

Reclaiming Disciple-Making: Life-on-Life Training Priority 2

In a world where churches often prioritize attendance numbers, outreach events, and information-heavy teaching, we've lost sight of Jesus' original model of disciple-making. This document explores the second priority in effective disciple-making: life-on-life training. We'll examine how moving beyond classroom-based discipleship toward intentional, relational investment transforms both individuals and communities. Drawing from biblical examples and contemporary research, we'll discover five essential adjustments to bring authentic disciple-making back to the center of church life. Join us on this journey to rediscover the power of walking alongside others as Jesus did with His disciples.

The Problem with Our Current Approach

Many churches today have replaced Jesus' relational disciple-making model with approaches that are easier to implement but less effective at producing mature disciples. Instead of life-on-life investment, we've prioritized:

- Accumulating people rather than developing them deeply
- Counting attendance as our primary metric of success
- Relying on outreach programs and events rather than personal relationships
- Focusing on doctrinal downloads rather than transformed lives
- Creating systems that make people try to measure up rather than experiencing grace

These approaches might appear successful on the surface, but they often fail to produce disciples who can make disciples—the true measure of success in Jesus' Great Commission. Churches often focus on counting attendance rather than measuring spiritual growth and disciple-making capacity. While numbers can be helpful indicators, they shouldn't be our primary measure of success.

Accumulating People

We've focused on gathering large crowds rather than deeply investing in a few who will multiply. Jesus demonstrated that quality transformation of a few leads to greater impact than shallow influence on many.

Doctrinal Downloads

Information-heavy evangelism assumes that knowledge alone transforms lives. While sound teaching matters, transformation happens through application in community, not merely through intellectual understanding.

Measuring Up

Performance-based discipleship creates environments where people feel they must earn acceptance through religious achievement rather than growing from a place of grace and belonging.

Jesus' Residential Model: All of Life Shared

Jesus demonstrated a radically different approach to disciple-making that we've largely set aside as outdated or impractical. His model centered on taking people into His everyday life rhythms—living, serving, and ministering together.



Continuous Contact

Jesus spent approximately three years in close, regular contact with His disciples—not just weekly meetings.



Shared Life

The disciples observed Jesus in all contexts—public ministry, private prayer, meals, travel, conflict, and rest.



Active Participation

Jesus involved disciples in ministry, gave feedback, and gradually increased their responsibilities.



Intentional Multiplication

He prepared them to continue His work and make more disciples after His departure.

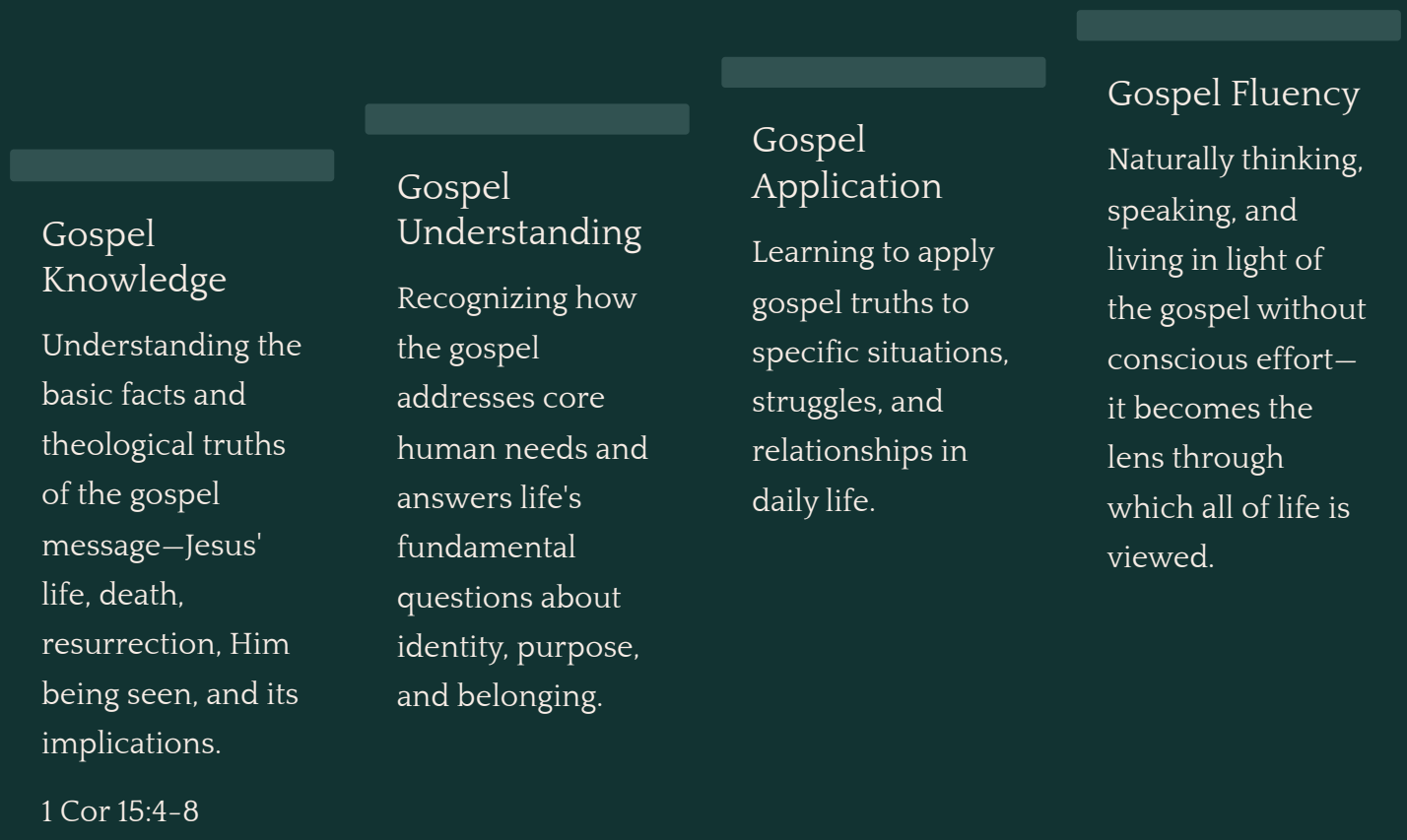
Mark 3:13-15 captures the essence of Jesus' approach: "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve **that they might be with him** and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons."

Notice the primary purpose: "that they might be with him." Being with Jesus preceded and prepared them for the doing of ministry. Presence came before performance, relationship before responsibility.

Jesus' primary method of disciple-making was essentially residential—He invited disciples to share life with Him over an extended period, allowing them to observe, learn from, and gradually participate in His ministry.

Creating a Pathway to Gospel Fluency

Effective disciple-making requires helping others become "fluent" in the gospel—able to see, understand, and apply it to every aspect of life. Gospel fluency means moving beyond basic understanding to a place where the good news of Jesus naturally flows into every situation.



