

DISCIPLE MAKING PASTORAL CARE

Turning everyday pastoral interactions into disciple making opportunities

Written by Sally Sims for Effective Ministry

Contents

1.0 Aim of the paper

To examine the relationship between pastoral care and disciple making and outline how we can turn everyday pastoral care interactions into disciple making opportunities

2.0 Introduction

3.0 Terminology and definitions

3.1 Pastoral care

3.2 Disciple making

4.0 The relationship between pastoral care and disciple making

4.1 The ultimate goal of pastoral care is to care in ways that encourage the spiritual growth of individuals and the church (disciple making)

4.2 God uses the combination of his word, prayer and self-sacrificial love to transform people

4.3 Caring for people and disciple making must go hand in hand

4.4 All followers of Jesus are to be engaged in disciple making and pastoral care

5.0 Turning everyday pastoral care interactions into disciple making opportunities

5.1 How we change and why people don't grow spiritually

5.2 Determining where people are on the spiritual continuum

5.3 Guiding principles for helping others move towards Christ and maturity in him

6.0 Bibliography and recommended resources

*"(Christian) caregiving is more than holding hands, offering prayers and being a calming presence. Disciple-shaping caregiving is about helping those visited find and take next steps in their faith."*¹ Edward Hammet

*In our care of one another we are "to bring more than a heart of compassion, a willingness to listen, and a commitment to help bear someone's burden." We are "to bring the heart-changing truths of Scripture to people in the midst of their situations and relationships."*² Paul Tripp

1.0 The aim of this paper is to examine:

- The relationship between pastoral care and disciple making
- Outline how we can turn everyday pastoral care interactions into disciple making opportunities.

2.0 Introduction

Disciple making is an essential and integral part of pastoral care. **Caring for others is more than the practical expression of Christian love, it is ultimately concerned with helping people to connect with Christ and move forward in their relationship with him.**

This important element of disciple making is often understated or missing from pastoral care interactions that take place within a church community. Pastor and author Dave McDonald suggests that for many Christians, pastoral care is 'the term for social work in the church.'³

In our care of others we can be tempted to focus on people's problems, which may be overwhelming at times, and overlook their spiritual needs or give scant attention to ministry of the word and prayer. As we reach out to one another Paul Tripp urges us to remember that, "The central work of God's kingdom is change. God accomplishes this work as the Holy Spirit empowers people to bring his Word to others."⁴

Genuine spiritual transformation always works from the inside out and its source is God's grace, as we prayerfully place ourselves under the transforming power of God's word and Spirit and help others to do likewise. It is God's revelation to us in and through Christ, through his word and by the working of his Spirit that brings about change in us.

Col Marshall and Tony Payne remind us that, "Growth happens only through the power of God's Spirit as he applies his word to people's hearts. That's the way people are converted, and that's the way people grow in maturity in Christ. We plant and water but God gives the growth."⁵ Therefore, as we care for others, we cannot afford to lose sight of the centrality of prayer and sharing God's word. We are to come alongside other people and interact with them in ways that help to strengthen their relationship with Jesus.

This side of heaven or until Jesus returns, we will never be fully mature in Christ. It is God's

¹ E Hammett, *Recovering Hope for your Church: Moving Beyond Maintenance and Missional to Incarnational Engagement* The Columbia Partnership books, 2014, p. 37

² P Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping people in Need of Change*, P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2002 p. 21

³ Dave McDonald *Pastoral care (1) Definitions and Background*
<http://australia.thegospelcoalition.org/article/pastoral-care> accessed 23.3.16

⁴ P Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hand* p. 35

⁵ C Marshall and T Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-shift that Changes Everything*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2009, p. 39

will for us that we prayerfully keep pressing forwards towards maturity (Heb. 6:1). The letter to the Hebrews urges us not to neglect meeting with one another but to consider how we can encourage one another to be growing in our relationship with Jesus and bearing fruit. We are to "spur one another on towards love and good deeds" and encourage one another towards godly living (Heb 10:24-25).

3.0 Terminology and definitions

3.1 Pastoral care

Christian pastoral care involves reaching out to others in need, listening attentively and bearing witness to God's grace through our words and actions. All Christians are called to follow Jesus' example and to be witnesses to his love, both within and beyond the church (Gal 5:13; 6:10; John 13:34-35).

