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Jesus' Final Command

When Jesus arose into Heaven following his resurrection, he gave his disciples just one final command:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.
(Matthew 28:19-20**)

Jesus gave one overall command, “make disciples”, but then clarified that there are two crucial components to making disciples: both “baptizing” and “teaching”. If we are not fulfilling both of these pieces, then we are not fulfilling Jesus’ command to us.

In order to learn how our Lord’s command to make disciples can be fulfilled, we must look to the lives of Jesus and his closest disciples to see how they made disciples by baptizing and teaching. Jesus showed us the perfect example of how to fulfill his command in the way that he lived his own life, which is the true crux of discipleship.

Definition of a Disciple

A disciple is someone who has awoken to the life-changing power of Christ and is embarking on the journey of being fully committed to Christ in all aspects – spiritually, emotionally, and physically to live in obedience to Christ.

In summary, a disciple is a student.

Definition of Discipleship

Discipleship occurs when a Christ-centered mentor lives life with a disciple in such a way as to teach him or her to the truth of how to follow Jesus. Discipleship is an investment in another person spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. It requires us to make sacrifices and commitments and to open ourselves up to being hurt. However, the risk of being hurt is outweighed by the expansion of the Kingdom and immense spiritual blessings for both us and those we disciple.

Both Baptizing and Teaching

Discipleship includes “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” – yet, baptism is only part of the command (Matthew 28:19). After someone has awoken to the life-changing power of Christ, God calls him or her to enter into a relationship with another believer who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, teaches him or her to follow the commands of Christ. The believer, who is now a discipler, then begins the work of teaching the new disciple how to follow Jesus, just as Jesus himself taught his disciples how to follow him. We see the necessity of such teaching in Philip’s ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch:

Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:30-31)

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If someone is baptized but never taught how to follow Jesus, he or she will struggle to mature in Christ. This is the cry of the disciple who wants to grow in Christ: *“How can I, unless someone guides me?”* (Acts 8:31).

The Necessity and Power of the Holy Spirit

As we begin to examine how to disciple people and lead them to growth in Christ, it is important to start in a place of humility before God. For, while God chooses to use disciplers to guide believers in following Christ, God is also very clear in 1 Corinthians that only his Holy Spirit does any of the growing and teaching:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)

Paul further explains the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit in teaching and growing believers elsewhere in the same letter, where he explains that believers can understand absolutely nothing without the help of the Holy Spirit – in fact, spiritual truth “is foolishness” to “the person without the Spirit”:

Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:13-14)

Elsewhere, John reminds believers that the Holy Spirit (“the anointing”) is the only One they truly “need” to teach them:

As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. (1 John 2:27)

Note that John is not arguing against any teaching at all, as John himself is teaching these believers just by writing this letter! Instead, by considering this passage together with the rest of Scripture, we can conclude that John is reminding believers that they only “need” one teacher, the Holy Spirit; other teachers may be helpful — if and only if they are sent by God — but they are not essential as the Holy Spirit is essential.

As we enter into discipleship, we must remember that the Holy Spirit, not us, does all of the teaching and growing for three reasons:

1. To humble ourselves before the God who is actually doing all of the work and deserves all of the glory,
2. To encourage us that it is impossible for us to “mess it up”, because it is actually God who is in control,
3. And finally, as a reminder that we should not try to teach deep, spiritual concepts to non-believers. Without the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, they will

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not be able to understand these spiritual truths. We should, however, still try to lead them to Jesus, and we will examine this concept further in the next section.

Make Disciples of All Nations

While only believers are ready for discipleship, we should still engage in conversations about Jesus, God, and the Bible with anyone who is willing to discuss them with us. Jesus saved his deepest teaching for his disciples who were mature enough to understand it, but he engaged in conversation and taught anyone who would talk with him: the woman at the well, tax collectors, a Roman Provincial Governor, prostitutes, Jewish High Priests, fishermen, a thief who was crucified alongside him — anyone who would listen. Jesus shared the Truth with everyone, knowing that they would not understand deep spiritual truths at first, but also knowing that anyone who came to him and made him their Lord would become one of his disciples.

We clearly see this pattern of people being told about Jesus prior to being invited to discipleship in Jesus' early ministry. Jesus' disciples were always led to realize that he was the Messiah prior to them becoming disciples. We see this first with Andrew, who was told by John the Baptist that Jesus is the "Lamb of God" prior to following Jesus (John 1:36). We see it again when Andrew tells his brother, Simon Peter, to come follow "the Messiah" (John 1:41) and "brought [Simon] to Jesus" (John 1:42). Again, when Jesus himself tells Philip to follow him, Philip says "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:43-45). Finally, before beginning to follow Jesus, Nathanael first proclaims, "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49). Always, the disciples were invited to become believers in Jesus as Lord and Messiah first – and only then became disciples.

As we were commanded, our goal should be to "make disciples of all nations". We should therefore discuss Jesus with absolutely everyone with the intent of eventually leading them into discipleship. However, we should save the deep spiritual studies of discipleship for after they have given their lives to Jesus and awoken to the Holy Spirit. Our discipleship should be first evangelistic to non-believers and then edifying to believers!

"Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you"
(Ephesians 5:14)

The Goals of Discipleship

With the core intentions of guiding a believer to grow in Christ and showing a believer how to follow Christ, discipleship pursues several goals:

1. **Grow in understanding his or her own identity in Christ.** Entering into discipleship, most believers will have a very superficial understanding of the Gospel and what it means to him or her personally. One of the goals of discipleship is to teach the believer that God's work through the Gospel has

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completely transformed his or her identity. A believer has value not because of anything he or she has done, but simply because God created and loves him or her:

But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! (Isaiah 43:1)

And a believer is righteous no matter what mistakes he or she makes, simply because God died for him or her:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did. (Romans 8:1-3)

In a society oriented around performance and earning our worth, the truth of self-identity in Christ is often one of the hardest truths for disciples to truly believe – but it is also one of the most important truths. We must understand what God says about us and what he has done for us through the Gospel, for it completely transforms our relationship with him.

2. **Grow a deeper knowledge of and desire for Christ.** These two goals go hand-in-hand, for the more that we know God, the more that we want to know God. When we spend time with him, his Spirit works in our hearts, and as his Spirit works in our hearts, we desire more and more of him. The end goal of discipleship is for the disciple to have such a deep desire for God that he or she thirsts for him and his Word continuously:

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2)

3. **Grow in emotional health and teach about the connection between emotional and spiritual health.** If someone is unbalanced emotionally, he or she will be blocked from growing spiritually, for emotional problems prevent us from giving ourselves fully to God. We see this truth throughout the Bible, such as in Proverbs:

A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, but when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken. (Proverbs 15:13)

However, while disciplers guide their disciples along the path to emotional health, disciplers are not counselors and should not expect to give professional psychiatric help to their disciples. We believe in the all-sufficiency of God and his Word to treat our every need, but we also believe that God chose to create medicine and proper training in order to carry out his Will. Referrals to qualified mental health professionals should be made for deep emotional problems. All the same, the discipler can walk people through difficult emotions and guide them to the help that they need.

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We will further explore the connection between emotional and spiritual health later in the module, “Living from the Heart”.

4. **Grow in understanding God’s purposes for his or her life.** God’s Word teaches us that God has one overall purpose for all of us: to conform us to His image as his Spirit actively sanctifies us and his Son continuously redeems us from sin:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

Learning to truly, deeply believe this truth and practically apply it to a believer’s life requires time and the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s heart, and this process can be greatly helped through the guidance and support of a discipler.

5. **Learn spiritual disciplines.** Spiritual disciplines are the core practical “actions” of following Christ, such as reading the Bible, praying to God, spending time listening to God in silence and solitude, and loving others through sacrificial service and giving. Faith alone is not all that God asks of believers; he also requires us to put in the work to follow his commands.

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:26)

Growing in regularly practicing spiritual disciplines is a process, and being guided and routinely held accountable by a discipler is a crucial help in this growth. We will learn more about the spiritual disciplines in the eponymous module “Spiritual Disciplines”.

6. **Incorporate him or her into the church body.** Followers of Jesus are called to gather together, serve together, worship together, and encourage each other:

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

However, more than simply gathering together, we are also called to be one body – a family so close that we become united as one in Christ!

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

Incorporating a believer into the church body is crucial so he or she can grow, worship, and serve alongside brothers and sisters in Christ. Further, he or she

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can be loved, supported, and guided through life, while in turn offering that same love, support, and guidance to other believers.

The most common misunderstanding about church is that it is a location or a time during the week; instead, church is meant to be a family, a group of people so united that there is no division between them:

So that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Corinthians 12:25-26)

Involving the believer in Christ's body and helping him or her to understand the true significance of church is very important!