Gospel Clarity develops as disciples learn to see Jesus as "Chief among 10,000" and "altogether lovely" (Song of Songs 5). They must understand that the gospel isn't just about salvation from hell or the reward of eternal life, but freedom for abundant life. As Jeff Vanderstelt explains:

"It's not us working for God or us trying to be Jesus to people, but rather Jesus coming and dwelling in us so that He can work in us and through us to show what He's like to the people that He sends us to. The mission God calls us to go on is not a mission He calls us to go on for Him, but rather a mission He wants to go on in us and work through us in everyday life."

This fluency comes through consistent practice in community, not just information transfer. Disciples need to regularly articulate how the gospel addresses real-life situations, failures, and victories, gradually developing the ability to see all of life through the lens of Jesus' finished work.

Jesus as Our Everything: The Heart of Gospel Fluency

For disciples to become gospel-fluent, they must come to know Jesus not just as Savior but as the answer to every human need and longing. This comprehensive view of Christ transforms how we understand both our struggles and our purpose.

Jesus as Identity

In Christ, we discover who we truly are—beloved children of God, accepted and valued apart from our performance, free from the need to prove ourselves through achievement or comparison.

Jesus as Security

His unchanging love and sovereign care provide the security our hearts crave, replacing our attempts to find safety through control, wealth, relationships, or reputation.

Jesus as Significance

Our purpose flows from His calling and Kingdom work, offering meaning that transcends temporary accolades or worldly measures of success.

Jesus as Satisfaction

He fulfills our deepest desires in ways that temporary pleasures never can, addressing the soul-thirst that drives our addictions and idolatries.

Scripture portrays Jesus as the supreme treasure worth sacrificing everything to possess (Matthew 13:44-46). This isn't mere religious hyperbole—it's the actual experience of those who come to know Him deeply.

Gospel Clarity means learning to articulate how Jesus specifically addresses our everyday struggles. Rather than seeing the gospel as relevant only to conversion, disciples learn to apply gospel truths to anxiety, conflict, temptation, disappointment, success, and every other life experience.

This comprehensive understanding of Jesus doesn't develop through classroom instruction alone. It emerges as disciples process real-life experiences in community, guided by mentors who can help them see how the gospel speaks to each situation.

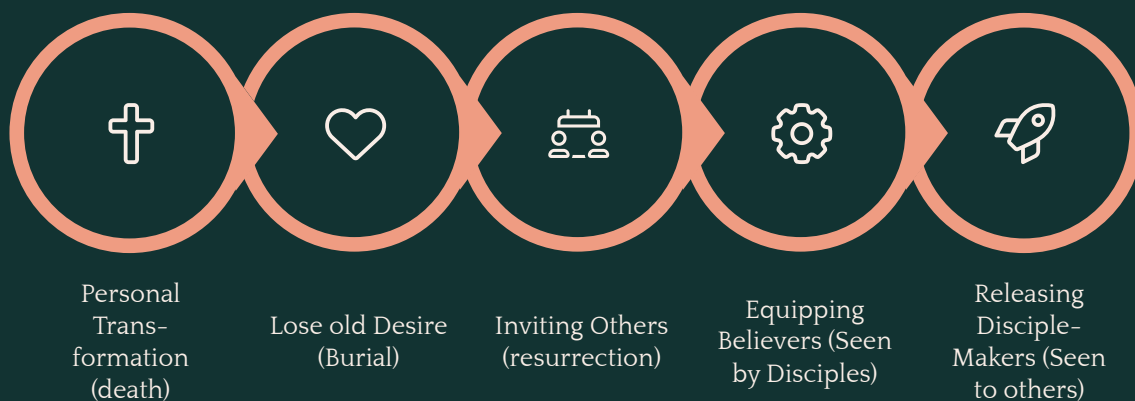
The Gospel as the Engine of Multiplication

The gospel doesn't just transform individuals—it naturally creates a multiplication movement. When disciples truly grasp and experience the good news, they become increasingly motivated and equipped to share it with others.

"The gospel that forms you is the same gospel that will propel you to send... Sending is a function of gospel growth and maturity. Multiplication happens when disciples are being made, the gospel is being proclaimed, and people are growing in faith."

— Brad Watson

This multiplication principle is embedded in the very nature of the gospel. As we experience the freedom, joy, and purpose that come through Christ, we naturally want others to experience the same. Our gratitude for grace (the love of Christ compels us, 2 Cor 5:14) becomes the motivation for mission. **Note: Below shows the Gospel (1 cor 15:4-8) in action in a persons life. It starts at Calvary.**



Disciple-makers must intentionally help others:

- Articulate their own gospel story in compelling ways
- Recognize opportunities to share the gospel in everyday conversations
- Connect others' struggles and questions to relevant gospel truths
- Invite people into gospel-centered community where they can experience transformation
- Equip new believers to begin making disciples themselves

When disciples see reproduction as the natural outcome of their growth rather than an additional religious obligation, multiplication becomes a joyful expression of their maturing faith rather than a burdensome duty.

Deepening Gospel Fluency in Life-on-Life Context

Life-on-life discipleship provides the ideal context for developing gospel fluency—the ability to see, understand, and apply the gospel to every aspect of life. Unlike classroom settings, shared life experiences reveal the actual beliefs driving behavior and create opportunities for gospel application in real time.

Identifying False Narratives

Life-on-life contexts reveal the stories disciples believe about themselves, others, and God that contradict gospel truth. These often surface in everyday conversations and reactions to circumstances.

Speaking Gospel Truth

Disciple-makers help reframe these narratives through the lens of gospel truth, showing how Jesus' work specifically addresses each false belief with better news.

Practicing New Responses

Together, they practice gospel-motivated responses to common situations, gradually replacing performance-based or fear-based reactions with faith-based ones.

For example, when a disciple expresses anxiety about a workplace conflict, a gospel-fluent mentor might help them:

1. Identify the underlying belief ("I need everyone's approval to be secure")
2. Connect this to the gospel ("In Christ, you already have complete acceptance from the only One whose opinion ultimately matters")
3. Practice a gospel-motivated response ("How might you approach this conversation differently if you're secure in God's approval rather than striving for theirs?")

These real-time applications in everyday situations gradually develop gospel fluency in ways that theoretical discussions cannot. The disciple learns not just gospel concepts but how to apply them to actual life challenges.

Additionally, seeing a mentor demonstrate gospel fluency in their own life—how they process disappointment, handle criticism, navigate temptation, or respond to success—provides a living model that classroom teaching alone cannot offer.

How to Life-on-Life

While few can duplicate Jesus' exact residential model, we can apply the principles of life-on-life discipleship in today's context. Modern disciple-makers can create intentional shared-life experiences that accomplish similar objectives.

Intentional Time Together

Regular, scheduled investments combined with spontaneous interactions. This might include weekly meetings plus occasional shared meals, ministry activities, or recreational time.

