

Discipleship with Direction

An eBook for Multiplying Disciples

written by:

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Discipleship with Direction: An eBook for Multiplying Disciples

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To Jeff Vandenberg and Ben Dager.

Two men who disciplined me with direction.

Thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I own a lot of books. My desk is covered in them. Shelves overflow.

One of my favorite pastimes is opening up Amazon to drop ten bucks on the latest brain candy. And when that pudgy little brown package arrives on my desk two days later...oh the sweet, unparalleled bliss.

But sometimes, books create clutter.

Seriously, my desk is a disaster. I once took pride in being an organized person. But now, half the time I can't even find the title I'm looking for amidst the piles of dead trees.

This excess of books reminds me of my own journey when it comes to understanding discipleship. I received so much information from so many sources over several years that eventually my view of discipleship became cluttered instead of clear. Instead of confidently moving forward in developing the faith of others, I tip-toed. Behind every piece of advice, behind every meeting over coffee, I heard the choir of a thousand critics.

I began to wonder: Could it be possible to know too much about discipleship?

After years of frustrated reflection on this question, I finally arrived at a clear answer:

No. And yes. Er, um...sometimes. It might be. But not really.

I don't know.

Enthusiasm further years of personal frustration. Welcome to my life.

But then, one day, I had a lightbulb moment. I realized that amid the diverse approaches and innumerable resources I'd combed through over the years, a consistent, coherent strand could be seen.

This eBook is my attempt to identify and articulate that discipleship strand.

I am of the opinion that discipleship should not be complicated. And

yet, I do believe it should be nuanced. That is, it should be flexible enough to uniquely adapt to each and every one-of-a-kind individual made in the image of God. But it should also be simple enough to be replicated with most anyone we have the opportunity to invest in.

In this eBook, I seek to chart a course for discipleship that is both repeatable *and* adaptable; both simple *and* nuanced. My hope in doing so is to equip every follower of Christ with a clear, big-picture of view of the discipleship process, while also providing numerous practical tools. These tools can be discarded or selected based on the unique circumstances of your discipleship context.

I've intentionally kept this eBook brief and to-the-point. It's designed to be read once from start to finish, and then serve as a reference handbook afterward.

I publish this work with full awareness that innumerable resources on discipleship already exist. My hope is that this tool can serve a unique purpose due to its brevity and practicality.

I pray it will be clarifying and instructive for you and your calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

What Discipleship Is Not

Jesus commands his followers to make disciples.

So, how are you doing with that?

I'm sorry, was that a little forward? Should I have told a pithy story to draw you in first?

For most of us, being asked how we're doing at "making disciples" gets us a little squeamish. It's kind of like asking a someone who they voted for last election cycle. Awkward...

We respond this way largely because of how we interpret the phrase, "make disciples". Many people think I just asked something like, "How are you doing at having your Bible out at the office?" Or, "Have you recently quoted Romans Road to any other moms while your kids played on the swing set?"

And if that's what it means, then I, as a pastor, am not doing well.

In order to move forward, we must get beyond several common misconceptions of discipleship. Only after identifying and disregarding these misconceptions will we be free to move toward a more accurate understanding.

With that in mind, here are several approaches that reveal a misunderstanding of discipleship.

Cold Turkey Evangelism

When we tell you to "go and make disciples", we are not asking you to hand out gospel tracts at the grocery store. We're not asking you to strike up conversations with strangers about where they will go after they die.

The proper name for this type of activity is "Cold Turkey Evangelism" or "Random Evangelism". It's the Christian version of "cold calling", and it isn't for everyone.

Discipleship is not cold turkey evangelism.

Broadly speaking, evangelism is the church word for sharing your faith with those who don't yet believe.

Discipleship, on the other hand, refers to the process by which someone grows in their faith over time (in contrast to their initial decision to trust Jesus, which evangelism tends to be focused on).

So, if "making disciples" involves more than cold calling for Jesus, then what is it? We'll get there in a moment, but first, a few more examples of what it's not.

A One and Done Meeting

Getting together over coffee is a great next step. It allows for personal connection, and communicates volumes about how you value someone as a person. Whether it's a pastor like me connecting with a newcomer to church, or you connecting with a friend who expresses spiritual curiosity, the one on one meeting is always a win.

The problem occurs when it ends there—after just one meeting.

For church leaders this is an especially common pitfall. I commit the error far too often myself. We have lots of people clamoring for our attention. We get "connection cards" all the time. We want to meet with everyone. So we try to. We get a one-time meeting with a lot of them.

But then, there's no follow up. We connect, we part ways, and the conversation ends. And because the conversation ends, their discipleship growth ends, too.

The best version of the "one and done" meeting ends with a clear next step—a step that will lead the person to a place of impactful, ongoing discipleship. Ideally, this next step will direct them not just towards a "program" or "class" (though that might be the case), but towards relationships with other Christians. As we will see, discipleship requires ongoing relationships.

