

9Marks Journal

Biblical Thinking for Building Healthy Churches

Discipling in the Church



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Posted on September 1, 2012 *[Listen online Now »](#)

False Conversions: The Suicide of the Church, by Mark Dever

Mark Dever diagnoses the problem of false conversions in the church and prescribes biblical solutions in his message from Together for the Gospel 2012.

Posted on August 1, 2012 *[Listen online Now »](#)

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Jonathan Leeman

Editor's Note

Discipling is not a program. It is not a podcast preacher. It is not a one-size-fits-all information transfer.

It is life-on-life loving in word and deed.

Jesus told us to make disciples, which means it is a basic part of the Christian life. But we are not always sure how to get a handle on it, or what it looks like.

If you are a pastor or elder, you should be leading the way in discipling younger individuals in the faith. Your instruction and example should be helping to cultivate a culture of discipleship in your church. Does that sound intimidating? If it does, are you sure you are called to be an elder?

Let's back up. The work of discipling starts in the heart—a heart that rejoices in the ministry of others. Is that you? Read Bobby Jamieson's excellent piece and ask that question.

Next, consider what your vision for pastoring or eldering is. Do you see discipling as a central part of the job? Jonathan Dodson and Jeramie Rinne will help you answer that question. And Jamieson will talk about how to do it.

Garrett Kell and Erin Wheeler then bring us back to the basics of discipling, and Brian Parks and Jani Ortlund help us to see some of the glorious fruit of discipling.

We have also included the handout that every new member of Capitol Hill Baptist Church receives about discipleship. Feel free to use or adapt it for your own purposes. Other resources you should check out include Robert Coleman's classic *The Master Plan of Evangelism* or the more recent *The Trellis and the Vine* by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne.

Quick Answers on Discipling

IN PRINCIPLE, HOW DOES DISCIPLING WORK?

- **Discipling works most essentially through instruction and imitation.** Discipling works best through **love**. As we lovingly instruct younger believers in the way of godliness and live commendable lives, they grow in Christlikeness by imitating our life and doctrine (see 1 Tim. 4:16).
- **Instruction:** The Bible calls pastors and parents to instruct those given to their charge (Proverbs; Gal. 6:6; Eph. 6:4; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 Tim. 1:18, 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 4:2). It also calls all believers to instruct one another (Rom. 15:14).
- **Imitation:** Christians are imitators, first of God, then of each other. We grow in God's grace by listening and imitating. Consider the following passages:
 - o "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1);
 - o "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7);
 - o "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:9);
 - o "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings" (2 Tim. 3:10);
 - o "Beloved, do not imitate evil, but imitate good" (3 John 11).
- **Love:** People will imitate your life even when you don't love them. But a leader who leads with love presents the best picture of Christ, and people will follow you best when you love them.
- **Friendship:** In a sense, discipling is simply friendship, but friendship with a Christ-ward direction. What do friends do? They imitate one another. In discipling, we befriend others to grow in Christlikeness and to help them grow in Christlikeness.
- **How to be a disciple?** (i) Listen and watch how older Christians work, rest, raise a family, deal with conflict, evangelize their neighbors, persevere through trials, serve in the church, or fight against sin. (ii) Imitate them!

IN PRACTICE, HOW CAN I DISCIPLE OTHER CHRISTIANS?

1. Join a church.
2. Arrive early at church gatherings and stay late.
3. Practice hospitality with members of your church.
4. Ask God for strategic friendships.
5. If possible, include a line-item in your family or pastoral budget for weekly time with fellow Christians. Discuss this matter with your spouse. If possible, provide such a budget line for your spouse as well.
6. Schedule regular breakfasts, lunches, or some other culturally-acceptable social engagement with teachable individuals (of the same sex). Depending on the person, you may decide to meet once, indefinitely, or for a set number of times (say, five). If you and the individual share a pastime, look for ways to share that pastime together.
7. Ask them about themselves. Ask them about their parents, spouse, children, testimony, job, walk with Christ, and so on. In asking questions, however, do so in a manner that's appropriate for your cultural context (don't scare them!).
8. Share about yourself.
9. Look for ways to have spiritual conversations. Maybe decide to read the Bible or some other Christian literature together.
10. Consider their physical or material needs. Would they benefit from your help?
11. Pray with them.
12. Depending on your home situation, invite the person to drop by your house or spend time with your family. Let them watch you live life.
13. Look for ways to pray for the person throughout the week by yourself and/or with your spouse.

SHOULD CHURCHES PRIMARILY VIEW DISCIPLING AS A “PROGRAM” OR A “LIFESTYLE”?

1. **Church should not primarily view discipling as special event or a flashy program.** Discipling is not something that’s occasional or out of the ordinary, something that can be sealed off from the rest of our Christian lives. To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Christ. And being a disciple of Christ *means*
 - (i) looking to others for help in being like Christ (to be a disciple);
 - (ii) looking to help others be like Christ (to disciple).
2. **Therefore, churches should view discipling as a lifestyle.** It should constitute an ordinary part of being a Christian and a church member. It’s what a follower of Christ does.
3. This means that churches may or may not use programs to promote discipling. **But they definitely want promote a culture of discipling.** It should be normal for younger Christians to discuss spiritual matters over meals with older Christians. It should be normal for younger Christians to spend time in older Christians’ homes to see them apply their faith to every area of life, down to how they put their kids to bed. By God’s grace, a church that fosters a culture of discipling will be full of members who look more and more like the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1).

For more material like this on discipling and other topics, visit: <http://www.9marks.org/answers-for-pastors/>



By Bobby Jamieson

The Heart of a Disciple-Making Pastor

What do you think is the essential quality of a disciple-making pastor? Here's my best shot: rejoicing in others' ministry.

FLY FISHING WITH THE APOSTLE PAUL

In his book *The Art of Pastoring*, David Hansen paints a striking picture of this when he describes the parallel between a great “spiritual director” and a great fly fishing guide:

The very best quality of the very best fishing guides is the very best quality of the very best spiritual directors. The very best fishing guides, the top of the heap of that profession, *all love to watch clients catch fish as much as they like catching fish themselves*. It gets to the point of silliness sometimes the way a truly great fishing guide starts to laugh, even giggle like a grade-school girl, when a client starts catching fish.

Hansen continues:

Likewise, the characteristic that sets the great spiritual directors apart is childlike joy. Out of pure love they give you their undivided attention, and when you catch your fish, when your net is full, there's always that smile, that glint in their eye that tells you they've just spent the best hour of their day with you.¹

In keeping with his somewhat mystical, contemplative spirituality, Hansen sees the role of a spiritual director as discerning God's work in someone's life and drawing attention to it. I think that's certainly an element of pastoral discipling, but Scripture goes further. Ephesians 4:11-13 says that Christ gave “...the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”

In other words, a pastor's job is to equip the church members to do ministry, to build each other up in maturity. To tweak Hansen's image, a pastor's job isn't merely to fish for his people—though that's certainly part of it—but to teach them to fish. And I'd suggest that a fitting litmus test for a pastor is how much joy he takes in others' works of ministry, and how well he builds his ministry around that joy.

Think about parenting. It's important for kids to have tied shoelaces, but it's far more important for them to learn, in due time, how to tie their shoes themselves. While of course parents do countless things *for* their children, they should always have an eye on what they can be teaching their children to do for themselves. And parents, for their part, are overjoyed at every new skill their children acquire. So it should be with pastors.

DON'T STOCKPILE MINISTRY, SPREAD IT AROUND

In light of this, pastors shouldn't stockpile ministry. Instead, they should spread it around.

Don't Be a Cul-De-Sac, But a Conduit

Caring for people is vitally important to pastoring—no argument there. But if your personal ministry only involves caring, then you run the risk of making people dependent on you rather than equipping them to find care from others and care for others.

And again, preaching, teaching, and evangelism are crucial to pastoral ministry. But let's say you're ten years into a pastorate and you're the only person in the church who regularly shares the gospel, or who can teach Sunday school, or who can preach the Bible. How healthy would your church be?

You don't want to be a cul-de-sac, but a conduit. You don't want to hoard ministry, but to fill other people's plates as full as they can manage, and then help them manage.

Tempted to Hoard

Many pastors are tempted to do everything themselves. For one thing, especially if you're the only one with the title "pastor," people will naturally look to you for pretty much everything. But it's your job to retrain them.

“It takes real humility to take the spotlight off yourself and shine it onto others. It takes genuine self-forgetfulness to enlist someone else to do something you could do better, for the sake of that person's, and ultimately the whole church's, growth in Christ.”

More than that, pastors can be tempted to hoard ministry since there are some things they can do better than anybody else in the church. But it will be far better for your church to struggle through a few sub-standard Sunday school classes and then, a few months or years later, to be fed by a skilled teacher who's grown up under your diligent training. It will be far better for them to learn to hear and heed other counselors than for you to try to bear their burdens alone.

A Lurking Heart Issue

There's a heart issue lurking here. Our pride can thrill at a ministry job well done—especially if that job is duly noted by church members. It takes real humility, therefore, to take the spotlight off yourself and shine it onto others. It takes genuine self-forgetfulness to enlist someone else to do something you could do better, for the sake of that person's, and ultimately the whole church's, growth in Christ.

If your desire is to equip your church and help it grow to maturity, then you will find as much or even more joy in someone else doing ministry than in doing it yourself. And that joy will be contagious. It will help a whole culture of discipling and ministry training to sprout up in your church.

PRACTICAL OUTWORKINGS OF THIS POSTURE

What are some practical outworkings of this posture of joy in others' ministry? Here are three.

Give Ministry Away

First, always be looking to give ministry away. Of course anyone to whom you entrust teaching, preaching, or counseling should be godly, theologically sound, and show promise and interest in that ministry. But don't set the bar impossibly high. Be willing to spend capital with the congregation in order to train them to embrace ministry done by "amateurs." In the long run, that will be far better for your church than a one-man show.

To mention only public teaching: if your regular week is jam-packed with teaching and preaching, consider how much of it you might be able to gradually siphon off to other elders, potential elders, or other younger men who show an interest in ministry. Or, if your church has relatively few teaching points, consider how you might be able to multiply teaching times in order to create a context for developing more teachers. Perhaps a content-driven, topical set of Sunday School classes would do the trick.

Affirm and Encourage, as Well as Critique

Second, affirm and encourage others' efforts, however halting. Remember that what you've done a thousand times, your disciplers- and teachers- and counselors-in-training are doing for the first time.

Your encouragement is empowering and life-giving, so be generous with it. Celebrate even the smallest successes. Show your church members that you delight in all the spiritual fruit they bear, even if they themselves are discouragingly unimpressed by it. If you want some inspiration on this front, read Sam Crabtree's excellent little book *Practicing Affirmation*.