Multiple Contexts

Interacting across various life settings—service projects, social gatherings, family events, and ministry opportunities—to provide a more complete picture of lived faith.

Transparent Living

Allowing disciples to observe your actual life—including struggles, decision-making processes, and how you apply faith to real challenges.

Progressive Responsibility

Gradually shifting from "I do, you watch" to "We do together" to "You do, I watch" to "You do with someone else"—a process that builds confidence and competence.

Practical approaches for implementing life-on-life discipleship include:

- **Meal-based discipleship:** Regular shared meals provide natural contexts for meaningful conversation and modeling hospitality
- **Ministry apprenticeship:** Involving disciples in your area of service with increasing responsibility over time
- **Life skill mentoring:** Teaching practical skills (financial management, parenting, etc.) while integrating biblical principles
- **Shared projects:** Tackling service opportunities together that require collaboration and allow for teaching in context
- **Recreational fellowship:** Building relationship through shared activities that create natural opportunities for meaningful conversation

The key is intentionality—deliberately creating opportunities for disciples to observe and participate in your life and ministry rather than limiting discipleship to formal teaching settings.

Five Adjustments: Reclaiming Jesus' Disciple Training Model

To reclaim authentic disciple-making in our churches, we need to prioritize these five fundamental approaches. These shifts align our practices more closely with Jesus' model while addressing the limitations of our current methods.

From Programs to Relationships

Move from relying on structured programs as our primary disciple-making strategy to prioritizing intentional relationships where life-on-life investment occurs. Programs can support relationships but shouldn't replace them.

From Information to Transformation

Shift from measuring success by knowledge acquisition to evaluating genuine life change. This means creating environments where truth is applied, practiced, and integrated into daily life, not just learned intellectually.

From Classroom to Life Context

Expand disciple-making beyond formal teaching environments into everyday life situations where principles can be demonstrated, practiced, and refined in real-world settings.

From Addition to Multiplication

Replace efforts focused primarily on adding more attendees with strategies that develop reproducers who can make disciples who make disciples, creating exponential rather than linear growth.

From Professional to Personal

Transition from viewing disciple-making as primarily the responsibility of professional ministers to equipping every believer to engage in the disciple-making process within their sphere of influence.

These adjustments require significant changes in both mindset and methodology. They often mean doing less to accomplish more—focusing on depth with a few rather than breadth with many. While these shifts might initially reduce visible metrics like attendance or program participation, they ultimately produce more mature disciples capable of reproducing themselves.

Church leaders must evaluate their current systems and structures to determine whether they facilitate or hinder these adjustments, being willing to reimagine ministry approaches to align more closely with Jesus' demonstrated method.

Adjustment 1: From Programs to Relationships

The first critical adjustment involves shifting our primary disciple-making strategy from program-dependency to relationship-centrality. While programs can play a supporting role, they cannot substitute for the intentional, personal investment demonstrated by Jesus.

Program-Centered Approach

- Relies on curriculum and structured content delivery
- Often limited to scheduled meeting times
- Typically focuses on consistent content for everyone
- Success measured by attendance and completion
- Leader functions primarily as information provider
- May create dependency on the program itself

Relationship-Centered Approach

- Built on authentic connection and shared life
- Extends beyond formal meetings into daily rhythms
- Adapts to individual needs, questions, and growth areas
- Success measured by maturity and reproduction
- Leader functions as model, mentor, and coach
- Creates capacity for independent spiritual growth

This adjustment requires honest evaluation of our current approaches. Many churches have robust discipleship programs but minimal relationship-based disciple-making. The pathway to change includes:

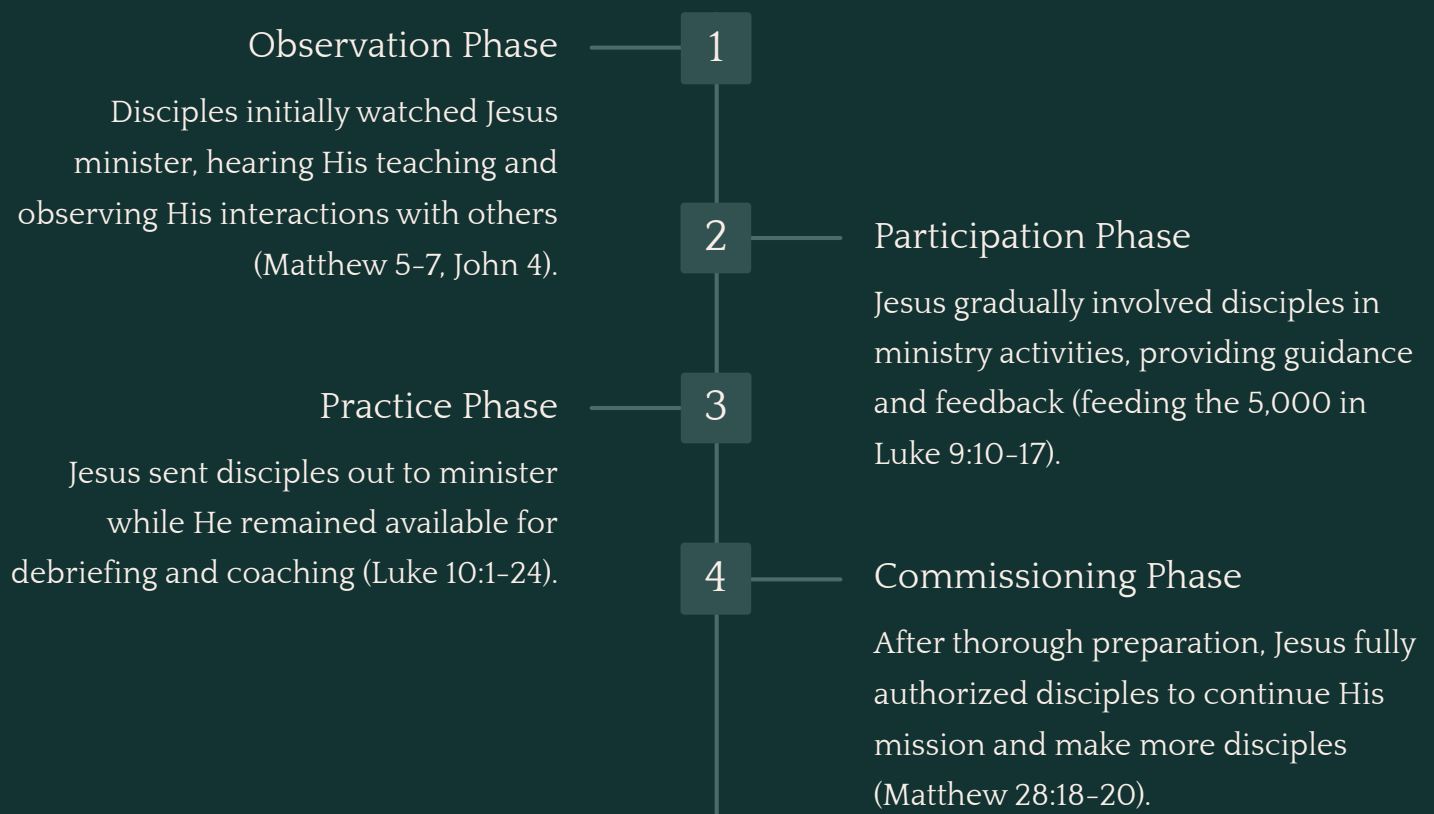
1. Redefining expectations for leaders to include relational investment, not just program management
2. Creating margin in ministry schedules to allow for organic relationship development
3. Training leaders in effective mentoring and coaching skills
4. Celebrating stories of transformation through relationships, not just program milestones
5. Developing metrics that value quality discipling relationships over program attendance