7. **Incorporate him or her into a small group.** While living in the church body as a whole is crucial, living in a small group within the church body is even more crucial. Much more than Bible study groups, small groups are times of vulnerably sharing life's struggles and successes, supporting each other through hardship, serving together, and studying the Bible together. Members of a small group should be able to share even their deepest struggles with each other, being fully vulnerable and fully loving to each other without judgement. This type of vulnerability and investment in each other's lives is not possible in larger church gatherings but rather only in these smaller gatherings of brothers and sisters. Much like the discipleship relationship itself, the unconditional love and vulnerability of a small group builds some of the deepest and truest friendships that people will ever find, fulfilling the Proverb:

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. (Proverbs 17:17)

It is only through involvement in small groups that Christ's body truly becomes one!

How Jesus Taught

Jesus taught his disciples how to follow him not only by formally teaching them through sermons and lessons, but also by living alongside them, eating with them, correcting them, and walking through life with them. What was Jesus' invitation to his disciples when he first called them? Not only "listen to me", not just "learn from me" – but rather, "follow me", "come with me", "walk with me" (Matthew 4:19). Using Jesus as a model, we can develop specific guidelines for how to do discipleship:

1. **Discipleship is one-on-one.** There is always a shortage of disciplers and a surplus of believers to disciple.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. (Matthew 9:37)

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Discipling multiple people together in a group can therefore be tempting, in order to allow more people to be discipled. However, our experience has shown that group discipleship produces inferior results to one-on-one discipleship because it stifles vulnerability. Discipleship relationships require the believer to be fully vulnerable about his or her greatest, deepest struggles and sins, which is difficult even in a one-on-one setting; being this vulnerable with a group is almost impossible. While we do still encourage this kind of vulnerability in our small groups, we also acknowledge that it usually does not actually occur in the group setting. It is only in one-on-one discipleship that people feel free to be truly open.

2. **The person being discipled must commit to at least 6 months.** Like all relationships, discipleship is a two-way relationship, requiring commitment and input from both the discipler and the believer who is being discipled. Sometimes, this means correcting a believer who is not investing in the relationship, especially when the believer is going through “the Wilderness” stage of his or her spiritual growth (see “Stages of Faith”). However, we must also give the believer grace, as described below.

Just as Jesus spent years traveling with and teaching his disciples, we should expect to spend a significant amount of time investing in disciples. Growth does not happen overnight, and living life together in discipleship is a very long-term commitment.

3. **Meetings should be regular and frequent: once per week.** Jesus spent every day with his disciples; we typically cannot maintain such a pace in our modern lives, with jobs and families. However, discipleship meetings should occur frequently and consistently. We typically find that meeting once per week is the best meeting frequency, with additional continuous communication as needed throughout the week via texting or short phone calls.

Again, “the harvest is abundant, but the workers are few”: we have to guard our time in order to be able to disciple as many people simultaneously as possible without burning ourselves out. Giving too much of our time to one believer can therefore be detrimental, but we also must ensure to spend enough time with him or her. There is a careful balance to be found.

4. **Discipleship requires grace on the part of the discipler.** While weekly meetings should be the aim, there may be weeks in which the person being discipled does not show up to meet for no better reason than because he or she is too depressed or feels unworthy of the spiritual investment that is being made in him or her. There will also be many times of apparent relapses into old sinful behaviors and lack of effort on the part of the person being discipled. During these times, the discipler must remember that discipleship is a long-term process and that Jesus always has grace, no matter how many times we stumble. When Jesus’ disciples fought over which of them was the most important, Jesus gently corrected them with love in his eyes. When Peter denied Jesus three times while Jesus was dying for the sins of the

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world, Jesus lovingly picked Peter back up and encouraged him to try again. No matter what we do, Jesus does not give up on us, and he lovingly invites us to try again. The discipler must show Jesus' grace to the person being disciplined, while also correcting him or her when needed.

5. **The Gospel of John is the beginning of Biblical study.** Uniquely among the four Gospels, the Gospel of John focuses upon theology and the divinity of Jesus. Therefore, John makes itself the perfect book for beginning discipleship by establishing basic theological truths about following Jesus. Please see the accompanying "Outline of the Book of John" for a guide to walking a believer through this Gospel.

6. **Discipleship relationships should be gender- and age-appropriate.** Men should disciple men and women should disciple women. While Jesus taught women and had followers who were women, none of his core disciples — with whom he lived and spent significant amounts of time — were women. The great degree of emotional intimacy and vulnerability that is created by discipleship has far too much potential for temptation to allow opposite-gender discipleship. However, between members of the same gender, this deep emotional intimacy and vulnerability will create some of the best brotherhoods and sisterhoods that most people have ever experienced!

In addition, children under the age of 18 are typically not ready for the heaviness and maturity of the content of discipleship and should not participate in discipleship. They should instead participate in children's and youth ministries that are appropriately designed for their maturities and stages of life.

Traits of a Disciple

There are several traits that mark someone who is ready to enter into a discipleship relationship. These traits are some of the first fruits of the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the disciple now that he or she has invited God into his or her heart:

Makes decisions based on the commandments of Christ

"teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20)

Has a hunger for Christ and his Word

Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it. (Psalm 37:4-5)

Shows a willingness to be vulnerable and grow in intimacy with Christ

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 14:4-5)

Commits to the discipleship relationship to allow accountability and authentic growth

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They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

Exhibits spiritual and emotional growth

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

As a disciple is grown by the Holy Spirit over the course of discipleship, the above fruits will become more and more evident, and additional fruits will also gradually appear in the disciple's life. However, these fruits will not appear immediately, and some of them may seem to come and go as the disciple goes through stages of growth and seeming regression – however, the Holy Spirit will gradually grow the disciple in these fruits over time. God uses the process of discipleship to bring disciples closer to Him over the long-term.

Conclusion

We now have a clear understanding of what discipleship is. Next, in order to teach others how to follow Jesus through discipleship, we must first be clear on what it means for us to follow Jesus ourselves. Therefore, the following modules serve as a refresher course in four crucial aspects of following Jesus: the stages of a journey of faith ("Stages of Faith"); knowing our hearts and humbly and openly bringing them before God ("Living from the Heart"); talking to and praying to God with honesty, supplication, and worship simultaneously ("Prayer, Process, and Praise"); and practicing spiritual disciplines as we obey God ("Spiritual Disciplines").

Stages of Faith

As the Holy Spirit grows a believer through discipleship, the believer typically passes through six stages of faith, as spiritual growth is not a linear process but rather a very complex process. The six stages that growing believers typically experience are:

1. **Spiritual Awakening:** As discussed above in the module "Introduction", awakening to the life-changing power of Jesus Christ is the starting point for faith and the prerequisite for discipleship. Spiritual awakening is the moment or moments when you realize that there is a God and you have an instinctual need and desire for Him.
2. **Hunger:** In this stage the disciple has awoken to God, and he or she has a desire to explore him more with the help of a discipler. Exhibiting a great hunger to know God more and grow closer to him, the disciple starts getting more and more involved in the church. He or she enters into a discipleship relationship, begins attending a small group, and generally starts to commit to God. The disciple still has a lot of growth to do in his or her relationship with God and a lot of emotional wounds that need to be healed by God, but he or she is beginning to greatly desire God. This stage should also be characterized by the disciple beginning to explore his or her emotions and bring them before God with the help of a discipler.
3. **Overflow:** This is the stage in which the disciple is beginning to grow, and he or she is beginning to realize that all of the love that God is pouring in is too much to

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be kept inside. He or she must allow for it to overflow. At this stage, we often see the believer joyfully loving others, serving in the church, and perhaps inviting friends and even strangers to come to know Jesus. The believer is experiencing God's love for the first time, and it is overwhelming. However, hidden on the inside, the believer still has many emotional and spiritual problems that the Holy Spirit needs to continue to heal.

We see an explanation of this overflowing love in 1 John 4, as John explains that God's love overflows out of all true believers:

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.... We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 John 4:10, 19-20)

John is clear that this love is not because of any initiative on our part, but simply because God is filling us with his Love. "*We love because he first loved us.*" And so it is with believers who have awoken to God and begun to fill up with his love in this Overflow stage.

4. **The Wilderness:** The believer begins to come off the spiritual high of the Overflow stage, and Christ becomes a more normal part of his or her identity. Satan begins to use the believer's past to challenge the believer's future, as he tries to oppose the believer's growth in Christ by attacking with past traumas and emotional wounds, temptations, doubting God, and feelings of unworthiness. Satan throws everything that he can at the believer in this stage, and the believer has not yet grown close enough to God to fend off the attacks.

