover the Heart of God – His mercy and

compassion – for all. Pharisaism has a severe case of cataracts in its religious eyes and is oblivious to that condition.

God’s covenants, as well as Jesus’ disciples’ world-view and paradigms, also needed to be rescued from what Pharisaism had done to them. It would be no small task. In fact, it would take the King of Glory and His Spirit three years to accomplish it! More on that in the next chapter.

Reflections to Journal and Share

- Who are today’s “poor?” What prisons has our culture or our churches put them in?
- Have you ever found yourself excluded – being on the outside looking in? For how long and for what reason(s)? What did that do to you?
- Who are today’s “righteous?” Those, who like the Pharisees, are convinced they have it right – all figured out – but have missed God’s heart of compassion and mercy for the outcasts of this world.

Ponder

And Levi gave a great reception for Him in his home. And there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others of a like nature who were reclining at table with them.

And the Pharisees and their men learned in the scriptures went to grumbling in a low undertone, conferring secretly together and discontentedly complaining to His disciples, saying, "For what reason with tax collectors and sinners stained with vice and crime are you all eating and drinking?"

*And Jesus answering said to them,
"Those who are sound in body do not have need of a doctor
but those who are in a miserable condition as far as their health is concerned.
I have not come to call righteous persons but sinners to repentance."*

—Luke 5:30-32

Wuest New Testament¹¹

*Having gone on your way therefore,
teach all the nations, making them your pupils,
baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of The Holy Spirit,
teaching them to be attending to carefully,
holding firmly to, and observing all, whatever things
I enjoined upon you.*

—Matt 28:19-20

Wuest New Testament¹²

Prayer

Lord, I do want to follow You, I do want to be Your disciple.

Yet I find so much more judgment in me than I do mercy and compassion.

Keep me “poor” in my perspective so that I will never lose the joy of having been rescued.

Remind me daily of Your gracious and merciful love to me so I can be intentional in bringing that grace and mercy into the lives of others.

Remove the cataracts and blind spots from my eyes so that I can see more of what I have been missing in your Kingdom.

Grant me the courage and strength to always honor You,

And empower me to stay the course of growing in You.

Amen.

Notes and Sources

¹Eugene Petersen, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1995), p. 153.

²Professor Hanna Safrai, Hebrew University. Evening lecture on “The Oral Tradition and First Century Judaism,” The Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies, March, 1988.

³Ibid.

⁴Dr. Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Astonishing Jesus: Through the Lens of Luke* DVD set, Disc 2 “One Violent Day in the Synagogue,” (Minneapolis, Minn., Crossways International, 2005).

⁵Brian Knowles, *What Was Jesus’ ‘Good News?’* website godward.org, under “Hebrew Roots.”

⁶Ibid. If you’re intrigued with what happens next in the text, Knowles provides a fascinating contextual perspective.

⁷Joel Green, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 211.

⁸A Dallas Willard phrase from *The Divine Conspiracy* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), p. 32.

⁹Dr. Robert Norris, phrase from a June 26 pulpit sermon, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Maryland.

¹⁰Dr. David Allen, Handout from The Eleuthera Institute, Arlington, VA. Dr. David Allen, a Christian psychotherapist and author of *In Search of the Heart* has developed what he calls the “Bermuda Triangle of the Soul.” His clinical experience suggests that the three sides of his Bermuda Triangle - abandonment, rejection, and humiliation - speak to the human condition of every person. The only question is to what degree. Contained within that prison triangle are the issues of guilt and shame, in what Dr. Allen calls “The Hurt Trail.”

¹¹Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994).

¹²Ibid.

4 Why Those Twelve?

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.

—John 15:16

Always Purposeful

Jesus was strategic in all that He did, including His choice of the Twelve. Have you ever wondered why Jesus chose those particular individuals to become the group of Twelve? Ever wonder what some of His other options for the Twelve could have been?

This chapter will take a contextual look at some of the issues surrounding the question: Why those Twelve? Its purpose is to learn more about the nature of the Twelve that Jesus chose. Then to ask, “what are the implications of Jesus’ selections for disciplemaking today?”

The Problem

There were many things concerning an understanding of God’s Word that had become corrupted in the Pharisaic religious system of Jesus’ day. Consequently, there was much that needed to be rescued and restored back into harmony with God’s original purpose. This included the restoration of God’s intent for the Covenants He made with Abraham, Moses and David.¹

Abrahamic Covenant²

- The **Land** was always intended to be the stage by which the nation of Israel would represent the One True God to the world. That was its purpose and their purpose. If the nation did that, they would experience perpetual provision and protection in the land.
- The **Descendants** were to be those who accurately represented the One True God in the land. After the conquest, they were to be inclusive in their thinking and welcome any and all peoples into the land to learn about the One True God.
- The **Blessing** that God promised Abraham was that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him.

By the time of Jesus, the Abrahamic Covenant had become corrupted. As a result,

- Jewish understanding of the purpose of the **Land** had evolved into exclusivity thinking – it was meant just for them. This fostered an isolation mentality rooted in a need for security.
- Many Jews became so compromised with Greco-Roman culture, and others so committed to behavioral legalism, that neither were **Descendants** capable of accurately representing the One True God in the **Land**.
- The intent of the **Blessing** became corrupted into an us versus them mentality based on a wrongful understanding of what it means to be right with God. Furthermore, observant Judaism developed a genetic entitlement paradigm. As Abraham's biological seed, they were convinced they were the chosen ones. No matter what they did, they would always be seen as acceptable in God's eyes.

Mosaic Covenant³

- After freeing the Israelites from Egypt, God, in a marvelous manifestation of His grace, gave them His **Law** to protect the nation in the **Land** – to forever keep them free from slavery and bondage. By keeping the **Law**, the nation would not only stay free, but would always identify with God and His ways. In so doing, they would reveal God's character and nature to others who would pass through the land.

By the time of Jesus, the Mosaic Covenant had degenerated into behavioral legalism which included an elaborate ritual purification and sacrificial system for people to get right with God. This corrupted state re-enforced a false assumption – that a person's behavior, coupled with the mechanics of sacrifice and ritual purification, makes you acceptable to God.

Davidic Covenant⁴

- **Worship** was always intended in God's design to be a communion of the heart resulting in authentic worship in Spirit and in Truth.
- God's design for the world was for a perpetual **Kingdom** of heart and mind where God's Will and Ways would always prevail. It would be a Kingdom that would be manifested in all peoples living fruitfully and abundantly under God's authority. His reign would encompass the world and all its cultures, including everything in those cultures, e.g. music, art, politics, literature, science, philosophy and the performing arts, as well as the marketplace, the home, the neighborhood and the church. Every part of the culture was meant to perfectly reflect who God is and how God does things.

By the time of Jesus,

- The Temple had become an institution with complex **Worship** rituals with a corrupt leadership. Not only were they extorting the people, but they were also oblivious to God's mandates for demonstrating compassion and mercy.
- The notion of **Kingdom** had come to mean a political kingdom where kings and armies, not *Yahweh*, will make things right for Israel.

With this corrupted state of covenantal intent as a backdrop, we are now better able to consider some of the potential leadership sources Jesus had available to Him for choosing the Twelve. These selections would be part of God's Eternal Plan to rescue and restore the world – and the people and cultures within it – from the corruptive legacy of the Mutiny.

Temple Leadership

Ever wonder why Jesus didn't select some of the Twelve from Temple leadership? After all, the Temple was the center of Jewish identity. It represented the pinnacle of Jewish worship and was the one unifying institution for a very diverse people. Furthermore, Jesus came to redeem worship, which is at the heart of the Davidic Covenant.

Given the systemic problems in the religious system of His day, one could build a reasonable argument that Jesus would have been wise to work from within the system, remaking it from the inside out. Since leadership can have a profound impact on those it leads, it would seem reasonable for Jesus to go to the Temple to make some initial disciple selections. There He could choose the majority of the Twelve from Temple leadership ranks, then proceed to remake their paradigms. If those leaders could catch a vision for the Kingdom that Jesus came to instill, then working from the inside out as well as from the top down, just might be an effective way to turn things around.

Temple, Inc.

The Temple of Jesus' day might well have been called Temple, Inc. It was the Wall Street of its day, an incredible cash cow generating millions of dollars annually from several Temple enterprises – dye making, incense selling, sacrificial animal selling, money exchange and more.⁵ This portfolio of businesses made Temple leadership very wealthy as well as extremely protective of their franchise. This Temple aristocracy was comprised of the High Priest and the Chief Priests who, along with some of the leading Jerusalem families called the Elders, essentially functioned as the Board of Directors of Temple, Inc. While separate from the Sanhedrin,⁶ they were also major

participants in this Jewish ruling council that had jurisdiction over all matters of Jewish Law as well as certain criminal matters.

Maintaining the Franchise

For its Board of Directors, the Temple was religious only in its form. There was nothing particularly spiritual about most of them. These leaders were so committed to maintaining their power base and controlling this Temple cash-generating machine that they would not allow anything or anyone, even the Messiah, to jeopardize their power, position, and wealth. There were no notions of compassion or mercy in their collective souls. The Temple, as a cash generating monopoly, had to be maintained at all costs, even if it meant selling their souls to the Romans – something they would ultimately do.⁷ All of this was general knowledge at the time of Jesus, which explains in part why John the Baptist positioned his ministry of repentance, and its desert venue, as a protest against everything that Jerusalem's Temple leadership represented.

Too Corrupt?

We know from the Gospel record that Jesus did not select any of the Twelve from institutional Temple leadership. These leaders were far too compromised by their wealth, too hard-hearted, too corrupt, and too impervious to the things that resonate deep within the heart of God. Everything about them was antithetical to the nature of the Kingdom of God. As we know, these Temple leaders were so resistant to Jesus that they would orchestrate His death on a Cross.

Sometimes working with established leadership to achieve reform from within is not a viable option. When Jesus looked at this pathetic scene, He saw men who were not just misguided,

but who had become utterly corrupt. When that is the case, raising a different form of leadership from outside the system is often the only way to revive things.

The Levitical Priesthood

The ordinary Levitical priesthood was a seemingly well-suited option for Jesus to consider in choosing a few good men to be part of the Twelve. These priests were all descendents of Levi, the family dedicated by God to His service in the Temple. Unlike the Temple leadership, there were many good people in the priesthood ranks. They were the Zechariahs⁸ of that time, and there were up to 20,000⁹ of them serving in some 24 Divisions¹⁰ maintaining the sacrificial and worship infrastructure of the Temple. They represented a large pool of devoted and righteous men serving God as the basis of their life's calling. They were just the kind of symbolic rootstock you might logically want to draw upon when starting something new that would have true worship at its core. Symbolically, they also represented continuity back to the very beginning of Jewish worship tradition instituted by God Himself. Importantly, they were not corrupted and compromised like those in Temple Leadership.

We know from the Biblical record that no one from the ordinary priesthood became part of the Twelve. The Gospels are silent as to why. Perhaps Jesus had the full "priesthood of all believers"¹¹ in view that Peter was later to describe. It could be that Jesus, knowing the full breadth and scope of His vision for His church, knew it might be compromised, misunderstood, or constrained if the traditional priesthood was given an initial leadership role in the Kingdom of God on earth.

Why Not Gentiles?

The Abrahamic Covenant calls for all nations to be blessed. Within two hundred years after Jesus' earthly ministry, non-Jewish people would make up the vast majority of the citizenry of the Kingdom of God. Looking ahead to this reality, choosing a few non-Jews would certainly make for good future sociology! And it wouldn't be that hard to do. Just by crossing over into the Southeastern quadrant of the Sea of Galilee, a several hour sail from Capernaum, you could be in the Decapolis, the land of the Gentiles, to make a few strategic future leadership choices from Greek and Roman rootstock.

As we know, that also did not happen! People with a mostly polytheistic worldview, with little or no knowledge of *Yahweh*, were not chosen to be part of the Twelve. Their time for leadership would come later.

Hellenistic Jews?

There was another demographic population in the land. They were Hellenistic Jews. These were Jews who had compromised the tenants of observant Judaism because they wanted to partake of the pleasures and fruits of Greco-Roman culture. They were Jews who wanted to have a foot in both camps. They wanted to go to synagogue on Sabbath and listen to the Torah being read. But they also wanted to go to the Greco-Roman theatres, arenas, circuses, gymnasiums and baths during the week, indulging in all the pleasures of that culture. They wanted to have it both ways. They were Jews scorned by their fellow observant Jews as compromisers. But at least they knew about *Yahweh*, and they certainly knew what it was like to be compromised. Since so many future followers of Jesus would come out of compromised backgrounds,

with only a partial understanding of who God is and how God does things, this might well have been a good symbolic population from which to choose a few disciples to be part of the Twelve.

As we know from the Biblical record, only one person was chosen from compromised Judaism to be part of the Twelve. His Jewish name was Levi, and his Greek name was Matthew. Fascinatingly, he was a despised port tax collector. More on his surprising selection later in this chapter when we consider the diversity within the Twelve that Jesus selected.

An Extremist Sect

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls shed light on a small group of Jews called the Essenes. They were a separatist movement who wanted to remove themselves from the evil of Roman contamination so they could be more holy and devout – both admirable objectives. Yet Jesus knew that one of the requirements of the Kingdom of God was for His disciples to be in the world while not being of this world. Any tendency to withdrawal from society leaves too much culture-needed salt in the shaker. Such tendencies would compromise His vision of God’s Kingdom on earth.

Observant Jews!

There is another demographic group in the land from which Jesus could have selected His initial disciples. It is the world of observant Judaism which is also the world of the Pharisees. One initial reaction to that possibility might be, “NO, not them! They are not only the instigators of the problem, but also the perpetuators of it! How could they be part of the solution?” Before considering that understandable reaction, it might be helpful to take a brief look at what it meant to be an observant Jew at the time of Jesus living in

the mostly Northwest quadrant of the Sea of Galilee – an area known as the observant Jewish triangle of Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John were observant Jews, something that ten of the Twelve had in common. Much of what it meant to be an observant Jew during the time of Jesus was developed in the *Rabbis and Disciples* chapter. That will be briefly re-summarized here with a few added observations. Observant Jews

- Had a passion for behavioral purity, with purity being defined as doing those things that would honor God as authoritatively interpreted by their rabbis. While there may have been diversity in how each rabbi interpreted all the nuances related to the Law, there was uniformity in the sense that they all wanted to observe it impeccably as they best understood it. Thus, for many, including Peter, Andrew, James and John, they would never consider
 - setting foot on Gentile land, or in a Gentile house¹²
 - dining with “sinners”
 - seeking out, let alone touching lepers
 - seeing disabled people as being acceptable in God’s sight
 - seeing anything of redeeming value in a port tax collector
- Were zealously committed to honoring God by not compromising with Greco-Roman culture.
- Knew their Scriptures very well.
- Were men of prayer, albeit mostly ritualized prayer, and would routinely pray many times throughout every day.

Misguided Zeal

Observant Jews did not know that their zeal was misguided, that their passions were misplaced in terms of emphasis. Quite the contrary, they were convinced they were doing all the right things to honor God. They were “true believers” in the Pharisaic religious system of their day. To our modern Western worldview, these observant Jews would be labeled religious extremists! And it was to exactly that kind of dedicated non-compromiser with the culture that Jesus first said, “Follow Me.” But there is more to it than that.

The Diversity of the Twelve

Even though most of the Twelve came from the Galilean strain of observant Judaism, there was still significant diversity within this small group of Twelve:

- Peter, Andrew, James and John came from the world of business, where fishing was their stock and trade.¹³
- Matthew/Levi was a despised and scorned port tax collector. He would have been viewed as having sold his soul to the Romans – the Kingdom of Evil to an observant Jew – for the right to engage in financially exploiting Jews.
- Simon was a zealot, an extreme nationalist¹⁴ for God.
- James and John, the sons of Zebedee, became known as the “sons of thunder,”¹⁵ a term Jesus later gave them. While we are not sure exactly what that suggests, perhaps they were the rough and tumble sort of volatile personalities you might find in a biker bar!
- Several of the Twelve were already disciples of someone else – John the Baptist – when Jesus chose them.

Since everything Jesus did was intentional, this was deliberate diversity. As such, it might be helpful to ponder this diversity a little more deeply through the clarifying lens of context.

John the Baptist’s Protest

Andrew and John were not just observant Jewish men, they were also disciples of Zechariah and Elizabeth’s son, John the Baptist.¹⁶ Thus to understand further what some of Jesus’ Galilean disciples-to-be were about, we need to take a closer look at the nature of John the Baptist’s ministry. For example, why had some of the original Twelve already cast their discipling lot with the Baptist before Jesus arrived on the scene?

At the time of Jesus, observant Judaism had evolved to such a point in its religious thinking that those in it had no need for further forgiveness beyond the mechanics of their system. In the world of the Pharisees, sin management was accomplished by three things: behaviorally doing all the right things, availing themselves of the sacrificial system in the Temple, and utilizing the ritual purification baths. Do those prescribed things and you are forgiven – you are right with God.

At one level they were zealous to honor God in all that they did. Yet at another level, they failed to understand that while they may have been covering their sins with a system, it did not mean they had been truly forgiven by God. John the Baptist knew that difference, saw through the religious façade of his day with its veneer of superfluous piety, and issued a Holy Spirit inspired call to repent. That was a call to change the way you see yourself, including your heart, and to acknowledge your need for the true forgiveness of God, not the superficial behavioral forgiveness that their religious system offered.

That is why John the Baptist was the fore-

runner to Jesus. One of his roles was to prick the conscience of observant Jews, to get them to see what was missing in their spirituality, and to get that religious culture to see that something was wrong in their understanding of how one got right with God. In doing that, the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus. This backdrop has implications for understanding why Jesus may have chosen some of the Twelve from John's disciples.

Conscientious Objectors

John the Baptist's disciples must have identified with John's call to repentance or they would not have asked him if they could be his disciples (Remember the "Choose Your Rabbi Carefully" section from the *Rabbis and Disciples* chapter.) This suggests that

- They were observant Jews who had already sensed something wasn't right with the religious system of their day. In aligning themselves with the Baptist, they were making a courageous protest statement against the status quo perpetuated by the Temple Leadership in Jerusalem, as well as the sin management system of the Pharisees.
- Perhaps they knew something was missing in their own religious lives, and that caused them to resonate with and then identify with John's radical repentance message.
- Perhaps they were starting to sense the hypocrisy of the "righteous" of their day. When the righteous no longer see a need to repent, hypocrisy starts to creep in until it clouds, distorts, and then controls everything. These Galilean observant Jews might have either sensed that or knew that to be true.

No Compromise With the Culture

We need to remember that in the beginning there was much that was deficient with these Twelve. They had a flawed worldview with dozens of faulty paradigms that caused them to put a mistaken emphasis on scrupulous behavior, with no particular concern for the nature of their hearts. But they were serious about their faith as they understood it, as well as rigorously committed to no compromise with the Greco-Roman culture around them.¹⁷ That zeal was something Jesus could work with and reshape in a totally different way.

Jesus knew the road would be difficult for His disciples after His Resurrection. It would require a commitment to "pick up your cross daily"¹⁸ and "follow Me." The last thing the Kingdom of God needed after Pentecost would be half-hearted disciples.¹⁹ So He chose men He knew would have Holy Spirit inspired power, perseverance, and persistence to see their call to the Kingdom of God through to the end of their lives. After Pentecost, they were to become disciples who would not compromise with the Greco-Roman culture around them, nor fall away in their commitment to His Lordship.

Why Him?

On the surface, picking Levi had to have been a shock to the rest of the band. "Oh No" had to have been their instant first response quickly followed by "Why him?" Levi was a very compromised Jew. He worked for the Romans extracting taxation money from the Jews. He was a despicable man in a despicable profession, and a contemptible traitor in the eyes of the righteous observant Jewish community. And that's not all! Not only was Levi a tax collector, he was a *port* tax collector! Because of the diver-

sity of goods coming into Capernaum where Levi operated, he had much more latitude to excessively tax the goods coming into that port than did the tax collectors who worked the land. That capacity to creatively extort taxes made him the scum of the scum to observant Jews.

Never Forgiven, Never!

At the time of Jesus, port tax collectors were held in such contempt that some of the rabbis taught that they could never be forgiven.²⁰ NEVER! Not even with 30 years of retribution and contrition. How would you like to be Levi and carry that “truth” around in your soul each moment of every day; to be absolutely convinced by the teachings of the religious establishment that you have no hope of ever being right with God. Can you imagine how heavy that would weigh in your soul? That was Levi’s reality; and it helps us understand the intense gravitational tug for Jesus he must have sensed deep within his soul when he first heard, and then thought about, the implications of this new rabbi’s teaching. More than once, while trying to stand inconspicuously near the Capernaum shore of the Sea of Galilee, waiting for yet another ship to reach port, he overheard Jesus’ compelling unveiling of the Good News.

An Overwhelming Thought

Could you imagine the first time this perpetually ostracized port tax collector heard Jesus authoritatively declare that any person could be forgiven by God for anything and everything he or she had ever done? No exceptions! No Limitations! Even him! It must have been an overwhelming thought! The kind of thought you just can’t seem to get your mind around, let alone quickly. Yet every time Levi eavesdropped, this rabbi Jesus

kept saying it was true – that He had come from God and authoritatively declared that God’s forgiveness could be a reality for anyone! Yes, you really can be forgiven for everything you’ve ever done! All that was required was an acknowledgment of your sinfulness and an admission of your need for God’s forgiveness. It was such a freeing thought that one day when Jesus asked him to “follow Me,”²¹ a rabbinic idiomatic phrase that means “come with me, become one of my disciples, and submit to my authoritative teaching,” Levi was ready to follow. It was worth paying the price of leaving behind his very wealthy port tax collector franchise for the value of being truly forgiven and being with this welcoming rabbi Jesus who came from God.

Overwhelming Joy!

Although we know it was purposeful, Jesus does not tell us why He chose Levi. So we are again left to wonder why. Could it be that Jesus wanted to make sure there was always someone in the Twelve who would never take His forgiveness for granted? Someone who would always be overjoyed that he had been forgiven, and who could constantly bring the joyous aroma of being forgiven to the rest of the group? Someone who would never let the others – observant Jews – presume, or fall back on their traditional presumptive understanding of sin management?