This doesn't mean eliminating all programs—they can provide structure, content, and gathering opportunities. However, programs should support relationship-based discipleship rather than replace it. The key question becomes: "Are our programs creating environments where discipling relationships naturally develop, or are they inadvertently hindering such connections?"

Jesus' Residential Model: All of Life Shared

Notice the sequence and priority from Mark 3:13-15 mentioned earlier:

1. First, Jesus called specific individuals into relationship ("called to him those he wanted")
2. Second, His primary purpose was shared life ("that they might be with him")
3. Only then did ministry activity follow ("send them out to preach")



This residential model meant disciples observed how Jesus handled conflict, responded to criticism, managed fatigue, prayed privately, and related to various people. They received immediate correction, personalized explanations, and tailored challenges based on their individual needs and maturity level.

The Strategic Genius of Jesus' Method

"When you examine His life, being the Son of God, he could have chosen any method to ensure the world would hear of His gracious sacrifice for them, to ensure that that the message would be shared around the globe. The world is His, so all resources were at His disposal... He could have chosen any method imaginable and unimaginable, yet He chose discipling people who would disciple others."

— Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, "Designed to Lead" (p. 155)

Jesus' choice to invest deeply in a small group wasn't a limitation—it was strategic brilliance. As the Son of God with unlimited resources at His disposal, He deliberately chose the method that would create lasting transformation and exponential growth.

The strategy was simple but profound: invest deeply in a few who would then invest in others. This multiplication approach ultimately reached more people than Jesus could have reached personally, even with His divine capabilities.

This approach requires intentional investment by the disciple-maker. The question for modern church leaders isn't whether this approach works—Jesus proved it does. The question is whether we're willing to exchange our efficient programs for effective disciple-making through personal investment.

Understanding Spiritual Giftedness: APEST

Effective disciple-making includes helping others discover how God has uniquely designed them to contribute to the body of Christ. The biblical APEST model can assist in this process.

Scripture reveals that Christ gave specific gifts to the church through different types of leaders and members with varied functions:

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

These gifts aren't just for professional ministers—they represent different ways all believers can function in the body. Understanding our primary orientation helps us serve more effectively and find greater fulfillment in our contribution.

The APEST Model

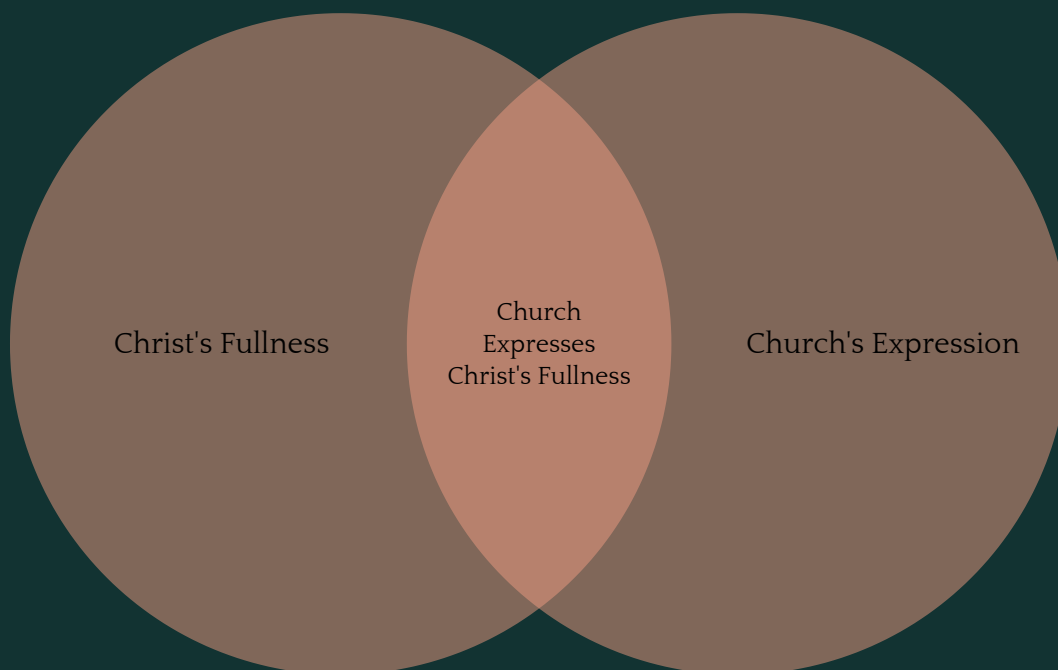
- **Apostles:** Pioneers who extend the gospel to new contexts and establish new works
- **Prophets:** Those who speak truth by discerning God's heart and challenging the status quo
- **Evangelists:** Those who naturally share the good news and recruit others to the mission
- **Shepherds:** Caregivers who nurture, protect, and guide the community
- **Teachers:** Those who clarify truth and help others understand and apply God's Word

Helping disciples discover their primary orientations in these frameworks enables them to serve from their strengths while appreciating others' different contributions. This prevents frustration from serving in misaligned roles and builds stronger teams through complementary gifts.

The Biblical Foundation for Diverse Gifts

Scripture reveals that the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ reflects the very nature of Jesus Himself. Colossians 1:19 tells us, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell," indicating that Jesus embodies all gifting perfectly within Himself.

Similarly, Ephesians 1:22-23 declares, "And He (God) put all things under His (Jesus) feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." This reveals a profound truth: the church, as Christ's body, expresses the fullness of Jesus through its diverse members and gifts.



This theological foundation has several important implications for disciple-making:

1. No individual believer possesses all gifts—we need each other to experience Christ's fullness
2. Our particular gifts reflect specific aspects of Christ's character and ministry
3. Diverse gifts are by design, not deficiency—they create healthy interdependence
4. The complete expression of Christ requires the functioning of all gifts in harmony

Helping disciples discover their gifts isn't about finding their "spiritual personality type" but about recognizing how God has designed them to express particular aspects of Christ's character and work. This shifts the focus from self-discovery to Christ-revelation, as each disciple learns to embody Jesus in their unique way while appreciating how others express different dimensions of His fullness.

