FRIENDSHIP WITH PURPOSE

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations”
-Jesus





DISCIPLE

What is a disciple?

The word disciple is lost in our cultural understanding today. You will not hear it or read it much in our current cultural context. It is a churchy word and not very popular or defined.

The Greek term for a disciple in the New Testament is *mathetes*, which means more than just student or learner. A disciple is a follower; someone who adheres completely to the teachings of another, making it their way of life and conduct. It refers to a student who follows the teaching and patterns of another that the student becomes a clone. It refers to someone who takes up the ways of someone else. Applied to Jesus, a disciple is someone who learns from him to live like him.

In the ancient world, gymnasiums were not arenas for sporting events. They were training centers to teach students the thoughts of Plato and the system developed by Aristotle, known as Aristotelian logic. The students thus trained were "gymnatized," which is a Greek word for a gymnasium.

So successful was this discipling process that it allowed the Greeks to influence the whole Greco-Roman world. This process was called Hellenization, in which people who were not Greek began to adopt Greek thinking, language, and culture. That was all part of this concept of discipleship.

In reality, you are already being discipled by the influence of culture. Today people are discipled by Netflix, ESPN, or CNN. Think about it, sports fanatics idolize their favorite players and attend every performance. Epic guitarists are worshiped by their fans as rock gods. And large groups of every day irreligious people spend their days devoted to their electronic devices. We are all products of being discipled by the influence of society and culture. The question is, "Am I being discipled to the full life Jesus promised?"

Jesus commissions us in Matthew 28:19-20 to *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

What does it actually mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

If we are a disciple or make disciples, we need to know what it is. Followers of Jesus were called disciples long before they were ever called Christians. To put it simply, a disciple is a follower of Jesus. But even that doesn't tell us what it means to be a disciple. During the times of Jesus, there were curious followers, casual followers, conflicted followers, and committed followers. These followers are defined as:

Curious Follower: Those who follow Jesus with caution but are openly seeking

Conflicted Follower: Those who want what Jesus offers but also wants what the world offers

Casual Follower: Those who believe fully in Jesus but follow as a consumer and when it is convenient

Committed Follower: Those who are all in and fully devoted their lives to risking and following Jesus



Start with the end in mind

To better understand what a disciple is, we need to start by identifying God's desired end goal for our lives. Discipleship is about hitting the bullseye of that end goal. Let's start with the end game and work our way back from there. Think of it this way, destination determines direction. Once we have a destination for our lives in mind, we can define and determine the direction discipleship should head in. So, the answer to this question can be summarized in this way:

(Life Transformation is the main goal God has for our lives!)

When we talk about life transformation, we are not just talking about a better version of ourselves, a few modifications, tweaks, or some self-help improvements. When we talk about life transformation, we are talking about our lives decreasing so that the life of Jesus can be formed and increased in us. This is what we call the formational journey. It is the process of my life supernaturally being transformed by the Holy Spirit to look more like the life of Christ in me and through me.

It's Experiencing and Expressing the Essence of Jesus

Think about it, the moment a person puts their faith in Jesus, they begin the process of experiencing the life of Jesus inwardly, and they begin to express His life outwardly. The Holy Spirit works in us by peeling away our broken characteristics and replacing them with godly characteristics. His work in us makes us more and more like Jesus. We begin to think like Jesus; feel like Jesus; act like Jesus. Even at the best version of ourselves, we will never compare to experiencing and expressing the life of Jesus. This is what Jesus meant when he said in John 10:10, *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* Life to the fullest is what we all want!

A transformed life is a more fulfilled life. At the very depths of our being, we experience the life Jesus lived. A life of healing, wholeness, peace, hope, power, and purpose. It's about not settling for the ordinary but living an extraordinary life. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the life of Jesus is transferred into us.

A TRANSFERRED Life leads to a TRANSFORMED Life

Those who believe in Jesus, and put their trust in Him, begin a new life in His power. The Bible describes this new life as a transformation. Many have compared the Christian transformation, the old self into the new self, in the same way as a caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly with metamorphosis.

Webster's dictionary defines metamorphosis as *a change of physical form, structure, or substance, especially by supernatural means* or *a striking alteration in appearance, character, or circumstances.* Through metamorphosis, the caterpillar becomes a totally new and much more beautiful creation.