Jesus knew that a huge paradigm shift needed to take place before His disciples could remake their understanding of forgiveness, that anything and everything can be forgiven in the Kingdom of God. That makes real forgiveness not just good news, but incredibly Good News! Levi would always be an ever-present reminder of that reality to the rest of the band.

Reconciliation Is Always Possible

There may have been another reason why Jesus invited Levi to be part of the Twelve. It has to do with the power of reconciliation in the Kingdom of God. If there were ever two kinds of people at opposite ends of a religious spectrum, two types of people who should never be able to accept each other, it would be these two – observant Jews and Levi the port tax collector. Each of the ten despised anyone who had ever cooperated with the Romans, and especially those who had sold their soul to this Kingdom of Evil. Now suddenly, they found themselves shoulder to shoulder, day after day, in the same fellowship circle as Levi! What an experiential lesson in acceptance! What a lesson in a new paradigm of forgiveness that Simon, as well as the others, daily had to confront and embrace. And what a daily reminder that anyone and everyone can be reconciled in the Person and Power of Jesus Christ.

It took a while for the disciples to absorb fully Jesus' Kingdom of God paradigm of forgiveness. Peter thought he finally got it right one day when he announced to Jesus his sevenfold understanding. Then Peter quickly found out the inherent limitations of what he thought was his newly expanded view. Jesus, his authoritative rabbi, then pronounced his newly expanded understanding of forgiveness to still be deficient. It needed to be at least seventy times seven,²² essentially a lifestyle of habitual forgiveness. That was something that not just Peter, but the rest of the disciples as well, now had to authoritatively embrace for the rest of their days.

The Need to Detox the Twelve From Their Religious Culture

Jesus knew that He would have to do much tearing down and then rebuilding of the religious and cultural paradigms of the Twelve. He knew He had to remake both their minds and hearts, and in so doing remake their very identity. He knew they needed to have a total reversal in how they saw and understood everything if they were ever to truly see the inner Kingdom of God in all its fullness. For that to happen, these disciples needed to be remade from the inside out.

Jesus knew that these disciples needed a new spiritual DNA at their very core, not just to graft on some new Jesus principles to what they had already embraced in observant Judaism. So He systematically exposed them to the outcasts of their religious world – prostitutes, lepers, paralytics, demon-possessed people, and other marginalized people. Furthermore, He confronted the core paradigms of the Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots and Essenes in their presence. He also entered the worlds of the Samaritans and the Greco-Romans bringing the Good News of the Kingdom of God wherever He went. By the time Jesus left this earth, He had exposed the Twelve to all the major worldviews of His day. Furthermore, He challenged those worldviews and their accompanying paradigms with His upside down reality of the Kingdom of God – where the last will be first, and the first will be last.²³

Understanding what Jesus did – remaking the worldview of the Twelve by deconstructing and detoxing the core paradigms of the Twelve – as well as the how, why, and when He did it, will be developed in the next three chapters.

Reflections to Journal and Share

- If Jesus made just the right choices in selecting the Twelve, what insights might that suggest?
- Have there been times when you felt like you have lost the joy of being forgiven?
- Like the disciples of John the Baptist, have you been dissatisfied with certain aspects of institutional religion? Perhaps sensing that there is something missing in it that Jesus came to restore?
- What did you most identify with in Levi's journey in becoming a disciple of Jesus?
- In God's family, have you had the Levi experience of having to not only forgive someone who was completely at odds with you, but embrace him or her, and then continually fellowship with him or her as well?
- Would others describe you as a non-compromiser with our secular culture? Where do you think you might have compromised with the world and its ways?
- Where might your Christian "religious" paradigm(s) be in need of detoxing so they can be remade to be more harmonic with the nature and character of the Kingdom of God?
- What challenges you in this chapter? Where is the Holy Spirit nudging you?

Ponder

And He gave this illustration also to certain ones who had come to a settled conclusion as a result of a finished process of persuasive reasoning, that upon the basis of their own worthiness and merit they were righteous individuals, and who utterly despised the rest of mankind. Two men went up to the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, and the other a man of a different character, a tax collector. The Pharisee, having assumed a stance, was uttering these things in prayer to himself: O God. I am constantly grateful to you that I am not even as the rest of mankind, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this fellow, the tax collector. I fast twice a week, I pay a tenth of all my income whatever it might be. But the tax collector having come to a stand at a distance, was unwilling even to lift up his eyes to heaven but kept beating his breast, saying, O God, justify me the sinner upon the basis of an expiatory sacrifice which satisfies the demands of divine justice and makes possible the just bestowing of righteousness on the basis of justice satisfied. I am saying to you, this man went down to his home having been justified and declared righteous rather than that one, for everyone who exalts himself shall be brought down to the place where he recognizes his moral littleness and guilt. But he who esteems himself small, inasmuch as he is so, and thinks truly, and therefore, humbly of himself, shall be raised to a place of honor.

—**Luke 18:9-14 Wuest**²⁴

*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love...
Remember the height from which you have fallen!
Repent and do the things you did at first.*

—**Revelations 2:4-5 a&b**

*Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

—**Psalms 51:10-12**

Assume Jesus will walk into your church next Sunday and choose ten people to be part of a new band of Twelve. What do you think would be the first five contemporary “religious” paradigms that He would start to detox and remake so these new disciples could more clearly see and understand what He means by the Kingdom of God?

Prayer

*Jesus, thank You for being intentional in everything
You do.*

Thank You for being purposeful in my life.

*Remake the ways I see and understand things so I
can see them as You see them.*

*Remake the ways I respond and act to reflect more
and more Your heart and Your ways.*

*Rekindle within me the joy of being forgiven by
Your loving Sacrifice.*

*Foster a compassionate spirit within me for the
outcasts of this world.*

*Help me to always see myself as a former port tax
collector who has been redeemed so that my joy in
You may always be full to overflowing.*

Make me into an engaging extremist for You.

Amen.

Notes and Sources

¹James C. Martin and Doug Greenwold, “Rescue and Restoration of the Covenants” graphic from the “*Understanding The Bible as it was Meant to be Understood – In Its Context*” seminar, (Gaithersburg, Md.: Preserving Bible Times, 2003).

²Genesis 12: 2-3, 15:18 & 26:2-5

³Exodus 19:4-5

⁴II Samuel 7:4-16

⁵Preserving Bible Times, *The Passion of Jesus – In Context* DVD, “Temple Authority” video clip, 2003, copyright by James C. Martin and Steven Holloway.

⁶Matthew 26:59

⁷John 19:15c

⁸Doug Greenwold, *Zechariah & Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God* (Rockville, Md.: Bible-in-Context Ministries, 2004).

⁹John Hastings, *Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 844.

¹⁰Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1997), p. 101.

¹¹I Peter 1:14 and 1:9

¹²Acts 10:28

¹³Mark 1:16 and 1:19

¹⁴Luke 6:15

¹⁵Mark 3:17

¹⁶John 1:40

¹⁷Acts 10:28

¹⁸Luke 9:23 and 14:27

¹⁹Luke 9:62 and 16:13

²⁰Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (MacDonald Publishing Company), Undated, p. 236-237.

²¹Luke 5:27

²²Matthew 18:22

²³Luke 13:30

²⁴Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1961).

5 Do and Teach

*In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to **do and teach**.*

—Acts 1:1 (added)

*What the Evangelists recorded in the Gospels was the sweat, blood, tears and elation they **experienced** with Jesus. Fisherman and tax collectors came to Jesus, listened to His teachings, witnessed His works, and observed His devotion to the Father. The theology of Jesus in the Gospels is rather thin. But their **experience** of Jesus is rich – so strong and convincing, in fact, that it prompted them to lay down their lives for Him. **Experience** changed them from timid, lukewarm followers into tenacious, blazing disciples of the risen Lord.*

—Bruce Demerest¹

(added)

Changing a Worldview and its Paradigms

How do you change a person's worldview? Remember the old joke: How do you eat an elephant? Answer: One bite at a time! This might give us an insight to that question: How do you change a person's worldview? Answer: One idea or paradigm at a time.

When it comes to achieving meaningful and permanent change in a person's worldview, you can try to change the way they think from the top down. This can be accomplished by exposing people to new ideas, concepts, and perspectives that they might never have thought about before. Another approach would be to strategically target certain key paradigms within their worldview, and then find ways to creatively change them. That would be effecting change from the bottom up, or perhaps better put, from the inside out. Another option would be to try and do both at the same time. Finally, you could elect to do both, but in a certain rhythm of first paradigm behavior change, then worldview idea change, repeating that pattern over time.

In the case of the Twelve, Jesus had those same tactical choices before Him. He could give these observant Jews some new ideas about how to see and think about their world differently – an approach that Western evangelicalism seems to favor. Alternatively, Jesus could strategically target certain key religious paradigms and dramatically and creatively confront them one at a time until their worldview starts to remake itself. Jesus could also choose to do some of each, in which case the wisdom is found in watching the sequence in which He does it. Let's watch the Master Paradigm and Worldview Remaker at work and closely observe not only what Jesus does, but also how and when He does it. As we will

see, Jesus seems to have adopted a paradigm and worldview changing rhythm of “*do and teach.*” This chapter explores that methodology and asks what does that mean for Western discipling today?

Wisdom in Sequence

If every word in Scripture is inspired, then it necessarily follows that the sequence of those words, as well as the thoughts contained therein, are likewise inspired. Because of that, there is often great discipling wisdom to be found in the sequencing of Scripture. As an example, Paul often starts his letters with various forms of the same grace-and-peace (underscored) salutation:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father...
(Col. 1:3)

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: *Grace and peace* to you... (I Thess. 1:1)

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ... (Phil. 1:2 & Gal. 1:3)

With Paul, the sequence is never “peace and grace,” it’s always “grace and peace.” That sequencing is essential for there is no peace to be found outside of God’s preceding grace.

Luke’s Sequence

When Luke reflects back on his Gospel, his opening summary statement in Acts 1:1 begins by referencing all that Jesus “began to do and teach.” He did not reverse that order by characterizing it as “teach and do.” Luke’s sequencing gives us another often overlooked insight into the genius of Jesus’ manner of making disciples: If you want to effectively and efficiently change a person’s paradigms – their ways of looking at and understanding things – give priority to creating experiences that foster behavioral change. By

doing that, attitudinal change will follow. Conversely, it may not be wise to rest the bulk of a discipling methodology on a lot of front-end teaching, especially when changing behaviors, attitudes and paradigms is the objective. In general, people have been adequately taught. It’s the experiential reality they are missing.

No where in Luke’s Gospel do we have any record of the Twelve ever expressing a self-initiated desire to interact with “sinners.” As far as we can tell, these future Kingdom leaders never woke up in the morning with a burning desire to touch lepers, interact with Gentiles, or dine with undesirables. Jesus knew He would have to teach for a very long time before those observant Jewish attitudes deeply imbedded in their psyche would ever change, let alone change to the point where they would be open to considering such radical Kingdom of God behaviors. Knowing the wiring diagrams of the Twelve perfectly, Jesus therefore gave them no choice in the matter as to how they were going to change.

No Choice!

As Luke records it in his early chapters, Jesus put his initial focus on fostering Behavioral change in the Twelve, knowing that Attitudinal change would follow later. In the beginning, Jesus chose not to preach intensively on “love thy neighbor.” Rather, He had them come along with Him as He lived out loving and rescuing people. Furthermore, these disciples had no choice in the matter. All of that just comes as part of the “Follow Me” package. In the process of exposing the Twelve to these unwanted and unsettling encounters, Jesus also started to redefine for them who their neighbor is and what it means to be neighborly. It was not so much a classroom experience as it was an onsite internship in the reality

of the human condition and how the Kingdom of God transforms it.

You Need to Experience This

As part of detoxing and remaking the Twelve's religious paradigms, Jesus decided each day where the band would be going and what the Twelve would experience. Since disciples always submitted to their rabbi, Jesus was able to get them to observe and experience encounters with undesirable people – to see up close the prisoners being set free.² As Luke records it, only after many of these events had been experienced did Jesus start to spend significant time explicitly teaching them about the inherent inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God.

In Jesus' methodology for re-forming the Twelve, these disciples were deliberately taken far outside their comfort zones and paradigms. Day after day they followed Jesus and watched closely as He healed lepers, demon-possessed people, paralytics, and people with birth defects. They were all people who had been culturally marginalized as outcasts. Left to their own preferences, these Twelve would have avoided these disconcerting and bewildering encounters at all cost, staying safely within their deeply embedded observant Jewish comfort zones. This strategy of fostering unwanted Kingdom-shaping encounters for the Twelve to experience is another key dynamic Jesus used in remaking them. It is a dynamic that is often missing in many of today's discipleship programs.

The Military Model

The United States Marines understand very well the implications of using **Behavioral** change to achieve **Attitude** change. They start with a disparate group of narcissistic, undisciplined young people, and make them into a cohesive unit where commands are not optional; and what's

best for the Corps and the squad, not the individual, is of utmost importance. The Marines know how to tear down self-absorbed paradigms and replace them with new community paradigms. Their tactics include non-optional long marches, unquestioned discipline, perplexing situations, and very uncomfortable environments, to name a few. The end result is a group of people who have been transformed in a short period of time to accomplish more than they might have ever thought possible. They are now trained soldiers who have a new community identity.

I don't want to push this analogy too far, and I certainly don't want to be misunderstood as implicitly blessing authoritative cults. Nevertheless, it is worth observing that Western discipleship is much more like an optional scouting-jamboree weekend than an "Onward Christian Soldiers" commitment. By way of contrast, especially when understood from the perspective of observant Judaism, Jesus' manner of making disciples had much more in common with the Marines than the Boy Scouts. For example, Jesus radically remade the disciples' paradigm of

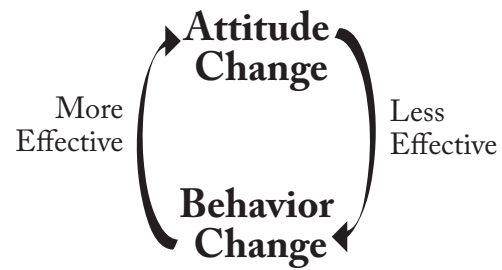
- **Society**, from giving priority to social status and reciprocal hospitality to one of elevating "the least of these"³ to the top of His priority list.
- **Gentiles, lepers, paralytics, disease and demon-possessed people**, from untouchables to dearly beloved brothers and sisters.
- **Blessing** with the Beatitudes.⁴
- **Prayer** with The Lord's Prayer.⁵
- **Righteousness**, away from the works oriented gold standard of the Pharisees and into one that focused on the condition of one's heart.⁶

- **God**, making a Holy God approachable and personal with the very familiar family word, *Abba*.⁷
- **Messiah**, from that of a political king on a throne to one of a suffering servant on a Cross.

The necessity of having to totally remake the disciple's worldview and all its core paradigms should provide ample food for thought for us today. In essence, Jesus had to detox the disciples from just about everything they held to be right and true in their religious culture. Is anything less than that detoxed outcome needed for today? Do we need to be detoxed from everything our world has told us, and even perhaps from some of what our religious culture has told us is "true?"

An Example

In the late 1960's, I heard a dialogue sermon that really caught my attention, both in its format and in its content. It was a two-pulpit exchange between a psychologist and a pastor entitled "What Psychology Could Teach the Church." What the psychologist suggested was that the church had the wrong emphasis in the 1960's when it gave priority to repeatedly preaching "love the Blacks" from the pulpit. He contended it was naively optimistic to repeatedly preach that theme, somehow hoping that the White people in the pew would wake up one morning and suddenly love people of another color. Basically this Christian psychologist went on to suggest that this emphasis on **Attitude** change preaching was often only marginally effective, particularly if its purpose was to achieve long-lasting **Behavioral** change. He suggested the church would be well advised, and its members would be better served, if that emphasis was reversed as portrayed by the following graphic:



In making his observations, this psychologist drew upon social scientist Leon Fessinger's Cognitive Dissonance model developed in the late 1950's. Cognitive Dissonance is a fancy name for the tension that results when a newly experienced behavior is in conflict with an ingrained attitude. With that perspective in view, this psychologist observed that achieving life-long **Attitude** change would be far more effective if a White church would partner with a Black church – that was the vernacular of that era – and periodically pair off its families for something like "My Place, Your Place" weekend visits. Thus, when a White family went to spend a weekend at a Black family's home, and a few months later vice versa, many discoveries and insights leading to **Attitudinal** change would inevitably take place. For example, both families might discover they like the same cereal for breakfast, laugh at the same cartoons, even like some of the same sports. They would discover they shared a concern about their kids' education and spiritual development, and that they both loved Jesus. Thus, at the end of those paired-off weekends, there would be many White families with significantly changed **Attitudes** towards Blacks because of their **Behavioral** experience with these families. And vice versa for the Black families! It was the experience that would be catalytic, not the attitudinal "love thy neighbor" exhortation that everyone had long heard.

Sequence Matters

Many discipleship programs are implicitly based

on the “teach and maybe do” model of Western thinking, not the “do and teach” emphasis of first-century discipling. In church life, this usually works itself out with an over emphasis on reading, teaching, and preaching at the expense of observing, doing, and experiencing. Not to be misunderstood, we desperately need good teaching and preaching focused on God’s Word. It’s more the sequence and the mix with paradigm-changing experiences that tends to become unbalanced.

To a Fessinger, all of this is a weak substitute for structuring appropriate Behavioral change situations and experiences that take people outside of their entrenched paradigms and comfort zones. The purpose of these situations would be to expose believers to those spiritual experiences that only get talked about in the pew and classroom. In our traditional Western teaching modes, we all too often:

- Spend too much time talking about prayer, and too little time doing it.
- Devote more time discussing the spiritual disciplines of meditation and contemplation, but seldom setting aside significant time to experience those transforming realities.
- Exhorting believers to become world Christians. But all too few will commit time every few years to go to Haiti, Brazil, China, or Indonesia to experience world Christianity first hand.

The reader is encouraged to add other examples.

Achieving Effective Behavior Change

While many Westerners will always maintain that teaching first is a necessity, Fessinger would suggest that this approach is often insufficient to significantly disrupt people’s comfort zones, let alone change their paradigms. It’s often a much

better discipling strategy to find creative ways to first expose people to needed new experiences, and then teach about them later. Examining Luke 4-8, we see Jesus operating in this manner. A large majority of the verses in these chapters are doing oriented. In these chapters, Jesus provides a continuing series of radical exposures and experiences that must have been daily shock therapy to the Twelve. It is a very different form of teaching – teaching by exposure to explicit doing.

Get In The Boat

This do-first pattern is particularly evident in Luke 8 when Jesus tells the Twelve to get in the boat because they are “going to the other side,” to the Decapolis – the land of evil. Not only was this in total conflict with their observant Jewish paradigms, but when they got there they found out the purpose was to rescue a demon-possessed, naked Gentile, living in a cave tomb. To an observant Jew, this was at best a sub-, sub-, sub-human being! Not in a million years would they ever have been open to considering that, let alone doing that! In reading Luke’s narrative carefully, observe that only Jesus gets out of the boat.⁸ The disciples stayed in the boat to avoid becoming contaminated with a quadruple violation of ritual impurity as defined by their religious culture. Yet Jesus knew this never-to-be-forgotten extreme experience was part of the necessary process if they were ever going to be detoxed from their observant Jewish paradigms. Only then would these disciples be able to rediscover that the Abrahamic Covenant was truly meant for all peoples. Time and time again, these disciples had to be systematically wrenched out of their restrictive paradigms concerning Gentiles, demon-possessed people, lepers, paralytics and people with birth defects, all “poor” people who had been disenfranchised

by observant Judaism. Only with their religious paradigms completely pulverized could they start to get the notion that *all* were welcome in the Kingdom of God.

A New Paradigm for Purity

The Twelve also needed to have their rigid notions of purity redefined back to God's original intent – away from the corrupted ritual purity notions of the Pharisees, and back to God's standard as repeatedly voiced by Moses and the prophets. In its place, a renewed understanding of purity was needed – a purity that had to do with the heart! In the end, Jesus' ready-or-not-here-it-comes strategy of systematically exposing these Twelve to everything that was in conflict with their religious way of seeing things, was effective. It was a strategy to deconstruct their entrenched paradigms and replace them with a new Kingdom of God way of looking at the world, as well as the people around them. Is any less required for making disciples of Jesus today?

A Personal Example

When I was 30 years old, my wife and I were living in a Midwestern university town, where we attended a campus church. One Sunday after the worship service, I was introduced to an older man named Bill. I didn't know much about Bill, but I had heard that he was affiliated with some group called the Fellowship Foundation, and they were somehow involved in the Prayer Breakfast movement. Over time, we struck up a relationship that mostly revolved around our common interest – pitching softball.

In retelling this story, it helps to understand that I had previously joined this church when I was 25 years old, which required me to confess Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. If the truth were known, I joined the church so my wife-to-

be and I could get married by the pastor. While I was raised in a Christian church culture, and I had no question that God existed, and that Jesus Christ was His Son who came to save me from my sins, there was nothing particularly personal or intimate about that for me.

A Penny For Your Thoughts

Some time later, this Bill became an Elder in the church. Shortly thereafter, he approached me one Sunday morning and asked me if I would consider doing something for him. Since he had just been elected an officer of the church, he wanted to get some input from people in the church. What he was particularly interested in was how people saw the church, what they liked about it, and what the church might consider doing differently. For whatever reason, I was one of the people he decided to approach with that request. In those days, I was both naive and arrogant enough to believe I just might have something worthwhile to say on those topics! So home I went, pulled out my 18 inch by 22-inch notepad, and began to compose some expansive ideas. That was the big pad I always used when I wanted to think big thoughts!

A couple of weeks later Bill stopped me after church and asked how I was doing on my assignment. I told him that I had two pages of diagrams, flow charts, Scripture verses, management principles and thoughts, and that they were coming together quite nicely. "That's great," he observed, "How about I stop by next Thursday evening at 8:00 PM, and you can share your thoughts with me." I said that would be fine, went home, and continued to polish up those expansive ideas being worked out on my big pad!

An Unexpected Outcome!