Of course you need to provide critical feedback as well. So learn how to do so both graciously and precisely. If you want your people to bear fruit, don't just plant the seed and water it, but pull out the weeds and tie the young plant to a stake to help it grow upright.

Think a Step Further Out

Third, always think a step further out. Don't just think about who you're ministering to, think about who they are, or soon will be, ministering to. Consider what Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:2: "...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." There are four "generations" of Christians in this one verse: Paul, Timothy, "faithful men," and "others also." Like Paul, a disciple-making pastor is always thinking about the next rung out on the relational chain.

“Ask yourself, ‘Am I just putting out spiritual fires, or am I training a whole unit of firefighters?’”

So ask the person you’re discipling, “Who are *you* discipling?” Consider how your yearly preaching schedule might be used not only to edify your flock, but also to raise up other preachers in your congregation. Find ways to fold others into ministry you’re already doing. Ask yourself, “How many ‘generations’ of Christians is my regular ministry reaching? Am I just putting out spiritual fires, or am I training a whole unit of firefighters?”

Personally, I went from being paralyzed by fear of man to being a fairly competent contact evangelist just by coming along with a friend and listening as he struck up gospel conversations on our college campus. Discipling certainly involves exposing others to your own character so that, by God’s grace, they will imitate it. But it should also involve exposing them to your ministry competence so that they will imitate that competence to the extent that God gifts and enables them.

Of course, the vast majority of ministry that church members do will not be public or easily quantifiable. Still, you want to encourage and delight in all the Spirit-enabled ministry that your church members do, from cleaning the church bathrooms to bringing a meal to an elderly member. And you want your joy in their growth to translate into their joy in others’ growth. You want to disciple all your people into being disciple-makers themselves.

NOT ADDITION, BUT MULTIPLICATION

Pastors who delight in others’ ministry will soon find that their ministry consists more in multiplication than addition. If you give ministry away, encourage others’ efforts, and constantly think a “generation” or two further out, you will, by God’s grace, raise up disciples who make other disciples. And that’s just the beginning.

So I pray that, like a great fishing guide and a loving parent, you would find joy in your members’ ministry. And I pray that God would grant you to find ways to cultivate that joy in the soil of your daily ministry.

[1] David Hansen, *The Art of Pastoring: Ministry Without All the Answers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 157, emphasis original. Hansen’s book is a mixed bag theologically, but it’s an insightful pastoral memoir nonetheless. For a book that turns the basic point of this article into a full-blown philosophy of ministry, see Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2010).

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By Jonathan Dodson

Discipling: More than a Podcast Preacher

Preaching and hearing the gospel is not enough.

Jesus didn't just preach the gospel—he mediated it. As he taught and modeled the gospel of grace, it was mediated through his flesh and blood relationships. He didn't rely on mountain top airwaves alone. He always came down the mountain, right into the mess of everyday sinners. Jesus was attached to disciples who were attached to one another. The gospel went viral through flesh and blood not silicon and megabytes. He mediated the gospel of the Father, Son, and Spirit through father-son-like relationships with others. His incarnation was not only to bear the cross but also to become a person his disciples could imitate.

Paul, too, brought the gospel down to earth when he faced factions and over-realized eschatology in Corinth. The church was more oriented toward personalities than actual persons, guided by personas rather than “fathered” by mentors they could imitate. Writing to the church, Paul contrasts guides with fathers: “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me” (1 Cor. 4:14-15). Guides were hired tutors bound to their students by money. But fathers are relational leaders bound to their children by love. Paul also called the church to mediate the gospel through close, imitable relationships.

Therefore, it is not enough to identify with a gospel guide. Favorite authors, preachers, and teachers are not sufficient for discipleship. Relationally detached, hired teachers cannot replace attached, loving fathers. In the tradition of Jesus and Paul, the church desperately needs to recover a relationally mediated gospel. We need fathers, not just guides.

WHO'S TO BLAME: PODCASTS OR PASTORS?

Today, many Christians identify themselves with specific preachers through podcasts or online sermons. Listening to these sermons can be a tremendous benefit to Christian growth and spreading the gospel. However, in the hands of sinners, podcasting can also become a detriment to growth. Listeners can be so beholden to a preacher outside their church that they identify less with those inside their church. They possess a technologically mediated gospel, not a relationally mediated one.

When this happens, disciples stunt their growth and the mission of the church. They settle for doctrine over life instead of “watching their life and doctrine closely” (1 Tim. 4:16). When discipleship is doctrine-dominated, it tempting to act

like an armchair quarterback. Disciples try to call the shots, criticizing local pastors for not being like other “celebrity” preachers or for not “doing church” like certain practitioners. Podcasting comparison (not podcasting) undermines the centrality of the local church. Instead of actively pursuing local leaders for discipling, church members passively listen to other preachers’ sermons. While “countless guides” are assembled in podcast playlists, local discipling declines. This “podcasting comparison” compromises the discipling impulse of the gospel. It produces more guides and groupies than fathers and sons. Worst of all, it misrepresents the gospel of the discipling God.

Who is to blame for this famine? Technology? Media mogul General David Sarnoff remarked: “We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them.” Podcasts are not to blame. We are. Technological blame-shifting will not help our churches raise up spiritual fathers to disciple others. Pastors and non-pastors mistake a diet of theological information for whole-life discipling. As a result, we face a disciple-making famine amidst a homiletical feast.

“ Pastors and non-pastors mistake a diet of theological information for whole-life discipling. As a result, we face a disciple-making famine amidst a homiletical feast. ”

Both pastors and churches will need to repent.

REPENTANCE FOR CHURCHES

There are disciples in local churches that need to repent of celebrity-leader comparison. Some will need to confess to their leaders. Others will simply need to change. Setting a new course, they should turn to affirm the leadership of their local pastors and look for ways to join the disciple-making mission of the church. Recognizing God has appointed elders and leaders for their good, disciples should search for a local father, or fathers, in the gospel. These gospel fathers will help them grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Look for a “father” among those older in the faith, small group or ministry leaders, or pastors.

Instead of looking to countless guides for *information*, disciples should seek out (and eventually become) fathers who disciple for *imitation*.

Although technology itself is not to blame, “I” technology certainly caters to the individual consumer. Ken Myers notes that, in the West, the identity of “disciple of Jesus” has been replaced with “sovereign consumer.” As sovereign consumers, we select our influences without regard to God’s sovereignly appointed influences. We seek podcast theology over pastoral discipling. We prefer isolated information instead of relational transformation. While the sins of individualistic consumerism and evangelical comparison are ours, the podcasting medium, relied on excessively, does carry a message: “All I need is informational discipling.”

REPENTANCE FOR PASTORS

Pastors who offer theological information at the expense of genuine relationships also need to repent.

Fellow pastors, our theology should disciple. It must express itself in intentional, mentoring relationships. Our calling is to shepherd not only through preaching but also with people. Our flocks hear our countless sermons, but do they have many fathers? Are we favoring theological information over fatherly imitation?

Jesus could have transmitted the gospel by dropping a Bible from the sky, launching an infallible podcast, gathering Twitter followers, or projecting holograms of himself in every village and city. But he didn't. He chose flesh, human touch, sight, smell, and presence. The Son of God became a spiritual father to twelve disciples in order to transmit the gospel through flesh and blood. He calls us to do the same. Technologically mediated preaching—and even preaching in person—isn't enough. People need to see the gospel live and hear it in relational stereo. They need our bodily presence, faults and all. Disciples need encouragement that breathes and correction that has a heartbeat. We all need gospel fathers to help us imitate Jesus.

WHO TO IMITATE: GOSPEL FATHERS

You're probably wondering: "What is a gospel father?" Paul viewed himself as one: "I became a father to you in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:14). A gospel father (or mother) is someone who takes spiritual responsibility for a disciple's growth (Thes. 2:7-14). This relationship happens by relating to someone through the gospel. It does not begin because the father is morally, experientially, or spiritually superior. It begins by a common, joyful commitment to the superiority of Jesus and his unmatched grace towards us. The gospel connects father to son, mother to daughter in a shared identity in Christ Jesus.

When we repent and believe in Jesus, we are converted not only to his lordship but also into his family. This family is like interconnected circuits, rewired into a new network of relationships energized by grace. When grace is absent, the network drags and gets disconnected. Fathers are separated from sons, mothers from daughters. Guides dominate. Family dysfunction creeps in. The gospel, however, offers an endless power supply of grace to strengthen family relationships. This is why we need not just fathers, but gospel fathers.

Gospel Fathers are Templates of Christ

Gospel fathers take responsibility for others by giving their disciples a template to imitate. As a gospel father, Paul exhorted his disciples: "I urge you, then, be imitators of me" (1 Cor. 4:15; cf. 2 Thes. 3:7, 9). The author of Hebrews reminded the church: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7).

Imitation is hardwired into family. My one year-old daughter bends her lip in like I do when I'm thinking. My seven year old son loves to explain things like I do, using hands and all. As gospel fathers, we have a responsibility to show the church what it is like to follow Jesus. We are to be templates of Christ. In order for people to imitate us, we must spend time with them. An occasional meeting won't do. People need to share our life as well as our faith. They need to see our struggles as well as hear our sermons.

As a pastor, the people with whom I spend most of my informal time often go on to become gospel fathers, leaders, and pastors. Why? Because shared time exposes them to a template of Christ that, by God's grace, they can confidently imitate. They see through the template into Christ. They observe how desperately I need the gospel of grace to reflect the image of Jesus. They see me frustrated and full of faith, discouraged and confident.

When gospel fathers share their lives with others, the template becomes tangible and attainable.

Tell the Gospel Truth and Offer a Template

Fathers also tell their disciples the gospel truth. They instruct their children *and* give them something to imitate. Guides cannot offer imitation, but fathers can. Fathers who are present are fathers we want to hear from. When we are present, our words have more meaning. Gospel fathers get deep into people's lives to struggle with and for them in life. Our experience and example is not enough. They need the gospel of grace applied in concrete, practical areas of struggle.

One of the men I spend regular time with is a professional in the tech field. In his new position, he found himself continually frustrated. As we peeled back the layers through shared meals, prayer, and life, we discerned that he was most frustrated when his boss disapproved of his work. This demanding boss made it difficult for him to work in peace. As a result, he oscillated between a sense of overconfidence and under-confidence depending on how his boss related to him. I shared how my confidence in preaching sometimes rises and falls depending on how the church responds. He was surprised. I also shared how I have found great confidence in Christ because Scripture reminds me that, though I am inadequate for preaching, the Spirit of God has made me more than adequate (2 Cor. 2:4-6). He reminds me that my approval comes through Christ not the church. Similarly, his approval is secure in the gospel, which frees him to work from approval in Christ not for approval from his boss. As a result, our confidence doesn't rise and fall with what people think but rests securely in what Christ thinks. Working through 1 Corinthians together we seized upon this promise: "all is yours, you are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:23). We have everything we need wrapped up in the love and approval of the Father and the Son! Now we encourage one another regularly with this gospel truth. Sharing my life as a template along with telling him the gospel truth, my "spiritual son" has since weathered unemployment remarkably well, drawing from deeper confidence in Christ.