Metamorphosis compares to the process of change that followers or disciples of Jesus undergo in becoming more like Him. The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* In other words, we are not reformed, rehabilitated, or reeducated, but we are re-created (new creations) living in divine union with Christ. And Romans 12:2, tells us *Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

A Transformed Life moves from ME-CENTERED to JESUS-CENTERED

Upon a person putting their full trust in Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit invades the hearts of believers, transforming their lives to be more Jesus-like. The Bible states that God has good, pleasing, and perfect plans for his disciples, and he wants them to be transformed people with renewed minds, living to honor and obey him. Over time, we begin to develop new perspectives, passions, possibilities, and pursuits. More importantly, we transform from being self-focused to being Christ-focused. We are transformed from being the caterpillar that is self-absorbed and obsessed with consuming food and destroying plants to a brilliant butterfly who sails through the air, flying and pollinating flowers and beautifying the earth.



Transformation happens when we move from our brokenness to God's brilliance.

The Bible references the character of Jesus as the glory or brilliance of Jesus. The more we are transformed, the more His brilliance shines through our brokenness. God defines His glory in terms of His character on display through us. The Bible describes this transformational phenomenon in 2 Corinthians 3:18: 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 by the Spirit.

A Transformed Life is a Fruit-Bearing Life

The outcome or fruit of this transformed life is promised in Galatians 5:22: the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Imagine living a life free of shame, failure, bondage, charades, or insignificance. We can live a life of power and purpose that will impact our identity, community, marriages, churches, families, friendships, jobs, and culture. Making disciples is about helping others unlock their God-given potential and move from the ordinary to the extraordinary!

Being a Disciple means Living a Radical Lifestyle

When we hear the word radical, we often think of religious extremists, crazy bull horn people on the streets, or even an off-the-grid hippie cult. However, the word radical means to be rooted. We know a tree or plant needs to have a healthy root system to bear fruit. Its root system ensures the health and quality of the fruit it grows.

Roots Determine Fruits

As disciples who want to bear the character fruit of Christ in our lives, we need to be rooted in Christ. Colossians 2:7 says, Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Jesus, also speaking of fruit-bearing said in John 15:15, I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing. Maturity for a disciple is determined by the fruit we bear in our lives and is the test of authenticity as mentioned in Matthew 7:16 By their fruit, you will recognize them.

Life Transformation is the main goal God has for our lives

Every person, at some point in life, must decide whether or not to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. It is the starting point of a lifelong journey in discipleship as a follower of Jesus. As the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4:15, we are to grow mature in Christ. We grow up into the head of the body, who is Christ. Such growing up is the process of spiritual formation.

Spiritual maturity is not measured by knowledge and information, but formation into the fullness of Jesus in us and through us. Maturity is experiencing and expressing the essence of Jesus each day. As we mature, we reflect more and more on His fruit, His life, His character, His values, His heartbeat, and His mission. The moment we believe, through faith, God puts His Spirit in us as a deposit of his DNA, and as we learn to walk with His Spirit in partnership and union, we see His life manifest brighter and stronger within us.

Discipleship involves Storytelling

We all love a good story with plot twists, character development, and cinematic heroes. The Bible tells us that Jesus, being fully God, showed up and walked the earth facing all of the earthly struggles we wrestle with. He didn't relate to us from a distance away but immersed himself deep into the story of human brokenness. As Jesus followers, when we experience his life, we are literally merging our story with his story. You could say it like this: Jesus made our story his story so that we can make our story his story. When we share about the transformation of our lives, we tell the story of Jesus, and he emerges as the hero of our narrative.


THE
Adventure
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FOUR INGREDIENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

When we look at ways God uses to shape our transformation, we can recognize four ingredients that all work together. In some ways, it's God's recipe for life-change.

Presence is about understanding transformation happens from the inside out. It's the role of the Holy Spirit inside of us to manifest the life of Christ. He enhances and alters our nature and then empowers us to live the life of Christ. Transformation is a supernatural experience, and when we are in tune with the inner working of the Spirit, we partner with the transforming and forming work he is leading us in. The Holy Spirit sets the agenda and timeline for our discipleship. Walking in step with him allows us to get on his page and surrender to what he highlights in our lives.

Practice is about aligning our life with the values of Jesus. God invites us to partner with Him by practicing the rhythms of humility, compassion, prayer, studying the Bible, being in community, serving, evangelism, and rest. There are intentional practices we can implement in our lives that position us to experience Him and express Him deeply. Rhythms are strong, repeated kingdom values, adopted to position us to be formed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. They put us in the correct posture to receive the fullness of the life God promises.

Problems are about the trials, challenges, and struggles we all face in life. We know during times of hardship and pressure, we can either become better or bitter at the circumstances in life. It's during these refining circumstances that areas of our life need to be stripped away. Hardship also brings to the surface those imperfect areas of our life that need the most transformation. Character traits like pride, ego, jealousy, anger, or apathy can all come into focus as areas we need to see eliminated and refined.