When Thursday night at 8:00 PM arrived, there was Bill at my door. After a few pleasantries,

he asked me to share my thoughts with him regarding the church. So I began my monologue. Every ten minutes or so Bill would interject something short and crisp like, “that’s interesting,” or “that’s intriguing,” or “that’s fascinating.” After I had completed about 90 minutes of my download, Bill made a seemingly straightforward statement: “You must really care about this church to have spent so much time thinking about it.” I replied rather quietly, “Yes, I do.” To which Bill then responded, “That’s great! By the way, do you care enough about this church to pray for it with me?” As those words began to sink in, I actually remember feeling like a noose was starting to drop around my neck! I realized I had but two choices: Yes and no; and if I said no, I would be contradicting everything I had just done and said. So, much more hesitatingly, and with a much more subdued voice, I replied, “Yes, I would be willing to pray with you about the church.” To which Bill promptly responded, “That’s great. How about I come to your house every Monday morning at 7:00 AM, and we’ll pray for an hour before you go to the office.” Then out the door he went. It was only then that it began to dawn on me that I was truly trapped, or so it seemed!

Later that evening, I couldn’t get over what had just happened. As I told my wife before we went to bed, up until that night I had created this nice, neat, arms-length Christian thing that I was nicely managing for over five years. During that time, I never allowed myself to be put into a position where I had to pray out loud with another Christian. But now I had this professional praying person coming to my house every Monday morning, and I can not even be a “no show” because it is at my house!

We Have Ignition

True to his word, Bill was there every Monday morning at 7:00 AM. I can still vividly remember anticipating that very first Monday morning with a good deal of dread. In fact, I didn’t sleep a wink the Sunday night before. I was too busy practicing my prayers to sleep! I figured if a professional pray-er was coming to my house, I at least better sound good – recognize any performance Christianity at work? It took months for me to start to become comfortable with this one-on-one hourly prayer time. But gradually it became more comfortable. As the months unfolded, the Holy Spirit started to make His presence and leading known. Then there came a time, as they say at Cape Kennedy, when “we have ignition.”

More New Experiences

As part of that three-year experience, Bill began to take me along to various fellowship weekends in different parts of the country, and more new experiences began to open up to me. I think you get the idea that for me this was “do and teach” in action. At that stage in my life, if any man had ever asked me if I would like to experience one-on-one weekly prayer time, I would have always found a creative way to avoid it. But Bill’s approach, whether intentional, or just guided by the Holy Spirit, was the kind of appropriate behavioral breakthrough I needed that no amount of words, pulpit rhetoric, or exhortation would ever have gotten me to do.

Today’s Dilemma

Jesus was able to put His “do and teach” methodology to good use because of the nature of the rabbi-disciple relationship. Those Twelve had to follow where ever their rabbi Jesus went because

they were committed to submitting to His teaching and way of understanding life.

Two thousand years later, the question is: How can we move closer to that powerful life-changing dynamic of rebalancing ourselves to more of “do” before we teach, that making disciples is often more “caught than taught.” Unfortunately, we can’t really mandate much of anything to disciples anymore, cultural paradigms being what they are. Furthermore, many believers now view everything in the area of discipleship as optional for their consideration, not mandatory for their participation. One pragmatic answer may lie in understanding the interrelationship of commitment and spiritual maturity, particularly as it relates to key decision times in the life of the believer.

Sacraments Can Be Strategic Too

In the life of our churches today, there are very few occasions when the church participates in a decision made by a person. However, there are at least three decision-making events – baptism, marriage, and church membership – where the church is significantly involved. It is at those strategic times that the church has a wonderful opportunity to ask individuals for a discipling commitment. Let’s explore one way how that might work itself out regarding church membership.

Want to Join This Church?

Dick and Joan are a married couple in their mid-30’s. After attending Gospel Times Community Church (GTCC) for several months, they were thinking they would like to become members of that particular community of faith. But unbeknownst to this couple, the leadership of GTCC is committed to making disciples as a total philosophy of ministry. To the pastoral staff,

making disciples is not a program, nor is it the emphasis of a particular church season. It is a life-long process undergirded by commitments, experiences, teaching, and much prayer.

As the leadership of GTCC began to embrace this new commitment emphasis to making disciples, they discovered a life-changing insight. If you wait for people to spiritually mature before you ask them for a discipling commitment, that day seldom comes. As a result, the flock doesn’t necessarily grow and mature. However, if you ask prospective church members for a discipling commitment up front, much to everyone’s surprise, spiritual maturity inevitably seems to grow out of that commitment, and the related experiences that flow from it. This epiphany understanding has dramatically reshaped how the leadership of GTCC now views church membership.

Commit and Join

When Dick and Joan approached the church administrator to inquire about joining GTCC, they found out that you just couldn’t join per se. First, you need to make some commitments as to what kind of a church member you were willing to become. In subsequent discussions with the pastoral staff, Dick and Joan discovered that to formally join the fellowship of GTCC, they needed to make a written commitment to dedicate their time and resources to a number of discipling experiences, including:

- Joining a Growth Group of 15-20 other church members that meets twice a month to focus on what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in all that we do and are.
- Take a Saturday Spiritual Gifts Workshop to identify their spiritual gift possibilities. Then commit to exploring those gift possibilities in a ministry setting. This includes mentoring

relationships with those who have already developed and refined the using of those gifts.

- Attend a Marriage Encounter weekend within the first two years.
- Take a prescribed list of twelve biblical studies and discipling courses in the church's Adult Education program over the next ten years, with the first four to be completed in the first two years.

In addition, Dick and Joan would be asked to commit to two of the following spiritual growth experiences:

- Spend two long weekends in the first four years in a silent retreat setting under the direction of a Spiritual Director.
- Give every third holiday to working in an inner city soup kitchen.
- Work in a ministry setting with people with developmental disabilities.
- Fast two days a month.
- Make up to four weeks available in the first six years for short-term mission trips to Haiti, Brazil and China to begin to develop a world Christian's perspective.

The staff of GTCC has come to realize that the best time to ask for people's commitments to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ is at the very beginning – when they want to join the church. This church discovered it is crucial to ask each member to participate in those events that the staff feels is important for his or her spiritual formation, growth and perspective. These are the kind of events and experiences that people unknowingly either avoid or miss, even with the best of discipleship intentions. For the GTCC leadership, this is part of “do and teach” in action!

What's Happening Here?

When the GTCC church began to raise the bar with these new expectations for church membership, the staff was convinced church attendance would start shrinking in size – that they would be left with a Gideon's army remnant. Much to their surprise, the church began to enter into progressive phases of ever increasing growth. The testimonies and case histories of those who embraced and benefited from the church's new commitment to a “do and teach” philosophy of ministry persuaded many others to join the church and experience that reality for themselves.

Looking through the rearview mirror, the leadership of the GTCC realized they had been expecting too little from their members, and therefore were asking too little from them. Furthermore, they were surprised to discover that there seemed to be more people than they ever would have imagined who were looking for a church that actually asks something substantial of them, certainly asking more than their community service organizations do!

A New Legalism?

My sense is that the preceding GTCC scenario will make many uncomfortable. I hope so! Becoming uncomfortable is the first step to meaningful change. There may be some who might object that such an approach to church membership could easily lead to a new form of legalism. While anything is possible and anything can be abused, I would not agree this would be the expected outcome. GTCC is all about encouraging new experiences that will foster spiritual growth and maturity. Furthermore, these experiences are all optional. If you don't want to go down that road, you certainly don't have to join.

Reflections to Journal and Share

- Do you have your own Bill experiences? Can you point to some examples in your life where unintended behavioral change came from events and experiences that someone engaged you in that you would not have chosen on your own?
- What is the balance in your life between doing and teaching? How about your church?
- Would you want to join the Gospel Times Community Church? Why or why not?
- What experiences from your past have significantly contributed to your spiritual growth? Looking forward, what experiences do you feel are still needed to further facilitate your spiritual growth?
- Do we need to be detoxed from our culture as part of the process of being remade into disciples of Jesus Christ? What about from aspects of your religious culture? If so, what might be some effective ways for this to be accomplished?

Ponder

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so. For that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

—**John 13:12-17 (added)**

Jesus’ approach to remaking the Twelve brings to mind G. K. Chesterton’s profound observation that *“All education is implication.”* Much of the disciple’s education came from daily wrestling with the paradigm changing implications of what Jesus was doing that went far beyond the boundaries of their religious culture. The question for disciplemakers is: How best to utilize this all-education-is-really-implication reshaping reality as part of the process of making disciples today?

Concerning the process of making disciples, someone once observed,
When all is said and done, a lot gets said and very little gets done!

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Your perfect wisdom.

*Thank You that You always use that perfect wisdom
in shaping my life.*

*Thank you that You know everything about me,
and still love me.*

*Show me the way to go. Lead me in the way of
being a disciple of Your Son.*

*Grant me the courage to go where I would not
normally want to go,*

*And experience that which I would not normally
choose to experience.*

*Empower me with a desire to be a doer, not just a
hearer.*

Remake me into Your person.

Amen

Notes and Sources

¹Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1999), p. 101.

²Luke 4:18

³Matthew 25:40

⁴Matthew 5:3-12

⁵Luke 11:2-4

⁶Luke 8:15

⁷Luke 11:2

6 Grace Before Truth

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the father, full of grace and truth.

—John 1:14 (added)

A Disclaimer

When we ponder God's **G**race and **T**ruth, it is a glorious **G**race and a magnificent **T**ruth that Jesus reveals to us. Volumes have been written about the immensity of both of these realities, and more volumes have yet to be written. We will not attempt to consider those vast subjects in this chapter. Rather, we will focus on a very small aspect of **G**race and **T**ruth, particularly as it relates to the dynamics of healthy discipling relationships.

Sequence Matters

As previously observed, sequence matters in the Scriptures. In reflecting on the fullness of Jesus Christ in his opening paragraphs, John records that the disciples saw the glory of the Godhead in Jesus Christ “full of grace and truth.” Note, he did not invert that sequence and write “full of truth and grace.” That inspired sequencing of **G**race before **T**ruth is profound in its implications. We all have shortcomings and blind spots. We all injure others in our relationships. As a result, we all desperately and continually need **T**ruth for remaking our lives more and more into the aroma of Christ. But will we listen and respond to that **T**ruth when it comes? That depends on how that **T**ruth comes to us – with preceding **G**race, or not.

E. Stanley Jones, a missionary to India for the better part of half a century, observed that when **T**ruth precedes **G**race, relational damage inevitably results.¹ That without preceding **G**race, **T**ruth injures people leaving them “wounded and bleeding” with feelings of humiliation and rejection. It is only when preceding **G**race is in place that we are even open to hearing the **T**ruth about ourselves. Thus, if we are convinced that someone really does care about our best interest, then we will be much more willing to listen to what he or she has to say about our shortcomings and mistakes. In other words, if you know that someone really cares about you, because you have repeatedly experienced his or her **G**race in your life, you will be much more willing to trust that person and to listen to the tough things he or she might have to say to you.

Healthy Relationships

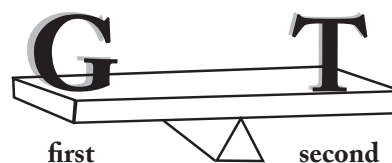
This sequencing of **Grace** before **Truth** is an essential ingredient of all healthy relationships, including discipling relationships. It is another pattern deeply embedded in the discipling methodology of Jesus, a pattern that is all too often missing in today's church or para-church discipling programs. Jesus' approach to making disciples embraced this timeless pattern of **Grace** before **Truth**. It was manifested in not only how He remade the disciples, but as a pattern for interacting with all kinds of people in all kinds of circumstances. **Grace** before **Truth** is one of those unchanging "laws of gravity" always at work in healthy relationships. And like gravity, if you choose to defy it, you do so at your own peril, for surely you will fall.

Balance is the Key

The graphic that follows portrays the intended balanced interrelationship between **Grace** and **Truth** as we see Jesus living this dynamic out in the Gospels. His was a consistent pattern of **Grace** before **Truth** when inviting people into the Kingdom of God to become His disciples. He lived out this dynamic in His relationships with the Twelve, as well as with lepers, tax collectors, people of ill repute, and with people with disabilities. If you were one of these marginalized people, you experienced **Grace** before **Truth** in the Person and Power of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' interactions with these culturally invisible people, you will find no criticism, no condemnation, and no judgment forthcoming from Him. He was always tender towards them. With Jesus, it is always **Grace** in the beginning. **Truth** time comes later. It was this consistent pattern of **Grace** before **Truth** that magnetically drew people to Him as that **Grace** manifested itself in acceptance, rescue, and restoration.

In trying to capture this **Grace**-before-**Truth** discipling dynamic, I chose to make use of a familiar childhood icon – the teeter-totter. Anyone who has been on one end of a successful teeter-totter experience knows how important proper weight distribution is if appropriate balancing is going to sustain teeter-tottering for any length of time.

The key to using this **Grace** and **Truth** Teeter-Totter graphic is to understand that the first relational priority always starts on the left with **Grace**, and then progresses to the second priority, **Truth**, as indicated on the right hand side. It is intentional that the **G** and the **T** are of equal size. This portrays balanced amounts of both **Grace** and **Truth**, and in that sequence, over time.



Balanced Discipling

Tilting Tendencies

By the very process of describing a balanced discipling relationship as equal amounts of **Grace** and **Truth**, with **Grace** needing to precede **Truth**, we can also define various unbalanced conditions inherent in the human condition:

- Bringing too much **Truth** too quickly to a relationship or discipling process.
- Leading with **Grace** – at least got that part right – but never getting past **Grace** to bring the **Truth** that is so desperately needed if people are going to be remade into the image of Christ.
- Starting with token **Grace**, but not investing enough **Grace** time for it to be effective, for

the **T**ruth to be heard so that it can become a transforming **T**ruth.

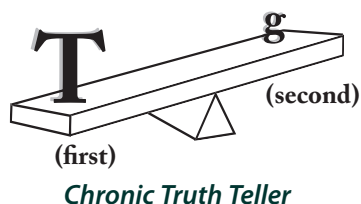
Each of these tilting tendencies is observable whenever people try to relate - in marriages, friendships, classrooms, churches, and disciple-making relationships. As a result, we often have out-of-balance **G**race and **T**ruth dynamics at work between husbands and wives, parents and children, managers and subordinates, disciple-makers and disciples.

Two Distortions

We all know people who tend to be either predominately **T**ruth Tellers or **G**race Givers. Furthermore, each of us, left to his or her own human condition realities, tends to be predominately either one or the other. That's partly why healthy relationships are so hard to establish and maintain. It takes hard work to stay balanced at various stress points in any relationship, and to lean against our instinctive tendencies to automatically veer toward either the **G**race ditch on the left side of the road or the **T**ruth ditch on the right.

The Chronic Truth Teller

There are people who always seem to put the emphasis on strong amounts of **T**ruth, or at least his or her notions of "**T**ruth," and the sooner the better! The following graphic tries to capture the essence of the pattern often lived out by these wound-inflicting **T**ruth Tellers:



This type of **T**ruth Teller pattern is typified by the

- Parent who is always criticizing or reprimanding a child, but never praising or complimenting. It's the **T**ruth Teller's misguided way of keeping children humble!
- Spouse who is always criticizing or correcting a mate, but never praising him or her.
- Employer who gives a new employee a 17-point improvement critique after week one on the job.
- Confrontational spouse who can't wait to go at it.
- Neighbor who always seems to want to tell you what is wrong with your kids, but never seems to have anything good to say about them.
- Person who talks too much about himself or herself while seldom asking anything about you. Or the corollary, a person who tries to steer any conversation toward him or her and what he or she thinks or feels. Other people are just convenient foils for their monologue tendencies.
- Someone in a Sunday School class who can't wait to pounce on the teacher and correct him or her in front of the whole class, for the slightest error or mis-statement. Or the corollary, the person who uses the chance to ask a question in the classroom as a podium to make an extended statement of what he or she thinks about something.
- An autocratic leader who always seems to know - in his or her own eyes anyway - what the right thing is that needs to be done, despite what others think and feel.
- Person with an agenda - hidden or otherwise - who does whatever it takes to get the

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conversation or the meeting agenda focused on his or her pet issues.

- Church or ministry that continually reminds people how sinful they are, how they don't measure up, and thus only gives lip service to **Grace**.
- A church or ministry that continues to dwell on the cost of discipleship with little or no emphasis on the joy of discipleship.
- People who take pride in “telling it like it is,” or “letting the chips fall where they may,” and in so doing try to make a virtue out of a vice. They function as the equivalent of hit and run drivers in personal relationships.
- People who want to “save” you so badly that they don't have any time to invest in getting to know you, or even care about you, before they try to save you.
- People who like to quickly spoon out black and white advice giving answers to quickly fix others who have deep wounds and gray issues in their lives. For them, **Truth** becomes embodied in the rapid and pat application of a formula – often with overly simplistic answers – at the expense of trying to graciously discern the complexities that might be at work in a another's life.
- Para-church ministry with a strong dogmatic “must do” list that makes you feel like a second class citizen in the Kingdom of God if you consistently fail to measure up to their implicit or explicit performance expectations. These programs often feel like more of a mass produced template, with one-size-fits-all approaches, than one with an individual relational focus that is strong on dialogue and interaction. These types of approaches often

end up with many more casualties and dropouts than discipling “successes.”

With a **Truth Teller**, if there is any thought of first leading with **Grace**, it is token **Grace**. In the vast majority of circumstances, that small amount of **Grace** is an ineffective precursor for their confrontational dose of **Truth**. Furthermore, these misguided efforts at **Grace** arrive on the scene too late to mediate the damage already inflicted from an overemphasis on delivering **Truth**.

The Chronic Grace Giver

This type of person has the sequencing right in that he or she always puts an initiating emphasis on **Grace**, or his or her misguided notions of what each thinks **Grace** is. However, he or she never seems to be able to get beyond that posture and those behaviors to dealing with the **Truthful** reality of a situation. These chronic **Grace Givers** are typified in the following graphic:



This type of **Grace Giver** pattern is typified by

- The doormat spouse who still tolerates, and never confronts, an inconsiderate or abusive mate after ten years of absorbing his or her dysfunctional behavior.
- A Church that preaches only love and warm fuzzies.
- An employer who always tells you that you are doing fine in your job and never addresses your shortcomings or offers suggestions for improvement.

- A person who is afraid to offer constructive criticism.
- A permissive parent whom seldom disciplines or sets limits for a child.
- The para-church ministry where anything and everything you do is fine, even if it's not very much.

These tilting tendencies can easily manifest themselves when it comes to the task of making disciples. These patterns can be characterized by too much or too little **Grace**, too much or too little **Truth**, or reversing the sequence. When that happens, relationships become unhealthy and discipleship becomes increasingly ineffective.

Everyone Has a Tilting Tendency

It is the reality of the human condition that we seldom function in a consistently balanced **Grace-before-Truth** manner in our relationships. Most of us seem to be set in motion with an inherent tendency to be much more of a **Grace Giver** or a **Truth Teller**. As a result, most of us have to consciously work toward leaning in the opposite direction, away from the ditch that we naturally gravitate towards. Fortunately for the follower of Jesus Christ, one of the wonderful roles of the Holy Spirit is to prompt us, correct us, and teach us how to become balanced, and then stay balanced in our relationships.

Every Ministry Has a Tilting Tendency

Since people are always involved in disciple-making ministries, the dynamic of those ministries tends to take upon itself the nature - **Truth Teller** or **Grace Giver** - of the person designing the process, leading the program, or doing the mentoring. Thus each discipling ministry has to likewise consciously work at leaning in the opposing direction of its inherent **Grace** or **Truth** leadership tilting tendencies.

Being Equally Yoked

It should be obvious that if two **Truth Tellers** get into a disciple-making leadership harness of a program, they have the likely possibility that each will re-enforce the other's out-of-balance tendencies, thus increasing the harm inflicted on others. The same is true if two **Grace Givers** are in a discipling leadership yoke together. Thus the ideal combination for providing leadership to a discipling process is when a person with a tendency to be a **Truth Teller** gets into the discipling leadership yoke with someone who has an inherent tendency to be a **Grace Giver**. In the biblical reality of "iron sharpens iron,"² this joining of a **Truth Teller** and a **Grace Giver** results in a more balanced discipling ministry, albeit with some creative tension from time to time, than either could facilitate on his or her own. For a number of reasons, Jesus sent out the disciples "two by two"³ on their disciple making journeys, not "one by one" as Lone Rangers.

Jesus and Grace and Truth

In reflecting on Jesus' interactions with people, it is intriguing to ask whether or not He always engaged His opponents and enemies with **Grace** before confronting them with the **Truth**. The cleansing of the Temple in John 2 seems to raise that question, particularly because it occurs so early in John's narrative. It may be the exception that proves the rule. For a perspective on this question, it might be helpful to reflect on the following:

- **Grace** time can be both direct and indirect. The Jerusalem establishment certainly had heard about Jesus' gracious acts and deeds benefiting people, even if they were not the direct recipients of it. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Temple leadership was very much aware of what Jesus was doing. Their

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various surveillance teams continually shadowed Jesus as He journeyed across the Galilean and Judean landscape. Their periodic reports had to have been monitored by many in Temple leadership.

- John reminds us that most of the **Grace** acts and deeds that Jesus did are not recorded in the Gospel record, for if they were, “even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”⁴ That reminds us that much of the preceding **Grace** acts that we might be looking for as evidence may have not been recorded.
- The Jewish Gospel writers were not necessarily concerned with the strict sequencing of the events they recorded. The Hebrew mindset is not particularly concerned with strict sequence as much as they are constructing a compelling narrative. John, for example, was focused on documenting certain “signs” and the attendant theology related to them that attested to Jesus’ Messiahship.
- In assessing these encounters, we need to remember that Jesus always exercised perfect discernment. In the early part of Luke’s 8th chapter, Jesus teaches a parable about the sower that highlights the fundamental condition of how people have been responding to Him – His deeds and His message. He said that it is all about the condition of your heart.⁵ Is it receptive, shallow, preoccupied, or hardened?

Thus, one might argue that Jesus lived out a strong pattern of **Grace** before **Truth** in the nature and character of His ministry. The exception was when He discerned leadership hearts hardened to the abundance of His preceding **Grace** acts that were there for all to observe. In those situations, Jesus was not hesitant to

confront them directly with the **Truth** of the situation – that their hearts were hardened resulting in hypocrisy and corruption.⁶ It was as if Jesus was deliberately trying to unnerve the religious leaders, to shock them out of a false sense of religious security, when He would truthfully confront them by referring to them as white-washed sepulchres.⁷

Since we do not innately possess the capacity for perfect heart discernment in others, we should always err on the side of sufficient **Grace** time. Therefore, we should never be in a hurry to move into **Truth** time until we have had time to discern another’s reality. Then when we think the moment for **Truth** time has come, we especially need to be in a listening prayer mode. In that posture, we ask the Holy Spirit for the discernment needed to lead us into all aspects of bringing **Truth** to another – when is the right time, what is the content, what is the emphasis to take, and how and when should it best unfold?