“As good fathers, we must assure our disciples they are loved and accepted regardless of their success in imitating us. Through these kinds of relationships, others can see that the gospel of grace is enough to get us through both failure and success.”

When discipling others, we must be present enough to provide a template but truthful enough to point them to Christ. As good fathers, we must assure our disciples they are loved and accepted regardless of their success in imitating us. Through these kinds of relationships, others can see that the gospel of grace is enough to get us through both failure and success.

WHAT WE NEED

If the church is to grow, fathers must be present to be imitated. Disciples must seek them out. We must find time with men and women who can mediate the gospel to us. Pastors and church leaders must move beyond dispensing truth to offering a template. The church needs gospel truth and relational templates. We need the gospel mediated through fathers, not just guides.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jonathan Dodson is the lead pastor of Austin City Life and the author of *Gospel-Centered Discipleship* (Crossway, 2012).



By Jeramie Rinne

Elders—The Church’s Lead Disciple-Makers

Are you an elder in your church? Then you should be one of the church’s lead disciplers. You knew that this was a key part of an elder’s job description, right?

Let me back up just to make sure it is clear. If I had to pick one image to best explain an elder’s job in the local church, the choice would be a no-brainer: the New Testament predominantly portrays elders as shepherds. Both Paul and Peter urged elders to shepherd their flocks (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). The writer of Hebrews called believers to submit to their leaders who “keep watch” over them “as men who must give an account” (Heb. 13:17). Peter said that elders serve as under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). Many of an elder’s duties—including teaching the Word, guarding against heresy, modeling godliness, pursuing wayward believers, overseeing church affairs, and praying for members—can be summed up within the simple picture of a shepherd tending sheep.

But what’s the goal of shepherding?

Elders shepherd church members in order to help those members *grow up* in Christ. Elders tend the flock in such a way that believers develop from spiritual infancy to full-grown Christ-likeness. Overseers labor in hope that the sheep will move beyond a needy, self-focused, toddler Christianity to an adulthood of serving Jesus and leading others to Jesus.

Paul identified Christian maturity as the reason Jesus gave various leaders to the church, including pastors (i.e., shepherds):

It was he who gave some to be...pastors and teachers to prepare God’s 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. (Eph. 4:11-13)

When elders fulfill their duties well, believers will “no longer be infants” but will instead “grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ” (vv. 14-15). Elders should say with Paul, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Col. 1:28).

In other words, shepherding aims at making mature disciples. What is disciple-making if not helping people progress toward maturity in Christ?

So as the church's shepherds, elders should lead the way and set the pace for disciple-making. All believers are called to the task of making disciples, but elders bear an overall responsibility for the discipleship work of the congregation.

“**Shepherding aims at making mature disciples. What is disciple-making if not helping people progress toward maturity in Christ?**”

When elders grasp the goal of shepherding as disciple-making and disciple-maturing, it will transform their ministry. Consider how the goal of making mature disciples might impact five common aspects of an elder's pastoral work.

MATURING DISCIPLES THROUGH TEACHING

Elders must be able to teach the Bible (1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17; Tit. 1:9). God's shepherds feed God's sheep with God's Word. And what's the point of feeding the sheep, except to strengthen and mature them?

When an elder opens his Bible to teach fifty people at a Sunday evening service, or twelve people at a home Bible study, or one guy over a cup of coffee, he should not only focus on interpreting the Bible well, though of course that is critical. Instead, he must also look up from his Bible to see the people in their various stages of discipleship, and then connect the Bible's truths to his congregation's hearts, relationships, speech, and finances. He should strive to apply the text in ways that ripen Christ-followers.

MATURING DISCIPLES THROUGH PASTORAL CARE

What is the point of that elder's hospital visit? Or why does he spend an evening with the couple devastated by infertility, or have breakfast with the elderly man who recently lost his wife of 50 years? Certainly he is there to encourage and comfort these hurting church members. But he should also be there to promote spiritual growth.

So instead of only asking, "How are you feeling?" and "Is there anything the church can do to help?" a discipleship-minded elder will tactfully ask questions like, "What do you think God is doing in your life through this difficult experience?" and "Has God showed you something about himself in the midst of your suffering?" He will not only pray for healing and comfort, but also for God's refining, sanctifying work.

Suffering is perhaps one of God's sharpest tools for chiseling us into Christ's image. Elders can support spiritual growth simply by reminding brothers and sisters that their suffering has a divine purpose.

MATURING DISCIPLES THROUGH HOSPITALITY

Paul twice says that elders must be hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:8). But let's again view this elder task through the lens of making disciples. When we do, we find that hospitality is about more than elders being friendly. Hospitality is also about elders making disciples by being examples.

An elder's hospitality enables others to see that elder up close in his natural habitat. They see how he relates to his wife, shapes his kids, and works out his Christian faith in real life. Hospitality facilitates an elder's ministry of modeling maturity (1 Pet. 5:3). It allows people into his life so that he can say to them, "Join with others in following my example" (Phil. 3:17).

MATURING DISCIPLES BY LIVING LIFE TOGETHER

Hospitality is just the beginning. Modeling maturity takes more than a cookout; elders must open their lives to others. Just as effective shepherds must be among the sheep, so effective elders will live life together with church members. Members need to see elders' behavior in a variety of contexts, including work and play, ministry and misery, success and setback.

This may sound daunting to men with hectic lives and busy schedules. But doing life together is not as much about adding more to the schedule as it is about inviting others into what is already happening. So if you're an elder, include members into your normal golfing or fishing, gaming or gardening. Commute together to work. If you teach a class at church, bring on an assistant teacher to apprentice with you.

Elders should be able to say with Paul, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well" (1 Thess. 1:8). As elders share their lives, members get glimpses of Christian maturity in high definition.

MATURING DISCIPLES THROUGH LEADERSHIP

Let's take one more example: leadership. Elders lead a local church, just as shepherds lead a flock. That's why they are called "overseers" (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 13:17).

But when an elder grasps the goal of making mature disciples, he no longer sees "leadership" as merely sitting around a table making decisions. He understands that leadership includes raising up more leaders. The maturity-minded shepherd invites others into his life to share in teaching and responsibility (2 Tim. 2:2). He will demonstrate and delegate. A discipleship vision shifts an elder's leadership focus from policies and programs to training future shepherds.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF MAKING MATURE DISCIPLES?

Why is it so critical that elders see disciple-making and disciple-maturing as the goal of their shepherding? Because making disciples isn't really the ultimate goal.

The ultimate goal for elders, and the church, is to savor and exalt God and his glory. Both shepherds and sheep exist to reflect the image and character of Jesus.

So when elders shepherd in such a way as to grow up Christ-like disciples, they are extending the reflection of Jesus' glory in the world. Making more and more mature disciples means there are more people treasuring Jesus, imitating Jesus, and proclaiming the good news about Jesus. Disciple-making shepherds labor to bring glory to the Chief Shepherd himself.

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By Bobby Jamieson

How Can Pastors Raise up Leaders?

Most pastors are all too familiar with the tyranny of the urgent. There are often so many leaks that need patching that it seems impossible to slow down and spend the time it takes to train a crew—that is, to raise up new church leaders.

Yet as a pastor, there are several reasons why you should be regularly discipling men who have the potential to serve as elders, whether in your church or another.

WHY PASTORS SHOULD RAISE UP LEADERS

1. Scripture commands it.

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul writes, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Since 2 Timothy was written not merely for Timothy, but for us all (Rom. 15:4, 2 Tim. 3:16-17), every pastor of a local church should train other men to be teachers in the church.

2. Pastors are best able to train other pastors.

Men training for ministry will learn best from those who are engaged in the work full-time. They’ll gain practical wisdom, personal sensitivities, and an up-close understanding of the work that they won’t get any other way.

3. The church needs it.

As the pastor, you need to take the lead in raising up leaders, whether those leaders will serve your own church as elders or go somewhere else. If you don’t disciple leaders, who will?

4. It evangelizes future generations.

A pastor can do “mission work” to the future by raising up leaders in the present. Who will lead your church and evangelize your community when you’re gone? Raise up leaders now and you get to send the gospel not just into your community, but into the future.

HOW PASTORS CAN RAISE UP LEADERS

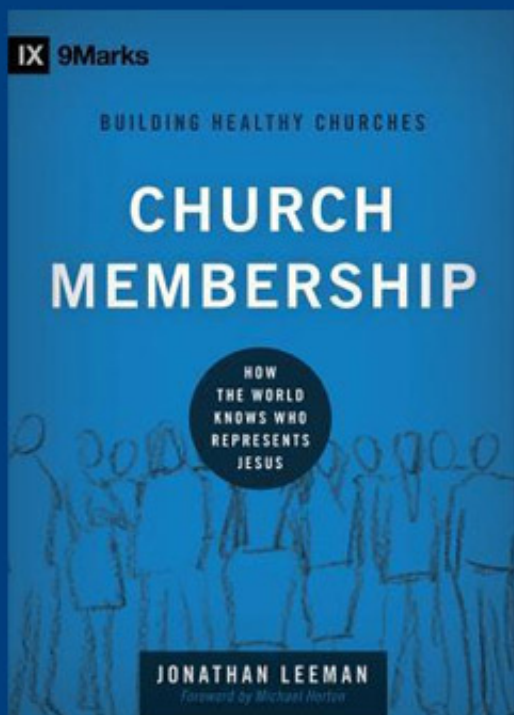
But how can a busy pastor with thinly spread resources disciple men toward being church leaders? Here is a handful of practical suggestions.