The APEST Model: Christ's Ministry Through His Body

The five-fold ministry gifts described in Ephesians 4:11-13 (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, Teacher) represent how Christ continues His ministry through His body, the church. Understanding these five expressions helps disciples recognize their primary orientation for service.



Apostle

Pioneers who extend the gospel to new frontiers, establish new works, and create systems. They think strategically, see the big picture, and help the church adapt to changing contexts. They ask: "What new ground should we take?"



Prophet

Truth-tellers who discern God's heart, challenge the status quo, and call the community back to faithfulness. They provide needed correction and keep the mission aligned with God's purposes. They ask: "Are we being faithful to God's Word and ways?"



Evangelist

Recruiters who naturally share the good news, invite others into the mission, and maintain outward focus. They keep the community's heart for the lost and ensure the gospel message remains central. They ask: "How can we reach more people with the gospel?"



Shepherd

Caregivers who nurture relationships, protect community health, and provide guidance through life's challenges. They create safe environments for growth and healing. They ask: "How are people doing spiritually and emotionally?"



Teacher

Clarifiers who help others understand truth, apply Scripture to life, and develop biblical thinking. They ensure the community remains grounded in sound doctrine. They ask: "Do we understand what God has revealed to us?"

Most disciples have a primary and secondary orientation within this framework. Helping them identify these patterns enables more effective service and reduces frustration from ministry misalignment. Equally important is helping disciples appreciate other orientations different from their own, recognizing that the body needs all functions to express Christ fully. When disciples understand their APEST orientation, they can intentionally develop in their areas of strength while finding complementary partners who bring different perspectives and abilities to shared ministry.

The Working Genius Model: Understanding Natural Contributions



Wonder

The gift of pondering possibilities and seeing greater potential in situations. These people naturally ask, "What could be?" and imagine new opportunities.



Invention

The gift of creating original solutions and ideas. These people naturally develop innovative approaches and find creative answers to problems.



Discernment

The gift of intuitively evaluating ideas and situations. These people naturally assess which ideas have merit and identify potential issues before implementation.



Galvanizing

The gift of rallying and inspiring others to take action. These people naturally build momentum and enthusiasm around ideas and initiatives.



Enablement

The gift of providing encouragement and assistance. These people naturally support others and help remove obstacles to progress.



Tenacity

The gift of pushing projects to completion. These people naturally focus on results and ensure that ideas become reality through persistent implementation.

The Working Genius model, developed by Patrick Lencioni, provides another helpful framework for understanding how different people naturally contribute to a team or project. While not explicitly biblical, this model aligns with Scripture's teaching about diverse gifts working together in the body.

Understanding these natural areas of contribution helps disciples:

- Recognize where they can add the most value in ministry contexts
- Identify which types of tasks will energize versus drain them
- Appreciate the necessity of different contributions throughout a project lifecycle
- Build complementary teams where all six "geniuses" are represented

This framework helps explain why some discipleship approaches work well for certain people but not others. Some disciples thrive in theoretical discussion (Wonder/Invention), while others need practical application (Enablement/Tenacity). Effective disciple-makers adapt their approach to engage disciples according to their natural working style.



Establishing Missional Values and Spiritual Disciplines

Effective disciple-making includes helping others identify and cultivate values and practices that shape their daily lives. Core values function as internal motivations that guide decisions, while spiritual disciplines provide structured practices that form Christ-like character over time.

Identifying Core Values

Core values reflect what matters most to us and shape our decisions, often unconsciously. Helping disciples articulate their values brings clarity to their spiritual journey. Some values particularly aligned with discipleship include:

- Integrity: Living integrated, whole lives consistent with biblical truth
- Community: Valuing authentic relationships and mutual accountability
- Growth: Embracing continuous development and transformation
- Service: Finding fulfillment in contributing to others' well-being
- Generosity: Freely sharing resources, time, and talents
- Authenticity: Being honest about struggles while pursuing holiness

Cultivating Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines are intentional practices that create space for God's transforming work. Essential disciplines for disciples include:

1. Sabbath: Regular rhythms of rest and delight in God's goodness
2. Prayer: Ongoing communion with God through various prayer forms
3. Scripture: Regular engagement with God's Word for transformation
4. Fasting: Temporarily denying physical desires to focus on spiritual needs
5. Solitude: Creating space for undistracted communion with God
6. Community: Intentional participation in the body of Christ
7. Service: Using gifts to meet needs and express Christ's love
8. Generosity: Sharing resources as an expression of trust in God's provision
9. Witness: Consistently sharing the gospel through words and actions

Both values and disciplines must be cultivated in the context of grace rather than legalism. The goal isn't rigid conformity to rules but developing patterns that facilitate genuine transformation and missional living.

Disciple-makers help others discover which disciplines particularly resonate with their personality and spiritual needs, creating sustainable rhythms rather than overwhelming obligations. This personalized approach recognizes that while certain practices are essential for all believers, the specific expression may vary based on temperament, season of life, and spiritual gifts.

Adjustment 2: From Information to Transformation

The second critical adjustment shifts our focus from knowledge accumulation to genuine character transformation. While biblical knowledge is essential, it must lead to changed lives rather than merely informed minds.

Transformed Living

Consistently living out biblical truth in daily decisions and relationships

Practical Application

Implementing biblical principles in specific situations with guidance and feedback

Personal Reflection

Processing how truth addresses personal experiences, challenges, and questions

Comprehension

Understanding the meaning and implications of biblical teachings

Information

Basic knowledge of biblical facts, stories, and concepts

Many discipleship approaches focus primarily on the bottom two levels (information and comprehension) while giving minimal attention to the upper three (reflection, application, and transformed living). True disciple-making must address all five levels, with particular emphasis on helping people move from knowledge to practice.

Three Essential Elements of Personal Disciple-Making

Effective disciple-making requires three fundamental elements that mirror Jesus' approach with His followers. These components work together to create an environment where deep transformation and multiplication can occur.

Assessment

Helping disciples understand their spiritual condition, gifts, and growth areas. This involves honest evaluation in light of Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Biblical basis: 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Ephesians 4:11-13



Accountability

Providing loving oversight as a spiritual parent would, offering encouragement, correction, and consistent support through life's challenges.

Biblical basis: 1 Timothy 1:2, 1:18, 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11-12

Apprenticeship

Walking alongside disciples in ministry contexts, demonstrating skills and practices while gradually giving them increasing responsibility.

The principle: "Where I go, you go; what I do, you do."

These elements cannot be fully implemented in a classroom setting. They require the disciple-maker to open their life to others, sharing both formal teaching moments and informal life situations. This approach is time-intensive but produces disciples capable of reproducing the process with others.

Assessment without accountability leads to knowledge without transformation. Accountability without apprenticeship creates dependent disciples who can't function independently. All three elements must work together for effective disciple-making.