The great emotional turmoil that is a characteristic of this stage has two causes: first, Satan is attacking the believer with anything that he can, including past emotional wounds; and second, God is exposing and healing the believer's emotional wounds, which requires the believer to be vulnerable and to feel painful emotions that he or she has long kept buried. Healing can be a painful process. The disciple may start to avoid God because he or she is focused on avoiding the pain instead of embracing the healing. He or she may also begin to avoid discipleship, because discipleship is a time when he or she has to face this pain.

This is often the most difficult stage of faith for believers, and believers can get stuck in this stage for years or even a lifetime unless they are guided and loved through it. The key to overcoming this stage, as with all things in life, is to surrender to God and allow him to bring you through the Wilderness. However, the difficulty in this stage, and the purpose of discipleship, is teaching the believer how to practically do this and encouraging him or her to actually do it.

What makes the Wilderness so difficult is not the attack – it is the believer not yet fully turning to God amid the attack. Once the believer begins surrendering the spiritual attacks and emotional pain to God, he or she will emerge from the

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Wilderness as God heals and sustains him or her. Like the Israelites wandering in the Wilderness for 40 years, the believer will eventually learn that total surrender to a perfectly loving God is the only key to escaping the Wilderness.

In the Wilderness, God is standing, arms open, waiting for the believer to finally run to him.

Even Jesus, in his perfection, experienced the Wilderness – but Jesus modeled for us the perfect response to the Wilderness by turning to God. In Matthew 4:1-11, we see Jesus in the Wilderness being attacked by the devil. Specifically, the devil tempts Jesus to try to escape the Wilderness by Jesus' own strength: by telling stones to become bread, trying to force angels to take care of him, or even surrendering to the devil himself. However, every time the devil attacks, Jesus remains fully surrendered to God and fights the devil off with the Word. In response, God sustains Jesus and brings him out of the Wilderness victoriously. Thus, Jesus emerges from the Wilderness perfectly, without ever turning his back on God or trying to escape by his own strength as the Israelites did, and as we do.

This is the goal for the believer who is in the Wilderness stage of faith: to surrender to God as Jesus did.

Great grace and patience – and a trust that God is in control and will continue to take care of the believer no matter what happens – are key for the discipler in this stage. As the believer struggles and avoids God, painful emotions, and discipleship, some disciplers will begin to worry that they are “losing” the believer in this stage; this is not true, and the discipler must remember that God is the one who is in control and doing all of the growing. This is one area where the humility that was discussed in the section “The Necessity of the Holy Spirit” is especially helpful. If the discipler wrongly thinks that he or she is in control and is causing the growth in discipleship, then the Wilderness will be terrifying, as it seems that he or she is failing. However, if the discipler humbly remembers that God is in control, causes all of the growth, and is all-powerful and all-loving, then the discipler will instead trust that God will lead the believer through this difficult stage, no matter what happens.

Other crucial keys to overcoming the emotional turmoil of this stage are repeated discussions about the 8 core emotions (in the module “Living from the Heart”) and how to surrender those emotions to God (in the module “Prayer, Process, and Praise”). The discipler must patiently and lovingly remind the believer that the pain is actually caused by trying to hide emotions and past hurts from God, who is the source of all healing, and encourage him or her to surrender those emotions to God. Only when the believer begins to fully turn to God with his or her entire self – including his or her painful past – will he or she begin to emerge from the Wilderness.

5. **Inward Journey:** The believer, with help of the Holy Spirit and the discipler, begins to realize his or her need to “deal” with the past and surrender everything to God. He or she has made it through the Wilderness and realizes the need for God to heal him or her. Notably, this stage does not mean that the believer is

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finished being healed from his or her brokenness – it only means that the believer has started to allow God to do this healing. At this stage, the believer understands that fully experiencing God is going to require him or her to put in hard work, face painful emotions, and surrender fully to God, but he or she is now ready to commit to this Journey.

During this stage, the Holy Spirit will greatly increase the believer's understanding of and relationship with God as the believer surrenders to him more and more. This growth will often require the deconstruction and “unlearning” of old, incorrect ideas about God and oneself and allowing God to build up a True understanding in the place of those old lies. The primary misconceptions that God corrects during this stage are truths about himself. Most people think that they already know about God, but until they surrender to the Teacher, the Holy Spirit, they cannot truly understand him, and much of what they think that they know about him is actually incorrect. As we examined in the section “The Necessity of the Holy Spirit”, “the person without the Spirit... is not able to understand” the truths that come from God (1 Corinthians 2:14). In this stage, the Holy Spirit will correct these misconceptions about God.

Another common preconception that God deconstructs during this stage is the believer's identity itself: instead of defining him- or herself on what the world says about him or her, the believer will start to define him- or herself on what God says about him or her. This reconstruction of identity often brings great healing and freedom to the believer, as he or she fully realizes that there is no need to earn love and that a person has immeasurable value simply because God says that it is so.

Again, all of this learning and growth is a process – but at this point the believer is fully committed and surrendered to allowing God to lead him or her through the process. The believer at this stage is embracing God's promise in Matthew 7:7-8 to give growth and healing to anyone who asks him for it and trusts him to provide it:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

Beyond spiritual and emotional healing, the believer is also learning that God will help us understand the purpose that He has given us and the path he chose to take us on to reach it. All we have to do is ask and trust!

While the Journey will sometimes be hard and painful, the believer is learning to absolutely love the Journey due to it contributing to his or her ever deepening relationship with God.

6. **To Live is Christ:** The believer has now become emotionally healthy through spiritual growth and has a deep, vibrant relationship with God and the Holy Spirit. He or she is filled with a consistent, flowing love for God and other people. Emotions no longer control him or her or cause major setbacks in his or her

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relationship with God. Instead, the believer freely feels difficult emotions and brings them to God for healing and help.

An important note on this stage is that spiritual health and consistency has allowed for emotional health and consistency – not the other way around. While emotional health is important for spiritual health, working on our emotions by themselves is not what heals us. Instead, it is God and working on our relationship with God that heals our emotions. At this stage of faith, the believer understands this truth and has put in the spiritual work in order to be emotionally healed by God. By focusing first on his or her relationship with God and allowing God's Will to become his or her desire, the believer has become the embodiment of Matthew 6:33:

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

No one will be fully healed in this life, but at this stage the believer has allowed God to heal enough of his or her emotional wounds and rebuilt enough of his or her misconceptions about God and self that he or she is now consistently spiritually and emotionally healthy.

We see one example of this state of spiritual and emotional health in the Israelites in Joshua 21:44, when God brought the Israelites to a place of peace and rest:

And the Lord gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. (Joshua 21:44)

Another example is Paul, who reached a place in which life was no longer about him. Instead, Paul was completely and totally reliant on God and content in God and only God:

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

Paul no longer asked, "why?", but instead lived Christ through His relationships with God and with other people!

When a disciple reaches this stage, life is about experiencing God and living for God, not just talking about God.

A Warning

While these stages can be a useful tool for helping the discipler to show the disciple where he or she is on the discipleship journey, spiritual growth is not a race. We should use these stages only to help believers better understand the journey that they are experiencing – never to measure or compare spiritual growth. The focus should never be on progressing through the stages or "leveling up", which is completely against both Biblical wisdom and the purpose of this tool. Instead, the focus should be on embracing the stage in which God has placed us and loving the journey that he is leading us through.

MODULE 1 - STAGES OF FAITH

If we are not careful with this tool, we could instill in our disciples a sense of pride as they proceed through their journey or a dissatisfied restlessness to constantly proceed through the stages. Even worse, we might mislead our disciples into thinking that some believers are better than others due to being in different stages. In truth, God has made all believers equal as parts of the same Body, his Church, and has shown that we are all equal in our need for his Grace:

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (James 2:9-10)

Spiritual growth is a process, and every stage has value. Each stage could last multiple years, and each stage has extreme benefit and can offer awesome opportunities to love God and love others right where you are – no matter if you are in stage one or stage six. We must encourage our disciples to love being with God right where he is leading them.

MODULE 2 - LIVING FROM THE HEART

Jesus' Emotions, Our Emotions

Our society – and sadly, even our society's version of Christianity – often teaches us to bury and ignore our emotions, as if they are dangerous, deceptive forces that we must shamefully hide from God. Yet, if we once again look to Jesus' example in the gospels, we see a man with an intimate knowledge of his emotions and who openly shares those emotions with both his Heavenly Father and people. Jesus experienced **sadness**, which he openly showed before his followers:

Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" (John 11:35-36)

And again, Jesus felt not only deep **sadness** but also great **fear**, both of which he openly brought before both God and his disciples:

And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed. (Matthew 26:37-39)

Jesus felt **loneliness**, most especially for God:

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)

Jesus felt **hurt** by the cruelty of men, which he, as always, brought to God:

But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

And Jesus felt **anger**, although his anger was always righteous:

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a robbers' den.'" (Matthew 21:12-13)

Through a careful study of Jesus' emotions and modern Christian psychology¹, we see that humans experience **eight core emotions**:

1. Gladness
2. Anger
3. Fear
4. Guilt
5. Shame
6. Sadness
7. Loneliness
8. Hurt

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Any other emotions that we feel can be considered combinations of these base emotions, much like how the three core colors red, green, and blue combine to create every other imaginable hue.