1. Share your pulpit (carefully). Look for ways to give doctrinally and pastorally reliable younger men in your congregation opportunities to preach and teach, even if they are not practiced public speakers.
2. Teach your congregation to care about other churches and God's broader kingdom purposes. The goal is for the church as a whole to embrace the agenda of raising up pastors both for themselves and for other churches. Encourage them that this will serve them better in the long run. This encouragement and leadership from you will help them to be more generous, prayerful, and patient with younger and less experienced men.
3. Publicly pray for other churches and pastors, by name.
4. Publicly pray for the spread of the gospel in other nations, by name.
5. Look for other opportunities to "give away" teaching and evangelism opportunities to younger men, such as Sunday School classes, public prayer, or service leading. Coach them through it. Provide feedback.
6. Hold a weekly "service review." Invite participants in the church's public ministry to review the events of the day. Invite feedback on your preaching and leading. Model how to give and receive godly encouragement and criticism. (Tips: Emphasize the biblical, theological, and pastoral rather than the stylistic and preferential. Be honest, but don't pile too many critiques on top of the young and inexperienced all at once. Look for evidences of grace and make sure participants leave feeling encouraged and built up.)
7. Set a personal example in evangelism, befriending non-Christians, and discipling younger Christians. See who begins imitating your example and specifically invest in them.
8. Consider developing a pastoral internship. Click [here](#) for some examples of church-based pastoral training.
9. Give away lots of good books. Invite developing leaders to schedule a follow-up conversation once they've read the book you gave them.
10. Invite younger men into your study to work and read as you do the same.
11. Invite developing leaders into your sermon preparation process. Discuss the text with one or two other men as you study. Once you've got the main point of the text, invite someone to think through sermon application with you.
12. Think of any windows in your life and ministry that you can invite developing leaders into: meals in your home, errands, pastoral visits, outside speaking engagements, conferences.
13. Discuss current (non-sensitive) pastoral issues with younger men and ask for their input. This will train them to think theologically and pastorally, and it might even give you fresh insight

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By Garrett Kell

Discipleship According to the Scriptures

My earliest memories revolve around fishing trips with my father. He taught me how to bait a hook, cast a line, and land a catfish without getting stabbed to death. But fishing wasn't all I learned. I learned about my father. I learned how he walked, how he talked, how he joked, how he prayed, how he spoke to others, and how he always thought about my mother on the drive home.

More than fishing, I learned about being a man.

To this day, the lessons I learned from my dad impact the way I live and love others. What happened in my time with my father was a form of discipleship. He led and I followed.

What is biblical discipleship? Of all the questions Christians need to wrestle with, this is one of the most important. Being disciples of Jesus gets to the very core of who we are and what we should be doing with our lives.

In this article I suggest that discipleship—helping others follow Jesus—flows directly from being a disciple of Jesus. Disciples are called to follow Christ, and following him means helping others follow him.

Are you a disciple that makes disciples?

DISCIPLES FOLLOW JESUS

When we encounter Jesus, we meet a man who calls us to come and die (Mk. 8:34-35). And he calls us to follow him and learn from him (Mt. 4:19, 11:29). It doesn't matter whether we're smart or stupid, rich or poor, young or old, Asian, African, or American. The only requirement is that we repent of rebelling against our Creator and cling to him through faith (Mk. 1:15; 1 Thess. 1:9). If we do this, we're promised forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation to God (Col. 1:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:17-21). Jesus calls us to come and die so that we might live.

Those who follow Jesus by faith are known as his disciples. Some suggest that disciples are the “super Christians” who are gettin’ it done for Jesus, while Christians are just “normal believers.” Scripture, however, offers no support for this distinction. (See, for example, Mt. 10:38, 16:24-28; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23, 57-62; Jn. 10:27, 12:25-26). We are either following Jesus or we aren’t; there is no middle ground (Mt. 12:30).

DISCIPLES IMITATE AND REPLICATE JESUS

At the heart of following Jesus is Jesus’ call to imitate him and replicate him. As disciples, we are called to imitate Jesus’ love (Jn. 13:34), his mission (Mt. 4:19), his humility (Phil. 2:5), his service (Jn. 13:14), his suffering (1 Pt. 2:21) and his obedience to the Father (1 Jn. 2:3-6). Since he is our teacher, we are to learn from him and strive in the power of the Holy Spirit to become like him (Lk. 6:40). This growth in Christ-likeness is a lifelong endeavor that is fueled by the hopeful expectation that one day we will see him face to face (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

DISCIPLES HELP OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS

As we follow our Lord, we quickly learn that part of imitation is replication. Having a personal relationship with Jesus is magnificent, but it is incomplete if it ends with us. Part of being his follower is to intentionally help others learn from him and become more like him. As a friend of mine says, “If you aren’t helping other people follow Jesus, I don’t know what you mean when you say you’re following Jesus.” To be his follower is to help others follow him.

Being a disciple that makes disciples happens in two particular ways. First, we’re called to evangelize. Evangelism is telling people who don’t follow Jesus what it means to follow him. We do this by proclaiming and portraying the gospel in our neighborhood and among the nations (Mt. 28:19-20). We must never forget that God has placed us in the families, workplaces, and circles of friends that we are in so that we can proclaim the gospel of grace to those who are destined to hell apart from Christ. We must help people learn how to begin to follow Jesus.

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The second aspect of making disciples is helping other believers grow in Christ-likeness. Jesus has designed his church to be a body (1 Cor. 12), a kingdom of citizens and a family who actively build each other up into the fullness of Christ (Eph. 2:19; 4:13, 29). We are called to instruct each other about Christ (Rom. 15:14) and to imitate others who are following Christ (1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9). As disciples, we are to intentionally pour into other disciples so they can pour into still others (2 Tim. 2:1-2).

DISCIPLES INTENTIONALLY BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Discipleship does not just happen. We need to be intentional about cultivating deep, honest relationships in which we do spiritual good to other Christians. While we can have discipleship relationships anywhere, the most natural place for them to develop is in the community of the local church. In the church Christians are commanded to meet together regularly, spur each other on in Christ-likeness, and protect each other against sin (Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25).

The discipleship relationships that spring out of this type of committed community should be both structured and spontaneous. When we study the life of Jesus, we see that he formally taught his disciples (Mt. 5-7; Mk. 10:1) while also allowing them to observe his obedience to God as they lived life together (Jn 4:27; Lk. 22:39-56).

In the same way, some of our discipleship relationships should be structured. Maybe two friends decide to read a chapter from the Gospel of John and then discuss it over coffee or a workout at the gym. Maybe two businessmen read a chapter each week from a Christian book and then talk about it on a Saturday walk through the neighborhood with their kids. Maybe two couples do a date night together once a month and talk about what the Bible says about marriage. Maybe a godly older lady has a younger single woman over to her home on Tuesday afternoon to pray and study a Christian biography. Maybe a mom spends time at the park with other moms each week. Regardless of the format, some of our discipleship should involve scheduled times of reading, praying, confessing, encouraging, and challenging each other to become more like Christ.

Discipleship can also be spontaneous. Maybe friends go to a movie together and then grab ice cream afterwards to compare the movie's message to what the Bible says. Maybe a father and a son sit on the porch and reflect on God's glory being displayed in a sunset. Maybe you invite visitors from church over for lunch and ask everyone how they came to know Jesus.

We always need to be intentional, but we don't always need to be structured. In fact, Deuteronomy 6 shows us that discipleship happens "when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (v. 7). Every moment presents an opportunity to discuss who God is and what he's doing. Since we are always following Jesus, we always have the opportunity to help others follow him as well.

DISCIPLES DEPEND UPON GRACE

While it is true that a disciple of Jesus ought to help others follow Jesus, we must always remember that apart from the sustaining and empowering grace of God we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). Whether you're a pastor, a plumber, a policeman, or a stay at home parent, you never graduate from your need for God's grace.

As we follow Christ and help others follow him, we're constantly made aware that we need grace. We fail. We sin. We struggle. But thankfully, God's grace abounds to his children. This is good news as we seek to follow Jesus together and daily be transformed into his glorious image (2 Cor. 3:18). May we faithfully follow Christ and help others to do the same until we see his face. Come soon, Lord Jesus!

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By Erin Wheeler

Discipling When You Need to Be Disciplined

I was not sure what discipling was supposed to look like, but I was certain it did *not* look like what I was doing.

“I must have it all backwards,” I thought as I closed the door behind the poor sister who had given up an hour of her life to come and be disciplined.

“I am a mess. I have no idea what I’m doing here. There certainly wasn’t any ‘teaching’ going on with my crazy hooligan children and my heart in a bad place toward my husband. I shouldn’t be teaching anyone. I’m the one who needs discipling! God, what would you have me do?”

“I am a mess. I have no idea what I’m doing here. There certainly wasn’t any ‘teaching’ going on with my crazy hooligan children and my heart in a bad place toward my husband. I shouldn’t be teaching anyone. I’m the one who needs discipling! God, what would you have me do?”

I mumbled all this half aloud as I walked back into the kitchen to finish making dinner.

FINDING STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

Little did I know how God would use this situation, along with many other similar ones, to teach me a great deal about his purposes in my life. Little did I know how God would turn my weaknesses into strength. During this season my husband and I, both in our thirties, found ourselves thrust into the category of “older people” in our church. I searched

for a woman who might be able to encourage me spiritually as we muddled through some challenging times, but God had other plans.

Instead of granting this desire, he grew my passion for discipling. Gradually I learned that it was less about me doing the right thing and more about me obeying God's command to "teach the younger women" (Tit. 2:4). I found God frequently brought women into my life who were younger in either age or spiritual maturity and who were desperate for someone to help them learn how to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deut. 6:4-9).

TEACHING BY BEING WATCHED

As much I desired to be discipled, I often found myself in the discipler seat, feeling deeply insecure and inadequate. I felt like Moses in Exodus 4, saying, "Oh God, please send someone else," for which God would rebuke me in a number of different ways. As with Moses, I sensed God saying, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak" (Ex. 4:11-12).

In discipling these women I tried to instruct and question them, discuss books together, and pray, but they would tell me later that often the best teaching came from simply watching me. They watched God use my weakness in fighting for patience when the day had long since worn me thin. They watched me struggle to love my husband after sharing with them my own struggles of feeling second place to his work.

GOD WILL SUPPLY WHAT WE NEED

I came to better understand the words of Paul when he said, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and *not from us*" (2 Cor. 4:7). These ladies got a front row seat to see the true jar of clay that I am. Since we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, sometimes we need to allow others to see God's strength shine out of our feeble attempts to serve him.

God does not call us to be all that we can be on our own. Instead, he calls us to pour ourselves out for others like a drink offering. For it is in emptying ourselves out of love for him and love for others that he can use our frailty as the perfect platform to display his strength. Every day God gives us life on this earth, he gives us everything we need for life and godliness. This means that he will be faithful to supply everything we need in order to disciple the women he brings into our lives.

“ God does not call us to be all that we can be on our own. Instead, he calls us to pour ourselves out for others like a drink offering. For it is in emptying ourselves out of love for him and love for others that he can use our frailty as the perfect platform to display his strength. ”

OUR CONFIDENCE: GOD IS AT WORK

Years later, God brought a new friend and sister in the church who would come over to hang out for a while on a Saturday afternoon while Brad was busy preparing a sermon. It seemed as though every time she came over something was going wrong, from the worst fit of rage from one of my children to the toilet overflowing! It was during one of those times that I looked up at her with a smile, confident in the Lord's perfect timing, and said, "You know, God must really love you to let you see all this."