Balancing Grace and Truth

Under the continual leading and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can live balanced lives leading with **Grace** before bringing the “**Truth** in love.”⁸ People who operate this way are not so soft that they have no substance, and not so hard that they injure people. They function in a balanced **Grace-Before-Truth** mode that maintains a tender heart, while never losing sight of the objective – the long-term spiritual maturity of another. In so doing, they often exemplify the following:

- As parents, spouses, managers, and teachers, they will first meaningfully compliment a person before bringing up an item for constructive criticism.
- They seldom use the word “why,” a negative word, which tends to function as a conversa-

tional closeout word that usually puts people on the defensive; e.g., “Why did you do that?” Their vocabulary is much more punctuated with “what” and “when” type questions. As a result, they won’t confrontationally ask, “Why did you do that?” Rather they are much more liable to gently ask, “What caused you to consider doing it that way?”

- When they lead a ministry, or are developing a relationship, they are very intentional about investing in substantial **Grace** time with others before they will even think of venturing into **Truth** time territory. They understand that you have to earn the right to be heard before you are in a credible posture where you can effectively bring the **Truth** into a relationship so it can be heard.
- In organizations, these balanced people just seem to have a knack that allows them to create empowered teams and enthusiastic committees that are productive as well as nurturing.

Some Practical Examples

Watching the dynamics of **Grace** and **Truth** at work in healthy relationships suggests some practical wisdom we can all benefit from:

- **Grace Time Takes Time**
Intentionally investing in **Grace** time in a relationship with another person or organization usually takes a lot longer than we might think or want. We live in a fast-paced world. We want things to be done quickly and well. But trusting relationships are not amenable to a microwave approach, as if we can spend two minutes on Power 10 and force-feed effective **Grace** time.

Grace time can often take years and even decades. Rather than the fast microwave approach, healthy relationships benefit most

from the slow bake process. The biggest temptation in any relationship, discipleship included, is to be in a hurry – to gloss over the need for **Grace** time – as well as the time investment needed to earn the right to be heard in the life of another.

- **Grace Time is More Than Nice Words**
Words don’t always communicate what they were intended to say. The disingenuous use of “nice” words is epidemic today, even in the church. All too often we intentionally or unintentionally say things we don’t really mean. All of us are familiar with people whose words are disingenuous. All of this helps in understanding why nice words and flowery phrases don’t meet the criteria of meaningful **Grace** time. When we say nice things to people, we have to mean them. They have to be genuine, appropriate to the situation, and credible. Importantly, they also have to be consistent with our behavior.

This raises two corollary issues. Noble thoughts don’t qualify as **Grace** time. The ancient Chinese long ago observed that a thousand noble thoughts are not the equal of one humble deed. As we have observed in an earlier chapter, to a first-century Jew, it is what you do that counts, not particularly what you say, or even what you think. As a result, **Grace** time encompasses doing gracious things for people – a note, a call, a gift, a surprise visit. It is love and care in action.

- **Don’t Presume on Prior Grace Time**
The Bible reminds us that God’s mercies are fresh and new each day.⁹ Based on the way each of us lived yesterday, that fresh-and-new mercy reality needs to be true! In a similar manner, the same can be said about **Grace** time. The fact that two people enjoyed some

meaningful **Grace** time a week ago does not mean that one of them is entitled to rush in and suddenly confront the other with **Truth** time today. Relationships work best when **Grace** time is re-established again and again, early in each encounter.

My wife understands this practical dynamic. If she has something on her mind that she needs to discuss with me, she knows she just can't nail me with it as soon as I walk in the door. She knows I will most likely just shut down, and then emotionally run for cover. And particularly when she knows it won't be an entirely pleasant discussion for me, she will be very deliberate in setting the stage for **Truth** time. Thus, for the latest **Truth** time encounter to have a reasonable chance of being effective, she knows she will need to re-establish **Grace** time with me yet again today, even though there may have been some quality **Grace** time experiences in our relationship as recently as yesterday.

So later in the evening, she will make a pot of tea (and that is not the only way she does it), and bring the tea set along with a pastry or two into the living room, and just start to review the day. That means she will ask me about my day, listen, ask good questions, and I will do the same with her. Then after a while, she will gently bring up something she would like to talk about that has been bothering her about something I said or did, either with her or with one of the children. She knows that with today's **Grace** time now in place, there is a higher probability I will listen to her, and will be more open to processing this particular **Truth** time issue with her.

It is one of the realities of relationships that we can so easily presume on prior **Grace** investments when we feel **Truth** time has

come. Re-establishing **Grace** time yet again in each new day is the anesthetic that allows the scalpel of **Truth** time to operate meaningfully on us. Bringing the "Truth in love" assumes that prior **Grace** is in place, and that the relational love is real and known and has been repeatedly experienced by the other.

- **Beware of Truth Tellers**

When you get more than one **Truth** Teller in a room at a time, effective group dynamics often take a nosedive. One **Truth** Teller is detrimental enough, because that person tends to take up a lot of the air in the room with his or her authoritative opinions and answers. But when two **Truth** Tellers operate in a small group setting, there's little air left in the room for anyone else. As a result, it's often hard for others in the group to even get a word in edgewise. One implication of this dynamic is that we all need to be very cautious about getting into any small group experience that looks like it is going to have more than one **Truth** Teller in it.

- **Truth Tellers Tend to Have Few Friends**

By the very nature of being a **Truth** Teller, of always dispensing advice and offering mostly unwanted answers, others learn they are better off by avoiding **Truth** Tellers. Thus, the long-term prognosis of a **Truth** Teller is that they tend to end up being lonely, often bitter, angry people. Changing **Truth** Teller tendencies is hard work. But it can be done. With the help of the Holy Spirit, as well as with the encouragement of proven friends you might want to invite into your life to help you break these **Truth** Teller tendencies, sufficient **Grace** will come your way. But the key questions are 1) can you see the reality of how you operate

with others, and 2) do you have a sufficient threshold of desire to want to change those patterns?

- **The Teeter-Totter is not a Rigid Formula.**

It is part of our Hellenistic heritage, together with the impact of centuries of modernity thinking, that we tend to be people who prefer simple answers and easy formulas to complex issues. Relationships function best by discernment, not the mechanical application of formulas and principles.

The existence of the Teeter-Totter framework, helpful though it may be, is no substitute for spending Abide time communing with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in a posture of meditative, listening prayer. That is the kind of posture that best allows the Holy Spirit to prompt us, remind us, teach us, and guide us into the discernment of those **Grace** and **Truth** dynamics that make for healthy relationships. When that Abide time is missing, and we go forth in our own inadequate strength and wisdom, we often end up functioning as clanging cymbals¹⁰ in our relationships, no matter how hard we might try to draw upon the insights afforded by the **G/T** Teeter-Totter dynamic. Resist the notion to make the teeter-totter into a rigid formula.

It's Even Harder Than You Might Think

As a closing thought for this chapter, it may be helpful to remind all of us that investing in discipling relationships in a discerning, balanced way, with sufficient **Grace** time appropriately preceding **Truth** time, and with equal amounts of **Grace** and **Truth** over time, is even harder than we might think.

That reality was brought home to me some time ago when I was reading and reflecting on Luther's commentary on Romans.¹¹ One day it dawned on me that a "good act," one that Luther would describe as one pleasing to God, had at least four components:

- Doing the **right thing** – just what the Holy Spirit wants done.
- Doing it at just the **right time** – just when the Holy Spirit wants it done.
- Doing it in the **right spirit** – with a genuine **Grace** before **Truth** concern for the long-term spiritual maturity of the other person.
- And doing it for the **right reasons** – with a motivation to glorify and honor God. Not because I want to make myself look good or feel good, or elevate myself at the expense of the someone else.

It is sobering to realize that getting it right in even three out of these four essentials still does not honor God fully. It does not meet His threshold of "be perfect as I am perfect."¹² It is still sin in God's eyes. And how many times do we end up doing the right thing at the wrong time in our relationships? Or doing the right thing at the right time, but for the wrong reasons? Relationships are difficult – even harder than we might think. That is why we all need to be led by God's Spirit, every moment of every day.

To balance off these closing thoughts, we also need to remember that when we mess up in our relationships, and we do and will, God's mercies are indeed fresh and new each day. Be sure to avail yourself of that incredible reality, as well as extend that reality to others.



Ponder

While it is true that only Grace saves us, not our works,
it is likewise true that Grace and Truth are both necessary
for the making of disciples. Thus, it is not “*all about Grace*”
when it comes to disciplemaking.

Rather it’s all about Grace and Truth blended together
in a balanced way.

Only in the context of grace can we face our sin.

—**Henri Nouwen**¹³

When the Holy Spirit Comes, He will guide you into all truth.

—**John 16:13**

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—**II Peter 3:18a**



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Prayer

*Lord, thank You for Your Grace, and thank You for
Your Truth.*

*And Lord, thank You that You always deal with me
with Grace before Truth.*

Lord, help me to see myself as I truly am.

*Reveal to me where I need to be rebalanced in how
I function in relationships.*

*Provide those people in my life who can encourage
me and help me to change,*

And grant me the courage to make those changes.

*Lead me in Your Spirit in those ways so that I can
ever increasingly be the aroma of Christ in the
relationships you have entrusted to me.*

*And Lord, thank You so much that Your mercies are
indeed fresh and new each day.*

Only You know how much I need that in my life.

Amen

Notes and Sources

¹E. Stanley Jones, *The Word Became Flesh, Festival Edition*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1979), pp. 34 to 39.

²Proverbs 27:17

³Luke 10:1

⁴John 21:25

⁵Luke 8:15

⁶Matthew 23:28

⁷Matthew 23:27

⁸Ephesians 4:15

⁹Lamentations 3:23

¹⁰I Corinthians 13:1

¹¹Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1977).

¹²Matthew 5:48

¹³Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: The Seabury Press, 1981), p. 30.

7

Value Before Price

For by him were all things created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by him and for him...and in him all things hold together.

—Colossians 1:16 a & c, 17a

Creational Truths

If something is always true, it's because it was created to be that way. Whether it be from the physical sciences – how gravity works, the social sciences – how relationships were meant to work, or the world of marketing – how people make decisions, if it is “true,” then Colossians 1:16-17 reminds us that Jesus is the author of it. As such, these truths are intended for our use and benefit as part of God's revealed wisdom. Furthermore, it shouldn't surprise us to observe Jesus using these same fundamental truths in how He remade the Twelve and invited people into His Kingdom.

The Value/Price Relationship

Any student of marketing will tell you that “**V**alue” and “**P**rice” always travel together. They are the two things that always get evaluated and weighed in any decision-making process. To my knowledge, the first person to articulate this relationship was Heartsill Wilson, a management consultant from the 1950's and 60's. In his model, *The Cybernetics in the Science of Marketing*,¹ Wilson postulated that perceived comparisons of **V**alue and **P**rice always take place in the mind of any decision maker.

In penetrating simplicity, Heartsill observed what we all know to be true. That if the perceived **V**alue a person expects to receive does not exceed the perceived **P**rice he or she expects to pay, a negative decision will result. Conversely, when the perceived **V**alue to be received exceeds the perceived **P**rice to be paid, a person will make a positive decision. In this way, Wilson contended that people are very predictable and remarkably consistent in how each makes his or her decisions. People will always choose to do what they perceive is in their best interest as they weigh perceived **V**alue against perceived **P**rice. The challenge lies in understanding what those particular **V**alue and **P**rice perceptions are in the hearts and minds of decision makers.

It's All About Perception

The key word in the **Value/Price** interrelationship is *perceived*, and it is defined by the buyer's paradigms. It is a given in the world of marketing that a person's perception is always his or her reality. Thus, at the moment any decision is made, the perceived **Value** to a buyer is always weighed against the perceived **Price**, and a rational yes or no decision made. A day, a week, or a year later, the buyer may realize that his or her initial perception was wrong. But at the moment the decision was made, each person acted very rationally in terms of weighing perceptions of **Value** and **Price** to determine what he or she perceived to be in his or her best interest.

Wilson formalized this perceived **Value/Price** relationship in terms of the following decision-making outcomes:

$$\frac{V}{P} \geq 1_{(\text{yes})} \quad \frac{v}{P} \leq 1_{(\text{no})}$$

The Universality of Value/Price

The **Value/Price** relationship applies to every decision a person makes. This includes whether or not to floss your teeth, start a diet, attend church, buy a car, or to marry. The challenging part of that dynamic is trying to understand all of the components that go into a person's **Value** assessment, as well as his or her corresponding **Price** determination. Both the **Value** and the **Price** determinants will involve many tangible and intangible factors, including emotional, relational, intellectual, and lifestyle paradigms. That is because most of the time our **Value/Price** decisions have little to do with financial cost. Mostly they are shaped by our egos, ethnic identification, peer group norms, political correctness concerns, spiritual values, and self-perceptions. Thus, **Value/Price** decisions are integrated decisions that draw upon all the factors that shape who we

are, and determine how we will therefore function. While the concept of **V/P** is simple, discerning all the factors at work in a person's decision can be a much more involved process.

I have observed the validity of Wilson's **Value/Price** determinations time and again in the church. Whenever decisions are made, including those decisions made with regard to discipleship, this decision-making **Value/Price** law of gravity is always at work. And like the law of gravity, it is at work whether you believe it or not, and whether you like it or not.

Jesus and Value/Price

Jesus' discipling approach consistently demonstrated His understanding of this **Value/Price** decision-making reality. In His ministry, Jesus lived out a consistent pattern of *first* establishing the great **Value** of being part of the Kingdom of God *before later* underscoring the **Price** to be paid – the cost and its consequences.

In chapters 5-8 of Luke, Jesus unveiled to those around Him the incredible **Value** of being part of the Kingdom of God. The disciples experienced the reality of Jesus, not the theory of Jesus, as they

- Witnessed people being set free from leprosy, blindness, birth defects, and even people brought back to life.²
- Watched a person experience the forgiveness of his or her sins.³ Observed the joy of not only being accepted, but invited into a fellowship with Jesus, no matter what the past liabilities.
- Experienced the reality of Jesus' concern and care for them.
- Witnessed the passion of God's heart for all people, as well as the dignity Jesus' deeds and words afforded them.

- Began to realize how freeing it can be when the weight of behavioral legalism is lifted from a person's shoulders – “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”⁴
- Realized they could be part of a new Kingdom that actually set people free, not part of a religious system that defined certain kinds of people as prisoners and outcasts.
- Realized that with Jesus, *Yahweh* was also *Abba*, and that a holy God could be both personal and approachable.
- Realized how liberating it can be to be in the presence of a Person who always wants good things for you, and has the power to bring them to be.
- Realized after Pentecost that they now had the promised Spirit of Christ living within them. That the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit could flow through them to replicate making disciples of others. Furthermore, they could be guided, taught, encouraged, nurtured, and provided with a peace that passed all human understanding, all by the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them.

A Reality

All this was not a theoretical Value, but a daily reality! They were truly loved, truly valued, and truly cared for by Jesus. All of that converged into an incredible Value that Jesus described as a “treasure” and a “pearl of great price” (Matthew 13:44-46). A careful reading of this passage where Jesus uses these analogies shows that He first starts with the discovery of the treasure and the pearl before raising the issue of selling the entirety of what one has to obtain it. Without the Value of the treasure and the pearl firmly in view, no one would be willing to liquidate everything to possess them. Ultimately these first disciples

were willing to pay whatever Price it took to obtain that pearl and keep it – a continuing intimate relationship with Jesus. As we know, most of them eventually did pay the ultimate Price with their lives.

Value/Price in the Church

This same Value/Price dynamic is always at work within the church for both believers and seekers. Decisions to go to church, or to stay home and sleep in, always get processed through each person's Value/Price grid. This same evaluation process is used for deciding whether or not to join a Bible study group or attend a Sunday School class. It is also at work in *THE* decision – the if and when a person puts his or her full faith and confidence in Jesus' atoning sacrifice for his or her sins – to accept His offer of forgiveness and Eternal Life, starting with abundant living in the here and now.

In terms of the focus of this book, all decisions relating to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, and to what degree to commit to being a disciple, or even to stay the course as a disciple, all come with Value/Price tradeoff assessments. All such decisions are made consistent with a believer's perception of what he or she feels is in his or her best interest at that moment in time. Adopting this perspective allows those in disciple-making ministries to be much more objective, as well as more rigorous, in examining and evaluating his or her approach to discipling.

Making Consistent Decisions

In our diagnostic examination of discipleship today, we need to take the position that believers will always make discipleship-related decisions in a rationale manner. Often the tendency of those in leadership is to question the decisions believers make, feeling they really don't want to pay the price, or count the cost, to be committed

disciples of Jesus. That thinking is dangerous because it keeps those in leadership and disciple-making roles from honest self-evaluation. It keeps them from asking what contributions they may be making to the discipleship malaise they lament. We need to start by taking the position that people in the pew always act in ways consistent with what they perceive as being in their best interest. As a result, they are predictable and rational in the decisions they make in the church, including any and all decisions regarding discipleship.

More Diagnosis

The diagnostic implications of Heartsill Wilson's Value/Price relationship are helpful for those involved in church life and discipling ministries. For example,

- If you are on the Value-presenting side of this reality, you need to be able to credibly present and demonstrate the Value of being a disciple to the one listening and observing. This can only be effectively done if the presenter has discerned a person's needs (N), and is able to separate them from his or her desires (D). In Wilson's multi-step model, this N/D determination process occurs just before the V/P assessment. Said another way, unless a presenter of Value can discern the difference between a person's Needs and Desires, he or she will not be able to adequately present appropriate and meaningful Value to those contemplating making a decision.
- In this area of Needs and Desires, Wilson contends that people will invariably tell you their Desires, but seldom will they disclose their real Needs. Thus, the element immediately preceding N/D in his model is PQ, the asking of good Probing Questions. The person who will be presenting the Value

needs to first be able to discern the difference between the listener's Needs and Desires. The use of good PQs allows those N/D insights to unfold. Furthermore, the key to asking good PQs is having a workable framework to draw upon for the effective probing of the key issues in another's life. All of this assumes, of course, that the one doing the probing is adequately skilled in the art of conversation, and is willing to invest in the time and effort often required to sort out N/D and V/P in another person's life.

Jesus' Approach

Jesus always had His framework in view – The Kingdom of God – when He interacted with self-righteous people. He was a master of asking good Probing Questions. This allowed Jesus to always make appropriate Value/Price statements like He did with the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price.

In Jesus' encounter with a lawyer (Luke 10:26), He asks this learned man in the beginning of His encounter with him: What is written in the Law? How do you read (interpret) it? After putting in place His "Good Samaritan" story, Jesus then asks another great Probing Question: Which of the three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers hands (Luke 10:36)? Since Jesus always had perfect discernment regarding those He interacted with, He always knew the real N/D issues operating in people's lives. In the case of this particular lawyer, Jesus knew his Desire was to "justify himself" (Luke 10:29). He also knew this man's Need was for a new heart that would give him a whole new way of looking at who was his neighbor and being neighborly.

In a similar encounter with the Rich Young Ruler in Luke 18, Jesus knew the man's Need was

to be freed from the grip of his materialism-wealth idol. In terms of **Value**, the man had no doubt heard, or may have even been a witness to the many gracious things that Jesus had done in the lives of people (the **Value**.) That backdrop allowed Jesus to frame the **Price** issue to him: Sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me (Luke 18:22). For this man, the perceived **Value** of treasure in heaven and following Jesus as a disciple on this earth apparently did not exceed the perceived **Price** of giving up everything he had (“for he was very rich”). As a result, he left Jesus’ presence “very sad.”

The Necessary Sequence

The progression of finding out what will constitute meaningful **Value** in another person’s life often unfolds sequentially like this:

Framework ⇒ **PQ** ⇒ **N/D** ⇒ **V/P**

We are not Jesus. Without a solid framework that structures good **Probing Questions**, the separation of another person’s unspoken **Needs** versus expressed **Desires** cannot be done effectively. And without the ability to separate **Needs** from **Desires**, it will be very difficult to make appropriate statements that will be perceived as having significant **Value**. We will develop this issue of a working framework later in *A Biblical Framework for Making Disciples* chapter.

A Real World Example

In the early 1970’s, I was part of a small market development group trying to establish the use of microfiche. A microfiche is a four inch by six inch piece of film that can hold up to 288 pages of miniaturized (40X) information viewable on a projection type reader that looks something like a TV set.

In our first endeavor, we targeted the Parts Catalog market segment. If you were a manufacturer of automobiles, farm equipment or construction equipment, you had thousands of dealers worldwide selling your products. In support of these products, these manufacturers had databases of thousands of pages of parts catalog information that were constantly changing for dozens of models. Back then, all these changes were printed on paper and distributed by mail to thousands of dealerships around the world. It was a system that was hardly adequate to the task.

Asking Good Questions

When I first visited a typical Manager of Catalog Publications of one of these companies, I never asked, “How would you like to buy my microfiche parts catalog system today.” I knew that answer would always be “No.” What I had to do was ask dozens of good **Probing Questions** because my first task was to start to determine the true **Needs** and **Value/Price** nature of that manager’s reality. So after establishing some form of a social relationship with the Catalog Manager, I would start to ask what I had previously learned were good **Probing Questions**. How big is your database? How often is it updated? How do you distribute it? What does that cost? How long does it take every month for the average dealer to collate the hundreds of new catalog pages into their 2,000-page catalog rack? How is your information structured, indexed and organized? How do typical information access and retrieval patterns work? What are the current frustrations in your department with this process? What are some of the things that the dealer network has said to your corporate management about your parts catalog update system? What are the political realities with dealers today in your company? And those were just some of the opening **Probing Questions**.