So, the one and done meeting can be an on-ramp to discipleship, but it is not discipleship itself.

Lots of One on One Meetings with No Particular Direction

A step up from the “one and done” meeting is the “let’s keep meeting together!” approach that never really goes anywhere.

One thing we must note here is the quality of intentions. Praise God that you want to invest in someone and are willing to give time to them on a regular basis! Wow. You are a rock star. If you come to my church, I’ll gladly put some tools in your hands to help give direction to your beautiful heart for people.

But for now, we must point out some problems with this approach.

The big problem with aimless discipleship is that it creates dependence. Instead of empowering a new believer to learn for themselves, they become dependent on you. Generally, this discipleship model results in an endless cycle of:

- You come to me with your problems;
- I tell you how to fix your problems (at best, I sprinkle in some Bible verses and show you how to find them);
- I pray for you to stand strong in the midst of your problems in the week ahead;
- You come back the next week with different problems;
- The cycle continues.

Indeed, how can this cycle end? In fact, it ends quite easily: as soon as your relationship comes to an end. If you move away, or the person you’re investing in moves, everything falls apart. They’ve been dependent on you to live the Christian life.

Without you around, how will they know what God wants them to do?

This is a big problem. If one goal of discipleship is to help people grow in their walk with God, then surely that involves helping them be able to do so without having to phone a friend anytime a challenge arises. Similar to how we expect infants to grow and gain independence as they age, we should also expect followers of Jesus to grow in independence over time. Certainly, as members of the church community we are never fully independent. But in terms of spiritual maturity, we should eventually be able to make basic decisions on our own and navigate our daily lives with confidence in Christ.

Sadly, the aimless discipleship process fails to produce people who

gain this kind of confidence.

Here is another problem with this approach: **so long as they are dependent on you, they will never be able to replicate this process to disciple someone else.**

After all, you are not training them to make disciples, you're just training them to come to you with their problems. So long as someone remains dependent, they will not develop the skills or confidence necessary to share their faith with others, nor help others grow in their walk with God.

Over time, I've observed that people with high social skills and natural intelligence are particularly vulnerable to this "directionless discipleship" model. After all, their natural gifts enable them to make the cycle look pretty good. Pastors and Bible-nerds are similarly vulnerable because their depth of Biblical knowledge allows them to lead these kinds of conversations easily. Pastors know what Bible verses to pull out for different challenges and situations. (Hint: Jeremiah 29:11 works every time!)

But if we truly want to create disciples who are able to go and make other disciples, then we need to equip individuals to learn for themselves, not just through their mentor. They need to know the Bible for themselves, not just rely on the mentor's knowledge. They need to be able to identify bad doctrine, not rely on their mentor's doctrine. They need to be able to instruct others in decision-making and Bible reading, not just rely on their mentor's ability to do those things.

Creating disciples at this level requires direction. It requires a game plan and a goal.

Soon, we'll get to what that plan and goal is. But first, one more insufficient model for discipleship.

Lots of Bible Knowledge

This model of discipleship gets so close to the ideal that it's tantalizing. In fact, it can sometimes be hard to distinguish between the ideal model of discipleship and the knowledge-based model I am describing here.

This model looks as follows: you meet with a disciple on a regular, ongoing basis, *and* you have a direction. WIN! We are getting

somewhere now.

However, the specific direction you have chosen (whether purposefully or unintentionally) is the goal of Bible Knowledge Mastery.

Yes, you and your disciple can quote every word of the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes, just for fun, you banter back in forth in nothing but Scripture. You know the seven churches the letters of Revelation were written to. You can name the twelve disciples, and can expound on the five points of Calvinism. You even think you know who wrote the book of Hebrews.

But, Jesus comes to this knowledge-based model of discipleship and delivers a ringer:

*You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:
These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
[Matthew 15:7-8]*

One theme we see with crystal clarity throughout the story of the Bible is this: **it is possible to *know* the Bible yet fail to *obey* it. You can love the *words* of the Bible without loving the *God* who inspired those words.**

Clearly, this is a major pitfall to be aware of. It is especially important to watch out for because those who fall into it often appear to be the most religious people around. Generally speaking, most who are in this camp are not aware of it, and that's frightening.

Yet, as we'll see, Bible knowledge *is* profoundly necessary for mature discipleship. The solution is not to scrap instruction on the Bible, but simply to make sure the Bible isn't the *only* thing giving direction to your process. Instead, you need obedience, love for God, and concern for others to be equally important.

Towards a Better Model

We've covered four models that fall short of a fully adequate process for discipleship. So, what *does* quality discipleship look like?

We'll explore that in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Holistic, Directional Discipleship

We've seen that "making disciples" does not mean striking up spiritual conversations with unsuspecting strangers in public places. It's also not aimless one on one meetings, nor just learning content from the Bible. These are all aspects, but fail to produce the goal of a multiplying disciple.

