



# DISCIPLE-MAKING PASTORAL CARE WITHIN SMALL GROUPS

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For

**Effective Ministry**

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## Disciple-Making Pastoral Care Within Small Groups

*“By God's grace it is possible for **everyone in the church to administer love and care, to be ministered to, to be given ears to listen and voices to comfort, council, reproof and rebuke - without a necessary increase in pastoral staff. This is accomplished as the pastor equips the saints for the work of ministry – Eph 4:12”**<sup>1</sup>*

*“Go, therefore, and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe everything I have commanded** you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”*

– The Great Commission: Matt 28:19-20 –

*“The goal of all Christian ministry in all its forms is disciple-making”<sup>2</sup>*

When Christians come together, either 1-1, in small groups or as a congregation of believers, God has set certain expectations of his followers as joint members of the body of Christ whenever they gather in any of those settings. But often in the small group context our focus can become inwardly oriented. Our focus can centre on ‘our’ expectations, on what ‘we’ may hope or expect of the group, or of the group leader – will I have a great leader? Will I learn from the studies? Will I like those in my group? Will I be looked after and cared for? There is nothing inherently wrong with those hopes or concerns, but the question is – are they the **primary concerns** that make up what the scriptures outline as God’s purposes when we meet together? If not, what are those purposes and how should we fulfil them?

This paper aims to address that question, and in particular, how groups are to understand their primary role as **disciple makers** of others, and the place that **pastoral care in small groups** fits within that disciple making purpose.

The hope in preparing this paper is that individuals and groups might become clearer and more confident about their role and responsibilities as **‘disciple-making pastoral carers’**; but more importantly, the hope is that both individuals and groups might better understand what disciple-making pastoral care may ‘look like’ in the every day, particularly how to implement disciple-making pastoral care principles *in practice* as they meet together in the small group context.

Let’s begin first by clarifying our use of terminology:

The injunction made to the first disciples in Matt 28 above, to go forward and **‘grow the gospel’** by - **‘making disciples’** (numerically and internally) is intended to be a paradigm for all disciples that follow. What it means is that each of us are not only *disciples* of Christ, but as disciples of Christ we’re also called to be a – **disciple-maker** of others.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P. Tripp, *Instruments In The Redeemer's Hands* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> C. Marshall & T. Payne: *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-shift that Changes Everything* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2009) p.13.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word- *mathētēs* translates into English as- ‘disciple’ or ‘learner’ or ‘pupil’. The word *disciple* itself typically has two aspects to it: the **relationship** of a student to a teacher, and the notion of **following along behind** someone. First and foremost our discipleship is to Jesus Christ, relationship with him and following him (Matt 16:24-25). In the words of John Stott: “*At its simplest Christ's call was “Follow me.” He asked men and women for their personal allegiance. He invited them to learn from him, to obey his words and to identify themselves with his cause*”. In this discipleship process we are being ‘transformed’ so that we will eventually be ‘conformed’ to his likeness (Rom 8:29, 2Cor 3:18). The verb form - ‘to disciple’, describes the **process** by which we encourage another person to be such a follower of Jesus; it means the **methods** we may employ to help that person to grow as a ‘learner’ of Christ, to grow towards full maturity in Christ, so they may also in turn disciple someone else (i.e. that they too may become a ‘disciple-maker’). By using the word ‘discipling’, Al Stewart best describes this activity as – “*more than simply evangelizing unbelievers, discipling is defined as: prayerfully and faithfully building people up until they are mature followers of the Lord Jesus (Col 1:28). Discipling is moving people forward in their knowledge of God; in their commitment to Christ; and in their commitment to serving others*”. In this regard, true discipleship and disciple-making must rightly be understood as a **process** not a program. A. Stewart (ed): *No Guts No Glory: How To Build Youth Work That Lasts*: (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1990) p64-65. J. Stott: *‘Knowing and Doing’* (C.S Lewis Institute, Summer 2011).

But, what exactly do we mean by disciple-making? EM defines it in the following way: <sup>4</sup>

“Disciple-making is – an **intentional, relational, Christ-oriented** activity, exercised by every believer, to use every opportunity in **encouraging** and **teaching** others to *know, grow* and faithfully *follow* Jesus.

Disciple-making is to be done **by** every believer, **through** every opportunity.

It’s an activity that recognises individuals are at different stages of spiritual growth and understanding, and responds appropriately, urging them forward to the next step.

In this way, disciple-making is a ministry of continuous **replication** and **multiplication**”

We can see from this definition that the call to discipleship and disciple-making is ultimately a call to spiritual **transformation in Christ**, it’s a call to **my** spiritual transformation, as well as a call to encourage and nurture the spiritual transformation of **others**. <sup>5</sup>

It’s *personal* in the sense that it’s a call for each of us to be willing to die to self and live *for* Christ. <sup>6</sup> It’s a call to unconditionally commit our lives, our minds, our whole being to becoming more - *like* Christ. But it’s also *corporate*; it’s *communal* and *mutual* in the sense that- as we actively pursue our own growth we’re also called to intentionally encourage and nurture **others** to be living - *for* Christ, and becoming - *like* Christ (Deut 6:4-9, 10:12, Matt 16:24-25, 27:37-39, Rom 8:29-30, Eph 4:1-16).