People are about the community of influence we allow to shape us. The people we surround ourselves with can shape us for the better or for worse. A Christ-centered community was always part of God's disciple-forming strategy in our lives. Discipleship was never intended to be a hermit living in a cave experience. Even though we have personal encounters with God that are significant to our formation, full maturity is carried out in our lives through deposits from others. As we live in community, we all help shape and help form one another. This is more than a social club or affinity groups. This is a community that seeks to live out the values of Jesus in rhythm together.

Being a Disciple means Living a Radical Lifestyle

WHAT DOES MAKING DISCIPLES LOOK LIKE?

Discipleship is a pursuit. It's a pursuit of God in the context of community.

Making disciples is more than an informational journey... it is a relational journey.

While discipleship is all about Jesus, it is not a solitary endeavor. Discipleship is relational, and to fully respond to the Great Commission, we need to be disciples who are making disciples of Jesus. This means we need to spend consistent time with other believers. Jesus and his disciples spent a lot of time together (Acts 1:21-22). They ate together, walked together, rode in boats together. They even fought together (Luke 9:46-48). The twelve disciples were in each other's lives, constantly and intentionally. While we are all called to become disciples of Jesus, we become disciples with one another, learning how to love God and each other as we go. We need to allow others to disciple us by letting them challenge us and encourage us in our walk with God. This is why church and honest relationships with other believers are so central to the Christian life—we need one another in this journey of becoming wholehearted disciples of Jesus.

When Jesus imagined disciple-making, he imagined a loving community in the process of transformation and formation. Jesus once looked at his disciples and said, I call you my friends. Jesus defined discipleship in the context of friendship.

Discipleship is Friendship with Purpose

The context for discipleship is relationships. The New Testament uses the context of these discipling relationships as friends and family. To reach maturity and reflect the full potential of Jesus in us, we need both the dynamic of friendship and church family. It's a both-and, not either-or experience. Let's start with the friendship aspect.

Jesus had friends. He was a friend.



Of course, Jesus isn't just any old friend. He's also Creator, Master, Savior, and King. But he is still a friend. Perhaps being those things and a friend, the Friend, makes his friendship all the more wonderful.

Friendship was Jesus' unique method for discipleship. He was a leader but never the lord-it-over kind of leader. He was the come-alongside kind, the kind who eats dinner at your house, takes long walks with you, and tells you stories. He encourages you when you mess up, empowers you to do ministry, and prays for you.

In John 15, he told his disciples explicitly, You are my friends. And he continues to say, I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give to you.

Having called his men, Jesus made a practice of spending time with them. This was the essence of his training program—letting his disciples follow him. Knowledge of Christ was gained by association before it was understood by explanation. He ate with his disciples, slept near them, and talked with them for most of his active ministry. Although there is no command to commit to such a level, it seems convincing that Jesus shows how important relationship development is to growing a disciple. If this does not happen, the disciple may feel like a project and not a person. The person should know he is loved, not only by Christ but also by their leader. Jesus never asked anyone to do or be anything which first he had not demonstrated in his own life. His desire was to get the disciples into a vital experience with God.

Jesus is passing the baton of his model to his disciples. Calling his disciples friends, he tells them that their mission is to bear fruit—that is, make disciples.

Making disciples is more than an informational journey...
it is a relational journey.

But what if we take the Jesus model of discipleship and turn it into something unrecognizable? All too often, we have made discipleship top-down, transactional, a one-hour meeting over coffee, a church service, or an eight-week class. We live in a society where pastors and elders do most of the ministry work instead of equipping the saints. Looking at Jesus as our example, we do not see him inviting everyone to the synagogues to hear the Rabbi preach or teach that weekend; we see him guiding a group of disciples and living life with them. He was teaching the disciples to follow after him as he followed after God. That is discipleship. What's most important to consider is that you cannot make disciples if you aren't one yourself. Discipleship is a lifestyle, not a program.

Discipleship is Family with a Purpose

As we read the New Testament, after the Gospels and book of Acts, the word disciple is never mentioned again. It doesn't mean there were no disciples or that discipleship wasn't emphasized; it means the context of making disciples evolved into the context of family. The most significant metaphor or image used to describe the church is the church as a family. It seems that God could have chosen to reveal His truth about the church and how it functions in so many ways. He was not looking for a marketing firm or an ad agency. He wasn't looking for a club, society, or business. Nope! He said, just give me a family. It's the idea of a band of brothers or a sisterhood of women.

Discipleship is both Small and Large

Discipleship is both personal and corporate. Discipleship has to happen in the context of a small group. It is in this small group that you can be known and share life together. Jesus said when two or three are gathered, I am there with them. You do not need church buildings, budgets, or crowds to make disciples. As local churches function as a large family where each member contributes to the whole, each and every other part is built up and shaped towards maturity.



