

INTIMATE DISCIPLESHIP

*“Having thus a fond affection for you,
we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God
but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.”*

1 Thess. 2:8 NASB

- I. God has **designed** us to be in relationships.
 - A. With Him, because He chose us to have an eternal relationship with Him
(Ps. 42:1,2; 63:1)
 - B. With fellow Christians, so we can encourage and support one another to grow spiritually (1 Cor. 12)
 - C. With non-Christians, so we can impart the reality of Christ to those who do not know Him
- II. The command of God, which is firm and unwavering to **all** Christians, is, ***“...go and make disciples of all nations.”*** **Matt. 28:19**
 - A. What is a disciple?
 1. One who denies self and follows Christ
 - a) “...If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Luke 9:23
 - b) Christ is calling the disciple to relinquish all rights to himself.
 2. One who is willing to pay the price
 - a) “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:27
 - b) Christ is calling the disciple to be willing to suffer.
 3. One who places Christ before all others, even his own family
 - a) “If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:46
 - b) Christ is calling the disciple to godly priorities.

These three verses carry the same message. The cross is an instrument of death. A disciple of Christ must be willing to crucify self - to die to self. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was killed in a concentration camp in Nazi Germany for his faith, understood the deep cost of discipleship when he spoke these

INTIMATE DISCIPLESHIP

words, *“When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.”* The cross is also an instrument of great suffering, and the disciple must be willing to suffer for His sake. (Phil. 1:29)

4. One who is not attached to the world

- a) *“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”*
Luke 14:33
- b) Christ is calling the disciple to live with an eternal perspective.

The follower of Christ must see all earthly attachments as belonging to God and to be used as He pleases. The true disciple has no rights of ownership over anything. He must commit all he has to the Rightful Owner, the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. One who lives by truth

- a) *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* John 8:31b,32
- b) Christ is calling the disciple to obedient living.

A disciple must be diligent in growing in an understanding of God’s Word and applying these truths to his life. The result of such application is a life set free from emotional sin and behavioral bondages.

6. One who loves others

- a) *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* John 13:35
- b) Christ is calling the disciple to sacrificial love.

Genuine love is unconditional. Love is giving to another unselfishly, without expectation of anything in return. The disciple’s life must be characterized by biblical love for the brethren, as well as his enemies and the heathen (1 Cor. 13). Love is giving up the right to non-involvement.

INTIMATE DISCIPLESHIP

7. One who bears fruit
 - a) “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” John 15:8
 - b) Christ is calling the disciple to manifest the fruit of the Spirit in all areas of his life. The disciple should also be “bearing fruit” through evangelism, discipleship and service to Christ.
8. One who imitates God
 - a) “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us...” Eph. 5:1,2
 - b) Christ is calling the disciple to be a follower, an imitator of Himself. As disciples of Christ, we must be willing to follow His example of forfeiting all earthly rights, to die to self-interest and self-protection and to live emotionally free to love God and to love others.

As you can see from these definitions of “disciple,” a radical life-change from self-orientation to God and others is being commanded. To make a disciple, you need to **be** a disciple. Then you will be able to share from your own experience how God has changed you.

B. How does a believer “make disciples” in obedience to God’s command?

1. Through large and small group teaching and preaching, in which God’s truth is shared
2. Through imparting God’s truth, with accountability, in one-on-one and in small group relationships, which is intimate discipleship.

III. The scriptural blueprint to facilitate significant change is **intimate discipleship**.

- A. You, as the discipler, impart biblical knowledge with the deep desire to help another change from a follower of the world to a follower of Christ.
 1. Teach him what God asks a true disciple to be.
 2. Teach your disciple biblical truths and sound doctrine.
 3. Teach him how to rightly relate to God and to his fellow man.
 4. Teach him how to solve his sin problems biblically.
 5. Teach him how to minister to and how to disciple others, motivated by genuine love of God and others.

INTIMATE DISCIPLESHIP

- B. There are certain principles you, as the discipler, convey in intimate discipleship to facilitate change in the disciple.
1. Impart biblical knowledge through *role-modeling* as well as through teaching.
 2. Impart this knowledge in an atmosphere of deep compassion, accountability, availability and vulnerability between you and your disciple.
 3. Evidence your deep commitment by your willingness to invest not only your time, but also your very life, to help bring change in another. (1 Thess. 2:8)
 4. Evidence your commitment by your willingness to maintain a *sustained* relationship with your disciple.
 5. Employ loving admonishment as an essential element of intimate discipleship in order to facilitate spiritual growth in the disciple.
 6. Expect and require the disciple to *practice* the application of truths taught, in an atmosphere of accountability, until they become a part of the disciple's life.
 7. Realize that you cannot be the agent of change. Therefore, rely on the Holy Spirit to cause the growth in your disciple.