In this way, in any spiritually healthy Christian community, each one will be growing in Christ whilst also actively engaged in this ‘disciple-making’ of others. Like-wise, their fellow brothers and sisters will be engaged in ‘mutual disciple-making’ towards them in return.

We see this mutual disciple making depicted beautifully in the words of Paul to the Romans – “*that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine*” (1:11-12). Notice here that the Apostle Paul includes himself in the mutual ‘disciple-making’ process.

Theologically and spiritually speaking, this is what it means to **be** a disciple and to **make** disciples. <sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Definition by Sarie King: For more on the nature of discipleship and disciple-making see the web page ‘*Introduction to Disciple-Making*’ on our Effective Ministry website (<http://www.effectiveministry.org/intro-understanding-disciple-making-disciples/>). Important to note here is disciple making is **not just** evangelism and it’s **not just** discipleship, we often confuse or unhelpfully separate the two. In understanding disciple making it’s important to recognise that the spiritual process and activity of evangelism and Christian growth and nurture stand together, and flow on from each other on a **spiritual continuum**. In this way, ‘disciple-making’, rightly understood, is **one integrated process and activity**. It involves spiritually helping each one from the point of “knowing” to also “growing and faithfully following”, Jesus. It’s clear therefore that the term ‘disciple-making’ encompasses every stage of gospel growth, from the engagement of unbelievers, at the point of conversion through to full maturity in Christ (Eph 4:11-16, Heb 6:1, Jas 1:4). The great Puritan theologian John Owen puts it this way: “*All pastoral ministry basically boils down to two things: making those that are not in union with Christ know they are not in union with Christ, and making those that are in union with Christ to live as if they are in union with Christ.*” The ministry of small groups is but one of many mechanisms and avenues that should be employed in the disciple-making process.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from Christ there is no transformation. We must understand that not all discipleship will be transformational; true gospel transformation only comes through discipleship that is centred on Christ.

<sup>6</sup> In the words of Bonhoeffer: “*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die*”. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *The Cost of Discipleship*. David Watson describes it this way: a disciple is a follower of Jesus. He has committed himself to Christ, to walking Christ’s way, to living Christ’s life and to sharing Christ’s love and truth with others. David Watson: ‘*Discipleship*’ (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981) p 66, 83. EM’s research paper on ‘*The Ministry of Small Groups*’ lists the following elements as the marks of a true follower of Jesus Christ: -1. A call to be a disciple-making disciple (Matt 28:18-20) 2. A call to a life of obedience, sacrifice, servanthood and suffering (Deut 10:12, Matt 16:24-25, 28:20, Mk 8:34-35, Lk 14:25-27, Jn 14:15-24, Eph 4:12, 1 Pet 4:9-11, Phil 1:29, 2Cor 1:5). 3. A concern for and witness to, the lost (Matt 28:19, Col 4: 2-6, 1Pet 2:11-12, 3:15-17) 4. The command to specifically demonstrate love to the brethren, and to obey the ‘one another’ commands (1Jn, 3:21-24,4:7, Gal 6:10) 5. The pursuit of spiritual growth, maturity and fruitfulness of living (Eph 4:13, Jas 1:4, 2Cor 3:18, Rom 8:28, 2Pet 1:3-9) through obedience to God’s Word (Jn 8:31,14:23-24, 2Tim 3:16-17) by prayerful dependence on God (Eph 6:18, Col 4:2) living by the Spirit, & bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Jn 15:1-16, Col 1:10).

<sup>7</sup> In this regard it means that disciples must be *made* or *formed*, not just informed. It’s not merely about imparting theological *information* but about personal, relational and spiritual *formation* and *transformation* (Gal 4:19, Rom 8:29, 12:2-3, 2Cor 3:18, Eph 4:14-15). This is certainly the ‘holistic’ intention of Jesus’ words to the disciples in the Great Commission.

So, if our calling as a disciple of Christ is also a call to become a 'disciple maker' of others (in each and every context we find ourselves in) then we must ask ourselves –

1. What might disciple-making look like within a *small group setting*?
2. And - how does the goal of disciple-making connect with *pastoral care*?<sup>8</sup>

Biblically speaking, it's clear that the goal of 'growing disciples' and producing 'disciple making disciples' necessitates that priority and emphasis must always be given to the **vertical axis** (understanding God through his Word) and allowing that to then shape, define, inform and transform the **horizontal axis** (our relationships together). Not the other way around (Deut 11:18, Ps 119: 9-16, 97-104, Col 3:16-17, Heb 4:12-14).

The overall biblical model is that God ultimately transforms people's lives (vertical axis) as God, through his people (you and me) and by his Spirit, brings his Word to us in **mutual ministry** together (horizontal axis), and to - **one-another** (2Tim 3:16-17, Eph 4:14-16).