So what does a proper discipleship process look like? We find our answer from Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

Holistic, Directional Discipleship

The apostle Paul stated the following goal for his life and for every Christian:

*[Jesus] is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, **so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end** I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.*

[Colossians 1:28-29]

Notice, Paul's goal is not converts. Paul, the church-planter, evangelist extraordinaire, the guy who established the Christian movement in much of the world—that guy said his goal was not converts for Christ. Rather, his goal was complete, mature disciples.

And when we look to Jesus, we discover more of the same:

*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and **teaching them to obey everything** I have commanded you.*

[Matthew 28:19-20]

Everything. That's fairly comprehensive. Especially when you consider that Jesus lived, ate, drank, slept, traveled, taught, preached, healed, and bantered with his disciples nearly every day for three years. He also said the entire Old Testament is actually about him, which means all of its commands and stories are instructional for our lives as well.

In other words, Jesus and Paul's model for discipleship was Holistic (affecting every area of life) and Directional (it had the goal of spiritual maturity). Let's explore each of these aspects.

Holistic

The first aspect of this model is "Holistic". This means interactions do not only take place in one setting (only in church, only the in coffee shop, only in your home). Rather, you interact in several settings. You invite them over for family dinner. You visit them at their workplace. You go out for coffee. You attend church together.

You might have a consistent time and place you meet every week, and that can be a foundational aspect of your discipleship process. But it cannot be everything. You need to get into their lives, and they need to get into yours.

The reason you need to get into each other's lives is because **knowledge is not the only goal for discipleship**. You also have the goal of helping them find healthy community. Of getting a handle on their finances, and living generously. Of loving their family well, and training their children in the faith. In order for all these things to happen, you must interact with each other in multiple settings.

In addition to interacting in multiple settings, **you also have to discuss more topics than just theology or Bible**. Theology and Bible are important, and people won't mature without knowing how to read the Bible or without being able to rehearse the foundational truths of the gospel.

However, you also need to let them know they tend to be a bad listener. Or, have they ever noticed they come off as arrogant, or abrasive? Or, how about that pile of debt they keep pretending doesn't exist? A holistic discipleship plan invites Jesus to speak into every area of life and seeks his guidance.

Directional

The second aspect of this model is “Directional”. That is, your discipleship seeks to go somewhere. Ultimately, the “destination” is creating a multiplying disciple. That is, your disciple is not “finished” until they are ready to take someone else through a similar discipleship process as they’ve experienced with you.

Implementing directional discipleship means coming in with a plan. It means having a sense of where you want to go with someone, and later being able to look back at how far they’ve come.

We encounter directional training processes in nearly every area of life, so why shouldn’t we have one in our walk with Jesus? Our kids are introduced to the fundamentals in sports camp, leading to short scrimmages, eventually leading to full blown games. If you want to play an instrument, you begin with a book for beginners, then work your way up to music of increasing complexity. If you take a new job, you’ll begin with an orientation, a meeting with Human Resources, then you’ll be shown around the office, and eventually you’ll be introduced to the mechanics and rhythms necessary to succeed in the position.

In a similar way, discipleship should have direction to it.

But is a disciple ever finished? Is there a finish line to this process?

In a broad sense, a disciple is never fully “finished”—at least, not until we come face to face with Jesus in the renewed creation. But there can be an end to the season of focused intentionality. This is similar to how, eventually, your job training program comes to an end. But that doesn’t mean you will never learn anything new about how to do your job. It just means the most intentional, structured season of training is over. You’re on your own now, and everything else you need to know you can figure out by your own initiative.

In a similar way, the bulk of the discipleship process concludes when someone is no longer an infant in Christ, but now is able to stand on their own two feet and to help others mature, too.

How Could I Possibly Disciple Like This?

Perhaps you are intimidated by this vision of Holistic, Directional Discipleship. You may balk at the immense time it would require to

mentor someone in this way. Or, you may feel ridiculously inadequate for the depth and breadth of knowledge that seems necessary.

These initial reactions are understandable. However, **I can assure you that, rightly understood, this vision of discipleship is attainable for anyone, anywhere.** You just need the right tools.

CHAPTER FOUR

How Discipleship Strengthens Evangelism

Before we outline a plan for discipleship, it's important to answer a potential objection to Holistic, Directional discipleship.

Some people hear this vision for discipleship and lament its slow, incremental, time-intensive requirements. They fear that while we spend time helping Christians grow to maturity, nonbelievers outside the church will suffer for lack of witness. In other words, from a perspective of time, energy, and resources, discipleship seems to hinder the work of evangelism.

These objections are understandable. The observation that discipleship is time-intensive and incremental is quite accurate, and is an important part of the counting the cost if you wish to become a person who makes disciples.

However, in the end, this objection is misplaced and shortsighted. Here are a several reasons why:

1. Mature, Equipped Christians Share the Gospel more than Immature, Non-Equipped Christians

At first blush, some leaders might object to this premise. They will number off the stories they've seen of brand new, fairly clueless Christians being the most evangelistic, passionate witnesses they've ever seen.

