

What Is an Authentic Disciple?

We know that we are all called to make disciples. It's not wrong to use the structure of the church to create pathways to discipling. In fact, it's smart. But we should never dismiss the call to personally become a truly authentic disciple who then multiplies that in others. Classroom and smaller group settings will never build the disciples Jesus commanded us to build without one-on-one accountability and encouragement. It just doesn't happen, for most people. The first thing we need to do is define what an authentic disciple is. Once we have our understanding of what Jesus wants us to see in His disciples, then we can develop our plan, present that lifestyle and begin to build a movement!

There are many definitions of a disciple, long and short. Webster dictionary says a disciple is one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another, a convinced adherent of an individual. That's Jesus for all of us. In the world of Biblical truth, many of us have created our own definitions of what a disciple is. Almost all of the versions are Biblical and helpful. They come from different angles. Many of us define what a disciple is, based on our own paradigm and sometimes in reaction to what we see missing in other definitions. Some of us measure all the qualities found throughout Scripture. Others of us summarize those qualities into a precise list. I personally like something that everyone, young and old, can memorize and remember. Then we can unpack that short, concise definition and build on all the details. Here's my definition:

An authentic disciple reflects the mind, character and priorities of Christ.

He or she loves, grows, serves, evangelizes,
makes disciples and multiplies.

He or she loves God intimately, walks in the Truth and by the Spirit,
reflects the overflow of that love to God's family and the watching world,
serves everyone, goes fishing as a lifestyle and makes multiplying disciples.

A disciple deepens and fully invests in three love relationships-
Loving God, loving the Family of God, and loving the Lost.

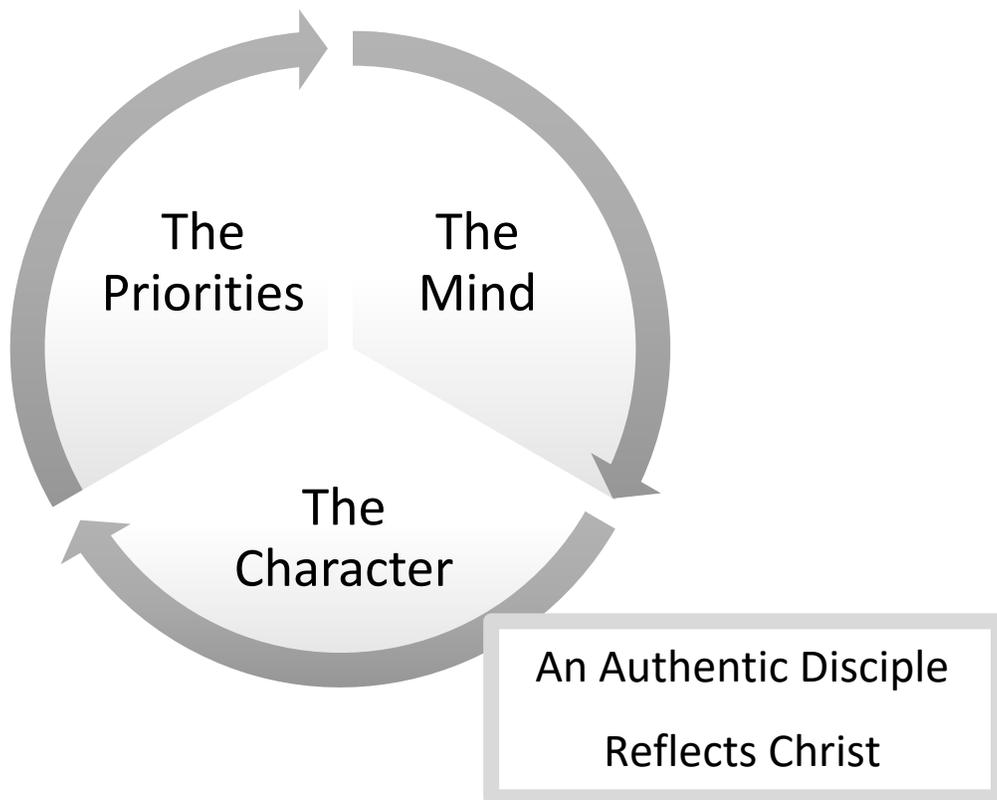
Becoming a disciple is often equated with helping people learn the Word of God and understand the principles of God. We teach and preach and fill minds with all kinds of information. We put people through all kinds of classes and seminars, retreats and home groups. Now, it's so important to learn the Word and its principles. But our churches are filled with people who know everything about Jesus, but they don't look anything like Jesus! Paul makes a powerful statement in his letter to the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 13.)