Paul Tripp puts the priority of the vertical this way:<sup>9</sup>

*"In personal ministry, I want to bring more than a heart of compassion, a willingness to listen, and a commitment to help bear someone's burden. Though these are the sweet fruit of Christian love, I want to offer more. I want to bring the **heart-changing truths of scripture** to people in the **midst of their relationships**."*

*Personal ministry is about people loving people, but in a way that includes **bringing them God's Word**. "This is the 'truth in love' model Paul describes in Ephesians 4. The combination of **powerful truth wrapped in self-sacrificing love** is what God uses to transform people"*

Likewise Dave McDonald:<sup>10</sup>

*"The purpose of small group Bible study isn't that people know the Bible better. Rather, it is so that that they **deepen their knowledge and love of God**. Our small groups **are pastoral care groups, in the true sense of the phrase**. They are contexts within the life of the church where people can be encouraged to run the race, persevere through trials, maintain their faith, change their hearts and minds, encourage one another to keep their eyes on Jesus, until the day we see him face to face"*

The end goal of this **Word** and **Spirit** driven transformation will necessarily be two-fold, it will result in **individual** as well as **corporate** growth to maturity in Christ (Eph 4:11-16, Col 1:28, Heb 6:1, Jas 1:4). Ultimately all true gospel transformation is one that should foster greater trust, obedience and dependence, not on group leaders or each other, but *dependence on, trust in, and love for* - our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (1Jn 5:1-5, Ps 52:8, 62:8, Prov 3:5-7).

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<sup>8</sup> McDonald explains the Biblical use of the word 'pastoral' this way: "*The word pastor comes from Latin word for shepherd. Pastoral ministry is the ministry of shepherding God's people. It's a leadership picture that uses the image of the shepherd to describe the roles and responsibilities of those who lead God's people. It's an idea that starts with God himself. God is the Shepherd and he leads his sheep where he wants them to go... God specifically promised to send one special shepherd. This new shepherd will be the Messiah in the line of David and he will rule over and care for God's people (Ez 34:23-24)... Jesus fulfills God's promises made through Ezekiel. He is the Davidic Messiah, the Good Shepherd who will rescue the sheep (Jn 10:14-16). He will not only gather in the lost sheep of Israel, but also people from all nations and he will unite them together under him... God's plan in saving and caring for his sheep extends from Jesus to others who will lead under Jesus' authority. Jesus as shepherd remains the model to follow*". D. McDonald: 'Pastoral Care (1) Definitions and Background' (The Gospel Coalition Australia Website) 31<sup>st</sup> Dec, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Tripp: p21.

<sup>10</sup> D. McDonald: 'Pastoral Care (2) in Small Groups' (The Gospel Coalition Australia Website) 18<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2016.

In this way the family of God are central to nurturing that dependence on God, they become central for fostering trust in his Word, and for supporting and encouraging transformational change; but the scriptures make it clear we must always understand that Christ alone is the author and perfecter of any true gospel transformation, whether it be in our lives, or the lives of those around us (Heb 12:2).

Right understanding of transformation through this mutual partnership is important for leaders:

*“Church ministry, like personal spiritual growth, is a **divine human-partnership**. As a church leader your role is not to transform people. You cannot, and it is offensive to God if you believe you can. Your role is to **place people in the pathway** of God’s transforming power”<sup>11</sup>*

Right understanding of the mutual nature of this partnership is equally important for every believer:

*“Clearly, God raises up particular people for formal ministry roles, But the Bible’s circle of helpers **includes all people**.*

*What’s more, the Bible’s view of personal change is radically different from our cultures. Scripture declares that personal transformation takes place as our hearts are changed **by God’s grace** and our minds are renewed **by the Holy Spirit**.*

*We don’t change anyone; it is the work of the Redeemer. We are simply his instruments”<sup>12</sup>*

We can see therefore that nurturing one-another’s understanding and trust in God through his Word becomes absolutely pivotal to any *disciple-making pastoral care* we might attempt to offer one another. By doing so we ultimately minister to their deepest need – the need to grow in their understanding of God, to have confidence in his comfort and help, and to continue to put their trust in him in all the varying circumstances of life.<sup>13</sup>

Condie makes the critical point that we cannot (and should not) disconnect the real theological needs that can sit behind every pastoral interaction:

*“**Every pastoral issue is a theological issue**. At the heart of almost every pastoral issue are misunderstandings of the **character** of God and the **adequacy** of Christ”<sup>14</sup>*

*“When people are struggling, Christian love will drive us to cook meals and sit and listen as they share their troubles. But it will also move us to remind them that we rest secure in God’s arms and that Christ really is our adequacy in the storms of life”<sup>15</sup>*

Likewise Bonhoeffer:

*“God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men...Therefore, a Christian **needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him**. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain or discouraged, for by*

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<sup>11</sup> E. Geiger, M. Kelly & P. Nation: Transformational Discipleship: *How People Really Grow* (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2012) p.88.

<sup>12</sup> See Rom 12:1-2. Tripp: 18.

<sup>13</sup> It’s interesting to note here is Keller in his book *‘Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism’* has placed the bringing God’s word in informal encouragement and counseling situations as 3rd in one of three level classifications of word ministries, demonstrating its importance in the mutual discipleship of believers. The sermon was placed first with semi formal speaking ministries as 2<sup>nd</sup>. T. Keller: *‘Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism’*, (Hachette: London, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> K. Condie: Small Group training, Moore Theological College.