The context for Christian caring is every day normal life, as believers share their lives with one another and with those around them. All believers are called to "love their neighbour as themselves" and to reach out to others in loving ways. Genuine faith expresses itself in words and actions that have spiritual significance and build others up according to their needs (Matt 22:37-40; James 2:14-17; Eph 4:29).

Pastoral care is distinctly Christian when we keep Jesus and the gospel at the centre of all that we do, and care for others in ways that affirm God's presence and help to strengthen a person's relationship with him.

Believers offer this kind of care in response to God's love for us in Christ. Christian caring comes from a living faith and a commitment to love God and neighbour, and is given with the understanding that any difference we make is only possible because God loved us first and sent Jesus to die for us (1 John 4:19). It is the outworking of God's grace in our lives. The love of God transforms our hearts and minds so that we look beyond our own interests to love others.

The scope of pastoral care ranges from simple acts of kindness, to care that is more planned. Care takes place in the context of every day relationships, in small groups and through caring ministries and pastoral care teams. There are many different situations and ways in which we can care for others. All members of a church community are to be involved in providing 'one another' care since this is the New Testament's teaching and pastors and church leaders cannot care for all of the needs of the flock on their own.

In our care for one another we are to depend upon God in prayer, enter the suffering of others with love and 'compassionate biblical thinking'⁶ and use the opportunities he presents to share biblical truths and the hope of the gospel. We must always do this sensitively and with humility, acknowledging that we are all needy and broken. We want to keep the brokenness of humankind in view, while we point people to God and the gospel. If we don't do this we run the risk of either becoming insensitive to a person's anguish or losing sight of God's promises.

3.2 Disciple making

Through faith in Jesus, spiritual growth is a divine-human partnership over a lifetime, which results in a growing and deepening relationship with God. God transforms us by his Spirit and enables us to mature and become more like Christ (2 Cor 3:18, Eph 4:13).

While we are totally reliant upon God for spiritual growth to occur, this reliance doesn't

⁶ P Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, p. 144

preclude personal responsibility for obeying God's commands, praying, reading the Bible and asking God to help us grow in our love and knowledge of him. We are also called to help others to do likewise.

Believers are transformed "as they encounter the gospel again and again"⁷ and as they pursue God with an accurate understanding of the gospel and their new identity in Christ, while taking part in the spiritual disciplines necessary to change. As we become more convinced that Jesus is worthy of our wholehearted allegiance, and as we surrender to God in the obedience that comes from faith, we are transformed in the way we live our lives and relate to God and other people.

God calls us to love others and to prioritize sharing the gospel and God's word with the people we come into contact with – a process commonly referred to as **disciple making or disciples making disciples**.

"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." "It's an activity that recognizes individuals are at different stages of spiritual growth and understanding, and responds appropriately, urging them forward to the next step."⁸

A disciple maker is therefore someone who through the love of Christ, is not only committed to moving closer to Jesus themselves but is committed to helping others around them to do the same.⁹ They are intentional about helping others to connect with Jesus if they don't know him, and to keep growing closer to him if they are already a believer.

We all need the constant encouragement and stimulus of each other to keep persevering in the faith and to grow closer to Christ. This can be especially true during difficult times when God can appear to be absent or far away.

4.0 The relationship between pastoral care and disciple making

The goal of Christian ministry is "not to make church members" but to make "genuine disciples of Christ."¹⁰ Since this is the case, **"the goal of all Christian ministry, in all its forms, is disciple making."**¹¹

There is no one context or structure for disciple making. Believers are not only called to prayerfully pursue their own spiritual growth, but are to take every opportunity to help others to know, grow and faithfully follow Jesus. Disciple making is to be "priority of every church and every Christian disciple."¹² This impacts every ministry within the church, including pastoral care, and caring ministries that operate outside of the church.

⁷ E Geiger, M Kelley, P Nation, *Transformational Leadership: How People Really Grow*, B&H publishing Nashville, Tennessee, 2012, p.67.

⁸ S King, Intro to Disciple-Making, <http://www.effectiveministry.org/intro-understanding-disciple-making-disciples/> accessed 14.3.2016

⁹ T Payne, *The Thing Is* Matthias Media, Sydney, 2013, p. 98

¹⁰ C Marshall and T Payne *The Trellis and the Vine*, p.14

¹¹ C Marshall and T Payne *The Trellis and the Vine*, p.153

¹² C Marshall and T Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, p.13

4.1. The ultimate goal of pastoral care is to care in ways that encourage the spiritual growth of individuals and the church (disciple making)

Pastoral care involves intentional relationships and walking alongside others during the ups and downs of life but most importantly it includes helping, guiding and encouraging others to move closer to Christ and move forward in godly living.