“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

It doesn't matter how much we know and how much we believe. Paul says that if we don't have God's character, we have nothing! We shouldn't minimize the need to study the Word and to know the Truth. But brilliant heretics know the Word and will quote it better than we can. The Pharisees and religious leaders who killed Jesus were students of the Word. And all of the cults use the Word. They just don't know how to interpret it properly. And they're taking people to hell every day! We can't rest on knowing God's Word as the ultimate goal in making real disciples.

An authentic disciple reflects the mind, character and priorities of Christ. If that's what we're to be and to build, what does it actually mean? All of us are on a journey toward maturity. None of us is

without sin. All of us fail more than we'd like to admit. But we can't afford to lower the standard of discipling to a knowledge-based proposition. So let's look at each of these three components.



Reflecting the Mind of Christ

Reflecting the mind of Christ is so much more than demonstrating that we know the Bible. It's thinking like Jesus. It's processing like Jesus. It's responding to information and issues and situations the way Jesus would respond. It's having a mind that has been shaped by and saturated with the Word and is now under the guidance and control of the Spirit. We need to know the Word in its fullness. Fellow believers are instructed to help us as we grow in our knowledge of God. That's what church, shepherding, teaching and discipling is all about. But ultimately, the Spirit guides us into all truth. He confirms truth as it's spoken to us or as we read it in a book. And He can guide us away from what authors or even our leaders are saying when they are wrong. The Spirit gives us the wisdom to unpack all of our information and all of our circumstances, both easy and difficult, and to know what to do and say.

The Word and the Spirit also help us to decide what is good and what is evil. Our minds can become very confused without God's help. Thoughts and temptations can come at us and we have no grid to discern what's coming from our own mind, from God or from a demon. So we can assume and presume something that may be false. The Word is truth. It stands as a standard against all lies in our mind or from the enemy. But it's the Spirit who enables us to discern what is truth and what is error. As someone misinterprets the Word, the Spirit gives us the ability to think clearly and to even perhaps present the truth with a spirit of love and gentleness. Knowledge can't stand by itself. Information without transformation brings no solution. We add the Holy Spirit, and the Word comes alive!

Reflecting the Character of Christ

God's plan is to build disciples who reflect the full picture of who He is. We clearly need the Word and its Truth, revealed and made alive by the Spirit of God. Then we add godly character to the mix. Look at what Peter said in his second letter (II Peter 1:5-9) about the process of growing up spiritually:

Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.

In other words, it's a package deal! All of these components make a disciple of Jesus. Our knowledge becomes more and more productive and useful as we grow up in all of these other areas as well! By the way, it's wonderful to know that all of this looks just like the fruit of the Spirit.

Look at how similar Paul's list is in his letter to the Galatian church. (Galatians 5:22-23):

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We don't try to produce the fruit. It's too hard. I know. I've tried to do it a lot in my lifetime. And I'm here to declare- it doesn't work! The energy and good intentions will always fade. The mask will slip off, when you're tired, when you're under pressure, when someone's pushing your buttons, when only the ones you love are watching, when you least expect it. Listen- we're not meant to try harder. We're meant to draw closer. "Draw close to Me and I will draw close to you!" (James 4:8) That's what He wants and that's what He promises. It's amazing. We remind ourselves of our absolute inadequacy and our need for His strength each and every day. As we draw closer and closer and become more and more dependent on Him, the character of Christ just happens. Along the way, it's the Spirit's job to point out and convict us of sinful thoughts, attitudes, words and actions. He'll help us learn to surrender more and more of our lives to Him. It's also His role to fill us and grow us in each of these areas.

This is one of the most difficult parts of becoming a mature disciple. It's having a complete mind and character transplant. Most of us have learned to depend on our own strength to do life. In fact, most parenting and schooling is aimed at teaching and fortifying self-sufficiency. Because this is the way we live, it's crept into the church and it's been accepted as the norm for Christian living as well. Here's the tragedy. We can lead home groups, elder, usher, teach classes and preach in our own strength. The more we do it, the easier it is. Entire churches can function using human knowledge, logic, intuition, wisdom and talent. We can even use spiritual gifts with no demonstration of spiritual character. I don't fully understand that one, but I see it all the time. We can use spiritual words and principles, and we can talk about faith and power but not have consistent power for everyday living! That's sounds so scary, but it's true. This has to change if we want to make authentic disciples who will impact the world.