That is our confidence: not that we have the perfect home and well-behaved children, but that in the muck and mire, God's Spirit is at work. Even in our weakness, God uses our words to warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, comfort the weak, and show patience to everyone, all for his great glory.

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By Garrett Kell

Discipleship and the Paradoxes of Growth

When I became a Christian in college I soon found myself a little confused. Not because my new Christian friends reminisced about talking-vegetable cartoons from their childhoods, or had fish symbols on their cars, or enjoyed playing board games on Friday nights, though all that was confusing. What puzzled me were the paradoxes that seemed inescapable for those who followed Christ.

As I studied the Scriptures with other Christians I discovered many truths that were both clear and unclear. I learned that there is one God who is eternally three. I learned that Jesus is fully God and fully man. I learned that God is completely sovereign and that people are responsible for their actions. These ideas were mysterious, puzzling, and at the same time, wonderfully edifying.

But the paradoxes of the Christian life didn't end there. Looking into the Scriptures I saw that Christian growth and maturity happened in paradoxical ways. If we want to grow as Christians and to help others to grow, it is essential to understand these paradoxes.

WE LIVE BY DYING

First, we live by dying. In Mark 8:35 Jesus says, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will find it." If we want to live, we must die. This advice seems foolish in a world that constantly counsels us to "follow our hearts" and "seize the day!" We are told we only live once, and that we should drink up every moment as we climb to the top.

Being a disciple of Jesus, however, means surrendering our lives and embracing the life that Christ gives. This is the only way to true life. As Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." This death happens thousands of times before heaven, and is always an act of faith in Jesus.

Several years ago, I became entangled in a web of sin. Discontentment, lust, and a lack of faith had crept into my heart like a python and were slowly crushing my devotion to the Lord. In that season, a dear brother spoke into my life in a powerful way: he called me to live by dying. He showed me that my love for the world was quenching my love for Christ. He spoke with truth and grace. God used that brother to open my eyes to the promise of life that would only come

through dying. I am not sure where I would be if he hadn't brought Jesus' call before me afresh, and I am forever grateful that he did.

In discipleship, we must consistently hold the lens of eternity before each other's eyes to ensure that we are not being "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). The world constantly calls us to find life in its pleasures. The only antidote to this powerful demand is to meditate on how Christ surrendered his life for our sake. Consider how he hated sin. Ponder how he loved us. Remember how he bled. Think of how he died. Rejoice in how he glorified the Father.

Our discipleship must be marked by helping each other meditate on Christ's call to take up our cross daily and follow him. Dying is the only way to live.

“Our discipleship must be marked by helping each other meditate on Christ's call to take up our cross daily and follow him. Dying is the only way to live.”

WE REST BY STRIVING

Second, we rest by striving. Jesus has finished the work, so we must not rest until the work is done. Huh?

How do I strive to “keep myself in the love of God” while at the same time rest in the fact that God “keeps me from stumbling” (Jude 20, 24)? What does it mean for us to come to Jesus who “will give you rest” (Matt. 11:29) while at the same time being told, “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest” (Heb. 4:11)?

Of all the paradoxes of Christian growth, the idea of striving and resting at the same time seems to be the most puzzling. Do I work each day until I pass out from exhaustion or do I sit on the couch and wait for Jesus to pick me up like a puppet? How do I “do” and “depend” at the same time? How do I work without working in my own strength? What does it mean to labor fervently by the grace that God supplies?

While it may be puzzling, we must embrace this tension as presented in Scripture (Dt. 29:29; 1 Cor. 15:10; Phil. 2:12-13). God calls us to rest completely in Christ's work (Jn. 19:30; Heb. 10; 1 Pet. 3:18) and at the same time to work hard (Jn. 15:8; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; James 2:14-26). Philippians 2:12-13 captures the paradox perfectly: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

It is in this paradox that we see the point of faith. We step out, we *do*, but when we put our foot down, we find the ground that supports us is the ground God promised would be there. When we look back, we find that, yes, we stepped out, but it was God at work in us. We rest in God's faithfulness to empower our striving in obedience.

So what does this paradox mean for our discipleship with other Christians? As you spend time with other believers, rest in Christ. Stare at the cross together. Ponder the empty tomb together. Recall promises that highlight our freedom from sin and condemnation (e.g., Rom. 6:1-4, 8:1). Pray through verses that speak of God's love for us in Christ (Eph. 2:1-10; Rom. 8:32-39; 1 Jn. 4:10). Remind each other that God is not keeping a scorecard in heaven. He doesn't have a “smite key” on his computer for the next time you mess up. Treasure the fact that we are pleasing to God because he is pleased with Christ. Preach the gospel to each other. Call each other to rest in Christ's cry that “it is finished!”

We must also rest in the fact that the risen Christ intercedes for us in heaven (Heb. 7-10). This intercession guarantees that God will be merciful toward our iniquities and will remember our sins no more (Heb. 8:1-12). What a wonderful truth to rest in! We are forgiven in Christ. God does not hold our transgressions against us. We rest in Christ's finished and ongoing work on our behalf.

At the same time, our discipleship should be marked by a striving together. Remind each other that Jesus has given the "Helper," the Holy Spirit, to empower us to live in a way that pleases God (Jn. 14:26; Rom. 8:4). We labor, but we do not labor alone. We are united with the presence of the victorious King of Kings through his Holy Spirit. He enables us to make disciples among the nations (Mt. 28:19-20) and to endure persecution as we go (Luke 12:11-12). We can endure sufferings of this life through his strength (2 Cor. 12:9-10) and then comfort others in their sufferings (2 Cor. 1:3-7).

So strive together by living as soldiers of Christ who are at war with the evil one (2 Tim. 2:2; Eph. 6:10; 1 Pt. 5:8-9). Discipline yourself and structure your habits around increasing in godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). Intentionally use your interactions to build up each other for love and good works (Heb. 10:24-25). And above all, help each other strip off everything that slows you down so that you may finish this race and enter that final rest we have been promised (Heb. 12:1-3).

The paradoxes of spiritual growth are not given to us to paralyze us. God gives them so that we will peer into his Word more intently and dig into his promises more freely. So encourage each other to live by dying and rest by striving.

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WHAT IS
SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP?

*the life
of GOD
in the soul
of the
church*

IX 9Marks

"For anyone who doubts the practical relevance of good theology,
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By Jonathan Leeman

A Discipler's Daily Itinerary

It is one thing to say that Christians should be involved in discipling relationships. It is another thing to figure out what this looks like practically. When do you do it? How do you do it? What does it look like?

In order to present as clear a picture as possible, here is what a day's schedule might look like for a typical Christian husband and father who has heard Jesus' call to be a fisher of men.

- 6:00 a.m. Shower & dress
- 6:30 a.m. Devotions: Bible reading & praying. Pray for family, day's events, discipling relationships, evangelistic opportunities, the church, etc.
- 7:00 a.m. Help kids get ready
- 7:30 a.m. Meet fellow church member Paul at nearby coffee shop for breakfast; discuss chapter of D. A. Carson book; discuss marriage and parenting; ask about his other Christian and non-Christian relationships
- 8:30 a.m. Work
- 12:30 p.m. Lunch with non-Christian co-worker; discuss faith
- 1:30 p.m. Work
- 5:30 p.m. Pick up items at store for dinner for wife; bring Ken, single man in the church who lives nearby. Ask deliberate questions about his life.
- 6:30 p.m. Dinner; family worship; play with kids; bedtime routine
- 8:45 p.m. Desert with wife and the Smiths in the living room, a younger couple in the church who are struggling in their marriage; conversations about marriage and prayer
- 10:15 p.m. Prayer with wife and bed.

On the one hand, that schedule is all very neat. Life never quite fits into 30 and 60 minute blocks. You know that. Any given day might have more time with family, doing home repair, taking kids to swim lesson, working late, or a hundred other things.

Still, it gives you the picture of a fairly average discipler. Nothing exceptional or groundbreaking, but hopefully faithful and deliberate amidst the many stewardships of life that God gives. Four touch points outside the family (breakfast, lunch, errand, dessert) might be unusual—one to three would be more typical. And some days, there might be none.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jonathan Leeman, a member of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, is the editorial director of 9Marks and is the author of *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*.



By Brian Parks

Six Benefits of Evangelism for Discipleship

Evangelism changed my life.” John, my taxi driver, told me this as we drove down the Orlando freeway toward the conference I was attending. Our conversation had quickly turned to faith when he discovered I had not come to Orlando for Disney World like most of his passengers.

“What do you mean?” I asked, fully expecting him to explain how someone had led him to Christ. But that is not what he meant. He meant that *doing* evangelism had changed his life.

He explained: “Learning to share my faith brought so many important issues into focus. It has made me work through things I had never thought about before. And, boy, after you lead someone to Christ you never forget it. It’s like you can’t stop! There’s nothing like it!”

John’s testimony to the spiritually invigorating effect of sharing one’s faith resonated with everything I have experienced in my own walk with Christ and in 22 years of student ministry and church leadership.

Yet how often have we thought of discipleship and evangelism as two separate and unconnected aspects of our life in Christ? Even more harmful, we often consider discipleship necessary and evangelism optional. Or we think evangelism is only for the most zealous and “spiritually gifted” in our churches.

EVERY DISCIPLE SHOULD EVANGELIZE

But the New Testament paints a picture in which *every* disciple of Christ is normally and naturally involved in evangelism as much as in Bible study, prayer, and corporate worship. From the brand new Christian to the wizened old saint, sharing the gospel is necessary and integral to a growing life in Christ.

Many of us have heard and even preached sermons that rightly focused on the Great Commission’s theme of “make disciples” (Matt. 28:18-20). And we’ve taught those around us that they should be disciple-makers themselves. But we also need to be clear that “making disciples” necessarily involves helping people who are not yet disciples to become disciples—that is, evangelism. Jesus modeled it (Mk. 1:14, 15; Matt. 9:35) and trained his apostles to do the same (Mk. 6:7-13; Lk. 10:1-12). Only a few days later Jesus said that they would be his “witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Part of the apostles' teaching that the newly Spirit-filled church devoted themselves to (Acts 2:42) must have been the normal and regular sharing of the gospel with family, friends, and strangers. From those very first weeks and months after the Pentecost, people were being saved every day (Acts 2:47). Evangelism was immediately a part of their new life of discipleship to the risen Lord Jesus.

EVANGELISM'S BENEFITS

Here are six ways that treating evangelism as a necessary part of discipleship helps to grow mature disciples.

1. Evangelism helps keep the gospel central in our lives and churches.

The gospel creates the church (Col. 1:5, 6), is its chief message (1 Cor. 15:1-3), and powers our growth in Christ (Phil 1:6). Therefore, we ought to do everything in our power to keep it central. We know that the world, our flesh, and the devil will do everything they can to move it out of view.