Christian brothers and sisters are one of the means God uses to transform us and help one another in our journey towards becoming wholehearted disciples. Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp in their book **How People Change** remind us that, "As isolated individuals, we cannot reach the level of maturity God has for us. It only happens as we live in a loving, redemptive community...individuals and families always come to deeper awareness of the grace of Christ when they experience it through the community of believers."¹³

In the Great Commission, Jesus commands his followers to make disciples and teach one another to obey all that he commanded (Matt 28:16-20). These instructions apply to all followers of Jesus, not only the first disciples. It is God's will that all Christians be disciple-making disciples. This encompasses both reaching out to non-believers with the gospel, and encouraging Christian brothers and sisters to put God's word into action and to be growing spiritually.

Ephesians chapter four tells us that among others, Christ has given the church pastors and teachers "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ "(Eph 4:11-13). Together with the Great Commission, this passage makes it clear, that all believers are to be engaged in works of service (serving and loving others) with the aim of helping people connect with Christ, see more of him, and become more like him, living as his wholehearted disciples.

As each member does their part and speaks the truth in love, the body is built up in maturity and love (Eph 4:15-16). Church leaders must therefore prayerfully consider how they can encourage believers to be growing in their love and knowledge of Christ and to be disciple making disciples. They must be intentional about teaching and training members so that there are disciple making disciples working alongside them in all ministries. In this way spiritual growth will extend beyond the individual and encompass the growth and maturity of the church as a whole, which is to be growing in corporate likeness to Christ.

4.2. God uses the combination of his word, prayer and self-sacrificial love to transform people

God brings about change in the context of relationships and every day he presents us with opportunities to serve others in love. There are numerous opportunities for encouraging others, speaking God's word, praying and using our God given gifts to serve others.

Through his Spirit and to his glory, God uses the combination of his word, prayer and self-sacrificial love to transform people.¹⁴ As we interact with one another in this way, transformation not only occurs in the heart and mind of those being cared for but also in those providing care. **God uses 'gospel focused care' to change both the recipient and those who speak in his name.**

Paul Tripp reminds us that we are all needy and suffering from the effects of the Fall and as 'instruments of God's grace' we must examine our own hearts and "confess that we need that grace just as much as the people we are helping."¹⁵ As we care for others we must therefore

¹³ T Lane and P Tripp, *How People Change* New Growth Press, Greensboro, USA, 2008 p. 74

¹⁴ P Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, p.21

¹⁵ P Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, p.209

pray for God's help, remembering that everything we do is for God's glory and will achieve nothing without love (Col 3:17; 1Cor 13:3).

As we interact with and care for others, we must always be ready to address a person's greatest need - their need for forgiveness and a personal, growing relationship with God through faith in Jesus. We mustn't lose sight of the fact that a right relationship with God and being saved from eternal suffering, are much greater needs than freedom from suffering in this life.

Once we have become believers, we will need to be constantly reminded of the gospel. Every day we face temptations to move away from Christ. This can be especially true during times of suffering when God can appear to be far off or absent. We need to be ready and prepared to remind one another of God's promises; of who we are in Christ and of all the spiritual blessings we have in him.

Life is full of ups and downs and there are many opportunities to come alongside others and engage with them in ways that are personal, loving and spiritually encouraging. As we care for and support one another, we want to hold out the hope of the gospel however, **we need to exercise wisdom and love, and discern when and how to speak God's word to one another.**

Listening attentively is a prerequisite to responding appropriately. We want to enter the suffering of others with empathy and correct biblical understanding, in order to bring God's word and prayer sensitively to where it is needed. Sometimes however, we will serve one another best by not doing or saying anything but by being present and listening.

4.3. Caring for people and disciple making must go hand in hand

As we have seen, pastoral care involves more than helping a person in need by listening, comforting and providing practical support, as helpful as these may be. We must avoid the temptation of caring for people without helping them to connect with Jesus or move closer towards him.

Disciple making is an essential and integral part of pastoral care and ultimately the goal. It's not loving to neglect a person's spiritual well being and solely focus on their physical, emotional or psychological needs. Caring for others involves being concerned about the whole person, including their spiritual understanding, well-being and growth.