Perhaps the most important and most likely misunderstood truth about these emotions for people living in our society is that every single one of them is “good” – there is no such thing as a “bad” emotion. After all, God created us to feel these emotions, and he Himself felt them, as we have seen! Emotions are “good” because – in his Goodness and perfect design – God gave each emotion a role in pointing us to him and to full life in him:

1. **Gladness:** The gratification of having our hearts’ desires fulfilled, a cause for our willingness to have desire itself.
2. **Anger:** Shows the presence of passion and hunger for life.
3. **Fear:** Opens the door for trusting God by allowing us to experience risk, trust, dependency, and wisdom.
4. **Guilt:** Sparks change in us by allowing ourselves to accept that we’ve done something wrong
5. **Shame:** Creates the humility in us to be able to recognize our potential to fail and do harm, to succeed, and to love.
6. **Sadness:** Shows ourselves how much we deeply value what is missed, gone and lost.
7. **Loneliness:** The desire to belong and to be known in relationships with ourselves, others, and God.
8. **Hurt:** A cry within us that lets us know we have pain which acts as a catalyst for seeking relief.

All of these emotions point us to God, because they teach us that only God can fulfill our desires, heal our pain, and fulfill our longings.¹

Living from the Heart

God created us with emotions in order to point us to him, but these emotions are only part of his emotional and spiritual design for drawing us to him. We can think of our hearts as being designed with five closely-interconnected spiritual “roots”, all of which are evident in scripture:

1. **Feelings or emotions:** Speak the “language of the heart” – feeling emotions is how we can know the health of our hearts and whether the other four spiritual roots are being satisfied or denied. Emotions are how our hearts and spiritual roots communicate with us.
2. **Needs:** Our basic needs for survival, which reveal our vulnerability when we realize that we cannot provide for them ourselves. Some examples are our needs for attention, safety, and affection.

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3. **Desires:** These are more than needs, because they are not required for basic survival. Through our desires, God shows us that he created us to do more than survive. Some examples are our desires for truth, excellence, and justice.
4. **Longings:** Deep emotional and spiritual cravings for the very traits of God, which cannot be fully satisfied in this life. These longings are similar to our desires, but they run deeper and more intensely than our desires. Longings are our hearts' deepest cry for God himself.
5. **Hope:** Our hearts' passion for Life, which pushes us to continue to pursue our needs, desires, and longings, no matter the situation.

We were created to live from the heart – to live in open, honest, intimate knowledge of our emotions, needs, desires, longings, and hope before God, ourselves, and others. When we try to bury and ignore any of these aspects of our hearts, we try to live a lie. We see the importance of caring for the spiritual roots of hearts not only in the emotional vulnerability that Jesus repeatedly exhibited, as we discussed above, but also in Proverbs:

A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones. (Proverbs 17:22)

And again,

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. (Proverbs 4:23)

God created us as both spiritual and emotional creatures, with emotions driving us to understand the roots of our hearts, and the roots of our hearts driving us to pursue God as the one spiritual solution to these needs, desires, and longings. The spiritual roots that God placed in our hearts ask us difficult questions which only he can answer:

- What is the point?
- Is there more?
- Will I ever be loved?
- How much longer can I do this?
- Is God really here?
- Is God good?

Unfortunately, if we are not living from the heart – if we try to ignore and suppress our emotions and our hearts – we all too often turn to counterfeit solutions to these questions instead of turning to God. We drink to excess. We pursue status and power. We use religion and ego-centered spirituality as a drug. We take any form of earthly “drug”, whether a pharmaceutical or behavioral “drug”, to avoid feeling our emotions and to numb the questions of our hearts.

Counterfeit solutions leave our hearts unexplored, and our hearts become corrupted by the very things that we do to satisfy them. Our hearts hope for less. We value ourselves only based on our accomplishments, which will never be enough. We act out of

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obligation instead of passion. We forsake the desire of being known by ourselves and others. And ultimately, we live a life of lies.

If, however, we allow ourselves to feel difficult emotions and allow God to use these feelings to turn our hearts to him, then we live in fullness and honesty as he satisfies all of our spiritual roots. We live in passion, expectation, acceptance, hope, humility, established identity, discernment, confession, forgiveness, and a hunger to change. We live knowing that we are fully known and fully loved by the God who is saving us.¹

Biblical Case Study

Let us use Adam and Eve as a Biblical case study in ignoring our hearts' spiritual roots. After consuming the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve exhibited some emotions that are very familiar to all of us: guilt and shame at their sin, hurt from knowing that they had harmed themselves and their relationship with God, and fear at how God would react. However, these are just the emotions that Adam and Eve were feeling; if we were to stop here at the surface of the heart, then we would never understand the deeper, underlying spiritual roots that explain why Adam and Eve felt this way. Unfortunately, it appears that Adam and Eve did choose to stop here at the emotional surface: they chose the counterfeit solution of hiding their hearts from God, both literally and metaphorically, by hiding in the bushes. However, if we choose to dig deeper, we can understand some of the causes of Adam and Eve's emotions:

1. Adam and Eve had needs: to be known, loved, and valued by God. They feared the loss of the Satisfier of these basic needs.
2. Adam and Eve had desires for knowledge, significance, and full life, which they wrongly thought could come from their own actions instead of from God. They felt hurt and disappointment from trying to fulfill these desires without God.
3. Adam and Eve longed for God himself, and they feared losing his Presence forever.

Thus, in digging deeper into their hearts, we see that the issue was not merely that Adam and Eve felt "sad", "afraid", and "guilty" – the deeper, underlying issue beneath these emotions was that Adam and Eve had inflicted great harm upon their relationship with God, and they feared losing that relationship forever. The Fall was not only a problem of guilt but also a problem of relationship and the needs, longings, and desires of the human heart. God understood that the issue went much deeper than only guilt, and he provided the means to restore that relationship and fulfill those needs, longings, and desires through Jesus.

Just like in the case study of Adam and Eve, we have to "dig through the dirt" in our own hearts and in the hearts of our disciples. We cannot stop at the surface, or we won't be able to find the real causes of our emotions and bring the most intimate parts of our hearts to God for him to heal and fulfill.

Conclusion

Like Adam and Eve hiding in the bushes, we may try to hide our guilt, shame, hurt, fear, needs, longings, desire, and other roots from the God who created us. But all that this

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counterfeit solution will ever do is hurt us. It is only by digging deeply into our hearts to learn what we are truly feeling, needing, and longing for, and then bringing all of these intimate secrets of our hearts to God that we can see him heal and satisfy our hearts.

Let us be clear about one important truth: God does not need us to do this heart work. God already knows every secret of the hearts that he created:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:12-13)

However, God created us for relationship with him and worship of him, and relationship requires vulnerability. We bring our hearts to God not because he needs us to, but because he wants us to:

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

How do we bring these difficult feelings and roots before God in a way that is honest, intimate, vulnerable, and glorifying to God, all at the same time? For that, God gave us the examples of Jesus and the Psalmist, which we will discuss in the next module, "Prayer, Process, and Praise".

MODULE 3 - SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

True Relationship Versus the Trap of Legalism

In Ephesians, Paul proclaims that we are saved by faith in Jesus alone:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Not one “work” that we can ever do can save us: not praying, not apologizing for our sins, nor donating money to the church. Only Jesus can save us! However, Paul continues to explain in verse 10 that Jesus does not stop at saving us; we are also “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand” for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Similarly, James said, “faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself” (James 2:17). We must have the faith in Jesus first; however, once we have faith, if we have no good works, then our faith is dead!

As they learn about this call to do “good works”, many new (and many not-so-new) Christians fall into the trap of trying to earn God’s love and approval by doing good works and following every tenet of God’s Law, a mistake that we call “legalism”. Legalism often comes from a root of feeling unworthy of God’s love and salvation. Christians see calls to be sinless, as in 1 John 2:1 (“I am writing you these things so that you may not sin”), and think, “Well, all I do is sin... I need to stop sinning, or God is going to give up on me soon!”. Unfortunately, these Christians do not understand the second half of that very same verse: “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 2:1) Not understanding that Jesus has already made them worthy of God’s love and forgiveness, these Christians therefore fall into the trap of trying to earn God’s love and forgiveness by forcing themselves to stop sinning, read their Bibles more, or do any other good work. The Galatians fell into this trap of legalism, and Paul corrected them, saying,

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? ... Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, **“The righteous man shall live by faith.”** (Galatians 3:2, 11)

The Word is therefore clear that we can never justify our worthiness of God’s love and forgiveness by following the Law and doing good works but rather only by “living by faith”. But what does it mean to “live by faith” instead of by legalism?