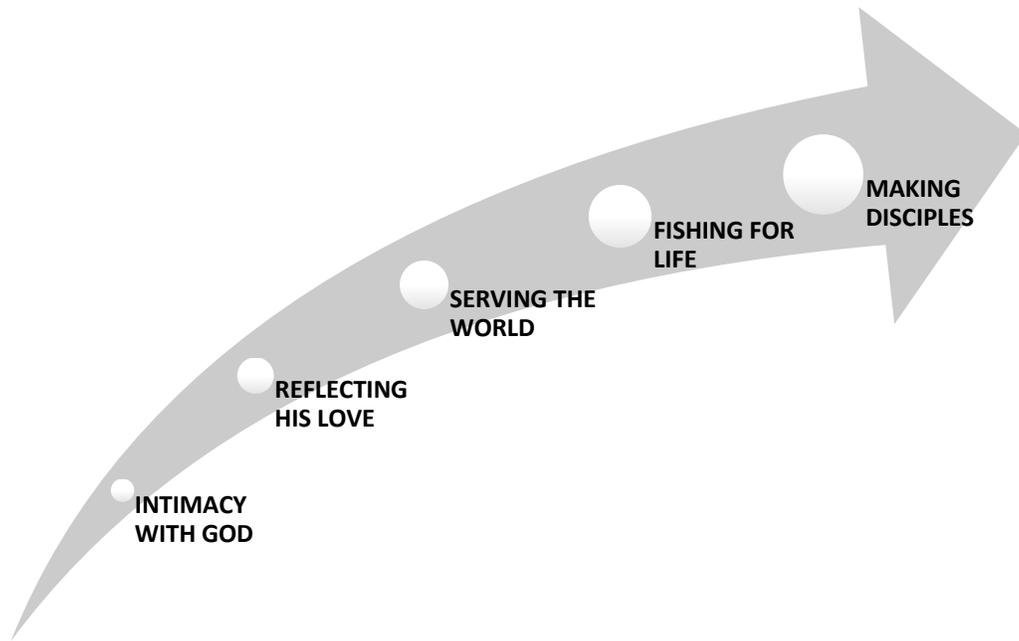
Paul knew how much we would drift and then try to do the Christian life without the power of the Holy Spirit. That's why He taught over and over again about the critical need to live by the power of the Spirit and not by the flesh. I love this passage in Ephesians 5:15-20:

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. **Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,** speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This passage summarizes an entire lifestyle of living and walking in the Spirit- all day and every day. This isn’t talking about Sunday. This is reflecting our life at home, work and wherever we go. This is the life of an authentic disciple. And the centerpiece is the control of the Holy Spirit. Don’t be controlled by other things, like alcohol. Don’t be controlled by desire, ambition, circumstances or people. And don’t be controlled by your own strength and capabilities. Be controlled by the Spirit of God! Some of you reading this right now don’t know how to do that. You’ve never let go of our own control. You’ve never really surrendered to the full control and Lordship of Jesus. Do it now. Surrender. Pause right now and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with His power and strength. Ask Him to show you what needs to go and what you need to do to bring wonderful, miraculous change in your character, attitudes and actions. Ask Him to heal you of the scars of the past that may be keeping you from being all that you can be in Christ. Let His presence and His character shine!

If we want to become real disciples who bring dynamic change to the next generation of disciples, it starts with us. We have to change the way we live and function, disciplining ourselves day after day. It’s equivalent to the discipline of going to a gym or running each day to lose all of those pounds and to get in shape. We have to admit we have a problem, called self-dependence. We can tell our level of self-dependence by how much time we spend with God throughout our day and how much we connect with Him in the functions of our day. Our greatest evidence comes from the inside. Do we see the consistent fruit of the Spirit flowing out of us? Are we overwhelmed as we watch the heart of God welling up in us, making us care and do things that aren’t natural to us? All of us should become increasingly aware of where we stumble and fall. We should be continually amazed and grateful when we see ourselves functioning so differently from how we know we function in our own strength. This is all part of the journey of making real disciples. But it has to start with the discipler. We’ve got to lose that self-dependent spirit ourselves, or that’s exactly what we’ll pass on to those we disciple. That would be terrible. Don’t do it! This is about imitating the character of Christ- it’s actually reflecting His character as it shines through us!