Questions of faith and thoughts about life and death often arise during times of suffering and crisis. The Bible helps us to make sense of suffering and provides comfort and assurance that we are loved by God and not forgotten. Scripture tells us that Jesus is our Good Shepherd and that we can "know and rely on the love God has for us" (John 10:11; 1 John 4:16). As we care for each other, we should therefore encourage one another to look to him first and foremost and to depend upon him in all circumstances.

While this is true we must also "mourn with those who mourn" (Rom 12:15) and be willing to sit with others and listen as they wrestle with God and go through their particular struggle. Without appropriate compassion we can inadvertently add to the suffering of others instead of helping to alleviate it.

Pastoral care and disciple making both involve intentional relationships and purposeful conversations. God uses our interactions with others to bring comfort, encouragement and change. If we are to speak God's words into the lives of others effectively, **we need to be**

able to listen well, and approach others with care and respect. In his letter to the Colossians Paul urges us to “put on love” and to be clothed “with compassion, kindness, humility and patience” before he urges us to “teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col 3:12;14;16).

Disciple making without exercising due care and respect isn’t loving. It doesn’t follow the biblical model of “speaking the truth in love” and always ensuring that our speech is “full of grace” (Eph 4:15; Col 4:6). We must listen well before speaking (James 1:19) and always speak in ways that are kind, considerate, purposeful, truthful, and loving.

People are rarely willing to hear the truth unless it is in the context of a caring relationship. When we see the love of Christ in other people, we are more open to hearing and receiving God’s word. As we care for others we must do so with a loving, servant heart as authentic followers of Jesus. Our character (being) is just as important as what we say and do (our doing).

If we are to be effective disciple makers and pastoral carers we will therefore need to build relationships that are grace filled and lead lives that match the message we bring. The Apostle Paul provides a good example of this. He cared for the people of Thessalonica as well as sharing the gospel with them. He encouraged, comforted and urged them to live lives worthy of God but did so with fatherly love (1 Thess 2:8-12).

“The love of Christ is not only the foundation for our personal hope, but our incarnation of that love is our only hope for being effective for Christ with others.”¹⁶

4.4. All followers of Jesus are to be engaged in disciple making and pastoral care

Although some believers may have particular responsibilities as pastors, leaders or teachers, **all followers of Jesus are to engage in disciple making.** Believers are to look for opportunities to prayerfully speak about Christ to others and speak God’s word to one another (Matt 28:19; 1 Pet 3:15).

In the same way **all believers are called to participate in the care of others.** Jesus commands believers to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:27-29).

Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and follow his example of self-sacrificial love. Through his death and resurrection and by his Spirit, it possible for us to love others in ways that are pleasing to him. The Scriptures provide numerous examples of how we are to love others including the ‘one another’ commands and exhortations for Christian living throughout the New Testament.

The New Testament disciples also demonstrate what it looks like to live lives of obedience, which bear fruit. The disciples provided food for the hungry, welcomed strangers, comforted the bereaved and looked out for the oppressed. **They remind us that we are not to care for people’s souls while leaving basic physical needs unaddressed.** These actions along with their obedience to the word and prayerful dependence upon God, bear witness to how we are to love God and others. Ultimately Jesus’ shows us what perfect self-sacrificial love looks like through his death on the cross in our place.

¹⁶ P Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, p.119

Followers of Jesus belong to one another because of their shared relationship with Jesus. This 'fellowship of believers' comes with certain responsibilities and privileges, including caring for one another and serving one another in love. In a church community every one must take responsibility for doing what they can to care for those in need, so that each person is cared for, encouraged and supported. In addition pastoral care teams should be in place to provide the additional care that is often necessary in crisis or chronic care situations. In this way leaders can be freed up to attend to teaching and equipping believers to live fruitful lives, which results in the multiplication of each area of ministry through every member.

Neither disciple making nor pastoral care are optional for believers. Disciple making is for everyone and pastoral care is for everyone. We are called minister to one another using whatever gift we have been given to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms (1 Pet 4:10).

The letter to the Romans reminds us that "the gospel is the power of God and brings salvation to everyone who believes" and that it is God's plan for those he has called is "to be conformed to the image of his Son" to his glory (Rom 1:16b; 8:29). If we are to become more like Jesus we must not only be like him in character but also do the work God has given us to do. With God's help we are to live obedient lives through "the obedience that comes from faith" (Rom 1:5).