Determining Reality

Having asked sufficient **P**robing **Q**uestions of management, a skill acquired over time from experience, I then went out to some typical dealers and asked if I could stand behind the parts counter and watch their service people function with that manufacturer's hard copy database. There I often discovered piles of catalog updates that had never been added to the master database. I also observed indexing shortcuts used by parts counter personnel to quickly find frequently needed information. I took note of all the cross-reference scraps of paper that the parts counter personnel had taped to the walls, and placed under their glass-topped counters. Invariably, the people in the field were not using the parts catalog databases like the management people at the company's headquarters thought. With all this homework done, I went back to my office and started to design a specific solution for their parts catalog system. It would be a customized solution that incorporated everything I just heard and observed from these two different realities. Only then could I start to work on a specific **V**alue proposal for this manufacturer to consider.

Crafting a Customized Value Statement

When the system design was completed and sufficiently tested, there would come a time when I was allowed to present my findings to a conference roomful of people at the company's headquarters. There I would unveil a potentially new system, one that would address their current system's shortcomings and inherent limitations. I would always open that presentation with feature-benefit-results **V**alue statements unique to their situation. Typically, it might be something like this:

I am going to present to you today a new parts catalog information system that will

increase your parts sales by 10% and reduce unnecessary parts returns by 30%. It will also lower your postage costs by 90% and improve the dissemination of new parts catalog information by 400%. It will reduce your printing costs by 60%, improve the integrity of your database at dealer parts catalog work stations by 250%, and reduce by 30% the hours required to perform each monthly update.

In addition, the new system will incorporate some new indexing techniques that will reduce the retrieval time for the average catalog lookup by 40%, thereby increasing efficiency. This new system will be so attractive that the dealers will be willing to pay for it out of their own pockets since it will give them a minimum annual return on investment of 50%. Now let's take a look at how this can be done.

Because I had done both my corporate and field homework with good **P**robing **Q**uestions, I could separate corporate and dealer **N**eeds from **D**esires, and make a **V**alue/**P**rice statement that had a 90% chance of resulting in a million dollar plus order. In the process, I had not only established a relationship of trust and credibility with the Corporate Parts Publications Manager, but I was also about to make that manager a hero in the organization.

Value/Price and Disciplemaking

Designing new information systems and the making of disciples have some of the same things in common. Relationships of trust need to be established – we called this “Grace Time” in the *Grace Before Truth* chapter. Listening and observing homework needs to be done as dozens of good **P**robing **Q**uestions are asked to ascertain that person's history, issues, doubts, paradigms, and worldview. The answers

obtained and the spiritual insights gained under the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit shape the eventual statement of a **V/P** proposition related to Jesus Christ that is rooted in that person's reality. With those statements made, it's then time to leave the response to that specific **V/P** proposition in the domain of the Holy Spirit. We are, after all, only responsible for doing our best to wisely and graciously sow the seed. We cannot make it grow. Such is the nature of disciplemaking. It is usually best accomplished by those disciples who emulate Jesus and who invest in the lives of other people to earn the right to ask good one-on-one paradigm-provoking questions, something programs usually can't do. Typically, these **V/P** statement opportunities often come after investing one-on-one time with people over lunch, not necessarily from one-on-fifty time in a classroom.

Lowering the Price

Another axiom in Wilson's model is that if you don't know how to discern a person's true Needs, you will not be able to identify and present real Value. Wilson contends that when we can't identify and articulate Value to another, the only option available is to start lowering the Price. With respect to discipleship, this price-lowering trend has been going on within the church for quite some time. That's because we often don't seem to be able to communicate convincingly – only use words when you have too! – the incredible abundant-living Value of being a *fully* committed disciple of Jesus.

In my marketing days, I could always identify a weak salesperson. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, they would reveal themselves to me. At some point in just about any market-related conversation with them, they would inevitably get around to saying something like this: "You know, if we really want to sell

more of our products, we're just going to have to lower our Price." With that statement, that sales person was unknowingly disclosing to me that he or she really was not effective at Value comprehension, Value creation, or Value presentation to others. And with those deficiencies, they most likely were not going to ever be an effective sales rep.

Answering the "Why?" Questions

The **V/P** relationship has something to say about every "why?" question that gets posed in the church. If someone asks why so few people come to discipleship training classes on Sunday morning, the answer lies in understanding the perceived Value and Price of those who are not there. For many, there is more personal satisfaction to be gained from reading the morning newspaper with a cup of gourmet coffee at Starbucks than going to a Sunday Adult Education class on some aspect of discipleship. That says a lot more about the perceived value of that class than it does about the quality of the coffee!

Choices

People always have choices before them. They are always comparing the relative Values and Prices of their respective options. At one level, it's very simple. All that needs to be done is to observe the decisions people made – did they come to church, join a small group, participate in Sunday School, or not? Did they decide, commit, or not? At the same time it's not quite that simple. The challenge is to understand all the **V/P** trade offs people are making in evaluating the other lifestyle choices before them. These tradeoffs involve all the tangible and intangible values and paradigms at work within each decision-maker's wiring diagram that factor into his or her final Value/Price decision. In the

example given, the challenge for church leadership is praying over, pondering, and listening to the Holy Spirit to discern what would be compelling Value to people as they consider those Sunday morning discipleship classes and then deciding how best to communicate that reality to their congregations.

Changing Behavior

The **Value/Price** relationship is also helpful in understanding what causes a person to change his or her behavior. When the **Price** that is being paid starts to exceed the **Value** being received, people will consistently do one of two things. Either they will start to look for something with greater perceived **Value** as a replacement strategy, or they will start to find ways to lower the **Price** they are paying. Thus, another discipling presentation strategy is to point out the eventual **Price** that will be paid from not following Jesus in a particular area of his or her life, or not following Him seriously in all aspects of life. It needs to be shown that there will be a much larger cost (**Price**) than the person currently realizes. When appropriate spiritual **Value** and **Price** are both clearly in view, then good and consistent decisions will be made – decisions that come with a commitment to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Implications of Value/Price

By now, you may have already identified some of the implications of this **V/P** reality for discipling-making:

- If believers are not willing to commit to being authentic disciples of Jesus Christ, it's because discipling makers are not effectively presenting *and* demonstrating the real **Value** of being a disciple of Jesus. Part of this **Value** presentation weakness rests in the fact that too many times we use only words to try and communi-

cate this **Value**. Furthermore, there are times when value creation and presentation is best done by behavioral experience, not a steady stream of rhetoric as we try to intellectually reason believers into deepening their discipleship commitment – remember the *Do and Teach* chapter.

- Could it be that people are seeing a dichotomy between the words we espouse in support of making a wholehearted commitment to being disciples of Jesus Christ, and the way we are living that commitment out in our own lives? Many people give far more weight to the latter than the former. It's not so much what we say as what we do. Remember that Quaker quote, "It matters not what a man says, just watch how he treats his dog." Prospective disciples are watching how we treat our figurative dogs, and they are not impressed! Said another way, there may be some perceived **Value** generated by our words, but not enough additional perceived **Value** observable in the living out of our daily lives. Given this apparent dichotomy, many believers factor this perceived inconsistency into their own **V/P** decision, and end up voting no with their feet to more discipleship.
- Often times we want so badly to get people committed to some aspect of discipleship that we lower the **Price** of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Often times we keep lowering that **Price** until they finally say yes! In so doing, we have been steadily lowering the perceived **Value** of discipleship. In some instances, we have progressively lowered the **Price** to the point where it seems there is little perceived discipleship **Value** left in the eyes of many in the pew. For many converts, discipleship seems to have been reduced to being synonymous with church membership and

attendance. So if I just go to church twice a month, tithe when convenient, and either sing in the choir or usher, I'm being a disciple. The graphic that follows tries to capture this. When great **V**alue is perceived, people will pay a great **P**rice. Conversely, when little perceived **V**alue is created, only a small **P**rice is willing to be paid.

$$\mathbf{V/P} \geq 1 \quad \text{or} \quad \mathbf{v/p} \geq 1$$

What we should be living out and sharing in our communities of faith is the great reality **V**alue of being a committed disciple of Jesus. This will encourage others to be willing to pay a greater **P**rice. Taking a related perspective: What is something worth? What you paid for it! As contrasted in these two very different **V/P** relationships, the diagnostic implications of these two comparisons are both sobering and challenging for the church and discipling ministries.

- So often in the church it seems we start by underscoring the **P**rice that needs to be paid to make a commitment to follow Jesus. The **V**alue/**P**rice relationship suggests that we first need to focus on communicating the reality of its great **V**alue. It's fine to talk about the "Cost of Discipleship," but only after the abundant "Joy of Discipleship" is in place.

The Value/Price of Calvary

The **V/P** relationship also helps us understand yet another dimension to Calvary. This can be illustrated by asking: Did Jesus come to be born at Bethlehem, and did He die on Calvary's Cross? Of course He did. So the question then needs to be asked: What did it cost Him to first come, and then die? What **P**rice was He willing to pay to come down to earth to establish the

great **V**alue to Him of people being restored into a right relationship with God? Part of that answer can be found in Philippians 2: 6-8.

Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

While we can't get our minds around what it meant for Jesus to empty Himself, to set aside the glories of Heaven to come and be "the Word became flesh"⁵ and dwell among us, we do know the **P**rice for Him and His Father was beyond infinite. But even with that **P**rice in view, did He come and do it? Yes! Thus for Jesus, the **V**alue of coming to die to set people free from the consequences of their sin so they could be restored back into a relationship with His Father was immense and indescribable! It exceeded the **P**rice that He, the Holy One, would have to pay to come to earth to live armpit to armpit, day after day with incredibly sinful people. That **V**alue exceeded putting aside all the accoutrements of Heaven, to be misunderstood, wrongfully condemned, spit upon, mocked, scorned, and crucified on a shameful Cross. One might even characterize that as being beyond infinite **V**alue. So the next time you think you're not worth much to God, ponder the cost of Calvary that He paid for you. That **P**rice, that beyond infinite cost, defines your **V**alue and mine as one of God's beloved children, loved with the exact same love as He has for His only begotten Son.⁶ Why? Because He did it! The **V**alue/**P**rice comparison exceeded one!

Regarding Sinning

In the **V**alue/**P**rice dynamic, the decision to sin is a decision to please self more than to please God.

The perceived **Value** at that moment to indulge self is higher than the corresponding **Price** being paid, which is dishonoring God and turning one's back on God's will and ways. That sin may be regretted later, as the consequences of sin always manifest themselves to be a far deeper and graver **Price** than we ever imagined. But at that moment in time, a person's needs, desires, habits, or addictions caused him or her to perceive more immediate gratification **Value** in doing something his or her way rather than whatever **Value** he or she perceived of doing it God's way.

A Key Question

Why is that? That's a key question. We were created with perfect desires and passions as part of being created for a perfect relationship with God. But because of the cosmic mutiny that occurred in Genesis 3, everything about us has become corrupted, infected, diseased, distorted, and therefore not trustworthy. There is nothing about us that has been left untouched by this corrupting invasion. As a result, there is a war within us. It's the perpetual conflict between our creational, heavenly nature, and our fallen, corrupted nature.⁷ Because of that, every person can have two very different ways of looking at **Value** and **Price** for every decision.

Which Nature Are You Feeding?

Each of these two opposing **V/P** perspectives within us makes their respective natures known to us in every decision. If the issue is the **Value** of relationships, our heavenly nature yearns for intimacy with God and others – what we were created for in the beginning. Yet our fallen nature wants to hide from God and to protect ourselves from being known by others for who we really are. This same tension and resultant tug-of-war always occurs when the issue is whether to please God or to indulge self. Both sides are clear in

their respective positions and how each chooses to define **V/P**.

The issue is, when it is decision time, which **V/P** assessment prevails – our heavenly nature or our fallen nature? As Paul told the Galatians in 5:17, “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.” The answer to that question almost always comes down to which side of us has been most recently cultivated and nurtured. That's why it is life-defining who we listen to, what we ponder, and which **V/P** perspective we consequently feed – or not feed as the case may be – since the opposite of feeding is starving. Each day we wake up and have two choices before us:

- Spend time with the Lord encountering Him and allow His Holy Spirit to work within us. This keeps cultivating a heavenly perspective on our **V/P** decisions. In other words, live each day as a disciple of Jesus, OR
- Feed the fallen side of who we are, and a very opposing **V/P** perspective will prevail that will keep some part of the mutiny alive in our life.

Every day each one of us awakes and makes a life-shaping decision – which side of my nature am I going to feed and nurture today? Correspondingly, which side am I going to starve? As we make daily choices to either feed the dove and starve the mongrel, or vice versa, our **V/P** reality for today gets shaped. Furthermore, you will always tend to instinctively gravitate toward your strongest desire. These daily decisions either enhance the care of our soul, or fan the embers of fallenness within us back into flames. These decisions determine which **V/P** reality operates within us giving shape to our desires and the resultant daily decisions that then flow inevitably out of them.

An Honest Perspective

This interrelationship of **V/P** is a wonderful way to keep all of us honest and grounded in reality when it comes to discipling. It takes away the excuses we can so easily bring forth to defend our various discipleship positions, even though

our entrenched positions are bearing little fruit! The fault of discipleship today, whatever it may be, doesn't just rest with the pew. To paraphrase Shakespeare in his Brutus – Cassius dialogue, "The fault, dear leaders, lies not in our stars, but in ourselves."

Reflections to Journal and Share

- Can you see the **Value/Price** principle at work in your life? Share examples. What new insights does that give you? Does it also help you to understand the actions of others?
- What are the things you **Value** most in your life? Did/do they also come with a significant **Price**?
- Does the **Value/Price** imbedded in the Cross deepen your understanding of how God sees you, and your intrinsic worth to Him?
- Jim Elliott, who was killed by the Auca Indians of Peru as he brought them the Good News of Jesus Christ, once observed, "It is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." How does that speak to you in terms of **Value/Price**? Try restating his statement in **V/P** terms.

- How would you describe the Value of being a follower of Jesus Christ? How has that Value changed over time? What is the joy of being a disciple of Jesus to you? Then consider how big of a Price you have paid, or are willing to pay, to experience the Value you just described. What do your answers suggest to you?
- Have you ever changed a habit, behavior, or a decision because the V/P relationship changed for you? If so, what are the implications for your future discipling decisions?
- Which part of your being this week have you prioritized for feeding, cultivating, and nurturing?
- Is there something in your life right now that needs to be starved?
- Someone once observed: “Be the change you’re trying to create in others.” How does that speak to you regarding being a disciple as well as discipling others. Might that be a more effective approach to evangelism?

Ponder

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us (Value),
in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Price).*

—Romans 5:8 (added)

Consider a portion of the Price He paid...

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for
your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

—II Cor. 8:9

*Who, although He existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself,
taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.
Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming
obedient to the point of death, even death of a cross.”*

—Philippians 2:6-8

*But He was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him,
And His wounds heal us.*

—Isaiah 53:5

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

—Matthew 27:46c and Psalm 22:1

Consider some of the Value of being a disciple of Jesus Christ...

When the Holy Spirit comes, He will guide you into all truth

—John 16:13

I have called you friends.

—John 15:15b

*Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits –
Who forgives all your sins and
Heals your diseases, who
Redeems your life from the pit and
Crowns you with love and compassion, who
Satisfies your desires with good things so that
Your youth is renewed like the eagles.*

—**Psalm 103:1-5**

The new birth does not solve conflict, nor does it give us automatic victory. Nor does it put us beyond the reach of temptation or the possibility of falling; the new birth in fact brings us into an arena where the old nature and the new nature battle it out.

—**J. A. Motyer**⁸

Have you ever looked at the decision to sin from the perspective of the V/P framework? Does that framework help you in dealing with the issue of sin? Moses, at the end of what we now know as Deuteronomy 28 and 29, took great pains to describe to the nation the enormous Value of following the Lord's commandments as they were about to enter the Promised Land. At the same time, he clearly described the great cost - curses and consequences - of sin to the nation. It was a great Value/Price summary for the nation, starting first with the blessing Value of obedience before detailing the Price consequences of disobedience. Perhaps those two chapters are something each of us should read every morning in our abide times to remind ourselves of God's V/P spiritual realities.

*Finally, brethren, whatever things have the character of truth,
whatever things are worthy of reverence, whatever things are righteous,
whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are attractive,
whatever excellence there is or fit object of praise,
these things make the subject of careful reflection.*

*The things also which you learned and received and heard and saw in me,
these things habitually practice, and the God of peace shall be with you.*

—**Phil. 4: 8 & 9 Wuest**⁹

Prayer

Lord, in Your grace, reveal more of Yourself to me.

Deepen my understanding of what it means to be loved by You.

In the power of your Spirit, help me to fathom more of the incredible price You paid.

Lord, You are the pearl of great price, the immeasurable treasure.

Grant me the desire and the courage to sell all that I have so I can love only You.

Thank You for dying for me, and for the great value You place on each of Your children.

Lord, grant me the required strength and courage from Your resources to starve parts of my life that still need to be put to death.

Empower me with the discipline and the persistence I need to continue to think on Your ways.

Amen

Notes and Sources

¹Heartsill Wilson, *Cybernetics in the Science of Marketing* (Livonia, Mich.: Schoolcraft Community College Seminar, February 13, 1980).

²Luke 7:11 and 8:55

³Luke 5:20 and 5:27

⁴Matthew 11:30

⁵John 1:14

⁶Ephesians 1:6, J.B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English*, 1958, Christianity Today Edition (New York: The Iverson-Ford Associates, 1963).

⁷I am indebted to Pastor Chuck Jacob of the Knox Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor Michigan, for this thought.

⁸J. Alec Motyer, "The Message of James" in *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, Ill., Intervarsity Press, 1985), p. 13.

⁹Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994).

8

Paradigms: Barriers To Spiritual Growth

It takes great strength and courage to move out of our comfort zones and claim new ground spiritually. And in fact, our greatest potential for growth lies in our areas of weakness.

—Bruce Demarest¹

So my form of worship and my style of prayer and my focus in service easily shapes the pattern into which I squeeze spiritual reality. The subjective, in other words, never has trouble overwhelming the objective.

—Donald McCullough²

Introduction

While much has been written about both the process of Christian spirituality and discipleship, relatively little attention has been given to the paradigms that work to impede their growth and development. This neglect has been to the detriment of both disciples and disciplemakers. This chapter explores the restrictive role that paradigms can play in impeding Christian spirituality and discipleship. Since Jesus had to completely remake the disciple's worldview and religious paradigms so they could see and understand the Kingdom of God, is anything less than that required for today? The question is: Like the disciples, what similar religious paradigms are currently impeding our capacity to see and fully understand the Kingdom of God today?

We begin with examining those personal paradigms that have become corrupted by what Luther described as the three enemies of the Christian: the world, the flesh (our fallen human nature), and the devil. These forces can easily act as significant barriers to spiritual growth. They are equally effective in disrupting our willingness to be discipled, or to disciple others.

Addiction therapy tells us that a significant part of the power of an addiction starts to be broken by publicly acknowledging its presence, as well as its effects. Thus, the most helpful step an alcoholic can take is finally admitting he or she is an alcoholic. So it is with those inhibiting paradigms that restrict our progress towards full maturity in Christ. A good first step can be to finally see an inhibiting paradigm for what it is, admit it exists in our life, and invite the Holy Spirit in to break it, and then remake it.

Paradigms Shape and Control Our Lives

As previously observed in the *Two Very Different Worlds* chapter, a paradigm is the framework of all that we think, and feel, and then hold to be true about some aspect of our life and world. It contains all the norms, standards, rules, truths, assumptions, presuppositions, thoughts and experiences within which we form our decisions, evaluations, judgments, attitudes, biases, and prejudices. While our worldview determines how we look at everything, our paradigms shape how we look at something specific.

Paradigms Are Filters, Lenses, Screens and Boxes

Paradigms are filters through which we process certain thoughts, ideas and propositions from the outside world before letting them into the interior part of our lives. They are the lenses through which our minds and emotions see and define a part of our world. Likewise, paradigms are those screens that we use to selectively sift information as we make assessments, form opinions and judgments, embrace or reject new thoughts and ideas. Paradigms take objective reality, and then make it subjective reality by passing it through our self-constructed biases to make it conform to how we believe things should be, or perhaps how we want them to be. Our paradigms can also be viewed as the boxes outside of which we cannot think. Often times our paradigms become part of the baggage that we carry through life. Sometimes our paradigms even become our prisons. We've all heard the phrase, "Think outside of the box," or a similar one, "Pushing the envelope." Sometimes at the end of a frustrating discussion with another, we might hear that person blurt out, "Well, that's just your perspective." Those types of reactions usually suggest that someone's paradigm has just been challenged.

Forming Paradigms

Our paradigms are formed by living life. Early on in this process of living we start our own paradigm creation process by unconsciously absorbing the paradigms of others – from our parents, families, churches, and ethnic cultures. By osmosis the convictions of others soon shape our own. Then as we grow, we also construct other paradigms from the experiences that shape us – the lessons we receive or observe from schools, churches, relatives, as well as the neighborhood peer group. It is a complex process, with many inputs. While paradigms continue to evolve, they are usually firmly in place by the time adulthood arrives.

Paradigms are Creational

God created us with a capacity for paradigms. All of Adam and Eve's paradigms were perfect in the Garden. Their view of God, their view of themselves, and their view of Creation were without blemish. Then temptation entered the world, which caused Eve to want to change one of her paradigms – the way she viewed God's creational scheme to include the potential of deity – to know for herself what God knows. As a result of that cosmic mutiny, sin entered the world and our paradigms, together with our ability to construct them, became corrupted and distorted by the consequences of that rebellion. Thus, unless our paradigms get redeemed, they are no longer trustworthy guides on how we see and objectively understand the world.

The distortions and errors that take root in our way of seeing things creates the capacity for our paradigms to constrain us, mislead us, and even destroy us. That is why I believe that Paul exhorts us in II Corinthians 10:5 to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ," since a paradigm is but a connected series of thoughts. Likewise, David implored the

Lord: Search me, O God, and know my heart...and see if there is any wicked way³ (of doing things – that is a defective paradigm) in me (added). David later continues this theme where he hates “every false way.”⁴ In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson translates “false way” as “false propaganda.”⁵ Propaganda is often what we use to try and impregnate our paradigms into the lives of others. In *The Psalms, A New Translation*, that same verse is translated, “I loathe all deceptive paths,”⁶ which is an apt description of what faulty paradigms do to us. They do lead us down the wrong paths even though they often seem like the “right” thing to do!