The Priorities of Christ



Reflecting the Priorities of Christ

As we draw close to God and He refines and infuses our mind and character with His thoughts and passions, our priorities change. We can't help it! It's the natural product of being filled with the Spirit. We begin to see the world like He sees it. Our hearts break for lost people. We see a sleepy church and we desperately want to wake it up. Our hearts are softened to the injustices that we see around us. Sometimes we don't know what to do with all of the feelings that are unleashed in our hearts. That's where discipleship is so helpful. The Word and the Spirit show us how to live and where to direct our emotion, energy and resources. God has wonderful, unique plans for all of us that vary with our talents, gifts, interests and journeys. We're all shaped differently. And many believers don't really know what to do next. That's where we come in. The disciplemaker has the opportunity to help guide the conversation within the framework of God's Word and the Holy Spirit's leading.

With so many options, here are some top-of-the-list priorities for every disciple to start with.

1) Intimacy with God

We've affirmed over and over again that our highest purpose in life is to walk closely with our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and His Spirit. The Westminster Catechism declares that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Our highest purpose in life is to give pleasure to God, our Father, as we walk with Him through life. But it's impossible for us to please God and give Him pleasure without His power operating in our lives. And we won't gain His power without drawing close to Him. He is our Source of strength and life. As we draw close to Him, He draws close to us. He is the Vine, and we are the branches. That's why this must become our first priority, our highest discipline. Everything begins with our intimacy with God. We can't move forward without it!

Our intimacy with God, our closeness to Him, with growing surrender and dependence, makes us more and more like Him. He actually miraculously transforms us. That process leads us to increasingly reflect the mind, the character and the priorities of Christ. We can't help it. It's amazing! He changes the way we think, look and act. It's not simply growing up over time as we adapt to our faith. Otherwise, we wouldn't drift backwards when we aren't staying close to God. Notice how your bad character qualities come back when you aren't as intimate with Him. Mine do. And notice how your passion for the things of God and His priorities can easily fade. I've seen it happen in many areas of my life. I've seen it in my lack of compassion for people. I've seen it with my hardening heart for evangelism. Then, when I repent and acknowledge my drift, and I draw close again, it all comes back. I love it! I can't control it. All I can do is draw close and respond to the Spirit. Every disciple needs to be brought back here. This is the starting point. Everything in the Christian life flows out of this discipline and walk.

The Holy Spirit has actually been given to us to empower us for daily living. We've already said that many believers suffer for years as they try to do the Christian life in their own strength. Yet the Word points us to a dependent relationship with the Holy Spirit. Although we have all of the Holy Spirit at salvation, He clearly doesn't have all of us! The Spirit has been given to us for so many reasons. We desperately need His power and strength to demonstrate consistent character. But we also need Him for wisdom, clarity, management, priorities and so much more. As we learn to depend on Him and listen to Him, everything changes. Life becomes richer, healthier, more joyous and so much more fulfilling.

2) Reflecting His Love

As we draw close to God, He draws close to us and fills us with His Spirit and His love.

Moses radiated such a brilliant shine when he spent time with God that he had to cover his face when he went out with the people. God's presence in our lives also shines out for everyone to see. The fruit or evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. People see His love all over us- through our attitudes, our actions, our compassion, our joy in living, and our heart for the things that are on God's heart!

Once again, a disciple thinks, looks and acts like Jesus. This is clearly a process- it doesn't happen overnight. We don't just learn how to do this. It's not an act or a company policy. It's the product of our intimacy with God and our dependence on God. It's the product of His presence and transforming power in our lives, as we draw and stay closer to Him. We grow to look more and more like Jesus at home, at work, at the store, in the neighborhood and on vacation. We look like Jesus when no one but Jesus is looking. As we stay close and filled with Him, this is how we look when we're alert or tired, when we're at our best or under pressure. When we aren't looking like Jesus, it's evidence that we, again, have drifted backwards. It's clear that we are more full of our own strength than the strength of the Lord. That's my personal signal to repent once again of self-dependence and to draw close.