<sup>15</sup> K. Condie: *‘The Character to Care’*: Moore College Faculty Blog.

*himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs a brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation”<sup>16</sup>*

To overlook, or to dismiss these real theological needs as secondary is to fail to offer biblical pastoral care in the truest sense of the word.

Therefore, as we look to the scriptures for **practical guidance** on **how** groups and members might achieve this goal of disciple-making pastoral care within their small group setting, it's clear that the hallmarks of any Christ centred group seeking to pastor well must be one that seeks to:

- \* Mutually nurture and encourage each other's *knowledge of, trust in, and obedience to God* through prayerful reflection on his Word, and speaking his Word to each other (Ps 1:2, 2Tim 3:16-17, Col 1:28, 3:16)<sup>17</sup>
- \* *Prayerfully depend* on God: for themselves, for each other and for the advance of the gospel (Jas 5:13,16, Col 4:2-3)
- \* Exercise biblical pastoral **one-another-ministry** together

In this regard, the N.T already dictates for us much of what is expected of one Christian towards another as they meet together. And therefore describes to us what healthy **spiritual, practical** and **pastoral** disciple-making behaviours and activities in a small group should look like.

For example, we know that when Christ calls individuals to follow him he also calls them into **common discipleship** together. Christ calls each believer to share their lives both *with him and with one another* in love (Jn 15:16-17). Our relationship with those around us is entirely based on our relationship with God through the cross, and we cannot disconnect one from the other. We're bonded together through eternity, *by Christ and in Christ*.

Timmis and Chester have described this notion of 'common discipleship' and 'mutual discipling' within the family of God this way:<sup>18</sup>

*"It is in the family of God that I am able to care and be cared for, love and be loved, forgive and be forgiven, rebuke and be rebuked, encourage and be encouraged- all of which are essential to the task of being a disciple of the risen Lord Jesus"*

In grasping hold of this truth we're to understand that being adopted into God's family means we've therefore also been given certain *spiritual, practical* and *pastoral* responsibilities and obligations towards one another. The scriptures are clear that these obligations and responsibilities cannot (and must not) be outsourced to the responsibility of leaders alone, for they are each Christian's obligation, **one to another**.

*"Sadly, many people in the church do not see themselves this way. They think of ministry as something for the paid professional. When they think of their involvement, they don't think very far beyond saying a prayer or making a meal. Yet, their adoption into the family of God was also a call to ministry, a call to be part of the good work of the kingdom"*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> D. Bonhoeffer: *"Life Together"*, p.11-12.

<sup>17</sup> This naturally includes making sure each member has firmly put their trust in the Lord Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Assurance of where any group member stands in relation to faith in Christ Jesus must be the first port of call in any disciple-making pastoral care.

<sup>18</sup> S. Timmis and T. Chester: *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel Community*: p.112 & 123.

<sup>19</sup> Tripp: p.19.

Pastoral care is a **corporate** responsibility. The ministry of caring in the church belongs to the **whole Body** not just to one person, or to a small 'care support' team (1Cor 12:24-15). The N.T 'one another' commands make it clear that it's **every** Christian's **spiritual, practical** and **pastoral** obligation and responsibility to commit themselves to the following as they meet together with others, and as they relate individually with others:

Every Christian is commanded to:

- \* Prove their discipleship by showing love towards others, as Christ has toward them (Jn 13:34)
- \* To be willing to offer spiritual instruction where appropriate (Rom 15:14, 1Cor 12:25)
- \* To prayerfully speak the truth 'in love' to each other (Eph 4:15)
- \* To teach faithfully, and in any admonishment - do so with wisdom and caution (Col 1:28, 3:16)
- \* To love others deeply from the heart (1Pet 1:22)
- \* To serve one another (Gal 5:13)
- \* To regularly encourage and build others up (1Thess 5:11)
- \* To honour others above ourselves (Rom 12:10)
- \* To encourage the fainthearted (1Thess 5:14)
- \* To help the weak (1Thess 5:14)
- \* To build each other up (1Thess 5:11)
- \* To encourage each other (2Cor 13:11, 1Thess 5:11)
- \* To be willing to confess sins to each other (Jas 5:16)
- \* To be committed to pray together and for each other (Jas 5:16, Eph 6:18, Rom 12:12)
- \* To help carry each other's burdens (Gal 6:1-6)<sup>20</sup>
- \* To love our neighbour (others) in the same way we do toward ourselves (Gal 5:14)
- \* To exercise forgiveness towards one another (Eph 4:32)
- \* As far as it depends on us, to live in harmony and at peace with others (Rom 12: 11,18, 14:19)
- \* To not leave hurts, sins or offences hanging but to reconcile (Matt 5:24, 2Cor 5:17-21)
- \* To show acceptance of one another, as Christ has shown towards you (Rom 15:7)
- \* To show patience, bearing with one another in love (Eph 4:2)
- \* To demonstrate devotion towards each other (Rom 12:10,15:7)
- \* As well as demonstrate kindness and compassion towards each other (Eph 4:2, 32)
- \* To show devotion towards each other (Rom 12:10, 1Cor 12:25)
- \* To honour one another and show equal concern for each other (Rom 12:10)
- \* To strive to go what is good for each other and everyone else (1Thess 5:14)
- \* To stop passing judgement on each other (Rom 14:13)
- \* To spur others on to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24)
- \* To use whatever gifts we have to faithfully serve Christ and his Church (1Pet 3:7-10)
- \* To be willing to submit to each other - out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21)
- \* To exercise generous and inclusive hospitality towards others and to 'outsiders' (1Pet 4:9)<sup>21</sup>
- \* To resolve how to best meet specific pastoral and practical needs as they may arise (Acts 2:44-45, 1Thess 5:14-15, Rom 12:12)