God seems very satisfied to faithfully use this imagery, especially as it learns to rely on him, learns about him, and discovers how they are designed to relate to each other in maturity and transformation. Maturity is something that is nurtured as we all play our part and mutually build each other up. Consider the way Paul explains how each of us is responsible for the communal maturity in each other.

In Ephesians 4:11-13, the Bible says: So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Discipleship is both Scattering and Gathering

We tend to speak about discipleship in strictly one-to-one or small group terms and not corporate discipleship. Jesus has designed our growth to take place in his body where he has gifted members and to serve each other. Everyone is essential and necessary to come together for the growth of the whole body. The scattered church can only disciple as it is discipled when it is gathered.

Discipleship apart from the church will always fall short because no single person as a disciple-maker has everything to offer to grow those they are investing in. Every member must work together for the growth of the body. You cannot provide everything a disciple needs; only the church can. Not only does this prevent disciple-makers from creating their personal little cult following, but this frees you from thinking you need to be everything for those you disciple, which is exhausting. This also means you and those you disciple need the church.

The definition always determines the relationship. If you see the church as a machine, a business, a set of programs, a series of meetings, a building, or a place, it will determine how you live out your life as the church.

Maturity is something that is nurtured as we all play our part and mutually build each other up.

How you define something determines not only how you think about something, but how you relate to something. Jesus decided that his church would be the family of God, rather than a smooth-running institution to be proud of, or a successful business to invest in or even an organization with greater efficiency. Plain and simple, He offered a family, a way of relating, and a way of being

This Journey of Discipleship is a Process

Discipleship is not a one-size-fits-all. When most people think of the disciples of Jesus, they usually think of the twelve disciples. However, there were hundreds of followers of Jesus, all ranging in different places on their personal faith journey.

In an instant gratification results-oriented culture, we can make discipleship a project like a weekend warrior wanting to renovate their basement. In reality, all of us are on a journey with peaks and valleys, with steps forward and steps backward, with victories and failures. Discipleship is not about a plug-and-play program. It's a process of meeting people where they are and then walking with them into life transformation. Personal growth and transformation are relative to each individual. Comparing or contrasting one journey to another can lead down a path of discouragement and frustration. What looks like growth for one person may actually be a step back for another. All of us are at a different season of life and different spaces within the formational journey.

One of the beautiful things about Jesus is how he took the time to meet people where they were and engaged them in terms directly connected to where they were at in life. That's why any effective process or program related to discipleship has to have a lot of space for what is needed and what God is doing. We need to delete the assumption that every city, every church, and every person is the same. Why? Because they aren't!



The secret to discipleship is not about being perfect but being a partner

Oftentimes, we think being a disciple-maker means having all the right answers, or we have to be a perfect model of a disciple. It really isn't about following a twelve-step program and graduate in six months. It's also not trying to force our growth plan on someone else with our expectations of how they should be transformed according to our timeline. The art of being a really good disciple-maker is being in tune with the aspects of transformation the Holy Spirit is highlighting in their life at the moment. Maybe the Holy Spirit is highlighting humility, but you want to coach them on compassion. Both are good but being a disciple-maker is partnering with the inner work of the Spirit in their life uniquely.

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, those we are discipling aren't making progress as we imagined. That's okay. The responsibility of bringing about growth is fully with the Holy Spirit. We can guide them in the right direction and commit their growth to prayer, but we must wait on the Lord for His work in their lives. Don't be discouraged if the growth is coming slowly. Nothing is too slow for God, and His timing is always perfect. Be patient and wait on the Lord, continuing to build your relationships and faithfully do your part in making disciples.

Discipleship is an Adventure

The word adventure is exciting. An adventure can take you places you didn't expect for reasons that weren't clear at the time. There may well be a sense of movement or progress on an adventure, but any destination you reach is just the next step in the journey, and even going backward can propel the plot forward. A part of what makes a journey or adventure exciting is who you journey with. Adventures are best shared with others. What's the joy in climbing Mt. Everest when there is no one there to celebrate with you?

Being a disciple-maker is partnering with the inner work of the Spirit in their life uniquely

On an adventure, you never know what twists or turns are around the next corner, which characters will be introduced in the next chapter, or what new information will cause you to reevaluate everything you thought you knew so far. An adventure can have a goal or a timeline, but any adventurer knows you have to hold your plans loosely and see what happens on the road. The adventure is not just sitting around talking about being and doing great things in a small group sipping coffee. Peter never walked on water until he got out of the boat. Think of all the adventures Jesus had with his disciples. Healing the sick, casting out demons, traveling the world all to live this wild and exhilarating life of a Jesus follower.