Jesus himself explains how to live by faith in his parable of “The Vine and Branches”:

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:1-5)

Jesus already knows that we struggle with the feeling of being unworthy of God’s love and forgiveness, and, in his goodness, it was therefore one of the very first things that he addressed in his parable: “You are already clean because of the word which I have

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spoken to you” (John 15:3). We are already clean because of Jesus! Every sin that we have ever committed and will ever commit is already forgiven by Jesus. We need not ever try to earn his or God’s love, approval, or forgiveness. Jesus has completely freed us from the fear of sin and failure, so we can focus on building our relationship with him and “producing fruit”, or doing good works.

And yet, Jesus’ grace runs even deeper than this, for Jesus also knows that we are completely incapable of doing these good works by ourselves! Jesus says, “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me”, and more directly, “apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). Now we have two promises from Jesus: he has not only already “made us clean”, or forgiven us for failing to obey God, but he is also going to help us to “produce fruit”, or obey God! The only requirement that remains for us is to “abide” in Jesus – but what does that mean?

The original Greek word for “abide” is used in two contexts in the Bible: in this parable and whenever a place of residence is discussed. When the first disciples asked Jesus where he was living, they used this word. When Mary stayed with her sister for three months, she used this word. When Jesus resided in people’s homes as he traveled, he used this word. Where you “abide” is where you live, where you stay.

So what does it mean to “abide” in Jesus? To live in him! To center our entire lives around him! To not just read his Word, but fill ourselves with his Word. Live in his Word. To not just be aware of his love but live in his love. To pray to him constantly. To sit with him in silence and solitude. To bring our most difficult emotions to him for healing. To praise him for everything that he does.

Jesus freed us from the impossible task of obeying God by forgiving us and helping us to obey. This frees us to have a true relationship with God and Jesus, which fills us with such joy that we naturally want to “abide” in Jesus more and more. “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” (John 15:11)

Let us summarize what we have learned about the Gospel’s response to legalism: we are completely incapable of doing good works, Jesus has already freed us from the shame of that failure and the impossible struggle of trying to continue to do good works by ourselves, and now Jesus helps us to do these good works as long as we maintain a close, dependent relationship with him! All we have to do is cling to Jesus! As Paul said, “Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need” (He. 4:16 CSB). Let us not only approach the throne of grace with boldness but also teach our disciples to do the same! Let us teach them to do good works as an expression of their relationships with Jesus, not as a requirement for their relationships with Jesus! As a joy and not as a duty! Let us help our disciples, through teaching them to bring their emotions before God, to invite God to heal any root emotional issues such as low self-esteem or chronic shame that cause them to try to earn God’s love instead of freely receiving God’s love!

With that background, the following are works in which Christians should continually grow, not due to shame or an effort to please God, but due to the overflowing joy of Christ and simply a desire to know and love God more! Growth is a gradual process,

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filled with both progress and regressions – which is why God gives us so much grace so freely through Jesus! As we abide in Christ, let us strive to grow in the following spiritual disciplines and teach our disciples to grow in them as well.

Discipline #1: Prayer

We are told throughout Scripture to “pray constantly” (1 Th. 5:17 CSB), to “pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request” (Ep. 6:18 CSB), and the early, idyllic church was “continually united in prayer” (Ac. 1:14 CSB). However, for new believers, talking to God often does not come naturally. There are three common blocks that prevent believers from freely praying to God: lack of knowledge of “how” to pray, a feeling of unworthiness to come before God, and a lack of devotion or discipline. Fortunately, God gives us clear help to address all three of these issues in his Word!

How to Pray: Prayer, Process, and Praise

The first issue, “how” to pray, is addressed by Jesus in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, exemplified by Jesus in Matthew 26, and also exemplified by David in all of his Psalms, with an especially clear example in Psalm 6. From these instructions and examples, we can develop a simple three-step model for prayer to help guide us in talking to God:

1. **Prayer:** First, we make our requests known to God “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7).
2. **Process:** As we discussed in the section “Living from the Heart”, God wants us to pour out our emotions and thoughts to him in our prayers. Jesus instructed us to pray, “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.” (Matthew 6:7) God doesn’t want empty words from us; he wants real conversation and honest praise — the true, deep emotions of our hearts!

Why did Jesus pray in the Garden of Gethsemane? Matthew says it is because Jesus “began to be grieved and distressed” (Matthew 26:37). Jesus’ first reaction when he began to feel strong emotions was to turn to the Father in prayer alongside his disciples! Jesus’ full prayer is not recorded in Matthew, but before praying he tells his disciples that he is “deeply grieved to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38). Given that this grief was the stimulus for Jesus’ prayer and that the Bible offers us so much instruction to pour out our emotions to God, we can be sure that Jesus “Processed” his feelings with God in the Garden!

3. **Praise:** Finally, we praise God for his goodness and perfect will, no matter how we feel. God is good and deserves worship always, regardless of our situation or our emotions. We always praise him for Who he is, how he has helped us, and how he will help us, even if we still feel hopeless at the end of our prayer. 1 Thessalonians is very clear that worship should be part of all of our prayers, saying, “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), and, similarly,

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Philippians instructs us to “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4).

Even beyond the fact that God always deserves praise, we will also often find that we suddenly feel more hopeful and healed after praising him, for the Word says that God’s Holy Spirit ministers to us directly when we spend time with him!

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:26)

We see Jesus practice this unconditional worship of God as he ends his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane by submitting himself to God’s perfect will: “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39). Similarly, he begins with this praise in the example prayer that he gave in his sermon about how to pray:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10)

Finally, we see this same “Praise” step in David’s prayer in Psalm 6:8-10, as David thanks God for “(hearing) the sound of (his) weeping” and “(hearing his) plea for help”. David praises God for hearing him and confidently proclaims the help that God will send him, even before he sees that help come. David worships God, even as his eyes are still “swollen from grief” (Psalm 6:7, [Christian Standard Bible])!

Discipline #2: Reading the Word

As we have seen throughout these modules, God revealing himself to us is the only way that we can know anything about him or have any kind of relationship with him. God chooses to reveal himself to us through his Word, as Paul explains in 2 Timothy 3:15-16:

That from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

In these verses, we see multiple important aspects of God’s revelation in the Scriptures:

1. “All Scripture is inspired by God”, meaning that the Bible is the very Word of God. The Words of Scripture are the exact Words that God wants to speak to us! Scripture is the primary way by which God speaks to us in this fallen world.
2. The Scriptures give us “wisdom” about Jesus, for we cannot have “faith in Jesus Christ” without being told about him! God chooses to use his Scriptures as the means by which he tells us about Jesus.
3. The Scriptures “teach”, “reprove”, “correct”, and “train” us to be more righteous — to be more like Jesus. They “equip” us to serve God well!

Further, John explains that Jesus *is* the Word, and the Word is God:

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1,14)

What does it mean for Jesus to be the Word? Language is how we express ourselves and have relationships with others. The Word, as we said, is how God chooses to speak to us, and is therefore God's expression of himself to us! Yet, God also chose to express himself to us by coming to Earth in bodily, human form in Jesus and speaking to us directly through Jesus. Therefore, Jesus and the Word are how God speaks and expresses himself to us. However, even more significantly, John is explaining here that those two aspects of God are actually the same! Since the beginning of everything, the Word has been the piece of God through which he expresses himself; John is explaining that this is the portion of God that he sent to Earth to be Jesus. Before there was ever a human named "Jesus", there was the Word, the expression of God since before anything was created! God literally sent a piece of himself to Earth to become the human named "Jesus", and that piece of himself is the Word!

Therefore, since the Word is how God speaks to us, and since Jesus is the Word, and since the Word is God — therefore, when we spend time in God's Word, we are spending time with God Himself. How can we have a relationship with God if we do not spend time with him? If you had a spouse, but you only spent time with that spouse once per week or even once per month, do you still have a spouse? Probably not! What if you only talked to your spouse when you were in trouble and needed something? Your spouse would probably call you a "deadbeat"! God is similar in that we do not have a relationship with him if we do not spend time with him, which we do by reading his Word. (However, God is different from this example in that he will never, ever give up on us or call us a "deadbeat", unlike how a disgruntled spouse might. God's grace is endless through Jesus.) We must spend time in God's expression of himself if we want to have a relationship with him!

God's Word is also our defense against temptation, lies, and the devil. As Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16 above, Scripture is how we are "equipped". Whenever Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, he fought the temptation using Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11).