Good News and Bad News

Like most things, there is both good news and bad news when it comes to our personal paradigms. On the plus side, paradigms do give us a degree of familiarity, safety, and security. We know how to safely function inside our comfort zones. But, like any strength, a related weakness is just a short distance away. While paradigms provide a measure of comfort and security, they can also make us closed-minded and deaf. As a result, we often become people who can no longer see and hear things for what they are. Thus we tend not to truly hear what someone else is really trying to say to us. As a result, we can become rigid and resistant to those new spiritual thoughts and experiences that would further grow and mature us, while at the same time consider our own particular paradigms to be the gold standard – the only way.

Paradigms and Past Successes

As a modest student of business history, it has been of interest to me through the years to observe that all too frequently the paradigms that shape the early successes of an organization also contain within it fatal flaws for its future. These

fatal flaws will prove problematic when the organization becomes much larger, and the market and technological landscape starts to significantly change. As a result, those paradigms that were responsible for early organizational successes – remember a church is an organization too – now become the only paradigm permitted. They become the “we’ve always done it that way” prison that keeps needed and often-radical organizational surgery and changes from occurring as external conditions change.

The same is true with respect to our personal paradigms. Those perspectives that were most helpful in the early stages of our life may now contain fatal flaws that make them much less helpful, or even detrimental, in the later stages of our life. Since our early successes caused significant re-enforcement of those initial paradigms, we tend to defend them intensely. This makes it even harder to acknowledge their limitations, let alone recognize the need to change certain core convictions over time.

Marketing Paradigms

It is axiomatic that anyone who wishes to bring a product or service to the market place has first to relate it to the buyer’s paradigms. That is a process called positioning, the objective of which is to appropriately place the product in the value system of the buyer’s paradigms. Unsuccessful positioning usually results in an unsuccessful product.

Periodically a product or concept comes along that is outside of everyone’s paradigm. Instant photography, introduced by the Polaroid Corporation in the late 50’s, was just such a product. Almost by definition, the market was not ready for it, and certainly not prepared to embrace it. It was Polaroid’s marketing challenge to change people’s photography and social paradigms so that they would want to have certain kinds of pictures *now*. In a similar way, it wasn’t

too long ago that e-commerce was outside of most consumer paradigms. This changing of a buyer's value system to embrace new concepts is called paradigm marketing, and is the most challenging form of marketing.

Similar issues are present when we try to encourage the spiritual growth of another believer. If something is suggested that is outside of a believer's existing discipleship or spirituality paradigm, there is a barrier that needs to be addressed before receptivity is possible. Fortunately, in God's Kingdom we have the Holy Spirit's power to change the various paradigms that can so easily become barriers to becoming more Christ-like.

The First Disciple's Religious Paradigms

Before Jesus called His soon-to-be disciples, they were deeply mired in the observant Jewish religious worldview of their day, together with all the religious paradigms that made it up. As was observed in an earlier chapter, some of the disciples' paradigms that needed to be torn down and rebuilt by Jesus included:

- Cultural prejudices toward Gentiles and Samaritans.
- A belief that an earthly messiah was needed to overthrow Roman occupation.
- A ritualistic notion of prayer – there was a prescribed prayer for every function and task.
- A view of God that caused them to fear ever mentioning one of His names.
- A blessing notion that reasoned if you were pleasing God, you would materially prosper. Conversely, birth defects and barren wombs were indications of God's displeasure with you.
- A behavior-oriented mindset that held up the self-righteous Pharisees as the gold standard.

- A social perspective that had a real concern for status together with mandatory reciprocal hospitality.

Jesus and His Kingdom Paradigm

Jesus came with a whole new Kingdom worldview that challenged and inverted all the foundational religious paradigms of His day. In fact, transformation can be viewed as a new way of seeing things – replacing restrictive religious paradigms with new liberating spiritual ones. As previously observed in the *Introduction*, foundational to the biblical understanding of repentance is changing one's mind for the better. Some of the paradigms of Jesus' radically new Kingdom of God understanding included:

- A Father paradigm that said it was acceptable to call God, *Abba*,⁷ what some have called the most radical verse in the Bible.
- A concern more about the nature of your heart than your behavior.⁸
- An emphasis that the “first shall be last” and that it is the humble heart of a servant that gives his Father pleasure.
- A teaching that we now call the Sermon on the Mount, which inverted many of the norms of that day. Thus, an “eye for an eye” inverts to “turn the other cheek.”
- A heartfelt concern for Samaritans and Gentiles.
- An emphasis on a Kingdom of the heart and mind, not a political kingdom of this earth.
- A fundamental change in the whole way the Sabbath was understood.

Paradigms and Spiritual Growth

In the medical world, when a patient has debilitating symptoms, a series of tests and exams are scheduled to determine a sound diagnosis. To

facilitate a good diagnosis, X-rays, MRI's, CAT Scans, blood work, and vital signs are used to try to find out what is happening inside the body. Until a physician knows the causative, biological issues at work, he or she can only guess at a diagnosis. And without a sound diagnosis, it is most difficult to devise an effective therapy, the objective of which is to restore the patient back to a healthy condition.

The medical analogy is a useful one when it comes to our spiritual life. We bring all of our paradigms to all aspects of our everyday lives, including our spiritual life. As a result, some paradigms can be helpful in stimulating and encouraging us to spiritual growth and “abundant living.” At the same time, other paradigms work in an opposite way to inhibit spiritual growth and maturity.

The Paradigms That Constrain Our Spirituality

Before highlighting some key paradigms that can easily become barriers to our spirituality, I want all of us to be mindful of the following:

- There are ditches on both sides of every road. The challenge is to stay in the middle! Paradigms are not bad per se. They possess many of the helpful qualities described previously. But because they are also fallen and corrupted by our sinful nature, they have the capacity to constrain us. Thus we can too easily dismiss things that we would be well advised to embrace, as well as avoid the very things that God intends to bless us.

For example, food is both neutral and necessary. We need food to survive. In moderation, a well balanced diet is essential to healthy living. However, when food is taken to excess, either too much or too little, it has debilitating consequences for our physical condition. In a

similar manner, when our paradigms distort objective reality, and become impediments to what God intends and desires for us, they slowly sap us of abundant living.

- Not every believer will be affected by the same paradigms, let alone to the same degree. Likewise, some will be more vulnerable to being constrained by certain paradigms than others. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to speak to each one of us in that “still small voice” regarding those particular paradigms that are constraining our spiritual development.
- The purpose of developing these potentially restrictive paradigms is to encourage each of us, individually and corporately, to put ourselves in a posture where we will let the Holy Spirit challenge us where our paradigms need to be changed. This may include
 - Recognizing a paradigm that has been inhibiting us unawares.
 - Realizing that a certain paradigm needs to be changed if we are to grow further.
 - Encouraging us to open ourselves up to the Spirit and invite radical surgery – an implant of a new Christ-authored paradigm – in an area where we have previously been constrained.
- My intent is to challenge some of our existing religious paradigms, and my technique will be to use hyperbole to try to break through the protective layers we have unknowingly constructed around these paradigms, to make a spiritual point or two. If I am perceived as having overdone it, I do so to emphasize something that I feel shouldn't be missed. I trust the reader will extend me grace if and when my desire to make a point goes too far!

Paradigms as Prisons

Perhaps a few quotes from Bruce Demarest's book, *Satisfy Your Soul*, will put an exclamation point on the critical role that paradigms play in constraining us:

- *Unfortunately there can be thick walls between us and any idea that is new and unfamiliar.*⁹
- *The truth is, we will never change unless we are sufficiently challenged with new ideas. But it is a fact of human existence that, when confronted with the new, our natural tendency is to defend our old position from behind a wall of resistance, sometimes even when our old position is draining life out of us.*¹⁰
- *The truth is, if we do not open up to ideas beyond ourselves, we run the risk of shaping God to our views and our ways – making God in our image.*¹¹

I like the visual picture of that early childhood toy which is a series of different sized boxes that all fit inside each other. That is a good image of what overlapping paradigms do to encase our spiritual life. In this analogy, the center of the smallest block is where our heart, mind, and soul reside as they look out into the world through these overlapping layers of paradigms. To the extent that we allow the Holy Spirit to penetrate these paradigm layers, and move inward to free us up, we move towards greater authenticity. To the extent that we re-enforce and protect these restrictive paradigms, we move more towards greater self-deception.

Most likely all of us will be constrained to a greater or lesser extent by many of the paradigms that follow. It is also helpful to realize that it is not just one paradigm that hampers us. Like the early disciples-to-be, we too have a portfolio of paradigms that seem appropriate to us - cultural, religious, Sabbath, prayer, body life - and, like the

disciples, all of them need to be reshaped by the Master Paradigm ReMaker. As you ponder the paradigms that follow, remember my purpose is to provoke your thinking so as to penetrate some of those paradigms, which you may be unknowingly protecting to your detriment, and propagating them in the lives of others to their detriment.

YOUR VIEW OF GOD

A.W. Tozer asserts that the most important thing about a person is his or her view of God,¹² because it shapes everything else about his or her life. A person's view of God determines whether he or she will draw close to God, or keep Him at a distance. His or her view will shape how each person understands God - as a benign Grandfather, a critical Father, a Santa Claus figure, a good buddy, - or the God as He reveals Himself in Scripture. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, for a person to have faith, he or she "must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."¹³ While the first is true for any Christian, one can wonder at the degree to which the second proposition is truly believed, and then lived out.

Problems arise when we do not have a biblical paradigm for our view of God. All too often we have a faulty view of God rooted in a faulty understanding of God's character and faithfulness. Thus, we have a tendency to construct a view of God that seems right for us. As a result, our sinful nature fashions an idolatrous view of God that suits our preferences. In his book, *The Trivilization of God*, and subtitled, "The Dangerous Illusion of a Manageable Deity," Don McCullough points out that Christians have a real tendency to try to control God, to shape a view of God that gives us a "safer deity." Thus, he says, we "pare God down to manageable proportions."¹⁴ That causes us to

create a “God of my cause...God of my understanding...the God of my experience...the God of my comfort zone...or the “God of my success,”¹⁵ which is not the God of the Bible.

A good place to start in a renewed pursuit of spirituality and discipling is to acknowledge the false god we have most likely created of the Holy One. Then repent and rediscover the God who reveals Himself accurately in His Word for who He is and how He does things.

YOUR VIEW OF PRAYER

Closely related to a person’s view of God is an understanding of prayer – the whole nature of why and how we pray, and what we expect from God, and ourselves when we pray. There are some wide ranging misunderstandings regarding the whole process, purpose, and posture of prayer. For example, are we praying to

- A 911 rescue squad
- Get what we want
- Change God’s mind about something
- Inform God about something He doesn’t know
- Give Him some advice about how to best accomplish what we would like to see done

Or are we praying

- As an act of worship
- To continue an intimate conversation with the Lover of our soul
- To listen much more than we talk
- To conform our will and ways to His will and ways
- To invite God to change whom we are, and how we tend to see and do things

Many prayers, including the first grouping above, reflect an idolatrous view of God – a view

of God we create – rather than an understanding of God as He is accurately revealed in His Word.

YOUR VIEW OF YOURSELF

Probably the second most important paradigm shaping how a believer approaches spirituality and discipling is what comes to mind when he or she envisions how God views him or her – as a person incredibly loved by God, or not? Then there is the whole issue of how a person sees himself – as a Christian lawyer, teacher, nurse, artist, plumber, janitor, or as a lawyer, teacher, nurse, artist, plumber, janitor who is a follower of Jesus Christ. The word Christian was never intended to be an adjective, it is a calling! It is a calling to be first and foremost a “Lover” (the two great commandments¹⁶). It is likewise a calling to co-labor with the Creator as priests¹⁷ serving and ministering with our gifts and abilities¹⁸ as we work to restore God’s original intent for the home, the church, the marketplace, and for all aspects of the culture.

YOUR FAMILY PARADIGM

Families can provide a substantial impetus to your spiritual life or be a significant hindrance. Someone once facetiously said that the most important decision we ever make in life is in choosing our parents wisely! Unfortunately, there are “sins of the fathers” that become impediments to spiritual growth and intimacy with Christ. Absent fathers, emotionally distant fathers, physically and emotionally abusive fathers, constantly critical fathers and workaholic fathers, all create an implicit fatherhood paradigm. That paradigm can easily become a barrier that we project upon our Heavenly Father out of our scars and our still bleeding childhood wounds.

This dynamic even extends to birth order. Firstborns tend to be the super-responsible, achievement-oriented children always trying to please, all tendencies that can easily be carried

over into a firstborn's spiritual life. In addition, we may have come from achievement-oriented families where excellence was assumed as well as from families that joylessly went through the motions of Christianity. All of these dynamics, and there are many more that could be cited, all create an implicit paradigm that we can all too easily project unto our concept of God, Christianity, worship, and prayer. Fortunately the Holy Spirit is in the renovation and re-creation business. But it certainly helps if He is invited in to start the reconstruction process because of the family paradigms that we inherited through no fault of our own.

THE PERFORMANCE – ACHIEVEMENT PARADIGM

There are times when I think we have a performance paradigm imbedded in the genetic makeup of every ounce of our being. The moment we are born, we become a percentile – already being compared to others in terms of our weight, length and size of our head! As we proceed through life, we realize that we are competing with others for just about everything our parents seem to value, and the real issue in life seems to be: How are we doing compared to everyone else? Before long, we compete to make a wide variety of teams, where there is always an A and a B squad to distinguish the best from the rest. For many, this starts with tryouts for a wide variety of school sports teams as we hope to progressively make the cut starting with junior high teams, then progressing to Junior Varsity and Varsity teams and, if you are good enough, to the college level. In the midst of all this, we can join the Scouts, where your status is determined not so much by who you are, but by the number of merit badges on your sleeves. Not surprisingly, we implicitly bring this merit badge mentality into our spiritual life. As Henri Nouwen observed:

When we start being too impressed by the results of our work, we slowly come to the erroneous conviction that life is one large scoreboard where someone is listing the points to measure our worth. And before we are fully aware of it, we have sold out our soul to the many grade-givers...then we become what the world makes us.¹⁹

The World and its Molds

In terms of academics, the concept of the grade point as a measure of worth and value manifests itself early in life. There are academic rewards given out in junior high. In some college contexts, it is no longer sufficient to have a 4.0 GPA in high school to gain admission. If you want to be considered by a prestigious school, you may also need a long list of Advanced Placement courses together with an impressive portfolio of novel volunteer experiences to demonstrate your well roundedness. The further we progress in this performance paradigm, the higher the bar becomes, and the higher we have to jump to make the next level.

Then having finally secured a first job, proving your worth starts all over again. Now we institutionalize it with annual performance reviews. The competition for a first rung supervisory or management position is becoming harder to achieve as organizational structures flatten. Not only are we working harder and longer to distinguish ourselves from all the others doing the same thing to get ahead, but at the same time we are also trying to avoid the next cut. Within this kind of performance paradigm, it is much more important how much you accomplish, what results you bring in, than it is the kind of person you are becoming. Needless to say, all of this is hardly a lifestyle of “holy leisure,” that lifestyle valued by the Puritans to try to ensure that they had both time and a nonfrazzled pace of life that

would allow them to focus on and practice the presence of the Lord each day.

In the midst of living every day within these performance paradigms, do we somehow think that this dynamic has not infected our concept of what authentic spirituality is all about, or what being a good disciple means? There are other implications as well. Are we content with our spirituality to be in the middle of the grading curve? When we compare our spiritual lives with those around us, who may well be coasting on empty, do we console ourselves that our spirituality is better than most, and therefore mistakenly conclude that things are all right? Unfortunately, this can and does happen all too often!

THE FRENETIC LIFESTYLE PARADIGM

As if these performance paradigms are not debilitating enough to our spirituality and discipling, the frenetic lifestyle paradigm usually absorbs whatever is left. To illustrate that, let me make some observations about the Washington, D.C. mindset, within which I have lived for over 20 years. You may not live in Washington, D.C., but that does not mean you are immune from the far-reaching ripples of this paradigm. We all need to be aware of it and on guard against it.

Henry Kissinger once said that you have to live off the intellectual capital you bring to Washington, D.C. because you will never have any time to add to it once you get here! The same observation could well be made about a person's spiritual resources! Without great diligence in this seductive environment, a person's faith can easily erode into "life support Christianity" as the increasing levels of secular static slowly seduce our souls.

A Faulty View of Significance

Having lived in six different cities in various parts of the country over the last thirty years, and

having recently returned to the D.C. area after being away from it for seven years, I can attest that there is a frenetic lifestyle in Washington, D.C. like no other place that I have lived. After a while, it imperceptibly sublimates into a destructive, self-validating narcotic that says the more hectic your life is, the more authentic you must be as a person, and the more significant your life must be as well. As a good friend of mine once observed, "Most of us believe, whether we realize it or not, that we only really become authentic when we do, or get acclaimed." This tendency gets pushed to the extreme in the culture of Washington, D.C. Thus, anyone who desires to spiritually thrive in Washington, D.C. would be well advised to heed Bruce Demarest's caution:

Some of us live our lives so chock-full that the Lord can't get our attention long enough to make Himself known. Our psyches are so programmed for action and accomplishment that we're unable to hear God speak. The static in our souls is sufficiently loud that the whisper of the Spirit gets drowned out. Our hurrying disease – our urgency addiction – sucks spiritual life out of us and turns us into hollow performance machines.²⁰

Washington, D.C. could easily be ground zero for the 24/7 exhausted culture that surrounds us. The D.C. culture expects long work days and weeks, and touts "extraordinary work ethic required" in its recruiting ads. It expects, using military jargon, "task saturation." It is a milieu where expectations continue to rise, competition continues to increase, and commitment overload is the norm.

The Myth of Importance

Not only is there an even higher standard of the performance paradigm in our nation's capital, but there is also a subtle pretentious value system that says: It is important to be important. That

causes people to become self-absorbed, spending an enormous amount of time trying to either become important or to stay important. Hardly something we find in the Beatitudes! Not surprisingly, all this has come at great expense to relationships and “holy leisure” time to spend loving God and our neighbor.

Influence and Spinning

Washington, D.C. is also an environment that places a premium on influence. That means that a good part of your value is determined by whom you know, can access, or will do something for you. Furthermore, it is a town that feeds on illusion, where “spinning” has been elevated to a consummate art form. As a result, it values the ability to make a vice look like a virtue, a fault like a strength, and a dumb mistake like a wise move. After being immersed in it for a while, we begin to put subtle spins on our own lives, first to impress others, but ultimately we end up deceiving ourselves by believing them! And then we begin to put positive spins on the nature and quality of our spiritual lives, even when we are close to running on empty. We even construct an implicit Theology of Excellence to try to convince ourselves that our performance drivenness, and our nearly empty spiritual bucket, is all done to honor the Lord in the eyes of the world! After awhile, we start to wonder why we are becoming spiritually impotent! Rather than standing firm with the complete armor of our faith, we slowly succumb via the slippery slope of cultural compromise.

YOUR EXPERIENTIAL PARADIGM

E. Stanley Jones, a long time missionary to India and a prolific writer of devotional materials, once said that we each bring to a word or a concept that which has been our highest experience. That insight warrants some further observations. First, it is almost impossible to go beyond what-

ever your highest experience has been in some area of your spiritual life – in worship, meditation, contemplative prayer, solitude and silence, being loved by God, or tasting the sweetness of Christ. Secondly, for many Christians, their highest spiritual experience in a number of these areas is often rather low.

Despite these limitations, we need not be held back. Demarest would encourage us by observing, “our greatest potential for growth lies in our areas of weakness.”²¹ It is in recognizing those implicit experiential paradigms that constrain our life that we can

- realize there is much more to be spiritually tasted than we have yet savored. For example, probing the depths of the spiritual disciplines and being expectant that the Holy Spirit will use them in deepening our intimacy with Christ.
- invite the Holy Spirit to 1) identify where our experiential foundation is low and 2) ask the Holy Spirit to take us beyond the current constraints of our experiential paradigms.

THE EVANGELICAL PARADIGM

There is an evangelical paradigm, and it is very real. If you have only spent time in evangelical circles, it may be much harder to see. In his book *Satisfy Your Soul*, Bruce Demarest develops some of the common elements found in a stereotypical evangelical paradigm:

*We assume that spiritual growth will automatically result from knowing more about the Scriptures.*²²

*A tendency to substitute knowledge of the Bible for knowing how to interact with God Himself or a knowledge of God's ways.*²³

*We have done a superior job of defending doctrine and evangelizing the unsaved. Have we done as good a job of building spiritually mature disciples?*²⁴

It may help to remember that evangelicalism is but one of several Christian traditions. Spending all of our time within evangelical circles can cause us to fail to appreciate what other Christian traditions can teach us about expanding our experience of spirituality. As Richard Foster points out, there is much that can enrich our understanding of Christian spirituality from the Contemplative tradition, the Holiness tradition, the Charismatic tradition, the Piety tradition and the Social Justice tradition²⁵ – when was the last time your heart was broken by the poverty and injustice of this world?

THE RITUAL PARADIGM

Every culture has its rituals, and so does every person and every church. From the moment I arise each day, I have a morning ritual. It unfolds in a very precise manner with no deviations. It is a progression that starts with a shower, which is its own ritual!, to drying off in a very prescribed manner, to then brushing my teeth in a very consistent pattern. Then it proceeds to shaving in an identical pattern each day, and then getting dressed in a very orderly, non-deviating manner.

One of the nice things about these rituals is they are very efficient – you don't even have to think about them as you go through them! They are rote routines, almost like being an airplane on autopilot. In fact, rituals free us up to think about things other than the motions we are going through in the ritual!

Unfortunately, we bring this same ritualization tendency into our spiritual life. All too easily we can fall into ritual ruts in our quiet time, in worship, or in prayer. We get so settled into a certain worship format that we can breeze through it without ever connecting with the significance of what is said, sung, or done. Likewise, we can so easily get into a personal prayer ritual of a constant repetition of our litany

of petitions, that we completely miss extended times of adoration, praise, expressions of gratitude. Like any ritual, it is all too easy to go through our spiritual rituals without even thinking about them, often times because we are so preoccupied with other pressing issues of the moment.

Rituals do serve other purposes in the sense that they do give us a certain satisfaction, even when they are empty! That's why heroin addicts will inject themselves with an empty syringe just to get some satisfaction from engaging in the ritual of injection, even when no drug is available. In like manner, going through the rituals of worship and prayer can give us a certain satisfaction. If we do that long enough, we can too easily confuse the satisfaction from the ritual with the real thing, and miss the spiritual experience and personal encounter that God desires for us.