Reflecting His love is so essential for every disciple. God's reputation is at stake. We are His very own children, called to shine with His light. We are His very own ambassadors in a watching world. Our actions speak so much louder than our words. If our words don't match our actions, why would anyone listen to our words or believe our dogma? If God's desire is to reach more people all around the world, He truly needs a movement of disciples who think, look and act like Him! The more the people all around us see our authenticity and consistency, the more they will begin to believe that we actually have something to say. If our children, our parents, our fellow workers and our neighbors see the character of Jesus reflected in us, they'll be drawn to Him! And that's His plan. Jesus said to His disciples, "Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

3) Serving Everyone

We have a heart to serve people all around us when we are filled with the love of God. We want to help people- our family and friends, other believers, the people we work with and even strangers that we meet in life. That's what happens when we're filled with His love. We could also call it giving- a growing heart to give to others. Serving is giving of our thoughts,

time, energy and resources. As we draw closer to God, we become more and more generous. We make ourselves more available. Our desire to give grows and grows.

We need to remember that serving looks different in each of us. Some of us are servants by nature or by gifting, and we'll be first in line to help with our hands. Some of us serve with our minds or our mouths and give guidance or solutions to help. Others of us love to use our resources to serve wherever it's beneficial. It's important to realize that we won't all respond in the same way to needs that arise around us. Our gifts often lead our thinking in how we respond. It's so easy and, unfortunately, natural to get disappointed when others don't want to serve the way we serve or the way we want them to serve. But God's made us very different so we can accomplish much more in our diversity. Don't force people into your box!

We need to give each other the freedom to serve in our own way. We also need to make sure that we're not simply justifying our desire **not** to serve. Some of us don't have a heart to serve or to give. We're still very focused on what we want to do with our time and resources. We haven't grown in generosity. That, again, is another evidence that **we** are still more in control of our lives than God's Spirit. We've either reverted or we haven't fully surrendered yet.

Remember, God loves to soften our hearts so we respond to people and needs the same way that He would. It's God's Spirit that awakens our hearts to a need and gives us the desire to help. It's His grand plan and we are simply acting in His power and His will. But we've got to be listening. Again, our hearts soften as we surrender and draw closer and closer to God. If that's not happening, we have a lot to talk about with the Father.

4) Fishing: for Life

One of our greatest callings is to help people move toward a relationship with Jesus. Remember the story when Jesus invited some fishermen into the journey of becoming disciples with these words: "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." Follow Me and you will be fishing the rest of your life! As His disciples, this **is** who we are. This is one of our major purposes in life. Paul was so moved by the lostness of people and the opportunity to make a difference that he declared that he wanted to save as many as possible. That passion and drive can only flow from the heart of God. He sent His own Son to die for all of us! Certainly He died to save you and me. But now, as His disciples, we are called to tell that amazing truth to people everywhere. As we reflect His love and power, we earn the right to speak. And as opportunities begin to open, the Holy Spirit uses our lives and our words to breathe conviction and life into the hearts and minds of those we touch.

The New Testament is filled with passages pointing us to our responsibility to be the ambassadors that He has called us to be. But our relationship to God takes all of this a step further. As we draw close to God, as we are filled with the Spirit, we become overwhelmed with a heart for the lost. God fills us with a portion of His heart. We can't help it. We see everyone through different eyes- our neighbors, our family, the people at work and the people in Walmart. Their need for Jesus grips our hearts. Perhaps we've never felt these feelings before. This is the heart of the disciple. This is the heart of God.

Real disciples listen to the Father and begin to act on these thoughts and feelings. Many of us have walked down this missional road. We've built intentional friendships with the people that come to our minds. Some of us have gone on missional journeys. In fact, some of us have even quit our jobs to give ourselves more fully to His mission, here or somewhere in the world. Now, others of us haven't known what to do with these new feelings of compassion that have filled our hearts. That's where training and discipling is so helpful. Someone who's already traveled the road can help the next pilgrim on his or her journey.

It's also normal to lose this passion for lost people when we lose our closeness to God. It happens all the time. We get filled with God's Spirit and our hearts are stirred for people all around us. This often happens at salvation. It also happens when we go through a crisis experience and sense a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit's power and passion. Almost invariably, we sense a new heart for lost people. God's doing that in us! That's when we need to act and form new patterns in our lives. And that's when we need to be disciplined and taught how to best build healthy and intentional relationships with our non-believing friends. Unfortunately, for many of us, that didn't happen, and, over time, that initial passion faded away.