Finally, God's Word actively transforms us as we immerse ourselves in it. God says that we do not have the ability to learn about him by ourselves because our understanding is darkened by sin, or we have "a veil" over our hearts. However, when we give our lives to Jesus and are redeemed by Jesus, the Holy Spirit can draw near to us, begin to help us to understand God, and remove the "veil" from our hearts:

But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:16-18)

Thus, the Holy Spirit actively helps us to understand the expression of God, the Word. As he ministers to us and helps us to understand more about God, he also transforms

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us. The Holy Spirit not only helps us understand, but also helps this understanding to truly transform us. He makes us more like Jesus by “renewing our minds”:

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

Therefore, let us embrace a relationship with God, the renewing of our minds, and the transformation of our hearts by spending time in his Word!

Discipline #3: Silence and Solitude

Another crucial aspect of a relationship with God is spending time alone with him in “silence and solitude”. Jesus taught us to pray in solitude:

When you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret. (Matthew 6:6)

Jesus also exemplified this teaching of spending time in solitude with God. When Jesus performed major miracles or preached sermons, he afterwards often went off by himself to spend time with God alone. For example, after feeding the 5000, Jesus “withdrew again to the mountain by himself” (John 6:15). After “healing various diseases” and “driving out many demons” in Capernaum, Jesus retreated to solitude:

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. (Mark 1:35)

Luke says of Jesus, “But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.” (Luke 5:16). Finally, Jesus also spent time alone with God when he was upset, as in the Garden of Gethsemane right before his crucifixion. He asked the disciples to accompany him, but only at a distance: he “withdrew from them about a stone’s throw” in order to be alone with God (Luke 22:41). Together, these Scriptures show us that Jesus saw the necessity of spending time alone with God in order to “refuel” himself with God!

Jesus shows us a pattern of filling himself with God in solitude, pouring out on others until he is empty, and then retreating to refill with God in solitude again. When we are alone with God in silence, without the distractions of the world, we can more clearly hear the Voice of the Lord instead of the voices of the world. As Jesus showed us, spending time alone with the Father gives us the power to live life!

In order to spend time in silence and solitude, simply go to a place where you are alone and make sure to eliminate the distractions around you (silence). Then, listen for the “soft whisper” (1 Kings 19:12, [Christian Standard Bible]) of God in the silence. Fully expose your emotions, thoughts, and feelings before the Lord and allow Him to radically transform your heart through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Discipline #4: Biblical Meditation

Often done in conjunction with Reading the Word and Silence and Solitude, Biblical Meditation is the discipline in which you fill your mind with the Word of God. The Lord commands Joshua to do this, saying:

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“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.” (Joshua 1:8)

We are instructed by God to fill our mouths and hearts with His Word. This suggests to facets to this meditation.

First, we meditate for a deeper understanding of God’s Word. When done in conjunction with silence and solitude, the Holy Spirit often reveals deep truths about God and the verse or passage being meditated on.

Secondly, we are supposed to speak this truth, meaning we must know the verse or passage. So, within Biblical Meditation we should memorize the verse or passage.

At the end of his epistle to the Philippian church, Paul says:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Biblical Meditation is not a “one-time” action, but a repeated and constant action. We should constantly have the Word of God on our minds, dwelling on its purity, loveliness, and excellence.

Discipline #5: Sacrifice

In Acts chapter 2, we see an idyllic picture of the early church thriving in Christ:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-27)

The early church sounds like a paradise — the embodiment of what the church is supposed to be! They were “devoted”, helped all who “had need”, had “joyful and sincere hearts”, praised God, “enjoyed the favor of all the people”, and “added to their number” every day! How did the early church reach this point of We see that sacrifice came in many different forms for the early church:

1. **Sacrificing time and abilities:** The early church sacrificed all of their time to God: they “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.” They met every day “together in the temple” and in each other’s houses. The early church knew that spending time together in community with other believers was crucial to following God, so they freely sacrificed their time to do this.

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Today, we sacrifice our time in many equally important ways: going to church on Sundays, being disciplined, participating in a small group, spending time in prayer and silence and solitude, reading the Bible, and evangelizing.

One way that we should sacrifice our time and the abilities that God has given us is to serve in his Church. Whether we are skilled at technology, writing, discipling other people, or just loving people, God wants us to sacrifice our time and abilities to build his Church. Sacrificing our time to serve God in the Church and disciple others is just as important as sacrificing our time to grow in and worship God!

2. **Sacrificing pride:** We see humility — which is the submission of pride — all over this passage. The early church “held all things in common”, showing humility in their relationships with each other. They were not fighting and arguing with each other but rather humbly living in peace together. They “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”, indicating that they were humbly teachable. They “sold their possessions... and distributed the proceeds”, showing humility in their rights to their possessions.

In fact, one could argue that the root of all sacrifice is humility: the placing of others higher than yourself. In humility, you are willing to sacrifice yourself for others’ sakes. As Philippians says, “do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Thus, sacrificing our pride is the first step to any other sacrifice.

3. **Sacrificing money:** The first thing that many people consider when we talk about sacrifice is money, and the Bible does command us to sacrifice our finances. The early church “sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need”. Financial sacrifice doesn’t get much clearer or more extreme than that! We also see multiple commands to sacrifice our finances and possessions to God throughout Scripture:

In the **Old Testament**, God commands a tithe from his people:

Take from among you a contribution to the Lord; whoever is of a willing heart (Exodus 35:5)

In the **New Testament**, Jesus teaches that we are to give until it hurts — there is no sacrifice unless we are giving something that hurts. He explains this in the parable of the poor widow:

A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all [c]the contributors to the treasury; for they

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all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.” (Mark 12:42-44)

However, this is also an extreme example; God also calls us to be good stewards of what he has provided to us. We are commanded to give until it hurts but not necessarily to give everything that we own.

Paul explains this stewardship to the Corinthians, who he encourages to give “beyond their ability” but not “according to what [they] do not have”:

That in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the]saints... For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction. (2 Corinthians 8:2-4, 12-13)

Paul encourages us to give “according to what a person has” and “beyond [our] ability”; as we said above, we are expected to give until it hurts but are not necessarily expected to give everything that we have. Finally, we are to give in “eagerness”, not reluctance. We should be excited about the opportunity to sacrifice our possessions to God and his Kingdom!

However, as we have also seen, many other types of sacrifice are also required. God wants us to give him all of us, not just our money.

4. **Sabbath:** One clear Biblical command found in both the Old and New Testament is to take a day (24-hour period) to rest with God. Why should we keep the Sabbath?

Jesus kept the Sabbath. While Jesus found himself in many debates over the Sabbath. However, all of these debates were over the Pharasaical laws regarding the Sabbath. The Biblical command of the Sabbath found in Exodus says to keep the Sabbath holy and not do any work. Jesus, who was perfect, obeyed this command perfectly.

Without creating Pharaical rules, we should cut out a 24-hour period every week to rest from our labor and rest in God’s presence.

This may not seem like a sacrifice, but as humans we are conditioned to go rather than to rest. Turning off the productive portions of our minds runs directly against the grain of society. This discipline may be harder to do than it seems. It also takes sacrifice the other six days of the week to keep a Sabbath. When we procrastinate and do not finish our work, we leave ourselves work on our Sabbath and are unable to keep it.

Conclusion

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Sacrifice is an important spiritual discipline that helps us to become more like Christ, who sacrificed all of himself for us. Let us grow together in learning to give all of ourselves to God in return!

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Before You Begin

The following outline is a guide for how discipleship generally progresses, but of course real discipleship will not always follow this outline exactly. Every believer is different and has different needs. Some believers will proceed through discipleship at the same pace as this outline, while others may need to spend three weeks on the first meeting. Most importantly, listen to and trust the nudging of the Holy Spirit as he guides you, shows you what needs to be said, and changes the “script” as needed!

How to Engage with Someone for Christ

God has given us wonderful opportunities to tell people about Jesus in our families and friendships: which of your family members and friends do not know Jesus, or if they do know him, would like to know him more deeply? Reach out to them, bring up your relationship with Jesus and what God means to you in your life, and invite them to have a coffee or meal with you to discuss God further.

Even beyond our existing relationships, we are called to tell the whole world about Jesus. This calling includes telling strangers who we have never met! Sitting down and having a conversation about Jesus with a stranger is not nearly as scary as it seems to most people. Most strangers are completely willing to have a discussion about Jesus with someone who is friendly and kind. As long as we are not judgmental and aggressive, we have nothing to fear from conversations about Christ! Most importantly of all, we have to remember that Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be with us and give us the words to say as we told the world about him:

12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what must be said (Lk. 12:12 CSB).

Jesus exemplified how to engage with a stranger about the Gospel when he talked to the woman at the well in John 4:

⁷A woman of Samaria came to draw water.

“Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, ⁸because his disciples had gone into town to buy food.

⁹“How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans (Jn. 4:7-9 CSB).