We really do need to ask the Holy Spirit to lead us into an awareness of when we are caught in ritual ruts, missing the spiritual reality that God intends for us. As part of that process, Fessinger – remember back to the *Do and Teach* chapter – does have some helpful insights regarding how we can approach the process of breaking these restrictive rituals. By behaviorally engaging in other approaches and being receptive to different experiences in worship, prayer and quiet times, these different realities can take us out of our autopilot modes. In so doing, these enriching experiences can revitalize our spiritual sensitivities to encounter the Lord in fresh and new ways.

LOCAL CHURCH AND BODY LIFE PARADIGMS

It's been previously observed in a tongue-in-check manner that the most important decision a person will ever make in life is choosing your parents wisely! Similarly, one of the most impor-

tant decisions you will make regarding your own spirituality and discipling growth rests in choosing your churches wisely!

Churches, like the people in them, have paradigms. And churches, like people, have both helpful attributes that can encourage growth in spirituality and discipleship, as well as some irksome blind spots and shortcomings that can work to inhibit growth in both. Each church's paradigms are shaped by multiple factors including the historical traditions of the church as well as the philosophy of ministry from pastors past and present. Then there are the distinctive denominational traditions, doctrines and biases that get overlaid on a church that can often result in very divergent perspectives on spirituality. In addition, its location - inner city or wealthy suburban setting - further shapes a local church's paradigm, as well as does the nature of those who attend - successful, wealthy, achievement-oriented, upper middle class folks, or street people.

There is another variation of this paradigm that gets implicitly fostered in churches comprised of very successful people. It is one that gets subtly communicated to all who come, "We only succeed here, no failures allowed." As a result, their members, by definition, don't have any major personal problems and life struggles because, so this paradigm implies, in this church we all experience victorious living through Jesus. This perspective results in a well understood, but never acknowledged paradigm that forces most people to pretend things are fine, being cheery and chipper on the outside, when they are hurting and hemorrhaging on the inside.

In my travels, I have observed churches with this bias not only denigrating psychology, but also failing to provide counseling services

because, as we all know, "All you need is Jesus." This kind of atmosphere leads to real problems of discouragement and depression being denied. As a result, those real hurts and legitimate feelings get stuffed. Not surprisingly, those members who suddenly find themselves unemployed feel like social lepers within this success-oriented atmosphere. This attitude can also spawn a mutant version of the Old Testament paradigm of blessing. So this distorted logic reasons, since I'm doing very well financially and also doing very well professionally, therefore my spiritual life must also be doing just fine. What other conclusions could there be because God is certainly blessing me? Seldom do people think about the flip side of this logic - what is a disciple supposed to think who suddenly finds himself or herself unemployed? Setting aside this flawed understanding of God's Grace, this distortion can easily lead to a strain of the "health and wealth" gospel virus that seeps into the local church's paradigm. All of this creates a distortion of true spirituality, a faulty view of what it means to be a disciple, as well as barriers to the authentic pursuit of each.

SPIRITUAL GIFT PARADIGM

There is the whole question of how a local church views Spiritual Gifts and body life. In our travels, journeys, and relocations through the years, we have visited a number of different churches. The less-than-precise data I have collected from these visits would suggest that 90% of all the churches in America never really address Spiritual Gifts. As a result, there is little or no teaching on Spiritual Gifts, ministries are not organized around Spiritual Gifts and, as a result, body life is not particularly satisfying. In further probing the 10% of those churches that give some emphasis to Spiritual Gifts, it seems as

if only one out of ten of those churches has gotten close to the real paradigm of Spiritual Gifts and body life reality that we observe in the book of Acts. One can debate whether or not the body life observed in Acts is applicable for today, but I would suggest its precepts are timeless. Therefore Spiritual Gifts need to be rediscovered if we are to have a vital spirituality, as well as a body life oriented around discipling.

Said another way, only about 1% of the churches in America have grasped the first-century body life paradigm and are actually doing something about it! And we wonder why the American church is underpowered! This means that 99% of the churches are inhibiting their parishioners' spiritual growth by shielding them from a key element in God's calling for their life and ministry. All of this has very significant repercussions on the spiritual life and discipleship experience for believers attending those churches.

In his book on *Calling*, Os Guinness states that "God normally calls us along the line of our giftedness."²⁶ But if we are functionally ignorant²⁷ regarding Spiritual Gifts, we end up with the unfortunate paradigm of typical church life that mirrors the 80/20 rule. Thus, 80% of the programmatic effort in the church is being carried out by only 20% of the congregation and the staff. After a while, this defacto reality ends up with the 20% minority being overworked and ultimately burned out. As this works itself out, the remaining 80% sit passively by and wonder: Is that all there is to this experience we call the Christian life? The institutionalization and propagation of this unintentional 80/20-body life paradigm has serious debilitating consequences for an individual's spirituality and discipling, whether you are in the 80% or the 20%!

And There Is More

The dozen paradigms that have just been highlighted are not the only paradigms that operate within churches creating barriers to spiritual growth and discipleship. The reader is encouraged to identify other such paradigms – worship, clergy, music, adult education – that might be at work restricting your church experience and understanding of the discipling process.

In Summary

Perhaps one of the biggest spiritual questions in life, after we acknowledge Christ as the Savior and Lord of our life, is whether or not we want to continue to grow spiritually, or whether we are comfortable coasting on a plateau. Wanting to grow spiritually comes with a price since it is usually not an entirely comfortable process! This growth is not usually easy, because to truly grow we may have to dismantle many of our paradigms, perhaps even paradigms that we have long been espousing. As my wife repeatedly observes, "It hurts to grow!"

Perhaps the best place to start is to put our heart, mind and soul in Chapter 6 of Isaiah, placing them prostrate in front of our holy and awesome God, and then echoing Isaiah's words (added), "Woe to me, I am ruined. For I am a man with unclean lips (and paradigms) and I live among a people with unclean lips (and paradigms)" and then arising later after having been touched where our lips (and paradigms) need to be touched to say, "Here I am Lord, send me." Such is the challenge to our existing paradigms and worldview. And such is the enormous potential if they are redeemed. The question is: Are we open to having our paradigms radically remade by God's Spirit so we can better love Him and love others, or are we not? That is both the challenge as well as the invitation.

Reflections to Share and Journal

- Do you ever think about why you think the way you think? What significant events, family influences and environments from your formative years might have most shaped the way you think today?
- Do you agree with Tozer's thought that the most important thing about a person is what comes to his or her mind when he or she thinks about God? If so, what are the implications of that for you? How might you best expand your understanding of God and correct any misconceptions about who God is and how He does things? What misconceptions of God do you think you might have right now?
- How do you react to this whole notion of paradigms and the way they can unknowingly shape your life and the decisions you make? Would you agree that paradigms could be both comfort zones as well as prisons in the way you think? What are the implications of that for your life, your faith, your spirituality, and your pursuit of God?
- Which of the paradigms profiled in this chapter do you identify with in your life right now? Which ones do you think you most embody and live out? Which paradigms do you think you would be well advised to change?
- Agree or disagree: The church you choose, and the spirituality and discipling paradigms that come with it, will have profound implications for your own Christian growth, spiritual vitality, as well as ministry. What does that suggest for the continued development of your spiritual life?
- What would you suggest as some practical ways for you to remake the restrictive paradigms that need to be changed in your life - to free you up to be more of what God intended you to be?

Ponder

If someone said to you: Every worship service should have something in it that makes each person slightly uncomfortable,²⁸ something that gently nudges each person out of their comfort zones, thus keeping them out of worship ritual ruts, would you agree or disagree?

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me:
He has sent me to announce good news to the poor,
To proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind;
To let the broken victims go free,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

—**Luke 4:18 & 19 NEB**

*Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world,
but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed.
Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know
what is good, acceptable, and perfect.*

—**Romans 12:2 NEB**

*How easy it is to define authentic spirituality according to
my particular experience and expression of it!*

—**Donald McCullough²⁹**

*We must be made aware of the call to let our false, compulsive self be transformed
into the new self of Jesus Christ... Solitude is the furnace in which this transformation
takes place... without solitude we remain victims of our society and
continue to be entangled in the illusion of false self.*

—**Henri Nouwen³⁰**

*Solitude is not a private therapeutic place. Rather it is the place of conversion,
the place where the old self dies and the new self is born,
the place where the emergence of the new man and the new woman occurs.*

—**Henri Nouwen³¹**

Prayer

Jesus, am I fooling myself?

Am I stuck in patterns and ways of thinking and doing things that are barriers to knowing and experiencing You more?

Lord, would You show me the error of my way?

In Your Spirit, will You give me the courage and strength to change those paradigms that are constraining me, as well as the persistence to see these changes through?

Lord, I do want to be evermore Your person, reflecting Your will and ways in my life to those around me.

Amen

Notes and Sources

¹Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1999), p. 87.

²Donald McCullough, *The Trivialization of God* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1995), p. 34.

³Psalm 139:23

⁴Psalm 119:104

⁵Eugene Petersen, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1995), p. 827.

⁶Bonaventure Zerr, *The Psalms: A New Translation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 275.

⁷Luke 11:2

⁸Luke 8:15

⁹Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, p. 56.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹²A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 9.

¹³Hebrews 11:6

¹⁴Donald McCullough, *The Trivialization of God*, p. 14.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 27-43.

¹⁶Luke 10:27

¹⁷I Peter 2:5 & 9

¹⁸Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11-13, I Cor. 12

¹⁹Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1977), p. 18.

²⁰Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, p. 126.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 87.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 23.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁵Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1988).

²⁶Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publishing, 1998), p. 46.

²⁷I Corinthians 12:1

²⁸I am indebted to Pastor Chuck Jacob of the Knox Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan for this thought.

²⁹Donald McCullough, *The Trivialization of God*, p. 37.

³⁰Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (Minneapolis, Minn.: The Seabury Press, 1981), p. 20 & 25.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 27.

9

A Biblical Framework for Making Disciples

We assume that if anything can be done at all, it can be done quickly and efficiently. Our attention spans have been conditioned by thirty-second commercials. Our sense of reality has been flattened by thirty-page abridgements. It is not difficult in such a world to get a person interested in the message of the gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain that interest...

There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.

—Eugene H. Peterson¹

Reliable beliefs, Godly affections. Obedient action. All three are essential to the Christian life. Embracing one, to the neglect of others, leaves us unbalanced and unfulfilled.

—Bruce Demarest²

Necessary But Insufficient

For the last 35 years I have been teaching God's Word trying my best to "correctly handle the word of truth."³ During that time, I have been woken up repeatedly with the realization that I was missing something important. The first such occurrence was in 1988 when I had the opportunity to go to Israel on a study program. Until then, I did not comprehend how important the land – its historical, cultural, geographic, visual and literary context – was to understanding the purpose and meaning of many of the Biblical passages.

Not so long ago I again realized something important was missing in my teaching of God's Word. This time it was discovering that I had been teaching the facts of the Scripture without always providing a facilitating framework to go with them. In saying that, I realize that statement needs some explanation.

For years in the classes I taught, and in the Bible-in-Context weekend conferences and "Bible Alive" retreats I led, I was often presenting many intriguing facts and insights without facilitating frameworks. From a contextual perspective, this information was necessary for understanding a particular portion of Scripture, but, nevertheless, insufficient for allowing the whole picture to be seen, let alone grasped.

Looking at my own journey through the years, it was as if I had been given hundreds of pieces to a puzzle, but no one had ever shown me what

the picture on the top of the puzzle box looked like. Have you ever tried to assemble a 1,000-piece puzzle without ever having seen the top of the puzzle box? I also began to realize that I was not alone in this experience. Furthermore, I was teaching people in the same way that I had been taught. Missing, until recently, were frameworks for helping people:

- Understand the Bible – “The Five Story Lines of Scripture”
- Think about God
- Construct a worldview and develop an apologetic for it
- And yes, how to understand the process of making disciples.

Giving The Rabbinic Method A Try

One Sunday morning not too long ago, I decided that it might be enlightening for the class I was leading to actually have a *yeshiva* experience. I didn’t realize it was going to be enlightening for the teacher as well! The objective of that Sunday morning class was to have, as best we could create it, a first-century, rabbi-disciple group learning experience and, if we could, to get outside of our Greek way of learning and the world of fill-in-the-blank Bible studies. Furthermore, I wanted the class to start to get a sense of what it means to wrestle with the Scriptures – to dig and mine for our understanding – not just get spoon-fed, easy answers.

On that particular Sunday morning, I came into the classroom, sat on my stool at the front of the class, and said, “Today I will be your rabbi, as best I can, and you will be my disciples as best you can. As a first-century rabbi, I will give you no answers. I will only ask you questions.”

Envision This

To set the stage for my opening question, I posed the following scenario as the focus for the class’s *yeshiva* experience:

Someone you know quite well has just come to you and asked, *Will you disciple me for the next 18 months? I will go anywhere you say, do anything you suggest, read anything you recommend, and experience whatever you think would benefit me. Time and money are not a constraint. Will you please be my spiritual director, spiritual mentor, and spiritual guide for the next 18 months?*

I told the class they needed to assume this was a serious request and that there would be a discipling compatibility between the two of them, an often overlooked dynamic in discipling since square pegs seldom fruitfully disciple round holes! I then informed the class that negatively responding to that request was not an option. Each of them must wholeheartedly respond with an emphatic YES! That backdrop allowed me to frame the initial question that I wanted these “disciples” to wrestle with: *Now What?*

Questions Beget Questions

That Sunday morning’s *yeshiva* turned out to be an eye-opening experience for many, including myself. Every time one of the “disciples” would make an observation relative to their new 18-month assignment, I would try to probe his or her reasoning, motivation, basis, and desired outcomes with further questions.

If someone suggested they would start by praying about all this, I would ask, “For what do you think you need to be praying?” If they said “wisdom,” I would ask, “What kind of wisdom do you think you need?” If somebody said they would first spend some time getting to know this

other person, I would respond by asking, “What do you think you need to know about this person – what would you be looking for in his or her background?”

If someone said they would teach this person how to study the Bible, I would respond by asking, “How do you intend to accomplish that?” If the response was to use the inductive Bible study method, I would probe their understanding of that method by asking, “What are its strengths and weaknesses? How would you protect your ‘disciple’ from becoming a practicing existentialist while imperfectly trying to use that method?”

If someone said they would teach this believer how to pray, I would respond by asking, “How are we to pray? Why are we praying? What is the purpose of prayer? Why do so many of our prayers not even rise to the ceiling, let alone the heavens?” And so the next hour went. Answer a question, and get more questions in return.

After an hour of asking questions, I felt the need to stop this process and review the collective suggestions and ideas that were raised by these classroom disciples for how to go about their 18-month spiritual director assignment. On the whiteboard were all the thoughts that were suggested, and modified, as a result of my questions. What struck me was that this mosaic of everyone’s best thinking

- Had little or no structure.
- Was so disparate that it wasn’t evident how you would connect the dots.
- Was very incomplete – no one even suggested dealing with that person’s understanding of God.

- Didn’t address the issue of barriers to spiritual development – paradigms, habits, obsessions or sins of the fathers – which this disciple might still be carrying around from his or her past.
- Basically would have resulted in a weak discipling effort requiring the Holy Spirit to consistently work overtime on behalf of the disciplemaker.

I then took the last 15 minutes of the class to sketch a framework for how a person could think about the process of discipling another for 18 months. As I did so, it struck me that everyone was now in a receptive mode where each wanted to listen and learn. They had wrestled enough for this class!

After Class

When the class was over, it was fascinating to listen to the various reactions from those who engaged me regarding this type of learning experience. The following were some typical responses:

- *This was fascinating. I’ve never had such an experience in my twenty years of being in Bible Study classes. Why don’t we do more of this?*
- *This is the first time my thinking has ever been questioned in any church. I want to be challenged! I need to know where my notions of spiritual things are soft or incomplete.*
- *Can we do this every Sunday? Let’s just throw out the usual curriculum for a while. This is much more helpful and a more productive learning experience.*
- *Now I am beginning to see what you meant by “wresting” with the Scriptures. We need to do more of this. This is exciting.*

- *Where has this teaching method been? Why have we never been exposed to it? I found this to be very helpful. Can we do more of it?*

To be fair, not everyone came forward with these kinds of comments. As I reflected on those who willingly provided feedback, I realized I was only counting the yes votes. A goodly number of people just left the classroom without giving me feedback. They may well have been no votes with a very different perspective!

Time to Marinate

When I left that classroom, I knew something significant had happened. I just couldn't quite put my finger on it. As I reflected on that experience over the next few days, it slowly began to come into focus. These believers had not been adequately prepared for the hypothetical 18-month discipling assignment I gave them. Other than some anecdotal ideas, they really were not clear where they should begin, what they were looking for, and what process to have in view. Furthermore, these were seasoned believers who had been exposed to wonderful Bible teaching in dozens of classes, semester after semester, year after year, many for decades. What to make of this?

An Epiphany Moment

A few days later, three insights began to emerge from this experience:

- **No More Facts Without Frameworks**

We certainly need to teach the facts and lessons of the Bible. But whenever we do teach them, we need to give equal time to presenting and developing the framework(s) within which these facts, insights, and lessons fit. Facts without a framework are facts without a home. Furthermore, without a discipling framework in view, it is much more difficult to be intentional when discipling another.

- **No More Downloads Without Dialogue**

In the Western model of teaching, we all too often use most of the class time for the teacher to download yet another dose of factual information to the class. We almost never plan for an equal amount of time to determine

- If the intended message was indeed received?
- If any part of the message was unclear or confusing?
- Whether the class connected the teaching from prior weeks with this week's teaching?
- How the class was integrating these teachings into their lives, and then living them out in the marketplace reality of each day?

We need to acknowledge that for the most part, discussion is not necessarily the same as meaningful dialogue. As teachers and students, we would benefit more from a two-hour fireside chat after each one-hour class to probe and process these kinds of questions.

- **Frameworks Facilitate the Asking of Good Questions**

As I was playing the role of rabbi in that Sunday morning *yeshiva* experience, I realized I was asking my rabbi questions from a framework for making disciples that I put together years earlier. Without such a discipling framework in view, my probing questions – remember **PQ** from the *Value Before Price* chapter – would have been much less focused, and certainly less effective.

In the rabbinic model, the asking of good probing questions leads to effective learning. Thus, equipping believers with frameworks enables them to likewise ask better discipling questions of others. It also allows them to frame spiritual issues more clearly, and engage in mean-

ingful dialogue with those who want to wrestle with God's Word. We need to provide disciples with the necessary tools for their discipling toolbox rather than assume that each person they meet can be disciplined with a one-size-fits-all hammer!

A Framework

As a result of that particular Sunday morning epiphany experience, I want to conclude this book with a framework for the making of disciples. It may not be THE best framework, but it is the framework I used that Sunday morning to pose rabbi-type questions to the class. It is a framework that comes from an impeccable source – Jesus. Perhaps it can be a useful tool for you.

Jesus' Leave-Behind Wisdom

As He was facing the Cross, Jesus took the Twelve aside and shared with them the Passover meal, together with His final thoughts. In what became known as His Upper Room Discourse, Jesus leaves behind His last words of spiritual wisdom. As part of that discourse, Jesus summarizes in John 15 the core priorities for disciples as part of His leave-behind wisdom. Jesus stresses – again we want to take note of the sequence – the following:

- First, the importance of *abiding* in Him (verses 1-11). It is such an important thought, that Jesus reiterates the word “abide” ten times in the span of these few verses using the following phrases:
 - Abide in me
 - Let my words abide in you
 - Abide in my love
 - Abide in my Father's love.

Obviously, this abiding command – being rooted in, connected to, and resting all the

aspects of one's life completely in Jesus – is paramount in His mind as He shares His final thoughts with His disciples.

- In verse 12, Jesus suddenly shifts the subject from *abiding* to *love one another*, and ends up His Body Life emphasis by repeating *love one another* as a command in verse 17. In doing so, Jesus underscores the importance of our life together in His Kingdom community.
- In verse 18, Jesus shifts the focus again by now referring to the *world*. Because of His disciples' commitment to Him, the *world* will be an inhospitable place for them. In fact, the *world* will hate them. This raises all the issues of engaging, witnessing, and ministering to a *world* that will not be receptive to disciples of Jesus Christ, nor to His Good News message.

The Significance of Sequence

Once again, we need to look at the discipling wisdom inherent in the sequencing of words and phrases that was previously developed for the *Do and Teach* and *Grace Before Truth* chapters. Jesus' final thoughts in John 15 provides us with yet another inspired progression to use in the process of making disciples:

- Everything starts with *abide time*. We have to be clear Who loves us, and therefore whom we are in love with, and why. We need to spend intimacy time with our Lover, which then allows us to learn more and more about the Lover of our souls, how much He truly loves us, and what is on His heart for the world in which we live.

Without spending abide time with the Father, feasting on His Word, and listening to the still, small voice of His Spirit, we will never be clear about God's priorities for our day, and therefore how we are to understand our tasks and priorities. Without daily abiding time,

we will never be able to maintain – or regain as the case may be – our perspective on who we are, and experience again His transforming love, power, guidance, care, and nurture.

A Sunday School teacher from years ago would often remind our Young Adult class of an “abiding truth.” “If you want to broadly irrigate ‘living water’ into the lives of other people,” he would remind us, “you better make sure you are digging a deep well with the Lord for yourself each day.”⁴

- Being a disciple of Jesus is all about community too. A vital body life manifests itself when believers, who consistently have had their abide time with the Father and who are continually filled with His love, care, and the enabling power of His Spirit, congregate with other disciples and share it! Only with a vital body life, where disciples genuinely and authentically love each other and share their lives with each other as Jesus commanded, will we have something compelling to present to the world; something to invite people into that will first engage them, and then transform them.
- With consistent and fruitful abide times, coupled with a vital Christian fellowship in the Body of Christ, we are then prepared and equipped to go into the world and engage it in His authority.