Practical strategies for this adjustment include:

- Designing learning experiences that include both instruction and immediate application
- Creating accountability structures that focus on obedience, not just understanding
- Asking application-oriented questions: "What will you do differently because of this truth?"
- Providing regular opportunities to share how truth is being applied in daily life
- Modeling transparency about personal struggles to apply Scripture

This shift often requires teaching less content but ensuring deeper integration of what is taught. It means creating space for processing, practicing, and providing feedback rather than simply covering more material. The goal isn't biblical literacy alone but biblical living.

Adjustment 3: From Classroom to Life Context

The third essential adjustment expands disciple-making beyond formal teaching environments into everyday life contexts where principles can be demonstrated, practiced, and refined in real-world settings. Disciple-making does not come from a class or a seminar. It cannot happen in a Sabbath School each week. Jesus gave a very different model to us that seems to have been lost or put aside as an outdated ancient practice.

Research consistently shows that learning retention increases dramatically when concepts are immediately applied in real-life situations. This is particularly true for biblical spirituality, where the gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation can be substantial.

Practical ways to implement this adjustment include:

1 Shared Ministry Experiences

Invite disciples to participate in ministry activities alongside you, providing guidance and feedback during and after the experience.

2 Life Skill Training

Teach practical skills like conflict resolution, financial management, or parenting in the context where those skills are needed.

3 Processing Real Situations

Use actual challenges disciples are facing as case studies for applying biblical principles rather than hypothetical scenarios.

4 Hospitality-Based Discipleship

Open your home regularly to provide a setting where disciples can observe how faith shapes family dynamics, decisions, and relationships.

This adjustment requires significant time investment and lifestyle openness from disciple-makers. It means being willing to let others see both our strengths and weaknesses as we navigate life's challenges—something that doesn't happen in a classroom setting.

The Ineffectiveness of Classroom Discipleship

Traditional classroom teaching has become our primary method of disciple-making, despite strong evidence of its limitations.

"A new study finds that undergraduate students in classes with traditional stand-and-deliver lectures are 1.5 times more likely to fail than students in classes that use more stimulating, so-called active learning methods."

— Aleszu Bajak of science.org

The lecture-based approach dominates our churches despite being one of the least effective ways to foster learning and transformation. Consider how little you remember from school lectures or even last week's sermon. This was not Jesus' method of making disciples.

The Challenge of Current Western Teaching Methods

Our default approach to disciple-making often relies on Western educational methods that are demonstrably less effective for spiritual formation. Understanding the limitations of these approaches helps us see why Jesus chose a different model.

"The Western style of teaching is what we would call 'confrontational'... which is often geared to allow people to gain intellectual control over things and then manipulate them according to their desire, and where the teaching style is usually an address, a professional monologue geared at students in an academic set-up, removed from real life."

— Wolfgang Simpson

Constraints of the lecture style methods for teaching and discipling.



Monologue-Based

Traditional teaching relies on extended one-way communication from expert to learner, with minimal interaction or participation.



Information-Focused

Success is measured by knowledge retention rather than life application or character development.



Time-Constrained

Learning is confined to scheduled sessions rather than integrated throughout daily life and experiences.



Expert-Dependent

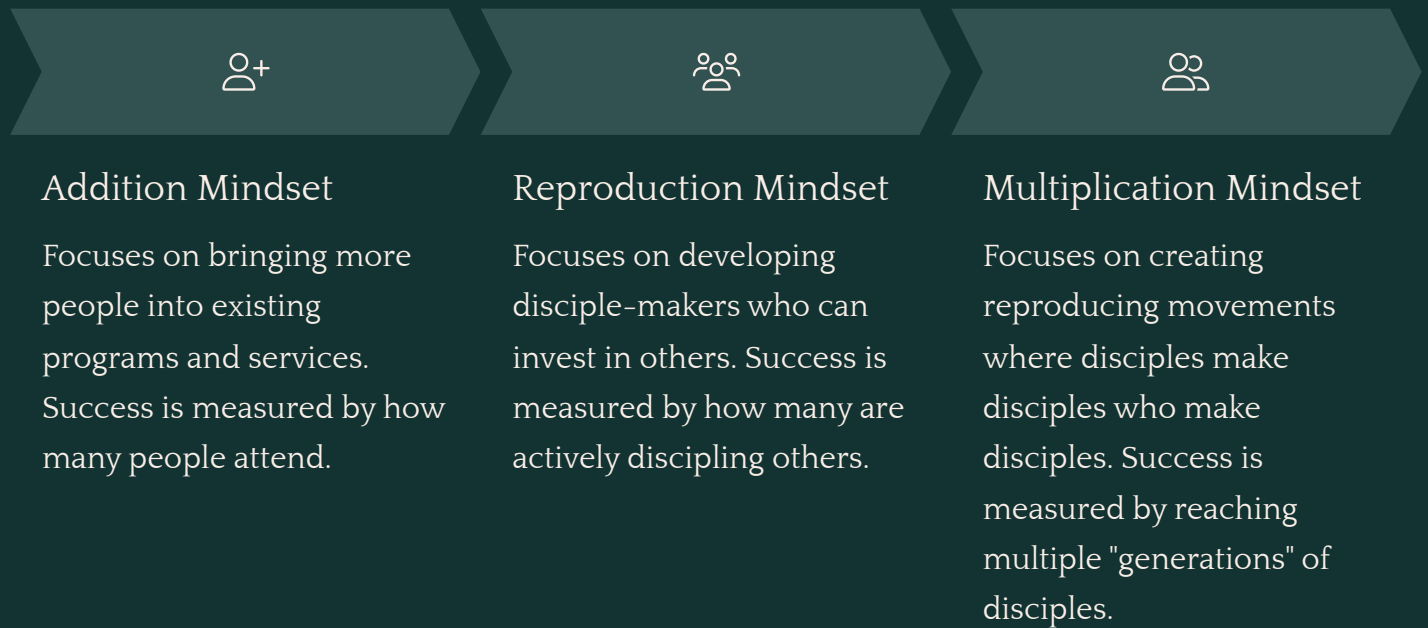
The system creates ongoing reliance on the teacher rather than developing independent learners who can teach others.

This last point relates directly to Simpson's observation that traditional teaching methods "artificially keep people in perpetual immaturity, prolonging their baby status in the name of great and wonderful discipleship teaching!" True disciple-making should produce mature believers who can in turn make disciples, not perpetual consumers of religious education.

Jesus' alternative approach—life-on-life training in real-world contexts—consistently produces deeper transformation and better equips disciples to reproduce the process with others.

Adjustment 4: From Addition to Multiplication

The fourth critical adjustment replaces strategies focused primarily on adding more attendees with approaches that develop reproducers who can make disciples who make disciples, creating exponential rather than linear growth.