***"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.
So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything,
but only God, who makes things grow."
1 Cor. 3:6,7***

8. Realize you will not influence growth in your disciple beyond the level of your own growth. Therefore, remain accountable to others so you will continue to grow spiritually, role-modeling the biblical precepts you are teaching.
9. Open yourself to the expectation that your disciple may become a peer and a fellow discipler. As your disciple matures, a mutual ministry and accountability to one another may evolve.

IV. Christ role-modeled intimate discipleship as a means to develop spiritual growth and to multiply disciples.

- A. Christ disciplined the multitudes through large group teaching and preaching, but out of the multitudes, He chose twelve men to intimately disciple.
- B. He chose an "inner-circle" of three, James, John and Peter, from his twelve disciples.
- C. He invested His life in these twelve, especially in the "inner-circle" of three.
 1. He imparted His life to them
 2. He knew them intimately and they knew Him intimately.
 3. He spent a great deal of time with them.

INTIMATE DISCIPLESHIP

“And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him...”

Mark 3:14 NASB

4. He taught much in the context of real life experiences.
- D. He was their teacher and role-model
1. for biblical living and biblical problem solving.
 2. for discipling and ministry.
- E. Christ role-modeled
1. godliness, self-sacrifice and life-changing truths.
 2. compassion, unconditional love and acceptance.
 3. admonishment, risking the relationship to tell the truth.
 4. availability, vulnerability and commitment.
- F. Christ sent His trained disciples to disciple others.
- V. The life of Paul exemplifies how vibrant individual and church growth took place through intimate discipleship.
- A. Paul was discipled by Barnabas, the encourager.
1. Barnabas established a discipler-disciple relationship with Paul.
 2. The life of Paul was radically changed, and he became a discipler.
- B. **1 Thessalonians 2** includes discipling concepts taught and role-modeled in Paul’s life.
1. He imparted his life to others; he was vulnerable with them. (v.8)
 2. He pleased God rather than pleasing men. (v.4)
 3. He was authentic, genuine and did not hide behind an image. (v.5)

INTIMATE DISCIPLESHIP

4. He did not use ministry to promote himself or as an escape from dealing with his own problems.
5. He was motivated by genuine love, rather than motivated by self-interest and self-gain (v. 3)
6. He was intimately involved in their personal lives; thus, he knew them well enough to admonish them. (v. 11)
7. He implemented the principles of biblical problem-solving in his own life. Therefore, he knew *how* to impart them to others. (vv. 10-12)
8. His ministry of discipleship was not superficial teaching, but a deeply involved shepherding of his followers. (vv. 7,8)
9. His compassion and tenderness were warmly and openly expressed. (v. 7)
10. He was self-sacrificing and willing to be a risk-taker in obedience to God's command to, "***Go and make disciples of all nations...***" **Matt. 28:19**
11. He had the **goal** of discipleship clearly defined in his mind: to teach others to "*live lives worthy of God.*" (v. 12)
12. He was thankful for and desirous of being closely involved with his people. (v. 17)

C. Acts 2 and 20 also include these concepts about intimate discipleship:

1. Paul realized that discipleship included confrontation and admonishment so that he might see lives changed. His love was so great that he admonished ceaselessly and with tears. (Acts 20:31)
2. There was no superficiality in his relationships; he loved deeply and was deeply loved in return. He was openly affectionate. (Acts 20:37)
3. Paul intimately discipled Timothy, Titus, the Ephesian elders and the Thessalonians.
4. His churches grew!!
5. The people he discipled reproduced his work by discipling others.

Kefa Sempangi, the author of *A Distant Grief*, was a pastor in Uganda during Idi Amin's regime. Thousands of Christians were slaughtered by Amin. Before the slaughter began, Kefa's church was characterized by superficial involvements, but through deep suffering, this body of believers were brought

INTIMATE DISCIPLESHIP

into intimacy with one another. Kefa, like Paul and Christ, understood the biblical principles of intimate discipleship. He states, *“Gradually, I came to understand what Mondo (an elder in Kefa’s church) was saying. If I was having a Bible study and disowning my brother, I was not repenting. If I was going to church and keeping my brother at a distance, I was not walking in the light. Without a willingness to live a transparent, broken life before my brethren, our meetings were just another form of alienation. They were religious counterfeits.”*

D. Paul viewed himself as a role-model of godly living and invited people to imitate him. (1 Cor. 4:16)

“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Phil. 4:9

VI. The modern church often ignores the biblical model of intimate discipleship, devoting little or no attention to it.

A. Programs, committees, banquets, social events, choirs, etc. may become the major focuses. These pursuits have their place but they cannot replace or duplicate intimate discipleship.