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<sup>20</sup> John MacArthur gives a helpful explanation of this verse: "The first and preeminent example of burden-bearing Paul mentions involves dealing with the burden of another Christian's sin. "If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness" (v. 1)... It merely explains how that process is to be carried out (gently and meekly), and it underscores the true goal (restoration, not punishment or public rebuke per se). Verse 2 then simply states the underlying principle as an imperative ("Bear one another's burdens"). Obviously, the precept applies to all kinds of burdens — not merely the burdens of those who stumble into sin. When Paul suggests that burden-bearing "fulfill[s] the law of Christ," he makes it clear that he has the whole moral law in view. Every act of compassion and self-sacrifice on behalf of our brethren is a practical means of displaying the love of Christ and thereby fulfilling the moral demands of His law. But the apostle clearly has in mind spiritual, emotional, and temperamental encumbrances — not physical freight only. The burdens we need to help carry for one another include guilt, worry, sorrow, anxiety, and all other similar loads". J. MacArthur: "Bearing One Another's Burdens" (Ligonier Ministries Website).

<sup>21</sup> The original Greek word for 'hospitality' is 'philoxenia' (φιλοξενία). The word can be broken down into two parts - 1. 'philo' - meaning 'love' 2. 'xenia' - meaning 'stranger' (with 'xenophobia' meaning 'fear of strangers') or it can simply mean 'guest' or 'host' (cf. Rom 16:23). Biblically speaking, 'hospitality' and its related words can sometimes be used in reference to 'strangers' (as in Heb 13:1-2) at other times it is clearly used in reference to those who are members of the church family (e.g. 1Pet 4:9, Rom 16:23).

**Firstly**, what we observe from these commands is that the scriptures are very explicit about **how** believers are to relate to one another, and on what **basis**. The fundamental basis for our behaviour, character and demeanour towards others is not grounded in mere 'social niceties', nor in some kind of 'generous spiritedness' for its own sake, but these one another commands are firmly grounded **in** the gospel, and must inevitably flow **from** the gospel:

*"The foundation for these commands, whether explicitly stated or implicitly applied through the grand narrative of the text, is the gospel"<sup>22</sup>*

For example:

*"Therefore accept one another, **just as the Messiah also accepted you**, to the Glory of God" (Rom 15:7)*

*"And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, **just as God also forgave you in Christ**" (Eph 4:32)*

*"**Just as I have loved you**, you must also love one another" (Jn 13:34)*

**Secondly**, we must also see that the 'caring ministry' (whether spiritual, practical or pastoral) depicted in these commands are clearly stated as the privilege and responsibility of **every member** of the Body of Christ; and the list is very specific about what that 'care' should look like as we go about serving each other, supporting each other and spurring each other on in our life together.

The list teaches believers that - this is **how** we're called to exercise love. This is **how** we're called to demonstrate care, concern and compassion. This is **how** we're to acknowledge the practical needs of others and mobilise to meet them. This is **how** we seek to recognise and address each other's spiritual needs. This is the attitude, demeanour and 'other serving' posture we're called to adopt whenever we meet with a brother or sister.

For example, using those same passages:

*"Therefore **accept one another**, just as the Messiah also accepted you, to the Glory of God" (Rom 15:7)*

*"And **be kind and compassionate** to one another, **forgiving** one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ" (Eph 4:32)*

*"**Just as I have loved you**, **you must also love one another**" (Jn 13:34)*

We can see that this kind of disciple-making pastoral care can never be done at a distance, it happens not only as we *mutually share gospel truths* with each other, but these one-another commands demonstrate that it happens more effectively as each believer is willing to **share their lives** as well:

*"...we must not think that sharing some Bible verses will suffice. Gospel comfort loses something if spoken from a distance or without compassion—for 'Hurting hearts have no ears'. Good pastoral care will mean deep involvement in others' lives. That Paul not only shared the gospel, but also his life (1Thess 2:8) was critical to his effectiveness"<sup>23</sup>*

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<sup>22</sup> Geiger, Kelly & Nation: p 90

<sup>23</sup> K. Condie: 'The Character to Care'.