Practical steps toward a multiplication mindset include:

1. Explicitly discussing reproduction from the beginning of the discipling relationship
2. Involving disciples in your ministry activities with increasing responsibility over time
3. Regularly asking, "Who are you investing in?" and providing coaching for their discipling relationships
4. Creating simple, reproducible discipleship methods rather than complex, resource-heavy approaches
5. Celebrating reproduction milestones (spiritual grandchildren and great-grandchildren)
6. Providing tools and resources that disciples can immediately use with others

This adjustment requires a willingness to invest deeply in a few rather than lightly in many. It means accepting slower initial growth for greater long-term impact. Most importantly, it requires disciple-makers who are focused not just on developing followers but on developing leaders who will continue the multiplication process.

Developing Disciple-Makers: The Reproduction Process

The ultimate goal of disciple-making isn't just helping people grow spiritually but equipping them to make disciples themselves. This reproduction process follows a predictable development pattern that can be intentionally facilitated.



Each phase requires specific leadership approaches:

01

Modeling Phase

Demonstrate disciple-making while explaining your process. Make your implicit practices explicit by verbalizing your thinking: "I asked that question because..." or "I approached the conversation this way because..."

02

Mentoring Phase

Create opportunities for guided practice. Let the disciple lead parts of the process while you provide structure, support, and immediate feedback. Gradually increase their responsibility.

03

Monitoring Phase

Allow the disciple to lead the entire disciple-making process with someone else while you observe occasionally and provide feedback in regular debriefing sessions. Focus on affirming strengths and addressing one growth area at a time.

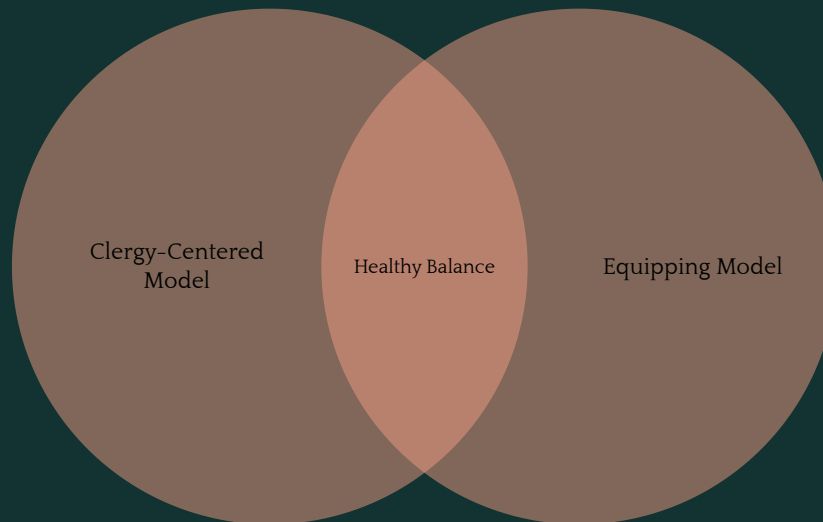
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Multiplying Phase

Release the disciple to independently make disciples who make disciples, transitioning to a peer relationship with occasional consultation as needed. Celebrate their unique approach rather than requiring them to duplicate yours exactly.

Adjustment 5: From Professional to Personal

The final essential adjustment involves transitioning from viewing disciple-making as primarily the responsibility of professional ministers to equipping every believer to engage in the disciple-making process within their sphere of influence.



This shift requires addressing several common misconceptions:

Misconception:
Disciple-making
requires seminary
training

Reality: While theological education has value, effective disciple-making requires spiritual maturity, obedience, and relational skills more than academic credentials.

Misconception:
Ordinary believers lack
sufficient knowledge

Reality: Most believers know more than they're applying. The discipleship bottleneck is typically obedience and reproduction, not knowledge.

Misconception:
Disciple-making is a
complex specialized
skill

Reality: While disciple-making can be done with excellence, the basic process is something any growing believer can engage in at some level.

Misconception: Church leaders should focus on programs

Reality: The primary role of church leaders according to Ephesians 4:11-12 is "equipping the saints for the work of ministry," not doing all the ministry themselves.

Implementing this adjustment requires church leaders to:

- Model disciple-making personally rather than just talking about it
- Provide simple, reproducible tools that don't require extensive training
- Create clear pathways for ordinary believers to begin making disciples
- Celebrate and share stories of non-professional disciple-makers
- Evaluate ministry staff primarily on how well they equip others rather than how much ministry they personally perform

This shift often requires pastors and church leaders to do less visible ministry themselves in order to invest more time in developing others. It means measuring success not by what the staff accomplishes but by what the equipped congregation accomplishes.

Balancing Directed Learning and Organic Growth

Effective disciple-making requires balancing intentional content delivery with organic, responsive teaching moments. Jesus demonstrated this dual approach—He had clear teaching content (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount) but also responded to questions, situations, and opportunities that naturally arose.

Directed Learning Components

Certain fundamental elements should be intentionally addressed in every discipling relationship:

- Biblical foundations and narrative understanding
- Core theological concepts and doctrinal clarity
- Identity in Christ and gospel implications
- Spiritual disciplines and worship practices
- Kingdom mission and personal calling
- Church community and relational dynamics

These topics provide the essential framework for Christian formation and should be deliberately covered, though not necessarily in a rigid sequence.

The art of disciple-making involves maintaining this balance—having a clear direction while remaining flexible enough to address immediate needs and opportunities. Some disciple-makers err by being either too rigid (following a curriculum regardless of the disciple's actual needs) or too unstructured (providing no intentional path for growth).

A helpful approach is to maintain a mental checklist of essential topics while creating space in discipling conversations for emerging questions and needs. This ensures comprehensive development while honoring the unique journey of each disciple.

Organic Growth Opportunities

Alongside planned content, disciple-makers should remain alert to teaching moments that naturally arise:

- Questions prompted by life circumstances
- Struggles that reveal growth opportunities
- Conflicts that allow for character development
- Ministry situations that require new skills
- Cultural events that invite biblical perspective
- Personal interests that connect to spiritual truth

These opportunistic moments often create the deepest impact because the disciple is already engaged and motivated to learn.

Overcoming Barriers to Life-on-Life Discipleship

While life-on-life discipleship is clearly biblical and effective, several common barriers prevent its widespread implementation. Identifying and addressing these obstacles is essential for churches wanting to reclaim Jesus' disciple-making model.

Time Constraints

Barrier: Modern schedules leave little margin for the time investment required for life-on-life discipleship.

Solution: Start with realistic commitments (perhaps 2-4 hours weekly), integrate disciples into existing activities, and recognize that some other activities may need to be reduced to prioritize disciple-making.

Privacy and Vulnerability Concerns

Barrier: Fear of exposing weaknesses or inviting others into personal life.

Solution: Begin with appropriate boundaries, gradually increasing transparency as trust develops. Remember that disciples benefit from seeing authentic faith amid real struggles, not just polished perfection.

Lack of Confidence

Barrier: Feeling inadequate to disciple others due to knowledge gaps or personal struggles.