To be on an adventure is to be committed to a process you know you can't control; but you know that process will also bring new knowledge, new discoveries, new risks, and new rewards. Your delight in following Jesus is tied directly to a spirit of adventure; a willingness to courageously embark without knowing all the twists and turns, and yet discover the meaning of the journey on the way. Making disciples is the most difficult thing you will ever do. And making disciples is the most exciting, challenging, engaging, heartbreaking, frustrating, meaningful, scary, fun, delightful experience you will ever be a part of.

Being a Catalyst

Personally, I love the word catalyst. It means to be an agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action. A catalyst Jesus follower is a contagious Jesus follower. Jesus had a vision that all of us who believe in him would be a catalyst for change in others. Jesus said it this way in John 14:12, Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these. Did you catch that? He said that any one of us who believes in him will do even greater things.

Jesus imagined that once you believe, you become an agent of change in another life. It's like paying it forward at the coffee shop. When you become a follower of Jesus, you pay it forward by helping others grow in their faith as well. The Bible calls this disciple-making. Not only do you put time and energy into the growth of another person, but the process of making a disciple increases your own growth and increases your sense of purpose.



You don't have to be a Bible scholar or expert at following Jesus to be a catalyst for someone else. You simply just have to have a desire to see others experience God in their own journey. The best way to be a catalyst is through the relationships you already have. This is why we like to call making disciples a friendship with purpose. Friendships are the best context to be a catalyst in their life. But instead of having a friendship centering around common interests and activities, friendship with purpose centers around Jesus and how he wants to use our relationships to encourage transformation and growth in each other.

Being a catalyst and pursuing friendships with purpose involves three key aspects:

Invite: Jesus invited others into his life. Discipleship always starts with an invitation. Inviting means to pursue someone with intentionality. It means to initiate and open your life to include space for others. It means including them in your way of doing life and creating a margin to spend time together.

Invest: Jesus invested in others. Investing means making a commitment to the spiritual growth of another. It means to create a safe place for someone to seek an answer, share doubts, and ask tough questions. It doesn't always mean having the answers, but it's seeking answers together. It means to care for the other person and share your life experiences and lessons for their benefit. It means spending time, energy, and love for a deeper connection with God and their life transformation.

Inspire: Jesus inspired others to do even greater things than him. Inspire means to blow wind or fan into flame the potential and maturity in someone else. Inspire means recognizing the potential and then affirm, encourage, promote and empower them towards their destiny and purpose in life. Inspire means to launch them out of the nest to take flight and soar, but also be there to pick them up when they stumble and help them take flight again.

Friendships are the best context to be a catalyst in their life.

This is why you don't need to have a slew of qualifications to disciple someone else. The original twelve were just ordinary, un-schooled men. You just have to follow and obey Jesus in your own life and be willing to help someone else do the same.

Making disciples is not something reserved only for pastors, priests, ministers, and church leaders. It is the responsibility of all believers. So the question remains: Who are you discipling? What younger believers are in your life that you can bring along in their relationships with Christ? Are you walking together with someone and sharing your life in Christ with them? Are you working with them through their doubts and rejoicing with them in times of celebration and breakthrough?

True discipleship involves investing in other believers, walking through life with them, and shepherding them to Christian maturity. Discipleship is purposeful, fun, and rewarding. It is one of the greatest joys of our lives. However, like most valuable things, discipleship also requires energy, time, and hard work. It is costly.

Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost us our lives. Jesus put it bluntly in Luke 9:23-25, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? To be a disciple of Jesus means that we have given up our lives to follow him wholeheartedly and unreservedly. It means that our lives are no longer our own—they are His.

When Jesus talked with his disciples about experiencing life to the fullest, he challenged them to have an ALL IN mentality. Having an ALL IN mindset and attitude is about living a life centered around Jesus where we decrease so that he can increase in us.



Jesus said it best in Luke 19:26; That's what I mean: Risk your life and get more than you ever dreamed of. Play it safe and end up holding the bag. Living as ALL IN requires a Risk ALL attitude. Risk requires vulnerability and the willingness to be known by others. Risk requires sacrifice and obedience to God's voice and direction. It means to risk all that I have to be all that he wants me to be. This is the Vertical Pursuit Creed!

SIX BENEFITS OF BEING A DISCIPLE-MAKER

1. It will give you personal satisfaction living your life as something bigger than yourself

2. It will grow you in the faith more than anything you have ever done

3. It will reward you with the joy of seeing others live out their destiny and purpose

4. It will create deep, lifelong relationships with those you disciple

5. It will bring the Word of God to the forefront of your life

6. It will let you leave a legacy that will echo for eternity

Risk All To Be All

15 REASONS WHY MOST CHRISTIANS DO NOT MAKE DISCIPLES

They have never been discipled. Discipleship starts with a desire more than a model. It may be true that you have never been officially discipled in a spiritual sense. But the concepts of coaching or mentoring are probably something you can relate to in your own life experience.