5.0 Turning everyday pastoral care interactions into disciple making opportunities

As previously highlighted, in order for us to be able to turn pastoral care interactions into disciple-making opportunities we will need to be able **to listen effectively, enter the world of the other person with 'compassionate biblical thinking' and respond with empathy, speaking biblical truths as appropriate.** Resources that can help us to do this well are listed in the bibliography and guiding principles for helping us move others towards Christ and maturity are outlined below.

Before we turn to the guiding principles, there are two important areas of understanding that should inform our actions:

- How we change and why people don't grow spiritually
- How to determine where people are on the spiritual continuum.

5.1 How we change and why people don't grow spiritually

If we are to use disciple making opportunities effectively when they arise in pastoral situations, we firstly need to understand how people change and why people don't grow spiritually.

In their book *How People Change*, Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp remind us that God's ultimate purpose for us is to become like Christ and live with him forever, to his praise and glory. God saves us and calls us into a life of constant transformation and change: "We have been changed by his grace, are being changed by his grace, and will be changed by his grace."¹⁷

In other words the very same grace that brings us salvation also trains us to live in ways that are pleasing to God. Through the work of the Spirit, God's grace teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and "Yes" to righteousness (Titus 2:11-12). Believers are declared righteous through Christ's finished work on the cross but are also being made righteous through

¹⁷ T Lane and P Tripp, *How People Change*, p.15

Christ's ongoing work of sanctification (Phil 3:12-14).

God provides us with various means for encouraging our spiritual growth. These include Christian fellowship, prayer, Bible study and church services, however these are not ends in themselves. It is possible to know Jesus but to produce little of the fruit of faith. We can be involved in all kinds of Christian activities and still not have Jesus at the centre of our lives.

Through their work as Christian counselors, Lane and Tripp have become convinced that **"often there is a vast gap in our grasp of the gospel"**¹⁸ and also **"a gospel gap in the culture of the church."**¹⁹ They believe that this gap frequently undermines our relationships and decisions, and "subverts our identity as Christians and our understanding of the present work of God."²⁰

We can understand that our sins have been forgiven and believe in the promise of eternity (the past and the future aspects of grace) but misunderstand or fail to see the difference that the gospel should make in our lives today.

Referring us to the teaching of the Apostle Peter, Lane and Tripp explain that Christians who are stalled in their faith have forgotten that they have been cleansed from their sins and are blind to the power and hope of the gospel in the here and now (2 Pet 1:3-9).²¹ They suggest that for many Christians this produces spiritual blindness at a number of levels:

- We may fail to see our identity in Christ and consequently underestimate the presence and power of indwelling sin
- We can underestimate God's provision for a godly life now and
- We can fail to understand that God calls us to a life of confession, repentance and constant growth.

They believe that "whenever we are missing the message of Christ's indwelling work to progressively transform us, the hole will be filled by a Christian life style that focuses more on externals than the heart."²² We can have this gap and fill it in ways we are not aware of.

An essential part of turning everyday pastoral interactions into disciple making opportunities, therefore involves **bringing the gospel and words of God's truth to one another, praying that God's Spirit will help his word to bear fruit in our hearts and lives, and transform us to be more like Jesus**²³.

The power to change comes from our union with Christ as we prayerfully depend on the Holy Spirit to enable us. Just as we are dependent upon the righteousness of Jesus to save us, we are to be dependent upon his power to transform us. While it is God who transforms us through the working of his Spirit, we are also responsible for bringing ourselves under the transforming influence of his word. We must pursue our own spiritual growth as well as the spiritual growth of others and make sure that we are endeavoring to live according to the gospel.

Peter urges us "to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to his glory both now and forever" (2 Pet 3:18) and Paul teaches us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). Transformation is an ongoing process and a life long journey. Ultimately we are all responsible to God for how we have responded to the gospel.

¹⁸ T Lane and P Tripp, *How People Change*, p.2

¹⁹ T Lane and P Tripp, *How people Change*, p.17

²⁰ T Lane and P Tripp, *How people Change*, p. 2

²¹ T Lane and P Tripp, *How people Change*, p. 3

²² T Lane and P Tripp, *How people Change*, p. 4-7

²³ C Marshall and T Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine* p. 39

Peter also reminds us that spiritual growth is not for our own selfish gain. As our character becomes more Christ like we will be kept "from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:5-8). This is for the good of the church and to the glory and praise of God.