Jesus starts by making a connection with the woman and showing her that he values her. Prejudice was so strong at this time that most Jews would “not associate with Samaritans” in any way, and further, men typically did not speak to women they did not know — yet Jesus purposefully engages with the woman, showing her that he values her.

Next, we see that Jesus begins to gently speak truth to the woman only after making this connection with her and showing her that he values her:

¹⁰Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water” (Jn. 4:10 CSB).

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Jesus is not only sharing truth here but also what that truth means to him personally. God is Jesus' "living water" – Jesus is sharing with the woman what God has done for him personally in his life.

Finally, after gently broaching the topic and conversing with the woman, Jesus very directly shares the Gospel with the woman:

²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Jesus told her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he" (Jn. 4:25-26 CSB).

Jesus connects with the woman, values the woman, speaks truth as it relates to his own life, and then presents the Gospel.

After having a similar discussion with the person (which hopefully ends in him or her accepting Jesus if he or she does not already know him!), invite him or her to meet again to discuss God and the meaning of life more. Set up a time and place over coffee or a meal. If he or she says, "no", it is okay! You have still been obedient to God!

One very important note is to never lead with talk about sin and damnation; there is a time for nonbelievers to confess their sins to God and repent, but that time is not when you are first meeting them. You have to earn the right to speak truth into someone's life by intentionally investing in him or her. Do we ever once see Jesus walk up to a stranger and tell him or her, "You're going to hell, sinner!"? Or do we see him lovingly build relationships with people by spending time with them, sharing meals with them, and serving them before guiding them into their need for repentance? Further, we see in the book of Acts and through their many letters that the first disciples evangelized in the same loving, long-term way.

Let us evangelize like Jesus evangelized: with love and an intentional, long-term investment of time into other people's lives!

The First Meeting

After engaging with the person and inviting him or her to discipleship, the first meeting of discipleship itself begins! The first meeting has a few goals: building trust and emotional vulnerability with each other, giving the discipler insight into the person's current relationship with God, and learning about key moments in the person's life that may need to be addressed later in discipleship. The final and most important goal is to lead the person into a relationship with Jesus if he or she does not already have one. The best way to accomplish all of these goals simultaneously is to exchange the stories of your spiritual journeys with each other.

Your Story

Your story should focus upon your relationship with Jesus and why he is so important to you. For some people, this may be a dramatic conversion story, such as "I used to be a drug dealer until Jesus transformed me." For other people, the story will be less

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dramatic but no less impactful. There may be no clear, dramatic turning point and no major trauma – yet, still, there is a life transformed by Jesus!

Many people who grew up in the church think that the core plot of their story is as simple as, “My parents introduced me to Jesus at a young age, but I felt like something was missing inside of me until years later, when I entered a deeper relationship with him. Now, I am getting to know him more and more every day.” However, even the person who thinks that his or her story is as simple as this most likely has much more detail to add to the story. This life is tragic, and no one escapes unscathed. Spend some time deeply thinking and praying about your story and the physical hardships and emotional wounds from which Jesus has rescued you; specifically ask God to show you what he has done in your life; and, finally, talk to your own discipler or pastor if you need guidance.

Your story should be no longer than 10 minutes so you can give the believer the majority of the time to share his or her own story. However, your story should also be long enough to give you time to share intimate details about your life – very specific hurts that you have experienced and ways that Jesus is healing you. Sharing vulnerable details like this builds vulnerability and trust with the believer. Instead of only telling the believer that you care about, trust in, and want to invest in him or her, you are putting action behind your words! As James says, “Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works” (Ja. 2:18 CSB). By sharing the vulnerable details of your journey of faith, you are showing the believer that you care “by your works” and not only by your words.

Here is an example journey of faith to guide you. Your story can be slightly more or less vulnerable than this (true) story, but this story can serve as a rough guide for the length and vulnerability that you should offer.

I was introduced to God at a very young age, but I spent most of my life living in shame and trying to please him instead of having a true relationship with him.

I very quickly began to spend all of my time trying to fulfill all of God’s commands perfectly and shaming myself when I inevitably failed – because we are all imperfect, and no one can fulfill all of God’s commands. Instead, I defined myself by how well I could please God and how well I could please the people I loved. If they were all pleased with me, then I was okay. If I messed up at all or even if the people I loved were just unhappy, then I was definitely not okay. So I grew up with a very low opinion of myself, seeing myself as a constant failure in the eyes of my God.

Alongside all of that, I also grew up with a rare and disabling genetic disorder which caused me to be bedridden for much of my teenage years. I was so lightheaded, nauseated, and exhausted that I literally could not get out of bed for years. Through this hardship, my parents led me in trusting God to bring me through it – either by healing me or by making my life still work out from a bed. Thus, God began to teach me to depend on him: I began to depend on him for my health and future, and someday he would also teach me to depend on him for my identity and forgiveness.

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After several years of being bedridden and being told by 39 different specialists all over the country that modern medicine could not help me, God raised me up out of bed. It was at the moment that we stopped striving, stopped chasing doctors, and simply trusted that God would work things out – at that very moment, God put a show on our TV that described my exact symptoms, we connected with the doctor on the TV show, and I was healed through a series of neurosurgeries! God brought me miraculous physical healing while also teaching us to depend on him!

However, as I said, at this time in my life I still lived in shame and believed that God was disappointed in me. I knew God from a distance, but I was too ashamed to have a close relationship with him. Thus, by the time I was 22, I was physically healed but spiritually and emotionally destitute. However, God would transform that, too.

At 25, I entered into a romantic relationship, which was always my deepest desire, but due to my emotional and spiritual unhealth, I spent all of my time trying to please her. As we were both thinking about marriage, one day my false efforts to please her accidentally triggered memories of severe abuse from her childhood, and she got so upset by the memories of her old trauma that she told me that I was a monster who needed to get out of her life, and she didn't speak to me again for a year.

As someone who defined his worth on what the people I cared about said about me, I took her definition of me to heart, and I fully believed that I was a monster who constantly failed both his God and the people he loved. I hated myself. However, God in his goodness was right there with me, and he sent me a series of people and resources to teach me about who he truly is: my old youth pastor, who suddenly reconnected after 7 years to talk about God's grace; a book about trying to please God and people that was enigmatically already on my bookshelf; and finally, after a year of teaching me more and more about him and his unconditional love for me, God brought me to this church.

The sermon on the very first day that I visited the church said that God is never disappointed in us, because through Jesus he has already forgiven us of every mistake. It said that we are loved simply because God loves us, not because we have done anything to earn his love. We have value because God created us and values us, not because of anything that we do. God's love for us and our value are unconditional because of what God has done through Jesus. God wants to help us improve, but he is never disappointed.

Finally, the last step in God's healing of me was placing me into discipleship, where I could learn more and more about God's unconditional love for me and allow it to transform my entire life. So, over the next few years, I began to have a real relationship with God, and God healed my broken spirit and emotions. And so I experienced firsthand a truth that Jesus repeated throughout his ministry on earth: how much better it is to be spiritually healed than physically healed!

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Listen, Learn, and Lead

The majority of the time in this first meeting should be spent listening to the believer's story, which should be much longer than the 10 minutes that we had for our story.

While the believer is telling his or her story in this first meeting – and also throughout discipleship in general – it is crucial that we truly, intentionally listen to the believer. Such active listening both shows that we care and gives us insight into the struggles that he or she may need help working through later in discipleship. We practice active listening using the model “listen, learn, and lead”.

The first step is Listen, which simply means that we give the believer our full attention, with our cell phones not even near our hands and silenced if at all possible. It is physically impossible to invest in someone who does not have our full attention.

The next step is Learn, which is practiced simultaneously with Listen: to Learn is to try to identify key points in the believer's words that help us to understand him or her and his or her struggles. We then make mental notes of these key points so that we can remember them later. On one level, we Learn simply because we are trying to get to know the believer as a friend. More deeply, we are also listening for clues to hidden root issues that may cause widespread problems in the believer's life and relationship with God. These are roots that need to be addressed with God's help through discipleship, but they are buried; at this point, the believer is probably not even aware of them. However, as we deeply Listen, we may hear clues to the issues, and we need to make mental notes to come back to these clues later – this is what it means to Learn.

For example, through Listening to a believer, you might hear her say, “My dad was always busy with work when I was little, so I didn't see him a lot.” She never directly said that this hurt her, but the very fact that she chose to include it as part of her story shows that it did greatly impact her. We can thus Learn that the believer may have some issues with her father to work through, and we can make a mental note to discuss her father later on in discipleship. We can further make a mental note to do a special study with the believer about who God Is as a Father and ensure that the believer does not think that God the Father has no time for her. Based upon our church's past discipleship experience, she almost certainly will view God as inattentive and uncaring until she works through her issues with her earthly father and learns – on more than a superficial level – that God is a perfect Father.