Solution: Remember that discipleship is about sharing your journey, not having all answers. Stay one step ahead by continuing your own growth, and be honest about limitations.

Unclear Process

Barrier: Uncertainty about practical steps and content for discipling relationships.

Solution: Start with simple frameworks and resources while developing your approach. Learn from others with experience, and recognize that your process will evolve over time.

Churches can help overcome these barriers by:

- Providing basic training and resources for beginning disciple-makers
- Creating accountability structures that prioritize disciple-making
- Sharing stories that normalize the challenges and celebrate the joys of the process
- Adjusting ministry calendars to create margin for discipling relationships
- Offering coaching for those engaged in disciple-making

The most effective way to overcome these barriers is simply to begin, even imperfectly. Most disciple-makers report that while the initial steps feel awkward, the process becomes more natural and rewarding with experience.

Measuring Success in Disciple-Making

Shifting to life-on-life disciple-making requires new ways of measuring success. Traditional metrics like attendance, program completion, or knowledge acquisition don't adequately capture the transformation and reproduction that true disciple-making produces.

Generations	Reproduction Rate	Life Application	Holistic Growth
Count spiritual "generations" (your disciples who make disciples who make disciples) rather than just the number of people you personally disciple.	Track what percentage of those you disciple go on to disciple others within a reasonable timeframe (1-2 years).	Assess specific areas of life transformation rather than just knowledge acquisition (using assessments that examine behavior change).	Evaluate development across multiple dimensions: knowledge, character, skills, and relationships.

More qualitative measures are also important for assessing disciple-making effectiveness:

- **Gospel fluency:** Can the disciple naturally apply gospel truths to various life situations?
- **Mission engagement:** Is the disciple actively engaged in kingdom mission in their spheres of influence?
- **Community contribution:** Does the disciple serve and strengthen the church community?
- **Character development:** Is there evidence of the fruit of the Spirit increasing in their life?
- **Spiritual autonomy:** Can the disciple feed and lead themselves spiritually?

For church leaders, success means building a disciple-making culture where:

1. Disciple-making language is common in everyday conversation
2. Stories of life transformation through discipleship are regularly shared
3. New believers automatically expect to be discipled and eventually make disciples
4. Ministry decisions are evaluated based on their impact on disciple-making
5. A significant percentage of the congregation is actively engaged in discipling relationships

These new metrics may initially show "slower" progress than traditional measures, but they ultimately lead to deeper transformation and sustainable growth.

Starting Your Life-on-Life Discipleship Journey

Beginning the practice of life-on-life discipleship doesn't require extensive training or elaborate systems. With a few practical steps, any committed believer can start implementing Jesus' model of disciple-making.

Pray for Guidance and a Mentor

Ask God to lead you to a mentor/coach who can help you grow. Then Ask God to help you find 1-3 people who would benefit from your investment. Look for those who are faithful, available, and teachable, with potential to disciple others.

Extend Clear Invitations

Clearly communicate your desire to walk alongside them in discipleship. Explain what this might look like, including expected time commitments and general content. Set an initial timeframe (3-6 months) for mutual evaluation.

Establish a Rhythm

Create a sustainable pattern of regular connection that includes both scheduled meetings and informal interactions. A weekly or bi-weekly dedicated meeting supplemented by shared meals, ministry activities, or other life connections often works well.

Balance Content and Relationship

Use a simple framework to ensure you cover essential topics while remaining flexible to address immediate needs and questions. Remember that relationship provides the context for content—trust and connection enable deeper growth.

Model Transparency

Share your own growth journey, including both victories and struggles. Appropriate vulnerability creates an environment where disciples feel safe to be honest about their challenges.

Focus on Reproduction

From the beginning, establish the expectation that they will eventually disciple others. Gradually include them in ministry activities, providing opportunities to practice what they're learning.

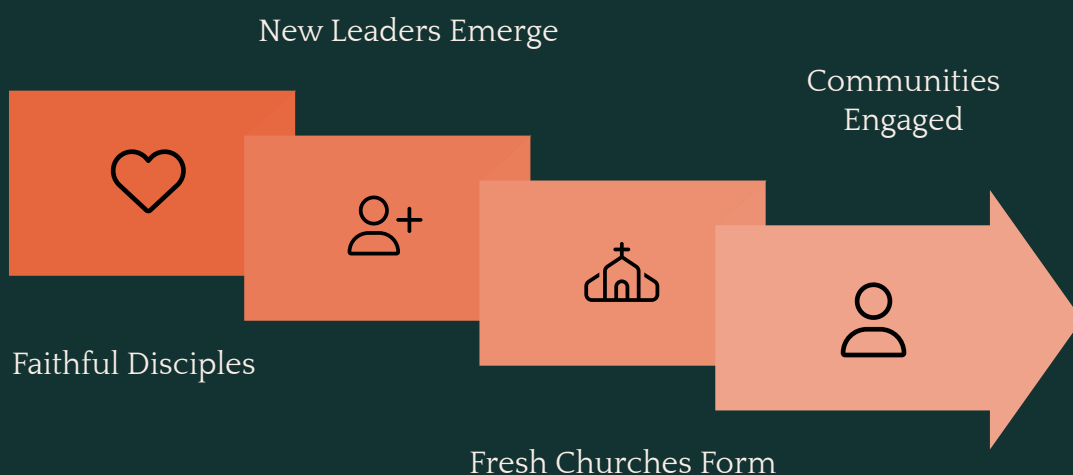
Helpful resources to support your discipling relationships include:

- A coach/mentor to help you and support you
- A simple Bible reading plan to work through together
- Basic assessment tools (APEST, DISC, etc) to identify growth areas and gifting
- Questions for regular reflection and discussion
- A journal to track insights, prayers, and growth observations

Remember that your first attempt at life-on-life discipleship won't be perfect, but it will improve with experience. The most important step is simply to begin, trusting God to work through your faithful efforts despite imperfections.

The Vision: A Disciple-Making Movement

The ultimate vision of reclaiming Jesus' life-on-life disciple-making approach isn't just improved individual discipleship but the catalyzing of genuine disciple-making movements that transform communities and reach the nations.



Throughout church history, the most significant spiritual awakenings and missionary movements have been fueled not by programs or events but by intentional disciple-making relationships that reproduced across multiple generations. This remains true today in the fastest-growing Christian movements worldwide.

Imagine a church where:

- Every new believer is automatically connected with a disciple-maker who invests in them
- Members naturally speak the language of discipleship and multiplication
- Leaders are identified and developed through organic discipling relationships
- Ministry structures exist to support disciple-making rather than replace it
- Multiple "generations" of disciples are celebrated as the primary measure of success
- The congregation's influence extends far beyond its weekly attendance through disciples making disciples

The journey toward this vision begins with a single step—one disciple-maker investing in a few others through life-on-life relationship. From these small beginnings, with God's blessing, movements that transform the world can emerge.