*“It is possible for the church to have so many activities, programs, clubs, projects, committee meetings, banquets and community involvements - so many wheels spinning without really accomplishing anything of eternal significance - that the congregation forgets its primary objective. Many churches are like that impressive invention which had hundreds of wheels, coils, gears, pulleys, belts, bells, and lights which all went around and rang and flashed at the touch of a button. When the inventor was asked about the function of the weird machine, he replied, ‘What does it do? Oh, it doesn’t do anything, but doesn’t it run beautifully?’ ”*Dropping Your Guard Charles Swindoll

B. Small group Bible studies or sharing groups may include no accountability for personal growth and require no practicing of the truths taught. These activities impart knowledge of Scripture and knowledge of fellow members’ lives, but because of lack of accountability, they are superficial in design and do not duplicate the principles of intimate discipleship.

1. Intimacy, vulnerability and accountability require great risks in relationships, and many Christians are intimidated by deep “body life” as described in 1 Cor. 12.
 - a) God chooses the word “body” to describe His Church, denoting the great interdependency which human body parts manifest in relationship to one another.
 - b) God did not choose the word “organization” to describe His Church. Superficiality in relationships results in an organizational mentality.
2. Spiritual growth may occur in less intimate settings, but usually intimate discipleship will create an atmosphere for much more *rapid* and *radical* changes in the life of a disciple.

INTIMATE DISCIPLESHIP

3. A basic principle of discipleship is that the disciple will be presented with the opportunity to become like his discipler. The disciple will be disciplined in either of two ways:
 - a) By example, he will be disciplined into superficial relationships and an organizational mentality.
 - (1) He will learn to hide his sin problems from others and build a spiritual image.
 - (2) He may become a discipler and thus, repeat the cycle.
 - b) By example, he will be disciplined into intimate relationships and deep body life.
4. Superficial relationships often do not encourage the *practicing* of biblical truths, with accountability. Therefore, often very little change is evidenced in the disciple.

- C. Kefa Sempangi understood that church functions, although good, could become a substitute for in-depth discipling relationships within the local body.

“They soon discovered that though they were busy having Bible studies, holding prayer meetings, and attending church services, the things they were doing were not the central message of Christ’s teaching. They had to ask themselves, did Jesus die for our meetings? Or was it for something else? They found that Jesus had given instruction that before they enjoyed their devotional life, they were to be reconciled with their brother or sister whom they might have wronged during the day. It was not for their devotions Christ died. What He had paid the price for was their relationship with God and one another.”

A Distant Grief
Kefa Sempangi

VII. Intimate discipleship, which is modeled in the New Testament as foundational to the church, produces fruit.

- A. A full-orbed discipleship, covering most aspects of a disciple’s life, is life-changing. It is a radical transformation from world and self-orientation to God and others-orientation.
 1. Radical change is effected as biblical truths are taught in a sequence and time frame that permit them to be regularly practiced.
 2. The discipler must have the goal of helping a person learn to be freed from a life which is *motivated* by self-interest (pride) and self-protection (fear) to a life *motivated* by a genuine love for God and others, which promotes intimacy.
- B. The sin that trapped your disciple is overcome through the breaking of self-will and the power of the Holy Spirit. The Christian is emotionally freed! (John 8:31b,32)

INTIMATE DISCIPLESHIP

- C. Emotional freedom from the bondage of sin leads to a genuine zeal, motivated by love, for the Lord and His Word, accompanied by a great desire to help others learn the same principles.
1. Learning to live biblically, through deep submission to God, must precede a truly effective one-on-one ministry.
 2. Ministering from pure motivation, which is love of God and others, rather than self-interest or self-gratification, impacts lives greatly.
 - a) Genuine zeal is the outflow of walking closely with Christ.
 - b) Authentic excitement and enthusiasm are generated for God's Word and obedience to it.
 - c) Great confidence in God's ability to empower and in the Scriptures to impart life-changing truths, is evidenced.
- D. The disciple becomes a discipler, knowing how to impart the reality of Christ to others, which may then lead to specific ministries, such as prison, drug and alcohol rehabilitation or other target ministries.
- E. The mature disciple will evidence a consistent godly life-style, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22,23)

Praise God for His blueprint for personal and corporate growth! Intimacy is costly, both to the discipler and disciple. It requires a sustained commitment to releasing the "right" to non-involvement. It requires moving out of your "comfort zone" to form deep relationships. But the reward is great, both to the discipler and the disciple. The fruit of discipleship, the abundant life, will be evidenced in both lives!

***"We continually remember before our God and Father
your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love,
and your endurance inspired by hope
in our Lord Jesus Christ."
Thess. 1:3***