5.2 Determining where people are on the spiritual continuum

In our pastoral interactions with others whether it be in small group, in one to one conversations or in crisis situations, we always need to minister to the whole person. However if we are to encourage one another spiritually, we will we want to provide opportunities for sharing with one another how are going in our relationship with Jesus.

Everyone is somewhere on a spiritual growth continuum that stretches from 'far away from Christ' to 'Christ centred.' Research conducted at Willow Creek Church²⁴ in America over three year period (2004-2007) found that church goers can be placed in one of four groups based on their self reported relationship with Jesus:

- Exploring Christ
- Growing in Christ
- Close to Christ
- Christ centred

The researchers found that the closeness of a person's relationship with Jesus is predictive of how they are growing in their love for God and others. They found that a growing relationship with Jesus correlates with the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that show a growing love for God and others.

Significantly they discovered that church involvement alone doesn't predict spiritual growth. In other words, spiritual activity doesn't necessarily equate with spiritual growth. This is because first and foremost, God has wired us to be in a growing relationship with him. Believers are already in Christ but as we come to know more of the reality of being in Christ in our hearts, we are drawn closer to him. There is a noticeable and predictable change in how we live our lives and relate to God and others.

However, spiritual growth isn't always linear, we tend to grow in spurts and then plateau before growing some more. There may also be periods of doubt or dryness and we can even become spiritually stalled. Understanding this helps us to be realistic about our expectations regarding the spiritual growth of others and ourselves.

We want to help people move from wherever they are towards Christ. This involves prayerfully helping them to grow in their understanding of the gospel and the Bible's teaching, so that by the work of the Spirit it may have a significant impact on their lives.

In order to determine where people are on the spiritual continuum we need to listen for cues and ask questions where appropriate, recognizing the need for empathy and sensitivity. The sort of questions that may be helpful include the following:

- **How is your current situation impacting you?** (Listen for words that express emotion or describe their interpretation of the events, including how they talk about God)
- **How is your relationship with God right now?** (Are they not yet a believer, new to the faith, mature or somewhere in between?)
- **How are you going with prayer and reading your Bible?** (Be aware that the

²⁴ G L Hawkins and C Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, Zonderman, Grand Rapids 2011

- person may not be able to pray or read their Bible at present)
- **Do you have any concerns or difficulties that are affecting your relationship with God or your Christian life?**

Having determined where people are on the spiritual continuum we want to prayerfully consider how we can share the word with them and speak God's truths into their situation. For example:

- A relatively new believer, who has recently undergone surgery for cancer, mentioned that she was struggling with trusting God. She was pleased to engage in one to one Bible reading and prayer at home while she was recuperating and also found it helpful to discuss Jerry Bridge's book *Trusting God*, which she was given a copy of.
- Another lady, a mature Christian who can no longer attending church because of her dementia, finds it encouraging to have regular visits from members of her former Bible study group for a social catch up, prayer and Bible reading.
- A Christ centred young man who is fearful of attending hospital for check-ups following a serious illness, expressed how encouraging it is to receive bible verses by text and to know that his friends are praying on the day of his appointment.

The ways in which we can turn pastoral interactions in to disciple making opportunities are countless. Each one of us is to consider what we can do to help others who are going through a difficult time, while prayerfully encouraging them to keep growing as a follower of Jesus. Life can be challenging and tough, we need the love and encouragement of others to help us persevere and grow in the faith.

5.3 Guiding principles for helping move others towards Christ and maturity in him

Turning everyday pastoral interactions into disciple making opportunities means that we are to prayerfully and appropriately, share God's truth and word with non-believers and believers, whenever we can.

Different contexts - same message

Col Marshall and Tony Payne remind us that while the context will differ, the message is essentially the same – the message of the gospel. "The word of God, the message that he has revealed in and through Christ by his Spirit - this is what converts us, and it is also what causes us to grow, bearing the fruit of godliness."²⁵

Four essential elements

The exact words and actions we will use will vary, however Paul Tripp²⁶ suggests that there are four essential elements to consider as we seek to help one another grow spiritually. The four elements are:

- **LOVE** people
- **KNOW** them (what's in their heart- their beliefs, goals, hopes, dreams)
- **SPEAK** truth into their lives so that they can see Jesus and the gospel more clearly
- **HELP** them respond to God's word in personal ways and do what God calls them to do.