However, this first meeting is not the time to address any of these issues, as we have only just met and are just beginning to trust each other! For now, we will make mental notes of the clues and issues that we should later explore.

We should also avoid writing notes down on paper; this is taking our Learning too far, and will make the believer feel like he or she is being studied. Instead, taking mental notes is the right balance of deeply listening to the believer without studying him or her.

A final warning is the reminder that we are not trained therapists, and we must refer the believer to a therapist for any major root issues that require psychiatric care. Major trauma, physical abuse, emotional abuse, significant neglect, and suspected psychiatric disorders are a few of the subjects that should never be handled by someone who lacks psychiatric expertise. As we discussed previously, we believe that God is the source of

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all healing, but we also believe that he created psychiatry and proper training in order to accomplish his healing. If you have any doubt about whether an issue should be discussed, then it is best to refer the believer to a therapist.

Of course, discipleship can still continue while the believer is in therapy, but even then, those specific issues should not be discussed in discipleship unless the believer brings them up. We must be content to know that the believer may never bring up these issues in discipleship, even after God has used therapy to heal the issues. We have to let go and trust that God will heal the believer of these hurts, even though he may not use us and discipleship to do so.

The final step is Lead, which encompasses using the knowledge about the believer that we just Learned in order to guide the believer to explore his or her earthly issues and how those affect his or her relationship with God. We can guide the believer in exploring these issues by asking him or her poignant questions about the clues that we noted earlier.

We do not want to force any ideas on the believer, just as God does not force any ideas on us but instead patiently guides us closer to himself. As God does, we patiently lead the believer in exploring him- or herself with God instead of just telling him or her what to believe. We are Leading, not “Telling”. We also must never dismiss the believer’s feelings or perceptions, even when we know them to be wrong.

The goal is instead to Lead the believer in working through the issues that are separating him or her from God, first by Leading the believer to explore the earthly aspects of the issues and then by continuing to Lead the believer to explore how those issues impact his or her relationship with God. The destination of Leading is always the Word: we are ultimately Leading the believer to what the Word says about his or her issue, as God and his Word are the source of all healing.

Continuing our previous example, we might Lead the believer into thinking about her relationship with her father by asking her (not in the first meeting, but in a later meeting), “You said that your father was always too busy with work. How did that make you feel? How do you think that relationship affects you as an adult?” After we have explored her relationship with her earthly father, we might move on to her Heavenly Father by asking, “How do you think your relationship with your earthly father influences how you view your Heavenly Father?” If she does not know how to answer that question, we can continue to Lead her with slightly more specific questions – but still without forcing any ideas on her – such as, “Do you ever feel like God does not have time for you?” Finally, after exploring both the earthly and spiritual ramifications of this root through questions like these, we continue to Lead the believer by directing her to the Word. Together, we explore Bible verses about God the Father and begin to invite him to heal this hurt.

Very importantly, and as we have mentioned, Leading does not usually happen in the first meeting. We have only just met the believer, and we have typically not built up enough trust and vulnerability with the believer to ask deep questions and speak into his or her life.

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Of course, the first meeting is not the only time that we should practice Listen, Learn, and Lead. This invaluable tool for active listening should be used throughout all of discipleship (and our entire lives, honestly).

Beginning True Relationship

From listening to the believer's story, you should be able to tell if he or she truly has a relationship with God. Some key words that indicate a lack of true relationship are talking about God and Jesus as "Savior", "King", "Redeemer", and "Lord" without ever mentioning what God is doing in the believer's life, how God comforts him or her, what God teaches him or her, or what God means to him or her. The believer may know God as all of these things, but he or she does not know God as a Friend, Father, and Healer! Or, if the believer does not even mention these traits of God, the believer may have no relationship with God at all.

Directly and boldly ask the believer if he or she has a true relationship with God, and gently explain what a relationship looks like in your own life and why you think that he or she does not have that relationship. Specifically share what God means to you and why your relationship with God is so transformative and healing in your life. Ask the believer if he or she wants to have that kind of relationship with God, and lead him or her in a prayer that asks God to begin that relationship.

There is no magic prayer to recite in order to invite God into someone's heart. However, the following prayers can serve as examples to help guide you.

If the believer knows God and Jesus as Savior and Lord but not as Friend, Father, and Healer, the prayer might look like this:

God, I have already given my life to you and asked Jesus to forgive all of my sins. However, I haven't invited you into every part of me. I have been holding back parts of myself from you instead of being fully open and vulnerable with you. I haven't been spending time with you or sharing my deepest secrets with you. Today, I want to start being real with you, God, and I want to have a true, open relationship with you. I want to truly know you as a Friend, Father, and Healer! In Jesus' Name I pray, amen.

If the believer has no relationship with God and Jesus at all, the prayer might look like this:

God, I know that I am disobedient to you – I am a sinner. I know that you came to Earth as Jesus in order to bear the punishment for my disobedience, because you love me so much. I know that you rose to life again after dying in that punishment, defeating sin for me. I can't save myself, but because of your sacrifice, you can. Today, I ask you to forgive me of all of my sin and take control of my life. I want to follow you and know you from this day forward! Please come into my life, God. In Jesus' Name I pray, amen.

Closing

Go ahead and set a time for your next meeting, being as flexible as you can. Being flexible shows the believer how much you care about him or her.

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Finally, always end in prayer, specifically praying for any struggles and sins that he or she shared with you (if any). Make sure to ask for the believer's permission before praying over these vulnerable issues. By ending each meeting in prayer, you are doing two things: turning the believer's growth and journey over to God and leaving the believer feeling uplifted and encouraged for the coming week!

Second Meeting

The second meeting should start with asking the believer how he or she is doing this week, and sharing how you are doing. This will likely be a very superficial conversation and will not reveal how the believer is truly doing, deep down inside. Therefore, when you reciprocate, you can share something deeper about a wound with which you are struggling or which God has healed this week — or anything else vulnerable from your week. As we saw before, when you trust people with your vulnerability, they begin to trust you with theirs. Specifically ask the believer what God has done in his or her life this week.

If the believer still does not open up, you can begin to Lead him or her using the mental notes that you made in your previous meeting. Ask him or her specific but gentle questions about any struggles or news he or she had shared the previous week. As he or she answers, make sure to continue to Listen, Learn, and Lead! Lead the believer to Scripture that speaks into any struggles that he or she shares — again, as we said above, making sure not to “preach” at him or her. You can also share with him or her how you have been praying over these issues.

If your meeting is one-hour, then this portion will likely take around 30-40 minutes.

Next, you can transition into reading the Word together. For this first time of reading together, explain to him or her why reading the book of John will be beneficial (see “How Jesus Taught” above) and ask him or her to agree to read the Bible together. If he or she says, “no”, do not push the issue; simply continue to meet and build a relationship. You can circle back to ask again in a future meeting. If he or she says, “yes”, begin to read through John using the “Outline of the Book of John” as a guide. You do not need to show them this outline, but it can help to guide you through the book.

Again out of a one-hour meeting, reading the word will take 15-20 minutes.

As you wrap up your meeting, end by encouraging the believer in his or her struggles. Also encourage him or her to read the next section of John before your next meeting. Finally, set a time for your next meeting and close in prayer, as always.

Prayer and closing should take around 5 minutes of a one-hour meeting.

Third and Following Meetings

The third and all following meetings will look much like the second meeting, but with the addition of increasing vulnerability and accountability.

Vulnerability increases as you spend more and more time together. You naturally learn to trust each other more, and the believer should begin to open up to you more about

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his or her struggles. Some people are more private or less self-aware than others, so fully opening up takes different amounts of time for different people — anywhere from 1 to 30 meetings! The keys are to be patient, never forcing the believer to share when he or she is not ready; to be fully open yourself, so the believer trusts you and feels safe to reciprocate; and to pray for God to show him or her what needs to be brought into the open, for he or she may not even know.

Accountability increases as you begin to hold the believer responsible for taking action and ownership over his or her own life and relationship with God. When the believer is just starting down this road of spiritual growth, we should show him or her extra grace, not placing too much responsibility on him or her. Just getting started is hard enough, and the believer may not yet have a strong enough relationship with God to be fully committed to him. However, as the believer matures, and as we feel led by the Holy Spirit, we must begin to hold the believer accountable to taking ownership over his or her spiritual journey by practicing the spiritual disciplines: prayer, silence and solitude, reading the Word, and sacrifice. We of course must still have grace, just as God does, but we also must gently encourage the believer to take action. Most of all, we must pray that God transforms the believer and plants a desire for him and for growth in his or her heart! No accountability or action will ever transform someone; only God can do that!

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Reference

** All Scripture references come from the New American Standard Bible (1995) unless otherwise noted

¹ Dodd, C. (2015). *The voice of the heart: A call to full living* (2nd ed.). Sage Hill, LLC.