Nor is this kind of disciple-making pastoral care only for moments of crisis, pain, difficulty or struggle. A right understanding of disciple-making pastoral care recognises that this kind of disciple-making pastoral care is necessary for **every** believer, at **all times**, and at **all stages** of the Christian walk:

*“We must also remember that pastoral care is necessary for **every believer**, whether they are experiencing difficulties in life or not. God’s desire is to see **all** progress to maturity in Christ, so **all** need pastoring”<sup>24</sup>*

In short, the principles and practices given to us in the ‘one-another’ commands teach us **how** we’re to reflect *our own discipleship* in Christ, as well as **how** to go about the task of *disciple-making pastoral care* with others.<sup>25</sup>

In his brief paper ‘A Model of Growth Groups That Grow Disciples’, Nathan Walter suggests the one another commands could roughly be organised into three broad categories- *ministries of speech*, *ministries of action* and *ministries of disposition*.<sup>26</sup>

Using his helpful categorisation as a guide, I’ve devised the following reference chart as a working tool for individuals and groups as they reflect on how they might be faring at implementing these commands as they seek to provide disciple-making pastoral care towards each other.

## DISCIPLE-MAKING PASTORAL CARE REFLECTION

**\* Proving my discipleship by my love towards others, as Christ has shown toward me  
(Jn 13:34-35, 15:12, 1Thess 4:9, 1 Jn 4:7,11)**

<b>Ministries of Speech</b>		<b>How Am I Going? What more could I do?</b>
Letting the word dwell richly within me and offering spiritual instruction, with all wisdom - as appropriate	Col 1: 28, 3:16, Rom 15:14, 1Cor 12:25	
Prayerfully speaking God’s truth (not my own) to others	Eph 4:15 2Tim 3:16-17	
Teaching faithfully	Col 1:28, 3:16	
Praying for the sick and troubled	Jas 5:13-14	
Humbly confessing my sins to others	Jas 5:16	
Faithfully praying for others	Jas 5:16, Eph 6:18, Rom 12:12	
Encouraging the fainthearted	1Thess 5:14	
Building others up in Christ	1Thess 5:11	
Spurring others on to love and good deeds	Heb 10:24	

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> This important spiritual and pastoral - ‘one-another’ ministry is to be exercised by each member towards one another as an act of *spiritual obedience* to God (the Chief shepherd of us all), and to do so in order to *build up* and *care for* the body of Christ under him. This *one-another mutual ministry* must be exercised whenever, and wherever we meet, but should particularly be the core element of how we **practice ‘disciple-making pastoral care’** within the small group context. It’s clear therefore, that for groups to focus on the ‘vertical’ over the ‘horizontal’ will mean giving priority to activities that specifically build the body in that ‘Christ-ward’ direction, and a place where spiritual (and therefore pastoral) one-another ministry can be exercised.

<sup>26</sup> Understandably, many of the commands would overlap more than one category. See N. Walter: ‘A Model of Growth Groups That Grow Disciples’ (Effective Ministry Website).

<b>Ministries of Action</b>		<b>How Am I Going? What more could I do?</b>
Helping to carry other's burdens	Gal 6:1-6	
Loving others/loving my neighbour in the same way I would towards myself	Gal 5:14 1Jn 4:7	
Regularly encouraging and building others up	2Cor 13:11, 1Thess 5:11	
Serving others in love	Gal 5:13	
Helping the weak	1Thess 5:14	
Striving to do what is good for others and everyone else	1Thess 5:15	
Honouring others above myself	Rom 12:10	
Being accepting of others, just as Christ as accepted me	Rom 15:7	
Exercising forgiveness towards others	Eph 4:32	
Living in harmony and at peace with others	Rom 12: 16, 18, 14:19	
Not leaving hurts, sins or offences hanging but seeking to reconcile with others	Matt 5:24 2Cor 5:17-21	
Willingness to submit to others out of reverence for Christ	Eph 5:21	
Exercising generous and inclusive hospitality towards others and toward 'outsiders'	1Pet 4:9	
Using my gifts to faithfully serve others (and so Christ and his Church)	1Pet 3:7-10	
Spurring others on to love and good deeds	Heb 10:24	
** Working out how to best offer specific pastoral and practical support of others as they may arise	Acts 2:44-45 1Thess 5:14-15, Rom 12:12	

<b>Ministries of Disposition</b>		<b>How Am I Going? What more could I do?</b>
Showing patience with others and bearing with others <i>in love</i>	Eph 4:2	
Demonstrating devotion to those in the family of Christ <sup>27</sup>	Rom 12:10 1Cor 12:25	
Loving others deeply from the heart	1Pet 1:22	
Being accepting of others, just as Christ has accepted me	Rom 15:7	
Demonstrating compassion and humility towards others	1Pet 3:8	
Demonstrating patience and kindness towards others	Eph 4:2, 32	
Honouring others and showing equal concern for them	Rom 12:10	

<sup>27</sup> The moral purity required in Rom 12:10 is not to be the only mark of Christian love; since they are members of one family, their love is to have the characters of strong natural affection (στοργή); it is to be warm, spontaneous, constant.