D.A. Carson has said that one way we preserve the gospel is by working hard to pass it on to others. Evangelism helps us maintain the gospel message as the engine of a growing life in Christ.

2. Evangelism deepens our understanding of the most fundamental truths of Scripture.

Gospel conversations with non-Christians force us to better grasp the central, underpinning truths of God's Word. Issues like God's character, his holiness and wrath, man's creation in God's image, sin, grace, the cross of Christ, and judgment all come into sharp focus. We have to think through explaining these concepts to different people in different circumstances. And we learn better how these truths lace together all of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

One of the clearest verses on the discipleship benefits of evangelism is Philemon 1:6: "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

Knowing something and explaining it to someone who doesn't understand it or believe it are two different things. These treasured truths become clearer to us as we explain them to others.

3. Properly motivated evangelism grows our love for God and neighbor.

All people are called to wholeheartedly love God and other people (Mark 12:28-31). Sharing our faith because we love God and people stokes the fire of this love all the more. I've never seen properly motivated evangelism do the opposite.

“If you've not led someone to Christ, I can only describe to you the joy of seeing the transforming power of the gospel newly at work in a person. To see their heart broken for their sin breaks my heart more fully for my sin. To see them revel in the freedom of forgiveness makes me want to drink it in all the more myself.”

If you've not led someone to Christ, I can only describe to you the joy of seeing the transforming power of the gospel newly at work in a person. To see their heart broken for their sin breaks my heart more fully for my sin. To see them revel in the freedom of forgiveness makes me want to drink it in all the more myself. Experiencing the privilege of leading someone to Christ reminds us of how much more powerful, holy, and merciful God is than we often think him to be.

Likewise, when we share the message of gospel hope with others, Christ promises us that sometimes they will reject it and perhaps reject us as well (Jn. 15:18-20). When that happens my heart is more broken over the imprisonment and blindness that sin brings. I ponder the coming judgment with greater urgency. And I wonder again why God would save me, just as much a sinner as the person who rejected me and the gospel message.

4. Evangelism prompts unexpected questions and objections from non-Christians, which can deepen our faith.

I've lived in the Middle East for almost ten years, and my interactions with Muslims and other non-Christians have consistently strengthened my faith as I turned to God seeking wise answers to their questions.

In the food court near our company's offices I have spent many an afternoon befriending Muslims. Often our conversations will naturally turn to issues of faith, and I have had the opportunity to explain what Christians really believe. I cannot always answer their questions immediately but as I turn to God and his Word for answers, my faith is always strengthened. Sharing my faith puts me in a position to hear objections and find answers to questions that I never would have asked on my own.

5. Evangelism protects us from mistakenly assuming that those around us are saved.

Unregenerate people cannot be discipled in any biblical sense. They do not and cannot grow in godliness (Rom. 8:5-8).

A great danger for the church today is assuming the salvation of people who simply claim the label "Christian" or are involved in church activities. Not being careful about who we consider to be "born again" often has its roots in unbiblical views of conversion (see the [9Marks Journal on conversion](#)). Or sometimes fear of man dissuades us from taking the risk of offending a professing believer by suggesting they may not be trusting in Christ after all.

But making the gospel a part of our everyday conversation will often result in nominal Christians actually being born again of the Spirit.

The sower spread the seed liberally, seemingly without consideration for where it landed (path, rocks, thorns, soil; Mark 4:2-8). We too should share the gospel broadly and without discrimination, allowing our sovereign God to use it however he sees fit, to save the lost as well as encourage the saints.

6. Evangelism increases the likelihood of being persecuted for the gospel, which leads to our growth.

There's a reason I didn't start with this "benefit"! Still, consider Romans 5:3-5:

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

While we should not seek suffering for suffering's sake, we should be prepared to embrace suffering for the gospel's sake (2 Tim. 1:8; Rom. 8:17). In fact, suffering because of our evangelism should be an encouragement to us as it was to the early church (Acts 5:41). And sharing our faith helps ensure that we will suffer because of the gospel itself rather than because of unwise decisions or giving needless offense. Suffering for our proclamation of the gospel can deepen our faith as we look to our suffering Savior.

CAUTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

One word of caution: as you push forward in evangelism as a part of your discipleship, be careful with evangelistic programs. I have described evangelism as needing to be "natural and normal." When we do it only because we are

participating in a program, then we are not conforming to how Scripture describes evangelism in the life of believers. Treating evangelism as a program can divorce it from discipleship and our daily lives.

Training wheels eventually need to be removed from a child's bike. In the same way, programs are fine as long as we see them as forms and structures that we will eventually shed in favor of a more natural and normal integration into the fabric of our lives.

Finally, the single greatest encouragement to your congregation and Christian friends to be actively sharing their faith is for the senior pastor and elders to be seen and heard sharing their faith. People will learn best what you are most excited about. If you as a pastor are excited to share your faith, the congregation will learn to be excited to share their faith. And they will grow as disciples of Jesus as they do.

“ If you as a pastor are excited to share your faith, the congregation will learn to be excited to share their faith. ”

Jesus told his apostles in the Great Commission, “Make disciples...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19). As we make disciples, let's be sure to model and teach them *all* that he commanded—including the great joy and blessing of a life of evangelism.

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By Jani Ortlund

A Sacred Trust: Reflections on Discipling Women

Many of us hunger for meaningful Christian togetherness. We attend church seeking friendship and community, but often leave disappointed.

To be part of Christ's body means growing in deeper fellowship than we can accomplish on a Sunday morning. And Jesus tells us through his words and example how to do that. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

A GREAT LINE OF DISCIPLES

Jesus wants you to be part of a great line of his disciples. He commands this as a way of life, so that the fullness of your life in him can be passed on to others, who in turn can pass it on to others until "the end of the age."

Think of your life thirty years down the road. How old will you be? I'll be 92. Both of my grandmothers lived well into their nineties, and my mother is celebrating her ninetieth birthday this year. I may well have thirty more happy years of serving Christ ahead of me! Still, I don't want to be the end of the line. I want to leave behind a trail of women who love Christ with all their hearts.

Psalm 78:1-7 challenges one generation to make known to the "coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders he has done." In this way we bring Christ to distant generations as well, "that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God."

This is a generational stewardship, given to us by God. When we disciple women, their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren stand to receive the blessings of our efforts. Our lives matter and will matter for a long time. A glacier seems to be accomplishing little at the moment but it leaves behind a Grand Canyon. Be willing to be part of a glacier. We want to leave behind generations of women who "set their hope in God."

HOW TO GET STARTED

The first step in discipleship is to be a disciple yourself. “Disciple” is not just a verb, it is also a noun. You are, first, a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship involves “Be who I am” more than “Do what I tell you.” Who you are will make an impact.

I am deeply indebted to two women who have made a costly investment in me. Much of what I am passing on to women today is what I have learned from them. In whom do you see spiritual life and the radiant beauty of Jesus Christ spilling over into different aspects of her life? Whom do you want to imitate (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17)? Ask her out for tea and tell her your heart’s desire. See if she is willing. The first woman I asked said she just couldn’t do it. That is okay—keep trying. Discipleship means taking relational risks.

Who are you in Christ? If you want to grow deeper in him, that’s perfect! Take others with you. If you feel weak and needy, that is when God’s power is strongest. Even in your weakness you can help other women learn what it means to trust God in theirs.

“Who are you in Christ? If you want to grow deeper in him, that’s perfect! Take others with you. If you feel weak and needy, that is when God’s power is strongest. Even in your weakness you can help other women learn what it means to trust God in theirs.”

Do you know Jesus? Do you love him? Is he worth giving your whole life to? Someone needs to hear that, be close to that, see you embrace that. Someone needs to see you live those convictions up close, and more than on a Sunday morning.

Discipleship isn’t about professional Christians passing on their best practices to amateur Christians. Being a disciple, and learning to disciple others, means looking at Jesus with such intensity and delight that you actually begin to reflect his beauty in everyday life. As you grow in grace, Jesus becomes more precious, more satisfying, more exciting than anything else. And as you behold him, others will want to join you and you can begin looking to him together. The most important way you can disciple others is by enjoying Christ yourself in such an irresistible way that your enjoyment becomes contagious.

INVITING OTHERS ONTO THE PATH OF LIFE

Every single person is heading down a path to one of two places—life or death.

The path of the righteous is life, and in its pathway there is no death. (Prov. 12:28)

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. (Prov. 14:12; cf. 16:25)

In discipleship we ask others to walk with us down the pathway of life. Should we challenge and exhort them along the way? Yes, but as a fellow pilgrim, not as one already across the finish line (Phil. 3:14-15). We should help them to recognize, admire, esteem, respond to, and enjoy Jesus, whose yoke is easy and burden is light (Matt. 11:30).

Love those you’re discipling as Jesus loves you (Rom. 15:7). Remember, it is not our mission to show others how sinful they are, but how beautiful Jesus is! So link arms as you walk together in your common need for Jesus.

Discipling does not always have to be structured. Some people do not work that way. But you might also find it helpful to build systems of intimacy and accountability. Here are a few suggestions from my own discipleship groups.

- We commit to how often we will meet, and for how long.
- We take turns sharing our own “biography bag” filled with meaningful symbols of our life so far.
- We spend time worshiping God together.
- We study different Bible passages.
- We share prayer requests and pray for each other, keeping requests confidential.
- We learn a song or a hymn and sing it together.
- We read and discuss a book.
- We memorize passages of Scripture.
- We serve together.
- We try to get to know each other’s families.

Obviously, this takes time. What will work for you? Make it your own.

OUR SACRED TRUST

We must cultivate in our sphere of influence—our homes, churches, neighborhoods, workplaces—spiritual daughters who in turn can pass on the Truth. The younger women among us are our sacred trust from our heavenly Father. Making disciples is not just a nifty idea someone thought up—it is a biblical mandate.

In this beautiful relationship of discipling, everyone wins. Think what we gain—a new friend, a prayer warrior, a fresh look at life, a deeper understanding of a different generation. In our giving we will be filled, blessed, encouraged, loved. Isn’t God kind to reward obedience with such joys?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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Member Handout: Plugging into Discipling Relationships

[Editor's Note: This is a handout which the staff of Capitol Hill Baptist Church give out to new members. We thought it could be useful for other churches as well, though you'll have to change the necessary details.]

New church members have lots of questions. A common one is, “How do I get connected in a discipling relationship?”

What a great question! Discipling is critical for our Christian growth as individuals as well as for making the gospel visible in our life together as a church. So we do everything we can to cultivate a culture of discipling in our church.

1. What do we mean by “discipling”?

In one sense, almost everything we do as a local church is about being and making disciples. The songs we sing, the prayers we pray, and certainly the sermons that are preached all aim to grow us as God-glorifying disciples.