In spite of stories like this (and I have seen individuals like this myself, so the stories are real), we must not become content with brand new converts eagerly sharing Jesus. Why not?

Because a brand new, fairly clueless Christian who is passionate about sharing the gospel cannot compare to a veteran, fully equipped Christian who is passionate about sharing the gospel.

Let me explain that a bit further.

Most of the people who trust Christ and immediately get others to trust Christ are individuals with natural gifts in leadership. They have high social skills, high woo (“win others over”), and high energy. When they meet Christ, the Holy Spirit accompanies these gifts, and the result is fun to watch. Others flock toward them, which now means they flock toward Christ.

However, for all this apparent fruit right out of the gate, we must ask some follow up questions:

First, what happens to this natural leader and their new flock of believers over the next six months? If they are not disciplined to maturity, then they will stagnate. If the leader doesn’t stagnate, then surely the rest of their flock will. And that is sad, because with some investment and discipleship, their entire flock could be imitating their influential leader.

Second, what would happen if this already-gifted evangelist were to be disciplined to maturity? People who come to Christ and display leadership and influence from day one are the kinds of people who become leaders of *movements*, not just individuals. People with high social skills, natural intelligence, and immense capacity should be trained to become Kingdom builders. They have the potential to be the next generation of entrepreneurs, cross cultural missionaries, church leaders, successful authors, and kingdom innovators.

Yet we are content to have them invite a couple friends to church.

And that’s only to speak of the people who come to church with already-established social abilities—but what about the rest of us? What is the disciplinemaking, fruit-bearing future of those who come to the church with baggage, with wounds, with social struggles?

Once again, the crux that separates these individuals from remaining needy or becoming effective witnesses rests on discipleship. Through careful investment, time, love, and intentional training, any follower of Christ can become a mature, multiplying disciple. That is the beauty of God’s Kingdom, and the power of God’s Spirit.

In the end, this means more people participating in the work of evangelism, which means more people hearing the good news of Jesus.

2. Evangelistic Hopes, Sermons, and Vision Assume Too Much of Immature, Ill-Equipped Believers

Sermons from the stage are excellent for inspiration and exposure to ideas, but they are terrible for practical training and accountability.

If you speak with anyone who works in the sphere of education, they will tell you a simple truth about how human beings learn: **the more people there are in a room, the less they absorb.** This has to do with teacher-to-student ratios. The best ratio for learning is, undoubtedly, one to one.

Some church leaders will use the “power of the Spirit” as an excuse for their own laziness towards work with individuals and small groups. Indeed, if God wanted the church to be fully equipped for life and evangelism through one sermon, he could certainly do that. But as with everything else, God prefers that people do his work when possible. This is our privilege, to participate with God in equipping his people for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12).

We can stand before our people and yell at them to share the gospel all day long. (I have done this...I still do.) But we should not be surprised when we get a “deer in the headlights” look from them.

Why?

Because **we should not be surprised when people fail to do what we are not training them to do.**

And how do we train them? Through a sermon only? Through a couple of classes on sharing your faith? No. These things help. They give guidance and direction. But ultimately, there is no substitute for Holistic, Directional Discipleship. When we give individualized attention and training, disciples are equipped to share their faith, thereby expanding the influence of the church.

3. Holistic Discipleship Pulls in Church-goers who are “On the Fence”

Often times, we think of faith in Christ with a bit too much polarity: either you trust Christ and are in, or you fail to trust Christ and you’re out. While this dichotomy is certainly true theologically, it’s incredibly difficult to manage on a practical, real-life level.

As leaders of a church, how are we to say who is really in, and who is

really out? Who is actually trusting Christ, and who is just showing up to church?

Generally speaking, the church has been content to identify which side you are on based on church-attendance. If you come to church three out of four times per month or so, then you are in. We're glad you're here. We're glad you trust Christ. Now we'll go about our business and let you go about yours.

But of course, the modern church is waking up to the insufficiency of church attendance as a measure for faith in Christ.

Truth be told, there are many who fill the seats on Sunday who do not wish to grow spiritually. When offered a clear, winsome path to deeper Christian experience, they think nothing of it. They are content with their lives as they are. Church is either a religious check-box, an emotional high, or a form of spiritual entertainment.

For these people, we can invite them into discipleship until we are blue in the face, and it makes no difference.

However, I also believe there are lots of churchgoers who *would* respond to a clear, winsome path to deeper Christian experience. Currently, they appear to be no different than the pew-sitters who come to get their emotional high and leave early to avoid traffic. But given some time and individual investment, they would emerge as heartfelt, fully invested followers of Christ. Their character would begin to change. Their finances would get in order. They would become generous. They would become hospitable. Who knows? They might even become a leader who makes multiplying disciples.