Stopping myself from passing judgement on others <sup>28</sup>	Rom 14:13	
Living at peace with others	1Thess 5:13b Rom 12:18, 14:19	

We can see from these one-another commands that in themselves they're not extraordinary activities for any believer to achieve or to practice, yet their significance in building the kingdom, and the capacity they offer for the spiritual, personal and practical care of fellow believers along the way can be vitally important, profoundly effective, in fact - necessary to the disciple-making growth of others.

In many ways, practicing most of these commands means recognising that *seemingly insignificant moments* in our daily interactions and ministry opportunities with each other are actually - *full of significance*, and *full of opportunity*. Each moment, each interaction, each small or large group gathering, presents us with a unique opportunity to forward *our* own discipleship and the discipleship of *others*.

Interestingly, Eugene Petersen in '*The Contemplative Pastor*' describes the often-profound significance of the 'ordinary' this way:

*"Pastoral work, I learned later, is that aspect of Christian ministry that specializes in the ordinary.*

*It is the nature of pastoral life to be attentive to, immersed in, and appreciative of the everyday texture of people's lives--the buying and selling, the visiting and meeting, the going and coming.*

*There are also crisis events to be met: birth and death, conversion and commitment, baptism and Eucharist, despair and celebration. These also occur in people's lives and, therefore, in pastoral work. But not as everyday items. Most people, most of the time, are not in crisis.*

*If pastoral work is to **represent the gospel** and **develop a life of faith** in the actual circumstances of life, it must learn to be at home in what novelist William Golding has termed the "**ordinary universe**"--the **everyday things in people's lives**--getting kids off to school, deciding what to have for dinner, dealing with the daily droning complaints of work associates, watching the nightly news on TV, making small talk at coffee break.*

*Small talk: the way we talk when we aren't talking about anything in particular, when we don't have to think logically, or decide sensibly, or understand accurately. The reassuring conversational noises that make no demands, inflict no stress. The sounds that take the pressure off. The meandering talk that simply expresses what is going on at the time"<sup>29</sup>*

The one another commands are the ordinary *tools, activities, relational dispositions and demeanors*, used by God in our ordinary *everyday moments* of life together, to achieve *extraordinary things* for His kingdom. We're just called upon to practice them!

<sup>28</sup> Matt 7:1-6 Remind us: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye".

<sup>29</sup> E. Petersen: The Contemplative Pastor.

So, if we want to know what *disciple-making pastoral care* actually **LOOKS LIKE**, one-to-one or in a small group, then the one another commands give profound and practical shape, force and direction to that activity.

The real challenge, as individuals and as a group, is to embrace and act upon these spiritual and practical pastoral responsibilities. For effective disciple-making pastoral care to take place within a small group there must necessarily be a right understanding of, and engagement in, these important spiritual obligations and responsibilities by every church member towards one another.

### **An important note on special practical or personal needs:**

It would be important not to leave this paper on the topic of - *disciple-making pastoral care in small groups* without taking a moment to offer some comment or practical guidance on specific times of personal or practical care within a group, or with a group member that may be over and above the 'ordinary' moments of life shared together.

In this broken, hurting and fallen world it's not unexpected that there will be times when individual group members may face a difficult period of personal crisis, or where for some reason prolonged or chronic care becomes necessary. This can present a challenge for any group member to demonstrate the willingness and trust necessary to open themselves up to a group with deeply personal concerns, particularly if they're ongoing. We need to be aware of the courage and vulnerability that kind of openness takes for a person when responding to their concern. Likewise group leaders or other group members may also feel uncertain how to respond helpfully, or worry about how they may best offer support and care during such times.

It's here that the ministry of the **Word, prayer** and the **one-another commands** continue to be the **core means** by which a group and group members exercise disciple-making pastoral care to an individual. In fact, by necessity these important 'one another' ministry activities should come into more critical focus and attention during periods of pastoral *crisis* or in *chronic need* situations.

That said, what else might a group member; the group as a whole, or the church do - to be helpful and supportive during these particularly difficult moments?

In his article - '**Pastoral Care: In Crisis and When It's Chronic**', Dave McDonald makes the following invaluable suggestions on moments of both crisis care and chronic care within small groups:<sup>30</sup>

#### **On Crisis Care:**

*"...sometimes the needs of a person are beyond the capacity of the group to cope on their own. They may require more people to be involved due to the magnitude of the problem. They might need greater expertise than they have in their group. A marriage break-up, legal issues, psychiatric illness, or domestic abuse are the types of matters that require the involvement of other qualified people. The group needs to remember it is part of a larger church family.*

*Sometimes matters will need to be referred to people beyond the congregation. At this point the role of the group should be to provide support, love, prayer, and care for the person/s rather than seeing itself as responsible to provide the specialised help needed. People may have further tough times ahead, so our care will be very significant"*

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<sup>30</sup> D. McDonald: 'Pastoral Care (4) in Crisis and When it's Chronic' (The Gospel Coalition Australia Website) 13<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2016.