For more detailed information on how these elements can be incorporated into practice, the reader is encouraged to consult Tripp's book *'Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands.'*

²⁵ C Marshall and T Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, p. 53

²⁶ P Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, p. 108 ff

Some guiding principles

As we make use of the disciple-making opportunities that God presents to us, it may be helpful to consider the following guiding principles:

- *Remind ourselves daily of the gospel and our new identity in Christ and be pursuing our own spiritual growth, living a life of prayerful dependence upon God.*
- *Embrace our God given responsibility to help people to apply the truth of God's word in order to move towards Christ and maturity in him and look for opportunities.*
- *Remember that God changes people through the gospel, by his Spirit as he transforms hearts. We must therefore keep the gospel and God's grace in full view.*
- *Make sure that we are leading with love first and foremost. Love comes from a living experience of the gospel and everything we do for others must come from a place of love. We are to be a means of God's grace to others. We are also to love others enough to speak the truth to them and help them see themselves and their situation through the lens of God's word.*
- *Respect the vulnerable position that people are in when they are going through adversity but recognize that at times like this, people are often searching for understanding and meaning. Be prepared to offer God's compassion, comfort and grace but also remember that God is already at work in the situation with his redemptive purposes.*
- *As we meet with others, pray that the conversations we have and the Scriptures we read will not only lead to the spiritual growth of others but that our hearts will also be changed.*
- *Listen well, build relationships of trust and get to know people well so that we can ask questions that will lead to self-disclosure in a safe environment.*
- *Remember we are to walk along side others and not adopt a position of superiority. We share in the suffering and struggles of others as 'wounded healers' who are also in need of God's transforming love.*
- *Where appropriate, help people view their lives and the world through God's eyes and purposes, so that they can see their situation through the lens of the gospel and biblical truth, rather than through their pain and circumstances.*
- *Any biblical truths must be offered in a thoughtful and sensitive way.*
- *Understand and accept the person regardless of where they are on the spiritual continuum and be patient, different people grow at different rates. Disciple making isn't a one off event, it's an ongoing process.*

Conclusion - be prepared to cross the pain line

In his book *Honest Evangelism*, Rico Tice²⁷ reminds us that there is often "a pain line that needs to be crossed" when we tell someone the gospel. We can feel uncomfortable, weak and inadequate as we speak to both believers and non-believers about Jesus and the gospel.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that while we may feel inadequate, "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). We are not called to be 'experts' but we are called to be willing, prayerful and obedient followers of Jesus. God's grace is sufficient in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

Everyone who belongs to Jesus can be used by God to help others grow spiritually. May we prayerfully ask God to transform our hearts, help us grow closer to Christ and live godly lives, and may we prayerfully and 'care-fully' seek to help others to do likewise.

²⁷ R Tice, *Honest Evangelism: How to Talk about Jesus Even when it's Tough*, The Good Book Company, UK, 2015, p. 15 and 17

6.0 Bibliography and recommended resources

J Bridges, *Growing your faith: How to Mature in Christ* NavPress, Colorado Springs, 2004

G Cheng, *Encouragement: How Words Change Lives*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2006

E Geiger, M Kelley, P Nation, *Transformational Leadership: How People Really Grow*, B&H publishing Nashville, Tennessee, 2012

E Hammett, *Recovering Hope for your Church: Moving Beyond Maintenance and Missional to Incarnational Engagement* The Columbia Partnership books, 2014

G L Hawkins and C Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, Zonderman, Grand Rapids 2011

Ccs

D Helm, *One to One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian* Matthias media, Sydney, 2011

S King, *Intro to Disciple-Making*, <http://www.effectiveministry.org/intro-understanding-disciple-making-disciples/> accessed 14.3.2016

T Lane and P Tripp, *How People Change*, New Growth Press, Greensboro, USA, 2008

C Marshall and T Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-shift that Changes Everything*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2009

McDonald, *Pastoral Care (Articles 1-4)*

<http://australia.thegospelcoalition.org/author/dave-mcdonald> accessed 23.3.16

T Payne, *The Thing Is*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2013

M J Stenbron, *Can the Pastor Do it Alone? A Model for Preparing Lay People for Lay Pastoring*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Oregon, 1987

S Sims, *Together Through the Storm: A Practical Guide to Christian Care*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2016

R Tice, *Honest Evangelism: How to Talk about Jesus Even when it's Tough*, The Good Book Company, UK, 2015

P Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping people in Need of Change*, P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2002

E Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love*, Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2015