In this way, the work of discipleship is a form of evangelism in its own right. It distinguishes the pew-sitters from the Christ followers. And it invites the Christ followers into a fuller experience of faith.

4. The Numeric Result of Spiritual Multiplication

In a certain way, the objection about "ignoring the lost" while we disciple Christians does have a grain of truth. This year, if we focus on making mature disciples instead of reaching more lost people, we may indeed fail to reach some we might otherwise have invited into our church family.

However, in ten years, the opposite will be true. Here is how this

works:

Let's say the pastors at your church are really good at reaching people for Christ. Plus, you've got a handful of really solid leaders in the church who consistently lead others to Christ. Let's be generous and say your church has 50 people who can lead lots of people to Christ this year. Let's also be generous and say each of those people can lead 50 others to Christ this year, and every year for the next ten years. That's leading someone to Christ almost every week—highly unlikely, but we're being generous for the sake of comparing numbers.

Here is how the numbers go in that scheme. These numbers represent the size of your church every year going forward:

Year 1: 2,500 (that's 50 people times 50 new believers they've each led to Christ)

Year 2: 5,000 (this is those same 50 people all reaching another 50 people)

Year 10: 25,000

So there it is: 25,000 people reached for Christ in 10 years. Your 50 evangelists have done a lot, and you should be proud. Every year, your church adds 2,500 new converts for Christ, leading to steady growth.

Now, let's see what happens if those same 50 people only invested in **one person** this year, and every year for ten years after that (instead of 50 people each year). However, because they are spending an entire year investing in one key person, at the end of the year, **all of their disciples are now able to reach someone else themselves** in the year that follows. This is the concept of "spiritual multiplication".

Here are the numbers:

Year 1: 100 (that's 50 people investing in one person this first year, plus your original 50)

Year 2: 200 (that's your new "labor force" of 100 all reaching and discipling one more person each)

Year 3: 400 (this time you started with a "labor force" of 200, reaching and discipling one person each)

Year 4: 800

Year 5: 1600

Year 6: 3200

Year 7: 6,400

Year 8: 12,800

Year 9: 25,600 (notice, here we passed the previous model!)

Year 10: 51,200

So there you have it. In ten years, we more than doubled the number of people reached for Christ. Not only that, every single person has been invested in for an entire year, not merely “prayed the prayer” or shown up to church.

And by the fifteenth year on this plan?

1,638,400.

That’s a big church.

So what’s the bottom line?

If you are passionate about seeing people far from God come to know Jesus, you should be passionate about turning young Christians into mature ones. A careful focus on Holistic, Directional Discipleship will, eventually, lead to increased evangelism.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Discipleship Plan

Up this point, we've corrected common misconceptions about discipleship and provided a better model after Jesus' own example: Holistic, Directional Discipleship. We've also shown that a focus on developing young Christians into mature disciples does not hinder new people coming to faith, but actually strengthens that effort.

Now, we're ready to get practical on what discipleship can look like.

If discipleship has direction (meaning it has a goal in mind), and if it's holistic (affecting every aspect of life), then how do we actually approach making a disciple?

I offer the plan that follows as one pathway that has proved to be successful. I view this plan as a distilling down of the crucial, consistent elements present in any discipleship plan I've seen over the years. Certain areas may be emphasized more or less, or additions may be given due to the personality of a ministry or leader. But in general, I believe these are the broad categories necessary for creating a multiplying disciple.

Each step of the plan could be elaborated on for many pages, but here I try to keep things brief. I've included a handful of practical tools to get you started. These tools are also great for further research if you want to go deeper in a specific area.

If your disciple is already excelling in a certain part of the plan, you can simply skip over it. The danger with that, however, is to assume. I've found that **wrong assumptions are often made based on age or social skills.**

If someone is older and has been around the church for decades, we may assume they have a devotional life and know the Bible well. This is probably a bad assumption. The only way to find out is to begin reading the Bible with them and observe how they respond. Do they know

what's happening? Do they naturally share things God is teaching them through their own time in the word? Or, are they lost?

Another group that gets robbed is people with high social skills. Because they are good with people, we tend to assume they must know a lot about Jesus. Again, this may not be the case. **Better to hit a topic and have it be repetitious than skip something and risk a frail foundation for their faith.**

So again, you can skip an area if your disciple is competent in it, but make sure not to assume.

Who is my disciple?

For the sake of simplicity, let's say you're about to work with someone who is fairly immature in their faith, or who is not even a believer yet but is genuinely interested in exploring Jesus. Let's also assume that this person's life is not in a state of crisis.