## On Chronic Care:

*“Not all significant needs remain crises. Sometimes the matters are ongoing for weeks, months, or years. There are real and often painful issues that simply don’t go away. Again, small groups have the opportunity to provide ongoing loving care for these people or families that can make the world of difference. These are some examples of chronic care needs that we have experienced in our groups...”*

- *Ongoing depression or mental illness*
- *Psychiatric disorder*
- *Chronic back pain or other physical illness*
- *Physical or mental disabilities, such as cerebral palsy or downs syndrome*
- *Family members who have chronic needs, especially children or ageing parents*
- *Chronic fatigue, long-term insomnia*
- *Eating disorders*
- *Bereavement or ongoing grief (my addition)*
- *Prolonged unemployment*
- *Ongoing legal battles*

*Once again there are many more expressions of chronic difficulties facing our churches, groups and families. The love and care of small groups is so valuable. Often these people become irregular, occasional, or non-attending members of our groups. Don’t forget them or give up on them. Stay in touch. Call, visit, write, help out in practical ways. Find out what you can pray for people each week, ask in advance and follow it up afterwards...*

*Maybe there are people in our church with ongoing chronic needs whom we could adopt as partners to our small groups. We could ask our pastor or pastoral care team who might appreciate us connecting with them. Again, we can go the extra mile with these people. Maybe they’re shut in through illness and would love visitors, or to be taken out now and again. Perhaps, someone would love us to visit, read the Scriptures, pray and talk with them now and again. There may even be people who’ve been burned by church in the past, who through our love and kindness find their way back into church or a small group where they experience the love of Jesus in practice.*

*As with those experiencing crises, some of these chronic needs will involve the wider church community or the specialised help of people outside the church. This is important. As groups and individuals we need to recognise our limitations. Our role is to provide the ongoing relational love and support throughout their journey.”*

## To conclude:

In his book - *“Instruments In The Redeemer’s Hands”* Tripp reminds us that whatever care we seek to offer one another, if it’s Biblical personal ministry we offer then it must be just that – *biblical*. This means that - *“whether in the pulpit, a member of a small group or one-to-one, we’re to understand and minister into people’s lives from the **distinct perspective of a biblical worldview**”*.<sup>31</sup>

As we humbly seek to speak into each other’s lives with the - ‘distinct perspective of a biblical worldview’, we must couple that with an equal intent to understand and enter into the **unique circumstances and**

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<sup>31</sup> In other words, this means that in each arena of personal ministry we’re to be conscious of, and concerned with - *“the glory of God, the sinfulness of man, the fallen condition of the world, the reality of the Devil, the grace of the gospel, and the certainty of eternity.”* Tripp: 185.

**experience of another's life concern.** As we endeavour to be a faithful minister of God's Word in *love* and *truth* we must intertwine the two realities together; both the big 'Truth' coupled with the little 'truth':

*"If you're speaking to someone who is depressed, and you want to speak truth in love, you **don't just** proclaim the glories of God. You talk about the experience of depression. You talk about what he or she is going through. You talk about what may be motivational factors. You talk about the one who is the truth and the God who is true in his Word. So counseling is about bringing **"big T Truth"** and **"little t truth"** together into conversational, counseling ministry, implying a give and take. **You want to deal with the life that's on the table"***

*"...when you counsel Christ, the process is typically going to be **bottom up, not top down**. You start by getting to know a person. You love the person. You get to know their world. They know you care. They have reasons to trust you. Once you've done this, you have a better idea of **how** to make the gospel of the one true living God **immediately relevant** to their lives."<sup>32</sup>*

Finally, as we seek to become more effective disciple-making pastoral carers, both 1-1 and in small groups, it's important we ultimately keep in mind that in this broken and fallen world, not all troubles can be fixed, not all hurts might ever be undone, and not all grief may abate. Christ has given us - *to one another* to comfort, care and support, and each of us must not retract from meeting our God given Christian obligations toward one another to do so. But within that love and care, our ultimate goal in every arena of ministry and church life is to help one another to keep persevering in living, serving, trusting and growing in our love for the Lord Jesus Christ in all the contexts he places us in; particularly in our personal ministry *with* and *to* one another.

*"Personal ministry is not about always knowing what to say. It is not about fixing everything in sight that is broken. Personal ministry is about **connecting people with Christ** so that they are able to think as he would have them think, desire what he says is best, and do what he calls them to do even if their circumstances never get 'fixed'...*

*It is about so thoroughly embedding people's personal stories in the larger story of redemption that they approach every situation and relationship with a 'God's story' mentality. We need to be filled with awe at what the Lord has called us to participate in! ...Biblical personal ministry is more about **perspective, identity, and calling** than about fixing what is broken"<sup>33</sup>*

So, as we seek to practice *disciple-making pastoral care* within our small groups and 1-1, we do so taking great heart and unshakable hope that the Lord who loves us and gave his life for us; the one who is good, faithful, and constant, will be trustworthy and sovereign in all things. Remembering that ultimately the work of Gospel transformation, both in our lives and the lives of others is God's work.

Let us love and serve one another with commitment and confidence, in the knowledge that - *"he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"* (Phil 1:6).

This is God's promise, both for us and for those we seek to love and serve.

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<sup>32</sup> D. Powlison: Looking at the Past and Present of Counseling: (9Marks website, 25<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Tripp: p184-186.

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