They do not know how. This may sound like the first reason, but it is not. Many believers have been discipled, but their discipling never included how to disciple another person. Any discipling that does not entail teaching and demonstrating how to do the same with another is incomplete. It is only disciples who can make disciples.

They are more focused on themselves. Disciple-making is a selfless task. To make disciples of Jesus requires dying to self all throughout the process, which in turn shows the one being discipled how to die to self too. Many run from disciple-making because they simply love themselves more than others and more than obeying Jesus.

They are comfortable. We all strive for comfort in life. Comfort is not always bad, but it can be an idol. Comfort can make a Christian mission lazy. His call to make disciples will always be more important than our comfort.

They are too busy or distracted. This reason is an excuse of priority. If a Christian is not making disciples because they are too busy with other non-mission-related things, then what they are communicating to Jesus is their 'thing' is more important than His purpose. His call to make disciples will never pit a Christian against their God-entrusted daily responsibilities (e.g. parenting, marriage, job, health). He will always provide enough time for us to do both.



They have let fear override obedience. For many, the thought of witnessing to someone about Christ and/or helping someone else follow Christ is terrifying. They are either afraid they are going to screw up their part or mess up the other person. Both of these reasons stem from doubting God working through us.

They have let complacency set in. This reason is about a false sense of effort. They have equated making disciples with serving at the church, or completing a task, or acquiring some Christian achievement, and so on. They have become complacent with checking boxes and not actually making disciples.

It's not because they cannot, but because they want not. This reason is all about desire. Disciples of Christ want to make and build up more disciples of Christ. It is an inherent desire brought by the Holy Spirit.

They are consumer-driven, not commission-driven. A consumer-driven Christian is more focused on what they can receive, less about what they do. A commission-driven Christian is more focused on their effort and what they can offer toward fulfilling the Great Commission. If you simply receive from your church, or other faith-based ministries, or faith-based resources, but you offer little to nothing toward making disciples yourself, you are a consumer-driven Christian.

They think it is the Pastors responsibility. This reason could be because of a lack of biblical explanation of discipleship by the church or a diversion of personal responsibility. Yes, a pastor is responsible for making disciples. And yes, pastors are responsible for setting the example of making disciples. But every Christian is responsible for making disciples. The Great Commission was given to disciples to go and make more disciples.

A consumer driven Christian is more focused on what they can receive, less about what they do.

They think making disciples is preaching sermons and/or teaching classes. This reason could too be because of a lack of biblical explanation of discipleship by the church, or a diversion of personal responsibility, or innocent ignorance. Sermons and classes are merely two ways of making disciples. They are not the only ways.

They feel under-qualified. This reason may sound like the second one, but it is different. Not knowing how to make disciples and feeling under-qualified to do so are two different things. Christians that use this reason are gun-shy and/or misinformed. Being gun-shy is not necessarily because of a lack of knowing how to disciple others or a lack of knowledge (biblical and wisdom) that can benefit other believers. Being gun-shy is when they feel like they need to know more before they actually go and do so. If a Christian is actively following Jesus, no matter their level of maturity or biblical knowledge, then they can (and are too) make disciples.

They think they have to become a leader first. This reason comes from being misinformed, or from a lack of biblical explanation of discipleship by the church, or a diversion of personal responsibility. Leadership is not a requirement for making disciples. Every Christian that is actively following Jesus can (and is to) make disciples.

They think they have to be a Bible scholar. Nowhere in Scripture does it state or imply that Christians must be experts before they can obey Jesus in making disciples. Christians do not need to go to Bible college or seminary to make disciples. So long as they follow Jesus, they can make disciples, no matter their biblical knowledge.

Culturally, people are not open to the kind of vulnerability that discipling entails. Making disciples is about inviting others behind the curtain of your own life. It definitely means living a life of transparency and authenticity which means others will see your imperfections. Remember, we are not discipling people to be close to ourselves but pointing them to be followers of Jesus.



Cohorts defined

In ancient times, a cohort was a military unit, one of ten divisions in a Roman legion. Today, it means any group of individuals with something in common.

Discipleship naturally happened simply from a group of people hanging out and growing together. And discipleship will not happen overnight. To understand what discipleship is on a deeper level, we must understand what discipleship is not. It's not a small care group of men and women who will cry on each other's shoulders because of trials and struggles. While this is a part of it, this is not the main goal of a discipleship cohort. It's also not about the numbers. Whether you have three or twenty in a discipleship group. What matters most is the quality of relationships you build with one another and the quality of the relationship each person has with God. Cohort groups free us up to engage in meaningful and authentic relationships. When two (or three, or four) broken people come together and have nothing to hide, no one to impress, no mask they are trying to put on, it becomes much easier to engage in honest relationships. Honest relationships are at the center of effective discipleship.