But for this handout we have something more specific in mind when we use the word “discipling.” We are thinking particularly about individual relationships. More formally, we are talking about the *intentional encouragement and training of disciples of Jesus on the basis of deliberate, loving relationships*.

Jesus tells us to pursue one another like this: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:17). How did Jesus love his disciples in ways that could be imitated? He loved them intentionally, purposefully, humbly, joyfully and normally. Let’s think about these descriptions.

Intentional: “You did not choose me but I chose you...” (John 15:16a). Jesus did not merely stumble across his disciples; he took loving initiative. He chose them. Christ-like love is not passive; it takes initiative. Loving other Christians like Christ love us means taking the initiative.

Purposeful: “...and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 15:16b). Christ’s love for his disciples is purposeful. He called them to bear fruit for God’s glory. In other words, his love is not merely sentimental, but has a wonderful, God-glorifying agenda. If we are to love one-another as Christ has loved us, surely we will share Jesus’ goals for one another, namely, the spiritual good of our friend and God’s glory through their joy in the gospel.

Humble: Jesus says, “As the father has loved me, so have I loved you,” (John 15:9) and “Instead [of slaves], I have called you friends” (John 15:15a). Jesus condescends to be our friend, even though he is infinitely far above us in majesty, holiness, and honor. Surely, then, we must relate with all humility to our fellow fallen brothers and sisters. We treat them as friends whom we love, not as “projects” or “lessers.” We don’t lord it over, we honor and cherish.

Joyful: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11). Jesus commands us to love one another so that we would know his joy. Setting out to care for other Christians, encouraging their growth in grace, can be hard work. But it is wonderful work, and Jesus says it is joy-producing work!

Normal: Jesus makes this kind of loving discipling his basic command to all his people and, thus, normal for all Christians. Listen again: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” Not surprisingly, you will find talk of basic Christian discipleship throughout God’s Word:

- “But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (Heb. 3:13).
- “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom. 12:10).
- “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11).

The New Testament is filled with such exhortations. Jesus and the apostles did not mean for discipling between Christians to be exceptional, but normal.

As a member of our church, we want *you* to be

intentional,

purposeful

humble

and joyful

as we work together at making these kinds of one-on-one relationships normal.

Do this by letting people get to know you. Do this by working to know them. Really, it is all of our work to cultivate a culture of discipleship in this place.

2. What do we mean by a “culture of discipling”?

You will probably hear that phrase a lot around us. Most dictionaries define a “culture” as something like “the shared values, goals and practices that characterize a group.” That is pretty much what we have in mind when it comes to discipling at our church. We don’t want just a program, we want mutual love and encouragement to be a value, goal, and practice that increasingly characterizes all of us.

Formal programs are not necessarily bad, but we want to make sure we do not fall short of the biblical ideal. And the biblical ideal, we have said, is to become a place where it is normal to take initiative in doing one another spiritual good. You don’t have to sign up for anything or get permission before loving fellow members this way. Nor do you want a church where discipling only happens when the staff sustain it. That’s not a healthy church! No, we want you to pray and think about how you can jump in. And talk to an elder or some other member about your unique opportunities and stewardships.

3. What should I do in a discipling relationship?

The most significant aspect of any discipling relationship, often, is not exactly what you do when you meet, but *that* you build a relationship with biblical truth at its core. As such, there is no “set program” for discipling relationships in our church. Members do a number of things:

- Meet weekly to discuss the prior Sunday’s sermon, a bookstall book, or a book of the Bible.
- Attend a Core Seminar together and discuss specific application in one another’s lives.

- Invite unmarried members to sit in on family devotions.
- Accompany mothers with young children as they run errands.
- Help dads with yard work and ask them for counsel.
- Schedule “play dates” for kids and talk about the Sunday night talk.

Examples abound, and the venues are flexible. What’s important, again, is that you pursue something, something where you have time to relate to another member with the intentional aim of encouraging and being encouraged by the truth from God’s Word.

So be creative! But be intentional about loving one another in the best, the highest, the most biblical way—by aiming to do the other person spiritual good.

If you would like even more help thinking through discipling relationships we have a thirteen week Core Seminar class on discipling. Attend the next time it is offered on Sunday morning at 9:30 a.m. Or download the discipling class manuscripts from www.capitolhillbaptist.org.

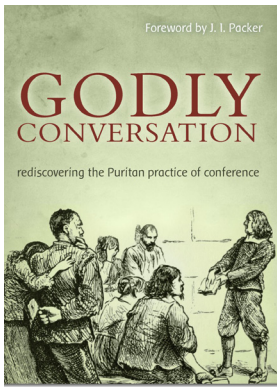
4. How can I get into a discipling relationship?

There are three ways to establish a discipling relationship at CHBC. First, take the personal initiative to try to work out a discipling relationship with any other member (of your same gender, please). No staff permission needed! Instead, show up to church early. Stick around late. Attend Meals After Church (MAC) Sunday nights. And start getting to know other people. Over time we hope you will begin to build the kind of relationships where these things happen naturally.

Second, talk to your small group leader for suggestions and assistance if you happen to join a small group (which is not required). They may not be free to meet up with you regularly, but as they get to know you, chances are they can help connect you with another member who would.

Third, if neither of these avenues results in a regular discipling relationship, feel free to contact one of the church staff for help. There are always a number of members who, because of schedules, geography, or other reasons, find it difficult to connect with another member one-on-one. In those cases the church staff is happy to help. Just call the office and ask for one of the pastoral assistants.

We do encourage you to start with your own initiative. It just might cause you to flex and even develop the discipline and evangelism muscles that will serve you and others for years to come. You might find that doing so becomes one of the most satisfying experiences of your life as a Christian. And you might find yourself understanding more clearly what Jesus meant when he said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).



JOANNE J. JUNG

BOOK REVIEW:

Godly Conversation: Recovering the Puritan Practice of Conference

Reviewed by Bobby Jamieson

Joanne J. Jung, *Godly Conversation: Rediscovering the Puritan Practice of Conference*. Reformation Heritage Books, 2011. \$25.00

Caricatures of the Puritans are like social media platforms: they seem to multiply and spread so quickly that it's hard to keep track of them all. One common slur on these seventeenth-century saints is that they were dour, hard-bitten individualists for whom the pinnacle of spiritual maturity was spending a week straight praying in private with no sleep, no food, and no human contact.

Happily, Joanne Jung's recent book *Godly Conversation: Rediscovering the Puritan Practice of Conference* sets out to dispel this caricature and to learn from the Puritans about how Christians today can grow in community. And the book succeeds on both counts.

INVESTIGATING AND APPROPRIATING PURITAN "CONFERENCE"

Godly Conversation is an examination and appropriation of the Puritan practice of "conference"—intense conversation about Scripture and spiritual things among small groups of Christians. After a foreword by J.I. Packer and other introductory matter, the book begins with a survey of literature on Puritan spirituality in chapter 1. However necessary this chapter may have been for a PhD thesis, it is more of a hurdle than a doorway into the book in its present form.

Chapter 2 examines the historical origins of Puritan conference, which Jung says arose in the wake of the late sixteenth-century "prophesyings" which Queen Elizabeth sought to stamp out. Prophesyings were meetings in which ministers would preach to each other, engage in theological debate, and discuss pastoral issues. Jung writes, "As supplemental,

on-the-job training for the ‘godly clergy,’ it eased the transition from an academic training to a pastoral, preaching ministry” (34). As such, prophesyings furnish an attractive model for contemporary pastoral fellowship and training.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide an overview of Puritan attitudes toward the Word of God read and heard. This will be familiar ground for many, though readers who are newer to the Puritans may well be struck by the vigor of the Puritans’ commitment to the centrality of the Bible in the Christian life and in the church.

Chapter 5 then presents a detailed discussion of conference, including its goals, biblical basis, benefits, and format. Building on this, chapter 6 contains a schema of different types of conference: pastors with pastors, pastors with their sheep, conference among families, and so on. And chapter 7 applies the study to the present. In it Jung critiques the state of contemporary evangelical small groups and suggests how characteristics of Puritan conference could be used to inject new spiritual life into them.

LESSONS FOR PASTORS

Overall, Jung’s book is a helpful historical survey, and her suggestions for appropriating Puritan conference today are useful. One critique I’d offer is that I don’t think the “spiritual formation” paradigm she’s working within is uniformly helpful and trustworthy. For example, the most frequently cited contemporary authors in the book are Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and Larry Crabb, and I’d have significant theological and pastoral reservations about recommending any of their works.

On a positive note, there are many lessons pastors can learn from the Puritans’ practice of conference as presented by Jung.

First, care for your fellow pastors’ souls—both your own pastoral team and other pastors in your community. Both conference and “prophesyings” offer great food for thought about how to do this.

Second, cultivate a culture of [spiritual conversation](#) in your church. Conference was not so much a program as a habit that flowed from the heart. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks, and many Puritans’ hearts were, to a remarkable extent, filled with heavenly things. So fill your people’s hearts and minds with the Word, and consistently model what it looks like for that Word to spill over into regular conversation and deliberate discipleship meetings.

Third, center discipleship—including small groups—on the Word. Puritan conference was remarkably Bible-driven. One of its primary goals was to increase all believers’ understanding of and ability to apply Scripture. So they provide a useful model of how to make the Bible central in our churches’ discipleship efforts.

Fourth, recognize how preaching and personal ministry mutually reinforce each other. This is one of the louder themes of chapter 7. For instance, in personal conference with their people, ministers could drive the Word home more specifically than they could in a sermon to the whole church, thus extending the reach of their sermon. As Richard Baxter said in a quote Jung returns to often, “I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse of conscience in half an hour’s close discourse, than they did from ten years public preaching” (132). Not only that, but what ministers would learn of their flock’s spiritual condition in these conferences crucially informed how they would explain and apply the Word to them in their weekly sermons. The better you know your people, the better you’ll preach to them.

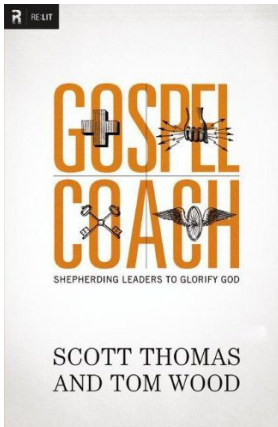
WHY NOT GO TO THE SOURCE?

All that said, would I recommend the book? Perhaps. It certainly highlights helpful facets of Puritan practice and gestures toward their application today, which I'm all for.