[Important side note: if someone is in a state of crisis, it will be difficult to move them forward toward spiritual maturity, new disciplines, or lifestyle changes. Their world has just been rocked, and they aren't even sure which way is up or down. God often uses crises as a way to wake people up spiritually, and it may catapult them toward faith. But as far as spiritual help in the midst of a crisis situation or shortly after, the best options are to be faithfully present with them, praying for their situation, and perhaps encouraging them to seek counseling or urgent medical care if drugs, addictions, or mental health problems are involved. When I say crisis, I do mean crisis, such as impending or very recent divorce, death of a loved one, shocking job loss, addictions, or severe mental health challenges. It is not a crisis to be in a lot of debt, nor to have a bad marriage, nor to struggle with laziness. These are just ordinary symptoms of living life apart from God. Once a person emerges from their state of crisis and resumes "normal" life, then the work of discipleship can begin.]

With that in mind, here is an overview of the plan, with explanatory notes along the way.

For time lengths, I have assumed you are meeting once per week and

having other touch points throughout the week. If not, then expand the timeline accordingly. The plan at my pace would take around one year to complete.

Step 1: Establish a Devotional Life (1-2 months)

Your first objective for your new disciple is to get them reading their Bible and communing with God through prayer. For simplicity, just focus on Bible reading for now. Instruction on prayer will come later, and prayer happens almost naturally when we read God's word in solitude and silence.

The what's and how's of this are not all that important. What is important is getting their nose in the Bible.

My personal starting point is usually the book of Mark. It's the shortest Gospel, easy to understand, focused on Jesus, and packs the most punch per page.

If you're looking for an easy tool to get you started, check out David Helm's [One to One Bible Reading](#). It has lots of simple formats for journaling and interacting with the text. You can also check out the [ABC Method](#).

There are a couple important notes to keep in mind for this first step.

First, **read the Bible *with* them.** (This principle of doing things *with* your disciple pervades the entire process of Holistic, Directional Discipleship, by the way.) When you meet, actually read the Bible together. Read it out loud. Then take some silent time for each of you to put some thoughts together. Model what you hope they will do on the days you aren't physically with them.

Second, get them writing, or interacting with the text. Reading is fairly passive. In order to really encounter Jesus, journaling methods help a lot. They also give you a format for conversation.

You could spend anywhere from three to eight weeks on Step 1. So long as they are a follower of Christ already, I would not spend too much longer than this simply getting them established. If they are still investigating Jesus, you can continue to focus on this longer. But moving on to the next step can be appropriate for either category of people.

Of course, when you finish "Step 1", that does not mean their Bible

reading comes to an end. It should be just the opposite! That is the point. You are trying to establish them having a regular, ongoing devotional life. Ideally, this habit of regular Bible reading will remain a cornerstone of their faith for the rest of their lives. You are just opening the door for them, and helping them take the first few steps.

Step 2: Establish Christian Community (unspecified length of time)

The next step is to ensure that they are connected to other believers through a network of relationships. This is where the local church comes in (if it hasn't already). At minimum, they should be exposed to worship services and introduced to some of your Christian friends. Ideally, they plug into the community in an authentic way themselves. Without Christian friends to show them the way, they are far less likely to reach Christian maturity.

In addition, and equally important, **they need to see that all this stuff they are reading in their Bible actually has an affect on the lives of real people in their world.** In this way, the Christian community doesn't exist just to give them more Bible knowledge, nor to have a social club to make them feel welcome. Rather, it is a context in which they can discover what obedience to Jesus looks like in everyday life.

Step 3: Clarify Foundational Truths (2 months)

At this point, they are reading the Bible, growing in their knowledge of God, and gaining relationships in the Christian community. It is appropriate at this stage to ensure that they are exposed to key truths about Jesus, sin, God, salvation, and the Christian life. Since they are reading the Bible for themselves, we can be sure that they will, eventually, come to learn about these topics. But a bit of help from someone who knows more than them can solidify their faith and improve their enjoyment in Bible reading, as they may understand more than they did previously.

This stage gives you opportunity to utilize several meetings to cover a variety of topics. You might consider sharing a gospel illustration in the first of these meetings. [Four Circles](#) is my personal favorite (see [script](#) and [printout](#)).

You could utilize Francis Chan's series "Doctrine" on

RightNowMedia.

I would also strongly recommend committing several verses of scripture to memory. Consider [The Topical Memory System from The Navigators](#), or [The Story of the Bible in 16 verses](#).

Reading through a book with your disciple is another solid option for this stage. Check out [The Gospel for Real Life](#); or [Kingdom Come](#).

For getting a grasp on the “big story” of the Bible, watch and discuss theme videos by [The Bible Project](#) or check out [Multiply](#).

Similar to establishing a devotional life in Step 1, we hope any disciple will continue to grow deeper in their appreciation of theological truths throughout their life. Whether through church attendance, podcasts, small groups, or books, we expect they’ll never stop growing in their knowledge of God. But for this stage in the process, we’re merely seeking minimum proficiency. We want them to rest easy in the grace of God. We want them to be able to articulate the ramifications of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection for their sin and their life going forward. If they can do that, we’re on the right track.