A Discipleship Cohort is a group of 3-6 people who will commit to doing community while vertically pursuing the life of Jesus together. Cohorts use the strategy of Jesus to Invite, Invest, and Inspire.

INVITE

Invite Means Choosing. It's about identifying and pursuing others with an invitation to join a cohort group and journey together. We all long to belong and there is an honor to be included and part of a team. Cohorts can last 3-5 months or even longer to multiply into new cohorts.

Cohort groups free us up to engage in meaningful and authentic relationships.

INVEST

Invest Means Consistency. It's about commitment and making the priority of time to invest in each other regularly. Cohorts should try to meet often and consistently; weekly or every other week. Cohorts can meet in restaurants, coffee shops, or homes.

Invest Means Content. It's about selecting the right material the cohort will study together, discuss, and apply to their lives. Cohorts can choose from resources like the Vertical Pursuit Discipleship Book, or other bible study resources.

Invest Means Caring. It's about showing support and encouragement for each other. Care is about helping to meet the practical, spiritual, and emotional needs of each other. It's about creating a safe place to be authentic, transparent to share struggles, receive prayer, and help in confidence and trust.

Invest Means Cultivating. It's about reaping what you sow. You get out of community and relationships what you put into them. Doing life together and sharing life experiences forms bonds and memories that can last a lifetime. Moving beyond a Bible study and actually going on adventures, retreats, mission trips, or just celebrating special occasions together can reap a harvest of relational and spiritual fruit.

INSPIRE

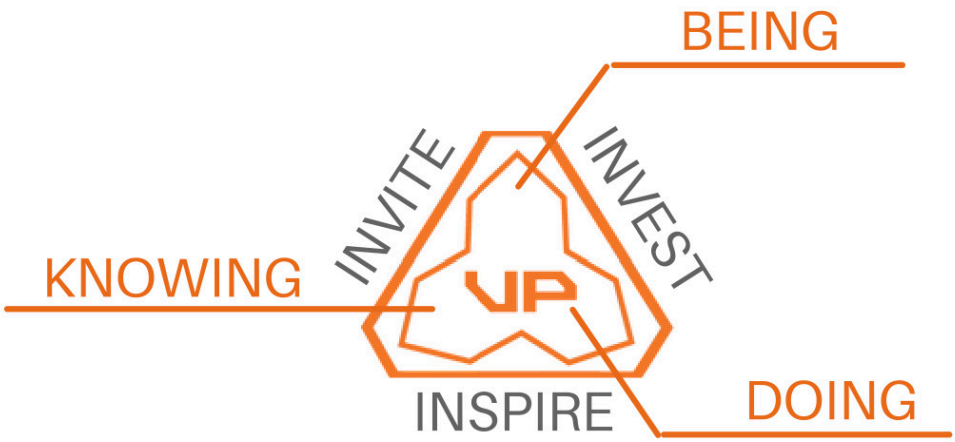
Inspire Means Championing. It's about sharpening each other and cheering each other towards achieving greater things and living out the Jesus life. Championing can be challenging each other, motivating each other, and celebrating each other as we seek to live out the values of Jesus. Faith and courage can be contagious and spurring one another on to do things that in and of ourselves would lack the tenacity to do alone.

Inspire Means Creating. It's about expanding and making more disciples through multiplication. All healthy things grow and need to reproduce. Inspiration is the act of affirming and empowering others to start new cohorts to disciple more people.



Using the VP discipleship triad

When Jesus was mentoring his disciples, he spent time incorporating conversations centered around knowing, being, and doing. Knowing who we are in Christ, then being who we are in Christ, leads us to do the work of Christ. As we meet and share our lives together through Bible study and sharing, we grow in our knowledge of Christ. Being is related to our identity as children of God. And as ones with knowledge of God and awareness of our identity as God's ambassadors, we do the works of the kingdom.



When you meet as a cohort, be sure to not just grow in knowledge but take the time to discuss how that knowledge is affecting your being. Each cohort time should also incorporate action steps to live out the doing. Jesus would often send out the disciples with a mission of doing or trying. As the disciples went out and applied what he commanded, they would learn first hand from putting into practice what they were learning. Think of it as trial and error. Sometimes doing was met with success and other times with failure.

Cohorts should be a safe place to circle back and process with your friends what is working and what is not. It's in the processing space that others can rework their strategy of doing and make the changes to try again. Following Jesus in the doing is not about not failing; it's about failing forward and having a support team to cheer you on in the process.