But I'd be more likely to recommend that you simply go read the Puritans yourself. If you want to get a firsthand feel for Puritan conference, start with Thomas Watson's work which Banner of Truth recently reprinted as *The Great Gain of Godliness*. Here's a taste: "Speak of the *preciousness of Christ*: he is beauty and love; he has laid down his blood as the price of your redemption. Have you a friend who has redeemed you, and never speak of him?" (69).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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BOOK REVIEW:

Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God

Reviewed by Bob Buchanan

Scott Thomas and Tom Wood, *Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God*. Zondervan, 2012. 239 pages. \$16.99

Gospel-hyphenated book titles seem to be everywhere these days. I am thankful that the gospel is getting attention for more than “entry-level Christianity.” It is good to remind believers that, as Tim Keller puts it, a Christian never gets beyond the gospel. Yet it takes more than a title to center a book on the gospel.

Happily, the authors of *Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God* are truly interested in seeing church leaders grow in Christlikeness according to the call of the gospel. At the time of writing, Scott Thomas was the Network Director of Acts 29 and the Global Church Pastor at Mars Hill Church in Seattle (he has since joined the staff of The Journey in St. Louis). And Tom Wood is founder and president of Church Multiplication Ministries in Atlanta.¹

EVERY LEADER SHOULD COACH AND BE COACHED

Thomas and Wood summarize the main point of the book when they write, “Every church leader needs a coach. And every church leader needs to be coaching other leaders” (23).

The authors distilled their work into three parts. Part one (23-108) explains the need for gospel-coaching. Citing the failures of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and the human-centered principles of the “life coaching” movement (44-45), they make their case for gospel-centered mentoring. They warn readers against Christian coaching that “suffer[s] from an unhealthy reliance on...therapeutic methods” (46). They tackle the problems of “performance-centered leadership” that lives by the flesh (Gal 5:16-17), that is, the idols of power, approval, comfort and security. And they argue that an important role for the gospel coach is to “be a grace giver and truth teller” (18) while being able to discern the difference between “doing good works for selfish reasons and extending generosity to display the gospel of grace” (76).

In part two (111-146), the authors turn to the qualities of the gospel coach. Above all, the coach is a shepherd-leader who knows, feeds, leads and protects. The coach is responsible to shepherd the disciple in three areas of life: spiritual, personal, and missional.

Part three (149-201) shows the practical application of gospel-coaching. And the conclusion of the book (202-234) offers appendices of coaching forms, accountability questions, and sample coaching sessions.

STRENGTHS

Gospel Coach is preeminently practical. If I were to reduce the book to a single phrase, it would be “the all-around value of gospel-friendships” — the kind where Christian leaders care for one other’s spiritual, ministerial and “missional” lives in the context of the work of ministry.

Three strengths of the book are worth mentioning. First, although the audience is church planters, the principles translate well to all sorts of Christian leaders and organizations. Because the gospel is central, one should expect these principles to work on the mission field, in staff meetings, on an elder’s retreat, or in children’s ministry planning sessions. The concern of the gospel coach is always the disciple’s growth in Christlikeness. A subtitle for this book could have been “Being in Christ before being in ministry.”

A second strength is the endnotes, where a veritable digest of gospel-centered authors will be found. The names of many of the authors will be familiar to readers of the 9Marks Journal; if not, they probably should be.

A third strength is more practical. Chapters 3 and 4 address the idols of the heart and will be a helpful antidote to pastors who “often drink in the poisonous cocktail of narcissism and isolation” (69). Only gospel-centered living that rests in one’s identity in Christ brings spiritual vitality. Chapters 11 and 12 illustrate a gospel-coaching conversation that gets to the heart of the matter.

The real value of gospel-coaching is accountability. As Wood told me, this is not the kind of accountability where pastors swap stories of failure and then do nothing. This is grace-filled accountability, listening carefully to the pastor’s heart and to the Spirit and calling the pastor to “live according to the gospel” (Rom. 16:25).

WEAKNESSES

A first weakness is that there is way too much information here to assimilate without some coaching. In Wood’s ministry, it takes nine months to a year to train a certified gospel coach.

Second, the separate concepts of “Action steps” (163) and “Accountability agreements” (193) seem interchangeable, even after Wood’s explanation. Additionally, I found the use of “SMART Strategies,” “Action steps” and “Goals” too much like traditional “life-coaching” principles. This may be my biased reaction to a personal coaching situation that felt more like a straight-jacket than pastoral shepherding. Ministry and spiritual growth planning are wise; Solomon tells us so. However, I would recommend that readers follow their instincts to adapt principles as needed.

Third, I found the illustrated coaching conversation a little contrived (199). My sense is that many gospel conversations meander down messier paths. After all, we are dealing with the heart. The heart has many back alleys down which to escape the Spirit’s searchlight.

Finally, it was confusing to me what the authors believe about the role of the spiritual disciplines in the pastor’s life. On one hand, the authors seem to minimize the value of spiritual disciplines calling them a “tool” and “techniques.” They write, “I find it disturbing to see how many spiritual issues we try to address with a physical tool...We sometimes believe that rubbing the genie’s lamp of spiritual disciplines will provide the solution for the void in our heart” (100). They fear that

pride and self-reliance will arise in the heart. Yet in another place, they argue that “help for troubled souls” only comes from “pursuing a relationship with our holy, loving God” through engaging in eight suggested activities, among them Scripture reading, prayer, confession, fellowship, and so on (103).

I understand the need to guard against the spiritual disciplines becoming a genie’s lamp or a checklist to earn brownie points with God. But they remain “habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times.”² Properly used, they promote spiritual growth, as the authors themselves seem to recognize.

RECOMMENDED? YES

Should pastors read this book? I’d say yes.

Apart from what appears to be a baptized version corporate or life coaching, the authors have rightly discerned that ministers of the church need these kinds of friendships and will greatly benefit from them. Therefore, I would recommend *Gospel Coach*, if only to stimulate more of these kinds of conversations among gospel-friends.

[1] I want to thank Tom Wood for speaking with me by phone about the book and about his collaboration with Scott Thomas.

[2] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 15.

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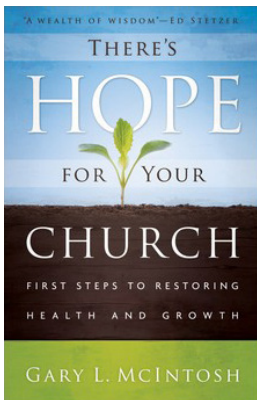
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BOOK REVIEW:

There's Hope for Your Church

Reviewed by Zach Schlegel

Gary McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth*. Baker, 2012. 208 pages. \$17.99

No church is perfect. Well, not yet anyway.

Christ laid down his life for the church and will one day present her holy and blameless. But this side of heaven, churches are filled with sinners fighting for holiness. So whether a pastor hopes to plant a church, revitalize, or has served in the same place for decades, reform is always on the agenda.

How can a pastor lead his congregation to reach more people with the gospel? Grow in holiness? Resolve divisions and disputes? Train up future leaders?

In his book *There's Hope for Your Church*, Gary McIntosh aims to help pastors lead their church in a new direction. For struggling churches, the book is intended to be a life preserver. But as with any book, readers need to be discerning. A drowning man won't complain about the color of the life preserver, but not every life preserver will float you to safety. People who read the book should heed its wise advice, yet tread carefully with some of the underlining assumptions.

SOME WISE ADVICE

McIntosh, who previously served as a pastor and is currently president of a church-consulting network that has worked with thousands of churches, has some good advice for pastors. For example, his "Church Revitalization Chart," which becomes the 13 chapters of the book, presents a helpful process to think through as you are leading change. The author doesn't suggest the process should be followed rigidly, but it does give pastors insightful categories and questions to assess where a congregation might be.

The book is also realistic about the challenges of pastoral ministry. Rather than suggesting an easy shortcut (which doesn't exist), the author challenges pastors to do what God desires rather than following the whims of people (27), to rely on God in prayer (60), to lead in repentance (60), and to persevere rather than leave when it gets tough (34).

Further, there's a refreshing call to gospel proclamation. Churches looking for hope may be tempted to get rid of the offense of the cross and adopt more palatable methods to draw people in. But McIntosh writes, "While churches certainly are right to serve others, they are called to do more. Churches are called to make disciples by preaching the Good News of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus" (64).

PASTORING, POM-POMS, AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

Despite this good material, there are other concerns that make me reluctant to recommend the book. There is a nod to the biblical basis for hope in chapter one, but the rest of the book lifts up a positive attitude as the key for church revitalization (95). At one point, the author suggests creating "a series of small successes—baby steps—to build up faith. Short-term projects, such as painting the auditorium, replacing carpet in classrooms, or restoring the landscape around the facilities, can help build up faith" (62). I'm all for good morale. No one wants to join a depressing church. But addressing the symptom (low morale) without addressing the root problem (lack of faith, idolatry, and so on) won't fix anything.

Our faith does not come from a positive attitude—it comes from hearing God's Word (Rom. 10:17). Pastors are not called to be cheerleaders who work people up into a frenzy about "wins." Instead, we're called to humbly and confidently preach God's Word. As the Spirit of God illumines hearts and minds, hope is established, affections blaze for him, and lives are truly transformed.

Another way of expressing this concern is considering the basis for what's being said. The idea that drives conclusions throughout the book is the repeated phrase "research shows." Research is great—but I get nervous when I'm told to pray *because* research shows that it works (59). God calls us to pray (1 Thess. 5:17, 2 Thess. 3:1, Jas. 5:13, 1 Pet. 4:7); but what if research showed that prayer doesn't work? Would that mean I shouldn't pray? When research and pragmatism drive the ship, we're in danger of letting good intentions lead us into disobeying God.

For those who read the book, I'd encourage you to read asking yourself, "What is the basis for what I'm being told? What does Scripture say about it?"

Consider a few other examples: "For your church to be revitalized you must form your own dominant coalition" (86). Revitalization calls for a coalition of leaders? Sounds good! But rather than looking to Jim Collins's business principles or George Barna's "Berry Theory," why not consider what Scripture says about elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-13; 2 Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:5-16; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)?

Or again, "Studies completed on pastors who have successfully revitalized a church demonstrate that such pastors are invariably either a D or an I" (31; referring to the DISC personality profile). No doubt action-oriented personalities are decisive, directive, and can get things done. But does that mean Moses (Ex. 4:10) or Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6) would be disqualified? Are there not other traits we should be looking for in our leaders (1 Tim. 3:1-7)?

IS THERE HOPE FOR YOUR CHURCH?

The hope of a pastor facing the daunting challenges of shepherding is not the latest research or business model, however helpful they might be in their place—it's the Bible. It's the Bible that gives life and creates God's people (Ezek. 37:1-14). It's Scripture that transforms his people (Rom. 12:2) and shows us God's vision for the church (Eph. 3:10). It's God's Word that gets us to the finish line (Jude 24).

Is there hope for your church? You'll find it as you let an unswerving confidence in the truth and sufficiency of Scripture shape your preaching, leading, and evangelizing.

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