Step 4: Teach them to Share their Personal Faith Story (2-3 weeks)

By this stage you want your disciple to develop a passion to share their experience with others. Eventually (in Step 7), you’ll equip them for full-blown mission. But for now, these few weeks are an opportunity to expose them to the concept of God’s mission. Implicit in the act of sharing your story with others is the fact that, as followers of Christ, the souls of others matter to us! We are concerned for the well-being of others, both now and for eternity. Pausing at this stage to state this clearly and provide initial equipping is huge for talk of mission later on. After all, we don’t want to get a year into our discipleship with someone before we ever talk about mission!

As you guide your disciple, consider teaching them how to give a thirty second version of their story for that awkward interaction at work; or a longer version to share with their friend who’s genuinely curious. Here is a [great resource from InterVarsity](#). If they find this challenge awkward, walk them through [The Journey to Spiritual Friendship](#), showing them that faith conversations can happen naturally through friendships with those who don’t know Christ (Podcast explanation

[here](#)).

Step 5: Identify Signature Sins and Build Accountability (3 weeks to 3 months, depending on struggles)

Your disciple is moving along now. You need to make sure you don't overlook some of the most obvious temptations that could shipwreck their faith. For all you know, though you've been mentoring them for several months, they are still hooked on a few shots of whiskey before bed every night. Or their marriage is on the verge of disaster. Or their credit cards are maxed out and they've never given a dime towards Kingdom work.

Its time to ask hard questions. I know of one pastor who said every single guy he meets with he asks: "how often are you looking at porn?" This level of directness, with a healthy dose of empathy, love, and vulnerability about your own sins, will be necessary. You want to make sure your disciple knows that following Jesus is a path for sinners, not perfectionists. This section of their development will be crucial for actually applying the foundational truths they've learned to their own life and soul.

You could utilize a simple analysis tool from [Signature Sins](#) to start your conversation. After identifying and confessing major failings in candid conversations, you work together toward holiness. You help him or her to identify means of accountability (may not be you!) and a road to (imperfect) victory in the future.

Step 6: Identify Gifts, Strengths, and Personal Sense of Calling (1-2 months)

Your disciple is growing up and becoming established. Its time to get them thinking in terms of service and mission. Over several meetings, you will seek to answer questions like:

- What are my spiritual gifts? What do I excel in?
- What, specifically, does it look like for me to serve the Kingdom of God?
- What is the role of my job in my walk with God?
- Who are the people God is calling me to share the gospel with, or to disciple?

This step will include several meetings and involve lots of prayer and discernment. You could have them take:

[Meyer's Briggs personality test](#)

[Strengthsfinder](#) Evaluation

Do a Bible study on the importance of daily work, or vocation. Check out the RightNowMedia studies *Redeeming Work* by Andy Crouch or *Work as Worship* by JD Greer. Or, read a book on the topic, like [Work Matters](#).

Step 7: Equip them for Mission and Send them Out (2 months)

By send them out, I don't necessarily mean a geographic move, nor a change of communities. I just mean that you communicate their "formal training" is coming to an end, and now its time for them to go out and begin training others.

At this stage, you want to equip them with practical tools for sharing the gospel, as well as the entire process of discipleship you have walked them through. Here you will discover the helpfulness of practical, simple tools, much like those provided throughout this eBook. I've found that the *exact* tools don't matter as much as the fact that you *have* tools to begin with. Have your disciple identify their "must read" books, their crucial illustrations. Help them to articulate the process that led them to spiritual maturity, in order that they might replicate a similar process with others.

Preparing these tools gives your disciple a plan, enabling them to enter future discipleship relationships with confidence and clarity.

For this final stage, my one must-read book is [The Master Plan of Evangelism](#).

Conclusion

So there you have it: seven steps to a multiplying disciple! Of course, the process is far more nuanced and complicated that it appears in this simple overview, but the major pieces and flow are there. If you were to get started on Steps 1-3 with one person, I think you would find yourself surprised at how doable this process is, and how eager you'll be to continue to Steps 4-7.

CHAPTER SIX

Discipleship Pitfalls to Avoid

Making disciples is an art, not a science. It's always different, yet often similar. In light of the many factors and multiple steps along the way, it can be easy to fall of the rails in one direction or another. I certainly do.

For this reason, below are Four Pitfalls to Avoid as you go about making disciples.

1. Default to the Knowledge Approach through Monotonous One on One Meetings

Because your weekly one on one time is your consistent touch point, its easy to have that become your only touch point. And because the Bible and theological curriculum is highly structured and easy to talk about, it may become your only topic of conversation.

But we can't forget: Holistic discipleship involves spending time together in multiple settings and discussing every aspect of life.

So how do you get out of the rut of Knowledge Based Discipleship if you find yourself there?

The biggest help is forethought. Think in advance what else you can do with your disciple. Plan to meet outside of your scheduled, weekly one on one time. Or, if that isn't possible, then change up the routine for your one on one meeting. Instead of sitting at the place you do every week, go do something together. Visit a new place. Have them interact with your family. Ask for their help with a house project (free labor!). Ask if you can interact on their turf or with their friend in some way. Play a sport or work out together.