Here's one more evidence that we aren't as close to God as we should be. So many of us feel guilty not evangelizing the people in our lives. So we take the classes and work the plan to try to do the right thing. We have the right intentions, but we're missing the key. The classes and training are all good, but they can't produce the right result. Don't try fishing in your own strength! The Holy Spirit is our fishing guide- He leads us to the right people in the right time and shows us what to do and say in the right way. Jesus set the pattern when He addressed His disciples right before He ascended into heaven. Here were some of His last words in Acts 1:8:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jesus had just told the disciples to wait for the baptism or indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

“Don’t go until you get His power! But when you get it, you will have the power to be my witnesses all over the world!” What a giant vision! And what a wonderful package deal. “This is what I command you to do and I’m giving you the absolute, supernatural power to do it!”

But here’s a scary thought. Imagine doing all of that on your own. How foolish. He’s the One who wants to draw people to salvation. He knows what we don’t. We set ourselves up for failure. We set up opportunities that may damage people, saying the wrong things in the wrong way or at the wrong time. And we’ll soon lose our desire to even share our faith if all we are using is our own strength. All of this clearly reminds us of our desperate need for His power, strength and wisdom as we go through life. As we again draw close to God, He again draws close to us. He fills us with His love and reignites our hearts to reach lost people!

5) Making Disciples

Authentic disciples make more disciples. It’s who we are. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus made it so clear in His last words to His disciples:

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

This wasn’t the Great Suggestion! These were His disciples. They are getting marching orders to pass on from generation to generation. Make disciples and teach every disciple to obey this command and everything else I’ve commanded you. We’re to grow up and then help others to grow up and reproduce as well. This is the job. All of our other commitments and relationships in life have new meaning the moment we surrender our lives to Jesus. His Kingdom takes preeminence. That doesn’t mean we suddenly ignore or discount our families, our careers and other responsibilities with our newfound faith. Some cults and extreme church settings demand that type of commitment, and it always ends badly.

Becoming a disciple and disciplemaker doesn’t ruin our relationship with people. It strengthens our relationships. We become the amazing person that God intended us to be, and all of our relationships now have much greater value. Everything we do each day has new purpose. We’re making disciples. We’re investing in every life we touch with heaven in mind. We have a much greater purpose and vision at home with our family. We want all of them to know the Lord and to grow strong in the Lord. In fact, discipling begins in the home! Our impressions, our responses, our words, attitudes and actions are shaping their hunger for spiritual things. We are His reflection. Our neighbors may come to Jesus as they get to know us. The people we work with may have no one else building a bridge for them to

journey towards heaven. Our prayers suddenly change and are filled with tears for people everywhere.

God opens our eyes, and we see people the way He sees them. As we look at other believers, we see their potential. We see what they could be if they would just grow up. We start finding ways to help them grow. We lead someone to Jesus and now realize that that new believer needs to be invested in. They need to be disciplined! We may meet with that person, meet with another new believer or we may teach a focused class on growing in the Lord. We may gather a group at our home and talk about how to live out the principles that we find in God's Word.

Does God expect every one of us to make disciples? That's a great question. We're all made so differently. Think of the wide spectrum of people across the planet. We think and talk and act so differently from each other. For example, some of us communicate more easily than others. Some of us talk far less and work far more with our hands or minds. That's the way God made us. So if making a disciple requires good talking or teaching skills, many people wouldn't be able to do it. But it doesn't. We make disciples in different ways. A godly mother and father will pour into their children as they grow up. Every believer should feel the responsibility to help others within their circle of influence to grow in the Lord. We are all, in fact, making disciples, all the time, for better or for worse. We are all influencing others by our words, by our actions, by the decisions we make and by our character. It's happening even though we're unaware of it. Knowing that should motivate us all to make sure we're influencing people toward a Kingdom lifestyle.

God does command every one of His disciples to make more disciples. But not everyone will disciple in the same structured way that we describe in our books or manuals. It will never happen and shouldn't be expected. What we need to do is provide discipling for everyone. Everyone who is fully disciplined will model the life of Jesus and will pass on the principles to those they touch. They may not all use a book or manual, but their lives and quieter words can be as effective as any book or manual! That's how we work together as a family. Think about spiritual communities, living it out loud, together, committed to model missional living, raising up and passing on the truth to current and future generations. Some of us are better with words and content. Others of us may be better at giving time, care and understanding. But all of us play a vital role in building the body up in love. Together.

That leads us to the purpose of this guidebook and website. Many of us don't know how to build fully developed disciples. And that's because no one has ever done that for us. We don't know how to measure what a real disciple looks like or what he or she does. We may not feel like we are real disciples. Going through this material and applying it with others will change that. It may change everything!