Staying Balanced

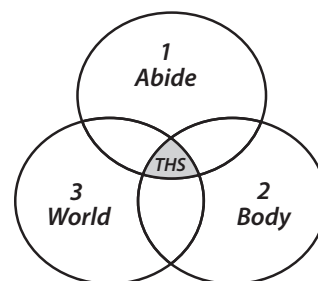
A significant part of discipling is nurturing a balanced spiritual life. To spend all of one’s time in abiding, as appealing as that may seem at certain times, but with little or no involvement with God’s family, nor engagement of the world, is an unbalanced condition. It leads to a monk-aholic existence that is inconsistent with the priorities Jesus gives us in John 15.

Likewise, to devote inordinate amounts of time exclusively serving in the family of faith, the expense of time spent abiding in Him, as well as time engaging the world, is likewise a distortion. It results in a one-dimensional serve-aholic state – a condition that has burnout as its end point.

In a similar manner, to devote all of one’s time to engaging the world, witnessing, and testifying, to the exclusion of abide time with the Lord and time spent in community with God’s people, is equally a distortion. It results in a Lone Ranger save-aholic condition.

Ditches Again

By now, I’ve probably worn out one of my favorite phrases: There are ditches on both sides of every road. However, it certainly applies to John 15 as well. A mature spirituality consistently functions in all three circles with a balanced emphasis. This balance is suggested as the core of Jesus’ framework for His disciples and is therefore the overarching framework suggested for the effective making of disciples. The following graphic portrays this concept:



Balanced Discipleship

We Need Knowledge

Jesus was purposeful in everything that He did. After three years of investing in the disciples, He had a defined outcome He wanted to achieve in their lives. While it took time for this transformation to occur, Jesus never departed from His

approach to achieving it. As part of His discipling methodology, He provided the disciples with the knowledge they would need to understand who He is and how He does things, His purpose, and His Kingdom. He provided this knowledge in a number of different ways:

- by doing things that revealed His nature
- by making observations about the religious culture of His day
- by the way He interacted with the Pharisees
- by making factual statements about Himself
- by telling them imaginative stories, often in parable form.

The disciples needed this knowledge so that at a later stage the Holy Spirit could reveal to them the integrated significance of all that they had observed, experienced, and learned. As we read the written accounts of Peter, John, and Matthew, we see mission accomplished!

Removing Barriers

One of the most important tasks of leaders is to develop the people resources entrusted to their stewardship. An important aspect of this development is barrier removal; that is, to try to identify the barriers keeping the people and the organization from realizing their respective potentials. In a similar manner, Jesus had to tear down His disciples' social and religious paradigm barriers if they were ever going to mature into the Kingdom of God outcomes Jesus envisioned for them.

If the knowledge Jesus was imparting to the disciples was ever to be comprehended by the mind *and* embraced by the heart, not only did these barriers need to be removed from their lives, but also new attitudes needed to be instilled in their place. It was a major purpose and focus for His three years with the Twelve.

Providing Appropriate Exposures and Experiences

As was developed in the *Do and Teach* chapter, Jesus provided the Twelve with a wide variety of paradigm-changing experiences as an essential part of His strategy for remaking their worldview and all its related paradigms.

A Framework for Transformation

All of this suggests multiple facets to the process of discipling that need to be operative in each of the three Abide-Body-World spheres, including

- Focusing on the *requisite knowledge* needed
- Addressing the paradigm *barriers* that would inhibit the desired outcomes
- Cultivating the *necessary attitudes* needed to foster the desired outcomes
- Providing the appropriate *behavioral experiences* needed to reshape attitudes and create new paradigms
- Developing needed *competencies*: understanding Scripture, practicing the Spiritual Disciplines, using Spiritual Gifts.
- Underscoring the means and gifts of Grace that facilitate *transformation* by God's Spirit.

Integrated Framework

The overall framework for discipling that follows is based upon integrating this preceding framework for transformation – knowledge gained, barriers removed, attitudes developed, competencies discovered and refined, and exposure to needed spiritual experiences – with the three spheres from John 15.

We want to be Hebrew in our understanding of these Abide-Body-World circles as well as with the necessary six elements of trans-

formation. Thus, we need to resist our Western tendency to see each aspect as sequential and separate. Rather, we need to view them as cords braided together to make up an abundant life rope.

THE ABIDE SPHERE (Life with Him)

- **Knowledge** regarding aspects of Abiding e.g., *knowing the nature, character, and attributes of God; facts of the Faith; being a disciple; fruits of the Spirit; authority of Scripture; Lordship of Christ; Understanding God's Will*
- **Barriers** to Abiding that need to be removed e.g., *bad habits; secret sins; sins of the fathers; empty love buckets; past issues of abandonment, rejection and humiliation*
- **Attitudes** that foster fruitful Abiding e.g., *submission, obedience, making space for God, spiritual hunger*
- **Competencies** needed to facilitate effective Abiding e.g., *Bible study, meditation, prayer, solitude, silence, simplicity*
- **Experiences and Exposures** of Abiding needed e.g., *encountering God in worship, prayer, retreats*
- **Transformation** via the Spiritual Disciplines e.g., *character formation, healing, holy habits*

THE BODY LIFE SPHERE (Life with Others)

- **Knowledge** needed for a vital Body Life e.g., *corporate worship and celebration, life together, calling, vocation and avocation, giftedness*
- **Barriers** inhibiting Body Life that need to be removed e.g., *Lone Rangerism, do-it-yourselfism, egocentricity, spiritual narcissism*
- **Attitudes** necessary for fruitful Body Life experiences e.g., *availability, accountability, transparency, vulnerability, receptivity*

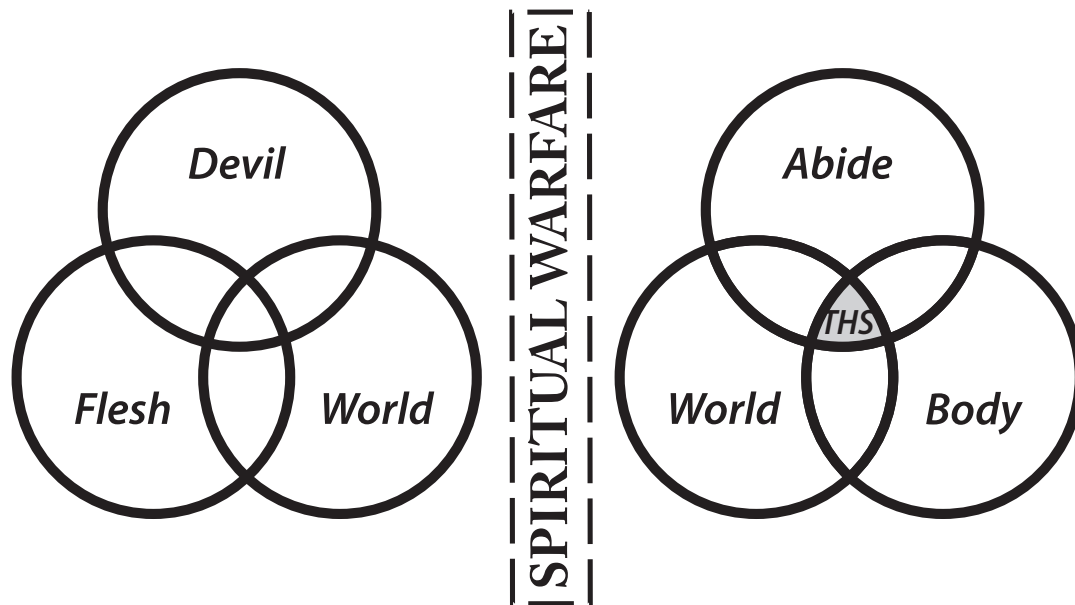
- **Competencies** needed for fruitful Body Life serving e.g., *using your Spiritual Gifts*
- **Experiences and Exposures** needed e.g., *fellowship, worship, discipling, serving*
- **Transformation** via Spiritual Gifts e.g., *fruitful ministry, healing, servant's heart, loving others, bearing one another's burdens*

ENGAGING THE WORLD SPHERE (Life in the World)

- **Knowledge** necessary to engage the World e.g., *worldviews and apologetics*
- **Barriers** to engaging the World that need to be removed e.g., *fear, apathy, lack of purpose and conviction*
- **Attitudes** needed to consistently engage the World e.g., *eternal perspective, commitment, courage, trust, sense of urgency, compassion*
- **Competencies** needed to effectively serve, minister, and engage the culture e.g., *the skill of critical thinking; an integrated worldview shaped by the "Five Story Lines of Scripture – God, Adversary, Mutiny, Human Condition, and Rescue and Restoration;"⁵ sharing your faith; nurturing newborns; an apologetic that deals with origin, meaning, morality, and destiny⁶*
- **Experiences and Exposures** needed to confidently engage the World e.g., *witnessing, interacting with seekers, mission trips*
- **Transforming** the World e.g., *growing in Christ-likeness as co-laborers with Him to redeem and restore the home, neighborhood, marketplace, community, and world as part of preparing for a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1).*

The Enemy and Spiritual Warfare

If the spheres of Abiding, Body, and the World represent aspects of God's Kingdom strategy, there is opposition arrayed against it - the three enemies of the world, the flesh and the devil.



Where these domains collide is Spiritual Warfare. This is symbolically represented in the graphic above:

As Paul develops in Ephesians 6, the disciple needs to be equipped for both offense and defense in Kingdom warfare. Offensive preparedness is comprised of spending time in the Spiritual Kingdom spheres of Abiding and Body Life. In addition, for defensive preparedness we need a thorough knowledge of our three enemies, and the respective game plans each has to derail, deceive, and destroy us. This needed spiritual warfare equipping is highlighted in the following areas of emphasis:

THE FLESH SPHERE – Understanding the Way of the Flesh

- Sinful Nature
- Self-absorbed view of life: Tozer's Hyphenated Sins
- Seven Deadly Sins
- Allure of *Money, Sex and Power*⁷

- Dealing with our “Besetting” Sins⁸
 - Nature of habits, compulsions, and addictions
- And more

THE WORLD'S SPHERE – Understanding the World's Way

- Molds the World is trying to squeeze us into, e.g., *frenetic living, sacred/secular dualism*
- Idols intended to seduce us, e.g., *success, materialism, achievement, accomplishment, importance, the American Dream*
- Competing worldviews, e.g., *Post Modernism, Existentialism, Atheism, Humanism*

THE DEVIL'S SPHERE – Understanding the Adversary's Way

- Who he is and how he does things, e.g., *tries to make God the author of what he instigates as in “Acts of God” clauses in insurance policies*
- Nature of sin and temptation, e.g., *mutiny, trying to control and/or replace God*
- Adversary's purpose, strategies and tactics, e.g., *destruction, deception, distortion*

It's a Framework, Not a Formula

As Westerners, we have a strong preference for formulas to deal with challenging issues. Disciplemaking is no exception. Furthermore, we often prefer to have our formulas rigid, as if one-size-fits-all can possibly work in disciplemaking, a process that is, by definition, never linear. Therefore, use the John 15 framework as more of a guide for your thinking than an inflexible formula.

An Example

A disciplemaker and a baseball relief pitcher share some things in common. If you are familiar with baseball, you know it is a given that the ball game is well underway when the relief pitcher enters it. Furthermore, the circumstances he finds as he enters at this particular point in the contest, while it may be similar to previous games, are never exactly the same. Yet there is an underlying strategy to the game being played. That game plan may now have to be adjusted somewhat for the realities of this particular inning – how many are on base, the current ball/strike count on the batter, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the individual batters he will now be facing. One thing every relief pitcher knows to be true: You can't pick the batters or pinch hitters you would like to face and when you would like to face them.

It is the same with disciplemaking. A disciple's life may well be in the middle innings when you encounter him or her, but the issue-of-the-moment always seems to be constantly changing. And as a disciplemaker, seldom can you choose the issue or topic you would like to deal with today! It's like the rules of summer golf – you have to play the ball where you find it! So you quickly try to size up the current situation, pray for the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and move to that part of the framework where today's issues seem to be centered.

Then use the appropriate part of the framework to start asking some **Probing Questions**, while at the same time praying that the Holy Spirit will guide this particular disciplemaking encounter.

It's a Framework Held in Dynamic Tension

The making of disciples is never done alone. While Jesus calls us to that task, we were never intended to pursue it absent from the leading and guiding of His Spirit. Thus, an effective disciplemaker is always doing two things at once – praying as if everything depends upon God, which of course it always does, while doing everything possible as if it depends solely upon him or her. That is the dynamic tension of disciplemaking. That kind of paradoxical thinking seems to perplex Western minds. To a Middle Easterner, it's not at all perplexing. They are much more comfortable embracing both as two cords braided together that makes for a stronger rope.

A Final Thought

Making disciples is a complex, imperfect process that requires a passion for doing it, a diligence in pursuing it, and a Spirit-inspired Grace-Before-Truth balance to carry it out. It is best done by those disciples who lead a balanced three-sphere life, and who have a framework for the making and transforming of disciples clearly in view. They are disciplemakers who know they have to wait upon the Lord for effective discipling to occur. They have learned not to move ahead of the Spirit, nor to drag their feet when the Spirit is obviously moving in the life of another. Like the vineyard picture Jesus uses in John 15, effective disciplemakers know they are not the ones who lift up the vine to prepare it for more fruitfulness,⁹ nor are they the ones who will effectively prune and cleanse the branch once it has been lifted up. They are joyful and obedient laborers in the vineyard following the lead and in the footsteps of the Master Gardener.

Reflections to Journal and Share

- How do you react to the observation that all too often in our preaching and teaching we tend to download without dialogue, and present facts without frameworks? Can you identify with that? Has that been true in your experience?

- How would you respond to the role-playing rabbi question I posed to that Sunday morning class: How would you disciple another for 18 months? What do our answers suggest?

- What are your reactions to the John 15 framework of Abide-Body Life-World? How balanced is your life when compared to this framework? Where do you tend to be out of balance? What does that suggest for your discipling journey?

- How do you respond to the contention that being exposed to new spiritual experiences and removing barriers are as important as the accumulation of knowledge when it comes to growing in each of the three John 15 spheres? Reflect upon
 - What knowledge has been critical to your development as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

- What experiences have been most helpful?

- What barriers, when removed, were helpful in your discipling development?

- What barriers still remain?

- How do you respond to Luther's three enemies of the Christian – the world, the flesh, and the devil? What do you most relate to in this part of the framework?

- How do you react to the Puritan's understanding of "besetting sins" as summarized in footnote 8? Can you relate to the Puritan's thinking? What would you describe as some of your past or present "besetting sins?"

- Using the discipling framework as a diagnostic tool, what does it suggest for your life? What do you need to next address in your discipling journey? Where do you need to invite the Holy Spirit in to continue your journey toward full maturity in Christ?

Ponder

*We are constantly announcing, admonishing every (person) in every wisdom
in order that we present every (person) spiritually mature in Jesus Christ,
to which end I am constantly laboring to the point of exhaustion,
engaging in a contest in which I am controlled by His Energy
which operates in me in power.*

—**Col. 1:28 & 29 Wuest¹⁰ (added)**

*Taking the broadest view of Christian spirituality,
we see that it embraces knowing, being and doing.
It involves the lifelong integration of the disciple's head, heart and hands.*

—**Bruce Demarest¹¹**

The longest journey is the eighteen inches south from the mind to the heart.

—**Unknown Priest**

*The words flee (into solitude), be silent, and pray summarize the spirituality of the desert.
They indicate the three ways of preventing the world from shaping us into its image
and are thus the three ways to the life in the Spirit.*

—**Henri Nouwen¹² (added)**

*We are responsible for our own solitude...we have, indeed, to fashion our own desert
where we can withdraw every day, shake our compulsions and
dwell in the gentle healing presence of our Lord.*

—**Henri Nouwen¹³**

*Silence is the way to make solitude a reality.
The Desert Fathers praise silence as the safest way to God...
Silence is solitude practiced in action.*

—**Henri Nouwen¹⁴**

Prayer

Lord, thank You for loving me.

Thank You for loving me with the same love You have for Your own Son – what a thought, what a reality!

And Lord, remind me again and again of that overwhelming reality when I look at who I am, and realize yet again how much still needs to be done.

Continue Your work within me. Lead me in the way I should go.

And Lord, help me to get out of my own way.

Give me the courage to give You the keys to all the rooms in my house so that You can renovate each one for Your glory.

Lord, there is so much to do. But I know You are the perfect Grace-Before-Truth Renovator.

I rest in Your promise, that You who have begun a good work within me, will indeed bring it to completion.

Amen

Notes and Sources

¹Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1980), p. 13.

²Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1999), p. 120.

³II Timothy 2:15

⁴A meaningful analogy shared by Dr. Kenneth Pike, Wycliffe Bible Translators, University Reformed Church, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Spring, 1970.

⁵James C. Martin and Doug Greenwold, from the Pentagram graphic, “The Five Story Lines of Scripture,” as used in Preserving Bible Times “Bible-in-Context” seminars, 2003.

⁶Ravi Zacharias, shared at a C.S. Lewis Conference at McLean Bible Church, April 30, 2005.

⁷Title from Richard Foster’s book, *Money, Sex and Power* (HarperSanFrancisco).

⁸A helpful notion from the Puritans who recognized we each have certain vulnerable areas that repeatedly trip us up and keep us enslaved. If we think of our lives as a pie cut up into eight pieces, most of the pieces of our life’s pie don’t consistently trip us up. However, there are one or two pie pieces of our life that seem to repeatedly do just that. It is therefore dealing with those respective besetting sins that are particularly significant in moving forward in our spiritual journey as disciples of Jesus Christ.

⁹See James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, Volume 4 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1999), pp. 1161 and 1162, for a better understanding of John 17:2. Boice builds a strong case that this verse has been traditionally mistranslated. More correctly he contents it should read: He lifts up every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

¹⁰Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994).

¹¹Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, p. 72.

¹²Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (Minneapolis, Minn.: The Seabury Press, 1981), p. 15.

¹³Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 43 & 44.

About the Author

Doug Greenwold is a long-time teacher of the Scriptures. He received his BS and MS degrees, as well as a MBA degree from the University of Michigan, where he also played basketball. For thirty-two years, Doug worked in general management and executive positions in Information Systems, Healthcare Services, and Life Sciences. He retired from the corporate world in 1999 to work and teach with non-profit teaching organizations.

In 1978 Doug discovered that he was called to teach the Scriptures, his true vocation. An ordained Elder in three denominations, Doug has been teaching the Bible, writing and leading retreats, conferences, and workshops for churches and para-church ministries ever since. In 1988, he first visited Israel on a study program and realized the importance of integrating the context of the land with the biblical texts. Since then he has been an avid student and passionate teacher of the Bible in its contextual setting.

Presently Doug is the Executive Director of Preserving Bible Times, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and presenting biblical truth through contextual restoration of the biblical record. Prior to that, he was a Teaching Associate at the C. S. Lewis Institute in Washington, D.C. Doug has also been a Teaching Director with Community Bible Study and a long-time Christian educator in the Washington, D.C. area.

Doug's first book, *Zechariah and Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God*, is a contextual revisiting of Luke's first chapter. This innovative book "tells the rest of the story" of this couple's remarkable journey of faith when life did not turn out as they hoped and dreamed it would. His second book, *Making Disciples Jesus' Way: Wisdom We Have Missed*, contextually examines the process of making disciples in the first century to identify some of the missing ingredients in our Western notions of "discipleship" today. Doug's most recent book, *Encounters with Jesus: The Rest of Their Stories* opens up the wisdom and insights from "familiar" Lukan passages that have been staring us in the face for centuries, but that without the lens of context we could not see.

Presently Doug and his wife Nancy live in Columbia, Maryland, where they are in close proximity to their children and grandchildren.

ORDERING INFORMATION

To order additional copies of and get quantity pricing for

Making Disciples Jesus' Way: Wisdom We Have Missed

Encounters with Jesus: The Rest of Their Stories

The Rest of the Story: A Closer Look at "Familiar" Passages

Zechariah and Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God

contact: Bible-in-Context Ministries
8852 Warm Granite Drive
Columbia, MD 21045

E-mail: doug_greenwold@yahoo.com

OTHER RESOURCES

For helpful information, weekend seminars, Israel Study Programs, Bible-in-Context Conferences, contextual publications, CD audio and DVD visual resources for understanding the Bible in its integrated context, contact:

Preserving Bible Times
P.O. Box 83357
Gaithersburg, MD 20883-3357

E-mail: info@preservingbibletimes.org

Or visit www.preservingbibletimes.org

MAKING DISCIPLES JESUS' WAY

Watching Jesus Detox and Remake the Religious Paradigms of the Disciples so They Can See and Understand the Kingdom of God.

Is your soul weary? Has your own discipleship journey become tiring and unfruitful? Do you desire more of the Christ life? Do you long to see Christ reproducing healthy disciples through your life? Doug Greenwold's book is a long overdue clarification of what "making disciples" is all about. Read, chew, reread and re-chew this book. It will be a "life-changer." One caution. I do not recommend reading this book before you go to sleep. It is too stimulating and paradigm shattering to provide deep rest.

—**Chuck Miller, Trainer in discipling for more than 40 years, Barnabas, Inc.**
Author, *Now That I'm A Christian*

I always benefit from Doug Greenwold's teaching and writing. He brings fresh, previously ignored insight; but more importantly, Doug opens up the first-century world and thus the Scriptures take on greater meaning and power. *Making Disciples Jesus' Way* is a gift in that when he writes about the words of Jesus, "make disciples," you hear what his disciples heard. Doug lifts the veils of history, geography, language and customs, and introduces us to the first-century mind. With Doug as the guide, stories and insights from the scriptures jump off the page. Prepare yourself for a series of aha! moments.

—**Bill Hull, Teacher and writer on discipleship, Bill Hull Ministries**
Author, *Choose the Life*

The strength of Doug Greenwold's book is the way in which he carefully explores the first-century context of Jesus' ministry and then draws out often-missed insights to make practical suggestions for how disciples are made in our time. This is an important study and deserves wide discussion in Christian leadership circles.

—**John Bernbaum, President, Russian-American Christian University in Moscow**
Co-author, *Why Work?*

Doug Greenwold has the unique ability to bring the Bible to life by placing it in its original historical and cultural context. The result in *Making Disciples Jesus' Way* is a thought-provoking exploration of what it means to be a follower of Christ and to fulfill his command to "make disciples of all nations."

—**Jeffery C. Geoghegan**
Author, *The Bible for Dummies*

A Penetrating and Challenging Perspective for Those Who Want to Wrestle With What it Means to be a Disciple and to "Make Disciples."