Whatever the specific means, do something to get some real-life experiences together rather than just coffee dates.

2. Default to the Aimless Approach through Constant Crisis Management

By way of review, the Aimless Approach to discipleship is when you have lots of one on one meetings that don't go anywhere in particular. Your discipleship lacks direction. It is an endless cycle of them coming to you with their problems, you solving the problems, and then them coming back with more problems.

Why is it so easy to default to this approach?

Because people really do have problems. And they really do come to us asking for help. And we really do desire to help them.

As a result, our one-hour meeting comes and goes, week after week, yet we haven't accomplished anything for their long term growth. We may even feel good about ourselves after these meetings, and feel better about where they are at as a result of our conversation. Moreover, our disciple may objectively be in a better place because of our conversation!

BUT, its the old lesson on the tyranny of the urgent. We attend to the urgent symptoms while neglecting the underlying causes. In doing so, we fail to give people what will truly help them in the long run. We keep handing them band aids when they need major surgery.

The holistic, healthy, sustainable solution is to teach the disciple to go to God of their own initiative to discover what they need to do in various situations. They need to cultivate a personal, prayerful, scripture-saturated relationship with God. If they do that, guess what? They won't need you and your answers anymore. They'll have the authoritative instruction of God to look to instead.

The way to fix this, practically, is to show up to your next meeting with a plan, and to take early control of the direction of your conversation. You can even have a frank conversation about it, saying something like, "so I've noticed we haven't really had a chance to dig into the Bible lately. I really want to equip you read the word for yourself, and not just need me for answers. So, I thought today we'd get out our Bibles and dig in for a while, sound good?"

3. Default to “The Plan” Instead of Giving Personal Attention

This error is the opposite pitfall of the above. Here you bring your formula to the table week after week, deliver your goods, and expect your disciple to get in line without ever paying attention to what’s happening in their life.

Not fun. Seriously.

You will either bore your disciple to death, or make them certain that you actually don’t care about them as a person.

The solution here is to take a few weeks to back off your agenda. Ease up. Take a deep breath. Switch up your routine. Do something that will communicate you are interested in a relationship with them and their ongoing development, not just in throwing doctrine at them every week. Once you slow down and practice listening with good questions, you’ll hear individual needs and desires come out. If you’ve been blazing a trail for a bit, it’s okay to step out of the plan and wander on a topic or felt need of theirs for a while. Don’t ignore a specific area of pain, frustration, or sin they are dealing with. And don’t miss out on taking advantage of an apparent hunger for a certain type of knowledge or experience.

4. Failing to Model Vulnerability and Personal Failings

As far as your disciple is concerned, if there was a fourth member of the Trinity, you’d be it! You are the all-knowing, all-seeing, never failing mentor. You are the wise sage whose car never breaks down and whose pee never hits the toilet seat.

It’s time to loosen up. It’s time to be real. Your disciple needs to know who you really are, and that your urine splashes on the toilet seat, too.

The only way your disciple will feel the freedom to be open and honest with you is if you are open and honest with them. Additionally, they need to see you being open and honest with others. This will be especially crucial when it comes to the conversation on signature sins.

So be vulnerable. Keep the focus on them most of the time, but also be willing to share from your own struggles and experiences. Make it clear that your relationship is a genuine friendship, and not just a formality or strictly church activity.

Conclusion

If you avoid these four pitfalls, you'll be well on your way to holistic, directional discipleship.

It's been a joy to outline a process for Holistic, Directional Discipleship for you over the course of this eBook. I hope it's been helpful to you in your understanding of the process and your pursuit of others for the expansion of the Kingdom and the glory of God.

CHAPTER SEVEN

About the Author

About Erik...

I met Jesus as a freshman in college at a school that is known as much for its partying as it is for its academics—the University of Wisconsin, Madison. I was discipled and developed in the best of two worlds: The Navigators College Ministry, where I learned to study the Bible, memorize scripture, and share my faith with others. I was also very involved with Blackhawk Church, a large church that excelled among Madison’s intellectual elite. Blackhawk showed me the life-changing power of the worship setting, and shaped my philosophy of teaching and preaching.

Today, I am the [College Pastor](#) at [Prairie Lakes Church](#) in Cedar Falls, Iowa, where I live with my wife and two sons.

I have a passion to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ. According to the Biblical writers, this news is not just “death therapy”—merely a way to make us feel better about what will happen after we die. Rather, it is an invitation to a new way of living here and now.

Since I came to Christ in college, young people, and especially intellectually curious ones, hold a special place in my heart.

If I can serve your church, ministry, or community by providing teaching for a conference, retreat, or training seminar, it would be an honor to do so. See the contact page on my website for further info.

Thanks for stopping by.

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