Sometimes "doing" was met with success and other times with failure.

TEN PRACTICES TO LEADING A HEALTHY COHORT

Don't Do All The Talking. The best leaders facilitate conversations rather than dispensing information. The best leaders strive to facilitate the conversation and keep it moving from member to member rather than talking to the members.

Be Comfortable With Silence. Embrace the 15 seconds of silence, which may seem like an eternity. Realize that through silence, the Holy Spirit is working on people. Learn to be comfortable with ambiguity.

Be A Good Listener. So simple yet so hard to do. Don't just listen – actively listen. James 1:19 tells us to be slow to speak and quick to listen. The best leaders listen with their eyes and ears.

Don't Answer Your Own Questions. The whole purpose of asking the question is to create an environment where group members feel safe to share. It's not about getting the right answer. When people are silent with some of these questions, embrace the silence. If no one really speaks you could say something like, "Paul, you look like you were going to say something…"

Ask Open-Ended Questions. Open-ended questions help to tell more than a simple yes or no. Questions like, "What did you like about the verse or chapter of the book?" will bring up more than yes/no questions. Use what or how questions to get people to open up.

Make Sure Everyone Understands The Purpose Of The Cohort From Day One. Your job as a leader is to cast a compelling vision. Keep that purpose at the forefront of every meeting and look for ways to promote vision-casting.



Try To Involve Everyone. Your cohort might be too big if everyone isn't able to speak their thoughts. Cohorts of over eight members will have difficulty doing this. In those cases, it's best to divide the cohort in half.

Remember, The Focus Is Not On Getting Through The Material. Know that if you are very task-oriented, you may concentrate more on getting through the study than allowing members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

Pray. Pray before your meeting, after your meeting, and during meetings. Pray in-between cohort meetings. Ask God for his help and leading. It is helpful to make a list of prayer requests and keep them on a bedside table so you can be very specific in your prayer request.

Remember That God Is In Charge. You were not selected to lead this cohort on your own; God chose you, He will be with you. Trust in His power and lean on him for support.

Cohorts
use the strategy
of Jesus to Invite,
Invest, and
Inspire.

HOW TO START YOUR DISCIPLESHIP COHORT

Pray: Take a few weeks and prayerfully consider two or three others you can invite into the cohort.

Invite: Personally approach each person. You might ask something like, "The Lord has placed you on my heart. Would you be willing to join me and one or two others on a weekly journey to explore a better life?" Ask each person to prayerfully consider the invitation. Specifically, ask them to not respond immediately but to really examine whether they have the time and the heart for the journey.

Communicate: If you are using resources, be sure everyone has what they need ahead of time, and find a time everyone will meet consistently.

Expectations: People need a clear sense of what is expected of them. Talk about vulnerability, commitment, and what potential the group has to multiply to start new cohorts.

Time & Place: Set the first regular time together and get started. Quiet places are best to develop transparency and intimacy. At the first gathering, ask each person why they decided to commit to the cohort and what they hope to get out of it.

Guide & Facilitate: Take time and move at a comfortable pace. Encourage questions. Address personal matters. Life will happen while you are together. The Vertical Pursuit resources are only tools, not something to check off your to-do-list. Remember, discipling cannot be forced through a curriculum. Discipling relationships require an individualized approach that takes into account the unique growth of those involved. The goal is Christ-likeness, not to complete the curriculum. It's all about loving God and each other.

Keys For Growth: The group will only go as deep as your willingness to be vulnerable, honest, and transparent. Intimacy, accountability, and transparency are paramount.

Multiplication: Within your cohort, always look for those who may launch out and start a new cohort on their own. When the time is right, it's important to celebrate and encourage others to step out on their own to start a new cohort.


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Join the VP discipleship tribe by leading a cohort today!

Jesus intentionally invested himself in the lives of a few men. He ministered to large crowds but went deep with a small group. This idea goes against our Western philosophy that everything bigger is better. Jesus understood the exponential impact of twelve men on the world. Limited on earth by time, Jesus could not train crowds of people, but He could impact the lives of a few who would then disciple others.

Imagine with me. What could happen if we followed the example of Jesus? Imagine the impact of a small group of Christ-followers with whom we invested not only our knowledge but our very lives. I believe the result would be exponential.

Think of those who have, or are, investing in your spiritual growth. Be sure to express your gratitude for their influence in your life. Begin praying about who God is calling you to help grow spiritually. Discipleship is about the continual investment in others. Let's make disciples who make other disciples.

When Jesus was mentoring his disciples, he spent time incorporating conversations centered around knowing, being, and doing.